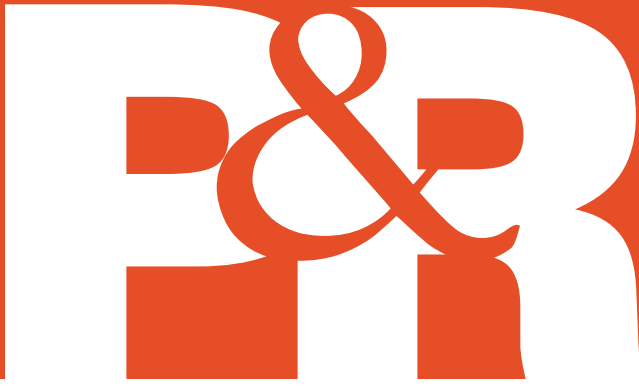


illinois

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PARKS AND RECREATION

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



risk
management



IPARKS

Illinois Parks Association Risk Services



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FROM THE EDITOR

Always Have a Backup Plan

“There's no harm in hoping for the best as long as you're prepared for the worst.” – Stephen King



While the quote above might seem pessimistic in nature, it reflects humanity's ability to be ready for anything. With every opportunity for something great, there usually comes the possibility of catastrophic failure, and all of us have to be prepared for things to go either way in an instant.

There's no better example than the work that you do every day. There are endless possibilities for the great things you and your fellow park and recreation volunteers, professionals and elected officials can accomplish together, yet the true strength lies in being able to handle any hand you are dealt.

Flexibility, communication, and forward-thinking are some of the true strengths so many of you carry in your everyday lives. It's these core elements that keep your community informed, safe, and reassured, no matter the situation.

This issue looks at risk management and how your agencies can better communicate times of difficulty and streamline the process of pivoting to be ahead of any and all possible outcomes from a program, event, or activity.

We have some phenomenal articles this issue, starting with *Safeguarding Success: Making Risk Management Everyone's Job in Park Districts* from the Itasca Park District and the West Chicago Park District on page 14. Next, Jill Allread returns to IP&R magazine in *Managing Risk Begins with Building Stronger Community Connections* on page 18. Finally, we have *Defensibility in the World of Aquatics* by StarGuard ELITE on page 22, discussing how to make sure your agency has a safe summer.

Take a moment in your busy day to read these great stories and take away something that will help ensure your agency is building a solid foundation of risk management.

Thanks for reading!

— Wayne Utterback, Editor

Photo Credit: The cover image was provided by Angie Pace-Tousignant from the Kankakee Valley Park District. The photo won an honorable mention in the 2023 Give Us Your Best Shot photo contest.



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

The Power to Persuade

The IAPD Legislative Conference was held May 7th and 8th with more than 300 IAPD members coming to the state Capitol to advocate for full funding of the OSLAD program at \$55 million and to oppose Governor Pritzker's proposed sweep of OSLAD in fiscal year 2025.

Other educational opportunities also abound at IAPD. On May 2nd, The IAPD Leadership Institute kicked off with Chakisse Newton, speaking about ***The Power to Persuade: Mastering the Art of Influencing Others.***

The next offering in The Leadership Institute Series will take place on **Thursday, June 6th**, featuring the topic: ***Success Skills: How to Achieve More by Making the Habits You Want and Breaking the Habits that Hold You Back.*** This program will be held from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. and will be a virtual program offered to the membership.

The following month on **Thursday, July 25, 2024**, The Leadership Institute will again offer a virtual program from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., entitled ***How to Get What You Want: Communicating for Results.***

The Leadership institute will conclude on **August 22nd** with an in-person workshop at the Itasca Park District's Recreation Fitness Center from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. This program is entitled ***Conflict of Conversation: Practical Conflict Resolution Skills for Leaders.*** This year's speaker, Chakisse Newton, is a fantastic presenter so plan to participate and elevate your boardmanship game.

Board Culture

One of the issues that seems to come up frequently with regard to board governance is the culture of an organization and how to keep board decision-making civil.

One of the top self-evident tips is to try to listen fully to the views of other board members. In short, you can agree to disagree but keep the discussion focused on the issues, not the people commenting on them. Encourage the board to try to avoid petty comments or insults when listening to other's views.

A key to success is dialogue and not debate. There are three steps to ensure that you as a board member are engaging in the right conversation with fellow board members.

The first is to ask thoughtful questions. To make informed leadership decisions, you need to ask simple, clear, well-thought-out questions. For example: How does this proposal align with the park district's mission? Some of the board has been quiet about this. What do you each think? Do you agree, do you have questions, or do you need more information?

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

– George Bernard Shaw



The next step is to listen for understanding. Effective board service means spending more time listening than speaking. Here are some suggested effective ways to listen for understanding:

- Don't develop your answer while listening to the other person until they are done speaking. In other words, listen for understanding, not for responding.
- Recognize that you listen less carefully when you assume that the conversation isn't important. Every conversation is important to the person speaking so check that assumption at the door.
- And finally, gauge what and when to probe. How do you know when to push for a robust conversation and when to keep it concise? Have everyone's questions been put on the table and have full answers been given?

These are just several approaches to try and keep a board discussion on point. This framework will hopefully eliminate extraneous comments and petty remarks that may otherwise occur.

Board Ethics

Ethical conduct includes moral principles and values. Ethics are personal and just because something is legal (or not illegal) does not make it ethical. Ethics involve sound judgement.

To help boards do more than debate ethical practices, the IAPD has established the following Board Member Code of Ethics:

As a member of the board, I will:

- Represent the interests of all people in my community. I will not favor any particular special interests.
- Not use my service on this board for my own personal advantage or for the advantage of my friends or supporters.
- Keep privileged information confidential.
- Approach all board issues with an open mind, prepared to make the best decisions for everyone involved.
- Do nothing to violate the trust of those who elected or appointed me to the board or of those we serve.
- Focus my efforts on the mission of the agency and not on my personal goals.
- Never exercise authority as a board member except when acting in a meeting with the full board or as I am delegated by the board.

After adopting your ethics code, you should also conduct annual ethics audits. This gives the board an opportunity to evaluate whether board decisions, conduct and meetings comply with the adopted code. It helps bring the board and agency's core values into focus with the media and the public you serve.

Unless attention (and audits) is given to the code of ethics, it might not be practiced. Don't assume it will be automatically followed. An annual or semiannual audit and board discussion will increase awareness and remind your fellow board members to put into practice the code.

Include open discussions on the audit at your annual board retreats. The board that follows a code of ethics will more likely be successful in fulfilling its mission to effectively serve the public who elected them to office.

Remember, ethics often include the tenants of the Golden Rule.

In essence, ethics involves such concepts as trust, duty, honesty, integrity, fairness, and professional responsibilities. Commonly, unethical conduct is considered to be cheating, lying and dishonesty. But it is also ridicule, snarky comments, sarcasm, and a failure to engage in a professional way.

One of the most important roles of a board member is to make sure that the governance process at your park district runs smoothly and efficiently. By using the aforementioned tips, this should lead to more board camaraderie, shorter board meetings and more effective decisions.

Thank you for your board service.

IAPD Calendar of Events

Aug. 17
**Park District
Conservation Day**
State Fairgrounds,
Springfield

Oct. 8-10
**NRPA Annual
Conference**
Atlanta, Georgia

Oct. 25
**Best of the Best
Awards Gala**
Chevy Chase
Country Club
Wheeling Park
District

Nov. 7
Legal Symposium
Hyatt
Lodge/Conference
Center
Oak Brook, IL

Jan. 23-25, 2025
**2025 IAPD/IPRA
Soaring to New
Heights
Conference**
Hyatt Regency,
Chicago

The
**IAPD Leadership
Institute**

Thursday, June 6
**Success Skills: How
to Achieve More by
Making the Habits
You Want and
Breaking the Habits
That Hold You Back**
Virtual via Zoom
6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, July 25
**How to Get What
You Want:
Communicating for
Results**
Virtual via Zoom
6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, August 22
**From Conflict to
Conversation:
Practical Conflict
Resolution Skills for
Leaders**
In-Person
6 to 9 p.m.
Itasca Park District


IAPD
Summer Golf Tour

**IAPD Summer
Golf Tour**
Wednesday, July 31
Sanctuary Golf
Course
New Lenox
Community Park
District

Monday, August 26
Shepherd's Crook
Golf Course
Zion Park District

Monday,
September 30
Sunset Valley Golf
Club
Park District of
Highland Park

IAPD
Illinois Association of Park Districts



By Suzi Wirtz, IOM
IPRA Executive Director

You've Got the Goods, Now Brand the Experience

Being in the field of parks, recreation and/or conservation, you are quite familiar with (and highly skilled at!) supporting your community and working with a wide variety of stakeholders—from families to legislators to your own staff and boards. As I've been making my way around Illinois to meet IPRA members, I am constantly and equally impressed with every facility, planned improvement, financial decision, staff responsibility and the sheer passion exhibited by IPRA members. Part of what members are so proud to show me is the unique experience community members get when they visit the [INSERT YOUR PARK DISTRICT]. They highlight how many people are able to utilize the resources, the accessibility, the diversity, and the depth of knowledge of their staff members. They explain to me about how special every person feels when visiting their parks, gym, pool, fields, trails, the list goes on. This, for all intents and purposes, is branding. And, it's really, really important.

Therefore, I decided to do a little research for this month's column to offer some of the newest and most relevant branding and marketing tips for your agency.

1. **What's ALWAYS in style is knowing your audience.** Make sure you have the demographics of your community as you promote your brand. Who are you appealing to when talking about your programs and services? Check your social media analytics for clues. Have a conversation with more than a few people as they walk through your agency doors, with a few set questions to capture likes, dislikes, suggestions and attitudes. Create personas of what your target consumer "looks like." This allows you to then tailor to their needs, segment audiences and write specific messages or text.

2. **Short, but sweet. Less is more.** People tend to read less and scroll more. So, when thinking of emails or social media to build your brand, pack a punch with a few words. Use consistent language from your website and tagline. Get to the point quickly and focus the message. Make it "skimmable."
3. **Emphasize the experience – even over benefits, and especially over features.** The experience evokes emotion, which is what I have witnessed over and over during my agency visits this year. It's the thoughts and feelings for your facilities and programs. How do people react after attending an event? What actions do they take? Of course, every person is different, but what trends can you identify?
4. **Let your community speak for you.** User-generated content is a must. When you promote your brand on social media, do you ask for comments? Do you pose questions that encourage engagement? When people visit your agency, is there a place for them to offer feedback? Those comments can become testimonials that ensure you are staying on brand—and they make you more credible.
5. **Don't reinvent the wheel.** If someone else is doing something you admire, make it your own. Tweak a message to make it relevant. Change some words to customize it. Look at your website and insert your programs, services and other unique offerings. A former colleague of mine referred to this as the CASE methodology: Copy And Steal Everything. We can change that "s" word to "share" and it has the same outcome. And, look to your professional association for help!

IPRA Builds Awareness through Unplug Illinois

Several years ago, IPRA embarked on a brand/public awareness campaign to educate communities about the value of parks and recreation. Initially, we felt we needed something to bridge the proven disconnect between citizens and elected officials about the essentiality of parks, recreation, and conservation. This campaign was called Unplug Illinois and it has grown every year. This year, Unplug Illinois Day is Saturday, July 13 and we expect it to be bigger and better than ever!

Unplug Illinois works locally and statewide, from the smallest park and recreation agency to the largest in Illinois. Unplug Illinois encourages people to unplug from their devices and 'plug into' all the recreational opportunities local park, recreation, and conservation agencies offer. It communicates how parks deliver value in people's lives and communities, parks provide healthier, sustainable communities and play delivers benefits to all.

Did you know that play, in almost any form, has benefits for adults? It reduces stress, improves feelings of optimism, builds cognitive flexibility and is even theorized to help attract and keep friends. Despite play's decreasing importance in our results-driven culture, researchers continue to find evidence for the power of play in almost every domain. Something every IPRA member already knows!

A recent study led by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health also indicates that living near green spaces, parks, or bodies of water may help protect older adults from first-time hospitalizations for neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

These are just a couple of examples of the importance of parks, recreation, and conservation in the communities we serve. You can learn more about Unplug Illinois Day at www.unplugillinois.org. Plan to host your own events, and look to IPRA to provide marketing tools and tips specifically for Unplug Illinois Day.

Check out the Unplug Illinois Day events happening near you at members.ilipra.org/unplugcalendar, and be sure to add the events you have planned, too! Have questions, or want to learn more? Contact Heather Weishaar, Communications & Marketing Director at heather@ilipra.org.

As we enter the busy summer months, I hope you all take some time to 'unplug' and recharge – and use some of that screen time to imagine new branding efforts!

IPRA Upcoming Events

Maximizing Use at Your Programs and Facilities: A Consumer-Centric Approach

July 10 & July 18 - Webinar

Parks and recreation customers are sharp individuals. They choose whether to "consume" your program, service or facility based on a variety of different factors. Consumer behavior is a complex interplay of psychological, social, cultural, and economic factors. Understanding these factors will enable the parks and recreation professional to deliver relevant and sustainable programs, events, and facilities.

highlight the programs and facilities that make your community thrive! Unplug Illinois promotes the value that parks, recreation and conservation play in creating healthier communities and encourages people to get out, unplug, play, and engage with one another through experiences at local park, recreation, and conservation agencies.

Challenging Conversations Don't Have to Weigh You Down

August 14 & August 15 - Webinar

We will all have challenging conversations in our workplace. But how you handle those conversations can make a world of difference to your success and the success of your team. There are several communication strategies that everyone can engage in and master to resolve workplace conflict successfully. Let's discuss five of those strategies to help elevate you and your staff.

6th Annual Unplug Illinois Day

July 13

Locations throughout Illinois, visit: members.ilipra.org/unplugcalendar

The 6th Annual Unplug Illinois Day is Saturday, July 13, 2024 – join park, recreation, and conservation agencies statewide in planning an event to

Visit ILipra.org for more information and to register.





Jason Anselment
IAPD General Counsel

Both Law and Facts Key to Buying and Selling Park Property

Among the hundreds of legal inquiries IAPD receives from members each year are questions related to the requirements for buying and selling park district property. Perhaps the frequency of these queries is because park districts have acquired thousands of acres of open space, but the confusion may also result from the number of applicable statutes depending upon the details of the transaction.

Below are the answers to some of the most common questions which provide guidance on the rules for buying and selling park property.

Acquiring Park Property

1. Can a park district accept the donation of real property like it often does with cash gifts?

Park districts have general authority to acquire real estate for park purposes under the general powers set forth in the Park District Code.¹ These powers are not limited to purchases of real property. The Park District Code also expressly provides the authority to acquire property by gift or legacy.

Before accepting a gift of real property, however, it is important to exercise the same level of due diligence as when buying property with cash or bond proceeds. For example, it is important to know the historical uses of the property and whether there are any environmental risks. It is also important to determine whether the donor-grantor has fee simple title to the property, whether the property is free and clear of all liens or other encumbrances, and whether there are any other deed restrictions.

The fact that property may be “free” does not obviate the need for due diligence. The park district should still ensure that it has all relevant information to assess risk and liability before accepting gifted property. So, it is critical to consult local counsel.

2. Can park districts acquire property through eminent domain?

Though rarely used, park districts do possess eminent domain authority. In order to exercise these condemnation powers, the specific procedures set forth in the Eminent Domain Act² must be followed.

Ultimately, the park district must commence a lawsuit to condemn property, so this method can be very costly, time consuming, and contentious.

3. Is a park district permitted to own property outside the park district's corporate boundaries?

Park districts may acquire property outside of their corporate boundaries.³ Where a park district owns property outside its boundaries, the Park District Code specifically provides that the park district has the same control and power over that property that it does with property it owns within its corporate limits.

A few members have also sought clarity between owning property outside the district's corporate boundaries and annexation. Annexation is the method by which a district expands its corporate boundaries for jurisdictional and property tax purposes by bringing additional territory within its borders.⁴ However, annexation does not equate to ownership. A district can, and typically does, annex property without actually purchasing it. Likewise, ownership does not equate to annexation. A district can acquire property outside its boundaries without annexing that territory into the district's corporate boundaries, though where such property is contiguous to the district's existing boundaries it usually makes sense to also annex it.

4. Are there other ways to obtain an interest in real property besides ownership?

Park districts can also lease real estate for up to 99 years with the approval of two-thirds of the board.⁵ Many agencies that are in densely populated areas with a high demand for recreational services and scarce open space have found lease agreements to be particularly helpful. Of course, park districts have also obtained access to land through intergovernmental agreements and public-private partnerships.

Selling Park District Property

Because park districts are organized in part to preserve and protect open space for public enjoyment, the Park District Code makes it much more difficult to sell or dispose of park district property than to acquire it. That said, the Park District Code also recognizes that there may be times where it is advantageous to exchange one parcel of land for another, to cooperate with other units of government, or, in rare instances, to sell property that is no longer needed for park purposes.

Selling park property is complex and often controversial. In addition to citizen objections, the applicable statutes and procedures depend upon a number of factors including the size of the parcel, the proposed purchaser, current and future use, and whether substitute property will be provided. Deed restrictions may also impact the proposed transfer, particularly if the property was acquired by gift or legacy. So, it is again important to engage local counsel when considering the sale of park district property.

1. Many years ago, the park district accepted a donation of land on the edge of the park district. The property is about an acre. The district has explored possible options for utilizing the land for park purpose, but it is isolated, difficult to access, and costly to maintain. The Board of Commissioners has determined that the property is simply not needed. Do we have to go to referendum for permission to sell this land?

Perhaps to address circumstances just like this, the Park Commissioners Land Sale Act^{vi} provides an alternative to the standard procedures for selling property by referendum under the Park District Code. Where the land is 3 acres or less and the park board determines that it is no longer needed by, or useful to, the park district, the board may seek court approval to sell the property without a referendum. This abbreviated process still requires the court to conduct a hearing, and the district must provide notice by newspaper publication.

This simpler process does not excuse the need for the park district to exercise sound business judgment such as having the property appraised. Again, selling park property can be very controversial, and the park district should always ensure that it receives fair market value to help mitigate criticism or the likelihood of objection to the proposed sale.

2. The park district acquired 40 acres of open space many years ago with the intention to develop a park in the future. Our community is much different today, and the location is no longer desirable for park purposes. A local developer would like to acquire the property for commercial development. Can we sell it without going to referendum?

There is no statutory authority to sell park property in excess of 3 acres to a commercial developer for a cash payment unless the district utilizes the referendum procedures outlined in #4 below. However, another option may exist if the developer owns and is willing to exchange property that is of substantially equal or greater value and of substantially the same or greater suitability for park purposes without additional cost to the park district. Prior to such an exchange, two appraisals are required, the park board must hold a public meeting to consider the exchange and publish three notices in the newspaper more than 10 days prior to the meeting. These notices cannot be more than 10 days apart.^{vii}

3. Our village may also be interested in acquiring the 40 acre tract. Does this change the analysis or are there other options?

Subject to specific limits, there is somewhat more flexibility when it comes to selling property to another governmental entity. First, the Park District Code provides authority for conveyances to another governmental unit if the deed contains a covenant to hold and maintain the property as a public park or for recreational purposes.^{viii} This covenant must provide that ownership automatically reverts to the park district if the governmental unit violates the covenant. Alternatively, the Park District Code allows another governmental unit to exchange property of substantially the same size or larger and of substantially the same or greater suitability for park purposes without additional costs to the park district.^{ix}

A third option exists under the Park Commissioners Land Conveyance Act if the property lies wholly within the limits of a city. In that case, a park district is permitted to transfer property to the city to be held and maintained for park, playground and neighborhood center purposes.^x That statute still requires a referendum, but voters can approve the transfer to the city without a public auction if the city accepts it by ordinance within 90 days of the referendum.

A fourth and much simpler option for transferring park property to another governmental unit can be found in the Local Government Property Transfer Act.^{xi} This Act allows a municipal corporation or political subdivision such as a park district to approve a resolution or ordinance by a two-thirds vote to transfer property to another governmental unit that is wholly within, coextensive with, or partly within and partly without its corporate limits. This is by far the easiest process for transferring park district property if the proposed transfer qualifies.

Please note, however, that unless (i) the real estate is subject to a covenant referenced above, (ii) the real estate is conveyed and replaced as referenced above, or (iii) the park district's boundaries are situated wholly within the corporate limits of the unit of local government or school district to which the property is being

transferred, then the real estate can only be conveyed for a price not less than the appraised value of the real estate as determined by the average of 3 written MAI certified appraisals or by the average of 3 written certified appraisals of State certified or licensed real estate appraisers.^{xii}

4. Is a park district ever permitted to sell property greater than 3 acres to a non-governmental entity without a restriction requiring recreational use or without receiving an exchange of substantially similar property?

As noted in the prior examples, the procedures for selling property depend upon specific facts such as the characteristics of the buyer, the size of the parcel, deed restrictions, and whether there is a substitute conveyance or exchange. However, unless the proposed transfer satisfies an exception outlined above, the general rule is that a park district may only sell property after following these procedures:^{xiii}

- Park board adopts a resolution by a four-fifths vote declaring its intention to sell or transfer the property because it is no longer useful or necessary for park purposes;
- The resolution is published at least 3 times in a newspaper in general circulation in the district (the notices may not be more than 10 days apart and the resolution is not effective until 10 days after the publication);
- The district then certifies the question of selling or transferring the property to the proper election officials to be placed on the ballot at a regular election, and notice of the referendum is provided in accordance with general election law;
- A majority of voters voting at a regular election approve the transfer or sale;
- Board adopts a second resolution fixing the time, place and terms of sale that meet the minimum requirements spelled out in the Park District Code;
- Board gives two weeks' notice of the time, place and terms of the sale by newspaper publication each week for two successive weeks beginning not less than 15 days prior to the sale in the form set forth in section 10-7d of the Park District Code;
- Thereafter, the board may sell the property to the highest responsible bidder at a public auction.

Although these procedures may seem burdensome, it is important to remember that park districts are in the business of preserving and protecting open space in perpetuity, not disposing of it.

5. Can the park district simply lease the property instead?

A park district may retain its ownership interest in the real estate and lease it in order to collect rents if the board of commissioners determines the property is not required for park and recreational purposes. However, the lease term may not exceed 90 years, i.e., 4½ times the term allowed for installment purchases. Additionally, if the park district's population is 3,000 or less, the property is greater than 70% of the district's total property, and the current use will be substantially altered, the district still must follow the referendum procedures set forth in the answer to #4 above.^{xiv}

As with sales, a park district can also lease property to another governmental unit that commits to hold and maintain the property as a public park or for recreational purposes or to provide property of substantially the same size or larger for park purposes without additional costs to the park district.^{xv} Note that the Park District Code contains a few additional restrictions on the sale or lease of property to the State of Illinois.^{xvi}

ⁱ 70 ILCS 1205/8-1(b)(1)

ⁱⁱ 735 ILCS 30/1-1-1 et seq. Note also that this authority generally does not allow a park district to condemn property outside its borders.

ⁱⁱⁱ See 70 ILCS 1205/8-1(b)(1)

^{iv} 70 ILCS 1205/3-1 et seq.

^v 70 ILCS 1205/8-16

^{vi} 70 ILCS 1235/1

^{vii} 70 ILCS 1205/10-7(b)

^{viii} 70 ILCS 1205/10-7 (a)

^{ix} Id.

^x 70 ILCS 1240/1

^{xi} 50 ILCS 605/1 et seq.

^{xii} 70 ILCS 1205/10-7(d-5)

^{xiii} 70 ILCS 1205/10-7a-7d

^{xiv} 70 ILCS 1205/10-7(e)-(f)

^{xv} 70 ILCS 1205/10-7(a)

^{xvi} Id.



By Duane Smith, CPRP
IPRA Education Director

That's the Way (I Like It)

In the dynamic field of parks, recreation, and conservation management, effective communication is not just a tool for engagement but also a critical component of risk management. Today's practitioners navigate a unique professional landscape that includes more staff diversification and a demand for inclusive services that cater to an increasingly diverse audience spanning multiple generations. Whether its Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z, or Generation Alpha, each comes with its distinct characteristics, preferences, and communication styles. Understanding and adapting to these generational differences is not just about enhancing user experience. It's without a doubt a strategic necessity for mitigating risks, ensuring safety, and promoting inclusivity.

At the heart of effective communication lies the recognition that we're working in a 5G world, one that commonly spans five generations, and sometimes six. It's critical for us to understand, in risk management and everything else related to parks and recreation, that park users, staff, and volunteers engage with information in different ways. According to a recent LinkedIn article powered by AI, Baby Boomers might prefer more hierarchical and traditional forms of communication such as newsletters and public announcements. Generation X values direct and efficient communications, often favoring email or phone calls for receiving information. Millennials, having grown up in the digital age, favor informal and collaborative communication methods such as social media and mobile apps. Generations Z and Alpha, the digital natives, expect interactive and visually engaging communication across multiple platforms.

One of the primary responsibilities of park and recreation professionals is ensuring the safety of everyone in their environment, and something as simple as tailoring communication strategies to meet the needs of different generations can enhance the effectiveness of overall safety. In spirit of the impending summer season, let's look at pool and trail safety as examples. A printed poster about the hazards of running on the pool deck might catch the

attention of Baby Boomers and Generation X, whereas a short, engaging video shared via digital screen in a foyer, locker room, or the pool deck can be more effective for reaching Millennials and the Digital Natives. Printed signage about trail closures due to flooding or other obstructions might work well for us Gen X-ers, but automated text notifications pushed at different times or locations throughout the trail would work better for my two teenage kids, or the Gen Z-ers.

So, what are some best practices to get you started with better communication for risk mitigation? For starters, become an ally for inclusivity. That might seem a bit out of left field considering the theme of this issue, but the reality is, as explained in my own terms, an ally looks beyond oneself to better understand, promote, and protect the interests of others. To become an effective communicator, you have to be willing and able to understand other people, and that can be challenging on a number of different levels. Next, educate yourself on the intricacies of communication styles across the 5Gs in the workforce, then organize staff trainings to educate your team about those differences and how to effectively reach more people using various communication techniques. Not only will your team reach across more generations, but also, you'll help foster a culture of inclusivity at your agency by equipping practitioners with the tools to navigate communication challenges, especially those in safety and risk management.

Recognizing and adapting to the different communication styles of various generations is not just a matter of enhancing engagement or user experience—it's a fundamental component of effective risk management in parks and recreation. By developing and implementing tailored communication strategies, park and recreation professionals can ensure safety, foster compliance, and build inclusive communities. When patrons feel safe and have a positive experience, regardless of age, they'll most definitely be singing to the tune of KC and The Sunshine Band, "And that's the way, uh-huh uh-huh, I like it!"



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SAFEGUARDING SUCCESS:

MAKING RISK MANAGEMENT EVERYONE'S JOB IN PARK DISTRICTS

BY LILY MEDINA, *Superintendent of Marketing & Communications, Itasca Park District & DANIELLE SPENCE*, *Marketing & Communications Manager, West Chicago Park District*

In the multifaceted realm of park districts, the significance of risk management extends beyond the specialized domain of dedicated risk management agencies, safety committees, and leadership roles. This article highlights the essential contributions of individuals who aren't typically involved in risk management, emphasizing their crucial roles in enhancing overall preparedness.



Acknowledging that not everyone is a risk manager, the focus shifts to empowering all staff members to contribute their knowledge and tools to risk identification, and minimization. From understanding processes, executing procedures, and creating materials, to instilling a proactive mindset among entry-level staff, this article aims to inspire a collective responsibility for safety, creating a culture of preparedness that benefits the entire park district community.

A fundamental aspect of risk management is training, extending to both staff and volunteers. Beyond the routine orientation, which includes the review of documents and processes, innovative training methods like memory games can be employed to enhance information retention through personal connection. Navigating a manual packed with forms and white papers can be tedious, especially when information is crucial during a crisis. It's vital to leverage available resources for creating visually engaging materials. Consider collaborating with the marketing department to develop content that facilitates easy recognition and accessibility.

PARKS & FACILITIES

A parks department, by the nature of its work, typically has a higher expectation of risk management. Inspections and maintenance for buildings, tools and machinery along with personal protective equipment can prevent injuries and workman's comp instances. Despite these precautions,

incidents can still happen. It is essential to identify hazards and review standards after any incident, this way readdressing critical areas with staff and reinforcing commitment to safety and continuous improvement.

Facility awareness is usually assigned to building managers, but they may not always be present. It's crucial for all staff, regardless of their position, to know facility maps, evacuation routes, and the locations of AEDs and fire extinguishers. Although rare, being aware of the main water shut-off, gas shut-offs and electrical panels can be valuable. For instance, if a sprinkler is accidentally triggered without a fire threat, knowing how to turn off the water can prevent additional damage to the facility.

SAFETY IN RECREATION

In the recreation field, there are many risk factors, it is important to note outstanding practices and innovative ideas in different areas. Here are a couple of noteworthy practices from local park districts. In the area of special events, a pre-event meeting is held where staff reviews and assembles a binder with essential documents, including a safety checklist, event schedule, map, key contacts of all local entities and partners, vendors, and certificates of insurance. This preparation provides clarity on when and whom to contact in case of an emergency, support vendors and groups after events, and provides a comprehensive reference package for the team.



AS RISKS CONTINUALLY EVOLVE, OUR PLANS, PROCEDURES, AND PROCESSES MUST ADAPT ACCORDINGLY.

In summer camps, a recreation supervisor can conduct a location site assessment for an upcoming field trip in person, via Google Earth or through a 360° tour of the facility when available. Becoming familiar with the facility ahead of time makes it easier to adjust counselor placement, ratios and allows for higher awareness in case of an emergency. Marketing departments can help create a template to be used for all future visits for efficiency.

Athletic Programs can pose more challenges than simply those of personal injury. During a thunderstorm when the weather system requires participants to clear a field, often parents are left sitting in their cars waiting for an all clear from the coach or program supervisor or they assume they can resume activities after 30 minutes. However, what if lightning or thunder strikes again? In those cases, the 30-minute timer resets; some tools can provide this crucial information to parents. The Perry Weather app offers a visual countdown and lets participants know when it is safe to return to the field keeping everyone on the same page and avoiding frustration for parents and coaches.

MARKETING & IT

As mentioned earlier, it's the collective efforts of all staff members, not just those in recreation and parks, that contribute to risk mitigation. Administrative staff can also play a significant role in various capacities. Utilizing resources such as OSHA, NIOSH, NFPA, and other organization standards the marketing department can develop materials that adhere to a consistent structure and color theory, promoting cohesiveness and engagement.

By condensing risk management information into easily digestible steps, rather than a lengthy manual, aids in recognition and retention. In the realm of risk management, marketing expertise goes beyond embellishment; it involves creating simplified designs using infographics, charts, and consistent color schemes for enhanced engagement.

From an IT perspective, risk is undeniable and ever present, the constant threat of cybersecurity issues such as phishing exposure, social ongoing threats and network safety controls are not limited by time and space as it is in recreation. Conducting regular IT risk and threat assessments for your organization is crucial. While initial training is often provided upon hiring, there's a noticeable lack of ongoing education. The introduction of two-factor authentication, though perceived as inconvenient by users, becomes more palatable with a clear understanding of the associated risk exposure. Another example is to send test emails to staff, mimicking spam, that they should not open, their actions will then prompt individual training. To garner staff support for new safety policies, it's essential to integrate training and education on password management systems and use of mobile devices along with periodic assessments. This approach not only fosters awareness and prevention but also contributes to embedding these practices into the organizational culture.

ALL STAFF

Conducting drills is a vital component of effective risk and crisis management. Preparedness for natural disasters, unexpected security threats, and incidents like shootings requires proactive planning. While having a solid crisis plan is crucial, its true value often only becomes apparent during an actual emergency. Drills involving all staff and relevant entities offer invaluable lessons.

Simulating various scenarios, including the involvement of different stakeholders, provides diverse perspectives and tangible experiences for those who might be part of a real-life situation. By actively engaging in the drill and establishing a personal connection, handling a crisis becomes more manageable.

INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

Consider the reunification drill conducted by the West Chicago Park District in recent years. It was a collaboration led by the school district that involved the DuPage County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, as well as local authorities, parents, and children. It also required signage, procedures, instructions on what to do in each area from set up, to implementation, to onboarding, and teardown. This collaborative effort generated meaningful suggestions to enhance the process. Impressed

by the developed approach, county-level leaders decided to standardize the reunification process for all school districts.

Maintaining a unified front with consistent language and processes ensures smooth communication during a crisis. This initiative sparked a movement that will save lives and prioritize the safety of students, staff members, and families. For the park district, it was a valuable opportunity to take part in this project and contribute to the broader goal of enhancing community safety.

As risks continually evolve, our plans, procedures, and processes must adapt accordingly. While safety committees in all agencies routinely review incident reports, it's imperative to take an additional step by establishing SMART goals. These goals serve to minimize risks and prevent recurring issues, fostering a culture of sharing insights with the entire staff. Tracking information allows for measurable success, creating best practices and standards for future use.

Adopting these proactive measures not only reduces risk but also mitigates legal and financial issues, resulting in cost savings. Moreover, collaboration among departments yields a well-rounded staff with diverse knowledge, reinforcing their pivotal role in the agency's overall success.



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RISK

MANAGING

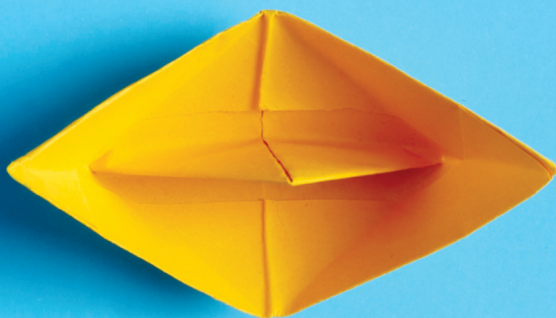
RISK

Begins with Building Stronger Community Connections

By Jill Allread, APR, Fellow PRSA

While serving thousands of people, park districts face potential risks daily. To lessen the possibility of issues or crises, district leaders conduct detailed risk assessments to help their team prepare to respond or proactively address potential threats to the district's operations, facilities and people. Often overlooked is the underlying risk of damage to a park district's public reputation when something goes wrong.





“A game-changing action is for park district leaders to plan and proactively build stronger community ties and build community pride and advocates for local parks.”

Public entities supported by tax dollars, including park districts, are challenged to meet the expectations of a diverse group of people who differ in age, socioeconomic status, gender, abilities, race, and personal interests. This translates into diverging expectations from the public.

Identifying and working to mitigate potential reputation risks is critical. However, as much as a park district prepares for "what if?" scenarios, it is impossible to anticipate and prepare for every challenging issue. For example, the increased interest in the court sport of pickleball has created many competing interests for amenities and space in park districts striving to accommodate the new demand. The key is for park districts to address potential pickleball conflicts before they become a community issue.

Also, park districts have growing expectations and vulnerabilities while working to meet community interests and expectations regarding inclusivity and equity. Nearly every park district has managed at least one race-related challenge or allegation. Again, park districts will benefit from assessing what they can do before a conflict by talking with community members and engaging diverse voices and ideas as a preventative step, not reactive.

A game-changing action is for park district leaders to plan and proactively build stronger community ties and build community pride and advocates for local parks.

Need for Stronger Relationships, Engagement

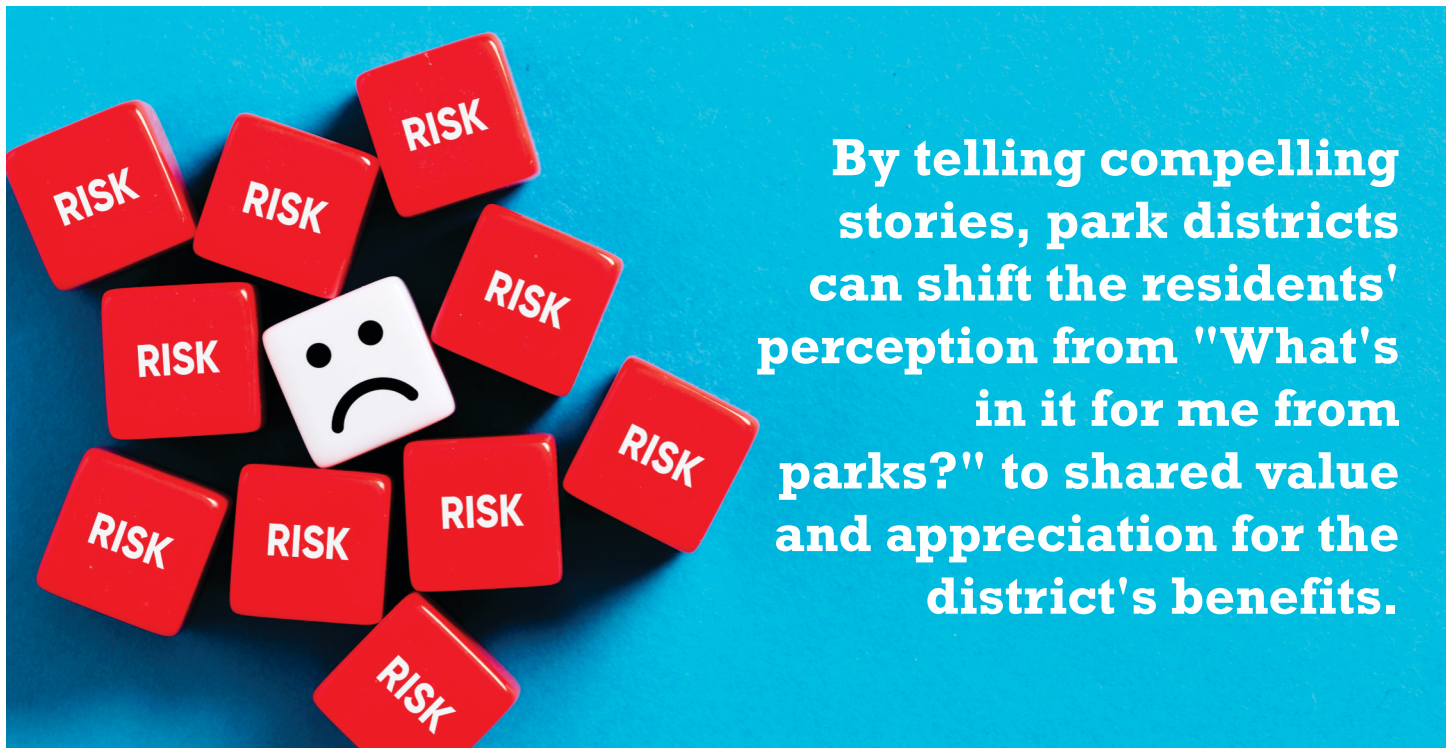
Building a robust relationship with the community is a cornerstone of effective risk management for park districts. When park districts foster positive relationships with their communities, they create a foundation to help weather a storm of potential crises.

Community engagement is more than transmitting information to residents. It creates a two-way dialogue that builds understanding and addresses tough questions together. It opens opportunities for understanding community needs and expectations. And it positions the district as a trusted and integral part of the community fabric.

Active engagement with citizens' committees, affiliate groups, sports teams, garden clubs, silver sneaker groups, parents, educators and other community stakeholders helps park districts remain attuned to the community's expectations and concerns. By asking questions and, most importantly, by listening to the community's needs, park districts can anticipate emerging and potential issues. Addressing these proactively can help mitigate future risks.

Not Communicating is a Risk

Park districts can easily fall into a communications routine focused primarily on promoting events, programs and facilities. Residents closely follow the seasonal schedule of park district programs and lists of special events. However, do those same residents recognize parks' critical benefits for the community's physical, mental and psychological health? Not often enough, which is a missed opportunity.



By telling compelling stories, park districts can shift the residents' perception from "What's in it for me from parks?" to shared value and appreciation for the district's benefits.

Limited resources, experience, and staff time to create and implement a community engagement communication strategy is a hurdle for most park districts. Yet, to not continually communicate the park district's value to the community is a missed opportunity for creating both short and long-term benefits.

Mitigating risk includes a consistent communication strategy and actions that help residents understand and appreciate the benefits of parks to residents' wellness, including physical, mental, and social well-being. For example, promoting a multi-generation walking path reminds people that the park district prioritizes physical and psychological wellbeing.

When issues arise for a park district that may draw public question or criticism, it is often due to the lack of understanding, unclear expectations, limited financial resources, or physical space availability. It is not unusual for park districts to receive criticism from individuals who claim that, as taxpayers, they deserve specific services or treatment. While small in number, these critics often amplify their complaints via social media channels, which are challenging for park districts to monitor and respond to due to limited resources.

Late to respond or sounding defensive will exacerbate an issue that could have been addressed and diffused communications before problems arise. Our PCI advisors often work with park district leaders and help their staff create a strategic communications plan and strategies that help diversify the park district's communication to reach key audiences and build a greater understanding of park programs to engage residents in supporting their parks.

Navigating Challenges

When challenges arise, how a park district communicates can significantly impact the outcome of a situation. Criticism or public apathy, for instance, can stem from a lack of understanding about the park district's obligation and limitations as it serves residents. Effective communication strategies will help bridge this gap, conveying the park district's value and relevance to the community.

Crafting a compelling narrative that resonates with the community is essential. This narrative, or story, should highlight the park district's mission and contributions to enhancing a higher quality of life. By telling compelling stories, park districts can shift the residents' perception from "What's in it for me from parks?" to shared value and appreciation for the district's benefits.

Two-Way Communication

Two-way communication is vital in building trust and rapport with the community. Surveys, social media, public forums, and listening sessions offer invaluable platforms for dialogue, enabling park districts to gather feedback, understand community expectations, and adjust their strategies accordingly.

This ongoing engagement ensures that park districts are seen as service providers and responsive, dynamic entities that adapt to changing community needs. It also provides a mechanism for park districts to clarify their priorities, address misconceptions, and highlight their contributions to the community, thereby enhancing their reputation and mitigating risk.

Impactful Messages

When developing messages that inform and engage the public, park districts must articulate their mission and purpose and the benefits they provide. These messages should be clear, consistent, and aligned with the district's values. Also, they should resonate with residents and reflect an understanding of the community's priorities and needs. The most effective messages are developed from listening to residents. While not all will be satisfied, all will know that the park district wants to hear from residents.

Moreover, in times of crisis or when addressing potential risks, these messages must be crafted with care to ensure they convey empathy, transparency, and a commitment to action. By being transparent and proactive in their communications, park districts can build and maintain trust, even in challenging times.

Building Resilience

Ultimately, the strength of a park district managing risks and navigating challenges lies in the depth of its connection with the community residents. This connection is built on consistent, meaningful engagement, clear and impactful communication, and a genuine commitment to serving the community's best interests.

Park districts that excel in building these relationships through strategic communications enjoy added public support crucial in times of crisis. Consider it banking goodwill and trust that can be built over time with communications and actions. Having public support can make the difference between a challenge that becomes a crisis and one that is managed effectively and constructively.

By prioritizing community engagement, communicating strategically, and consistently articulating their mission and contributions to a community's wellbeing, park districts can manage risks more effectively and spotlight their role as a vital, valued pillar of their communities.

Jill Allread, APR, Fellow PRSA, is CEO and a reputation management counselor at Public Communications Inc., a woman-owned, national PR agency in Chicago that works with many park districts and attractions on public engagement, referendums, communication strategies, and issues and crisis management.

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Defensibility

IN THE WORLD OF AQUATICS

By **Jessica Gray**, StarGuard ELITE

The aquatic season is quickly approaching and while there are many facilities operating year-round, almost everyone is gearing up now for the busy summer season. Typically, the biggest focus this time of the year is hiring and making sure the facilities are properly staffed on all levels. Between all the recruiting, interviews, new hire paperwork, what else can you and your team do now to minimize risks and prepare for a safe summer? A great resource for any aquatic facility operator is the Model Aquatic Health Code (MAHC). The MAHC is a great resource to reference when looking for best practices or guidance for how to safely operate or maintain a facility. The MAHC is all encompassing, but for the purpose of this article, we'll stick to a few topics to focus on before opening day: Unsupervised children, documentation, facility inspections, attractions, and training.





Unfortunately, in the summer of 2023, the aquatic industry saw several fatal drowning events occur. Many of these drownings occurred at facilities with a lifeguard on duty at the time of the incident. An alarming trend identified was that many of these events involved children seven and younger swimming **unsupervised** and unaccompanied in a pool with a sloping floor that led them to deeper water. As a result of this trend, it is strongly recommended that all facilities review their current policies and procedures and think about ways to prevent this type of event from occurring at their facility. These types of reviews should engage not only the operational leadership team, but also legal counsel, owners, senior leadership, and insurance company. Many voices should be involved when discussing a policy and the implementation of best practices.

At StarGuard ELITE, we have recommended clients develop unsupervised children procedures that focus in three main areas: Guest education and awareness, staff training practices, and monitoring and enforcement. Education should include posted rules on websites, social media messages, and signage throughout the facility. Recommended messages should include something like “Children must be supervised at all times by an adult within arm's reach.” Facilities may also consider a guest orientation highlighting arm's reach supervision and other key rules when entering a facility or swimming area. This could be a spiel by staff, video demonstration of rules, swim test, waiver, or other ways to effectively educate guests.

Staff must be trained on separated party (“lost child”) procedures, identifying unsupervised children, and how to manage the situation of an unsupervised child. Training should be reinforced through regular meetings and in-service trainings. Facility supervisors, deck attendants, and lifeguard staff not currently covering a zone should be

assigned to routinely check designated areas for unsupervised children and enforce arm's reach supervision. On-duty lifeguards covering a zone should not be the only individuals designated with the task of monitoring for unsupervised children. Both the Model Aquatic Health Code and the American Academy of Pediatrics support the importance of adult supervision in the aquatic environment.

We all understand how important documentation is, but also how easily it can sometimes be overlooked in Aquatic Facilities. Your team may be doing everything right; 4 hours of in-service training every month, regularly checking chemicals, daily facility inspections, internal audits, and more. The documentation of these activities is critical. Like many other industries, the aquatics industry has seen a significant turnover of staff in recent years. During these transitional periods, it is easy for facilities to become deficient in their documentation due to items getting lost in the shuffle of the transitions. If you think your documentation may be lacking or needs improvement, do not panic! Not sure where to start? Our recommendation is to start with your staff training records, including pre-service, certifications, in-service, and other trainings. Document date, time, and length of trainings, what topics were covered and keep a monthly log of each lifeguard's in-service hours. Physical facility inspections are also an easy place to start. Create daily checklists to complete before the facility opens for the day and after closing. Rescue and emergency response equipment should always be inspected daily and the bottom of all pools should be checked and signed off on that they are clear before opening and after closing. Zone verifications are another easy piece of documentation to check off. Outdoor facilities are encouraged to verify their zones at various times of the day as well as for all staffing levels. Indoor facilities should complete this activity at various times of the day

throughout the year. Zone verifications can be an educational activity to do with your management staff, but also with your lifeguard team. If you are new to aquatics or your facility and don't know where to start, reach out to other aquatic professionals in the area! From my experience, IAPD/IPRA members love to share and help each other out.

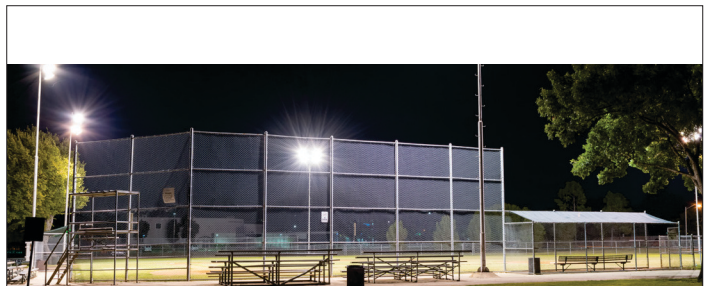
It's April, and preliminary inspections of seasonal facilities are starting to happen. If you have a maintenance team, meet with them, and get involved. Make sure all grates are in good condition, all underwater lighting is working, and any items that need to be secured are done so properly. We know that communities are counting on you to open your facilities, but it is up to you and your team to make sure those facilities are safe when they open, and corners haven't been cut. While facilities are being inspected, be sure to check slides, diving boards, and any other attractions. It's always a good idea to review manufacturer Operations & Maintenance (O&M) manuals. If you don't have the O&M, reach out to the manufacturer of your attractions to get the correct manual, and keep it readily available. These attractions can be the biggest source of injury or risk at your facility. It's important to thoroughly inspect any attraction daily, and close them, as necessary. Proper and frequent training on these attractions is key to creating both a safe and defensible environment for your facility.

Training lifeguards can be time consuming, but your lifeguard certification company likely provides you with lesson plans, tools, and training to complete an effective lifeguard course. This isn't always the case with dispatch and attraction training. Taking the time to properly train your staff on your attractions will reduce the potential risk of injury or misuse of an attraction. Dispatchers are encouraged to give a quick spiel of the rules of the attraction, appropriately space riders, enforce height and weight rules, etc. Taking the extra time to train these individuals will go a long way.

Supervisor ("Head Lifeguard") training is often overlooked as well. The MAHC provides great general guidelines for supervisor training. The nine categories that should be included in the training are: EAP, Pre-service and In-service requirements, lifeguard scanning, lifeguard zones, lifeguard performance evaluation and correction, risk mitigation strategies and potential hazards, legal issues and responsibilities, equipment, water quality. We highly recommend that you go back to your supervisor training and make sure it includes all nine components. Additionally, we also encourage everyone to review their Emergency Action Plan every year. Adjust it as needed and then practice it with your management and other team members regularly. Copies should be available for staff to review as needed. Finally, get your local EMS involved in

training if you can. Many facilities are completing joint pre-season training with their local fire, EMS, and police departments. This type of training gets all the first responders on the same page and allows everyone to ask questions and practice a variety of incidents together.

The next couple of months are extremely busy and important for aquatic professionals to prepare for a safe summer season. If you're an experienced professional, taking the time to review and update your documents and policies and procedures will go a long way in reducing risk and increasing defensibility. Take the extra time to train your supervisors and get them involved with your preseason inspections. If your facility doesn't have great systems in place, now is the time to start. Make an in-service schedule, start working on daily checklists, and verify your zones. If you need help, just ask! Aquatic Professionals are some of the best risk managers in the field. We all want to provide a safe environment for our whole community, but especially the kids. Take the time now to look at your policy on unsupervised children in your facility and see if there is a way to make it stronger and safer. Encouraging parents to be within arm's length of their children and empowering staff to enforce these policies may be the most important things you do this summer.



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PEOPLE & PLACES



Bartlett Park District Announces New Executive Director

The Bartlett Park District is excited to announce **Kevin Romejko** as its new executive director, bringing over 30 years of experience in the park & recreation field. His academic credentials include a BA from the University of Iowa and an

MBA from Keller Graduate School of Management of DeVry University, laying a strong foundation for his distinguished career in public service and administration.

During Kevin's career, across various park districts, he has gained diverse experience and knowledge in finance & business operations, information technology, human resources, recreation, facility and risk management. Kevin has a deep connection to the Bartlett community as his family previously resided in Bartlett from 2008-2019 and he was previously an integral part of the district's team between 2016 and 2020 as the superintendent of business services.

Before returning to Bartlett, Kevin showcased his leadership skills as the executive director at Rolling Meadows Park District. Other accomplishments include successfully securing over \$900,000 in grants from the Illinois Department of National Resources (IDNR) for park renovations and collaborating effectively with community stakeholders, such as the library, on projects like the StoryWalk installation.



Bartlett Park District Executive Director Retirement

Bartlett Park District Executive Director **Rita Fletcher**, CPRP, has announced her retirement following a distinguished 37-year tenure with the organization and nearly four decades in the field. Starting in 1986 as a recreation

supervisor, Fletcher's journey culminates with her retirement in May 2024. Throughout her career, she progressed through various roles including assistant superintendent of recreation, superintendent of recreation, and finally, executive director.

During her time as executive director, Rita's exemplary leadership and dedication propelled the district to remarkable achievements. These include securing grants totaling over \$3.2 million, successfully advocating for the passage of an \$18 million referendum, and overseeing the transformation of vital facilities such as Villa Olivia (introducing the state's first ski hill to a park district) and the Bartlett Aquatic Center (introducing the state's first over-water zip line). Under Rita's outstanding leadership, the park district has received widespread recognition, earning esteemed accolades such as being selected as a Gold Medal Finalist by the National Park & Recreation Association, attaining the esteemed status of an IPRA/IAPD Distinguished Accredited Agency, and being honored with the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association for an impressive 22 consecutive years.

She has been a committed participant in the Illinois Parks and Recreation Association (IPRA), the Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD), and the Suburban Park and Recreation Association (SPRA). Furthermore, she has played vital roles as an integral member of various committees and boards, including the Joint Distinguished Agency Committee, the Bartlett Parks Foundation, and the Northwest Special Recreation Association Board.

Want to Read More?

Keep up with the latest milestones, new hires, promotions and award winners in the Illinois park and recreation industry online. Visit our website, www.ILparks.org, select IP&R Magazine and then People and Places.

E-mail information and jpegs to wutterback@ILparks.org.

Jpegs should be 300 dpi at about 2 inches tall.

PEOPLE & PLACES



Gayle Mountcastle Retires from Park Ridge Park District

After 39 years in the parks and recreation industry, **Gayle Mountcastle** has announced her retirement effective May 31. At the time of her retirement, Gayle had led the Park Ridge Park District as executive director for 13 years. She devoted almost half her career to the Park Ridge Park District, previously serving six years as Superintendent of Recreation. Before joining Park Ridge, she was the Superintendent of Recreation at both the

Des Plaines and Streamwood Park Districts, and began her professional career at the Skokie Park District.

During her tenure as executive director, Gayle led major improvements that resulted in significant growth in facilities, programs, and the acquisition of open spaces. She worked closely with legislators, advocating for the district, and successfully acquired over \$5 million in grants for park and facility improvements. Some of the major initiatives under her leadership included the renovation of the Centennial Aquatic Center, Maine Park renovation, Prospect Park land acquisition and development through a \$13.2 million referendum, and most recently, the passing of a \$33.4 million referendum to renovate Oakton Facilities and Park. Her vision transformed Park Ridge parks into vibrant spaces of joy and community interaction.



John Shea, Jr. Named Park Ridge Park District Executive Director

The Park Ridge Park District announced the selection of **John Shea, Jr.** as its new executive director, effective May 1. This appointment comes as the District prepares for the retirement of their current executive director, Gayle Mountcastle, who is retiring in May.

John brings a wealth of experience to Park Ridge, having served with distinction since

2021 as the executive director at the DeKalb Park District. In DeKalb, he oversaw the operations of both an 18-hole and a 9-hole golf course, an aquatic facility, fitness center, banquet facilities, community center, museum, and 40 park sites totaling over 700 acres. In his role as the executive director, the district was awarded a \$507,000 OSLAD grant for the replacement of a fully inclusive ADA playground. Prior to his time in DeKalb, John most recently served for six years as the Superintendent of Recreation for the Winnetka Park District where he implemented changes resulting in a \$2.5 million increase in the recreation fund.



Manager of Education and Community Liaison Retires at Lemont Park District

After serving the community of Lemont for over 36 years, **Pam**

Carter, manager of education and community liaison at the Lemont Park District, announces she will retire in June.

Pam saw the need for early childhood programs in the community of Lemont and started as a part-time Lemont Park District employee in 1988. Pam moved forward in creating original and imaginative programs designed for young children. From her creative ideas to her incredible skill in planning and implementation, Pam proved to be a natural in this profession. In 2009, Pam secured a full-time position heading up the preschool and early childhood programs. Under Pam's leadership, the district's preschool program has become a community staple, welcoming more than 170 students each year.

During Pam's tenure at the district, she has also been the main point person for summer camps, overseen programming from seniors to gymnastics and played a key role in creating and implementing special events as well as the district's volunteer program and guest services committee.

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