

A photograph of a park with a winding path, trees, and a person walking. The path is light-colored and curves through a green lawn. A large tree is on the left, and a person is walking on the path. The background is filled with more trees and a clear sky.

1 Parks & Recreation

THE BENEFITS OF PARKS AND RECREATION

"The Benefits are Endless." As the motto of the National Recreation and Park Association, this statement is meant to exemplify that parks and recreation provides benefits that transcend many aspects of our lives. When issues such as health, property values, environmental quality and alternative modes of transportation are discussed, these benefits are evident. Studies and surveys by local organizations throughout the country, as well as national organizations like the National Association of Realtors and the National Association of Home Builders, have illustrated the importance of parks, trails and open space to homebuyers and businesses alike. Residential properties in close proximity to public open space have been shown to have significantly greater value. Parks and open space near commercial and industrial properties are often considered a free employee benefit. Providing opportunities that allow people to walk or bike rather than use their cars promotes a cleaner environment. Park and recreation venues and programs also promote healthy lifestyles, providing opportunities to fight against obesity, heart disease and a variety of other health concerns. As responses to the community survey question on this topic show, Addison residents understand these benefits and believe that the Addison Park District provides them well.

PARK & RECREATION TRENDS

As the Addison Park District prioritizes its future goals and determines the direction of its programs and services, it is important to look at some of the park and recreation trends that may play a role in Addison. These regional and national trends can affect future program and facility development. Some of the current trends, and what they mean to APD, are described below.

AGING POPULATION

More than 75 million Americans turned 60 in 2006. By 2030 it is expected that 20% of the U.S. population will be considered a senior. Though most park and recreation agencies have significant programs for their senior constituency, and many provide dedicated venues for these activities, this surge in the senior population will not be met with current offerings. Studies also suggest that the aging baby boomer generation may not be as interested in the types of activities and programs that are typically offered today. Many more of this generation expects to be cycling, golfing, running and participating in active sports well into their senior years.

Activities that stimulate the mind are equally as important as physical activities. Cognitive health refers to maintaining and improving mental skills such as learning, memory, decision-making and planning. Studies have proven that fit seniors live longer, remain in their homes longer and participate more fully in community life.



Never has it been more important for park and recreation agencies to enhance programming for this growing population. Partnerships with hospitals, senior centers and community organizations to promote organized health, recreation, fitness programs, therapeutic recreation and mental fitness will allow the senior population to maintain and improve their quality of life.

The Addison Park District offers numerous programs for active adults. But as that population continues to grow and remain active, additional program types will be required that offer greater active, cognitive and motor components. APD will need to work closely with area healthcare agencies to develop and promote new programs.

TECHNOLOGY

Park and recreation agencies have jumped on the technology bandwagon in a big way in the last couple of years; and in a variety of ways. Well beyond doing e-mail blasts or simply having a website, Facebook and Twitter are now common venues for interaction between park and recreation agencies and their constituents. These venues can be used for a variety of things, from helping to fill programs in danger of cancellation to informing athletic teams of weather delays. They can also be used to develop a more spontaneous teen program offering or to encourage volunteerism. They get people involved. And offering WiFi provides a service to the community that can bring more people into recreation facilities.

Other types of technological advances being embraced by the park and recreation industry are operations related. New irrigation technology reduces water loss. Artificial turf technologies eliminate the need for irrigation. 'Live' on-line program registration makes the process easier for both staff and program users. New work-order tracking systems can make maintenance scheduling and implementation more efficient for crews and eliminate waste.

The Addison Park District utilizes both Facebook and Twitter, and is updating numerous operational services and programs to advance the District in the community.



SHADE



Providing greater amounts of shade in parks is a trend that is a direct result of the climb in the number of cases of skin carcinoma and melanoma that come from over-exposure to the harmful UV rays of the sun. Trees, shelters, canopies, awnings and other means of providing shade are being used in parks throughout the country as escapes from direct sunlight. Shade is especially important over, or near, amenities that are used for long periods of time. Playgrounds, benches, spectator seating, team benches and other similar uses where people are exposed for long periods of time are being shaded. In other situations, like tennis or basketball courts, shaded areas are provided adjacent to the courts to provide a place to escape for short breaks. Adding more shade in parks is a healthy trend for the 21st century.

While the Addison Park District has been planting trees in many parks, this is an initiative that the District needs to develop further as most playgrounds, benches and other use areas are in full sun.



STEWARDSHIP OF THE LAND

Preservation and stewardship of environmentally sensitive areas are falling more and more to park and recreation agencies. All public lands, including parks, conservation areas, open space, trails and greenways, lakes, streams and wetlands may offer significant fish and wildlife habitat that require a philosophy of protection and sustainability. Often times park and recreation agencies possessing unique natural resources must take extraordinary measures to protect fragile resource areas for their community, especially in communities where limited natural areas exist. This includes the need to limit or restrict access to some areas where particularly sensitive ecological systems are at work. But it also means providing access to natural areas where educational opportunities exist.

Equally important and related to this stewardship role is the need to provide programs to the public that promote a greater understanding of our natural systems as well as an awareness of global environmental issues. Environmental programming is one of the fastest growing types of programs offered by park and recreation agencies. Whether classroom based activities or interpretive trails, environmental programs can provide a way to secure support for the philosophical approaches needed for stewardship.

Lake Manor Park and Army Trail Nature Preserve provide excellent venues for environmental programs, while collaborative efforts with the Forest Preserve District will provide expanded opportunities for the Addison Park District to promote stewardship.

STAYCATIONING

The recent economic downturn caused most people to reassess their budgets, including the way in which they recreate. Instead of travelling to far off lands or even to the regional major attractions, many people, especially families, have decided to spend their vacation time at home. The 'staycation' includes looking at local venues, programs and events as a way to enjoy the community in which people live. Neighborhood or community festivals offer a way for people to enjoy culturally diverse experiences. People participating in no-cost activities like cycling or hiking may be interested in programs or events that revolve around these modes. Staycationing provides park and recreation agencies with an opportunity to reach out to more residents of their community and to promote the local economy.

The parks, festivals and programs offered by the Addison Park District are important components of the staycation that can be successfully marketed to the local and surrounding communities.

FAMILY HEALTH INTERESTS

Families are engaging in life-long fitness and nutrition programs that are geared toward maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Healthy living is fundamental in improving one's physical and emotional health and social well being. Parks and recreation services play a vital role in encouraging people to develop and maintain healthy lifestyles by providing the programs, the facilities and the protected environment that allow people to be physically and socially active.

A study by the National Recreation and Park Association found that, in terms of overall health, local park and recreation users reported fewer visits to a physician for purposes other than check-ups than did non-park users, even when controlling for the effects of age, income, education level, health status and other possible influences. Active people have longer life spans and are at less risk of developing diseases. Physical activity has also been shown to help people become more emotionally and mentally fit.

Park and recreation agencies provide programs that families can enjoy together. These shared activities reduce family stress and allow families to share time together in constructive and healthy ways that are conducive to strengthening family bonds. In this way, the agencies foster the positive emotional and social impacts that create strong families.

Many Addison families come from ancestral heritages that promote greater family cohesiveness than may be typical, meaning that more family-based activities and programs may be very well received here.

