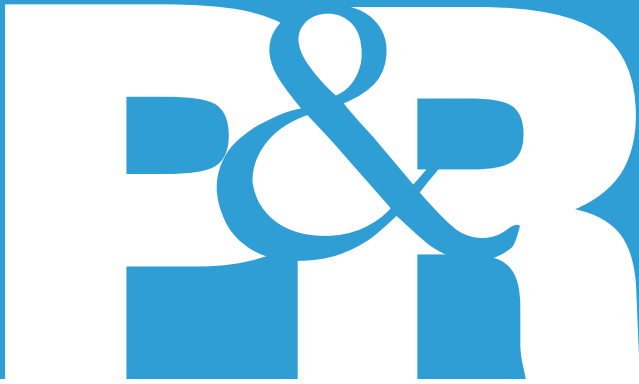


illinois

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PARKS AND RECREATION

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



aquatics &  
themed parks



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## FROM THE EDITOR

I hope all of you are having a great summer so far! This issue of *IP&R* magazine takes a look at aquatics and themed park areas and in some cases, themed water parks. Theming has been used across many industries to attract and retain customers. Stores even use theming for things like holiday displays. Imagine walking into just about any store around the fourth of July weekend and not seeing a section decked out in red, white and blue.



Themes give a meaning or a purpose to an exhibit, display, event or park. There is something about a theme park that gives it an attractive spirit of its own. People are naturally drawn to themes because it entertains their individual interests.

Think of a zoo, for example. The overall theme of a zoo is of course animals but what is especially interesting are the themes within the zoo. Each habitat has a theme such as monkeys, lions and bears among others. People want to visit each habitat because of its theme. For instance, a child has just seen the Lion King movie so naturally they want to check out the lion exhibit.

My favorite theme at the zoo is the aquatic area or the aquarium. For me, there is nothing better than taking a new visitor on a tour of the fish habitats and showing them all the different fish, explaining their origin and identifying certain fish that are kept as pets.

So you see, themes are all around us whether we realize it or not. Thankfully, people in our agencies have seen the value of themed parks and have built them for all their residents to appreciate.

I hope you enjoy the articles on aquatics and theme parks in this issue. Don't forget to get out to your nearest agency park and aquatic center for some fun in the sun!

*Rachel Laier*

— Rachel Laier, Editor



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Peter M. Murphy, J.D., CAE  
IAPD President and CEO

## Living Legends: IAPD Jump Starts Its Living Legends Video Series

IAPD's Living Legends series was started more than 20 years ago to record and memorialize the experience and dedication of citizen volunteers and park board members throughout Illinois.

Most recently, IAPD Chair, Diane Main, who has served the Westmont Park District for more than 38 years as a park commissioner, shared her ideas, thoughts and feelings about service to her community. The results were wonderful and reflected the dedication and commitment that I see from locally elected park board members across Illinois. Her story is unique as is each of yours.

IAPD's Living Legends program also includes Bruce Larson who served the Urbana Park District for 42 years and was also IAPD president in 1996, and Don Bresnan, affectionately referred to as "Mr. Commissioner," who served the Champaign Park District for 36 years and as IAPD president 46 years ago in 1969.

Among others, the program also features the thoughts and impressions of two additional IAPD presidents: Mike Cassidy, a Freeport Park District commissioner for 36 years and the individual for whom the Mike Cassidy Community Service Award was named, and Ralph Cianchetti, who was a dynamic member of the Park District of Highland Park board for nearly 20 years and served IAPD on numerous committees and as board president in 1986.

The Living Legends series has been replicated many times, but no more successfully than by this year's winner of the TED Talks prize. Personally, I am a big fan of TED Talks which, as most of you know, is contributed to by various leading authors, musicians, humanitarians, business and philanthropic leaders. TED is a nonprofit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less). TED began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, and today covers almost all topics – from science to business to global issues – in more than 100 languages.

The 2015 winner of the million dollar TED Talks prize is Dave Isay, founder of StoryCorps, whose mission is to provide people from all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share and preserve the stories of their lives. This is accomplished by recording high quality interviews between friends or family in which one person interviews the other. StoryCorps has traveled across the country and has collected and archived more than 50,000 interviews from more than 90,000 participants. It is one of the largest oral history projects of its kind. All StoryCorps interviews are archived at the American Folklife

Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. If you are interested in listening to StoryCorps interviews, please refer to the American Folklife Center's website at [www.loc.gov/folklife](http://www.loc.gov/folklife) for information on how to access the collection. See also NPR's interview with gambler and businessman-turned conservationist ([NPR.org/2015/06/17/415226300](http://NPR.org/2015/06/17/415226300)).

IAPD's Living Legends video series follows a similar format, however, it uses uniform questions asked of all participants. For information on the IAPD Living Legends series and to view the most recent video featuring IAPD Chair, Diane Main, please go to the IAPD website at [ILparks.org](http://ILparks.org).

*"Our stories matter...  
Your stories matter...  
For you never know how  
much of a difference  
they make and to whom."*

*- Caroline Joy Adams*



Through the end of 2015 and throughout 2016, IAPD will be continuing a series of legends interviews. If you have a park commissioner who has served your agency in an exemplary manner and whom you feel has a story to tell, please email me at [pmurphy@ILparks.org](mailto:pmurphy@ILparks.org) and we will put them on the list to be interviewed in the future. It is my goal as well to have a day of living legends interviews during the IAPD/IPRA state conference taking place January 28-30, 2016.

Telling your story as an agency to those you serve should also be an ongoing goal and I know that for many of you it is. Park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation and special recreation agencies make a tremendous contribution to the quality of life in communities across Illinois. This needs to be recognized and reaffirmed constantly so that there is never a question about the value that you all deliver on a daily basis. The seasonal brochures that you all offer filled with recreational programming opportunities for the young and old alike are worthy of emulation. These programs teach lifelong skills and recreation which keeps a community healthy and in tune with nature and the outdoors. Keep up the great work! I applaud your daily efforts to make Illinois a better place to live.

## How Not To Be An Effective Board Member

- Talk too much and listen too little.
- Criticize a board decision that was voted on and passed by the majority of the board, but that you did not specifically support.
- Demonstrate to fellow board members that you have all the answers for every issue.
- Refuse to change your mind on any issue regardless of the evidence that is presented.
- Fail to read board packets and prepare for board meetings.
- Divulge information from an executive session.
- Refuse to compromise when decision making has stalemated.
- Ridicule past board members and the decisions made by the board before you became a member.
- Try to give instructions to the executive as an individual board member.
- Hold grudges against fellow board members who don't agree with you.
- Try to dominate the conversation at every board meeting.
- Arrive late at board meetings and leave early.
- Remind fellow board members, "It's always been done this way in the past."
- Appear at the agency giving orders to employees.
- Want the agency to be a haven for hiring friends and the politically deserving.
- Constantly criticize and question board policies and executive decisions.
- Do not try to know or understand the other people who serve on the board with you.
- Have no interest in being educated on good boardmanship.

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## 2015 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Thursday, July 16, 2015  
**Joint Legislative Awareness Golf Outing**  
White Pines Golf Club,  
Bensenville Park District

Friday, October 2, 2015  
**IAPD Best of the Best Awards Gala**  
Chevy Chase Country Club,  
Wheeling Park District

Wednesday, July 29, 2015  
**New Rules for Managing Local Electronic Records Webinar**

Tuesday, October 13, 2015  
**New Rules for Managing Local Electronic Records**  
1pm-3pm  
Prospect Heights Park District's Old Orchard Country Club Banquet Room

Monday, August 17, 2015  
**IAPD Summer Golf Tour #3**  
Inwood Golf Course  
Joliet Park District

Wednesday, October 14, 2015  
**New Rules for Managing Local Electronic Records**  
1pm-3pm  
Bolingbrook Park District's Boughton Ridge Golf Course/  
Ashbury's

Saturday, August 22, 2015  
**Park District Conservation Day**  
IL State Fairgrounds,  
Springfield

Saturday, August 29, 2015  
**Legislative Awareness Picnic**  
Inwood Park, Joliet Park District

Thursday, October 29, 2015  
**IAPD Legal Symposium**  
McDonald's University/Hyatt Lodge

September 15-17, 2015  
**NRPA Congress**  
Las Vegas, NV

January 28-30, 2016  
**IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference**  
Hyatt Regency Chicago

Monday, September 28, 2015  
**IAPD Summer Golf Tour #4**  
Glenview Park Golf Club  
Glenview Park District

**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).



By Debbie Trueblood, CAE  
IPRA Executive Director

## IPRA's New Programs Make it Easy to Connect with Others During Your Busiest Time

This issue is dedicated to aquatics and themed parks. Did you know IPRA has an online community just for discussions and resources related to aquatics? IPRA members can sign up at <http://connect.ilipra.org/home>.

Summertime in parks and rec has everything to do with family, fun, memories and connections. At IPRA, we have been rolling out all of our new online communities to make it easier for professionals to connect to people and resources during your busiest time of year.

IPRA is also rolling out the new cycle of ProConnect, IPRA's mentoring program. We recently learned that ProConnect received a national award from the American Society of Association Executives and we can't wait to roll out applications for the next cycle of mentors and mentees to join this great program. ProConnect, now in its second year, is in partnership with the University of St. Francis in Joliet, and includes a unique three part mentoring team including professionals who are early career, mid-level, and seasoned professionals. Their team comes together five times over six months at events which include educational programs, networking opportunities, a service project and culmination. In the end, all mentors and mentees receive a certificate of completion from University of St. Francis along with the foundation for a professional mentoring relationship which is designed to support you in your career. Both mentors and mentees have found the program valuable and exit surveys show 97% would recommend this program to a friend or colleague. If you are interested, applications will be out this summer with the new cycle beginning this fall. Further, IPRA is thrilled to announce ProConnect South, a duplicate program in collaboration with Southern Illinois Park and Recreation Association (SIPRA) for southern Illinois park and recreation professionals. This program will have all the quality of ProConnect with alterations to make it accessible and valuable for the southern region. In southern Illinois, if you are interested in applying, contact George Bryant at Mt. Vernon Park and Rec Department.

Also this summer, IPRA will open elections for section board seats as well as IPRA's Board seats. The board seats have staggered terms, so the positions up for election this year are the Southern Region Rep and the Chicago Metro Rep. Any member who lives in one of those two regions may choose to run for the board. For

clarification, IPRA defines the Chicago Metro Region as those members from the following counties: Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake and Will. And IPRA defines the Southern Region as members from the following counties: Alexander, Bond, Calhoun, Christian, Clark, Clay, Clinton, Crawford, Cumberland, Edgar, Edwards, Effingham, Fayette, Franklin, Gallatin, Greene, Hamilton, Hardin, Jackson, Jasper, Jefferson, Jersey, Johnson, Lawrence, Macoupin, Madison, Marion, Massac, Monroe, Montgomery, Moultrie, Pike, Perry, Pope, Pulaski, Randolph, Richland, St. Clair, Saline, Scott, Shelby, Union, Wabash, Washington, Wayne, White and Williamson. We will send out the application to our members and post it on our website on Monday, June 29, 2015 and applications will be due Monday, August 3, 2015, 5:00 PM. We have contested elections and usually have at least two people running for each position. Incumbents may choose to run for re-election.

"I hope that you have an opportunity to witness the power of parks and recreation to create lasting memories, bring families together, and inspire a sense of togetherness throughout your community this summer."



This fall, the Community Campaign Task Force will be rolling out the Unplug Illinois campaign to educate the public about the value of parks and recreation. The first step was creating the community calendar where members can post upcoming events at your agency for the public to view to advance your marketing efforts statewide. Future steps include a new secondary website to run parallel with IPRA's current website which will have a different branding focused on the public directly with access to the community calendar as well as research/facts and figures about the value of parks and recreation and other resources to educate the public and help them to connect to your programs and opportunities. Once the new website goes live we will do a marketing effort to ensure the public knows about it. This fall, the committee will publish a new toolkit with information about the value of parks and recreation with the latest research to help you have all the information you need to best communicate to your community. Finally, in 2016 and beyond, we will do a statewide



marketing effort to again, better educate the public about parks and recreation and the value it brings to each community. As our sister organization, IAPD, works so hard to advocate on behalf of the industry, we believe this public education effort goes hand in hand with that effort and comes at a most needed time when so many budget pressures are facing elected officials. The more the public understands what parks and recreation can do for them, the more they will find value and support local agencies.

IPRA has also worked hard to ensure that as a staff we participate in our local park and recreation agencies. We received the 2015 PDRMA Employee Wellness Grant for our "Practice What We Preach" program which allowed staff to get reimbursed for fitness opportunities at their local park district or municipality as well as fund a team fitness outing. In the end, all staff participated in the team outing to Top Golf, affiliated with the Wood Dale Park District and five of seven participated in the personal fitness opportunity. We, as staff, have experienced first-hand, the value of parks and recreation in our local communities and made connections at our local agencies. What a pleasure it has been to reinvigorate our personal commitment to this field and our mission.

I hope as summer heat comes in that your pools, water parks, golf courses, summer camps, and other outdoor activities are successful and that you have an opportunity to witness the power of parks and recreation to create lasting memories, bring families together, and inspire a sense of togetherness throughout your community.

## JOIN THE DISCUSSION!

Build community and connect online with your colleagues!

[CONNECT.IIPRA.ORG](http://CONNECT.IIPRA.ORG)

## IPRA Calendar of Events

**August 4-6, 2015**

### Certified Playground Safety Inspector Course (CPSI)

Time to recertify or looking to become certified? Registration is now open for the August 4-6 CPSI training course to be held at Chevy Chase Country Club in Wheeling, IL. This special summer course has been added to accommodate a growing demand. Space is limited. Beat the fall rush and ensure your seat at this popular, top-selling course. The registration deadline is July 10, 2015.

**August 5-6, 2015**

### Teen Kayak and Camping Trip

The IPRA Teen Committee is offering a kayak and camping trip for teens. Teens will participate in a 2 hour guided kayak tour, hiking, movie on the big screen and will receive dinner and breakfast.

**August 12 & 20, 2015**

### Skills Development Webinar Series: Corporate Partnerships

Corporate partnership has changed dramatically over the past decade. The dynamic economy has impacted corporate giving, marketing and partnerships.

**August 20, September 25, October 9 & November 6, 2015**

### Certified Park and Recreation Professional (CPRP) Exam Preparation - Series of Four Classes

Certification is important to demonstrate that you have an understanding of the basic competencies needed to be successful in the park and recreation profession. In addition, maintaining the certification shows you have a willingness to continue to learn and grow throughout your career. This workshop consists of four sections and will prepare you to become a Certified Park & Recreation Professional. This is a progression training course for taking the CPRP Test. You are not required to attend all dates, however different areas of the test will be covered each date.

**August 26, 2015**

### PSC's Joint Section Education Workshop: Strategies to Prevent Burnout - 8/26/15

Most of us are terrific at taking care of our bosses, our families, our co-workers, our friends, our neighbors and anyone else who needs nurturing. But when it comes to taking care of ourselves, we just don't seem to have any time or energy left, right?



For a complete list of upcoming events, and to register, visit [ILipra.org](http://ILipra.org)



Jason Anselment  
Legal/Legislative Counsel

# A State Mandated Property Tax Freeze Would Result in Unavoidable Cuts to Important Local Services

Although the General Assembly's regular spring session was scheduled to adjourn on May 31<sup>st</sup>, both chambers remain in session as this issue goes to press. To date, lawmakers and the Governor have not yet reached an agreement on a State budget for the fiscal year that began on July 1<sup>st</sup>. While it is uncertain when an agreement will be reached, it is clear that a local property tax freeze remains a key part of the negotiations.

A "one size fits all" approach that imposes a statewide property tax freeze would tie the hands of locally elected officials and jeopardize important services that are relied upon by citizens throughout Illinois.

## Context Is Critical to the Property Tax Discussion

While there appears to be general acceptance that Illinois has the 2nd highest property taxes in the nation, this assertion is based upon the comparison of property taxes to a snapshot in time of estimated home values.<sup>1</sup> A home is a long term investment. Like stocks, home values can fluctuate, and the value is most relevant at the time of sale. In recent years, Illinois home values were suppressed because of the recession, which contributed to Illinois' property tax ranking in those studies that rely on a snapshot of home values.

The recently released study by the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability (CTAB) uses more accurate indicators.<sup>ii</sup> That study found that **Illinois ranks 10th in property tax revenue per capita and 9th when it comes to property taxes as a percentage of personal income.** But even these rankings require further explanation.

As the CTAB analysis illustrated, the primary driver of property taxes in Illinois is our state's disparate reliance on local property taxes to fund schools. In fact, **Illinois' local property taxes account for 63.3% of all school funding.** In comparison, the national average is only 44.6%. Because Illinois relies so heavily on local property taxes to fund schools, **school districts account for nearly 60% of all property taxes collected in Illinois** (see chart to the left).

If Illinois aligned its school funding sources with other states, local property taxes here would drop substantially and our national ranking would be dramatically lowered. Simply put, addressing the way in which Illinois funds schools is the key to lowering property taxes.

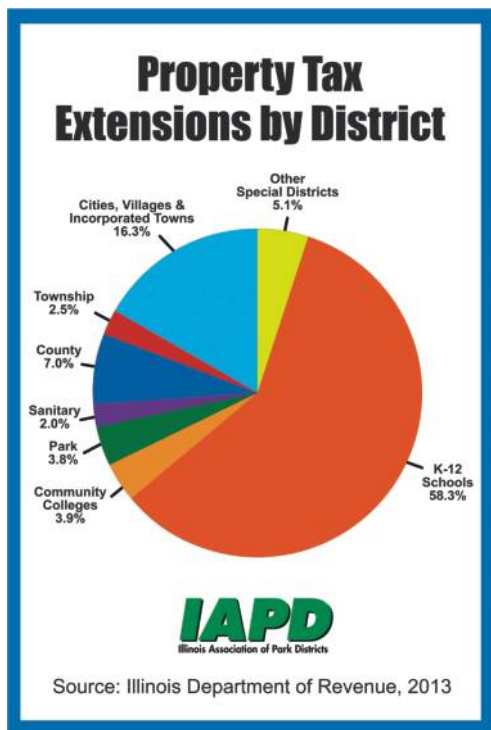
## Park Districts Would Be Disproportionately Impacted by a Property Tax Freeze

Although a local property tax freeze would have long term consequences for all local governments and school districts, park districts would be particularly hard hit. While **park districts represent only 3.8% of all property tax receipts statewide**, they have fewer sources of available revenues than other local governments and school districts. For example, park districts do not receive tax dollars from the Local Government Distributive Fund (LGDF). While park districts help generate substantial sales taxes for the State and other local governments, park districts themselves do not have the authority to impose a local sales tax and do not receive sales tax revenue. Unlike school districts, park districts also do not receive any general state aid for their operational budgets.

In fact, the only other significant source of operational revenue for park districts is user fees. Raising program registration fees is not an option to offset a property tax freeze because park districts serve the entire community, not just those who can afford to pay more. Moreover, park districts have already carefully studied the amount of user fees that their community will support, so attempting to increase fees to make up for a loss in property tax revenue would likely have diminishing returns due to a drop in participation.

## Cuts Would Be Unavoidable

To be clear, the property tax freeze proposed thus far would **permanently freeze the total amount of property tax revenues** at their current levels *in perpetuity*.



While revenues would be frozen, a park district's expenses for utilities, equipment, supplies and labor will not be frozen. This means that a State mandate that eliminates a modest growth in property tax revenue will result in immediate cuts. The long term consequences will be more ominous as the permanent loss in revenue will be compounded over time, thereby causing the need to close facilities and eliminate services.

Local government budgets have already diminished in recent years because of the recession. The minimal CPI-increase allowed under PTELL has barely allowed local government to cover inflationary increases in expenses such as utility costs, supplies, materials and equipment.

The proposed property tax freeze would apply PTELL to all non-tax capped counties even though they have rejected PTELL. Non-tax capped park districts are already holding the line on taxes. During the recession when EAVs were declining, many did not raise tax rates accordingly. This meant that their revenues from the property tax extension dropped dramatically. Going forward, it would also mean that a state mandate imposing a zero percent increase under PTELL on these districts will punish them for exercising fiscal restraint because it will permanently freeze their tax levies at recession-levels.

### Our Representative Democracy Already Provides Protections for Local Taxpayers

Requiring voters to approve every inflationary increase to cover their extra expenses is far from "local control." A representative democracy has served our country well for more than two centuries. Ours is a system that relies on locally elected officials – not ballot propositions – to make budgetary and other fiscal decisions based on community needs.

Park districts are governed by a non-partisan board of locally elected community members. These locally elected officials are readily accessible to the community and spend many hours every month reviewing the district's finances and approving all expenditures. They take their positions very seriously. These public servants are in the best position to make the determination of the annual revenue needs of their local district, subject to existing legal limits. Since they are elected, dissatisfied citizens always have the option of voting them out of office.

Not only does the idea of requiring a referendum on an annual budget decision contravene our American system of government, it also ignores the PTELL's restrictions. By statute, the referendum question cannot inform voters what programs will be eliminated or what facilities will close if the referendum fails. This is far different than asking voters for an increase to pay for a new project that is easily defined.

In sharp contrast, the proposed property tax freeze will take away voter choice with regard to matters that current law allows them to decide because it would automatically mandate that all counties are subject to a frozen PTELL – even those that have already rejected the idea. In fact, in the 20+ years since PTELL's imposition only 39 of 102 Illinois counties have decided PTELL is right for them. The voters in ten counties have voted to reject PTELL outright, including Jersey County in April 2015. The proposed legislation would reverse the decision of those voters and dictate to every other Illinois county what is right for them.

Elections hold local officials accountable for their tax levy decisions. Additionally, numerous other laws require taxing bodies to go out of their way to give the public adequate notice and an opportunity to express their opposition. If there is a hue and cry over local property taxes, park districts are not hearing those complaints about their share of the local property tax bill.

In fact, **a recent statewide survey shows that the vast majority of Illinoisans believe that park districts are good stewards of their property tax dollars.**<sup>iii</sup> The same survey found that **7 in 10 Illinois citizens** believe the portion of their property taxes going to the **park district represents an excellent or good value** given the level of service provided in return.

### Investments in Park Districts Pay Huge Dividends for Illinois Homeowners

A state mandated property tax freeze on park districts is shortsighted public policy. Studies show that park and recreation services increase property values and the vast majority of Illinois citizens (9 out of 10)<sup>iv</sup> agree with those studies. This means that forcing local governments to cut valuable services by freezing property taxes will only keep home values suppressed.

While we are unaware of any study that shows that property taxes are actually driving businesses out of Illinois, public parks and recreational facilities improve Illinois communities and attract new businesses and employees while helping to retain existing businesses and residents. Ask any homeowner or realtor if they emphasize proximity to park land as a selling feature and the answer will be an emphatic "yes."

Taxpayers also get a substantial return on their investment in their local park district. For example, park districts provide affordable afterschool and summer school programs, lower facility membership fees, and cost effective program registration fees. The thousands of programs offered by local park and recreation agencies at these facilities promote healthier lifestyles through daily exercise, which leads to savings in healthcare costs. Studies also show that every \$1 invested in conservation returns \$4 in natural goods and services like storm water mitigation and improved air and water quality. Park districts help reduce crime and provide facilities for use by schools and other organizations.

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America's system of representative democracy has served park districts and their residents very well. Surveys show that Illinois citizens are highly satisfied with the way in which their locally elected, non-partisan, uncompensated park commissioners have invested their local property tax dollars for park, recreation and conservation services. A state mandated property tax freeze will unnecessarily tie the hands of community-minded park board members, and it will inevitably result in a loss of the services that Illinois citizens value so highly. Unfortunately, such a shortsighted state mandate would also have long term, negative consequences for park districts and the entire state.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.illinoispolicy.org/property-tax-rates-skyrocket-in-illinois-2nd-highest-in-u-s/>

<sup>ii</sup> Illinois Property Taxes – Updated, Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, May 14, 2015

<sup>iii</sup> Statewide Survey of Illinois Residents conducted by Market Probe, Inc., September 2013

<sup>iv</sup> Statewide Survey of Illinois Residents conducted by Market Probe, Inc., September 2013



Photography by Mark Ballogg

# Theming *with* IMAGINATION



Is it possible to combine a water park with a zoo? It could only happen in the dreams of children...right? The Mt. Vernon Parks and Recreation Department took children's dreams combined with childlike imagination and built themed activity areas for a safari adventure at the Mt. Vernon Aquatic Zoo Water Park.

Why is it called an Aquatic Zoo Water Park? This is our story. It was the mid-1900s when Dr. S.A. Thompson approached the City of Mt. Vernon with an offer to provide animals for a zoo in what is now called Veterans Park. Dr. Thompson and other spirited public citizens contributed until the zoo consisted of monkeys, parrots, bears, buffalo, deer, antelope, mountain goats, coyotes, birds and lions.

Even though the small zoo has long since disappeared, many of the senior citizens remember the animals. You can still hear the old stories from those who lived near the zoo. Hearing the roar of the lions throughout the night seems to be one memory etched in the minds of those who remember the zoo.

By George Bryant, CPRP, Parks and Public Facilities Director, Mt. Vernon Parks and Recreation Department

When I first came to work for the City of Mt. Vernon eight years ago, I remember seeing an old worn out yellow lion drinking fountain in the back corner of the maintenance building. Faded, dirty and chipped, Leo the Lion had provided a cool drink of water to thousands of children in the park before he was taken out of service. Little did we realize back then, Leo would serve to be the future mascot of our new water park.

A new comprehensive plan for the City and the Parks and Recreation Department was developed in 2009 as a result of numerous public meetings. It was determined that the 1971 L-shaped city swimming pool was on the hit list of capital projects needing to be addressed because of the facility's deteriorated condition and lack of attendance. One unique community meeting involved an elementary school which allowed the children to participate in "Park Director for a Day." A special exercise each of the students participated in was drawing a picture of their ideal park. I will always remember the picture submitted by one child of playground equipment that was drawn in the shape of animals. The smiles of the children and the playground animal equipment drawn that day just stuck with me.

When it came time to plan for the new facility, the City of Mt. Vernon contracted with FGM Architects. Councilman-Hunsaker was the aquatic consultant and together both firms provided professional services for the design and construction of the aquatic facility. One of the main features of the facility would be a splash pad containing an animal safari theme.

During one of many long detailed planning meetings a question was asked, "Have you thought about a name for the facility?" That comment started a brain storming session that seemed to constantly come back to the animal and safari theme. The staff picked a definite direction when they reviewed the rich history of the park system involving the old zoo, along with the children's present and past fascination with animals. Who would have believed that the history of a small community zoo and a child's school drawing would help spark the vision to create the City of Mt. Vernon's Aquatic Zoo Water Park?

The Aquatic Zoo theme is deeply carved as an integral part of the facility's operation. The interactive animal spray features and safari themed elements help bring this adventure to life. The splash pad is a popular feature boasting palm trees, a King Kong tipping bucket, zebra, giraffe and assorted animal fountains that all "sound out" when the children come into contact with them. The Gator Walk always creates excitement as children and adults try to move from log rafts to the backs of alligators, as they attempt to cross using only the suspended cargo net above their heads.

What better a way to start a safari than an imaginary trip on the back of a wild animal? A zebra and Land Rover are dry play features that small children may ride on. They are entertained by an assortment of sounds including drums, honking horns, Tarzan yells and of course, a short tune of "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" song.

The aquatic staff even gets into character by going through customer service training. Wes Plummer, recreation coordinator, developed the training which also involves the theming element and story behind the creation of the Aquatic Zoo. You will also find employees decked out in T-shirts identifying them as official "Zoo Keepers." Plummer oversees the facility's operation utilizing 4 managers, 50 lifeguards and 15 customer relations/concession staff. Polite and helpful staff go beyond the norm and enhance your visit as they become part of your safari experience.



What ever happened to old Leo the Lion drinking fountain? He was taken out of retirement beginning with a makeover at the local car body shop. Now it's only natural that Leo, the Aquatic Zoo mascot, be up front and center as you enter the facility. You may even hear an old story or two from a grandpa telling his grandchildren how when he was little he would stick his head in Leo's mouth to get a cool drink of water. Since Leo is old enough to remember the Mt. Vernon Zoo, it should be no surprise that he should bring all of his old zoo friends to the new water park. So you see, Leo and all of his zoo friends are still continuing to entertain children as well as adults.

When you have finished your first safari at the Aquatic Zoo you will be sure to call it the "AZ," just as the locals do. The "AZ" is filled with interactive animal spray features bursting with sound upon every child's touch.

During the first year of operation in 2014, the community embraced the new facility and staff with showers of compliments. Attendance figures soared to over 50,000 even with the cool weather that showed up in July and August. One of the most heartfelt and gratifying compliments was made by an 8 year old girl. When her mother asked if she would like to go to the ocean on vacation this summer she quickly responded, "Can we go to the AZ for vacation?"

When looking at the benefits to the City of Mt. Vernon regarding the themed water park, Mt. Vernon Mayor, Mary Jane Chesley, was quick to identify 3 important areas. "First, theming allowed a significant part of the community's history to be carried over from when the City once operated a live zoo, to today's operation of a new water park. Second, the Aquatic Zoo is truly unique and those visiting the facility will find features that create an atmosphere of fun for all that attend. Finally, theming allows the City to transition into the future for new additions to be considered in order to keep the facility fresh to the public."

What ideas do you have to create and enhance powerful and positive emotions in your facility that will leave a lasting impression for your patrons? Remember, creating lasting experiences through theming is an exciting part of being in the parks and recreation profession. Every community has a story. The trick is in how you tell it.

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# FUN

## at Rainbow Falls Waterpark and Pirates' Cove Children's Theme Park in Elk Grove Village

by **Kelly Carbon**, Superintendent of Marketing and  
**Diane Malinowski**, Public Relations Manager, Elk Grove Park District

### **Rainbow Falls Waterpark**

Rainbow Falls Waterpark is a suburban escape to a summer paradise. The 11 acre tropical-themed water park is located 20 miles west of Chicago in Elk Grove Village, Illinois. The facility features vortex, leisure, dive and tot pools, body slides, tube slides, a drop slide, a lily pad walk, spray structures and a fun house. For those visitors looking for a more relaxing experience, grab a tube and float down our lazy river. This multi – generational water park has something for everyone!

Attached to the aquatics area, you will find a 15,000 square ft. building including a bathhouse and Rainbow Falls Community Center which is available for pool parties and private rentals during the summer season. Programming and private rentals are also offered at the center in the off-season. The Rainbow Falls Community Center is equipped with a catering kitchen and a view of the water park with an attached private outdoor picnic area. The entirety of the Rainbow Falls facility also includes an inline hockey rink used year-round, when there isn't snow!



## The first 50 years of Fun in the Sun

The Rainbow Falls facility that you visit today began as a neighborhood pool in 1960 as a donation from Centex Homes to the Elk Grove Village Lions Club. In 1968, the Lions Club gave it to the newly developed Elk Grove Park District. At this time, Lion's Park pool consisted of an "L" shaped pool, a splash pad and a diving area. The transformation into a water park began in 1987 when it was officially named Rainbow Falls and added water features including: a baby pool, theme pool and tube ride. In later years, the bowl water slide and funhouse were added.

Rainbow Falls was redesigned with energy efficient features including regenerative diatomaceous earth filters, which reduced water consumption by 100,000 gallons per year and also reduced chemicals and energy usage to heat the water.

## Theme Days at the Waterpark

In order to keep our customers engaged, we began offering theme days in 2006. The New Rainbow Falls Summer Splash Series appeals to a wider audience and offers events at varied hours on different days of the week. The Summer Splash Series consists of eight themed events: Night Slides, Teen Only Nights, United We Stand, Water Wars, Fathers' Day Cannonball Brunch, Aqua-Palooza, Pirate & Princess Pool Party and the Back to School Splash Bash. These events build excitement, increase customer engagement and encourage families to return throughout the summer. Specialty themed items are given to the first 300 guests at each event. Character appearances from Roxy the Reptile and Ollie the Octopus also add to the festivities on any given day.

## Programming

Rainbow Falls programming also includes aqua fitness and diving lessons. Our most popular aqua fitness class is River Walking, where participants ages 14 and older can walk against the current of the not-so-lazy river. River Walking classes are offered in the evening and early mornings. Aquatic fitness classes are primarily offered in our indoor Pavilion Aquatics Center, but the outdoor River Walking classes remain our most popular – appealing to a variety of ages and abilities.

Many special occasions take place at Rainbow Falls Waterpark and Community Center. Over the years, thousands of people have enjoyed family reunions, wedding showers, birthday parties, retirement parties, anniversary and graduation celebrations. On average, 150 parties are hosted at Rainbow Falls Waterpark and Community Center each season. Our party planners will help you design an event you will always remember.

## Pirates' Cove Children's Theme Park

Since 1981 Pirates' Cove Children's Theme Park has been advertised as a buried treasure. Last year alone over 34,000 children visited there. It appears as though the treasure has been found! This one-of-a-kind amusement park was designed to stimulate the imagination of children. Each year Pirates' Cove opens Memorial Weekend and closes in mid-September.

## History

In the late 1970s, Jack A. Claes, executive director of the Elk Grove Park District, traveled to a carnival convention in Florida. He went with the intention of finding attractions to fit his vision of a theme park for young children. Pirates' Cove opened in 1981 with seven separate play areas featuring a child sized merry-go-round, hand cars, a western town, a tree house, a stage, a creative play area and a mighty pirate ship. The mighty pirate ship is the center piece of the park. It is a beautifully maintained replica of a wooden sailing ship. It turns out that the merry-go-round is a rare 1950s Herschell Kiddie Carousel. It has 22 hand painted aluminum horses and is specifically sized for children. The district restored it in 2007 and it was ceremoniously recognized and added to the National Carousel Association census. Other attractions have been added and changed over the years.

## Unique Features

There are many unique things about Pirates' Cove. New this summer is the Soarin' Schooners ride. The new ride was made in Italy and it is the only one of its kind in the mid-western United States. This bright, colorful ride has boats that rotate up and down around a big pirate. Each of the little boats has interactive steering wheels with musical buttons. Currently, the other attractions include a train ride, a climbing wall, paddle boats, a plunge slide and a castle playground with a smoke breathing dragon slide. All of the attractions have a pirate or nautical theme and name.

Another unique feature of the park is the price. Since it serves primarily one to nine year olds, the admission charge is only \$11 for children. Adults are always free. Visitors are welcome to bring their own picnic or snacks making it a great deal for the whole family. There is also a concession stand in the park that has a menu featuring child-friendly food. Picnic tables with umbrellas and an entire shaded area provide resting spots for the moms, dads and youngsters.

The beauty of the park is what welcomes the adults. Manicured lawns and flower beds surround the attractions and provide the experience of being in a garden. There is a safe and enclosed feel to the park. Many grandparents bring their grandchildren to Pirates' Cove. The positive feedback over the years has been consistent for the friendliness of staff, reasonable cost and overall beauty. The number one comment is always about the pure pleasure the children have in being able to explore and feel independent. As in any survey a common question to ask is, how did you hear about us? The past few years we have been happy to receive a new answer, "I came here as a child and I now I'm bringing my children." Thus we've grown from being a summer destination to a family tradition.

## Events

Pirates' Cove is now open seven days a week until August 16<sup>th</sup>, after which it's open on weekends until September 13<sup>th</sup>. With daily hours, birthday parties and private rentals this theme park needs 65 staff members each summer to run efficiently. Lisa Sibik, the current full time manager, was a summer staff member through high school and college. Her knowledge and dedication add to the overall employee experience. The staff members are not just ride attendants. They dress the parts for special events and even write and perform the stage shows. On any given day you will encounter the mascots, Pirate Pete or P.J. the Parrot. Each Friday from 10:00am to 2:00pm we host a special event at no extra charge.

Summer 2015 will have 11 special event Fridays. The first 300 children into the park on Fridays receive a toy that promotes the theme for the day. On Happily Ever After Day the children get crowns to signify them as little princes or princesses. The staff dress as royal characters and performs a play on stage. Most of the stage shows end with the staff characters leading a dance with all the children. Super Hero Day is another Pirates' Cove favorite. The staff dress as a super heroes, perform a play and involve the children in a parade around the park. Many of the little ones come dressed as their favorite super hero and join the parade. There is also Santa's Summer Vacation, where you can see Santa, Mrs. Claus and some elves. Included on this day are cookies, caroling songs and writing letters to Santa. The Friday events enhance the experience and support the purpose to stimulate the young imaginations.

The Elk Grove Park District is proud of their buried treasure. Money is budgeted each year for updates to add new attractions and keep the existing ones in top shape. The park horticulture staff refreshes the landscape with new flower beds and topiary sculptures. Marketing dollars are spent in all types of media so our message reaches the adults that can bring their children to visit this charming place. We're on a quest to make sure each new generation has the opportunity to discover Rainbow Falls and Pirates' Cove!



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# Themed Parks

## Building The Yorkville Community One Park At A Time

By Timothy V. Evans, CPRP, Director of Parks and Recreation & Scott Sleezer, Superintendent of Parks  
United City of Yorkville Parks and Recreation Department

The United City of Yorkville Parks and Recreation Department has created an integrated system of green space, parks and playgrounds throughout the city. Each park has a unique characteristic or theme allowing community members and visitors to experience various activities, such as playing music on the City's music-themed playground at Hiding Spot Park, kayaking on the Fox River in the Marge Cline Whitewater Course at Bicentennial Riverfront Park, exploring and learning more about flowers, trees, and animals indigenous to the area at Clark Park or cooling off by the sprinkler/water feature at Riemenschneider Park. The United City of Yorkville is proud of its parks and offers something for everyone to enjoy year round.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Parks and Recreation Board and management team decided to designate each specific park playground with a unique purpose or theme.

This enhanced the possibility that both new and existing residents would explore the various park playgrounds and enjoy all the opportunities afforded to them and their families. Currently, the City of Yorkville Parks and Recreation Department has 24 park playgrounds, of which 19 have been "themed" since 2000. Following is the process used to implement the park playground theming feature:

### **Collaborating with the Playground Manufacturer**

After obtaining approval from the park board, staff began seeking input from playground manufacturers in developing a theme for Hiding Spot Park, a location in which the city was preparing to install a new playground. Instead of having a landscape architect design the new playground, staff decided to design the space themselves. They began by contacting playground manufacturers and their sales personnel to submit an RFP (Request for Proposal) for a specific themed park. In what falls under the category of “being in the right place at the right time” GameTime, a playground manufacturer, notified staff that they were already working on a music-themed playground prototype and asked if we would be interested in working together on the project. After a series of meetings between staff and GameTime, initial project plans were finalized, which included purchasing the playground equipment, and we were off and running in building Yorkville's first music-themed park.

### **Mobilizing the Community**

The next step was getting the Yorkville community involved and supportive of the project. Staff decided the best way to encourage community involvement was to have a one-day community volunteer “playground build.” The hope was that by getting the community involved with actually building the playground, Yorkville residents would take ownership of the playground as well as highlight this new theming of park plans. Advertisements asking for volunteers were placed in the local newspaper, city water bills with mailers were sent to residents. Additionally, numerous local service organizations and elected officials were contacted to participate in the project as well. Even GameTime employees provided assistance throughout the process, including being present the day of the playground build.

### **Implementing “Playground Build Day”**

Once volunteers were secured, staff began planning for the one-day community playground build. Preparations included the following:

- a) Prepping the playground location by pouring the necessary concrete foundations and footings before the big day.
- b) Utilizing site furnishings and landscaping to enhance the music-themed playground.
- c) Purchasing all necessary equipment plus volunteer shirts for everyone.
- d) Creating a kids area to entertain small volunteers as their parents helped out with the playground build.
- e) Solicited donations from local restaurants of food and drinks for all of the volunteers to keep them energized throughout the day.

At the end of a very busy day, we were excited to say that the City of Yorkville was able to offer a new music-themed park playground to its residents.

**Involving everyone from the concept stage really helps the parks come together in a positive way as they are able to see their own ideas and concepts come to life.**

### **Summarizing the Experience**

Since we had an extremely positive experience with our first themed park playground build, we have tried to develop partnerships to continue gaining support and buy-in from community groups and the public for all themed park playgrounds. For instance, at our space-themed park, we partnered with the Junior Women's Club to build and support the project, additionally granting naming rights for the park to the club. For Riemenschneider Park, a firefighter-themed playground, we partnered with the Bristol Kendall Fire Protection District. This not only allowed us to build a great firefighter-themed playground but we were also able to add fire safety and memorial areas, honoring the volunteer fire fighters of the Bristol Kendall Fire Protection District.

The community had really gotten behind the effort, and we have seen staff personally involved in this endeavor as well by investing time, ideas and efforts in enhancing the unique theme at each park. An example of this was at Raintree Village Park, a castle-themed playground, staff built a stone concrete table to mimic the Knights of the Round Table and a draw bridge to the entrance of the playground. Staff even repurposed old traffic lights to work in our transportation-themed playground at Green's Filling Station Park.

We even take theming into consideration when naming the parks. The transportation-themed park was named Greens Filling Station Park, after a local family who operated a gas station and car repair service for over thirty years in Yorkville. Riemenschneider Park, the firefighter-theme playground, is named for a family who has served for generations on the volunteer fire department.

We continue to receive tremendous support and a positive response from the Yorkville community, as well as from staff, with the decision to theme park playgrounds. One of the most frequent comments we receive from residents and staff is that they really enjoy the theming feature because it has allowed for everyone to give their input and ideas on ways we can enhance the park playgrounds in Yorkville.



### **Theming gives each neighborhood its own identity**

By theming the parks, we have noticed, over the last fifteen years, that it builds community support and involvement by getting residents out of their own subdivisions to visit other park playgrounds and meet new people, while enjoying the parks and playgrounds. In addition, as we had originally hoped, the theming feature has allowed citizens and staff to take ownership of the park playgrounds for the betterment of the entire Yorkville community. Theming goes beyond the park playground itself by helping create the type of community in which Yorkville residents are proud to live.

Following are some of the most popular themed parks in Yorkville:

#### **Bicentennial Riverfront Park (Whitewater Course)**

The park, located along the Fox River, and in the heart of the downtown area, is a favorite of visitors and residents. Attractions include a canoe/kayak access point, fishing, picnic area, restrooms, large shelter and a trail. There is also the Marge Cline Whitewater Course which allows river travelers to bypass the Glen Palmer Dam. The 1,100 foot-long bypass chute allows canoes, kayaks, and tubers to travel downstream safely around the dam without having to portage. It also provides a recreational amenity for kayakers to enjoy in the river. The Fox River drops almost 6' between the eastern and western edges of the chute with portage points provided at both ends of the facility. A 12' wide concrete path allows paddlers to walk their canoes, kayaks, or tubes back up the chute to travel down the chute again.

#### **Sunflower Park (Farm Theme)**

This is a two acre park site that features a farm-themed playground with swings for children age's five to twelve. There is a sand feature for children to pretend they are farmers. The barn like shelter provides multiple tables for picnics. The landscaping features daylilies planted in rows to mimic crops and flowering pear trees planted like an orchard. The basketball court feature was designed in a circle configuration with three hoops along the outside arch. This promotes family and neighborhood play, while discouraging large full court style play.

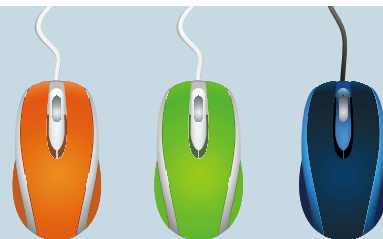
#### **Riemenschneider Park (Fire House Theme)**

This eight acre park includes two (2) baseball fields, fire truck themed tot lot, play structure for ages 5-12, swings, shelter, a perimeter walking path and a multipurpose open space. A special feature of this park is a water tower spray feature that keeps the neighborhood children cool on a hot summer day!

#### **Green's Filling Station Park (Transportation Theme)**

A seven acre transportation themed park includes two separate play structures, a mini-skate park, sledding hill, and asphalt path. The shelter is complete with two gas pumps for the little drivers to fill up their tanks. The 5-12 ages play structure has overhead climbing events, and children ages 2-5 can play on the truck and car play structures, and several swings are surrounded by an asphalt path striped like a road.

As you can see, creating theme parks has become a bit of a tradition in our community. We have a theme park for every age and interest. Involving everyone from the concept stage really helps the parks come together in a positive way as they are able to see their own ideas and concepts come to life. Theme parks make the City of Yorkville a fun place to play and the parks bring families and friends together in places they can truly enjoy no matter what theme park they choose.



# WebXtra

## **What's the Recipe for Optimum Summer Fun? Just Add Water!**

by Erika Young, Public Relations and Marketing Manager,  
St. Charles Park District

Themed around a river otter and his friends, Otter Cove Aquatic Park in St. Charles offers water fun for everyone! Featuring a 25-yard pool, zero-depth entry activity pool, a shallow pool just for toddlers, a splash park with water wheels, dumping buckets and spray cannons, a sand/water play area, and rides that twist, turn, and twirl through water that shoots, sprays, and spins.

The project was completed in 2010 by Innovative Aquatic Design, LLC., Williams Architects and W-T Mechanical / Electrical Engineering, LLC.

Exciting activities are sure to appeal to every water enthusiast, from the most energetic cannon baller to the most laid-back floater. Speed down the salamander slides. Enjoy an inner tube ride along turtle creek. Flitter around Dragonfly Den. Hop all over the Frog Bog. Exercise in the Crayfish Canal. These exciting water attractions and green open space offer thrills and relaxation for all ages.

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## PEOPLE & PLACES



### IN MEMORIAM: Jeena Greenwalt

Former Executive Director of Northeast DuPage Special Recreation Association (NEDSRA) **Jeena Greenwalt**, 49, passed away on May 30, 2015 peacefully in her hometown of Carlinville, IL surrounded by her family. Jeena worked at NEDSRA in Addison for nearly 20 years before stepping down this past March due to her illness.

She dedicated her life to improving the lives of people with disabilities and championed many new programs at NEDSRA. Jeena was well respected and loved by the participants and their families. "Jeena's spirit will be truly missed by our participants and by staff. Her inspiration and guiding force at NEDSRA will continue, as we honor her with our commitment to excellent recreational programs that improve the lives of individuals with disabilities," said new Executive Director, Rick Poole.

Jeena graduated from Carlinville High School in 1983 and from Illinois State University in 1988 and began her career at NEDSRA in 1991.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to the Jeena Greenwalt Scholarship Fund at NEDSRA, the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, or St. Paul's United Church of Christ.



### IN MEMORIAM: Sandy Fernstrom

**Sandra L. "Sandy" Fernstrom** passed away on May 27, 2015 in Elk Grove Village. Sandra was elected to the Arlington Heights Park District Board in 1981 and served five four year terms. During this time she served in many capacities including president, vice president and the chairperson of many committees.

She was the founding member of the Arlington Lakes Golf Course Advisory Committee and helped guide the park district to two National Gold Medals. Sandra was instrumental in the acquisition of the North School Property and "Payton's Hill" for the park district.

Additionally, she served two terms as president of the Illinois Association of Park Districts Board and she also served on the Board of Directors for the National Recreation and Parks Association where she served on the Legislative Committee of the Great Lakes Regional Council.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to the National Wildlife Federation, the Illinois Association of Park Districts or to the Arlington Heights Park District.



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## NEDSRA Names Rick Poole as New Executive Director

**Rick Poole** is the new executive director for the Northeast DuPage Special Recreation Association. NEDSRA did not have to look far to find their new director as Rick has been the deputy director of the Lombard Park District for the past 12 years.

Rick is familiar with NEDSRA, as the Lombard Park District is one of 11 member partners supporting NEDSRA's programs for individuals with disabilities. He has a master's degree in managerial

leadership from National Lewis University and also attended Western Illinois University where he received his bachelor's degree.

At the Lombard Park District, some of Rick's accomplishments include being on the design team that constructed the Paradise Bay Water Park, building public support for the \$5.9 million dollar park referendum in 2008, and overseeing the process to win the prestigious Gold Medal Award for the Lombard Park District presented by the National Recreation and Park Association.

Rick is a 29 year veteran in the recreation field having worked for the park districts of Arlington Heights, Wheeling, and Carol Stream prior to coming to Lombard in 2002. He is also a Certified Parks and Recreation Professional.



## Lindenhurst Park District Names David Mohr, Jr. as New Executive Director and Announces New Hire

**David Mohr, Jr.** is the new executive director of the Lindenhurst Park District. David has more than 18 years of experience in the field of parks and recreation. Most recently, David was the superintendent of recreation for the Lindenhurst Park District where he was responsible for overseeing all aspects of the recreation department including

facilities. He was also in charge of the districts IT operations, human resources, and wellness/safety coordination. David also has previous experience in athletics, before/after school and day camp, special events, senior and special recreation programming.

During his 11 years in Lindenhurst, David has been involved both locally and professionally. He currently serves as vice president of the local Kiwanis Club, is a Chamber of Commerce board member and is an active volunteer for local events. Previously David served as the Co-Chair/Chair for IPRA's Athletic Committee and as a committee member for IPRA's BMW Golf Committee.

David received his bachelor's degree from Eastern Illinois University in recreation management. He was also a recipient of IPRA's Rec. Section, Al Hattendorf Professional of the Year Award in 2011. He is excited and honored to continue to serve in such a great community in his new role.

**Kristi Murray** is the new superintendent of recreation for the Lindenhurst Park District. Kristi has been in the field of parks and recreation for more than 11 years, with varying experience in recreation, facility management and special recreation. Most recently, Kristi was a division manager at the Gurnee Park District where she managed the Viking Park Community Center, performing arts, special events, rentals, adult and senior programming as well as community relations. Kristi is also active with the Illinois Parks and Recreation Association, and serves on various community service organizations.



Kristi has a bachelor's degree from Illinois State University in recreation and park administration. She is also a graduate of IPRA's Leadership Academy and a Certified Park and Recreation Professional.

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