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Environmental/Conservation

Nominee: Can'd Aid Crush It Crusade

Nominee's Organization: Great Parks of Hamilton County, OH

Population:

A grant from the Can'd Aid Foundation helped Great Parks of Hamilton County (Great Parks) to not only continue to educate park guests about items that can be recycled and composted but also encouraged guests to carry out these green practices at home. The Can'd Aid Foundation awarded Great Parks with a \$7,446 Crush It Crusade grant in 2019 to implement a targeted waste diversion and education strategy at a series of large, one-day special events throughout the year. With a goal to create a zero-waste strategy at these events, Great Parks purchased 10 sustainability stations with the Crush It Crusade grant. These sustainability stations included colored-coded compost, recycling and waste bins featuring pictures and descriptions to show what was and wasn't acceptable per bin. From a park cleanup event in April to the Kids Outdoor Adventure Expo in summer, event attendance ranged from 100 to 4,000 guests. Great Parks employees and volunteers - called Zero-Waste Goalies - were trained on the park-wide initiative and manned the sustainability stations. Zero-Waste Goalies were trained before each event on what items were compostable, recyclable or what items were waste. Guests shared with goalies that they were primarily unaware that they were contributing to recycling contamination by placing wrong or unacceptable items in recycling bins. Great Parks and other agencies in Hamilton County focus on efforts to not only increase recycling and composting but also work to reduce contamination in recycling streams. Thanks to the Can'd Aid Crush It Crusade, Great Parks was able to divert an estimated 4,475 pounds of materials out of landfills and into recycling and compost in 2019. With parks throughout the county and daily interactions with guests, Great Parks is poised to be an example of sustainability in the local community through our actions, such as implementing this project.

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Environmental/Conservation

Nominee: Cranberry Slough

Nominee's Organization: Forest Preserves of Cook County, IL

Population:

Located in Willow Springs, Illinois in southwest Cook County, the Forest Preserves of Cook County's (FPCC) Cranberry Slough Nature Preserve is one of the region's premier natural areas. The 372-acre site is distinguished by its peat bog and rolling upland woods and is the fifth oldest nature preserve site in Illinois. It is uniquely situated for an urban preserve, located squarely within the fourteen thousand-acre Palos/Sag-Valley preserve system that comprises the largest contiguous tract within the FPCC's holdings. The FPCC's 2015 Natural and Cultural Resources Master Plan, developed in collaboration with the Prairie Research Institute at the University of Illinois, included a rigorous assessment of the FPCC's natural areas and Cranberry Slough emerged as the top ecological priority. Historically portions of the site were used for agriculture, timber harvest, and grazing. Insufficient ecological management and fire suppression further degraded the site through much of the 1900s. Despite this, the site maintained pockets of diverse plant communities and degraded areas showed a high potential for restoration. In 2015 the FPCC initiated a major restoration project at Cranberry Slough to remove invasive brush across 240 acres, connecting the higher-quality and previously restored portions of the preserve. Ecologists monitored the site and reported that native plants species had returned. To complement this restoration, the FPCC has accelerated efforts in surrounding preserves including clearing 500 acres of invasive brush, conducting an in-stream hydrologic repair project to stabilize a portion of Crooked Creek, a small stream that flows through the preserve, and engaging volunteers to help care for the site. The restoration of Cranberry Slough Nature Preserve ensures one of the region's most important natural areas continues to thrive and promotes the proliferation of rare native plant and animal species and ensures that future generations can experience this outstanding example of Illinois' natural heritage.

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Environmental/Conservation

Nominee: Dotson Family Marsh Restoration

Nominee's Organization: East Bay Regional Park District, CA

Population:

Founded in 1934, the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) today manages 73 diverse parklands serving 2.8 million residents in Alameda and Contra Costa counties, east of San Francisco. Great disparities in health outcomes are evidenced in communities based on zip codes and access to green open space and clean air. This is the case for the low-income African American community in Parchester Village, Richmond - sandwiched between two industrial railway tracks, next to polluting oil refineries and shipyards. Our Director Whitney Dotson, who recently passed away on January 8, 2020, at age 75, grew up in this village named after the financier/developer Fred Parr and his son Chester (hence, "Parchester"). Parr solicited the help of local ministers, including Whitney's father, Reverend Richard Dotson, to build 400 houses in the 1940's. In return for their help, Parr promised to keep the adjacent marsh that he owned, free from development. However, in the 1970's Parr sold the property to Gerald Breuner who planned to build a private airport and a housing development. The Dotson family and the community quickly mobilized to fight to keep the marshland wild and accessible. Whitney was elected to EBRPD Board of Directors in 2008. Under his leadership, EBRPD acquired the 150-acre property in 2011. EBRPD began the \$14 million wetland restoration in 2013 to accommodate sea-level rise. The restoration, completed mostly in 2017 and continues today, created a refuge for threatened and endangered species, while providing trails, picnic sites and dynamic bay experience for Parchester Village residents and thousands of San Francisco Bay hikers, bikers, and nature lovers. Annually, hundreds of schoolchildren visit the Dotson Family Marsh for ecological and climate change studies. This precious marshland symbolizes the triumph of a community and its allies fighting tirelessly for 40+ years for social and environmental justice. <https://www.sfestuary.org/climate-change-and-community-built-into-dotson-family-marsh/>

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Environmental/Conservation

Nominee: Electronics Recycling Day

Nominee's Organization: Great Parks of Hamilton County, OH

Population:

Great Parks of Hamilton County (Great Parks) focuses on conservation initiatives through preservation of green spaces and by encouraging sustainable practices within the community. 2019 marked the second year Great Parks partnered with Mount St. Joseph University Sustainability Committee to host Electronics Recycling Day. The objective for the initiative is to encourage residents to reduce the amount of electronic waste in landfills by recycling old, unwanted or broken electronics. In previous years, Electronics Recycling Day was held at Mount St. Joseph University, located on the west side of Hamilton County. By moving it to a more central location in the county at Winton Woods, 2019 saw a very significant uptick in the amount of electronics recycled than in past years. This program is unique in that it was open to everyone in the tristate area, not just Hamilton County residents. Similar programs offered in the Cincinnati area are only open to residents of the community they live in. Held Saturday, October 19, 2019 at Winton Woods Harbor, 508 vehicles came through in just over four hours. This resulted in 64,708 pounds (32.35 tons) of electronic waste collected, filling three semi trucks and three box trucks. This is over four times as many cars and a 350% increase in weight from 2018! Offering a convenient opportunity to dispose of old, unwanted or broken electronics for the region is vital in reducing waste in landfills where the components would further harm the environment. The partnership on this program has improved this event's accessibility, increased audience reach to educate about sustainability practices and has built a likeminded partnership, which opens more opportunities for future event growth. By providing ways for people to recycle locally, Great Parks is able to make an impact in protecting the environment on a larger scale.

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Environmental/Conservation

Nominee: Elk Creek MetroPark -Meadow Ridge Area - Nature Delivered!

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: MetroParks of Butler County, OH

Population:

Objective: Provide public enjoyment and access for thousands of individuals to 435 acres (a closed under-performing privately owned 36-hole golf course) in Madison Township, OH by acquiring, restoring, and re-purposing the site into a breathtaking natural public greenspace for passive recreational use.

The outcome is the creation of MetroParks largest park at 795 acres due to the addition of the 435 acres to the park system. The added property is now known as the Meadow Ridge Area of Elk Creek MetroPark. Efforts to date include the restoration of 29 Acres Upland Prairie; 41 Acres Native Grassland; 300 feet Stream, 140 feet Day-lighted Stream; 15 acres invasive honeysuckle, 36 greens, and pavement removed; 2,000 native trees planted and 617 volunteer hours contributed.

This video speaks volumes about how the public is responding and enjoying the park:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmA2Quj-ssQ>

This initiative was unique because MetroParks seized an opportunity created by the trend of closures of many golf courses nationally, utilized creative funding, and strategically expanded the project with state, in-house and other resources (<https://www.golfadvisor.com/articles/closed-golf-courses-in-2019>). The specific opportunity was the realization that a local failing private golf course could result in the acquisition, re-purposing, and conservation/restoration of significant acreage at little cost to the park system for passive public recreational use. Additionally, creative use of state and federal funds; an innovative partnership with the Trust for Public Land, and a seller's discount for most of the local match required by Clean Ohio funding left only \$10,000 coming from MetroParks levy funds. 99.5% of the funding came from outside sources! Also significant was the strategic execution of the restoration work and use of in-house resources and volunteers achieved substantially more acreage restored than planned.

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Environmental/Conservation

Nominee: Holiday Tree Sinking

Nominee's Organization: Five Rivers MetroParks, OH

Population:

The Dayton region's conservation leader, Five Rivers MetroParks protects more than 16,000 acres of land, which includes a variety of habitats. Five Rivers MetroParks and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) teamed up in winter 2018-2019 to bolster aquatic life in Eastwood MetroPark through a successful holiday tree sinking program, which would not have been possible without the public's help. A popular fishing, boating and paddling destination, attracting thousands of recreationists per year, Eastwood Lake is also home to a variety of wildlife. In 2018, ODNR's biennial aquatic survey at Eastwood Lake found the bass were not robust due to the lack of feeder fish in the lake. Originally a quarry, Eastwood Lake lacks natural foliage around the water so small feeder fish lacked habitat to thrive. Sinking tree structures would create food at the lowest levels of the aquatic habitat's food chain, eventually resulting in healthier bass populations. The public was engaged through unpaid social and traditional media efforts following the 2018 holiday season, which resulted in the donation of 700 trees. In January 2019, these trees were bundled and tied to cinder blocks - donated by Snyder Concrete - then sunk around the lake by MetroParks volunteers, staff and rangers. ODNR mapped where the structures were submerged, ensuring recreationists would have access to the information. Though ODNR conducts its research biennially, anglers have already seen noticeable improvements in the aquatic habitat. Additionally, the successful community engagement of this project allowed MetroParks to inform the public about the importance of conservation and local habitats. This important conservation project was completed with very little cost, and will ensure that the fish, bird and wildlife populations which rely on Eastwood Lake will thrive well into the future.

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Environmental/Conservation

Nominee: Hadley Valley Preserve Restoration

Nominee's Organization: Forest Preserve District of Will County, IL

Population:

During the early 2000's, the Forest Preserve District of Will County began acquiring agricultural land along the Spring Creek Greenway to connect to Messenger Woods Nature Preserve, a high-quality woodland and savanna. The most recent land acquisition was completed just last year in 2019. Now, twenty years after the start of the project, Hadley Valley is one of the Forest Preserve District's largest restoration efforts. Hadley Valley contains over 700 acres of wetland, prairie, and savanna communities restored in the Spring Creek Greenway. Multiple partners have contributed to the restoration, funding the installation of 148,000 native plugs, 7 tons of native seed, 32,000 trees and shrubs, disabling eight miles of drain tiles, and dechannelizing 3 miles of Spring Creek. Invasive species control, drainageway stabilization, native seedings, and prescribed burns have been performed to provide a diverse, high quality ecosystem for a plethora of fish, aquatic invertebrates, insects, herptiles, mammals, and birds. Several imperiled species, including the state threatened Slippershell Mussel, benefit from the restoration efforts that have improved stream habitat and water quality. Restored wetlands attract local and migratory waterfowl whom are dependent upon foraging and breeding in these ecosystems. Grassland bird surveys have shown Hadley Valley supports many conservative grassland and wetland bird species including the state endangered Northern Harrier, and many species that are in greatest need of conservation per the state wildlife plan such as: Dickcissel, Eastern Meadowlark, Grasshopper Sparrow, Henslow's Sparrow, Northern Bobwhite, and Marsh Wren. With its relatively large size and diverse habitats, Hadley Valley Preserve is becoming a birding hotspot. Hadley Valley boasts three public access areas including picnic shelters and nearly 5 miles of trails for visitors who wish to enjoy hiking, birding, and biking across the preserve.

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Environmental/Conservation

Nominee: Holiday Lights Recycling

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Great Parks of Hamilton County, OH

Population:

Great Parks of Hamilton County practices conservation initiatives through the preservation of green spaces and by encouraging residents to live sustainably. This season marked the sixth year Great Parks hosted its Holiday Lights Recycling program in partnership with Cohen, a locally owned company that specializes in industrial and electronics recycling. The program is the only one of its kind in the Cincinnati, Ohio region and reached record-breaking numbers as it continues to be a well-received option for residents. Running from November 1, 2019, through February 2, 2020, large recycling bins were conveniently placed at six park visitor centers throughout Hamilton County. Residents were encouraged to drop off broken, unused or unwanted holiday lights for collection at those locations. The lights were then gathered, processed and refined into materials to reenter the manufacturing stream and be made into new products. This keeps the lights out of landfills and reduces the need to mine new metals, which is an environmentally damaging process. This year, 11,500 pounds of lights were recycled, surpassing the 2018 amount by nearly 500 pounds. That is approximately 44,500 strands of lights that were recycled! As a part of the partnership, Cohen donated \$2,000 back to Great Parks with a matching donation that supports Great Parks' ongoing conservation initiatives. The Holiday Lights Recycling program started as a simple outreach idea in 2014 and has evolved into a service that residents of Hamilton County anticipate and expect every holiday season. It is another way that Great Parks fulfills its dedication to park supporters and its mission to continue and expand ongoing conservation initiatives throughout the region.

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Environmental/Conservation

Nominee: John C. and Margaret K. White Horticultural Park Restoration

Nominee's Organization: Fairfax County Park Authority, VA

Population:

A two-year ecological restoration of the John C. and Margaret K. White Horticultural Park (known as White Gardens) was completed in 2018. Located in a busy suburb of Washington, DC, the 13-acre property is the former residence of the Whites, who purchased the home in 1939. FCPA acquired the property in 1999 with the goal of using it to preserve and enhance horticultural resources while promoting stewardship of natural resources in an urban environment. Due to the historic value of the natural, cultural, and horticultural resources on the property, a cross-divisional team evaluated the potential for restoration of a three-acre field within the property. The team decided to restore the field by aligning it to the cultural landscape of the White family's 1930s residence. The firm hired to design the restored meadow included native plant species that would have been used in plant palettes at the time that the White family were investing in the property's horticultural resources. The design contained plant species lists comprised of only native plants suitable for northern Virginia in the coastal plain/piedmont physiographic province. The desire for a low maintenance natural landscape was achieved by this intuitive design and creative approach. The new grassland community was designed to efficiently manage non-native invasive species, promote the wildlife habitat and serve as an urban park setting for interpretive programs. Since completion, the project has enhanced ecosystem services to the surrounding landscape, such as pollination and pollinator population support and soil development. New wildlife such as goldfinches, monarchs and swallowtail butterflies have been observed in the grassland. It has also helped to improve water and air quality in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and has increased park usage and stewardship opportunities. The project has become a model for efficient and effective use of natural resources in urban parks.

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Environmental/Conservation

Nominee: North Mill Creek Channel Restoration

Nominee's Organization: Lake County Forest Preserves, IL

Population:

The 58-acre Rasmussen Lake at Ethel's Woods Forest Preserve was ranked as the second worst of the 162 lakes in the county for water quality largely due to the accumulation of deep, deposited sediments over the years North Mill Creek was impounded by an earthen dam. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency classified Rasmussen Lake Act as an Impaired Lake. The Lake was non-support for aquatic life, swimming and recreation. After many years of study, the Lake County Forest Preserve Board concluded the best alternative was to abandon the lake, modify the dam and restore the stream. The design team of engineers, geomorphologist and ecologist developed a restoration plan using natural channel design. Channel width and depths would vary based on the pool/riffle sequence and have a strong connection to the floodplain. Floodplain widths are variable, though designed to limit the total volume of sediments excavated out of the lake basin. The design mirrored the historic channel before the dam was in place allowing harvesting of buried gravel substrates and logs and rootwads were harvested from the site to stabilize the channel. The North Mill Creek Channel Restoration project was completed in two phases. Phase 1, involved construction of a sheet pile coffer dam to drain the lake. The dam was permanently modified in Phase 2 construction with the concrete spillway removed and a stable channel with a pool/ riffle pattern created through the accumulated sediments. The new channel is connected to a new floodplain with native, riparian vegetation. The restored 1.5-mile stream is visible from a new 1.5-mile trail with dramatic views of the rolling topography and oak-hickory woodland beyond. Watch a video of Ethel's Woods at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvfe5s_PvJc

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Environmental/Conservation

Nominee: Obregon Green Pilot Project

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 9.8 million

Once plagued by water and energy inefficiencies due to aging infrastructure, the 1960s era, 11-acre Obregon Park, was transformed into a model of sustainability thanks to the Obregon Green Pilot Project (Project). Completed in November 2018 and located in the economically disadvantaged community of East Los Angeles, the Project provides multiple benefits including mitigation of heat island effect and CO₂, water and energy conservation, and green space enhancement of a high-need area. The Project began in 2009 when a conceptual site plan and research document were developed to reduce the park's carbon footprint and promote environmental stewardship. In 2014 LA County Parks (Parks) was awarded an \$837,000 California State Urban Greening Grant to begin upgrading the park, which continued as additional funding became available. The completed Project has provided many benefits to the community and environment. Lighting upgrades help conserve energy and increase public safety. The park's new features promote environmental stewardship to an increasing number of visitors and generate awareness of climate change's impacts. The expansion of native trees decreases local air and water pollution. Park benefits have produced 270,000 kWh in energy savings, helping mitigate 20 metric tons of CO₂; 30,000 square feet of permeable paving helps improve water infiltration for groundwater recharging; 23,000 square feet of installed vegetated swales mitigate pollutants and improve water quality; and 132,000 square feet of warm grass reduces historical water usage. The first-of-its-kind model green park Project now serves as the leading example within the County for how parks should be designed to thrive and remain sustainable as climate change threatens vulnerable green spaces. Other agencies throughout the United States can use Obregon Park as an example for emulating proven sustainable strategies that will not only improve park facilities and maintenance operations, but also improve the lives of park patrons, the environment, and communities.

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Environmental/Conservation

Nominee: Rivercane Restoration

Nominee's Organization: Buncombe County Recreation Services, Asheville GreenWorks, and Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, NC

Population:

Parks are great spots to stay active, connect with nature, and make friends. They are also home to thousands of plants, pollinators, and wildlife, fueling local ecosystems. One way Buncombe County leads the way to protect native plants and engage the community in sustainability is through rivercane propagation workdays. Rivercane was historically important to both humans and wildlife in the North Carolina mountains. Researchers estimate that 98% of canebrakes (large contiguous areas of rivercane) have been lost since European settlers arrived in the area due to overgrazing and agricultural land clearing. These canebrakes reached heights of 39 feet and supported plentiful fauna, including several species now extinct such as Bachman's warbler and Carolina parakeet. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians traditionally split rivercane lengthwise and made coverings for walls of their houses by strapping long halves parallel. They also fashioned woven baskets and fire-forged darts out of the abundant grass to fell birds with blow guns. The reestablishment of natural canebrakes reinforces their cultural heritage and provides supplies for benches and baskets crafted by modern tribal artisans. Canebrakes also act as highly effective riparian buffers, supporting bank stabilization and reducing sediment and contaminants more effectively than forest buffers of equal size. Thirty feet of rivercane reduces nitrogen and phosphorus from entering waterways through surface and ground water run-off by as much as 80%. Local residents help restore canebrakes along streams, creeks, and rivers through regularly scheduled workdays at Buncombe County parks. The labor-intensive process involves air spading and transplanting available plant material. In addition to reestablishing canebrakes, rivercane propagation is being attempted at a community nursery in a county park to create readily available plant material for future restoration projects, proving this hardy and beautiful grass is making a comeback. Park signs educate visitors on its cultural and ecological value. Supporting report:

https://www.wcu.edu/WebFiles/PDFs/A_Griffith_thesis.pdf

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Environmental/Conservation

Nominee: Rum River Riverbank Erosion Management

Nominee's Organization: Anoka County Parks, MN

Population:

The Rum River is one of the most important ecological water resources in Minnesota and is a key asset to the Anoka County Park system. Anoka County Parks partnered with the local Conservation District to inventory eroding streambanks on the Rum River in Anoka County and developed a multi-phase plan for stabilization projects. The project sites utilize a variety of local and state grant funds to address varying degrees of severity and importance. These projects greatly enhance water quality and erosion while focusing on fish and wildlife habitat restoration and water quality improvement. Project sites are being repaired with a dense armor of naturally decay resistant Eastern red cedar trees, inter-planted with live willow stakes and other native vegetation providing habitat and cover for game fish, fur-bearers, waterfowl, and invertebrates. These projects reduce sediment in the river by 500,000 pounds per year, and phosphorus by 250 pounds per year. Cedar tree revetments are a cost-effective and biologically friendly way to achieve stable shoreline habitat along eroding streambanks. The trees are readily available at no cost and can be installed with basic planting and hand tools with little specialized expertise. The per linear-foot cost to install a cedar tree revetment is as little a one-tenth the cost of a more invasive hard armoring process for sites that have severely eroded. Anoka County Parks has also successfully addressed a large severely eroding site on the Rum River by re-shaping, armoring, bio-engineering, and introducing in-stream habitat features for small-mouth bass and walleye. This completed project reduced sediment entering the Rum River by 286,875 pounds per year and protected a 65-acre native tall-grass prairie immediately adjacent to the river. Anoka County Parks understands and appreciates the ecological and recreational value of the Rum River and is committed to ensure it is protected for generations to come.

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Environmental/Conservation

Nominee: William and Gina Gerwin Garnett Wildflower Overlook

Nominee's Organization: Great Parks of Hamilton County, OH

Population:

The William and Gina Gerwin Garnett Wildflower Overlook was made possible by a generous donation from park neighbor, supporter and retired entomologist, Bill Garnett. The overlook is a 26-acre area in Winton Woods where Mr. and Mrs. Garnett discovered a unique blend of woodland wildflowers. For many years the couple hiked the area in all seasons. They were diligent about visiting every February 18th to see the first wildflowers of spring start to bloom. After his wife's passing, Mr. Garnett made a large donation in 2018 to Great Parks Forever, the philanthropic partner of Great Parks, to preserve this unique wildflower habitat. As educators, Mr. and Mrs. Garnett were dedicated to enriching the lives of future generations. Mr. Garnett knew preserving and sharing the habitat would be a wonderful way to celebrate the couple's love for nature and invite others to learn about and enjoy wildflowers. Great Parks Natural Resources Department began the project in October 2018 by clearing the 26-acre area of invasive species to make space for native wildflowers such as Harbinger-of-Spring and Dutchman's breeches. The Planning Department designed and constructed a boardwalk that uses the natural slope of the terrain to give park guests a view of the wildflowers and tree canopy. Educational signs were installed on the boardwalk to inform guests about the wildflowers and biodiversity found in regional forests. The project was completed in the spring of 2019 and officially opened with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on May 21, 2019. Mr. Garnett's generous gift covered all developmental aspects of the project from planning, to construction and maintenance, to land management. A portion was also committed to developing future nature education programming at the overlook.

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Historical/Cultural Facility

Nominee: Brecksville Trailside Program Center

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population:

Cleveland Metroparks Brecksville Reservation is the largest and one of the most visited of Cleveland Metroparks 18 park reservations. The reservation's highlight is the Brecksville Nature Center, one of the most historic buildings in Cleveland Metroparks 102-year history. The nature center is the last of Cleveland Metroparks three original trailside museums, and first opened in 1939 as a WPA era Trailside Museum. In 2018, Brecksville Nature Center served approximately 51,000 guests through programs within a limited 1,000 square feet space. In late 2018, Cleveland Metroparks opened the newly constructed 1,540 square foot Brecksville Trailside Program Center adjacent to the nature center to accommodate growing demand and continue the park district's mission to promote conservation, education, and recreation. The new Trailside Program Center pays homage to the Brecksville Nature Center and has hosted approximately 5,000 guests since it opened. Interior finishes are made from the same Wormy American Chestnut as was used on the original nature center. The wood was salvaged from previously razed structures within Cleveland Metroparks and repurposed into trim, wainscot, cabinets and shelving, which further ties the two buildings together aesthetically. The Trailside Program Center is able to offer year-round programming for all ages including wildlife programs, nature inspired arts and crafts, primitive skills lessons, lectures about wildlife and more. Construction of the Trailside Program Center was a collaboration between Cleveland Metroparks building trades and an outside contractor. Total investment for the improvements was approximately \$750,000 including \$335,000 in donations. The Brecksville Nature Center and Trailside Program Center together serve as a place for people to connect with nature. With the addition of the Trailside Program Center, an additional 10,000+ guests were served in 2019.

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Historical/Cultural Facility

Nominee: Fort Christmas Historical Park

Nominee's Organization: Orange County Parks and Recreation Division, FL

Population:

On December 25, 1837, a force of 2,000 U.S. Army and Alabama volunteers arrived in Christmas, Florida, to construct a supply depot fort during the Second Seminole Indian War. By 1838 the Fort was abandoned. In 1930, the original 10 acres of land was deeded to Orange County to create the Fort Christmas Historical Park. Orange County Parks and Recreation operates a now 142 acre historical park and museum. In addition to tours, groups can reserve pavilions. Other amenities include a playground, softball field, tennis courts, volleyball and basketball courts, picnic tables and grills. Construction of the fort replica began in 1975 with the dedication on December 17, 1977. It features two blockhouses, a storehouse (featuring a museum) and a stockade. Outside the stockade visitors can tour a replica of a Florida Cracker House, a sugar cane mill and syrup kettle, a stand of sugar cane and a small orange grove. In addition to the Fort, multiple historic structures were moved to the park to create an interpretive living history village. The site structures include the 1917 Beehead Ranch House, the 1870s Simmons house, the 1906 Union School and Lunchroom, and the 1953 Dixie and Emma Partin House and Barn. Signature events include Cracker Christmas, Militia Encampment, Fort Christmas Bluegrass Festival, and a Living History Festival for elementary students. Restoration of the 1937 Christmas Post Office is in progress. Last year Fort Christmas served 257,000 visitors with almost 51,000 program participants. Findings from the 2015 community survey found that 87,000 Orange County households have a need for the Fort Christmas historical museum.

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Historical/Cultural Facility

Nominee: Moore's Lake Cottage - Historic Route 1 Preservation

Nominee's Organization: Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation Department, VA

Population:

Moving a 100-year-old cottage five miles down a major highway to a new home in a historical park was just the beginning of a preservation effort. The Moore's Lake Cottage is one of two remaining cottages from an entertainment complex that began in the 1920's on historic Route 1. The acquisition of the cottage began with the Falling Creek Ironworks Foundation exploring what would happen to the now abandoned Moore's Lake Cottages. The property owner worked with the Foundation and Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation (CCPRD) to donate the cottage in August 2018. The cottage was moved to its new home at Falling Creek Ironworks Park in February 2019. Planned residential development would demolish what was left of the cottages and swimming lake. Objectives were saving the structure from demolition and moving it to a public site to interpret this part of the county's history. CCPRD obtained jurisdictional approvals and overcame procurement hurdles in a limited timeframe to make the project happen. Specially-trained movers shored up the cottage to protect it during travel to the park. Short term stabilization on the outside of the cottage walls and foundation provided reinforcement and balance. A crane the lifted the cottage onto a flatbed for towing. Keeping the cottage in motion prevented additional damage. Once at the park, the cottage was permanently secured on the foundation. The facility was dedicated on May 4, 2019, during the 400th Anniversary Celebration for the Ironworks Park, and opened to the public as an exhibit structure. The cottage expands the interpretive opportunities at the park, location of the nation's first ironworks, and preserves history of the Route 1 bygone era. An interpretative marker and illustrative panels explain its significance. Plans include adaptive reuse of the cottage as a mini-museum highlighting the Chester area and Route 1.

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Historical/Cultural Facility

Nominee: The Re-Opening of the Miller House

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Westchester County Parks, NY

Population:

Thanks to a \$3.5 million face lift, the newly renovated Miller House in North White Plains, New York, best known to have hosted General George Washington on three separate occasions during the American Revolution, was re-opened to the public on October 28, 2019. After years of deterioration due to a lack of funding, the project was accomplished through a combination of funding approved by the Westchester County Board of Legislators and New York State. The project rebuilt the farmhouse roof, shored up the walls, chimneys and foundation, rehabilitated areas of the interior and created an onsite visitor center/classroom. Originally built in 1738 by John Miller, the farmhouse is set up as it was in 1776 when his son Elijah Miller and his wife Anne Fisher Miller were its residents. The re-opening ceremony took place on the 243rd anniversary of the Battle of White Plains at the Miller House during which General Washington was said to have stayed. Two descendants of the Miller family attended the opening. Highlights of the artifacts in the house are the table and chair reportedly used by the General during his stay there. Westchester County has been working with Westchester-based groups and organizations such as the Daughters of Liberty's Legacy (DOLL) and the Friends of the Miller House to provide educational opportunities. Regular programming has begun with guided tours and scheduled historical programs about the war and the General's role at the time, along with various aspects of life in Colonial America for school and scout groups as well as the public. The Miller House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the New York State Register of Historic Places and the Westchester County Inventory of Historic Places.

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Marketing

Nominee: 2019 Girls Empowerment Conference Marketing Campaign

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation, CA

Population:

The full marketing campaign for LA County Parks and Recreation's 2019 Girls Empowerment Conference (Conference) raised the bar on how strategic engagement is directly correlated to the goals of the program. The theme "My Choice and Voice" brought in the biggest attendance yet, of over 1,000 girls, 11-18 years. The Conference is organized by the LA County Parks team of leaders who strive to provide girls and young women with meaningful experiences that help enhance their lives. In the past, about 450 girls have attended. The Marketing Committee worked with the Head of Communication and team to provide background, methods to target Generation Z, and craft the 'look and feel' of the campaign. The 8-week campaign was built surrounding the existing logo, a girl's shadow with fist up, demonstrating the power of the girl. Original content was created to showcase the voice of local girls who participate in our parks such as a boxer, a lacrosse and softball players. The marketing campaign could not be niched to the girls alone since they are not followers of the Department's social media. The strategy was to distribute and outreach to their mothers, adult relatives, youth organizations, schools, and libraries. The small budget of \$500 was used for bus advertisements, and everything else was leveraged through the creativity of the campaign. Key performance indicators, social sentiment, chatter, and trends were tracked every day. Social media graphics and posts outlined statistics and empowering quotes from notable athletes. Hashtags #MYCHOICEandVOICE and #IMatter2019 were used across all social and collateral. Video bites, Insta-stories, GIF's, and fun graphics were incorporated. Tangible and online collateral was all designed. For the day of the event, a full activation was planned that covered the sessions, lunch jam, field the media, and speak to the girls. The micro-budget with a strategic campaign demonstrates how a powerful message can break through one of the hardest generations to reach, Gen-Z.

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Marketing

Nominee: 2020 Dog Park Calendar to Benefit Will County Humane Society

Nominee's Organization: Forest Preserve District of Will County, IL

Population:

In 2019, the Forest Preserve District of Will County initiated a unique marketing campaign not only to promote the District's six dog parks and the adorable pooches that use them, but also to help the local humane society. The Forest Preserve set out to create a 2020 Dog Park Calendar, where all proceeds from the project would benefit the Will County Humane Society, the county's oldest no-kill shelter that relies solely on donations. The project was a large undertaking that required the cooperation and generosity of the community - as well as some serious effort from the Forest Preserve District- in order to be successful. It was, as hundreds of calendars were sold, with a net profit of \$5,865 going to the Humane Society. Throughout the project, multiple marketing pieces were developed to promote the calendar, the dog parks and the dogs in the calendar, while also giving the humane society additional exposure.

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Marketing

Nominee: Don't Be A Jerk

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Forest Preserve District of Will County, IL

Population:

In 2019, the Forest Preserve District of Will County set out to do a public service campaign tackling many of the issues repeatedly brought to our attention by the public, such as a littering, uncontrolled dogs, inconsiderate trail users, and in general, just bad behavior. While it would have been easy to politely remind people to throw away their trash and share the trail, that message wouldn't have had much impact, as it's something we've been asking people to do for years. So instead, we opted to go with a more in-your-face approach to get people to take notice. A series of videos featuring our resident "jerk", signage in the preserves, and social media posts were utilized throughout the summer and received significant local and national media attention. Without a doubt, our "Don't Be A Jerk" campaign worked and had many people talking, with an overwhelmingly positive response from the public and the media.

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Marketing

Nominee: THE ENCHANTED EFFECT: Descanso Gardens Lighted Festival

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation, CA

Population:

Descanso Gardens by day has its own green and leafy charms. But when night cloaks the Gardens in darkness, and the lights come up, the real magic begins. Enchanted: Forest of Light is a light-show experience with installations including a Japanese garden bathed in blue, offset by bright red paper lanterns, a grove of live oaks surrounded by illuminated color-changing platforms, and an expansive flower bed of 3,000 programmed electric tulips. Enchanted has become a Southern California holiday tradition attracting visitors from all over the country and often sells out. How do you sell a show like no other in Southern California? It takes a concerted branding and marketing effort. Tapping into the organic wealth of the content and live social media, Descanso capitalizes on influencers, blogs, vbloggers, and online media to spread the word about Enchanted. After visiting Enchanted, these influencers share photos and videos of the ethereal experience describing it as “fantasy” or “magical”. To measure the power of Enchanted, between an Author and two mini-influencer tagging @descansogardens reached nearly a million followers. The social buzz translated into 225K website visits in December 2019, of which 60% were from organic searches. Across social media platforms, over 3,000 unique profiles chatted between Twitter and Instagram. Utilizing traditional marketing methods, Descanso also drew media attention from local sources, including television stations and the LA Times, and from Reuters and AP to reach a worldwide audience. The growth of Enchanted Forest of Light has given Descanso what we call the “Enchanted effect” of introducing Descanso Gardens to hundreds of thousands of new visitors. Attendance during other times of year has doubled, and membership is growing like never before. Enchanted is a highlight to the burgeoning audience of social media followers who share their Enchanted moments, attracting their friends, families, and followers.

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Marketing

Nominee: Teen Council

Nominee's Organization: Three Rivers Park District, MN

Population:

At the start of the 2018-19 school year, Three Rivers Park District staff organized the first-ever Teen Council in the Park District to intentionally engage youth in being active members in decision-making processes. Members of the Council, youth who are between the ages of 14 and 19, serve as the voice for young people as park users and environmental stewards. Teen Council members learn about all aspects of the Park District and collectively create a vision and goals that drive efforts for the year to support Three Rivers in being more welcoming and inclusive to all. The idea of the Teen Council gained momentum after a group of 30+ teens gathered for a day of brainstorming with Park District staff on what teen engagement could look like at Three Rivers, a day planned because teens are an underrepresented audience in the park system. That group had hundreds of ideas, but ultimately said that nothing would be successful unless teens were leading the charge. They proposed a Teen Council who could develop and ramp-up a social media presence for teens, create teen-focused events, and be a voice within the Park District advocating for programs and policies that would be welcoming to their peers. There are now 15 members on the Teen Council and their initiatives are far-reaching, ultimately engaging a much wider audience of teens throughout the Park District. The creation of the Teen Council is a vital program to ensure that the future generation is invested in advancing environmental stewardship and protecting the outdoors. Youth have historically been left out of conversations and decision making when it comes to environmental stewardship, and Three Rivers has an opportunity to intentionally develop young leaders who will be the most impacted by environmental shifts and who are passionate about making a change.

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Marketing

Nominee: Time to Explore

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population:

While Cleveland Metroparks attracts more than 18 million recreational visits annually, many guests were found to identify most with their local park(s), as opposed to the Park District as a whole, which includes 18 park reservations, 300+ miles of trails, eight golf courses and nationally acclaimed Zoo. With a desire to promote broader guest exploration and awareness, Cleveland Metroparks launched the 'Time to Explore' marketing campaign. The campaign focused on the concept of exploration to educate the community about new opportunities to connect with nature and programs. A digital and social media component of the campaign, "Ten to Explore," features ten highlights across Cleveland Metroparks each month to promote new areas of interest to park followers. The lists, such as "10 Easy Hikes for Families" and "10 Most Instagrammable Spots," are accompanied with videos produced by our in-house team. In 2019, the top ten initiative reached more than 760,000 people and received nearly 30,000 total engagements on social media. The lists were also curated for targeted earned media opportunities. The campaign also included a virtual series through Facebook Live to connect followers with education programming and outdoor experiences throughout the park district. The series offered guests a chance to go behind-the-scenes with park naturalists and helped highlight Cleveland Metroparks five free nature centers. The live series reached more than 144,000 people in 2019 and nature center visitation increased nearly 5 percent year-over-year. Under the "Time to Explore" campaign, average outdoor recreation program attendance across the parks has increased by nearly 25 percent from 2018 to 2019. Last year Cleveland Metroparks also reached its second highest attendance year on record with nearly 18.5 million recreational visits. The campaign has served as a catalyst driving record visitation and promoting recreation in Cleveland Metroparks to attain a healthy lifestyle.

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Marketing

Nominee: Women in the Wild

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population:

The County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) launched a new program: Women in the Wild (WitW). Mission: Encourage women to spend more time in nature through education, training and experiences that empower them to make outdoor recreation a way of life. Vision: Bring women closer to nature, and to each other, through recreation, collaboration and accomplishment.

WitW events teach essential outdoor skills in a fun, nurturing and non-competitive environment. Activities are interactive - building participants' confidence and a sense of community, while fostering new appreciation for parks, preserves and the staff who maintain them. WitW events are led for and by women - showcasing successful women in STEM positions, effectively shifting perceptions about women in industries typically dominated by men. This unique approach to programming is in direct response to industry research, which shows women are interested and see value in outdoor experiences, but barriers stand in their way of enjoying nature as often as men. WitW demonstrates a lean toward equity and workplace diversity. WitW furthers DPR's mission of "enhancing the quality of life in San Diego County by providing exceptional parks and recreation experiences and preserving significant natural resources." Exposing more women to parks through carefully curated experiences, may encourage them to "pay it forward" through future attendance, info-sharing and ambassadorship. While the cost-recovery model for WitW is set at 80 percent, revenue generated via the first few events has added roughly \$2K to the general fund. These included a campout (workshops: fire-starting, tent-building, campfire cooking, night-hiking, wilderness survival skills and nature meditation), and two hikes in a progressive series (content: wildlife identification, orienteering, leave-no-trace principles and proper packing). Events are coordinated by DPR staff with help from agency partners and sponsors. A robust communications plan includes a website, Facebook page, dedicated e-blast and branded collateral.

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Operational Facility

Nominee: Crestmore Manor - Park District Headquarters

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District, CA

Population:

Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District operates a unique facility as the District's Headquarters. Crestmore Manor, officially the Paul J. Anderson building, is a colonial-style mansion designed by significant local architect Herman Ruhnau, and built in the mid 1950's by W.W. "Tiny" Naylor, a restaurateur and horse rancher, to appease his wife's desires to live in a home similar to those in Kentucky's horse country. Over the years the home has been the site of films like 1964 movie Straight Jacket with Joan Crawford. In 1973 the County of Riverside purchased the home and the surrounding area along the Santa Ana River to be used for open space, habitat conservation, and park use. The Parks Department (as it was known at the time) made the home their Headquarters offices soon after the acquisition. The front lawn was improved with a pond and picturesque trees. In the 1990's the site began to garner interest as a wedding venue due to the uniqueness of the property and the setting. In 2006, the Carriage House was constructed behind the original Manor House to house large meetings or events. In 2019, an addition to the Carriage House was constructed and renovation of the courtyard, providing a main campus entrance, guest reception, and Riverfront Room event venue. Since the recent expansion, the District has hosted many conferences and meetings, most notably the recent RivCo Parks all staff conference, the first in over 3 decades - though the campus continues to be most popular as a wedding venue. The unique design of the original manor house, the improvements made to the campus over time, as well as beauty of the setting adjacent to the Santa Ana River and Rancho Jurupa Park have created a highly desirable and idyllic setting to work, meet and celebrate.

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Outstanding Contributor

Nominee: James W. Corcoran

Nominee's Organization: Snohomish County Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism, WA

Population:

On September 11, 2019 James W. Corcoran donated 3.43 acres of land he owned to the Snohomish County Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism. The land is valued at \$ 1,573,800.00 making it one of the highest valued land donations in the 57 years of the Department. The property will soon be known as the Corcoran Memorial Park in memory of Mr. Corcoran's younger brother who died in 1970 shortly after serving in Vietnam with the 82nd Airborne Division. In addition, Mr. Corcoran's lady friend lost two brothers in 1960 while serving in the navy in a plane crash in the Pacific Ocean. Mr. Corcoran also lost a nephew in 2014 who was amongst the 43 people that perished in the Highway 530 Oso mudslide. Mr. Corcoran is a decorated retired U. S. Army Lieutenant Colonel, Special Forces, Green Beret serving 31 years in the military, while visiting 42 countries teaching military skills. More recently Mr. Corcoran has been involved with the community by supporting and sponsoring boys and girls clubs basketball teams over the past 25 years. In addition, Mr. Corcoran is a member of his local VFW Hall.

Corcoran Memorial Park will have a playground, a place for dogs to run around, a small parking area, and a picnic area that area neighbors will be able to enjoy for generations. With his neighbors to the west and south of his property selling to developers for new housing Mr. Corcoran's foresight and generous donation make him an ideal candidate for the NACPRO, Friends of Parks and Recreation, Outstanding Contributor award.

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Outstanding Contributor

Nominee: Friends of Adaptive Recreation (FAR)

Nominee's Organization: Loudoun County Parks, Recreation and Community Services, VA

Population:

Football great Walter Peyton once said, "We are stronger together than we are alone." The Loudoun County Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services Adaptive Recreation Program has embraced the team approach. Adaptive Recreation is supported by a non-profit whose mission is to assist in providing recreational and leisure activities for youth and adults with physical and/or cognitive disabilities. Friends of Adaptive Recreation (FAR), established in 1987, was the first 501c3 for the Parks and Recreation department. The partnership with the non-profit meets crucial needs in making programs accessible to the community. FAR picks up where the county's resources end. It provides financial assistance to members of the community who lack resources. Supplemental funding enables Adaptive Recreation to keep enrollment costs down for all. Additionally, sponsorship from the non-profit enables Adaptive Recreation to offer countywide special events, including the Annual Halloween Party, Holiday Celebration and Valentine's Dance, which bring participants and their families together for fellowship, food and fun! FAR members are seen at these events setting up and cleaning the room, serving food and interacting with participants. FAR's contribution is much more than financial - members are true partners. Loudoun is one of the few counties in Virginia to have a non-profit board for adaptive recreation. FAR has funded purchases that set the Loudoun program apart. For example, Adaptive Recreation was able to purchase a pool lift before it became an ADA requirement. The county does not fund scholarships and FAR makes it possible for some participants to attend programs and/or summer camp.

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Outstanding Contributor

Nominee: Peter and Christine Koch

Nominee's Organization: Snohomish County Parks & Recreation Dept, WA

Population:

Peter and Christine Koch love(d) the beautiful scenery, amazing view-points, the wild and scenic Stillaguamish River and historic mill towns that the Whitehorse Regional Trail passes through on its 28 mile journey from the City Arlington, through the Oso Landslide Memorial Park and on to the logging town of Darrington. Even though they live in the City of Bellevue, in neighboring King County, the Kochs fell in love with the Whitehorse Trail and have been staunch supporters of the Whitehorse Trail we are constructing in Snohomish County with a grand opening ceremony expanding the 6 mile trail to 20 miles in the Spring of 2020. The Koch's have been long term benefactors to numerous public trail and park improvements throughout the Puget Sound region as their love for the outdoors and generosity to give back to the community goes back decades. Beginning in 2014 the Koch's provided funds in the amount of \$272,000 to deck and rail 18 of the 19 bridges that spanned the Stillaguamish River along the 28 mile Whitehorse Regional Trail. In addition to the funds to deck and rail the bridges the Koch's also provided funds in the amount of \$250,000 to add additional acreage to the already existing property owned by Snohomish County at the Fortson Mill site. This property will allow the Snohomish County Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism to expand the parking lot to accommodate horse trailers and more motor vehicles at one of the largest public trailheads serving the Whitehorse Trail in addition to a future campground adjacent to the Whitehorse Trail as well. The Koch's have been long term benefactors to numerous public trail and park improvements throughout the Puget Sound region as their love for the outdoors and generosity to give back to the community goes back decades.

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Outstanding Contributor

Nominee: The Lazar Family

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Fairfax County Park Authority, VA

Population:

The Lazar Family - Heidi Allen and Tibor Lazar and their sons Corvin & Keaton - are the embodiment of citizen stewards, sharing their love of the environmental and the natural world in personal and more tangible ways. Theirs is a lifetime of loving nature and time spent outdoors. Their house is also filled with a menagerie of animals that serve as a welcoming committee for visitors to their home. Heidi and Tibor come from families that love nature, animals and most importantly, giving back to the community. Heidi's desire to help the environment led her to volunteer with the Invasive Management Area program in 2014. This award-winning program has already taken hundreds of unmanaged park acres, overgrown with invasive plants that thwart the growth of natural fauna and species, and returned them to health. Through this work, she observed the need to help restore parkland to its natural state. To that end, Heidi and Tibor established The Lazar Family Fund to create an endowment to support natural resource stewardship efforts on Fairfax County parkland. The Lazar Family Fund has agreed to donate \$360,000 over the next ten years, in addition to the generous \$16,000 donated since 2015. "We want this fund to be a starting base and encourage other people to give to this fund so we can have good-quality parkland that people can enjoy. We need to take better care of the land and control invasive plants," said Heidi. The Fund was established in memory of Tibor's parents, Rita and Csaba Lazar, Hungarian immigrants whose environmental legacy continues in Rappahannock County. "I'm so happy we've been able to put this together. My hope is that down the line, our sons, who both love nature, will continue supporting charitable funds, follow through and choose well," stated Heidi.

For more info on the Lazar Family, go to the 2:41 mark on this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCW5alpJQ-4>

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Outstanding Contributor

Nominee: William Garnett

Nominee's Organization: Great Parks of Hamilton County, OH

Population:

An unnoticed area of wildflowers is now an inviting gathering space thanks to a generous contribution by park neighbor, supporter and retired entomologist, Mr. William Garnett. The Gerwin Garnett Wildflower Overlook, 26-acres of managed greenspace with an observation deck, opened in May 2019. In honor of his late wife, with whom he visited the area for over 20 years, Mr. Garnett's gift was pivotal in preserving this unique wildflower habitat and ensuring it could be enjoyed by others for years to come. In 2017, Mr. Garnett approached Great Parks with a goal of preserving the woodland wildflowers for current and future generations. Mr. Garnett collaborated with park staff to create an invasive species management plan, construct an overlook deck, design interpretive signage, and develop materials for nature education programs. He truly partnered with staff members by respecting their roles, experience, and expertise. In addition to funding the creation of the overlook, Mr. Garnett planned for the future with funding to maintain the overlook for 25 years. The project is a model for others interested in supporting Great Parks mission of conservation, recreation and nature education through philanthropy.

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Outstanding Public Official

Nominee: Bruce Rinker

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population:

I wish to nominate Bruce Rinker for the 2020 Outstanding Public Official award. As a political subdivision of the state of Ohio, Cleveland Metroparks is governed by three Board of Park Commissioners who serve three-year terms without compensation. Bruce has served on our board for the past decade overseeing every aspect of the 24,000 acre park district, which includes 18 park reservations, eight golf courses and a nationally acclaimed zoo. The park district is guided by three core pillars: conservation, education and recreation. To that end, under Bruce's management over the past decade, the park district has served more than 5.3 million guests through educational programming, increased trail mileage and park visitation by 10 percent each, respectively; and acquired more than 2,500 acres for protection. Bruce was instrumental in the strategic acquisition and transformation of 750 acres of underutilized city parks into safe, active beaches. In 2017, as Board President, Bruce guided the park district through its centennial year celebration which drew record visitation of 18.5 million park visits through programming and capital investment. In addition to his service to Cleveland Metroparks, Bruce has practiced real estate law for over two decades on cases involving land protection. Most recently in 2019, he testified before the Ohio House Civil Justice Committee on the importance of governments to retain eminent domain rights for public use projects. He also served as Mayor of Mayfield Village, a suburb of Cleveland, from 1993 to 2015. As Mayor, he implemented a 2.5 mile shared-use trail corridor to connect businesses, residents, schools and parks. In his honor, the trail has been named the Bruce G. Rinker Greenway. Over the past decade, Bruce has worked tirelessly and selflessly for the protection of park land across Northeast Ohio.

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Outstanding Public Official

Nominee: Suzan Prince

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority, GA

Population:

Suzan Prince, chair of the Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority Board, is a champion both for our organization and for improving the quality of life for all area residents. In nearly ten years on the board, Prince has led the Authority in building six new tennis courts, an eight-field soccer complex, and a five-field baseball complex that includes a Miracle Field. In addition to fighting for new facilities, she has worked to grow programs and bring in sports tourism dollars.

Prince led the charge to add six courts to our tennis facility, resulting in 18 courts and the ability to host large tournaments. In fact, Prince herself lobbied to bring two USTA State Mixed Doubles Championships to our tennis facility that resulted in nearly \$1 million in economic impact for our community. She was Tournament Director both years, and USTA Georgia named it their Tennis Event of the Year in 2019. Prince also got a grant from USTA to add permanent 10 & Under lines to three of the courts resulting which led to our juniors program doubling in size. She's also a volunteer coach for youth tennis & volleyball.

Prince chaired the local \$150 million SPLOST campaign with her commitment to recreation at the forefront: she chaired the committee on the condition that VLPRA received monies from the fund upon approval. She was also instrumental in securing contributions for our one-of-a-kind Miracle Field Complex, bringing in nearly \$100,000.

Outside of VLPRA, she's the regional hospital's Foundation Board President, collecting over \$2 million in 2019. Prince is a board member & fundraising chair for the Children's Advocacy Center, and is on Hahira Middle School's Parent Action Committee Board.

Prince is passionate about VLPRA, our community, and providing a high quality of life- there's no one more deserving of this award.

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Outstanding Public Official

Nominee: The Honorable James Holland

Nominee's Organization: Chesterfield County Board of Supervisors, VA

Population:

Since 2007, the Honorable James Holland has served as the Dale District Supervisor on the Chesterfield County Board of Supervisors. Mr. Holland consistently acknowledges the importance of parks and recreation initiatives, programs, and facilities. In November of 2015, Mr. Holland's support of the Bikeways and Trails Plan made its adoption into the county's comprehensive plan possible. Since then, Mr. Holland's support of the plan has been steadfast, ensuring funding for trail and bikeway projects that allow citizens to walk and bike more safely. Working with local groups, Mr. Holland was instrumental in the conversion of underused tennis courts at Daniel Park into six pickleball courts, satisfying public demand for additional facilities. He spearheaded community support for the Cogbill Park Master Plan. In the fall of 2019, he allocated \$4,000 to projects to improve a high school football field and elementary school blacktop play area. Mr. Holland is a fixture at events sponsored by the Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation Department and has devoted countless hours of his personal time to helping staff prepare for and host these events. Because of his dedication to tourism and the county's booming sports tourism industry, Mr. Holland was appointed to the Richmond Region Tourism Board of Directors. Additionally, he serves on: Capital Region Airport Commission, Capital Region Workforce Partnership Chief Local Elected Officials Consortium, Richmond Regional Planning District Commission, Richmond Regional Transportation Planning Organization, and Virginia Association of Counties Board of Directors. Mr. Holland is active in many civic organizations and has been appointed to positions by four Virginia governors. Mr. Holland demonstrates a clear understanding of the leisure services industry's impact on quality of life in Chesterfield County. His hard work and dedication have advanced the mission of the parks and recreation department and helped ensure a better future for residents of Chesterfield County.

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Outstanding Support Organization

Nominee: 2nd Street Market/Homefull Partnership

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Homefull, OH

Population:

Like many cities across the country, Dayton is challenged with food insecurity and food deserts, areas where it's difficult to find fresh food. The 2nd Street Market, a Five Rivers MetroParks facility, is near some of the most prevalent food deserts in the Dayton region. In 2017 the Market and Homefull created a strategic partnership with a goal to help provide better equity and access to fresh, local food. Homefull, a non-profit dedicated to ending homelessness in Dayton, has a booth at the Market, vending produce grown at their urban farms. Homefull's booth is run by their clients who also run the Market's EBT token exchange program. These client-employees build meaningful workplace skills and can share Homefull's mission with the public. People who utilize SNAP/EBT benefits can visit Homefull's booth at the 2nd Street Market to receive tokens that participating Market vendors accept in lieu of cash or cards. Additionally, Homefull also allows the Market to offer Produce Perks, a state-wide program available to those who use EBT/SNAP benefits. An incentive program that matches benefits spent on produce purchases, Produce Perks encourages people to make healthy choices when grocery shopping and allows broader access to nutritious foods.

In 2019, these programs grew exponentially: Produce Perks benefits doubled, from \$10 to \$20; There was a 62.3% increase in the total amount spent using SNAP/EBT benefits at the Market; and There was a 167.5% increase in the use of Produce Perks at the Market. This unique Five Rivers MetroParks and Homefull to effectively fulfill their missions while addressing hunger-related issues, which affect 17 percent of those living in Dayton. These programs provide better access to fresh food, encourage people to eat healthier, broaden local farmers' customer base and create a more inclusive shopping space at the Market.

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Outstanding Support Organization

Nominee: Great Parks Forever

Nominee's Organization: Great Parks of Hamilton County, OH

Population:

As the philanthropic partner for Great Parks of Hamilton County, Great Parks Forever translates an early conservation promise into everyday experiences and lasting legacies. Great Parks Forever (GPF) strives to discover and create intersections where supporters' purpose meets Great Parks' mission. The successful launch of a new GPF brand in 2018, paved the trail for clarification of promise and purpose for the supporting organization in 2019. Throughout the year, GPF paired donors with park projects, such as the design of a new trail connecting two active parks and the addition of a music garden to a vibrant children's garden. GPF collaborated with a donor to restore and manage a unique wildflower habitat and helped families create everlasting memories for loved ones. GPF is mindful of providing philanthropic support that carries a contribution into the future. Gifts of restricted support include funding to maintain a project beyond construction or initiation. Unrestricted support from GPF allows Great Parks to make investments in general operating, capital projects, new ideas, employees and more. Every day Great Parks and Great Parks Forever demonstrate how two organizations can impact one promise to preserve natural resources.

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Outstanding Support Organization

Nominee: Metroparks Toledo Foundation

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population:

The Metroparks Toledo Foundation, a supporting organization of Metroparks Toledo, launched and completed a successful fundraising campaign to raise over \$1.5 million to enable the Metroparks Toledo construction of the largest Treehouse Village in a public park system. The Foundation's volunteer Board of Directors, along with a special volunteer campaign committee, led the 18-month, community-wide campaign, which launched with a leadership gift of \$750,000 to the project. The Foundation worked with local companies to secure important material contributions such as lumber, doors, insulation, countertops and labor. To close the campaign, volunteers led a community-wide "Treehouse Days of Giving" program, partnering with local grocery, coffee and bike shops to run giving promotions for an entire week. The result? Over 700 individual and corporate donors contributed and helped surpass the \$1.5M goal, raising \$1.7M in cash and in-kind contributions. The funds raised fund the construction of something entirely unique in our region - the Cannaley Treehouse Village at Oak Openings Preserve. Designed with help from Nelson Treehouse and Supply, of the TV show "Treehouse Masters," the Cannaley Treehouse Village will feature: four overnight rental houses, three tent platforms and a common treehouse for day rentals. The goal of the Treehouse Village is to provide a compelling new way for people to connect with the outdoors. This special experience would not be possible without the efforts of the Metroparks Toledo Foundation and the many supporters it engaged in this special effort.

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Outstanding Support Organization

Nominee: Preservation Foundation of the Lake County Forest Preserves

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Preservation Foundation of the Lake County Forest Preserves, IL

Population:

Since 1958, the Lake County Forest Preserves has protected the natural and cultural heritage of Lake County. Today, more than 30,800 acres are restored and managed for public enjoyment. The Preservation Foundation was established in 2007 as the charitable partner of the Forest Preserves. A 501c3 charity, the Foundation is governed by a board of directors and two standing committees, comprised of 21 civic and business leaders. These dedicated volunteers support staff in fundraising, donating their time, talent, connections, and financial resources. Since 2007, \$21 million has been raised from 4,183 donors. Their gifts range from \$3 to \$1 million, including gifts of conservation land and real estate for resale. Donors to the Preservation Foundation support every aspect of the Forest Preserves mission, from education to land preservation, public access to habitat restoration. They provide Gateways Grants, reducing barriers for low-income schools to participate in field trip programs, and they fully fund the Green Youth Farm, a 1.25-acre sustainable farm that provides a first job for Lake County high school students each summer. A \$1 million grant helped protect a 338-acre parcel that, when restored, will add nearly 200 acres of wetlands. Private donations support the care and maintenance of trails and preserves, initiate new habitat restoration projects, and enable staff to work at landscape scale across property lines and geopolitical boundaries to protect biodiversity, such as at the 4,000-acre Illinois Beach Lake Plain, a RAMSAR Wetland of International Importance. In 2019, the Preservation Foundation worked with the Forest Preserves to establish its first permanent endowment and launched an ambitious campaign to raise \$20 million by 2025. The endowment will provide a permanent source of support for tree-planting, reforestation, and to maintain the more than 20,000 acres of forest preserve land that has been restored to ecological health.

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Outstanding Volunteer

Nominee: Carol Hogan & Wesley Wolf

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Lake County Forest Preserves, IL

Population:

Wesley Wolf and Carol Hogan exemplify dedication and passion for natural areas restoration. They volunteer as Natural Areas Stewards at Grassy Lake Forest Preserve. Additionally, they donate their time, energy, knowledge and expertise to mentoring other site stewards at other natural area sites in both public and private landholdings. They understand the full gamut of restoration from cutting invasive brush and targeting herbaceous invasive species to collecting native seeds and sowing them in the right places at the right time. They are planting native species, including some they purchase with their own funds. Wes and Carol are outgoing and great spokespersons for natural areas restoration. They interact with forest preserve visitors engaging them in conversations about what they are doing and educating visitors on the importance of conservation and restoration. They are masters at engaging all of volunteer participants by drawing them in and making them feel welcome. On occasion, Wes and Carol provided full meals to their fellow volunteers when the work ends creating a fun, social gathering to complete the day. Wes and Carol started volunteering for Lake County Forest Preserve District in 2006, taking on the steward roll at Grassy Lake in 2010. Since becoming Stewards they have contributed nearly 14,000 hours to restoration at the Preserve and they have guided volunteers to nearly 19,700 hours of cutting invasive brush and collecting and sowing seed. In total, the stewardship group they lead has restored over 65 acres of woodland and 25 acres of wetland. Wes and Carol have also been active volunteers in the Barrington Greenway Initiative, a public/private partnership between three county open space agencies and four conservation not-for-profits intent on bring additional resources to protect and restore natural areas and to amply natural areas management and research in the Barrington Illinois area.

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Outstanding Volunteer

Nominee: Greg and Michele Petrosky

Nominee's Organization: Oakland County Parks and Recreation, MI

Population:

There aren't many programs hosted by Oakland County Parks and Recreation (OCPR) where the names Greg and Michele Petrosky don't appear on the volunteer list. The husband and wife team are not only generous with their time, they are enthusiastic volunteers who enjoy welcoming participants and donating their talents wherever needed. Between the two of them, they volunteered an impressive 777 hours in 2019. "Greg and Michele really exemplify what it means to be a steward and advocate of Oakland County Parks through their service and we are extremely grateful to have them on our team," said Jess Whatley, Recreation Specialist- Volunteer Services. The majority of their time - a whopping 242.5 hours - was spent on the trails. OCPR maintains more than 80 miles of trails across 14 parks. As trail ambassadors, the couple patrols natural trails on foot, promoting safe and proper usage and sharing details about park rules and policies with visitors. Another large portion of their time was dedicated as nest box monitors and administrators. OCPR trains volunteers to monitor nest boxes at seven parks for the Eastern Bluebird and other cavity-nesting birds from March-August. Perhaps some of the Petroskys' favorite assignments are OCPR's adaptive programs. They typically assist with refreshments at adaptive socials, themed events for adults with developmental disabilities. The pair donated 59 hours to these events as well as those geared toward active adults and history buffs. "They are genuinely kind people. They are reliable and always willing to lend a hand," says Recreation Program Supervisor Sandy Dorey. "They love sharing our parks."

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Outstanding Volunteer

Nominee: Judy Egan

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population:

In a recent USA Today poll of “The 10 Best Award” for Holiday Historic Home Tour, Metroparks Toledo Manor House was in stiff competition with Graceland, the Biltmore and other great national treasures. At times, the Manor House led the poll but in the end, came in 2nd to Elvis Presley’s home, Graceland. Part of the appeal of the Manor House is the wonderful volunteers who support this historic home. Leading the Manor House volunteers is treasured volunteer, Judy Egan, President of the Manor House Volunteers. As President, Judy resides over the Executive Committee and over 125 Manor House volunteers. In this capacity, she is responsible for raising funds events such as Ice Cream Social, Tea at the Manor House and Music in the Grand Manor. Funds have gone to repainting historical wall paper, purchasing fine furnishings and other restoration efforts. Judy is also co-chair of widely popular Tea at the Manor House which serves up to 400 guests each first Friday of the month. Each tea has a particular theme and Judy always dresses to showcase each theme. Under her leadership, Cup of Christmas Tea was introduced which routinely sells out within 24 hours. To show care and appreciation for her fellow volunteers, she began the Star Awards Program to honor the volunteers’ gift of time with sparkly star pins. As a Manor House docent, she has given hundreds of tours of the Manor House for the public. Judy has volunteered with Metroparks for over 13 years, contributing 3,000 lifetime volunteer hours and over 200 hours in 2019 alone. She is a leader in the continued care and preservation of a beloved, local gem - the Manor House. Judy’s relentless bright and sparkly attitude brings a special light to the Metroparks and is truly an outstanding volunteer.

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Outstanding Volunteer

Nominee: June Webb

Nominee's Organization: Forest Preserves of Cook County, IL

Population:

The Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC) depends on thousands of volunteers to help care for the more than 70,000 acres of natural areas under its care. June Webb stands out as one of the FPCC's most dedicated and passionate volunteer stewards and has adopted Kickapoo and Whistler Woods as her primary sites. These sites are both located in the Calumet region in southeast Cook County which is known for its rich natural, cultural and industrial heritage. Along with the benefits of industry also come some drawbacks including pollution and habitat fragmentation which has made it challenging to recruit volunteers here. June has been undaunted by these challenges and has succeeded in attracting local volunteers and building a team of stewardship leaders. June is a Master Naturalist and leads activities at Whistler and Kickapoo that educate visitors and volunteers about local ecosystems. A former Chicago Science teacher with more than 14 years of experience, June is a natural at inspiring students of all ages to learn about and care for nature. She is a Co-Steward of Kickapoo Woods, making her the only African American steward out of the 100 site stewards that help the FPCC meet its ecological goals. June has dedicated over 1200 hours to the FPCC as a steward, trail watch volunteer, and dragonfly monitor. She also volunteers with other programs like the Friends of the Chicago River as a wildlife monitor and River Day Site Captain, Openlands as a Treekeeper, and the Field Museum's Calumet is My Back Yard high-school program. June is a cherished member of the Chicagoland environmental community. She is an energetic volunteer who is always seeking opportunities to merge her naturalist and teaching experience and enhance her knowledge of ecosystems and stewardship.

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Outstanding Volunteer

Nominee: William (Bill) Dryburgh

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Charlotte County Community Services, FL

Population:

Bill Dryburgh has been an active member of the Charlotte County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board for 14 years and has been the Chairman for the past ten years. During his tenure with the Board, Bill has played an instrumental advisory and support role for numerous projects that have improved the park system and quality of life in Charlotte County.

Some of his contributions include:

- Assisting in the development and implementation of the County's Parks Master Plan.
- Supporting and promoting agency's successful national accreditation (CAPRA) in 2017.
- Supporting, promoting and planning for the 2014 Sales Tax initiative projects.
- Projects include two new recreation centers opened in 2019, significant improvements to three existing recreation centers, a new 50-meter aquatic facility scheduled to open in April 2020, plan and build Veterans' Memorial Park, transform existing McGuire park into a destination attraction for children, planning for multi-use trails and on-road bicycle trail development, a regional park splash pad, and three new disc golf courses. Total expenditures of more than \$30 million for new construction and improvements.
- Involvement in the planning and design of three regional parks and the Charlotte County Event Center.
- Involvement in the planning to convert an old railroad bridge into a fishing pier over the Myakka River.
- Assisted the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office to redesign several neighborhood parks using the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design program making the parks safer for citizens.
- Coordinated with numerous citizens to develop the community garden at South County Regional Park.
- Assisted with the fund raising enabling the William Gaines Memorial Park become a reality. Gaines, a local high school graduate, was killed in the Beirut Marine Barracks bombing.
- Work as an Ambassador for Tampa Bay Rays Spring Training games at the Charlotte Sports Park
- Participated in interview panels for last two Community Services Directors.

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Outstanding Volunteer

Nominee: William G. Bouie

Nominee's Organization: Fairfax County Park Authority, VA

Population:

Board Chairman William G. Bouie is one of those capable individuals who rolls up his sleeves, examines the task at hand and gets the job done. Bill brings keen business acumen, a sense of fair play, an appreciation for doing the right thing, and a sense of camaraderie and good humor to everything he does. It's no surprise he is in demand. When you need to get something done, call Bill. He believes you should touch someone's life in a positive way, each and every day, noting, "Whatever you decide to do, do it with passion and conviction." Bill, a member of the Fairfax County Park Authority Board since 2005, has served as chairman for nearly a decade. As the first African American chair of this influential policy board, he has stressed the need for diverse board membership reflective of a changing community. Everyone has a voice at the table and Bill builds consensus carefully. A telecommunications executive, his commitment to community service and to parks and recreation is evident in his volunteer leadership with organizations such as Little League Baseball of Northern Virginia, Wolf Trap Center for the Performing Arts, Reston Community Center, the Initiative for Public Art Reston, Virginia Senior Olympics and the United States Olympic Committee's Project Gold Team. He leads by example and the positive results are clear. Under his care, FCPA is a high-performing, nationally accredited, four-time recipient of the National Gold Medal Award. The park system embraces new partnerships, innovative and sustainable funding mechanisms, plus record public support for capital bonds which allow the 23,500-acre system to flourish. Leadership is manifested in many ways. Bill embraces the community's One Fairfax initiative that seeks equity and access for all, and his vision and actions speak to increased recreational opportunity, fiscal sustainability and system-wide excellence.

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Park & Recreation Facility - Class I

Nominee: Fort Tuthill Bike Park

Nominee's Organization: Coconino County Parks & Recreation, AZ

Population: 140,776

Set amid the Ponderosa pine trees at Fort Tuthill County Park south of Flagstaff, Fort Tuthill Bike Park originated with a community desire to have a gathering place where people could practice their mountain biking skills. A 2013 partnership agreement between non-profit Flagstaff Biking Organization (FBO) and Coconino County Parks & Recreation (CCPR) allowed FBO to go forward with fundraising. Once the initial funds were secured, construction began in 2014 on the seven-acre facility. Having just completed phase 3, the Bike Park now includes three flow trails, two pump tracks, four progressive drops, Belgian steps, and several wooden features including two wall rides. Through the years, CCPR and FBO secured additional funding through donations and grants from Bell Built, Land and Water Conservation Fund, and Recreational Trails Program. Designing the Bike Park pump tracks, jumps, and custom features required trained personnel that incorporate skilled design. The Bike Park phases have been designed and built by IMBA Trail Solutions, FlowRide Concepts, American Conservation Experience, and CCPR staff. Countless bicycle enthusiasts of all ages and all abilities test their mettle in the park. There are youngsters on strider bikes enjoying the youth pump track, and riders on BMX bikes taking jumps on the expert flow trail. Five National Interscholastic Cycling Association teams from the Flagstaff area, totaling 100 youth, utilize the Bike Park for their training. CCPR is happy to feature this state-of-the-art Bike Park in Northern Arizona where riders can increase their mountain biking skills on a variety of new features.

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Park & Recreation Facility - Class I

Nominee: Kayak Share

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population: 429,899

Metroparks Toledo is always seeking new avenues to engage park users in exciting ways and in partnership with Mercy Health, opened FitPark Paddle which includes the region's first kayak share, FitParks are designed in a manner to engage new and diverse groups of users to encourage fitness and engagement in natural areas. The kayak share is based on the bike share concept. Users rent boats by the hour using a smartphone. Six boats, along with paddles and personal flotation devices, are secured in lockers that open once payment is made through a mobile application, Movatic. The service provides users the ability to get out on the water without having to own your kayak or canoe or coordinating the delivery from an outside vendor. This allows for spontaneous adventures which is especially advantageous at a location like Howard Marsh, a premiere destination for birders and other outdoor enthusiasts. The park's unique design immerses park visitors into a total wetland experience with a spectacular 360 degree view of three interconnected marshland units. When Metroparks began to research the available third party vendors for the kayak share, they did not find any which met the Metroparks design and operating standards. This led the staff to develop their own fabricated six locker unit. The initial location at Howard Marsh will hopefully serve as a pilot for future expansion at several other Metroparks locations where kayak share would be appropriate. At Howard Marsh, which is located on the eastern edge of Lucas County near Lake Erie, the kayak share had almost 100 users in the initial startup from August through September 2019. FitPark Paddle is a great example of Metroparks Toledo's commitment to provide unique experiences that encourage active outdoor recreation that is both healthy and fun.

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Park & Recreation Facility - Class I

Nominee: Miracle Field Complex

Nominee's Organization: Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority, GA

Population: 115,489

VLPRAs Miracle Field Complex is a state-of-the-art, fully inclusive facility that brought our community together in an unprecedented way. VLPRAs worked with the Miracle League of Valdosta in a public/private partnership to build the two-dimensional sports field and surrounding structures. Private donors collaborated with VLPRAs to fund the \$5 million complex that also features four standard baseball/softball fields, a fully accessible pavilion, a boundless playground for all abilities, and a concession stand. Our Miracle Field is the largest in the nation at 200 feet and the only one with lines for four sports: baseball, soccer, basketball, and track. The field's dugouts have air-conditioned bathrooms with showers to accommodate any issue that may arise. They also act as calming rooms for individuals who experience sensory overload. Before the rubberized field was built, Miracle League teams played on a grass field, which was a non-starter for users with wheelchairs and walkers. Now we are seeing far more participants in wheelchairs, with over 100 total athletes each season. In addition to the field, the concession stand was built to be fully accessible both inside and out. Individuals of all abilities can work inside and even train to work in retail, setting them up for success in future long-term employment. Finally, by positioning this field among four new standard fields, we're promoting interaction among people of all abilities. We purposefully schedule our youth league games at the same time as Miracle Field games to highlight inclusivity. It's beneficial to MLV athletes and to mainstream players who may not otherwise have one-on-one contact. Hundreds of athletes of all abilities, plus volunteers, play together. The field also houses therapeutic-centered special events like egg hunts and state Special Olympics. This one-of-a-kind complex is the jewel in VLPRAs crown: building bridges and creating community through recreation.

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Park & Recreation Facility - Class I

Nominee: Nature-themed Playground at Dodd Park at Point of Rocks

Nominee's Organization: Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation Department, VA

Population: 340,000

Using partnerships with the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and Niagara Cares, a unique nature-themed playground has become a popular destination. The first of its kind in Chesterfield and the region, the playground features elements that reflect flora and fauna from the natural environment, such as ants, butterflies, frogs, mushrooms and turtles, as well as educational signage. "Our goal is for the playground to entice visitors to explore the trails and natural areas of the park," said Dr. James Worsley, Director of Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation Department (CCPRD). Targeting 2-12 year-olds, the facility introduces creatures of the forest, meadow and marsh ecosystems and invites them and their parents to explore the park's natural areas. Interpretive and educational signage expands the nature experience. A trail connects the top area of the park to the river bottomland. Cues along the trail serve as a catalyst for further nature exploration.

Objectives:

- Provide play experiences for preschoolers - elementary ages.
- Use marsh, meadow, and forest-themed play pods to expose visitors to outdoor wonders at the park.
- Entice physical play.
- Educate visitors on the park's natural environment.
- Invite visitors to explore other park areas .
- Build community partnership with Niagara Cares, philanthropic arm of Niagara Bottling.
- Continue partnership with NRPA.
- Allow volunteer involvement.
- Provide in-house training of staff in playground construction.

The project was conceived by CCPRD with a grant coordinated by NRPA and working with local sponsor, Niagara Bottling. Parks staff designed the facility, procured equipment and supplies, and coordinated construction activities and volunteer work days. Volunteers from the local Niagara Bottling plant landscaped the area. Visitation to the lower part of the park has increased significantly. Interviews with users have been very positive.

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Park & Recreation Facility - Class I

Nominee: Secret Forest Project

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population: 429,899

Planning for a children's play area at the Toledo Botanical Garden began 10 years ago with the non-profit TBG Inc. and some generous donors. This group successfully raised approximately \$200,000 in donations, but struggled to advance the project so it sat dormant for several years until Metroparks Toledo took over responsibility for the botanical garden in 2017. With this change in property ownership came a commitment from Metroparks to bring this project to fruition.

Metroparks staff used the work of the previous volunteers and donors as the foundation for an updated design that could be built within the next construction season. The project was named the Secret Forest Play Area as a reflection of its location within a wooded shade garden. Staff honored the botanical focus of the park by building raised play platforms on and around the trees. These platforms were interconnected with a series of climbing nets. This unique design allowed for a rich play experience without excessive fall protection which would have smothered the tree roots. The design concept and material selection allow for the play area to blend into the park so the play experience becomes one of natural area exploration and discovery. The play area opened to the public on September 13 and realized immediate positive impacts on the park and community. The addition of the Secret Forest increased park visitation by approximately 20% compared to the previous year. An even greater impact has been the increased diversity of park users that are visiting the gardens as a result of this project. The Botanical Garden is being used extensively by families with young children for the first time. These new park users are also taking the time to explore and learn about the unique botanical features of the park while they visit the play area.

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Park & Recreation Facility - Class I

Nominee: Mindfulness Walk

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Stark Parks, OH

Population: 372,542

With the benefits of spending time outdoors long documented by some of the greatest minds in history, taking time in a park, under trees, near the water, or on a trail has been known to aid physically and mentally. While Stark County is home to dozens of parks, over 120 miles of trails, and outdoor gathering places, no space had been dedicated to mental health and guided reflection. Partnering with Stark Mental Health and Addiction Recovery agency (Stark MHAR), Stark Parks set out to create a spot designated for meditation and self-care. From here, the Mindfulness Walk concept originated. The location for the Mindfulness Walk was chosen with intention. Petros Lake Park is central in the county, the park has a network of existing trails, and the space offers varied terrain. This park is also significant as the school district in which it's located, Perry Local, was recently the site of a suicide cluster where six kids took their lives during the 2017-18 school year. The chosen route for the Mindfulness Walk is a 1-mile trail that offers users ten stations, each one promoting relaxation, focus and awareness, reflection, and embracing the present moment. Stations include a zen sand garden, a musical xylophone, stacking stones, and a labyrinth. Stark Parks' budget for was \$10k for construction and materials, which was matched by StarkMHAR. With \$20,000 in total, we ended up using every penny. In addition, local businesses generously donated or sold materials at cost.

The grand opening was held June 1, 2019, and over 200 people attended to celebrate. The Mindfulness Walk was created to be a sustainable reprieve for those as and when they need it. In nine months, it has brought new visitors to the parks, gained recognition countywide, and pioneered a new outdoor space for mindful reflection.

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Park & Recreation Facility - Class I

Nominee: The Overlook

Nominee's Organization: Anoka County Parks, MN

Population: 351,373

Through an 18-month community engagement process for Anoka County's Comprehensive Parks System Plan, the County realized that there was a need for additional large capacity gathering spaces within the Anoka County Park System. As a result, the County added plans for additional large gathering spaces within the system. In addition, the County began plans for "The Overlook" project which was completed in 2019. The Overlook is located at Bunker Hills Regional Park adjacent to the Activities Center building in central Anoka County. This building includes several large capacity meeting spaces, a teaching center and it houses the Parks Administration offices, the County's Extension offices and the University of MN Regional Extension offices. The Overlook is a 120-person capacity outdoor event and gathering space set amid 1600 acres of woodlands, wetlands and restored oak savanna habitats. The entrance to the Overlook starts adjacent to a very colorful Veterans Memorial Garden. From the entrance, a handicap accessible elevated bridge leads guests between two large oak trees and onto the Overlook. The Overlook consists of a large open area for seating, a pergola structure on the west end to serve as a backdrop and/or presentation area, a bar/caterer area on the east side, and a stair access to a grassy area nestled in among the surrounding woodland. The facility is unique in that it created a large, usable and functional space above a storm water drainage area. Below the Overlook, native plants camouflage a permeable swale that moves storm water from the gutters away from the building. The Overlook is accessible to two of the large meeting rooms for extra space when large events occur and most importantly the facility connects people to the outdoors. The space has been used for programming, music and cultural events, family reunions, weddings, birthday parties and team-building exercises. The public use and response to the new overlook facility has been invaluable.

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Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

Nominee: A NOVEL PLACE TO PLAY: Woodcrest Library Play Park

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 9.8 million

A neighborhood park and public open space is not an option for many communities. The idea of a park within walking distance in this urban South Los Angeles neighborhood seemed like a fairy tale. Indeed, the 2016 Countywide Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment rated the West Athens-Westmont community as having a Very High Park Need. The severe lack in park space urgently needed to be addressed as the community suffered from the highest rate of premature mortality from cardiovascular disease in Los Angeles County and an extremely high risk of death from diabetes, according to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. The Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation (LA County Parks) rose to the challenge and addressed the critical need for park space for the residents by creating an innovative play park on the grounds of the existing Woodcrest Library. As the first collaboration of its kind between LA County Library and LA County Parks, the Woodcrest Play Park project offered mutual benefits by increasing recreational opportunities and park space in a dense, park-poor community while increasing patronage to an aging library experiencing declining usage. Working within a limited 1,800-square-foot space, LA County Parks built the interactive Woodcrest Play Park to include a children's play area with book-themed elements; an outdoor fitness zone with exercise machines requiring little to no maintenance; with over 1,500 new drought-tolerant plants; and a multi-generational outdoor seating areas with USB charging stations to encourage people to stay for extended periods and engage with library services. The plaza park serves as a gathering space for the West Athens-Westmont community, an informal classroom for learning and exploration with convenient access to much-needed County services.

Link to Youtube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fUQ8ppuWS8

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Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

Nominee: Andy's Unity Park

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Sonoma County Regional Parks, CA

Population: 504,217

Andy's Unity Park grew from a community's commitment, perseverance and belief in the healing power of a park. The park remembers the life of 13 year old Andy Lopez who was tragically shot and killed by a Sonoma County deputy while carrying an air rifle that the deputy mistook for a real firearm. While the park will forever be connected to the tragic fate of a young boy, it has also contributed to the rebirth of a more unified community with the promise of a healthier future for an underserved neighborhood previously lacking park and recreational services.

Video: the story of Andy's Unity Park (created by Sonoma County Regional Parks)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_xgdKT6r1E&feature=youtu.be&utm_source=June+2018+Newsle

This 4.4 acre park remembers the life of Andy Lopez, and also celebrates community unity while providing much needed open space with a variety of features for neighborhood residents and families to gather and play. The community planning process itself brought the neighborhood together and became a source of healing, and since opening in June of 2018 the park is clearly having a significant positive impact on the neighborhood. It is a vibrant hub of activity, facilitating social connections, and provides open spaces for gathering and physical activity. There is truly something for everyone at Andy's Unity Park including a play area for kids, a small skate boarding and scootering spot, full size basketball court, off leash dog area, areas for small gatherings and larger celebrations, and a thriving community garden with a waiting list for plots. Staff has created several art and exercise programs at the park, and facilitates stewardship efforts through well-attended volunteer days. Additionally, the park not only affords access to a small natural area, it also serves as a portal to the larger open space preserves in Sonoma County, California.

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Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

Nominee: Golf in Schools

Nominee's Organization: Great Parks of Hamilton County, OH

Population: 814,671

Golf in Schools is a Great Parks of Hamilton County initiative that introduces kids in grades third through seventh to the game of golf through physical education classes. Golf has shown to encourage physical activity and build confidence and teambuilding skills among children. This is the second year that Great Parks has offered the program with PGA Professionals who provide instruction to local students. Participation was made possible by Matt Starr, Head Golf Professional at Meadow Links & Golf Academy, a facility that specializes in junior instructional programs.

In 2019, eight PGA Professionals went to five schools located in three different districts from November through January. Staff taught 57 classes to 1,429 students, both girls (47%) and boys (53%). Since starting in 2018, Great Parks has taught in nine schools and introduced the game to 2,872 kids through 135 classes. In one school district, the program influenced a junior league at a Great Parks golf course, which has resulted 30 kids utilizing that facility. Having the ability to interact with thousands of children in a short period has proven Golf in Schools to be very successful in promising future enrichment opportunities for Great Parks. The overall objective of Golf in Schools is exposing children to the mental, physical and social benefits of playing golf. Great Parks goal is to introduce the game to as many kids as possible, generate an interest and get them to Great Parks courses to enjoy additional practice and play opportunities. This program is unique in that it takes golf off the course and brings it right to the children, allowing the opportunity to introduce the game in a comfortable environment to kids who might not have thought to try it or had an interest.

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Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

Nominee: Orlando Magic Recreation Centers

Nominee's Organization: Orange County Parks and Recreation Division, FL

Population: 1.38 million

Five Orange County Orlando Magic Recreation Centers are the product of a partnership between Orange County and the Orlando Magic professional basketball team. Orlando Magic provided five million dollars to build each gymnasium as part of an agreement with the county to secure tourist development taxes to fund a new arena. Orange County spent 3.5 million on land preparation. Five sites were chosen in areas deficient of recreation services and also where the county owned land. A ceremony for the five Recreation Centers took place on May 14, 2010 with the grand opening dates as follows: South Econ Recreation Center-May 14, 2010; Goldenrod Recreation Center-July 24, 2009; Meadow Woods Recreation Center-August 19, 2010; Silver Star Recreation Center-October 27, 2010; West Orange Recreation Center-December 13, 2010.

Each facility has a 12,000-square-foot basketball gym (large enough to divide into two side-by-side high school courts), a fitness center with treadmills, cycles and cardio equipment, and locker rooms with showers. Fitness Center memberships are \$100/year, \$25 for 90 days or \$75 annually for seniors. Parks staff provides structured afterschool programs, summer camp, Homeschool PE programs and instructor-led fitness and wellness courses at all facilities. Youth sports programs include Jr. Magic basketball, Jr. Kicks soccer and youth volleyball. All gyms offer adult basketball leagues and for seniors there are fitness classes, arts and crafts, games and social programs. Findings from the 2015 Community Interest and Opinion Survey for Orange County indicated that: 131,733 households have a need for indoor exercise/fitness center; 108,070 have a need for indoor recreation centers; and 72,453 have a need for indoor basketball courts.

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Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

Nominee: Renaissance Senior Center

Nominee's Organization: Orange County Parks and Recreation Division, FL

Population: 1.38 million

The grand opening for the Renaissance Senior Center was held on May 30, 2007. The Center's 30,000 square feet and sits in a 62 acre community park. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) allocated Community Development Block Grant funds for this capital project which benefits low and moderate-income individuals. The 6.6 million dollar facility offers a wide array of amenities for seniors. There are three meeting rooms that hold 40 people and one larger meeting room with a capacity of 80. It has a grand ballroom that will seat 350 auditorium style and 240 for a banquet. The Center is also equipped with a state of the art catering kitchen. The Renaissance Senior Center is located in the heart of a residential area and serves the local community. Participants visit from the east side of Orange County and travel from two adjacent counties. The Renaissance Senior Center has more than 1,700 active fitness members. Patrons must be age 55 to use the facility at a cost of \$10 per year. Thirty-four different recreation, social and educational programs are offered at the Renaissance Senior Center. The Programs are either led by staff, volunteers, contracted instructors or are self-led. Findings from a 2015 community survey found that the Renaissance Senior Center ranked highest in park/site scores on a five point Likert scale. The 5.0 sustainability rankings include: Facility enhancement to the neighborhood; The Senior Center offers users numerous choices; and Users feel safe at the Center.

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Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

Nominee: Santa Ysabel Nature Center

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 3.3 million

On December 14, 2020, the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) opened the Santa Ysabel Nature Center (SYNC) - a 6,000-square-foot LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold facility that serves visitors and backcountry nature enthusiasts who wish to learn about the ecology and natural history of the area. SYNC is designed to be zero net energy, meaning it produces all the energy it uses by relying upon energy efficient materials and a photovoltaic system. This significantly reduces operating costs. The building includes a large space for interpretive and educational exhibits, a conference room capable of accommodating weddings and events up to 100 people, and an information area. The exhibit space includes state-of-the-art interpretive and educational elements. Indoor and outdoor exhibits are designed to concentrate on the natural world showcasing the unique ecology and history of the surrounding environment. Outdoors, the project connects visitors to nature through outdoor educational opportunities, including a 3.5-mile interpretive loop trail, amphitheater, and nature-based play area.

DPR owns and manages the 6,000-acre Santa Ysabel Preserve in which the SYNC was built. This area of the preserve is part of an 84-acre parcel donation from the Nature Conservancy to DPR for the purpose of constructing a nature center. The parcel is in an ideal location for a nature center due to its proximity to the Santa Ysabel and Volcan Mountain Preserves, William Heise County Park, the Cleveland National Forest, and the Cuyamaca Rancho and Anza-Borrego Desert State Parks, with direct access from inland North San Diego County cities.

SYNC construction began in September 2018 and completed in December 2019. Construction of SYNC was fully funded at \$9.5M and the County hired a Design Build team to take the project from concept to design and construction.

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Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

Nominee: Shawnee Mission School District Aquatic Center

Nominee's Organization: Johnson County Park & Recreation District, KS

Population: 570,000

The \$28 million Shawnee Mission School District Aquatic Center (SMSDAC), with seating for 1,500, opened in December 2019. This state-of-the-art facility is a prime example of how patrons benefit from public agencies working in partnership for the good of the community. The school district had a vision of making every 3rd grader “water safe”, also recognizing the need in our region for a competitive natatorium where high school athletes, as well as other community swim teams, could practice and hold meets. The City of Lenexa donated the land (estimated worth of \$1 million), and paid for half the parking garage, understanding the positive economic impact the facility would bring to their new City Center campus - filled with hotels, restaurants, their community center, and a county library. These facilities, in tandem, also give the aquatic center support facilities needed for regional meets, which bring in athletics from across a multi-state area. Through an RFP process, the school district chose Johnson County Park and Recreation District (JCPRD) to operate the facility. The school district pays for all utilities and building maintenance and receives priority scheduling of the center, while JCPRD is responsible for offering programming such as Learn-to-Swim and Master’s, as well as managing all rentals and meets, with the goal of a self-sustaining facility. Swim communities from across the region are thrilled to have this facility, built to ensure air and water quality are of the highest level guaranteeing athletes and their families stay healthy, while promoting the sport of swimming. Businesses within the campus have greatly benefited from the large regional meets this facility is attracting. And, most importantly, the children of our county will be safer due directly to the efforts to make them “water safe” - thanks to a school district, a city, and a park district POOLING efforts!

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Park & Recreation Program - Class I

Nominee: All Inclusive Outdoor Adventure at Middlegrounds

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population: 429,899

At the All Inclusive Outdoor Adventure at Middlegrounds, Metroparks produced its first large scale program that focused on inclusivity and targeted our population of people with varying abilities. Although Metroparks has specialized equipment such as adaptive boat launches, bows and tricycles, those items do not meet everyone's needs. Metroparks staff was able to creatively adapt the equipment to meet people's needs at the time of their try-it program - effectively showing that anyone can enjoy outdoor recreation. By providing everyone an opportunity to recreate safely we enhanced their physical and mental wellness illustrating that the outdoors is for all. Below are some of the activities that were on hand, free of charge, and adapted so that no matter your comfort or skill level everyone could participate: Tree Climbing; Archery; Canoeing; Fishing; Adaptive Trike and Bicycling; Sensory Box/Water Table/Leaf and Bark Rubbings; Forest Therapy (health and wellness program); and Slackline.

The following are objectives the program achieved:

- To illustrate to everyone Metroparks is inclusive and has the ability to meet their needs. This was measured by providing, at the time of try-it, the necessary adaptation. 100% of all individuals who were present at the event were able to try every offering Metroparks provided.
- Garner attention for our educational and outdoor skills programs. This event received widespread media attention from all local stations.
- To create stronger partnerships with organizations who benefit from our services but haven't used them in the past. We worked closely with the Ability Center, Lucas County Board of DD and the Epilepsy Center to plan, market and staff the program.
- We also wanted the program an excellent experience and to be well attended - we had over 350 people attend. These efforts have contributed to a 30% increase in inclusive outreach programming.

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Park & Recreation Program - Class I

Nominee: Coconino County Fair

Nominee's Organization: Coconino County Parks & Recreation, AZ

Population: 140,776

In 2020, the Coconino County Fair celebrates its 71st anniversary. Celebrating agriculture as its foundation, the Coconino County Fair showcases and applauds community members' achievements in creating art, jewelry, crafts, home economics, horticulture, floriculture, and animal raising and showmanship. Community members showcase their achievements with no cost of entry, and the potential to receive excellence with ribbons and prizes. As the event organizer, Coconino County Parks & Recreation accomplishes this by providing an educational and entertaining experience in a family-friendly environment that encourages the public to showcase their accomplishments. What distinguishes a county fair from any other special event? We asked visitors to the Coconino County Fair and here's what we heard. It's seeing community members' handmade items that they enter in the Fair and celebrating their craftsmanship. It's the 4-H youth who take the time and energy to care for and show an animal. And finally, it's the time spent with family and friends listening to live music and enjoying the carnival rides. The Coconino County Fair is a community gathering place and that's what makes it so special.

While Coconino County Parks & Recreation organizes the event, we partner with many organizations to make the event run smoothly. We partner with University of Arizona Cooperative Extension to run the 4-H events, with Northern Arizona Junior Livestock Association to manage the livestock auction, the Sheriff's Office for law enforcement education and protection, and the Flagstaff Sunrise Lions Club for the Demolition Derby. Parks and Recreation manages all the live entertainment, from the headliner bands to community groups. How do we know the event is special? The public supports the event by returning year after year and making it part of their tradition, with over 40,000 people visiting the Fair every year.

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Park & Recreation Program - Class I

Nominee: Fit 4 U

Nominee's Organization: Charlotte County Community Services, FL

Population: 168,000

Fit 4 U is a walking-based group fitness class, designed to enhance flexibility, increase balance, bone density, body image, and overall strength. The program, held at Tringali Park Recreation Center in Englewood, FL with a population of less than 15,000 provides residents with a year-round opportunity for affordable indoor exercise. Certified group fitness instructor Patricia Hamann leads the program, which is easily modified for individuals of all ages and ability levels.

Since its inception in October 2019, enrollment has exploded, requiring staff to add a second session to accommodate additional participants. The first session of the winter sold out in under an hour. Currently, two sessions are offered during the winter season, when seasonal residents arrive from the northern United States and Canada. Participants range in age from 49 to 89 and have spoken very highly of the program. Most participants express gratitude for a way to stay youthful at such an affordable price.

The Fit 4 U program is unique because it addresses many of the distinct needs of our community. Charlotte County's median age of 59.8 makes it the third oldest county in the nation. This places a greater emphasis on the need to develop programming for older Americans. Additionally, Charlotte County faces significant walkability challenges, with a lack of sidewalks and multi-use trails. In the summer, the average temperature stays above 90 degrees for three months. The Fit 4 U program provides residents with a safe and comfortable indoor space to stay fit. Furthermore, many friendships have developed throughout the course of the program, leading to expanded social opportunities for participants

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Park & Recreation Program - Class I

Nominee: Fitness Warriors Program

Nominee's Organization: Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation Department, VA

Population: 340,000

Working with a local sports organization, Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation (CCPRD) has expanded fitness offerings to the community at no charge to the participants. The Sports Backers Fitness Warriors program trains volunteers to lead free exercise programs in the Richmond area. The goal is to reach communities with the lowest rates of physical activity and the highest rates of chronic disease. Since the program's inception in 2014, CCPRD has been a part of the program. Chesterfield hosts Fitness Warriors at the Bensley, Ettrick and Stonebridge recreation centers. These centers are in disadvantaged areas of the county. Two of the centers were originally built with Community Development Block Grant funds. Residents in the areas served by the recreation centers report median household incomes of \$40,000 and under, well below the countywide median of \$72,363. Having free, high quality fitness programs opens opportunities for these residents to improve health, connect with others and remain active. Current offerings include five weekly classes reaching 243 participants. The beauty of this program is that the classes are free for the participants. In addition, CCPRD does not pay the volunteer instructors. It's a win-win for everyone. "The Fitness Warriors have brought so much energy and passion for fitness to our recreation centers where they host classes," said Dr. James Worsley, Director of Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation. "We are so thankful for this partnership and the positive impact it is having on our community." The Fitness Warriors are true agents of change. Attendee LaToya has been a loyal participant at the Ettrick Recreation Center program since March 2018. She reflects on the classes, "I'm not as stressed. I've lost weight. I'm more active with my daughter." Over 80% of participants report reduced stress, improved mood, and improved ability to complete daily activities.

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Park & Recreation Program - Class I

Nominee: Rec-n-Roll Mobile Playground

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation Department, VA

Population: 340,000

With an NRPA/Disney Play Spaces Grant, the Rec-n-Roll Mobile Playground debuted in August 2019 at a National Night Out event in a county park. Children and families flocked to the colorful trailer and play items, immersing themselves in self-directed play. The custom-designed 20' trailer is filled with imaginative play items and travels to community events in disadvantaged areas of the county. The experience provides opportunities for imaginative play, physical activity, sports, cultural exploration, and social interaction. This concept uses child-led play to improve decision-making skills, gross motor skills, and conflict resolution skills. Chesterfield Parks and Recreation (CCPRD) staff are responsible for the scheduling, setup, supervision, and break down of all mobile playground equipment. CCPRD partners with the Chesterfield County Police Athletic League (CPAL) to offer team sports activities at some mobile playground events. This partnership promotes interaction and trust between the community and public safety officers. Parents are expected to remain onsite and are welcome to participate with their children. The purpose of the mobile playground is to bring the recreation experience to underserved communities. In 2019, Rec-n-Roll visited nine sites with approx. 3,000 participants from August through mid-November. Attendees at the mobile playground are mostly Latino or Hispanic (43%), from low income households (50%), and do not live within walking distance of a county playground (50%). Response has been phenomenal. At Trunk or Treat, with hayrides, music, a movie, food and candy distribution, one child commented that the best part of the event was the Rec-n-Roll playground. CCPRD's innovative approach to providing free-play opportunities delivers equity for all participants. Race, ethnicity, language, ability, and socioeconomic standing have no influence on the quality of the unstructured play experience. By offering a wide range of activities that require little, if any, prior skills, no child is excluded.

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Park & Recreation Program - Class I

Nominee: Rec+Roll Van

Nominee's Organization: Shawnee County Parks + Recreation, KS

Population: 178,107

2019 was the first full year of use for the Shawnee County Parks + Recreation Rec+Roll Van. The Rec+Roll Van takes the fun to where the people are - in the parks, at events and even the workplace. The Van is outfitted with balls, hula hoops, games, art and fitness supplies, music and a PA system with microphones. The van helped meet several CAPRA standards which helped SCP+R gain accreditation.

Schools, businesses and community groups can rent the van for adult recess, staff teambuilding retreats or fitness programs. The van can also be rented for birthday parties or family events for \$75 per hour including staff - Rec+Roll ambassadors - and equipment.

The Rec+Roll Van appeared at 70 well-attended events including six National Night Out events (5th largest NNO event in the nation), a Downtown Trunk or Treat with the Topeka Police Department, Project Forward downtown event, the launching of the Library's new Bookmobile, school homecoming parades, Topeka's First Friday Artwalk, National Trails Day event in Skyline Park, school wellness nights, Stormont-Vail [Health] Family Fun Day, the Spookomotive (Halloween event with Gage Park Mini-Train), Business Unwind, solar observation nights, Outdoor Kansas for Kids Day, Tails on the Trail, All Camp Day (SCP+R Summer Camps), Wacky Water Day during Park and Recreation Month, Preschool Track Meet, and fitness demonstrations in parks. The van made 75 visits to local parks and splash pads during May through August. Rentals included the Family Service and Guidance Center for teambuilding, and the National Lutheran Deaf Association to entertain kids at the group's conference in Topeka. Future plans are to have the van in the St. Patrick's and Christmas parades and to do events in conjunction with downtown Topeka's new Evergy Plaza.

The Rec+Roll Van was featured on public television station KTWU's Suflower Journey's broadcast on Oct. 9, 2019 - <https://www.pbs.org/video/3205-outdoor-classrooms-recreation-hwoun2/>

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Park & Recreation Program - Class I

Nominee: Summer Basketball Program

Nominee's Organization: Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority, GA

Population: 115,489

The Summer High School Basketball program is a unique platform that gives at-risk teen boys a recreation and mentorship opportunity with public officials like law enforcement, firefighters, and city council members. Teens involved live in an underserved area and face challenges associated with a low socio-economic status. Community relationships with police and other public servants can often be strained. But this program built positive connections and lifelong friendships between the teens and those public officials. Youth teams played with and against adult teams made of elected officials and government employees during the summer months.

Private donors gave thousands of dollars to pay for the league including for a uniform for each participant, ensuring the boys had no participation barriers. VLPRA held regular season games and a single elimination playoff. The result was bigger than basketball: participants developed self-discipline, integrity, and the concept of teamwork. Many of the teens were unable to play in school leagues; some were even in alternative school because of poor choices. This league was an opportunity to reward positive choices and good behavior. The teenagers were able to form lasting bonds with elected officials, firefighters, and police officers. These adults mentored the teens, showing them the importance of setting goals and taking steps to achieve them. The relationships formed set the stage for the teenagers to evade dangers like drugs or gang activity. This league gave them the opportunity and knowledge to know that they can work together as a team for a common goal. The community benefits as these participants can be examples to other teenagers in our area with similar struggles. And both adults and teenagers got the advantage of exercise and a healthy, camaraderie building activity.

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Park & Recreation Program - Class II

Nominee: Better Beaubien Project

Nominee's Organization: Forest Preserves of Cook County, IL

Population: 5.2 million

In 2017 the Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC), together with partners, embarked upon a multi-year pursuit to understand how Beaubien Woods and the Little Calumet River, located on the southeast side of Chicago, IL, could be transformed into inviting and thriving outdoor recreation and education hubs. Beaubien Woods is underutilized due the perception that is unsafe, lacks amenities, and has become estranged from neighboring communities. The FPCC has dedicated resources, including support from the Chicago Community Trust's Our Great Rivers funding, to better connect nearby residents to Beaubien Woods through the Better Beaubien Project. The FPCC's public engagement and programming team embedded themselves in the community, to better understand its assets and needs and help navigate how the preserves and nature could play a role in the community. Working with local organizations including the health center, schools, park district, early childhood coalition, local advisory council, senior initiatives and a teen jobs program, the FPCC invested its resources and hosted a variety of activities to build a network of community members working towards connecting people to nature. Through this project 38 events and programs have been hosted with over 2,600 participants. Additionally, The American Institute of Architects provided pro-bono design work and led a visioning process that identified a variety of capital improvements in and near Beaubien Woods to increase connectivity, diversify programming and develop river access.

The FPCC has learned it can meet its mission and vision for public land when it has a better understanding of the broader goals and needs of the community. The FPCC is proud to be part of this evolving community vision and looks forward to continuing to work with partners and community members to improve and activate Beaubien Woods and the Little Calumet River to benefit all who call this area home.

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Park & Recreation Program - Class II

Nominee: First People Day

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population: 1.3 million

“Native history is Cleveland history,” begins the description for the annual First People Day event at Cleveland Metroparks Rocky River Nature Center. With this statement, we are committed to telling the indigenous past of this land and contextualizing the often-overlooked Native stories of present day Cleveland.

Cleveland Metroparks inaugurated First People Day in the early 2010s to showcase Rocky River Nature Center’s location near a prehistoric Woodland Indian earthworks. The event featured primitive skills, music, face painting, and reenactors. This programming situated Native stories exclusively in a long-distant past and left little room for nuance.

In 2016, Beth Whiteley and Jen Graham were placed in charge of the event. In order to best promote local Native experiences, Beth contacted the Lake Erie Native American Council (LENAC). Jen used her historical training to determine which activities aligned with best practices for teaching American Indian history. Together, they refreshed event programming and gave it a new focus: education and authenticity.

In 2014, event attendance hovered only around 500. The most recent iteration in November 2019 brought in 1,632 people. The trust between the Native community and our staff has grown, allowing for a wider variety of programming each year as more LENAC members want to participate. School teachers and college professors send their students to the event for extra credit. Countless adults express their astonishment at having learned something new about the city where they were born and raised. In America, 66% of people have not met someone of Native descent. This disparity is even more pronounced in a place like Cleveland that has no federally-recognized tribes. With First People Day, we set out to create a space where stereotypes could be challenged, new stories could be told, and Native voices could be amplified. Since 2016, the event has become truly unique to our region and provides a valuable service to our community.

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Park & Recreation Program - Class II

Nominee: General RV - Groveland Oaks County Park and Campground

Nominee's Organization: General RV - Clarkston, MI

Population: 1.2 million

Over the past four years, General RV, the #1 Recreational Vehicle dealer in Michigan, has supported Oakland County Parks and Recreation (OCPR) both financially and through its products. The company has donated more than \$20,000 to programs at OCPR's Groveland Oaks County Park and Campground.

General RV first started supporting Air Fair in 2016. Air Fair is one of the premier events at Groveland Oaks drawing thousands of people to the full day and evening event which includes hot air balloon displays, children's activities, music, shows and nature experiences. The event has grown to 2,600 visitors.

Now the company sponsors the award-winning Campground Recreation programming as well. General RV added its support to the popular Haunted Hallows fall event and the summer campground concert series. As with Air Fair, the company brought out several RVs to Haunted Hallows which encouraged the park's day use guests to become campers.

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Park & Recreation Program - Class II

Nominee: Nature Ninja Warrior Program

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department, FL

Population: 1.4 million

The Nature Ninja Warrior Program is designed to grow parks and recreational professionals of the future and recruit the currently unaware. Middle school students from underserved urban and rural communities participate in unique nature based experiences in the “real world” and develop professionally as they learn park and natural resource management, outdoor experiential learning, and environmental recreation with an emphasis on job, life, and leadership skills. Research shows that the best way to connect the youth to nature and outdoors is through regular positive experiences.

This free program was launched in the spring of 2018. Students are selected through an application process, much like applying for employment in the profession. Students meet at least ten times throughout the year and are provided experiential job training in natural resource and land management. Unique program components include overnight camping, a high/low ropes course, transportation assistance thru Palm Tran, program t-shirts, lunch/snack and a graduation ceremony. Graduates may continue to build upon skills learned by having first opportunity to participate in similar parks and recreation related programs and work experience opportunities. The post program participant surveys demonstrate that a minimum of 85% of youth improved proficiency in the following areas: independence, teamwork, responsibility, friendship skills, competency, exploration skills, affinity for nature, and problem solving confidence. By engaging and sustaining involvement from youth participants, youth leaders and the community, we anticipate growth of the program to include other areas of underserved Palm Beach County, which will serve to enhance youth development opportunities countywide.

The video is available to view on the PBC Parks and Recreation Department’s YouTube channel.

“Nature Ninja Warrior” <https://youtu.be/EcHHcDO7wQUNature>

Ninja Warrior Program photos can be viewed on Flickr: <https://flic.kr/s/aHskv54VkB>

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Park & Recreation Program - Class II

Nominee: Parks to Work

Nominee's Organization: Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department, FL

Population: 1.4 million

In 2017, Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department partnered with other agencies to implement an innovative thirteen-week Parks to Work pilot program to aid the chronically homeless individuals residing in County parks. The purpose of the pilot program was to reduce the number of homeless persons residing in John Price Park and other county-owned parks; promote respect and self-confidence in homeless persons; provide employment to homeless persons who are difficult to employ; provide resources to persons in the work program that will end their homelessness including but not limited to job training, linkage with appropriate social services and mainstream resources, permanent housing (programmatic or independent), and healthcare.

The program was successful and provided employment opportunities and job training for up to nine clients at a time. After the completion of the pilot program, the effort was deemed to be so impactful that it was extended permanently by County Administration and continues to provide benefits to the area's homeless population and the larger community as a whole. This work program allows homeless persons currently living in the park to earn a living wage and to reside in transitional housing until they can earn and save enough money to obtain permanent housing. This coordinated effort provides resources to the homeless that lead to self-sufficiency and sustainability.

Program goals are tailored to reduce homelessness in Palm Beach County by providing economic pathways through job training and employment, permanent sustainable housing opportunities, and facilitating a linkage to wrap-around social services and resources to homeless individuals residing in our parks. This program supports our department objectives by improving our community, providing enriching social and cultural experiences, fostering environmental stewardship and providing welcoming parks.

Success Story Video: <https://youtu.be/1yKPIJ-ho4ICBS12>

News Story: <https://cbs12.com/news/local/hope-for-man-once-homeless-in-the-park>

The Parks2Work program was awarded with a NACo Program Award in 2019.

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Park & Recreation Program - Class II

Nominee: Silverwood Park

Nominee's Organization: Three Rivers Park District, MN

Population: 834,033

Silverwood Park serves as a regional center for the arts and the environment, devoted to the integration of artistic creation, appreciation and natural resources. Programming is devoted to using art viewing, art making and creative experiences to teach about environmental science and connect guests with the natural world and each other. This innovative method of engagement is called arts integration and provides a new way of looking at the world in outdoor spaces that is free and open to the public.

While it may not seem like a natural fit, combining art and natural science is a powerful, hands on, nonverbal approach to learning that allows for deeper understanding of and empathy for the outdoors. Art fosters creative thinking, racial and cultural equity, honors local traditions and catalyzes social change. At Silverwood, teaching artists and naturalists work together to create this ground-breaking programming for all ages in all seasons. This includes a one-mile outdoor sculpture trail, indoor art gallery and nature programs taught through the lens of ceramics, photography and performance arts to name a few. No other park in the nation is offering this type of revolutionary work at this scale.

Silverwood serves over 400,000 visitors and offers 500+ public and private art and nature programs annually. In addition to pioneering arts integrated scientific learning, the Silverwood Visitor Center is the site of a full-service cafe and a large banquet/event rental facility. To many guests, the cafe acts as "Third Place" - a meaningful place to meet friends, convene with social groups and enjoy organic food. On a greater scale, the banquet facility financially supports park operations by hosting corporate convenings, weddings and celebrations of life in an artistic natural setting.

Silverwood is a success that can be replicated. We would love to share our experiences with other agencies.

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Park & Recreation Program - Class II

Nominee: SUMMER CAMP WITH A TWIST: Environment, Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math Camp (ESTEAM)

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 9.9 million

How do you make traditional Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) summer camp fun and more relevant? Add Environment and Art (ESTEAM) and infuse it with engaging activities like group games, field trips, cooking projects, music, and an overnight camping trip to provide children with hands-on learning activities that excite, energize, and expose them to a wide variety of skills and ideas.

In 2019, LA County Parks partnered with Natural History Museum, Beaches and Harbors, and Los Angeles County Public Works to launch a six-week ESTEAM Summer Camp at 17 sites serving over 800 children. This was a major expansion from the pilot camp which served 350 school-age children at 8 sites in 2017. ESTEAM subject matter experts from LA County Parks and the Natural History Museum worked seamlessly together, and with other partners, to formalize curriculum, aid staff in developing ESTEAM competencies, ensure consistency, and promote cross-organizational learning. Additional administrative support from LA County Parks provided operational support.

At 2019 ESTEAM, campers received guided instruction and followed a fun curriculum that promotes inquiry, creativity, dialogue, and critical thinking. Campers become better connected with the outdoors, explore early career pathways, build self-confidence and learn to take action to improve their natural environment. Effective positive youth programs like ESTEAM can contribute to a range of positive outcomes among adolescents, prevent a variety of risk behaviors, result in robust and sustained impacts, and have the potential to reduce health disparities. From its early imaginings through its innovative partnership and implementation, ESTEAM embodies the value of youth as the future, and by engaging them, their potential to become thought leaders, inspirators, creative inventors, and peacebuilders.

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Planning Initiative

Nominee: Great Parks Master Plan

Nominee's Organization: Great Parks of Hamilton County, OH

Population:

Since its founding in 1930, Great Parks of Hamilton County (Great Parks) has established one of Ohio's largest and most diverse inventories of parks, nature preserves and conservation areas. Great Parks continues to be the regional leader in conservation by forming strategic partnerships and directing countywide initiatives.

Great Parks completed our first-ever Comprehensive Master Plan in January 2019. Led by planning consultants MKSK, Great Parks conducted an inclusive and thorough community planning process. Engaging more than 2,200 residents, the feedback helped create the Comprehensive Master Plan to guide parks, facilities, programming and services through 2028.

The Comprehensive Master Plan established five goals for Great Parks: 1) Be a recognized leader in conservation. 2) Provide innovative programming as a gateway to nature exploration. 3) Create outstanding experiences. 4) Advance fiscal health. 5) Operate with high standards of excellence.

These five goals were then distilled into eight priorities for implementation: 1) Build more trails. 2) Add programming and events for diverse audiences. 3) Provide access to conservation areas. 4) Establish a defined blueway system. 5) Focus on partnerships. 6) Build ecological resiliency and sustainability. 7) Expand access for all users. 8) Plan for the future of every park.

To plan for the future of every park, the process for implementation of Park and Facility Master Plans began in fall 2019. Park and Facility Master Plans ensure that the recommendations founded in the Comprehensive Master Plan are reflected in operation and physical design of all parks, facilities, nature preserves and conservation areas.

Because Great Parks is in a unique position to be the regional leader in conservation, many community members' feedback concentrated on preserving open space and the environment. Moving forward, plan implementation will not only focus on protecting natural resources, but also focus on inviting residents of, and visitors to, Hamilton County to connect with nature through self-directed and guided exploration of Great Parks.

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Planning Initiative

Nominee: L.A. County Master Plan for Sustainable Parks and Recreation: Phase I

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation, CA

Population:

The L.A. County Master Plan for Sustainable Parks and Recreation: Phase I (Plan) consists of Community Parks and Recreation Plans (CPRPs) to create 14 new urban parks for six of the county's most park-poor, predominantly African-American and Latino communities that also experience low income and high levels of childhood obesity and crime rates.

With a strong commitment to ensuring environmental justice, CPRPs address the unique park, recreation, and urban greening needs of each community by examining demographics, existing parkland and recreational facilities, parkland gaps, tree canopies in existing parks, transportation and connectivity to parks, and availability of land. CPRPs provide an assessment and prioritization of local park needs which informs a green space vision, design concepts for potential new urban parks, and strategies to address the identified gap. Implementation includes partnership and funding opportunities and next steps for actualizing the green space vision and strategies.

CPRPs formulation benefited from collaboration between Parks and Departments of Regional Planning, Public Health, and Public Works. Staff became better acquainted with each agency's projects and identified opportunities to complement and support efforts.

Involvement of residents was central to the CPRP process, with custom methods for each community based on project goals and understanding neighborhood issues. L.A. County Parks (Parks) partnered with community-based non-profit organizations to engage community members in discussions about vision, needs, implementation, priorities, and partnership opportunities. Methods included stakeholder interviews, focus groups, questionnaires/surveys, design workshops, community tours, and youth programs. CPRPs enhance public awareness of the benefits of parks and sustainable planning. The California Strategic Growth Council's case study on our project recognized its transferability and acknowledged that its implementation will help advance several California sustainability objectives, particularly in the areas of equity; public health; reduced automobile usage and fuel consumption; water conservation; energy conservation; and revitalized urban and community center.

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Planning Initiative

Nominee: Lakewood Master Plan

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Lake County Forest Preserves, IL

Population:

Lakewood Forest Preserve (Lakewood) is the largest single preserve in the Lake County Forest Preserve District (District) and is also one of the most complex. Perhaps because of its size, age, and accessibility, Lakewood has been called on to accommodate a myriad of uses - ranging from the Lake County Discovery Museum to the District's Operational Headquarters. The number of facilities, activities, and events hosted at Lakewood throughout the years is truly remarkable. The buildings and infrastructure needed for the scale and magnitude of events was immense and challenging to integrate within the larger woodland and wetland ecosystem. Over the years, land use and programming needs changed. The museum was relocated to a climate-controlled facility better suited for its rare archival collections. The District's Operational Headquarters was relocated to a new, centrally located facility. The number of organized events diminished along with its land uses, and after 70 years, the preserve had become a model of inefficiency with unused buildings, oversized parking lots, and outdated utilities. Spurring this inefficiency to action, the District established an interdepartmental planning team comprised of six departments to lead the master planning process of historical documentation, evaluation and analysis of existing resources, and treatment recommendations that would provide the framework for a complete overhaul of the recreational facilities and future capital improvements. Informed by a public participation process, the master plan provides a compact, efficient design with infrastructure that is rightsized, offers a significant reduction in annual operating costs, is ADA compliant, and is respectful of the preserve's natural resources. With a restored, regionally unique ecosystem and updated cultural and recreational resources, the redevelopment of Lakewood will positively impact the quality of life for residents for generations to come and will serve as model of efficiency that can be applied throughout the District.

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Planning Initiative

Nominee: Oswego Oaks Park

Nominee's Organization: Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department, FL

Population:

Three overgrown vacant lots located within the Westgate neighborhood in suburban West Palm Beach, Florida have been transformed into Oswego Oaks Park. The primary objectives in creating the .76 acre park were: 1) To establish a sense of identity and arrival through place making; 2) Engage the surrounding neighborhood through tailored programming and special events and 3) Compliment the adjacent Westgate Community Center by offering amenities and services not provided at the Center.

The site falls within the Westgate Community Redevelopment Overlay where 51% or more of the area households have very low, low, and moderate incomes based on the US Department of Housing and Urban Development guidelines. Areas meeting this criteria qualify for Community Development Block Grant funds, which helped make this \$760,000 project possible. The Westgate CRA, as administrator of this neighborhood, initiated the park's creation and sought design assistance from the Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department.

Design entailed the construction of a small amphitheater, kiosk, passive walkway with meeting points, two new on-street parking spaces, water-filtering retention and preservation of six live oak trees. The ADA accessible space can be activated with movies for neighborhood children, fitness instruction, small musical performances, and serve as a place for neighborhood gathering and outreach.

The multifunctional design is a departure from traditional neighborhood park development which typically target either active or passive activities. The project exemplifies a successful collaborative effort between government agencies. As the land owner, the Westgate CRA provided the funding via Federal grants and provided project management services. The Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department, led by Casey Pranckun, RLA provided conceptual planning and site design services, and acted in an advisory role during the project's construction.

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Planning Initiative

Nominee: Park Improvement Plan

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population:

The purpose of the Metroparks Toledo Park Improvement Plan is to integrate the future planning efforts of natural resources, major maintenance, and new development into a unified document to ensure that the activities represented in each of the plans work together. This plan does not supplant any natural resources or major maintenance planning efforts already underway. As with all future initiatives at the Metroparks, no new project will move forward at the expense of the stewardship of natural resources or ongoing maintenance responsibilities. The plan is designed to be transparent and encourage agency wide participation. New opportunities will be evaluated based on community interest, cost, and impacts to the natural resources that we steward.

In 2013, Metroparks Toledo launched a comprehensive planning process, the purpose of which was to establish a long term 20-year vision for the park system, inventorying existing conditions, identifying opportunities for connecting natural areas and open spaces, and connecting parks and parkways to communities. The Park Improvement Plan serves as the organizational document to evaluate the following criteria: 1) Level of Priority, 2) Grant Funding Potential, 3) Private Donor Potential, 4) Partner Potential, 5) Cost Estimate, and 6) Departmental Responsibility.

The three departments, Natural Resources, Major Maintenance, and Planning/Capital Projects each determined evaluation criteria for projects within their respective areas which are both specific to the type of project while also in sync with broader agency objectives. As Metroparks Toledo serves all of Lucas County, the plan is divided into 8 districts. Within each district, both existing and future parks located in the district each have an existing conditions summary and a concept plan (with a map). The Park Improvement Plan, which also includes details for broader regional connectivity plans, is scheduled to be updated annually by Metroparks Toledo staff.

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Planning Initiative

Nominee: Program Progression Plan

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population:

In 2019 Metroparks programming department embarked on a planning initiative that produced a comprehensive Program Progression Plan. This strategic plan gave the program department a clear mission for service delivery and outreach. Utilizing five key priorities the program plan outlines goals, objectives and meaningful tracking mechanisms. There are three components to the Program Progression Plan that provide the backbone for sustainable growth and create lifelong users of Metroparks. Component one is the clear approach to programming document that outlines the desired priorities and strategic actions necessary to accomplish them. The five key priorities identified to strengthen programming were: programs are mission-based combining engagement, exploration and learning in a fun environment inspiring a personal connection to Metroparks, are creative and responsive, increase usage and engagement, teach a succession of skills to create and develop independent users, are of high quality, and reflect Metroparks' position as a leader in conservation. These priorities were determined through a cross-functional team--assembled from every department--spending two days in stakeholder sessions. These priorities were presented to all programming staff who were required to provide input on how these strategic actions would be achieved and measured. By collecting feedback, we created a sense of ownership for the matrices and plan. Everyone, from master naturalist to first-year seasonal, had equal say in how their performance would be measured. The second component, the programming flow chart, outlines the sustainable growth strategy and provides programmers with an easy to follow guide for planning future programs. The final component is the actual program progression plan for each programming unit; educational and outdoor skill programs. This comprehensive list is easy to follow, guiding visitors through a continuum of programs. Since the implementation of the plan, programming provided over 150 programs a month and served more than 115,000 people.

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Professional - Fellow

Nominee: Jill Geller

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Roseville CA (former Executive Director of JCPRD, Kansas)

Population:

Jill Geller contributed over 36 years of outstanding service to the Johnson County Park & Recreation District (JCPRD) and Johnson County community. JCPRD is nationally acclaimed, being awarded the NRPA Gold Medal in 2017 and reaccredited twice under Jill's leadership.

Jill started her career with JCPRD in 1980 as an aerobics instructor. Jill was promoted five times before being named JCPRD's Executive Director in 2014. Under Jill's executive leadership, JCPRD began experiencing its most rapid and successful growth. Four new parks were opened, offering an additional 2,500+ park acres to the community. Partnerships developed with JCPRD now managing the new Johnson County Arts and Heritage Center for Johnson County Government and the Shawnee Mission School District's new aquatics stadium. JCPRD doubled its Children's Services program in 2019 by adding the Olathe School District's 36 school sites. Jill has always been a supporter and active leader in parks and recreation agencies at local and national levels. After serving as a board member for Kansas Recreation and Park Association, Jill was elected to serve as president in 2010. Jill is highly respected at the State level and was appointed by the Kansas Governor's Council on Fitness to serve on the Physical Activity Champions, which advocates for local residents to be more active by promoting physical activity and its benefits to their communities. Jill strongly believes that the health and success of an organization is the responsibility of all. She incorporated and led training of JCPRD employees in the Leadership Empowers All People (LEAP) staff development program. The program enhances an organizational culture that empowers all of its employees to become leaders in the agency and builds the agency as a high-performing organization. We thank the Awards Committee for all your efforts and time in recognizing outstanding service.

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Professional - Fellow

Nominee: Mark Pinney, CFEA

Nominee's Organization: Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation Department, VA

Population:

Throughout his 19-year career at the Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation Department (CCPRD), Mark Pinney has displayed inexhaustible enthusiasm, commitment, and creativity. Mr. Pinney's extensive work with the Virginia Recreation and Park Society (VRPS) demonstrates his commitment to the leisure services industry. Since 2008, Mr. Pinney has served in a variety of roles with the VRPS, including serving on the golf, scholarship, and auction committees, often as committee chair. Mr. Pinney served as chair of the Central Service Area (2005), chair of the VRPS golf tournament (1999 and 2018), and led the Central Service Area Special Event Workshop (2019). The VRPS has recognized Mr. Pinney's achievements, awarding him the Outstanding New Professional Award (2001), Best New Program (2006), and the 2018 VRPS President's Award for his fundraising efforts supporting the organization's mission.

Mr. Pinney's contributions to CCPRD and Chesterfield County have been just as impressive. In 2019, Mr. Pinney secured a \$100,000, 5-year sponsorship agreement with the Virginia Credit Union, allowing the department to fund camp scholarships for underserved youth, enhance special events, and provide financial education courses at all County recreation centers. Mr. Pinney has implemented three new wildly successful special events over the past two years, including the Trunk-or-Treat event, the Chesterfield LIVE! music festival, and the Veterans Day Motorcycle Biker Rally. To ensure the continued quality of CCPRD special events, Mr. Pinney has attended the NRPA Event Management School and in 2018, became a Certified Festival and Event Associate. Mark Pinney's devotion to the recreation industry, his department and coworkers, and his fellow citizens is evidenced by his actions during and outside of his regular work hours. His ability to create and maintain partnerships and relationships is unrivaled in the industry.

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Professional - Fellow

Nominee: Ralph Protano

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population:

Ralph Protano, joining Cleveland Metroparks in 2012, established the trails division, a dedicated workforce creating innovative trails and connections. With his two guiding principles leading him and his crew, Ralph believes “there are no straight lines in nature” and “trails are made from natural materials and should be built to last for generations”. These principles help them create trails that are sustainable and accessible and work with the surrounding resources and terrain. During the past 8 years, Ralph has built the program to consist of skilled artisans, a seasonal worker program and an army of volunteers to support his efforts.

These efforts include the addition of 26 miles of new, sustainable, natural surface trails, including the first designated mountain bike trail network in the region. He has re-designed legacy trails to improve accessibility to some of the most iconic locations and views in the park district. Ralph takes care to blend the trail and any structures into their natural surroundings. One way to achieve this goal is to use hazardous trees removed from the park district. The trails division collects the logs, then mills them into timber that are used for overlooks, boardwalks and bridge structures. When materials need to be moved into the woods and to the work location, they take precautions to minimize the impact to the surrounding environment using rigging/rope along with specialized compact equipment. Ralph also started a volunteer program, allowing members of the community to build, restore and monitor these trails. Through their efforts, bootleg trails have been decommissioned, the final restoration after projects have been completed and the ongoing conditions of Cleveland Metroparks’ trails have been and continue to be monitored and communicated to the public. These volunteers have accounted for 3,000 hours every year. Ralph is truly a professional in his field.

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Professional - Fellow

Nominee: Tom Teigen

Nominee's Organization: Snohomish County Parks, Recreation & Tourism, WA

Population:

Tom Teigen has been a leader and innovator in parks and recreation agencies for 37 years. He has served in key leadership positions in 3 cities, 2 Park Districts and 2 Counties in Washington State and Illinois. He currently serves as the Director of the Snohomish County Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department (SCPRT). The Department oversees the Evergreen State Fair Park, Annual Fair, Arts/Culture, Historic Preservation and the Washington State University Extension Services programs in Snohomish County, population 810,000. Tom provides inspirational and results driven leadership to 84 full time and 490 seasonal staff managing 110 park properties, nearly 12,000 acres, 47 miles of shoreline, the Evergreen State Fair Park, Campgrounds, Regional and Community Parks, and an extensive Regional Trail System.

In his 13-year tenure, the Department has secured more than 4,680 acres of new public lands, serves more than 5 million visitors annually, creates \$53 million in annual positive economic impact for the region and boasts one of the highest cost recovery models in the nation returning over 78% of General Fund dollars to the County General Fund. The SCPRT Department has been recognized for its \$138 million Capital Investment Program (CIP) and land acquisition strategy, 2007 - 2020, with a focus on opportunity costs, leveraged capital investment, public/private/non-profit partnerships and reducing maintenance and operation costs.

Tom provided key leadership over the last 20 years in creating, implementing and securing public/private sponsorships of major regional, statewide and national festivals and events with the Waukegan Park District, Waukegan, IL, King County Parks Division, Seattle, WA, and Snohomish County Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, Everett WA.

Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers states, "Throughout Tom's career he has been a person of integrity, high energy and exceptional team leadership. Tom's leadership and innovation make him the perfect recipient for the NACPRO professional award".

Primary Contact

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Professional - Lifetime

Nominee: David Bowden

Nominee's Organization: Fairfax County Park Authority, VA

Population:

David Bowden will be retiring from FCPA after 36 years of public service planning, designing and constructing recreational facilities for Fairfax County and the U.S. military. He has been responsible for providing more than \$750 million in parks and recreation facilities to residents and members of the military stationed here and abroad. This work is his passion. And he's very good at it incorporating Green Building Standards, ADA and inclusive compliance as well as community desire and needs. Over the past eleven years, he managed over \$240 million in voter-approved Park Bonds for Park Capital improvement and an additional \$50 million in park improvements through partnerships with developers, youth sports groups, and non-profits. Another \$100 million Bond approaches this fall. Partnerships have stretched dollars and led to the development of nationally recognized park facilities such as: Joey Pizzano Memorial Fund's Chessie's Big Back Yard Family Recreation Area, including a unique inclusive spray park; Analemma Society's Observatory Park, with an innovative roll-top observatory; Increased synthetic turf field capacity; Washington Nationals and Major League Baseball's Bryce Harper Baseball Field Complex.

As Planning & Development Division Director, Bowden oversees 40 professional engineers and planners in land acquisition, planning, design, contracting and project management. He directs long-range planning, works with the Park Authority Board and represents FCPA in park planning and development at other Board and Commission meetings. He prepares the division's yearly operating budget and capital construction budget and monitors expenditures for efficient use of funds. Throughout his career, Bowden has been commended for outstanding performance and meeting project schedules and budgets. He has received a slew of planning awards, but his passion surpasses these accolades. His performance and mindset is an ethos of excellence and provides the strong foundation of our CAPRA-accredited, Gold Medal park system.

Overview of current Planning Projects under Bowden's leadership:

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/projects>

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Professional - Lifetime

Nominee: Robert E. Doyle

Nominee's Organization: East Bay Regional Park District, CA

Population:

Robert Doyle has served as the nationally recognized General Manager of the 85-year-old, 125,000-acre East Bay Regional Park District in the SF East Bay region since 2010, after 35-years with the agency starting as a temporary ranger. His talents, skill, knowledge, experience, and passion make him key in advancing the Park District's mission and vision.

A scant few of his accomplishments, include: Chief Land Negotiator, personally negotiating, implementing and overseeing an expansion of the Park District's lands to twice the acreage as when he started; Overseeing the greatest ever diversification of the Park District's user base with: Multicultural Wellness Walks/the Multicultural Advisory Committee, Healthy Parks Healthy People Bay Area partnership, Parks Rx, SHINE (Stay Healthy in Nature Every Day), and Walk with a Doc; Regional Parks Foundation expansion; youth outreach program development: e.g. Kids Healthy Outdoor Challenge, Adventure Crew/Richmond Rangers and Community Outdoor Outreach - recreation, environmental education, and youth employment programs.

Expanding and diversifying the Park District's funding sources and enhancing funding for parks in general by authoring the Park District's \$.5 billion Bond Measure WW, and Measure FF (2018 - 85.6% voter approval); conceiving and advancing the desperately needed 2016 State Parks & Water Bond; supporting legislation and creative finance for LWCF; championing an Economic Study showing the value of parks.

Heightening the visibility and perceived value of parks in the East Bay and throughout society by partnering with diverse parks and open space committees, communities, organizations and legislators throughout the East Bay, California, the US and the world.

Mentoring and inspiring park professionals to see the possibilities inherent in parks, and avenues to elevate the parks field in so many ways. The San Francisco East Bay's residents are deeply grateful and thank Robert for his dedicated leadership in preserving and protecting natural lands for the public.

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Professional – Lifetime

Nominee: John Wicker

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation, CA

Population:

John Wicker, Director of the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, is responsible for the operation, management, and maintenance of more than 70,000 acres of parkland and 183 parks. These include 9 regional parks, 13 recreational lakes, 15 wildflower and wildlife sanctuaries, 8 nature centers, four arboreta, and botanic gardens, and 20 golf courses that comprise the largest municipal public golf system in the country. Mr. Wicker oversees a Department that operates 41 swimming pools, 23 splash pads, more than 200 miles of multi-use trails, the John Anson Ford Amphitheatre, and the world-famous Hollywood Bowl. Mr. Wicker administers the Department's annual operating budget of more than \$243 million, a capital improvement program totaling \$80 million, and more than 1,000 full-time equivalent positions serving more than 50 million park visitors each year. As part of his responsibilities, Mr. Wicker also administers the Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District, which has issued more than \$1.5 billion in grants to parks and recreation agencies serving Los Angeles County. Mr. Wicker began his dedicated career with Los Angeles County as a Lake Lifeguard in 1978. He has worked in a variety of positions with the Department of Parks and Recreation, including serving as the Chief Deputy for over 10 years before being appointed as Director on March 29, 2016. He completed his studies at San Diego State University in May 1980 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Applied Arts and Sciences degree in Recreation Administration. He has changed the facet of the Parks and Recreation industry. Mr. Wicker built the mission of this department, championing innovative projects, building healthy and resilient communities, and advancing social equity and cohesion. With Mr. John Wicker's leadership, the department has received local, state, and national awards. Unique and notable projects include Obregon Green Model Park, first of its kind in the nation, the Parks After Dark program, Drowning Detection System, first municipality to use this technology, Environment, Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (ESTEAM) camp, Don Knabe Golf Center and Junior Academy, and the Puente Hills Park Master Plan to name a few. Mr. John Wicker is a champion for our families and park guests across Los Angeles County to ensure team members provide programming and services to the ones that needed it the most. For the depth and breadth of his truly exemplary accomplishments to advance parks for LA County and across the state and nation, and for the occasion of his retirement effective March 26, 2020, after a nearly 42-year Parks career, John Wicker is deserving of a Lifetime Professional achievement award.

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Professional - Lifetime

Nominee: Scott Bangle

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District, CA

Population:

Scott Bangle is an exceedingly experienced recently retired Parks Director and General Manager of Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District, as of December 2019. Spanning nearly 40 years of service, he began as a Park Ranger in San Bernardino County in 1981. Scott's entire career was in the public sector for three jurisdictions in the Inland Empire area of Southern California, including: Counties of Riverside and San Bernardino, and the City of Fontana.

Scott's responsibility as a Certified Parks and Recreation Professional included management, executive and elected level involvement, and significant experience in park planning, construction, maintenance, and programming of unique high-quality sustainable park and recreation facilities throughout the Inland Empire. Scott served on the Board of Directors for water districts, resource and conservation districts, NACPRO, the California Parks and Recreation Society, the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies, and is a Fellow for the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration.

During his 18 years at Riverside County, Scott was most well-known for the relationships built with elected officials, peers and especially staff. He made a point of meeting all staff, making regular visits district-wide, demanding hard work - yet taking time to thank and appreciate the effort of those involved. Under his direction, the District achieved National recognition as a CAPRA accredited agency, confirmed by re-accreditation shortly before his retirement. The CAPRA accreditation served as Scott's greatest accomplishment, though it capped an overhaul he gave to the District during his 11 year tenure as General Manager that included improvements to the financial accountability of a \$24 million operating budget, a robust \$6 million Capital program, as many as 450 FTE employees, and over 100,000 acres of land management serving 2.1 million residents spanning the 7200 square miles of Riverside County.

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: Adaptive Athlete CrossFit Program

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Buncombe County Recreation Services, Buncombe County Special Olympics, and South Slope CrossFit, NC

Population:

The Adaptive Athlete Program offers free, fun, and supportive CrossFit classes for individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. Classes are open to the public and participants do not need to be Special Olympics athletes. The weekly CrossFit class features inclusionary workouts tailored to develop strength, mobility, and body awareness through functional movement.

Community members with intellectual and physical disabilities are often left on the sidelines when it comes to fitness. One of the first of its kind, the program incorporates hands-on exercises with inclusive techniques including specific strategies for adapting different CrossFit movements and entire workouts. Each workout includes a warm-up, cool down, and 40 minutes of total body workout with one-on-one instruction from volunteer coaches. Individual instruction ensures specific movements are adapted for each participant's physical, mental, and emotional needs.

The ultimate goal is to prepare participants for daily life and remove barriers to exercise. Functional movements practiced in class include squatting, picking things up, balancing, pushing, and pulling. Designed to foster independence, training in a room of people with similar challenges helps everyone understand their potential and leads to greater quality of life.

Athletes range in age from 13-70 with varying individual program outcomes. One athlete was initially shy and overwhelmed, but now demonstrates movements for new athletes. An athlete with cerebral palsy was told by his doctor that he has more muscle mass currently than ever before. Some athletes cannot physically perform certain movements during early classes, so coaches modify them. Weeks later, they are able to do the workouts as originally prescribed. Coaches constantly create new modified movements for athletes.

Many members of the CrossFit gym volunteer every week; others engage in lengthy conversations with athletes which is equally important. The national CrossFit organization has highlighted the program and other communities are exploring their own programs.

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: Adaptive Kayaking and Archery

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation Department, VA

Population:

With a goal of independent pursuit of sports, Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation Department (CCPRD) has been providing programs in adaptive kayaking and archery since 2014. The department partners with Sportable, an adaptive sports club for those with physical disabilities. Classes are offered in flatwater kayaking, progressing to advanced river currents, as well as adaptive archery accommodating all skill levels. Additionally, CCPRD provides instruction for school special education classes, veterans and department therapeutic recreation programs.

Kayaking - Approx. 125 participate in kayak programs annually. On land, paddlers are either standing or wheelchair users. But on the water, disabilities disappear, providing a sense of mobility and independence not available on land. One participant with quadriplegia gained enough skill that he desired to purchase his own kayak. With assistance from CCPRD staff, a kayak was donated so he could pursue the sport independently. Eventually, he became an employee of Sportable.

Staff have become a regional resource for adaptations since providing these programs. One participant wanted to take a class but did not think accommodations were possible. Staff provided the adaptations and a local resource which allowed her to participate with her family.

Archery - Serving approx. 40 participants each year, archery classes are moving to a more inclusive approach. In addition to offering advanced sessions, classes will provide more development and attention to participants. Currently five youth archers are ready to join regular program offerings. One participant's skill developed enough to attend archery tournaments and Wheelchair Games, even securing gold medals. He has been a member of a local archery club for the past year.

CCPRD is a leader in the region providing accessible and inclusive opportunities for persons with physical disabilities to pursue new sports or a beloved interest. Small successes are achieved in each class, but reaching independence is the ultimate satisfaction.

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: Adaptive Sailing Program

Nominee's Organization: Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department, FL

Population:

Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department's Therapeutic Recreation Services Section partners with Special Olympics Florida-PBC to provide adaptive sailing programs for teens and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This sailing program utilizes adaptive sailboats which are easily controlled by one person or two, in any type of wind and water conditions and will not tip over. The program is skill building as well as therapeutic. There have been studies done about the benefits of sailing on emotional, physical, cognitive and social functions. During sailing seasons, staff work with athletes to provide stepping-stones to success through short and long-term goals. Goals include sailing ten minutes longer, building confidence and sailing independently. The program has seen first-hand benefits to both parents and participants, providing independence, self-confidence and skill building for the sailors. The sailing instructors have personally witnessed participants who are non-verbal around others, speak or sing when they are alone on their sailboat. This sailing program is unique in that it is the only Special Olympics sailing program in the state of Florida. Because of this, there is not a traditional Special Olympics sailing competition at the end of the season, however we provide racing experience through annual participation in an adapted sailing regatta in Naples, Florida. This regatta brings together athletes from different counties who all share in the love of sailing no matter the physical, intellectual, or developmental barriers they may face. While the sailing program is limited by the amount of boats and equipment, in the past three years the program has introduced sailing to over 30 new participants. The Palm Beach County's Adapted Sailing Program employs US Sailing Certified Small Boat Sailing Instructors and Adaptive Sailing Instructors allowing for a safe opportunity to recreate with peers without parent/care-giver support.

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: Adaptive Sports

Nominee's Organization: Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department, FL

Population:

Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department's Therapeutic Recreation Services section offers adapted sports for individuals with physical disabilities. Adapted sports not only remove barriers to participation they help athletes maintain and improve physical and mental health, develop peer relationships and a peer support system. In 2007, the Club Managers Association of America Therapeutic Recreation Complex opened specifically for Therapeutic Recreation program use. This provided a unique opportunity to expand adapted sports programs, which lead to Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation becoming a United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) Paralympic Sport Club in 2015.

By 2018, Paralympic Sport Club Palm Beach County became a Silver Level Paralympic Sport Club. Paralympic Sport Club Palm Beach County currently offers seven training and recreational sport opportunities: boccia, goalball, cycling, swimming, track and field, specifically Javelin, wheelchair basketball and wheelchair rugby. In 2019, sixty-nine athletes including five disabled veterans participated in sport training programs offered by the Therapeutic Recreation Services Section. Four of these athletes also train at the national level.

In addition to local sports training and recreational play, each year staff host clinics and tournaments. In 2019, staff hosted three international tournaments at the CMAA Therapeutic Recreation Complex including competitions for the sports of wheelchair rugby, boccia and goalball. Goalball is an exciting, highly competitive sport for athletes who are blind and visually impaired. Wheelchair rugby and boccia offer a unique opportunity for individuals with more severe physical disabilities to compete in sport. One-hundred nineteen athletes, including several disabled veterans competed in the tournaments. These tournaments provide an increased level competition for local athletes and a unique opportunity for community members to learn about Paralympic sports. These recreational and competitive level adapted sport experiences have helped many individuals with disabilities become athletes or remain athletes after injury.

Video: <https://youtu.be/OfcYEjVYAtU>

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: Lake Skinner Splashpad Expansion & Inclusive Playground

Nominee's Organization: Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District, CA

Population:

The Lake Skinner Recreation Area Inclusive Playground and Splash Pad Enhancements provide accessibility and interactive elements for children of all ages. The new playground was developed with the intention of including park visitors of all abilities in each play element, providing opportunities for fun and engagement for all. The Riverside County Parks and Open-Space District recognizes the communities we serve are diverse. The facilities and playgrounds we offer should reflect the communities we serve. Our district believes active, independent play is critical for the development, health, well-being, and social opportunities of all children.

The Lake Skinner Recreation Area is a regional park and campground which serves a large area in southwestern part of the County. Based on the Accessible Playground Directory provided by "Let Kids Play!" accessibility consulting firm, our project provides substantial community benefit by addressing the need in the surrounding and regional communities for inclusive playgrounds. Currently, in the surrounding areas of Hemet, Menifee, Murrieta and Temecula, Margarita Community Park in Temecula is the only other listed Accessible Playground in the surrounding area. In addition to increasing value in the community by providing a much needed accessible recreational amenity, the District was able to improve water efficiency and usage at Lake Skinner Recreation Area.

The improvements were completed in Summer of 2018, just in time for vacationing families to enjoy these new amenities. To date, the playground and splash pad use has added value to the park for visitors with 99% rating the improvements as "excellent" or "very good." While the inclusive playground is a new addition, use is high with daily averages of 35 children and weekend high attendance at over 150 children per day. Splash pad use also increased by 13% over prior years.

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: Adaptive Recreation Program

Nominee's Organization: Loudoun County Parks, Recreation and Community Services, VA

Population:

The Loudoun County Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PRCS) Adaptive Recreation Program provides participants opportunities to feel a part of the community and develop self-worth. One participant's sibling said that, without Adaptive Recreation, her brother would spend every day in front of the television. Countless other community members with disabilities report a similar disconnect. They, along with their families, struggle to find a place to belong. PRCS Adaptive Recreation serves people of all abilities, not just those who are high-functioning or independent.

Participants form social bonds and strategies as they experience overnight vacations, attend concerts and enjoy parties. For example, on overnight trips, participants manage their own money and keep track of their belongings, just as their peers without physical and cognitive challenges are expected to do. Activities offered through Adaptive Recreation mirror those offered to non-disabled peers. Adaptive Recreation serves all members of the community with disabilities, starting from age five.

A summer camp alternative is offered for children who may not be successful in an inclusive camp setting. Staff provides complete care and supports intensive behaviors. The experience is similar to a traditional camp, including field trips. Families are often included and may be invited to a camp performance or seasonal party. Loudoun is one of the few jurisdictions offering such a comprehensive, inclusive program. It has made a significant difference in many lives, as illustrated by one participant who told his family that he never wants to leave Loudoun County!

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: Sensory-friendly Hours

Nominee's Organization: Great Parks of Hamilton County, OH

Population:

Sensory-friendly hours were offered prior to the start of select Great Parks events and exhibits in 2019. Great Parks education staff worked with Starting Our Adventure Right (SOAR) program at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center (CCHMC) to develop the standards for these programs. During these hours, lights were dimmed, the volume of the environment was lowered and crowd presence was limited. By adjusting the atmosphere, children with sensory challenges and their families were able to acclimate and experience the exhibits and events before the programs went into full swing.

The sensory-friendly hours were held during Maple Sugar Days at Farbach-Werner Nature Preserve in the winter, at Out of This World in spring at Sharon Woods, and nature-themed exhibit weeks in the summer at Miami Whitewater Forest. The over 120 guests who attended were greeted by trained staff with copies of the event narrative so that they were able to create a visual schedule of activities with their child. Guests who attended provided positive feedback about their experiences. One guest stated, "This was great. We love coming to the parks, but we've never been able to experience the parks like this." A father also said that his kid enjoyed one of the features so much that he was going to make something similar at home for them to enjoy. The hours also provided staff, volunteers and other guests a new understanding of how sensory challenges can impact a family, increasing compassion for those dealing with sensory sensitivities. Events can be overwhelming experiences for those with sensory sensitivities. These times set aside have helped to expand the diversity of guests who would not traditionally attend. The sensory-friendly times seek to remove possible stressors so guests of all abilities can enjoy educational programming.

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Removing Barriers Initiative

Nominee: Virtual Reality

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population:

Cleveland Metroparks, in collaboration with Cleveland's nationally ranked University Hospitals (UH), is bringing the significant therapeutic health benefits of the natural world to UH's Seidman Cancer Center patients using innovative Virtual Reality technology.

With the use of virtual reality headsets and 360 video content produced by Cleveland Metroparks Information Technology team, the project enables patients to enjoy several outdoor park experiences. Currently, patients can select to view wildflower fields, cherry blossoms at Brookside Reservation, kayaking on the Cuyahoga River, even gorillas in Rwanda as part of Cleveland Metroparks Zoo's field conservation work.

Preliminary studies suggest that virtual reality may be an effective tool for chronic and acute pain management and stress in patients suffering from a variety of ailments. Similarly, public health and palliative research have consistently shown that the simple act of viewing nature can alleviate stress and anxiety and even increase healing time for patients.

"Our mission is to connect guests with nature and remove barriers to access," said Cleveland Metroparks CEO Brian M. Zimmerman. "I applaud the Cleveland Metroparks team for bringing this immersive park experience to fruition for these patients who are unable to enjoy the parks first-hand and see tremendous growth potential for this project.

"The pilot project with Seidman Cancer Center, made possible with the generous support of a private Cleveland Metroparks donor, has been so well received that UH has already tested it with sickle cell and cystic fibrosis patients, and may look to expand the program further. Cleveland Metroparks is also working with hospice and Parkinson's support organizations to pilot the technology.

In addition to its clinical application, Cleveland Metroparks has integrated the use of Virtual Reality at its Nature Centers as part of its ADA efforts to ensure guests are able to experience aspects of the park regardless of physical ability.

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Trails & Corridors - Class I

Nominee: Columbus Dragonfly Trails

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Columbus Parks and Recreation Department, GA

Population: 197,485

Columbus' Dragonfly Trail, part of the City's Rails-to-Trails project, is constructed on an abandoned railroad route and is Columbus's network of off-road greenway trails for recreation, transportation & interaction. The current 34 miles of trail include the Follow-Me Trail, MLK Trail and the Fall Line Trace as well as the RiverWalk with the most recent addition added this year connecting the existing Riverwalk to Lake Oliver Marina where there had long been a disconnect. In a City of almost 200,000 people, the Dragonfly Trail Network allows users to access the trail at parks, numerous road crossings, and trail spur connectors. It provides connectivity in our community and makes Columbus a more walkable, bikeable and healthier city. Long having been a city of cars, Columbus has now become a community that advocates and provides the opportunity to promote and demonstrate what trails can mean for a community.

In addition to making transportation a little easier and greener, the trail also offers a superb route for recreational bikers, joggers and walkers to enjoy daily exercise and the sights of Columbus. The Dragonfly Trails Network, and concept, was the brainchild of two civic leaders, Ken Henson, local lawyer and philanthropist, and Betsy Covington, President and CEO of the Community Foundation of the Chattahoochee Valley. The two of them recognized the need for a master plan for the trail system, and were able to overcome the obstacles that prevented the City from connecting and creating more trails. The DragonFly Trails Network is a wonderful example of the success that comes from a private-public partnership. Another 27 miles is planned throughout Columbus, creating more than 60 miles of interconnected trails that connect citizens & visitors to the Chattahoochee River, to neighborhoods and jobs, and to each other. <https://www.columbusga.gov/Planning/pdfs/dragonfly-trails.pdf>

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Trails & Corridors - Class I

Nominee: Moseley Trail

Nominee's Organization: Metroparks Toledo, OH

Population: 429,899

The Oak Openings Region of northwest Ohio is a globally recognized rare ecosystem declared by the Nature Conservancy as “One of America’s Last Great Places.” The Moseley Trail is a transformative project that, when all phases are completed, will complete a trail network of shared use trails, linking local residents to points of interest throughout the Oak Openings Region in northwest Ohio. The Moseley Trail is utilized by local residents to increase access to safe commuting alternatives, enhance tourism, and encourage active healthy lifestyles. In addition, this trail project protects, enhances and promotes awareness of the corridor’s globally significant natural resources by enhancing access and linkages to protected open spaces. Five of the six natural plant communities in the region are considered globally rare. This corridor is home to 1/3 of Ohio’s rare or endangered species, more than anywhere else in Ohio.

Boardwalk sections of the Trail correspond directly to those lands identified as Category 3 wetlands. Wetlands are critical to improving water quality as they naturally filter pollutants which is a topic of increasing importance due to the ever present threat of large algal blooms on Lake Erie. The unique modular concrete boardwalk and helical piers/foundation were selected for its longevity and low impact in ecologically sensitive areas. Though millions have been spent to date to acquire and restore the Oak Openings area, local residents have heard much but seen very little. The Moseley Trail is an important step in allowing residents to experience why this area is so grand and important. It offers unparalleled educational and programming opportunities. Metroparks’ dual missions of conservation and recreation could not be more fully articulated than in this trail project, which combines non-motorized connectivity with improved accessibility to and through one of the most important natural resources in the County, State, and country.

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Trails & Corridors - Class II

Nominee: Lake Apopka Loop Trail

Nominee's Organization: Orange County Parks and Recreation Division, FL

Population: 1.38 million

The Lake Apopka Loop Trail is a 17.6 mile trail that wraps around the north shore of Lake Apopka. Lake Apopka is Florida's fourth largest lake. The St. Johns River Management District (SJRWMD) manages 9.38 miles of the trail and 0.49 of a mile is maintained by Orange County Parks and Recreation. The trail extends from the Lake Apopka Loop Trailhead in Magnolia Park into Lake County. The scenic route allows visitors to enjoy biking or walking and horseback riding while exploring nature along the way.

Popular events like the Birdapalooza Festival have drawn thousands to the trail to explore the 360 different species of birds seen at the site. The list of birds observed here is amongst the highest numbers in the state of Florida. Friends of Lake Apopka also sponsor an annual bike ride every November. Approximately 100 bikers kick off the ride from Magnolia Park, loop around the lake and end the event in a neighboring town.

Future plans include the Lake Apopka Connector Trail that will connect the Lake Apopka Loop Trail to Orange County's West Orange Trail. The total length of this connector trail is approximately 4.3 miles and will serve as an important connection between the trail systems of Orange County, SJRWMD and Lake County. The connector trail begins at the West Orange Trail at Clarcona Horse Park Trailhead, runs west along McCormick Road, passes through an Orange County Reclamation Property before eventually connecting to Magnolia Park. Construction on the connector trail should begin in a few years.

Findings from the 2015 Community Interest and Opinion Survey for Orange County indicated that: 74% of households have a need for walking, hiking and biking trails; 49% believe in the importance of high quality Parks, Trails and Recreation facilities; 84% agree that parks, trails, facilities and services improve mental health and reduce stress.

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Trails & Corridors - Class II

Nominee: Park to Playa Trail and Pedestrian Bridge and Wildlife Crossing

Nominee's Organization: Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation, CA

Population: 9.8 million

Ten years in the making, a trailblazing project to build an unbroken 13-mile pedestrian corridor connecting several recreational and park areas, open spaces, and inland neighborhoods of Los Angeles to the County's multi-use trails system and reach the beach is finally becoming a reality. The Park to Playa Trail system provides recreational pedestrian access from Baldwin Hills to where Ballona Creek meets the Pacific Ocean. The final link, planned for completion in Fall 2020, is a 235-ft. pedestrian bridge spanning a 6-lane highway that connects two county parks - Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area and Stoneview Nature Center and the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook.

In a city known for its car culture, a pedestrian bridge and trail system that encourages people to get out of their cars is monumental. The trail will help abate both automobile traffic congestion and vehicle pollutants, thus improving human health and the ecosystem. By encouraging foot-travel and bicycling, the trail provides numerous social, health, and recreation benefits to the community. Additionally, the bridge will feature native landscaping to facilitate safe crossings for small wildlife who call the local habitat home.

Traversing urban neighborhoods with many access points, the trail connects diverse communities and provides equity to lower-income communities once cut off from easy beach access. The trail's easternmost leg is Stocker Corridor Trail, opened in 2016 near the future Crenshaw Line. The path then connects to Kenneth Hahn parkland and Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook, before linking with paths through Culver City Park. Most of the trail's western portion coincides with Ballona Creek Bike Path.

The project was a highly collaborative effort with LA County Parks and Public Works, Baldwin Hills Conservancy, Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority and local jurisdictions and community organizations and crossed municipal jurisdictions including City of Los Angeles, Culver City, and unincorporated Los Angeles County.

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Trails & Corridors - Class II

Nominee: Valley Parkway Connector Trail

2020 Awardee

Nominee's Organization: Cleveland Metroparks, OH

Population: 1.3 million

On October 22, 2018, Cleveland Metroparks opened the Valley Parkway Connector Trail. This six-mile “missing link” in the all-purpose trail network between Brecksville and Mill Stream Run Reservations was laid out more than 100 years ago as part of park founder William Stinchcomb’s vision of an inter-connected Emerald Necklace. With this gap finally filled, bicyclists and pedestrians now have access to 33 consecutive miles of connected paved off-road shared-use trails before reaching the Towpath Trail, part of the statewide Ohio to Erie Trail, and on to the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

Completion of this missing link had been a priority for Cleveland Metroparks since planning began in 2009 with an involved public process supported by the region’s metropolitan planning organization, the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA). The resultant Valley Parkway Trail Alignment Study, provided the plan to develop the trail, and the process used to create it solidified the partnership of Cleveland Metroparks and the cities of Brecksville, Broadview Heights, and North Royalton.

In order to structure funding from multiple sources, the trail was split into two phases. Patience and persistence were needed to assemble funding. Construction on the \$4.75 million project began in 2016 with support from grants from the Clean Ohio Trails Fund through the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, a federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) improvement grant through NOACA, and local funding from the cities of Brecksville, Broadview Heights, and North Royalton and Cleveland Metroparks capital funds. This strong partnership also allowed for additional outreach to the community, resulting in positive solutions to trail-building concerns. As part of this process, Cleveland Metroparks staff and members of the Ohio Horseman’s Council also re-established an equestrian trail along the north side of Valley Parkway corridor prior to construction of the new all-purpose trail.

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