

SUMMER 2026



IMPACT

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE WISCONSIN PARK & RECREATION ASSOCIATION



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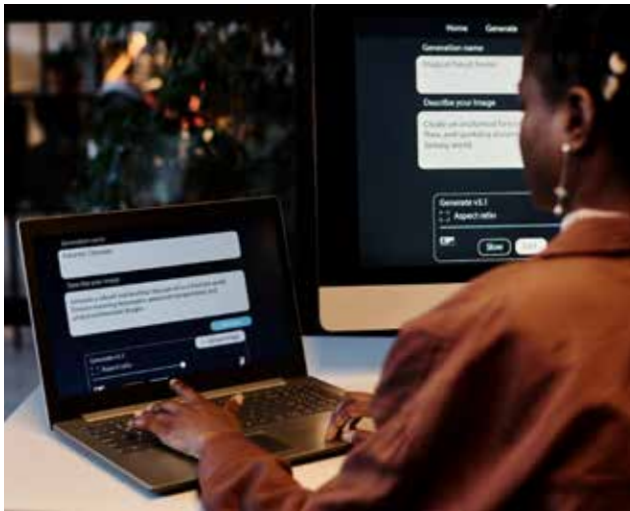


Have You Experimented with AI Tools?

by Sandy Schueller, CAE, Executive Director

Artificial intelligence is quickly becoming part of everyday work and life. Some people are excited about its potential, while others have valid concerns, but regardless of perspective, AI is already shaping how we work.

Many professionals are familiar with tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude. Some are actively using them to save time and improve efficiency, while others feel unsure where to start or worry they're falling behind. If that's you, here's the key point: your value comes from your expertise, judgment, and relationships, things AI can't replace. What it can do is support you by handling routine tasks.



Start Simple

General-purpose AI platforms are built to assist with a wide range of tasks, from answering questions to drafting content or generating ideas. While more specialized tools are emerging, it's often best to begin with something broad and approachable. The best way to begin is with curiosity, no expertise required.

Personal: Keep It Low-Stakes

Try experimenting in simple, everyday ways:

- Ask something fun or creative to see how it responds
- Use it instead of a search engine for things like travel planning, home projects, or general questions

In many cases, it delivers organized, relevant information much faster than traditional searching.

Professional Use: Take Small Steps

When bringing AI into your work, begin with simple, low-risk applications:

1. Improve Everyday Communication

AI can help refine emails or messages. For example, if you've written something that feels too long or unclear, you can ask for a more concise, polished version while maintaining the right tone. It's a helpful way to sharpen communication without starting from scratch.

2. Draft Initial Documents

Whether it's a proposal, outline, or request for information, AI can generate a strong first draft when given clear direction. Just remember to avoid sharing any sensitive or confidential details.

3. Summarize and Compare Information

Reviewing multiple documents can take significant time. AI tools can highlight key differences, organize content, and present summaries, making it easier to evaluate options and communicate findings efficiently.

This isn't about becoming an expert overnight; it's about getting comfortable. Even a little familiarity with AI can be valuable as it becomes more common in the workplace.

For now, focus on curiosity. Try asking one simple question you'd normally search online and see what happens.

Everyone starts somewhere, and there's no better time than now. ■

Sandy Schueller, CAE

Executive Director, Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association

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Contents

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Sandy Schueller, CAE
Executive Director

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GENERAL OFFICE

Wisconsin Park & Recreation
Association
6737 West Washington Street
Suite 4270
Milwaukee, WI 53214
(414) 423-1210

MISSION STATEMENT

To empower and support WPRA members by fostering professional growth, advocating for the parks and recreation profession, and enhancing the quality of life for communities across Wisconsin through education, networking, and leadership development.

VISION STATEMENT

Fostering a thriving parks and recreation profession that is recognized for its essential role in creating vibrant, healthy, and connected communities throughout Wisconsin, WPRA members lead the way in innovation, collaboration, and professional excellence.

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Association
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Ashburn, VA 20148
(703) 858-0784

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Cover Contest – Members Only!

Want to see your photo featured on the cover of IMPACT magazine?

Submit your high-resolution photographs measuring at least 8.5 inches wide by 11 inches tall at 300 dpi to office@wpraweb.org before December 1, 2026 for consideration.

Must be a current WPRA member to be considered.

By submitting a photo, you give WPRA permission to publish your name, likeness, image, voice and/or appearance as such may be embodied in any pictures, photos, video recordings, audiotapes, digital images and the like, taken or made on behalf of WPRA. You further agree that the WPRA is granted copyright permission to use your submission for any purpose consistent with WPRA's mission. These uses include, but are not limited to illustrations, bulletins, exhibitions, videotapes, reprints, reproductions, publications, advertisements and any promotional or educational materials in any medium now known or later developed, including the internet. You also acknowledge that you will not receive any compensation, etc., for the use of such pictures, etc., and hereby release WPRA and its agents and assigns from any and all claims which arise out of or are in any way connected with such use.

Did You Know?

Did You Know: Following WPRA on all of our social media platforms allows you to keep up to date with the latest happenings and events in the Wisconsin Park and Recreation System.

Stay in the know and follow us below:



Ethics Policy

The Communication Committee reserves the right to edit and/or reject any proposed or submitted magazine materials (stories, features, photos, etc.) based on ethical principles or other criteria established by the committee that are in the best interest of the association and generally reflect WPRA membership values. Said ethical principles include, but are not limited to:

1. Magazine authors/contributors:
 - a. Must cite sources unless submittals represent original work.
 - b. May not realize any direct financial gain.
2. Materials will not be accepted:
 - a. If they promote items inconsistent with the values and benefits of parks and recreation (i.e., smoking, drugs, alcohol, poor behavior/language, etc.).
 - b. If considered to be slanderous and/or negatively personal in nature.

IMPACT Magazine – Articles, Photos and Ads

IMPACT magazine is the official publication of the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association. This professionally designed quarterly magazine is a critical component of WPRA's communication with members. It contains industry-relevant articles, notices of upcoming events, highlights, award winners and sponsors throughout the year, and is a great way for advertisers to ensure readers are aware of their products and services.

In 2026, brief summaries and upcoming meeting dates for WPRA regions and membership sections will continue to be posted, and all members are encouraged to submit news and articles for consideration.

Deadlines for upcoming issues are:

Fall 2026: September 1, 2026	Winter 2027: December 1, 2026
Spring 2027: March 1, 2027	Summer 2027: June 1, 2027

Advertisements are due one week after the above content deadlines. One-time rates are listed below, and an approximate 15 percent discount applies if advertising in four consecutive issues.

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Quarter Page:.....	\$300.....	\$400

REQUIREMENTS FOR PHOTOS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

High-resolution photographs at 300 dpi; Photos should be at least 4x6; No images pulled from websites.

Please submit all articles (1,000-word maximum), photos and news releases for publication in IMPACT to the WPRA office at office@wpraweb.org.



Building Our Story, Together

by Joleen Stinson, CPRP, President, WPRA

Across Wisconsin, we are all doing extraordinary work every single day. You are leading programs that bring neighbors together, maintaining spaces that define community identity, and creating opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to connect, play, and thrive. Yet too often, those stories stay local. They live within your departments or communities, but they do not always reach the broader audience that needs to hear them. That is where we have an opportunity as members of WPRA.

One of the most powerful things we can do as an association is tell our story. Not just when budgets are on the line, but consistently, visibly, and collectively. Every program you run, every event you host, and every improvement you make to a park is a story worth sharing. When we share those stories together, we begin to paint a much bigger picture of the impact that parks, recreation, and aquatics have across Wisconsin.

That is why I am asking each of you to take a simple step. Send your photos, highlights, and short descriptions of your projects, programs, and events to WPRA via email to office@wpraweb.org so they can be posted on WPRA's Facebook page.

It is easy to think of this as just posting, but it is much more than that. This is advocacy. When we consistently show our work in action, we reinforce the value of what we do. We remind people that parks are not just green spaces, they are gathering places. Recreation programs are not just activities. They are opportunities for growth, health, and connection. Behind every trail, every youth league, and every community event, there are dedicated professionals making it happen.

When WPRA's Facebook page reflects the full breadth of work happening across the state, from large urban systems to small rural communities, it becomes a living portfolio of our collective impact. It helps answer the question of why parks, recreation, and aquatics matter with real, tangible examples. That kind of visibility matters. It can influence funding conversations, build support for projects, strengthen partnerships, and elevate the profession as a whole.

Beyond advocacy, this is also about connection. One of the greatest strengths of WPRA is the sense of community among members. We learn from each other, support each other, and celebrate each other's successes. When you share what is happening in your community, you are inspiring your peers. A creative program in one community can spark an idea in another. A successful event can become a model. A simple improvement can lead to broader innovation.

It also gives us a chance to pause and recognize what has been accomplished. Too often, we move quickly from one project to the next without taking a moment to reflect. Sharing your work allows all of us to acknowledge the effort, creativity, and dedication behind

it. It reminds us why this work matters.

I understand how busy this profession is, especially during the peak summer season. Adding one more task, even a small one, can feel like a stretch. But this truly is quick. Snap a photo or two. Write a couple of sentences about what is happening. Send it in. You do not need a formal write up or polished marketing materials. Authentic, real-time glimpses into your work are exactly what resonate. A full shelter, a well-used trail, kids engaged in a program or going down a pool slide, or volunteers making a difference. These moments tell the story better than anything else.

When each of us contributes just a little, it adds up quickly. Imagine a WPRA Facebook page that consistently showcases activity from every region of the state. Large communities, small towns, school-based departments, and counties, all represented. A steady stream of stories that reflect the diversity, creativity, and impact of parks, recreation and aquatics in Wisconsin. That kind of presence does not happen by accident. It happens when members like you choose to participate.

It also strengthens something that cannot be measured in numbers alone, a shared sense of pride. There is pride in seeing your work recognized. There is pride in being part of a statewide network doing meaningful work. There is pride in knowing that your contribution helps elevate the entire profession.

This is how we move from being a collection of individual agencies to a unified voice. WPRA is more than a professional association. It is a community built on shared values, shared challenges, and shared successes. That community grows stronger when its members are visible, engaged, and connected.

So I encourage you to look for those moments worth sharing. They are already happening all around you. Send them in. Help us populate the WPRA Facebook page with the stories that define our profession. Help us show the joy, the pride, and the real community value created by parks, recreation and aquatics.

When we tell our story, we do more than inform. We advocate. We connect. We inspire. And together, we ensure that the impact of parks, recreation, and aquatics in Wisconsin is seen, understood, and valued. ■

Joleen Stinson, CPRP

President, Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association





Reviving a Community Tradition at Marathon Park

by Katie Swanson, Senior Communications Specialist,
Gerber Leisure Products

For more than 100 years, Marathon Park has served as a gathering place for residents and visitors in Wausau. The 78-acre park, Marathon County's first park property, features historic buildings, towering white pines, an urban campground, sports facilities, playgrounds and the Wisconsin Valley Fair. For generations, one amenity has remained a constant: a place for families to cool off and play in the water.

That tradition is entering a new chapter with the redevelopment of the park's splash pad, a project that honors the site's history while creating a modern recreation experience for today's families.

The location has been home to a water feature since the park's early days. A wading pool occupied the site for decades, becoming a childhood destination for local families. In 2004, the county transformed the pool into a splash pad by retrofitting the existing infrastructure. After years of heavy use, however, aging systems and original piping required significant upgrades, forcing the attraction to close several years ago.



"The feedback we heard was overwhelming," said Jamie Polley, parks, recreation and forestry director for Marathon County. "People kept asking when it was coming back. No matter what form it has taken over the years, it's always been one of the most heavily used amenities in the park."

County leaders viewed the project as an opportunity to preserve a beloved community asset while creating a more accessible and engaging experience for visitors of all ages. Working with Aquatix® by Landscape Structures Inc. and local consultant, Gerber Leisure Products, the team developed a design that remains within the footprint of the original wading pool while significantly expanding play opportunities.

At nearly 8,700 square feet, the new splash pad is believed to be one of the largest in Wisconsin. The design features separate areas for different age groups and incorporates natural themes inspired by the park itself. Pine tree-themed dumping buckets reflect the



Reviving a Community *continues on next page*





Reviving a Community *continues on next page*

park's iconic stands of mature white pines, while the splash pad's centerpiece pays tribute to the site's past.

A Mushroom Dome recreates a familiar feature from the original wading pool, connecting generations through a shared experience.

"I have memories from when I was 5 or 6 years old being under the mushroom fountain," Polley said. "I'm excited to see today's families create those same memories with their children."

The splash pad is located adjacent to Marathon Park's inclusive playground, which was renovated in 2021 as part of broader efforts to improve accessibility throughout the park system. Together, the playground and splash pad create a destination where children of varying ages and abilities can play side by side.

The project also reflects strong community support. Marathon County funded approximately half of the redevelopment through its capital improvement program, while local fundraising efforts generated support for the remainder of the project.

"The support from our local foundations and partners has been incredible," Polley said.

As construction nears completion, anticipation continues to build. The splash pad will once again complement many of Marathon Park's most popular attractions, including the historic miniature train that circles nearby, annual festivals, family events and one of the state's largest county fairs.

For Polley, the project represents more than a new recreation amenity. It reflects Marathon County's ongoing commitment to health, quality of life and stewardship of community spaces.

"We take pride in offering great amenities, good services and fun activities for our community," she said. "This is another opportunity to revitalize something people care about and bring it back to life for the next generation." ■



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Connecting Community Through Thoughtful Design

by Dan Borchardt, PE, ENV SP, Engineering Team Leader, MSA



MSA partners with the Town of Elcho to deliver a safer, more connected USH 45 corridor

In the Town of Elcho, US Highway 45 serves as a vital lifeline that links residents to schools, recreation, local businesses, and the surrounding Northwoods. Through recent years, pedestrian and bicycle activity notably increased in the township. This emphasized a lack of dedicated pedestrian facilities, creating growing safety concerns for non-motorized transportation along USH 45. Recognizing both the challenge and the opportunity, the Town worked to submit a Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant to improve pedestrian facilities in this critical corridor.

MSA was chosen through Qualifications-Based Selection for the design and construction of the project and partnered with the Town and Wisconsin DOT (WisDOT) to transform this corridor into a safe, accessible, and vibrant multi-use transportation route. The restrictions of developing infrastructure within right-of-way land and within a high-traffic corridor presented a design challenge. Through working closely with Town leadership and WisDOT, MSA helped guide the project from early planning through design and into construction. Backed by federal TAP funding and local investment, the project represents a strategic commitment to community connectivity and quality of life.

This solution reflects MSA's commitment to context-sensitive design — providing the right facility for each segment of the corridor.

Today, the upgraded USH 45 corridor represents more than just an infrastructure upgrade; it represents a safer, healthier, and more connected future for Elcho. The corridor links the community's neighborhoods, parks, and destinations, while also encouraging active transportation and recreation — ultimately enhancing accessibility for residents and visitors alike.



From concept through construction, MSA brought technical expertise, collaborative leadership, and local understanding to every phase of the project — helping the Town of Elcho turn a critical need into a lasting community asset. For the Town, the project fulfills a long-standing vision. For MSA, it reflects a continued commitment to delivering tailored, community-focused solutions that make a meaningful impact.

The project was completed in the spring of 2026. The Town of Elcho, project partners, and stakeholders celebrated the grand opening of the new trail with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on June 6, 2026. ■

The results of Phase 1 are a thoughtfully designed nearly 0.8 miles of pedestrian improvements that blend urban sidewalk infrastructure with a scenic off-street recreational trail. The improvements include:

- A 5-foot sidewalk through the town core to enhance walkability;
- A 10-foot-wide asphalt shared-use path with shoulders for bicyclists and pedestrians;
- A continuous connection between Elcho Street and Parkway Lane, extending to Otter Lake Park.





Stella's Playground

by Tom Mortensen, PLA, ASLA

raSmith

CREATIVITY BEYOND ENGINEERING

A special project is currently underway to create Milwaukee's first universally accessible and inclusive playground at Kilbourn Reservoir Park in Milwaukee. The site design team at raSmith is collaborating with the Stella's Playground team, City of Milwaukee DPW Park staff, Kahler Slater, UWM Community Design Solutions, KOMPAN, and GRG Playscapes to develop the conceptual site plan for Stella's Playground.

Inspired by a courageous young girl named Stella, this project will be a vibrant, inclusive destination that welcomes everyone to play, share fun times, and build long-lasting memories together. The playground will feature universally inclusive and accessible areas for active and passive recreation, creative interaction, and a variety of fun activities. The existing site is sloped, which will add to the opportunities for year-round fun, including a sledding hill, chess park, dog exercise area, multi-purpose sport court, potential water feature, public art, and several other site enhancements.

The initial site plan is currently evolving into a final site master plan, moving closer to the exciting day when the playground is open! The project is on track to break ground in early 2027.

Fundraising is well underway, and you can help make this dream playground a reality for Stella, her family and friends, and the entire community. Visit stellasplayground.org to learn more about this project and explore ways to get involved.

About the Author

Tom Mortensen, PLA, ASLA, is a site planner / landscape architect at raSmith's Brookfield office. He has over 35 years of experience on projects including site planning, park and public open space design, urban spaces, memorials / public plazas, retail developments, restoration plans, and integrated stormwater management / green infrastructure.

Stella's Dragon - Concept Sketch



Image courtesy of KOMPAN



Brewer Outing/Tailgate Event a Great Success!

by The WPRA Foundation Brewer Outing Committee

The WPRA Foundation Inc. (WPRAF) and WPRA were pleased to bring back the Brewer Outing/Tailgate Event once again. Game day was Thursday, May 14th at American Family Field against the San Diego Padres. Special thanks to Beverage Sponsors MWP Recreation and Gametime. We appreciate their longtime sponsorship of the event.

The Planning Committee, comprised of both WPRAF and WPRA Board Representatives, worked hard to provide a quality networking event to the membership. Thanks to the WPRA Board of Directors again for approving to fund 70% of the expenses, as well as assist with promotion of the event. The generosity of the WPRA Board aided in keeping the cost down to just \$40 for members to attend the event. The WPRA Office Team did an incredible job creating an event flyer, doing email blasts and Facebook posts, as well as including the event in various issues of the PRMonthly.

With 112 registered attendees, the event was deemed a resounding success! The Tailgate started at 10:30am, while members enjoyed networking, playing bags games, and socializing. The catered tailgate lunch followed in the rented pavilion. A total of 12 teams participated in the Team Trivia Contest. After an initial 3-part tie-breaker, there was an epic best out of 3 rock/paper/scissors battle between the "O.G.'s" and "Suicide Squeezes." Congratulations to the "O.G.'s" team for clinching first place and winning Foundation Ambassador Club (FAC) t-shirts.



The crew from Onalaska.

The Tailgate ended at 12:30pm, and everyone headed into American Family Field to enjoy the game. Seating was in the Left Field Infield Box Seats just 9-17 rows from the field, and just beyond the visitor's dugout. Along with enjoying the beautiful sunshine and blue skies of the 70+ degree day - the Brewers even came home with a big 7-1 WIN!

Positive feedback was received from participants, asking to please bring the event back again next year. Plans are to do just that!

Brewers Outing *continues on next page*



Excellent food selection for our tailgate!



Brewers Outing *continued from previous page*

Thanks to all who attended to support the event, and please consider this your official invitation to join us in 2027!

Overall, the event made a profit of almost \$3,000 to benefit the WPRAF. The WPRA Foundation Inc is a 501(c)(3) Tax Exempt Organization established to enhance the role of parks and recreation services in Wisconsin. Donations and fundraising efforts help to:

- Provide Professional Grants and Student Scholarships to be used toward professional development/educational opportunities in the parks, recreation, and natural resources field.
- Sponsor Professional Speakers at WPRA Conferences, Workshops, and the Annual WPRA Leadership Academy.
- Promote the development of parks, recreation, and related service projects and programs.
- Further education programs and projects related to the natural environment.

To donate to or find more information about the WPRA Foundation, please email info@wprafoundation.org or visit the website: <https://www.wprafoundation.org/> ■



Beer pong is always a popular tailgate game.



Region IV represented well.



Getting a photo with the Racing Sausages.



Team O.G.'s was the Trivia Winner.



More Than Watching the Water: Modern Risk Management in Aquatics

by Amanda Bruce, Recreation Manager, City of Marshfield
Parks & Recreation Department

On a hot July afternoon, the pool deck is full, swim lessons are wrapping up, open swim is at capacity, and families line the edge of the water. A lifeguard scans their zone, moving methodically from left to right. A parent tries to get their attention with a quick question. Another child jumps in early before their swim test is complete. Nothing seems out of the ordinary – until it is.

In aquatics, incidents rarely come from obvious chaos. More often, they stem from small breakdowns: a missed scan, a blocked sightline, a moment of distraction, or unclear expectations on the deck. While lifeguards are the most visible layer of safety, effective risk management extends far beyond the lifeguard chair. It is built through systems, training, supervision, and intentional design.

The Limits of the Lifeguard Chair

Lifeguards are trained to be vigilant, responsive, and prepared. But even the strongest guard cannot compensate for a system that sets them up to struggle. Crowded water, overlapping programs, glare, and poorly defined zones all increase the likelihood of something being missed.

It can be tempting to rely on the idea that “a good guard will catch it.” In reality, surveillance fatigue is real, and even experienced staff can be challenged by long rotations, high patron capacity, and constant environmental distractions. Risk management must account for human limitations, not ignore them.

Strong aquatics operations recognize that lifeguards are one part of a larger safety system and are not simply the system itself.

What Gets Missed: Understanding Silent Distress

One of the biggest challenges in aquatic safety is that distress does not always look like distress. The instinctive drowning response is often quick and silent. Swimmers may be vertical in the water, unable to call for help, and easy to overlook in a crowded environment.

In busy pools, constant movement can mask subtle warning signs. A struggling swimmer may blend into the activity around them, especially when guards are managing multiple responsibilities or visual distractions.

This is why initial certification is only the starting point. Ongoing, scenario-based training helps staff recognize less obvious signs of distress and reinforces the importance of consistent, active scanning. The goal is not just to react quickly, but to recognize risks before they escalate.

Designing for Prevention, Not Reaction

Effective risk management begins long before a rescue is needed. Facility design, programming decisions, and operational planning all play a role in preventing incidents.

Thoughtful zone coverage is critical. Zones should be designed based on visibility, depth changes, and usage patterns – not just convenience. Guards should be positioned to minimize blind spots and maximize clear sightlines.

Programming also matters. Overlapping swim lessons, open swim, and special features can create crowded, unpredictable environments. Adjusting schedules, limiting capacity, or staggering activities can significantly reduce risk.

Environmental factors such as glare, water clarity, and deck layout should be evaluated regularly. Small adjustments, like repositioning a guard stand or modifying a rotation pattern, can have a meaningful impact on safety as well.

When systems are designed well, they reduce the number of situations that require emergency response in the first place.

Changing Patron Behavior

Aquatic environments are also shaped by the people who use them, and patron behavior continues to evolve year after year.

Parents and caregivers are often more distracted, frequently using phones or engaging socially rather than actively supervising their children. At the same time, many swimmers overestimate their ability or assume that brief exposure to swim lessons equates to competency.

In addition, risky behaviors – from rough play to unsafe entries – can escalate quickly in crowded settings. Lifeguards are not only responsible for surveillance, but also for managing behavior and enforcing rules consistently. Ensure your lifeguards know the why behind your facility's rules – it will help them enforce the rules in the long run.

Clear communication is key. Ensure your signage is clear, large, and visible (at multiple locations) and that staff interactions are professional and consistent, as these are major contributors to setting



Watching the Water continues on next page

Watching the Water *continued from previous page*

expectations for a safe environment. When patrons understand the rules and see them enforced, they are more likely to follow them.

Supervisors as Risk Managers

While lifeguards are on the front line, supervisors play a critical role in maintaining a safe environment. Their presence on the deck should be active and intentional, not passive.

Supervisors can support risk management by:

- Monitoring zone effectiveness and making adjustments as needed
- Providing real-time feedback to guards
- Leading regular in-service trainings and drills
- Ensuring policies are applied consistently across all staff

Frequent, informal evaluations are often more effective than occasional formal reviews. Quick corrections (whether related to scanning posture, positioning, or attentiveness) help reinforce expectations in the moment.

Strong leadership on the deck creates accountability, consistency, and a shared commitment to safety.

Building a Culture of Safety

At its core, risk management is about *culture*. Policies and procedures matter, but they are only effective when supported by a team that understands and values them.

A strong safety culture encourages staff to speak up, ask questions, and support one another. It normalizes reviewing incidents – not to assign blame, but to identify opportunities for improvement. It emphasizes consistency, so that expectations are clear for both staff and patrons.

When safety becomes part of the daily routine, not just a response to emergencies, operations become more proactive and resilient.

Looking Beyond the Chair

When risk management is done well, it often goes unnoticed. Incidents are prevented, issues are addressed early, and staff operate as a cohesive team. The environment feels controlled, even on the busiest days.

The lifeguard chair will always be a central symbol of aquatic safety, but it should never stand alone. True risk management is built on the systems, decisions, and leadership that surround it. By looking *beyond* the chair, aquatics professionals can create safer, more effective environments for both their staff and the communities they serve. ■

Amanda Bruce

*Recreation Manager, City of Marshfield
Parks & Recreation Department*



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Find Your Own RAD Way

by Katie Lindgren, West Allis-West Milwaukee Recreation & Community Services Department, Program Manager, National Inclusion Project Inclusive Recreation Specialist

A typical day at the West Allis- West Milwaukee Recreation and Community Services Rec Center starts with the hustle and bustle of the morning. Senior morning stretch participants are entering for class, preschool students and their parents are running down the hall excited for class, and our adult day program participants stop to say hello to our front desk staff before heading back to their room for the day.

Our day program is nothing new for our department, but it has long been a hidden gem in our community. Proudly serving adults from the disability community since 1968, WAWM RCS has continued to grow to serve the needs of participants in our Recreational Adult Day Program, or as we lovingly call it, RAD. RAD started because of the advocacy of families and caregivers, and it continues to evolve through the inspiration and direction of our participants in the program.

Five years ago, RAD moved into our brand-new Rec Center and since then our participants have been integrated into their community daily, and our hidden gem wasn't such a secret anymore. Participants volunteer in our preschool program, sell coffee to our community members at our coffee cart, and use the walking track with community members on their afternoon walks. Our participants advocate for themselves, their peers and their programs. Their advocacy has led to visits from state representatives and new accessibility additions to our recreation center, including a communication board and universal changing table.

RAD participants are encouraged to be "loud and proud" here every day. What they say about their experiences, the moments they are proud of, and what they want others to know about RAD

says more than we ever could.

The voices featured in this article belong to Michelle, Cody, Jeremy, Lori, Joy, and Gabe. Just like each of us, each of them brings their own unique strengths, interests, and experiences to our program. They all play an important role in making RAD the community it is today. Whether you find them helping friends, working in Cafe RAD, cooking our group lunch, playing basketball in the gym, talking sports with everyone in the office or lending a hand wherever needed, each one of them contributes something unique to our RAD community.



When asked about what RAD means to them, participants shared that "RAD is a special community", and we couldn't agree more. Incorporating an adult day program (or similar program offerings) into your recreation center creates a hub of inclusion that you simply can't replicate otherwise.

RAD participants take great pride in telling anyone and everyone that they are a part of RAD. They are proud of what they learn each day in the program, what they contribute to our Rec Center, and the relationships they build with their peers. Michelle shared that she feels most proud when helping her friends. Cody feels proud anytime he can help someone out. Jeremy takes pride in cooking our group lunch, Lori in acting as our coffee shop manager, and Joy when helping our Director, Shelly, with special projects.

Speaking of community, the daily interactions with everyone in the recreation center are of the utmost importance to our participants.

Find Your Own RAD Way continues on next page



Find Your Own RAD Way *continued from previous page*

Michelle and Lori both love that they get to interact with other adults and everyone who comes into the rec center. You'll find them at the coffee cart, Cafe RAD, twice a week working on their math, team building and communication skills. Since starting at Cafe RAD, Michelle has flourished in her ability to "talk to anyone and everyone". Lori has grown into a confident coffee cart manager and proudly wears her name badge. Cody and Gabe take pride in meeting new people and our community members on our walking track. They enjoy being amongst their peers doing an activity they love, listening to music and getting laps in on the track. The friendships formed on this track have introduced us to a new community member friend who has since created individual birthday candles for each participant. Every birthday we now get to celebrate not only the birthday, but the friendships formed in and out of our program room.

While our participants interact with community members every day in normal interactions, they also invite our community to join us for special events, programs and opportunities to further connect and strengthen friendships. Participants host two fundraising events each year, which bring in countless new friends while also raising funds for their program. They also host a yearly Hoop-a-Thon & Lap-a-Thon to highlight the importance of accessibility in public spaces. These raised funds towards purchasing a communication board and universal adult changing table as a result of their advocacy work. Their advocacy helped bring two local state representatives and our Lt. Governor for a visit at our program.

The moments outside the room are important, but the moments within our program space are the most impactful for participants. The common thread in all of this is the importance of friendship and belonging. Cody shared how important it was to him that after he graduated from high school, he still has a place to go each day to see his friends AND that he can still have a job. Joy and Michelle love that even after all of these years they are still able to see their friends. They love learning alongside their same friends that they spent their elementary school years with. Participants not only practice their life skills while at RAD, but they also learn and

practice their math, science, reading, writing, communication and creativity skills. RAD is rooted in the belief that our participants are lifelong learners and are treated as such.

Finally, and most importantly, RAD participants have shared why they would like to challenge other communities to create their own "RAD" program, or a space for members of the disability community to gather.

Michelle believes that other communities should and can create a space for her friends like her to go to. "Not only would it be better for you, but it makes life better for everyone when people can go to a program like RAD!" Jeremy and Cody share the same thought about the importance of creating a space that everyone should be able to go to. Gabe believes that having a space like ours is important because everyone belongs. Michelle and Lori also share the importance of creating a space that is accessible, even your bathrooms! Joy would like other communities to create their own "RAD" so that we can be their friends and most importantly, because they have a right to be here.

Here at RAD, we live by "The RAD Way" and amplify the voices of our participants to ensure that they know they have the right to be "loud and proud". Our participants are part of our community, and they deserve to enjoy the benefits of recreation, just like their peers.

As you continue to look for new ways your community and department can make an impact where you are, here at WAWM we encourage and challenge you to find your own "RAD Way" and create your own space for learning, friendships, recreation & inclusion. As Michelle said, "Not only would it be better for you, but it would make life better for everyone". ■

Katie Lindgren

*West Allis- West Milwaukee Recreation & Community Services
Department, Program Manager, National Inclusion Project Inclusive
Recreation Specialist*





Bridges Need Love Too

by Todd Bierman, Former Vilas County Parks and Recreation Supervisor

We all know the amount of work that goes into maintaining snowmobile trails – brushing, signing, storm cleanup, and grooming. But what about our bridges? They are one of the most critical – and costly – components of any trail system, yet they're often overlooked once installed. The reality is simple; bridges require regular care and maintenance, just like any other part of the trail system – if not more.

One of the most basic maintenance tasks that clubs or organizations can do is cleaning the bridge deck before and after each season. Dirt buildup adds unnecessary weight and prevents the decking from drying properly. Over time, this can lead to rot and deterioration of the surface. In some cases, vegetation can even begin growing on the bridge deck along the edges and railings where debris has accumulated.

Brushing around the bridge is equally important. Clearing vegetation allows sunlight and airflow to reach the structure, helping it to dry out after precipitation. As a general rule, maintain at least a 10-foot cleared area around the bridge to promote proper drying conditions. The initial clearing may take some effort, but routine annual maintenance becomes much more manageable. Be sure not to overlook vegetation growing beneath the bridge as well.

While performing this work, take the opportunity to inspect the structure as you go. Check for dirt buildup on the sills – the components that support the bridge on the abutments – as well as debris that may accumulate around piers in the waterway. Removing these materials early helps prevent further accumulation and potential damage.

Why is this level of care so important? Bridge construction and replacement costs have more than doubled in recent years, while available funding has remained the same, or even declined in some cases. At the same time, many of the more than 1700 bridges within the State Trail System are aging and require repair or replacement.



This places an increased strain on limited funding resources.

If your club has the capability, consider using trail maintenance funds for redecking or repairing railings. These projects are typically reimbursable, including club labor. When redecking, using Copper Naphthenate with a UC4C retention level is recommended. This product is available through suppliers like *Wheeler*, or CCA to UC4B retention level can be ordered from retailers such as *Menards*.

You might be wondering how to assess the condition of your bridges. Professional inspection services are available and can provide valuable insight and guidance into structural integrity and needed repairs. These inspections are also reimbursable under trail maintenance programs. For more information on bridge inspections, reach out to your county snowmobile coordinator.



Bridges may be owned by clubs, counties, or state or federal agencies, but maintenance responsibility falls to the local club. Without proper upkeep, other agencies may be forced to restrict or close access – impacting the entire trail system. So, as you prepare for the upcoming season, don't forget that your bridges need love too. A little maintenance now can go a long way in preserving these essential trail connections for years to come. ■



Todd Bierman

Vilas County Parks and Recreation Supervisor, Phelps Snowmobile Club President



Opportunities For All

by Jackie Scott, Wisconsin Partnership for Kids

Recreation isn't just something nice to have or an extra bonus, it is essential for community thriving. At the Wisconsin Partnership for Kids (WPK), we are committed to ensuring every kid in every community of our state can access meaningful opportunities beyond the school day and throughout the summer.

Our Work

The Wisconsin Partnership for Kids is a statewide, nonpartisan advocacy coalition uniting out-of-school time (OST) providers, supporters, and partners to ensure all Wisconsin youth have equitable access to high-quality afterschool and summer programs. Founded by the Wisconsin Out of School Time Alliance, Madison Out of School Time, and the Wisconsin Youth Company, WPK aligns priorities and amplifies a collective voice to advance sustainable funding, access, and quality statewide.

Research shows that access to quality OST programs is good for kids and families, and while 28 states fund OST programs, Wisconsin does not. For every child currently attending an OST program in the state, there are four more who lack access to this opportunity. Kids attending these programs have better outcomes in school and later in life. When surveyed, 85% of WI parents say these programs boost their productivity at work and 87% say they help working parents keep their jobs (Afterschool Alliance).

A key component of our work involves meeting with youth program staff and providers across Wisconsin, gaining valuable insight into both the successes and challenges of delivering high-quality programming. These conversations help identify barriers such as funding constraints, staffing shortages, and gaps in access, while also highlighting innovative practices that can be scaled or replicated.

Join Us

We want to amplify your school-aged (4-18) programming. Connect with us, share your story and help us to get more funding into crucial programming for kids! Your stories are powerful and do make an impact.

To get involved or learn more, reach out to our organizer, Jackie Scott, at jscott@wipartnershipforkids.org. ■

Jackie Scott
Wisconsin Partnership for Kids



Inclusive (ADA)



Mirage (ADA)



Tire Swing



Generation Swing



CONTACT US TODAY FOR MORE INFORMATION!
651-815-4097 | info@northlandrec.com | northlandrec.com





REGIONAL UPDATES

REGION I

As we head into the busy summer season, everyone is gearing up for another great year of programs, events, and community engagement. Swimming lessons, aquatic programs, day camps, youth sports, concerts, and special events are all underway across our communities, and we appreciate the dedication of all park and recreation professionals working to make summer successful and memorable for residents and visitors alike.

We encourage all Region 1 members to stay involved and connected by attending upcoming meetings and networking opportunities. Future regional meetings will continue to provide a chance to share ideas, discuss challenges, celebrate successes, and learn what is happening in neighboring departments.

Please consider sharing updates from your agency, including upcoming events, facility improvements, staff highlights, innovative programs, or community partnerships. The strength of Region 1 comes from collaboration and communication, and we want to continue creating opportunities for everyone to connect and support one another.

Thank you for all you do to enhance parks, recreation, and quality of life throughout our communities. We look forward to seeing everyone this summer and at future Region I gatherings! ■

– John Jimenez, Region I Representative

REGION III

Thank you to CAPA, Pickleball Kingdom, Madison College, and Columbus for hosting our final Spring 2026 meetings in Region III. It was great to see all who attended, hope that you all have a great summer. I look forward to seeing you again at meetings as we start back up again in the fall.

Are you interested in hosting a meeting in 2027? Please reach out by the end of August if you are willing to do so.

Remaining 2026 Region III Meetings

Thursday, October 8th – Middleton – Sponsor: Kompan

Friday, November 13th – Baraboo

Tuesday, December 15th – City of Janesville at the Woodman's Sports and Convention Center ■

– Sam Frederickson, CPRP, Region III Representative

REGION II

Region II had their second meeting of the year on May 21st in Oshkosh in their new parks building. They were amazing hosts and gave a very thorough and detailed tour of the facility. Many questions, discussions and dialogues were had during this time. Overall, it was very informative and a great tour. We also brought in Kristin Grissom who gave an amazing presentation, the topic being “Building High Performing Team (tips and tools for building teams that are accountable, engaged, and that genuinely enjoy working together)”. We will take the summer months off from meetings and meet again in October in Ripon! Have a great Summer everyone! ■

– Ryan Pawlisch, Region II Representative

REGION IV

Region IV was proud to host the 2026 WPRA Summer Camp Workshop on May 30, welcoming more than 360 camp counselors from across Wisconsin for a day of learning, networking, and camp fun!

From games and activities to leadership development and behavior management strategies, the workshop helps prepare camp staff to create safe, engaging, and memorable summer experiences for thousands of campers.

A huge thank you to all the presenters, volunteers, and attendees who helped make this year's workshop such a success. It's always inspiring to see so many passionate camp professionals come together to share ideas and continue growing in their roles.

Looking ahead, our next Region IV meeting will be hosted by Menomonee Falls on September 17 at 10:30 a.m. Members will have the opportunity to tour their new facility and continue sharing ideas and best practices with recreation professionals from across the region.

Also, be sure to save the date for the WPRA Fall Workshop on September 23-24 in New Berlin. We look forward to seeing recreation professionals from across Wisconsin gather for two days of education, networking, and inspiration. ■

– Katie Roth, Region IV Representative



SECTION UPDATES

AQUATIC SECTION

Making Waves Across Wisconsin – Summer Aquatics Update!

Summer is officially in full swing, and the WPRA Aquatic Section has been hard at work supporting aquatic professionals across Wisconsin! From new resources and professional development opportunities to exciting regional events, plenty is happening in the world of aquatics.

Free Water Safety Resources – Ready for You!

Water safety continues to be a major focus of the Aquatic Section, and we're excited to share that **free water safety templates and educational resources are available through the WPRA website!** These ready-to-use materials are designed to help agencies promote water safety, drowning prevention, and community awareness during the busy summer season.

Whether you're looking for tools to share with families, educational messaging, or outreach materials for your facility, these resources are here to help make your job a little easier while helping keep Wisconsin communities safer around water.

Be sure to check out the WPRA website and take advantage of these valuable member resources! <https://www.wpraweb.org/water-safety>.

Aquatic Seminar & Professional Development

This spring, aquatic professionals from around the state gathered for the **Aquatic Seminar**, bringing together passionate leaders to learn, collaborate, and share ideas. From operational strategies to programming and safety discussions, it was another great opportunity to connect with colleagues who understand the unique world of aquatics.

We're also continuing to work on future **Aquatics Technician Workshops**, helping professionals gain hands-on knowledge and practical tools to bring back to their facilities. Stay tuned for additional opportunities to learn and grow together!

Lifeguard Olympics – Let the Games Begin!

Get ready for some friendly competition! **Region II and Region IV are**

making a splash this summer with Lifeguard Olympics!

These events are a fun way to build teamwork, sharpen rescue skills, and celebrate the incredible work lifeguards do every day. From relay-style challenges to rescue scenarios and team-building events, Lifeguard Olympics continue to be an exciting way to engage staff while reinforcing critical safety skills.

We love seeing regions bring energy and creativity to staff engagement; who knows, maybe even more regions will join in next summer!

Safety, Certification & Industry Updates

The Aquatic Section continues to stay engaged on important safety and operational topics impacting facilities across the state. This quarter, ongoing work has included updates and discussions around **lifeguard FAQs for deep-water facilities, labor laws for minors working in aquatics, and swim lesson instructor and assistant regulations.**

As our industry continues to evolve, the Aquatic Section remains committed to helping members stay informed, supported, and prepared with the latest information and best practices.

Want to Get Involved?

The Aquatic Section is always looking for passionate aquatic professionals who want to get involved, share ideas, and help shape the future of aquatics in Wisconsin. Whether serving on a committee, participating in events, or sharing your expertise, there are so many ways to make an impact.

Wishing everyone a safe, successful, and sunshine-filled summer season. Thank you for everything you do to keep Wisconsin communities active, engaged, and safe around water! ■

– Deb Bossingham, CPO
Aquatic Section Representative-At-Large
(Board Position)

PARK SECTION

Summer is Here, Parks People! Summer is officially underway, and park professionals across Wisconsin are in full-season mode, mowing, planting, building, fixing, cleaning, planning, and occasionally wondering where the last six weeks went.

While communities enjoy beautiful parks, busy trails, and great events, we know the work happening behind the scenes to keep our spaces safe, welcoming, functional, and fun. Parks don't happen by accident; they happen because of dedicated park people like you.

The Park Section will continue planning for the future this summer, including the 2027 Annual Conference and our Fall Workshop. This year's workshop, in partnership with the Recreation Section, will focus on ADA compliance and accessibility, with plenty of opportunities to learn from one another and, of course, a park tour. Because Park people love seeing parks almost as much as we love talking about them.

My challenge to you: **Recruit one new WPRA member this year.** Introduce someone to the profession, invite them to an event, encourage them to volunteer, or help them find a place to get involved. Our future is strongest when we bring new people to the table.

I'd also like to welcome **Sara Rigelman** as our newest Park Section board member and State Park/DNR Representative. We're excited to have her perspective and leadership on the team.

Thank you for everything you do. Keep creating places people love, keep sharing your expertise, and keep making Wisconsin's communities better one park at a time. ■

– Kiley Scherer, CPRP, CPO,
Parks Section Secretary/Treasurer

RECREATION SECTION

The Recreation Section normally meets monthly online but was able to meet in person in the Wisconsin Dells in April. It was great to see everyone in person! The Section has been hard at work finding exciting speakers for the Fall Workshop and Conference. Members of the Section were excited to host the Summer Staff Workshop in June and trained over 360 summer staff! The next big push will be getting nominations for Silver Stars, so start thinking of programs that you would like to nominate. ■

– Adrienne Lacy, CPRE,
Recreation Section Secretary/Treasurer



FALL WORKSHOP

September 23 - 24, 2026
New Berlin, WI

Wednesday, September 23, 2026

	Park Track	Recreation Track
8:00 - 8:30 am	Registration <i>(Breakfast not included)</i>	
8:30 - 10:45 am	Parks and Recreation Infrastructure: Accessibility Standards and Strategies John McGovern	Cost Recovery That Works: A Practical Framework for Implementation Kristin Grissom
11:00 am - 12:00 pm		Finding and Stewarding Sponsorship Connections Jade Pekol
12:00 - 1:00 pm	Lunch	
1:00 - 3:00 pm	Parks and Recreation Infrastructure: Accessibility Standards and Strategies <i>(Continued)</i> John McGovern	From Behavior to Belonging: A Manager's Role in Program Culture Erin Cross & Katie Roth
3:15 - 4:30 pm		Tour of the New Berlin Activity & Recreation Center and Hickory Grove Community Center
7:00 pm	Social	

Thursday, September 24, 2026

8:00 - 8:30 am	Registration <i>(Breakfast not included)</i>
8:30 am - 12:30 pm	Park Tour

Register online at wpraweb.org/2026-fall-workshop

THANK YOU TO
OUR SPONSORS!



2026 MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION



The Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association was founded in 1965, and is a state-wide, voluntary, membership association that represents over 1,600 individuals delivering a broad spectrum of services in Wisconsin. Members include Park, Recreation, and Aquatic professionals in local, county, state, school district, private, and agency settings. WPRA also represents public Park and Recreation Boards and Commissions, students, commercial firms, and Emeritus (retired) members.

MISSION

To empower and support WPRA members by fostering professional growth, advocating for the parks and recreation profession, and enhancing the quality of life for communities across Wisconsin through education, networking, and leadership development.

VISION

Fostering a thriving parks and recreation profession that is recognized for its essential role in creating vibrant, healthy, and connected communities throughout Wisconsin, WPRA members lead the way in innovation, collaboration, and professional excellence.

MEMBER BENEFITS

→ Professional Development

The park and recreation industry is constantly changing. Therefore, the importance of professional development is paramount to your agency and yourself. The WPRA offers professional development opportunities to fit your needs. For a full listing of all of the Association's services and educational training opportunities, visit our website at www.wpraweb.org.

→ Annual Conference & Trade Show

WPRA is committed to helping you do business better by providing conferences and events that highlight issues affecting your agency and our industry. These events, which attract approximately 400 attendees and over 100 exhibitors annually, are designed to help you network among other professionals, develop business strategies and grow your agency professionally.

Future Conferences

- February 2 - 5, 2027 - Wisconsin Dells
- January 25 - 28, 2028 - Green Bay
- January 23 - 26, 2029 - Madison
- January 22 - 25, 2030 - La Crosse

MEMBER BENEFITS *continued on next page*

2026 MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

MEMBER BENEFITS *continued from previous page*

→ Leadership Academy

The WPRA Leadership Academy delivers a highly regarded curriculum focusing on leadership and business analysis skills and delivers a comprehensive leadership training experience for selected participants. The Leadership Academy provides the tools you need to further your career in parks and recreation administration.

→ Other Educational Opportunities

WPRA offers a myriad of additional training and informational opportunities to members every year including, but not limited to:

- Fall Workshop
- Region Meetings
- Aquatics Seminar
- Aquatic Technician Workshop
- Playground Workshops
- Park Tours
- Webinars

→ IMPACT Magazine

The Association's quarterly, member only magazine that consists of WPRA news, updates, and articles.

→ PRMonthly

WPRA's monthly electronic newsletter keeps members up to date on pertinent association, state and national park and recreation news, educational offerings, membership updates, etc.

→ Legislative Advocacy

The Association Public Policy Committee and Lobbyist Firm take issues directly to state and federal elected representatives to work for laws and regulations that enhance your ability to provide for your communities.

→ WPRA Website – www.wpraweb.org

The website is your source for information about the Association at your fingertips – 24/7. WPRA's website is changing continually to provide you the information you need when you need it.

WPRA Connect

A forum available to members to connect with other members with recent successes or questions





2026 MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

JOIN TODAY!

Sign up at www.wpraweb.org/membership OR fill out this form and send to the Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association, 6737 W Washington St, Ste 4270, Milwaukee, WI 53214.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Full Name: _____

Job Title: _____

Organization/Agency: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Membership Type	Fees	Amount
☐ Individual Professional	\$150	
☐ Premier Level (<i>up to 15 individual professionals</i>)	\$775	
☐ Premier Level (<i>16 and more individual professionals</i>)	\$1,500	
☐ Commercial	\$475	
☐ Affiliate	\$50	
☐ Student	No Fee	
☐ University	No Fee	
☐ Emeritus/Retired	No Fee	
TOTAL		

PAYMENT INFORMATION

Check payable to: Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association, 6737 W Washington St, Ste 4270, Milwaukee, WI 53214

☐ Please invoice me (WPRA Members only)

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**Thank
you!**

SAVE THE DATE!



Ride the Wave of Innovation
Parks & Recreation in 2027 & Beyond

**February 2-5, 2027
Wisconsin Dells, WI**

MORE UPCOMING ANNUAL CONFERENCE & TRADE SHOWS

January 25-28, 2028
Green Bay

January 23-26, 2029
Madison

January 22-25, 2030
La Crosse



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

AUGUST 2026

Emerging Professionals Lunch & Learn
August 19th

Board of Directors Retreat
August 19th - 20th

SEPTEMBER 2026

Fall Workshop
September 23rd - 24th

Recreation Roundtable: Youth and Adult Sports
September 24th

NRPA Annual Conference
September 29th - October 1st

OCTOBER 2026

Aquatic Roundtable: Lessons Learned /
Mid-Year (End of Season) Reflection
October 7th

Board of Directors Meeting
October 28th

NOVEMBER 2026

Park Roundtable: Splash Pad
Maintenance and Operations
November 4th

DECEMBER 2026

Leadership Academy
December 2nd - 4th

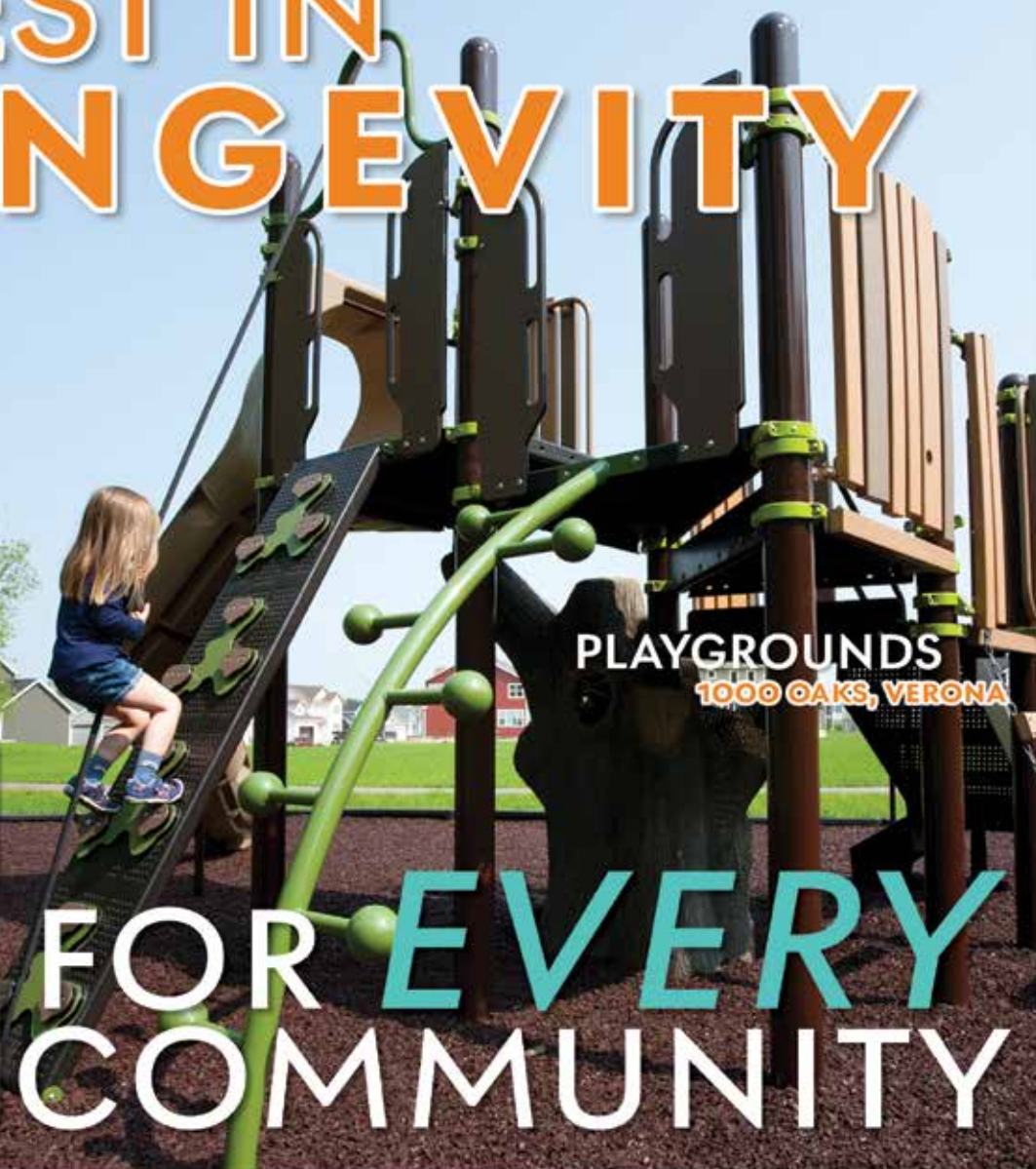
Recreation Roundtable:
Behind the Scenes of Recreation
December 8th

Board of Directors Meeting
December 10th

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