

illinois

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PARKS AND RECREATION

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



community  
partnerships  
that make a difference

PLUS: Tips to Creating Successful Partnerships in Your Community

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## TRUE STORY

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Sometimes, nature takes an unexpected turn resulting in property losses. **At Times Like These**, you realize the importance of your coverage.

At Litchfield Park District, a sudden storm rolled in and winds became destructive. Gusts up to 40 miles per hour resulted in significant damage to a fence and stadium lighting.

Fortunately, the IPARKS Representative had previously explained the benefits of full replacement cost coverage, to which Litchfield Park District agreed. As a result, the park district received a check for the full replacement value.

Litchfield Park District has been an IPARKS Member since 2001. Mr. Steven Bryant, Director of Parks and Recreation, stated, "Our park district has been pleased with the service and coverage provided by IPARKS. I encourage other parks that are evaluating their coverage needs to look into IPARKS."

## At Times Like These...

you're glad you have a Property and Casualty  
Coverage program as strong as IPARKS!



**IPARKS** *Specializing in risk management services for Illinois park districts since 1991.*

**Member owned and controlled.**

For more information, contact an  
IPARKS Representative at 800-748-0554.



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# IN THIS ISSUE



4 **From the Editor**  
Mud and memories from a personal partnership

6 **Get on Board**  
IAPD - A History of Service

8 **Eye on the Profession**  
IPRA Partners With Like Minded Organizations to Serve You Better

10 **Statehouse Insider**  
Spring Session Successfully Concludes With \$29 Million for New OSAD Grants

12 **Partnership Tips From a Seasoned Pro**  
A professional in the field shares strategies to create successful partnerships

16 **Nature Play Spaces Evolve from Community Partnerships in Chicago**  
Unique partnerships ensure the next generation of environmental stewards is ready to play

20 **What Do Birding and Job Training Have in Common?**  
The Forest Preserves of Cook County creates stronger connections between people and nature through coordinated partnerships

24 **People and Places**  
Updates and tributes in the park, recreation and conservation family



## FROM THE EDITOR



On May 30, 2015, six girlfriends and I piled into a couple of vehicles and drove more than three hours north to Richmond, Illinois. Our destination event was *Chicago Mudderella*, a seven-mile course with 15 obstacles in – you guessed it – a lot of mud.

When we registered for the event in February, we were excited to think about warm May sunshine and the chance to partner together to tackle this challenging course. The event was promoted as “a true athletic challenge, designed to test all-around fitness and build camaraderie.” We ordered cute tank tops featuring our team name: ‘Mind Over Mudder.’

We arrived at *Mudderella* with several thousand others who were as surprised as we were to find unseasonably cool, 48-degree weather with gale force winds and rain. In fact, it was so windy, some of the higher obstacles had to be closed for safety purposes.

Our cute tank tops were covered in layers of warm clothing and garbage bags in a bleak attempt to stay warm and dry. Together, the seven of us used every partnership technique we could muster to get through those seven miles of mud. There were piggy-back rides, human step ladders, hand-holding and a lot of hoisting of teammates over the 13-foot high walls and helping each other crawl through the rope-covered mud pits. We made it, but we knew that it would not have been possible alone. We needed each other to accomplish our goal.

Partnerships are amazing things that can make the difference between bringing great plans to fruition or watching them fizzle. *Nature Play Spaces Evolve from Community Partnerships in Chicago* on page 16 of this issue summarizes how the Chicago Park District uses partnerships to co-create Nature Play Spaces throughout the city. These spaces give thousands of children in the Chicago area the opportunity unplug from electronics, immerse themselves in nature and make lifelong memories getting their hands dirty.

*What Do Birding and Job Training Have in Common?* on page 20 explains how coordinated partnerships play a critical role in the implementation of the Forest Preserves of Cook County's *Next Century Conservation Plan*. These partnerships inspire people to care for nature and empower them to guide and influence various forest preserve initiatives. And, our readers will learn a lot about building successful partnerships from the Bloomingdale Park District's *Partnership Tips from a Seasoned Pro* on page 12.

Illinois park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation and special recreation agencies are doing great things through partnerships. They are enhancing the lives of citizens throughout the state, enabling them to get in touch with nature, participate in an array of recreational endeavors and make lasting memories with friends and family.

I can personally vouch for the fact that memories made through recreation and nature – and mud – are the best.

— Bobbie Jo Hill, Interim Editor

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PARKS AND RECREATION

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# PARK TOUR 2018

**Highlighting  
Greenfields' projects  
across the nation**

See the video!



**Miami, FL**





Peter M. Murphy, Esq., CAE, IOM  
IAPD President and CEO

## IAPD's 90th Anniversary - A History of Service

Citizen volunteerism is personified by those of you serving your community as a park, forest preserve or conservation district commissioner or trustee. I am always impressed by the selfless dedication and countless hours of meetings, district events, strategic planning sessions and community outreach that each of you engage in.

The September/October issue of IPR magazine will have a special section that provides an overview of IAPD's highlights throughout nine decades.

As you will see, we have come a long way over the years. IAPD began as a small network for sharing ideas on park district governance and issues, and we have grown from that modest beginning into an organization that provides multifaceted programs and services.

Last year alone, IAPD provided more than 40 educational programs and a state conference bringing together more than 4,200 industry leaders.

Our library of publications adds more commissioner centric titles each year and our digital content has exploded with a website that features literally hundreds of articles and resources you can use.

Ninety years ago, research was based on how your fellow park boards handled a particular issue. While this network is alive and well, it is now supplemented by statewide data collection specifically designed to meet current needs and address today's pressing issues. Information

### LEADERSHIP CORNER

#### Board Organization

The effectiveness of a board greatly depends on the structure of its organization and how its meetings are conducted. The board's rules, formulated over time and frequently out of habit or tradition, determine these matters. A productive board is usually one that periodically takes the time to sort out its duties, critically review its organizational structure, and update its bylaws, policies, and procedures.

The board also should review the procedures governing formulating agendas and conducting meetings in order to see that the necessary business is dispatched promptly, the implications of key policy of the board decisions are carefully considered, and time is not wasted.

Consider the following:

1. Within the last three years, has the board in some formal way reviewed its:
  - a. Committee structure?
  - b. Policy covering frequency, length, and format of its meetings?
  - c. Allow members to be heard before recommendations are made to the full board?
2. With respect to the board's meeting agenda:
  - a. Does it put before members issues of policy the board should consider?
  - b. Is it accompanied by appropriate supporting information?
3. Does the current committee structure:
  - a. Make the handling of the board's work more efficient?
  - b. Give the full board the opportunity to consider all matters of key importance?
4. Do board meetings allow time for responsible discussion of all key issues?
5. Does the board meet:
  - a. More often than it needs to?
  - b. Less often than it needs to?
  - c. As often as it should?
6. Do board policies governing the selection of committee leaders afford sufficient opportunity for rotating leadership?
7. Does the board have a policy manual that consolidates and codifies policy decisions?
8. Is time provided for discussion of long-term planning and policy issues as distinct from immediate or crisis issues?

on state W-2 agency employment and IAPD's current research on facility usage and program participation in an easy to use format are just two examples.

IAPD's money-saving programs and grants, which were unheard of just years ago, bring real value to IAPD's members. The *PowerPlay!* program alone has paid out more than \$630,000 since inception.

On this occasion of our 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, your association is a reflection of your leadership and that of those committed commissioners serving throughout the years. Lifetimes of experience are packed into our history. Wonderful achievements mark the decades, and the best is yet to come.

Enjoy the look into our history and be ready for a deep dive when our comprehensive 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary history of IAPD book is published in November.

## 2018 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Monday, August 27, 2018

### **IAPD Summer Golf Tour Outing #3**

GolfVisions Management, Inc.  
Oak Grove Golf Course  
Harvard, IL

Monday, September 17, 2018

### **IAPD Summer Golf Tour Outing #4**

Zion Park District  
Shepherd's Crook  
Zion, IL

September 25-27, 2018

### **NRPA Congress**

Indianapolis, IN

Thursday, October 4, 2018

### **Launching Successful Leaders: "Can I Hear YOU?" Recharging YOUR Communication Skills Workshop**

Hoffman Estates Park District's  
Bridges of Poplar Creek  
Country Club  
6pm – 9pm

Friday, October 12, 2018

### **IAPD Best of the Best Awards Gala**

Wheeling Park District's  
Chevy Chase Country Club

Thursday, November 8, 2018

### **Legal Symposium**

McDonald's University /  
Hyatt Lodge

January 24-26, 2019

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

Hyatt Regency Chicago

**“When construction of the Sears Tower was completed in 1973, the Illinois Association of Park Districts had already been serving its membership for 45 years.”**

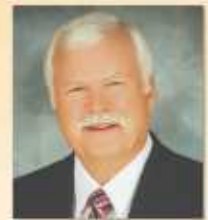


The Willis Tower, built as and still commonly referred to as the Sears Tower, is Chicago's monumental 110-story, 1,450-foot skyscraper. At completion in 1973, it surpassed the World Trade Center in New York to become the tallest building in the world, a title it held for nearly 25 years. The building is considered a seminal achievement for its architect Fazlur Rahman Khan. More than one million people visit its observation deck each year, making it one of Chicago's most popular tourist destinations.

Another formative achievement took place when A.D. McLarty used a letter-writing campaign in 1928 to rally the cause for a statewide association for park officials, now known as the Illinois Association of Park Districts. This great organization was created with the goal of making citizen board members and professional staff of Illinois park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation and special recreation agencies among the very best in the nation.

The parks and facilities maintained by our member agencies are of great value to the residents of Illinois, and they also serve as popular tourist destinations. Together with our membership, we have built a renowned park system that is the envy of the nation.

IAPD celebrates 90 years in 2018 ... *a Legacy of Innovation and Excellence!*



*Peter M. Murphy*  
PETER M. MURPHY  
IAPD PRESIDENT/CEO





By Debbie Trueblood, CAE  
IPRA Executive Director

## IPRA Partners With Like Minded Organizations to Serve You Better

In addition to enjoying the outdoors this summer in your professional role, I hope you and your family have also had time to enjoy the summertime just having fun and building memories together. Summertime is such a wonderful time in our industry. It is when so many professionals really have the opportunity to shine and remind your community why parks and recreation are such a valuable part of our community life together.

The theme of this issue is "Community Partnerships." Just like your organization may partner with schools, churches, for profit, and nonprofit entities to serve your community, so does IPRA. We partner with many organizations to serve you better.

I would like to take this time to introduce to you a partnership IPRA is rolling out this fall. We have a new university partner for our Leadership Academy program with Western Illinois University in Macomb. We have been working closely with WIU for several years on a variety of projects. For example, last year, Dr. Daniel Yoder, the Faculty Chair of the Recreation, Park & Tourism Administration Department, came to present at an IPRA board meeting to keep us connected with all that is going on at Western these days. Further, a newer faculty member there, Dr. Megan Owens, has done many big things in our field since she was the IPRA Graduate Assistant from 2011-2012 and she is a strong advocate for IPRA and our values. We have recently also contracted with WIU on a project you will be seeing in spring 2019. This will be a new free member benefit that will help individuals learn about the different career paths available to them in our field - what those jobs are, what skills are needed, where to find them, and what education and other skills you might need to become eligible for those jobs. I can't wait to roll out that new member benefit to help members in their individual career tracks.

This Career Toolkit will be a wraparound to another partnership we have with the Management Association. We started a printed salary survey project with them last year. We will be rolling out the new version starting with the data collection phase beginning in late August this year. Our IPRA

Salary Survey Task Force is coordinating with the Management Association this summer, combing through the feedback we received to ensure the next edition is even more helpful. We've revised some of the questions, as well as the job descriptions, and adding some additional jobs. We greatly appreciate the feedback we received from the members and strive to make the new edition more useful to you.

Just like your organization may partner with schools, churches, for profit and nonprofit entities to serve your community, so too does IPRA partner with many organizations to serve you better.



Additionally, the Illinois Park and Recreation Foundation (IPRF) has recently formed relationships with Santa's Village "Azoosment Park" in East Dundee, IL as well as the Bloomington Edge indoor professional football team in Bloomington, IL. We are partnering with them for certain charity fundraising days where IPRF will receive a portion of the ticket sales. For Santa's Village, as an IPRA member, you are eligible to buy discounted tickets for Santa's Village. Normal ticket prices are \$24.99, but you can buy for \$17. To purchase, go to <https://passes.santasvillagedundee.com> and enter [iprf@santa](mailto:iprf@santa). Available days are: August 11 & 12 and December 1 & 2. Take your day camp, plan a special trip, or take your family and enjoy a great day at Santa's Village! Questions? Contact Sue Gwinup at Santa's Village [sales@azoosmentpark.com](mailto:sales@azoosmentpark.com). For our partnership with the Bloomington Edge, they will be donating \$2 from each ticket sold for their July 14 game to the Illinois Park & Recreation Foundation (IPRF). I would guess this magazine will be in your hands after that date, but if not, follow this link to order your tickets: <http://www.bloomingtonedge.net/home> or look for more info at <https://www.facebook.com/events1716182358473532/>.



IPRA has many partnerships on a wide variety of programs and projects. All over our state, we partner with our affiliates. We have shared meetings of the IPRA's Park and Natural Resource Management Section held in partnership with the Midwest Institute of Park Executives (MIPE). We provide regular newsletter articles to our friends and shared members of the Illinois Afterschool Network (IAN). We have hosted a shared networking event at the national conference with the Suburban Park and Recreation Association (SPRA) and South Suburban Park and Recreation Professional Association (SSPRPA). We also have a shared scholarship for young professionals in conjunction with our foundation and SSPRPA. In central Illinois, we have held events jointly with CIRCLE and hold an annual event in southern Illinois with our friends at Southern Illinois Park and Recreation Association (SIPRA).

I hope you had a great summer and found many new and exciting ways to serve your communities and all the families who look to you for their summertime opportunities for parks and recreation.

## IPRF Joint Section Golf Outing

Friday, September 14  
Tanna Farms Golf Course, Geneva  
\$80 single golfer/\$320 foursome  
Register at [ILiprf.org](http://ILiprf.org)



## Upcoming Events

### September 5, 2018 CPRP Exam Prep Series B: Operations

This is the last of four in a series of classes designed to prepare individuals for the National Recreation and Park Association's Certified Park and Recreation Professional (CPRP) exam. All four classes will be taught by Nikki Ginger of the Chicago Park District, and they will provide attendees with an intensive review of parks and recreation in the content areas of Programming, Human Resources, Finance, and Operations. It is highly recommended that participants attend all four classes, but it is not mandatory.

### September 7, 2018 Joint Section Outing: Arlington Park Racecourse

Sponsored by IPRA's Joint Section Education Committee, this event gives professionals the opportunity to have fun and network with professionals in a relaxed and casual environment. This year's outing will take place at the Arlington Park Racecourse, home to historic thoroughbred horse-racing since 1927. Registration includes entrance to the park, access to live racing (starting at 3:15pm), and food. This is an outdoor event, so participants should dress appropriately for the weather. Come join your colleagues for an afternoon of horse-racing, fun, and networking.

This event is open to members and non-members alike, so participants are encouraged to bring friends.

### September 12 & 20, 2018 Webinar: Coaching Employees for the Future

This month's webinar, Coaching Employees for the Future, is presented by Tracey Crawford, Executive Director at NWSRA in Illinois, and she will demonstrate how to build a future-driven team by changing the way you hire, train, manage, and lead.

### September 14, 2018 IPRF Joint Section Golf Outing

The annual IPRF Joint Section Golf Outing is a great opportunity to enjoy a day of golf, good food, fun, and networking! The proceeds from this event support the IPRF scholarship programs which assist student and professionals in the field of park and recreation.

### September 21, 2018 Therapeutic Recreation (TR) Leadership Summit

The TR Leadership Summit, sponsored by IPRA's Therapeutic Recreation (TR) Section, offers a full day of continuing education for professionals that work in and around special recreation. The day

will consist of three 1.25-hour concurrent breakout sessions presented by highly-recognizable professionals in the field. Attendees can pick and choose the TR topic that best fits their personal and professional development needs.

### October 4, 2018 2018 State Education Roadshow: Springfield, IL

In partnership with CIRCLE & SIPRA, IPRA has created this Education Roadshow. The Roadshows are one day education events which will be repeated at different locations throughout the state in 2018. Topics include: Choose your Own Adventure: Trends in Recreation, New Revenue Streams in Parks & Recreation, and Internal Communication Strategies.

### October 5, 2018 CPRP Exam Prep Series C: HR and Communications

This is the first of four in a series of classes designed to prepare individuals for the National Recreation and Park Association's Certified Park and Recreation Professional (CPRP) exam. All four classes will be taught by Nikki Ginger of the Chicago Park District, and they will provide attendees with an intensive review of parks and recreation in the content areas of Programming, Human Resources, Finance, and Operations.

For details and registration, please visit the IPRA event calendar at [ILipra.org](http://ILipra.org)



Jason Anselment  
Legal/Legislative Counsel

## Spring Session Successfully Concludes With \$29 Million for New OSLAD Grants

IAPD and its member agencies enjoyed another very successful legislative session this past spring. The inclusion of \$29,000,000 for new OSLAD grants in the State budget that began on July 1 was nearly double the proposed amount and was a major achievement for IAPD.

IAPD's advocacy also resulted in the passage of another IAPD Platform bill, and our efforts influenced numerous measures through the amendment process or by helping to sideline harmful proposals.

Overall, the General Assembly had a relatively active session as both chambers approved several hundred bills. Dozens of these bills have the potential to impact IAPD member agencies if they are signed into law, and several of these are discussed below.

The Governor has 60 days from the date he receives legislation from the General Assembly to act by signature or veto. IAPD will update members through Legislative Updates as the Governor takes action on bills this summer, but as a reminder IAPD members may access the status of every bill we are tracking at [ILparks.org](http://ILparks.org).

### Bills that Increase Local Control

If signed by the Governor, IAPD Platform bill, **HB 4573 (Zalewski, M. / Jones, E., III)**, will expand existing authority under the Public Funds Investment Act by lengthening the maximum term for investments in highly rated corporate obligations from 270 days to up to 3 years from the date of purchase. By increasing the maturity length, IAPD member agencies will have the opportunity to earn additional interest on their investments.

This same measure has been introduced by other organizations in the past but did not receive sufficient legislative support. Because of IAPD's advocacy and the leadership of our bill sponsors, this IAPD Platform bill passed both the House and Senate with very strong, bipartisan support and is now poised to become law.

Another bill that was supported by IAPD, **SB 2328 (Holmes, L. / McDermed, M.)**, also awaits the Governor's signature as this issue goes to press. The measure would

increase the exemption threshold under the Local Government Professional Services Selection Act for architectural, engineering and land surveyor contracts from \$25,000 to \$40,000. If signed by the Governor, the new \$40,000 exemption would increase annually by the CPI.

### Employment Practices

Numerous measures were approved by both chambers during the Spring Session that would impact most employers if the Governor signs them into law.

### Public Act 100-0588 / HB 138 (Currie, B. / Bush, M.)

first surfaced on the final day of the legislative session, passed both chambers in a matter of hours and was signed into law by the Governor the following week on June 8, 2018. The bill continues the General Assembly's efforts to address the issue of sexual harassment. Most of the provisions pertain to the reporting and investigation of complaints related to legislators, state employees and registered lobbyists, but one provision amends the Illinois Human Rights Act to add a new anti-harassment statement to the current anti-discrimination notice that employers are required to provide under the Act. The Illinois Department of Human Rights is required to make the documents available for retrieval through the Department's website.

The bill also extends the statute of limitations for filing complaints under the Human Rights Act to 300 calendar days after the alleged violation (currently, 180 days).

**HB 1595 (Stuart, K. / Haine, W.)** amends the Nursing Mothers in the Workplace Act to require employers to provide a reasonable break time during the first year after a child's birth each time the employee needs to express milk (currently, the law requires only "unpaid break time each day"). Under the legislation, the break time may run concurrently with any break time already provided to the employee, but an employer may not reduce an employee's compensation for time used for the purpose of expressing milk or nursing a baby. Employers would be exempt if the requirement would create an "undue hardship as defined by the Illinois Human Rights Act."

**HB 4163 (Moeller, A. / Castro, C.)** is similar to **HB 2462 (Moeller, A. / Biss, D.)** that the Governor vetoed last year and amends the Equal Pay Act of 2003 to prohibit an employer from: (i) screening job applicants based on their wage or salary history, (ii) requiring that an applicant's prior wages satisfy minimum or maximum criteria, and (iii) requesting or requiring as a condition of being interviewed or as a condition of continuing to be considered for an offer of employment that an applicant disclose prior wages or salary.

The bill would also prohibit an employer from seeking a job applicant's salary, benefits or other compensation or salary history from the applicant's current or former employer unless: (1) the job applicant is a current employee and is applying for a position with the same current employer; or (2) the job applicant's wage or salary history is a matter of public record under the Freedom of Information Act, or any other equivalent State or federal law, or is contained in a document completed by the job applicant's current or former employer and then made available to the public by the employer, or submitted or posted by the employer to comply with State or federal law.

The bill further prohibits an employer from requiring an employee to sign a contract or waiver that would prohibit the employee from disclosing or discussing information about the employee's wages. Finally, the legislation provides for penalties and injunctive relief and modifies existing language under the Act relating to unlawful discrimination.

**HB 4242 (McSweeney, D. / Cullerton, T.)** would require local governments and other local taxing bodies to provide notice to the public after approving a severance agreement with an employee found to have engaged in sexual harassment or sexual discrimination.

The legislation requires the taxing body to publish a notice on its website and make available to the news media for inspection and copying within 72 hours of the taxing body's approval the following information: 1) the name and title of the person receiving the payment; 2) the amount of the payment; 3) the fact that the person receiving the payment was found to have engaged in sexual harassment or sexual discrimination, as applicable; and 4) the date, time and location of the meeting at which the taxing body approved the severance agreement.

The legislation further provides that the local government shall not incur liability as a result of its compliance with these provisions, except for willful or wanton misconduct.

**HB 4743 (Ford, L. / Lightford, K.)** amends the Equal Pay Act of 2003 to provide that no employer may discriminate between employees by paying wages to an African-American employee at a rate less than the rate at which the

employer pays wages to another employee who is not African-American for the same or substantially similar work on a job that requires equal skill, effort, and responsibility and is performed under similar working conditions except where the payment is made under: (1) a seniority system; (2) a merit system; (3) a system that measures earnings by quantity or quality of production; or (4) a differential based on any other factor other than race or a factor that would constitute unlawful discrimination under the Illinois Human Rights Act.

**SB 2516 (Morrison, J. / Gabel, R.)** relates to mandated reporter requirements under the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act.

Under current law, individuals who are mandated reporters under the Act must sign a form prescribed by DCFS acknowledging that the employee understands his or her reporting requirements before commencing employment. **SB 2516** would require DCFS to update this form to also include information about the availability of mandated reporter training. The bill does not change the existing requirement for employers to maintain the form.

**SB 3604 (Cullerton, T. / Kifowit, S.)** was filed late in the legislative session in response to media stories related to severance packages received by a few government employees.

The bill creates the Government Severance Pay Act to require local governments, school districts, community colleges, universities and most other public agencies to include specific limitations in future employment contracts, and future renewals and renegotiations of existing contracts, if such contracts contain a provision for severance pay. These provisions must limit severance pay to no more than 20 weeks of compensation and prohibit severance pay altogether if the individual is fired for misconduct.

The bill does not create an entitlement to severance pay in the absence of a contractual authorization or as otherwise authorized by law.

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If the Governor signs these measures into law, they will be discussed in greater detail at the IAPD Legal Symposium on November 8, 2018 in Oak Brook. In the meantime, please watch for IAPD Legislative Updates as the Governor takes action.



# PARTNERSHIP TIPS

*from a Seasoned Pro*



By **Josh Hendricks**, Director of Communications & Marketing –  
Bloomington Park District

I remember one of my first meetings where I was trying to secure a sponsorship for the park district. It was approximately 8 years ago, and I was sitting in the grungy office of a local grocery store. I had secured the meeting (whoo-hoo!) and now I was there, with my boss sitting next to me, asking about their marketing objectives, what we could do to help, our community reach – all that fancy stuff that people in my position prepare to say.



I was sitting there thinking, *“How do I ask this person for a \$1,000 sponsorship?”*

Meanwhile, I'm pretty sure he was thinking, *“How do I get these people out of my office without giving them any money?”*

Do you know what we got in the end? Approximately 400 free cookies. Not the buttery, gooey, sugary kind that are made in-house and melt in your mouth. These were boxed cookies, and they were pretty bland. But you know what? People ate them. No one complained.

Although I didn't secure the kind of partnership I wanted, our rec supervisor was happy because she didn't have to use her budget to buy cookies. The brief sponsorship only lasted a year, but it was the start of something much bigger for us at Bloomingdale Park District. I've learned a lot since then, and hopefully I can pass along to readers some of our hard-earned knowledge.

### A Brief Overview

Bloomingdale Park District's number of partnerships isn't the largest in the parks and recreation field, and certainly not the most profitable by any means. We have four what we call 'corporate partners,' who sponsor the majority of our events and account for approximately 75% of resources raised. The rest is made up of 2-3 advertisers in our seasonal brochure and 4-5 random sponsors that come and go every year.

Here are some of the strategies that we have used to get to where we are today.

### Establish Your Worth

The simple association with your agency is a positive. People like park districts. We do good things in the community. We are involved in people's lives from cradle-to-grave, so to speak. Businesses want to be a part of that. This is a VERY desirable, marketable benefit for sponsors.

In addition, because of our standing in the community, people pay attention to what we do (at least hopefully). We've got their ear. Businesses want access to our audience, and by partnering with us, they can achieve that.

We also have collateral to offer. Our buildings, facilities, fields, etc. offer endless opportunities for visibility. Our signage offers impressions. Our website and database offer extended reach. And, our events and venue areas offer a proprietary platform for engagement.

Ask yourself, *“What are my district's strengths?”* Make a list of all the positive benefits of partnering with your park district. And, if you are looking for an actual number in terms of valuation, there are companies such as IEG (sponsorship.com) that will come out and do that for you.

### Identifying Partners

One of the keys to our successful partnerships is working with (and initially identifying) businesses that have similar culture, vision, mission and values.

One of our most successful partnerships is with a local hospital network, whose motto at the time the partnership was formed was *“Keeping You Well.”* Bloomingdale Park District's mission statement is to provide recreation programs, facilities and open space for enjoyable leisure time experiences that benefit the community. It is no coincidence that we work so well together. Participating in park district programs and using its facilities and open spaces keeps people well, which aligns with the hospital's motto. It is easy to work together when similar desired outcomes are shared.

Other business types that Bloomingdale Park District has had success with include banks, car dealerships, dentists, the local mall and new businesses in the area.

Want to know who might be willing to sponsor you? Check out your local Chamber of Commerce. Who's a member? Who's advertising in local papers or clipper magazines? If they are willing to spend in those areas, chances are they will be interested in spending money on your agency as well.

## Research, Create and Package Proposals

Once you have established your worth and identified your best prospects, it's time to do a little research to effectively create and package your proposal.

The first research question I ask is, "What's in it for my potential partner?" I try to look at things from their perspective. What are they getting out of this? What do they want to achieve? I always conduct a Google search on the potential partner to see if there's any recent press – good or bad.

Are they looking for exposure via advertising? Park district program catalogs are great, relatively inexpensive ways to advertise. And, these guides aren't thrown away like the daily newspaper. They remain on coffee tables or in other areas to be reviewed repeatedly until the next one arrives. They have a 2-4-month shelf life. That's an amazing benefit to advertisers.

Is it person-to-person interaction with your audience that your sponsor seeks? Obviously, the numerous special events that park districts conduct are ideal for that kind of engagement. However, what are you doing to involve your sponsor? Are they simply sitting behind a table?

I try to get them actively involved. Our bank helps patrons assemble kites at our kite fly event. Our health partner leads a group stretch before our 5K. Our dental partner comes to our preschool and teaches kids how to take care of their teeth. Find ways to get your sponsor talking to the people they want to talk to in an engaging, non-threatening way.

Once you have figured out what it is your potential partner seeks, try to match up your special event or program area appropriately. Our health partner obviously likes health and wellness activities. They are a natural fit for our 5K, but they also offer free blood pressure checks to our seniors. Our bank likes person-to-person interaction, so in addition to being involved in nearly all of our special events, they also host our summer movie night. It's on their turf and they get to show off their beautiful bank and all its amenities. Our dental partner collects unused candy to ship to troops overseas. They're a natural fit for our Halloween event.

In terms of packaging proposals, I find it easier to offer a sponsor a multitude of opportunities (event sponsorship, brochure advertising, website presence, etc.). It's easier on them and me, and it eliminates the need to ask for money before every event that they sponsor. Larger partnership packages provide the added benefit of advance budgeting by both parties.

## Maintain the Relationship

People do business with those they know, like and trust. I work with, and these organizations are led by, great people. Easy to talk to. Down to earth. I like all my contacts at the organizations that sponsor us.

I like to think my contacts think similarly of me. I am always honest. I do what I say I am going to do. If I think an event isn't right for a sponsor, I tell them. If an event flops, I'll add additional value to the partnership by offering something else for free. I also try to get to know my business partners and their families, hobbies, etc. Our meetings, however often they occur, are usually 45 minutes of learning more about each other and 15 minutes of discussion about the partnership opportunity at hand. We often meet at coffee shops, over lunch or even over appetizers after work hours. I look forward to these meetings because I have grown to like these people and vice-versa. It makes doing business with each other an absolute pleasure.

## Review and Recognize

Finally, it is important to review your partnership at least every year. Analyze what is working and what is not. Be flexible. Be willing to try new things. Ditch the mundane. Don't be afraid to fail. There is always room for improvement. Your business partner will appreciate your effort.

Do you have a great partnership? The Illinois Association of Park Districts' *Best of the Best Awards Gala* is a great opportunity to recognize it. I try to nominate a person or partner every year. I send the press release and photos to the local papers, and I post them on our website. I tag them on social media. I put it everywhere - whether they win or not. The simple fact they are nominated means a lot. And, partners LOVE this. It solidifies the partnership. I have never had an award-winning partner turn down the next yearly partnership. It's also a great time to increase the sponsorship resources.

Questions? Requests? Inquiries? Feel free to contact me at [josh@bloomingdaleparks.org](mailto:josh@bloomingdaleparks.org).

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A young child with blonde hair in a ponytail, wearing a red top, is sitting on a bed of wood chips in a nature play space. The child is looking down at a metal bowl and a brush. In the background, there are logs and sticks arranged in a structure. The text "Nature Play Spaces" is overlaid in large white letters.

# Nature Play Spaces

## EVOLVE FROM COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN CHICAGO

By **Sarah Unz**

Outdoor & Environmental Education Manager, Culture and Natural Resources Department - Chicago Park District

& **Matt Freer**

Assistant Director of Landscape, Culture and Natural Resources Department - Chicago Park District

*What is your strongest memory from childhood?  
Where were you? Who were you with?*

For many of us, our strongest memory finds us outside, playing in nature, often taking risks and having the time of our lives.

These memories aren't universal.

Some of our millennial colleagues don't have these same memories and many of the children we serve don't either. How we respond to this change will play a key role in developing future conservation stewards and park and recreation professionals.





One child begins leaning sticks against a trunk of a tree. As more and more sticks are placed, another child approaches, offering to also place sticks. Together both children create the outline of a possible fort. Two more children come up and soon, the fort emerges. Using “tree cookies” as their medium, a pathway leading to the fort entrance appears. When sticks fall, the team works together to replace them and adjust the fort. The group disagrees on next steps, but after a brief team consultation, they resume working. Satisfied with their creation, each child steps inside the fort and sits. They beam at each other, proud, sweaty and ready for more.

*Welles Park Family Nature Play Date. Nature Play fosters self-determination, mapping skills, problem-solving and cooperation.<sup>3</sup>*

One of the Chicago Park District's responses to this change has been the creation of a Nature Play Space program. The mission of the Chicago Park District's Conservation and Environmental Engagement Unit is to develop habitats that are dedicated to the cultivation and enrichment of ecological diversity, nature exploration, learning and the enlivening of the human spirit. Throughout the past several years, the Chicago Park District has moved from a model of simply habitat preservation to one that encourages and cultivates participation through a variety of ways, including the creation of Nature Play Spaces throughout the city.

The Nature Play Space Initiative invites communities to re-imagine traditional playgrounds for the purpose of promoting spontaneous free play by children, allowing them to immerse themselves in nature. A Nature Play Area uses natural materials for play equipment and loose parts that encourage imaginative and child-directed play. When children play in natural environments, their play is more diverse with imaginative and creative play that fosters language and collaborative skills.<sup>1</sup>

Nature Play Areas are ever changing, offering children the opportunity to explore, create and wonder. Directed by children, they can appear messy and disorganized to adults, but these spaces provide endless opportunities for solitary rest and reflection by children away from screens. Play in nature is especially important for developing capacities for creativity, problem-solving and intellectual development.<sup>2</sup> Spontaneous, self-guided nature play by children has a beneficial impact on their health, attention and stress levels.

With frequent, repeated visits, habitats designated or created for nature play can become safe spaces for children to develop motor skills, friendships, creativity and a sense of place in the environment of their city. The variety of experiences available to children through nature play, including risk-taking activities, is a necessary

component of youth development and the development of a future generation of conservation-minded citizens.

The Chicago Park District partners with community advisory groups, community based non-profit organizations and social service organizations to co-create Nature Play Spaces throughout the city. Each space is unique and represents the ideas and interests of the community in which it resides. Community groups agree to fund, program and steward the space with the support of the Chicago Park District. With 77 distinctive and diverse communities in the City of Chicago, these spaces vary dramatically in scale, scope and design. For example, Garfield Park Conservatory's Play and Grow Garden - an initiative of the Chicago Park District and the Conservatory's non-profit arm, Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance - totaled approximately \$1,500,000. Conversely, West Ridge - a collaboration of the Chicago Park District and the West Ridge Advisory Council - simply included the expense of staff delivering tree limbs, sticks and stumps to the location and the dedicated efforts of the Advisory Council to create the space.

Some communities have chosen to invest a large amount of resources into their spaces with large capital construction projects, while others have chosen to engage children in play using low-cost, easily-accessible natural resources with little to no construction. By utilizing nearby water sources such as rivers or streams, incorporating mud, boulders, hills and existing trees or stumps, communities can re-imagine and creatively see and use their space. Ephemeral elements, such as the recently created “Frog Pond” by the neighborhood children at Welles Park Nature Play Space after heavy rains, is present now, but may not be in the heat of late August. Children have used sticks and logs to create temporary bridges and stepping stumps throughout the “Frog Pond,” once again changing the play environment and offering new opportunities to explore and wonder.



The Chicago Park District's Nature Play Space program has grown during the past year and has varied widely in scale and scope; however, the process, regardless of size, is designed to actively engage community members in the co-creation and co-stewardship of the space. The unique process creates partnerships between the Chicago Park District and each interested community group.

First, the community submits an initial application indicating the park land in which they wish to create a nature play space. This initial application is reviewed by an internal committee of staff from various park district departments including Natural Resources, Outdoor and Environmental Education Programming, Planning and Capital Construction. Once the initial application is approved, the group completes the second phase application. This second phase asks the community group to map the site - surveying for sunlight, shade and natural resource elements such as trees, water and existing plants. This application also requests information about site usage and size.

Groups must collect signatures of community residents and identify project leads. We also encourage groups to begin researching grant opportunities and start considering fundraising goals. Organizations such as the National Recreation and Park Association, KEEN and The North Face periodically make funding available. While there are very few grants specifically for Nature Play Spaces, grants aimed at increasing access to the outdoors, environmental education or early childhood education may be useful.

Once the applications are completed and approved, the community group and the Chicago Park District work in partnership to execute a conceptual design. This may include several community meetings where children are encouraged to attend with their families as valuable Nature Play Space designers. The Chicago Park District has created a Nature Play Toolkit specifically for these meetings, so that children and families can use scale-sized

sticks, stumps, logs, rocks, wooden people and various other materials to dream up a Nature Play Space and see firsthand a possible layout of their space.

After the second application is submitted, the community group is asked to submit a fundraising plan and a stewardship plan. The group is also asked to sign a two-year commitment to the space, which outlines the responsibilities of the Chicago Park District and the community for maintaining the space in the months and years to come. This partnership allows communities to have a voice in the creation of their space, while providing guidance and a systematic process to ensure the success of the space long-term. It also gives the Chicago Park District local eyes and ears overseeing the space with a reduced dependency on staff to manage the site.

The Chicago Park District is just getting started on a city-wide push for Nature Play Spaces with seven active locations. By promoting this initiative with staff support and resources, we can continue to activate natural areas and bring nature free-play to communities. Our model provides a great starting point and allows flexibility in the implementation and development of each site, creating unique and exciting opportunities for play.

We are continuously learning about community, collaboration and resources required for nature play to be successful, and since parks have an abundance of tree limbs, sticks, logs and rocks, parks are perfect areas to create Nature Play Spaces.

The next generation of environmental stewards is ready to play!

<sup>1</sup>Moore & Wong 1997, Taylor, et al. 1998, Fjortoft 2000

<sup>2</sup>Kellert, 2005

<sup>3</sup>Moore, R. 2014

# Partnerships Matter



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# WHAT DO BIRDING AND JOB TRAINING HAVE IN COMMON?

The Forest Preserves of Cook County, established more than a century ago, is one of the oldest and largest urban conservation districts in the United States. With nearly 70,000 acres of public land, the Forest Preserves of Cook County is responsible for preserving diverse natural ecosystems in the heart of the Chicago metropolitan region, which provide places for people to explore, learn, exercise and play.



**BY THE  
FOREST PRESERVES OF  
COOK COUNTY**

## Coordinated partnerships play a critical role in the implementation of the NCCP and the efforts to link diverse and urban populations with nature.

Protecting nature in the nation's second largest county comes with its own unique challenges – invasive species, pollution, habitat fragmentation and people often out of touch with nature. As urban populations continue to expand and change, new opportunities arise that hold the potential to create stronger connections between people and nature.

Inspired by its centennial milestone, the Forest Preserves of Cook County decided to address these challenges and commit to finding solutions by developing the *Next Century Conservation Plan (NCCP)*, an ambitious vision for the future. The plan commits the Forest Preserves to ensuring these public lands will be nurtured for future generations, and that everyone in Cook County will treasure these irreplaceable natural areas.

Coordinated partnerships play a critical role in the implementation of the NCCP and the efforts to link diverse and urban populations with nature. Two notable collaborative partnerships include the *Conservation Corps* job training program and the *Bird the Preserves* initiative.

The *Conservation Corps* mobilizes people to help restore nature to health while training the next generation of conservation leaders and forest preserve advocates. *Conservation Corps* is coordinated in partnership with the Friends of the Forest Preserves (FOTFP), Student Conservation Association (SCA), Greencorps Chicago (Greencorps) and Audubon Great Lakes (Audubon). It provides paid, hands-on experiences to youth and adults. Participants throughout Cook County's diverse

communities, including those with barriers to employment, can join a variety of programs that include year-round, summer and six-month experiences. The program has grown from 15 interns in 2005 to 264 participants in 2017. To date, *Conservation Corps* members have helped to improve more than 1,000 acres of public land through habitat restoration activities, and in the process, have become nature ambassadors in their communities and among their peers. Graduates of this program have obtained jobs and pursued careers in a conservation field, attended universities to study conservation sciences, or volunteered and advocated for nature and the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

The *Conservation Corps* offers diverse program opportunities to participants of all ages and educational backgrounds. Youth programs focus on teamwork, basic job skills and environmental awareness, while adult programs focus on the technical conservation skills needed to pursue a career in conservation and related fields. Programs included under the *Conservation Corps* umbrella are:

**Forest Preserve Experience Program:** Co-managed by the FOTFP and the Forest Preserves, this four-week summer employment program mobilizes more than 100 high school youth (ages 14 to 19) from Cook County's low-income communities to clean and maintain the forest preserves' lakes, mulch trees and remove invasive plants. Environmental education and nature-based recreational activities are incorporated into the program to give their hard work context. Participants also learn why healthy forest preserves are important to their



While the Conservation Corps and Bird the Preserves are two vastly different initiatives, they share many commonalities including inspiring people to care for nature and ensuring that partners are empowered to guide and influence the initiatives.

community and quality of life. The Housing Authority of Cook County is a partner on the FPE program and participating youth are required to be from families who utilize the services of the HAC.

**Chicago Conservation Leadership Corps:** FOTFP and SCA manage this six-week summer program that engages 50-80 high school students in hands-on conservation service in the forest preserves through paid summer employment. Participants work as a team on a variety of projects including trail building, mulching trees and invasive plant removal. Environmental education and nature-based recreational activities are an important component of the experience. This program boasts a 95 to 100 percent retention rate.

**Habitat Restoration Internship:** Audubon manages this full-time, six-month program that hires interns over the age of 18 to work on Forest Preserves of Cook County's lands and assist with the management and restoration of wetlands, prairies, savannas and woodlands with special emphasis on grassland birds and their habitats.

**Friends of the Forest Preserves Adult Conservation Corps Programs:** FOTFP manages multiple *Conservation Corps* crews throughout the Forest Preserves of Cook County's property for adults over the age of 18 in 30-hour per week, one-year positions. Participants are paid for their work to help restore woods, savannas and prairies. They also gain essential skills such as job readiness and financial literacy, and most importantly, are poised to become the next generation of front-line advocates for the forest preserves and nature.

**Greencorps Chicago:** The City of Chicago, in partnership with WRD Environmental, runs and manages a green industry job training program for individuals with barriers to employment. Participants, who must be over the age of 18, work 30 hours per week in nine-month positions. The Forest Preserves of Cook County partners with Greencorps to provide valuable training opportunities as well as hands-on experience in restoration, forestry and natural resource projects.

Funding for the *Conservation Corps* is diversified, with the Forest Preserves of Cook County and its partners strategically leveraging resources to secure support from foundations, government grants, corporations and private funders. The Forest Preserves and its partners work together to share expertise, training, tools, potential candidates and funding through ongoing collaboration that ensures all resources are maximized. This program would not exist, nor be as successful, without the ongoing support of all partners.

Another initiative that relies on the support and involvement of partnerships is *Bird the Preserves*. Many people do not realize that birding is one of the most popular recreational activities in America. According to a 2001 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Study, approximately 46 million Americans consider themselves birders, spending an estimated \$41.6 billion annually on their hobby.

The Forest Preserves' diverse habitats, which range from woodlands to wetlands, provide abundant opportunities to see nearly 300 different species of resident and migrant birds that depend on Chicagoland's natural areas for

feeding, resting and nesting. Recognizing the opportunity to use birding as a gateway to a greater connection with the natural world and to provide people with a positive and fun experience in nature, the Forest Preserves worked with nearly 20 partners to create the *Bird the Preserves* initiative.

Two main objectives of *Bird the Preserves* were to better connect diverse communities to the Forest Preserves and to establish the Forest Preserves as the region's premier birding destination. In 2015, 17 organizations representing birding clubs, non-profits and government agencies came together to plan, organize and implement the *Bird the Preserves* initiative. Partners included Audubon Chicago Region, Barrington Natural History Society, Bird Conservation Network, Chicago Audubon Society, Chicago Botanic Garden, Chicago Ornithological Society, Chicago Zoological Society, Evanston North Shore Bird Club, The Field Museum, Forest Preserve Foundation, Fort Dearborn Audubon, Lake Cook Audubon, Openlands' Birds in My Neighborhood, Outdoor Afro, REI, Sand Ridge Audubon, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Wild Birds Unlimited.

In 2016, a fun and engaging marketing campaign launched, bringing online, print and on-air attention to the initiative. Traffic to the *Bird the Preserves*' website increased by an incredible 596 percent. The marketing campaign was honored with a 2017 National Association of County and Park District's Marketing Award. In 2017, the Forest Preserves and partners conducted an evaluation and decided to pilot several new programs including a bilingual English/Spanish International Migratory Bird Day, a Bird Blitz and Big Month; these were held in addition to

another 230 birding events. The initiative's success has inspired the forest preserves to incorporate birding activities into more of its programming moving forward. Partner support and investment was an integral component to the success of the initiative. Partners had a critical voice in developing the goals of the initiative and were crucial to its launch and implementation.

*Bird the Preserves* is now in its third year, and the Forest Preserves is developing a report to determine how best to maintain the initiative and replicate its successful partnerships for future initiatives. *Bird the Preserves* brought together multiple partner organizations and volunteers to implement shared goals and collaborate on programming. No other Forest Preserves' initiative has had such a tremendous impact with this type of cooperation among so many partners on a county-wide scale.

Collaborative partnerships are one of the keys to successfully implementing the Forest Preserves of Cook County's *Next Century Conservation Plan*. While the *Conservation Corps* and *Bird the Preserves* are two vastly different initiatives, they share many commonalities including inspiring people to care for nature and ensuring that partners are empowered to guide and influence the initiatives. They also offer an inclusive and engaging approach to mesh a diverse group of partners and audiences.

The Forest Preserves values collaborative partnerships. These are just two examples of how the Forest Preserves is working with partners to protect nature and ensure that everyone feels welcome in the preserves.



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## PEOPLE & PLACES



### Jeremiah Johnson Appointed to the Waukegan Park District Board

The Waukegan Park District has appointed **Jeremiah Johnson** to fill the Board of Commissioners vacancy created by the resignation of Bill Sarocka. Johnson was officially sworn in on June 26, and

his term will run through May 2019.

Johnson is a local businessman who owns several restaurants in Waukegan. He coaches youth baseball and serves on the Waukegan Parks Foundation Board.

He was previously employed by the Waukegan Park District in the Fitness Center at the Field House Sports, Fitness and Aquatics Center.



### Theodora 'Teddy' Anderson Promoted to Superintendent of Community Relations for the Waukegan Park District

The Waukegan Park District is pleased to announce that **Teddy Anderson** has been promoted to

Superintendent of Community Relations.

Her efforts have created valuable partnerships between the park district and key community leaders and organizations. She led the park district's *Community Engagement Project*, which brought together the faith community, not-for-profit organizations, government institutions, businesses and media to establish new communication channels, identify needs and discuss possible collaborations.

Anderson was initially hired as Manager of Community of Relations and has been with the Waukegan Park District since 2008.

### Mundelein Park & Recreation District Receives Top Honors in Reader's Choice Poll



**Mundelein Park & Recreation District** received top honors in three categories of the *Daily Herald's* Reader's Choice awards program.

The paper holds an annual Reader's Choice survey spotlighting the suburbs' best places for dining, entertainment, recreation, shopping and living. The Mundelein Park & Recreation District was selected as *Best Venue* for a Quinceañera, Mundelein Trails was selected for *Best Camp*, and Steeple Chase Golf Club was selected for *Best Public Golf Course*.



### Larry Gabriel retires from Geneva Park District after 38 years of dedicated service.

**Larry Gabriel**, Superintendent of Parks and Properties, retired from the Geneva Park District on June 22, 2018. The Geneva Park District Board, staff and community are grateful for his 38 years of service.

Gabriel led his team through several projects, both large and small. Some of the most notable include the Skate Park, Moore Park Sprayground, Hawks Hollow Nature Playground, The Links Disc Golf Course, Wheeler Park Greenhouse, Wheeler Maintenance Facility addition, and the north bridge at Island Park, which was named in his honor.

Other projects Gabriel has been instrumental in include playground, tennis court, and pavilion renovations; shore line stabilizations at Bennett and Stanley Esping Parks; and the creation of natural areas throughout the District.

Gabriel began his career at the Geneva Park District in 1979 as the Horticulturalist. He managed all the plantings in Geneva Park District parks. He was promoted to Foreman at Peck Farm Park in 1998 and became the Superintendent of Parks and Properties in 2001.



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