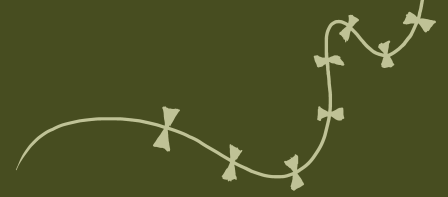


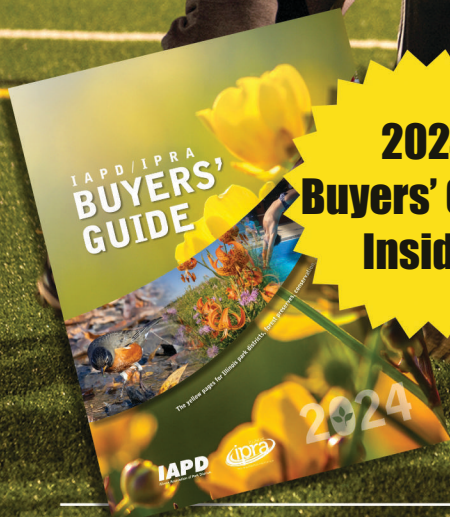
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Volume 55, Number 2 | March/April 2024



PARKS AND RECREATION

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



**2024
Buyers' Guide
Inside!**

athletics

PLUS: 2023 give us your best shot award winners



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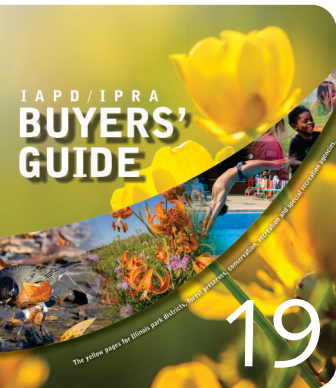
Members have a dedicated Risk Control Specialist, Member Services Partner and Member Representatives working as an extension of their team

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Photos courtesy of Salt Creek Park District

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FROM THE EDITOR

Delivering A Full Array of Sports

A crucial component to any parks and recreation agency is meeting the needs of those involved in sports.



There are time-tested offerings such as baseball, basketball courts and soccer fields that many take for granted that have just always been there. The challenge of maintaining these fields and courts along with being a reliable home to recreational and competitive play means that high quality is expected.

There are also new and emerging trends that are bringing in new crowds to agencies. For instance, technological assets like Toptracer are bringing excitement and new opportunities to park districts throughout the state. These innovations are changing the way visitors experience recreation.

This issue looks at both of these topics. In “Transforming a Winter Ice Rink Into a Year-Round Community Hub” on page 44, the Glencoe Park District shares how they found an opportunity to add value to a seasonal facility. In “The Challenges and Rewards of Hosting Large-Scale Tournaments at Your Park” on page 40, the Oak Brook Park District looks at how to be versatile to handle any type of sport while delivering high quality. Finally, on page 14, the Byron Forest Preserve District goes into detail about how Toptracer has brought new crowds in “PrairieFire Golf & Grill: A Toptracer® Story.”

It's always a joy and pleasure to see how parks, forest preserves, conservation, recreation and special recreation agencies are adapting and growing with every year.

Thanks for reading!

— Wayne Utterback, Editor

Photo Credit: Cover image was submitted by Joy Stuart of the Northbrook Park District in the 2019 Give Us Your Best Shot Photo Contest.



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IAPD President and CEO

Hone Your Leadership Skills in 2024

One of the great opportunities serving as a park commissioner provides is being a recognized leader in your community. It also gives you a chance to further develop the leader within you.

Many times, we hear references to a person as a born leader, but in reality, this trait is not typically innate, but rather learned, developed, and refined. This is good news for all of us who have the desire to be life-long learners, and you can't really thrive as a park commissioner without this commitment.

The foundation of leadership development is to treat others (park district staff, the public and fellow commissioners) as you would like to be treated. When you combine this basic tenant of good leadership with the diligence to continually expand your knowledge and hone your skills, you and your team will reach new heights of success.

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

With this commitment in mind, the Illinois Association of Park Districts is pleased to present the **2024 IAPD Leadership Institute**.

This unique educational series is designed to enhance the personal growth and professional development of those holding leadership and governance roles within park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation and special recreation agencies.

Collectively, this series will transform your leadership skills and take you to the next level. It is an important opportunity for board members to attend this training as their leadership is critical to an agency's success.

It has been demonstrated that board members and professionals with advanced leadership skills add a tremendous value to their agencies and those they serve.

This **four-part series on Leadership** takes place as follows:

Thursday, May 2, 2024
In-Person Workshop, 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

“Persuade with Power: Master the Art of Influencing Others”

Itasca Park District's Recreation & Fitness Center
350 E. Irving Park Road | Itasca, Illinois 60143

How do you communicate with others so that they want to say yes to your requests? Studies show that the average person spends more than 40% of their time trying to motivate others to act. As a park and recreation advocate, your bar is even higher! What if it could be easier to create communications that interest your board constituents and staff in order to persuade them to follow your recommendations?

“Live a good life, and in the end, it is not the years in the life, it is the life in the years.”

– Abraham Lincoln



Thursday, June 6, 2024
Virtual Meeting, 6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

“Success Skills: How to Achieve More by Making Habits You Want and Breaking Habits that Hold You Back”

Aristotle said, “We are what we repeatedly do.” Excellence, then is not an act, but a habit. Yet we frequently overlook the building blocks to our successes or failures: our habits. In this session, you will see how habits create hidden systems that determine results. And you will learn simple techniques to harness your habits to build personal and professional success systems.

Thursday, July 25, 2024

Virtual Meeting, 6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

"How to Get What You Want: Communicating for Results"

Studies consistently show that effective communication is key to personal and professional success. After all, how can you get what you want if you can't express what you want? Learn practical techniques to increase productivity, inspire others, and achieve your goals by improving your communication skills.

Thursday, August 22, 2024

Itasca Park District's Recreation & Fitness Center

350 E. Irving Park Road | Itasca, Illinois 60143

In-Person Workshop, 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

"Conflict to Conversation: Practical Conflict Resolution Skills for Leaders"

Even reasonable people can disagree. When you add differing priorities, communication styles, and goals, conflict is unavoidable. But what if there was a way to turn conflict into conversations that build better relationships with the people you serve? In this workshop you will learn to

- become more comfortable handling conflicts and disagreements
- use simple shifts in language that create collaboration instead of conflict
- turn conflicts into conversations that actually strengthen relationships
- defuse potential conflicts before they begin and de-escalate conflicts that have already started

Chakisse Newton is this Leadership Institute's nationally recognized presenter. She is the president of Cardinal Consulting, a boutique strategy firm that helps organizations achieve their goals by aligning their people, processes, and communications.

She is an award-winning speaker who provides consulting, coaching, and training for groups around the world. Her expertise includes strategic communications, branding, management and leadership, negotiation, and business development. She also serves as faculty for the US Chamber of Commerce Institute of Organizational Management and the Buckley School of Public Speaking.

Clients call Chakisse "edu-taining," because you learn from her presentations while enjoying every moment.

Registration is now open online at ilparks.org.

Another great opportunity comes in April. Don't miss the Financial Sustainability Certification Program.

Join us at Bolingbrook Park District's Ashbury's at Boughton Ridge, April 10-12 for the Financial Sustainability Certification Program, designed to enhance and accelerate career growth for park, recreation, and conservation commissioners and professionals.

Jamie Sabbach, founder, president, and principal of 110%, will address complex issues including the pressing need to practice financial discipline and acknowledge the responsibility commissioners and professionals have as stewards of taxpayer dollars.

The program schedule includes three days of education:

Wednesday, April 10, 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Thursday, April 11, 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Friday, April 12, 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Registration is also open online for this great program at ilparks.org.

Thank you for all you do to move your agency forward with intention, foresight, and great leadership skills.

IAPD Calendar of Events

April 10-12
Financial Sustainability Certification Program

Ashbury's at Boughton Ridge Golf Course
Bolingbrook Park District

May 7
Parks Day at the Capitol
State Capitol, Springfield

May 7
Legislative Reception
Illini Country Club, Springfield

May 8
Legislative Conference
Crowne Plaza, Springfield

April-May
Flying 4 Kids Months
Statewide Kite Fly

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



Leadership Institute
Thursday, May 2
In-Person
Itasca Park District

Thursday, June 6
Virtual

Thursday, July 25
Virtual

Thursday, August 22
In-Person
Itasca Park District

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

EYE ON THE PROFESSION

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



By Suzi Wirtz, IOM
IPRA Executive Director

Celebrate Good Times, Great Volunteers and Exceptional Member Experiences!

This year, IPRA is proud to celebrate its 80th Anniversary! A lot has happened in those eight decades, including hundreds of programs, thousands of volunteer opportunities, dozens of annual conferences and a good number of Strategic Plans—all aligning with the vision and mission of IPRA. Thanks to consultants at Berry Dunn and the hard work of the Board of Directors, staff and extremely valuable input from stakeholders last year, we now have a new plan that will live on the IPRA website, with updates for members periodically.

What hasn't changed throughout IPRA's rich history is the purpose, the reason for being, the vision, mission and what we believe in and value—which is to say, what IPRA members believe in and value.

VISION: *IPRA leads the nation in providing premier education, networking, and resources for professionals in parks, recreation, and conservation.*

MISSION: *Provide and promote exceptional standards of education, networking, and resources for all professionals in the Illinois park, recreation, and conservation communities.*

Looking Back at 2023

To help look forward and plan for IPRA's future, it's important to see what has been accomplished as well. I'd like to take this time to review some of what IPRA achieved in 2023 ... of which every member should be proud. First, in the early part of the year, staff selected and integrated a new association management system (AMS). This AMS included a fully refreshed and enhanced website – meaning a more interactive experience for members. Trackable CEUs, access to the engaging mobile app, a much easier and user-friendly registration and payment process—these are the top benefits. In addition, the new system makes it easier for IPRA staff to run reports, automate communications, and ensure greater member engagement whether you are in Gurnee, Carbondale, Geneseo, Chicago or somewhere in between. And, this means ultimately that IPRA staff has more time to focus on developing additional programs and partnerships and delivering even greater value for every member.

IPRA hit a record-high number of members in 2023 (nearly 3,400 individuals)! And, thanks to the new system, we know that over 4,000 attendees registered for events (just since April). Nearly 500 members have attended at least one event – and 800 members have attended at least two events. None of this event data even includes Conference attendance numbers. However, for IPRA, Conference attendance was at an all-time high, about nine percent greater than last year and greater than our last pre-COVID Conference. This is really valuable data, which I consistently turn to when making and measuring decisions. This is data we can monitor and track year over year. Another positive data point is the IPRA Job Board. This is, by far, the most popular webpage and points to a priority we will detail in the new Strategic Plan. As a staff and Board team, we will research and create ways to think beyond traditional career paths and workforce efforts. We will develop marketing and outreach in order to promote the benefits of a career in this awesome field to as many people as possible, statewide and even nationwide for some programs.

It Takes a Few Villages of Volunteers

We all know we cannot do it alone – which is a major reason people join an association. Furthermore, IPRA is proud to have a number of specialty groups called sections which each serve specific needs and identify distinctly different goals. They enhance the member experience by placing individuals with others that share a common work setting, interests, and problems. These special interest sections underwent a purposeful new governance structure that offers opportunities for every member's personal and professional development.

Last year, IPRA launched several new programs:

- Financial Sustainability Certificate Program (in collaboration with IAPD).
- Volunteer Management Certificate Program
- Playground Maintenance Program
- Safety Symposium (A&F Section)

This year, IPRA will roll out some additional programs. To name a few:

- Equity in Practice Certificate
- Certified Pool Operator Course
- Mental Health and Wellness Course
- Communications & Marketing Summit (C&M Section)

The Skills Development Webinar Series is celebrating its 10th anniversary in delivering quality education right to home and offices. IPRA partnered with other state associations to bring this program to their members, thus making this a national program and showcasing Illinois as a leader. In 2023, IPRA held the 5th Annual Unplug Illinois Day, with over 60 events happening throughout the state! State Representative Charlie Meier and State Senator Laura Fine both proclaimed July 15 Unplug Illinois Day. There were Unplug Illinois ads on Pace buses and radio PSAs running across six stations. Save the date for this year's event – July 13th.

On behalf of the Board and Staff at IPRA, thank you for the support and confidence from all members. As you know, working with your own staff teams and boards, it's about collaboration, respect and truly believing in the mission, vision and values of your organization. And a little fun, too! To celebrate the 80th Anniversary, we're asking members to send in videos (15 seconds or less) stating, "Why I love IPRA!" or "What IPRA membership has meant to me over the years!" Please email these to me at suzi@ilipra.org. We look forward to sharing these on social media, in addition to filming some of our own as our staff and I make our way around the state this year. Happy Anniversary, IPRA!

IPRA Upcoming Events

Park Pursuit: Groovin' in the Grove

Thursday, May 2, 2024 - Downers Grove

The 17th Annual Park Pursuit, sponsored by IPRA's Recreation (REC) Section, is modeled after the Emmy Award-winning reality television series 'The Amazing Race'. The event provides park district professionals with the opportunity to engage in a half-day race where team building, healthy competition, and recreation take center stage.

Building Resilient Communities: Preparing, Responding, and Recovering from Disaster Events

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 or Thursday, May 16, 2024

Webinar

Park and recreation agencies play an increasingly important role in emergency preparedness for both man-made and natural disaster response. They are often the first responders who set up shelters, clear debris, and aid in the restoration of normalcy for troubled communities. Join us for this session to learn how to prepare and respond in times of crisis.

Understanding the Significance and Impact of Cultural Competence

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 or Thursday, June 20, 2024

Webinar

Cultural competence is crucial for effective communication across diverse backgrounds. It involves recognizing and respecting beliefs and behaviors of clients and employees and integrating them into policies and practices. Cultivating these skills can enhance organizational efficiency, effectiveness, and customer service. The presentation will cover culture components, the significance of cultural competencies, and strategies for developing and enhancing them.

Visit Ilipra.org for more information and to register.

SATURDAY,
JULY 13, 2024

Unplug
Illinois
Day

Plan to
participate!



Kids ages 8-18
now spend, on
average, over
seven hours in
front of a screen
for entertainment
each day.

(cdc.gov)

unplug
ILLINOIS
unplugillinois.org



Jason Anselment
IAPD General Counsel

Lawmakers Introduce Thousands of New Bills

Since the beginning of the calendar year, state lawmakers have introduced another 2,523 new bills. When added to last year's bill introductions, there are now 9,482 total bills for IAPD to monitor in this second year of the 103rd General Assembly.

As always, we have reviewed each of these bills to determine their impact on our member agencies and will keep the IAPD membership apprised of the latest developments from the Capitol through Legislative Updates and Alerts.

IAPD Legislative Platform

IAPD's Legislative Platform is a two-year agenda that coincides with each General Assembly. Fortunately, because of our success in passing five legislative initiatives last year, much of our platform has already been signed into law. This year, we have introduced three more IAPD Platform bills.

SB 2841 (Johnson, A.) / HB 4502 (Lilly, C.) would statutorily protect dedicated Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) grant funds from being swept or transferred to another State fund.

SB 2849 (Morrison, J.) / HB 4715 (Rita, B.) would allow local governments to establish rules for the recreational use of drones on property that is used for recreation or conservation purposes.

SB 2870 (Aquino, O.) / HB 4503 (Stuart, K.) would ensure cooperation between local governments and election authorities when it comes to using local government facilities as early voting polling places.

Other Bills Impacting IAPD Member Agencies

While it is still too early in the legislative process to know which proposals will move forward this spring, the legislation below provides a snapshot of bills that IAPD will closely track because of the impact on park districts, forest preserves, conservation districts, and recreation and special recreation agencies.

SB 2863 / SB 3309 (Simmons, M.) is a so-called "trailer" bill that is designed to clarify the new trail signage requirements that were signed into law last year as **SB 1710 / Public Act 103-386**.

For example, the new legislation would clarify that permanent trail signage alerting users to a highway intersection is not required if the intersection where the trail crosses the highway is already controlled by an official traffic control device or sign. Additionally, if a permanent sign is required because the intersection is not already controlled by an official traffic control device or sign, the permanent trail sign would not need to comply with the State sign manual. Consequently, trail owners could erect any sign they deem appropriate to warn users of the highway crossing.

The bill would also give more flexibility when it comes to warning users of emergencies or safety hazards. Rather than requiring the placement of temporary signage, the trail owner could instead choose to use other warning markers like cones, barricades, or drums to alert pedestrians or cyclists of the dangerous condition.

Several recently introduced bills propose amendments to the Open Meetings Act.

HB 4402 (Didech, D.) would limit the current OMA rule that permits remote attendance by a public body member for "a family or other emergency" when a quorum of the public body is physically present at a meeting. The legislation would narrow this exception to "exigent circumstances" concerning a family member, which are defined as "situations requiring immediate attention, including, but not limited to, injury, sickness, loss of life, or damage to property."

In the provisions allowing for remote meetings without a quorum physically present during a disaster declaration, the bill provides a new definition for the term "bona fide emergency," which would be "a disaster, an act of terror, or any other occurrence that the public body determines is a threat to the continuity of governmental operations or endangers the health or safety of the public."

HB 4898 (Didech, D.) would allow public bodies to meet by video or audio conference without the physical presence of a quorum if the National Weather Service has determined that all or part of the public body's jurisdiction is located within an area that is subject to a severe weather alert on the day of the meeting. The public body would still need to follow the Act's additional requirements that apply when the Governor or the IDPH Director has issued a disaster declaration.

SB 2665 (Porfirio, M.) would permit public bodies to allow a member to attend the meeting by other means if the member is prevented from physically attending because of performance of active military duty as a service member and a quorum is physically present.

SB 3774 (Villivalam, R.) would allow a public body to hold a closed session to vote on final approval of closed session minutes notwithstanding the requirements of the Act that no final action may be taken at a closed meeting.

Several other new bills would amend the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA.)

HB 4401 (Didech, D.) would specifically exclude unsolicited commercial mail, i.e., junk mail, and unsolicited commercial electronic communications, e.g., junk email, from the requirements of both FOIA and the Local Records Act if the unsolicited commercial mail or electronic communication is not responded to by an official, employee, or agent of the public body.

SB 3076 (DeWitte, D.) would require a public body to include in its list of available records the identification and a plain-text description of each of the types or categories of information of each field of each database of the public body. A public body would also be required to provide a sufficient description of the structures of its databases to allow a requester to request the public body to perform specific database queries.

SB 3118 / SB 3129 (Wilcox, C.) would require a public body's FOIA officer to be an elected or appointed officeholder or employee and would prevent private attorneys or law firms appointed to represent the public body from serving in that capacity.

HB 5557 (Katz Muhl, T.) would amend the OMA and FOIA to give the Public Access Counselor (PAC) additional authority to investigate, gather data, and report on a public body for frequent violations of the Acts or frequent violations of court orders for failure to comply with the Acts. The legislation would also allow the PAC to impose civil penalties if the PAC finds frequent violations after the public body receives due process.

Several other proposed bills would directly impact IAPD member agencies.

HB 4418 (Davis, W.) / SB 2729 (Preston, W.) would require units of local government and state agencies to pay any amounts withheld as retainage from contract payments within 60 days after the date it was retained except for retainage on the final contract payment, in which case the deadline is 120 days. The legislation would further require interest on all retainage from the date withheld.

HB 4441 (Didech, D.) would amend local government statutes, including the Downstate Forest Preserve District Act and the Park District Code, to allow local governments to establish aspirational goals for the awarding of contracts to minority-owned businesses, women-owned businesses, and businesses owned by persons with disabilities.

HB 4742 (Hoffman, J.) would extend the paid leave provisions for organ donors under the Employee Blood and Organ Donation Leave Act to include part-time employees. Current law permits full-time employees to use up to 10 days of leave in any 12-month period to serve as an organ donor.

HB 4805 (LaPointe, L.) would prohibit the operation and sale of gas-powered leaf blowers with 2-stroke or 4-stroke engines that use gasoline beginning next year.

HB 4932 (Faver Dias, L.) would require certified pesticide applicators to give written or email notice to schools and public parks at least 72 hours prior to applying a pesticide to a site that is within a half mile. The notice would need to describe the pesticide and be delivered to the administrator of the school or park, which includes a park, forest preserve, bikeway, trail, or conservation area under the jurisdiction of the State or a unit of local government.

HB 4937 (Morris, Y.) would require local public museums to offer free admission to Illinois teachers.

SB 3447 (Cunningham, B.) would provide a new referendum option for local governments that are subject to tax caps by allowing them to ask voters to increase their annual tax extension above PTELL's CPI limits by a specific dollar amount.

SB 3567 (Harriss, E.) would amend the provisions of the Truth in Taxation Law that require notices to be posted on a taxing body's website by requiring that such notices be "conspicuously" posted on the taxing district's homepage or on a page accessible through a direct link from the homepage for not less than 30 consecutive days.

This is just a small sample of the legislation IAPD is actively monitoring this session. Additionally, we will be advocating to ensure full funding for OSLAD and other grant programs. As a reminder, you can view the complete list of legislation and current status of the hundreds of bills we are tracking through the Advocacy section of the IAPD website (www.ILparks.org).



By Duane Smith, CPRP
IPRA Education Director

A Plea to Resolve the Pickle

As you know all too well, pickleball has ascended to the forefront of park district athletics since the establishment of USA Pickleball Association in 2005, offering a blend of accessibility, competition, and social engagement for people. Many capital improvement projects have produced dedicated and blended pickleball courts, resulting in a new array of programming services from introductory lessons to competitive leagues. Needless to say, pickleball has been generating a buzz for years, but with the thrill came the unexpected dilemma of noise pollution that has frustrated residents in close proximity to outdoor pickleball courts. Pickleball ambassadors across the country are seeking innovative solutions to mitigate the frustration of residents and ensure its sustainable growth.

Let us first be reminded of why so much effort went into providing supply for the demand. Pickleball's allure lies in its simplicity and inclusivity. It's a sport that bridges generations by engaging players of all age groups and skill levels. Playing pickleball promotes physical health, offering a cardiovascular workout that improves endurance, agility, and coordination while being easier on the joints than tennis (so they say!). It fosters community spirit and social interaction by encouraging camaraderie and friendship, both on and off the court. With minimal equipment requirements and adaptability to various playing environments, pickleball is accessible to a broader segment of the population, making it a perfect fit for park district programming. However, as professionals worked diligently to provide this service, along came the unexpected and unintended dilemma of noise pollution, potentially hindering the sport's growth and acceptance.

Pickleball paddles contribute to noise pollution due to the game's nature and the materials used in paddle construction. According to Pickleball Sound Mitigation LLC, which specializes in pickleball sound analysis, when a pickleball paddle strikes the ball, it produces a "pop" sound that is amplified by solid materials like graphite or composite that make paddles lightweight and durable. The sound vibration from the "pop" produces a pitch like musical note C6, which is compared to the sound of a

whistle and electronic beep. People are more annoyed by unnecessary sounds with this pitch, so from that perspective it makes more sense how and why the "pop" sound is an issue.

Mitigation Strategies

An article titled "Promising Solutions for Pickleball's Noise Pollution Problem" in the 2024 January/February edition of Athletic Business identified a few initiatives designed to help mitigate the issue. USAPA worked with an acoustic engineering firm to better understand sound technology and manufacture a Quiet Category of certified paddles that produce significantly less sound. A simple and logical solution that has its own challenges. There is a higher manufacturing cost, which means a more expensive paddle, and you can't force players to use them. However, some agencies are testing the idea of "quiet courts" by installing equipment lock boxes with quiet paddles that can be opened with the simple swipe of an ID card. Keeping the desired equipment on-site encourages players to use it, thus increasing the likelihood of a quieter pickleball game.

Other initiatives include agencies working with engineers such as Pickleball Sound Mitigation LLC to conduct acoustic studies and install sound barriers such as walls, suspended sound panels, and noise-reducing fabrics for fences. The size and type of walls are determined by the court's surroundings, but they offer a means to contain the sound more effectively. Sound panels, which are preferred over tarps for their portability, have proven to be effective in reducing pickleball sounds and can be easily removed by maintenance staff in the instance of inclement weather.

Regardless of your agency's role in pickleball's journey to a mainstream sport in parks and recreation, it is important to work with your local ambassadors in the quiet movement to help propel this sport into a new era of growth and community engagement. If not, you are risking a unique opportunity for collective endeavor to enhance community well-being, advocate for inclusivity, and address challenges through innovative solutions. An amateur player myself reaping all the benefits of playing pickleball with family and friends, will you heed my plea?



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How does a golf course in northern Illinois, that only operates seven months a year, generate enough revenue to support its operational and maintenance expenses while facing challenges affecting golf courses throughout the country?

PRAIRIEFIRE GOLF & GRILL: A Toptracer® Story

By Scott deOliveira, General Manager – PrairieView Golf Club / PrairieFire Golf & Grill

VISION AND CONCEPT

Owned and operated by the Byron Forest Preserve District, PrairieView Golf Club has been a premier public golf destination in north central Illinois since 1992. After the “golden age” of golf ended in the early 2000s, like many golf courses over the next twenty years, PrairieView endured challenges including economic downturns, a national decline in golf popularity, an aging customer base, and increased maintenance costs to name a few. The primary issue PrairieView (and the forest preserve) faced in this environment was financial stability of golf operations. How does a golf course in northern Illinois, that only operates seven months a year, generate enough revenue to support its operational and maintenance

expenses while facing challenges affecting golf courses throughout the country?

While many courses attempted to cut their way to profitability, staff at the forest preserve and PrairieView envisioned a different solution. What if we invested in a facility that provides a year-round revenue stream at the golf course? What if we could attract customers outside the traditional golfer base to the facility? What if we could operate the facility both day and night? Answering these questions became the inspiration for PrairieFire Golf & Grill, a year-round golf entertainment facility equipped with Toptracer® virtual golf technology.



THE BUILD

In December 2018, staff presented the concept of PrairieFire to the Byron Forest Preserve District board to be included in the capital budget. Within months of board approval, plans for PrairieFire were developed. The uniqueness of the facility required a design-build concept, and the board put their trust in the expertise of longtime staff to develop a successful concept and execute the project in a cost effective and timely manner. Byron Forest Preserve District Executive Director Todd Tucker said the collaboration and support from the board was integral to the success of the project. Construction began in July of 2019 and was finished in April 2020. The opening was delayed until June 2020 due to the pandemic.

Nestled just behind the clubhouse, PrairieFire was constructed within the footprint of the existing grass driving range at PrairieView Golf Club. The facility is a pole barn style building constructed by Morton Buildings®. The building style was cost effective and ideal for design requirements of the outdoor hitting bays and open interior layout. The hitting bays are on the south side of the building which allow for maximum sun and heat exposure on sunny winter days.

Many design elements of PrairieFire incorporate the forest preserve's mission of preservation, education, and recreation. The design intended to provide visitors with a

warm and inviting feeling that blended with the natural prairie landscape of the golf course and adjacent preserve. The “modern earth” concept for the interior color and aesthetics of the facility includes earth tones, stone, copper, wood, nature art, insect displays, fire, and prairie grasses intended to draw visitors to nature. Each hitting bay is named after one of the eight preserves in the forest preserve district and each bay has informational rack cards about the preserves. There is also a floor to ceiling mural with historical photos of the golf course and forest preserve dating back to the origination of the forest preserve in 1980. Tucker said the aesthetics of PrairieFire was a great opportunity to blend the district's golf and forest preserve missions together.

Comfort was also an important component to the design of PrairieFire. The eight outdoor hitting bays are equipped with overhead heaters, fire tables, large TVs, and lounge furniture. LED lit targets provide a warm glow on the range at night. The interior of the facility is adorned with a mixture of modern and Edison style light fixtures, live edge wood tables, panoramic electric fireplaces, modern lounge seating areas, and a custom-made coppertop bar.

TOPTRACER® TECHNOLOGY

Each bay is equipped with Toptracer® terminals that feature the same camera-based ball tracing technology as



seen on many PGA Tour TV broadcasts. Golf at PrairieFire combines live golf shots with the virtual games of Toptracer that entertain people of all ages and abilities. Toptracer offers game modes including points game, long drive, closest to the pin, virtual courses, and more. Game modes like “Go Fish” offer children and beginners an entertaining and non-threatening introduction to golf. More serious golfers fine-tune their game in a variety of practice modes and on virtual courses.

GOLF TRENDS

During and after COVID, there has been a resurgence in golf nationally. Golf experienced a “COVID surge” in 2020-21 as it was an activity that people could participate in while still abiding by social distancing guidelines. Many people either returned or were introduced to the game during this time. Interest in golf has sustained beyond COVID leading to a record high number of on-course rounds played nationally in 2023 (National Golf Foundation).

One factor that also led to the resurgence in golf is the proliferation of simulated golf at standalone golf entertainment facilities like TopGolf, X Golf, etc. and green-grass facilities adding a virtual golf element to their driving ranges. An estimated 6.2 million Americans hit golf balls in a virtual golf simulator within the past year, a total that's

surged 73% compared to pre-pandemic levels (National Golf Foundation). The growth, engagement, and benefits of virtual golf facilities are twofold. Virtual golf allows traditional golfers to remain engaged in the sport during seasons green-grass golf is not available. It also is a place where non-golfers can be introduced to the game in a comfortable setting that potentially converts them to a traditional golfer.

ATTRACTING VISITORS

In almost four years of operation, PrairieFire has become a golf entertainment destination for both golfers and non-golfers. PrairieFire draws a demographically diverse range of visitors from communities up to 40 miles away on a regular basis. During the winter months, PrairieFire provides traditional golfers with a place to practice or play a virtual course and hosts virtual golf leagues and scramble events. Throughout the year, customers visit PrairieFire for a variety of social activities including birthday parties, date nights, corporate gatherings, or casual outings with family and friends. Staff are happy to provide a year-round facility for golfers and a place where non-golfers can be introduced to the game in a fun and inviting way. About 70 percent of patrons could be considered non-golfers that purely come for the entertainment experience with friends or family.”



Beyond the virtual golf and cozy atmosphere, exceptional food and drink selections complete the experience for visitors. The menu at PrairieFire includes sharable items such as traditional apps, sliders, quesadillas, and signature items such as loaded PrairieFire fries and Bison Bites. The bar features an extensive selection of beer, wine, and spirits. When coming to play with friends and family, PrairieFire really felt the food and drinks should complement the activity and atmosphere, with the high-quality menu and service is what set it apart from other establishments.

THE IMPACT

The success of PrairieFire has benefited both the forest preserve and the community. The uniqueness and entertainment value of PrairieFire draws visitors both locally and from other area communities such as Rockford. Visitors frequently will patronize other businesses in Byron before or after their visit to PrairieFire.

As a year-round revenue stream, PrairieFire has enabled

the forest preserve district to rely less on, and possibly eliminate the need for public funds to support our golf operations and capital investments. Annual surpluses from PrairieFire are providing the forest preserve golf fund with a financial foundation capable of supporting future capital investments in course improvements, equipment, clubhouse renovations, and a new irrigation system.

Over the last few years, many courses and ranges throughout the country have modeled their virtual golf facilities after concepts from PrairieFire. Virtual golf facilities are something public courses in Illinois are building or considering, as they seek ways to enhance their offerings and bolster revenue for their golf operations.

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The yellow pages for Illinois park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation and special recreation agencies.

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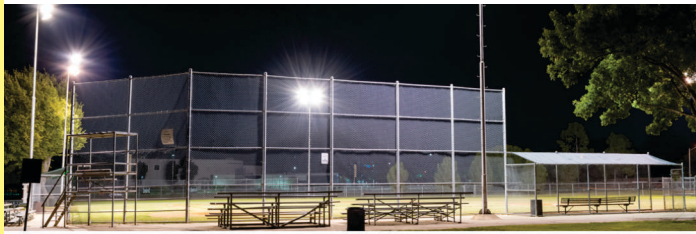
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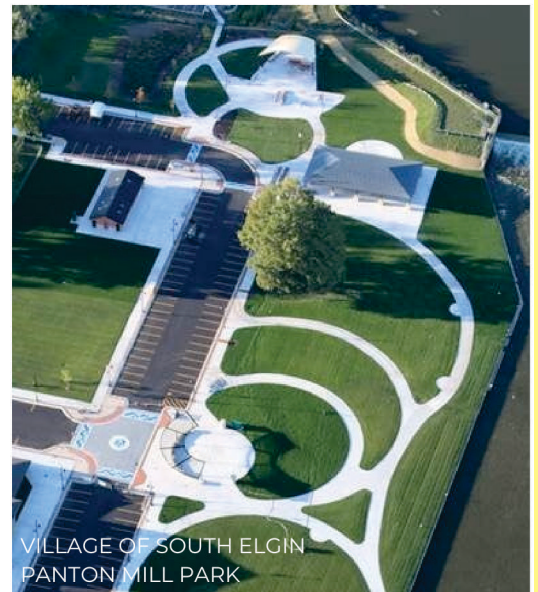
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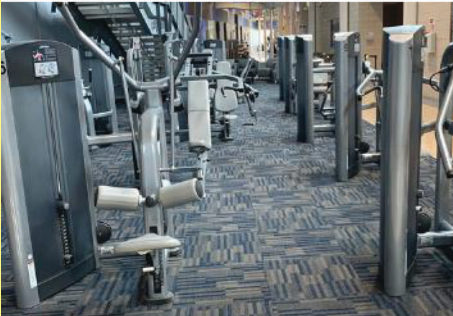
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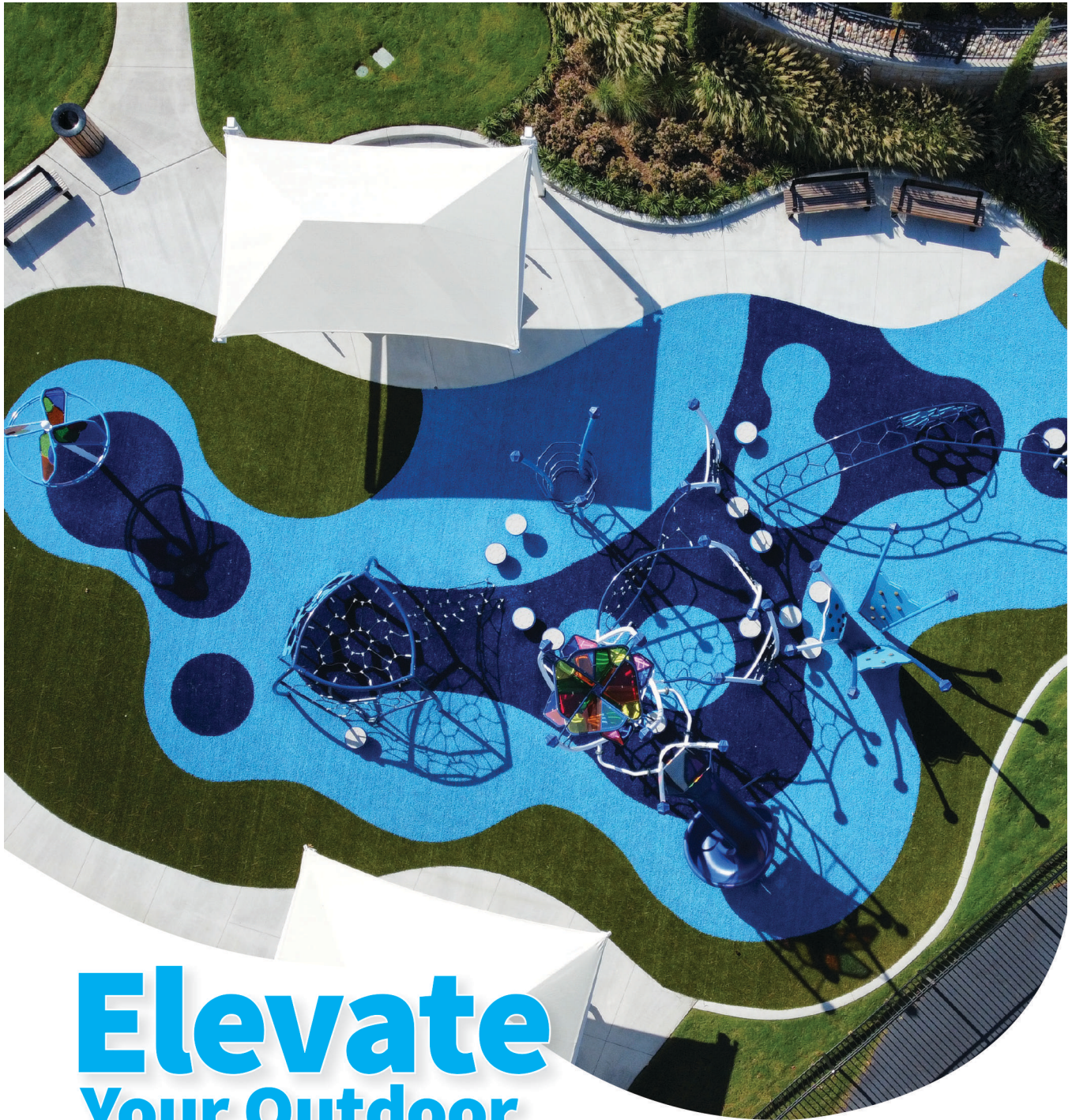
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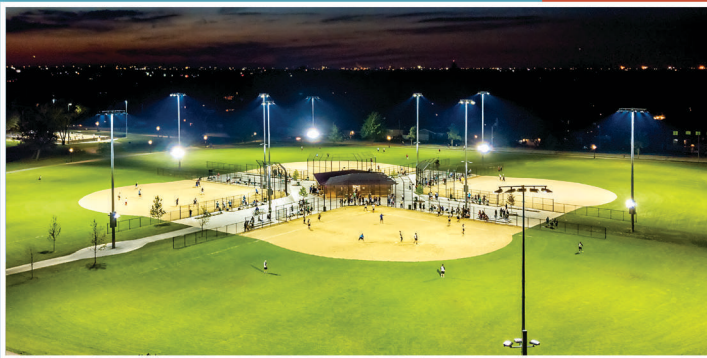
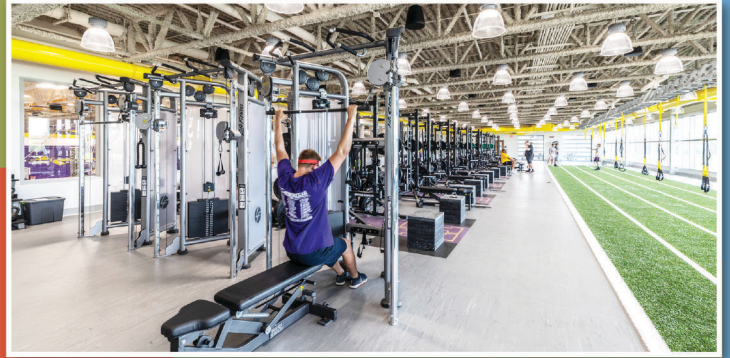
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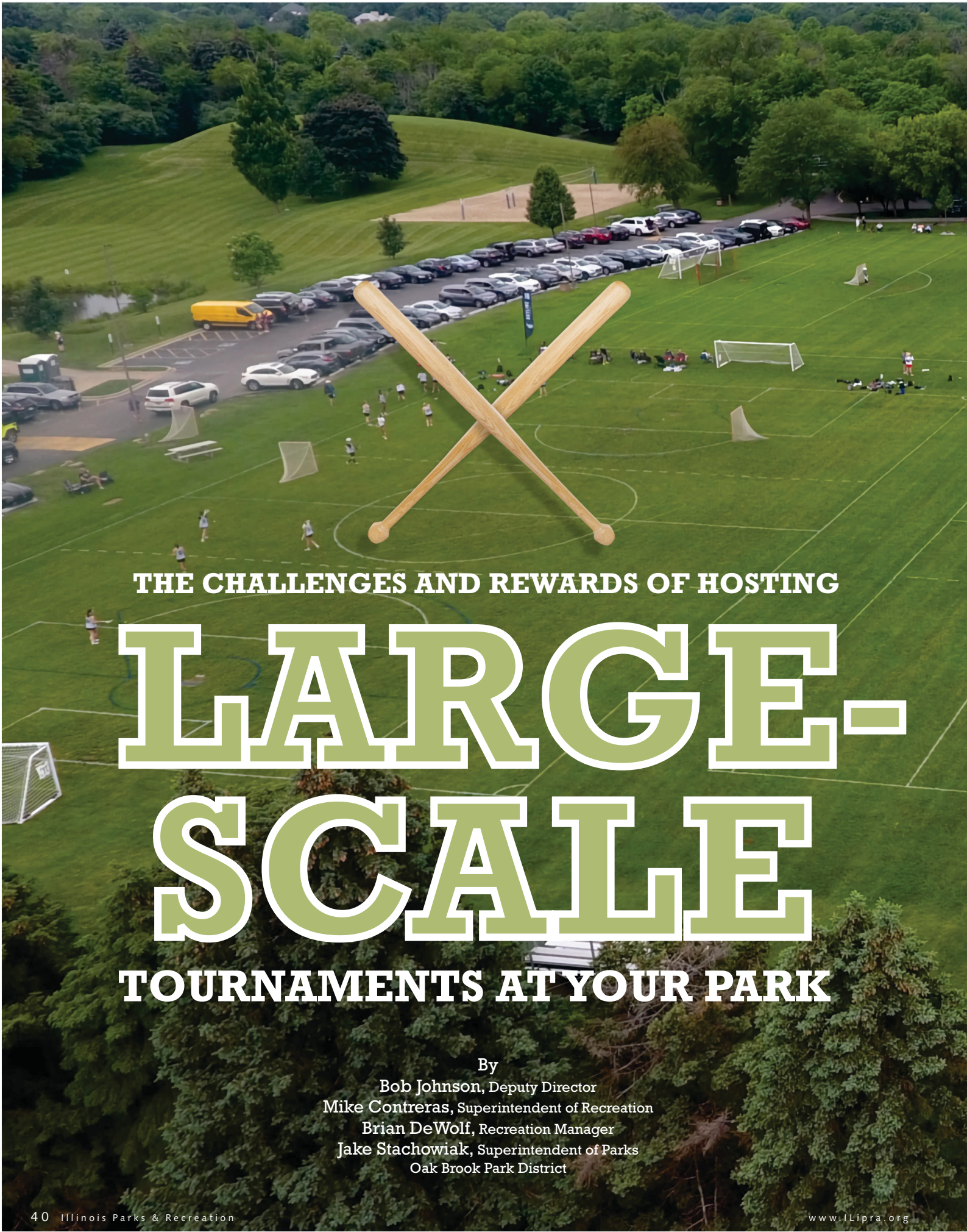
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THE CHALLENGES AND REWARDS OF HOSTING

LARGE- SCALE

TOURNAMENTS AT YOUR PARK

By

Bob Johnson, Deputy Director
Mike Contreras, Superintendent of Recreation
Brian DeWolf, Recreation Manager
Jake Stachowiak, Superintendent of Parks
Oak Brook Park District



“ Regardless of the size and scope of the tournament, the steps taken in the planning process are critical to its success. ”



In the months and years post-covid, the park and recreation field has seen a resurgence in organized sports participation. As in-house, club, and travel leagues continue to expand, the need for space to host large tournaments is growing. For a larger agency with multiple fields, accommodating 200+ teams over multiple days may be possible. However, a smaller organization might consider a tournament a fraction of that size to be large for their space and resources. Your organization may be pondering the idea of being a host site, or maybe you have been approached by a tournament organizer looking for a large space to rent. What constitutes a large tournament depends on the organization and its capabilities. While soccer, football, baseball, and softball tournaments may be more

common in parks, other activities such as ultimate frisbee, paintball, or lacrosse need these spaces too. Regardless of the size and scope of the tournament, the steps taken in the planning process are critical to its success.

First and foremost, assemble your team. A large tournament may require significant resources, and will likely have an impact on guests, programming, and facilities not necessarily associated with the tournament itself. Make sure to invite team members from parks, recreation, facilities, marketing, etc. Involving your team early in the conversation will provide different perspectives and insights which help pave the way for a successful event. Identifying the



pros and cons, and even performing a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges analysis of your available site and resources, are valuable exercises in determining the feasibility of hosting the tournament.

In evaluating the pros, revenue is often top of mind. Tournaments can be a substantial revenue-generator for your organization depending on how the fees are structured. Additionally, a well-run tournament can be great positive exposure for your organization which may lead to future tournaments and rentals. Larger events that draw teams for longer distances may benefit the community and local businesses with attendees requiring hotel stays and restaurant options. It is equally important to determine the drawbacks of a large tournament. If natural grass fields will be used, you may see a significant increase in wear and tear over a 2 to 3 day tournament. With games often taking place morning through evening, many recreational fields are not conditioned to withstand that sort of use. Another point to discuss with your team is the pressure on staffing resources. Even larger organizations have only so many staff and hours to commit to preparing for and staffing a tournament, so having that conversation early on can help prevent employee burn-out. Hosting a large event will have an impact on other programs, rentals, and uses of your facilities. The fact is there will be opportunity costs associated with a large tournament, so weighing the benefit against the cost is a critical step for decisions in the planning process.

When planning for a large tournament, understanding the unique requirements of a particular sport or activity is a determining factor in how you prepare. For instance, laying out and painting a lacrosse field is more time consuming than a soccer field. The crease area, arc, and fan can be challenging to measure and position correctly. Furthermore, setting up a lacrosse or football field over an area that is normally used for soccer may require alternate paint colors to differentiate between the playing areas. Depending on the sport, the wear areas on a field may change. Lacrosse tends to have more aggressive activity around the goal areas which may require both a stronger stand of turf grass to begin with, and more intense renovation post-play. These factors highlight the need for a complete communication circle from start to finish with your team. Soliciting input from your park and field staff will help them prepare in advance to improve turf resilience, and to be ready for more significant repairs after the tournament.

Another aspect that requires complete communication is the impact on your surroundings. If your site is in or near a residential setting, being proactive with your neighbors about increased traffic congestion and parked cars can prevent phone calls from angry residents later. In addition, communicating with police and EMS prior to the tournament will help them be prepared for larger than normal crowds, and they may provide input regarding traffic management, safety, and keeping access for emergency services open. Providing adequate directional signage and parking maps to your guests in advance of the activity will help everyone stay organized and facilitate better vehicle and pedestrian traffic. Work closely with your marketing staff, bringing them on-site to help visualize the size, quantity, and design of necessary signs, banners, etc.



While generating revenue for your organization is a positive, the satisfaction from managing a well-organized, large-scale tournament with your team may be the most rewarding part of the entire experience.

Support facilities play a significant role in a successful large tournament or event. Having adequate restrooms, shelters or tents, and concession options will make or break your visitor experience. Even at sites with permanent restroom facilities, the addition of portable units is usually a good idea, especially when you anticipate large or prolonged crowds. However, even more important is keeping these facilities clean and well-stocked with supplies. If contracting our restroom services, make sure your vendor is prepared to maintain them over the length of your tournament. Concessions can be as simple as selling pre-packaged goods under a tent, or inviting food trucks or a catering company to provide food and beverage services. Regardless of the direction you choose, be prepared to secure the proper permits and licenses required in your community well in advance of the activity. Naturally, with hundreds or thousands of attendees at your site, there will be a substantial increase in litter, both loose and in receptacles. When evaluating the staffing needs at the tournament, remember that staff, whether paid or volunteer, must be scheduled for the duration of the activity to keep up with these maintenance chores. Overflowing trash is not only unsightly and a turn-off to your guests, but it also attracts stinging insects, especially during those late summer and early fall months. Keep in mind that visitors will be spending at minimum several hours at your site, and having clean and welcoming amenities is a positive reflection on your organization.

Even with careful planning, the unexpected will happen. Contingency planning is often overlooked, but being prepared for some unexpected or unfortunate scenarios is essential. With outdoor venues, weather is the most unpredictable and often the most impactful on success or failure. Early on in your planning, decide who controls the decision to cancel or postpone the activity. What policies and procedures do you have in place that will drive and support your decision? If you will allow teams to continue play on wet and soggy fields, are you prepared for the restoration? Will closing a field that was destroyed over a weekend of play have a negative effect on revenues and programming in the days and weeks to come? These are important conversations to have with your team throughout the planning process, and being proactive rather than reactive to these situations can soften the blow to your organization, staff, and programming.

Combined, these points of consideration have associated costs. Items such as extra field paint, restrooms, concessions, permits, and staff hours are quantifiable, and should be a factor in determining your fees. Building in restoration fees to offset the expense of new seed, soil, and sod may be necessary depending on the spaces you are providing. While all this may seem daunting, having these discussions and preparing with your staff, volunteers, coaches, and tournament/event managers early on, helps manage expectations, and ultimately makes for a more pleasant, rewarding, and successful experience for everyone. While generating revenue for your organization is a positive, the satisfaction from managing a well-organized, large-scale tournament with your team may be the most rewarding part of the entire experience.

BY LISA SHEPPARD,
Executive Director Glencoe Park District and

ERIN CLASSEN,
*Superintendent of Marketing
and Communication, Glencoe Park District*



TRANSFORMING A WINTER ICE RINK INTO A YEAR-ROUND COMMUNITY HUB

Since 1972, Watts Center has been a cherished winter destination for Glencoe residents, featuring two refrigerated ice rinks that operate seasonally during the winter months. However, for the remaining nine months, the rinks lay dormant, prompting the Glencoe Park District to express concern about the underutilization of this prime location.



**IN A LANDLOCKED
COMMUNITY
WHERE SPACE FOR
A DEDICATED BLOCK
OF PICKLEBALL
COURTS WAS
LACKING, A UNIQUE
SOLUTION EMERGED.**

The district felt like there was an issue with this big space only being used three months of the year. The rinks are nestled in a prime location, next to a school and a park district facility.

Various ideas were considered, from velodrome courts to dog runs, and even pop-up roller-skating events. Although the latter gained popularity, it wasn't a sustainable solution. The smaller rink was converted to a seasonal DekHockey court, but the main rink remained largely unused.

Simultaneously, a pickleball resurgence was taking place. The Glencoe Park District responded by adding lines and temporary nets to existing tennis courts. However, during a Board meeting regarding the renovation of a tennis court, pickleball enthusiasts dominated public comments. Residents expressed a desire for dedicated pickleball courts without the interference of tennis nets



IN THE INAUGURAL SEASON, THE DISTRICT NOT ONLY TRANSFORMED AN UNDERUTILIZED SPACE INTO A VIBRANT COMMUNITY HUB BUT ALSO WITNESSED THE JOY OF PLAYERS WHO EMBRACED THE NEW PICKLEBALL COURTS.

Pickleball's appeal lies in its inherently social nature, with players gravitating towards multi-court locations that foster a vibrant community atmosphere and encourage interaction among enthusiasts. One dedicated court at a location would not be enough.

In a landlocked community where space for a dedicated block of pickleball courts was lacking, a unique solution emerged. The idea to repurpose the ice rinks for pickleball courts proved to be a perfect marriage of two challenges.

The district began brainstorming how to convert the rink each season into a pickleball destination. Painting lines on the concrete was considered, but the expense and playability of the surface quickly ruled out that option.

Turning to sports court manufacturers, the team discovered a new modular surface specifically designed for pickleball play. This surface, infused with rubber, offered improved traction, cushioning, and grip comparable to an asphalt court.

While the purchase of a sports court was a fraction of the cost of building new courts, the team needed to ensure it met the expectations of discerning players. A two-week testing period involved pickleball instructors, participants, and avid players providing feedback on two sports court materials designed for pickleball. Although the sports court material was not the preferred choice by most competitive pickleball players, it was met with enthusiasm by recreation players.

With positive reviews in hand, the park district officials delved into the practicalities of the surface, addressing installation, storage, and actual costs. Armed with answers, the next hurdle was obtaining buy-in from the board of commissioners and the Glencoe community, which was successfully achieved.

The main ice rink, now known as the Weinberg Family Recreation Center, unveiled six pickleball courts on May 8, 2023. Swiftly, the public embraced these courts, turning them into a popular pickleball destination. Within the initial six months of operation, approximately 4,000 visitors enjoyed the new facilities. While ensuring plenty of time for open play, the district saw a demand for reserved courts and offered reservations at a nominal cost. The district recorded a revenue of \$59,000 from court reservations and class fees during this period. Impressively, users bestowed a remarkable 4.67-star rating (out of 5) upon the courts.

However, the transition from an ice rink to a pickleball facility posed challenges. To preserve ice rink operations, nothing could be secured to the rink floor or dasher boards. The district initially placed free standing court dividers to separate games, but because the dividers could not be secured, a strong wind could easily push them down. The district later installed a hanging net system to keep game play separated.

The facility implemented a real-time feedback system through QR codes, which immediately alerted facility managers and allowed for continuous improvements based on user input.

Other challenges included the lack of shade during the summer months and potential slipperiness of the courts after rain. Adaptations, like shaded tables and benches on the rink runway and providing a shop vac for players, were made to address these issues.

Ice rinks are pitched to hold water, while traditional racket courts are designed to drain water. The sports court material, laid on top of a rink designed to hold water, often traps water in the grooves. After a large rainstorm, when traditional racket courts are dry, the rink courts are often still wet and unplayable for a day, limiting play on the courts. The slippery courts were a safety issue when the court would get slippery. The community expected the new courts to be always in peak playing condition. The district could not keep up with the demand, so one of the ways it compromised was to make a shop vac available for players to use if the courts were wet.

As a protective measure, the park district is working to change its policy to allow for class cancellations due to standing water. Instead of offering refunds, we guarantee a certain number of classes. If the session includes eight meetings, participants pay for seven classes and the district guarantees those seven classes will take place. If there is a need to cancel one class for standing water or weather, the district does not offer a refund. If all eight meetings take place, participants receive a free class.

While pickleball isn't universally adored due to the noise it generates, experts recommend implementing abatement measures, especially for homes within 350 feet of the courts. Nine homes are located within 350 feet of the Weinberg rinks. The rink's sound-deadening dasher boards, coupled with the surrounding mature arborvitae, naturally reduce noise. Despite these measures, there is still ambient sound that can be heard in the neighborhood. The board of commissioners voted to limit play hours to 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. They also agreed to limit play by not using the rink's outdoor lights for pickleball play. Despite only one neighbor registering a complaint, the situation is being closely monitored.

The community would love to play pickleball year-round, especially on the unseasonably warm days. The district's ability to provide courts is tempered because the space reverts back to a refrigerated outdoor ice rink from November to February. While not ideal, the district has equipped an indoor gym and some outdoor tennis courts with pickleball lines and temporary nets. These makeshift solutions ensure the enthusiastic pickleball community can continue enjoying their passion even when conditions are less accommodating. Of course, the quest for extended playtime still persists.

Looking ahead, the park district is focused on enhancing the user experience by considering larger group rentals and increased outdoor seating.

The Glencoe community has embraced the new courts. As the district prepares for its sophomore season, it is exploring ways to improve the user experience. The priority is to ensure residents feel like the Weinberg courts are their place to play.

In the inaugural season, the district not only transformed an underutilized space into a vibrant community hub but also witnessed the joy of players who embraced the new pickleball courts. It's not just a game; it's a testament to the power of innovation and community spirit. The resounding success of our first season sets the stage for an exciting journey ahead.



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Lori Palmer, Bartlett Park District

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Robert L. Johnson Sr., Peoria Park District

RISING STAR



Jeremiah Johnson, Waukegan Park District

HONORED PROFESSIONAL



Craig Talsma, Hoffman Estates Park District

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Representative Terra Costa Howard
Representative Norine Hammond
Senator Sally Turner
Senator Elgie Sims, Jr.

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COMMUNITY IMPACT



Deborah Fandrei, Buffalo Grove Park District

All Conference Awards Luncheon Winners

YOUNG PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR



Sara Witteck, West Chicago Park District

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Carrie Fullerton, Arlington Heights Park District

PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR



Jay Lerner, Waukegan Park District

CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE



Park District of Oak Park



AGENCY SHOWCASE AWARDS

Overall

1st Place: Downers Grove Park District
2nd Place: Lake County Forest Preserve District
3rd Place: Glenview Park District

Peoples Choice

Oak Lawn Park District

Category Honors

Brochure Print: Lake County Forest Preserve District

Brochure Virtual:

Wheeling Park District

Integrated

Photography: Waukegan Park District

Large Format

Marketing: Batavia Park District

Logo Design:

Glenview Park District

Marketing Campaign:

Downers Grove Park District

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Print Communication – Informational:

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Downers Grove Park District

Website: Glencoe Park District

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 Lemont Park District
 Oak Lawn Park District
 Park District of Oak Park
 Southeast Association for Special Parks and Recreation (SEASPAR)
 Worth Park District

OUTSTANDING AWARDS

Park Division I:
 United City of Yorkville Parks & Recreation Department -
 Yorkville Storywalk Partnership

Park Division II:

Park District of Highland Park
 Sunset Woods Park Playground Renovation

Facility Division II:

Park District of Oak Park
 Oak Park Community Recreation Center

Program Division I:

United City of Yorkville Parks & Recreation Department
 Future Foxes Preschool & School District 115 Collaborative Learning Program

Program Division II:

McHenry County Conservation District
 Find Your Wild Summer Challenge

Special Event Division I:

Freeport Park District
 Oakdale Fall Festival

Special Event Division II:

Fox Valley Park District
 Big Foot Trail Run 5k



SECTION DISTINGUISHED AWARDS

Administration & Finance:

Bret Fahnstrom, River Trails Park District

Communications & Marketing:

Sheri Potter, Warrenville Park District

Diversity:

Jonelle Bailey, Sycamore Park District

Facility Management:

Lacy Marinenko, Vernon Hills Park District

Parks & Natural Resources:

Dan Payne, Elmhurst Park District

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Mike Gianastasio, Homewood-Flossmoor Park District

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The *Give Us Your Best Shot* photo contest winners were announced at the Soaring to New Heights Conference.



1

SPORTS

1st Place

Jerry Dallege
Skokie Park District
"Ice Show Star"

2nd Place

JP McNamara
Palatine Park District
"Water You Waiting For"

3rd Place

Mike Terson
Buffalo Grove Park District
"Cricket Among Kites"

Honorable Mention

Sheri Potter
Warrenville Park District
"Perfect Balance"

Katy Denight
Champaign Park District
"All Eyes on the Ball"

Rafael Gomez
Skokie Park District
"Hockey Jail Break"



2



3

WILDLIFE

1st Place

Nicholas McCarney
Sycamore Park District
"Beak to Beak"

2nd Place

Maurice Shallow
Springfield Park District
"Reflection"

3rd Place

Glenn Knoblock
Forest Preserve District of Will County
"Three Headed Goose"

Honorable Mention

Amanda Pawelko
McHenry County Conservation District
"White Egret at Golden Hour"

Nicholas McCarney
Sycamore Park District
"I Spy With My Little Eye"

Ben Beranek
Forest Preserve District of DuPage
County
"Limpkin"



RECREATION/ PEOPLE AT PLAY

1st Place
Allison Corcoran
Lombard Park District
“Fun At The Pool”

2nd Place
Bethany Erickson
Macomb Park District
“Rhythm Circle”

3rd Place -
Samantha Cicogna
ForeverLawn Chicago
“Play 2”

Honorable Mention
Margaret Beaudin
West Chicago Park District
“Sunlit”

AngiePace-Tousignant
Kankakee Valley Park District
“Walking on Water”

AnthonySchalk
Forest Preserve District of Will County
“Casting a Line”



NATURE/ LANDSCAPES

1st Place

Jennifer Rogers
Arlington Heights Park District
"Shine in the Dark"

2nd Place

Nicholas McCarney
Sycamore Park District
"Tranquility"

3rd Place -

Renee Pixler
Forest Preserve of Winnebago County
"Kishwaukee George North
Forest Preserve"

Honorable Mention

Chad Merda
Forest Preserve District of Will County
"Dandelion Seed Macro"

Ben Beranek

Forest Preserve District of DuPage
County
"Trail"

Amanda Pawelko

McHenry County Conservation District
"You Belong Among the Wild Flowers"



A heartfelt thanks to everyone who submitted a photo in 2023.



PEOPLE & PLACES



Oswegoland Park District Selects Betsinger as New Executive Director

Tom Betsinger has accepted the position of executive director at the Oswegoland Park District, effective December 4, 2023.

Tom is a familiar face within the Oswegoland community.

His career in parks and recreation began at the district in 1997 as a recreation supervisor overseeing athletics and special events. Over the years he has demonstrated exceptional leadership, earning promotions to superintendent of recreation in 2008 and, most recently, director of recreation in 2018.

Beyond his service to the Oswegoland Park District, Tom spent several years on the Planning and Zoning Commission and two terms as an elected board member for the Village of Montgomery. Additionally, Tom was a charter member of the Rotary Club of Montgomery and served as club vice president and Rotary Foundation board member.

Tom earned his undergraduate degree from Illinois College, is a National Parks & Recreation Association Revenue Development School Graduate, and is a Certified Parks and Recreation Professional (CPRP).



In Memoriam

Illinois Parks and Recreation extends our condolences to family and friends of **Gordon "Brent" Manning**, who passed away January 26, 2024. Manning was a towering figure in conservation. From his early days at the nonprofit Ducks Unlimited to his pivotal roles as the head of both the Illinois Department of Conservation and later the Illinois

Department of Natural Resources, Brent's impact was profound and far-reaching. Under his leadership, IDNR started the Conservation Congress, Conservation 2000, Illinois River 2020, and more. Brent also briefly served as executive director of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

Brent finished his career as the executive director of the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, where he championed accessibility and sustainability by spearheading the installation of accessible fishing piers in suburban forest preserves and the development of an archery range. He was also instrumental in the creation of the district's Urban Stream Research Center, the only aquatic conservation facility of its kind in Illinois.

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