



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

By Kiley Foss, MRPA Summer Intern

Each year MRPA recognizes agencies or organization in Minnesota for outstanding achievements. The following are the recipients of the MRPA Awards of Excellence for projects completed in 2018.

## Administrative or Management Strategies

### *Eden Prairie – Passport to Fun Scholarship Program*

In an effort to make funding for programs more accessible and the process more efficient, Eden Prairie Parks and Recreation restructured their scholarship program – “Passport To Fun.” Previously, applicants would apply for funding and would have \$100 applied to their account. Now a 50-percent discount is applied to the account. The customer service staff are able to see if the applicant had been approved.

Research was conducted by staff to seek out opportunities for improvements. First, staff contacted neighboring communities to poll how their scholarship programs were administered. The next phase addressed whether their registration software, RecTrac, could administer this change appropriately. Testing was then performed for approximately a month before rolling out the new process to the current Passport To Fun members. Collaboration with the non-profit People Reaching Out to People (PROP) was necessary during the transition. PROP provides funding for those that qualify, therefore the other 50-percent of the payment for programs were covered either partially or fully on behalf of the participant.



Eden Prairie award recipients (left to right): Lori Brink (City of Eden Prairie), Jay Lotthammer (City of Eden Prairie), Brad Aho (City of Eden Prairie), Aimee Peterson (MRPA awards committee member), and Valerie Verley (City of Eden Prairie)

## ***Roseville – Unity Park: A Non-Identified Park with Strong Community Support***

Unity Park was a small private parcel of land that was not identified in the recent parks and recreation system master plan for acquisition. It was pursued because of strong community interest, and the uniqueness of its location relative to apartment buildings occupied by new U.S. citizens. The overall interest was to create

a safe learning and gathering area close to the apartments. This was an opportunity to create an area where intergenerational and inter-ethnic could gather, as well as an area for programs, services and other offerings.

The planning and development process was successfully initiated and championed

by community members. This project challenged staff to think outside the box, listen intently, and determine to involve new U.S. citizens. Rec-Connect Youth Outreach program was established specifically for this area as a pilot program to introduce new U.S. citizens to public parks.



## **Marketing & Communications**

### ***Plymouth – Plymouth Creek Center Community Engagement***

The 20-year-old Plymouth Creek Center serves as an important hub for senior, arts and recreation programming, as well as community events. The well-used center needed maintenance and updates, so City Council directed staff to conduct a formal community engagement process to help gauge community interest, and develop the best fit for facility users. Four primary tools were utilized with the goal of creating convenient discussion with as many Plymouth residents as possible.

Two new technology tools were utilized for collecting feedback throughout this process – FlashVote and Social Pinpoint. FlashVote is a quick online and mobile survey tool that has allowed Plymouth residents to give their input on a range of community initiatives. The results included an informational analysis of responses by demographic data such as age, gender, property ownership and ward residents. Social Pinpoint is a social mapping tool which allowed citizens of Plymouth the opportunity to view the project from their phone or computer and place comments anywhere on the aerial site plan. Once a comment was “pinned,” other users were free to upvote, or react, helping the community create a vibrant online dialogue about the project.



## Parks and Facilities:

### ***Burnsville – Archer Park***

Burnsville is a community that is 98-percent developed leaving little to no vacant land available for new projects. In 2016, a local business submitted a request to purchase land abutting their property for additional space. At the time of the request, the property served as the home of the archery range. Staff needed to identify a safe and suitable site to relocate the existing range or face the possibility of losing a park that serves a unique and growing recreational community. After a full review of existing park systems, it was determined that there was no existing park land that could properly meet the relocation requirements. As a last resort, staff identified one piece of City-owned property that met all the above requirements. The primary goal was to create a safe site design that met the needs of the Burnsville archery community within the existing budget. Not only does the City of Burnsville have an archery range, but it is one of the nicest archery ranges in the Midwest.



### ***Crystal – Edible Courtyard***

The purpose of this project was to create a free edible courtyard at the Crystal Community Center, which would be used to grow fruits, herbs, and vegetables for everyone to share. This project helped transform an outdoor space at the Crystal Community Center that was underutilized, and turn it into a vibrant edible courtyard. The garden provides food access and food education to all, while giving us a place to engage and organize the community around healthy foods. The edible courtyard was funded through the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership and Hennepin County Public Health Promotion. This funding allowed the City of Crystal to work with the nonprofit, A Backyard Farm, to create a great edible space.



### ***Golden Valley – Lawn Bowling Green at Brookview Golf Course***

The concept to add a Lawn Bowling Green at Brookview Golf Course was proposed and implemented in order to create an aligned non-golf attraction appropriate for a wide range of ages. Lawn bowling is a lifetime recreational activity requiring no specialized skills and is similar to bocce ball. Participants do not need any specialized equipment and full instruction is provided. This new amenity was the first municipal lawn bowling green in Minnesota to be operated by a golf course with a parks and recreation programming model for use and access.

## **Owatonna – North Straight River Parkway**

This project consisted of construction of 2.1 miles of multi-use trail along the Straight River in Owatonna. The previous trail consisted of dirt and woodchips and was often washed out after a heavy rain.

The parkway connects the 26th Street Trail on the northern end of the city to the Buxton Trail at the edge of the downtown area. This connection is very important for the safety of bicycle commuters, youth heading to the water park, and many others. The project was funded using only 5-percent city funds and the rest was covered by grant dollars, such as a federal Transportation Alternatives Program grant and a Minnesota DNR Local Trails Connection Grant, along with land donations.



## **Plymouth – Rotary Tree Walk**

The Rotary Tree Walk is an education project, in addition to a tree planting project. The planting event was held along Lake Camelot on June 2, 2018. It provides continuous opportunities to learn about 40 trees suitable for planting in Plymouth, provides shade for the city trail, and offers screening for the adjacent homeowners. Users of the new walking path on the south side of Lake Camelot can enjoy all 40 trees and learn about each specie from the informational plates that are posted by the trees. This project combined resources from different contributors to make a positive environmental statement for years to come.

The main partner with this project was the Rotary Club of Plymouth. The City celebrated its 34th Arbor Day at the planting event, where more than 40 residents and volunteers assisted in the installation of the trees. The long-standing Arbor Day tradition demonstrates Plymouth's commitment to trees and the environment. Plymouth Rotary President Jason Cardwell said it best, "the collaborative efforts of many coming together to make it a project that serves the earth, people's connection and awareness to it, and offers beauty into a neighborhood of homes and families."

## **Owatonna – Sid Kinyon Repurposing**

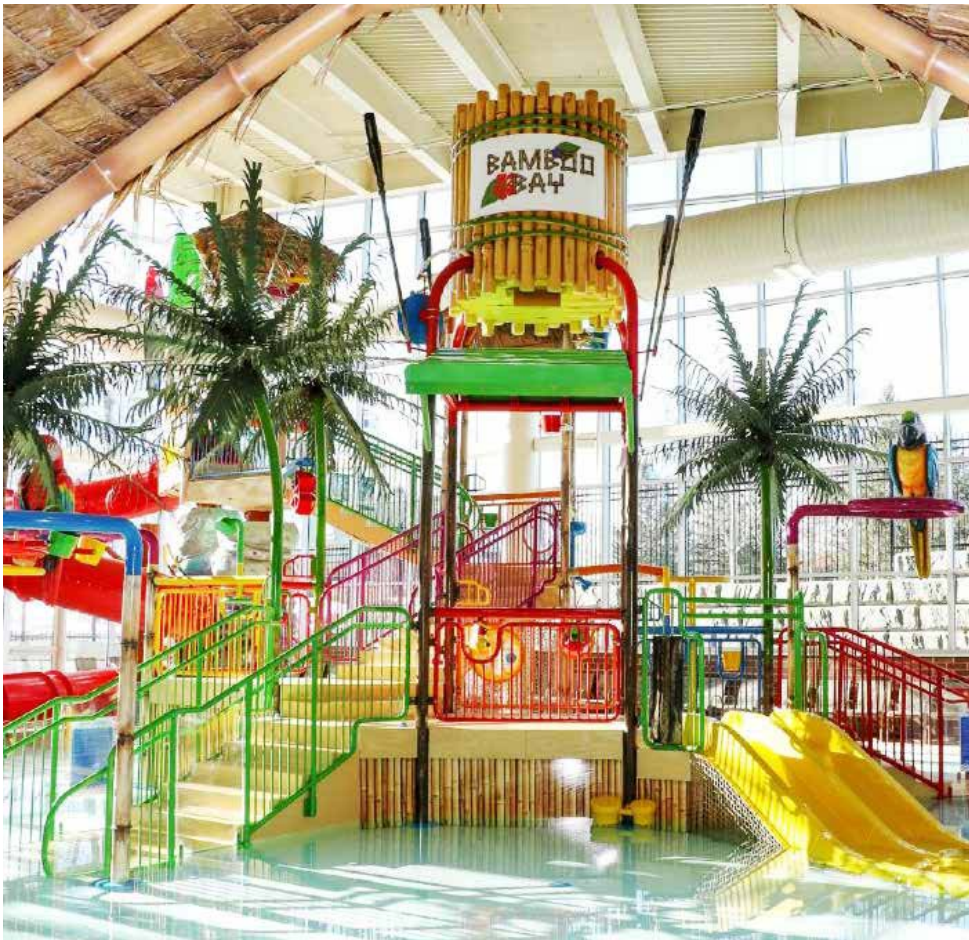
The tennis courts at Lincoln School in Owatonna were deteriorating, and there was not enough budgeted in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to do necessary repairs. The tennis courts were locked in 2014 when they were deemed to be too dangerous to play on. Parks and recreation determined the multi-use facility would provide the best "bang for the buck." The CIP dollars provided a 50-percent match to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Outdoor Recreation Grant. In 2018, the existing courts were removed. The rebuild project consisted of one tennis court, two pickleball courts, as well as concrete fixtures: two bean bag boards, one ping pong table, a bocce ball court, and an open space for spectators and additional games. Waterproof lockboxes/lockers with keypads for equipment were also added. Codes were provided free of charge to residents. The two goals of this multi-use facility were to break down cost barriers for people to participate, and to encourage unstructured free play.



# Experience Minnesota Fall

From trails and athletic fields to community gathering spaces, ISG is constantly looking for ways to strengthen our value as project partners, and opportunities to increase the value, longevity, and versatility of the solutions we provide.





## ***Shoreview – Community Center Expansion Project***

In October 2017, the most significant expansion project started at the Shoreview Community Center. Over 25,000 square feet was added to the existing building, and over 35,000 square feet of space was remodeled. The total cost of this project including architect fees was \$16,579,350. The project also included a nearly 8,000 square foot expansion of the Tropics Indoor Waterpark called “Bamboo Bay.” Tropical Adventure Indoor Playground was expanded to provide a larger playground, a greatly improved toddler play area, and improved seating for adults. Four activity rooms were added on the upper level above the studios that can or will accommodate a variety of programs. This two-level expansion added 15,000 square feet to the community center. Another highlight of the project was remodeling the locker rooms and replacing the old concrete floor with LifeFloor, a foam rubber flooring system designed for use in wet areas with barefoot traffic. From the initial concept, the community has been very supportive of the Community Center Expansion Project.

## ***Three Rivers Park District – Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail***

The Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail spans the communities of Hopkins, Minnetonka, Edina, Richfield, and Bloomington in suburban Hennepin County. As a critical component in Three Rivers Park District’s regional trail system, the trail provides vital non-motorized recreation and transportation connections to residents of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, as well as connections to Fort Snelling State Park and the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center. The 15-mile paved, multi-use trail utilizes existing parkland and open space to the greatest extent possible to create high-quality recreational opportunities. The trail also serves as a linking function by connecting the regional parks and trail system to itself, connecting people to destinations including job centers, schools, libraries, retail/commercial nodes, churches, and parks, and provides a safe, non-motorized transportation option for a wide variety of user groups and skill levels.





## ***Washington County – Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park***

Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park is now open. This park underwent a major renovation starting in spring 2017, fully reopening in summer 2018. Washington County, in partnership with the City of Cottage Grove and the South Washington Watershed District, partnered together to deliver over \$8 million improvements to the park and surrounding roadway infrastructure. This project set the anchor for development within Cottage Grove, reinvigorated Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park, provided storm-water control to allow regional growth in Woodbury and Cottage Grove, addressed intersection traffic safety concerns, and added capacity at a gateway connection into Cottage Grove from the trunk highway system.

## ***Washington County – Point Douglas Regional Trail***

The vision for Point Douglas Regional Trail, to provide connectivity from Washington County to Prescott and Hastings, started over 20 years ago. Construction of the 2.5-mile trail, occurred in 2016 and 2017. The trail runs along an abandoned rail line along the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers. The final piece of the bridge was completed and opened to the public in June 2018. The trail provides scenic views of both the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers and links the three communities of Denmark Township, Hastings, and Prescott, three counties (Washington, Dakota, and Pierce County in Wisconsin), and two states, Minnesota and Wisconsin. The trail also provides a critical link that ties together numerous local, regional, and state trails, parks and natural areas into a cohesive, interlinked system.



## **Programming and Events:**



### ***Crystal and New Hope – Young Mudder***

The parks and recreation departments of Crystal and New Hope worked together to offer a new youth special event in 2018 called the "Young Mudder." The event was an outdoor obstacle course designed for youth ages 6-12 at Valley Place Park in Crystal. The course was filled with climbing walls, hay bales, tires, a mudpit, a giant slip and slide and much more. Each of the 12 obstacles was staffed by local volunteers from businesses, associations, police departments and the West Metro Fire. A DJ was on site to help keep the participants motivated, along with providing a great atmosphere.

Almost 200 participants and over 500 people were in attendance. The race was funded by the registration fee of \$25 per participant. Each participant took home a swag bag with an event t-shirt, a Young Mudder dog tag, snacks and other goodies provided by event sponsors.

## Eden Prairie – PeopleFest!

As a community growing in ethnic diversity, the City of Eden Prairie established a new, week-long series of events called “PeopleFest! A Community Celebration of Culture.” The inaugural events featured a number of smaller-scale classes, demonstrations and speakers leading up to the culminating event – the “PeopleFest! Party” which took place at Staring Lake Park amphitheatre and plaza. This collaborative effort came together as a result of a desire on the part of both City and School District leadership to showcase and celebrate the diversity of cultures represented in the Eden Prairie community.

Even with a new event concept/title and limited amount of time to market, PeopleFest! was well received by the Eden Prairie community. Overall participation by local organizations was higher than expected, and collective attendance at the week’s events was strong. The PeopleFest! Party alone had over 350 people in attendance, enjoying performances, learning about various organizations, trying a new ethnic food, taking part in collective art-making and connecting with other Eden Prairie residents.



## Plymouth – After Hours at the Creek

Plymouth Parks and Recreation offered the first After Hours at the Creek event in 2018. This new event was geared towards adults (21+). The evening included appetizers and a pizza buffet, along with a cash bar. Entertainment included arcade games, inflatables, a DJ and a photo booth. The event headliner was Last Comic Standing finalist, Tommy Ryman, who entertained the crowd for an hour with his hilarious set and self-described, awkward disposition.

Tickets were sold online and at the door. Fees were \$25/person which included food, admission to all activities/entertainment, plus a voucher for a free drink from the bar. The Plymouth Creek Center

(PCC) hosted the event - multiple rooms were used with the primary focus being the ballroom and Fireside Room, and the PCC Dome/Fieldhouse held active games.

This first year, the goal was to bring in \$2,500 in revenue which equated to 100 attendees. This goal was surpassed as 208 adult participants jumped in with staff to launch the event for the first time. This brought in \$5,200 in revenue. After Hours at the Creek coordinators were able to present a fun and exciting event, which was also extremely reasonably priced, allowing for even greater attendance.



## ***Plymouth – Ninja Warrior Camps***

Plymouth Parks and Recreation offered a series of ninja warrior camps. There were 350 participants at the three different camp options that were offered over a two-week period. The camp featured a top-notch, full-scale ninja warrior course, complete with a 20-foot warped wall, as well as a 120-foot inflatable obstacle course. Campers received a t-shirt and bottle of liquid hand chalk with their registration. Camps took place at the Plymouth Creek Center Fieldhouse and were set-up on the artificial turf, taking up about half of a full-sized soccer field. Camps were open to participants ages 6-15.

Plymouth Parks and Recreation partnered with Ninjas United, LLC to offer the camps. The course was set-up for just over three weeks to allow time for set-up and tear down. Ninjas United became an independent contractor through the City of Plymouth. The contractor supplied coaches, Plymouth took registrations and provided the space and administrative support – both parties agreed upon revenue percentage split. In two weeks of camps, 350 participants attempted to conquer this ninja warrior course.



## ***Plymouth – Skate the Garden***

Plymouth Parks and Recreation offered the first Skate the Garden. This free winter event included outdoor skating, music, hot chocolate and cookies. Rental skates were included at no cost. The mayor was a special guest at the event and skated alongside community members. The event took place on the Millennium Garden pond at the Plymouth Creek Center. The goal was to offer a simple and fun event, giving community members a chance to embrace winter in Minnesota.

Lighting was the highlight of Skate the Garden. LED lights helped an otherwise dark area, stand out. Staff purchased and prepped a 20-foot section of programmable rope lights. This section changed colors and darted in and out. Staff covered the lights with a tube for safety and burrowed a track into the ice where the lights would stay. This event proved once again that Minnesotans love outdoor recreation opportunities. Feedback at the event, as well as on social media, was positive and reinforced the need for this event. Skate the Garden will be an annual event in collaboration between parks and recreation and forestry departments.

## ***St. Louis Park – Be the Light Winter Solstice Event***

Westwood Hills Nature Center held “Be the Light Winter Solstice” event, which was developed to bring awareness to mental health issues, provide resources for mental health, build community, and capitalize on the therapeutic value of spending time outdoors. The activities included: a walk on wooded trails lit with luminaires, a fire with s’mores and hot cider, a personalized luminary, “shine on” temporary tattoos, a lit candle in support of someone who is struggling with mental health issues or remembrance of someone who is no longer with us because of those struggles, and a table of mental health resources from National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Over 180 people attended this program, which is part of the City of St. Louis Park’s wellness initiative, Health in the Park, a grass roots initiative to create connections, engage in conversation and take action to inspire healthier, more active individuals.





### ***Three Rivers Park District – Nordic Ski Opener***

The Minnesota Nordic Ski Opener brought the entire Nordic ski community together and introduced new skiers to the sport of Nordic skiing. The response from the Nordic ski community was overwhelmingly positive. Event attendance was 2,549 during the hours of the event and there were 940 ski rentals. The Minnesota Nordic Ski Opener included seven components: Nordic ski tour where rental fees and day pass fees are waived, free Nordic ski lessons for beginners, Nordic ski expo with 50 vendors, kids' area ski obstacle course run by the Minnesota Youth Ski League, Governor's Proclamation reading, Nordic skiing team sprints exhibition race, and seminars by industry experts. The event provided the opportunity for the Nordic ski community to come together and celebrate.

### ***Washington County – Girl Scout Programs at the Historical Courthouse***

In 2018, Washington County Parks debuted three new Girl Scout programs designed to teach scouts the history of the Washington County Historic Courthouse and Washington County, inspire active citizens and help celebrate their communities. Each program included a tour of the historic courtroom, 1900s county jail and exhibit rooms. All programs were council-sponsored, and fulfilled requirements to earn a badge. Ten program dates were offered with 434 Girl Scouts and chaperones in attendance. The program costs were very minimal since registration and marketing expenses were covered by the Girl Scouts of River Valley. The Girl Scout programs at the Washington County Historical Courthouse were unique in highlighting the history and architecture of the building while providing fun, interactive activities allowing children to have a better understanding of how historical sites and parks impact their communities.



## **Sponsorship and Partnerships:**

### ***Three Rivers Park District – Partnering for a Better Play Area: French Regional Park and Park Brook Elementary School***

After nearly 30 years, the play area at French Regional Park was due for replacement. Staff emphasized the critical need for community engagement at the front end of the project, before the design phase. A theme rose to the surface: the play area is primarily used by kids; therefore, kids themselves should have an integral voice in the concept, design, and development. Staff quickly decided the best opportunity would be to engage a third-grade elementary school class, and charted a course of workshops over a two-year period.

Three faculty from Park Brook Elementary School in Brooklyn Park and 22 students (the Kid Task Force) partnered with the Three Rivers project team to participate in seven workshops at French Regional



Park over the course of two years. They provided critical insight to the design of the new play area, along with continual decision making and feedback throughout the project. The goals of this partnership were to gather insight from youth to build a better project, educate from a unique perspective, and provide career mentors for diverse youth.