

### RECOGNIZING MINNESOTA AGENCIES AND **ORGANIZATIONS FOR OUTSTANDING 2021 ACHIEVEMENTS**

By Bethani Gerhard, Minnesota Recreation and Park Association

Each year, MRPA recognizes agencies or organization in Minnesota for outstanding achievements. Congratulations to the 26 recipients of the MRPA Awards of Excellence for projects completed in 2021.

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In addition, the Credit Union supports the Minnesota Park and Recreation Foundation. Hiway's association with the Foundation has led to a variety of mutually beneficial programs. Hiway has had the opportunity to be a presenting sponsor at the Minnesota Park and Recreation Annual Conference, giving Hiway exposure to many Park and Rec employees across the state of Minnesota. In addition, Hiway has been a part of Park and Rec's scholarship program, financially supporting students who are seeking a degree in a Recreation, Parks, or Leisure Services program.

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#### **ADMINISTRATIVE OR MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**



### Plymouth Parks and Recreation K.U.B.E. Kiosk & Door Access System

During the planning of the Plymouth Community Center, staff expressed the need with the architects to create a self-serve door access and ticketing system for the K.U.B.E. indoor playground to meet the needs of the community, facility and staff.

Following hours of research, the city purchased customized kiosks compatible with RecTrac and a door access control system that integrated together to offer visitors the opportunity to "scan and play" without having to wait in line, as well as help with staffing limitations and cost-savings.

In its first month of use, 800 playground visitors utilized the system. Upon seeing the success of the playground system, the City of Plymouth added an additional system to access the gymnasium for open sports programs.



### MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

### **Mendota Heights**

### Par 3 Community Golf Course Rebranding Initiative

Since its inception, the Mendota Heights Par 3 Golf Course has lacked an identity to position itself and differentiate it within the golfing community. In preparation for the 2021 golf season, staff worked on implementing a course rebranding initiative that began with designing a new logo. The goal of establishing a logo was to give the golf course a new and refreshing brand identity. Staff's objective was to change the customer's current perception of the course by modernizing the brand while leveraging the course's positive qualities. The Mendota Heights Par 3 saw its best year ever and that success was partially attributed to the impact of our rebranding initiative.



### PARKS AND FACILITIES



### **Anoka County Parks**

### Bunker Beach Wave Pool Replacement Project

As a lone wave pool in 1987, Bunker Beach Water Park has evolved into one of the premier public waterparks in North America. After more than 30 years in operation, Bunker Beach continues to be a destination for more than 150,000 visitors in the short Minnesota summer season. Bunker Beach Water Park opened on June 5, 2021 following the completion of a state-of-the-art two-year wave pool replacement project.

The Anoka County parks department started the construction of a \$6.5 million public investment in June of 2020 which included the complete replacement of the wave pool, a new family restroom, operational support facility, and a reconstructed parking lot. Using a sustainable design approach, new infrastructure was built using environmentally friendly design standards that resulted in decreasing impervious surfaces, water, energy, and pool chemical conservation, and pollinator-friendly rain gardens to capture filter runoff.

### Bemidji

### North Country Park Natural Playground Project

The natural playground is a unique feature in the Bemidji parks system. It's located in a 20-acre park, in a highly wooded area with trails and existing pollinator gardens. The project brought together a large contingent of volunteer groups working collaboratively on building components at one volunteer event. Neighbors, commission members, scouts, homeschool groups, uniformed police officers and other groups worked and discuss ideas.

The Rotary Club led the fundraising effort, raising over \$36,000. The fundraising goal was \$30,000, but with increased costs of lumber, the Rotary Club raised additional funds for volunteer building materials. Multiple pop-up events were provided for on-site, yet socially distanced interactions with the neighborhood. The passion and commitment of committee and those dedicated to the natural playground project made the project an amazing experience.



### **Brooklyn Park**

### River Park Redevelopment

The River Park redevelopment project demonstrated collaboration and partnership. Five financial and two in-kind grants were received from different agencies. Strong efforts were taken to engage everyone involved, including the residents of Brooklyn Park. River Park is very popular with the neighbors and regular users. Many people lobbied for no changes to be made to the park, but now that the project is complete nearly every person concerned about the changes has applauded the changes to the park. The redevelopment of River Park also resolved a significant storm water runoff issue while incorporating many natural plantings and opportunities for interpretive interaction. Storm water had previously drained a 250-acre area to the west and south and was emptied directly into the Mississippi River, causing pollution over the years. Now this surface water is treated through integrated ponds and rain gardens to fully treat the water before entering the Mississippi River.





### **Crystal**North Lions Park Concrete Hockey Rink

Through a year-long planning effort in 2017, North Lions Park was identified as the location to add a grouping of winter activities. The planning process proposed installing a new quality rink. A new rink compliments a sliding hill and warming house that were already in this location. The addition of ice-skating has made this park a winter recreation destination, which is an important improvement for this lower-income part of the community. To assure the park is usable to everyone, the project utilized a concrete surface for the rink, which allows for better ice-making than turf provides. Concrete also makes the space usable for a variety of hard surface activities during the summer. This is the only concrete surface hockey rink in Crystal. Because of the new surface, a remote control car track activity was offered during the summer months, thanks to a MRPF new initiatives grant. New energy efficient LED lighting was also installed to reduce the amount of light going into the adjacent neighborhood. In addition, staff converted the outdated men's and women's restrooms into gender neutral restrooms with one being ADA accessible.

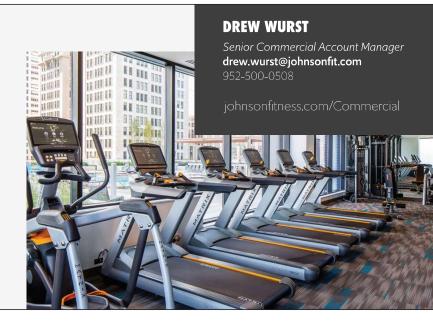
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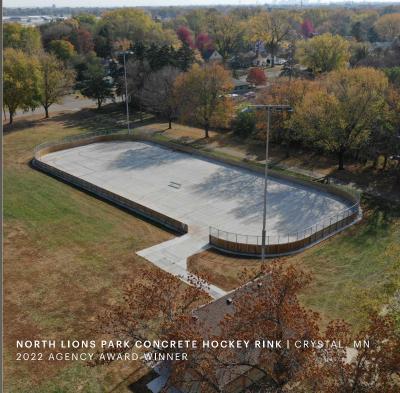
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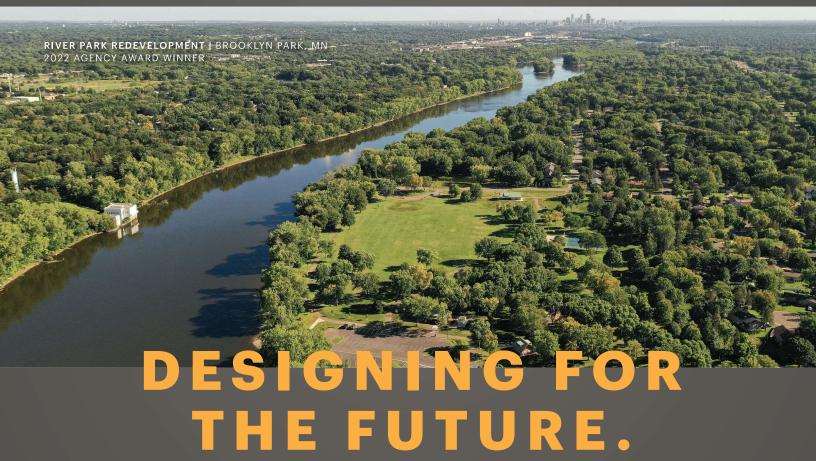












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### **Eagan**Destination All Play

Destination All Play was a planned commitment to redevelop an under-utilized park. This location provides not only socio-economic improvements, but also what was deemed an underserved neighborhood per the 2016 Parks System Master Plan. The financial commitment to this project was a public investment into community wellness, along with diversity and inclusivity with a direct connection to the City's 2040 Comprehensive Plan. Immediate access to the freeway and proximity to the Twin Cities Outlet mall created both immediate economic impact on nearby businesses and aids in economic growth by creating a destination park. Design features such as the new and expanded trails, tree preservation effort, Eagan's first Bankshot court, expanded truncated domes, and a restroom building. This project was more than a playground, it sparked a revitalization of a neighborhood and brought community together even during a pandemic. It created Eagan's first public art mural and called on its residents to help design it. The project helped created new expectations towards play and recreation in Eagan's Parks System, and became a destination for all.

### **New Hope**Civic Center Park and Pool Project

In June 2021, the City of New Hope held a ribbon cutting ceremony at their new pool. City staff, engineers, contractors, commissioners, city council and residents joined the celebration, and the feedback was overwhelmingly popular. The same feedback was provided when the first concert at the Performance Center was held and the improved skate park opened. The Civic Center Park and Pool project is unique because it offers the visitors a new destination park with various amenities for all ages and interests. Visitors can enjoy a pool, skate park, performance, picnic shelter, and walking trails all in one area. All of these facilities and amenities provide resources to the community and great value for all ages. The pool offers swim lessons, water walking, lap swimming, swim team practices, and more. The Performance Center offers concerts, movies, theater camps, theater performances and other recreational activities. Programs and camps can be held at the picnic shelter, skate park and walking trails. In addition, this project has been impactful during the pandemic as it offers all ages the ability to enjoy the park and new amenities in the City of New Hope.





















#### **New Ulm**

### Recreation Center Expansion & Remodel Project

The New Ulm Rec Center recently underwent \$15 million in significant updates and improvements that included a new aquatics center, playground, gymnastics center, fitness center, group fitness and multipurpose space, consolidated admin and remodeled fieldhouse.

Functionality and value were core objectives and are reflected in the design. New technologies were implemented in the aquatic center, including Life Floor and Paddock

Evacuator system that significantly improves air quality by exhausting air impurities produced from chemical treatment of water. Zoned HVAC conserves energy and reduces utility consumption. Other innovative features in the aquatic center include tall flume slides, Aqua Zip N, climbing wall and Minnesota's first NinjaCross.

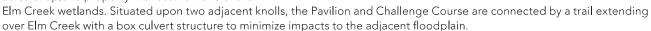
This project was a breath of fresh air in an old building! Modern design creates an inclusive, accessible, and inviting atmosphere throughout. For a virtual tour, go to: https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=DbZtSMqv5kR and view our aquatics video here: https://vimeo.com/628718225

### **Plymouth**

### Northwest Greenway Trailhead Pavilion & Challenge Course

Located in the northwest quadrant of Plymouth, the Northwest Greenway is a 350-acre wooded nature preserve with bike and pedestrian trails, stretching from Lake Camelot on the east side of Plymouth to the Northwest Greenway Pavilion and Challenge Course on the west.

The Pavilion and Challenge Course sits on over 8 acres of upland property with scenic views of the



The trailhead features: A challenge course park structure with fitness components for ages 13 and older, large open-air pavilion, multi-use plaza, parking, restrooms and drinking fountains, a bike repair station and more.





### **Rochester**Gamehaven Park Development

Gamehaven Park provides an array of active recreational facilities and programs set into diverse landscapes, woodlands, wetlands, and prairies. The park provides four-season recreation opportunities. Accessibility for park visitors is integrated seamlessly by establishing a safe, clearly-marked, high-quality circulation network throughout the park. Financial and environmental sustainability are the two key elements for the long-term success of the park. Gamehaven Park provides restoration of natural vegetation in a former farm, creation of wetlands, 18-hole championship



caliber disc golf course and a 9-hole recreational disc golf course. The park also featured a large nature play elements, along with cross country skiing, with some trails and sledding hill using artificial snow, new access drive and parking lot along with a permanent restroom.

### Three Rivers Park District Baker Play Area

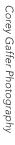
The popularity of the new play area developed during the summer and fall of 2021, concluded it was a success. The original Baker Play Area opened in 1977. Throughout the design project, the project team spoke often about relevancy and what that meant in the context of the project. For team members, it meant designing a play area that offered inclusive play opportunities for



a wide range of ages and abilities, and it also meant creating a play area that young people are excited to keep visiting. The Park District engaged with more than 600 kids and parents to learn what features they would like. The feedback confirmed that a zip line feature should be an integral component of the play area, and defined the design for the preschool embankment play area. The new 100-foot-long zip line continues the tradition of that muchloved play feature at Baker. The feedback also helped select the new climbing structure that is almost nine feet tall, over 70 feet in diameter, and the first of its kind in the United States.

# Here's to you, Three Rivers Park District! 2022 MRPA Award of Excellence for the **BAKER PARK CREATIVE PLAY AREA** DF/ DAMON FARBER LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS







### Washington County Ravine Landing

In June 2021, Washington County hosted the grand opening of a new facility named Ravine Landing at Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park. Washington County completed this nearly \$4 million dollar facility to enhance park user experience and continue the improvements being made to the park. The existing shelter was run down to the point that the facility needed to be closed to the public. The parks department wanted to replace this shelter with a year-round facility that could host all the different activities that the park has to offer. Ravine Landing is a 4,000-square-foot building that provides public restrooms, a lobby, wayfinding materials, office space, large multi-purpose room, kitchenette and AV equipment. The interior was built of durable, low maintenance materials that allows for the building to act as a catch all for all seasons and uses of the park. There is also outdoor covered seating, a fire-pit, and storage. The exterior was designed to blend into the surrounding landscape and accentuate the natural beauty of the park.

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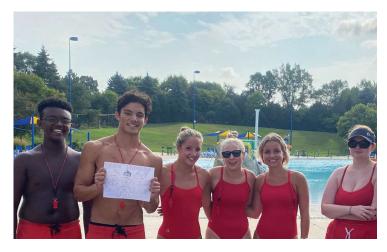
### PROGRAMMING AND EVENTS

#### **Burnsville**

#### Winter Golf

The first winter golf event took place in January of 2021. The City of Burnsville was still going through some COVID challenges and restrictions during this time. Staff was thinking of safe, effective ways to engage with the community and offer a recreational activity that would get people out of the house. There was a lot of snow on the ground in January, and it was a bit of a workout to walk throughout the course. Staff groomed a "cart 1 path" throughout, allowing golfers to easily walk from each hole. All participants pre-registered for the event. This made for a seamless check-in process and had people on the course within minutes.





### **Eagan**

### Cascade Bay Waterpark Lifeguard Pipeline Program

A national lifeguard shortage due to pool closures and the lack of certification classes offered during COVID created many challenges for cities. The City of Eagan and Cascade Bay leadership quickly realized that traditional recruitment channels for its summer lifeguard staff was not working. In February 2021, Cascade Bay had 60% fewer applicants than February 2020. The creation of the Lifeguard Pipeline Program provided American Red Cross lifeguard training courses to current, new, and potential staff in the off-season. Staff raised awareness about the program through social channels, Google ads, and at the Cascade Bay Waterpark. In addition, the class was taught in a blended-learning format with online and in-person sessions with COVID protocols in place for participant safety. Texting and email were used to communicate with participants and provide technical support for the online portion of the class.

### Maple Grove Intergenerational Garden Club

The mission of the Intergenerational Garden Club was to build a diverse community of youth and seniors focused on sustainability and growing their own food. Staff wanted to bring all ages together to learn about gardening and to bridge the gaps between these generations. The goal was to team up a senior with a teen to plant and maintain their own garden bed and work together as a large group to water and harvest produce. An unused area of land at the Maple Grove Community Center property had eight standing garden beds for this project. A Facebook group was created to share photos and communicate when the garden needed attention. The goal was to offer this program at no cost for participants, so the club would be accessible to all.



#### **PROGRAMMING AND EVENTS**



### **Roseville**Kite Day in the Park

Kite Day in the Park was a new event created in 2021 to provide a recreational experience for the Roseville community. Roseville Parks and Recreation, North Suburban Kiwanis, and Do Good Roseville worked together to offer this unique event on April 24, 2021. The event was offered as a free, COVID-safe event, and offered youth and families the opportunity to receive and fly kites at the Central Park Victoria Ballfields. The event also offered volunteer opportunities for service groups as well as through the Roseville volunteer database. Over 120 kids received a free kite and were able to fly the kites at the park. More than 30 volunteers were able to offer services and assistance to the event.

### **Saint Paul** Youth on Boards Saint Paul

Youth on Boards introduced young people of Saint Paul to civic engagement and career pathways in local government. It was a collaboration of the mayor's office, parks and recreation, sprockets, and libraries, The City of Saint Paul gave young people the ability to utilize their voice and collective power to bring change. Youth on Boards representatives acquired foundational knowledge and network connections to support their time serving as full voting members across boards and commissions. This initiative brought youth into the local governance and redefine what youth power and voice looks like in the City of Saint Paul. This initiative ensured young people were involved in decision making, and in the future by preparing young people for future careers in government.



#### SPONSORSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS







### **Owatonna** Lowe's 100 Hometowns

Goal 1 - Replace Lake Kohlmier playground with inclusive play structures. Goal 2 - Update amenities near Lake Kohlmier to be accessible. Objective - to provide more amenities to more people. This area has been a popular place for families but felt outdated, overgrown and not a welcoming environment. The Lake Kohlmier playground is the oldest in the system, at over 30 years old. The features were still safe, but worn, faded and outdated with weeds growing through the fall material and trees overgrown and hanging over the equipment. Timbers surrounded the container prohibiting access. The area around the playground had some picnic tables, but old grills and an aggregate drinking fountain ran over with rusty water.

### SPONSORSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS

#### Roseville

### Central Park Victoria Inclusive Playground

The Inclusive Playground project at Central Park is a fantastic and unique example of many partners coming together in a variety of ways to create something truly special for our community. Over the course of several years, the financial partners have included the City of Roseville, the 6 Roseville Central Park Foundation, the Friends of Roseville Parks and two private, two significant private donors. These financial contributions enabled Roseville to complete a truly unique, one of a kind inclusive play experience at a fraction of what it would have cost for any individual to do alone. These partners have been involved every step of the way, from the inception of the idea, to the fundraising, to site selection, to the planning all the way to the ribbon cutting. And it doesn't stop there: Roseville will be installing fitness pods on the site to even further expand the "play for everyone" concept – with many of the same partners' involved in the planning.



### Saint Paul Como Park Zoo & Conservatory ANIMATE

ANIMATE was a cross-sector partnership of the highest caliber, allowing simpatico organizations with a shared value of being an inviting, welcoming, affirming destination for everyone to showcase and educate via a marriage of arts and science. Virtuosic theatre artists told tales that came directly from zoo professionals, aficionados, and detractors to herald the ambitions of zoos as champions of species preservation, conservation, education and recreation with dedicated, loving, passionate staff for whom animal care is their highest priority. With scenes in the primate house, hoof stock building, polar bear odyssey, aquatics building, big cat grotto, tropical encounters, and the sea lion amphitheater and eight scenes of identical length told a compelling story that challenged its viewers' aesthetics and ethics.

### Saint Paul **Emerald Ash Borer Project**

In the face of ever tightening and challenging budget landscapes for municipal governments, strategic publicprivate partnerships and relationships have become increasingly important. This partnership between the City of Saint Paul and Saint Paul Port Authority met the needs and mission of both organizations. In addition, the vital sustainability and youth employment goals being met as a result of the partnership had a positive, long-lasting impacts on the Saint Paul community and beyond. This project helped fund and prioritize reforestation efforts and alleviate stress on the City's Forestry Unit which was responsible for Emerald Ash Borer management. Replanting efforts were prioritized for neighborhoods with the lowest tree canopy, which were predominantly low-income communities, helping address stated sustainability goals within the City's Climate Action and Resilience Plan.



#### SPONSORSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS



# Saint Peter Veteran's Park Outdoor Pickleball Courts

The City of Saint Peter and the St. Peter Pickleball Association formed a partnership for pickleball in the St. Peter community. The amount of volunteer time the Pickleball Association put into this project once the City identified a possible route to completion exceeded expectations and really made this project a possibility. The City of Saint Peter staff worked closely with many user groups and associations with the goal to be a supportive and valued partner. We know these associations provide meaningful opportunities in communities, making it a huge priority for the City to prioritize their needs. This project was another successful example in how projects that seem to be far off, can quickly gain traction and support with the project is truly a collaborative effort.

### St. Louis Park

### Westwood Hills Nature Center Hobbs Pavilion Project

A generous donation led to the unique and meaningful partnership between Westwood Hills Nature Center and donor Maurice Hobbs. The Hobbs Pavilion was built on the site of the original interpretive center. It became an appealing, inclusive, and engaging open-air shelter. This considerate donation spoke to how Westwood Hills Nature Center can deeply impact the lives of the residents. This project brought to light the many ways the community can find value in nature. The shelter itself meets the need as a peaceful refuge near the water garden, a space for recreational activities such as archery, a place for connection as a community gathering space, and a facility that can provide a valuable outdoor classroom for children.





### **Woodbury**Coin Quest

Coin Quest was a three-week long medallion search that included three coins (medallions); one hidden in a Woodbury park each week. This event was a collaboration between Woodbury's Parks and Recreation, Public Safety and Woodbury Community Foundation. Coin Quest began January 18 and concluded three weeks later. Every week, a coin of acrylic paper weight was hidden in a park. Three times a week, a video clue leading participants to the coin's location was posted on Woodbury Public Safety and Parks and Recreation Facebook pages, the City of Woodbury's website and the YouTube channel. Individuals who found each coin received the coin and \$100 worth of gift cards for Woodbury businesses. In addition, when a coin was found, the Woodbury Community Foundation donated \$100 to a local non-profit.

### **VOLUNTEER INITIATIVES**

### **Three Rivers Park District**

#### Research Volunteers

The research volunteers initiative began in large part due to the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Research staff had considered utilizing volunteer time in the past for park visitor counts and surveys, but hadn't pursued the idea due to apprehension by staff about the level of supervision volunteers might require or a potential lack of commitment by volunteers. But when volunteer resources staff heard from volunteers asking what they could do, the circumstances seemed to align for a new initiative, and volunteers were used to collect winter park use data. The response from volunteers, and their interest in and dedication to the project, exceeded staff's expectations. The volunteers performed meaningful work that helped Three Rivers Park District staff better understand who is using park and trail facilities in the winter months and the public's level of satisfaction with the facilities.

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to members in January or watch mnrpa.org.

