

2011 NACPRO Excellence in Parks Awards

The NACPRO awards program is intended to recognize and honor excellence in county park and recreation endeavors throughout the nation and to share best practice ideas with other agencies. NACPRO hopes its awards program will encourage dreamers and dreams.

NACPRO recognizes member agencies for successful park and recreation facilities, programs, environmental/conservation initiatives, historical/cultural projects, and removing barrier initiatives.

NACPRO encourages interested readers to learn more about these projects by contacting the winning agencies.

The winners of the 2009 NACPRO County Parks excellence awards are listed and described below.

Outstanding Public Official

The Outstanding Public Official Award is presented to a nominated, elected or appointed federal, state, or local official (including commissioner or board member) who has contributed significantly to the benefit of county level parks, recreation, leisure services and open space programs.

This year's award recognized Pecky Lewis, nominated by the Oakland County Parks & Recreation Commission in Michigan.

Pecky Lewis has served as Chairman of the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission for 18 years and has been a commissioner member for 30 years. He remains on the commission as a Chairperson Emeritus when funds have been scarce.



Under his leadership and guidance,

Oakland County benefited from significant park acquisitions, including 1,042 acre Lyon Oaks, 623 acre Rose Oaks, 264 acres in Highland Oaks, and 347 acres of environmentally important property adjacent to Addison Oaks.

In addition, significant projects included opening of the wave pool at Red Oaks Waterpark and Dog Park, renovations to Addison Oaks and Groveland Oaks campgrounds, and a 4,000 square-foot addition to Wint Nature Center.

Mr. Lewis was instrumental in the development and implementation of a 10-year strategic Master Plan for Oakland County Parks, focusing on major initiatives such as customer service, marketing, improving efficiencies, exploring alternative revenue sources, and educational programs.

This year's second Outstanding Public Official Award went to Nelson Meade, nominated by the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission in Michigan.

Nelson Meade has served as a member of the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission for over 37 years, and has been a member since its establishment in 1973. He served as its President for 15 years, and is currently serving as its Secretary.

The Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission has developed a county park system and recreation program that ranks among the best in the state of Michigan. These successes are a direct result



of the vision and commitment of the members of the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission, and most notably, Nelson Meade.

Outstanding Contributor Award

The Outstanding Contributor Award is presented to an individual who has made a significant contribution of land or fiscal resources to county parks and recreation.

This year's Outstanding Contributor Award went to Donald Bren, nominated by Orange County Parks.

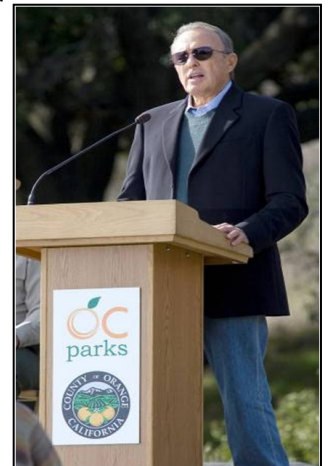
Donald Bren, Chairman of the Irvine Company, donated 20,000 acres of protected open space to the County of Orange.

The gift represents the largest single donation of land to the public in Orange County's history, and increased County parkland by 50 percent, from 40,000 to 60,000 acres.

With this gift, Mr. Bren and the Irvine Company have set aside 50,000 acres of parks, open space and trails of the original more than 100,000 acre Irvine Ranch.

The land is a significant environmental resource that has been transferred to public ownership.

It characteristically belongs to the Mediterranean Climate Zone, and although it only covers 2 percent of the Earth's landmass, it contains 20 percent of the plant species found on the planet.



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It encompasses a large portion of the historic Irvine Ranch, and is designated a National Natural Landmark by the U.S. Department of Interior and a California Natural Landmark by the California Department of Parks and Recreation. This honor recognizes the geological and ecological significance and the exceptional value of these lands to California and the entire nation.

OC Parks now stands ready to fulfill Mr. Bren's wish of increasing public access while maintaining conservation responsibilities on the property. His donation transferred this magnificent open space into public stewardship, to be enjoyed in perpetuity by people for generations to come.

Outstanding Volunteer

The Outstanding Volunteer award is presented to an individual who has made a significant contribution of personal time and talent to county parks and recreation.

This year's Outstanding Volunteer Award was presented to two outstanding volunteers - **Barb and George Carley**, nominated by Anoka County Parks, Minnesota.

For 17 years, the Carleys have made the campground at Bunker Hills Regional Park their summer home. Serving as campground hosts, they have each volunteered over 3,000 days of service, totaling an amazing 74,000 hours on site.

Every day, Barb and George are available at their permanent campsite, ready to assist campers during their stay, helping with check-ins, park information, wood sales and more.

They are incredible ambassadors the 25,000 campers who visit Bunker Hills Campground each year.

They recently announced that 2011 will be the last season at Bunker Hills.

Anoka County Parks will attempt to fill the very large shoes that they are leaving behind.

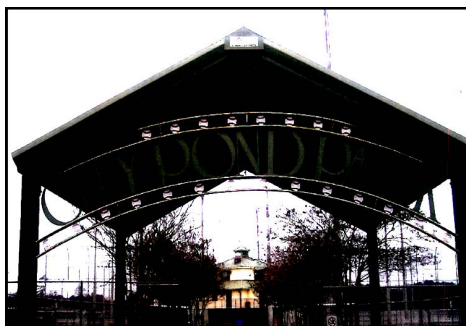


Outstanding Support

The Outstanding Support Award is presented to an organization that has made a major contribution to benefit park and recreation programs or facilities.

The contribution may be in terms of facility or program development, operation or support.

The 2011 Outstanding Support Organization Award goes to **SteelCo Buildings Inc.**, and the Newton County Recreation Commission. "Making dreams become a reality" is not only part of SteelCo's corporate



vision statement, but also a corporate mission for their community.

The three young principals of the company, Shane Millwood, Denny Hewell and Jason Smith maintain a positive "can-do" attitude in all of their community endeavors.

SteelCo contributed finances to complete a renovation project at City Pond Complex, and again to complete a marsh bridge at Turner Lake Complex.

Their gift of materials, time and money was extremely generous during these tough economic times.

In addition to their parks and recreation contributions, they are strong supporters in the community through many different recreation programs. They have coached sports programs, raised money for cancer treatment for a volunteer coach, and are major supporters of the "Relay for Life."

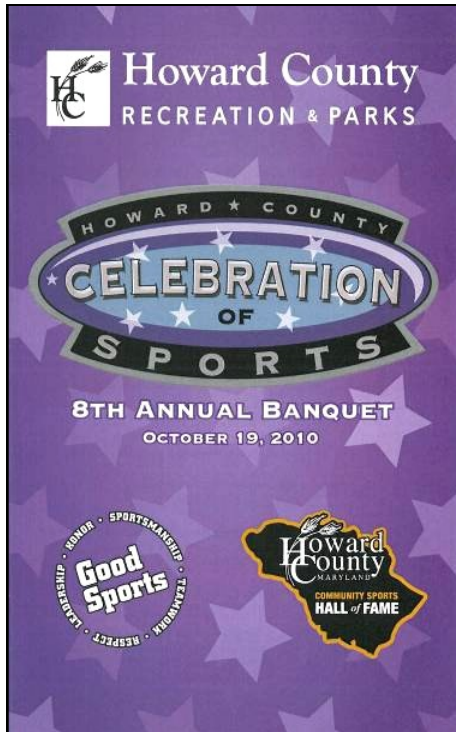
Park and Recreation Program

The Park and Recreation Program Awards recognize county park and recreation agencies for unique or exceptional programs, activities, or events which provide an outstanding example for other agencies. In Class I, we recognize the programs of those agencies from counties with a population under 500,000.

The first Class I Program Award goes to "Celebration of Sports" program offered by **Howard County Department of Parks and Recreation** in Maryland.

The **8th Annual Celebration of Sports** banquet has been an integral part of Howard County's commitment to the growth of recreational sports in the community. Last year, 43 people were recognized at this important event.

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Past keynote speakers at this event include former Baltimore Bullet Phil Chenier, University of Maryland broadcasting legend Johnny Holliday, Baltimore Colt Pro Bowler Joe Ehrmann, and two-time Super Bowl referee Terry McAulay.

In 2005, the Community Sports Hall of Fame inductions were added to the Celebration of Sports program, and 43 members have been inducted during the past five years. These honorees have made substantial contributions to recreation in Howard County in all sports, including football, baseball, soccer, lacrosse, swimming, ice skating, and the Special Olympics. Also honored are Good Sports Award winners, who are coaches, league administrators and teammates who always demonstrate a positive attitude on the field.

The second Class I Award goes to **Lake Metroparks** for their **Aquatic Adventures Program**. Lake Metroparks created a program

to offer never before boating education classes on Lake Erie, one of the largest freshwater lakes in the world.

Last year, Aquatic Adventures facilitated 207 boating programs for 3,495 participants of all ages during a 3-month summer period.

The agency's fleet of watercraft is now at 60 vessels, due to partnerships and grants with the United States Coast Guard, the Ohio Division of Watercraft, Spirit of America Foundation, and the National Water Safety Congress, as well as generous donations from local boaters. Because of these revenues, Lake Metroparks now offer classes in kayaking, sailing, power boating, jet skiing, and paddle boarding. Programs include Captain Kids Adventures, sailing camps, moonlight paddles, sea kayaking, dog paddles, adaptive boating, and canoeing. Certification classes were held for ACA Canoe and Kayaking, USSA Sailing and Power Boating, National Water Safety Congress PWC Training, and the Ohio Boating Education license course.



In one program alone, the Spirit of America Youth Boating Program, 168 seventh grade students completed a 40-hour on-the-water program where they became proficient in five types of watercraft, patrolled on a U.S. Coast Guard rescue boat, and received their Ohio boating license – all at no cost to the students.

Moving on to Program Class II Awards, NACPRO recognizes the programs of those agencies from counties with a population over 500,000.

The first award winner is the **Camino de Esperanza program from OC Parks**.

OC Parks and the Orange County Probation Department created an innovative new program at the Youth Leadership Academy (YLA) in the fall of 2010.

This program, named "Camino de Esperanza" (or "Trail of Hope"), organized field trips for incarcerated youth at YLA to OC Parks facilities to educate and inspire each of the participants.



This goal of this program was to allow these at-risk youths to experience an "outdoor classroom" in a natural environment to learn about habitat, adaptation and biology from subject-matter experts.

The hope was that outdoor activities could be seen as a positive diversion

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for these young men when they are released from custody.

These experiences made a positive impact to the participants involved, as exhibited by their behavior and comments throughout the program. These visits also had a positive effect on park rangers, and they were excited to help at-risk youth by sharing their love of the outdoors.

The second award winner for Class II Programs goes to the **Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation** for their **Parks After Dark** Program.

The Parks After Dark program was designed as a component of the Los Angeles County's Gang Violence Reduction Initiative to keep parks open after hours, to enhance a neighborhood resource and create a stronger sense of community. This provided low-cost or free activities to families for recreation during the summer months.

This program was offered at three L.A. County parks that are heavily impacted by gang activity. These parks were opened Wednesday through Saturday evenings during summer months, and these extra operating hours improved quality of life for residents and increased community relationships.

By offering interesting and enjoyable programming for youth during their summer break, this program offered an alternative to gangs and violence. The Sheriff's Department provide additional law enforcement presence and community outreach



during these months, and reported a reduction in criminal activity in the surrounding neighborhoods. L.A. County Parks combined with positive programs can be a low cost alternative to gang violence reduction.

Areas and Facilities

The Areas and Facilities Awards are presented to recognize and honor excellence in recreation and park facilities; to focus national attention (both public and professional) on the very best facility design; to encourage outstanding efforts in planning, design, construction, and benefits to the community; and to be a resource of information for the highest quality of facility development.

Starting with Class I for populations under 500,000, the first award winner is **Douglas County, CO** for their East West **Regional Trail** – West Section.



The East-West Regional Trail extends 26 miles through the southern edge of metropolitan Denver. This multi-use trail was first envisioned by a citizen's group from equestrian, hiking and cycling groups in 1986.

The regional trail was officially opened at a ribbon cutting ceremony in June 2010.

The East-West Regional Trail is a unique recreational opportunity that gives wilderness trail access for 500,000 residents.

The trail offers sweeping vistas of the Continental Divide while being

located near a major metropolitan area, and also connects with the state-wide trail system via the Colorado Trail.

The second Class I Facility award belongs to **Anoka County, MN** for the **Bunker Beach Water Park** expansion project.



The newly expanded Bunker Beach is now the largest and most heavily used outdoor water park in Minnesota.

In 2010, the park received 122,000 visitors and generated \$1.7 million in revenue.

The project was completed under budget and on-time for the June 5th, 2011 opening.

The Parks and Recreation Department also partnered with the County Library system to sponsor the Grand Opening and support learn to read programs.

The first of two Facility Awards for Class II organizations belongs to **Riverside County, CA** and the **Rancho Jurupa Park**.



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Rancho Jurupa Park opened in 1981 adjacent to the Santa Ana River, and has been a crown jewel of the Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District for many years.



In 2004, an ambition plan to make improvements to the park became possible due to grant funding.

These improvements were made from April 2008 to March 2011 at a cost of \$13,000,000.

Improvements included more than 50 camping sites with full utilities, a new water splash pad, a new miniature golf course and boulder play area.

The park also received a new entryway, kiosk, camp store, irrigation drainage, and sewer and water improvements to meet water quality needs in the greater Santa Ana River watershed.

Rancho Jurupa Park now offers an array of amenities for camping and recreation for the greater Riverside area.

The response from visitor has been overwhelmingly positive, with a 50% increase in campground reservations, and a 99% satisfaction rating.

The second award in the Class II Facility category belongs to the **County of San Diego Parks and Recreation** for their **Sweetwater Campground** improvements.

Originally conceived as a 160 campground site in 1987, Phase I of Sweetwater campground was completed in 1988 with 53 operational RV spaces with utilities, fire rings, picnic tables, restrooms and other amenities.

Phase II was completed in March of 2011 and was designed to maximize valley and mountain views while expanding the number of RV sites and amenities.

Phase II improvements include 56 additional RV campsites, ADA accommodations throughout the project site, paved roads and direct access to regional multi-use trails that link the mountains to the Pacific Ocean.



An open amphitheater is the focal point of the new expansion, with easy access for users to enjoy the beautiful views.

Additional new amenities include an interactive water play area, tot lots, picnic areas and a community building that overlooks the Sweetwater Reservoir and the San Miguel wildlife preserve.

Seven additional campsites were included in the project as part of mitigation requirements by CALTRANS.

Environmental/Conservation

The Environmental/Conservation Award is presented each year to recognize an exceptional effort to reclaim, restore, preserve or acquire, unique natural areas and programs.

The first award goes to **Anoka County Parks (MN)** for the **Cedar Creek Conservation Area**.

Anoka County Parks took an innovative approach in acquiring a 590 acre conservation area.

This land acquisition serves as a model for other agencies seeking to protect large open spaces through a combination of creative partnerships, a new statewide conservation funding program, and skillful negotiations by a national land trust.

By spending significant effort in grand funding, land purchase negotiation, interagency planning, public outreach and legislative activity, \$3.8 million in state funds were secured to complete the land purchase.

The result is the permanent protection of the largest undeveloped natural area in Anoka County, and one of the largest in the Metro Area.

After securing the funding, the Trust for Public Land was able to break a negotiation stalemate and significantly reduced the purchased price to the acquisition could be completed.



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Because of these efforts, the new conservation area is in the hands of Anoka County and is protected for all future generations.

Combined with the adjacent Rum River Central Regional Park, this area encompasses over 1,000 acres of the pristine wild land.

Another Conservation Award goes to the **County of San Diego's Department of Recreation** for its **Water Conservation program**.

The Department of Parks and Recreation resolved to reduce its water consumption at open space pre-

that include artificial turf ball fields, living roof and use of recycled water for irrigation, a splash park that recycles cleans and filters water, waterless urinals, low-flush toilets and efficient faucet change-outs. Since November of 2009, 17 facilities have saved 25 million gallons of irrigation water.

Historical/Cultural

The Historical/Cultural Facility Award is awarded to a unique facility development dedicated to historical or cultural preservation, recreation, and/or interpretation.

The next award also goes to the **County of San Diego** for the **Historic Bancroft Rock House** renovation project.

The Department of Parks and Recreation partnered with several groups to complete a \$523,000 restoration of the historic Bancroft Rock House.

This 5 year project was completed in 2010 and serves as an exemplary historic preservation effort on archaeologically sensitive soil.

The house was build by Hubert Howe Bancroft between 1885 and 1888, and was used as a guest-house, schoolroom, and was nota-



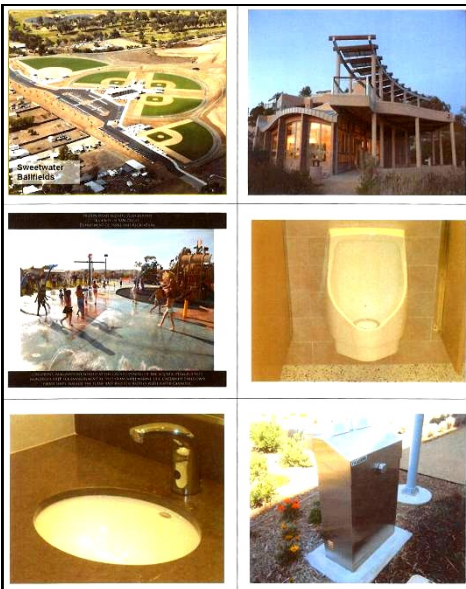
bly used by Bancroft himself while writing his epic volume on the history of California.

A Historic Structures Report documented changes through time and adequately identified missing elements to be restored.

The rock walls and fireplace were retain as distinctive craftsman features, while replacement features like the porch, roof and floor matched the originals in all respects

The restoration of the Bancroft Rock House enabled the Department to bring back the rich history of the region, and is currently used for educational purposes to inform the public about Hubert Howe Bancroft and his contributions to the western United States and San Diego.

The next Historical/Cultural Facility Award goes to **Newton County Recreation Commission (GA)** for



serves, local parks and regional parks.

A Water Conservation Plan was drafted to decrease water consumption and related costs, and to track and document the results

Water Conservation methods were broken down into near, medium and long term categories and prioritized measures that are the most cost effective, easy to implement, and maintained with relative ease.

This resulted in current methods



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their **Renovation of Wolverine Gym.**



R.L. Cousins High School was established in 1957 as an all black school in Newton County, It served the African-American community for thirteen years, and then became an integrated middle school until its closing in 1999.

During the years since its closing, the school was vacant and the site deteriorated. A group of community leaders formed the Cousins Community Center to preserve and restore the old school and its grounds.

Renovations to the gym was funded through grant funds and the help of neighboring Cousins Community Center.

Renovation cost was completed at half of the original estimate, and local contractors were used whenever possible to help local businesses stay open during the recession.

The refurbished gym is striking with its unique shape and soaring ceilings. The original bleachers and court have replaced, and adjacent offices and bathrooms have been updated. Members of the 1965 R.L. Cousins undefeated basketball team attended the dedication ceremony, a tribute to the tradition of the school's sports excellence.

Future plans for the gym include opening it to the public for basket-

ball and other athletic events.

Removing Barriers

The Removing Barriers Initiative is presented to an agency with a unique program or facility that enables and encourages greater participation in parks and recreation by persons with disabilities.

The first of these awards is given to **Clinton County Parks and Green Space Commission (MI)** for the **Motz County Park Beach House** improvements.

Departing from conventional restroom design, the beach house used unisex barrier-free restrooms, including a special needs restroom and wheelchair room to accommodate a variety of visitors. This design allows for private care of children and adults, allows for most of the restrooms to be available dur-



ing maintenance activities, and serves disabled citizens through special amenities.

Motz County Park has been well received by area residents with an estimated 70,000 visitors during last summer.

This design won many industry awards, including the National Multiple Sclerosis Society da Vinci Award for Accessibility.

Built at a total cost of \$172,532, or \$119 per square foot, this construction compares favorable to mid-Michigan commercial construction costs. The user friendly, functional design elements can be completed by other park agencies.

Another Removing Barriers Initiative Award goes to the **Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation** for their **Wheelchair Basketball** program.

The Wheelchair Basketball program was created at Cerritos Regional Park in 2007 to remove barriers facing athletes in wheelchairs.

One of only a few sports activities available to people with orthopedic disabilities, this program currently provides recreation to more than 50 individuals with spinal cord injuries.

The Wheelchair Basketball program serves a diverse ethnic and socio-economic population and plays an important role in the lives of its participants.

Each youth athlete must be enrolled in school and be in good academic standing.

Many mentors share their experiences and demonstrate to younger athletes that life does go on after spinal cord injury.

This program has become one of the most successful of its kind in the nation. Last year, both the Varsity and Champion teams became the second ranked team in the nation, and is expected to head back to nationals again this year.

This program continues to grow and give athletes with disabilities an opportunity to make their mark in the sports world.

