



Impacting the Quality of Life in Our Community

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

Introduction

The mission of the Park District of Oak Park states “*In partnership with the community, we enrich lives by providing meaningful experiences through parks, programs and facilities.*”

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

Statistics

The Park District owns and operates 24 facilities that occupy 84 acres of parkland within the Village including:

- 7 neighborhood recreation centers
- 18 parks including the unique urban forest Austin Gardens and our village green Scoville Park
- Dole Center – Owned by the Village of Oak Park, this historic building houses Park District fitness and martial arts classes and many cultural arts programs and is also home to the Dole Library, a branch of the Oak Park Public Library system.
- 3 historic properties (Cheney Mansion, Pleasant Home, and the Oak Park Conservatory)
- 2 outdoor swimming pools (Rehm and Ridgeland Common)
- 1 indoor, year-round ice rink (Paul Hruby Ice Arena at Ridgeland Common)
- 1 Gymnastics and Recreation Center
- 1 Environmental Education Center in Austin Gardens
- 6 special facilities including Stevenson Park Active Sport Area featuring basketball courts and skate park, Longfellow Park basketball courts, Barrie Park sports court, Rehm Trains, The Cubhouse preschool play area, and the Hedges Administrative Center.

Pleasant Home is designated a National Historic Landmark. Scoville Park and the Oak Park Conservatory are named by the National Park Service to the National Register of Historic Places. Cheney Mansion and the Oak Park Conservatory were granted Oak Park Historic Landmark status

In 2018, the Park District served 36,746 participants in 3,000+ recreation programs which meet the recreational needs of infants up to seniors throughout Oak Park. We sold 16,467 passes for the outdoor pools, skating rink, Preschool Playtime, Dog Parks, Fitness classes and The Clubhouse. We also offered a number of free activities such as summer concerts and movies, open houses at the Conservatory and Cheney Mansion, Walk with a Doc and Astronomy Nights and the ever-popular Rehm Park trains. Our Conservatory staff planted nearly 90 flower beds in the parks and at various school locations. The results of a 2014 attitude and interest survey showed 94% of survey respondents visited a Park District of Oak Park park in the past year which was 14% higher than the Illinois average. That same survey showed that 91% of responding households rated the quality of programs as good or excellent with 90% of the households rating the quality of parks as good or excellent.

In 1976, the Park District of Oak Park along with the River Forest Park District founded the West Suburban Special Recreation Association which provides year round recreation programs for individuals of all ages with disabilities. WSSRA is now a partnership of 13 communities.

Value to our Community

Individual Benefits

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

For those residents who cannot afford Park District programs or services, we offer a scholarship program funded with monies received from the Youth Services division of the Oak Park and River Forest Township (\$8,000 in 2018) and through the use of Park District non-resident fees. Total scholarship funds awarded to participants in 2018 totaled \$67,057 65,316.17 compared to 65,316.17 in 2017.

Scholarship funds were used for swim passes, recreation center programs, day camps, tennis lessons, gymnastics classes, family trips and more. Park District patrons have an opportunity to contribute to the scholarship fund through the Park District's registration form. Scholarship eligibility is aligned with the free and reduced lunch programs through School District 97.

For teens we offer outlets for adventure with trips to skate parks, climbing walls and campgrounds. The Stevenson Park Active Sport Area, a joint effort of the Village of Oak Park

and the Park District, opened in fall 2004 featuring outdoor basketball courts and a skate park area. This facility, well-received by area youth, is certainly a creative use of a 2.5 million gallon water reservoir. The Park District helps our young adults become tomorrow's leaders with junior counselor and junior lifeguard programs which prepare them to enter the workforce. We are the number one employer of youth in our community providing ample opportunities for personal growth as teens learn to take responsibility and develop important decision-making and problem-solving skills.

Adult program participants can get in shape and stay in shape, explore local and distant destinations, and learn new hobbies such as gardening, ceramics, cooking and yoga. With our fast-paced society, the Park District provides individuals with a valuable balance between work and play and an opportunity to connect with nature.

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

Family & Community Benefits

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

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

Economic Benefits

Economically the Park District impacts our community through increased home values. We bring in tourism dollars by operating regional facilities such as the Oak Park Conservatory, Cheney Mansion, Ridgeland Common Recreation Complex and Pleasant Home. Over 45,000 guests visited the Oak Park Conservatory in 2018 from around the world. Scoville Park and Austin Gardens also increase tourism in Oak Park by hosting a variety of special events. For the past 42 years, the Park District has been host to the Frank Lloyd Wright Races which in recent years brings 2,100 registered walkers and runners as well as their families and friends to Oak Park from around the Chicagoland area. And as mentioned earlier, we provide jobs for youth as well as for people of all ages and abilities. Park and Recreation Agencies build Illinois' small businesses. 73 cents of every dollar spent by Illinois Park and Recreation Agencies stays in Illinois.

Environmental Benefits

Let's not forget the environmental impact of parks and recreation. We preserve open space and in doing so, help to keep our air and water clean. Park visitors can enjoy a walk through passive

and natural areas in Austin Gardens, Lindberg, Taylor, Euclid Square, or Maple Parks. The Oak Park Conservatory allows visitors to enjoy a variety of plant experiences all year long. In 2016 the Park District opened the Austin Gardens Environmental Education Center which is home a nature preschool, nature preschool camps, and numerous programs and nature workshops for all ages. Certified as a Platinum LEED facility, the AGEEC has been recognized by the Village of Oak Park and the Illinois Association of Park Districts for the many green amenities it features including a geothermal system, solar panels, green roof, storm water harvesting, rain gardens and an energy efficient building envelope and mechanical systems. The Illinois chapter of the American Institute of Architects placed the AGEEC on the list of Illinois' 200 Great Places in 2018.

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

Fostering Partnerships

In order to maximize recreational opportunities while running an efficient operation, the Park District fosters valuable partnership agreements with local organizations including the Friends of the Oak Park Conservatory, Pleasant Home Foundation, Baseball Associations, Oak Park Dogs, West Suburban Special Recreation Association, Festival Theater, Dominican University, Fenwick High School and, of course, other governmental entities including the Village of Oak Park, Oak Park Public Library, Oak Park Township and School Districts 97 and 200. A cooperative effort between the Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation and the Park District resulted in the receipt of a \$220,000 Access to Recreation Grant from the Kellogg Foundation in fall 2007. A portion of these monies was used for accessibility improvements at Longfellow Park and to initiate an endowment for future community accessibility projects. The Good Heart Work Smart Foundation partnered with the Park District in 2009 to install an elevator at Longfellow Center. The renovated park and center were officially re-opened on Saturday, May 30, 2009. All-weather fields were installed at Irving Elementary School in 2014 in partnership with the Irving School PTO, District 97, AYSO and Chicago Edge Soccer. All-weather fields at Julian and Brooks Middle Schools, installed in 2015, were made possible through the cooperative efforts of District 97, Good Heart Work Smart Foundation, AYSO, Chicago Edge and Oak Park Youth Baseball/Softball.

Historic Property Transfer

An historic moment for the Park District took place on April 6, 2006 when the Village of Oak Park transferred the ownership of five recreation centers to the Park District. Due to water reservoirs at Barrie and Stevenson Centers, the Park District has 99 leases for these properties. Previously these facilities were owned by the Village but operated by the Park District.

Planning for the Future

In April 2005 the citizens of Oak Park approved a Park District referendum to address a serious deferred parks maintenance issue and to fund the newly developed Capital Improvement Plan which is updated and implemented annually. To keep a pulse on the community, an attitude and interest survey is conducted every 5 years. A Strategic Plan was developed in 2012, updated in 2015 and once again in 2018 setting specific goals for the agency for the next three years.

In 2014 the Park District worked with consultants to develop a Comprehensive Master Plan, which included a community attitude and interest survey. This plan sets the course for our agency's future for the next 10 years.

Since the referendum passed, site master plans have been completed and significant improvements have been made to all District parks and facilities. New facilities have also been an important focus of the District. A "Dogs in Oak Park" Plan was developed in 2006 and since then, dog parks have been established at Ridgeland Common and Maple Parks. The Rubinstein Garden Project at the Oak Park Conservatory was completed in early summer 2011. After years of planning, construction of the Gymnastics and Recreation Center was completed and the doors were opened on October 5, 2013. An Existing Conditions Study was completed for Ridgeland Common in 2007 and the Park District completed the Ridgeland Common master planning process in July 2008. After continued planning and a 15-month construction project, the new Ridgeland Common Recreation Complex opened on June 14, 2014.

In 2013 the Park District began the process of revisiting and updating all site plans. Park improvement projects are ongoing with the renovation of Lindberg Park completed in 2014 as well as ball field improvements at Carroll, Fox and Longfellow. The Park District purchased the property at 947 South Ridgeland Avenue in July 2014 to be used as outdoor storage for the buildings & grounds department. The 218 Madison facility, which houses buildings & grounds operations and administrative offices, reopened in April 2015 after a 6-month renovation to expand B & G into the former gymnastics center space and update offices. In partnership with the Friends of the Oak Park Conservatory, the land to the east of the Oak Park Conservatory was transformed into the Elsie Jacobsen Discovery Garden which was dedicated on September 12, 2015 with help from members of the Jacobsen Family. Construction of the Austin Gardens Environmental Education Center was completed and the doors were opened in June 2016. Major renovations to Maple Park were completed in December 2016 and to Euclid Square Park in August 2017.

The Park District has actively pursued alternative revenue sources to fund ongoing park improvement projects including Open Space Land Acquisition and Development Grants (OSLAD) through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Since 2006 the Park District has secured over \$5 million dollars in IDNR grants including an award of \$400,000 in February 2019 for future renovation of Stevenson Park. Pleasant Home was notified in January 2013 of an \$80,455 grant award for the much needed renovation of the summer dining porch which was completed in summer 2014. An IDNR Museum Grant for \$146,000 was awarded for construction of the Elsie Jacobsen Discovery Garden.

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