

# 2017 NACPRO Award Nominations

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## Environmental/Conservation

**Nominee:** Tijuana River Valley Regional Park Habitat Restoration

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** County of San Diego, Dept of Parks and Recreation, California

**Population:** 3,000,000

It is with pleasure that I am submitting the nomination for the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park (TRVRP) Habitat Restoration project for consideration of the NACPRO Special Award for the Environmental/Conservation Award. What is now a regional park and preserve, with over 1,800 acres under County Parks and Recreation management was once a historic agricultural and equestrian use area bisected by the Tijuana River. Located immediately north of the U.S. and Mexico border within the Pacific Flyway, TRVRP provides a critical breeding habitat for over 300 different bird species and the restoration of the parkland provides for significant conservation of our natural riparian areas, including habitat for the least Bell's vireo, California gnatcatcher, red tailed hawk, among others. Over the past 20 years, the County has worked to acquire these lands for purposed of habitat conservation and recreation in coordination with our regional planning efforts of the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) which guides implementation of our Natural Communities Conservation Plans.

Through the implementation of the MSCP, the Management Framework Plan for Tijuana River Valley Regional Park, TRVRP Areas Specific Management Directives, the TRVRP Trails and Habitat Enhancement Project Environmental Impact Report, and the Restoration and Enhancement Plan for the TRVRP Trails Project over 60+ acres of habitat restoration and enhancement are currently underway creating a significant unified habitat area for sensitive, as well as state and federally listed endangered species. As part of our environmental conservation efforts we have taken the 70 miles of redundant, haphazard trails and created a formalized 22 mile multi-use trail system that provides a nature based experience for both the trail users and species living in the park. By restoring over 30 miles of haphazard trails we are reconnecting this unique habitat, bringing back the vegetation and species that once used to thrive here.

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## Environmental/Conservation

**Nominee:** The Invasive Management Program

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 1.1 million

The Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) Invasive Management Area (IMA) program trains volunteers to lead other volunteers who remove non-native, invasive plants from parkland and plant native plants. IMA includes an Early Detection Rapid Response team that locates new populations of invasive species, a Non-Native Invasive ID and Control handbook, and an annual spring promotion called Take Back the Forest held in cooperation with REI, Inc. It is promoted through local media outlets, FCPA publications, county school teachers and a website. The spring promotion overlaps with Earth Day, Arbor Day, Global Youth Service Day and Invasive Plant Removal Day. It coincides with the time students scramble to fulfill class volunteer requirements. Take Back volunteers receive a t-shirt designed by a county high school student and a deck of cards sporting photos of invasive plants.

IMA started in 2006 with 454 volunteers donating 1,600 hours at 21 places. About 2,000 volunteers helped during each of the last four years. Through 2015, 13,441 volunteers donated 43,442 hours to remove 8,706 bags of invasive plants from 68 sites. REI has donated \$55,000 in grants through the Fairfax County Park Foundation.

The program increases awareness of non-native invasive plants, provides tips for their control and eradication, and invites residents to care about their land. IMA includes an innovative invasive plant prioritization plan that support wise resource use, cost effectiveness and efficiency.

IMA leaders have made presentations at the Northern Virginia Urban Forest Roundtable, to the Virginia Recreation and Park Society, at the Delaware State Invasive Plant Conference and at the U.S. National Botanic Garden. Program volunteers have been Master Naturalists, students, local business partners, Park Authority employees, the agency director, and Park Board members. Annual volunteer hours are estimated to be worth over \$250,000.

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## Environmental/Conservation

**Nominee:** Native Seed Collection Collaboration

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 580,000

The Johnson County Park and Recreation District (JCPRD) partnered with KC Wildlands, a local environmental non-profit and team of specialized volunteers, to solve a critical problem. The Kansas City region lacks any availability of local ecotype seed for prairie restorations and remnant sites. JCPRD staff and KC Wildlands volunteers collected a total of 128 species of native plants from remnant prairies with a market value of \$82,653 in 2016. Eight species of milkweed specific to the region were also collected. Volunteers targeted species in a three county area throughout the season. The operation is housed in a JCPRD barn with specialized seed cleaning equipment, drying racks, and processing stations. The processed seed was mixed into blends and distributed to specific sites in both KS and MO for critical pollinator projects. Additional seed was sent to a local native greenhouse for propagation and eventual installation in a fenced rare plant production plot. Remaining seed was provided to local community restoration projects. This project would not be sustainable without the 400+ volunteer hours, school groups, and key staff dedicated to the restoration of prairie in Johnson County and the Kansas City Area. JCPRD continues to scale up the seed collection effort in anticipation of a 500-acre prairie restoration at the 2,000-acre Big Bull Creek Park scheduled to open in early 2018. Additional partners in the collaboration include Kansas City Missouri Parks and Recreation, Master Naturalist Program, and the Missouri Department of Conservation. Native plants do not notice state boundaries and either does this collaborative effort!

See the following video stored on this project: <https://youtu.be/Mcl4JB8dGRk>

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## Environmental/Conservation

**Nominee:** Land Acquisition Plan

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 400,000

For decades, Lucas County has been well known for its abundant natural resources including the Oak Openings Region, Maumee River basin, and Lake Erie coastal wetlands. By the late 20th century, the region was faced with widespread habitat fragmentation, water resource degradation and biodiversity loss. Urban development far outpaced the national average, demanding immediate action to save the best remaining natural areas. Collaborating with community leaders, conservation planners, and regional stakeholders, Metroparks developed a Strategic Land Acquisition Plan to acquire at least 4,300 new acres of parkland, effectively expanding the park system by over 50%. The Board of Park Commissioners placed the new 0.3 mill, 10-year land acquisition levy on the 2002 ballot. The levy was approved by 61.3% of voters, generating \$23 million.

Metroparks leveraged this money with \$30 million in matching funds from the following sources: Clean Ohio Fund, Federal Highway Administration, Ohio EPA's Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, ODNR Division of Wildlife; NOAA, and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

This funding supported an average of 1 real estate transaction per month for 14 years and required an agency-wide commitment, ensuring that properties were protected from encroachments, natural areas were restored and managed, new infrastructure was built, and all funds were accounted for. Land holdings grew at 9 of 11 existing Metroparks.

By successfully completing its plan, Metroparks has guaranteed that Lucas County's natural heritage is protected for future generations. Results include: two new parks opened in 2015, a Downtown Toledo Metropark opened in 2016, construction of the Oak Openings Corridor and Chessie Circle Trails will be completed in 2018; 700 acres of coastal marshland will be restored by 2018, 1,500 acres of Oak Openings habitat have been restored, and populations of 40+ rare plant and animal species are now protected.

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## Environmental/Conservation

**Nominee:** Osprey Point Golf Course

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 1.4 million

Owned and operated by the Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department, Osprey Point Golf Course has set the standard for the environmental preservation and management of land in the golfing industry. Built adjacent to the Everglades, Osprey Point was opened in 2010 and shortly thereafter became just the second golf course in the United States and fifth in the world to earn the coveted "Certified Classic Sanctuary" distinction from Audubon International, an honor that recognizes environmental stewardship from conception through on-going management. Audubon International re-certified the facility in 2015, making it the first golf course in the U.S. to earn re-certification, while the course was named the "World's Best Eco-Friendly Golf Facility" by the World Golf Awards in 2016.

Osprey Point's environmentally friendly practices are wide reaching. During the design and construction phase of the facility, Palm Beach County minimized irrigated acreage and utilized an alternative turf, Platinum Paspalum, which required less irrigation and maintenance. Furthermore, during construction, a waste water recycling system and infiltration sumps were installed and vegetative swales and wetlands were used to clean water before it drained into neighboring lakes or groundwater. As a result of these water-saving efforts, Osprey Point utilized nearly 31 percent less water than permitted in 2016, a savings of 57 million gallons of water.

Environmental efforts extend beyond the reduction and treatment of water. Maintenance staff only use chemicals approved by Audubon International and certain identified areas have been removed from maintenance and allowed to return to their natural state to promote habitats for both fauna and flora. More than 2,000 hours are spent each year to remove exotic and invasive plants while Osprey Point holds events throughout the year to help educate golfers on the course's environmental efforts and steps golfers can take to aid in the process.

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## Environmental/Conservation

**Nominee:** Skyline Park

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 173,537

Skyline Park is home to the storied Burnett's Mound - the highest point in Shawnee County - named for Chief Abram B. Burnett, a former Topeka mayor and Potawatomi Indian whose family owned the land on which the park is situated. For the past 20 years, Shawnee County Parks + Recreation's forestry staff and volunteers including Westar Energy's Green Team have worked to restore the land to its original prairie state by clearing trees and conducting controlled burns to allow sunlight to promote the growth of warm season grasses, plants and native prairie flowers.

This year, Azura Credit Union announced its new name by providing a \$180,000 gift to enhance the trails and the park. The park's 4.7 miles of natural surface trails are now known as the Azura Trails at Skyline Park and are used by hikers, joggers and mountain bikers. Wooded trails give way to prairie as users approach the higher levels of the park with panoramic views of Shawnee County. The Kansas Trails Council created a fourth trail loop and Azura employees adopted one of the trails. New trail markers have been placed. Coming enhancements include a new parking lot, shelter, entry gate and trailhead markers along with interpretive signage about the native plants, landmarks viewable from the summit, and perhaps the very interesting story of the Potawatomi Indians who moved to the area after being forced by the federal government to relocate their homes back east.

Social media posts indicated that residents not previously aware of the park or its trails now plan to use them. SCP+R's forestry staff has a prairie plant walk program scheduled for this summer and there are requests for star watching and other programs. Trails and nature areas were the top desired amenity identified in SCP+R's master plan research.

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## Historical/Cultural Facility

**Nominee:** Gardenville School House

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Hillsborough County, Florida

**Population:** 1,400,000

Hillsborough County, Florida consists of many styles of recreation sites and community centers. One of the originals has recently been resurrected and rehabilitated in Gibsonton, Florida. The Gardenville Schoolhouse was built in the early 1920's at the cusp of the area's boom. The population of the Gardenville community reached a record of 125 residents. When the number of school-age children outgrew the 4 room, 4000 square-foot schoolhouse, it became a recreation center for after-school programs and summer camps and a landmark for the community. The County parks department acquired the building in 1960. The facility was the hub of the community, offering local residents a place for children and adults to play, socialize and gather.

After several decades of constant use and Florida weather, the building began to show its age. Temporary fixes were becoming abundant and not practical. The community exploded with new homes and families. In 2005, the schoolhouse was shuttered and a new 12,000 square-foot community center was opened. In the shadow of the state-of-the-art facility, the community discussed whether the timeworn schoolhouse should be torn down or rebuilt. With support from County government and local leaders, the decision to save the schoolhouse was made. Funds from a Community Development Block Grant were obtained and the Gardenville Schoolhouse was granted another opportunity for residents, young and old, to play, socialize and gather. \$830,000 was approved for renovation. The building was brought up to current building codes and the entire facility now appears much like it did in the 1920's, with use many modern materials to achieve this look. The original red bricks and new windows surround the schoolhouse.

Today, the Gardenville Schoolhouse offers multiple programs for users, young and old. The morning Aging Services program hosts participants who attended the same building as students.

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## Historical/Cultural Facility

**Nominee:** Loxahatchee River Battlefield Park

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 1.4 million

Loxahatchee River Battlefield Park is one of the most significant multi-level historic sites in Palm Beach County. Gateway to the Loxahatchee River, prehistoric and historic habitation has occurred here dating as far back as the Archaic Period, over 5,000 years ago. The primary goal of the park is to preserve and protect these cultural resources, while providing education and passive recreation opportunities for the public to experience this beautiful park and its history. The first battle of Loxahatchee, known as Powell's Battle, took place on January 15, 1838. The second battle of the Loxahatchee, known as Jesup's Battle, occurred nine days later on January 24. Today, the pine flat woods, open meadows, cypress swamps and oak hammocks are home to hundreds of native species of flora and fauna, and give visitors a sense of "Old Florida".

The park provides educational programs which are designed to meet the standards of school groups from fourth grade to university level as well as civic and private group interests. In 2016, approximately 600 students were allowed on the grounds where the battles happened. Through use of visual aids, props and utilizing the location itself the students walked through a timeline of historical events. Our Educational Day for the Battle of the Loxahatchee 2017 provided 250 students and 50 adults the opportunity to interact with dressed re-enactors and interpreters representing the units of the US Army and the Seminole Nation that fought here in the Second Seminole War.

In addition to the two State Historic designations for Jesup's and Powell's Battles, the battlefield is in the process of being designated on the Nation Registry of Historic Places. Presently, a "Battlefield Plaza" is being constructed for the enjoyment of future generations of park patrons so the stories and lessons of the Loxahatchee Battlefield will be remembered.

### Download Links

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## Historical/Cultural Facility

**Nominee:** Through the Eyes of the Servants Tour at Merestead Estate

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 960,000

**Event Summary:**

Merestead is an early 20th century intact estate owned and operated by Westchester County. Curator-led tours of the house are offered monthly to inform the public of what life was like for the people who lived on the estate during that time in our nation's history. In 2016, a new tour added called "Through the Eyes of the Servants" was developed to provide a glimpse of what life was like for the servants in this great house. As they tour the house, visitors become part of the tour by "playing" the role of a servant - but with an untraditional twist.

**Background:**

Listed on the National Register of Property, Merestead was built by famous architects Delano and Aldrich in Neo-Georgian style that became associated with the early 20th century American wealthy elite. It was owned by William Sloane, president of the nationally known furniture business W and J Sloane. Tours on a variety of different topics have been offered since 2007, and are free and open to the public by reservation only.

**Description:**

Each visitors is greeted by the curator and presented with a card with the name and/or position of an actual Merestead servant; on the reverse side is a list of general rules for servants to be followed by all staff at the manor. The group is led into the house as the curator weaves together the context of the house with regard to what each servant would be doing.

As the group moves from room to room, a particular staff member who would be working in that room is talked about while the visitor holding that card is featured and becomes "part" of the tour by association with that servant. The tour culminates with a visit to the servants' wing where each staff member's name is matched with their own room. This is followed by a trip down the back stairs to the kitchen and the servants' hall where they take their "elevenses" (coffee breaks) and meals.

**Results:**

Traditionally, similar tours of historic houses are offered in a walk-and-talk format by a costumed staff member who relate the history of the house directly to them, resulting in a more passive experience. "Through the Eyes of the Servants" allows visitors to experience this historic house by becoming part of the tour as both servants and owners. Further, "Through the Eyes of the Servants" highlights the lives of people who, not all so long ago, were marginalized people who were locked into a life of servitude from generation to generation. Also, since Merestead is contemporary with the castle in "Downton Abbey," the tours have generated a lot of public interest in the property among the people of Westchester.

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## Marketing

**Nominee:** Securing a Future for Wildlife

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 1.3 million

Cleveland Metroparks Zoo (CMZ) is dedicated to the responsible stewardship of our natural environment through exhibition of living animals and plants, and administration of programs in wildlife education and conservation. CMZ recently developed a comprehensive strategy to increase impact on wildlife conservation and integrate the Zoo's already broad field conservation work into the fabric of activities of the entire organization. To generate awareness and engagement from the community a marketing campaign was developed - "Securing a Future for Wildlife".

The goal of the campaign is to generate awareness and interest by educating and inspiring audiences to take conservation action. While we continue to measure the impact, initial results are promising. Since June 2016, the website (FutureForWildlife.org) attracted over 18,000 unique visitors. Awareness of the website has been primarily driven by onsite visits to the zoo. These visits have resulted in nearly a minute and a half of engagement with CMZ wildlife conservation content and over 10% of them have visited the "Take Action" page. Staff, signage, collateral, onsite donation programs and social media have provided the website as a call-to-action. Overall, CMZ has raised nearly \$600,000 in donations.

Zoos no longer operate in isolation from the natural world or international conservation community often representing the most immediate link to wildlife and conservation issues for the public. It is important that members of the public view animals in zoos as stewards for their wild counterparts and see zoological institutions as an integral part of the international conservation community.

Clear communication of conservation goals and activities will increase awareness and promote a zoological park's identity as a conservation organization. Improving public awareness of the zoo's conservation mission and efforts may help sustain local and international conservation programs through increased financial support, renewed commitment to a conservation ethic, and measurable change in behaviors.

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## Marketing

2017 Awardee

**Nominee:** Los Angeles County Comprehensive Park and Recreation Needs Assessment Website

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 10 million

The County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) believes that all County residents should have equal access to parks that are safe and contribute to a healthy lifestyle. As part of our commitment, DPR prepared a Countywide Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment (PRNA) to analyze park needs across the County.

Los Angeles County's size (4,751 square-miles, over 10 million residents) and a short timeframe for completing the PRNA created a challenge for communicating with the public. It was determined that a single website that could be accessed from anywhere, including on mobile devices, was the best option.

Enter [www.lacountyparkneeds.org](http://www.lacountyparkneeds.org), the website for the PRNA. It provided meeting information, data sharing and transparency about the PRNA process. The website allowed County residents to learn about and participate in the PRNA. Its easily-navigable pages presented information in multiple languages, and a variety of formats for users of all technical abilities. The website became a hub for supporters of the PRNA, and continues to be a resource for residents. The simple design incorporated straightforward language, dynamic photographs and consistent use of the project logo, color scheme and fonts to engage all users.

The website features resources such as downloadable fliers, translated meeting materials, presentation templates and fact sheets. These materials were accessible to all facilitators, including city and County staff and members of community-based organizations.

The website greatly enhanced awareness of the PRNA, and received more than 30,000 page views from November 2015 through February 2016. Community meetings were attended by over 5,000 residents, and the PRNA was highlighted in more than 30 publications.

Due in part to the success of this website, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted to adopt the PRNA, and placed a park funding measure (Measure A) on the November 2016 ballot, which passed with 75 percent voter approval.

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**Alternate Contact**

## Marketing

**Nominee:** Annie's Canyon Trail Virtual Hike Video

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** County of San Diego, Dept of Parks and Recreation, California

**Population:** 3,000,000

It was known as one of the wildest stretches of trail in northern San Diego - meandering through sandstone corridors to incredible views of the ocean and San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve. For decades it was closed to the public. Then it began trending on social media as a hotspot for illegal activity, destroying native plants and compromising cliff integrity. In 2015, a local resident donated money to open the trail under the name, Annie's Canyon. Goals across agencies were to balance recreation with the safety and security of park patrons and staff, and protect the land from future abuse. In 2016, vegetation was restored, graffiti was scraped and ladders were installed where makeshift handles/ropes once sat. Signs were placed along the 1/4-mile path, reminding people to stay on trail. A grand opening event was held June 21, 2016. Promotions included a press release, news articles, social media posts and, most importantly, a virtual hike video.

"Annie's Canyon Virtual Hike" is the most popular, most accessed and most referenced video in San Diego County News Center History. It was initially loaded three times - twice on San Diego County's news channels and once on County Parks' Facebook page. To date, "Annie's Canyon Virtual Hike" has garnered over 2 million impressions and 1+ million views, nearly 22,000 comments, over 12,000 shares and about 4,700 likes. Hashtags linking the trail to ongoing preservation efforts included #upsideofoutside, #ACT and #loveyourlagoon. Its innovative approach has spurred massive interest, effectively turning this once crime-prone area into family-friendly tourist attraction that draws several hundred visitors a day.

Since the opening of the trail and video launch, the park has experienced a surge in volunteers, partnerships, sponsorships and organized hikes. Public relations have improved and the trail has effectively morphed from an eyesore to a symbol of neighborhood pride.

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## Marketing

**Nominee:** Bird the Preserves

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 5.2 million

Bird the Preserves connects diverse communities to the Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC) by expanding birding programs and activities and establishes the FPCC as a premier birding destination in the region. In 2015 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through Chicago Wilderness provided federal funding to launch the initiative. In 2016 Bird the Preserves held a Big Year Competition and more than 220 bird walks, events, trainings, and festivals that attracted an estimated 2,400 people.

The program owes much of its success to its marketing efforts. The initiative created a wide variety of promotional materials that would inspire participation from diverse audiences. The hashtag #birdthepreserves was widely used via social media, and FPCC and partners birding events were advertised on websites, and in social media and quarterly event brochures. An updated birding checklist was printed and distributed and "Bird of the Month" rack card series highlighting different birds and fun facts and graphics were sent out via media advisory, and shared on the website and social media. And a blog post featured interviews with birders of all levels and backgrounds.

To date nearly 20 online and print publications and two on-air segments on local news channels featured Bird the Preserves. Traffic to the Bird the Preserves website increased by 596% compared to 2015. Between March and June of 2016 Facebook and Twitter activity generated a total of 134 Tweets with 119,448 impressions and 2,194 engagements and 30 Facebook posts with 90,012 impressions and 2,423 engagements. And #birdthepreserves, an unofficial Facebook public group page created by partners, currently has 300 members.

The FPCC gained a new audience and grew its reputation as a regional birding destination through Bird the Preserves' successful marketing campaign.

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## Marketing

**Nominee:** Hillsborough County Hiking Spree Marketing Campaign

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Hillsborough County, Florida

**Population:** 1,400,000

The Hillsborough County Hiking Spree is in the midst of its inaugural year. Our Nature Program Specialist, Brad Lympany, designed the Spree from a course in which he participated as a child. As he modified this adventure for our local climate, the weather allows for participation to run from November 1, 2016 through March 31, 2017. The program objective is to not only promote our amenities and offer a unique means of exploration, but it is to also enhance wellness initiatives by introducing exotic ways for citizens to live a healthy lifestyle. Participants must register and hike eight out of 20 designated trails. Trails vary each year to refresh the program and introduce residents to the hidden gems lying throughout the County. As this is the first year, the team set a lofty goal of 1000 registrations. With the event ending on March 31st, and the results not yet final, 791 participants have registered as of March 1, 2017.

In order to obtain such a hefty initial response, we composed a Marketing Campaign to highlight the program's uniqueness. One method utilized to captivate our growing audience was the creation of our "Journey through Hillsborough" video. To bring this epic video to life, the team utilized volunteers throughout the Comic Con community to donate their time, talent and incredible costumes. Posted to YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, it was the Social Media push that generated the viewership needed to immensely impact program participation.

The YouTube video attracted 1,255 views, 684 of them through a paid \$30 advertisement. Seven Facebook posts reached 10,345 users receiving 251 reactions, including 27 comments and 47 shares. Two Instagram posts received 83 likes, 17 comments, and 218 views. Lastly, three tweets enticed 4,731 impressions and 81 engagements on Twitter.

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## Marketing

**Nominee:** Branding - New Website Initiative

**Nominee's Title:** Marketing and Communications Assistant

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

**Population:** 400,000

Metroparks website was outdated in technology, design and didn't provide a mobile experience necessary to make it useful to today's park visitors. These shortcomings inhibited our agency's communications and marketing objectives. Lucas County voters were surveyed a year earlier about where they prefer to get their information and the number one response was from the internet. Goals included targeting user groups with email newsletters and engaging the community through social media, both of which required a new ability to host content for sharing.

In addition to the new website, a new mobile friendly logo was needed with a fresh new look. The project was funded by Metroparks, but North Design, which designed the site, donated in kind services valued at more than \$45,000. Also, the new website enabled us to launch a mobile friendly interactive map.

Since the launch of the website, February 2016, Google Analytics shows an 11% increase in sessions (times people access site), a 3% increase in users and a sharp increase in page views, up 25%. The interactive map is the third most popular page. While the percentage of mobile users increased from 43 to 53 percent in August, 2016. This modern new look and functionality of the site gives a fresh, positive reflection of the park district and the community. It has provided a platform to showcase the region's natural features, and new ways for the community to enjoy them. In October, a survey of 400 registered Lucas County voters, 54 percent said they had visited the website and 83 percent said they know how to get information and questions answered about Metroparks. This past summer, US News and World Reports used information from the website to prepare a story naming Toledo area second in the nation for Best Places to Live for Outdoor Lovers.

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## Marketing

**Nominee:** Department Logo

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 1.4 million

The Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department finally has a look of its own after decades of using the county's seal as its brand identity. Understanding the need to brand our wide range of award-winning parks and facilities to residents, visitors and partners, we worked closely with the O'Donnell Agency to design a department logo to serve as a kind of "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval" and to communicate a standard of quality, so that it looks credible and authoritative, yet still communicates the essence of the park experience, which is happiness, inclusiveness, wellness, and stress relief through the calming, enriching effects of contact with nature.

The logo elements are made up of several icons that successfully unite to tell our story and capture a typical day of fun at a Palm Beach County Park into one vibrant new design. A boat under full sail across the water with a sea bird soaring among the cloud can be seen in the new logo and on any given day at a county park. A picnic table where families and friends come together to share a meal, make crafts, relax and read, play games or just hang out is also illustrated in the design. Trees, parkland, lush grass green lawns as well as biking, running, and hiking is also depicted.

The new logo, which includes an animated version, appears on all department communication including email signatures, printed and electronic marketing material, periodicals, publications, forms, stationary, apparel, videos, and social media. A comprehensive brand guideline was developed to ensure consistent use. Department staff and volunteers continually hear positive feedback regarding the logo from park visitors and colleagues in the parks and recreation industry. Recently, the logo was awarded a Gold ADDY by the American Advertising Federation competing among 40,000 entries.

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## Marketing

**Nominee:** Marketing the 50th Year of Stark Parks

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Stark County Park District, Ohio

**Population:** 375,432

Beginning in 2015, Stark Parks began a park-wide standardization of marketing protocol. This included an overall rebrand, the creation of a style guide, and the regulation of all signage, logos, and maps. Community feedback has proven that the updated brand is visually up-to-date, and standardizing marketing etiquette has resulted in a more consistent identity. Additionally, a new logo adaptation was adopted, still featuring the local celebrity, FeLeap the Frog. The "new" logo appears more bold and modern.

In 2014, Stark Parks kicked off a three-year marketing campaign by appealing to individuals and new users, featuring the theme of "Be Active" by promoting solo activities, like kayaking, and highlighting the ways different parks could be used. In 2015, the theme grew to include families and friends, and focused on activities like picnicking and programs, introducing the tagline "Make Memories." In 2016, Stark Parks challenged visitors to try new things and "Branch Out" and extended this idea to their civic groups, focusing on volunteer opportunities.

The three-year strategic marketing plan was designed to lead up to 2017 - Stark Parks' golden anniversary. Wanting to break from a traditional "50th" theme, the slogan "Get Your Park On!" was adopted, a theme that explores all the ways people choose to embrace the parks. In addition to building up to a grand 50th celebration, Stark Parks planned for events that would garner community involvement, two of the most notable being unveiling a new website in February and hosting the Special Park District Forum in June. With the new website ([www.StarkParks.com](http://www.StarkParks.com)) came a streamlined reservation system, easier access to programs and activities, an interactive "ParkFinder" map, and efficient mobile responsiveness. The Special Park District Forum, hosted in Stark County, will connect park professionals from across the country to the Stark Parks story of growth using partnerships.

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## Operational Facility

**Nominee:** Solar PV System

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** over 500,000

In December 2016, Great Parks of Hamilton County began installation of its first solar photovoltaic (PV) system at the Winton Woods Maintenance Building, which is home to fleet services and park operations. The solar PV system is designed to supply usable solar power by collecting sunlight and converting it to electricity. The goal of the project is to help reduce electricity use, reduce carbon emissions and reduce power costs at the facility.

The \$97,900 system was installed by Third Sun Solar of Athens, Ohio and was completed in February 2017, thanks to grants and matching funds provided by the Great Parks Foundation. The new system includes 176 solar modules that will generate an annual average of 63,000 kilowatt hours of energy to the grid. This will reduce the average annual electric consumption at this facility approximately 95% and will offset approximately 2.5 million pounds of carbon dioxide over 25 years.

To promote the benefits of this system, educational and interpretive components will be provided to the public through interactive kiosks available at Great Parks' visitor centers. These kiosks will provide online monitoring showing real time data of the system operations. The installation will also be a feature at the Solar and Sustainability Celebration event on April 6, 2017, that invites "green" organizations and the public to learn more about the project, as well as park district-wide sustainability efforts being accomplished by Great Parks.

Overall, the solar PV system brings the Winton Woods Maintenance Building one step closer to becoming a "net zero" facility, which also has LED lighting and a recycle waste oil furnace. Working to reach "net zero" is a goal that others can set for their facilities as well by making beneficial changes to their energy consumption.

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## Outstanding Contributor

**Nominee:** Midwest Health

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 173,537

Before Shawnee County Parks + Recreation undertakes a major project, the department seeks funding to provide an endowment to pay for for maintenance of the project well into the future. SCP+R's Master Plan calls for the building of a multi-generational recreational facility in the rapidly expanding southwest quadrant of the county. The facility could include either an indoor or outdoor aquatic facility to replace the closed Crestview Pool which had become irreparable.

The Midwest Health Aquatic Center, opened in August of 2016, became the second largest project ever completed by SCP+R. Before it opened, Midwest Health, a provider of senior living communities, stepped forward with a \$1 million gift to provide for future maintenance. The aquatic center features a first-of-its-kind bow-tie wave pool as well as a 30-foot high slide tower that ranks in the top 10-to-15 percent of municipal water slides in the United States. Add to the wave pool and twisting, intertwining water slides the region's first zip line, a climbing wall and a leisure pool with a children's play tower, basketball goals and a vortex pool and you have a regional attraction and economic development engine for the county.

The slide tower is designed so that two additional slides can be added to keep the facility fresh in the future. Midwest Health's gift will make the additions possible. Midwest Health leaders Jim Klausman and Butch Eaton are building a legacy not only with their business, but by investing in the community. They are big investors in the renewal of downtown Topeka and are investing in construction of a new office park in southwest Topeka. By virtue of their gift, Midwest Health also has a representative serving on the Shawnee County Parks and Recreation Foundation. The aquatic center was eventually featured in World Waterpark Magazine.

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## Outstanding Public Official

**Nominee:** Arnold Randall

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:** General Superintendent

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

**Population:** 5.2 million

Arnold Randall brings a remarkable sense of integrity, openness, leadership and enthusiasm for collaboration to the Forest Preserves of Cook County, that empowers employees, partners, and volunteers to work together to protect nature and improve outdoor recreation in an often challenging urban environment.

In December 2010, Mr. Randall was appointed by Forest Preserves of Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle to serve as the General Superintendent of the Forest Preserves of Cook County, one of the country's oldest and largest conservation districts. Mr. Randall oversees and has greatly increased the Preserves' focus on restoring biological diversity and protecting the nearly 70,000 acres of public land under its care. Under his leadership, the Forest Preserves of Cook County has made significant progress in multiple areas resulting in improved outdoor experiences for local and regional visitors.

In particular, Mr. Randall is committed to ensuring that people from all backgrounds and walks of life have the opportunity to participate in healthy outdoor recreation and enjoy nature. In order to engage these new and diverse audiences Mr. Randall has made environmental education and outdoor recreation programs a priority for the Preserves, in 2014 he formed the Conservation and Experiential Programming Department (CEP) that provides public programming for people of all ages and abilities. In 2016 alone, CEP successfully reached approximately 735,000 people through nature and recreation programming. Mr. Randall's commitment to good government has made the Preserves a stronger and more sustainable entity allowing us to work across geo-political boundaries and collaborate with partners that represent diverse socio-economic audiences to achieve conservation goals. Mr. Randall has made significant strides to ensuring that the Preserves continue to be an asset for all that call this region home.

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## Outstanding Support Organization

**Nominee:** Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** El Paso County Parks, Colorado

**Population:** 655,000

For 40 years, the Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers (501-c-3), has supported community outreach and educational programming provided by the county's Bear Creek and Fountain Creek Nature Centers.

The Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of seven members. The Board of Directors exercises general management and control of the business affairs of the organization, including promoting the mission and philosophy of El Paso County Nature Centers. Key issues currently related to the Board's effectiveness are specific to addressing identified mission-centric needs in the community while providing an adequate volunteer workforce for the Nature Centers. Board terms are three years, with two consecutive terms allowable. One hundred percent of governing Board members contribute financially to the organization for the ultimate benefit of the El Paso County Nature Centers.

The organization engages volunteers in a variety of capacities. The Nature Centers benefits from the support of over 70 volunteers who donate more than 6,000 hours annually in the following areas: information receptionists, interpretive programs, environmental education, fundraising, and special projects. This volunteer service amounts to more than \$100,000 contributions annually. Volunteers also provide outreach to the community through involvement in special events sponsored by the Nature Centers, including: Bear Creek's Bear Run, Pikes Peak Birding and Nature Festival, Fountain Creek Firelight Evening, Sustainability Series, and Murder Mystery Dinner Theater, among others. The Nature Centers also welcome teen volunteers as young as 12 years of age; youth volunteers alone contributed almost 900 hours of service every year. Please view our promotional video at Friends of El Paso County Webpage and Video

With restricting County budgets, the Friends organization became a critical financial support partner starting in 2008. In 2016, the organization raised \$191,000 that provides direct support to the nature centers. In addition, the organization conducts fundraising campaigns. Recent fundraising efforts included \$600,000 to triple the size of the Fountain Creek Nature Center and \$150,000 to replace and refurbish the exhibits at Bear Creek Nature Center.

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## Outstanding Volunteer

**Nominee:** Norma Hoffman

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:** Volunteer

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

**Population:** 1.1 million

In 1978, a planned four-lane road would have cut through Huntley Meadows Park, a 1,500 acre wetland oasis for creatures large and small in Fairfax County, Virginia. Norma Hoffman had the foresight to understand the damage it would cause. She started the Citizen's Alliance to Save Huntley and enlisted scientific and legal help. Thirty-nine years later there is no road, and the park's Visitor Center is named in her honor.

The Alliance succeeded in having the road plan removed from the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan. The group eventually would grow to more than 600 members. Hoffman then co-founded the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park in 1985, instituting a model that has been used by subsequent Friends groups at other county parks. Ms. Hoffman served as the Friends president, and in that role used wetland protection laws to prevent any further potential degradation to the park. These two groups worked collaboratively to secure state grants for the stabilization of 1,000 feet of severely eroded streambanks above the park using bioengineering techniques. Her efforts eventually added over 100 acres of wetlands to Huntley Meadows Park, repaired several failing stormwater ponds on an adjacent golf course, and established a continuous pollution monitoring system, protecting a vital water passageway to the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay.

Ms. Hoffman, now an octogenarian has been a volunteer at Huntley Meadows Park for over three decades, and has been honored with the Park Authority's highest volunteer service award. She has taught thousands of children about nature and our responsibility to be environmental stewards. In 1992, the Sierra Club named her one of its 100 Environmental Heroes. A Park Authority Board resolution noted that she tirelessly served community children in a 30-year crusade to imprint an appreciation for the environment through countless classes, hikes, and engaging stories.

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## Outstanding Volunteer

**Nominee:** Eileen Sutter

**Nominee's Title:** Volunteer

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

**Population:** 5.2 million

Eileen Sutter is one of the Forest Preserves of Cook County's most extraordinary volunteers. A volunteer for several decades, Eileen has dedicated countless weekends and hours to restoring the Preserves helping by clearing invasive brush, collecting and sowing native seeds, and conducting prescriptions burns. Each year, Eileen dedicates more than 300 hours of volunteer service and then there are the hours that Eileen inspires others to contribute - over the last three years, Eileen has connected over 1,600 volunteers to stewardship activities, for a total of 4,750 hours of volunteer service!

Eileen's love and enthusiasm for plants is contagious. She has become an expert in identifying native prairie and woodland plants and is always eager to share her knowledge with beginners. She is an active participant in Plants of Concern, a regional rare plant monitoring program, managed by the Chicago Botanic Garden, designed to assess long-term trends in rare plant species. Eileen monitors several plant populations within the Preserves. Late spring to late fall finds Eileen leading a volunteers on seed collections trips throughout the preserves, keeping meticulous notes on the collection data that is shared with Preserve staff. The volunteers collect hundreds of pounds of seeds that are then processed and distributed to restoration sites.

Eileen is the steward at Watersmeet Prairie Grove, a wet woodland that harbors unusual plant species including skunk cabbage, dog violet, and more. Together with her co-steward John Berg, Eileen has removed invasive plants and conducted other restoration activities that have substantially contributed to the site's health.

Eileen has contributed her knowledge, energy, and generous and kind spirit to healing nature, promoting community, and inspiring others to care for the Preserves. She inspires staff, fellow volunteers, and everyone who meets her and we are all immeasurably richer for having her in our midst.

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## Outstanding Volunteer

**Nominee:** Lynn Desy

**Nominee's Title:** Lead Docent, DuBois Pioneer Home

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

**Population:** 1.4 million

Lynn Desy is an original volunteer docent for the historic DuBois Pioneer Home, circa 1898, located in DuBois Park, Jupiter, Florida. Lynn is a natural leader with her fellow docents, frequently covering shifts and volunteering to host private tours. Her ability to captivate visitors of all ages is integral to the success of the popular tours of the house. Lynn has a gift to connect to children especially. Often reconciled to tag along with the adults, Lynn insures the youngest visitors to the house experience the value of historical preservation by engaging the children in the lifestyles of the past, examples: games played back in the day, types of chores performed, and fielding questions about going to school in the wilds of the new Florida frontier.

Lynn has a thirst for knowledge and generous nature to share the foundation for the continually evolving library of information documenting the DuBois home, its descendants, and the Jupiter area in general. Lynn leads the DuBois Pioneer Home Speakers Bureau by creating and providing PowerPoint presentations with Q and A sessions to local civic clubs. She researched the DuBois genealogy through Ancestry.com which includes the family's involvement in the American Revolutionary War.

Lynn truly embodies the spirit and hard work of an Outstanding Volunteer. Without her tireless energy, the story of the house and early pioneer life would not have the features it does today. Thanks to Lynn, we have a resident expert on hand to share the joy of discovering our community's past. Her passion for the DuBois Pioneer Home, and attention to details, moreover, her commitment to the positive experience the visitors received is invaluable to our department. Lynn's legacy to the historical home and the department will be one of filling in the past's missing pieces and connecting them to future generations.

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## Outstanding Volunteer

**Nominee:** Dave Caldwell

**Nominee's Title:** Volunteer, Ward-Meade Historic Site

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

**Population:** 173,537

Dave Caldwell is the longest-tenured volunteer at Old Prairie Town/Ward-Meade Historical site, having given 35 year of his time, talent and treasure. Recognized as the railroad engineer who gives children rides on the hand car during the Apple Festival, Caldwell arranged for the Santa Fe Train Depot to be donated and moved to Old Prairie Town from its original location in Pauline just south of Topeka. He is the "ring leader" in recruiting volunteers to staff the station for visitors. Caldwell and other the members of the Topeka Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society have restored the Pauline Depot back to its original state in 1910 when the building was built.

According to Shawnee County Parks + Recreation staff, "Dave's fingerprints are all over Old Prairie Town." Caldwell is a member of Friends of Ward-Meade which supports the entire Ward-Meade Historic Site including the 1880s village that comprises Old Prairie Town as well as the Ward-Meade Botanical Garden which has gained national notoriety in each of the past two years. Caldwell has volunteered as a tour guide and as a member of Old Prairie Town's defunct Master Plan Committee. He also helped organize the Pauline Depot's 100th Birthday celebration.

Caldwell has financially supported a brand new event - Tulips at Twilight - a fundraiser designed to raise money for the Tulip Time festival in which visitors can see 120,000 tulips in bloom in three different SCP+R garden areas including Old Prairie Town/Ward-Meade Botanical Garden. Tulips at Twilight will feature 40,000 tulips illuminated by strings of white holiday lights as well as illuminated 20-foot tall man-made tulips. Without strong volunteers and volunteer groups, we would not be able to entertain visitors and carry out the several festivals per year that entertain thousands at such venues as Old Prairie Town/Ward-Meade Botanical Garden.

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## Park & Recreation Facility - Class I

**Nominee:** Anoka County and University of Minnesota Design/Build Collaboration 2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Anoka County Parks and Recreation Department, Minnesota

**Population:** 339,500

The Anoka County Parks and Recreation Department partnered with the University of Minnesota School of Architecture to build unique "learning kiosks" at the Heritage Lab/YMCA Camp Heritage site in Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve.

In a graduate course created specifically for this project, students had the opportunity to design the kiosks, fabricate the materials, and then build them in sections at the University. The kiosks were later assembled in the park in the summer of 2016.

This project served a dual purpose of giving Architecture students real world, hands-on experience with design and construction while allowing Anoka County to complete much-needed investments in infrastructure to better serve the public. A \$60,000 Regional Park and Trail Legacy Grant, donations of \$20,000 each by Connexus Energy and the YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities, and in-kind donations by the University and private businesses funded the \$150,000 project. Anoka County provided operational support throughout design development and closely coordinated building schedules and permit requirements.

This investment will positively impact the 5,000 day campers, Heritage Lab participants, and staff who use the site every year. Thanks to excellent budget management by the University, carryover funds will allow for two more learning kiosks to be built in 2017. Above all, this project is an outstanding best practices model for combining human and economic resources to better serve both the needs of the public and aspirations of students seeking relevant training in their field of study.

### Download Links

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## Park & Recreation Facility - Class I

**Nominee:** Liberty Lagoon Family Aquatic Center: Phase II

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 445,227

The Liberty Lagoon Family Aquatic Center is roughly 6 acres, and is located in BREC's Independence Community Park at 111 Lobdell Ave, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70806. It is centrally located in East Baton Rouge Parish so it may best serve the needs of the parish as a unique facility.

The objective of this project (Phase II) was to expand and improve the existing facility by adding new aquatic features while increasing the capacity of the park to accommodate popular demand for the facility. The crown jewel of this project is the addition of the Flowrider (simulated surfing) feature, which is the first of its kind in Louisiana. The project also consists of two additional thrill slides, a new restroom/ concession building, expanded deck space, and site furnishings.

The public is anxiously anticipating the ribbon cutting for this project, which is set to take place in late April 2017. The Flowrider will facilitate rentals and after hours use of the park that has not been possible in the previous years of operation. Overall, the functionality and quality of the facility as a whole has been greatly improved as a result of this project due to additional aquatic features, improved circulation, expanded service facilities (restrooms/concessions), and an increased operating capacity.

Design of Phase II of improvements began in 2015, with construction starting in the spring of 2016 and was completed in the winter of 2017. The BREC Planning and Engineering department developed a schematic plan for the site improvements and worked with Southeast Engineers to develop the construction documents. Additionally, construction was completed by the Wharton-Smith, Inc Construction Group.

The remarkable aspect of this project is that the new elements have been seamlessly integrated with the existing features, and will allow the facility to be partially operated after hours for special events and rentals, without having to operate the entire facility. This project shall serve as an excellent model of the value added to a facility when improvements to an existing facility are designed to complement the existing features as well as serving their own purpose.

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## Park & Recreation Facility - Class I

**Nominee:** Jefferson Highway Park - Site Improvements (multiple Phases)

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 445,227

Jefferson Highway Park is approximately 6 acres and is a public park centrally located in the south portion of East Baton Rouge Parish at 8133 Jefferson Highway, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70809 and situated primarily amongst residential neighborhoods.

The project objective was to totally renovate and re-imagine the scope and functionality of the park and transform it from an old pool facility into a destination rental for weddings, parties, special events as well as to improve the site as a park in general. To accomplish this, several phases of development were required: The demolition of a swimming pool and existing playground, the renovation of the exterior site (Playground, walking paths, Sand Volleyball, Outdoor reception area, Tennis courts, Site furnishings, Parking lot, and Lighting), and the complete renovation of the recreation center.

The public response to this project has been overwhelming as we had many requests to rent the facility long prior to it's opening in January 2017. Overall, the functionality and quality of the park has been totally revamped and will now properly function as a first class rental facility.

Design of the improvements began in 2013 followed by several phases of construction which concluded in 2017. The BREC planning and engineering department developed a schematic plan for the site improvements and worked with various consultants through the various phases of design including: Benchmark LLC (Site), Hoffpauir Studio (Architect), and BREC PandE Staff. Additionally, construction was completed by various contractors: Gulf Services contracting (Demolition), Capital Construction (Site and Building), Barriere Construction (Parking Lot Overlay), Quality Courts (Tennis Court Surface), and BREC Construction crews (Site Work and Sports Courts).

The remarkable aspect of this project is the complete transformation of the park that has occurred as a result of these improvements. Almost every aspect of the park has been dramatically improved and is now fully functional as a complete recreational facility and event center. As such, this project shall serve as an excellent model of the value added to a facility when it is allowed to be reimagined and the plan for improvements is fully implemented.

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## Park & Recreation Facility - Class I

**Nominee:** Fallen Timbers Metropark

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 400,000

The purpose of this project was to preserve a National Historic site, and educate the public on the importance to the country's development and identity. The battlefield located in a developing region of NW Ohio, was in danger of being turned into commercial land. Metroparks purchased the 187 acres of battlefield. Multiple organizations came together to not only save the battlefield from development but also to provide resources for its successful implementation. Community partners included Maumee Valley Historical Society, Fallen Timbers Battlefield Preservation Commission (FTBPC), City of Maumee, Maumee Valley Heritage Corridor, Ohio Historic Connection, National Park Service and Metroparks. Today FTBPC is still actively engaged in fundraising, preservation and education. FTBPC have raised over \$50,000 for educational materials, marketing and exhibits for Fallen Timbers. During the building phase, a community member donated a bridge worth \$40,000. With this donation the walking trail was changed to allow visitors a more comprehensive walk along the battlefield. Volunteers have contributed significant hours to reforesting the site. To date over 8,000 trees have been planted with over 400 volunteer hours. An existing building on site was renovated to provide restrooms and a visitor center with help from a grant from Ohio Department of Natural Resources was awarded for \$150,000 for restroom improvements. During the opening celebration the Wyandotte and Anderdon Nations provided an Honor Guard and Smoke Blessing. These tribes along with the Ottawa and Odawa have provided significant educational contributions. Since its opening, Fallen Timbers has educated over 71,000 visitors. Through a partnership with River Raisin, Metroparks has taken part in two "Journey Towards Understanding" experiences with the Wyandotte, Anderdon, Ottawa and Odawa Nations, reintroducing tribal history to Native Americans whose ancestors fought and died there. <https://vimeo.com/187875745>

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## Park & Recreation Facility - Class I

**Nominee:** Middlegrounds Metropark

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 400,000

The new Middlegrounds Metropark, a 28-acre scenic greenspace, provides an urban recreational opportunity in downtown Toledo that connects the community to the water and the area's heritage. Middlegrounds provides publically accessible amenities, riverfront usage and a park within five miles of city residents, where previously there was little to no accessibility, open green space or activity. Through the reconnection to the regional heritage, the park's design enhances community character and sense of place and improves psychological health and productivity. The entire project from acquisition to daily operations was and is a collaborative effort, while volunteers have and continue to donate hundreds of hours of their time for a variety of activities. Middlegrounds successfully leveraged the following grants and donations for construction:

- \$1.3 million grant from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to purchase the property
- \$300,000 from the Ohio Department of Transportation during the Anthony Wayne bridge rehabilitation to develop a stormwater treatment strategy.
- \$125,000 from Ohio EPA Surface Water Improvement Funds to help construct the remainder of the stormwater system. Which is capable of filtering 300,000 gallons of water for every 24 hour rain event.
- \$45,000 worth of tree plantings and street scape improvements from the City of Toledo.
- \$300,000 from The Rotary Club of Toledo for the construction of the Roundhouse Shelter and restrooms.

Middlegrounds provides passive recreational trails through restored native habitats which improves community health, and promotes active, healthy lifestyles. To date Middlegrounds has restored upland prairie/meadow, riparian zone and emergent wetlands by planting 236 native trees, 1,025 shrubs, 3,009 perennial plants and grasses, 1,070 wetland plants and 14 acres of tall-grass prairie.

<https://vimeo.com/187590076> and <http://www.13abc.com/content/news/Middlegrounds-district-spurs-repurposeing--414286403.html>

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## Park & Recreation Facility - Class I

**Nominee:** Pittsylvania County Park Project

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Pittsylvania County Parks and Recreation, Virginia

**Population:** 62,000

In 2011, county native and 15 year veteran of the parks and recreation profession, Mark Moore, came home to start the first parks and recreation department in the history of Pittsylvania County. Through the first four years, the department obtained more than \$125,000 in grant funding to add seven athletic fields across the county. After the establishment of a strong recreation program, the department turned its focus to creating more park access opportunities for county residents of all ages. Building on the department's strong relationship with the PC School Board, community parks were built at all four middle schools in the County; Chatham, Tunstall, Dan River and Gretna Middle Schools. These are the first parks ever built in the 250 year history of Pittsylvania County! Park amenities include a playground, paved walking track, picnic shelter and restrooms. The parks were subsequently named after the school mascot (Titan, Cavalier, Hawk and Wildcat Park).

The total cost of the park project was \$625,000. Funding partners in this project are Pittsylvania County, Danville Regional Foundation, JT-Minnie Maude Charitable Trust, Centra Health, Danville Regional Medical Center, Southside Electric Cooperative, Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative, Revitalization for a Greater Gretna and GameTime Playgrounds.

Public response has been wonderful with calls to reserve parts of the park for activities and school gym teachers raving about the benefits that the parks provide to the students and their lesson plans. Community parks at schools create a community school atmosphere, bringing school and community assets together.

The impact of this park project has been increased access to parks and open space in Pittsylvania County, and increased levels of physical activity amongst children and families. The development of these four parks will make physical activity opportunities available for more than half of County residents, compared to the one-third who currently have access.

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## Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

**Nominee:** Fort Hill Steps

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 1.3 million

Reconstruction of the Fort Hill Steps was completed Fall 2016. Originally constructed in 1982 and ascending a steep ridge overlooking the Rocky River, the steps were an iconic landmark and one of the most popular attractions in the Park District. Adjacent to historic earthworks and linking to five miles of scenic nature trails, the Fort Hill Steps were beloved by the community for the scenic views and recreational opportunities they offered.

Over 33 years, erosion and weathering caused a cavity in the cliff wall. The Park District worked with a geotechnical engineer and performed a 3D scan of the cliff to assess the cavity and potential safety risk. The results of this analysis showed significant movement of the shale cliff and a severe slope, resulting in the immediate closure and removal of the original 135 steps.

Recognizing the remarkable connection generations of visitors had to the steps, the Park District set out to expedite the process to rebuild them and design a new structure that would enhance the guest experience.

The design and engineering challenges of building the steps required geotechnical guidance, and resulted in the use of 294,000 pounds of concrete and drilling to depths of 18 feet. Innovative in its approach, Cleveland Metroparks identified a low impact single pier design for each platform to prevent further erosion and constructed a unique bracket design connection between the platform and concrete base.

When the community learned their beloved steps would be rebuilt, Cleveland Metroparks received an outpouring of support. Individuals and corporations initiated a giving campaign resulting in \$153,000 in donations. The newly built 155 Fort Hill Steps offer such an exceptional fitness experience that Cleveland's MetroHealth Medical Center asked to partner with Cleveland Metroparks to promote the vast health benefits received by making a single trip up the steps.

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## Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

**Nominee:** Tijuana River Valley Regional Park Trails Project

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** County of San Diego, Dept of Parks and Recreation, California

**Population:** 3,000,000

The Tijuana River Valley Regional Park (TRVRP) offers more than 1,800 acres of diverse habitats to explore&mdash;from dense riparian forests along the Tijuana River to coastal maritime sage scrub on top of Spooner's Mesa. In February 2016, the County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) completed a \$7,800,000 TRVRP trail project to construct a 22 mile trail system throughout the park and restore 40 acres of habitat. DPR sought and received project funding through partnerships with the Coastal Conservancy, Recreational Trails Program, Wildlife Conservation Fund, Riverparkways and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The project created the park trails identified in the TRVRP master plan over a decade ago and was designed to provide looping trails to allow park visitors to explore the scenic beauty of the Tijuana River Valley. The TRVRP is located in the southwest corner of the United States and is surrounded by dense, low income housing.

Wood bollards and lodgepole fencing are signature elements that define the new trail system which leads park visitors through unique habitats to explore a wide variety of natural experiences. A 450-foot boardwalk snakes through an area often inundated by the Tijuana River. A semi-circular observation deck overlooks a pond and provides interpretive signs about the value of habitat and clean water. Staging areas are strategically located to provide convenient trail access for hikers, bikers and equestrians.

Public response to the new trail system has been very positive with the ribbon cutting drawing over a hundred people. This project is unique because it created a new, free recreational resource and a connection to nature for residents of the surrounding low income neighborhoods. The 22-mile TRVRP trail system encourages people to visit the park, go outside to exercise and to connect with nature.

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## Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

**Nominee:** Oak Marr RECenter

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 1.1 million

When the Fairfax County Park Authority set out to renovate and expand Oak Marr RECenter, one goal was to make an environmental statement, as well as to respond to the community need for increased access to exercise and fitness facilities. The project was designed to achieve LEED Silver Certification by emphasizing sustainability. It was designed to enhance community health by adding innovative exercise equipment and low-cost child care to attract new users.

Designers sought to maximize use of available space by adding a two-story fitness center. The slope of the site was used to advantage adding natural lighting to the upper and lower fitness levels. Expansive glass windows were used to provide customers with views of nature in the surrounding parkland, and the high visibility of the fitness space was designed to inspire those outside the glass to join the fitness activities on the inside.

The addition uses a white-colored roof membrane to reflect and emit solar energy, water efficient landscaping, and low-emitting materials to improve indoor air quality. It uses LED lighting, occupancy and daylight harvesting sensors, and separate HVAC zones to reduce energy use. More than 20 percent of the building materials came from recycled components, and more than 20 percent of the materials were sourced regionally. Bicycle racks and shower/changing facilities for patrons and staff encourage use of alternative transportation to reach Oak Marr.

The project has won kudos from park patrons and received the 2015 Honor Award for Design Excellence as part of the Fairfax County Exceptional Design Awards Program and the Virginia Recreation and Park Society 2015 Award for the Top New Building for municipalities over 100K in population. It was recognized in Athletic Business' 28th Annual Architectural Showcase, and the Park Authority was praised by U.S. Senator Mark Warner.

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## Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

**Nominee:** Swallow Cliff

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 5.2 million

Swallow Cliff has been a winter sports mecca in suburban Chicago for almost 100 years that has recently been transformed into a year-round eco-fitness area, in large part due to climate change. A grand set of 125 limestone stairs that once were full of tobogganers is now a circuit of 263 stairs - a crowd-pleasing "ultimate outdoor stairmaster" with a stunning view. A historic warming shelter was replaced with a new energy-efficient place for yoga instructors, fitness trainers and a cafe; for healthy snacks.

In 1918, Swallow Cliff was described as a 50-foot tall bluff in a 2,300-acre forest preserve and a haven for "thousands upon thousands of swallows." Six wooden toboggan chutes and a giant ski jump were built in the 1920s, attracting as many as 35,000 visitors to a ski tournament in 1929. The original 125 limestone stairs were built in 1930 by the Civilian Conservation Corps along with a wooden warming shelter captured in a historic photo of the Palos Hills Winter Sports Area.

Due to high maintenance and improvement costs and severe budget problems, the Forest Preserve District decided to close the runs in 2004. Public opinion surveys conducted by the District in 2013 revealed public nostalgia for the popular toboggan chutes. A master planning process considered but rejected re-fridgerated chutes but imagined other new outdoor adventure features. A simpler plan by County Board President Toni Preckwinkle to just add another set of stairs was completed in three years at modest cost and has made the site more popular than ever.

The natural beauty of the site is a draw for work-out warriors and nature lovers alike. The revamped preserve is a popular spot for a wide range of programs like "Wellness in the Woods," "Stars, Stories and S'Mores" and music concerts hosted by nearby municipalities.

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## Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

**Nominee:** Des Plaines River Trail and Greenway Completion

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Lake County Forest Preserve District, Illinois

**Population:** 703,019

It took 54 years to complete the Des Plaines River Trail and Greenway (DPRT), which runs 31.4 miles from just below the Illinois-Wisconsin border to the border between Lake and Cook Counties in Illinois. Over that time, it required 142 separate land acquisitions totaling 4,911 acres to build the trail. The DPRT routes through 12 individual forest preserves and protects over 76 percent of the Des Plaines River in Lake County. Building the trail was supported by the first Lake County Forest Preserve Board of Commissioners as part of a larger vision for a countywide trail system. Building a countywide trail system has been a fundamental LCFPD goal since the vision was introduced in 1961.

The final 4.4-acre land purchase was made in December 2014. Before that purchase, trail users had to leave the trail, "portage" a considerable distance, then re-enter the trail to complete their journey. Securing the final land purchase closed a small but key gap, making possible a continuous trip from Wisconsin to the Cook County Line. The now-continuous trail and protected river corridor not only provide for human recreation, they provide valuable wildlife habitat, natural flood management, and serves as a vital thoroughfare for wildlife traversing a densely-populated and highly-developed county in search of food, water, and mates.

Hundreds of thousands use the DPRT each year. Since the trail completion, use has increased considerably, especially from July through November 2016 during the Des Plaines River Trail Challenge, an initiative challenging the public to complete the whole 31.4 miles of the trail, thereby calling attention to maintaining and supporting trails in Lake County. Building the DPRT is a testament to the adage "good things come to those who wait." It proves that patience, vision and perseverance can reap lasting rewards for current and future generations.

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## Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

**Nominee:** Lake Pleasant Regional Park Discovery Center

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Dept., Arizona

**Population:** 4.17 million

In 1990, the Bureau of Reclamation built an overlook at the Lake Pleasant Regional Park allowing many visitors to watch the progress as New Waddell Dam was being constructed. When the dam was completed, the facility was transferred to Maricopa County's Parks and Recreation Department, who transformed it into a small visitors' center. Over the past 25 years, use of the small facility has been expanded to include educational programs, an information center, display space for marketing materials, live animals exhibits, information on the parks flora and fauna, and an ever expanding inventory of retail items for sale.

While the bones of the structure were still in good condition, it was time to modernize and expand the facility. Several years before the renovations commenced, park staff began meeting with Reclamation to discuss the project, and ensure the final product would be a good representation of both agencies visions. The newly renovated 4,321 sq. ft. facility includes a reception area, informative interpretive displays and wildlife exhibits, a fish tank, retail space, a meeting room and administrative offices. Restrooms are easily accessible located adjacent to the building's entrance. Next to the Discovery Center, guests will find an amphitheater for outdoor programs and presentations, desert tortoise habitat, and the Discovery Center Trail.

The nearly 1.4 million dollar Lake Pleasant Regional Park Discovery Center aspires to be a one-of-a-kind central Arizona visitor attraction distinguished from others in the region by telling the unique story of the Lake Pleasant area. The story includes the marrying of rich natural history, indigenous culture and environment with engineering and recreation that have helped to shape the area as it is today. The indoor and outdoor exhibits integrate this story so that the Discovery Center's purpose as an informal learning facility is realized.

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## Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

**Nominee:** Young Pine Community Park

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Orange County Parks and Recreation, Florida

**Population:** 1,288,126

Opening on January 28, 2017, the 60-acre Young Pine Community Park was built with an inclusive playground suitable for kids of all abilities. It includes a ramp and space for a wheelchair, ADA swings, and a tactile play area with Braille, bongos and tic-tac-toe.

### **Objectives and outcomes**

Citizens first approached Orange County Commissioner Jennifer Thompson regarding the need for an inclusive playground during public meetings in 2013; members of the Autism Society of Great Orlando supported the request. Young Pine Community Park was the first new park, the second in the system, to have an inclusive playground.

Built in a park-deficient area of Orange County, Florida, the park was under construction from 2016 to 2017; the grand opening was held on January 28, 2017. This unique playground is a model for others to follow because every child should have access to recreation.

Findings from the 2015 Community Interest and Opinion Survey for Orange County indicated that:

- 90 percent of our residents agree that parks, trails, recreation facilities and services improve their physical health and fitness;
- 89 percent agree that parks, trails, facilities and services make Orange County a more desirable place to live; and
- 84 percent agree that parks, trails, facilities and services improve mental health and reduce stress.

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## Park & Recreation Facility - Class II

**Nominee:** Nokomis-Minnesota River Regional Trail

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 813,000

The Nokomis-Minnesota River Regional Trail is exceptional because it is an off-road trail built entirely within the fully developed urban core and involved collaboration across nine jurisdictions: Three Rivers Park District, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Minneapolis, Richfield, Bloomington, Hennepin County, the Metropolitan Airports Commission, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The project created a 5.1-mile, 10-foot wide paved multi-use trail, and was completed in August 2016.

Building an off-road regional trail after a city has been fully developed is a unique challenge. Limited public land and road right of way, along with the hundreds of properties directly adjacent to any proposed route, makes planning, design and development of such a trail a formidable task. The success of this project shows that it can be done, and how it can be done. Urban trails such as this are in demand, and are an integral part of modern urban design that meets the needs of our changing population.

The trail also helps provide a more equitable recreational landscape for historically underrepresented populations. Much of the trail passes through highly diverse population areas. Residents are now able to take their kids on a safe path to local and regional parks, and/or to use the trail itself as a linear park. It links Minneapolis, Richfield and Bloomington to the trail network in Dakota County, the trail network within Minneapolis, and the vast regional network provided by Three Rivers throughout Hennepin County. It is now possible for a commuter to bike from their home in Bloomington into downtown Minneapolis all on off-road trails. Conversely, a resident of Richfield can now bike to their job at the Mall of America, again on an off-road trail. The trail is estimated to serve about 200,000 users each year.

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## Park & Recreation Program - Class I

**Nominee:** Explore the Outdoors

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation, Virginia

**Population:** 340,000

Entering its fifth year, Explore the Outdoors is an annual event planned through the collaborative efforts of Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation and Central Virginia's Public Television Station, WCVE. The event brings together area businesses, organizations and clubs that offer outdoor and environmental themed activities and services. Held each spring on a Sunday afternoon, the primary objective of this free event is to give the public a chance to explore outdoor adventure opportunities while the participating groups get to share the services they have to offer. As a family-oriented event it is a stipulation that each group have an activity or craft in which the attendees can participate. There are approximately 35 groups, ranging from honey bee and geocaching clubs, scout troops, master naturalists to Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and local outfitters that participate annually.

From the onset, Explore the Outdoors has proven to be very popular with the approximately 4,000 people who attend each year. Many attendees are families with children under the age of eight. The attendees even arrive an hour early to take advantage of the fun activities. Held on the grounds of the WCVE station and adjacent county park, there are opportunities for visitors to create crafts, take home plantings, play games, shoot archery, climb trees and experience mammals, birds and reptiles. The station also provides behind the scene tours to promote their Science Matters programming as well as photo opportunities with Curious George and Sesame Street characters.

The event is a unique partnership between two public entities, Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation and Public Television Station WCVE, who work together to provide interactive experiences into the natural environment. The event certainly meets the goal of introducing the public to nature and encouraging them to get outdoors.

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## Park & Recreation Program - Class I

**Nominee:** Pickleball

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation, Virginia

**Population:** 340,000

Pickleball is the fastest growing sport for older adults combining tennis, badminton and ping-pong and played on a badminton-sized court. Chesterfield Parks and Recreation started Pickleball in 2010 with the assistance of dedicated volunteers in the community. Temporary Pickleball lines were created on tennis courts at Rockwood Park. In addition, we partnered with various churches, athletic clubs and YMCA's to use their gyms to offer a free-play program, again supervised with the assistance of volunteers. At this time, the department also started offering Pickleball instructional classes from beginner to advanced levels. As the program continues to grow, Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation has added multiuse lines to other tennis courts throughout the county.

The initial objective of this program was to provide a recreational opportunity for the older adult population that would promote and improve health, wellness and socialization. As the program grew all ages have benefited. We see younger adults playing on the courts, as well as grandchildren playing with their grandparents. Many others have participated in local and national Pickleball tournaments.

After a few years and substantial growth of the program, volunteers organized themselves and solicited and raised \$19,500. This donation along with county funding was used to convert three tennis courts at Rockwood Park into eight Pickleball courts, therefore creating the first permanent Pickleball Center in the Richmond area in 2015. An estimated 1000 people participate in Pickleball monthly at 14 locations throughout the county.

In 2016, the volunteers organized and created the Pickleball Club of Chesterfield.

Because of citizen interest and enthusiastic involvement, the Pickleball program and facility became a reality. By using existing resources and cultivating community partnerships, the program continues to thrive.

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## Park & Recreation Program - Class I

**Nominee:** Columbus Parks and Recreation Little Free Library Initiative

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 201,000

In 2016 our Parks and Recreation Department looked for ways to expand our focus in our neighborhoods and build community interaction to promote literacy. The Little Free Library program helps to promote education through reading, culture and arts, our parks and facilities, accessibility, and empowering neighborhoods.

A Little Free Library is a "take a book, return a book" free book exchange. They come in many shapes and sizes, but the most common version is a small wooden box of books. Little Free Library book exchanges have a unique, personal touch. There is an understanding that people are sharing their favorite books with their community; Little Free Libraries have been called "mini-town squares." Libraries offer everyone the opportunity at literacy. It is a chance for kids to get enthusiastic about finding a "treasure" of a book every time they visit a Little Free Library.

In Columbus we plan to place a Little Free Library in every park we have which would total about 52 Little Free Libraries. Each one uniquely painted for each site that will be a reflection of our diverse community. We will use our facility staff to act as "librarians" for our libraries making sure they stay stocked with lots of books for people of all ages. Volunteer organizations like our Retired Senior Volunteer Program, as well as other partner organizations such as the Columbus Literacy Alliance, UGA Cooperative Extension, galleries, libraries, and community sponsors will also help maintain the books at each Little Free Library.

Little Free Libraries have increased business involvement and additional community involvement by partnerships with local community groups. Each Little Free Library will reflect the diversity of our community. Our department is using this program to cross over city departments, community groups, and citizens in a personal way through arts in public spaces.

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## Park & Recreation Program - Class I

**Nominee:** Fishin' With a Friend

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 201,000

In the summer of 2016, the Therapeutic Recreation Supervisor, Shajra Thrasher, partnered with Community Schools (Parks and Recreation Division which oversees youth summer program and after school) for a four day activity which span over two months. The program objective was to build a positive relationship between the youth and individuals with disabilities while participating in a recreational or leisure activity.

Initially, the program focused on partnering the therapeutic recreation participants with fifth graders in the summer program for a day of fishing. The groups would meet in the morning at Lake Oliver Marina, a parks and recreation facility, and partner with someone they had similar interests with. Throughout the development of the program, the staff witnessed this program as more of a teaching opportunity for the individuals with disabilities than to show the youth how to fish.

The goal of the program was reached by developing relationships between the two groups. The public response was received by the feedback of the youth within the program who were excited to participate and returned to their summer programs talking about the friendships they've developed. The Therapeutic Recreation participants spoke highly of their new friends. More youth and participants were interested in attending and as the program continued, more people begin to display greater interest.

This program is unique because it targets two influential groups, at essential ages, and emphasizes the impact of character development. The program required each person to communicate, ask questions and remove them from their comfort zone. Although this summer program was simply four days, the relationships developed will play an influential role for years to come in the lives of everyone who participated. Other organizations can implement similar programs to advance the development of community integration and building stronger relationships between the youth and disabled community.

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## Park & Recreation Program - Class I

**Nominee:** Outdoor Adventure Expo

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 400,000

Recently Metroparks of the Toledo Area established an Outdoor Skills Department to help promote the use and enjoyment of the resources that Metroparks steward. A 2015 recreational needs survey indicated that the majority of visitors to Metroparks wanted outdoor activities such as kayaking, fishing, camping, and archery. The primary goal of the Outdoor Adventure Expo was to bring community organizations and partners together at one venue to introduce visitors to the world of outdoor skills programming. Another goal was to establish Metroparks as a community asset where these programs and skills could be explored and enjoyed. Over 55 non-partner supplied volunteers for the event gave 315 hours in parking, registration, set-up, trail patrol and bike tours. 44 of these volunteers were new to the Outdoor Skills department programs and events. 30 partner organizations participated in the Expo donating over 360 hours. Partners who participated provided staff for presentations, educational resources, and giveaways. Each activity available at the event had sign-in sheets to record attendance; each available spot was filled for geocaching, archery, canoeing and kayaking. The event lasted six hours with over 4,243 participants, not including vendors or partners. The success of the Expo created so much excitement for the Outdoor Skill Department that a direct result of the feedback was an increase in outreach programs. Over 90 new programs have been implemented and most had waiting lists. These programs include archery, paddling classes and an overnight backpacking adventure. A common complaint is how quickly these programs fill, Metroparks is increasing its 2017 offerings.

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## Park & Recreation Program - Class I

**Nominee:** Holidays in the Manor House

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 400,000

Begun in 1975, Holidays in the Manor House was a "thank you" to the community for passing a levy that allowed Metroparks Toledo to purchase Wildwood Preserve. But during the 40 years park visitor surveys suggested that the message of Wildwood and the thank-you to Lucas County voters and volunteers was losing momentum. To remain fresh and relevant Metroparks embarked on a mission to reconnect the story of Wildwood's success with the festivities of Holidays. Accompanying all the dazzle of the season, interpretive messages were interwoven in the decorations of each room. The rooms were all decorated by volunteers who go through a rigorous interview process to keep decorations changing. Metroparks also added new activities to engage returning families and capture new visitors. A welcome tent for making S'mores along with nature interpreters roving the grounds completed outdoor programming and added additional volunteer involvement. Holidays 2016 added: Holidays in the Hall with movies and crafts for children and photos with Santa in the converted limousine garage, carriage rides which sold out, food trucks and an on-line gallery of the decorated house. Holidays was supported by many organizations who donated in-kind material. One private local corporation, The Andersons' Foundation, provided \$8,000 in cash, product and food. 7-Up donated all drinks for the nine day event, valued at \$1,500. Furniture and floral donations have an approximate value of \$2,000. Musicians also donated their time and musical instruments during the entirety of the event from 10am until 8pm at night! The volunteers who decorated the rooms provide all their own supplies, and decorations estimated at \$10,000. In nine days Metroparks provided a free family friendly program that engaged over 24,000 visitors, 22,000 online viewers and 400 volunteers who gave 6,900 hours.

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## Park & Recreation Program - Class II

**Nominee:** Youth Outdoors

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 1.3 million

Cleveland Metroparks is dedicated to promoting social equity and positively impacting community. Youth Outdoors (YO) gives urban youth a long-term relationship with the Park District and outdoor adventure. Working in an innovative partnership with Ohio State University Extension 4-H and the City of Cleveland, YO provides outdoor adventure recreation experiences to urban youth ages 8 - 18, promoting personal growth while building lasting relationships with the outdoors.

Youth primarily connect with YO through adventure clubs based at recreation centers, neighborhood centers, churches, community police, schools and other agencies. Monthly club outings build comfort level and skills while exploring a wide range of outdoor recreation and education experiences including hiking, biking, camping, backpacking, fishing, rock climbing, canoeing, kayaking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, sledding, tobogganing, nature exploration and service projects.

YO targets communities that have not participated in traditional park programming where many families lack time, transportation and discretionary funds to participate in traditional nature-based activities. Additionally there is limited family history of participation. By working closely with urban youth centers such as recreation centers and faith-based organization, YO makes a lasting connection to these communities.

The purpose of YO extends beyond teaching outdoor skills. While YO strives to be a pathway for urban youth to experience nature and incorporate outdoor activity into everyday life, the program goals also include four youth development components:

- Increase knowledge/responsibility of self
- Increase interpersonal relationship skills
- Develop sense of group/community
- Develop safe/healthy lifestyles

Outdoor adventure activities challenge and inspire youth, but YO turns these activities into a character-building experience. Each activity is debriefed and youth encouraged to provide their input, thoughts and feelings about the outing. Promoting positive relationships and teamwork within the group and with adult leaders provides a pathway for long-term participation over many years.

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## Park & Recreation Program - Class II

**Nominee:** Camping Leadership Immersion Camp

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 5.2 million

The Forest Preserves of Cook County's Camping Leadership Immersion Course (CLIC) training is successfully connecting community groups and other mission based organizations with nature immersion through its overnight training at Camp Sullivan, in Oak Forest, Illinois. CLIC is tailored to meet the needs of individuals who have little to no experience or means to experience camping. Partnering with the Outdoor Empowerment Network (OEN), the Forest Preserves was able to leverage OEN's extensive experience to develop a robust training program.

CLIC empowers community leaders who facilitate group outings to become comfortable with bringing groups out for camping and outdoor recreation experiences. Once group leaders have completed the 32-hour training, the Gear Library becomes accessible to them. The Library provides groups of up to 30 participants and two chaperones with everything they need for a successful night under the stars at Camp Sullivan. The CLIC program is offered for six months every year from mid-April through mid-October. Since launching in 2015, the program has trained more than 70 group workers and teachers, who in turn have brought out more than 515 participants.

This program provides an all-encompassing opportunity to introduce camping to communities who otherwise would not see this as an activity "for them". Participants walk away with the confidence to handle camping equipment and to lead outdoor activities, as well as a network of fellow trainees upon whom they can lean on. Connecting teachers and group leaders to the outdoors through the CLIC program allows us to then connect their groups and youth to the nearly 70,000 acres of public lands that we manage. By creating a positive experience in the outdoors for these adults and their groups, lifelong stewards and advocates for the outdoors are being born - one campout at a time. The CLIC program is truly a transformative experience.

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## Park & Recreation Program - Class II

**Nominee:** PGA HOPE Program

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** over 500,000

PGA HOPE is a national golf program through the PGA of America. Its primary purpose is to provide military Veterans with free golf instruction from PGA Golf Professionals as a way to enhance their rehabilitation and assimilation back into the community. Great Parks of Hamilton County's Meadow Links and Golf Academy is the first location within Cincinnati, Ohio and the Southern Ohio PGA area to provide the program.

Great Parks reached out to local VA Hospitals, as well as local organizations that serve Veterans, to encourage involvement in the program. Twenty-six Veterans participated and were provided with eight weeks of instruction, from April 30-June 18, where they were paired with a PGA Professional and other Veterans. The program wrapped up with a graduation tournament on June 25.

Based upon feedback from the Veterans themselves, PGA HOPE had a positive impact on their lives by providing an activity that they can share with others who have had similar past experiences. "As a host of the program, it was a great way for us to give thanks to the Veterans who made and continue to make sacrifices in order for us to enjoy and appreciate the freedom we all have living in the United States of America. It reinforced the importance all Veterans have in the communities they live in," says Great Parks Golf Manager Doug Stultz.

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## Park & Recreation Program - Class II

**Nominee:** Agents of Change

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Hillsborough County, Florida

**Population:** 1,400,000

The partnership of the Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation Department, the Boys and Girls Club of Tampa Bay, and the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office has been one of the most productive and influential partnerships ever formed. An initial partnership with Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office opened the door to creating an additional agreement with the Boys and Girls Club. Currently, five Department community center sites offer the partnership.

As a goal of the Department is to offer affordable programming tailored to fit the needs of the community, this partnership has truly served a positive purpose. Whereas the Parks and Recreation Department must be fair in pricing throughout the County, the Boys and Girls Club of Tampa Bay is a charitable, non-profit organization that is able to accept donations and grants for which the Department would not qualify. This past year, \$4.5 million in donations has been garnered.

By creating an initial partnership with Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, the Department was able to establish a safe presence in the community. Each site has assigned Deputies and functions as a substation allowing access 24/7. As the law enforcement agency provides the staffing, the partnered sites have experienced a reduction in crime of 48% and a 96% grade progression for participating youth. It is important to note that these kids are from "high-risk or underserved" communities. In fact, 86% of Club Members showed an improvement in reading skills; 97% improved in homework completion; and 94% improved in school attendance.

An interesting aspect of the program is that the deputies do not wear their uniforms for the first few weeks so that the new students see them as mentors and not law enforcement. Through the partnership, youth and teens ages 5 to 18 are able to access nationally-recognized programming in a fun and safe environment.

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## Park & Recreation Program - Class II

**Nominee:** Setting Our Children up for Success!

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 585,000

A national leader in the Out-of-School Time industry, Johnson County Park and Recreation District's Children's Services Department continues their commitment to raising a healthier generation of children - both mentally and physically. Serving 1,800 children in their programs daily at 28 sites, staff concentrates on offering proper nutrition and adequate physical activity, as well as educating families about the importance of each.

Through their partnership with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, this department is fighting childhood obesity and reinforcing healthy eating habits and active lifestyles in the children they serve. Following specific nutrition guidelines, each month a snack calendar is formulated by a licensed nutritionist and includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low sugar and high protein options as staff understands that better nourishment leads to better learning. No packaged or processed food is served and an emphasis is placed on fresh food, using local sources when possible.

Children learn about the importance of growing their own food and proper prepping techniques, giving them a solid foundation to support their continued healthy eating habits. Educational pieces are sent to their families through electronic newsletters, including easy, healthy recipes to try at home, aiding to instill healthy habits in the entire family.

In addition to better health, studies show that children who exercise also tend to be more successful in school, so staff offers at least 30 minutes of vigorous physical activity each day through a variety of games as a way to reinforce an active lifestyle. Shifting away from competitive sports, staff now offers innovative games and activities that engage all children, regardless of their current fitness or physical abilities.

Due to these extensive efforts, our children have improved health, more self-confidence and the foundation in place to lead healthier, more productive lives!

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## Park & Recreation Program - Class II

**Nominee:** Prickly Pedal Mountain Bike Race on the Maricopa Trail

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department, Arizona

**Population:** 4.17 million

Last spring, 300 plus cyclists from around the country put the pedal to the metal at the inaugural Prickly Pedal race, a 40-mile race along the Maricopa Trail from Lake Pleasant Regional Park to Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area. During the race, seasoned riders experienced aggressive ascents and descents which were all part of the fun on the challenging course. Simultaneously, promoters hosted a shorter family-friendly race in the park for less experienced riders. At the end of the race, participants were treated to an after party and awards ceremony. Entry into the after-party was complimentary, and included refreshments, a raffle ticket, beer garden, and live music which was made possible via sponsorships. To ensure racers were able to get back to their vehicles safely, a shuttle was provided and the racers bikes were checked into a secure bike corral located near the after party.

The Prickly Pedal race generated \$40,000 in event income. All race entry fees went to supporting Maricopa Trail + Park Foundation's Trail Maintenance Program. This race was made possible via support from numerous volunteers, and a partnership between Maricopa County's Parks and Recreation Department (MCPRD) and the Maricopa Trail + Park Foundation (MT+PF).

The Prickly Pedal race was hosted on the Maricopa Trail which is a 242-mile trail constructed and managed by MCPRD. Once completed, it will connect all of Maricopa County's regional parks together via existing trails, right-of-ways, and canals to offer approximately 315-miles of trails. Given the Maricopa Trails vast size, and the fact that the MCPRD has limited funding and resources available for trail maintenance, MCPRD has an Agreement with MT+PF which allows MT+PF to help manage trail repairs and maintenance outside of the regional parks, conduct fundraising efforts to assist with trail maintenance, and host events with MCPRD along the trail.

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## Park & Recreation Program - Class II

**Nominee:** Bringing the Outdoors In

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation, North Carolina

**Population:** 500,000+

Bringing the Outdoors in was a unique and exceptional event and program that Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation put on. The program focused on connecting youth to nature and exposing the participants to variety of new experiences by introducing them to trees, science tables, discovery sand, water tables, books, art easels, crafts, and real life nature specimens. The healthy living component increases the awareness of gardening, the importance of vegetables, fruits and a healthy lifestyle. The kids used age appropriate gloves and tools to garden and create sprout and grow gardens which they used to plant outside. Using their hydroponics lab, they experimented growing plants in water, sand and compost. These programs provided socialization, opportunities to gain new knowledge and skills, and a sense of achievement in producing their own healthy food.

We focused on our recreation centers that have preschool indoor play areas that we call Fun Fit Centers. We incorporate nature and gardening education into the programming for youth and their parents. Each site has their own outdoor garden areas, however, due to the extreme heat and excessive ozone levels during the summer, our gardening programs were limited. We also incorporated our program in our afterschool programs. The participants engaged in arts and crafts such as leaf making and were introduced to water tables which was geared toward preschool age. Lastly, the participants in the fall explored the science tables which took a real life of nature specimens and expose them to new experiences. This project will allow year round programming and education for the public.

Trinette Mumford and Heidi Kitterman were the spearheads of this fun and unique program. We were able to get our summer camps involved in this event throughout the summer and incorporate our afterschool programs. Bringing the Outdoors in should be used as a based model for others to follow just by the name alone! But more importantly connecting with our youth and exposing them to nature is an amazing concept that they will have for the rest of their lives.

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## Park & Recreation Program - Class II

**Nominee:** Come Out and Play

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 1.2 million

Last summer, Oakland County residents were invited to put down their electronic devices and head outside to enjoy fresh air, sunshine and recreational activities at a series of community events hosted by Oakland County Parks and Recreation (OCPR) called Come Out and Play. Two events took place at Catalpa Oaks County Park, located in the southern part of Oakland County in a highly populated urban area and one was set at Independence Oaks, a park in the northern portion of the county in a more rural setting. Other events were hosted by local communities to celebrate Parks and Recreation Month and OCPR's 50th anniversary. The Come Out and Plays attracted approximately 500-1,000 people each. Some participants came with their families, while others were part of a daycare group, summer camp or another community organization.

The goal, said Recreation Program Supervisor John Haney, was to showcase what the parks have to offer while visitors explored the parks together as a community. Children were delighted to jump and play on water inflatables, try the zip line, test their skills on the climbing tower and play retro games, courtesy of OCPR's mobile recreation units. An interactive nature touch table and performances by popular local entertainers were a hit with the crowd as well. All activities were free, including face painting and summertime treats like popcorn and Kona Ice.

These events allowed OCPR to continue making important connections with community members. While OCPR was responsible for much of the planning and promotion of this initiative, the goal is to have the local communities coordinate in the future with an assist from OCP to provide the activities, allowing more people to rediscover what fun it is to play outdoors. These events can easily be replicated by other communities, based on resources available locally.

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## Park & Recreation Program - Class II

**Nominee:** Staff Conference Day 2016

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 960,000

**Event Summary:**

The Westchester County Parks Staff Conference Day took place on February 3, 2016 at the Westchester County Center. for a day of staff development and friendly camaraderie, and to provide a sense of unity among our staff.

**Background:**

With 50 parks facilities, the bulk of the more than 275 staff work at ancillary facilities scattered throughout the county. All full-time and key part-time personnel are required to attend, with a goal of promoting a sense of unity and a joint commitment to the mission of Westchester County Parks.

**Description:**

Staff received a folder at check in with a variety of information pertaining to the day's activities: a schedule of events, workshops, organizational chart, along with a conference evaluation form and an employee satisfaction survey, both of which were to be turned in at the close of the day. A fun contest was circulated with photographs of staff members' baby pictures, with names to be matched to each. Attendees enjoyed breakfast as they greeted and re-connected with each other.

The keynote speaker set the theme for the day's event. Rob Sweetgall, a professional fitness enthusiast and motivational speaker, presented his formula for overall wellness, through health and fitness not just for the body but for the mind, and promoting a healthy lifestyle.

Workshops of a variety of interests and information were offered and each staff member was allowed to choose which ones to attend. Topics ranged from personal enrichment subjects such health and wellness topics, team building, and cyber-technology. The keynote speaker offered workshops to expand further on his initial address, while several were hosted by qualified staff members from both the parks department and other resources.

Just before lunch, all staff members mugged for a professional photographer, and photos of past conferences were flashed on large screens during lunch, interspersed with photos of staff working on projects during the year.

The conference culminated with the commissioner's presentation that reviewed projects that were completed during the past year, along with a look ahead to upcoming projects and challenges for the upcoming year. New hires were introduced and promotions were acknowledged, and five staff members were recognized for outstanding service for the past year.

**Results:**

The results of the evaluation forms showed that the staff enjoyed the conference in many different ways: by enjoying the camaraderie of their co-workers and having the opportunity to reconnect with many they don't usually have the opportunity to see; by reaffirming that each is an integral part of the parks department as a whole; by re-affirming and internalizing the goals and mission of the department in which they all play a key

role; and by instilling a sense of pride of accomplishment in each individual for the work they do and the contributions they make to the department as a whole.

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## Planning Initiative

2017 Awardee

**Nominee:** Great Parks, Great Communities Long Range Park Plan & Needs Assessment

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 1.1 million

The Great Parks, Great Communities park planning initiative (<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/plandev/greatparks/>) was the culmination of four years of collaboration, citizen input, creative thinking, and hard work by members of the public, Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) staff, and other stakeholders committed to development of a comprehensive guide for park planning through 2020. Since its adoption in 2011, the plan has served as a guidebook for FCPA park land acquisition, resource protection and development activities.

The plan was developed, in part, to respond to the need for a better understanding of park system requirements at a time when county funding for parks was being slashed. It includes a county-wide plan, as well as 14 district-level plans that offer district conditions information, a discussion of issues, and specific recommendations. That initial effort laid the groundwork for continuing efforts to determine factually the baseline needs for a growing park system serving a diverse, active and demanding community. A Parks Count Needs Assessment that stemmed from the plan included a mailed survey to 15,000 households. That survey, completed in 2016, found that 87 percent of county households had visited the FCPA's 400+ parks in the preceding year. It revealed what services, programs and facilities were most important to park patrons and where there was need for improvement. For example, though 91 percent of respondents described the physical condition of the parks and facilities as excellent or good, the survey pointed to a need for expansion and renovation of these much-loved, well-used sites.

Both Great Parks, Great Communities and the Parks Count Needs Assessment were instrumental in development of a ten-year Capital Improvement Plan and voter approval and passage of a \$94 million Park Bond in 2016. Findings from both efforts will be included in a new agency wide Master Planning effort currently under development

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## Planning Initiative

**Nominee:** Measuring Parks Attendance

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** over 500,000

The ability to dependably measure and report on park attendance is critical for Great Parks of Hamilton County. It allows Great Parks to share the outcome of taxpayer's investment and provides a baseline to compare success from one year to the next. Effective measurement helps to demonstrate impact for leveraging outside funding and allows agency leaders to make sound, informed decisions. However, in a county-wide park system with numerous properties and dozens of entrances, this is a daunting task. A committee organized by the Recreation Services Director was created to address this "monster in the closet" and find a solution.

Achieving statistical credibility and creating a focused action plan were the first and most important steps in the process. Knowing that help was needed, staff initiated a search to find a partner for guidance. Northern Kentucky University's (NKU) Burkardt Consulting Center answered the challenge. Burkardt specializes in statistical consulting and their experts were eager to take on the project. Work began in early 2015 to map 72 survey points spread throughout 17 parks and nature preserves. This includes 54 permanent road and trail counters along with sales records and reservation data. With guidance by Burkardt, Great Parks' staff and volunteers gathered nearly 12,000 manual samples that were used to turn raw counts into relevant attendance information.

In September, 2016 with a full year of sampling in hand, the professors and students of NKU applied their mathematical wizardry to produce the first statistically valid attendance estimate in the agency's 87-year history. Great Parks and NKU jointly issued news releases celebrating the partnership and results. With that milestone achieved, work with Burkardt continues. Next steps are to refine data collection processes and develop a database that allows park staff to produce monthly reporting of attendance.

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## Planning Initiative

**Nominee:** Park Needs Planning

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** L.A. County Dept. of Parks and Recreation, California

**Population:** 10 million

Between 2012 and 2016, the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) undertook an extensive planning process to improve parks and park access. Beginning with six “park poor” communities and expanding to the entire County, DPR worked with residents to analyze parks and recreation needs and developed a framework for the distribution of future funding.

Building off that framework, DPR initiated the Countywide Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment to analyze park needs across the County.

Together, these planning efforts exemplified an innovative approach to enhance the environment and quality-of-life in underserved areas by incorporating: a robust analysis of park needs; study of land opportunities; dynamic community outreach; and creative approaches to site design, recreational programming and neighborhood greening.

Many urban communities in Los Angeles County have limited availability of parks, green spaces, and few places to walk or exercise. DPR pursued an inventory of all parks and recreational facilities serving County residents, as well as a strategic approach for future investments.

To identify the level of park need, a thorough inventory of all parks was conducted to better understand the type, size, location, amenities and condition of parks countywide. This Needs Assessment helped the County to better understand the urgent need for parks across the County. Representatives from the 88 cities and unincorporated communities within the County helped us identify key sites for future park development through the Needs Assessment.

DPR believes that all County residents should have equal access to parks and recreational facilities that are safe and contribute to a healthy lifestyle. Our Needs Assessment enabled us to formalize that commitment by creating a roadmap towards implementing that vision, as well as guiding future funding and investment.

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## Planning Initiative

**Nominee:** Mapping the Community of a Park: A Survey Design & GIS Application

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 1.4 million

The Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department is in the process of conducting onsite user surveys targeting specific categories of parks. The survey utilizes traditional questions on user behaviors and preferences but also includes a spatial component that allows the Department to map the departure points of the survey respondents. By asking respondents to provide the nearest major intersection to their home we are able to both obtain a valid dataset for our use as well as avoid intrusive surveying techniques such as asking for a home address. We found this method of framing the location-based question to be more effective and useful than the traditional questions such as "which city do you live in?" or "what is your zipcode?".

This process revealed that, within our district park classification, a significant number of respondents provided departure points beyond the standard five-mile radius utilized as a de-facto service area for our District park properties. In fact, as with the case of Phil Foster Park, over 50% of respondents were traveling from locations beyond five miles from the park. While the survey work is ongoing, the results to date have benefitted our Department by 1) Providing support to modify our current Impact Fee zone boundaries to allow for the collection and utilization of residential development impact fees from a larger geographic area, and 2) Expanding the geographic areas our Department targets around a park to promote programming opportunities and special events.

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## Planning Initiative

**Nominee:** Jim Martin

**Nominee's Title:** Advisory Board Member

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

**Population:** 173,537

As a retired engineer and member of Shawnee County Parks + Recreation's Advisory Board, Jim Martin quickly recognized the extent of capital maintenance needs for both existing and new facilities. Martin is well qualified to serve as chairman of the board's Capital Projects Committee as he was the engineer for SCP+R's state-of-the-art Bettis Family Sports Complex and spent years working on other park projects. He produced a 29-page report recommending redefining capital projects and reassessing associated costs, potential restructuring of methods to fund capital projects, and a potential revised approach to long-term budgeting and reporting to the public specific, understandable capital needs. Martin dedicated an estimated 100 hours to researching and determining the amount of money needed to help the county government keep pace with funding SCP+R's capital needs.

Ultimately, he determined that funding for existing and new facilities should be segregated and that total capital needs amounted to \$1.635 million per year. Martin presented a detailed report to the Advisory Board, SCP+R staff and the Board of County Commissioners. In stating the capital needs, he also noted that since the consolidation of the City of Topeka parks department and Shawnee County Parks + Recreation, actual dollars dedicated to capital maintenance were decreasing.

While additional money is simply not available in the county's budget, the county and SCP+R determined that any unspent funds at the end of each year will be placed into the building and maintenance fund for capital maintenance. Additional focus on capital maintenance will be part of future planning and budgeting. SCP+R has already instituted a policy of not beginning a major new facility without first having a funding mechanism in place for addressing future maintenance. Martin continues working to get the county to take the next step which is addressing how to maintain new capital projects.

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## Professional - Fellow

**Nominee:** Holli Browder

**Nominee's Title:** Director

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

**Population:** 202,000

Holli is a leader in the City of Columbus, well respected by her peers and department staff. She is someone employees feel they can depend on to be honest, open and who truly care for them. She has worked her way up through the Columbus Parks and Recreation Department over the past 15 years serving as a Recreation Specialist III, Recreation Division Manager, Assistant Director and now as the Director of the Department. Holli is a mentor to several staff within the department and is truly a team player. She values the ideas of others and is happy to take the opinions and advise for the betterment of the department needs and those served within the community.

Holli is passionate regarding the work she does. She is always the first to start a project and is usually the last to stay. No matter whether she is performing administrative duties such as project planning, personnel, finance/budget, meeting with civic leaders or community partners/citizens, organizing an event for the youth population, senior citizens, arts or special populations Holli believes that every citizen is someone special deserving the best that our City and department have to offer. She is always looking to use her connections within various groups to build partnerships that strengthen the community. Partnerships are extremely important to Holli. Through the years, Holli has built partnerships with 100s of organizations, businesses, churches, non-profits, and youth groups. Her willingness to bring everyone to the table to benefit the community by sharing resources is a strength that not only benefits the parks and recreation department but moreover is extremely beneficial to the citizens in their community. She is a true giver and believes that helping others is her life's calling. She truly deserves and should certainly be considered for this prestigious honor.

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## Professional - Fellow

**Nominee:** Tim Schetter

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:** Director of Natural Resources

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

**Population:** 400,000

Tim Schetter is the Director of Natural Resources for Metroparks Toledo and oversees land acquisition, natural resource management, and research. As a leader in conservation efforts, he has advanced natural area land protection, restoration, and species preservation for future generations.

Tim has brought in approximately \$25,000,000 for land acquisition and natural area restoration, through grants. This amount more than doubled the public investment of \$21,000,000 and provided many additional jobs.

Overall, he has acquired 4,387 total acres district-wide: 2,520 acres in the Oak Openings Corridor, 880 in other parts of the district, and 987 for a wetland restoration project in the Lake Erie Coastal Zone. Similar in ecological significance to the Oak Openings, this site is considered one of the largest coastal zone restoration efforts in a 22 state region. Coordinating with more than 15 different agencies and private businesses, Tim has been the key person to see each stage through successfully. Additionally, his personal passion for projects is evident through educational presentations he has given in an effort to share conservation accomplishments with others.

In 2012, Tim earned a PhD and wrote his thesis on "Land Cover Classification." This model continues to inform regional planning efforts focused on land acquisition, habitat restoration, as well as research and monitoring. Tim has been integral in promoting The Green Ribbon Initiative, which is a collection of agencies working to protect and restore the Oak Openings Corridor and its rare species. He pushed this initiative forward through continued organization, planning, and collaboration. His commitment to this partnership leveraged over \$4,000,000 for restoration of significant habitats which resulted in the restoration of over three-thousand acres.

Through the opening of two, new Metroparks in the Oak Openings, over 50,000 people have connected with these areas through wildlife watching, camping, fishing, kayaking/canoeing, and hiking.

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## Professional - Fellow

**Nominee:** Dave Bartels

**Nominee's Title:** Horticulture Supervisor

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

**Population:** 173,537

When Horticulture Supervisor Dave Bartels started working in Ted Ensley Gardens 28 years ago, it was a 3-acre plot of land with rectangular beds. A catalyst for bringing together ideas from multiple groups of people, Dave planned and expanded the gardens to their present 37.5-acres with 9.5 acres of gardens, an arboretum and a nature area. The gardens are a favorite of Topekans and travelers alike for a relaxing walk, a place to regain perspective, and to breathe in a beautiful setting.

Visitors recognize the garden's landmarks - the ornate pagoda, gazebo and pergola. In a slide show, Bartels shares the gardens' lesser-known features. He has incorporated brick and pavers from old city streets into walkway intersections and patios. Two conversation benches are named Hope and Reflection. Hope faces the sunrise to welcome a new day. Reflection faces the sunset at day's end. Dave received a past Kansas Recreation and Parks Association Special Project/Design Award. In homage to the historical rockwork from the WPA days, Bartels built a rock bridge into the trail around Lake Shawnee, and incorporated rock into a fountain and recognition wall in the garden. He has used his architecture and horticulture background to teach a spectrum of design ideas to local citizens. The arboretum he developed has helped Boy Scouts and Master Gardeners alike learn about trees.

Outside of the gardens, Bartels turned a dysfunctional fountain at the Kansas Expocentre grounds into a functional landscape that welcomes people to the adjacent Capitol Plaza Hotel and to Topeka. He also helped develop the community's 25-year trail development plan, which included the Lake Shawnee Trail. In three different parks Bartels and his horticulture staff maintain major gardens enjoyed by locals and tourists alike. They also maintain hundreds of public garden beds and stage Topeka's annual Tulip Time featuring 120,000 tulips.

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## Professional - Lifetime

**Nominee:** Sandy Stallman

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:** Planning Branch Manager

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

**Population:** 1.1 million

When Park Planner Sandy Stallman retired from the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) Planning and Development Division in December 2016, she left behind a legacy of strong, effective leadership in parks and recreation planning and development and a road map for future park system growth.

Stallman, hit the ground running at FCPA 15 years earlier as project manager for a complex, comprehensive agency-wide Needs Assessment. It was the first of two successful assessments she led, along with three agency Strategic Plans, the Great Parks, Great Communities Long Range Park Plan, agency accreditation and reaccreditation, five Park Bonds, and dozens of individual park master plans. Her work also included park policy updates to the County Comprehensive Plan, development of the Urban Park Framework in the Comprehensive Plan and applying that framework in the highly urbanized Tysons and Reston communities.

Stallman joined the Park Authority in 2001 as a Planner III and retired as the Manager of the Planning Branch. During that time, she assembled a talented and effective team who honored her in 2012 with a Trailblazer Award for Supervisor of the Year. In her years at the FCPA, Stallman reviewed thousands of development plans, rezoning cases and site plans for impacts to Fairfax County parks. She led the planning effort for park master plans ranging from major sites, such as Riverbend Park, to smaller neighborhood parks and athletic fields.

In recognition of her efforts, Stallman received multiple Outstanding Performance Awards and Director's Team Leadership Awards from the agency and Board of Supervisors, as well as awards from the American Planning Association's Virginia's Chapter, Fairfax County, and the Department of Planning and Zoning. Her retirement was marked by the Park Authority Board with a resolution in her honor. She consistently performed at the highest levels throughout her career.

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## Removing Barriers Initiative

**Nominee:** Spring Prom

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

**Nominee's Organization:** Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation, Virginia

**Population:** 340,000

A high school special education teacher saw the void for her students who did not feel comfortable attending the regular high school prom. She approached the Chesterfield Parks and Recreation Department for assistance and the Spring Prom was the result. The Spring Prom is a dance for individuals with disabilities and special needs ages 16 and older. The objectives of this program are to provide an opportunity to attend an activity where they can enhance socialization skills, engage in positive leisure education, engage in positive sensory stimulation and enhance normalization for functional independence. This is a free event made possible by the support of the Knights of Columbus Council #6189. This organization coordinates with the Chesterfield Parks and Recreation TR section providing monetary support, use of their facility, a DJ and volunteers to set-up, serve food and supervise the dance. They have been supporting this event since 1986.

Those who attend look forward to the event every year. The participants come dressed in their "prom" attire, some with flowers. There is a photo station for couples and individual pictures. The excitement level at the dance can't be ignored. The event truly makes an impact on the attendees and their families.

Because of the popularity and public interest a fall dance was added, also with the support of the Knights of Columbus. These dances fill to capacity with about 200 participants per event. This concept is so popular, now Tim Tebow sponsors a similar event: Night to Shine.

For over 30 years, the Spring Prom has proven to be a unique avenue to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities and special needs. We are fortunate to have forged a partnership with a non-profit organization that uses their resources, along with ours, to benefit a special segment of the community.

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## Removing Barriers Initiative

**Nominee:** Civics Class

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 201,000

During the summer of 2016, the therapeutic recreation section introduced a new program for the adults with disabilities. Partnered with Be A Girl Like Me, Inc. and The Arc of Greater Columbus a civics class was created to teach individuals about the judicial system and their rights when it came to the voting process. The participants were taught for eight weeks and met on Mondays and Wednesdays for one hour.

Since it was a presidential election year, we found this class to be very important for the participants to understand. For the election process, participants were able to create mock elections and understand the difference between the popular votes and how the Electoral College works. Towards the end of the summer program, a member from the elections and registration department with the City of Columbus came and brought registration forms for all to take home.

With their family support, our participants were encouraged to fill out their registration forms to become a registered voter prior to the November 8th presidential election. Due to the positive feedback received by the families of our participants, the therapeutic recreation program had two individuals vote for the first time. The civics class demonstrates the importance of therapeutic recreation programs. The goal is to improve the social, physical and cognitive independence for the individuals within the program. Since then, the participants have all become more conscious of their rights and more participants will show interest to participate in the election process.

The civics class was educational, informative and important to the development of each participant within the therapeutic recreation program. The program was designed to teach the participants of their rights regarding the legal system and voting. This proves that disabilities should not create barriers for anyone.

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## Removing Barriers Initiative

**Nominee:** ADA Canoe/Kayak Launch

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** over 500,000

In April 2016, Great Parks of Hamilton County completed the installation of a canoe/kayak launch at Miami Whitewater Forest that meets the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This project was made possible by a \$30,000 grant from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Watercraft. The construction of an ADA compliant walkway, gangway, floating dock and canoe/kayak launch was performed by Maxwell Construction Company of Glendale, Indiana.

The new lake access system consists of a floating dock with a canoe and kayak launch equipped with a "Universally Accessible Transfer System" that allows an unassisted individual with a physical disability to access a canoe or kayak. The transfer system consists of a transfer bench and slide board that allows users to simply sit, slide over and drop down, then use side rails to pull off or back on. This system is also ideal for children, seniors or anyone needing extra stability launching and docking a canoe or kayak.

The new feature has been well received by park guests who have used it. Comments have include, "We are seniors who kayak and this will make it much easier for us to enter and exit our kayaks. Thanks for installing this structure," and "This is awesome, it's so easy!" As the first feature of its kind in Great Parks, the accessible canoe/kayak launch breaks down the barrier for people with physical limitations and allows them to experience water recreation. It sets a standard for other regional parks and lakes in allowing all abilities access to enjoy everything that nature has to offer.

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## Removing Barriers Initiative

**Nominee:** My Mentor and Me: A Dynamic Camp Team

2017 Awardee

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 400,000

As a parent, sending a special needs child to summer camp can be daunting. Children with physical, social, cognitive and emotional needs can easily get lost or fail to connect. Feedback from parents and local service providers, in Lucas County, Ohio, demonstrated a need that could be met by providing mentorship for campers as they participated alongside peers in day camps.

Metroparks of the Toledo Area, in partnership with Ability Center of Greater Toledo (ACT) and Lucas County Board of Developmental Disabilities (LCBDD), train staff and volunteers and develop a camp where all kids can thrive. My Mentor and Me program has been operating for five summers and parents call specifically requesting support for their child. Over 100 children have attended camp with their peers and over 350 staff and volunteers have been trained.

Mentors accompany 1-3 children per week and provide individualized support. Mentors assist with transition times, eating, changing, adaptive programming and encouraging kids to participate fully. When campers need a sensory break, support during a tough time or just space to cool down mentors step in.

The My Mentor and Me was offered at 39 Metroparks Camps between June and August of 2016. Support is available by request year round.

Metroparks provides park facilities, staff, equipment, programming and field trip transportation. ACT serves as a referral center for campers and oversees mentors. LCBDD provides training resources for staff and volunteers. All three partners help parents utilize funding and scholarships.

Feedback from parents (special needs and typically) has documented that 97% would send their child again.

My Mentor and Me is a model program because it highlights interagency cooperation and support on a county wide level. During the school year, many of these students receive paraprofessional support. My Mentor and Me provides support in the outdoors.

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## Removing Barriers Initiative

**Nominee:** Therapeutic Recreation Services Section

**Nominee's Title:**

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

**Population:** 1.4 million

The Therapeutic Recreation Services Section has supported adapted sports for over 20 years. The mission of the adapted sports programs is to provide individuals with physical disabilities opportunities to participate in sports, improve physical and mental health, develop relationships and a peer support system.

In 2007, the Therapeutic Recreation facility was opened, which provided a unique opportunity to expand adapted sports programs. Working with the athletes has led to the development of a non-profit organization, Endless Possibilities for the Disabled, Inc. As a partner with the Parks and Recreation Department, Endless Possibilities writes grants and receives donations to help purchase the equipment necessary to run adapted sports. The Therapeutic Recreation staff members focus on developing, implementing and marketing the adapted athletic programs. Together we organize special events, educate the public on disabilities and adapted sports, support and recruit athletes.

Since the opening, the South Florida Ratters Wheelchair Rugby team was the only sport team to utilize the facility, however since then it has expanded to Paralympic sports of Boccia, Swimming, Handcycling, Goalball and Wheelchair Basketball programs. Sports clinics, tournaments and special events are offered throughout the year and have included wheelchair rugby tournaments, a sitting volleyball clinic, handcycling clinics, wheelchair rugby clinics, MDA summer camp clinic, Olympic Day, Adapted Sports Day, and power soccer. We also offer a unique adapted scuba diving program and support local adapted rowing athletes and sled hockey team. In March 2015, we became a partner with the United States Olympic Committee and our facility is now recognized as a Bronze Level Paralympic Sport Club. Other supporting partnerships are: Achilles International, Diveheart, Muscular Dystrophy Association, Lighthouse for the Blind, and USOC Paralympics. These partnerships offer a unique opportunity to share resources and expertise, remove barriers with a goal of greater participation. The outcome has increased participation and program sustainability.

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