

MRPA AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

RECOGNIZING MINNESOTA AGENCIES & ORGANIZATIONS
FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS

By Bethani Gerhard, Minnesota Recreation and Park Association

Each year, MRPA recognizes agencies or organizations in Minnesota for outstanding achievements. There were 26 awards given based on scoring criteria, the most MRPA has ever granted. The following are the recipients of the MRPA Awards of Excellence for projects completed in 2016.

ADMINISTRATIVE OR MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

1 THE 20-YEAR NEIGHBORHOOD PARK PLAN - MINNEAPOLIS PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

The Minneapolis neighborhood parks have a greater need for maintenance, repairs and replacements; yet years of underfunding have left these beloved spaces in desperate need of repair. The 20-Year Neighborhood Park Plan (NPP20) is the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's (MPRB) response. It was developed not just to allow MPRB to catch up on a backlog of maintenance, rehabilitation and replacement work, but also to address racial and economic equity in park funding for capital investments.

A historic agreement between MPRB and the City of Minneapolis, NPP20 was approved as an ordinance in 2016 to accomplish the goal of revitalizing the city's 160 neighborhood parks for current and future generations of park users. NPP20 protects current levels of MPRB funding received from city and state sources and provides an additional \$11 million annually for 20 years, with those funds dedicated to three areas: park maintenance, rehabilitation and capital investments.



2

GIS MANAGEMENT — PLYMOUTH PARKS AND RECREATION

With the growth of the Plymouth park system, GIS Management has become huge priority. From 2000 to 2016, the city park system increased in size from 31 parks with 1,023 acres to 75 parks with 1,671.88 acres. In addition, the trail system increased from 75 miles of trails to 166.66 miles of trail, sidewalk, greenway, and on-road bike.

A City GIS Coordinator was hired in 2012, while this assisted the department it was not enough to fulfill the growing needs of parks and recreation. To assist with the demand and importance of managing assets, the parks and recreation initiated a new organizational plan to hire a project coordinator that could take on the GIS Management for the department. GIS Management touches all aspects of parks and forestry, and provides assistance to recreation and facilities as well. The department now utilizes GIS for everything from tracking park acreage to managing contracts. GIS assists staff in making informed decisions with more accurate geographical data.



COMMUNICATIONS

3

SPOTTED IN PLYMOUTH PARKS – PLYMOUTH PARKS AND RECREATION

Spotted in Plymouth Parks is a social media campaign created with the goal to increase awareness, usage and overall excitement about the parks, trails and facilities maintained by the Plymouth Parks and Recreation department. Advances to our system are occurring daily and we were looking for an innovative avenue to educate our community members of the many improvement, upgrades and new park additions.

Spotted in Plymouth Parks aims to highlight a different park or park amenity throughout the summer, utilizing social media and its expanding reach. Once we locate an individual using the park, we approach them and engage in conversation. With their permission, we photograph them and post to our social media accounts. Those 'spotted' get a prize – options in 2016 included: collapsible water bowl for pets, LED lighted shoe clip and buds. Spotted in Plymouth Parks has also provided staff an opportunity to engage directly with park users.



City of Plymouth, MN @PlymouthMN_gov · 15 Jun 2016

Kelli and pup Beatrice aka 'Bea' were Spotted in #PlymouthParks strolling @ Turtle Lake Park bit.ly/1WMbsLA



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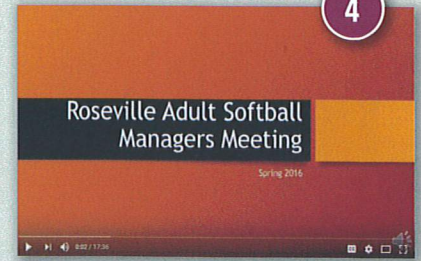
Spotted in Plymouth Parks aims to highlight a different park or park amenity throughout the summer, utilizing social media and its expanding reach.

4

ADULT SPORTS VIRTUAL MANAGERS MEETING – ROSEVILLE PARKS AND RECREATION

Roseville Parks and Recreation has traditionally offered manager meetings for participants in adult sports leagues. The meetings are an important opportunity for the league director to convey important information to team managers including: league operations, rule highlights, conduct expectations and any additional information that may be helpful.

As the years have passed, attendance continued to dwindle. After much consideration, a virtual league managers meeting allowed managers to receive the information in their own home. The meeting is a 17-minute video that managers can access from any computer or mobile device that prepares managers for their upcoming season with a discussion of league organization, communication, rules and other "hot topics" that will come into play. This innovation has provided a solution to a programming problem, and has directly improved the quality of the Roseville Parks and Recreation programs.



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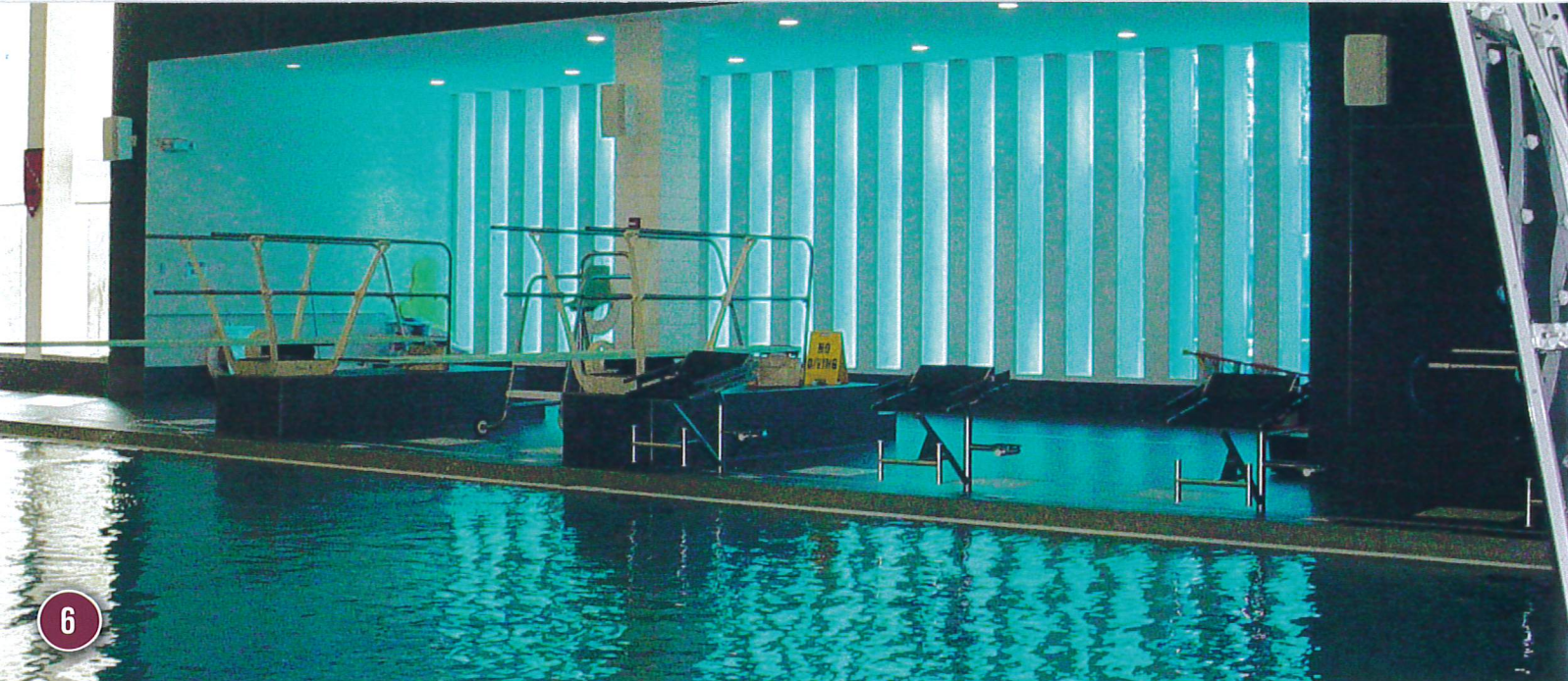
DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN – SAINT PAUL PARKS AND RECREATION

The Community Engagement Strategy was developed by the parks and recreation design and construction staff in response to the need for a more efficient process garnering input on design of public spaces. The common result of the outdated design process was the attendance and contribution of an overwhelmingly heterogeneous sample of the community, rather than a representative sampling of the demographics of any given park's service area.

In 2014/15, design staff decided to try a new approach to getting community participation and ideas. Called a Pop-Up Design Camp at the time, the goal was to capture ideas thought activities at the park, rather than relying on the traditional public meeting approach. Over 75 people participated during the three workshops, representing 7-10 times the number of people at a design meeting. As a result, the design and construction team used what they learned and developed a community engagement strategy. Completed in 2016, the planning worksheet helps project managers identify the best practices and input for each design and construction project.

5





PARKS AND FACILITIES

6 EDEN PRAIRIE COMMUNITY CENTER AQUATICS/FITNESS EXPANSION – EDEN PRAIRIE PARKS AND RECREATION

What had once been a single pool for the aquatics center with one pool temperature attempting to meet all needs, and an out of compliance diving well, is now a state of the art aquatics facility that can serve all users within the community. There are now five different bodies of water: an eight-lane competition pool, a diving well pool, a recreational pool, a plunge pool for the waterslide, and a spa. The varying temperatures provide multiple activities a comfortable experience.

The project was completed in two separate phases. Phase I included the completion of the competition pool, dive pool, wet locker rooms, dryland training room, an expanded fitness floor and the addition of a third fitness studio. Swim meets as well as events like log rolling, Swim Jitsu scuba, and triathlons are now offered. Phase II included the construction for a waterslide, spa, zero-depth entry pool, viewing area and meeting room.

7 SPRINGBROOK NATURE CENTER – FRIDLEY PARKS AND RECREATION

The existing 5,000 sq/ft. Springbrook Nature Center was incorporated as part of a stunning remodel and expansion project to create the new 13,000 sq/ft. facility. The new interpretive center features four classrooms with vistas into nature, exciting hands-on exhibits, wonderful visitor amenities and sustainable features such as geothermal heating and cooling, bird-safe glass, raingardens, green roof and permeable pavement.

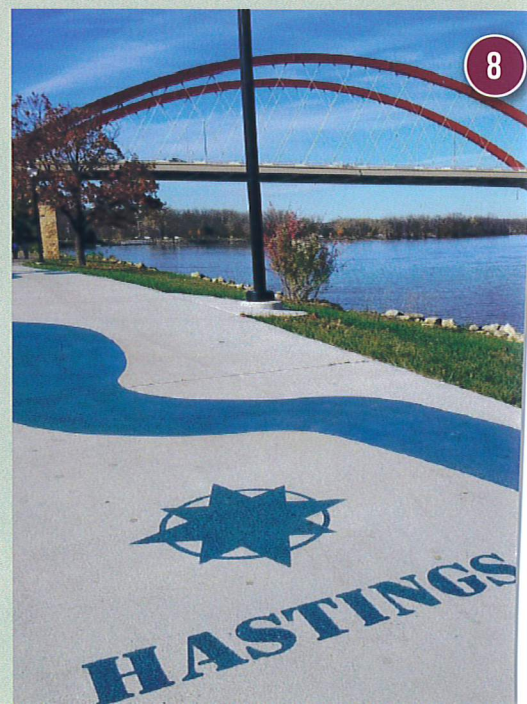
The new interpretive center has allowed the nature center to increase capacity to serve the community through public programs, school field trips, community rental space and increased trail access. The remaining components of the Sanctuary Protection and Renewal Into The Next Generation (S.P.R.I.N.G.) project; a nature-based play area, community amphitheater and picnic pavilion are 90% funded and are planned for construction in 2017 and 2018.



8 RIVERFRONT RENAISSANCE IMPROVEMENTS – HASTINGS PARKS AND RECREATION, BOLTON & MENK

The City of Hastings expressed a desire to revitalize and reconnect their downtown to the Mississippi River. Bolton & Menk collaborated with the City to develop a three-phase Downtown Riverfront Renaissance project. Phases one and three focused primarily on the downtown infrastructure, while the second phase focused on Levee Park, a prominent park straddling the Mississippi River and downtown business district.

Through collaboration with City staff, stakeholder groups, and the general public, a Park Master Plan was developed. The Master Plan included a limestone amphitheater, musical playground, ice skating rink, branding and signage, enhancement of the Mississippi River Trail, and a veteran's memorial. Through these efforts, the City now has a uniquely stunning park that links the downtown to the Mississippi River.



9



9 MADISON'S PLACE PLAYGROUND — WOODBURY PARKS AND RECREATION

Madison's Place is a completely handicapped accessible inclusive playground where children of all abilities can play together side-by-side to foster friendships, understanding and acceptance. Each facet of the 16,000-square-foot structure, located on the perimeter of the Bielenberg Sports Center, has been designed to optimize access to each sun-shade covered play deck, swings and sensory play equipment. The structure includes multiple therapeutic play pieces researched and supported by the Star Center.

Fundraising for the \$830,000 total cost of the playground, took six years. The construction of the playground included 41,456-pounds of equipment and 638-cubic-feet of concrete, and the community build included 1,000 volunteer hours. The playground was completed and opened June 4, 2016 with a grand opening celebration.

10



10 JAYCEE PARK PAVILION — OWATONNA PARKS AND RECREATION

The previous pavilion at Jaycee Park in Owatonna was outdated, deteriorating, and small. The bathroom facilities were not ADA compliant and were deteriorating to the point of locking them. An upgrade was important since it gets heavily used during baseball season and for park and recreation programs, as well as other community rentals.

The pavilion was constructed solely by parks and recreation staff members. The project was lucky to have a large donation from the community. Kwik Trip closed a site and built a new store on a larger footprint across the street. A donation designated to parks and recreation came from the proceeds from the sale. This generous donation funded the materials for the main pavilion and bathroom fixture. Funding for materials for the concession stand came from the Husky Bullpen Club. The Jaycees and Straight River Women of Today donated funds for the purchase of picnic tables.

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11

TUJ LUB COURTS — SAINT PAUL PARKS AND RECREATION

Tuj Lub is a traditional Hmong sport where two teams compete by throwing spinning tops at eight successive stages spaced over a seventy-foot long court. Without permanent facilities, players bring their own carpet remnants and 2' x 2' squares of conveyor belt, measure out, and set up a temporary court in an open, flat area of a park each time they play the game.

The Duluth and Case Recreation Center, in the heart of the Hmong community, was selected to construct permanent Tuj Lub courts. The 6' x 15' concrete pad is topped with a specialized plastic athletic surface for the running and stopping required to throw the tops. The throwing lane is a 5' x 72' concrete pad with a PVC coated conveyor belt that provides a durable surface for the impact from thrown tops. The courts were funded by Saint Paul's Neighborhood Sales Tax Revitalization program, which provides loans and grants to capital projects that improve neighborhoods. This project has been well received by the Saint Paul community.



13

PROGRAMMING AND EVENTS

REC AND ROLL-LOG ROLLING — INVER GROVE HEIGHTS PARKS AND RECREATION

Inver Grove Heights Parks and Recreation was looking for a fun, creative way to utilize their pools and reach broader demographics. Log rolling is a historic sport for modern times, and is an activity that all ages and abilities can do. The City used a grant for \$2,000 from the Minnesota Recreation and Park Foundation to purchase a log roller from Key Log Rolling. The grant was a matching grant which allowed the City to train staff, offer free demos, clinics and classes in 2016. They have budgeted for 2017 programs and events, such as log roll days and a log rolling club where participants pay a fee.

The Key Log is transportable. It is filled with water and it floats, spins and reacts like a traditional cedar wood log. The Key Log has been designed for beginners so it is simple to teach and train staff. Key Log was used for demo days, safety camp, childcare programs, pool parties, fitness classes and team building programs.

12

NOKOMIS-MINNESOTA RIVER REGIONAL TRAIL — THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT

The Nokomis-Minnesota River Regional Trail project created a 5.1 mile 10-foot wide paved multi-use off-road trail which connects the Cities of Minneapolis, Richfield and Bloomington. On its north end, the trail begins at Lake Nokomis Regional Park and the Grand Rounds Scenic Byway System. Along its route the trail offers connections to several local parks, Taft Lake, the Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail, the Mall of America, the Minnesota River Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Ft. Snelling State Park and the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. The trail had a grand opening in August of 2016.

The trail is estimated to serve about 200,000 users each year. It was 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 Airport Commission, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service – Minnesota River National Wildlife Refuge.





14 REC ON THE GO – BROOKLYN CENTER PARKS AND RECREATION, BROOKLYN PARK RECREATION AND PARKS

The Rec On The Go (ROTG) program uses mobile recreation vehicles to travel to 12 different sites in Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park throughout the summer to provide activities for youth ages 5-18 who have never participated, or may have barriers to participating in recreation programming and live within walking or biking distance. Programming was twice a week for 90-minutes at each location. Three Rivers Park District brought outdoor programming to some of the sites. Partners in Nutrition provided food at 10 sites.

The Brooklyn Bridge Alliance for Youth, on behalf of Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center, submitted a Hennepin County Youth Sports grant proposal for a mobile recreation program. The two cities will provide in-kind funds to support each vehicle in being entered into the fleet of vehicles for each respective city and have committed to shifting programming and staff time allocation over the next two years to ensure sustainability.



15 KIDS RACE SERIES – WOODBURY PARKS AND RECREATION

Woodbury Parks and Recreation's Kids Race Series, geared toward youth ages 6-12, was a 2016 summer race series in partnership with the City of Cottage Grove. The race series was funded by the registration fee of \$25 per participant. At the end of the series, all expenses and revenues were totaled, resulting in \$8,000 total income split between the two cities.

The series consisted of three races where youth were able to run in one, two, or all three. Kids Mud Run: Challenge Accepted took place on June 4 in Cottage Grove. Kids climbed, crawled and ran through a muddy three-fourth of a mile obstacle course of hay bales, cargo nets, tarps, balance beams, mud pits and more. Woodbury held a duathlon on July 2 titled the Kids Duathlon: Bike it. Run it. Du it! Participants biked a two-mile loop and ran one-mile on the trails. During the evening of September 17 in Woodbury took place titled Kids Glo Run: Light it up! Kids received a neon shirt that glowed. Glow sticks and neon signs guided their one-mile route.



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16

16 BARK IN THE PARK — PLYMOUTH PARKS AND RECREATION

Bark in the Park was a free community-wide event targeted towards people and their four-legged companions held outdoors at the Hilde Performance Center. Attendees were able to stroll through 20 vendor booths related to canine services like veterinarians, rescue agencies, pet supply stores, grooming services and day care. Event visitors were able to connect with local companies and non-profits and many offered free giveaways and coupons. This was the first year hosting the event and it was held on May 21, 2016.

Bark in the Park was given a line item in the recreation budget of \$1,500 for expenses. With more vendors attending the event than expected, the event ended up exceeding the revenue goal and made \$1,482.50. Plymouth Parks and Recreation received several emails expressing appreciation and excitement for next year's event.

17 SAFE SUMMER NIGHTS — SAINT PAUL PARKS AND RECREATION

The Safe Summer Nights initiative began in 2014 when a group of local business owners and volunteers approached the Saint Paul Police Department and the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation to host community events every Thursday that brought neighborhood families and police officers together, offering free meals to the community and building effective relationships. Additionally, the events allowed youth to explore various police vehicles, jump in the jump castle, and utilize the mobile climbing wall.

Safe Summer Nights has helped bridge the gap between the police and the people they serve, while Saint Paul Parks and Recreation has provided park space and equipment to be able run successful events throughout the summer. In 2016, Saint Paul hosted 14 Safe Summer Nights and served over 29,000 meals. All the food was donated by the Safe Summer Nights organization, who also provided all the necessary volunteer support for the events.



17



18

SPONSORSHIP AND PARTNERSHIPS

18 ANOKA COUNTY/UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA DESIGN AND BUILD COLLABORATION — ANOKA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION

In late 2015, Anoka County Parks and Recreation entered into a research development agreement with the University of Minnesota, School of Architecture, for a unique design/build partnership for the development of "learning kiosks" at Heritage Lab/YMCA Camp Heritage site located in Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve. Funding was achieved through a \$60,000 Regional Park and Trail Legacy Grant, coupled with donations of \$20,000 each from Connexus Energy and the YMCA of the Greater Win Cities, for a total budget of \$100,000. This was a unique project combining the expertise and design talents of academia, with the needs of County government to invest in the development of infrastructure to better serve the needs of the public.

19

PAUL BUNYAN INCLUSIVE PLAYGROUND - BEMIDJI PARKS AND RECREATION

The Paul Bunyan Inclusive Playground opened in the fall of 2016 in the City of Bemidji. In partnership with Shane's Inspiration and the Bemidji Rotary Club, the City of Bemidji, worked to design, garner support, and fundraise for an all-inclusive playground. The playground was about \$440,000 — most of which was funded by local foundations and organizations, as well as \$85,000 from the City of Bemidji and \$30,000 from Beltrami County. The Rotary Club pledged to raise \$100,000 internally through club members and special events. The Neilson Foundation also contributed \$100,000 and the First National Bank Foundation donated \$10,000. There were many individual donations, including one larger anonymous donation of \$25,000. This playground is the first of its kind in Bemidji and the largest of its kind in northern Minnesota.

20

HERMANN HEIGHTS INCLUSIVE PLAYGROUND – NEW ULM PARKS AND RECREATION

Hermann Heights Park, southern Minnesota's first inclusive playground, is located in the center of New Ulm. Allina Health and the New Ulm Medical Center Foundation approached the park and recreation department with a proposal to partner with the City on a project that would fit into their Courage Kenny Rehabilitation fundraising project, focusing on an outlet for youth and adults to continue rehabilitation outside of the walls of the New Ulm Medical Center. The two groups met to discuss a project the two entities could join forces.

In speaking to various playground vendors, it was determined that to do this project, the anticipated cost would be approximately \$250,000. The department requested an additional \$125,000 out of their fund balance, which the City Council unanimously approved. Allina Health and the New Ulm Medical Center Foundation made a significant commitment of up to \$50,000 for this project.



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21

STARLIGHT CINEMA MOVIE SERIES – WOODBURY PARKS AND RECREATION

The Starlight Cinema movie series of 2016 was a five-movie summer series which included a free outdoor movie, shown on a huge two-story inflatable screen and two hours of red carpet activities ahead of time for the community to enjoy. The movie series was completely funded with sponsorship dollars and/or in-kind donations with over 16 local businesses providing financial contributions and another six local businesses providing in-kinds donations towards the Starlight Cinema movies series. This along with partnerships between Twilight (movies screen rental) and Swank (movie rental), allowed for the movies series to be completely funded at no fee to participants. In-kind donations consisted of water and soda for participants, red carpet games and activities, marketing flyers, emcee, face painter, balloon artist and craft activities.

19



21

EL RIO VISTA FIELDS — SAINT PAUL PARKS AND RECREATION

The fields at El Rio Vista Recreation Center were improved with the help of the partnership with Neighborhood House and the Westside Boosters. The old fields had compacted soils, poor drainage, and exposed manhole covers which created hazards for the youth to play on.

The impressive improvements include a natural turf youth baseball field and an artificial turf multipurpose athletic field, which includes infiltration basins, and a turf drainage system. The funding for the improvements were from the following: Minnesota Twins Community Fund - \$300,000, NFL Foundation Grassroots Program - \$200,000, Ramsey County Soccer Partners - \$50,000, Local Initiative Support Corporation and ESPN - \$25,000, and City Capital Improvement Bonds - \$1,510,000. The MLB Twins All-Star youth baseball field was developed as Phase I, and was completed in July 2014. The multi-purposed athletic field developed as Phase II, was completed in the fall of 2016.



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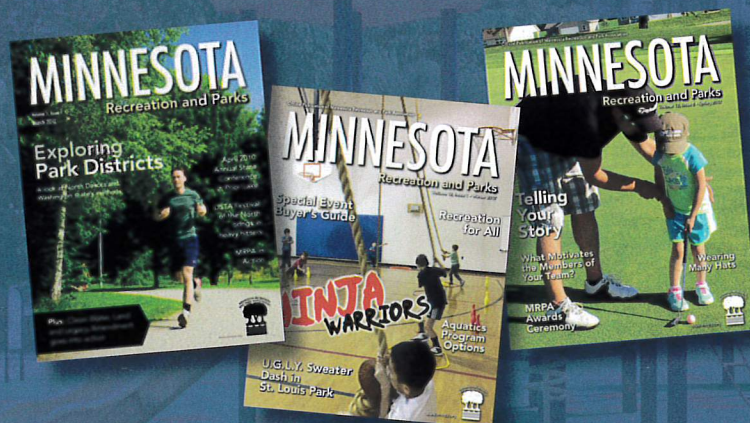
MUSLIM FEMALE SWIM NIGHTS — SAINT PAUL PARKS AND RECREATION

The culturally appropriate Muslim women and girls swim program was developed for Muslim women to receive access to a private space to swim and increase physical activity. Due to religion and cultural restrictions, Muslim women and girls cannot swim in public places. Therefore, the program is intended to address the disparities: costs, religion and cultural barriers. The program takes place twice a month, for two hours each session, and includes swimming lessons, exclusively staffed by female lifeguards and police officers who attend to build community connections.

There were four principle organizations that have made this program possible: Saint Paul Police, Saint Paul Parks and Recreation, Saint Paul Ramsey County Public Health, and the Minnesota Da'wah Institute. There have been community leaders that have also taken a leadership role. This is a really a model of how several agencies can work together to meet a community need.

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SUSTAINABILITY

23

PALACE COMMUNITY CENTER — SAINT PAUL PARKS AND RECREATION

The Palace Community Center has long been a valuable asset. Since 1909, there have been a series of structures built at this location to benefit the changing needs of the neighborhood. It became clear that the Palace Recreation Center was no longer meeting the neighborhood needs or the high City standards. The much needed expansion and makeover now has a glass façade welcoming visitors, with sustainable practices in both its design and the construction. The existing gym was preserved during demolition and refurbished as part of the project. This reduced construction waste and new building materials.

This project was funded with Capital Improvement Bonds sold by the City. The majority of the funding occurred over three years: 2014, 2015, and 2016. The funding provided coincide with the project schedule for design, building construction, and site completion. The total project budget was \$5,603,787.



23

VOLUNTEER INITIATIVES

24

EARTH DAY NEIGHBORHOOD PARK CLEAN UP — BLAINE PARKS AND RECREATION

Blaine Parks and Recreation began an initiative in the spring of 2016 to empower residents to clean-up as many city parks as possible. The program was titled: Earth Day Neighborhood Park Clean-up. Interested residents stepped forward to lead a clean-up at their local park. Blaine Parks and Recreation provided support through supplies and marketing and the neighborhood leader provided organization and implementation on the day of. The supply cost of the initiative was \$800. There were no staff costs beyond the normal work hours of the recreation manager and public works staff.

The goal was to reach 10 cleanups, but they reached 23, gathering 170 bags of garbage, 120 bags of yard waste, two tires, and using three tons of mulch. Overall, there were 458 volunteers providing 1,374 hours of service. The monetary equivalent of these hours for a full-time maintenance staff is approximately \$35,000.



24



Firemen's Park; Chaska, MN



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25

FUN FOR ALL INCLUSIVE PLAYGROUND — SHAKOPEE PARKS AND RECREATION

The City of Shakopee installed a new all-inclusive playground called "Fun for All Playground." The Shakopee Lions Club initiated a renovation to the playground in Shakopee's Lions Park, which is the City's most highly used park. The playground was one of the oldest playgrounds in the city and was scheduled for an update in the park asset plan. The city had set aside \$150,000 for the replacement.

A committee of community members and professionals was formed to develop an all-inclusive playground for the community. The Lions Club committed \$50,000 and the Shakopee Valley Lions committed \$5,000 to get the project started. In addition, the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community donated \$50,000. The Shakopee Rotary Club added a musical area for \$15,885. The task force raised the remaining amount of \$142,966.76 through monetary and in-kind donations. The total cost of the playground was \$413,851.76.

The Shakopee Fun for All Playground was installed through a community build in October, 2016. And it was fully completed in November, 2016. There were over 100 individuals and businesses that donated to the project.