

2026 | REGISTRATION BROCHURE



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CONNECTION IS KEY

UNLOCK YOUR POTENTIAL

2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE & TRADE SHOW
FEBRUARY 3 - 6, 2026 - WISCONSIN DELLS



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#WPRA2026

PRESIDENT'S INVITATION

Dear WPRA Members and Friends,

Get ready—because the 2026 WPRA Annual Conference & Trade Show is going to be one of our best yet! Our theme this year, “Connection is KEY: Unlock Your Potential,” couldn’t be more fitting. Every day of the conference is designed to spark new ideas, open new doors, and help you build the connections that will fuel your success.

From the moment we kick off with an energizing keynote from Neelay Bhatt, the excitement will carry through the week to Annie Frisoli, our exciting endnote speaker. The trade show will be buzzing with innovative partners and products ready to support your work. You’ll have dozens of opportunities to learn and grow through sessions covering leadership, recreation trends, aquatics, equity, and executive strategies—practical tools you can bring back to your community the very next day. And of course, the evenings will bring us together to laugh, share stories, and celebrate with socials you won’t want to miss.

This conference is more than just workshops and speakers—it’s a chance to recharge, reconnect, and have fun while growing as professionals. Whether you’re learning in a breakout session,

discovering new resources on the trade show floor, or swapping ideas over dinner with colleagues, you’ll find that connection really is the key.

A huge thank you to Trista Taylor and the entire Conference Committee for their incredible work planning this year’s event. Their creativity, attention to detail, and dedication to our profession have built an experience that will inspire and energize us all.

So as you dive into the week ahead, I hope you learn something new, meet someone who inspires you, and most importantly—have a great time celebrating the amazing work we do as park and recreation professionals. Here’s to a fantastic conference!

With enthusiasm,
Jamie Polley, WPRA President



JAMIE POLLEY, CPRP
WPRA PRESIDENT

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Get Ready This Year's WPRA Annual Conference Will Be One for the Books!

We’re thrilled to invite you to the 2026 WPRA Annual Conference at the Kalahari Resort & Convention Center, and trust us, you won’t want to miss it. With this year’s theme, “Connection is KEY: Unlock Your Potential,” we’re focusing on the power of community, the value of taking time to recharge, and the importance of refilling your professional and personal cup.

This year’s Conference Committee has built an experience designed to energize, inspire, and connect you like never before. From engaging speakers to purposeful networking events and time to simply be, the week will remind you why you do what you do and why it matters.

Our lineup of speakers is nothing short of exceptional. We kick off with a dynamic keynote by Neelay Bhatt, Founder and CEO of Next Practice Partners. Neelay brings a powerful message about inclusion, innovation, and rediscovering your “why” and how that purpose fuels the work we do in our communities.

Other featured speakers include Jason Peters, returning with a Pre-Conference AI Lab tailored for Parks & Recreation professionals. Chase Ellis, diving into imposter syndrome and the critical role of building meaningful professional relationships. Michael Clark, on why “I Play Too” is a message for us as professionals, not just those we serve. The RecLess Podcast crew, joining us for several sessions plus a live podcast taping onsite! Wisconsin speakers Lyn Hulgan, Guy Smith, Joe Mrozinski, and more. Annie Frisoli will be closing out the conference with an energizing, interactive endnote session designed to help you reflect, recharge, and return ready to keep inspiring your communities.

Make connections that count. Whether it’s your first conference or your fifteenth, we’ve added even more ways to connect: Professional Headshots with Stephanie Shanks on Wednesday (additional fee applies). Conference 101 – Lunch & Learn, coming in December, hosted by committee members Sami Meyer and Amanda Schwichtenberg, will help you navigate sessions, socials, and everything in between. Speed Networking on Wednesday afternoon offers a fun, fast-paced way to meet peers, share career wins, swap advice, and leave with new connections.



TRISTA TAYLOR
WPRA CONFERENCE CHAIR

You can’t pour from an empty cup, so we’ve built in plenty of time to play, laugh, and unwind: Tuesday Night: It’s time for Camp WPRA at JustAGame Fieldhouse! Enjoy basketball, volleyball, pickleball, crafts, or simply good conversation in a relaxed, camp-style atmosphere. Wednesday Night: Join us at the Grateful Shed for live music, food, and a high-energy social that promises fun and maybe a few dance moves. Thursday Night: Celebrate excellence at our Annual Awards Banquet, followed by a relaxed social at the Wisconsin Brew Pub onsite at the Kalahari.

This year is about real connection, personal and professional growth, and a reminder of the incredible impact you make every day. The 2026 WPRA Annual Conference isn’t just a getaway; it’s a game-changer.

We can’t wait to see you there!
Trista Taylor, WPRA Conference Committee Chair



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PARKITECTURE + PLANNING

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2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

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Executive Speakers
Jordan Held
Chad Holpfer
Emma Magadanz

Publicity/Marketing
Sami Meyer
Amanda Schwichtenberg

**Student
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Andrew Rossa

Tradeshow Coordinators
Ben Andrews
Josh Bennett
Seth Westberg

Networking Events
Cory Check
Sarah Zahn

Board Liaison
Joleen Stinson

Pre- Chair
Amanda
Schwichtenberg

GENERAL INFORMATION

The WPRA 2026 Annual Conference & Trade Show will be held at the Kalahari Resort & Convention Center in Wisconsin Dells, WI.

What to Bring

- Casual business attire for educational sessions
- Comfortable casual attire for social events
- Business cards to hand out while networking or for vendor drawings

Check-In & Information Headquarters

The check-in and general information headquarters for all conference activities is Registration Booth 3, located in the Kalahari Resort & Convention Center in Wisconsin Dells.

Hours of Registration

Tuesday10:00 am – 5:00 pm

Wednesday7:30 am – 5:00 pm

Thursday8:00 am – 2:00 pm

Friday9:00 am – 10:00 am

Name Badges

All attendees will receive a name badge when checking in for the conference.

Badges are required for admittance to education sessions, exhibit halls, meals, functions, special events, and socials.

Name badges will contain all your meal tickets and special event admission tickets.

Continuing Education Units (CEUs)

Continuing Education Units (CEUs) are available at no cost to attendees for all educational sessions. Attendance will be tracked at each session. You must have your name badge scanned at each session to obtain CEUs. Up to 1.3 CEUs are available (including Pre-Conference sessions). Educational sessions are subject to change and additional CEUs may be added to the final program schedule, or sessions may be dropped. All educational sessions are .1 CEU unless otherwise indicated.



Cancellation and Refund Policy

Cancellations received in writing by December 31st, 2025, will receive a refund minus a 25% administrative fee. No refunds will be issued after December 31st, 2025. There is a \$35 service charge on ALL returned checks.

All sessions and information provided in this conference registration booklet are tentative and subject to change.

Hotel Information

Kalahari Resort & Convention Center

1305 Kalahari Drive, Wisconsin Dells, WI 53965
877-253-5466

Check in: 4:00 pm • Check out: 11:00 am

\$125 (plus tax) – Single, Double, Triple, Quads – Includes passes to the Indoor Waterpark.

Reservations must be made by calling 877-253-5466. Be sure to mention Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association when making your reservation to receive our special group rate or reserve your room online at wpraweb.org.

For attendees interested in larger rooms, upgrades or suites, additional room styles may be available at discounted pricing. Please inquire with the resort after asking for the WPRA group rate.

A sleeping room block does not guarantee sleeping rooms will be next to each other. Deposit policy for individual reservations: One night (plus tax) at the time the reservation is made.

Cancellation policy for individual reservations: 72 hours, or more, prior to arrival to receive full refund less \$25 processing fee. Less than 72 hours prior to scheduled arrival forfeits entire deposit.

Reservation Deadline is January 2, 2026.

Reservations can be made through the deadline OR until the block fills.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THE 2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Attending conferences is beneficial to you and your community. You can get the most out of your conference experience by having a plan before you arrive. Below are some techniques to get the most out of your conference investment.



- 1. Arrive Ready to Network** – Interacting with others, especially people we don't know, requires stepping outside of your comfort zone, but it's worth it. The contacts, learning, and interaction will boost your confidence and create great connections that you will find helpful in the future. Be prepared to start conversations with strangers or ease into group discussions where you have information or ideas to contribute. If you see someone new, invite them to join in!
- 2. Be Prepared** – Plan Ahead. Use your conference time wisely. Decide in advance what sessions you want to attend so that you can focus on other things once you get to the conference.
- 3. Consider Your Learning Objectives** – Why do you want to attend? What do you hope to learn at the event? Who do you need to connect with? What industry trends do you want to know more about?
- 4. Attend and Leave Your Work at Work** – It is very common to see conference delegates checking emails, making phone calls and even participating in conference calls during breaks while at an event. Let people know you will be away and set up your voicemail and email auto responder to notify people that you are not available. Do whatever you can to keep your work

obligations from stealing your attention from your educational investment.

- 5. Trade Show Time is Valuable** – The exhibit hall is a key part of every conference. The exhibitors can show you new technologies and products that can dramatically enhance your work performance. Use your time at the Trade Show wisely and plan to visit every booth...in addition to meeting new people and learning lots of new things, you could win some great prizes! Remember to thank our exhibitors for attending... their support makes a huge difference to our Annual Conference.
- 6. Follow Up** – Collect business cards from colleagues and commercial partners and write personal notes on the back to help remind you of your discussion. Stay in touch through social media. Send a quick email reminding people of your conversation at the conference.
- 7. Share What You Learn with Your Colleagues** – It will reinforce your own learning, strengthen your team, and make it easier to negotiate attending the event next year. Ask to present the best ideas captured at your next staff meeting.



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TRADE SHOW INFORMATION

The Trade Show features over 110 commercial and educational exhibitors, presenting the latest products, innovations, and services to the park, recreation, and aquatic fields. There will be no educational sessions, scheduled at this time.

1:00 – 5:00 pm..... Trade Show
3:30 – 5:00 pm..... Snacks & Beverages

Don't Forget to pick up your 3-day Conference Favor (Available ONLY on Wednesday at the Trade Show) in Booth #114!

All registered delegates entering the Exhibit Hall must have a conference name badge. Everyone is invited to attend the WPRA Trade Show FREE of charge. If you are inviting additional staff, board and commission members or others to only attend the Trade Show, be sure to obtain

special name badges to allow them to attend from the WPRA Registration Booth or by reaching out to office@wpraweb.org. Many booths will hold promotional drawings...don't forget your business cards!

Update your Professional Headshot!

This year, we will have a photographer onsite during the trade show to take professional headshots! They will be available from 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm on Wednesday, February 4th. Sessions will be 10 minutes in length and will include two images for \$65. You must pre-register for your timeslot. The registration form can be found online at: www.wpraweb.org/annual-conference



PHOTO & VIDEO DISCLOSURE

Photos and video footage are periodically taken of people participating in a WPRA meeting. Please be aware that by registering for a WPRA meeting or participating in an activity or attending an event at a WPRA meeting, you authorize WPRA to use these photos and video footage for promotional purposes in WPRA publications, advertising, marketing materials, brochures, social media (including Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media sites operated by WPRA), and the WPRA website without additional prior notice or permission and without any compensation. All photos and videos are property of WPRA.



2026 KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Opening Speaker: Neelay Bhatt, Founder & CEO, Next Practice Partners

Neelay's career on five continents includes Disney, The Super Bowl, The Olympics, and years of consulting, public speaking and training. He champions "Ideas Worth Spreading" as the curator for TEDxCollegePark, TEDxIndianapolis and TEDxIndianapolisWomen and his service as a trustee for the National Recreation and Park Association sought to ensure "no child was left indoors."

As the Founder & CEO of Next Practice Partners, he combines inclusion and innovation to help agencies prepare for "what's next" through planning, training, and technology solutions. Over his 25- year journey, he has trained and coached Olympic Gold Medalists, Indy Car Race Drivers, Oxford Physicists and start up CEOs on telling their story and discovering their WHY. His Master and Strategic planning work with Atlanta, Broward County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, Indianapolis, Las Vegas, San Diego, among others have recommended facility development and infrastructure improvements totaling over \$2.5 billion, shaping a more equitable and accessible future for all.



As a first-generation immigrant raised by three women and a father who always showed up, he hopes to model the same for his two kids. These life experiences are woven into his keynotes and training sessions on the power of one, leading with your WHY, the art of storytelling and magical customer service, and have inspired executives, professionals, startups, and students from Charlotte to China and from Switzerland to New Zealand.

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2026 KEYNOTE SPEAKERS CONTINUED

Endnote Speaker: Annie Frisoli, Founder & CEO, Creating Community LLC

Annie's journey towards becoming Founder & CEO of Creating Community LLC includes a combination of education, professional certifications, and life experiences. Her adventure has included having the honor of being a 20-year university faculty member in park, recreation and event management, facilitator of staff development for parks and recreation agencies across the U.S., strategic planning consultant for state parks and recreation associations and municipalities, culture design consultant for various park and recreation agencies, and recent author of the book *Leadership by Design* (that includes 28 different park, recreation and event professionals insights and quotes). Even more importantly she is a wife, daughter, sibling, mentor, best friend, and the 1st International Ambassador for the Canadian Hi-5 Run.

In her energizing and interactive endnote, Annie will guide WPRA members through a meaningful reflection on their conference experience and leadership journey. Leadership is unpredictable, challenging, and full of opportunities to make a lasting impact. Participants will define what leading with purpose means to them, identify one way to apply it in their daily leadership, and commit to integrating at least one key insight from the conference into their strategies moving forward. Through dynamic stories and practical tools, Annie will inspire attendees, whether just starting out or well into their journey, to lead boldly, empower their teams, and build a legacy that lasts.




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2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE & TRADE SHOW

Quick Links

[GET INVOLVED IN WPRA FOR 2025!](#)

[AWARD NOMINATIONS DUE OCT. 1ST!](#)

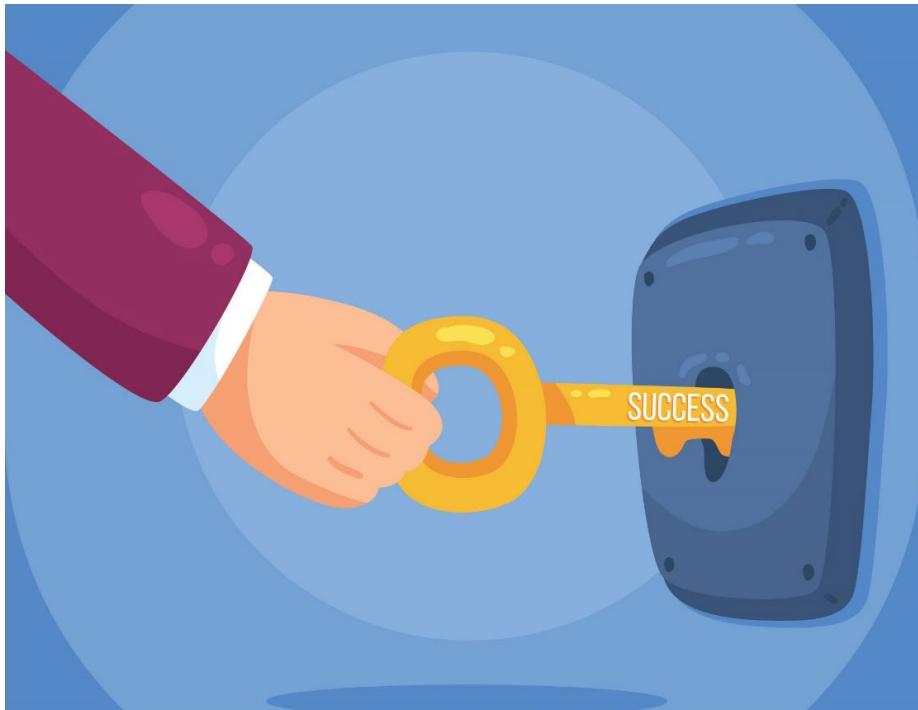
[CAREER CENTER](#)

Upcoming Events

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2 - PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP													
	AQUATICS	AQUATICS	EXECUTIVE	EXECUTIVE	PARKS	PARKS	RECREATION	RECREATION	DEI/Emerging Professionals				
8:30am - 4:30 pm	AFO Certification Course Carrico Aquatic Resources												
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3 - PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS													
8:30am - 4:00 pm	AFO Certification Course Carrico Aquatic Resources						Hands-On AI Lab for Parks & Rec: Build and Promote a Program in One Afternoon Jason Peters & Sam Lunt	Beyond Basics: Leading Successful Disability Inclusion in Recreation Settings Lisa Drennan					
1:00pm - 4:00 pm													
8:00 pm - 12:00 am		Camp WPRA Social: JustAGame Fieldhouse (200 La Crosse St, Wisconsin Dells, WI 53965)											
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4													
8:30 am - 9:30 am	Behind the Scenes Tour of Kalahari Waterpark Kalahari Staff	How to Make Your Community Fall in Love with You Lyn Hulgan		Trends in Play Space Design Melinda Pearson	Smart Trails: Using GIS to Map, Monitor, and Manage Your Trail System Kiley Scherer	Delivering Superhero Level Service: Building a Culture to Wow Patrons! Hank Ebeling		Intro to WPRA and First Time Conference Attendees EP/Conference Committee					
9:45 am - 10:45 am	Keynote Opening Session: Moving from Best Practices to Next Practices with the Power of One - Neelay Bhatt												
11:00 am - 12:00 pm	Aquatics Section Meeting	Perfectly Polished Professional Lyn Hulgan	WPRA's Legislative Agenda and its Impact on YOU(R) Community Cathy McDermott	The Business of Movement: Economic Impacts of Bike and Pedestrian Projects Kim Biedermann	From Bids to Builds: Mastering Wisconsin's Public Bidding Requirements Emma Weman & Raine Gardner	Nature-Based Solutions for Your Recreation Programming Robert Yonkee	Build Your Dream Team! Attract, Develop and Retain A+ Talent Hank Ebeling	Difficult Conversations Neelay Bhatt					
12:00 pm - 1:00 pm	Lunch & WPRA Annual Meeting												
1:00 pm - 5:00 pm	Trade Show												
4:00 - 5:00 pm	EPC Speed Networking Event												
8:00 pm - 12:00 am	"All in for WPRA" Social: The Grateful Shed (1470 Wisconsin Dells Pkwy, Wisconsin Dells, WI 53965)												
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5													
8:30 am - 9:30 am	Hands on Water Session: Practical Swim Lesson Strategies for a Lifetime Courtney Kline & Cory MacKline	Right Fit, Right Facility: Tailoring Aquatic Spaces to your Community Adam Janesz & Carter Arndt	I Lead My Organization, But Why Do I feel Alone? Confronting Imposter Syndrome Chase Ellis	Generating and Leveraging, Buy-in, (Literally) for your Parks Guy Smith & Becky Stoner	What is CPTED Phil Johnson	Preserving Urban Forests: Strategic Management in the Face of Environmental Challenges Emily Helm	Activating Your Goals: An Odyssey to Unstoppable Professional Progress Scott Mason	Silver Star Awards	Keeping Your Fire Lit Without Burning Out Bobbi Nance				
9:45 am - 10:45 am	How to Create a Championship Team in 22 Seconds Wes King	Grants: A Guide to Free Money Trace Hoekstra & Jodi Rhone	Connection Is Key: Why Building Meaningful Connections is a Need in Our Profession Chase Ellis	Beer Gardens in Parks: Public and Private Partnerships Joe Mrozinski	From Theory to Practice: Just What the Heck Is a Reasonable Modification? John McGovern	Rooted in Carbon: Dane County's Climate Action on the Ground and in the Grid Joleen Stinson & Michelle Probst	WWYD - 25 Years of Craziness in the Parks & Rec World Brett Kettnerman		Career Development Bootcamp: How to Stand Out Jay Tryon & Shane Mize				
11:00 am - 12:00 pm	Encouraging Team Creativity for Aquatics Gabriel Castillo	Swim Lesson Strategies for a Lifetime of Water Competency & Confidence Courtney Kline & Cory MacKline	Winning Over Your Elected Officials: Building Relationships for Parks and Recreation Success Tom Venniro	Backing Your Passion with Proof Bobbi Nance	If You Collaborate, You Can Celebrate! How to Implement a Joint Project Between Your Agency and Local School District Blake Theisen, Matt Schuenke & Jeff Mahoney	Managing a Summer Camp: How to Plan, Manage, & Grow Tyler Stahl, Lynette Vyhnanek & Katie Roth	Sponsorship Basics from A-Z Stacey Fontechia	I Play Too Michael Clark & Jason Bookheimer					
12:00 pm - 1:15 pm	Networking Lunch												
1:15 pm - 2:15 pm	Learning to Lead with Language Wes King	Dealing with Media Criticism Gabriel Castillo	Am I an Effective Park and Rec Professional? Tom Venniro	Diving Into Your Data Without Drowning Bobbi Nance	Parks Design Awards	Rethinking Lawns Lauren Umek	Leading with Empathy: Building a Culture of Trust, Safety, and Purpose Michael Clark & Jason Bookheimer	Marketing (Taylor's Version) Deanna Angelini Johann, Cassidy Reinhard & Skylar Greenberg	Those Darn Kids Nowadays: Surviving Generational Diversity Todd Kuckkahn				
2:30 pm - 3:30 pm	The Secret Ingredient: How to Develop Staff Ownership Elaena Noffsinger	Automation Controls and The Future Jessie Krueger	Live from the Dells: Reckless in Session Tom Venniro, Jay Tryon & Shane Mize			Driving Success Through Volunteer Collaboration Anna Reinhardt	Small Staff, Big Strategy Dustin Kleefisch	Teens: Too Old for Camp, Too Young for Staff Joe Lilly, Abby Meachum & Abby Sacks	Beyond Awareness: Mitigating Implicit Bias and Confronting Microaggressions in Parks and Recreation Zach Zuchowicz				
4:30 pm - 6:00 pm	WPRA Foundation Basket Raffle & Social Hour												
6:00 PM	Awards Banquet												
To follow	Post Awards Banquet Social: Brew Pub (at the Kalahari Resort)												
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6													
9:30 am - 10:30 am	Aquatic Code Discussion Mary Ellen Bruesch	Connecting and Leading an Engaged Team Deb Kneser		Creating Pawtive Spaces - Planning, Designing, Building, and Maintaining Successful Dog Parks Kevin Wiesmann, Lael Pascual & Nick Spence		Experience by Design Annie Frisoli		Parks and Pronouns: LGBTQ+ Inclusively Zach Zuchowicz					
10:45 am - 11:45 am	Endnote: The Leadership Adventure: Blazing Trails, Building Legacies - Annie Frisoli												

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UNLOCK YOUR SUCCESS!**

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www.wprafoundation.org



2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE & TRADE SHOW

KALAHARI RESORT & CONVENTION CENTER • WISCONSIN DELLS, WI

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS: MON., FEB. 2 – WED., FEB. 4

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2

PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS

AQUATICS

8:30 am – 4:30 pm

AFO Certification Course (*Additional Registration Fee \$350*)

Carrico Aquatic Resources

The two-day AFO program provides the most comprehensive and up-to-date training for pool operators and includes information on water chemistry, disinfection, mechanical systems, operations, healthy pools and safety.

Banyan

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3

10:00 am – 5:00 pm

Registration

Registration Booth 3

PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS

AQUATICS

8:30 am – 4:00 pm

AFO Certification Course

Carrico Aquatic Resources

Course continued from Monday.

Banyan

RECREATION

1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Hands-On AI Lab for Parks & Rec: Build and Promote a Program in One Afternoon (*Additional Registration Fee \$40*)

Jason Peters & Sam Lunt

Join Jason Peters and Sam Lunt for this three-hour pre-conference workshop, which walks Parks & Recreation professionals step-by-step through the full lifecycle of building a new program with ChatGPT and other AI tools. Participants will learn to map community needs; use pre-built ChatGPT prompts and open-web tools to analyze local demographics, participation trends, and service gaps; set goals and objectives; translate the assessment into clear, measurable program goals that fit departmental missions; audit resources and design the program; inventory facilities, staff, and equipment; draft activity schedules that maximize inclusion and accessibility; create a working budget; generate realistic cost and revenue tables with AI-assisted price research for cost recovery; draft a marketing plan and materials; plan evaluation; and create a post-program survey to capture participant feedback. Attendees will leave with a completed program worksheet, a reusable AI prompt library, and first-draft marketing assets they can refine back at the office.

Guava

DEI/EMERGING PROFESSIONALS

1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Beyond Basics: Leading Successful Disability Inclusion in Recreation Settings (*Additional Registration Fee \$10*)

Lisa Drennan

This half-day interactive workshop is designed for recreation professionals who are ready to take their inclusion practices to the next

level. We'll focus on three of the most common and complex hurdles to successful inclusion: getting your team on board, addressing challenging behaviors, and effectively engaging with families. Walk away with actionable tools, tested strategies, and leadership tips for fostering more inclusive, supportive environments in your programs.

Tamarind

8:00 pm – 12:00 am

Camp WPRA

It's time for Camp WPRA! Enjoy basketball, volleyball, pickleball, crafts, Adult Recess Games or simple good conversation in a relaxed, camp-style atmosphere. Come dressed in your assigned color based on years of service and show your camp spirit:

- 0–5 years: Green
- 6–10 years: Blue
- 11–20 years: Red
- 21–30 years: Purple
- 30+ years: Yellow

JustAGame Fieldhouse

200 La Crosse St, Wisconsin Dells, WI 53965

Sponsor: BCI Burke



Shuttles will start running at the Kalahari lobby at 7:50 pm and the last shuttle will leave JustAGame at 11:55pm.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4

7:30 am – 5:00 pm

Registration

Registration Booth 3

EDUCATION SESSIONS SET 1

AQUATICS

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Behind the Scenes Tour of Kalahari Waterpark

Kalahari Staff

Ever wondered what it takes to keep the waves rolling at Kalahari? Go behind the scenes of one of the nation's largest indoor waterparks to explore its operations, safety systems, and staff coordination. This hands-on tour offers a rare peek into the mechanics and teamwork that make aquatic magic happen every day.

Kalahari Waterpark

EXECUTIVE

8:30 am – 9:30 am

How to Make Your Community Fall in Love with You

Lyn Hulgan

Learn how your Park and Rec team can personally connect with the community through social media and in-person opportunities to be seen as a positive, inclusive, community-based resource and valuable asset, while increasing program attendance and overall community support.

Marula

PARKS

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Trends in Play Space Design

Melinda Pearson

Parks today face the challenge of providing environments that will attract children and families to engage, play and stay. To compete with indoor, more sedentary activities. In this session, we will examine playground trends that create kid magnets, that facilitate multi-generational interaction, or signature playgrounds that tell a community story.

Guava

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS: WED., FEB. 4

PARKS

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Smart Trails: Using GIS to Map, Monitor, and Manage Your Trail System

Kiley Scherer

This comprehensive session will introduce participants to the key methods and tools for GIS mapping and inventorying trails, enabling the creation of a robust, system-wide maintenance program. Attendees will learn how to utilize Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to map trails accurately, assess trail conditions, and document critical assets (such as bridges, signage, and other infrastructure). Emphasis will be placed on leveraging this data to establish a detailed maintenance program that prioritizes resources, schedules work and monitors ongoing trail health.

Tamarind

RECREATION

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Delivering Superhero Level Service: Building a Culture to Wow Patrons!

Hank Ebeling

In today's market you need to not only get patrons, but you need to keep them coming back and back yet again all while spending more and telling others. The easiest way to do this by delivering not just good service but Superhero level service to create major distinction.

Tamboti

DEI/EMERGING PROFESSIONALS

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Intro to WPRA and First Time Conference Attendees

EP/Conference Committee

New to the WPRA Conference or still getting the hang of it? This session is designed just for you! Whether it's your first time attending or you're back for your second or third year, join us for a warm welcome and an engaging introduction to the Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association (WPRA) 2026 Annual Conference. We'll cover what the WPRA Annual Conference is all about, highlight key conference events you won't want to miss, and share tips to help you get the most out of your experience. You'll also have the chance to connect with fellow attendees, ask questions, and start building your professional network in a friendly, inclusive environment. Let's kick off the conference together and make sure your experience is fun, valuable, and full of connections that last beyond the week!

Mangrove

KEYNOTE SESSION

9:45 am – 12:00 pm

Moving from Best Practices to Next Practices with the Power of One

Neelay Bhatt

This session will highlight challenges and changes facing agencies in Wisconsin and nationwide. It will serve as inspiration to remind staff of their "Why" and the impact they have in people's lives. It will help attendees shift their thinking from "we've always done it this way" and "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" to a journey of continuous improvement and intentional inclusion.



Kalahari Ballroom A/B/G/H

EDUCATION SESSIONS SET 2

AQUATICS

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Aquatics Section Meeting

Aquatics Section Board

At the aquatic section meeting and round table, we will discuss general WPRA Aquatic Section business, awards, and introduce incoming board members. After the meeting professionals will have an opportunity to network with one another and discuss topics they are facing to get immediate feedback and comparisons as to what other professionals are doing to combat similar situations.

**this session is not CEU eligible*

Portia

EXECUTIVE

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Perfectly Polished Professional

Lyn Hulgan

Professional tips and polished tricks to create lasting business relationships within your department and throughout your community. Discuss the power of a first impression, multi-generational networking and communications, the power of personal branding, and risk-taking strategies to expand your internal career opportunities and achieve your personal goals.

Marula

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

WPRA's Legislative Agenda and its Impact on YOU(R) Community

Caty McDermott

Whether you are new to the field or a seasoned veteran, advocacy is a key component of our association mission and requires every professional to engage, learn, and stay connected.

Aralia

PARKS

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

The Business of Movement: Economic Impacts of Bike and Pedestrian Projects

Kim Biedermann

Communities are investing in active transportation infrastructure, and we know there is intrinsic value in building out these facilities. But what is the economic value of these facilities; what does the return on investment look like? Join us for an insightful presentation that highlights the findings of a recent economic impact study on active transportation facilities in four counties in Northeast Wisconsin, with additional input from other areas of the state. This session will explore how investments in trails, bike lanes, and walkable communities contribute to local economies, supporting businesses, increasing property values, and improving public health. Attendees will learn about how the study was conducted, gain key insights about the holistic benefits of active transportation, and learn how this data is being used to support local investments in bicycling and walking infrastructure.

Guava

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS: WED., FEB. 4 - THURS., FEB. 5

PARKS

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

From Bids to Builds: Mastering Wisconsin's Public Bidding Requirements

Emma Wenman and Raine Gardner

The presentation will provide an overview of the public bidding requirements for construction projects in Wisconsin. Attendees will gain understanding of the legal and procedural requirements that govern public contracts, ensuring transparency and fairness throughout the process. We will explore what constitutes a public contract, with a focus on the type of projects (capital improvement vs. maintenance). A key to this topic is the financial thresholds that determine the necessity for public bidding. Understanding into the sealed competitive bidding process, the criteria for selecting the lowest responsible bidder, and the importance of financial responsibility, capacity, and competence will be provided. Additionally, scenarios will be explored where public bidding requirements may be waived, such as in emergency situations or projects involving donated materials or labor. Lastly, the impacts of how funding can affect bidding requirements and modify contract documents will be shared.

Tamarind

RECREATION

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Nature-Based Solutions for Your Recreation Programming

Robert Yonkee

Looking to enhance your recreation programming with meaningful nature-based experiences? This session explores the role of conservation in recreation and stages of outdoor stewardship. Attendees will learn how to develop engaging outdoor programs with existing resources and gain practical insights into implementing nature-based programming within their organizations. Using Westmont Park District youth fishing camp as a case study, we will discuss strategies to connect participants with nature, foster environment stewardship, and create impactful outdoor experiences. Whether you're developing new programs or improving existing ones, this session will provide practical steps to integrate conservation principles into your agencies recreation programming.

Aloeswood

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Build Your Dream Team! Attract, Develop and Retain A+ Talent

Hank Ebeling

It is really challenging to find employees let alone ones who can deliver a great experience to your patrons. In this session you will be able to apply a cut and paste process to ensure you can not only find the talent but develop and keep them!

Tamboti

DEI/EMERGING PROFESSIONALS

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Difficult Conversations

Neelay Bhatt

Did you have questions that you felt too uncomfortable to ask? Or had preconceived notions that needed to be revisited? What if there was a safe space for your peers speak their truth where eyes are opened, stereotypes are challenged and perspectives are shaped through honest and, often, uncomfortable conversations. This facilitated dialogue can help gain an understanding of situations faced by 'others' (gender, race, religion, sexual

orientation, nationality physical ability) in the workplace and beyond; learn how stereotypes and implicit bias routinely occur in the workplace and how to overcome them.

Kalahari Ballroom A/B/G/H

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

Lunch & WPRA Annual Meeting

Kalahari Ballroom A/B/G/H

1:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Trade Show

Kilimanjaro Ballroom

4:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Emerging Professionals Speed Networking Event

Mangrove



Shuttles will start running at the Kalahari lobby at 7:50 pm and the last shuttle will leave The Grateful Shed at 11:55pm.

*Grateful Shed, 1470 Wisconsin Dells Pkwy, Wisconsin Dells, WI 53965
Sponsors: Musco Lighting & N.E.W. Playscapes*

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5

8:00 am – 2:00 pm

Registration

Registration Booth 3

EDUCATION SESSIONS SET 3

AQUATICS

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Hands on Water Session: Practical Swim Lesson Strategies for a Lifetime

Courtney Kline & Cory MacKline

This session will bridge the gap between the skills and open water application of them, complimenting it's partner land session "Swim Lesson Strategies for a Lifetime of Water Competency & Confidence." This active, hands on, session will have you laughing your way through brainstorming your programming. Come ready to get in the water or interact poolside, both options will be available. Experience the concepts of buoyancy to transfer to your students. What sinks and what floats and why is this important for aquatics programming? Apply the most basic swim skills and strokes to turbulent, moving water simulations that transfer to lifesaving reactions. Understand how neural pathway, "habit forming," behaviors learned in a controlled setting, will favor empowered problem solving responses instead of fear responses.

Kalahari Waterpark

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS: THURS., FEB. 5

AQUATICS

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Right Fit, Right Facility: Tailoring Aquatic Spaces to your Community

Adam Janesz & Carter Arndt

Every community is unique and your aquatic facilities should be too. This session dives into how to assess community demographics, interests, and feedback to shape aquatic spaces that truly serve local needs. Learn practical tools for engagement, programming, and design that ensure your facility is inclusive, accessible, and well-utilized by all ages and abilities. Walk away with strategies to align your aquatic offerings with what your community values most.

Portia

EXECUTIVE

8:30 am – 9:30 am

I Lead My Organization, But Why Do I feel Alone? Confronting Imposter Syndrome

Chase Ellis

Imagine starting each day confident and valued as a leader, free from self-doubt and second-guessing. For Parks and Recreation Directors, the reality often includes juggling Board demands, navigating politics, and fostering a positive culture, all while feeling isolated and uncertain. This session addresses two key challenges: Director Isolation and Imposter Syndrome. Discover how these issues affect relationships with Boards, staff, and yourself, and gain strategies to set boundaries, build trust, and foster authentic connections. Whether leading a department or stepping into a supervisory role, you'll leave with tools to embrace your strengths, overcome isolation, and manage imposter feelings. Hear real stories from Parks and Recreation leaders who've faced these challenges while building resilient teams. Join us to enhance your confidence, inspire your team, and create the department you envision!

Suite A

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Generating and Leveraging, Buy-in, (Literally) for your Parks

Guy Smith & Becky Stoner

Park systems of all sizes are experiencing increased operational and capital funding needs to sustain quality services for their communities. Milwaukee County Parks has prioritized increasing engagement, investment, and partnership to bring a raised awareness to their needs, resulting in diversified revenue sources and increased buy-in (in all its forms) from the community. In this session, we will share strategies that can be replicated and tailored to a park system of any size. Examples shared will include the creation of the Milwaukee Parks Foundation (2023 WPRA Partnership Award recipient), creation/leveraging of Park People and Friends Groups (including the Mitchell Park Domes) to enhance human/financial capital, establishing/leveraging relationships with philanthropic organizations/businesses, and more. Attendees will leave with strategies that can be implemented across any park system to increase overall buy-in and investment in their community.

Suite H

PARKS

8:30 am – 9:30 am

What is CPTED

Phil Johnson

Designing communities using CPTED principles focus on affecting physical, social and law enforcement directives that seek to affect positive

human behavior as people interact with their environment. The three basic principles used by communities look at ways of managing the following: 1) Natural surveillance, 2) Developing natural access controls and 3) Affecting territorial behavior. Each of these elements may seem intuitive and on the surface they are. However, as a community examines these principles more closely, methods are developed to implement techniques that have proven to be effective in reducing crime.

Guava

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Preserving Urban Forests: Strategic Management in the Face of Environmental Challenges

Emily Helm

Urban forests face growing threats from pests, diseases, invasive species, and shifting environmental conditions, making their future increasingly uncertain. How can county park systems take a proactive role in protecting and sustaining these vital natural resources? This session highlights Waukesha County's approach to urban forestry as part of its broader natural land management strategy. We'll share the inspiring work behind preserving the State-threatened Blue Ash, including the continued efforts needed to support its recovery. We'll also share the county's path to securing a Wisconsin DNR Urban Forestry Grant and how developing a comprehensive forestry plan is helping to guide strategic, long-term tree management. Join us to discover practical solutions for preserving and strengthening urban forests for future generations.

Tamarind

RECREATION

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Activating Your Goals: An Odyssey to Unstoppable Professional Progress

Scott Mason

In today's fast-moving, resource-stretched world, it's easy for parks and recreation professionals to lose connection -- with their goals, their purpose, and sometimes even themselves. But what if the real barriers to growth and momentum weren't just external? What if they were internal myths - stories we've unknowingly absorbed about who we are, what's possible, and how far we're "allowed" to go? And what if a simple process could obliterate them, forever? In this powerful session, attorney, executive coach, and 2x TEDx speaker Scott Mason -- the Myth Slayer -- uses the Greek myth of Odysseus to guide you through a proven process to reclaim your professional goals and unlock your full leadership potential. You'll learn to slay the inner myths that sabotage your future, reconnect goals to your core values, and walk away with a clear, actionable plan to move forward with bold impact. Because in this field, connection is the key. And that journey begins within.

Suite B

8:30 am – 10:45 am

Silver Star Awards

Join us to recognize those who won the 2025 Silver Star Awards in the categories of:

- Youth Programming
- Adult/Older Adult Programming
- Creative Service Delivery/Marketing
- Special Events

Suite G

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS: THURS., FEB. 5

DEI/EMERGING PROFESSIONALS

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Keeping Your Fire Lit Without Burning Out

Bobbi Nance

We all have moments where life gets overwhelming, but over time this continued stress can feel like a permanent state of being where everything is a bit too much, where work that was fun and fueled your passion is suddenly heavy, and you notice that you are less effective and less inspired. But backing away or opting out of opportunities professionally can have negative impacts on your career as well. Learn the commonly missed causes that contribute to burnout at work and within your organization and how to be proactive on the individual level with steps you can take in your personal and work life to help keep the overwhelm at bay while you keep pushing towards your goals.

Mangrove

EDUCATION SESSIONS SET 4

AQUATICS

9:45 am – 10:45 am

How to Create a Championship Team in 22 Seconds

Wes King

This session focuses on the value of gaining “buy-in” from your “star players” while having a universal team goal and passion from all “players”/staff.

Portia

9:45 am – 10:45 am

Grants: A Guide to Free Money

Trace Hoekstra & Jodi Rhone

What do grants and free pets have in common? We'll start there. Then, we'll explore different funding tools and the jobs they do best, and tackle the elements of a basic grant cycle, including the work that comes after the check. Finally, we'll discuss simple strategies to improve proposal quality and increase the chances an application will land in the “yes” pile on the funder's desk.

Wisteria

EXECUTIVE

9:45 am – 10:45 am

Connection Is Key: Why Building Meaningful Connections is a Need in our Profession

Chase Ellis

Being a leader is hard work, and finding connections with other leaders is even more critical as we continue to navigate new and expanding service offerings and role responsibilities. In this session, hear from industry leaders who promote the importance of self-care, relationship building and work-life balance. The pressures that directors face not only from their staff but also from city management, elected officials and community members can be overwhelming. We strive to create environments and opportunities for leaders to develop meaningful connections that help them THRIVE. This session will focus on how to build meaningful connections with peers and not just focus on building one's network. With the help of different online platforms, the term “networking” has turned into a “click to connect,” but lacks the building of a connection that will support and benefit the professional relationship.

Suite A

9:45 am – 10:45 am

Beer Gardens in Parks - Public-Private Partnerships

Joe Mrozinski

With over 150 parks, miles of scenic trails, golf courses, beer gardens, dog parks, beaches, community centers, botanical gardens, nature trails, renal facilities, athletic fields, and hundreds of events, Milwaukee County Parks is the largest park system in Wisconsin. Park systems of all sizes are experiencing increased operational and capital funding needs to sustain quality services for their communities. In 2012, Milwaukee County Parks tapped into the business of open-air beer gardens, seeking additional revenue sources and increased park usage. Over time, the Beer Gardens have become a prime attraction across Milwaukee County Parks, expanding to four permanent Beer Gardens and a Traveling Beer Garden. Attendees will learn strategies to start (and operate) a beer garden in your park system. Budgeting, legal considerations, finding an optimal location, general operations, partnerships, and more will be discussed.

Suite H

PARKS

9:45 am – 10:45 am

From Theory to Practice: Just What the Heck IS a Reasonable Modification?

John McGovern

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires parks and recreation agencies to make reasonable modifications to support participation in recreation programs. In this session, we will discuss the ADA title II reasonable modification mandate, methods, and trends. We will follow that theory discussion with real-life parks and recreation dispute scenarios, where the audience can solve the problem. We will also discuss how the ADA is enforced and what that means for Wisconsin parks and recreation agencies.

Guava

9:45 am – 10:45 am

Rooted in Carbon: Dane County's Climate Action on the Ground and in the Grid

Joleen Stinson & Michelle Probst

Dane County's Climate Action Plan puts the county on track to be carbon neutral across all county operations by 2030. This session will explore the innovative land-based and energy initiatives helping to make that vision a reality. Learn how Dane County is leveraging land management strategies, such as prairie restoration, to capture and store carbon in soils, alongside efforts to monitor long-term changes in soil health and carbon levels. The session will also spotlight solar energy projects that are powering county parks and facilities, as well as complementary efforts like expanding EV charging infrastructure in parks and transitioning the parks fleet to electric trucks and hand tools. Join us for a grounded look at how parks planning, development, and operations are advancing measurable, place-based climate solutions.

Tamarind

RECREATION

9:45 am – 10:45 am

WWYD - 25 Years of Craziness in the Parks & Rec World

Brett Ketterman

Giving real scenarios I have encountered in my 25 years in this profession, I will ask What Would You Do. I will give a brief description of the scenario, audience members through an app or Google form/vote (not sure what I will use), vote on how they would respond. I will then go

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS: THURS., FEB. 5

over what I did, and ask anyone who differed, why they voted that way. Topics include, volunteer coaching situations, Youth Center issues, Pool issues, and Rec Sports issues.

Suite B

DEI/EMERGING PROFESSIONALS

9:45 am – 10:45 am

Career Development Bootcamp: How to Stand Out

Jay Tryon & Shane Mize

Are you seeking to advance your career and enhance your soft skills? This session will cover four career phases and provide actionable strategies for each level to prepare for the next step. Attendees will gain specific ideas to improve themselves, increase their influence, and position for promotion.

Mangrove

EDUCATION SESSIONS SET 5

AQUATICS

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Encouraging Team Creativity for Aquatics

Gabriel Castillo

For Aquatics Professionals, the power of creativity and innovation is like a refreshing wave propelling us forward! Think about the exciting possibilities that emerge when we embrace fresh perspectives. While having top-notch programs and safety protocols in place today is essential, nurturing creative thinking within our teams is the key to unlocking even greater success. With imaginative new activities, engaging programs, and efficient operational methods constantly evolving, we'll not only enhance the experiences of those we serve but also set new standards in the aquatics field, inspiring others to dive into innovation alongside us!

Wisteria

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Swim Lesson Strategies for a Lifetime of Water Competency & Confidence

Courtney Kline & Cory MacKline

Deep dive into your aquatics programming from foundation to results. Rediscover your “why” as we clarify the industry-wide shift from teaching swimming to water competency. Learn fun, easy and proven activities that empower your students for a lifetime in and around water anywhere. As a result you will engage families in water safety and attract staff with a passionate mission. You will even get tips on how to take your program outside of a pool into natural water in your area.

Portia

EXECUTIVE

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Winning Over Your Elected Officials: Building Relationships for Parks and Recreation Success

Tom Venniro

Effective relationships with elected (and appointed) officials are critical to the success of any parks and recreation agency. Many of these individuals control resources and make decisions that directly impact your ability to serve the community. In this session, you'll learn how to connect with elected and appointed leaders, manage up, and develop

strong, consistent communication channels. We'll discuss storytelling techniques that clearly convey the value of your services and programs, helping you advocate for your agency. We'll explore how to make agency officials your strongest allies and ensure they become champions for parks and recreation. By understanding their priorities and concerns, you can build a powerful narrative that aligns with their goals and demonstrates the essential role of parks and recreation in community well-being. Discover how to turn your local officials into enthusiastic supporters, ensuring long-term success for your agency and community.

Suite A

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Backing Your Passion with Proof

Bobbi Nance

In today's information-saturated world, advocacy efforts must break through the noise to truly make an impact. Explore how to effectively combine your passion for your community and services with data to add credibility and drive action. We'll demonstrate how to weave data into your messages in that way that connects with both the logical and emotional side of decision-making, allowing you to highlight both the heart and the facts behind your work. Whether you're preparing for a budget meeting, rallying support for a new project, or demonstrating your agency's value, this session will give you the tools to help make your message stick.

Aralia

PARKS

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

If You Collaborate, You Can Celebrate! How to Implement a Joint Project Between Your Agency and Local School District

Blake Theisen, Matt Schuenke & Jeff Mahoney

In this session we explore examples of how collaboration between a Park and Recreation Department and School District can benefit everyone in the community. The case study of the McFarland Inclusive Playscape will be highlighted.

Suite H

RECREATION

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Managing a Summer Camp: How to Plan, Manage, & Grow

Tyler Stahl, Lynette Vyhnanek, & Katie Roth

In this session you will hear from three different recreation professionals on program planning, staff management, budgeting, marketing, and communication/improvement in camp management.

Suite B

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Sponsorship Basics from A-Z

Stacey Fontechia

In this session, we'll walk through the basics, take a look at the evolution of a media kit, and share creative ways to generate new sponsorship opportunities for your district. We'll also cover how to build stronger community connections and best practices in conducting sponsorship surveys, with the goal of sparking new ideas to bring back to your district!

Suite G

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS: THURS., FEB. 5

DEI/EMERGING PROFESSIONALS

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

I Play Too

Michael Clark & Jason Bookheimer

As recreation professionals, we are given one of the greatest gifts we can ask for from our community and that is their time. When residents choose to come to our parks, participate in a program or attend an event they have made the choice to spend the most valuable resource we have with us. The question this session will answer is "How do you value your community's time?" We will also take a deep dive into how we as professionals spend our time and the strains that life puts on us in our roles. As seen through the eyes of two parks and recreation professionals, we will learn from their journeys and events that led each of them to decide that "I Play Too." Presenters will include ideas and ways to help ensure awareness of personal boundaries.

Mangrove

12:00 pm – 1:15 pm

Networking Lunch

Kilimanjaro Ballroom 3/4/5/6

EDUCATION SESSIONS SET 6

AQUATICS

1:15 pm – 2:15 pm

Learning to Lead with Language

Wes King

In this session the audience will gain a better understanding of the value of the "words" on how to create their own "language."

Portia

1:15 pm – 2:15 pm

Dealing with Media Criticism

Gabriel Castillo

In today's digitally connected world, navigating media criticism is an unavoidable reality for any organization. This workshop provides essential strategies for proactively managing your public image and effectively responding when your organization faces scrutiny. You'll learn how to transform potential crises into opportunities to strengthen your reputation and rebuild public trust.

Wisteria

EXECUTIVE

1:15 pm – 2:15 pm

Am I an Effective Park and Rec Professional?

Tom Venniro

In today's evolving parks and recreation landscape, balancing community needs, organizational goals, and personal development is more important than ever. This session will help professionals reflect on their effectiveness by examining the key areas of community engagement, organizational leadership, and personal growth. Participants will explore practical strategies such as gathering community input, developing staff, and optimizing time management. Through real-life examples, self-assessment tools, and interactive discussions, attendees will leave with actionable techniques to enhance their effectiveness and make a greater impact in their roles.

Suite A

1:15 pm – 2:15 pm

Diving Into Your Data Without Drowning

Bobbi Nance

Curious about what insights your data holds, but unsure where to start? Using real-life, relatable examples, we'll walk through high-impact questions you should ask of your data, areas of focus that will make a big impact on your data efforts, and small tweaks that you can steal to make your results stand out. Along the way, we'll sneak in some data and evaluation best practices expose you to tools, tips and tricks, and help you start asking better questions of your data, even if you find spreadsheets scary. Taught in a fun, approachable way - this promises to inspire you to change your relationship with your data from avoidance to asset!

Aralia

PARKS

1:15 pm – 3:30 pm

Park Design Awards

Join us to recognize those who won the 2025 Park Design Awards in the categories of:

- Under \$250,000
- \$250,000 - \$499,999
- \$500,000 - \$999,999
- \$1,000,000 - \$3,000,000
- Over \$3,000,000

Suite H

1:15 pm – 2:15 pm

Rethinking Lawns

Lauren Umek

While lawns are critical in urban parks, not all are actively used. Conversion of these non-recreational turf lawns to natural areas can have significant environmental benefits. However, this conversion can pose visibility, safety, aesthetic, or management concerns. This session will present a suite of middle ground landscape options that include native plants that are shorter and more lawn-like than a typical tallgrass prairie, but that deliver ecosystem service that are critical to sustainable cities and towns. Partnering with local research institutions, the Chicago Park District has installed multiple test sites of these landscape options and will present preliminary data on installation, maintenance, public perception, educational opportunities, and key ecosystem services including native biodiversity, pollinator support, stormwater infiltration, and soil carbon storage provided by these "native lawn alternatives."

Tamarind

RECREATION

1:15 pm – 2:15 pm

Leading with Empathy: Building a Culture of Trust, Safety, and Purpose

Michael Clark & Jason Bookheimer

Empathy isn't just a nice-to-have for leaders, it's the bedrock of a thriving organizational culture. In this engaging two-hour session, park and recreation professionals will discover how leading with empathy can boost performance, enhance staff retention, and create a psychologically safe workplace where everyone feels appreciated and heard. Through interactive activities, real-life examples, and group discussions, participants will delve into the vital link between empathy, trust, and team dynamics. By the end of the session, attendees will walk away with practical strategies to lead with empathy, nurture a sense of belonging, and build resilient, high-performing teams.

Suite B

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS: THURS., FEB. 5

RECREATION

1:15 pm – 2:15 pm

Marketing (Taylor's Version)

Deanna Angelini Johann, Cassidy Reinhard & Skylar Greenberg
Are you ready for it? In this dynamic session, we'll draw inspiration from Taylor Swift's groundbreaking marketing strategies to elevate your parks and recreation programs. Known for her ability to captivate audiences and build a fiercely loyal fan base, Taylor Swift's approach to marketing is a masterclass in storytelling, engagement, and reinvention. Join us for Marketing (Taylor's Version) and watch your engagement and participation soar to new heights. Don't miss this chance to make your marketing efforts 'Fearless.'

Suite G

DEI/EMERGING PROFESSIONALS

1:15 pm – 2:15 pm

Those Darn Kids Nowadays: Surviving Generational Diversity

Todd Kuckkahn

Retaining and attracting talent is a huge challenge in the workforce. Not enough attention is being paid to generational diversity. While differences do make us better, we need to understand those differences before strategizing solutions. With a record five generations in the workplace, the challenges are only growing. We will look at understanding generational differences, bridging the generational gap, maximizing strengths of each generation, addressing stereotypes, adapting leadership styles, creating a culture of inclusion, and preparing for future generations.

Mangrove

EDUCATION SESSIONS SET 7

AQUATICS

2:30 pm – 3:30 pm

The Secret Ingredient: How to Develop Staff Ownership

Elaena Noffsinger

How do you get your staff to come back year after year? Do you just hope they had a great summer? In this session you will learn why staff ownership is the secret to creating a strong teams and how to create a culture that works hard, picks up shifts, wants to be there, and most of all wants to come back year after year.

Wisteria

2:30 pm – 3:30 pm

Automation Controls and The Future

Jessie Krueger

This session provides an in-depth exploration of the latest technologies shaping modern swimming pool management. Participants will gain insight into the operation, programming, and troubleshooting of controllers, actuators, NexGen salt generation, alkalinity management and robotic vacuums. The course will also give insight into the new Chemlock control utilized for interlocking chemical feed pumps. This session is designed for pool technicians, facility managers, and industry professionals seeking to expand their technical knowledge and stay ahead of advancements in pool automation and water quality management.

Portia

EXECUTIVE

2:30 pm – 3:30 pm

Live from the Dells: RecLess in Session

Tom Vinniro, Jay Tryon & Shane Mize

Join Shane Mize, Jay Tryon, and Tom Vinniro for a special live taping of the RecLess Podcast at the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association conference! Known for their engaging and entertaining takes on parks and recreation, these three career-long friends bring unique perspectives and plenty of laughs. Each episode features a surprise guest, and this live session will spotlight a WPRA member(s) for an improvised and authentic conversation. Expect insights, surprises, and humor as the hosts explore the world of recreation with their signature style. Don't miss this one-of-a-kind experience!

Suite A

PARKS

2:30 pm – 3:30 pm

Driving Success Through Volunteer Collaboration

Anna Reinhardtzen

Learn how to maximize the volunteer partnership opportunities within your organization to drive the successful completion of large-scale projects and initiatives.

Tamarind

RECREATION

2:30 pm – 3:30 pm

Small Staff, Big Strategy

Dustin Kleefisch

In this presentation, the audience will be presented with general information about strategic planning for parks and recreation departments, report templates, and a methodology to accomplish your department goals without hiring an outside contractor. Being small doesn't mean you can't work more efficiently or effectively; it just means we have a little more work and time to get the goal accomplished.

Suite B

2:30 pm – 3:30 pm

Teens: Too Old for Camp, Too Young for Staff

Joe Lilly, Abby Meachum & Abby Sacks

Are you looking to bridge the gap between teenage campers and seasonal staff at your summer camp? Look no further than programs like Counselor in Training (CIT) and Junior Lifeguards! Learn how to initiate, sustain, and leverage these initiatives to cultivate leadership skills and foster personal growth in participating teens. Invest in CIT and Junior Lifeguard programs to enrich the lives of teens, cultivate dedicated staff members, and revitalize your organization's recruitment pipeline. Join us on a journey of growth, empowerment, and endless possibilities with summer teen steppingstone programs!

Suite G

DEI/EMERGING PROFESSIONALS

2:30 pm – 3:30 pm

Beyond Awareness: Mitigating Implicit Bias and Confronting

Microaggressions in Parks and Recreation

Zach Zuchowicz

Unconscious bias is an invisible force that shapes our perceptions, decisions, and interactions, often without our awareness. This session aims to uncover the subtle ways unconscious bias manifests in our daily

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS: FRI., FEB. 6

lives and work environments, particularly within parks and recreation settings. Through interactive discussions, real-life examples, and practical exercises, participants will gain a deeper understanding of unconscious bias and its impact on inclusivity and equity. This session will equip attendees with the knowledge and tools needed to recognize and mitigate unconscious bias, fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment for all.

Mangrove

4:30 pm – 6:00 pm

WPRA Foundation Basket Raffle and Social Hour

Kilimanjaro Ballroom 3/4/5/6

6:00 pm

Awards Banquet

Kilimanjaro Ballroom 3/4/5/6

To Follow: Post Awards Banquet Social

Brew Pub (at the Kalahari Resort)

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6

9:00 am – 10:00 am

Registration

Registration Booth 3

EDUCATION SESSIONS SET 8

AQUATICS

9:30 am – 10:30 am

Aquatic Code Discussion

Mary Ellen Bruesch

Highlights and Updates related to regulations for public pool operation and experiences with the 2023 Pool Code.

Portia

EXECUTIVE

9:30 am – 10:30 am

Connecting and Leading an Engaged Team

Deb Kneser

This interactive workshop will focus on identifying the key elements of communicating with, and leading an engaged, motivated team. We will discuss preferred ways to communicate with each employee due to their work style, along with identifying flexible leadership behaviors to use when needed. We will also discuss strategies for dealing with challenging personality traits some employees may exhibit.

Marula/Aralia

PARKS

9:30 am – 10:30 am

Creating Pawsitive Spaces - Planning, Designing, Building, and Maintaining Successful Dog Parks

Kevin Wiesmann, Lael Pascuel, Nick Spence

This engaging roundtable presentation brings together three experienced professionals to explore the full lifecycle of dog park development

from initial planning and community engagement to design innovation, construction best practices, and long-term maintenance strategies. Each presenter will offer insights from their area of expertise, sharing lessons learned, case studies, and practical tools for building safe, accessible, and sustainable off-leash areas. Attendees will have the opportunity to participate in collaborative discussion, ask questions, and exchange ideas for creating dog parks that serve both canine and human communities effectively.

Tamarind

RECREATION

9:30 am – 10:30 am

Experience by Design

Annie Frisoli

This interactive, power punched session will provide practical strategies to assist you in leading collaborative meetings and/or planning sessions with your team or community to assist in the design of programs and events. Participants will examine the stages of an experience and the importance of the participant journey as it applies to their event and/or program design.

Kilimanjaro Ballroom 3/4/5/6

DEI/EMERGING PROFESSIONALS

9:30 am – 10:30 am

Parks and Pronouns: LGBTQ+ Inclusively

Zach Zuchowicz

In this interactive session, participants will learn about the unique challenges LGBTQ+ individuals can experience when engaging in recreation programming and park facilities. Through the use of situational scenarios, participants will be able to practice different tools and strategies to best support LGBTQ+ participants, community members, and staff. Additional resources will be shared to support continued inclusive sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE) practices.

Mangrove

KEYNOTE SESSION

10:45 am – 11:45 am

The Leadership Adventure: Blazing Trails, Building Legacies

Annie Frisoli

Leadership is an adventure, unpredictable, challenging, and filled with opportunities to leave a lasting impact. In this energizing, interactive endnote, WPRA members will reflect on their time at conference, along with where they are in their leadership journey and be reminded how they inspire others by leading with purpose, empowering their teams, and influencing future generations. Through dynamic stories and practical insights, this session tasks conference attendees one last time to embrace growth and commit to building a legacy that lasts. Whether an individual is just starting to blaze new trails or is reaching the summit, this endnote will remind attendees at all levels to continue to lead boldly.

Kilimanjaro Ballroom 3/4/5/6





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REGISTRATION FORM

HOW TO REGISTER

Complete and return enrollment form via:

- **Mail** – WPRA, 6737 W Washington St, Ste 4210, Milwaukee, WI 53214
- **Online** – www.wpraweb.org

Name _____

First/Last (Name to appear on name badge)

Job Title _____

Agency: _____

City of _____
 School District _____
 Village of _____
 Other _____
 (Department/University/Business)

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Business Phone _____

Cell Phone _____

E-mail _____

Do you have any special dietary needs? _____

ADA Compliance: Please complete if you require special accessibility or accommodations. My requirements are:

Are you a first time attendee? Yes No

Will you be attending the Speed Networking Event?

Yes No

Will you be attending the Awards Banquet on Thursday night?

Yes No

Children and spouses will not be allowed to attend sessions. No children will be allowed to attend regular conference socials, meals or be allowed in the exhibit hall.

Check payable to: Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association

Please invoice me (WPRA Members only)

Cancellations received in writing by December 31, will receive a refund minus a 25% administrative fee. NO REFUNDS will be issued after December 31, 2025.

WPRA MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Join WPRA today online at wpraweb.org or contact the WPRA Office for more information at 414-423-1210 or office@wpraweb.org.

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Professional	\$150	<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	\$475
<input type="checkbox"/> Premier Level	\$775 (up to 15 individual professionals)	<input type="checkbox"/> Affiliate	\$50
<input type="checkbox"/> Premier Level	\$1,500 (16 and more individual professionals)	<input type="checkbox"/> Student	No Fee
		<input type="checkbox"/> University	No Fee
		<input type="checkbox"/> Emeritus/Retired	No Fee

3-DAY PACKAGE

Includes sessions, socials, Wednesday & Thursday lunch, awards banquet, 3-Day Conference favor. CEU's if submitted.

REGISTRATION RATES & TIMELINE			
Early Rate By 1/8/26		Regular Rate 1/9/26 - 1/25/26	Late Rate After 1/25/26
PROFESSIONAL	MEMBER	NON-MEMBER	
<input type="checkbox"/> \$300	<input type="checkbox"/> \$415	<input type="checkbox"/> +\$25	<input type="checkbox"/> +\$50
<input type="checkbox"/> \$100	<input type="checkbox"/> \$140	No Additional Fee	No Additional Fee

1-DAY PACKAGE

Includes sessions, meals and social.

REGISTRATION RATES & TIMELINE			
Early Rate By 1/8/26		Regular Rate 1/9/26 - 1/25/26	Late Rate After 1/25/26
PROFESSIONAL	MEMBER	NON-MEMBER	
Wednesday	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150	<input type="checkbox"/> \$200	<input type="checkbox"/> +\$25
	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150	<input type="checkbox"/> \$200	<input type="checkbox"/> +\$50
	<input type="checkbox"/> \$60	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75	<input type="checkbox"/> +\$25
Thursday	<input type="checkbox"/> \$60	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75	<input type="checkbox"/> +\$50
	<input type="checkbox"/> \$60	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75	No Additional Fee
	<input type="checkbox"/> \$30	<input type="checkbox"/> \$40	No Additional Fee
Friday	<input type="checkbox"/> \$60	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75	No Additional Fee
	<input type="checkbox"/> \$60	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75	No Additional Fee
	<input type="checkbox"/> \$30	<input type="checkbox"/> \$40	No Additional Fee

EMERITUS PACKAGE

Emeritus members receive complimentary registration on **THURSDAY**, which includes one lunch and one Awards Banquet ticket.

Check if you will be attending on Thursday.

SPOUSE PACKAGE

Includes meals, exhibit hall, and social – no sessions.

Spouse Name _____

REGISTRATION RATES & TIMELINE	
Regular Rate: By 1/8/26	Late Rate After 1/8/26
<input type="checkbox"/> \$150	<input type="checkbox"/> +\$25
<input type="checkbox"/> \$100	<input type="checkbox"/> +\$25
<input type="checkbox"/> \$100	<input type="checkbox"/> +\$25

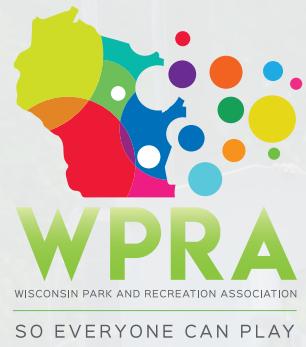
PRE-CON EVENTS

Pre-Conference Sessions have limited space and will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

Aquatics: AFO Certification Course.....	<input type="checkbox"/> \$350
Recreation: Hands-On AI Lab for Parks & Rec: Build and Promote a Program in One Afternoon.....	<input type="checkbox"/> \$40
DEI: Beyond Basics: Leading Successful Disability Inclusion in Recreation Settings	<input type="checkbox"/> \$10

CONFERENCE TOTAL

► \$



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Full Name: _____

Job Title: _____

Organization/Agency: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

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<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Professional	\$150	
<input type="checkbox"/> Premier Level (<i>up to 15 individual professionals</i>)	\$775	
<input type="checkbox"/> Premier Level (<i>16 and more individual professionals</i>)	\$1,500	
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	\$475	
<input type="checkbox"/> Affiliate	\$50	
<input type="checkbox"/> Student	No Fee	
<input type="checkbox"/> University	No Fee	
<input type="checkbox"/> Emeritus/Retired	No Fee	
TOTAL		

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