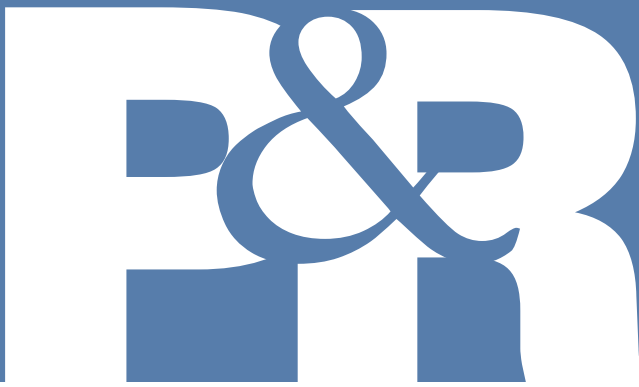


illinois

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PARKS AND RECREATION

The magazine of the Illinois Association of Park Districts and the Illinois Park and Recreation Association



# connecting with nature

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Learn How People Around Us are Getting Back to Nature



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## FROM THE EDITOR



The theme for this issue of *IP&R* magazine is “Connecting with Nature.” This topic brings me back to my childhood when I was truly one with nature. Toys were a luxury, so entertainment for me was going outside to create an adventure. I would turn over logs and trek through the woods behind our house just to see how many frogs, toads or snakes I could find. Although the snakes were not welcome at the house, I would bring my bucket full of toads home to show off my collection for the day. Once I was sure my mother was impressed with all of the toads I had found, I made note of their individual markings and released them under the lily of the valley plants that bordered our yard under the lilac bushes (we lived in Lombard at the time). Since I recorded their markings, I would know if I caught the same toad again. There were a few I found multiple times for several years in a row.

Once in a while, I was allowed to go to the pond to look for leopard frogs or bullfrogs and catch some fish. I'd take my friend Jenny and we would head down to the pond on our bikes with fishing gear, nets and buckets brimming with excitement in anticipation of what we would find that day. Would we get frogs, crayfish or perhaps even a turtle??? The possibilities seemed endless!

I grew up surrounded by nature and to this day it still brings me great pleasure. In fact, a canoe trip on the river is my idea of the best kind of get-away. I hope in this issue you find a story that inspires you to put down your phones or tablets and step away from the computer and get back to discovering what nature really has to offer. You might just be surprised.

Enjoy!

— Rachel Laier, Editor



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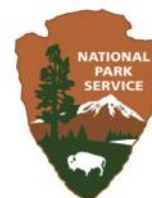


# 250,000 MARCH ON WASHINGTON 50-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE DAY 1 DONATION FOR AMERICA

**Episode 5, America's Front Yard.** August 28, 1963, 250,000 American citizens marched on Washington to call for change. August 28, 2013, 20,000 came together to remember the day. Time and again, the National Mall, America's Front Yard, has been at the heart of pivotal moments in our country's great history. And just like America, America's Front Yard needs care and attention.

See how a John Deere donation of turf equipment to the Campaign for the National Mall is helping the National Park Service care for America's Front Yard and learn how you can help, too. Get the story at [JohnDeere.com/NationalMall](http://JohnDeere.com/NationalMall).

The National Mall has a story. Be a part of it.







Peter M. Murphy  
IAPD President and CEO

## The Leadership Principle

One of the great opportunities that serving as a park commissioner provides is being a recognized leader in your community. It also gives you a chance to further develop the leader within you. Many times we hear references to a person as a born leader, but the reality is that this trait is not typically innate, but rather learned, developed and refined. This is in contrast to a person's desire to act in a leadership capacity for which, many times, they find themselves ill-suited. This is good news for all of us that have the desire to be life-long learners and you can't really thrive as a park commissioner without this commitment. Following the basic tenant of good leadership which is to treat others (park district staff, the public and fellow commissioners) as you would like to be treated yourself is the foundation for leadership development.

It is also a core service of the IAPD to provide rich content for this lifelong learning in a wide variety of educational opportunities from interactive, face-to-face seminars and conferences to webinars and online self-directed programs.

This summer IAPD will be implementing one of its strategic initiatives by conducting the first **IAPD Leadership Institute**.

This inaugural educational service will feature five pillars of leadership development in a series of classes and webinars. Watch for the announcement of this not-to-be missed opportunity. In the meantime, I would like to share with you the wisdom of author and thought leader, John Spence that he shared on leadership at a seminar that I recently attended.

"To be a great leader of others, you must first be a great leader of yourself." Oftentimes when I'm teaching a teambuilding class I will ask the attendees to give me a short list of the most critical skills, abilities and characteristics of an "Ideal Team Member," someone they would absolutely love to have on their team. After more than 15 years of asking for this list, the ones that come up over and over again are:

- **Honesty**
- **Integrity**
- **Proactive**
- **Excellent Communicator**
- **Highly Competent**
- **Innovative**
- **Creative**
- **Takes Accountability**
- **Works Well on a Team**
- **Delivers Results**
- **Good Strategic Thinker**
- **Enjoyable to Be Around**

"To be a leader for the next Century you have to be able to bring out the best in people."

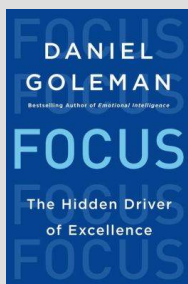
- Patricia Aburdene



As you read over the list you probably thought to yourself, "Yes, I would love to have someone who had all of those characteristics as a member of my team or board." Here is the hard truth for you as a leader: You don't get anybody like this on your team unless you are like this first! People who have all of the attributes on the list above will only follow a leader who has all of them as well. So to be a successful leader the first thing you must do is take a look in the mirror and realize that your greatest challenge is to be a living example of what you expect from your followers.

“Once you accept the mantle of leadership, whether you lead two people or 20,000, you have given up part of your life because you now live on a stage. Your followers see everything you do, they hear everything you say...they see what you don't do and hear what you don't say...and make up a story about it.”

I thought this was a good reminder for board members as all exceptional governance comes from a board that takes a team approach. In addition, the visibility of a board member is sometimes taken for granted but does exist and should be appreciated.



### Recommended Reading

#### **FOCUS**

**The Hidden Driver of Excellence**  
By Daniel Goleman

What do a world-class athlete, a star rapper, and a high-performing executive all have in common? Focus – how well they pay attention to what matters most for their performance. In *Focus*, Daniel Goleman offers a groundbreaking

look at today's scarcest resource and the secret to high performance and fulfillment: attention.

Combining cutting-edge research with practical findings, *Focus* delves into the science of attention in all its varieties, presenting a discussion of this little-noticed and under-rated mental asset. In an era of unstoppable distractions, Goleman persuasively argues that now more than ever we must learn to sharpen focus if we are to survive in a complex world.

Goleman boils down attention research for individuals into three types: inner (on yourself) for the self-awareness that lets them manage their inner world, other (on others) for the empathy that lets them build effective relationships, and outer focus (on the larger systems) in which their organization operates, dictating what strategy will work best. Drawing on rich case studies from fields as diverse as competitive sports, education, the arts, and business, he shows why high-achievers need all three kinds of focus and how you can achieve it as well.

## 2014 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April-May, 2014

**Flying for Kids Month,  
Statewide Kite Fly**

Monday, June 9, 2014

**IAPD Summer**

**Golf Tour #2**

Randall Oaks Golf Club,  
Dundee Township Park  
District

Thursday, July 17, 2014

**Joint Legislative**

**Awareness Golf Outing**

White Pines Golf Club,  
Bensenville Park District

Saturday, August 16,  
2014

**Park District**

**Conservation Day**

IL State Fairgrounds,  
Springfield  
Wednesday,

August 27, 2014

**IAPD Summer**

**Golf Tour #3**

Sanctuary Golf Course,  
New Lenox Community  
Park District

Saturday,  
September 6, 2014  
**Legislative**

**Awareness Picnic**

Inwood Park, Joliet Park  
District

Monday,  
September 29, 2014

**IAPD Summer**

**Golf Tour #4**

Wilmette Golf Club,  
Wilmette Park District

October 14-16, 2014

**NRPA Congress**

Charlotte, NC

Friday, October 24, 2014

**IAPD Best of the Best  
Awards Gala**

Chevy Chase Country  
Club, Wheeling Park  
District

Thursday,  
November 6, 2014

**IAPD Legal Symposium**

McDonald's University/  
Hyatt Lodge

January 22-24, 2015

**IAPD/IPRA Soaring to  
New Heights Conference**

Hyatt Regency Chicago

**IAPD**  
Illinois Association of Park Districts

For the most up-to-date Calendar of Events, please  
visit the IAPD website at [www.ILparks.org](http://www.ILparks.org).

# EYE ON THE PROFESSION

A CLOSER LOOK AT TRENDS AND ISSUES IN THE PARK AND RECREATION PROFESSION



By Debbie Trueblood  
IPRA Executive Director

## IPRA Around the State

This issue is about connecting with nature. At IPRA, we have been outside connecting with our members all over the state in recent months.

Over the last few months, IPRA has been involved in rolling out our new five year strategic plan. The IPRA board and I agreed we wanted the members to all have a chance to learn about the new plan. Towards that end, we have done a magazine article about it, a newsletter article about it, the power point presentation and talking points are available on our website, and we have done numerous in-person events all over the state in Hoffman Estates, Bartlett, Decatur, Geneseo, Tinley Park, Wauconda, and Mt. Vernon. Further, we have done small group presentations for the IPRA Past Chairs, Membership Council, Section Boards, the Foundation Board (upcoming) and we have presented it in short form at every quarterly open house at IPRA. If you haven't had a chance to learn about our new plan and new direction, please check out our website.

One of the areas in the new plan that we have been busy implementing is our new governance model. In the past few years, the IPRA board met six times a year, always in the Chicago suburban area. This year, we wanted to venture out together, so the IPRA board and I are meeting four times, each time in a different region of the state. When we meet, we are taking the opportunity to have a meal with our local VIPs and affiliate groups and then staying in town to engage in a park and recreation event in the community together. We have already had two of our four meetings for the year in Lincolnwood and Fairview Heights respectively. These regional events allow the IPRA board and the members to make statewide connections.

In Lincolnwood, we had the pleasure of sharing dinner with the boards of Midwest Institute for Park Executives (MIPE), South Suburban Park and Recreation Professional Association (SSPRPA), and Suburban Park and Recreation Association (SPRA). This was an exciting opportunity for our groups to network together and learn from each other. My thanks to IPRA Chair/ Director, Lincolnwood Parks & Recreation Department Jan Hincapie for helping us set up the event and to Barbara Cremin, supt. of administrative operations, and Glenview Park District for her presentation on the IPRA Salary Survey Task Force.

In Fairview Heights, we shared dinner with past IPRA chairs Mark Badasch and George Whitehead as well as board members from South Illinois Parks and Recreation Professional Association (SIPRA) and key southern Illinois volunteers. In southern Illinois the IPRA board and I also attended a SIPRA board meeting and many SIPRA/IPRA members attended the IPRA board meeting as well. This was an excellent opportunity to spend some face time together making connections. The IPRA board and I are always on the look-out to identify ways we can better serve IPRA members in all parts of the state.

“Regional events allow the IPRA board and the members to make statewide connections.”



As an additional piece of our new governance model, we focused our first meeting on board training on governance issues and our annual board orientation, but we added a secondary training at our second board meeting. This was a focus on the governance subtopic of ethics, to ensure our board is always up to date on the latest issues in ethics. Further, we spent the bulk of our time together that day on the topic of parks and recreation in southern Illinois- the history, the needs, the economic and political pressures, etc. My thanks to Mary Jeanne Hutchison, IPRA board member/director of O'Fallon Parks and Recreation Department and Angela Beaston, parks and recreation director, City of Fairview Heights for helping us to set up this event. My thanks to George Whitehead, Mark Badasch, and Southern Illinois University student Torri Withrow for presenting.



I also attended the following SIPRA meeting in Mt. Vernon to present the new strategic plan. I always enjoy seeing my IPRA friends in southern Illinois!

Our final two board meetings will be in the fall in Rockford and Springfield. We will be hosting similar events in these communities for local leaders and affiliate groups.

Speaking of affiliate groups, recently, I was in Geneseo, Illinois in the northwest region at a joint event of IPRA and the Northwest Illinois Association of Parks and Recreation (NWIAPR). The event was well attended and I was thrilled to get out to this part of the state, near Iowa, for the first time. I hope I have more opportunities like that in the region. I especially enjoyed touring the community and the park district facilities with IPRA board member and executive director of Geneseo Park District, Molly Hamer.

Our IPRA board chair, Jan Hincapie, also attended and presented at a CIRCLE event in Decatur, along with board member Dawn Schaefer. My thanks to CIRCLE's leader, LoriKay Paden for including IPRA in this event.

When we're not traveling, IPRA has also been busy implementing some other strategic planning items. IPRA chair Jan Hincapie formed three task forces this year towards some of the items in our new plan. These task forces are Women's Issues, Community Campaign, and Mentoring. The IPRA Salary Survey Task Force will also continue. Each of these task forces is engaged in their work. The Mentoring Task Force expects to be rolling out the new mentoring program in the fall with applications for mentees opening this summer. If you are interested in being a mentor, please let me know. We plan to recruit some excellent mentors for the program.

Also, in an effort to implement our new plan, we have shuffled our staff around a little bit. We continue to have 7 staff, one of whom is part time. Leesa Kuo, conference director and Jessica Kollman, administrative assistant/marketing coordinator joined us in early December and were with us at conference. Additionally, Heather Weishaar was promoted to outreach director in February. Heather will be handling media and press releases as well as working to roll out our new on-line communities. The rest of the team finance director Barry Franks, member services and education manager Sheila Mulvey, membership services and education manager Matt Fairbanks, and I continue in our existing roles.

If you have any questions about our new strategic direction or have suggestions for ways we can serve you better, do not hesitate to contact me.

## IPRA CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 4, 2014  
**Administration & Finance Section Meeting & Workshop**  
Bartlett Park District

June 11, 2014  
**Skills Development Webinar Series: Building Consensus**  
online

June 19, 2014  
**Skills Development Webinar Series: Building Consensus**  
online

June 27, 2014  
**IPRA New Member Webinar - 2nd Quarter**  
online

July 9-25, 2014  
**Six County Senior Olympics**  
Various locations throughout Chicagoland

July 9&17, 2014  
**Skills Development Webinar Series: Managing Millennials - Working With the "Y" Factor**  
online

**Certified Park and Recreation Professional (CPRP) Exam Preparation - Series of Four Classes**  
Chicago Park District

July 10, 2014  
**Therapeutic Recreation Section Meeting**  
NEDSRA

July 14, 2014  
**Kane County Cougars vs. Beloit Snappers**  
Fifth Third Bank Ballpark

July 18, 2014  
**IPRA Guard Games**  
Oak Lawn Park District - Centennial Aquatic Center

July 23, 2014  
**3rd Annual Teen Camp Olympics**  
Lisle Park District

July 23, 2014  
**Chicago White Sox vs. Kansas City Royals**  
US Cellular Field

July 28, 2014  
**Kane County Cougars vs. West Michigan Whitecaps**  
Fifth Third Bank Ballpark



For the most up-to-date Calendar of Events, please visit the IPRA website at [www.ILipra.org](http://www.ILipra.org).



Jason Anselment  
Legal/Legislative Counsel

## Deliver Key Messages From Legislative Conference Back in Your District

Last month, nearly 400 IAPD members came to Springfield to attend the IAPD Legislative Conference and Parks Day at the Capitol and to discuss the importance of parks, recreation and conservation with their legislators.

To assist participants during their legislator visits, IAPD developed an easy-to-use pocket card, which contains key talking points on three major themes. These messages share positive information about the benefits of local park and recreation agencies and also address hot topics at the Capitol such as the minimum wage. Although the General Assembly is scheduled to adjourn the Spring Session on May 31<sup>st</sup>, these key messages from the Legislative Conference will still be salient when lawmakers return to their legislative districts in June.

With recreational programming and activities in full swing, the summer months are the perfect time to invite legislators to visit your facilities, show them all that your agency offers to your community and deliver these key messages.

### 1. Park and Recreation Capital Construction Projects Provide Great Returns

During his annual Budget Address in March, the Governor proposed the establishment of a bipartisan working group to develop a new 5-year capital plan. The prospect of a new capital construction plan highlights the need to continue to remind lawmakers about the significant demand for capital improvement projects at park districts, forest preserves, conservation districts and municipal recreation agencies as well as the substantial economic benefits these projects provide.

As you tour your facilities with your legislators in the coming months, here are some key points to discuss:

- Each year, **83% of Illinois families** use park district facilities, recreational programs and local parks.
- Due to the high demand for recreational programming and facilities, the **unmet capital construction needs of Illinois' park and recreation agencies is \$1.2 billion.**
- In 2014, there were 126 grant applications totaling \$191 million for the Park and Recreational Facility Construction (PARC) program – **more than 7½ times the available funding.**
- Park and recreation capital projects are typically matched dollar-for-dollar by local park districts and other recreation agencies, so **the State gets twice the return on its investment.**

- **Park and recreation construction projects improve the State and local economies and generate additional revenue** through job creation, the purchase of building supplies and materials and tourism promotion.
- These construction projects also help the State positively address budget issues such as Medicaid and other health care costs. **The thousands of programs offered by local park and recreation agencies at these facilities promote healthier lifestyles** through daily exercise, which reduces medical costs.
- Open space and recreational facilities provide critical support to park districts in their delivery of after-school and summer programs. Law enforcement officials overwhelmingly agree that these programs **have a greater impact in reducing youth crime and violence than hiring more police officers.**
- Given the return on investment, **park and recreation capital construction projects pay for themselves.**

All of these points will be even more compelling when you relate them to your agency. Showing legislators recently completed construction projects or discussing future projects that are on your community's wish list will help tell your agency's story.



Legislative Conference attendees received an easy-to-use pocket card containing a summary of key talking points. IAPD members can download a copy of the pocket card from the Public Policy/Advocacy Resources section of the IAPD website ([ilparks.org](http://ilparks.org)). Email [janselment@ilparks.org](mailto:janselment@ilparks.org) if you would like copies mailed to you.

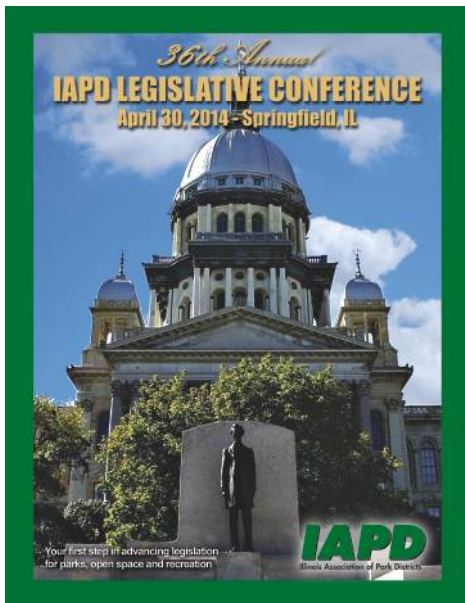


## 2. Park Districts and Forest Preserves Make Illinois a Better Place to Work and Live

Research is one of IAPD's most valuable membership benefits. Attendees at the Legislative Conference learned about IAPD's exciting new research results from a statewide survey of Illinois residents. These results include a number of key findings that confirm that park districts and forest preserves are improving the quality of life within Illinois and that citizens recognize and appreciate all that your agencies offer.

Among the study's key findings that you should share at every opportunity:

- **Nine out of ten** Illinoisans believe that parks and open space improve property values.
- Parks and recreation rank among the top features that make Illinois communities desirable places to live.
- The vast majority of Illinoisans believe that park districts are good stewards of their tax dollars with **70%** of Illinoisans agreeing that their park district represents an excellent / good value.
- Most Illinois citizens believe their park district spends their tax dollars wisely with little waste.
- A majority of adults are willing to pay more in taxes for park and recreation capital improvements.
- Park districts and forest preserves receive the highest esteem ratings when compared to other taxing bodies.



Legislative Conference attendees also received a binder containing more than 200 pages of valuable advocacy resources and other important information such as the results from the IAPD's recently released Statewide Survey of Illinois Residents, available grant opportunities, and tips on managing and maintaining your agency's electronic records. A few copies of the binder are still available for purchase by visiting [ILparks.org](http://ILparks.org) or calling the IAPD office at 217/523-4554.

## 3. Minimum Wage Increases Have a Distinct Impact on Local Park and Recreation Agencies

As IAPD members know from our weekly Legislative Updates or from attending one of the 12 legislative breakfasts held throughout the State in February and March, the minimum wage has been a major topic throughout the Spring Session. When discussing this issue with legislators, it is important to recognize that members of the General Assembly have varying views.

At the same time, it is also important to remind legislators about the specific impact that minimum wage increases have on park and recreation agencies. As legislators observe all of the youth employed at your agency during their visits to your facilities, you can highlight the following points as they relate to your specific agency.

- Local park and recreation agencies employ more than 50,000 part-time employees in Illinois.
- Most of these employees are teens, and the summer jobs that local park and recreation agencies provide are often their first.
- Local park and recreation agencies operate on fixed budgets, so increasing the minimum wage will necessarily result in fewer summer jobs for youth or an increase the cost of recreational programs for taxpayers.
- Part-time summer positions such as lifeguards, day camp counselors, umpires and referees are critical to programming, so reducing the number of employees will also cause a loss in the number of recreational programs that park and recreation agencies can offer.
- The minimum wage that adults need to support families should be distinguished from the wage paid to youth for valuable, first-time job experience.

### Grassroots Advocacy Is a Yearlong Effort

The Legislative Conference is always a great opportunity for IAPD members to hone their advocacy skills, meet one-on-one with their legislators at the Capitol and obtain valuable information that can be used in their grassroots advocacy efforts back in their districts. This year's Legislative Conference was another huge success, but effective grassroots advocacy programs last all year. When lawmakers return to their districts in June, make sure you continue to convey these important messages that were developed and delivered during the Legislative Conference.

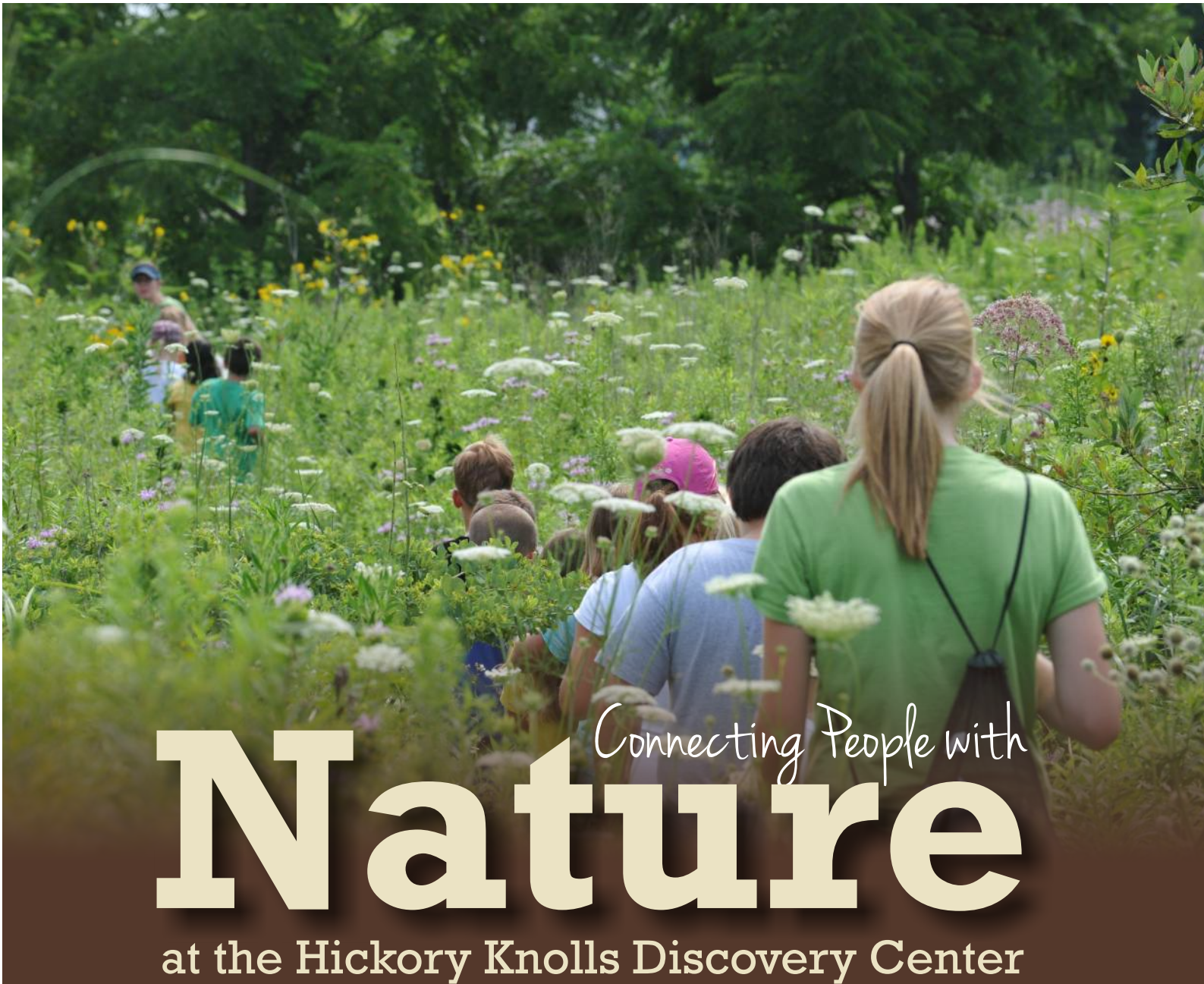
Again, the summer is the ideal time to invite your legislators to tour your facilities. Not only will you showcase all your agency offers and deliver key messages, but you will also help achieve our goal of 118 legislator site visits this year. **Once you complete your site visit, please report the date of the visit and the name of the legislator by emailing me at [janselment@ILparks.org](mailto:janselment@ILparks.org).**

### SAVE THE DATES

#### Upcoming Legislative Awareness Events

Legislative Golf Outing – July 17, 2014  
White Pines Golf Club, Bensenville Park District

Legislative Awareness Picnic – September 6, 2014  
Inwood Park, Joliet Park District



Connecting People with

# Nature

at the Hickory Knolls Discovery Center

**By Erika Young**  
St. Charles Park District  
*(photos by Mike Frankowski)*



When did you last take the time to observe, explore, unwind, connect and wonder at the natural world that exists right here in Illinois?

Lining the winding drive to the Hickory Knolls Discovery Center in St. Charles are five vibrant banners depicting these serene words. Works of art in their own right, the banners were created by Chicago-area artist Noreen Brookins. They are a luminous lure, drawing visitors into a world perfectly situated for appreciating mother nature's restorative qualities. "The words on our banners evoke experiences often reserved only for vacations," says Pam Otto, manager of nature programs and interpretive services at Hickory Knolls.



*"Maybe they can only take an hour away from their daily or weekly routines, but if they can, there are truly awesome things right here. We may not be the seashore or the mountains, but we do offer a number of ways people can reconnect with nature and recharge."*

"When you go away, you're more apt to go exploring because you're in a place that's new and exciting. You're unwinding, connecting with new environments. We want to inspire people to do this even when they're not on vacation. "Maybe they can only take an hour away from their daily or weekly routines, but if they can, there are truly awesome things right here. We may not be the seashore or the mountains, but we do offer a number of ways people can reconnect with nature and recharge."

Children enjoy exploring the lives of past residents listening to story time within the confines of the center's wigwam and dugout canoe, or connect with one's sense of whimsy by contributing to the center's newest exhibit, a fairy garden appropriately named "Hickory Hollow," which was created from gnarled tree limbs salvaged after a recent storm. "It's all about connectivity," says Otto. "You get to see something in one element – in this case, a tree used indoors as an interactive display – and make the connection to the setting it normally appears in."

Building upon the theme, "You Don't Know What You've Got...", Hickory Knolls aims to focus the public's attention on the often overlooked, or totally unknown, natural treasures that exist within the Fox Valley. Take Illinois' native prairie, for example. Everyone knows that the Amazon rainforest is an endangered habitat, but they might

be hard pressed to understand that our state's native prairie is a far more beleaguered environment. "The habitat disappeared when nobody was really paying attention to such things," explains Otto. "Now we have a very, very small fraction of 1% of native prairie left in Illinois."

With its diversity of plants, insects, and other wildlife, the prairie is a phenomenal example of nature working in harmony. Hickory Knolls' visitors are encouraged to learn about Illinois' prairies' past, present and future, then experience the sights and sounds of prairie restoration in progress at the adjacent Hickory Knolls Natural Area.

Another phrase with a very local connection is "endangered species." While exotic animals such as the Siberian tiger might be the first image that pops to mind when this term is used, its northern Illinois counterpart is equally fragile and threatened: the Blanding's turtle. Working in conjunction with the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, Hickory Knolls staff maintains an indoor turtle pond complete with basking logs and a trickling waterfall, located in the center's main lobby that features a number of these charismatic creatures. "Like all our other education animals, the Blanding's turtles were all captive bred; that is, we did not take them from the wild to put them on display," says Otto says. "Each one was hatched as part of the Blanding's Turtle Recovery project founded by our friends in DuPage





County. Our goal is to educate the public about this important program, the challenges facing this distinctively marked turtle and introduce them to the important role regional wetlands and marshes play in the species' survival. Otto claims, "Being able to connect to an at-risk species on a personal level will help increase awareness of their plight."

Visitors are invited to stop by the center anytime for a self-guided tour and the knowledgeable staff at Hickory Knolls are always on hand to point out current displays. For example, the center's cold-blooded species display houses resident critters, Kevin the corn snake and Billy the bull snake. "There are a lot of people who don't like snakes, but having one named Kevin helps break down some barriers and make lasting connections," says Otto.

Visitors may observe animal behavior, whether it's the survival skills of a group of fox squirrels living in a cavity in an oak tree in the center's backyard, or the more pampered existence of Peter Rabbit, the center's unofficial welcoming mascot in the front lobby. "Petey came to us from a local animal rescue agency," explains Otto. "Details of his past are sketchy, as he was found wandering in a nearby town. What we do know is that efforts to find his owners failed, and he now lives the life of a king, holding court at Hickory Knolls." He gratefully accepts pats on the head, and will do just about anything for a chin rub. But like any good mascot, he does have a mission: to let people know that pets have no place in the wild, and wild animals don't make good pets.

Through programming for all ages, nature staff provides many learning opportunities, everything from turtle wrangling to nature walks to frog monitoring and a firefly festival.

Listen to little ones as they explore the outdoors and you'll come to appreciate the magical powers mother nature wields over the very young. "Whoa! Awesome bug!" or "Look! Is that a hawk?" and "Ooh, (not eww) a snake!" Fast forward a few years, and the sentiments don't really change much, especially for those who have nurtured their love of the natural world from childhood on. Through programs such as "Nature's Cool!" for the preschool crowd, to "Calls of the Wild" for older kids and teens, to "Map & Compass Skills" for adults, the district offers a full spectrum of nature programs designed to initiate and cultivate an interest in what goes on in the great outdoors.

"Our mantra here is to get 'em early and get 'em often," says Otto. "That repeat exposure really helps our message sink in. By reaching out to the younger kids - before kindergarten - we hope to instill a love that will continue throughout their lives." Because children seem to come hardwired with a certain amount of natural curiosity, they instinctively feel comfortable being outdoors and interacting with nature early on. As they grow older, however, other influences can lure them away from outdoor play. Sports, music lessons, video games and computers all vie for what little discretionary time kids have outside of school. Faced with such overwhelming competition, parents and teachers are challenged to find ways to make mother nature a priority in the lives of children and teens.





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Programs that combine exploration and education, adventure and activity, technology and training have the best chance of capturing and maintaining a youngster's interest from childhood through their teen years, and provide a stepping stone to involvement as an adult. Birthday parties held at the Hickory Knolls Discovery Center have become increasingly popular, where, along with the party cake and presents, kids also play games and participate in activities that introduce them to elements from the varied world outside the party room. Later on, summer camps that combine hiking and canoeing with lessons on tent camping and cooking over an open fire may appeal to a teenager's sense of adventure and independence.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the value of play in an unstructured environment, one where jungle gyms and playground slides don't automatically dictate what kind of experience the child will have. Recreation out of doors inherently brings a sense of freedom that stimulates creativity and learning, says Otto. “Go into the woods and you can do anything. You can turn over rocks and logs, you can swing from a branch, and you can sniff the flowers. What you experience is completely up to you.”

And just how did Hickory Knolls get its name, you might also wonder? Well, the land contains many hills that date back to the period of time called the Ice Age. Roughly two million years ago, glaciers came and left St. Charles several times. Around 12,000 years ago the climate started to warm, and the glaciers receded. In their wake they left the land formations—the 'knolls'— seen today.

To learn more about this occurrence, educational signs explain these geological formations.

As the first LEED certified public building in its county, Hickory Knolls is a destination in and of itself. From its overall architectural design to the materials incorporated throughout the building, the center represents cutting-edge ideas, techniques, and resources that demonstrate and promote sustainability and eco-responsibility. The facility serves as a showcase for green building features as well as a source of ideas for how to make eco-friendly lifestyle choices.

Hickory Knolls offers the best viewing area with floor-to-ceiling windows that frame views of the oak savanna just outside the doors. Visitors may pull up a chair and watch a show of birds feasting on sunflower seeds and suet. With new and innovative programming, vibrant and collaborative displays, and a state-of-the-art environmentally-friendly building, Hickory Knolls Discovery Center stands poised to open new worlds to more people than ever before. The St. Charles Park District manages 500 acres of wetlands, woodlands and prairie in 11 locations, two of which are district-owned Illinois Nature Preserves. This property is a great place to reconnect with nature.

# Getting Back

# to NATURE

**By Jennifer Dumas**

Waukegan Park District



Instead of playing outdoors, most children are engaged with screens of some sort, smartphones, computers, television or game systems indoors. Playing outside has become a thing of the past. When I was a child some thirty years ago, I would be gone for hours playing in the woods or fishing at a nearby pond. Playing outside and getting dirty was the thing to do. Today, with heightened concerns for child safety, limited green space in some communities, and the competition of screen time, children are failing to connect with nature. Even more, many children think outside time is boring. “WHAT!” how can this be possible? Very simple. Lack of time and money and increased screen time has created “nature deprivation” for children and adults. As children and adults become less exposed to the enjoyment of nature and its benefits, interest diminishes, and the love and appreciation of the natural world is lost.



**We need to remind people that participating in nature programming or heading out as a family on a camping trip offers unique opportunities to explore, discover and be exposed to new experiences.**

# OUTREACH

What to do? This is where we, as parks and recreation professionals, have to take action and lead our communities. In a sense, remind residents what the value of outdoor recreation is all about, and seeing it as more than playing outside in a sports league or playing tag in the backyard. We need to remind people that participating in nature programming or heading out as a family on a camping trip offers unique opportunities to explore, discover and be exposed to new experiences. The benefits of playing outside are proven. Richard Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods*, explains that children who play outside are less likely to get sick, become aggressive or be stressed and are more adaptable to life's ups and downs.

So perhaps you are asking yourself what you can do to prevent "nature deprivation" in your community? Remember, parks make lives better. Start with assessing the resources you have within your park system. Ask yourself what other organizations in the community could become a partner and provide education or skills to instruct programs. Perhaps there is a company that would jump at the opportunity to sponsor a program for a little recognition. It doesn't matter how big or small you start, just start!

The Waukegan Park District started its Back to Nature campaign in 2011. Fortunately, the district has both developed and undeveloped natural areas with a variety of ecosystems; therefore, the main concern was to secure funding and build partnerships with outside organizations. In the three years of the campaign, funding has been secured annually and partnerships have been developed, resulting in the creation of a Children's Garden that is used as a program area and a teaching classroom. This success has led to numerous new family and youth programs that are offered free or at a very affordable cost. Three years ago, participation in nature programming was virtually at zero, and now reaches nearly 400 people each summer and many more throughout the year.

Lesson Learned: It is vital to find out what a community is willing to pay for such programming. We are entering the fourth year of our nature based programs, and during the process we have been through many trials and errors. We have come to the realization that our district is most responsive to free nature centered curricula with a variety of fee based choices. We know the positive impact of such programs and people seem to enjoy outdoor recreation. Until the public demands otherwise, we are focused on being the leaders and generating awareness to the value and benefits associated with nature based programming.



Live Green Family Festival: The Waukegan Park District offered a new event called the Live Green Family Festival. The three-hour event was on Sunday, April 28, 2013 in celebration of Earth Day and attracted nearly 1,200 people. It was decided that such an event could provide a positive outdoor recreational and environmental experience that integrates cognitive, social and health benefits for families. Activities appealed to young children and adults and were designed to be educational, increase understanding of the environmental role of Bowen Park and stimulate stewardship among residents. The event was held in Bowen Park, a sixty-acre park that offers a picturesque setting and interesting habitats. It was the perfect setting for a spring event. Activities offered included interpretative nature walks, camping and outdoor cooking demonstrations, nature crafts, children's garden planting, hands on nature exhibits, storytelling in the garden, Solid Waste Agency of Lake County (SWALCO) recycling, a cigarette clean-up project and nature scavenger hunts.

By creating the Live Green Family Festival and celebrating Earth Day, the priorities of the district were reinforced. The Live Green Family Festival supported the Waukegan Park District's mission statement, which reflects its belief in providing beautiful and clean parks and leisure opportunities to Waukegan's culturally diverse population. Additionally, it supports one of the major focus areas of the strategic plan, "Being Green." The district is heavily invested in the "Leave No Child Inside Initiative," and the event offered families an opportunity to connect with nature and fun outdoor activities. With outstanding attendance, the event was considered extremely successful.

This year, Live Green Family Festival is seeing a surge in interest from the community. Organizations that volunteered at the event last year plan to expand their activity offerings and have encouraged their partner groups to get involved. Additionally, the park district has invited organizations from neighboring communities to partner at the event and have received their acceptance along with their willingness to share their resources. Sponsorships for the event also continue to be strong, allowing the park district to maintain all its activities and plan for a significant increase in participation. The Live Green Family Festival is an event that interests the community and is expected to become a signature event for years to come.

Below are some actions from Education.com:  
**Ten Actions Parents Can Take to Prevent Nature Deficit Disorder.** You can share this with families at your agency that will help to get their children outside to connect with nature.

1. Be a role model and demonstrate your own curiosity about nature. Share what you love doing in the outdoors with your children. Model respect for nature with simple everyday activities like recycling and not littering.
2. Plan a monthly, or better yet, weekly surprise outdoor adventure. Explore a park, a beach, nature preserve, river or wetland. Fun family time builds children's excitement for the next adventure and demonstrates how you value time with them.
3. Organize an outing with your child's school to experience the outdoors. A trip to a local park, or the lakefront will help build community and instill a love of nature.
4. Follow the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations and limit TV and video games to 1-2 hours each day enabling your child to have time for unstructured, imagination-fueled playtime outside and with friends.
5. Take a daily or weekly walk together as a family after dinner. Walk around the neighborhood or to the nearest park. Use the quality time to catch up on the day's events and as a side benefit, get some exercise together.
6. Register your child for an outdoor summer camp. Give your child a dose of the outdoors, a chance to make new friends and fall in love with nature during summer vacation.
7. Go camping! Grab a tent, sleeping bag, and camp stove and teach your child how to camp and enjoy local, state and national treasures.
8. Plant a garden. Whether a backyard, school, or community garden plot, your child will learn about nature, nutrition, and making better food choices.
9. Check out a field guide from the local library. Use the guide during a walk in the neighborhood or a local park to identify animals, flowers, trees and fruits.
10. Link up with local, state, and national organizations such as Scouting, National Audubon Society, Sierra Club and more.



# WebXtra



## Naturally Connecting to Geocaching

By Bret Fahnstrom & Dina Lindemann

Geocaching is a high tech “treasure hunt” where players use handheld GPS receivers, or smart phone applications, and multimillion dollar satellites to find containers or information hidden by other players. When you find the container, you sign in on the log sheet, maybe swap some trinkets, and replace it just like you found it for the next person trying to find it. There are geocaches (or “caches”) everywhere around you. You may find them right down the street on the corner of your block, at the local shopping mall parking lot, the local library, the park in your neighborhood, the forest preserve and even state and national parks. There is even a geocache on the International Space Station, though it doesn't get found very often as you might guess. The first geocache (called a “stash” back then) was hidden in May 2000 and there are now about 2.3 million active geocaches around the world. Containers can be as small as a pencil eraser or as large as a 55 gallon drum. A few are even larger.

For some geocaches, you have to solve a puzzle or visit multiple stages before finding the container with the log to sign. And there are some caches where you don't need to find a physical container at all but rather visit a location that has cultural, historical or geological significance and answer some questions about what you find. These types of caches are Virtual Caches or EarthCaches.

### Read the Full Story Online

Go to [ILparks.org](http://ILparks.org) and select Publications/IP&R Magazine/WebXtras from the left column.

### Read the following articles online:

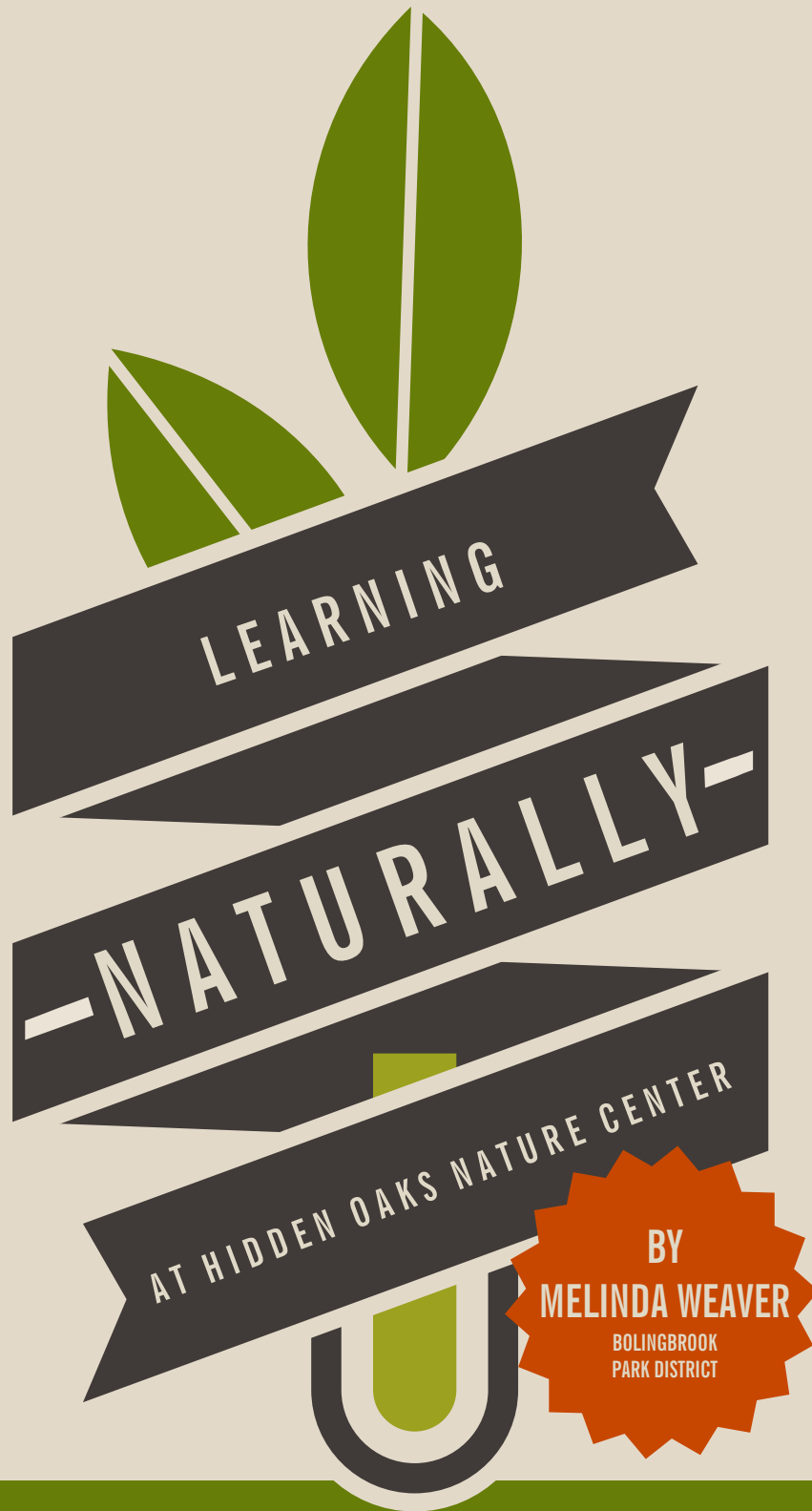
**Scouting and Park Districts: The Evolution of a Natural Partnership**, by Daniel Mitchell, Bartlett Park District

**Getting Back to Nature**, by Charles Szoke, Channahon Park District

**That Natural Sense of Wonder (Go out and Play!)** by Chris Carling, Itasca Park District

**Catching the Sustainability Light Through Community Involvement: “Combining Conservation Outreach and New Land Use Ideals”** by Dave Margolis, Oswegoland Park District

**Connecting with Nature Reaches New Heights**, by Kathy Nowicki and Agnes Wojnarski, Prospect Heights Park District



The Bolingbrook Park District built the Hidden Oaks Nature Center five years ago on the belief that it's vital to connect residents to nature. The mission of the Hidden Oaks Nature Center is to provide visitors of all ages and backgrounds opportunities to connect with nature by offering positive and experiential learning activities that engage and teach them to appreciate the world around them. It is the goal of the staff at the center to inspire curiosity and the exploration of nature and offer residents/visitors an opportunity to discover the pleasure of being in nature and realizing their own connection to the environment. When people learn more about nature they are more likely to be open to conservation efforts.





Through our volunteer program; Stewards of Natural Areas in the Parks (SNAPS), we offer opportunities for the public to be a part of restoration and protection of the district's natural areas. Some of these opportunities include clearing invasive species, mulching trails, collecting/cleaning/starting native seed and picking up litter.

Our school, scout, and environmental education programs focus on creating awareness and understanding about the environment. The first step toward that awareness is getting these groups outdoors. The natural classroom fosters learning in new, exciting ways that create lasting impressions. People tend to learn best by experiencing and doing. We encourage participants to use their senses and engage with their surroundings such as touching the rough bark of a tree, listening to birds sing, smelling the flowers, and turning over a log to see what lives underneath. The biggest reward is watching a child or adult's eyes light up and their genuine excitement as they are discovering nature. This is one of the main reasons the naturalists at Hidden Oaks, including myself, got into the environmental education field. The possibilities and learning opportunities are endless when you have the natural world as your classroom.

**The natural classroom fosters learning in new, exciting ways that create lasting impressions.**







Our Nature Play area is located directly behind the nature center. Here you can climb on a spider web, balance on a huge log, build a fort out of sticks, or just hang out in the small log cabin. Nature offers immense and diverse sensory experiences including sights, sounds, smells and touch. Similar to nature, the play area changes on a daily basis which inspires children to be observant and naturally curious. An overturned log may reveal a bunch of mushrooms one day and insects the next. Our Nature Play area allows children to explore and stimulate their innate curiosity. By accomplishing small challenges like crossing a stream by using rocks as stepping stones or climbing a tree can build confidence and self-esteem for children and adults alike. In the play area children can learn at their own pace and discover their own interests.

The Nature Play area is just a small portion of the vast 80 acres that visitors can explore. Hidden Oaks Conservation area includes the nature center and Hidden Lakes Trout Farm. The site is comprised of several habitats which include woodlands, savannas and wetlands. Visitors to the conservation area can let their imaginations go wild in exploring the natural world around them.



One of our primary roles is to educate our local community. We take this role very seriously and look forward to taking the time to introduce the public to nature and educate them about the wonders of the environment they live in. Hopefully these experiences will allow them to develop a sense of place, an understanding of the natural world that will continue to teach and inspire them for a lifetime. Hidden Oaks' staff develops and offers programs focused on families with the hope that parents see the value in nature, spend more time outdoors with their children, and to embrace the role that they all have as stewards.



Earth Aid is a yearly event where we highlight sustainable practices and how to see the world around you in new and exciting ways. This year we're focused on pollinators from insects to bees and bats. Visitors to the event will learn how to protect pollinators, create habitats for them, and learn more about how they are a benefit to the environment and the risks they face. Following the theme of pollinators our native plant sale will offer plants specific to creating a butterfly garden.

I have my parents to thank for the path that led me to a profession in nature. From an early age, my parents instilled a love of, and appreciation for, nature that I carry to this day. In the summer I didn't come inside until it was dark out and even then I could be found in the yard catching lightning bugs. I would lie on my back for hours in a grassy field and stare up into the blue sky at the clouds and listen to the sounds of the world around me. I didn't get in trouble when I would come into the house covered from head to toe in mud. My Mom would shake her head and ask me if I had fun and to tell her all about the exciting things I learned. I was consistently in awe of nature, from watching ants and crickets to discovering the creatures that lived along the river while fishing with my Dad. Even on family vacations our trips took us to natural places. Now as an adult with a busy life and plenty of responsibilities, finding time to be out in nature seems like an impossible dream and luxury. But we need to find a few minutes each day to connect with the world around us. To me it is therapeutic; I try to make a point to get some 'nature time' each day, even if it is only five minutes. These experiences are brief escapes, moments of peace in an otherwise busy day.

When was the last time you walked barefoot through the grass after a rain? Nature should be appreciated, respected, and protected. This connection has given me an enjoyment of nature, empathy for creatures, a sense of oneness with the natural world and a responsibility for the environment. Nature is an important part of my life and always has been. It still amazes me that a massive 100-year-old oak tree once started as a small acorn. Nature should be embraced not feared. I hope that the connection I have developed with nature can be used to create programs for the community to give them the opportunities to create their own connection with the natural world.



Hopefully these experiences will allow them to develop a sense of place, an understanding of the natural world that will continue to teach and inspire them for a lifetime.

## PEOPLE & PLACES



### The Buffalo Grove Park District Announces the Retirement of Dan Schimmel

Dan has served as the executive director since 2010. Prior to that, he served as the department head for the recreation and facilities departments. Dan's professional career spans 38 years, with valuable experiences gained from the St. Charles, Elmhurst, Glenview and Des Plaines Park Districts. He came to Buffalo Grove Park District after serving 5 years as the superintendent of recreation for the Hanover Park District.

Notable achievements during his 24 years at the Buffalo Grove Park District include starting the Clubhouse before and after school care program, serving on the management team for the construction of the Buffalo Grove Fitness Center and Buffalo Grove Golf and Sports Center facilities, assisting in the acquisition and development of the new Community Arts Center, and obtaining several grants for park and facility development, including the renovation of Willow Stream Pool, the Crossroads Exhibit at the Raupp Museum, the redevelopment of Kilmer Park, and two grants for the upcoming redevelopment of Willow Stream Park. Schimmel will continue to serve as executive director until December 2014, when the district's deputy director, Ryan Risinger, will assume the position.



### The Northern Illinois Special Recreation Association (NISRA) Announces the Retirement of Brian Shahinian

**Brian Shahinian** will retire at the end of June. Brian joined the staff in 1987 as superintendent of recreation and became executive director in 1989. He previously worked for Maine-Niles and Northern Suburban Special Recreation agencies. Under Brian's leadership, the association grew from seven to thirteen member districts, allowing hundreds of residents with disabilities to begin enjoying programs. NISRA and its staff were honored twice with the National Gold Medal

award and have received numerous other awards. The NISRA Foundation was created and raised over \$1 million to fund innovative projects.

Brian has inspired staff to "leave a legacy" and personally pioneered initiatives such as the Independent Angling Project (the Arthur G. Farley wheelchair-accessible fishing pier and pontoon boat, and annual fishing tournament in Wauconda), and the Pepper Family Accessible Treehouse (Illinois' first of its kind) constructed in Barrington. NRPA, IPRA and IAPD honored both with awards. In 2009, Brian and the NISRA Board secured permanent office space for the association. Brian spearheaded special recreation projects, worked toward passage of S.B. 1881, and is an ITRS Distinguished Service award recipient.

### The Northern Illinois Special Recreation Association (NISRA) Names Jim Wiseman as New Executive Director

The Northern Illinois Special Recreation Association (NISRA) Board of Directors has selected **Jim Wiseman** as its new executive director, beginning



June 2. Jim has served as superintendent of recreation for NISRA since 2008. From 2003-2008, Jim was superintendent of recreation for the Northwest Special Recreation Association, returning to the agency where he began his career years earlier as a program specialist. Throughout the 1990s and into 2003, Jim contributed his leadership & management skills to Special Olympics Wisconsin in the roles of director of sports management and director of training & volunteer services.

Jim holds a bachelor's degree in therapeutic recreation from the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse and is a graduate of Professional Development School. Jim has actively participated in both IPRA and the Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association (WPRA). In the therapeutic recreation section of both organizations, he has served in multiple roles including section director, board member and committee chair. The WPRA therapeutic recreation section recognized him as Professional of the Year in 1998. Jim has been a leader in the Rolling Meadows Rotary Club and Crystal Lake Dawnbreakers Rotary Club, and is a NISRA representative to several mental health service organizations in McHenry County.





### The Urbana Park District Announces the Retirement of Vicki Mayes

Vicki has served as the executive director of the district for 10 years. She has worked in the field of parks and recreation for more than 35 years. Under

her leadership, the new Crystal Lake Park Family Aquatic Center was developed and opened. A new efficient and environmentally sensitive planning and operations facility was constructed. Improvements were made in virtually all twenty of the district's parks and its eight recreation facilities with a focus on citizen involvement in planning, sustainable design, creative playgrounds, natural areas and internal park walking trails.

During her tenure with the Urbana Park District, Vicki has led the district through the current strategic plan, projects leading to the Illinois Parks and Recreation Association (IPRA) Outstanding Park and Facility award for the Crystal Lake Park Family Aquatic Center and the Daniel L. Flaherty award for Park Excellence for Weaver Park from the Great Lakes Park Training Institute. The district also received a Certificate of Achievement of Excellence through the Illinois Joint Distinguished Accreditation program (IAPD/IPRA).



### The Urbana Park District Names Tim Bartlett as New Executive Director

**Tim Bartlett** will take over as executive director of the Urbana Park District in May. Tim is the associate director of the Urbana Park District and was

recognized at the recent Mid America Trails and Greenways (MATAG) Conference. Representing the trail interests of seven midwestern states—Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin — MATAG aims to tighten and strengthen the trail building community across America's heartland.

Tim received the Outstanding Advocate award from the State of Illinois for his work as a board member of the Champaign County Design and Conservation Foundation to coordinate the efforts of the Champaign County Forest Preserve District and Vermilion County Conservation District to acquire the 24.5 mile CSX railroad line to serve as a bicycle/pedestrian trail between Urbana and Danville. As an adjunct faculty member in the department of landscape architecture at the University of Illinois, he facilitated class projects involving colleagues and students that use the corridor as a learning opportunity and that have resulted in communicating the wider benefits of acquiring and developing the former railroad right of way.



### Batavia Park District Announces Two New Staff Members

The Batavia Park District is pleased to announce that **Jennifer Bruggeman** is the new human resources and risk manager. In this position, Jen assists staff in finding confidence and increasing comfort in the district's changing environment. She helps staff develop and serve as leaders in their individual areas as well as encourages visionary thinking as a part of decision making.

Growing up in the Oswegoland area, she was pleased with all the opportunities that the park district offered to its patrons and staff. She previously worked at the Wheaton Park District in the recreation department for over 5 years, where she was given many leadership development opportunities, which set her up for success in Batavia. Jen has a bachelor's in recreation program management and commercial recreation from Illinois State University and a master's in management and organizational behavior from Benedictine University.

The Batavia Park District welcomes **Aleks Briedis** as director of community recreation. In this new role, Aleks coaches a staff of 6 recreation supervisors to help deliver the highest quality of recreation programs. He builds and maintains relationships throughout the community by collaborating and communicating with individuals, groups and families.

Aleks previously worked as the recreation director for the city of Rifle, Colorado for more than 14 years. He received his bachelor of science in leisure studies from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. With his experience and passion, he looks forward to enhancing recreation programs, aquatics, facility rentals and special events.

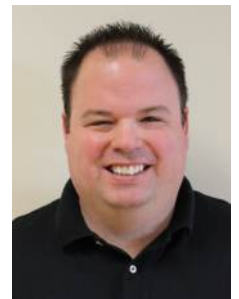


### West Chicago Park District Announces Two New Staff Members

**Lily Garcia** is the new marketing and public relations coordinator for the West Chicago Park District. She has over ten years of experience in project management, marketing, event planning and sponsorship procurement. Lily has a background in journalism and a passion for outreach and public relations. Her parks and recreation career started with the Hanover Park Park District. She brings her knowledge and experience to the West Chicago

Park District at the perfect time with the launch of a brand new recreation facility along with the advancement of the Park Foundation. Lily is a member of the IPRA Communications & Marketing section.

**Brian Kaspar** is the new facility manager for the West Chicago Park District. With a brand new recreation facility in the progress, his background in customer service, fitness and facility programming will be key in the planning and daily operations of the center. He has over fifteen years of experience and has previously worked for the Westchester Park District, the Gateway Special Recreation Association and the City of Palos Hills Resource and Recreation Department. Brian is a member of the IPRA Facility Managers Community Center and Fitness sections.



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