



Park District of Oak Park

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park districts:

- reduce crime
- lower healthcare costs
- build self-esteem
- boost local economies
- increase property values
- promote healthy lifestyles
- encourage community pride
- strengthen neighborhoods
- provide jobs
- attract new business
- lengthen lives
- provide nature education
- increase accessibility
- protect the environment
- preserve land
- bring happiness
- reduce stress
- control weight
- conquer boredom
- offer safe play areas
- believe fun is essential
- build family unity
- increase tourism
- diminish gangs
- promote cultural diversity
- the benefits are endless**

Impacting the Quality of Life in Our Community

The Park District of Park plays a vital role in enhancing people’s lives, building strong families and a more connected community. We protect and preserve our environment and positively impact our local economy. The following information outlines the important role the Park District of Oak Park plays in our community and the many benefits of parks and recreation enjoyed by our residents.

Introduction

The mission of the Park District of Oak Park states “*In partnership with the community, we provide quality parks and recreation experiences for the residents of Oak Park.*”

Since 1912, the Park District of Oak Park has provided park and recreation experiences to the citizens of Oak Park and in doing so, has made and continues to make a positive impact on our community. Our Park and Recreation services make significant contributions to the physical and mental health of our residents, the quality of the environment here in Oak Park and the economic growth of our community. We look forward to celebrating 100 years of providing parks and recreation programs and services to Oak Park residents in 2012.

Statistics

The Park District owns and operates 24 facilities that occupy 80 acres of parkland within the Village including:

- 7 community centers
- Dole Center – Owned by the Village, this historic building houses most Park District fitness classes and many cultural arts programs and is also home to the Dole Library, a branch of the Oak Park Public Library system.
- Community Parks such as Lindberg, Taylor, Rehm and Maple

In partnership with the community, we provide quality parks and recreation experiences for the residents of Oak Park.

- 2 tot lots
- 5 neighborhood parks
- 10 special facilities including 3 historic properties (Cheney Mansion, Pleasant Home, and the Oak Park Conservatory) Rehm and Ridgeland Common outdoor swimming pools, Stevenson Park Active Sports Area, Oak Park Gymnastics Center, Paul Hruby Ice Arena at Ridgeland Common, Hedges Administrative Center, the unique urban forest Austin Gardens, and our Village Green, Scoville Park

Pleasant Home, Scoville Park and the Oak Park Conservatory are designated National Historic Landmarks. Oak Park Historic Landmark status was granted to Cheney Mansion and the Oak Park Conservatory.

In 2009, we served approximately 34,000 participants in 2,850 recreation programs which meet the recreational needs of infants up to seniors throughout Oak Park. In total, the Park District logged over 467, 550 program participation hours in 2009. We also offered a number of free activities such as summer concerts, open houses at the Conservatory and Cheney Mansion, Recreation in the Streets and the ever-popular Rehm Park trains. Our Conservatory staff planted nearly 90 flower beds in the parks and at various school locations. The results of a 2003 attitude and interest survey showed 83% of survey respondents visited a Park District of Oak Park park in the past year which was 11% higher than the national average. That same survey showed that 87% of responding households rated the quality of programs as “good” or better with 77% of the households rating the quality of parks as “good” or better. The Park District will be conducting another community survey in 2010 to once again gauge the attitudes and interests of Oak Park residents.

In 1976, the Park District of Oak Park along with the River Forest Park District founded the West Suburban Special Recreation Association which provides year round recreation programs for individuals of all ages with disabilities. WSSRA is now a partnership of 11 communities.

Value to our Community

Individual Benefits

You may perceive the programs we provide as just fun and games but the Park District contributes so much more to the quality of life here in Oak Park. Games children play, whether it's in a sports league or summer camp, encourage the development of socialization skills. Play involves teamwork, learning to be a leader and sharing with fellow teammates. Children develop motor skills through sports and games and improve their coordination and self-esteem. We provide outlets for creativity and self-expression. We offer a solution for the child obesity problem plaguing our nation by keeping kids active in swimming lessons, gymnastics classes, summer day camps, karate, floor hockey and many other recreation activities. We provide recreation opportunities during high risk times between 3pm and 7pm such as youth sports, arts & crafts and cooking which give kids healthy alternatives while giving parents peace of mind. All of these factors contribute to developing resilient and confident children who grow up to become responsible and well-adjusted adults.

For those residents who cannot afford Park District programs or services, we offer a scholarship program funded with monies received from the Youth Services division of the Oak Park and

River Forest Township. In 2005 the scholarship program provided support for 55 families, 52 adults and 132 youth who enjoyed reduced rates for swim and ice rink passes, community center programs, day camps, tennis lessons and gymnastics classes. To complement the monies received from the Township, the Park District's registration form provides our patrons with an opportunity to make a contribution to the scholarship fund. A partnership between the Township, Village of Oak Park and Hephzibah has provided a streamlined procedure to apply for these scholarship monies.

For teens we offer outlets for adventure with trips to skate parks, climbing walls and campgrounds. The new Stevenson Park Active Sport Area, a joint effort of the Village of Oak Park and the Park District, opened in fall 2004 featuring outdoor basketball courts and a skate park area. This facility, well-received by area youth, is certainly a creative use of a 2.5 gallon water reservoir. The opening of 49 Lake Teen Center, a cooperative community effort in the lower level of Stevenson Center, took place in late January 2008. The Park District also helps our young adults become tomorrow's leaders with junior counselor and junior lifeguard programs which prepare them to enter the workforce. We are the number one employer of youth in our community providing ample opportunities for personal growth as teens learn to take responsibility and develop important decision-making and problem-solving skills.

Adult program participants can get in shape & stay in shape, explore local and distant destinations, and learn new hobbies such as gardening, ceramics or yoga. Adventure programming is also quite popular for adults including kayaking, hiking and rock climbing. With our fast paced society, the Park District provides individuals with a valuable balance between work and play.

We provide a safe haven for seniors who can make new friends and learn new skills through trips, classes, workshops and drop-in opportunities. We have many popular fitness classes designed for older adults at Dole Center that help seniors improve their physical and mental well-being. A well known quote in the parks and recreation field states, "We do not cease playing because we are old; we grow old because we cease playing."

Family & Community Benefits

Not only do individuals benefit from parks and recreation, but so do families. It is true that families that play together, stay together. Breakfast with Santa, Family Swim and Skate, as well as Daddy Daughter and Mother and Son events are just some of the recreation opportunities we provide to build strong family bonds.

If you have ever been to a summer concert in Scoville Park or the Day in Our Village summer carnival at Rehm Park, you know how the Park District can bring our community together and show our community spirit while building community pride. The two most important factors people look at when considering relocation are schools and parks. We help in attracting new families and businesses to our community.

Economic Benefits

Economically the Park District impacts our community through increased home values. We bring in tourism dollars by operating regional facilities such as the Oak Park Conservatory, Cheney Mansion and Pleasant Home. In a 2003 analysis of the Oak Park Travel Market completed by the National Laboratory for Tourism and eCommerce at the University of Illinois

in Urbana-Champaign, 13% of respondents indicated they visited the Oak Park Conservatory which was equal to the number of respondents who visited the Hemingway Museum and Hemingway Birthplace. Scoville Park and Austin Gardens also increase tourism in Oak Park by hosting a variety of special events. And as mentioned earlier, we provide jobs for youth as well as for people of all ages and abilities. Park and Recreation Agencies build Illinois' small businesses. 73 cents of every dollar spent by Illinois Park and Recreation Agencies stays in Illinois.

Environmental Benefits

Let's not forget the environmental impact of parks and recreation. We preserve open space and in doing so, help to keep our air and water clean. Park visitors can enjoy a walk through passive and natural areas in Austin Gardens, Lindberg, Taylor, Euclid Square, or Maple Parks. The Oak Park Conservatory allows people to enjoy a variety of plant experiences all year long. The Park District of Oak Park spent 6 years in an effort to assure Barrie Park is environmentally safe for future generations. Barrie Park officially re-opened on September 10, 2005 and is currently being enjoyed by soccer and softball players, sledding enthusiasts and residents of all ages.

Park and recreation opportunities provided by the Park District are inexpensive and convenient for everyone in our community. More importantly, the Park District does not meet the needs of one particular demographic group but rather strives to serve the needs of every age and demographic component within our community. We aim to positively impact the health and well-being of all of our residents.

Fostering Partnerships

In order to maximize recreational opportunities while running an efficient operation, the Park District fosters valuable partnership agreements with local organizations including the Friends of the Oak Park Conservatory, Pleasant Home Foundation, Baseball Associations, Oak Park Dogs, West Suburban Special Recreation Association, Festival Theater and, of course, the Village of Oak Park, Oak Park Public Library, Oak Park Township and School Districts 97 and 200. A partnership with Dominican University and Fenwick High School has allowed the Park District to double the funds available to renovate tennis courts located throughout Oak Park. A cooperative effort between the Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation and the Park District resulted in the receipt of a \$220,000 Access to Recreation Grant from the Kellogg Foundation in fall 2007. A portion of these monies was used for accessibility improvements at Longfellow Park and to initiate an endowment for future community accessibility projects. The Good Heart Work Smart Foundation partnered with the Park District to install an elevator at Longfellow Center. The new park and center was officially re-opened on Saturday, May 30 2009.

Planning for the Future

Since 2000, the Park District has been focused on tackling a severe deferred maintenance problem throughout our park system due to a lack of financial resources. A year-long inventory and evaluation of the parks infrastructure was completed by a citizen-led review committee in fall 2002. This study led to a comprehensive planning process involving hired consultants, the Village of Oak Park, the Park District and the newly-organized Park District Citizen Committee and included a community attitude and interest survey. At every step in the comprehensive planning

process, community input was sought out and integrated into the plan. The Parks & Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan was completed in October 2004 which identified community priorities and set a course for future programming and capital needs. In April 2005 the citizens of Oak Park approved a Park District referendum to fund the newly developed Capital Improvement Plan which is currently being implemented.

Since the referendum passed, site master plans have been completed for 16 parks and site plans for the District's final two parks, Scoville and Lindberg, will be completed in 2010. A "Dogs in Oak Park" Plan was also developed as well as short- and long-term plans for the facilities at 218 Madison. An Existing Conditions Study was completed for Ridgeland Common in 2007 and the Park District completed the Ridgeland Common Master Plan in July 2008. Andersen, Carroll, Field, Fox and Longfellow Parks and Wenonah Tot Lot have been renovated since the successful "Renew Our Parks" referendum in 2005. Renovation of Randolph Tot Lot will be completed in late spring 2010. Euclid Square, Maple and Mills Parks are slated for major improvements beginning in the summer and fall of 2010.

An historic moment for the Park District took place on April 6, 2006 when the Village of Oak Park transferred the ownership of the seven recreation centers to the Park District. Previously these facilities were owned by the Village but operated by the Park District. This transfer was a major recommendation of the Infrastructure Committee and the Park District Citizen Committee whose charge it was to oversee the development of the Comprehensive Plan. In November 2006, the Park District was notified it had been awarded a \$399,000 grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources for the renovation of Field Park. The Park District received a \$400,000 grant from IDNR in 2008 for Longfellow Park renovation and the District was recently notified it will be the recipient of a \$400,000 grant for Taylor Park improvements slated for 2011. In total, the Park District has surpassed \$1 million in grant funds in the past 4 years.

Developing a long-range vision for park and recreation programs and services in our community has allowed the Park District of Oak Park to continue to provide the many individual, community, economic and environmental benefits that enhance the quality of life here in Oak Park and make our community a great place to work and play.