

# 2009 NACPRO Excellence in Parks Awards

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

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

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

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

## Outstanding Public Official

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

This year's award recognized Charles D. "Danny" Stone, nominated by the Newton County Recreation Commission in Georgia.

**Danny Stone** has a long history leading many civic organizations in Newton County. As the current Vice Chair and Board Member of the Recreation Commission, Danny has worked hard to secure recreation facilities and programs that benefit the financial and physical health of Newton County. He has been instru-



mental in securing bonds for recreational facilities, land for green space and corporate donations when funds have been scarce.

Through his volunteerism and elected positions, Danny Stone has demonstrated his vision, persuasive power, and community support. He truly embodies the spirit of this award.

## Fellow Award

The NACPRO Fellow Award recognizes exemplary professionals who are currently employed in county park and recreation service. This year, two individuals were selected to receive this award.

The first Fellow Award winner is **Lois Holmes**, nominated by Georgetown-Scott County Parks and Recreation in Kentucky.

Serving as Director of the Georgetown-Scott County Parks and Recreation Department since 1985, Lois has made extensive progress. Park acreage has quadrupled, the budget has grown from \$37,000 to \$3.2 million, and program participation has increased from 20,000 to over 90,000 annually. In addition, Lois has helped to open many new facilities, including a 56,000 square foot indoor recreation facility, a soccer complex, a football complex, the Ed Davis Learning Center, and the Suffoletta Family Aquatic Center.

Lois has been involved with the recreation profession for over 27 years. In addition to her work with Georgetown-Scott County, Lois has served on the Kentucky Recreation and Park Society for over 20 years, adding her expertise to multiple committees, chairing conferences and raising funds to support the work of



the Society. Her dedication to the profession runs deep and her hard work has shown great results for her community.

The second recipient of the Fellow Award is **Tom McDowell**, Associate Superintendent, Recreation and Education, for Three Rivers Park District in Minnesota.

For over 30 years, Tom McDowell has played an integral role in the growth, development, and creative accomplishments of Three Rivers Park District.

A renowned champion of environmental education, Tom and his staff have fostered the development of many programs that have served as models around the country. In addition, recent award-winning and unique facility developments under Tom's leadership include the Baker Near-Wilderness Settlement, Gale Woods Farm, Elm Creek Winter Recreation Area, and the soon-to-opened Silverwood Park, a center for arts and the environment.

Tom has been recognized for his leadership skills throughout his career. Hired originally as a seasonal naturalist, he has moved through the ranks to his current role as Associate Superintendent, Division of Education and Recreation. Chairing numerous committees, he has developed many innovative policies and management practices such as: ensuring winter recreation opportunities under unreliable weather conditions; expanding dog walking and off-leash opportunities; increasing opportunities for all ages to connect with nature; and developing a program cost recovery model resulting in 140 percent revenue increase over five years.



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### Outstanding Contributor

The Outstanding Contributor Award is presented annually to recognize a significant contribution of land or fiscal resources to county parks and recreation.

This year, Outstanding Contributor Award was presented to **Jesse and Beulah Cox**. The Coxes were nominated by Hamilton County Parks and Recreation in Indiana. The award was presented posthumously.



In 1999, the Hamilton County Parks and Recreation Department received a call from Jesse Cox, a local businessman. Jesse and his wife, Beulah, wanted to donate a 125-acre piece of land for park development. They envisioned a unique park, where park visitors could enjoy nature and life at a relaxed pace, a place with gardens, trails, and amenities to host musical and theater events. Their donation was appraised at 4.25 million. Three years later the Park Department broke ground for the park, named Coxhall Gardens. Park development was estimated at 28 million dollars, raised through a combination of public and private partnerships.

Today the park includes many highlights including a copper roof gazebo surrounded by fountains, lawn seating area, a children's garden and a beautiful scenic overlook of the lake that provides a view of the entire park.

Coxhall Gardens has received rave reviews from the public. Thanks to the donation of Jesse and Beulah Cox.

### Outstanding Volunteer

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

The outstanding volunteer this year was **Flemmie Pitts**, nominated by Newton County Recreation Commission in Georgia

A longtime volunteer for Newton County, Flemmie Pitts is widely known for his ability to listen to the citizens and to work hard to bring about necessary change. Flemmie has been involved with a variety of local and regional boards including Newton County Recreation Commission, the NE Georgia Regional Development Council, Newton County Government and the Voter's League. Through this involvement, he has garnered support for all ages and has raised funds for numerous projects.

Flemmie is not shy about getting his hands dirty -- he has tirelessly renovated historical buildings for recreational and educational space.

In addition to the highly visible projects, Flemmie is known for his attention to the small but still important tasks. From the Newton County staff...."we would need much more space to tell you about all the behind-the-scenes things that Flemmie doesn't know, that we know, he does. How he picks up kids and takes them to school and recreation functions or pays an elder's utility bill."



### Outstanding Support

This Outstanding Support award is presented to an organization that has made a major contribution to benefit park and recreation programs or facilities. The contribution may be in terms of facility or program development, operation or support.



The 2009 Award for Outstanding Support Organization went to Hallmark Cards, Inc. nominated by Shawnee County Parks and Recreation in Kansas.

Each year, the **Hallmark Cards** Community Assistance Program provides their employees the opportunity to give back to their community by volunteering for the Shawnee County Parks Department. Over the past eight years, this program has grown to be a very important contributor to the success of the County's Parks and Recreation facilities and programs.

Volunteers in the program do everything from cleaning, stripping wallpaper, and painting in park facilities to planting seedlings, transplanting annuals and bulbs in landscape plantings, as well as maintaining those plantings throughout the season. Their dedicated work affords park employees the time and energy to focus on other park needs.

Contributions to the program exceed 2000 hours annually. Considering the current economy, this contribution is considered invaluable by Shawnee County Parks and Recreation staff.

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## Park and Recreation Program

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

The first program award recognized the Water Safety Program at **Indian River County Recreation Department** in Florida.



Responding to a need to instill water safety skills at an early age, the Water Safety Program has been implemented for elementary schools and special needs classes. A total of 13 schools participated this past year reaching approximately 500 students.

This two-part program begins with a dry-land training course highlighting proper water safety skills followed by American Red Cross skills training that includes emergency preparedness and basic first aid. After completing the first part of the program, students are bussed to an aquatic center to spend time in the water learning life saving skills as well as swimming and boating rules and regulations.

The program has been very successful and has received lots of positive feedback from educators and the community. The students gain valuable life saving skills and the community gains an awareness of the issues that surround bodies of water, whether they are backyard pools, lakes, ponds or other waterways.

The second program award was made to the Legend of Sleepy Hollow Program, at **Lake County Parks and Recreation** in Indiana.

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow Program is an interactive, progressive play, portraying the classic story of the same name. Guests are immersed into Tarrytown as they experience the story on a guided tour. Along the way, they dance at Von-Tassel's Fall Frolic, gather for stories around the campfire, search for schoolmaster Ichabod Crane and meet the Headless Horseman.

The program is very popular! Tickets sell out almost instantly and additional tour times have been added in recent years to accommodate the high demand. Volunteers are key to the success of this program, making up almost all of the 90 cast members. The program is a wonderful example of creative programming that is engaging, educational, active, and fun for all ages.



The Class II Parks and Recreation Program award is presented to park and recreation agencies from counties with a population over 500,000.

The first Class II program award was made to the PIL, Program, nominated by **County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation** in California.

"Play for Life" is an exciting Parks and Recreation marketing campaign

developed by the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation. The campaign's message to all ages promotes health, wellness, quality of life and a diversity of recreation opportunities.



The campaign's specific calls to action are manifested in short, catchy slogans with double meanings to encourage everyone to "Play for Life" by using the county's many beautiful parks and recreational facilities. Each

phrase encourages people to engage in an enriching activity. Slogans include: Take a Hike! Chill Out! Go Fore It! Make a Splash! Be One with Nature! Culture Shock! Walk it Off! And, Stop and Smell the Flowers!

With a limited budget, "Play for Life" was successfully promoted throughout Los Angeles County through both print and electronic media outlets. The campaign increased awareness of Los Angeles County Parks and programs and impacted the nearly 21 million visits experienced in 2008. The grassroots buzz and conversation created by the campaign served as an important catalyst in motivating people to live more active and healthy lives.

## Areas and Facilities

The Areas and Facilities awards are presented to recognize and honor excellence in recreation and park facilities; to focus national attention (both public and professional) on the very best of facility design; to

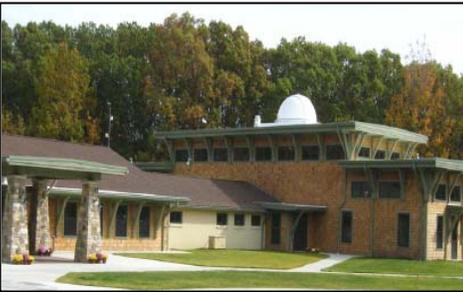
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encourage outstanding efforts in planning, design, construction, and benefits to the community; and to be a resource of information for the highest quality of facility development.

The Class I Award goes to park and recreation facilities in counties with a population under 500,000.

The first Class I award goes to the Environmental Learning Center, at **Lake MetroParks** in Lake County, Ohio.

The Lake Metroparks Environmental Learning Center is a state-



of-the-art science and educational facility that connects people with nature and fills a county-wide need for environmental education. It features educational exhibits, high-tech classrooms, an astronomical observatory, a biology/biotechnology lab and a weather station. Opened in Fall 2008, the Center is sited on 250 acres of beautiful and ecologically diverse open space. The focus of programming at the Center is the national "No Child Left Inside" initiative.

One of the highlights of the new center is programming that occurs through a partnership with the award-winning Porter Program for Science and Mathematics. This partnership has resulted in science programs that serve approximately 15,000 students annually. Anticipated future partnerships with other educational institutions will expand learning opportunities for all ages.

The second Class I Areas and Facili-

ties award was made to the Lake Shawnee Trail, nominated by **Shawnee County Parks** and Recreation in Kansas.

The Lake Shawnee Trail is a 7-mile



multi-use trail in Lake Shawnee Park that circles Lake Shawnee and winds through 700 acres of parkland connecting multiple park facilities.

The project was initiated in 2000 as a safe alternative for pedestrians along a busy roadway adjacent to the park. In 2001, the trail was incorporated into the County's Trail Master Plan and expanded to create a link into an entire network of trails in Topeka-Shawnee County. The 2.3 million project included the construction of multiple trailheads, parking lots, pedestrian bridges and access points to neighborhood communities.

Amenities along the trail include a campground, golf course, baseball and softball facilities, multiple shelters, gardens, marina, arboretum, playgrounds, tennis courts, fishing docks, and restrooms. As it meanders through the rolling terrain of Lake Shawnee Park, the trail provides trail users with multiple recreational opportunities as well as wonderful scenic views.

The Class II Award for Parks and



Recreation Areas and Facilities is presented to counties with a population over 500,000.

The first Class II Award goes to Long Key Natural Area in **Broward County Parks** and Recreation Florida.

The Long Key Natural Area is one of the largest natural areas managed by Broward County. As recently as a century ago, this elevated oak hammock was part of a series of islands surrounded by Everglade marshes. The natural area serves as a habitat for wildlife and is one of the largest remaining stands of upland hardwood forest in the County. Additional natural features include an orange grove, restored wetland marshes, man-made ponds and canals, and a bird rookery.

The park's centerpiece is the 18,000 square foot nature center, which includes an assembly hall, exhibit hall, classroom, theater, offices, kitchen, and restrooms. A bridge spanning a pond connects the center to nature trails. A public Art and Design project is inspired by the site's geological and hydrological features.



The project, which broke ground in August 2006 and opened in March 2008, encompasses some of the most significant archaeological, historical, and ecological resources in the region and can now be fully enjoyed by the residents of Broward County. Congratulations on receiving this award for this wonderful new facility!

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The second Class II Award for Park and Recreation Areas and Facilities goes to **Hilton Head Park Aquatic Playground** in the County of San Diego, California



In a unique partnership between The County of San Diego and a local advisory group, the first admission-free public aquatic playground was constructed at Hilton Head County Park. Construction of this \$1.6 million aquatic playground began in January 2008 and was completed and opened to the public in October 2008. The new playground serves residents from all areas of the County, providing cool, clean outdoor fun.

The nautically themed design of the park emphasizes the mysterious creatures of the deep and entices the children to "swim with marine life, captain their own pirate ships, walk the plank and stage epic battles with water cannons." The park's state-of-the-art computer and innovative re-circulating filtration system kills bacteria such as E-coli and saves over 500,000 gallons of water each year

### Operational Support Facility

The Operational Support Facility Award is presented to recognize a support facility of unique design.

The 2009 Operational Support Facility Award goes to the Administrative Office Complex and Recreation Center, nominated by the Recreation and Park Commission of **East Baton Rouge Parish** in Louisiana

An existing commercial building site located in the heart of mid-city was donated to the Recreation and Park Commission of East Baton Rouge. This donation, valued at \$5.1 million and the largest donation ever made to the Commission, included a 145,000 square foot building with approximately 20 acres of land. A local architecture firm was contracted to design the renovation for the new administration offices for the Commission

The remodeled building houses the Commissions administrative offices, meeting rooms and warehouse space that hosts an Interactive Gaming room. A public fitness center and rentable ballroom are also amenities of the facility. In addition, there are spaces designated for possible future office tenants and small retail shops surrounded by a lush green park.



### Environmental/Conservation

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

The 2009 Environmental/Conservation Award was given to the **Michigan Turfgrass Foundation** Environmental Stewardship Program Certification in Oakland County, Michigan.

Groveland Oaks County Park is a 360-acre park located in Oakland

County, Michigan. In 2008, Groveland Oaks became the first park in Michigan to earn the Michigan Turfgrass Foundation's Environmental Stewardship Program Certification. In order to receive this certification, Groveland Oaks had to exceed requirements of environmental laws, water resources protection and enhance the maintenance and management of turfgrass and open spaces.

Strategies to receive the certification included: converting to bio-fuel and energy efficient lights; installing vegetative swales to prevent runoff; instituting a bluebird nest box program; and creating a emergency oil spill action plan. The certification process provided the opportunity to evaluate park property, assess stewardship practices, and make changes and improvements when necessary, ensuring that parkland is kept in an environmentally sound condition for future generations.



### Historical/Cultural

The Historical/Cultural Facility Award is awarded to a unique facility development dedicated to historical or cultural preservation, recreation, and/or interpretation. This year, we have two awards in this category.

The first Historical/Cultural Facility Award was to The Ranchos of San Diego County Project, nominated by the County of **San Diego Department of Parks** and Recreation, California.

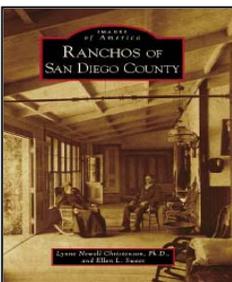
The Mexican ranchos of San Diego County were a colorful and vital part of early California history. Ran-

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chos covered the most fertile lands in San Diego and produced grain, vegetables, and fruits and grazed thousands of head of cattle, sheep and horses.

The Ranchos of San Diego County

project was initiated to provide park rangers with materials to help them interpret this rich history. The objectives of the Project were to develop an interpretive program that informed and excited the public, was produced at minimum expense, could be used at several different parks, didn't require additional staff, and if possible, would generate revenue.



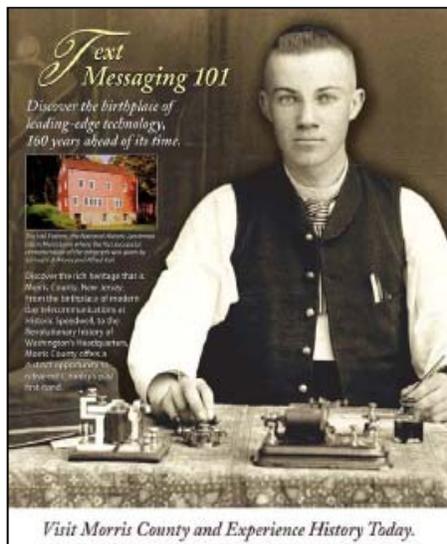
The Ranchos of San Diego County book consists of photographs, maps, and images of 12 of the original 30 ranchos located in San Diego County. Chapters in the book high-

light restored adobe ranch houses as well as land within the park system that was originally part of the ranchos. Many of the images are new to the public and come from the descendants of the original rancho owners. The Ranchos book is used by rangers as a complement to their education programs. With this book, County Parks accomplished its objectives and provided the public with a new and energized interpretive program.

The second Historical/Cultural Facility Award this year was made to The Historic Speedwell Rehabilitation Project, at **Morris County Parks** in New Jersey.

Historic Speedwell is a rich historical site located in Morris County. Restoration of the site was conceived shortly after the facility was acquired by the Park Commission in 2002. Previously operated by a private non-profit, the site was in serious financial trouble, falling into disrepair, and had limited public visitation.

The hallmark project of the restoration was the restoration of the Vail



Factory Building, the site of the first successful demonstration of the electromagnetic telegraph by Alfred Vail and Samuel Morse in January, 1838. This event earned Speedwell the title "Birthplace of the Telegraph" and clearly placed the Factory building in the growth of modern telecommunications. Today, visitors can explore and enjoy state-of-the-art exhibits in this facility.

Unique aspects of the project included the challenges of preserving the historical, authentic, and aesthetic qualities of the structure while providing safety and accessibility. The total project cost just over 3 million and was funded in part through local and federal grants. The site is now open 7 days per week in season, hosting school groups, interpretive programs, and public visitation.

### Removing Barriers

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

Our first award went to Handicap Hayride Program, nominated by **Lake County Parks** and Recreation Department, Indiana.

Each fall, Lake County Parks provides a fall hayride for families with special needs. Based on feedback from participants, park staff realized that in order to truly be inclusive, the hay wagon needed to be wheelchair accessible. Staff explored ways to best secure the wheelchairs and chose a method often used in school busses. Chairs are secured with straps that attach the frame of the chair to the floor of the wagon. Other accessible features include a long aluminum ramp that leads to a large wooden transfer deck.

The public may attend the annual public hayride or reserve a wheelchair accessible private group hayride. It is significant for those in wheelchairs to be able to join their family and friends on the wagon; bumping and bouncing through the park, up and down the hills, and going through the woods. The delight on their faces is immeasurable and the experience is truly inclusive.

The second Removing Barriers Ini-



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tiative Award was given to the Accessible Canoe and Kayak Launch, nominated by **St. Clair County** Parks and Recreation Commission and **Midland County** Parks and Recreation in Michigan.

In 2008, St. Clair and Midland Counties collaborated to develop an accessible launch system that could accommodate many types of canoes and kayaks, did not require electricity or the use of cables and pulleys, was easy to use without supervision, and was vandal resistant. After much research, a plan was



devised to use existing EZ-Dock components and build custom handrails. The prototype was installed and tested in September 2008. Users reported that the launch was easy to use. Since then, other agencies have started to work with EZ-Launch to create their own accessible launches and EZ-Dock now markets the unit as an EZ-Launch. Additional plans are underway to design and fabricate a wheelchair transfer mechanism that will allow users of all abilities to enter and exit their boats independently.

### Planning Initiative

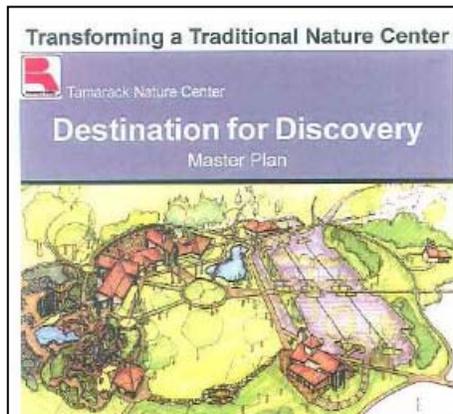


The Planning Initiative Award is presented to recognize an agency that conducts a research or planning initiative that has provided the agency with important data to aid in decision-making and which contributes to a body of knowledge that will be valuable to other county agencies.

The 2009 Planning Initiative Award was presented to Tamarack Nature Center, nominated by **Ramsey County** Parks and Recreation Department in Minnesota.

Tamarack Nature Center is a 320-acre prairie, forest and wetland preserve located within the most densely populated county in Minnesota. The nature center has been open to the public since the 1970s serving over 50,000 visitors annually.

Recognizing the growing "Nature Deficit Disorder" articulated in



Richard Louv's book *The Last Child in the Woods*, Ramsey County undertook a comprehensive planning initiative. "Destination for Discovery" redirects the role of the nature center from traditional programming towards a more active regional center for community engagement utilizing arts, humanities, science, adventure and play to reconnect

people with nature.

Funding for the planning and design initiative came from several grants. Deliverables included a site master plan, curriculum and program plans, defined EcoArts programming, design development plans for the campus and preliminary construction documents for several features. The planning process enabled Tamarack Nature Center to define an innovative and transferable approach to reconnecting children and families with nature.

### Award Program Sponsors

NACPRO thanks this year's award program sponsors, including: **Biological Mediation Systems, Inc.** (BMS), providing the Parks and Recreation profession with systems and buildings to meet outdoor restroom needs; and **Pilot Rock**, providing landscaping equipment products wherever people gather to enjoy the outdoors; and **TrafficGuard**, specializing in the manufacture of top-of-the-line manually operated removable and collapsible vehicle access control systems; And **Sybertech Waste Reduction Ltd**, committed to providing cost saving services and products that help keep the environment cleaner and the work place safer.

### To Enter the 2010 Awards Competition:

Nominations will be accepted beginning February 1, 2010 for the NACPRO County Parks Excellence 2010 Awards. Presentation of the awards will be made at an award banquet in conjunction with the NACo meeting to be held mid - July 2010 in Reno, Nevada.

**For details and application forms check the NACPRO website <http://www.nacpro.org/> in February.**