

# 2016 NACPRO Award Nominations

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## Environmental/Conservation

**Nominee:** Huntley Meadows Park Wetlands Restoration

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Fairfax County Park Authority, Virginia

**Population:** 1.1 million

After many years of planning, 60 public meetings, and construction, Huntley Meadows Park in Alexandria, Va., has a renewed wetland. The park's wildlife literally dove into it -- the ultimate measure of success.

Huntley's central wetland, the largest non-tidal wetland in Northern Virginia, was one of the most productive and diverse non-tidal wetlands in the mid-Atlantic, a beaver-dammed hemi-marsh attracting regionally rare wildlife. Silt and aggressive plants had reduced wetland habitat by 33%.

Research, monitoring and public meetings determined that biodiversity, resource protection and environmental education were local priorities.

A restoration was planned with five aspects: 1) an earthen berm to hold back water, 2) a structure to manage water levels, 3) wetland expansion, 4) five pools to provide year-round habitat, 5) brush shelters and logs for habitat. Construction started in April 2013 and was completed in March 2014. The \$3 million cost was funded by park bonds and grants and managed by Park Authority staff.

Park staff and volunteers monitor, manage and maintain the restored wetland. Staff manipulate water levels seasonally to expand the wetland pool from 23.2 to 46.2 acres. The area has become paradise for wildlife and wildlife watchers.

Park personnel thought it would take three years to judge success and whether wildlife would return. It took seven days of rain in October 2013. Staff raised the water level 10 inches above its 1986 levels, and wildlife had a ball. The park was inundated by the largest chorus of Southern Leopard Frogs staff had ever heard. Over following weeks, Northern Shovelers, Northern Pintails, Green-winged Teal, Belted Kingfishers, Winter Wren and American Black Ducks returned.

The renewed wetland has drawn professionals from other states and countries to view the project. It is an outstanding example of environmental stewardship with impact on water quality, wildlife and wildlife viewing.

**Primary Contact**

Judith Pedersen  
Fairfax County Park Authority  
12055 Government Center Pkwy  
Fairfax, VA 22035  
[Judith.Pedersen@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Judith.Pedersen@fairfaxcounty.gov)  
703-324-8662

**Alternate Contact**

Carolyn Gamble  
703-768-2525  
[Carolyn.Gamble@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Carolyn.Gamble@fairfaxcounty.gov)

## Historical/Cultural Facility

2016 Awardee

**Nominee:** “Lasdon Park Remembers Vietnam” Exhibit at the Westchester County Veterans Museum

**Nominee’s Title:**

**Nominee’s Organization:** Westchester County Parks, New York

**Population:** 960,000

Event Summary: “He didn’t make it home. I barely made it home,” commented a Vietnam War veteran who stood with his grandson before a model of the U.S.S. Westchester as he recognized the name of a former fellow soldier whose name was on the roster as having served on the ship during this conflict. Designed to honor veterans of a controversial time in American history, the exhibit premiered at the Veterans Museum on November 28, 2015.

Background: Located at Lasdon Park, this museum is dedicated to Westchester men and women who served our country and is a joint effort of the county’s Parks and Veterans Service Agency, and the Vietnam Veterans of America/Westchester County Chapter 49. Prior to the development of the exhibit, the museum exhibition team consulted with the curator of the Vietnam Era Museum and Education Center in New Jersey to determine an appropriate way to pay tribute to those who served our country during this controversial conflict and have “lived in the shadows” since their time in the service.

Description: The exhibit features a photographic timeline of America’s involvement in Vietnam, along with personal war-time photographs of veterans belonging to the local chapter. Light weapons, uniforms, mines, documents, helmets, flack vests and other military equipment are on display as well. A photographic tribute to the military war dogs of Vietnam, the largest contingent ever, is highlighted. A model of the U.S.S. Westchester, the only American ship to have served during the conflict, is on display. The exhibit also includes photos and biographies of the three Vietnam Congressional Medal of Honor winners associated with Westchester County, along with a tribute to Prisoners of War.

Results: The exhibit has drawn hundreds of veterans and their families from all over the area who openly share their own “war stories” and as they view the display. One woman commented to her young son, “That’s the uniform your Pop-Pop wore during the war.” Another flashed a photo of her grandfather in a uniform that was very similar to one on display. The exhibit not only provides closure for the soldiers who finally feel recognized for their efforts, but also for their families who come away with insight into what their loved ones endured during their service.

**Primary Contact**

Kathleen O'Connor  
Westchester County Department of Parks,  
Recreation and Conservation  
450 Saw Mill River Road  
Ardsley, NY 10502  
[parksinfo@westchestergov.com](mailto:parksinfo@westchestergov.com)  
914-231-4504

**Alternate Contact**

Mary Kaye Koch  
914-231-4565  
[parksinfo@westchestergov.com](mailto:parksinfo@westchestergov.com)

## Marketing

**Nominee:** Green Friday

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** County of San Diego, California

**Population:** 2M

On Friday, Nov. 27 - typically known as Black Friday - the County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) asked San Diegans to nix their shopping trips and head outdoors to experience the "upside of outside" in a County park for Green Friday.

DPR works year-round to provide San Diegans with diverse recreation opportunities and lay the foundation for memorable park experiences. We continually seek innovative ways to inspire the next generation of parks ambassadors. Green Friday was one such pursuit; with 350 miles of trails where people can hike, bike, ride a horse, site-see and picnic, County Parks offer a ready (an economical) escape from daily life.

The Marketing and Public Outreach Manager, in conjunction with DPR leadership staff, developed a robust communications plan for a 2-week campaign (11/16 - 11/28). A web page was launched on [sdparks.org](http://sdparks.org) that showcased images of parks along with recreation tips, with articles like "How to Get Fit for Free in County Parks" and "Secret Picnic Spots." Information was shared on social media and news outlets for DPR and the overarching County of San Diego. A "Paint Your Photo Stream Green" photo contest ran on both Facebook and Twitter. Local television station KUSI picked up the story, adding a park ranger to their program lineup.

2016 was an inaugural year for DPR's Green Friday campaign, but one that generated a flurry of conversation and laid the groundwork for lucrative business partnerships. We were thrilled with the response on social media, and with the number of people who visited parks on Nov. 27 despite the morning's inclement weather. But the key takeaway is that we successfully created an outlet through which we could share our vision with the community, and where they could share what the "upside of outside" is all about to them.

**Primary Contact**

Brian Albright  
County of San Diego  
5500 Overland Avenue, Suite 410  
San Diego, CA 92123  
[brian.albright@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:brian.albright@sdcounty.ca.gov)  
858-966-1301

**Alternate Contact**

Jason Hemmens  
858-966-1342  
[jason.hemmens@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:jason.hemmens@sdcounty.ca.gov)

## Marketing

**Nominee:** Colvin Run Mill/Partners in Preservation (PiP) Campaign

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Fairfax County Park Authority, Virginia

**Population:** 1.1 million

In 2015, Colvin Run Mill became one of only a handful of mills of its kind in the world to be fully restored, operational and open to the public. That was thanks in part to a \$75,000 grant the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) received for the mill's top-4 finish in a 2013 web-based Partners in Preservation (PiP) voting contest sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and American Express.

The competition among the 25 finalists was fierce, and the mill's 4th place finish is especially outstanding when you consider the heavy hitters that finished ahead of the mill - the National Cathedral (1st), Mount Vernon (2nd) and the 6th and I Street Synagogue (3rd). The mill also out-campaigned nationally known sites such as the Iwo Jima Memorial, Arlington House, and Congressional Cemetery.

The goal of the three-week preservation campaign was to get the public to cast daily votes for the 202-year-old working mill and help assure its survival for generations to come. The PiP grant funded the mill's grain elevator restoration, and bond funds covered second and third-floor restoration costs including those of c.1811 drying and sifting equipment.

As a result of the campaign:

- The FCPA attained a 275% financial return on its campaign investment.
- The campaign video was viewed by nearly 7000 people via the FCPA website.
- Facebook engagement spiked during the campaign by 1200%.
- The campaign also resulted in increased public awareness, and subscriptions for the FCPA's chief marketing publication, Parktakes magazine, increased by nearly 7000; the largest quarterly increase since Jan. 2007 when the agency started mailing only to households that requested it rather than to all households in the county.

The entire campaign is best illustrated through the attached Thank-You presentation the Park Authority submitted to PiP judges on the last day of voting.

**Primary Contact**

Judith Pedersen  
Fairfax County Park Authority  
12055 Government Center Parkway, Suite 927  
Fairfax, VA 22035  
[Judith.Pedersen@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Judith.Pedersen@fairfaxcounty.gov)  
703-324-8662

**Alternate Contact**

Karen Thayer  
703-324-8562  
[Karen.Thayer@Fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Karen.Thayer@Fairfaxcounty.gov)

## Marketing

**Nominee:** Great Parks Comprehensive Marketing Plan

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Great Parks of Hamilton County, Ohio

**Population:** over 500,000

Great Parks of Hamilton County created its first Comprehensive Marketing Plan in 2015. Even though communication has always been a priority for the 85-year-old organization, a tangible plan was not possible until Great Parks' evolved and grew to the capacity to create and maintain one.

And just as the team has evolved over time, so did the park district, with a rebranding in 2013. This change involved months of research and analysis by studying ever-changing markets and demographics in order to better determine how to communicate best. Thus, the necessity for a marketing plan was born.

Of course, with it being the first plan for the agency, challenges arose in collecting accurate and timely demographic, measurement and statistical information. Standards and best practices of collecting information was a new concept. Yet, the goal of the plan remained focused, and that was to present a simple, straightforward overview that is detailed enough to be meaningful, purposeful and productive.

The Comprehensive Marketing Plan is a snapshot of Great Parks' overall marketing efforts, including strategies, goals and tactics. It was created using staff resources including GIS statistics; industry reports; staff feedback, goals and concerns; software and sales data; focus group findings; staff, resident, and park guest survey results (in-person, online, and phone); and public resources such as the U.S. Census Bureau. Sections of the plan include "State of the Agency", SWOT Analysis, Industry and Health Trends, and Key Marketing Concepts.

Overall, the Comprehensive Marketing Plan is meant to be a fluid document that will continually evolve to better reflect Great Parks' moving forward as a public agency. Great Parks hopes for it to be a beneficial tool that serves as a foundation for messaging consistence and maintaining a connection with the community by providing Great Parks as an economic, physical and social value.

**Primary Contact**

Jack Sutton  
Great Parks of Hamilton County  
10245 Winton Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45231  
[kwhitton@greatparks.org](mailto:kwhitton@greatparks.org)  
513-521-7275

**Alternate Contact**

Kimberly Whitton  
513-521-7275  
[kwhitton@greatparks.org](mailto:kwhitton@greatparks.org)

## Operational Facility

**Nominee:** Westwinds Metropark Facility

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Metroparks Toledo, Ohio

**Population:** 430,000

One of any park district's biggest challenges is to serve community needs without compromising the integrity of natural areas. At the newly designed and operating Westwinds Metropark, Metroparks Toledo has done just that. Westwinds sits on 195 acres in the globally rare Oak Openings region that supports more rare species than anywhere in Ohio. But until now, the greater Toledo area has had no public opportunities for the popularly growing outdoor pursuit of archery. Compatible with the conservation initiative of the surrounding region, Westwinds is the first archery range in Northwest Ohio to be free and open to the public. It features a 3D range with animals paired in predator/prey relationships. The interpretation introduces visitors to the importance of conservation and safe hunting practices. Westwinds also incorporates a large static range that allows visitors to shoot from a platform at targets ranging from 10 to 70 yards away. The static range includes targets specifically dedicated to broadhead arrows. The \$150,000 cost of this project was offset by grants and donations from National Wild Turkey Federation, Ohio Division of Natural Resources, and Bass Pro. Additionally, The Flying Tigers, a radio-controlled flying club, partners to maintain the grounds and offer free public programs. Since its opening in September of 2015, over 1,000 people a week have visited Westwinds. Through programming, hundreds of visitors have been introduced to archery at this prime Oak Openings site. This range has become home to the popular Metroparks "Try It" archery programs which introduce participants of all ages to this outdoor skill. At Westwinds, Metroparks is fostering future conservationists through the hook of a newly popular outdoor pursuit.

**Primary Contact**

Shannon DeYoung

Metroparks Toledo

5100 West Central Avenue

Toledo, OH 43615

[Shannon.deyoung@metroparkstoledo.com](mailto:Shannon.deyoung@metroparkstoledo.com)

419-360-2599

**Alternate Contact**

Jill Molnar

419-407-9709

[jill.molnar@metroparkstoledo.com](mailto:jill.molnar@metroparkstoledo.com)

## Operational Facility

**Nominee:** Irvine Regional Park Soda Fountain Pavilion

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Orange County Parks, California

**Population:** 3 Million

Irvine Regional Park is California's first regional park, first opened in 1897. OC Parks recently refurbished one of its oldest and most storied buildings as a meeting room, which has proved extremely popular for County agency training, meetings and retreats.

The park's Soda Fountain Pavilion was designed in 1930. In 1942 the park closed to be used as an Army training camp, and the Pavilion was converted into a Postal Exchange. Later it served as a restaurant concession, then in 1992, the 2,600 square foot building was refurbished to serve as OC Parks headquarters, which it did for 15 years. In 2007, offices moved to a different location and the Pavilion was again vacant.

In 2013, OC Parks decided to repurpose it as a training and meeting facility for OC Parks. The Pavilion was remodeled to include a state-of-the-art audio visual system, Wi-Fi access, new carpeting, upgraded lighting, custom-made ceiling tiles, new tables and chairs, revamped air conditioning system, restrooms, and a kitchen facility. Cost of renovations was \$550,000. In 2014, the Pavilion started hosting small meetings on a trial basis. Word soon spread about the Pavilion, located underneath old oak trees within the heart of Irvine Regional Park. Due to high demand, the building is now available to all County agencies to reserve weekdays at no cost. It seats up to 100.

In 2015, the Pavilion was booked for 126 occasions with 4,000 attendees total. Participants have commented that they enjoy the rustic setting, and the opportunity to visit the park's nature center and OC Zoo, which are adjacent to the pavilion.

The Soda Fountain Pavilion has also had limited use for select public events. One event featured screening a movie about hiking the Pacific Crest Trail. Expected attendance was 50 people, but more than 100 attended.

### **Primary Contact**

Stacy Blackwood

OC Parks

13042 Old Myford Road

Irvine, CA 92602

[stacy.blackwood@ocparks.com](mailto:stacy.blackwood@ocparks.com)

949-923-3743

### **Alternate Contact**

Marisa O'Neil

714-973-6870

[marisa.oneil@ocparks.com](mailto:marisa.oneil@ocparks.com)

## Outstanding Public Official

**Nominee:** Andy Kunasek

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:** Maricopa County Board of Supervisor

**Nominee's Organization:** Maricopa County, Arizona

**Population:** 4,087,191

Maricopa County Board of Supervisor Andy Kunasek has been a member of the Board for nineteen years. While his business and family background is in farming and cattle operations, he is a strong supporter of solid land management and responsible government planning for parks and open spaces. Over the years, he has played an instrumental role in growing Maricopa County's regional park system by negotiating land deals which resulted in numerous acres of Bureau of Land Management land for the County, and ensuring that the initial funding was allocated for the development of the Regional Trails Master Plan.

In 2004, the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors authorized development of the Maricopa Trail. Supervisor Kunasek is identified by the Board as the driving force behind the creation of the continuous 310-mile trail system. The goal of the Maricopa Trail, a non-motorized regional trail system, is to connect all of Maricopa County's regional parks. The County has spent approximately \$2.5 million on the trail so far. Thanks to support from Supervisor Kunasek, approximately 80% of the trail system has been completed with a targeted completion date of October 2016.

To bring awareness to the long awaited trail system, Supervisor Kunasek reached out to the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department to discuss the opportunity to host a mountain bike race, the Prickly Pedal. To bring the project to fruition, Supervisor Kunasek connected the Department with individuals and organizations who support the development and preservation of the Maricopa Trail. In 2015, the Maricopa Trail and Park Foundation began organizing the 45-mile mountain bike race. To express his dedication to the project, Supervisor Kunasek secured an advertising and marketing firm to help brand the event and create a website for participants to register for the event, and secured \$83,000 in sponsorship funding/donations.

### **Primary Contact**

RJ Cardin  
Maricopa County Parks and Recreation  
Department  
41835 N. Castle Hot Springs Rd.  
Morristown, AZ 85342  
[RJCardin@mail.maricopa.gov](mailto:RJCardin@mail.maricopa.gov)  
605-506-2930

### **Alternate Contact**

Dawna Taylor  
602-506-2930  
[dawnataylor@mail.maricopa.gov](mailto:dawnataylor@mail.maricopa.gov)

## Outstanding Public Official

**Nominee:** Kathy Crawford

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:** 38th District Michigan State Representative

**Nominee's Organization:** State Legislature, Michigan

**Population:** 105,000

Kathy Crawford, 38th District Michigan State Representative, is a dedicated advocate for parks, recreation and senior services. She has been a parks and recreation professional in the area of seniors and aging for more than 30 years, directing programming for more than 30 senior centers through the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency, implementing the city of Novi's first senior center and serving as its first senior citizen director. She retired from the City of Novi Parks and Recreation Department in 2004.

Her political career began in 2007 when she was elected to the Novi City Council. Three years later, she was elected to the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, representing the 9th District. In November, 2012, she was overwhelmingly re-elected to the same post.

In 2014, Crawford was elected to her first two-year term as a State Representative for Michigan's 38th District where she continues to support parks and recreation. She recently supported a house bill providing funds for a new park in Novi. The grant will provide \$385,000 for the acquisition of 10 acres for the new Novi Northwest Neighborhood Park.

In 2015 she co-hosted a luncheon that connected parks and recreation officials with state legislators. The objective was to make critical connections together so state legislators could understand the impact of parks and recreation beyond their status on paper as a budget item.

Throughout her public and political careers Crawford has garnered many honors. The most recent are:

- 2016: mParks (Michigan Recreation and Park Association) Elected Official of the Year.
- 2015: Detroit Regional Chamber's one of six `Legislators to Watch`.
- 2015: Inducted into the Michigan Recreation and Park Association Hall of Fame.

A tireless champion of recreation, Crawford continues to support the park and recreation profession and the quality of life for the residents of Michigan.

### **Primary Contact**

Desiree Stanfield  
Oakland County Parks and Recreation  
2800 Watkins Lake Rd.  
Waterford, MI 48328  
[stanfieldd@oakgov.com](mailto:stanfieldd@oakgov.com)  
248-705-4108

### **Alternate Contact**

## Outstanding Support Organization

**Nominee:** Cook County Department of Public Health

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Cook County Department of Public Health, Illinois

**Population:** more than 500,000

We are nominating the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) as an outstanding support organization for their leadership role in connecting the residents of Cook County to opportunities to live a healthy lifestyle. They are helping us connect residents to the physical, emotional, and mental benefits of spending time in nature. The CCDPH invited us to partner in a recent health and nature related initiative - the Healthy Hotspot project, funded through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Partnerships to Improve Community Health grant program. The Healthy Hotspot initiative seeks to provide healthy living opportunities for all residents across suburban Cook County, including increased awareness and access to physical activities. Through this partnership, the Forest Preserves has been able to create an innovative "gateways to nature" plan that includes the creation of signature gateway sites throughout Cook County. These sites will feature improved trail access, wayfinding, access to outdoor recreation, and a strategic communications campaign promoting the Forest Preserves as a resource for active living.

Our partnership with the CCDPH and the spirit of inclusivity that they have demonstrated has allowed us to build new and strategic relationships with healthcare providers. The CCDPH invited us to be part of the Alliance for Healthy and Active Communities, a group of community health advocates who work to make healthy options accessible to residents of Cook County. And we are involved in "WePlan2020", the CCDPH's community health assessment, a planning process conducted every five years with community partners and residents to develop and implement a strategic health improvement plan.

The CCDPH has been an excellent partner to us, helping us develop new relationships, expand our reach, and leverage resources. Through this relationship we are making clear progress on demonstrating the link between health benefits and spending time in the forest preserves.

The Gateways Master Plan can be downloaded at:

<http://fpdcc.com/preserves-and-trails/plans-and-projects/gateway-master-plan/>

### **Primary Contact**

Michelle Uting  
Forest Preserves of Cook County  
536 N. Harlem Ave.  
River Forest, IL 60305  
[Michelle.Uting@cookcountyil.gov](mailto:Michelle.Uting@cookcountyil.gov)  
708-771-1157

### **Alternate Contact**

## Outstanding Support Organization

**Nominee:** Miracles do Happen!!

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Greene County Recreation Department, Georgia

**Population:** 16,500

In a quest to revitalize the Greene County Recreation Department retired Newton County, Georgia Recreation Director and 2005 NACPRO Fellow of the Year recipient Tommy Hailey was hired by the Recreation Commission to help resurrect a struggling department that the Citizens of Greene County seemly had given up on. After several years of neglect of grounds and facilities as well as large number of participants leaving the structured programs for various reasons public trust was at an all-time low.

Hailey's first order of business was to re-establish the vision, image and mission of all staff members. Hailey worked closely with each staff member in recognizing their strengths as well as their weaknesses and encouraged each one to take pride in the job responsibilities. Next, Hailey took an assessment of all facilities and grounds. The Sports Complex along with the multi-purpose areas saw little or no grass growing, infields were deplorable, playgrounds were unusable and many buildings had long been neglected, limited signage throughout the parks and no ADA accessibility to ninety percent of the facilities. Immediately contractors were secured and work began to address the problems and issues. Thankfully, within eight months projects were completed thus bringing life and renewed interest back to the Recreation Department. This was all done with vision, hard work with limited resources and budget. Lastly, the re-establishment of severed ties in the community were mended. Hailey is a strong believer that involvement in communities and participation in organizations such as NACPRO, GRPA, and NRPA contributes to a healthy and successful department.

In closing, Hailey stated, "we were it was going to be a nearly impossible challenge. We met that challenge with overwhelming success that will be rewarding for our Citizens."

**Primary Contact**

Tommy Hailey  
Greene County Recreation Department  
2741 Old Union Point Hwy  
Greensboro, GA 30642  
[thailey@greenerec.org](mailto:thailey@greenerec.org)  
706-486-2251

**Alternate Contact**

Vince Wright  
706-486-2251  
[vwright@greenerec.org](mailto:vwright@greenerec.org)

## Outstanding Support Organization

**Nominee:** Santa Rosa Plateau Foundation

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Riverside County Regional Parks and Open Space District, California

**Population:**

Formed in May 2003, the Santa Rosa Plateau Foundation continues to lead efforts in educating and empowering youth to appreciate, preserve and protect nature. The Foundation works as an active partner with Riverside County Parks, specifically in order to educate youth at the Santa Rosa Plateau, located within Southwestern Riverside County, California. The Foundation held its first fundraising event in 2004 and has grown its programs to include concerts in the park, garden tours and art tours which raise funds in the hope of building a non-wasting endowment that will provide sustainable funding for future years.

The Foundation provides Riverside County Parks \$45,000 every year for transportation services that enable schools to make the voyage to Santa Rosa Plateau Preserve, resulting in approximately 84,000 youth who have visited the Preserve due to the Foundation. The third grade trip to the Preserve is the first leg of the environmental education pathway programming facilitated by the Foundation. A pre- and post-grade level science quiz, written in conjunction with California Dept. of Education Elementary Science Standards, is given to students in their classroom and again after their trip to the Preserve. On average, students demonstrate a 25% gain in natural science knowledge after participating in the field trip.

As the Board of Directors for the Foundation has grown, so has fundraising and diversification. By 2014, Foundation educational programs grew in number to six: Third Grade, Third Grade Outreach to Title 1 schools, 5th Grade Seed Bank Study, Middle School Grassland Restoration, High School Grassland and Watershed Restoration, and Family Wildlife Day. The number of children served has grown to more than 8,000 per year coming from 10 school districts.

**Primary Contact**

Scott Bangle  
Riverside County Regional Parks and Open Space  
4600 Crestmore Road  
Jurupa Valley, CA 92509  
[sbangle@rivcoparks.org](mailto:sbangle@rivcoparks.org)  
951-955-4398

**Alternate Contact**

## Outstanding Volunteer

**Nominee:** Dick Riner

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:** Volunteer Steward

**Nominee's Organization:** Forest Preserves of Cook County & Bartel Grassland Volunteers, Illinois

**Population:** over 500,000

Dick Riner is a shining star of the Forest Preserve of Cook County's Ecological Stewardship Program. For more than a decade, Dick has played a pivotal role in the Forest Preserves' volunteer community. His creativity, positive attitude and nuanced understanding of complex ecosystems have made him a natural leader in local restoration and outreach efforts.

Dick's volunteer efforts have been focused on the Forest Preserves' Bartel Grassland in Matteson, Illinois where he serves as a Site Steward - a volunteer who provides leadership in carrying out ecological goals of the site, leading workdays, inspiring and coaching leaders, and more. Bartel Grassland is a 585-acre site that provides important habitat for grassland birds and is filled with native prairie flowers. Dick played an instrumental role in building community support for this preserve and helped to found the Bartel Grassland Volunteers who guide and support the restoration, monitoring and maintenance of this site.

As a retired schoolteacher, Dick brings his love of teaching and enthusiasm for nature to everything he does. Whether someone is a lifelong volunteer or holding a pair of loppers for the first time, Dick goes out of his way to make sure every person feels included and appreciated. He infuses thoughtfulness and caring into each workday, and also encourages everyone to learn as much as they can about biodiversity. Dick organizes monthly meetings that feature environmental professionals that have inspired many volunteers to stretch their wings and become Bird Monitors or Workday leaders.

The Forest Preserves of Cook County are all the richer for having Dick Riner in them. He inspires countless people to take a closer look at nature, at birds, and at what each of us can do to heal the environment.

### **Primary Contact**

Michelle Uting  
Forest Preserves of Cook County  
536 N. Harlem Ave.  
River Forest, IL 60305  
[Michelle.Uting@cookcountyil.gov](mailto:Michelle.Uting@cookcountyil.gov)  
708-771-1157

### **Alternate Contact**

## Outstanding Volunteer

**Nominee:** Bob Saathoff

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:** Friends of Ward-Meade Board Member

**Nominee's Organization:** Shawnee County Parks + Recreation, Kansas

**Population:** 127,473

Volunteer Bob Saathoff has worked tirelessly for years for Shawnee County Parks and Recreation to make this area a horticulture destination. His vision has led to two efforts gaining featured gardens national distinction.

Well-studied and with abundant energy, Saathoff has played a key role in the development of water gardens, regular annual and perennial plantings, and gardens focusing on specific varieties of plants. He has worked with the highly regarded and frequently visited Ted Ensley Gardens, and has more recently turned his attention to the Ward-Meade Botanical Garden, a 2.5-acre true botanical garden nestled next to Old Prairie Town - an 1800s village featuring the Ward-Meade Mansion which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The botanical garden has seen significant development in the past five years including the installation of water gardens, hosta gardens, day lily gardens, an herb garden, a monarch butterfly way station, installation of a sound wall to protect visitors from the traffic noise from the nearby I-70, and development of plans to add an Asian garden. Saathoff, a Friends of Ward-Meade board member and president of its garden committee, has been part of most all of it.

Saathoff's vision led to the 2015 effort to gain Ward-Meade's hosta garden American Hosta Society distinction as a National Hosta Display Garden. It is one of only 23 gardens in the United States to hold the distinction. One part of the garden features the national Hosta of the Year award-winning hosta. From the mid-1990s to the present, Saathoff personally secured and paid for each award-winning hosta plant. In 2016, he is working to help Ward-Meade's day lily garden gain national distinction. It will be the only public hosta and day lily display garden in the U.S.

Finally, Saathoff is an ambassador, bringing in new volunteers and planning outside excursions for them to visit other horticulture venues.

### **Primary Contact**

Linda Kelly  
Shawnee County Parks + Recreation  
3137 SE 29th St  
Topeka, KS 66605  
[Linda.Kelly@snco.us](mailto:Linda.Kelly@snco.us)  
785-250-7602

### **Alternate Contact**

Olivia Mayer  
785-251-2625  
[olivia.mayer@snco.us](mailto:olivia.mayer@snco.us)

## Park & Recreation Facility - Class I

**Nominee:** Highland Road Community Park: Phase III

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** BREC -Baton Rouge Parks, Louisiana

**Population:** 445,227

Highland Road Community park is a 144 acre public park located in the Southeast portion of East Baton Rouge Parish in Louisiana and is situated next to residential on three sides and Bayou Fountain to the South.

The objective of this project was to improve and connect three major park elements (the recreation center, the playground/splashpad, and the youth tennis courts) thus allowing them to function together and bring added value to the park and user experience. Additionally, a splash pad was added and is the focal point of the project. Previously, these site features were not connected and did not interface with each other in spite of being directly adjacent to one another.

The public response has been on target with high preliminary expectations. The splash pad has been extremely well received and was utilized from 8 Am to 8 PM daily through Halloween. Additionally, the new side rooms of the recreation center and the pavilion are frequently rented by park patrons, and utilized by BREC for camps and programming. Overall, the functionality and quality of the park as a whole has been greatly improved as a result of this phase of construction.

The BREC Planning and Engineering department developed a schematic plan for the site and worked with Jerry Campbell and Associates (Architect) through design development and construction documentation. Construction began in Spring of 2014 and was completed in Summer of 2015 by Charles Carter Construction Company.

The remarkable aspect of this project is the connectivity that was fostered between the recreation center, playground, splash pad, and youth tennis courts. By connecting each of these site features, substantial value has been added to each feature, and the park as a whole, beyond what would have been possible had each feature been improved as a stand-alone element. As such, this project shall serve as an excellent model of the value added to a facility when the site elements are developed in conjunction with one another rather than individually.

**Primary Contact**

Ted Jack  
BREC  
6201 Florida Blvd  
Baton Rouge, LA 70806  
[tjack@brec.org](mailto:tjack@brec.org)  
225-273-6405

**Alternate Contact**

Brett Wallace  
225-273-6405  
[bwallace@brec.org](mailto:bwallace@brec.org)

## Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

**Nominee:** Spring Hill RECenter Expansion and Renovation Project

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Fairfax County Park Authority, Virginia

**Population:** 1.1 million

The expansion and renovation of the Park Authority's Spring Hill RECenter not only provides patrons with a state-of-the-art recreation center but also supports the agency's environmental mission by meeting the requirements for LEED Silver Certification. This two-story design expanded cardio, fitness and weight areas, provided a new multi-activity court and multi-purpose rooms for fitness classes, and renovated the control desk to provide a more welcoming entry. It also provided new offices to increase staffing capabilities. This was accomplished while reducing the addition's energy usage by 27 percent over conventional facilities.

Spring Hill now features energy efficient packaged HVAC systems, low-emissivity glazing, LED lighting and energy efficient insulation. Recycled content was used for more than 20 percent of the materials in the addition, and more than 20 percent of the materials in the addition were sourced and manufactured within 500 miles to reduce the use of fossil fuels in transportation. Native and adaptive landscaping was used outside that requires no irrigation once established. A white roof membrane reflects and emits solar energy, reducing cooling requirements and saving energy. Restrooms use water-efficient fixtures. Low-VOC adhesives, sealants, paints and flooring systems were used to improve indoor air quality. A construction waste management program recycled, diverted or salvaged more than 75 percent of the waste generated in construction.

The center's redesign has won kudos from patrons and the 2015 Award of Merit from the Northern Virginia Chapter of the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties (NAIOP). This \$10 million project was designed by Hughes Group Architects of Sterling, Virginia, and took 18 months to complete, opening in January 2015. It is an example to others for the way in which it blends the recreational needs of patrons with pleasing aesthetics while offering a sustainable design that saves tax dollars and benefits the environment.

**Primary Contact**

Judith Pedersen  
Fairfax County Park Authority  
12055 Government Center Parkway  
Fairfax, VA 22035  
[Judith.Pedersen@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Judith.Pedersen@fairfaxcounty.gov)  
703-324-8662

**Alternate Contact**

Anne Cissel  
703-324-8677  
[anne.cissel@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:anne.cissel@fairfaxcounty.gov)

## Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

**Nominee:** Renovation of Miami Whitewater Forest Horse Trails

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Great Parks of Hamilton County, Ohio

**Population:** over 500,000

For over 30 years, the nearly 20 miles of horse trails in Great Parks' Miami Whitewater Forest was open to public riding, until years of weather, over usage and lack of funding caused sections of trail to fall into disrepair.

That was until a group of community volunteers raised \$35,000 in funds through grants, community outreach, auctions, raffles, etc. to match an already \$35,000 in a Bridle Fund that was established by the Great Parks Foundation.

As soon as funding was in place, Great Parks kicked into gear. This consisted of realigning just over five miles of trail located in flood-prone areas; expanding sections of horse trail into more scenic areas of the park; providing improved creek crossings; improving width of trails; GPS mapping and flagging eight miles of horse trail at .1 mile distances; the purchase and labeling of over 80 trail markers to be installed along the trail system; updating the Miami Whitewater Forest horse trail maps to depict the new trail system and the renovation of two trailhead areas to become one large attractive, highly sustainable and safe area completed by a large permanent trail sign featuring the new horse trail map, donor acknowledgements and additional park information.

After six years of fundraising and project construction, Great Parks of Hamilton County joined over 60 others representing horse organizations, local and regional businesses and numerous individual donors in celebrating the opening of the 7.6-mile long, newly renovated horse trails on May 18, 2015. The celebration included music, horse carriage rides and the unveiling of an attractive new trail head sign.

Great Parks' horse trails are the largest public horse trail systems in Hamilton County, Ohio. They are also ranked in the top 30% statewide as a favorite Ohio riding location (for miles ridden) by Ohio Horseman Council members.

**Primary Contact**

Jack Sutton  
Great Parks of Hamilton County  
10245 Winton Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45231  
[jsutton@greatparks.org](mailto:jsutton@greatparks.org)  
513-521-7275

**Alternate Contact**

Kimberly Whitton  
513-521-7275  
[kwhitton@greatparks.org](mailto:kwhitton@greatparks.org)

## Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

**Nominee:** Hyland Hills Chalet

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Three Rivers Park District, Minnesota

**Population:** 789,667

In fall of 2015, Three Rivers Park District completed a new Chalet building at Hyland Hills Ski Area in Bloomington, Minnesota. Built in 1974, the old chalet was outdated, overcrowded and not well designed for current operations. In order to enhance the visitor experience and make chalet operations more efficient, the Park District demolished the old chalet and started from scratch.

The old chalet was demolished in spring of 2014, and construction was completed in summer of 2015. The Three Rivers Park District Board of Commissioners authorized a creative funding package for redevelopment of the Chalet that including utilization of money from the ski area's fund balance, the Park District's general fund undesignated fund balance, a Metropolitan Council development grant, and issuance of general obligation revenue bonds. This funding package ensured that the project was done without a direct impact to taxpayers.

The \$14.9 million project more than doubled the size of the chalet from 17,000 square feet to 37,000 square feet. In addition to increasing the size of the chalet, other major upgrades included:

- Improved accessibility and flow from guest services to the hills.
- Increased parking, additional shuttle service and more efficient skier drop off.
- Spacious seating with spectacular views.
- Expanded food court with tantalizing new selections.
- Rental shop with improved guest flow and great equipment.
- Changing areas and larger, more spacious restrooms.
- New retail and tune shops with all the essential gear.
- Secure lockers with seasonal and daily rental options.

"Our goal was to streamline operations and provide a better, more comfortable experience for our 165,000 annual visitors and the 37,000 kids and adults who take ski and snowboard lessons," said Three Rivers Park District Commissioner John Gibbs.

**Primary Contact**

Kim Lynch

Three Rivers Park District

3000 Xenium Lane N

Plymouth, MN 55441

[kim.lynch@threeriversparks.org](mailto:kim.lynch@threeriversparks.org)

763-559-6779

**Alternate Contact**

Jason McGrew-King

763-559-6779

[jason.mcgrew-king@threeriversparks.org](mailto:jason.mcgrew-king@threeriversparks.org)

## Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

**Nominee:** Crystal Lake Regional Trail Robbinsdale Segment

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Three Rivers Park District, Minnesota

**Population:** 789,667

Three Rivers Park District completed the Robbinsdale segment of the Crystal Lake Regional Trail late in 2015. Robbinsdale is a city within Three Rivers Park District's service area located in Hennepin County, Minnesota, and adjacent to the City of Minneapolis. The trail adds 2.4 miles of paved 10-foot multi-use trail to the 130-mile Three Rivers system and connects to the Grand Rounds Scenic Byway System, a 51-mile trail network operated by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.

The trail was built through a fully-developed suburban community, which presented challenges during the planning and design phases of the project. The trail passes along several residential areas on frontage roads and adjacent to two parks, as well as within two blocks of Robbinsdale's downtown commercial area. Three Rivers Park District worked closely with city staff and elected representatives to ensure that the trail route is an asset to the community.

A notable feature of the project is a 940-foot boardwalk built over a portion of Crystal Lake. The boardwalk preserves woods located on the lake's western shore and provides outstanding vistas for trail users. During the design phase, Robbinsdale representatives identified the boardwalk as a potential signature community element, and the Park District Board of Commissioners supported adding it to the project.

The project cost was just under \$2.3 million. The Park District received a 2009 Federal Surface Transportation Program grant for up to 80 percent of the construction costs. The remaining 20 percent match was funded through a Hennepin County Bikeway Grant, Minnesota Legacy funds and Park District general obligation bond funds.

The Crystal Lake Regional Trail Robbinsdale Segment is an example of effectively partnering with a local jurisdiction to construct a regional trail through a fully-developed community that will be a regional asset for years to come.

### **Primary Contact**

Kim Lynch  
Three Rivers Park District  
3000 Xenium Lane N  
Plymouth, MN 55441  
[kim.lynch@threeriversparks.org](mailto:kim.lynch@threeriversparks.org)  
763-559-6779

### **Alternate Contact**

Jason McGrew-King  
763-559-6779  
[jason.mcgrew-king@threeriversparks.org](mailto:jason.mcgrew-king@threeriversparks.org)

## Park & Recreation Program - Class I

**Nominee:** Sign Language 2015

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Columbus Parks and Recreation, Georgia

**Population:** 202,000

The program purpose was to give some learning advantages to students related to learning a second language. The program permitted insight into the Deaf culture and how it bestows more opportunities to communicate with those who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

Also to offer an educational opportunity outside of the classroom for students interested in the universal language, American Sign Language. The program also provides the opportunity to develop awareness and sensitivity to cultural and linguistic diversity. In addition, it provided cultural enrichment and fostered an understanding between people who are hard of hearing and those who are not. Furthermore, it gives students the opportunity to identify questions and challenge one's own cultural assumptions, values, and perspectives to contribute positively to society.

The benefits and motivation for the program were to develop cultural awareness and offer opportunities to students to become involved with a multimodal language. Pairing sign language with spoken English proves beneficial to language development and the greatest learning occurs when both tactile and kinesthetic channels combine with auditory and visual modalities, which makes use of both modalities, thus improving learning and thinking.

Sign Language promotes vocabulary, spelling proficiency, self-esteem and helps to bridge the two hemispheres of the brain giving the student two ways to access a word and its meaning. Additionally, using sign with verbal language meets the needs of all different types of learning: auditory, visual and kinesthetic. Sign language helps to develop small motor skills because of the dexterity required for communicating with hand and gestures.

The program was offered for 6 weeks during the months of May, June and July 2015. We included activities that incorporated signing the colors, numbers, and alphabet by using phonic and visual aids. The program also included work activity sheets, games, matching cards and guest speakers.

**Primary Contact**

James Worsley  
Columbus Parks and Recreation Department  
3111 Citizens Way  
Columbus, GA 31906  
[jworsley@columbusga.org](mailto:jworsley@columbusga.org)  
706-225-4658

**Alternate Contact**

Holli Browder  
706-225-3982  
[hbrowder@columbusga.org](mailto:hbrowder@columbusga.org)

## Park & Recreation Program - Class I

**Nominee:** Thrift Shop Fashion Show

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Columbus Parks and Recreation, Georgia

**Population:** 202,000

The Thrift Shop Fashion Show was held for the citizens of the Carver Heights community in Columbus, Ga. The event was put on to educate people on how fashionable clothes can be found for low prices. The Goodwill of Columbus helped sponsor the event by donating all of the pieces of clothing showcased in the fashion show.

The Carver Heights community is a low income area of Columbus, Georgia, where most of the citizens don't make enough money to afford clothes from popular department stores. Along with the citizens of this community being low-income, Columbus also has an unemployment rate of 8%. The Goodwill was used for this partnership because of the great work they do placing people in jobs. Two donated pieces of clothing to the Goodwill helps produce one hour of job training; so rather than collecting money for entry in the show, we collected clothes as donation.

Since the Fashion Show, there has been an increase of citizens utilizing the local Goodwill for not only shopping purposes, but for job training as well. Goodwill resources are now utilized at the Fluellen Community Center, where patrons can come in and get assistance with interview training, and resume preparation. Along with the job training aspect, citizens have started utilizing the local Goodwill stores for not only donations, but for shopping. Because Goodwill is a nonprofit organization, the community benefits from not only the donated goods, but from the money made from the donated items.

This program is innovative because it targets different populations: senior citizens on a fixed income that don't have much money to spend, single mothers that have to buy school clothes for their children, or the person who was laid off from their job and needing assistance getting back in the workforce.

**Primary Contact**

James Worsley  
Columbus Parks and Recreation Department  
3111 Citizens Way  
Columbus, GA 31906  
[jworsley@columbusga.org](mailto:jworsley@columbusga.org)  
706-225-4658

**Alternate Contact**

Holli Browder  
706-225-3982  
[hbrowder@columbusga.org](mailto:hbrowder@columbusga.org)

## Park & Recreation Program - Class I

**Nominee:** Urns for Vets

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Columbus Parks and Recreation, Georgia

**Population:** 202,000

Early in 2015 a man walked into the Britt David Cultural Arts Studio with a particular need. He was looking for an urn for his brother-in-law and knew we offered pottery classes. His brother-in-law had served in the army. He did not have much money and there was no other family. He felt that his brother-in-law deserved a nice, hand-made urn for his ashes. This started in motion an idea for the 'Urns for Vets' program. Simply to create handmade pottery urns for vets to support veterans with a final resting place for ashes. Local artists lend their talents to creating one-of-a-kind urns that are worthy of the people who protect us. This would help to promote the arts and local artists. To promote Columbus Parks and Recreation's dedication to community service, and strengthen our commitment to local military families at Fort Benning.

To get this off the ground we started to apply for grants. 20-50 urns would be needed with new urns created as needed. This would take 500 pounds of clay and 5 gallons of glaze. The Britt David Studio supplies the firings. Before grants were finished sponsors and interested people started to offer support. RSVP offered to purchase part of the clay as part of the MLK Jr. `Day of Service` program. From the success of this day, the North Columbus Exchange Club offered to purchase the glaze. The more urn making days and promotions, the more people and organizations are ready to help.

The plan is to create 50 urns for Veterans Day 2016 for the Columbus/Fort Benning area. Already, people are asking if this could be expanded to other military bases. This could easily be done by working with other recreation and private studios.

**Primary Contact**

James Worsley  
Columbus Parks and Recreation Department  
3111 Citizens Way  
Columbus, GA 31906  
[jworsley@columbusga.org](mailto:jworsley@columbusga.org)  
706-225-4658

**Alternate Contact**

Holli Browder  
706-225-3982  
[hbrowder@columbusga.org](mailto:hbrowder@columbusga.org)

## Park & Recreation Program - Class I

2016 Awardee

**Nominee:** Grand Opening of Fallen Timbers Battlefield and Fort Miamis National Historic Site

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Metroparks Toledo, Ohio

**Population:** 430,000

The grand opening of Fallen Timbers Battlefield was the culmination of 20 year's effort. In 1995 a group of dedicated volunteers investigated a theory that rewrote history. Contrary to what had been believed for 200 years, they found that the battle took place several miles to the north of the Maumee River floodplain. Once the location of the battle was determined, partners including citizen groups such as the Fallen Timbers Battlefield Preservation Commission, the Maumee Valley Heritage Corridor, and Maumee Valley Historical Society set out to preserve the historical site and enlisted the help of Metroparks and the National Park Service. The Battlefield's protection did not come without incredible perseverance - it was in danger of being developed into a mall, but instead this archeological treasure was designated as a National Battlefield. Finally, on October 25th, 2015, the grand opening brought together a culturally diverse audience of hundreds from both sides of the battle as well as individuals and organizations that had worked together to preserve and open the site. The program design transcended cultures and included a flag ceremony presented by the Wyandotte Nation Honor Guard, a Blessing and Smoke Ceremony by the Wyandotte and Anderdon Nation and speeches by the Consul General of Canada and Honorable Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur. The day also included dramatic readings from the battle and viewings of The History Channel's The Battle of Fallen Timbers. Lastly, guided tours and a self-guided trail with 4 interpretive nodes allowed visitors to gain deeper appreciation for the site and events that transpired there.

### **Primary Contact**

Shannon DeYoung

Metroparks Toledo

5100 West Central Avenue

Toledo, OH 43615

[Shannon.deyoung@metroparkstoledo.com](mailto:Shannon.deyoung@metroparkstoledo.com)

419-360-2599

### **Alternate Contact**

Jill Molnar

419-407-9709

[jill.molnar@metroparkstoledo.com](mailto:jill.molnar@metroparkstoledo.com)

## Park & Recreation Program - Class I

**Nominee:** Tulip Time

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Shawnee County Parks + Recreation, Kansas

**Population:** 127,473

Tulip Time began in the home gardens of Mr. Jerald Binkley, a member of the Topeka Beautification Association, who had dedicated years of service to the Shawnee County community. For 22 years, he shared his personal gardens with visitors to Topeka. His desire to create a sustainable, community-wide event was the impetus for Tulip Time.

Eight years ago Tulip Time was moved to three of Shawnee County's destination parks as well as downtown Topeka. Today, more than 120,000 tulips adorn 13 acres in Lake Shawnee's Ted Ensley Gardens, Old Prairie Town and the Ward-Meade Botanical Garden and the Doran Rock Garden in Gage Park. The Shawnee County Parks and Recreation Foundation purchases the tulip bulbs for the event.

Each fall, the Shawnee County Parks and Recreation horticulture staff and passionate volunteers from Friends of the Garden groups, a half-dozen outside volunteer groups and interested individuals plant tulip bulbs in preparation for the two week event in April of each year. At the end of Tulip Time, they help dig up bulbs which are then sold to the public. Tulip Time volunteers from garden groups and corporations give more than 200 hours to the event in the three gardens.

This year Topeka's Tulip Time has been designated by the American Bus Association as one of the Top 100 Events in North America. The Top 100 list is published as a supplement to Destinations magazine. It indicates that Tulip Time offers entertainment value to tour groups and individual travelers from around the world. Last year 28 states and seven different countries were represented in the attendance log.

**Primary Contact**

Linda Kelly  
Shawnee County Parks + Recreation  
3137 SE 29th St  
Topeka, KS 66605  
[Linda.Kelly@snco.us](mailto:Linda.Kelly@snco.us)  
785-250-7602

**Alternate Contact**

Olivia Mayer  
785-251-2625  
[olivia.mayer@snco.us](mailto:olivia.mayer@snco.us)

## Park & Recreation Program - Class I

**Nominee:** BikeSmart Stark County

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Stark Parks, Ohio

**Population:** 375,000

Stark County's Bike Share program, BikeSmart, came from middle school students attending the TomTod Ideas' 2014 camp, Canton Dreamatory. This hands-on experience provided students an opportunity to meet with community leaders to discuss community challenges and possible solutions. Students proposed the idea of using a library card to borrow bikes for free so that residents could travel to appointments, run errands, or live a healthier lifestyle. The students recognized the need for accessible, affordable transportation that would promote healthy lifestyles and identified the Stark County District Library (SCDL) as the community organization most centrally located and easily accessible by potential bike users. Accessibility to alternative transportation in underserved populations and a core goal to promote community wellness is identified in Stark Parks' Five Year Master Plan (SP). The 2015 City of Canton Parks Master Plan (CCPR) also recognizes the community's need for access to alternative transportation in low income neighborhoods.

The goal of BikeSmart was to provide an accessible bicycle sharing program to the community free of charge so both residents and visitors would have access to alternative transportation and options for a healthier lifestyle. After researching the bike rental model used in Ohio City, the partnering agencies, the SCDL, SP, and CCPR researched five shared bicycling providers to identify a vendor willing to work with the concept of offering a rental system based on borrowing with a library card for Stark County residents. Each partner agency then agreed to provide 1/3 of the costs associated with obtaining the bike sharing amenities, creating the first public bike sharing program in Ohio. Six bike hubs were placed near libraries and community centers.

This project was awarded the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association's (first place) Award of Excellence for Management Innovation in 2015.

**Primary Contact**

Robert Fonte  
Stark Parks  
5300 Tyner ST NW  
Canton, OH 44708  
[bfonte@starkparks.com](mailto:bfonte@starkparks.com)  
330-477-3552

**Alternate Contact**

Aimee Engelhart  
330-476-2336  
[aengelhart@starkparks.com](mailto:aengelhart@starkparks.com)

## Park & Recreation Program - Class II

**Nominee:** Youth Outdoor Ambassadors

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Forest Preserves of Cook County, Illinois

**Population:** 5.25 million

The Forest Preserves of Cook County's Youth Outdoor Ambassadors (YOA) program, launched in 2014 with a grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' Coastal Zone Management Program, was designed to engage a group of young people that would serve as "ambassadors" for nature and identify how their peers could become lifelong advocates for nature. Six local ambassadors, ages 16-19, were hired and tasked with developing and administering a survey to their peers, conducting presentations on the forest preserves to youth in the Summer Advantage Program and planning a teen focused event and recruiting attendees. The survey that the YOAs conducted provided important insight to environmental education, programming and recreation staff allowing them to adjust activities to better resonate with young people. The YOA program has become an integral part of the Forest Preserves' Conservation and Experiential Programming Department and continues to evolve and grow. In 2015, 17 youth were hired and more than 700 youth were recruited to attend teen focused events. The YOA program now also includes a focus on introducing participants to careers in conservation while engaging their peers and others in this field. The program typically runs from June-August and planning for the 2016 cohort is underway.

In addition to the outdoor recreation and conservation activities, YOAs build their skills and confidence by participating in resume writing and financial literacy workshops in partnership with One Summer Chicago. Recent YOA "graduates" were inspired to launch an Alumni Association, that not only keeps YOAs connected and involved in the Forest Preserves but also fosters professional development and lifelong skills for future jobs/careers.

The YOA program is a successful model for both retaining participants and creating lifelong ambassadors of nature.

**Primary Contact**

Michelle Uting  
Forest Preserves of Cook County  
536 N. Harlem Ave.  
River Forest, IL 60305  
[Michelle.Uting@cookcountyil.gov](mailto:Michelle.Uting@cookcountyil.gov)  
708-771-1157

**Alternate Contact**

## Park & Recreation Program - Class II

**Nominee:** Great Parks 85th Birthday Party

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Great Parks of Hamilton County, Ohio

**Population:** over 500,000

Great Parks' 85th Birthday Party on August 1, 2015, provided a unique, one-time opportunity for the park district to connect with the community through a celebration of the outdoors. The fun day offered free entrance into all parks and free activities including harbor rentals (bikes, boats, canoes and kayaks), fishing, golf, nature programs, outdoor fitness classes with YMCA of Greater Cincinnati, dance party with Pones Inc., climbing wall and three outdoor concerts by local bands.

The event went from dawn until dusk and attracted a diverse gathering of 10,553 guests to Great Parks throughout the county. The day was made possible by the generous support of the Great Parks Foundation.

### **Primary Contact**

Jack Sutton  
Great Parks of Hamilton County  
10245 Winton Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45231  
[kwhitton@greatparks.org](mailto:kwhitton@greatparks.org)  
513-521-7275

### **Alternate Contact**

Kimberly Whitton  
513-521-7275  
[kwhitton@greatparks.org](mailto:kwhitton@greatparks.org)

## Park & Recreation Program - Class II

**Nominee:** Countywide Fitness Challenge

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Los Angeles County Dept. of Parks and Recreation, California

**Population:** 10 million

In 2009, according to the County's largest HMO, over 75 percent of Los Angeles County employees were overweight or obese and 7.7 percent diabetic, with others possibly undiagnosed. With health care costs rising, the need to create innovative workplace wellness programs wasn't an option: it was an imperative. While the County did have some wellness initiatives - like fairs, lunch-and-learns, and exercise classes - access for all employees and funding shortages proved to be significant barriers. A drastic change was needed to improve employees' health. So, in 2010, the Department of Human Resources in partnership with the Departments of Parks and Recreation and other County departments, along with all County-sponsored medical plan carriers, rolled out the Countywide Fitness Challenge (CFC) as a way for County employees and their families to have fun, stay active, and get healthy.

Since its inauguration, weekend events are held at parks and facilities over the course of five months throughout each of the County's five districts. These events - including hiking, swim safety, boot camps, cooking demonstrations, yoga, kayaking, paddle boarding, pedal boating, dragon boat racing, softball scrimmages, and walking - are made possible through the comprehensive network of partnerships the program has formed. In addition to these activities, the County's medical partners, including Anthem Blue Cross, CIGNA, Delta Dental, Kaiser Permanente, and United HealthCare, provide biometric screenings and other services.

The latest data shows that CFC has been a resounding success. The program has grown from 3,145 participants in its inaugural year to more than 7,200 people representing 30 departments and over 60,000 pounds of weight loss in its five years. Soon to kick off its sixth year, this budget neutral collaborative partnership will continue to engage and empower employees to take the initiative in their own health and wellness, a unique achievement for its demographic and scale.

**Primary Contact**

Kaye Michelson  
LA County Department of Parks & Recreation  
433 S. Vermont Ave.  
Los Angeles, CA 90020  
[kmichelson@parks.lacounty.gov](mailto:kmichelson@parks.lacounty.gov)  
213-738-2955

**Alternate Contact**

Aram Pirjanian  
213-738-2844  
[apirjanian@parks.lacounty.gov](mailto:apirjanian@parks.lacounty.gov)

## Park & Recreation Program - Class II

**Nominee:** 100 Citizens

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Los Angeles County Dept. of Parks and Recreation, California

**Population:** 10 million

In order to continue combatting the growing problem of obesity, diabetes, and sedentary lifestyles, the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation sought to provide a truly unique fitness program that was free to the public. In this endeavor, the Department faced several challenges, including developing innovative ways to teach participants exercises they could continue at home, finding highly qualified staff to maintain the program, and allotting necessary staff hours.

These challenges were mediated through an inventive new partnership with the California State University Northridge Kinesiology Department, led by Dr. Steven Loy and his team of kinesiology students. The symbiotic partnering was designed to create a sustainable and replicable public health model while giving students an opportunity to hone their skillset. The tailored program delivered a free physical activity regimen that taught simple and effective exercise strategies. These activities were selected specifically because they were easy to learn, needed little or no equipment, provided the desired caloric burn, allowed participants to work at their own fitness level, and were repeatable with no assistance.

Success stories from participants tell us that this special program is working. One participant reported her doctors have been extremely happy with her health progress and encourage her to continue with her exercise routine. Another participant was so happy with her progress that she recruited other family members and said she now has more energy to spend with her kids. Yet another participant started with an injured knee and was very limited in mobility and strength but progressed tremendously with his two years in the program. The success of this program has allowed it to expand to other colleges and universities with the hopes of impacting as many lives as possible, fostering healthy communities by giving citizens the tools to help themselves and those around them.

**Primary Contact**

Kaye Michelson  
LA County Department of Parks and Recreation  
433 S. Vermont Ave.  
Los Angeles, CA 90020  
[kmichelson@parks.lacounty.gov](mailto:kmichelson@parks.lacounty.gov)  
213-738-2955

**Alternate Contact**

Aram Pirjanian  
213-738-2844  
[apirjanian@parks.lacounty.gov](mailto:apirjanian@parks.lacounty.gov)

## Park & Recreation Program - Class II

**Nominee:** Butterfly Parade

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Oakland County Parks and Recreation, Michigan

**Population:** 1.2 million

During one afternoon each summer, butterflies can be spotted just about everywhere at Red Oaks County Park in Madison Heights. In a tent, there are hundreds of live, colorful butterflies fluttering around while on the trails naturalists narrate Hungry Caterpillar Hikes to discuss how butterflies impact the environment. In Red Oaks Nature Center, children can craft their own butterfly wings and decorate T-shirts. Later, children don their homemade wings as they skip down the trails for the highlight of the afternoon - the Butterfly Parade.

More than 300 participants attended last year's event, which was free thanks to ITC, a longtime supporter of Oakland County Parks. Planning was made possible through the efforts of multiple departments within the parks system working together, including Mobile Recreation, Operations, Planning, Communications and Marketing, Recreation Programs and Services, Volunteers and Natural Resources.

Besides being a lot of fun, the Butterfly Parade draws attention to a serious issue: The decline of the Monarch butterfly. These amazing creatures are crucial to Michigan's ecosystem as they cross-pollinate plants, but as milkweed continues to disappear from the landscape, their population is struggling. This is because the lack of milkweed makes it increasingly challenging for the butterflies to find a food source and lay their eggs. Complicating the issue further is the strong emergence of the black and pale swallow wort species, a non-native plant that is similar enough to milkweed to attract Monarch butterflies, but is toxic to caterpillars.

**Primary Contact**

Dan Stencil  
Oakland County Parks and Recreation  
2800 Watkins Lake Road  
Waterford, MI 48328  
[stencild@oakgov.com](mailto:stencild@oakgov.com)  
248-858-0916

**Alternate Contact**

Desiree Stanfield  
248-705-4108  
[stanfieldd@oakgov.com](mailto:stanfieldd@oakgov.com)

## Park & Recreation Program - Class II

**Nominee:** Caspers Wilderness Park Star Party

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Orange County Parks, California

**Population:** 3 million

Caspers Wilderness Park is a wilderness camping and day-use park operated by the County of Orange in San Juan Capistrano, California. One Saturday night per month, the park hosts an astronomy-themed event for campers called "Star Party." The Star Party started 20 years ago, when a local resident and amateur astronomer Allan White was visiting the park's astronomy program for his first time with his own viewing equipment. The Park Ranger who was to lead it was suddenly dispatched elsewhere in the park, and unable to host the program. Allan was able to lead it, and after that he became an OC Parks volunteer and has been hosting Star Parties ever since.

Over the past 17 years, the event has remained a popular attraction. In 2015, OC Parks took a variety of steps to publicize the Star Party program in order to increase attendance and awareness of the program. These steps included: posting Star Party announcements on the park website; posting event fliers at strategic park kiosk locations; and park attendants advising all incoming campers with reservations of the Star Party time and location. Additionally, park staff provide red battery-powered night lights that draw attention and create a pathway for park visitors to follow up the main park road to the event destination.

Despite the remote location of Caspers Wilderness Park, some five miles outside of San Juan Capistrano, the Star Parties remain a unique opportunity for park visitors to have a unique experience. Over the past few years, attendance levels have steadily increased, making it one of the most popular events at Caspers Wilderness Park. In 2013, the Star Parties averaged 47 attendees per event. In 2014, that number increased to 64. As of 2015, event attendance numbers have averaged 104 people - an overall increase of 121.3%.

**Primary Contact**

Stacy Blackwood

OC Parks

13042 Old Myford Road

Irvine, CA 92602

[stacy.blackwood@ocparks.com](mailto:stacy.blackwood@ocparks.com)

949-923-3743

**Alternate Contact**

Marisa O'Neil

714-973-6870

[marisa.oneil@ocparks.com](mailto:marisa.oneil@ocparks.com)

## Planning Initiative

**Nominee:** Camp Master Plan

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Forest Preserves of Cook County, Illinois

**Population:** more than 500,000

In January 2013 the Forest Preserves of Cook County adopted its Camp Master Plan with the goal of providing Cook County's five million residents with camping and nature exploration. Camping had long been part of our outdoor recreation menu, but over the years many of the facilities fell into disrepair and camping was limited to organized youth groups.

The Camp Master Plan undertook a rigorous assessment of dozens of sites including all existing and proposed new campgrounds. The plan was done with help from a team of design and market feasibility experts to ensure the new camps would be both environmentally and financially sustainable. A series of diverse camping experiences were created that showcase a wide range of habitats. The plan's operational framework and detailed case studies, accompanied by beautifully illustrated maps, brought this vision to life - five campgrounds, distributed evenly throughout the county, opened in summer 2015 and have already served more than 16,000 campers.

Camps are some of our most important gateway sites for introducing new people to nature and have inspired new programmatic initiatives:

- Family Campout Camperships - ensures that families of limited financial means can experience camping.
- Camping 101 - "how to" camping workshops.
- Camping Leadership Immersion Course (CLIC) - overnight training course that includes instruction in leadership skills, camp equipment use and care, and group activities related to outdoor recreation and nature-based education. CLIC certified leaders can bring out large groups for camping trips.
- CLIC Gear Library - allows first time campers to borrow all necessary camping equipment.
- Annual signature weekend event scheduled to launch in 2017.

The 2013 Camp Master Plan provided a solid foundation and strategy to connect Cook County residents to the forest preserves and can serve as a model for other agencies who are seeking to introduce camping in a metropolitan area.

To access the complete plan, please go to:

[http://www.fpdcc.com/downloads/20121303\\_final%20report\\_compressed.pdf](http://www.fpdcc.com/downloads/20121303_final%20report_compressed.pdf)

### **Primary Contact**

Michelle Uting  
Forest Preserves of Cook County  
536 N. Harlem Ave.  
River Forest, IL 60305  
[Michelle.Uting@cookcountyil.gov](mailto:Michelle.Uting@cookcountyil.gov)  
708-771-1157

### **Alternate Contact**

## Planning Initiative

**Nominee:** Meadowbrook Park Master Plan

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 560,000

Meadowbrook Park is proposed to be located on a former 135-acre golf and country club that will become a mixed-use development, including an 80-acre park. The parkland will be donated to Johnson County Park and Recreation District (JCPRD) with a first phase developed from proceeds of a tax-increment financing (TIF) district, the first ever TIF funded park in Johnson County. The park is located in an area of the county that has a significant shortage of parks and open space. The master planning process took place in 2015 and was completed in early 2016. The process included numerous public meetings that generated ideas for this new park. Over 1,000 citizens attended the various public meetings, a staggering number for a park master plan, demonstrating the demand and need for this park space.

Development of the new park is slated to be initiated in 2016 and the park should be opened for public use in 2017. Amenities will include a system of multi-use paved trails that connect to adjacent private uses, picnic areas, a destination playground, iconic gardens, tennis and pickleball courts, ponds for water-based activities and stormwater management and an area for formal and informal gathering. The existing clubhouse will be renovated to accommodate a variety of public uses including events, pre-school age daycare, 50-plus activities and many other uses.

This creative planning project would not have been possible without significant cooperation from Prairie Village, the local municipality, the developer, county governments and JCPRD. Citizens and neighbors provided significant input into the master plan that will provide a unique park in an underserved portion of the county.

**Primary Contact**

Bill Maasen  
Johnson County Park & Recreation District  
7904 Renner Road  
Shawnee, KS 66219  
[bill.maasen@jocogov.org](mailto:bill.maasen@jocogov.org)  
913 826-3437

**Alternate Contact**

## Planning Initiative

**Nominee:** Shared Regional Parks & Trails GIS Database

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Metroparks Toledo, Ohio

**Population:** 430,000

In the recent past, Metroparks Toledo, City of Toledo, TMACOG, and the Lucas County Auditor all maintained similar parks datasets with varying attribute definitions. When it came time for regional planning initiatives or creating a comprehensive map of parks it would take days to combine shapefiles and pull out relevant information. Therefore, the purpose of this initiative was to agree on a regional GIS schema in order to enhance regional planning and improve the quality of information shared with the public.

The project planning phases began in early 2013 and by summer the database structure was finalized and data entry began. Contact was made with each organization who owned, managed, or planned parks and trails to ensure the data was collected and entered with accuracy. Once the initial database development was complete, the layers were hosted on a server and accessible to each of the participants. All of the participants were actively engaged in either developing the common database format or hosting the data in a shared environment for everyone to access and edit.

Today the shared datasets span 2 counties and includes all public parks as well as open, committed, and planned bike facilities and existing hiking, equestrian, and cross country ski trails. The data has been used for determining proximity of existing and planned amenities and infrastructure to one another, identifying gaps in amenities and infrastructure, and use in TMACOG's long range transportation plan. The data is on an annual maintenance schedule but can also be updated as-needed and can be easily shared with confidence to other organizations needing accurate regional information. This project has been a success because it centralized the data repository, improved data quality, stopped duplication of data, and allowed the partners to work collaboratively to enhance regional planning efforts.

**Primary Contact**

Emily Zeigler  
Metroparks Toledo  
5100 West Central Avenue  
Toledo, OH 43615  
[Emily.ziegler@metroparkstoledo.com](mailto:Emily.ziegler@metroparkstoledo.com)  
419-407-9843

**Alternate Contact**

Jill Molnar  
419-407-9709  
[jill.molnar@metroparkstoledo.com](mailto:jill.molnar@metroparkstoledo.com)

## Planning Initiative

**Nominee:** Oakland County Parks Dashboard and Data Book

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Oakland County Parks and Recreation, Michigan

**Population:** 1,237,868

The staff and Parks Commission of Oakland County Parks and Recreation have access to park-related data from many sources - surveys, vehicle and trail counters, external databases, natural resource monitoring and point-of-sale information, for example. The Annual Dashboard and Data Book organizes these data into a comprehensive overview of park statistics and trends (the Dashboard), as well as richer, more detailed facility-level data. Both levels of data are needed for making plans and decisions regarding park facilities.

As decisions are made and park plans are implemented, consistent data collection and analysis will help us evaluate the success of a given project. Are more visitors coming to the facility? Are they satisfied? Did we have a positive impact on natural resources? By following best practices for data collection and analysis, we can understand the impact of changes and improvements.

Over the past three years, methods of data collection and analysis have improved. A computerized point-of-sale system was introduced in 2010 and its use for entering and reporting data is expanding. We conducted studies in 2015 that helped improve the quality of estimates of the numbers of visitors entering the parks in vehicles. Planning staff continue to work with park supervisors to improve data collection methods throughout the park system.

The data management program looks beyond Oakland County Parks' facilities and considers nation-wide trends, as well as population and economic trends on the county and national level. These analyses will help us to identify target markets and plan facilities that are enthusiastically welcomed by the residents of our county.

Systems are now in place to update data monthly. In addition to this park-system Data Book, park-specific data reports will help park and administrative staff to monitor performance metrics on an ongoing monthly basis.

### **Primary Contact**

Desiree Stanfield  
Oakland County Parks and Recreation  
2800 Watkins Lake Road  
Waterford, MI 48328  
[stanfieldd@oakgov.com](mailto:stanfieldd@oakgov.com)  
248-858-4627

### **Alternate Contact**

## Planning Initiative

**Nominee:** Box Springs Mountain Reserve Comprehensive Trails Master Plan

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Riverside County Regional Parks and Open Space District, California

**Population:**

In 2012, Riverside County was preparing plans to extend 24 miles of Commuter Rail that would improve alternative transportation options on one of the most heavily traveled and congested freeways in the region. The environmentally friendly transportation alternative was expected to operate primarily along a right-of-way used as a freight rail line since the late 1800's. However, as the project progressed, citizens in a nearby neighborhood filed a lawsuit, placing an indefinite delay on the project and jeopardizing Federal funding dollars needed to complete the project.

In July 2013, the neighborhood friends group reached a settlement with the Transportation Agency in which several recitals centered on hiker safety near the train tracks, wildlife movement and open space enhancement. The Riverside County Parks Department was asked to work with the Transportation Agency, local City, neighborhood friends group and other conservation agencies to build a collaborative, sustainable plan that would meet the needs of the region based upon sound science and best management practices. The project launched in March 2014.

In November 2015, Riverside County Parks adopted the Box Springs Mountain Reserve Comprehensive Trails Plan. This plan includes an assessment of existing trail networks and staging areas, as well as connectivity opportunities with adjoining communities and areas. The plan includes analysis of natural features, existing trail alignments, sustainability, usage patterns, user groups, and connectivity with neighboring parks, trails, schools and city facilities. The Plan was approved by the County Trails Committee, County Parks Advisory Commission, City of Riverside and the local friends group, enjoying wide range support.

**Primary Contact**

Scott Bangle  
Riverside County Regional Parks and Open Space  
4600 Crestmore Road  
Jurupa Valley, CA 92509  
[sbangle@rivcoparks.org](mailto:sbangle@rivcoparks.org)  
951-955-4398

**Alternate Contact**

## Planning Initiative

**Nominee:** Comprehensive studies of park visitors and Three Rivers Park District residents

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Three Rivers Park District, Minnesota

**Population:** 789,667

Three Rivers Park District is located in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area and manages 27,000 acres of park reserves, regional parks, and regional trail corridors. To better meet the needs of local residents along with current park visitors, Three Rivers has completed both a park-based resident study and comprehensive park visitor study in 2008 and 2013. Continuation of both studies is planned for 2018 to better identify trends and service opportunities. This model is valuable because it includes longitudinal data from constituents who do and do not visit Three Rivers.

The Morris Leatherman Company completed both resident studies through a representative telephone survey of 1,000 adults during the fall of 2008 and fall of 2013. Both samples were stratified into four geographic tiers within suburban Hennepin and Scott Counties. Data from the 2008 and 2013 park visitor studies were collected during summer months by Three Rivers' research staff via intercept surveys. The number of park visitors age 16 years or older completing a survey totaled 7,000 in 2008 and 6,000 in 2013.

Primary study objectives and resulting outcomes included:

- Identifying under-represented populations at Three Rivers.
- Outreach and partnership efforts have increased with under-represented populations (people of color, residents of inner-ring suburbs, households with low annual incomes and/or low education levels).
- Determining what future actions are most and least important to local residents and park visitors.
- Long-term planning has been assisted by discovering local residents and park visitors believe keeping parks well-maintained is more important than acquiring land, building new facilities, or increasing program offerings.
- Learning how to improve a visitor's experience at Three Rivers.

Selected actions include directing additional resources to restroom facilities, improving options for trash disposal, and increasing shoreline fishing opportunities.

**Primary Contact**

Kim Lynch  
Three Rivers Park District  
3000 Xenium Lane N  
Plymouth, MN 55441  
[klynch@threeriversparkdistrict.org](mailto:klynch@threeriversparkdistrict.org)  
763-559-6779

**Alternate Contact**

Jason McGrew-King  
763-559-6779  
[jason.mcgrew-king@threeriversparks.org](mailto:jason.mcgrew-king@threeriversparks.org)

## Professional - Fellow

**Nominee:** Julia Leo

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:** Ocean Rescue Supervisor

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

**Population:** 1.4 million

Julia Leo has been a valuable Palm Beach County employee for 28 years. As an Ocean Rescue Leader she has earned the respect of peers, subordinates and supervisors by demonstrating professionalism, creativity, dedication and teamwork. She has won many recognition awards, including the Department's Employee of the Year and the Florida Beach Patrol Chief's Association Lifeguard of the Year. A fierce Ocean Rescue competitor, Julia is a USLA National Champion including winning the Top Female competitor in 2009.

Her contributions to the Department are innumerable; creating the first Junior Lifeguard and Spring Break Surfing programs; writing and regularly reviewing the Ocean Rescue Operations Manual; playing key roles in the design and opening of many beach front parks; and continually implementing operational improvements. Julia was selected for the County's Leadership Level I Program, and the first Leadership Level II program. Her leadership project, creating an Ocean Rescue Training Academy for new hires, was wholeheartedly adopted by all employees and has had a huge impact on the skills and professionalism of new guards. Other Ocean Rescue operations have emulated this program and asked for her consultation on their operations.

It is very clear that Julia excels in finding what others do well, encouraging them to use their strengths and skills to grow and to help the operation. Her staff has grown and excelled as a result. When new challenges arise, she finds the subject-matter expert and works with them to obtain great results. Her operational innovation has led to the establishment of a Lead Worker position for Lifeguards to gain supervision skills, improved methods of training, and the creation of specialty teams beneficial to the organization. Those that work with and for Julia have only compliments about her work ethic, skills, humble demeanor and ability to help each individual grow.

### **Primary Contact**

Eric Call

Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation  
Department

2700 6th Avenue South

Lake Worth, FL 33461

[ecall@co.palm-beach.fl.us](mailto:ecall@co.palm-beach.fl.us)

561-966-6613

### **Alternate Contact**

Laurie Schobelock

561-966-6629

[lschobel@pbcgov.org](mailto:lschobel@pbcgov.org)

## Professional - Fellow

**Nominee:** Christine Craycroft

**Nominee's Title:** Executive Director

**Nominee's Organization:** Portage Park District, Ohio

**Population:** 163,862

Chris is exceptionally skillful in motivating volunteers. For so many years she was the only employee & had to rely upon the generosity of the time of volunteers to maintain the parks and conduct its programs. She was often in the awkward position of having to balance the needs and priorities of the park system and the interests of the volunteers who sometimes wanted to pursue a particular project contrary to what needed to be done. Her success in developing a large, very committed following throughout the county for the park system was a major contributor to our recent success with a 10 year levy for the Park District. –Jane Preston

Rose, Portage Park District Foundation Vice President

Chris has proved to be an outstanding director, growing with the job, balancing administrative and visionary tasks, and meeting every challenge with grace and gusto. She has exceeded the originally modest expectation for her role and has given Portage County a lasting legacy. One year Chris received unsolicited, tempting offers from two Metroparks- But these she declined, revealing a rare quality - loyalty.

Virginia Shaw - Former Park Commissioner, Conservationist & friend

Chris is an inspiration to me. She has created her career and environmental legacy all on her own. I love working with her and appreciate her vision. Her tenacity and loyalty to the conservation of Portage County makes the District One of a Kind. –Rory Locke, Administrative Assistant-Portage Park District

### **Primary Contact**

Rory Locke  
Portage Park District  
705 Oakwood St. Suite G-4  
Ravenna, OH 44266  
[rlocke@portageparkdistrict.org](mailto:rlocke@portageparkdistrict.org)  
330-297-7728

### **Alternate Contact**

## Professional - Lifetime

**Nominee:** Harold L. Strickland

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:** Former Vice Chair FCPA Board

**Nominee's Organization:** Fairfax County Park Authority, Virginia

**Population:** 1.1 million

Harold L. Strickland is retiring from the Fairfax County Park Authority Board after 23 years of service and six terms as chairman, leaving behind a lifetime legacy of advocacy and accomplishment in the sometimes competing areas of sports and recreation and the preservation of natural and cultural resources. His loss is offset by the enthusiasm and dedication he brought to the Park Board that inspired others to join in the agency's mission.

Strickland was a strong believer in acquiring parkland while open space was still available, and Park Authority land grew by thousands of acres during his tenure to its current 23,400+ acres. He spearheaded efforts for the newly established 2,300-acre Sully Woodlands area that will provide open space and limited recreational amenities, with nearly 80 percent of the land to remain in its natural state. Strickland was also a strong proponent of the synthetic turf program as a solution to rectangular field shortages, and more than two dozen of these fields are now in operation in county parks. They are a vital component of the county's anti-gang initiative by providing more year-round outdoor activities for youth. They have also expanded field opportunities for the many sports leagues in the county.

Strickland kept park issues at the forefront of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisor's agenda, and his leadership was key to helping the agency achieve national accreditation and become a three-time recipient of the Gold Medal Award for parks. Last year, the Park Authority established an award in his honor to recognize those who demonstrate his ability to use teamwork and cooperation to get things done. It honors collaboration and partnerships. He was also the founder and long-time leader of the Chantilly Youth Association and a representative to the Fairfax County Athletic council, which are active in the parks.

### **Primary Contact**

Judith Pedersen  
Fairfax County Park Authority  
12055 Government Center Parkway  
Fairfax, VA 22035  
[Judith.Pedersen@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Judith.Pedersen@fairfaxcounty.gov)  
703-324-8662

### **Alternate Contact**

Anne Cissel  
703-324-8677  
[anne.cissel@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:anne.cissel@fairfaxcounty.gov)

## Removing Barriers Initiative

**Nominee:** OUCARES staff training

2016 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Oakland County Parks, Michigan

**Population:** 1.2 million

Oakland County Parks collaborates with a number of community partners to develop adaptive programming that provides recreational, social and sports opportunities for residents with physical and cognitive disabilities. Recently, OCP supervisors received a unique training opportunity from one of their partners to better understand how to interact with individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

This training session was provided through the Oakland University Center for Autism, also known as OUCARES. During the training session, OCP supervisors learned to recognize common characteristics of autism spectrum and how to communicate effectively by breaking information down into simple steps, keeping verbal statements short and maintaining a low voice among other strategies.

The growth of OUCARES demonstrates a clear need for autism outreach in Oakland County. OUCARES began in 2004 with just one program and 25 families. Last year, it held more than 25 programs and assisted 1,400-plus families. Year-round programming includes sports, social clubs, employable skills programs, film camp, special events and summer day camp. OCP's facilities are utilized for some of these activities, with coordination assistance provided by the Oakland County Parks Recreation Program Supervisor - Adaptive and Therapeutic Services.

Oakland University began offering an autism endorsed certificate for teachers and other professionals more than 30 years ago. That program developed into OUCARES, a multifaceted approach to education, research and support services for families. In 2004, the university established a nonprofit autism center focused on improving the quality of life for families impacted by autism.

**Primary Contact**

Dan Stencil  
Oakland County Parks and Recreation  
2800 Watkins Lake Road  
Waterford, MI 48328  
[stencild@oakgov.com](mailto:stencild@oakgov.com)  
248-858-0916

**Alternate Contact**

Desiree Stanfield  
248-705-4108  
[stanfieldd@oakgov.com](mailto:stanfieldd@oakgov.com)