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2023

National Gold Medal Awards

The Premiere Award in Parks and Recreation



2022 Grand Plaque Recipients



Agency Class I
**Recreation and Park Commission for the
Parish of East Baton Rouge (BREC)**
Baton Rouge, Louisiana



Agency Class II
City of Des Moines Parks & Recreation
Des Moines, Iowa



Agency Class III
South Bend Venues Parks and Arts
South Bend, Indiana

Agency Class IV

**Waukesha Parks, Recreation & Forestry
Department
Waukesha, Wisconsin**



Agency Class V

**Town of Fountain Hills Community Services
Fountain Hills, Arizona**



Armed Forces

**Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay
Kings Bay, Georgia**



2023 Gold Medal Judges

Jennifer Cirillo

Parks and Recreation
Director
Palm Beach County
Lake Worth, Florida



Randy Bina

Parks and Recreation
Executive Director (retired)
Bismarck, North Dakota



Nasha McCray

Assistant City Manager
City of Greensboro
Greensboro,
North Carolina



Michelle Healy

Deputy Executive Director
Bend Park and Recreation
District
Bend, Oregon



Rachael Goodwin

Community Services
Director
Town of Fountain Hills
Fountain Hills, Arizona



National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)

Kristine Stratton

President and Chief
Executive Officer

Kevin Roth, Ph.D.

Vice President of Research

Gina Mullins-Cohen

Lead, Special Projects

American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration (AAPRA)

Janet Bartnik, CPRP

President, AAPRA
Deputy Director, Prince William County Parks,
Recreation & Tourism
Prince William, Virginia

Jane H. Adams

Executive Director, AAPRA
National Gold Medal Award Program
Manager
Sacramento, California

Brit Kramer, CAE

Gold Medal Program Administrator, AAPRA
Lacey, Washington

Rod Tarullo, CPRE

Gold Medal Judges Liaison, AAPRA
Glenwood Springs, Colorado

John Prue, CPRP

Gold Medal Committee Chair, AAPRA
Kenosha, Wisconsin

Armed Forces

Representing All Branches of the Military

Dover Air Force Base

Dover, Delaware

Fort Knox Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation

Fort Knox, Kentucky

Naval Air Facility Atsugi Morale, Welfare and Recreation Department

Atsugi, Japan

Naval Air Station (NAS) Whiting Field Morale, Welfare, Recreation

Milton, Florida

State Parks

State Park Systems

Missouri State Parks

Jefferson City, Missouri

Ohio State Parks & Watercraft

Columbus, Ohio

Texas State Parks

Austin, Texas

Wyoming State Parks, Historic Sites, and Trails

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Agency Class I

Population of more than 400,001

Gwinnett County Parks & Recreation

Lawrenceville, Georgia

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

Greenbelt, Maryland

Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation

Tampa, Florida

Virginia Beach Parks & Recreation

Virginia Beach, Virginia

Agency Class II

Population of 150,001 to 400,000

City of Henderson Parks and Recreation

Henderson, Nevada

Roseville Parks, Recreation & Libraries

Roseville, California

City of Plano Parks & Recreation Department

Plano, Texas

South Suburban Park and Recreation District

Littleton, Colorado

Agency Class III

Population of 75,001 to 150,000

Champaign Park District

Champaign, Illinois

Plainfield Park District

Plainfield, Illinois

City of New Braunfels Parks and Recreation

New Braunfels, Texas

Waukegan Park District

Waukegan, Illinois

Agency Class IV

Population of 30,001 to 75,000

Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services

Bristol, Connecticut

Hoffman Estates Park District

Hoffman Estates, Illinois

Douglasville Parks and Recreation

Douglasville, Georgia

Park District of Oak Park

Oak Park, Illinois

Agency Class V

Population of 30,000 and less

Cullman Parks, Recreation, and Sports Tourism

Cullman, Alabama

Oak Brook Park District

Oak Brook, Illinois

Macedonia Parks & Recreation Department

Macedonia, Ohio

Sycamore Park District

Sycamore, Illinois

Armed Forces 2023 Finalists



Dover Air Force Base Outdoor Recreation program takes great pride in offering a wide range of resilient and engaging activities for Airmen and their families. Our diverse portfolio of recreational programs plays a vital role in helping the military community recharge, reconnect, and relax. Due to the high tempo at Dover AFB, it is crucial for Airmen to have a constructive outlet that contributes to mission readiness and morale. By fostering family and individual well-being, unit cohesion, trust, spiritual renewal, resiliency, and readiness, our programs create a safe and exciting environment that supports well-being.

Located in the Delaware Tri-State area, Dover's Outdoor Recreation program provides venues that allow the military community to explore the natural beauty of the region, including access to the Atlantic Ocean, stunning beaches, mountains, major cities, and exciting "once in a lifetime" events along the Mid-Atlantic Coast. Whether a novice or an experienced enthusiast, engaging programs cater to all levels of experience.

Our primary goal is to encourage healthy lifestyles through outdoor living and experience-based activities. Additionally, we educate the community about the benefits of resilience activities through skill-building and reinforcing positive behaviors. Dover's Outdoor Recreation's engaging team of professional deliver programs that are intuitive, innovative, and resourceful

Dover Air Force Base Dover, Delaware

in creating meaningful quality-of-life experiences for our airmen and families. We greatly value our community partnerships, as they provide vast opportunities for our members to experience the historical significance and enjoyable activities within the first state of the union—Delaware.



Fort Knox Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation is a cornerstone of the Fort Knox community, providing unparalleled services and programs designed to enhance the lives of our service members, their families, civilians and retirees. Based in the heart of Kentucky, we are committed to delivering a wide array of opportunities including recreational activities, sports and fitness programs, leisure and entertainment, events for youth, and more.

Our purpose extends beyond traditional parks and recreation. We are a pillar of support, promoting health and wellness, encouraging creativity, and fostering personal growth. We take pride in hosting communal events that bring our community together to create shared memories and stronger bonds. Our steadfast commitment to service excellence has earned national recognition, including the prestigious CAPRA accreditation – a symbol of our alignment with the highest standards in our field. This acknowledgment serves as a testament to our constant pursuit of excellence.

We believe in the power of community, of unity,

Fort Knox Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Fort Knox, Kentucky

and the potential to effect positive change. This belief propels us forward as we serve those who serve our nation, demonstrating through our actions the essence of what it means to be part of Fort Knox Family and MWR. For a deeper understanding of our work, visit www.knox.armymwr.com.

Naval Air Facility Atsugi Morale, Welfare and Recreation Department Atsugi, Japan

What are our superpowers? First, we are an organization that deeply cares about people. We leverage the diversity of our staff to express their diverse thinking, differing problem-solving techniques and points of view. This diversity allows us to maximize our limited resources to provide unique programming that supports all service members, families, civilians, and local nationals who call Atsugi “home.”

Our mission has transformed over the last few years. We take outstanding care of the commands already on our base, and we now regularly host missions from other service branches. Handling change and surging to meet increased demand, displays another superpower - flexibility.

Our last superpower is location. Our geographical location, 30 miles southwest of Tokyo, provides

a wealth of programming options. In addition to our outstanding on-base programming, we take customers to the largest city in the world, beautiful beaches, outdoor adventures, incredible ski resorts, and UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

We have been awarded CNIC 5-star accreditation each of our last 3 grading periods. This honor focuses on programming, financial results, staff training, and customer feedback. In 2022, Atsugi scored 8.41 overall in customer satisfaction surveys. This is well over the Navy average of 6.14. Our goal is to go above and beyond with our program standards our customer’s expectations. According to our customer



satisfaction scores, we are meeting these goals.

Naval Air Station (NAS) Whiting Field Morale Welfare Recreation Milton, Florida

NAS Whiting Field is located just north of the desirable Emerald Coast in Milton, Florida. With over 1 million flight operations each year, is the world’s busiest Aviation Complex. Priding itself on the development of the finest aviators in the world, Whiting Field produces 60% of the Navy’s primary fixed wing and 100% of the Navy, Coast Guard and Marine helicopter pilots. The Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Department supports the installation’s mission by contributing to the retention, readiness and well-being of our military personnel, their families, and the local retiree population. Keeping with the NRPA guiding principles, Team Whiting serves our diverse demographics by providing world-class facilities, services and special events.

Pioneering efforts in space allocation, MWR incorporated strategic designs and re-imagined several facilities to improve services and efficiency. The recently constructed Airdales Recreation Center offers twelve different services operating under one roof with one unified staff. Sitting in the pristine Blackwater River Watershed, MWR takes great pride in executing all aspects of our environmental stewardship program. Complimenting installation efforts, MWR encourages back to nature strategies while inspiring awareness and individual responsibility.



These efforts provide both current patrons and that of future generations pristine recreation opportunities. Our dedicated team stands ready to proudly serve those who serve this great nation!

State Parks 2023 Finalists



Missouri State Parks Jefferson City, Missouri

We have state parks in some of the most remote areas of the state to historic sites in downtown St. Louis and Kansas City. We offer unique opportunities to see homes of famous Missourians, such as Scott Joplin, Mark Twain, Harry S Truman, and Thomas Hart Benton. Visitors camp and hike

in some of the most remote areas in the state.

Missouri State Parks is home to 92 state parks and historic sites. Our mission is threefold, all of which are of equal importance: to preserve and interpret the finest examples of Missouri's natural landscapes; to preserve and interpret the finest examples of Missouri's cultural landscapes; and to provide healthy and enjoyable outdoor recreation opportunities for Missourians and its visitors.

We work to preserve Missouri's cherished destinations and make our guests' experiences memorable. We're truly dedicated to making these special places sustainable and vibrant for years to come. We're very proud of our accomplishments and invite you to come see for yourself – you are always welcome in Missouri State Parks!



Ohio State Parks & Watercraft Columbus, Ohio

Whether people are looking to rough it along the Ohio River, go 'glamping' while staring out at the stunning sunset on the shores of Lake Erie, or sit in the lap of luxury at one of Ohio's lodges, Ohio State Parks & Watercraft have something for everyone. With more than one million overnight stays each year, visitors enjoy outdoor recreation in all four seasons while making memories with loved ones.

Texas State Parks

Austin, Texas

Texas will be dotted with State Parks . . . for the public good, now and forever.” That was Governor Pat Neff’s vision as he established the Texas State Parks system in 1923. One hundred years later, his words echo in our mission to serve “all generations.”

Our 1,400 employees steward diverse resources with diverse operations for Texas’ diverse population. Over 30 million Texans have safe access to more than 640,000 acres in 89 state parks, “dotting” the second largest state. Visitors explore the 12,000 years of human history we preserve, including five National Historic Landmarks. They recharge in the same natural resources that shelter more than 50 threatened and endangered species and protect half a million acres of aquifers and drinking water sources.

Our Park Police Officers were awarded the PLEA Platinum Award for Excellence recognizing them as the best in the nation. As is established in our mission, our 100 education professionals share the stories of our parks to “foster an understanding of the diversity of Texas’ lands and heritage.”

But we never forget our promise to the future. We know an invitation to new audiences today is an investment in tomorrow’s stewards. We’re increasing park access by improving recreation opportunities, making sites safer and more accessible to all Texans, and opening new parks. We’ve successfully pioneered new funding strategies to realize this long-term



commitment to “all generations” of Texans. We’re proud of this balanced service to share parks with everyone now and forever.

Wyoming State Parks, Historic Sites, and Trails

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Wyoming State Parks, Historic Sites, and Trails (SPHST) offer exceptional experiences that enhance the overall quality of life for our visitors and staff. Our visitors gain understanding and appreciation for the public lands we manage, while exploring and enjoying Wyoming’s natural and cultural heritage. Dedicated and professional employees provide outstanding customer service.

The agency focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion by performing outreach to under served populations and developing programming and events to ensure everyone feels welcome and safe. These collaborations and active invitations include Latino Outdoors, Women Who Hike, Wyoming Equality, and Boys & Girls Club. The agency has made sites more universally accessible. By creating and expanding the

interpretive program over the last two years, the agency has made huge strides in outreach efforts.

SPHST values the health and wellness of its staff and visitors. Initiatives such as a partnership with Cigna insurance group and the “You Matter” public messaging campaign promote health and well-being. The agency also encourages staff exercise habits through a monthly tracking program and rewards those who meet the requirements with additional leave. The agency has also partnered with the Veterans Administration Hospital recreational therapy program, bringing veterans to parks and historic sites to create healthier habits and provide opportunities for



participation in recreational activities. Additionally, partnerships like the Adaptive Adventures have allowed SPHST to teach injured veterans about adaptive recreation and participation.

Improving communities and enriching lives - it’s what we strive towards every day.

Agency Class I 2023 Finalists



Gwinnett County Parks & Recreation Lawrenceville, Georgia

Gwinnett Parks and Recreation is a vibrant and dynamic organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors of Gwinnett County. With its vast array of parks, facilities, and programs, Gwinnett Parks and Recreation offers a diverse range of opportunities for people of all ages, abilities, and interests. The division takes pride in its extensive park system, which encompasses 51 parks and green spaces spanning across thousands of acres. These parks are meticulously maintained, providing residents with well-kept trails,

playgrounds, sports fields, picnic areas, and serene natural environments.

Whether one is seeking a peaceful retreat, a place for family gatherings, or a venue for outdoor activities,

Gwinnett Parks and Recreation offers something for everyone. The division organizes and manages a wide variety of recreational programs and events. From athletics to fitness classes, from art workshops and volunteer workdays to nature exploration programs, there are opportunities for residents to discover and pursue their passions. Gwinnett Parks and Recreation also hosts seasonal events and camps, fostering a sense of community and providing memorable experiences for attendees. The division operates

state-of-the-art facilities, including community centers, aquatic centers, activity buildings, and senior centers, designed to cater to the diverse needs of the community. Gwinnett Parks and Recreation is committed to promoting healthy and active lifestyles, preserving natural resources, and fostering community pride. With its extensive offerings and commitment to excellence, it has become an integral part of Gwinnett County's identity and a cherished resource for its residents.



Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation Tampa, Florida

Hillsborough County Park and Recreation is proud to be a Finalist in the National Gold Medal Award program. Committed to enhancing lives through people, parks, and enjoyable experiences, we provide exceptional recreational programs and facilities in Florida. With millions of annual visitors, we offer diverse programs and meticulously maintained parks. Our dedication to community connections, wellness, and memorable experiences has solidified our reputation.

Our parks are tranquil sanctuaries with playgrounds, sports fields, trails, and picnic areas, catering to various interests. Crafted for all ages, our programs include sports leagues, fitness classes, cultural events,

and educational workshops. We adapt to our community's evolving needs, providing innovative and inclusive experiences. Our exceptional team creates a warm, welcoming environment. Their passion ensures every interaction is exceptional. As a Finalist in the 2023 Gold Medal Award program, we are humbled by the recognition, reflecting our core values and team's tireless efforts. We remain committed to enhancing lives, fostering connections,

and creating lasting memories. Join us at Hillsborough County Park and Recreation, where people, parks, and enjoyable experiences transform lives and build a brighter future.

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission Greenbelt, Maryland

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) is a bi-county agency founded in 1927 under state charter to manage physical growth and plan communities, protect and steward natural, cultural, and historic resources and provide leisure and recreational experiences where residents and visitors can live more, play more. CAPRA accredited, M-NCPPC serves a diverse community of all ages, ability levels, cultural, religious, racial, and ethnic backgrounds across urban, suburban, and rural areas. We provide rich and diverse award-winning programs and services, including aquatics, senior programs, therapeutic recreation, summer camps, wellness, community gardens, volunteer opportunities, historic preservation, and more. We serve our more than 900,000 residents with heart through equity, health and wellness, and conservation! Live more, play more with M-NCPPC!



Virginia Beach Parks & Recreation Virginia Beach, Virginia

Virginia Beach Parks & Recreation serves Virginia's largest city with a population of over 450,000. We manage 299 parks over 7,000 acres of land, seven regional recreation centers, including two LEED certified centers, a marina, and a large athletic complex. Through an extraordinary partnership with public schools, we provide childcare at all 56 elementary schools, making us the largest and most trusted childcare provider in the city.

city's first dedicated mountain biking trails. Our best-known park, Mount Trashmore, was the nation's first park built on an old landfill site, and this year marks its 50th anniversary.



Our unique park ecosystem includes beach front parks where you can watch dolphins play; peaceful lakes and lagoons, nature trails, bee-friendly pollinator gardens and a Japanese garden lined with cherry trees. Outdoor recreation venues include skate parks, dog parks, disc golf, athletic fields, outdoor fitlots, and in 2023, we opened the

Agency Class II 2023 Finalists



City of Henderson Parks and Recreation Henderson, Nevada

The City of Henderson Parks and Recreation Department has been accredited through the Commission for Accreditation Parks and Recreation Agencies for over 20 years and is a two-time National Gold Medal Award recipient. Henderson is committed to providing residents with a variety of diverse and inclusive programs classes and events. These programs are hosted at 70 neighborhood and community parks, seven aquatic facilities and eight recreation centers, including two centers for adults 50 and over.

Henderson has 3,995 acres of award-winning parks and open space, over 200 miles of hiking trails, and is home to a variety of special facilities such as a Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve, Water Street Plaza, Whitney Mesa Nature Preserve, BMX tracks, sports complexes and an equestrian park. Recreation programs incorporating all ages, individuals with disabilities, and many cultural and demographic groups, reach participants throughout Southern Nevada.

of location or infrastructure age. Additionally, environmental stewardship is at the forefront of programming and future development, ensuring responsible water use during unprecedented drought conditions. City of Henderson Parks and Recreation consistently achieves a 95% satisfaction rating from residents by providing an innovative approach to programming, dynamic cultural experiences, interconnected and safe trails, revitalization projects for under served areas, health and wellness initiatives and infrastructure investment in world-class sports and entertainment venues..

Strong strategic planning has provided 73% of Henderson residents access within a 10-minute walk to a park or trail. All parks are maintained at the same high-quality standards regardless



City of Plano Parks & Recreation Department Plano, Texas

Founded in 1968, Plano Parks and Recreation enriches Plano by providing inviting spaces, caring service, outstanding value, and memorable experiences. Nationally accredited since 1994, Plano Parks and Recreation has been ranked #1 in Texas since 2015 by The Trust for Public Land. A four-time winner of the National Gold Medal Award in Parks and Recreation Excellence, the Department delivers quality of life services to people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities

through a robust system of parks, trails, recreation programs and facilities.

The Department is an active participant in health and wellness initiatives and partnerships benefiting the community at-large. Plano Parks and Recreation's 4,376 acres of parkland includes 85 park sites, 69 playgrounds, 100 miles of recreational trails, more than 100 competition fields, 29 lighted tennis/pickleball courts, three performing arts venues, a railway museum, nine swimming pools, six recreation centers, a championship golf course, a skate park, a tennis center, a retreat center, and two nature preserves.

The Department's array of recreational opportunities appeals to a variety of interests and cultures and encourages connecting with nature while creating active and healthy lifestyles. From guided nature walks and family camp-outs to archery lessons, aquatics, fine arts, and more, Plano residents took advantage of more than 7,000 enriching course offerings last year. Thanks to a long history of visionary planning and continued public support, as well as new advances in technology, Plano Parks & Recreation is poised for another 50 years of excellence in the community.

Roseville Parks, Recreation & Libraries

Roseville, California

Roseville Parks, Recreation & Libraries (PRL) is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for the residents of Roseville, California. Recently surpassing 150,000 residents, Roseville is one of the fastest growing cities in the nation. PRL's commitment to providing accessible green space is demonstrated by 84% of residents having a park within a 10-minute walk. Eighty-one parks cater to various interests and ages, and PRL preserves nearly 4,000 acres of open space for exploration and recreation. Those wanting to stay fit and active can visit PRL's fitness center, enjoy its two golf courses, or cool off in one of three swimming pools, while the community center serves as a hub for social gatherings and community events.

Thousands of school-aged children learn, recreate, and are cared for each day at 19 Adventure Clubs. PRL's diverse programs and events

engage residents of all ages, attracting more than 1.5 million program participants and facility visitors annually. Learning is supported and encouraged at the department's three libraries, offering a variety of resources and educational opportunities. The Native American museum and historic site offer a glimpse into the region's past, honoring and celebrating its significance. Embracing progress and future development, PRL's Strategic Master Plan guides its efforts. Exciting upcoming projects include the opening of a regional soccer complex and 10 new parks in the next two years. Thanks to dedicated staff, strong City leadership, and a supportive community, PRL is honored to be a National Gold Medal Award Finalist for the second year in a row.



South Suburban Park and Recreation District

Littleton, Colorado

South Suburban Park and Recreation District excels at its mission of fostering healthy living through stewardship of the environment, parks, trails, and open space and by providing top-notch recreation services and programs. As a unique CAPRA-accredited, special district, the organization serves more than 150,000 residents across three counties and six cities. Collaboration is the key to the management of South Suburban's resources as it joins forces with municipal, private, and public organizations to provide 98% of its residents with recreation opportunities within .5 miles of their home.

The District earned more than \$4.8 million in grants for improvements to more than 40 of its 92 parks. Community-driven decision-making

is a priority as South Suburban embarks on new trends, including an eSports Lounge, renovated Pilates reformer room, and new pickleball facilities. Public input is a focus as staff gathered information from 15 events and more than 2,000 surveys to complete the 2022 Master Plan, which will guide the District for the next five years. In keeping up with an expanding population, planning is underway for an 80-acre regional park and facilities to serve 20,000 new residents.

South Suburban is already one of the largest providers of senior programming, serving nearly



9,000 insurance-benefit plan members. The organization's offerings expand outside traditional agencies, including a hotel, food pantry, botanical gardens and entertainment center. Innovative ideas, such as an old ice arena repurposed into a temporary tennis facility, and a board room reimaged into a private hockey school, exemplify impactful revenue-driven partnerships.

Agency Class III 2023 Finalists



Representing the heart and innovative spirit of downstate Illinois is Champaign Park District. Champaign is the 3rd fastest growing community in Illinois and is home to a diverse population of nearly 90,000 residents. Champaign Park District manages 62 parks, over 700 acres of green space, and 15 facilities that bring the community together for unique recreational opportunities. Over 1,400 programs and special events each year create unforgettable moments for individuals of all ages and backgrounds. Champaign Park

District consistently finds new ways to increase access to recreation. Champaign Parks Foundation distributed over \$120,000 in scholarship funds providing equal access to swim lessons, day camps, and special recreation. In the last three years, nearly 3 million dollars in grant funding has supported cultural arts programs, trails expansion, ADA improvements, and historic site upkeep.

Champaign Park District is an environmental steward – finding new ways to connect the community with nature and increase sustainable practices. Conservation expands beyond the parks to historic facilities like the restored Virginia Theatre and Springer Cultural Arts Center. Champaign Park District is invested in keeping our

Champaign Park District Champaign, Illinois

community healthy and engaged by increasing access to garden plots, fitness trails, and healthy cooking classes for teens and seniors. With a mission to enhance our community's quality of life through positive experiences in parks, recreation, and cultural arts, Champaign Park District strives to bring innovation and a welcoming spirit to our residents and visitors. Champaign Park District - a place to recreate together, embrace our similarities, and celebrate our differences.



New Braunfels Parks and Recreation focuses on small town charm and big city fun. Home to 90,000 residents, our city is a welcome combination of natural resources, recreation, and community. The CAPRA accredited department oversees 700 acres of parkland, two recreation centers, 18-hole championship golf course, Nature Center, Comal River Tube Chute, 21 historic sites and a wide variety of parks, trails and specialty facilities.

and maintaining an arboretum with over 80 species of trees. Fun is always close at hand for our citizens. Programs and events focusing on health, heritage, family, and friendly competition provide many options for our customers.

Employee development is a hallmark of NBPARD. Staff are encouraged to be active with professional organizations within their respective disciplines.

City of New Braunfels Parks and Recreation New Braunfels, Texas

Protection of our natural resources is a priority focus in New Braunfels. Conservation projects include protecting the fragile Comal Springs and endangered species, restoring over 30 acres of endangered Blackland prairie,

Staff hold forty-one unique certifications. Employee development plans assist employees achieve desired goals. In three years, thirteen staff were internally promoted, and three employees promoted to positions externally. Our department engages when the community needs it most including the pandemic (providing outdoor, virtual, and modified fitness and childcare programs) to the great winter storm of 2021 (assisting with warming centers and water distributions). As our founders discovered and we still know today. . . in New Braunfels ist das leben schon (the living is good)!

Plainfield Park District Plainfield, Illinois

The Plainfield Park District has actively been serving its 110,000 residents since 1966. Located in the southwest suburbs Chicago, it is the ninth largest park district in the State of Illinois, covering more than 43 square miles between a multitude of municipalities including Plainfield as well as parts of Joliet, Romeoville, Crest Hill and Bolingbrook. The District incorporates a variety of open space and amenities. Through its 20-plus miles of regional water trails and multi-use pathways, 90 park sites over 1,500-plus acres, and 10,000-plus programs, the District provides recreational opportunities for the entire community, from toddlers to active adults.

The Plainfield Park District strives to serve its constituency by adhering to its core values as its operating pillars. The values of Community, Fiscal Responsibility, Stewardship of Natural Resources,

Health & Wellness, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are evident throughout the District but shine especially bright with the 2019 construction of the Prairie Activity & Recreation Center. The 40,000-square-foot, NetZero-designed facility achieved Passive House certification in 2019, meaning it creates as much energy as it uses. The District has taken an innovative, diverse and inclusive approach to recreation and preservation to enhance the lives of a rapidly-growing, every-changing populace. Responding to a common theme from surveys, the District established the Welcome Everyone platform, featuring free events that unite and welcome thousands of participants of varying ages, races, abilities and genders. Plainfield Park



District has been recognized nationally, state-wide, and locally, but our greatest recognition comes daily from those we serve.

Waukegan Park District Waukegan, Illinois

The Waukegan Park District manages 53 properties and more than 742 acres of land, while providing outstanding creative and innovative programming. The District is committed to providing parks, facilities and recreation opportunities to the culturally diverse population of nearly 90,000 residents. There are a variety of experiences supporting health and wellness, equity, and conservation education. Programs and services are provided to all abilities and information is in English and Spanish to reach the diverse population. Hundreds of low-cost programs are offered and more than 30% of programming is free. An average of \$33,000 in scholarships is given annually to families in need, breaking down barriers and allowing access for all.

The indoor fitness facility provides the community

with free indoor walking to improve health, and there are numerous paved walking paths incorporated into park renovations along with accessible playground equipment. Nature education is integrated into programming to promote conservation education. The staff and community are involved in the planning process through public input meetings, committees, surveys, and social media engagement. Continuous improvements to parks, facilities, and programs are ensured through accountability to deliver outstanding parks and services for our community. These efforts have been recognized nationally and statewide by the NRPA Commission for Accreditation of Park and



Recreation Agencies, Government Finance Officers Association, Illinois Association of Museums and Illinois agency accreditation (IAPD/IPRA). Through leadership, community involvement and dedicated staff, the Waukegan Park District has been serving its residents in innovative ways for more than 100 years, with more to come!

Agency Class IV 2023 Finalists

Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services Bristol, Connecticut



Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services (BPRYCS) is the 2nd largest municipal park system in Connecticut and one of the top ten largest municipal park systems in New England. Rated as the #1 thing residents love about Bristol, the department oversees 730 acres of urban parks, hundreds of recreational programs, three aquatics facilities, counseling and case management for youth and community members, a federal drug free communities program, and a community theater. The organization has evolved from a

traditional parks department to a comprehensive full-service agency that impacts every aspect of how people live, play, and work in the City of Bristol. The integration of youth and community services has fostered service alignments

that have increased access to resources, while a new arts and culture division has resulted in public art installations and the development of a cultural district. BPRYCS is known nationally for its innovative and award-winning programs and facilities, which continue to expand access to recreation and advance social equity.

The department is committed to engaging in diversity, equity, and inclusion work to fully

deliver high-quality services and facilities that enhance the community's quality of life, meet the diverse needs of all citizens, and build a sustainable future. For close to a century, the Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services Department has served as an essential department impacting the lives of all Bristol residents by shaping positive public perceptions, fostering cultural unity, creating responsible and healthy citizens, and inspiring advocacy.



Douglasville Parks and Recreation Douglasville, Georgia

Located 30 miles west of Atlanta, Douglasville is a vibrant community to live, grow, and thrive. Douglasville Parks and Recreation Department (DPRD) commitment to our community aligns with the National Recreation and Park Association's three pillars.

Led by our social equity plan, our environmental sustainability strategy, and our healthy futures initiative, these focus areas drive our pledge to

provide equitable opportunities for our residents. Serving as one of the thirteen CAPRA accredited agencies in Georgia, DPRD offers over 100 programs and events catered to ALL.

Through our "Impact That Matter" campaign, we have

invested \$27 million dollars in historically under served communities. This includes building a new gymnasium, senior center, football stadium and 5,000 sq ft zero entry swimming pool. Recognizing inclusion has no boundaries, we have provided over \$15,000 to families through our "Dare 2 Play" Scholarship Program. This initiative allows youth the opportunity to participate in any one of our programs regardless of financial hardship.

Through intentional planning we were able to complete 90% of the recommendations outlined in the Parks & Recreation Master Plan, focusing on parks and facilities, staffing, and program operations. Our mission is to plan for inclusion, build with intention, and care for all.

Hoffman Estates Park District

Hoffman Estates, Illinois

The Hoffman Estates Park District (HEParks) is an award-winning Illinois agency. A previous National Gold Medal Award winner and 2022 finalist, we are CAPRA accredited twice and have recently earned a third perfect score from our evaluation team. Our Agency prides itself on “making life fun!” We have two recreation/fitness centers with gymnasiums, programming space and DCFS certified childcare. Our Triphahn Center has two standard NHL size ice rinks and is the official practice facility of the Chicago Wolves.

The Club, our 100,000+ square foot fitness center, has an indoor activity pool and lap pool, and with three full-size basketball courts, is the official practice facility of the Windy City Bulls. Our 18-hole Bridges of Poplar Creek golf course includes a state of the art ten-bay heated Toptracer range and simulator, the first in our area, providing

year-round golf. We continually offer new programs, and last year introduced 46 new offerings with a 74% success rate. Our 88 parks are colorful with imaginative ways to play; from nature to ninja warrior courses, these are not your conventional playgrounds! We do more with less reliance on taxes, with innovative personnel and alternative revenues, including grants, we have one of the lowest tax to total expense ratios in Illinois for an agency our size. HEParks supports NRPAs three pillars, ensuring open access to parks, facilities, and 14 miles of walking/biking trails. Our wide selection of programs and amenities allows us to deliver our mission, “providing the best in park and recreation services.”



Park District of Oak Park

Oak Park, Illinois

Established in 1912, the Park District of Oak Park has a long history of developing green space and offering recreational opportunities for our residents. Oak Park is located immediately west of Chicago and encompasses just 3.5 miles N/S and 1.5 miles E/W. We serve 53,000+ residents with only 84 acres of land. Thus, staff must be creative when offering our 3,000+ programs and maintaining our spaces.

The District is proud that our sustainability commitment aligns with the expectations of our residents. We implement best practices through construction of LEED, Net Zero, and Passive House designs for our facilities as well as the installation of bio-swales, solar arrays, rain-harvesting, geo-thermal, and other strategies to preserve energy and help protect mother earth.

We also have our own Conservatory where staff grow native perennials and annuals that are planted in our parks, and we do not use any herbicides or pesticides on our green spaces including sport fields.

Reaching under-resourced and under-served residents is a priority for PDOP. We have expanded our financial assistance offerings to serve more families in need. The Community Recreation Center offers free after-school programs for grades 6-12 as well as free access to the indoor walking track for all residents. Finally, our DEI Committee focuses on diversifying engagement efforts through partnerships to help us reach



new audiences for PDOP involvement, we built inclusive restrooms and locker rooms in our CRC, and we published a language guide to assist staff. We strive for inclusion of all.

Agency Class V 2023 Finalists



Cullman Parks, Recreation, and Sports Tourism Cullman, Alabama

Cullman, Alabama's story is greatly influenced by Cullman Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism. Through partnerships and community support, CPRST invests in educational programs, public parks, inspiring structures, local events, and regional festivals that continue to attract families and tourists alike.

CPRST makes it a goal to find opportunities that enhance the city while supporting local business owners and the economic development for the future growth of the community. In the last few years, CPRST has fulfilled many of the needs of the people who live, work and play in the Cullman area while continuing to look for more ways to enhance the quality of life in Cullman.



Macedonia Parks & Recreation Department Macedonia, Ohio

and a strong network of volunteers and partnerships, the department's progression has been exponential.

We received an innovation grant from OPRA and partnered with NOPEC to complete

2 ballfield LED light installations through a \$90,000 grant. We continue demonstrating creative solutions to fulfill the needs within our department by introducing two full-time positions, increasing wages, and offering free membership for staff. We also address needs within our community by re-purposing facility space, infrastructure improvements, and establishing new field space. Since 2020, we have completed

\$750,000 of department improvements, we have added a new dock, fitness turf, facility LED lighting, and new fitness equipment to better serve our community. Through our 5 year-strategic plan, another \$4.8 million is planned through 2027, with a focus on program and facility expansion. Through the execution of our values of excellence in community, sustainability, and service, we continue adapting to the evolving needs within our community, and planning for what's to come, while pushing sustainable efforts to leverage resources to maximize our impact for the future.

While the City of Macedonia has a population of only 12,000, the Parks and Recreation Department is robust both in park space and offerings. Our 350+ acres of land hosts more than 25,000 people over the course of 9 events, over 2,700 participants in 34 programs, and nearly 125,000 visits to our Recreation Center annually. Our programs have seen record-high participation, launching our department to new heights. As a result of extensive planning, a culture of leadership,

Oak Brook Park District Oak Brook, Illinois

The Oak Brook Park District (OBPD) was founded in 1962 with a mission to provide the very best in parks and recreational opportunities, facilities, and open lands for our community. Today, this CAPRA-accredited agency serves an aging residential population of about 8,000 and over 100,000 corporate residents. The OBPD's 10-Year Master Vision has directed the prioritization of capital improvements within the 173.4 acres of property we own and maintain, 40 of which are dedicated to preserving the Dean Nature Sanctuary. The OBPD also owns and maintains Central Park. This park is home to the Family Recreation Center, an aquatic center, and our award-winning Oak Brook Tennis Center. The most recent additions to Central Park include the acquisition of 34 acres of land, currently under construction, the Sandlot, a completely accessible playground, and the

Winter Lights at Central Park, an illumination created during the pandemic, which brought more than 90,000 visitors over the past three years.

Our award-winning preschool provides a responsive educational experience that welcomes children with special needs to learn alongside their peers. The OBPD has established the nation's first certified deep water running class to better meet the needs of those with limited mobility, and the annual Pink 5k has generated over \$130,000 to provide free mammograms to uninsured women in surrounding communities. From innovative programming to state-of-the-art facilities, over 225 staff work



passionately to create opportunities that help our community feel the very best and be the very best.”

Sycamore Park District Sycamore, Illinois

This year the Sycamore Park District celebrates its 100th anniversary and the Board and staff are honored to be a National Gold Medal Award Finalist during this special time. In recent years, facilities and services have undergone a significant expansion to support a growing community of approximately 18,000 residents. As they move forward, the District leadership team is committed to setting a precedence of sustainability for the next 100 years.

In 2021, to guide responsible resource management and effective goal setting, the Board identified new mission and vision statements while also defining a set of core values: equity, transparency, sustainability, and connections. Conversations and initiatives related to diversity, equity, and inclusion have been brought to the

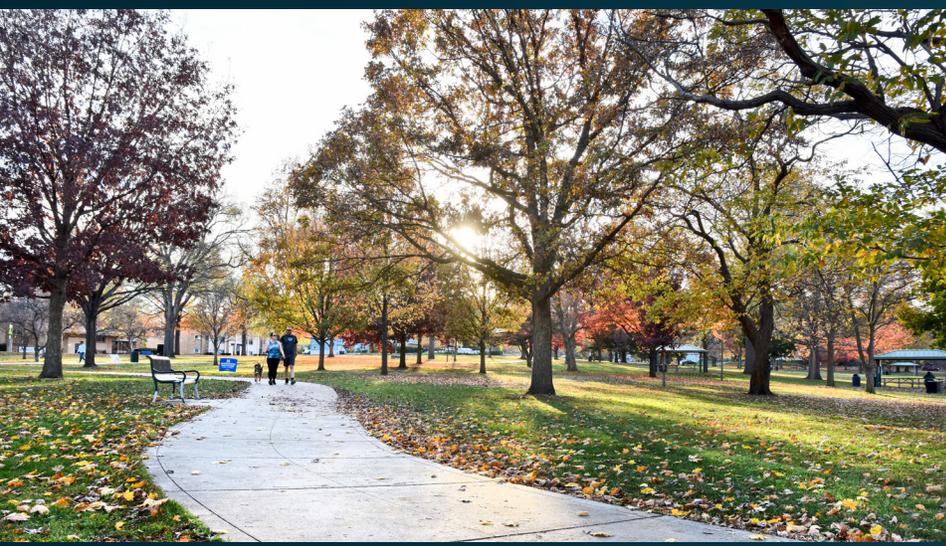
forefront of planning, service, and community outreach. Through purposeful, proactive communication the Board and staff set a standard for transparency that builds trust and keeps the community informed. A commitment to sustainability supports Sycamore's plant and animal communities and ensures today's actions lay the groundwork to provide a vibrant park system for future generations. Finally, the District continues to maintain meaningful connections and provide spaces for residents to do the same. As the agency grows so does the opportunity to strengthen and diversify these important relationships. The Board and staff are thrilled to see these initiatives come to life



among the Sycamore Park District's 21 parks, Community Center, 18-hole golf course, two sports complexes, dog park, and splash pad as they continue the mission and legacy of connecting Sycamore to wellness, nature, and each other.











Musco Lighting

Congratulates All 2023 National Gold Medal Award Program Finalists

From the Heartland to the Gulf Coast, from the Smoky Mountains to the Rockies, and around the globe, park and recreation professionals are committed to improving their communities through dedicated service. Musco Lighting is proud to recognize the efforts of individuals and agencies making a difference in the lives of so many, increasing opportunities for life-enhancing activities at all levels.

Whether it's pools, trails, nature, sports, environmental restoration, or green space improvement; the activities, programs, and management efforts of these dedicated organizations span the broad range of interests and needs in their communities. All finalists are actively involved in finding the solutions best suited for their communities, and their communities are better for it.

Through the expansion of programs devoted to the well-being and health of their citizens, recreation and parks departments are positively impacting current and future generations with better prospects for healthy lifestyles, communities, and environments. Musco salutes these programs and the people who have brought them to life.



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