

Illinois

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P&R

PARKS AND RECREATION

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



thinking outside the box:

Creative & Unique Ideas from Our Members

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FROM THE EDITOR

Creative Endeavors

While the words “adapt” and “pivot” have become more a part of our daily lexicon during a pandemic, one word has also sprung up more and more.



Creativity.

One word with endless possibilities. One of the amazing things about humanity is our ability to create something from nothing or to transform an already existing idea into an even greater one. Creativity is the cornerstone of any successful agency. How many problems have been solved in your life by thinking outside of the box? How many times have you had an idea hit you out of nowhere and you brought it to life and watched it succeed beyond your expectations?

This issue of *Illinois Parks and Recreation* wants to share some of those stories. Our contributors this month have done it all, transforming buildings, connecting history to recreation, built buildings using unique funding methods, and so much more. I implore you to read through some of these stories and think about how your agency can do something similar or chart a new course that nobody has ever traveled on.

I am excited to introduce a new feature to our digital edition of this issue, as some of our contributor articles will also have links to episodes of IAPD's *Park Cast*, where I talk more in-depth about these stories with the people who made them happen. Be sure to check out a few of these podcasts and get to know these incredibly creative professionals. If you have a story you'd love to share, let me know at wutterback@ilparks.org.

Keep creating, keep breaking new ground and, of course, keep reading!

— Wayne Utterback, Editor



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- 
- Nice close cut along the curb
 - Discharge clippings out the back
 - Put all my troubles behind me



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

Celebrating Success: The Best of the Best

Grants from the iconic OSLAD program were released in July for this past fiscal year.

This, coupled with the historic funding level of more than \$56 million for FY23, portends a great future for park funding in Illinois. More good news follows as the IDNR has indicated to IAPD that the next grant cycle will open shortly.

The OSLAD program was created by state statute in 1986 and sporadically funded until 1989 when a portion of the real estate transfer tax was allocated on an annual basis as its funding source. IAPD, working with then State Representative Terry Steczo, crafted a bi-partisan initiative which also included an allocation from the real estate transfer tax for affordable housing and natural areas.

The real estate transfer tax has proved over the years to be a key component of the program as it ensured consistent funding from year to year at a time when the federal LWCF was dwindling in its support of state assistance. Based on the match provided by park districts, forest preserves, conservation districts, and municipal recreation agencies, more than \$1.2 billion dollars have been invested in the outdoor recreational infrastructure of the state of Illinois since the program's inception.

On Friday, July 8th, Governor JB Pritzker formally announced \$30.3 million in grants for 87 local park projects that will help communities acquire open space and develop and improve recreational facilities throughout Illinois.

In doing so he stated, "Park projects don't just create jobs and boost local economic development – they open the gateway for a healthier, happier Illinois. Every family in our state deserves nearby access to outdoor public spaces where they can gather with their friends and neighbors – and enjoy."

This is a sentiment we all can celebrate as park and recreation agencies are experiencing all-time highs in usage and provided solace and a place of refuge during the pandemic.

The grants announced through the state's Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) program are

administered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). OSLAD grants can provide up to one-half of a project's funds, \$400,000 for development, and \$750,000 for acquisition, and when combined with the investment of local matching funds, will support more than \$60 million in local park development projects and land acquisition statewide.

The grants funded projects in 49 park districts, 5 forest preserves, and 32 cities and villages and 1 township..

State assistance from the OSLAD program has invested \$433.5 million in 1,816 local park projects since 1986.

IAPD's *Best of the Best*

It has been said that celebrating your achievements and applauding your triumphs is a sure way to refuel your enthusiasm and keep yourself motivated for future endeavors.

In 2007, the Illinois Association of Park Districts had the idea to create a formal event that would give our member park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation, and special recreation agencies an opportunity to celebrate their successes. The event would recognize board member and agency anniversaries as well as the businesses, media, citizen volunteers, and coaches who go above and beyond the call of duty to make Illinois a better place to live, work, and play.

We were the first to coin the phrase 'the best of the best' in terms of an Illinois parks-related awards program because our research showed that since the National Gold Medal Award program began more than 55 years ago, Illinois park, recreation, and conservation agencies have won the award more than any other state in the nation. Knowing that Illinois agencies are already 'the best,' we named our prestigious event the *Best of the Best Awards Gala*.

Fifteen years later, this highly anticipated annual program has become known as the red-carpet event of the year for Illinois park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation, and special recreation agencies. The event is a resounding affirmation that the work we are doing is making an enormous difference not only to the flora and

fauna of this great state, but also in the lives of children and adults of all ages. Each year, our gala generates positive media stories and leaves attendees motivated, inspired, and deeply touched by ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Their stories live on through this incredible event, and every year, there seems to be 'that one story' that leaves a lasting impression on all attendees.

Take our 2009 Outstanding Citizen Volunteer of the Year, Lawrence DuBose. In the early 1980's, Dr. DuBose told his local forest preserve that it needed bees for its living history farm. Bees have historically been needed to pollinate vegetation and they produce honey and beeswax, which have a diverse array of uses.

Dr. DuBose volunteered his time to the forest preserve for more than 30 years, overseeing operations of the forest preserve's beehives, training volunteers, and teaching people about the vital importance of the honeybee. The more than 200 people who attended our 2009 Gala gained a newfound respect for this buzzing little miracle of nature.

Dr. DuBose's heartfelt acceptance speech that evening referenced poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson and brought the audience to their feet with his closing words, "When Alfred, Lord Tennyson comes up with that one clear call for me and says, 'It's time to cross the bar,' I'm just hoping on the other shore, I'll be the Beekeeper."

Our 2012 Partnership winner from the Wheeling Park District also left an indelible impression. *ZAC Camp* was named in honor of Zachary Archer Cohn, who loved the water and spent most of his summers swimming with family and friends. Tragically, Zachary passed away at the age of six after getting trapped in the drain of the family pool in Connecticut. The family's grief and their desire to honor Zach's memory inspired them to create *The ZAC Foundation* to educate families across the country about water safety.

When the Wheeling Park District learned about *The ZAC Foundation's* mission, they hosted the first ever *ZAC Camp* in Illinois. One hundred and nine Wheeling children ages six to eight years, who had never had the opportunity to take part in formal swim lessons and did not know how to swim, were invited to participate in the one-week camp.

The benefits of the *ZAC Camp* were immediately apparent, and the camp brought many new faces to the Wheeling Park District, some of whom became faithful swim-lesson participants. By communicating the message of water safety to 109 more children, Zach's memory was able to continue on in a very special way.

The ZAC Foundation continues to benefit children today, and water safety programs through *ZAC Camps* have been provided to more than 20,000 children nationwide.

We also won't forget Callie Ramirez, our 2021 Outstanding Citizen Volunteer of the Year who taught us that not all heroes wear capes – some wear river waders!

At the young age of 14, Callie contacted the Forest Preserve District of Kane County after her participation in a Fox River cleanup left her wanting to do more. With the forest preserve district's encouragement, she created the Fox River Helpers Group and hosted two more cleanups that year. When most girls her age asked for the latest fashion attire for Christmas, Callie asked for river waders.

Her volunteer group has logged more than 350 hours and has removed more than 1,400 pounds of garbage. She partnered with Friends of the Fox River and Senator Villa to organize a Mother's Day Cleanup, and she landed a seat on the St. Charles Natural Resources Commission.

Celebrating success does so much more than make us feel good about what we do. It creates an awareness of the *critical importance* of what we do.

Please consider submitting nominations for your agency's success stories at ILparks.org by August 22 for partnerships, intergovernmental cooperative agreements, relationships with local businesses and journalists, arts programs, environmental advancements, coaches, and citizen volunteers.

Yours might be 'that one story' that leaves a lasting impression on us all.

2022 CALENDAR OF EVENTS



Aug. 20
Park District Conservation Day
State Fairgrounds
Springfield, IL



Oct. 14
Best of the Best Awards Gala
Chevy Chase Country Club
Wheeling Park District



Sept 20-22
NRPA Congress & Exposition
Phoenix, AZ

Nov. 3
Legal Symposium
Hyatt Lodge/
Conference Center
Oak Brook, IL



Jan. 26-28
IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference
Hyatt Regency, Chicago



By Barbara Arango, CAE
IPRA Executive Director

Building a Learning Culture

Starting a new job can be exciting, but it can also be demanding to learn a new set of responsibilities and to navigate a different culture. Of course, there's also the fact that the unexpected is inevitable. 40 days into my tenure here at IPRA, I had one of my seven employees resign. She had a great opportunity in her field of interest in California. Nothing to panic about. I have a great crew and we can take our time finding the right person to join our team. Then, ten days later, another employee resigned. OK, we still got this. What a great opportunity to adjust roles and responsibilities among all the staff. Right?

Little did I know that a third employee was waiting for a good time to announce her retirement. Two weeks after the second employee left, she dropped the news. No way would I have anticipated losing over 40% of my staff in the first 4 months. How can you prepare for a situation like that? It's not like we're in the middle of a tight labor market or anything...

Well, I can tell you that (knock wood) it actually has been smooth sailing thanks to a fabulous IPRA staff team. Everyone has stepped up and we are tackling this challenge together. In our last issue I discussed the difficulty of recruiting employees in this market, and we were prepared for a bumpy ride. However, we have had a great selection of candidates from which to choose and found outstanding professionals to fill our vacancies. I believe that is partly because our industry is so awesome and partly because we showed our personality in the recruitment process. By the time this article is printed, we should be fully staffed again. I hope you will welcome our new team members with the same warmth and enthusiasm that you welcomed me just a few short months ago.

Onboarding half the total team in a short period of time sounds pretty challenging, but we are figuring it out as we go. Our team dynamic has changed a bit, but as part of the interview process, we purposefully looked for people that would fit in with our culture and team spirit. The key is to be flexible and not take ourselves too seriously. We work hard, but we laugh a lot, too. We also put a high value on professional development which we are able to promote during the hiring process. And we all have a sense of mission to serve you, our members, so you can best support our communities.

A learning culture is like an incubator for innovation and improvement.



Many of you have been through similar situations. You have your own war stories about something unexpected that caught you by surprise or some challenges you had to overcome. And I'm sure part of the solution included working with others. Humans are collaborative by nature and research shows that teamwork not only produces better outcomes, but it also encourages personal growth, reduces stress, and increases job satisfaction. This does require a well-functioning team, however, and that takes work to develop.

As you move out of the hectic summer season, take a step back and assess how your team is functioning. Is there open, honest conversation among staff members? Are there areas of frustration that can be addressed? Do you have the freedom and flexibility to try new initiatives? Is everyone able and willing to contribute to discussions? Even if things seem great on the surface, there are always opportunities to improve. Sometimes just doing things a little different can energize the team and get people out of their comfort zones. The goal is to foster a team environment where everyone feels valued and safe in expressing their ideas and opinions.

Another characteristic of a high functioning team is one where each member has the time and initiative to continuously improve themselves. Whether that means attending professional development classes or just constantly reading articles about the industry, a learning culture is like an incubator for innovation and improvement. It can also prove to be valuable protection from staff turnover. As you consider your current environment, look for ways to foster a learning culture for yourself and for your colleagues. Demonstrate a desire for learning and seek out opportunities for growth. Then drag your teammates along for the ride.

It's easy to get caught up in day-to-day tasks and leave professional development on the back burner. Today I'd like to challenge you to schedule some time on your calendar for yourself. Sign up for IPRA's Professional Development School, read this magazine cover-to-cover, or watch one of the recorded webinars on IPRA Connect. Find something that interests you even if it is not directly related to your current job. This is a great way to make connections between concepts and come up with new ideas. It can also position you for future roles as opportunities present themselves.

You can also encourage a learning culture within your team by sharing interesting articles, watching webinars together, hosting brainstorming sessions or attending educational classes as a group. Who knows? Maybe instead of talking about the latest Netflix series in the breakroom, you'll find yourselves in a deep debate about the best article you read last week. Maybe not, but at least you will have a team that is engaged and ready to tackle whatever comes your way.

IPRA Upcoming Events

Therapeutic Recreation (TR) Summit

October 7, 2022

Location: TBD

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.

Time Waits for No One

October 12 & 20, 2022

Webinar

Presented by Marie Knight, owner of Knight Leadership Solutions. Everyone wants to know how to be better at time management,

the reality is - you can't manage time, you can only manage YOU! Learn how to identify your priorities, focus on them, and reduce the time wasters, so you are better prepared for the unexpected.

Professional Development School 2022

November 6-9, 2022

Location: Galena, IL

PDS, provides park, recreation, forest preserve, and conservation professionals with the opportunity to gain practical education in a small, student-focused and relaxed atmosphere. Come experience this year's gnarly "Park and Rec Mix Tape: The Soundtrack of Success" and join the many professionals that have graduated from PDS and advanced their career.

Visit ILipra.org for more information and to register.



Jason Anselment
General Counsel

Open Meetings Act Primer - Part I

Aside from the Park District Code, perhaps no other statute induces more legal questions from members than the Open Meetings Act (OMA). This may be because districts confront the OMA as often as any statute besides the Park District Code. To further complicate matters, the OMA is frequently the subject of legislative changes and the text itself is not always well organized.

My next two columns are intended to help navigate these complexities by first discussing the general rules for regular open meetings and then treating special circumstances such as closed sessions, special meetings, and remote attendance as exceptions. Though comprehensive, this two-part primer is not exhaustive of every OMA issue. As with all matters requiring legal advice, agencies should always consult their local counsel with specific questions.

Purpose of the OMA

At the outset, it is helpful to remember that the purpose of the OMA is to ensure that public bodies¹ conduct deliberations and take actions openly so the public can be informed. To achieve this goal, advance notice of meetings and proper documentation of what occurs at them is required. Meetings must always be held at convenient times and places that are open to the public and not on holidays unless the regular meeting schedule happens to fall on that day.

Regular Meeting Notice

Holding an open meeting would provide citizens little opportunity for information if no one except district staff and the board knew about it. So, at the beginning of each calendar or fiscal year public bodies must provide notice of the schedule of dates, times, and places of all regular meetings for that year by posting the notice at the district's principal office². This annual notice must also be posted on the district's website and remain there until approval of the next annual notice³. Copies of all meeting notices must be posted at these same locations and supplied to news media that file an annual request. Regular meeting notices must remain on the website until the regular meeting is concluded.

Once the regular meeting schedule is fixed, any change in regular meeting dates must be published in an appropriate newspaper at least 10 days prior to the meeting in addition

to the regular posting. The Attorney General's Office has advised that this specific publication requirement only applies to a permanent change in the regular meeting schedule such as changing the regular meeting day from the first Monday of each month to the second Tuesday of each month. In other words, the newspaper publication requirement does not apply if only a single meeting is rescheduled; however, the other meeting notice requirements would still apply.

Notice of the time and place of a regular meeting is not enough. At least 48 hours prior to each regular meeting, the district must also post the agenda for the meeting at its principal office, the meeting location, and on its website until the meeting is concluded. The public meeting notice and agenda must be continuously available for public review during the entire 48-hour period preceding the meeting. Posting the notice and agenda on the public body's website satisfies this requirement. If a notice or agenda is not continuously available for the full 48-hour period due to actions outside the public body's control, e.g., a web server failure, then that lack of availability will not invalidate any meeting or action taken at a meeting.

Conducting Business during Open Session at Regular Meetings

Assuming proper meeting notice, the board may take action on agenda items as long as a quorum of the board⁴ is physically present and the meeting is open to the public⁵. The agenda must set forth the "general subject matter" of any resolution or ordinance that will be the subject of final action at a meeting. Agencies should ensure that agenda items are as descriptive as possible if they intend to take final action because the sufficiency of the description is often challenged. Unlike the rules for special meetings discussed in Part 2, the board is not precluded from discussing items that are not on a regular meeting agenda, but the board may not take final action on those items. For 5-member boards, the OMA requires at least 3 affirmative votes to adopt any motion, resolution, or ordinance regardless of the number of members present.

The OMA requires public bodies to permit any person an opportunity to address public officials at an open meeting, but this is not an unlimited right. The district can and

should establish rules for public participation such as when the public comment period will take place and reasonable time limits for each individual.

The public or media often want to record open meetings by video or audio tape. Although reasonable rules are appropriate, this activity cannot be prohibited except when a witness refuses to testify on specific grounds in a quasi-judicial proceeding.

Regular Meeting Minutes

Citizens who choose not to attend board meetings still have the right to know what happened. The OMA addresses this by requiring districts to keep written minutes, which must minimally include the date, time, and place of the meeting, the attendance record for each member and whether he or she was physically or remotely present, a discussion summary of all matters proposed, deliberated, or decided, and a record of all votes taken. To help prepare minutes, many local governments tape every meeting, but verbatim recordings of open meetings are not required.

Open meeting minutes must be approved within 30 days after the meeting or at the second subsequent regular meeting, whichever is later. Once approved, the minutes must be made available for public inspection and posted on the district's website within 10 days and must remain on the website for at least 60 days.

Closed Sessions

Public bodies sometimes confront sensitive matters that necessitate a closed session. Yet, few issues are subject to more public scrutiny than closed meetings. Consequently, it is critical for boards to strictly follow the procedures for closing meetings and confine the discussion to matters for which the open meeting was properly closed.

The OMA currently lists 40 subjects boards may consider in closed session if they follow proper procedures. These exceptions are to be strictly construed, extending only to subjects clearly within their scope. To hold a closed meeting or "executive session" the board should first convene a properly noticed open meeting with a quorum present. A motion to close the meeting must be made in open session and sufficiently cite the specific section of the OMA authorizing the closed session. Obviously, the motion must pass, and each member's vote must be publicly disclosed and recorded in the minutes. If there is proper meeting notice and these procedures are followed, boards may close regular meetings regardless of whether matters are specifically listed on the agenda as closed session topics, but many local counsel advise listing closed session items on the agenda as a matter of best practice. Of course, if the board intends to take final action on the item in open session, the action item would need to be listed on the agenda.

Once a meeting is closed, the board cannot discuss any topic that was not specifically covered by the motion to close the meeting. If discussion on another topic becomes

necessary, the board should adjourn the closed meeting, return to open session, and properly move to close the meeting for the new purpose. No final action may be taken at a closed meeting. To take final action, the board must return to open session and publicly recite the nature of the matter being considered and enough information to inform the public of the business being conducted prior to the vote.

Closed meeting minutes, which must include the same information as open meeting minutes, must be kept. These minutes can be kept confidential to the extent it is necessary to protect the public interest or the privacy of an individual. However, the district is required to review closed meeting minutes at least every six months (or as soon thereafter as is practicable taking into account its meeting schedule) and determine whether the need for confidentiality still exists or if minutes or portions thereof can be made public because confidentiality is no longer needed. Although the board may discuss this review in closed session, it must report its determination in open session. Unless and until the board determines to make closed meeting minutes public, they are exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

Unlike open meetings, boards are also required to make verbatim audio or video recordings of all closed meetings. Verbatim recordings must be kept for at least 18 months and are designed to ensure that elected officials comply with closed meeting rules. After 18 months, the public body can vote to destroy these closed meeting recordings without notification to, or approval of, a records commission or the State Archivist under the Local Records Act if the minutes have been approved. Although boards may choose to publicly release confidential closed meeting recordings, it is not required except in civil or administrative actions brought to enforce the OMA and even that disclosure is subject to specific rules.

All current board members have the right to access their public body's closed meeting minutes and verbatim recordings regardless of whether the closed meeting occurred before they were members of the board. This access is limited to the location of the public body's main office or official storage location where the recordings are kept, and the public body's records secretary, administrative official such as the executive director, or another board member must be present during the review. Board members may not make a duplicate recording or otherwise remove recordings or minutes from the storage location unless otherwise allowed by a vote of the public body or court order.

This primer will continue in the September/October issue of *Illinois Parks & Recreation*.

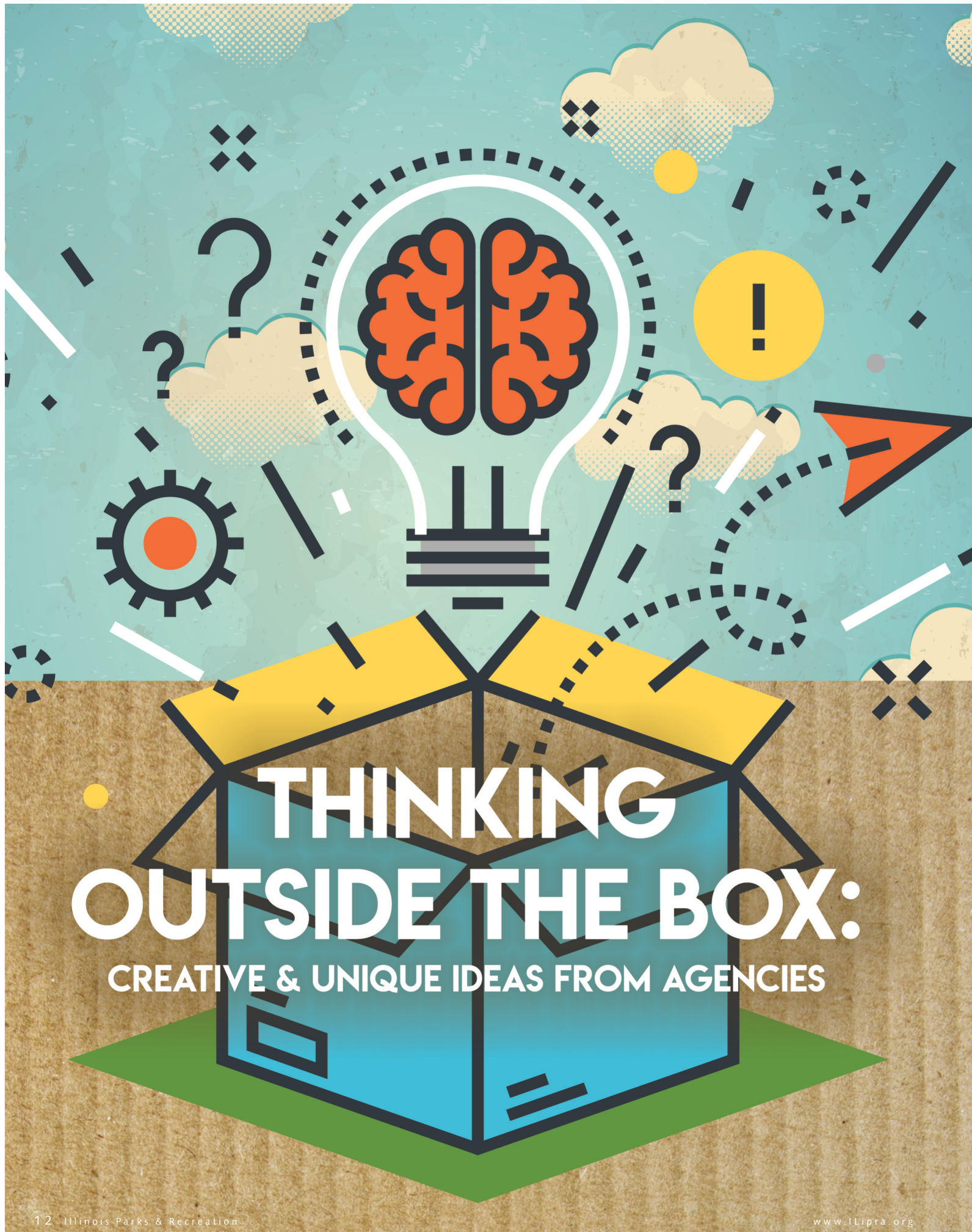
¹ Note that a "public body" covers more than just elected boards and their formal committees. For a detailed discussion of what is considered a public body under the OMA, see the *IAPD Guide to the Open Meetings Act and FOIA*.

² If the district does not have a principal office, the notice should be posted at the building where the meeting will be held. 5 ILCS 120/2.02, 2.03

³ This primer assumes the district has a website maintained by a full-time staff person. Otherwise, the requirements for websites would not apply. 5 ILCS 120/2.02

⁴ For 5-member boards, 3 members

⁵ Remote attendance rules are discussed in Part 2



THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX:

CREATIVE & UNIQUE IDEAS FROM AGENCIES



1

BUILDING A PARK IN A PANDEMIC

KARI CHRISTENSEN, MARKETING/ESTIMATING, LAMP INCORPORATED

Working with our park clients and design partners allows us to construct accessible spaces that unite communities. Outdoor recreational places were essential in providing safe spaces to gather during the pandemic. In August 2020, Lamp Incorporated completed construction of Panton Mill Park, nestled in the heart of downtown South Elgin along the Fox River, a neighboring village four miles south of our office. During the pandemic, the South Elgin Parks and Recreation Department made terrific use of Panton Mill Park and continues providing and expanding its offerings to its residents. We are so delighted by all the village has done and continues to do with this park that we reached out to Kim Wascher, director of parks and recreation for the village. This article shares the inspiration behind the park,

its features, and a few examples of how the village brings the community together at Panton Mill Park.

Panton Mill Park includes a 4,500 square foot open-air pavilion, a 2,000 square foot permanent band stage, a multi-purpose comfort station including dedicated concession space, a splash pad, and walking trails within the park created access to other trails and parks. The grand opening was in October 2020; that day's air temperature was in the 50s—the first people to run through the splash pad were the South Elgin Fire Chief Steve Wascher and Greg Bohlin, Vice president of construction at Lamp Incorporated. Panton Mill Park brought smiles and laughter from the very beginning.





AS A RESULT, MOST WEEKENDS ARE RENTED FOR FAMILY REUNIONS, GRADUATIONS, AND COMPANY PICNICS—A RESIDENT IS EVEN HOSTING AN OPERA CONCERT.

The park's grand opening came during a difficult time for the world. The pandemic brought separation, but parks provided a way to bring people together safely. Each November, the village hosts its popular *An Almost Winter Day*. For November 2020, the village could not host its usual version of the event; instead, staff created a drive-thru version, including appointments so families could safely have their photos with Santa in the snowglobe. In addition, the Village started hosting concerts, movie nights, and cruise nights. The community craved activities providing a safe escape from their homes. In 2021, the first year the park was open during the summer, it hosted over 5,000 attendees at its free events (the village's population is just over 28,000). This summer, the village is hosting over 30 free events, including its *Concerts in the Park* series, a Ravinia-style event.

Twenty years ago, the village created a plan for the downtown park system, including four quadrants. Panton Mill Park is the second of the four quadrants. The inspiration behind this beautiful park came from Riverfest, a popular event the village has hosted for over 25 years. Unfortunately,

the event had high tent/stage rentals, generators, and lighting costs. Beyond the costs of Riverfest, the village board was interested in creating a space where more free community events could be hosted.

Other terrific features of this park include its accessibility — both financially and physically. The park was built so its features are physically accessible to all, but it also provided safe access to SEBA Park, Illinois's first fully accessible park. Additionally, the village board wanted the park's amenities to be financially affordable—staff invested significant time creating a reasonable fee structure for private events. As a result, most weekends are rented for family reunions, graduations, and company picnics—a resident is even hosting an opera concert. In addition, local nonprofit organizations like the Boys & Girls Club of Elgin and the Fox Valley Special Recreation Association are hosting two significant events this summer.

We are so grateful for this relationship and look forward to hearing about all the memories yet to be created at Panton Mill Park.



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2

BECOMING A KID AGAIN IN ELMHURST

KARI FELKAMP, CPRP, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS, ELMHURST PARK DISTRICT

Over the years at the Elmhurst Park District, we've hosted the traditional line up of community events, including an egg hunt, movies in the park, fall fest, and a tree lighting.

The events are very well attended and have grown to bring in 4,000 people on average. But until recently, the target audience for all the events was families with young kids.



Years ago, during our strategic planning process, we heard loud and clear that the community loved our events, but adults wanted in on the fun! They wanted an excuse to leave the kids at home, grab a group of friends, and have a fun night out. So in 2019, we

rolled out a new community event specifically for ages 21 and up called Bags, Brew & BBQ.

The event consisted of...you guessed it...bags, beer, and BBQ trucks! We teamed up with a local vendor to sell alcohol, got the blessing of our police department, and staff underwent Basset training to

get the required certification to check IDs. We also brought in a DJ, large inflatable games and had a variety of "giant" games like checkers, Battleship, Kerplunk, and Jenga.

During the initial promotion of the event, staff had no idea what to expect. The community had asked for it, but would they attend? The initial set up called for using the small garden area, parking lot and tennis courts near Wilder Mansion. But as interest in the event grew and numbers continued to rise on the Facebook event, it was clear that adults in town were definitely ready and willing to attend! As a result, staff had to field adjust to utilize the park area on the east side of the mansion instead.

On a perfect Saturday night in July 2019, more than 500 adults flocked to Wilder Park in the heart of Elmhurst to act like a kid for a night! The event attracted the newly-turned-21 crowd all the way up to retired couples excited to enjoy an evening out. A group of about 20 friends from a nearby subdivision even made a night of it and attended as a group!

The response was overwhelmingly positive, and people couldn't wait for us to do it again! Unfortunately, COVID had other plans so the event was paused in 2020, and a storm came through and forced us to cancel in 2021. But this year, staff will be bringing in more food trucks and adding games like 3-in-1 interactive sports, giant beer pong, and popular yard games like ladder toss and Kan Jam!



CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT - DESIGN BUILD



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3

EDUCATING AND EXHILARATING EXPERIENCES THROUGH RE-ENACTMENTS

PAM HUTTON, PR & MARKETING SUPERVISOR, LOCKPORT TOWNSHIP PARK DISTRICT

Military History Weekend (MHW) is one of the Lockport Township Park District's largest events that covers themes from the Civil War, World War I, World War II and Vietnam, as well as live music and entertainment. MHW encompasses our national pride by re-enacting our history of each era for future generations, paying homage to those heroes who laid down their lives in the line of duty and celebrates the achievements and sacrifices of our current military and veterans.



Battles from every era mentioned above are showcased throughout the weekend. Darrell West once said, "every war has its own rhythm in terms of how it is conducted

and how the public responds. Depending on the nature of the times, the quality of the political and military

leadership, and the strength of the opposition wars can go either really well or very poorly from the standpoint of achieving a country's strategic goals". The stark differences between each battle and the eras they

represent ushers in this realization. For example, re-enactors representing Union soldiers during the Civil War march in an open field with cannons firing at Confederate soldiers and vice-versa. In contrast, this same field will also host other battles, particularly the skirmishes of Vietnam. This battle introduces pyrotechnics, which adds to the realism of the confrontation.



APPROXIMATELY 400-500 RE-ENACTORS ATTEND MHW FROM THROUGHOUT THE MIDWEST BRINGING ALL KINDS OF ARTIFACTS FROM THE DIFFERENT PERIODS

Before the battles, a group of children come out of the woods with a massive American flag, and everyone sings the Star-Spangled Banner. An announcer thanks our veterans for their service and broadcasts the setting before each battle. There is also a VIP area for our veterans and their families to sit in the shade and watch the battles in comfort.

Approximately 400-500 re-enactors attend MHW from throughout the Midwest bringing all kinds of artifacts from the different periods such as uniforms, equipment and vehicles. Roughly, 4,000 spectators attend the battles each day. Attendees can also walk through the various encampments and experience a day in the life of a soldier.

A Veteran's Hospitality Tent welcomes all veterans and their families on both days for free coffee, donuts, lunch, and beverages. The Veteran's Hospitality Tent is located in the Beer Garden by the Bunker Bar and all veterans are welcome to attend.

Visitors can relive the era by enjoying music from Sweet Reminder, covering the Andrew Sisters with 50s and 60s classics, in front of the Performing Arts Center, followed by some dance lessons of the era. There will also be a free USO show featuring Silver Bullet STL, which is a Bob Seger tribute band. Other entertainment includes a WWII radio hour, music from the 1940s, and a Rockford Peaches baseball game.

MHW will be held on Sat., Sept. 10th and Sun., Sept. 11th beginning at 9:30 a.m. on both days in Dellwood Park, 199 E. Woods Dr. in Lockport. Tickets are available for purchase at www.lockportpark.org; adults and children 12 years and younger are \$10, seniors 55 and older and veterans are \$5.



4

MCHENRY COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT INTRODUCES BISON FOR GRASSLAND GRAZING

BY WENDY KUMMERER, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING & EDUCATION
& BRENNAN NESS, AGRICULTURAL ECOLOGIST
MCHENRY COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

McHenry County Conservation District leased 180 acres of pastureland at Pleasant Valley Conservation Area in Woodstock to Ruhter Bison, LLC to raise young bison. In late December of 2021, six bison were introduced to their new oak savanna pasture.

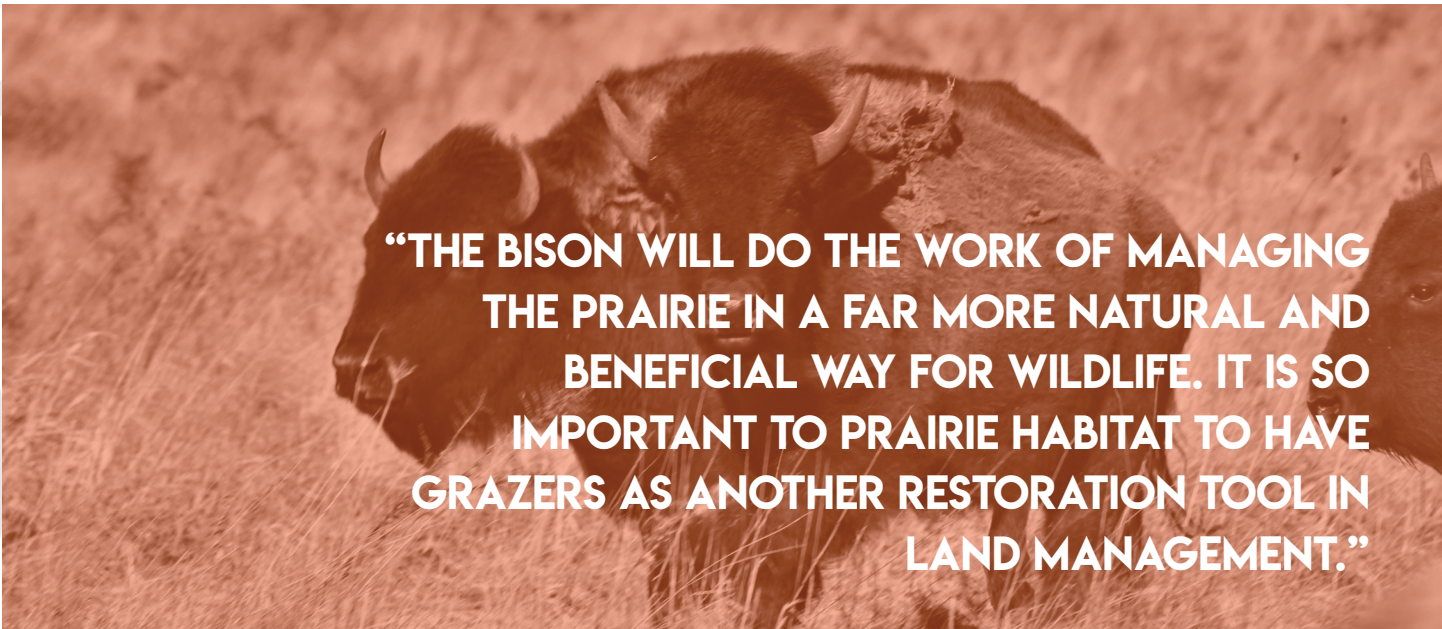
“Bison are a native species that historically played a keystone role in the ecology of prairies and grass-lands, which makes them a valuable resource when used in conjunction with prescribed burns to manage grassland habitat. Their grazing and wallowing behavior creates a mosaic of micro habitats for birds, pollinators, small mammals, and other wildlife,” stated Agricultural Ecologist Brenna Ness.



Grassland bison grazing is something the McHenry County Conservation District has looked at establishing for many years, but there were few opportunities where the

conditions were just right. The opportunity presented itself when the previous tenant, who utilized the land for row crop and cattle production, no longer wished to re-new their farm lease.

In 2021, the conservation district entered into a 15-year lease agreement with Ruhter Bison, LLC to raise young bison (age 1-3 year-old animals). The herd will be kept at a low stocking rate and rotated through the pasture to manage the habitat. Liberty Prairie Foundation was instrumental in finding and connecting the two entities, which developed



“THE BISON WILL DO THE WORK OF MANAGING THE PRAIRIE IN A FAR MORE NATURAL AND BENEFICIAL WAY FOR WILDLIFE. IT IS SO IMPORTANT TO PRAIRIE HABITAT TO HAVE GRAZERS AS ANOTHER RESTORATION TOOL IN LAND MANAGEMENT.”

into a successful match for the district to begin its bison grassland grazing program.

“This time we had the right location, the right opportunity, and the right contacts. It finally all came together. Ruhter Bison is a great fit because they are dedicated to wildlife conservation and protecting natural resources,” said Natural Resource Manager Brad Woodson. “The Ruhters are investing money in the property – new fences, watering system and building improvements. But the true value to the district goes beyond monetary; the savings is in staff time and resources toward ongoing habitat management.”

At this time the area is closed to the public. However, future programs involve a partnership with Ruhter for viewings, tours and educational opportunities for the public to learn about the bison. “We hope to develop a great public access and vantage point for viewing, so that’s something to look forward to,” said Woodson. “For now, the herd needs to establish Pleasant Valley as a home territory. The bison will be here so we hope the public is patient with us. These are inspiring animals, the sight of bison grazing on an open prairie is above and beyond what we are used to. It is exciting for this to finally happen,” said Woodson.

The benefits of grazing bison are numerous. Bison primarily prefer grasses, tending to leave forbs ungrazed. The removal of the grass canopy will result in warmer soil temperatures and increased soil moisture, which increases light availability to ungrazed forbs and can stimulate earlier growth of forbs in the spring. Bison grazing also creates a vegetation structure that is attractive to many grassland birds. Grassland birds evolved alongside these large

grazers. Declining species such as grasshopper sparrows, bobolinks, upland sandpipers, and savannah sparrows prefer the shorter, patchier structures of grazed pastures versus the taller, more uniform structure of restored prairies.

“The bison will do the work of managing the prairie in a far more natural and beneficial way for wildlife. It is so important to prairie habitat to have grazers as another restoration tool in land management. Grazers like elk, deer or bison are essential to enhancing the diversity of a grassland habitat – they help keep the balance of habitat structure and species composition of the prairie. We are looking forward to seeing the result!” declared Woodson.

Bison grazing also alters nutrient cycling processes and nutrient availability. Insects and bacteria decompose their feces, helping to recycle nutrients back into the soil. Bison also help disperse seeds that get caught in their thick fur and are distributed throughout the prairie. Their hooves plant seeds in the soil while leaving divots that hold moisture.

“The district is committed to advancing its conservation goals through data-driven, conservation oriented farm management using practices that protect soil and water resources, conserve wildlife habitat, and regenerate ecological function. We continue to seek innovative ways to accomplish these goals through new partnerships,” added Ness

More information and a short behind the scenes video can be found on the conservation district's website at MCCD.ME/Bisongrazing.



5

NOT YOUR GRANDPARENTS' CAMPS

ILLINOIS COMMUNITIES THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX TO PROVIDE NONTRADITIONAL YOUTH CAMPS AND PROGRAMMING

BY TODD PERNSTEINER, PERNSTEINER CREATIVE GROUP, INC.

When I was a child, I didn't realize the many benefits of my local park and recreation departments' summer camps. I wasn't an athletic child and assumed parks and recreation programming was only about playing t-ball or flag football. Now I know differently, and while it's too late for me to partake in a summer camp, many kids like young Todd are able to thanks to proactive park districts and agencies.

Today, park and rec departments not only go above-and-beyond to include a wide variety of camp programs for kids of all interests and abilities, but they are also doing a lot of extra promotional legwork via social media and other tools to let families know that such programs exist.



CEDAR CREEK RANCH

"Not all kids are into sports, so we're constantly looking for opportunities that can engage all children," said J.P. Rose, Director of Parks and Recreation at the City of Ogelsby, IL. "We not only heavily promote our programs to local

residents, but we also partner with the cities of Utica and Tonica who don't have park and recreation programs, inviting their families to participate."

The City of Peru, Illinois, also provides a variety of unique inclusive programs for all youth. Seth Brannan, Peru's Park and Recreation's Summer Camp and Splash Pad Director, said they offer a wide range of innovative, outside-the-box camps – everything from hard cover book publishing and interactive stories, to metal detecting and BB gun safety. The city's goal with camps is to do more than just provide



an activity to fill a child's summer vacation, they want to make sure children are soaking up both educational and life-long lessons.

"Our 'Metal Detecting' camp, for example, is more than just letting kids loose to discover hidden treasures, it teaches them to be respectful of their surroundings," explained Brannan. "The instructors, all members of the Illinois Valley Historical Research and Recovery Association, offer general guidelines as to what types of materials a metal detector can detect, but he also teaches and reminds the campers how to get permission at locations where they would like to search for treasure."

Home on the Range

When it comes to innovative programming, Ogelsby and Peru's staff have both discovered a one-of-a-kind, off-the-beaten-path camp site that helps young people connect with the outdoors. Both cities offer horseback riding camps through Cedar Creek Ranch in Cedar Point, IL, a town of approximately 265 residents just 56 miles northeast of Peoria.

"Our partnership with Cedar Creek Ranch is entering into its eighth year this summer," said Brannan. "What keeps us coming back is that kids get to do so much more than just trail riding. They get to experience a normal routine of horse care that teaches them how to groom, saddle, prep and get comfortable with their horse. Their next step, usually on day two, is they get to ride. We love that Cedar Creek staff go above and beyond to provide amazing programs."



"Horse camps are more than just about riding," said Paul Williams, Cedar Creek's owner. "We provide animal care and maintenance instructions which help campers see the important steps required to take care of a large animal. Oftentimes, this is the only exposure to a farm that kids have ever had, so it's an extra special opportunity for them."

"This is our first summer working with Cedar Creek Ranch. It sits on a beautiful piece of property and Paul has been wonderful to work with," added Rose. "The programs should be a lot of fun for our campers, and we're excited to hear about their experience."

Promotion and registration for Cedar Creek Ranch's one-week horse camps are handled directly by the cities of Ogelsby and Peru with special rates negotiated between the facility and agencies. The camp is open to groups of up to 14 riders who are entering into grades 5-8 in the fall. In addition to youth horse camps, Cedar Creek Ranch also offers programs for adults and families including therapeutic horseback riding, group trail rides, goat yoga, fishing, overnight camping, and Gator Creek Cruises (motorized amphibious or non-amphibious tours highlighting the history, animals and nature on the ranch). They also offer programs that can travel to Illinois communities such as goat yoga and a petting zoo. Learn more at www.ccrstables.com.

Cooking Up Practical Life Experiences

In addition to horse camps, communities also provide a variety of other unique camps and programs. Summer camps can inspire future publishers, chefs, scientists, artists, and athletes.



The City of Ogelsby partners with Illinois Valley Community College, a University of Illinois extension, to provide cooking classes, a junior chef camp, and fitness camps. These programs are offered free to youth from economically disadvantaged families.

Ogelsby is also in the process of helping their youth sign up for programs through the Everybody Plays Foundation, a non-profit offering recreation education to elementary and secondary students. The organization offers mentoring programs, camping workshops, and two-day team building workshops. Everybody Plays is “committed to providing positive fitness role models who promote a healthy lifestyle and outdoor recreation of all kinds.”

Peru Parks and Recreation also offers two cooking camps at Parkside School, the community's middle school. The “Cook with a Book” camp, geared to students in grades 2-4, teaches campers how to cook a recipe related to a book being read to them. A past session was based on the book *If You Give a Moose a Muffin* by Laura Numeroff, naturally, the kids made muffins.

For older campers, the “What's Cooking” camp teaches middle schoolers best practices in cooking – everything from learning about ingredients to appropriate measuring and reading recipes.

Publishers in the Making

Peru Park and Recreation offers several unique camps that allow kids to flex their creativity. In their “ABCs of Summer” and “What Summer Means for Me” programs, kids get to write and design a book. After the camp is finished, their creation gets sent to a printing company to be physically produced into each camper's very own hard cover edition.

“The book publishing camps are very popular,” said Brannan. “It's so fun seeing what the kids come up with.”

Helping Keep Kids Safe

Keeping children safe is a number one priority for the City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department. One of their popular programs, Safe Sitter, strives to help keep youth safe when home alone as well, and teaches lessons on how to care for infants and babies. Bloomington has offered Safe Sitter classes to youth ages 11-14 for roughly 10 years.

Bloomington appreciates that the Safe Sitter program is extremely turn-key and can be run in-house by their own certified instructors. After an initial fee to become a program site and certify their own instructors, they now only pay for class materials for the students in the program. Each student receives their own student manual and course completion card if they successfully complete the class.

“When we first brought the program to the community, one of my seasonal staff and I took the training to become instructors. The other staff member is a nurse and former educator in her professional life, so teaching these skills was a natural fit,” said Jill Eicholz, Bloomington program manager.

“The Safe Sitter curriculum allows us to train our own staff to teach the course, which is a great option for us,” explained Eicholz. “We can offer classes that work for our own scheduling, on a more frequent basis. We partner with Normal Parks and Rec, and take turns being the host location for our classes.”

Eicholz pointed out that while many Safe Sitter participants seem a little wary coming to classes – asking 'why did my parents sign me up for this situation?' – they seem to really get into the class, particularly when the baby dolls are brought out and they practice skills with them.

“We have heard from previous participants that taking the class helped prepare them to speak in a professional manner to the adults they make arrangements to babysit for, as well as asking questions that were important for them to have the answers to before they were at a house in charge of someone's children, said Eicholz. “It doesn't matter who or what the youths' backgrounds are, they can all have a different take away on what they learned that might be most important to them.”

Eicholz emphasized that not only do the class participants find the Safe Sitter program beneficial, they also hear from parents quite often. “Parents of participants really like their children to experience and learn the life skills that are taught in this course. It teaches responsibility, being safe when home without an adult as well as basic skills to take care of infants and small children that can carry over into adulthood. The class also helps prepare participants to deal with possible emergency situations and to keep themselves safe.”

One of the best parts of Ogelsby, Peru, and Bloomington's life skills camps: they require campers to disconnect from technology for a few hours. In a fast-paced, digital world, these hands-on camps are giving kids a chance to just be kids, away from their smart phones, tablets, computers, and televisions. That's a good thing.

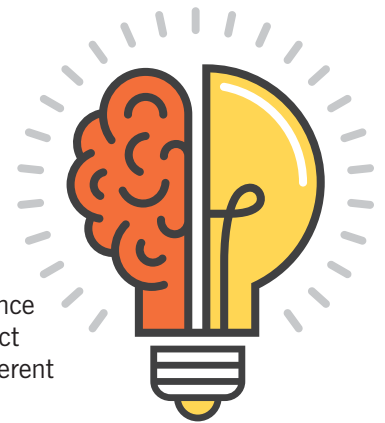
Innovative Youth Sports Programs

Athletics programs are, of course, the backbone of parks and recreation programming, teaching both technical skills and valuable life lessons.

Keep Calm and Learn Soccer

Bloomington Parks and Recreation has been partnering with Challenger Sports to provide an International Soccer Camp for nearly 15 years.

Who better to learn soccer (or football as it's called in many parts of the world) from than the people who invented it? Every summer, approximately a dozen instructors, typically from the United Kingdom, descend on Bloomington to teach the camps. Challenger arranges to



place instructors in host homes in the city, which offers families an experience and opportunity to connect with someone from a different place.

Youth from ages 4-16 participate in the soccer camps – catering to everyone from beginners to experienced high school athletes.

What makes the soccer program unique? “Their accomplished instructors are able to give greater insight into the sport,” said Neal McKenry, Bloomington Athletics Program Manager. “Our partnership with Challenger has been fantastic. Their instructors help transfer more knowledge of the sport to area youth and have always been great to work with throughout the years.”

In a Real Pickle(ball)

Bloomington Parks and Recreation has also been working to get youth and adults involved in the growing sport of pickleball. The city converted an in-line skating rink into nine pickleball courts and offers youth clinics and adult open gyms at the site.

While pickleball has typically been a sport catering to adults, McKenry says they've seen many teenagers using the courts as well, he explained that the entire Bloomington Parks and Recreation team has been aware of the massive growth in pickleball and they are key to accommodating its continued popularity in the area.

When asked if interest in tennis is converting more to pickleball, McKenry replied “It is shifting. People who have never picked up a racquet for any sport seem to take to pickleball a lot more than they would trying tennis. It's a great avenue to keep those competitive juices flowing, or to just get a little exercise and socialization with one's peers in the community.”

The one common theme I encountered when talking to the park and recreation departments featured in this article? They are committed to offering exciting, innovative programs to youth with all types of interests, passions, and talents. As a person who didn't participate in parks and recreation programming as a child, this makes me happy to know that they're reaching everyone – even kids without an athletic bone in their body (like me).



CONNECTING WITH RESIDENTS DIGITALLY

HOW PALATINE PARK DISTRICT USES AN OUTSIDE THE BOX METHOD TO PUBLISH DOCUMENTS ONLINE

BY TODD PERNSTEINER, PERNSTEINER CREATIVE GROUP, INC.

Palatine Park District communicates with its nearly 83,000 residents on a regular basis while striving to keep their messages as current and accurate as possible. Never was this more necessary than during the first year of the pandemic. As programs were cancelled, postponed, or relocated, the agency needed a way to keep their heavily used programming catalogs up to date.

With the popularity of digital publications and virtual content, park districts and recreation departments have been adapting their marketing strategies beyond traditional, and often costly, printed formats in order to



reach more residents and increase program engagement. As a result, many agencies have sought out unique ways to publish content digitally while achieving optimal exposure.

Along with extensive use of social media platforms and websites, Palatine Park District's communications

department relies on an outside the box online publishing tool called Issuu to share publications in a user-friendly, flipbook style format.

"Issuu was a lifesaver during the height of the pandemic, all throughout 2020 and early 2021 when we weren't



printing our programming catalogs. It was the one and only location people could find the catalog on our website,” said JP McNamara, Palatine’s Community Outreach Coordinator. “The platform works seamlessly in transitioning our multi-page documents into a digital reader format. Having it in our back pocket is amazing.”

“Issuu transforms your park and recreation marketing strategy through the unique ability to bring your publications, content and social media efforts to life,” said Nathan Burns, Issuu’s Acquisition Program Manager. “The platform allows communicators to publish and track numerous types of single and multi-page documents at a few clicks of a button.”

The ability to make edits to uploaded documents on-the-fly is also a critical feature McNamara appreciates. “The fact that we can re-upload the catalog without any breaks in viewership to the public is great. If we have changes to make to the catalog, we can update it and upload a new version with ease and use the same link to it. We don’t have to worry about updating active links in multiple different web locations,” he said.

Palatine’s programming catalogs, as well as many other types of publications, are uploaded to Issuu and stored in their own digital library. Once uploaded, they in turn can

be embedded into websites, social media, email marketing programs, and other communication tools – a process McNamara says is quick and painless. Palatine Park District uses Issuu for a variety of publications including:

- programming catalogs,
- community fitness center newsletters,
- athletic handbooks,
- summer camp guides,
- dance, skating and theatre show programs,
- advertising & sponsorship media kits,
- *Volunteer Voice*, a volunteer recognition newsletter, and
- master plans.

The park district also uses it to publish internal documents, such as their NRPA Gold Medal award applications.

McNamara says he appreciates how seamlessly Issuu recognizes active links from their publications produced in Adobe InDesign or Acrobat. He explained that his department has gotten better at linking everything in the digital catalogs, allowing users to click and be directed to additional information or program registration pages. “The linking feature is huge for us,” he pointed out.

Palatine still prints approximately 39,000 of their catalogs which mail to residents and are on-hand at their facilities.

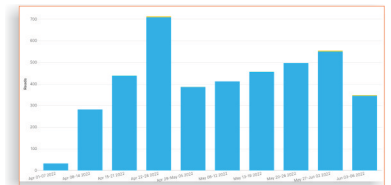
...THIS PROCESS IS IN A TRANSITION PHASE, AND WE ARE TALKING ABOUT SCALING THAT BACK AND REDUCING THE NUMBER OF PRINTED CATALOGS IN GENERAL AND RELYING MORE AND MORE ON THE DIGITAL SIDE.



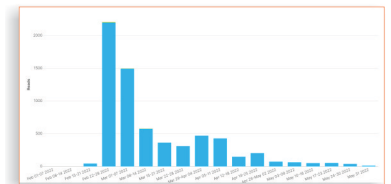
You can see samples of Palatine's digital publications in their digital library at <https://issuu.com/palatineparks>.

PALATINE ISSUU READERSHIP BY THE NUMBERS
Statistics for past programming catalogs

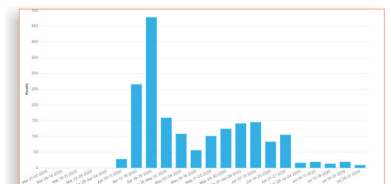
SUMMER 2022 CATALOG
6,135 impressions



SPRING 2022 CATALOG
9,775 impressions



SUMMER 2020 CATALOG
(This was an online-only version that wasn't printed due to the pandemic) 2,628 impressions



“That being said, this process is in a transition phase, and we are talking about scaling that back and reducing the number of printed catalogs in general and relying more and more on the digital side. This will help with cost savings and adapt to the fact that the market and community are going more online for their information,” he explained.

One of Issuu's biggest benefits is the ability to track statistics, such as number of impressions and link clicks. While tracking is important to many private-facing companies, it's not something Palatine Park District is concerned with.

What features does McNamara appreciate most about this outside the box publishing tool? “The fact that it works. It's seamless. Easy to integrate. Easy to learn. We've never second guessed it or thought about an alternative digital publishing platform. That says a lot since we're always reassessing the tools we use for how efficient and cost-effective they are.”

Like print, but better.



5 powerful features that help showcase your programs

Issuu helps you engage with your community by converting your publications into digital flipbooks. Instantly transform static PDFs into dynamic digital experiences. Create additional assets from just one publication at the click of a button, then share with your audience.

1 Upload content with a few clicks of a button

You don't have to be a computer programmer to use Issuu. The platform hosts a number of valuable, user-friendly features that can help you quickly and effectively distribute content via an innovative flipbook.

2 Optimize your social media presence

Custom stories are more important than ever and can be a great way to get your content noticed. Repurpose publication content for all your social channels. Issuu's visual story and article story features can help you increase engagement through visually appealing, motion-graphic stories for Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram.

3 Drive web traffic with active links

Embed brochures, branding and external websites (like your park and recreation home page) directly into your publication. It's a useful way to cultivate a broader audience as well as generate interest in your department's offerings.

4 Embed videos into your flipbooks

Embedding YouTube and Vimeo videos directly into your flipbook is a great way to boost engagement and deliver a multimedia experience. Videos help readers interact with your content and propels them to learn more about programs.

5 Make data-driven publishing decisions

Once you've launched and shared your content, check out your dashboard for up-to-date information on impressions, reads, read-time, clicks and more. Unlike traditional printed publications, Issuu's digital statistics feature allows you to track real-time data and properly evaluate the overall effectiveness of your marketing strategy. You'll gain beneficial insight into your publication's audience.



Opalville Park District

Impressive budget savings!

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7

THE POWER OF REBATES

GARY GILLIS, COMMISSIONER, PEKIN PARK DISTRICT

We've all heard about "creative financing," but at the Pekin Park District, they've discovered a way to "finance creatively" using Menards rebate checks.

The district has been blessed to have Kerry Hall, a very skilled master gardener who always thinks ahead using her special skill set. "Among those skills is the ability to pull plants from our gardens that are not rated for our climate zones and winter them in our "grow room" which is located in the upper loft of our mechanic shop," says Scott Clausen, superintendent of parks. The need for a separate greenhouse space was sorely needed. Having such a facility would meet the annual need for proper seeding and plant propagation.

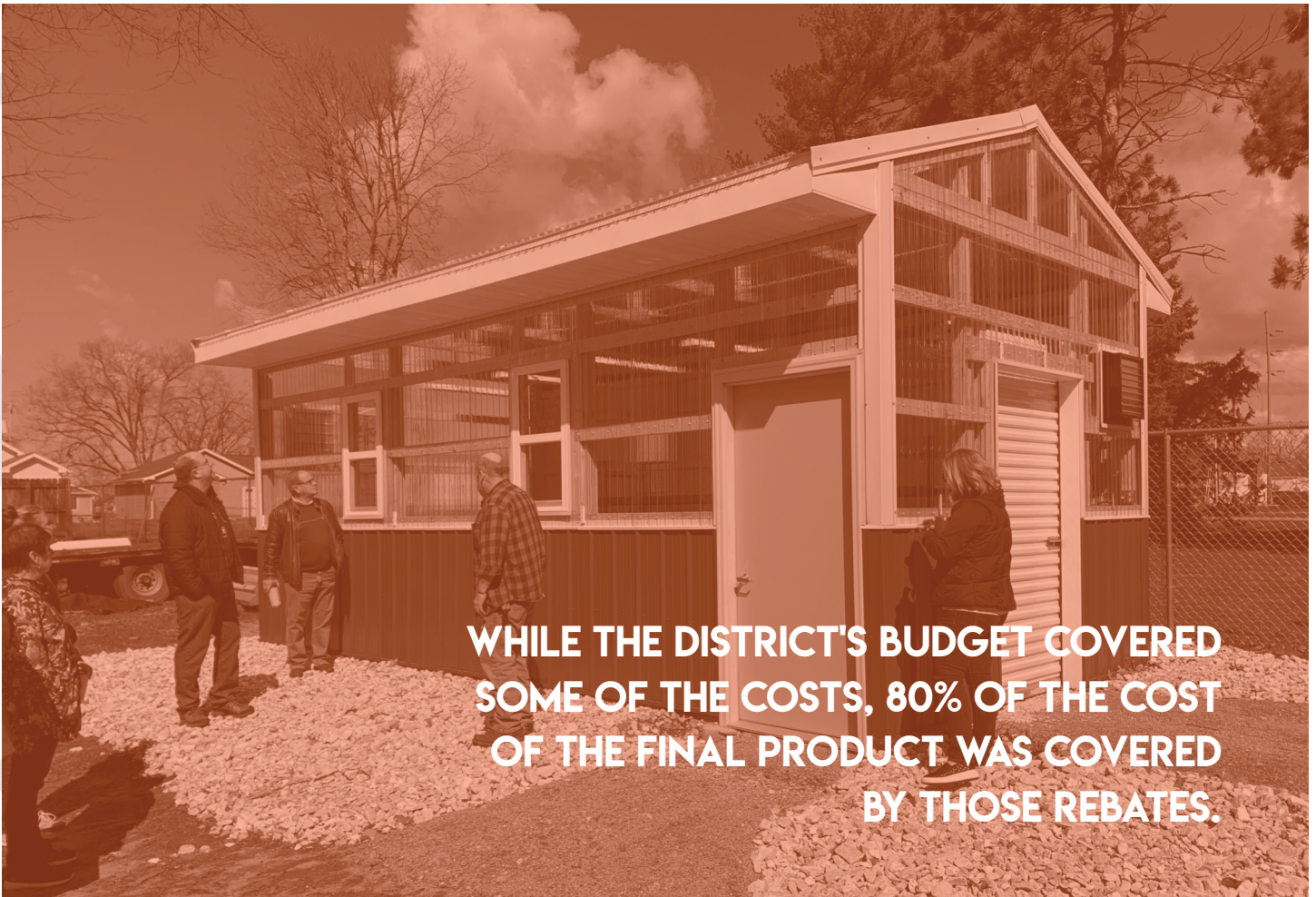


Additionally, there was a consideration of the cost of purchasing plants and flowers and housing them during planting. Clausen said this provided added pressure to minimize costs. "It was a no-brainer to build a greenhouse," he shared. "As good stewards of the

taxpayer's dollar we needed to find a way to do as much in-house as possible."

That's where Menards rebates come into play.

With years of accumulation of the traditional 11% rebate coupons, the district was able to completely fund the construction of a 12 by 24-foot greenhouse. The very skilled parks Department team did the construction and the greenhouse is up and running. "My guys did a great job", Scott Clausen said. "They're very proud of it."



WHILE THE DISTRICT'S BUDGET COVERED SOME OF THE COSTS, 80% OF THE COST OF THE FINAL PRODUCT WAS COVERED BY THOSE REBATES.

This is not the only rebate success story for the district. Before the greenhouse idea came to fruition, the parks department team tackled a major remodeling task. The park police were moving into a former snack shack with few financial resources to adapt it as that department desired. But again, the rebates came to the district's aid.

"We built two offices and a conference/training room with a big-screen TV for viewing training videos." Scott Clausen added. "We built a secure evidence room; relocated ducting for the HVAC; ran new electrical receptacles and lighting, and data lines for computers. We also painted and carpeted the offices and training room; created a small kitchenette for the officers to have coffee and heat up a meal". While the district's budget covered some of the costs, 80% of the cost of the final product was covered by those rebates.

Both these projects are examples of the dedication and ingenuity of the talented people who work for our park districts, forest preserves, and conservation districts.

The Pekin Park District construction technician and maintenance crew prove that.

As long as Menards offers the rebates, the Pekin Park District will surely be using them, making the parks better because of it.





8

TAKING A RIDE THROUGH HISTORY

ERIKA YOUNG, PR & MARKETING MANAGER, ST. CHARLES PARK DISTRICT

Take in the beauty of the Fox Valley aboard an historic paddlewheel riverboat – an iconic attraction in St. Charles for more than 75 years. This recreational activity that has spanned generations began in 1945 when the late Chet Anderson bought his first paddlewheel riverboat to charter cruises up and down the Fox River.

Chet was working at the Pottawatomie Park concession stand in the mid 1940s

when the idea of buying a boat and offering rides to park picnickers began to take shape in his mind. Before long, he made his dream a reality when he bought his very first boat, the *Honeymoon Queen*, for \$200 and started making trips up the Fox River from Pottawatomie Park.



For a young man who just wanted to provide some more fun for park visitors and share his love of the park and Fox River, little did he know he was leaving a legacy of recreation to be enjoyed by so many people 75+ years later.

This family-run business is true summer tradition for plenty of families all around the St. Charles

area. The boats hold a special place in the hearts of many as a venue for weddings, family reunions, birthday parties and more.



**TRAVELING FROM THE ERA OF MARK TWAIN
THROUGH A GREEN CORRIDOR OF SCENIC
BEAUTY, EACH RIVERBOAT TRIP OFFERS
SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT.**

Several newer boats have replaced the original Honeymoon Queen over the years. In the mid 1980s, the boats that are currently in service were built: the St. Charles Belle II and Fox River Queen. Both boats have open-air upper decks for unobstructed sightseeing and the lower decks have windows that can be closed in cool or rainy weather. A 45-minute cruise travels two miles up and back the Fox River.

Traveling from the era of Mark Twain through a green corridor of scenic beauty, each riverboat trip offers something completely different. Sometimes you might see an eagle or a turtle, other times an osprey or a family of foxes. This completely unique way to explore the city and the beautiful Fox River is affordable and memorable for all ages during both public and private events.

When Chet Anderson's son, Rich Anderson, retired in 2019, the St. Charles Park District purchased the business and continues to carry on its legacy. The Park District is truly honored to carry on this unique experience, which has been a symbol of pride and tradition in the community. Park District staff keeps that sentiment top of mind by creating programming to honor the past but also give patrons new experiences when they set sail down the Fox River.

On the public cruises, the riverboats tell stories from the past. While taking in the scenery, guests will learn about the Pottawatomie tribe that roamed the banks of the shore prior to St. Charles settlement and historic landmarks including Pottawatomie Park, Boy Scout Island, Norris Woods Nature Preserve and Ferson Creek Fen Nature Preserve. More fun is had when you hear the tales of icehouses and underground railroads as well as community lore regarding Al Capone's infamous "hideaway."

Sunset Cruises, including those with BYOB options, allow guests to experience the exhilaration of the outdoors with a beautiful sunset backdrop, the abundant waterfowl, and the ever-changing natural skyline of the Fox River. These cruises also make a perfect date night to celebrate with your someone special or an anniversary.

If your celebration includes a number of friends, group tickets are available for purchase or consider booking a riverboat for a private cruise to celebrate a family reunion or company event.

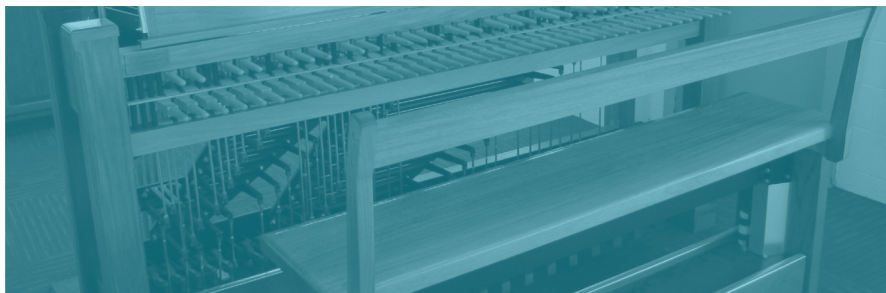
These beautiful boats and their homegrown story are something that St. Charles can truly be proud of, and rest assured, the Andersons' legacy and the generations of family memories these boats carry is in good hands with the dedicated staff of the St. Charles Park District at the helm.



RINGING IN THE FUN

**AMANDA TIPPIN, SPRINGFIELD PARK DISTRICT
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF RECREATION AND MARKETING**

The Springfield Park District's Thomas Rees Carillon is one of the largest and finest carillons in the world. Located in historic Washington Park, the Rees Carillon is the site of numerous free public concerts and exciting community events in Springfield, Illinois such as the world-renowned International Carillon Festival, Art Spectacular and Jack-o-Lantern Spectacular.



The International Carillon Festival features the world leading carillonists and is considered one of the most important carillon events of its kind. This is a free event for the public and patrons are encouraged to bring lawn chairs and blankets to listen to the beautiful music of the carillon while relaxing in the beauties of the botanical garden in Washington Park. There is also a breathtaking fireworks display that happens during the festival each June.



IF YOU ARE EVER LOOKING FOR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES THAT CAN BE PASSED DOWN FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION, THE SPRINGFIELD PARK DISTRICT'S THOMAS REES CARILLON HAS YOU COVERED.

The Art Spectacular was founded by Rees Carillon Society Board Member, Barb Walker. This two day multi-experience festival of professionally juried fine art and music attracts thousands of fine art and music enthusiasts each fall.

The Jack-O-Lantern Spectacular is another wonderful event that happens during the fall. Founded by former Rees Carillon Society Board Member Brenda Poston, this event was inspired by the Jack-O-Lantern Spectacular in Providence, Rhode Island. Springfield's event differs in that everyone in the community is invited to join in the FUN! The grounds are lit up by hand-carved Jack-o-lanterns and are displayed around the carillon and the Washington Park

Botanical Garden grounds for this weekend event. This amazing event features special festive carillon music, lighting, sound effects, lights and food vendors. It is a great event to get you in the Halloween spirit.

If you are ever looking for memorable experiences that can be passed down from generation to generation, the Springfield Park District's Thomas Rees Carillon has you covered. We invite everyone near and far to experience the wonders the Carillon offers. It is truly a place you will want to come back to time and time again.





10

BRINGING THE NORTH POLE TO TINLEY PARK

ANNA BROCCOLO, PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGER, SOUTH SUBURBAN SPECIAL RECREATION ASSOCIATION

South Suburban Special Recreation Association (SSSRA) brought holiday joy to our participants last December with a brand-new event, A Visit to the North Pole. The garages at the SSSRA office are usually home to SSSRA's vehicles, but staff transformed the space into the North Pole Workshop. Festive decorations, including giant candy canes, stockings, and gingerbread men were just part of the holiday ambiance. Staff wore costumes, reindeer antlers, or Santa hats – there was even a special appearance by the Grinch.



Sammy Stingray, SSSRA's mascot, stood in a large, inflatable snow globe waving to everyone as they arrived. When guests turned the corner, stations were set up with

many fun activities to enjoy, including games and crafts. Participants could make their own stuffed animals in the “Toy Workshop.” Each stuffed reindeer kit came with a

certificate of adoption so participants could name their new toy.

“Mrs. Claus' Bakery” was hosted by Laura Pubins, Operations Manager at SSSRA. Dressed as Mrs. Claus, Laura handed

out cookies and decorating kits that were donated by Farmhouse Academy in Mokena. The decorating kits included cookies shaped like gingerbread men, frosting, and sprinkles. Families enjoyed hot cocoa while snacking on their cookies.



THE EVENT WAS SUCH A GREAT SUCCESS, THAT SSSRA HAS DECIDED TO MAKE IT AN ANNUAL EVENT.

One of the highlights of A Visit to the North Pole was the “Reindeer Barn,” where participants had the opportunity to meet two real reindeer. The staff from Whispering Pines Reindeer Ranch dressed as elves to pose for pictures with their reindeer and our families.

Jack Knies, volunteer at SSSRA and certified Santa Claus, donated his time as Santa. Jack decorated the bus wash bay in the garage to make it a picture-perfect area to visit with Santa. Participants enjoyed watching toy trains weave around the base of the Christmas tree while they waited for their turn to talk to Santa and get a picture with him.

A volunteer elf handed out SSSRA tote bags full of goodies for our families to take home, including an activity book with coloring pages.

A Visit to the North Pole was open to all ages, and SSSRA participants had the option of bringing friends and family as their guests. Due to the generosity of our sponsors, the event was free for residents of SSSRA's member communities.

The event was such a great success, that SSSRA has decided to make it an annual event. We are looking forward to A Visit to the North Pole on Saturday, December 10.

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PEOPLE & PLACES



Gina Radun Named New Executive Director of West Chicago Park District

Gina Radun has been named the new executive director of the West Chicago Park District.

Gina Radun's journey at the park district began as a lifeguard and she remained dedicated to the park district's mission by serving in various positions over the years. When she

became a full-time employee as a manager in 2012, she gained valuable experience in a variety of areas, from Keppler Academy Preschool and youth programming to room rentals and birthday parties, all of which contributed to her becoming a well-rounded individual. Prior to COVID-19, she was promoted to superintendent of recreation, where she oversaw administrative planning, organization, and supervision of park district recreation services.

She has a bachelor's degree in philosophy from Arizona State University.



Gary Major Retires as Executive Director of West Chicago Park District

Gary Major retired May 31 after 15 years of service as the Executive Director at the West Chicago Park District.

Beginning in 2007, Gary utilized his strong facility background to enhance park district facilities and reenergize relationships with various agencies in West Chicago. Over his fifteen years, Gary worked to create a strong staff and positive working environment and to expand relationships in the community to bring residents a new level of service through indoor and outdoor venues.

His accomplishments include pioneering the referendum to construct the ARC Center; the creation of Zone250, the Shell, trails, and a Bears-themed playground; the revitalization and rebranding of Turtle Splash Water Park; and the newest indoor playground TreeTop Escape. These facilities helped the park district evolve into a modern recreational hub and will benefit generations to come.

In Memoriam



Plainfield Park District Commissioner Passes Away

Illinois Parks and Recreation extends our condolences to the family of Plainfield Park District Commissioner **Robert Ayres**, who passed away on May 12, 2022.

He was appointed to the board in 2014 and elected to additional terms in 2015 and 2017. As a commissioner, he was the chairperson

of the finance and liability committee and co-chair of the personnel and policy committee.

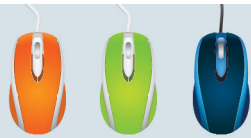
During his tenure with the Plainfield Park District, Rob played a large role in the passage of the 2016 referendum that saw the district building its first 40,000-square-foot indoor recreation facility, the Prairie Activity & Recreation Center.

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WebXtra

Western Illinois University Assistant Professor Megan Owens and IPRA's Duane Smith discuss how partnerships provide opportunities to expand one's capabilities and reach new audiences. Western Illinois University Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Administration (WIU RPTA) partnered with the Illinois Park and Recreation Association (IPRA) and the American Camp Association, Illinois Section for the 2022 Summer Opportunities Fair(s). In this time of competitive recruiting, these entities are focusing on key ways to build connections between Gen Z students and employers.

Looking for the latest Web Xtras, including additional employment announcements, park district stories and more? Check out the digital version of Illinois Parks & Recreation magazine, located at ILparks.org.

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WEB XTRA

Partnering to Connect Gen Z Students with Illinois Agencies

By Megan H. Owens, Ph.D.

Duane Smith, CPRP

Partnerships provide opportunities to expand one's capabilities and reach new audiences. Western Illinois University Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Administration (WIU RPTA) partnered with the Illinois Park and Recreation Association (IPRA) and the American Camp Association, Illinois Section for the 2022 Summer Opportunities Fair(s). In this time of competitive recruiting, these entities are focusing on key ways to build connections between Gen Z students and employers.

For over 35 years, WIU RPTA has hosted one of the largest summer camp job fairs in the country. The pandemic provided an opportunity to expand the job fair for a more comprehensive representation of positions available across the parks and recreation field. An important component to expanding the job fair was the connection with Illinois agencies. WIU RPTA recognizes that recruiting and retaining employees is a challenge that started before the pandemic. The Department believed it was important to support Illinois agencies, as a significant portion of the student population are Illinois residents.

IPRA's commitment to support the WIU job fair went beyond simply distributing information. IPRA's staff said, "we can do better than just promote the event. We want to support our members engagement!" Agency budgets have limited flexibility and we knew that requesting funds to cover job fair registration and travel expenses would be challenging for most agencies. IPRA initiated the professional scholarship award to support members' participation in the WIU Summer Opportunities Fair(s). During November and December 2021, agency members applied for the scholarship and a committee of professional members selected the award recipients based upon the agency's planned recruitment

**For over 35 years,
WIU RPTA has hosted
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WEB XTRA

efforts, staffing needs and financial needs. Twenty-two (22) agencies with qualifying IPRA members received a scholarship to participate this Spring.

Two job fairs were planned for the Spring 2022 semester. An in-person fair with a restricted number of employers was scheduled for mid-February and a virtual fair was scheduled for mid-March. The recent trends suggest that agencies engage in multiple waves of recruitment and hiring as the busy summer season approaches.

The in-person fair was designed to engage the eager, go-getter students while the virtual fair was designed to connect students seeking that last-minute internship placement or summer job while agencies were in their second wave of hiring. Unfortunately, the in-person fair was cancelled when WIU closed for severe weather.

The IPRA recognizes the importance of building a pipeline of students to enter the field of parks and recreation today. However, parks and recreation positions are just one sector of employees needed to maintain the field. Agencies employ accountants, human resource managers, marketing and communication specialists, alongside highly specialized field professionals. How many agencies directly contact university academic departments to recruit their students? This job fair partnership between IPRA and WIU is hopefully a model that agencies will use to enhance their recruitment of Gen Z applicants to address the increased need for seasonal workers and full-time professionals.

Long before the pandemic, cuts to agency budgets and changing employment patterns hampered agencies' ability to maintain a sufficient workforce (NRPA, 2021). Once considered traditional, coming-of-age summer jobs like lifeguards, concession stand or parks crew workers, are now viewed through the lens: (1) does the job provide a competitive wage, (2) can I work a flexible schedule,

or (3) how does this job fulfill my internship requirements? Additionally, as professionals retire, we need a strong pipeline of young professionals entering our field. Engaging directly with applicant pools is more important now than ever before.

Good applicants are everywhere, but our recruiting tactics may need to be reinvigorated to account for Gen Z's approach to the job hunt. First, it is important to ensure that open positions are

accurately listed on agency, job search, and professional association websites. Students frequently comment that jobs are not posted online, which suggests there are no openings at the agency despite the availability of internships or seasonal positions. Second, go where the applicants are located. This involves actively recruiting with and

through universities.

The current generation of college students, Gen Z, are the most diverse generation to date and that means they use a range of tactics to identify relevant jobs and opportunities. Universities provide a well of applicants if you can connect with them in the way they wish to engage. Handshake, one of the job search and career fair platforms, provides some insight to this generation's preference for engagement with job recruiters and potential employment sites.

1. Gen Z uses remote connections to establish relationships even with job recruiters
2. Women and students of color are more likely to embrace the opportunity to participate in virtual career events
3. Gen Z students believe that responding to an employer's message online could lead to further opportunities

Excitement for the expanded Summer Opportunities Fair grew quickly on the WIU campus. The faculty from multiple academic departments (e.g.

The current generation of college students, Gen Z, are the most diverse generation to date and that means they use a range of tactics to identify relevant jobs and opportunities.

WEB XTRA

Management and Marketing, Communication, and Kinesiology) recognized that seasonal employment in the parks and recreation industry builds students' interpersonal, leadership, and critical thinking skills. Support from university faculty and staff can be a stepping stone as you recruit Gen Z for seasonal work and professional positions. Below are additional considerations when recruiting Gen Z workers.

- 1. Make recruiting personal.** Gen Z wants to understand how their work fits in the larger picture of the organization and how the position supports their personal and career goals.
- 2. Build a relationship with candidates early on.** Once Gen Z applicants feel they are "just a number", their behavior will reflect that detached feeling.
- 3. Connect the Gen Z applicant with their potential supervisor during the application process.** Agencies that use a single HR recruiter to hire staff may have a difficult time forming the meaningful and informative connection sought by Gen Z applicants.
- 4. Consider add-on benefits for seasonal employees.** Many agencies are now focusing on "growing" their own pipeline of career staff members. Agencies that provide resume reviews, mock interviews, and career coaching for seasonal workers may be able to identify staff with the right qualities for professional positions. Then, agencies can provide meaningful opportunities to keep them engaged.
- 5. Contact applicants using methods other than email.** Using job search website message boards or direct messaging apps will capture applicants' attention quicker than emails.

6. Recognize the power of social media.

Gen Z are prolific social media users; thus, they will review your agency's social media presence and material. These platforms can showcase the experiences connected to the available positions at the agency.

The parks and recreation field provides endless opportunities for community members to experience leisure, engage in skill-building activities or enhance personal wellness. The pandemic led more people to recreate closer to home and in outdoor spaces with greater frequency than before. These opportunities are made possible by the thousands of individuals working at our park districts and municipal departments, forest preserves, conservation districts, or special recreation associations each year. Using the model partnership between IPRA and WIU, let's work together to engage Gen Z in the parks and recreation field.

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