

# OPRA connection

A Publication of Ohio Parks and Recreation Association • Fall 2021

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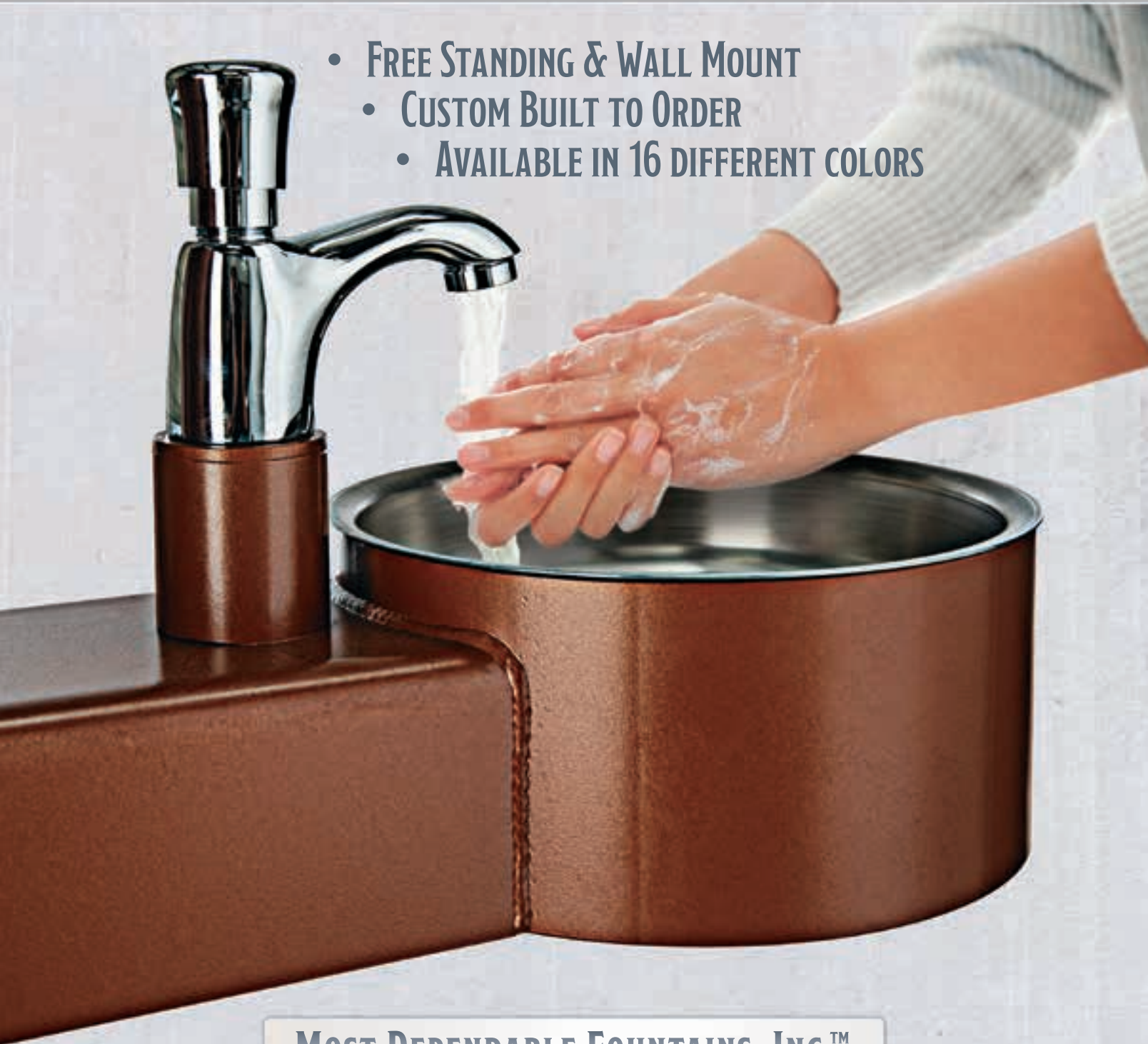
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**OPRA Connection, News, Events and Programs of**

**Ohio Parks and Recreation Association**

*Educate. Advocate. Collaborate.*



Phone: 614-895-2222 • 1069-A West Main Street • Westerville, OH 43081 • www.opraonline.org

**Mission Statement:**

OPRA will provide the leadership to advance the positive impact and value for the profession in Ohio, through a committed Board of Directors and staff, that will promote the values of being a park and recreation professional, implement effective governance of the Association, create a fiscally stable organization, while supporting effective legislation and communications for our members that will enhance the quality of life in the communities we represent.

**Vision Statement:**

OPRA is dedicated to position parks and recreation, its professionals and its citizen advocates for success through effective networking, professional development, communications and advocacy.

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**Cover Photo:**

Erie MetroParks

**Next Issue:**

The next issue of the magazine will be published in February.

**Job Postings**

Please visit the OPRA website, [www.opraonline.org](http://www.opraonline.org), for job advertisements. If you have a position to post, please use the online form or call the OPRA office at 614-895-2222.

**LinkedIn**

If you have questions or would like to network with other OPRA members, please join the OPRA Group on LinkedIn.

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by Amy Bowman-Moore

# Welcome to Conference – Together Again!

Hello, I am Amy Bowman-Moore, executive director of Erie MetroParks. But also, I am your president of the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association for the 2021-2022 year. I am so honored to have this role, at this time in our history. For the past months, life has been, and is, a challenge. Changing constantly, sometimes daily.

While we start to have meetings face to face, or mask to mask, one thing has stood out to me — the emotions people are carrying with them. Delight, to see others they have not seen for more than a year. Caution, being in a room full of people. (That has not happened in a while.) Exuberance, because you are with people who know what you have endured, having endured it themselves. And yes, there are those who carry deep grief from this time, as they have suffered great loss. That is why the 2022 OPRA Conference, as great as OPRA conferences always are, will have a special meaning this year.

I cannot wait to be able to say, “Welcome to the 2022 OPRA Conference.” Once again, Woody, his staff, and the Conference Committee have worked hard to present a great experience for you. There will be

73 education sessions to choose from, two keynote speaker addresses, an awards banquet, and a large exhibit hall for you to browse. And, of course, some networking events at the end of the long day.

This Conference is one that we all have waited a long time for. I would even say we have all earned this one. It's an opportunity to see old friends and colleagues, make some new ones, and learn something new and become more enlightened and educated for our professional and personal journeys.

Also, for the second time, the Small Agency Forum will be held the day before Conference with six education sessions, three roundtables, and one keynote speaker. If you are involved in a park district or recreation agency in a smaller, less funded situation, you are encouraged to attend the Small Agency Forum.

I hope to see you all in February in lovely Sandusky, Ohio. February is a great time to be up here in northern Ohio — not many tourists. Please join us; I am sure the weather, experience, and memories will be great.



# Faces of Change

For years now, we have talked about the work that parks and recreation professionals around Ohio do every day to change the lives of the people they serve. That is the essence of the work that you are involved in. It is what you do. It is who you are!

Over the next few months as we lead into our Annual Conference & Trade Show, we are going to look deeper inside the parks, facilities, and programs that impact our state every day and introduce you to some of the amazing people who have been impacted by your work. Some of them you will know, because you see them every day, participating in the things that your department offers. Some will be from other parts of the state. You will be meeting them and hearing their stories for the first time.

We believe that all of them will inspire you, will help to remind you why you do what you do, and perhaps will help you as you remind others in your community just how important parks and recreation are to the lives of people around our state.

As I have traveled around the state and begun to meet some of these folks, I've been reminded in new and powerful ways just how important your work is. Some literally say parks and recreation saved their

lives. For others, your work provided the only respite from the difficult days of COVID-19. In every case, parks and recreation impacted, inspired, and influenced their lives in a profound and positive way.

As we celebrate parks and recreation in February, these people will be front and center. You'll know their stories and see their faces. You'll be inspired and impacted by them just as they have been inspired and impacted by your work in your own communities. You'll see them in the premiere of a video, supported by the OPRA Foundation, that celebrates the work that you do.

Over the next few weeks, you'll begin to meet them in social media posts, through emails, and through other communications you receive from us. We hope that when you see their faces, you also think of the countless faces in your own community who help to remind you exactly what you do.

You change lives. Every day. And it's more than what you do. It is who you are.

We can't wait to celebrate that with you this fall and at Conference as we get to know these faces of change.



by Woody Woodward

## WHAT'S COMING UP?

**February 6, 2022**  
OPRA Small Agency Forum  
Sandusky, Ohio

**February 6-9, 2022**  
2022 OPRA Conference & Trade Show  
Sandusky, Ohio

**April 29, 2022**  
How to Integrate Diversity, Equity, and  
Inclusion into Your Agency  
Dublin, Ohio

*For more information on these events, visit the OPRA calendar at [www.opraonline.org](http://www.opraonline.org).*

*Dates subject to change.*



# ODNR Breathes New Life into State Park Golf Property

by Stephanie O'Grady, Media & Outreach Specialist, Ohio Department of Natural Resources

With a long, rich history, the land now known as Shawnee State Park has long attracted people for its beauty. Nestled in Ohio's "Little Smokies," the park consists of nearly 1,100 acres of breathtaking views and immersive experiences deep in the state's rich wilderness.

Once the hunting grounds for the Native Americans of the Shawnee Tribe, the land now serves as an outdoor refuge along the banks of the Ohio River. Soon, visitors will have even more ways to enjoy a day at Shawnee. Last year, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) began reshaping and revamping the property to welcome a whole new group of outdoor enthusiasts. Now referred to as the Shawnee Ohio River Park, Campground, and Marina, campers will get to experience state-of-the-art campgrounds that can accommodate larger RVs. They can enjoy a view of the Appalachian hills and the river with the comforts of full water, electric, and sewer capabilities.

"Southern Ohio is blessed with beautiful natural areas," said ODNR Director Mary Mertz. "Shawnee State Forest and State Park are popular destinations every year, and we hope these investments will help visitors discover their next adventure."

Kids will be able to cool off on the new splash pad, pedal their way through nature on winding bike trails, test their skills on the newly installed bicycle pump course, or swing or climb the rock wall on the new playground. A unique paddling course for kayakers and canoers will let people of all ages try out their sea legs before launching onto the Ohio River. There's also a new fitness area and archery range to keep everyone active

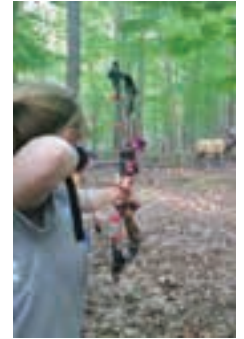


and entertained. And don't forget your four-legged friends! The new dog park will give Fido and Rover a place to frolic and work out all that energy.

The first signs of Fall bring people to our state parks for all kinds of reasons. This year, folks can come experience a

new Storybook Trail with river views, a 1.5-mile walking/biking path, a scenic Riverwalk Trail along both the river and wetland, the newly renovated camp store, and the new fuel operation at the marina, which were dedicated earlier this summer. In the years to come, Buckeye fans should be able to yell their "O-H!" in a





new amphitheater, which will be used for big games, movies, and other educational events. Additional plans include a zip line, more unique camping areas, and marina upgrades.

These improvements to Shawnee State Park represent a significant investment by ODNR in the ecotourism industry in Appalachia. The diversity of this beautiful park, with its grasslands, trees, and wetlands and wide array of plant, bird, and animal species, has the potential to attract even more tourists to the region — providing a great outdoor experience for all.

Park Manager Ryan Bartley, who oversees Shawnee park operations, is excited for the project, which recently completed Phase 1 construction and is now in the Phase 2 design stage, with construction to be completed next year. Bartley believes this renovation gives park visitors an experience that simply did not exist before.

“This project provides us with our only campground on the Ohio River and one that is brand new in our park system,” Bartley said. “This not only provides a completely new experience for campers but also one with some different

amenities that will be greatly appreciated by both campers as well as day-users throughout the area.”

“I hope we never stop improving our park system,” Mertz said. “I want to see every park constantly improving and changing for the better.”

That’s the goal at ODNR — to improve the experience at Shawnee, and every state park, for future generations to enjoy. From camping along a river or lake to a hike in search of fall colors, every little change signals more progress toward that goal.



# 2022 OPRA Conference Sandusky, Ohio • Febru

*Don't miss the 2022 OPRA Conference as we cel*

## Sunday, February 6

4:30pm - 7:00pm Registration Open  
5:00pm - 6:00pm Student Attendee Meeting  
6:00pm - 12:00am Sunday Networking Event

## Monday, February 7

6:30am - 7:30am OPRA Fitness  
7:30am - 4:00pm Registration Open  
8:30am - 9:45am Education Sessions  
10:00am - 11:30am Keynote Speaker, Kyle Scheele  
11:30am - 2:30pm Exhibit Hall, Lunch  
1:30pm - 2:15pm Student Attendee Meeting  
2:30pm - 3:45pm Education Sessions  
4:00pm - 5:15pm Education Sessions  
5:30pm - 6:30pm Alumni Hour and Minority Meet & Greet  
8:00pm - 12:00am Hut Hop Networking Event

## Tuesday, February 8

6:30am - 7:30am OPRA Fitness  
7:30am - 4:00pm Registration Open  
8:30am - 9:45am Education Sessions  
9:00am - 9:30am Exhibitor Roundtable  
9:45am - 12:45pm Exhibit Hall, Lunch  
10:00am - 11:00am Student Attendee Meeting  
1:00pm - 2:30pm Leadership Series  
2:45pm - 4:15pm Leadership Series  
3:00pm - 6:00pm Professional Photo  
5:30pm - 6:30pm Informal Networking  
6:30pm - 8:30pm Awards Celebration, Dinner  
8:30pm - 12:00am Awards After Parties

## Wednesday, February 9

7:30am - 11:00am Registration Open  
8:30am - 9:45am Education Sessions  
9:45am - 10:15am Break to Check Out of Hotel  
10:15am - 11:30am Education Sessions  
11:30am - 1:00pm Keynote Lunch Buffet and Speaker,  
J. Drew Lanham

*\*Schedule is subject to change.*

## Registration Information

### 2022 OPRA Conference Registration Fees

Full Registration includes all education sessions, access to the Exhibit Hall, FOUR meals, and networking events.

		Full	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.
<b>Early Bird</b> 9/1 - 11/12	<b>Member</b>	\$295	\$150	\$150	\$150
	<b>Non-Member</b>	\$395	\$200	\$200	\$200
<b>Regular</b> 11/13 - 1/12	<b>Member</b>	\$325	\$165	\$165	\$165
	<b>Non-Member</b>	\$425	\$215	\$215	\$215
<b>Late</b> 1/13 - 2/9	<b>Member</b>	\$375	\$190	\$190	\$190
	<b>Non-Member</b>	\$475	\$240	\$240	\$240
<b>Retiree**</b> 9/1 - 2/9	<b>Member</b>	\$175	\$60	\$60	\$60
	<b>Non-Member</b>	\$200	\$75	\$75	\$75
<b>Student*</b>	\$99 for Full Conference				

\*Student Fee: Includes a one year membership to OPRA. Students must be enrolled as a full-time undergrad or full-time grad student and cannot be employed as a full-time employee in the profession.

\*\*Retiree Fee: Retirees must be retired from the profession.

**Don't forget! Sign up early and pick the "Bill me in 2022" option for more cost savings!**

## SAVE \$ - Volunteer!

**Volunteer and earn up to 50% off your registration!**

Volunteer opportunities include shifts at the Welcome Desk, Exhibit Hall, as Room Hosts, and more! Check out the Conference homepage for more information.

## Hotel Information

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# & Trade Show ary 6-9

**celebrate parks and recreation!**

Presented by



There is no bigger event for Ohio parks and recreation professionals than the OPRA Conference & Trade Show! You can't miss this week, which features many sought after speakers from around the country, opportunities to interact with and learn from colleagues, and the biggest celebration of parks and recreation in Ohio. You'll leave Conference informed, inspired, and with new tools to help your agency succeed and help you grow as a professional. This is a can't miss event! **Register today** to ensure the best possible pricing!

## Monday Opening Keynote

### Kyle Scheele | The Grilled Cheese Secret: How to Order the Life You Want, Even When It's Not on the Menu



One of our highest ranked Conference speakers, author, speaker, and cardboard builder, Kyle Scheele is back with us as our opening keynote for 2022! Scheele received rave reviews for his session in 2020 titled "It Only Takes One." He challenged us to make a difference right where we are and this past year we dug deep and did just that! Based on your requests Scheele is back in 2022 and better than ever with his insight into how to order the life you want, even when it's not on the menu!

Have you ever looked at the menu of options life offered you and thought, "I don't want any of this"? If so, Scheele has good news for you. In this talk, he shares the secret of how he built a life that's custom-fit to his personal strengths and interests, and how you can do the same. You won't want to miss this keynote!

## Wednesday Closing Keynote

### Dr. J. Drew Lanham | Coloring the Conservation Conversation

A native of Edgefield, South Carolina, Dr. J. Drew Lanham is the author of *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature*, which received the Reed Award from the Southern Environmental Law Center and the Southern Book Prize, and was a finalist for the John Burroughs Medal. He is a birder, naturalist, and hunter-conservationist who has published essays and poetry in publications including *Orion*, *Audubon*, *Flycatcher*, and *Wilderness*, and in several anthologies, including *The Colors of Nature*, *State of the Heart*, *Bartram's Living Legacy*, and *Carolina Writers at Home*. An Alumni Distinguished Professor of Wildlife Ecology and Master Teacher at Clemson University, he and his family live in the Upstate of South Carolina, a soaring hawk's downhill glide from the southern Appalachian escarpment that the Cherokee once called the Blue Wall.

Lanham will discuss what it means to embrace the full breadth of his African-American heritage and his deep kinship to nature and adoration of birds. The convergence of ornithologist, college professor, poet, author, and conservation activist blend to bring our awareness of the natural world and our moral responsibility for it forward in new ways. Candid by nature — and because of it — Lanham will examine how conservation must be a rigorous science and evocative art, inviting diversity and race to play active roles in celebrating our natural world.



# Leadership Series

## Amanda Gehres & Melissa Hindman | Lessons from Leslie Knope

Working in public service can be a challenge. "What I hear when I'm being yelled at is people caring loudly at me." In this fun, interactive session, Amanda and Melissa will take lessons from the Pawnee Goddess herself, Leslie Knope, and reinforce the reasons you love working in parks and recreation. They will discuss how to work with a wide cast of characters and how to handle successes and failures. Take some time during conference to "Treat Yo' Self" and ask WWLKD?

Amanda has been a Recreation Supervisor for Youth Programs with the City of Grove City Parks and Recreation Department for the last 9 years. She currently oversees before and after school programs, summer camp programs, along with various youth programs and instructors.

Melissa is the Marketing and Community Outreach Supervisor for Worthington Parks and Recreation Department. Starting as a Recreation Leader, she has worked for the department for 23 years. She started her career with Columbus Recreation and Parks. Her non-official title is Chief Memory Maker and Facilitator of Fun.



## Julie Jones | Happy Leaders, Happy Employees, Better Results

Have you ever stopped and thought about how your mindset affects the performance, commitment, and happiness of those you lead? How we think affects everything and everyone around us. Learn a few tips on how you can help bring out the best in those around you by examining how our mind-set affects everything from relationships to results. Thinking about how you can positively affect the well-being and performance of your team isn't fluff, it's science — science that makes a difference.

Julie has spent 26 years leading Division I softball programs with her mission being simple — to build Smarter Students, Stronger Athletes, and Better People. Continuing her work of helping student-athletes reach their goals on and off the field, Coach Jones now serves as a Certified Mental Performance and Mindset Coach and Positive Performance Visualization Specialist as the founder of SSB Performance, LLC. — Smarter, Stronger, Better Mindset Training and works with sports teams and business organizations from all over the U.S.



## Networking Events

### Sunday

#### Sunday Networking Event

Join us Sunday evening in the Kalahari Ballroom to participate in the OPRA Partners Sunday Networking Event. Enjoy some food and fun while networking with old and new friends.



### Monday

#### Hut Hop Networking Event

Enjoy a relaxing evening with colleagues visiting Marrakesh and Kalahari's Jaamati Huts where OPRA partners will offer food, drinks, games, and other interactive surprises.





## Bobbi Nance | Failing Forward

Bobbi is an expert in bridging the gap between passion and proof. As founder and President of Recreation Results LLC, Bobbi partners with park and recreation agencies across North America to help them find value in their data, capitalize on trends, and push innovative thinking to increase their impact in the communities where they work. For over 13 years, Bobbi has been providing workshops across North America for regional, state, and national conferences and schools, as well as on-site training for sports, recreation, and fitness organizations, local governments, and other companies trying to inject some passion and fun, while getting down to work. She also serves as an instructor at Oglebay's Revenue Development & Management School and NRPA's Director School.



Bobbi will take an inspirational look at embracing failure as a necessary precursor to success. Sharing stories and examples from start-ups and her own insight on building and leading a nationally recognized government innovation program, Bobbi will help remove the stigma of failure that comes with innovating and share the keys to helping audience members become entrepreneurs at their own organizations.

## Leon Younger | Nothing Changes if Nothing Changes

Leon has 45 years experience in the parks and recreation industry as a director of four park and recreation systems including Lake Metroparks. He has owned PROS Consulting for 25 years, which serves park and recreation agencies across the United States. PROS Consulting specializes in providing system master plans, feasibility studies, business plans, operational studies, and strategic plans. Leon has been a speaker at NRPA Conferences for the last 40 years.

In Leon's session, he will discuss how the best agencies know when it is the time to change course. This session will focus on 20 essential business management practices that provide change opportunities that can dramatically help your agency to manage financially and sustain yourself into the future in how you think about parks and recreation services for the future.



## Tuesday

### Awards Celebration

Celebrate the best of the best in Ohio and be inspired for your next project all while enjoying dinner with friends.

After dinner continue the celebration at the Dance Club, Game Room, Hony Tonk, or Club Room. There is something for everyone!



Monday	Aquatics	Diversity & Inclusion	Facilities & Operations	Fiscal Administration	Fundamentals	Human Resources
LOCATION	BANYAN	NILE	ORANGE	LEOPARDWOOD	CYPRESS	ALOESWOOD
8:30am-9:45am	Ask an Aquatics Professional... -Courtenay Chaffin, Branden Burns, Anastasia Bradley	Supporting LGBTQ+ Inclusive Work Environments -AJ Leu	Maximum Overdrive: Your Equipment Could be Your Demise -George Wenner	Recreational Opportunities in Parallel with Private Development -Chris Hermann, Timothy Rosenthal, Steve Studenmund	Accountability; It's Everybody's Responsibility -Lori Hoffner	Leading Tough Staff in Tough Times -Cara Prell
10:00am-11:30am	Keynote: The Grilled Cheese Secret: How to Order the Life					
2:30pm-3:45pm	Spray Play for All: Designing Inclusive Spray Grounds and Splash Parks -Ingrid Kanics	Creating Positive Practices to Reduce Unconscious Bias -Lori Hoffner	Formulation/ Application of a Good Emergency Action Plan -Joe Stefanyak	ODNR Available Grant Programs -Melissa Moser, D'Juan Hammonds, Timothy Robinson	Advance Your Career with a Mentor -Arnie Biondo, Cara Prell	Good Employees – Hire, Train, & Retain Them -Aaliyah Earvin
4:00pm-5:15pm	Think Outside the Tank! Unique Programming Opportunities -Matt Freeby	Acknowledging Race and Privilege in Planning Processes -Amanda Golden, Cristina González Alcalá	Navigating the Jungle Gym of Cooperative Contracts -Paul Buettell, Chad Coe, Jon Dobney, Chuck Frazier, Jon Henke	Growing Gifts from Individual Donors -Danielle Locke, Denise Shafer	Program Planning 101 -Mary Parr	High Tech, High Touch Volunteer Engagement -Dana Litwin

Tuesday	Management				
8:30am-9:45am	Role of the Recreation Professional in Addressing Trauma -Emily Lake, Kristen Clatos Riggins, Taylor Singleton CYPRESS	Becoming the Best Version of You -Ryan Davis, Gary Schussler SAGEWOOD/ZEBRAWOOD		How to Manage Up and Sideways -Darren Hurley, Addie Weaver ALOESWOOD/LEOPARDWOOD	
1:00pm-2:30pm	Lessons from Leslie Knope -Amanda Gehres, Melissa Hindman NILE		Failing Forward -Bobbi Nance INDIGO BAY		
2:45pm-4:15pm	Lessons from Leslie Knope -Amanda Gehres, Melissa Hindman NILE		Failing Forward -Bobbi Nance INDIGO BAY		

Wednesday	Customer Service	Facilities & Operations	Fundamentals	Management	Marketing
LOCATION	ALOESWOOD	ORANGE	CYPRESS	SAGEWOOD	MANGROVE
8:30am-9:45am	Communication Etiquette: Creating a Culture of Respect -Andrea Peck	How to Create a SMART Dog Park! -Beth Cherryholmes Miller	Leadership - All Good Things Come in 3's -Mike Musser	Economic Development & Recreation Spur Urban Revitalization -Tom Mignery, Larry Peck	Does My Brand Matter? -Stephanie Sercu
10:15am-11:30am	My People? Your People? Nope... OUR People! -Jo Burns	Planning for the Unthinkable – An Emergency TTX -Michelle Eibel, Bob Holub	Learn and Understand Your Leadership Style -Greg Walker	Strengthening the Workplace through Conflict -Andrea Peck	Social Media: When Things Go Wrong -Stephanie Walton, Lindsay Smith
11:30am-1:00pm	Keynote: Coloring the Conservation Conversation - Dr. J. Drew				

Schedule is subject to change. For the most up-to-date information go to [opraonline.org](http://opraonline.org).



Management	Natural Resources	OPRA	Parks	Planning	Programming	Trends
SAGEWOOD	ZEBRAWOOD	MANGROVE	ZAMBEZI	ROSEWOOD	IRONWOOD	INDIGO BAY
Get Extraordinary Things Done Faster, On Time, and Under Budget -Sherry Winn	Land Management and Survey Techniques for Ohio's Bats -Erin Hazelton	Park District Section & Advocacy Meeting -Woody Woodward	The Power of a Neighborhood Park - By The Numbers -Nelson Beckford, Jessica Gift	Evidence-Based Landscape and Playground Design -Ingrid Kanics	The New Age of Group Fitness -Aaliyah Earvin	eSports In My Community - What Does it Look Like? -Dave Pace

You Want, Even When It's Not on the Menu – Kyle Scheele **Kalahari Ballroom**

FUNDamentals: Data, Technology, & Math, Oh My! -Ryan Davis	DETOUR Ohio Trails – Promoting Your Organization's Authoritative Trail Data -Phil Hoffman	Diversity Listening Session -Woody Woodward	Bridging the Gap in Parks -Tom Less, J. Scott Myers	Contractor Selection: Keys to RFP/RFQ Development -Neal Hess, Jim Miller, Chris Scannell	Strengthening Culturally Relevant Programming in Urban Recreation -Ebony Hood, Erika Hood, Marcia Hood	The Benefits of Drones for Parks and Recreation -Joshua Brenwell
Winning Stakeholder Support for Your Ideas -Michele Wierzgac	Three Naturalists Walk into a Public Garden -Erin LeGalley, Kaleigh Obrock, Mike Przysiecki	Summer Camp Roundtable -Addie Weaver, Amanda Gehres	Maximizing Social Capital through Park & Trail Connectivity -Bruce Rankin, Jon Wiley	Everybody Plays: A Guide to Multigenerational Design -Jill Moore, Ingrid Kanics	Add Adventure to Your Summer Camps -Oliver Wuensch	RAPID 5, Public-Private Partnership -Tim Moloney, Tatiana Parfenova

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Time is Finite, Personal Energy is Renewable! - Julie Jones <b>ZAMBEZI</b>	Taking the Leadership Leap -Kate Mattison, Erin Duffee <b>NILE</b>	Equity in Evaluation -Bobbi Nance <b>INDIGO BAY</b>	Developing a Cost Recovery Plan -Bill Tschirhart <b>MANGROVE</b>	Ass-Kicking Women: How They Leverage Their Informal Networks for Success -Michele Wierzgac <b>ORANGE</b>
Happy Leaders, Happy Employees, Better Results -Julie Jones <b>ZAMBEZI</b>		Nothing Changes if Nothing Changes -Leon Younger <b>ORANGE</b>		
Happy Leaders, Happy Employees, Better Results -Julie Jones <b>ZAMBEZI</b>		Nothing Changes if Nothing Changes -Leon Younger <b>ORANGE</b>		

Natural Resources	Planning	Programming	Trends
ZEBRAWOOD	ROSEWOOD	IRONWOOD	INDIGO BAY
A Weedy Situation: Aquatic Plant Growth in Recreational Lakes -Natalie Pirvu	Building Playgrounds that Successfully Benefit your Community -Tina Stanton-Chapman, Kelli Jette	Grow Your Base - #Preschoolers -Robin Gregory, Ashlee Schmitt	Innovation is Invitation: What's Next in Inclusive Play -Jill Moore
H2Ohio Small-Scale Wetland Restoration Project -Sarah Betts, Jakob Boehler, Christina Kuchle, Judith Mitchell	Motivation to Move: Promoting Physical Activity at Multi-Generational Park Destinations -Ron Blake	Senior Games: Everyone Can Play -Teresa Grodsky, Mary Stallings	How to Design the Best Outdoor Classrooms -Tina Stanton-Chapman, Kelli Jette
Lanham <b>Kalahari Ballroom</b>			





# Virtual Education — Keeping Participants Engaged

by Jennifer White, Education Program Coordinator, and Andrea Metzler, Public Engagement Manager, Portage Park District

Adding virtual education to your programming docket is typically something an organization will plan and strategize prior to implementation. The pandemic shifted many into the virtual realm without the time to map out what this new environment would look like. For Portage Park District, this method of quickly adapting to a new way to present programs turned into a wonderful opportunity to shine and share information with a wider audience.





Ideas for engagement like videos, podcasts, and take-home kits made their way to top priority years in advance of when we had planned them to. In the process of pivoting into a virtual classroom, we learned that engaging our audiences would look different than in our in-person programs. We successfully engaged our existing audience and welcomed new attendees. We learned these lessons in the process:

### **Inventory Your Toolbox**

There are plenty of high-priced tools on the market, but creating virtual education content does not require fancy equipment. Most of our videos were recorded on cellphones! A tripod for stationary shots and a gimbal for video stabilization during guided hikes are helpful accessories. Video editing was done with iMovie, but there are free PC editing options available to use.

### **Keep the Energy Flowing**

In a virtual environment, energy can quickly drain from a presentation, so it's important to stay upbeat and excited throughout the program. Write notes to yourself and prep guest speakers to make sure the program flows with minimal snags. Something as simple as a practice session prior to the program puts presenters more at ease and gives them the opportunity to shine. Attention spans are short, so use graphics, photos, and movement to visually engage participants.

### **Change the Way You Present**

Whether in person or virtual, presentations need to be updated frequently to inspire attendees. Adding new elements or new mediums can help keep engagement levels up. Using



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**There are plenty of high-priced tools on the market, but creating virtual education content does not require fancy equipment.**

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PowerPoint is good, but consider using audio, video, and even your dry-erase board to provide examples on topics that require additional explanations.

### **Welcome Guest Speakers**

Offer a variety of voices and faces! Guest speakers are a great way to give participants a new way to view a topic. Bring in experts on subjects relevant to your organization's mission and engage your audience in the conversation. Program participants

want to feel as though they are getting a glimpse into information they cannot get elsewhere — make sure you are promoting your guest speakers accordingly.

### **Ask Your Attendees to Participate**

Attendee participation is key to many types of programs but is essential to a virtual environment to keep attention from waning. If the presentation does not provide the option for guests to ask questions themselves, make sure you utilize polls or the





question-and-answer section on your platform to engage your guests. There are other ways to participate besides questions — you can also ask guests to share an experience or offer suggestions when appropriate.

### Survey Your Attendees for Feedback

While not every survey will be filled out, those who take the time to answer survey questions often offer valuable feedback that will help to update and enhance your program. It's important to be thoughtful about survey questions — think about what you want to learn from your attendees — and use the survey to get those answers.

### Keep the Park Connection

Ultimately, our goal is to connect people to the natural world and get them outside. Offering self-guided opportunities for park exploration and giving calls to action during virtual programs are vital to achieving this goal. The virtual environment connects with a new audience, but it does not replace the magic of nature!

Moving to a virtual platform for the pandemic enabled the Portage Park District to look at our programs in a new light for the future. We have returned to in-person programming, and we are excited to continue using virtual presentations to make our education more accessible to all. Some programs even have both a virtual and in-person component, like a college course with a hands-on lab. Adaptability and a willingness to expand our efforts have opened the door to new ways to experience outdoor education. The Portage Park District plans to continue to expand program offerings in a variety of formats as we strive to reach all those who wish to learn about our natural world.



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# Restoring the Water Quality of Chippewa Lake

by Isaac Smith, Planning and Operations Manager, Medina County Park District

Chippewa Lake is Ohio's largest natural inland glacial lake, located just south of the continental divide in the Ohio River Basin and in the heart of Medina County. The 330-acre lake began its human connection as a hunting ground for Native Americans in the Chippewa Valley and later became a popular picnic ground and leisure destination as the home of Chippewa Lake Amusement Park. Lake cottages and boat docks became a prominent feature of the landscape during this time. Despite the closure of the amusement park in 1978, Chippewa Lake has continued to be a recreational destination — but soon that will come with a twist.

Although Chippewa Lake had been privately owned for much of its recorded history, it had always been identified as an iconic recreational opportunity. During its infancy, Medina County Park District (MCPD) published its first park district master plan,

conveniently in 1978, and it clearly highlighted Chippewa Lake's ecological, cultural, and historical significance and identified the importance of the recreational opportunities that the lake provides. Following the adoption of this master plan, the park district began to strategically acquire land within the approximately 14,000-acre watershed of Chippewa Lake, ultimately acquiring the lake in 2007 and the former amusement park site in 2020.

Like many park districts in Ohio, MCPD employs staff with natural resource expertise, and following the acquisition of Chippewa Lake it became apparent that the lake was suffering from a health issue. Observations of a “scum” on the surface of the lake were made, and a water sample tested in 2014 indicated low toxin levels attributed to cyanobacteria, the blue-green algae that infamously bloomed in the

western basin of Lake Erie in 2014. This was later confirmed in 2017 when the park district was notified by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that a harmful algae bloom (HAB) had been detected on Chippewa Lake. This marked the first time that the park district had issued a public health advisory for the lake.

The source of the cyanobacteria and HABs can be attributed to the land use surrounding Chippewa Lake. Many of the floodplains and wetlands within the Chippewa Lake watershed have been drained and converted to agricultural land. Additionally, housing developments, which come with manicured and fertilized lawns, have exploded in Medina County as the population has grown 61.26 percent between 1980 and 2020. Chippewa Lake serves as the catch basin for it all. A proactive approach to addressing the health of the lake was necessary in order

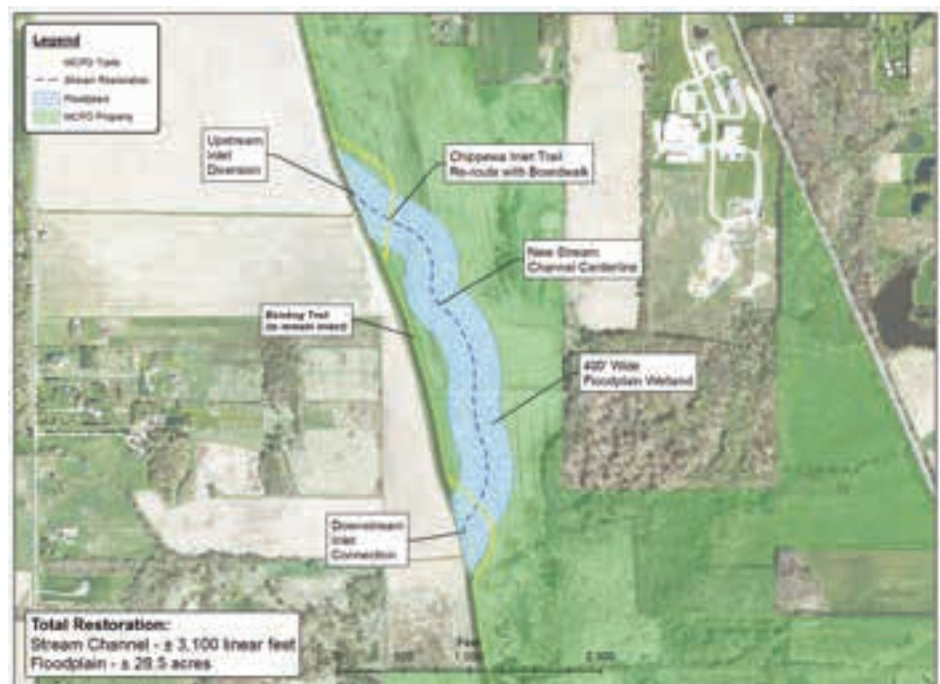


to prevent future HABs. In 2017, the park district partnered with the Save the Lake Coalition, a group of local volunteers with a vested interest in improving the water quality of Chippewa Lake, to seek solutions to the HAB problem.

A short-term “solution” to the HAB problem was found through an experimental application of a new product that was applied in 2019. It treated the existing cyanobacteria within the lake, allowing the lake to remain advisory-free following its application. However, the heart of the problem continues to rest in the lake sediment and the nutrients flowing into the lake.

Over the years MCPD has worked to offset the impacts to water quality within the Chippewa Lake watershed through restoration of wetlands and streams that flow into the inlet channel of the lake. Outside funding through the Clean Ohio Conservation Fund for land acquisition and creative use of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency 319 program and wetland mitigation banking facilitated many of these restoration projects. Although substantial, more restoration work is necessary to address the nutrient issue that feeds the HABs of Chippewa Lake.

In 2020, MCPD embarked on an ambitious partnership with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) through the state’s H2Ohio program to create more than 50 acres of wetlands spread across three locations within the Chippewa Lake watershed. The state awarded \$1.52 million toward the project, which will combine traditional wetland creation with a creative endeavor to divert the engineered and channelized inlet for Chippewa Lake through 3,000 linear feet of new, sinuous floodplain with restored wetland habitat. The project will reroute portions of one of the first multiuse paths in Medina County, the Chippewa Inlet Trail, with sections of boardwalk that will further remove barriers to the floodplain for the inlet channel. Another portion of the project will create approximately 2 acres of wetlands in combination with paddle-craft access,



furthering the recreational legacy of Chippewa Lake while simultaneously addressing the health of this significant cultural and natural resource.

We’ve given ourselves until December 2023 to complete our H2Ohio work at Chippewa Lake. Watch for project updates on MCPD’s website and social media channels.

# Beyond the Playset: Engaging Families Through Park Exploration

by Sarah Fink, Recreation Specialist, City of Montgomery



On any given summer afternoon, children fill the playgrounds at Montgomery's parks. But how do you get kids exploring and learning about nature? The City of

Montgomery developed three programs to teach kids about our parks, trees, and history. The Recreation Department in collaboration with the Montgomery Parks and Recreation Commission found a gap in engaging youth and families in educational play and exploration in nature. Together we created the "Montgomery Park Explorer" and "Montgomery Tree Explorer" programs. As Montgomery's recreation specialist, I developed the programs with help from our city arborist, Parks and Recreation Commission members, and other community stakeholders. The programs guide participants through various age-appropriate activities that engage children and families in learning about various park amenities, natural features, and trees within our parks in a fun and playful way.

## Montgomery Park Explorer



The Montgomery Park Explorer program was introduced in October 2017 to encourage children, adults, and families to explore our six parks and one nature preserve. The program includes two workbooks geared toward participants, one for ages 2-5 and the other for participants 6 and up. The workbook activities include drawing by numbers, crossword puzzles, word finds, and more. Once completed, participants can turn in the workbooks to City Hall and receive a patch and certificate.



*"They had a wonderful time completing the books and were very excited to turn them in," said mom of son Jay and daughter Emma who completed the program. "It is a great program."*

## Montgomery Tree Explorer



The Montgomery Tree Explorer program was introduced in August 2019 to expand upon our Montgomery Park Explorer program. The program was developed to encourage children, adults, and families to explore Montgomery and learn about our various local trees. Through fun activities such as connect the dots, crossword puzzles, coloring, and word finds, the goal is to teach kids about the trees in their community in a fun new way. Once completed, participants can turn in the workbooks to City Hall and receive a patch and certificate.

*"It was so kind of you to let us 'older' explorers play, too!" said Pat, an adult participant. "We had a great time and learned much. Thanks again for such a great program."*

The Park Explorer and Tree Explorer programs contributed to us continuing to receive the Tree City Growth Award. The response from the community for these programs has been great. Due to the success of these Explorer programs, we developed and implemented the Montgomery History Explorer program.

## Montgomery History Explorer



After the success of both programs, I teamed up with our Community Development Department, in partnership with the Landmarks Commission and the Montgomery Historical Preservation Association, to create the Montgomery



History Explorer. The program was introduced in May 2021 and aims to teach children, adults, and families about Montgomery's rich history and local landmarks. The program includes one workbook that is geared toward people 6 and up. Activities include searching for local landmarks and identifying architecture.

For each of the programs, once a participant completes the workbook appropriate to their age group, they receive a certificate and embroidered patch to commemorate all that they have learned. All three programs are free to participants. Throughout the development of these programs, it was

essential for us to provide an opportunity, free of charge, to the community on a relatively low budget for us. The workbooks are designed and printed in house, while the embroidered patches are outsourced for printing. This helps to keep costs low, and we can continue to provide learning opportunities year-round.

*"We want to offer Montgomery residents of all income levels a fun and inexpensive way to enjoy our parks and our City," said Montgomery City Manager Brian Riblet. "Sarah Fink, with the help of others, has developed three programs that educate and engage our families."*

An important component of what makes all three Explorer programs successful has been collaboration with departments and community stakeholders. This teamwork enabled me to pull from a variety of subject matter experts to ensure that we were able to deliver a high-quality and engaging program to our community.

All of the Explorer programs provided a full self-guided learning opportunity. The self-guided nature of the programs has been a great way to engage with our community. The programs have also been beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic; people can safely participate while social distancing.



Please visit [www.montgomeryohio.gov/youth-programs](http://www.montgomeryohio.gov/youth-programs) or scan the QR code to access all three Montgomery Explorer program workbooks. If you have questions or would like to discuss ideas to help guide you in developing Explorer programs for your community, email me at [sfink@montgomeryohio.gov](mailto:sfink@montgomeryohio.gov).

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CORPORATE SPOTLIGHT: CIVICREC

# The Difference Between Citizen Engagement and Civic Experience

and Why the Latter Is Key for Park and Rec Departments

by Kathryn Boutwell, CivicRec

Civic engagement is a term that's been central to local governments' citizen services and civic operations for decades. As a result, local leaders have designed and executed programs and initiatives to encourage civic participation and the voluntary utilization of available revenue-generating services. The response to such programs has been positive and impactful for many communities, with citizens being active voters, volunteers, and event participants.



While citizen engagement is vital to a community's success, there is yet another, even more crucial component of a foundationally strong and vibrant community. With focus, it is an area that can be even more impactful in generating self-sustaining communities that are financially sound. The key is to place emphasis not just on citizen engagement but on *civic experiences*.

### What Are Civic Experiences?

Civic experiences are interactions between local governments and citizens. These interactions are many and varied. For example, citizens get permits, attend municipal meetings, participate in recreational programs, book facilities, make payments, and conduct other such actions every day. To meet these needs, local government staff members process requests, administer programs, provide public safety, and conduct operational business that keeps the municipality running smoothly.

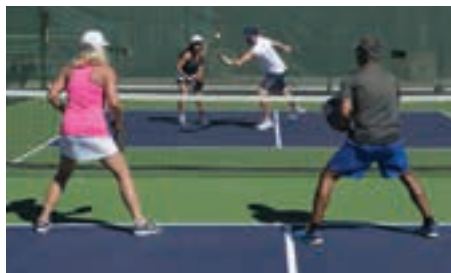
These interactions represent the moments when citizens *experience* their government. And the experience can be positive or negative, with lasting impact. Governments that optimize civic experiences:

- Gain appreciation for getting things done
- Drive more revenue
- Operate more efficiently with happier staff members
- Increase awareness for their community as a desirable place to live, work, play, and conduct business

### Citizen Engagement vs. Civic Experiences in Parks and Recreation

For park and recreation departments, citizen engagement is important to fostering awareness and participation in programs, events, and classes. After all, citizens won't sign up for the youth Little League or volunteer for the Earth Day cleanup event if their community leaders don't promote their availability and invite them to attend. The process of sharing information and then inviting participation represents moments of engagement.

However, citizen *engagement*, which describes residents coming together to participate in community-building opportunities, is different from *civic experience*, which is the interactions citizens have with their government. Civic experience represents the totality of every interaction that a community member has with their



local government. More than just moments where someone acknowledges that they are participating in civic activities, such as voting or volunteering, civic experiences involve everything from driving down a paved road to adopting a cat at a pet shelter to buying a ticket for the annual Halloween festival.

To be financially profitable, park and recreation departments need to do more than invite engagement. They need to have the infrastructure, staff, facilities, and opportunities in place to ensure that every moment of interaction with a citizen is so frictionless, simplified, and personalized that it encourages repeat participation.

For example, the family that needs to mail in a membership application and check to the county pool may find a more convenient recreational activity the following summer. However, if the busy parent can auto-renew the family's pool membership with online billing year after year, this positive civic experience will generate revenue for the park and recreation department and seasons of joy for the family.

Similarly, if a trip to the local lake is frustrating from beginning to end — from navigating the parking lot to finding an open shelter and grill — the family won't be likely to return the next time they're planning a family reunion. On the other hand, when it's easy to rent a park pavilion, interact with a park map on their mobile device, and purchase a parking pass online in advance — all from the park and recreation department's website — the local lake will become their go-to spot for summertime fun.

### Final Thoughts

Park and recreation departments that have mastered engagement are ready to take their community service strategy to the next level by creating positive civic experiences at every citizen touchpoint. From park cleanliness to online payments, from inclusive programming to digital tools that accommodate assistive technology for people with disabilities, every interaction with a user is an opportunity to foster the types of relationships that keep citizens engaging, participating, and playing year after year.

### About the Author

*Kathryn Boutwell joined the CivicRec® implementation team as a solutions manager. After helping many clients launch successfully with CivicRec, she now helps existing clients take full advantage of all the features and functionality CivicRec offers. Her CivicRec clients see her as a valuable partner to their critical parks and recreation operations.*



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# Let's Thrive Outside Together, Ohio

by Lindsay B. Deering, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

The healing benefits of time spent in nature are well-documented for people of all ages, as are the reasons why green spaces and access to parks are crucial community resources. Not only is it beneficial for our physical health, but evidence shows that spending just 15 minutes outdoors also lowers our stress levels, improves our mood, and enhances our sense of well-being.



That's why the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), Division of Parks and Watercraft, partnered to create the Thrive Outside initiative, which encourages Ohioans to improve their mental health by spending time outdoors.

Ohio offers outdoor recreational opportunities year-round, and each season boasts unique ways to have fun outside. It's always a great time to rediscover Ohio and take advantage of the restorative benefits our great outdoor spaces provide us.

It can be as simple as taking a walk around the block with a friend or neighbor, sitting on a park bench to breathe in the fresh air, or visiting a state or local park. Time spent on the trails or on the water can relax a person and help decrease stress levels. Open every day, and always free, Ohio's state parks provide an escape from daily life.

ODNR offers tools to help Ohioans plan their next outdoor adventure. There's no waiting, no appointment needed, and no prescription required. The refills are endless. To learn more, visit [ohiostateparks.gov](http://ohiostateparks.gov) to find a place to walk, hike, bike, boat, or just sit and enjoy the sounds and sights of nature.

To find trails more easily, ODNR introduced the **DETOUR** trails mobile app. It is Ohio's new go-to source for trail information for both beginner and expert trail users. App users can search for trails by region, level of difficulty, activity, type, and distance. The app features routes, driving directions to trailheads, and information for trail managers.

To access the web app, visit [detourtrails.ohiodnr.gov](http://detourtrails.ohiodnr.gov). For mobile devices, the free app can be downloaded from the Apple App Store or Google Play Store. Whether planning a trails trip from a home computer or on the road looking for spontaneous adventure, the new **DETOUR** trails app makes it easy to find a great trail.

Sometimes spending time outside may not be enough to face life's challenges. For those struggling and in need of additional support with their mental health, OhioMHAS offers the Ohio CareLine at 1-800-720-9616 for free emotional



support from a licensed clinician, available 24/7. Someone is always on the other line to listen, share helpful tips to manage stress, and connect the caller with local resources if needed.

You are invited to take part in the Thrive Outside initiative by sharing information

with your visitors about the great mental health benefits that the outdoors has to offer. Share photos and stories on social media using the hashtag #thriveoutside.

Let's thrive outside together, Ohio. We'll see you soon in Ohio's great outdoors!



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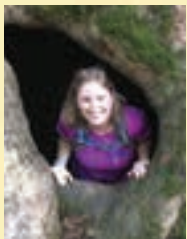


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## Five Questions: Member Spotlight

Celia Thornton, Project Supervisor, Worthington Parks & Recreation Department



### 1. What made you choose this profession?

I became a parks and recreation professional by luck and accident, rather than choice, so in my case the question might better be posed as “what made you stay in this profession?” — for more than 20 years. I attended Miami University and received a B.S. in elementary education with a concentration in natural sciences, and I

wanted to teach in a traditional classroom. My family had recently moved to Worthington and my mother, who was taking classes at the Worthington Community Center, saw a posting advertising for summer camp counselors, and mailed it to me. I applied, interviewed over spring break, and my first job out of college was as a “fun center leader” for Worthington. In the fall, I began substitute teaching in Columbus and took an internship with Worthington Parks & Recreation, learning the administration of the back office and creating my own program. I then took a teaching job in northwest Ohio for several years but still came back each summer to work or supervise camps. About the time I moved back to central Ohio, Worthington was expanding the Community Center to add a fitness floor and indoor pools. I was once again looking for a teaching job, when my boss suggested I apply for one of the new full-time positions — customer service supervisor. I enjoyed the work, my colleagues, and the community. It was exciting to be part of opening this new amenity to our residents, and I learned so much outside of my scope of expertise, from cash-handling best practices to the intricacies of registration software and hiring and supervising adults (rather than children!). Eventually I moved into the position of project supervisor, which allows me to work on projects I’m passionate about and interact with other city departments. For many years, I continued to think of myself primarily as a teacher, and felt a bit like a fraud, but I have finally embraced this profession and am proud of it. I stay because I love helping people and feel that we make our communities better places to live.

### 2. What has been the highlight of your career so far?

In the fall of 2012, Worthington City Council created a goal of forming a Bike and Pedestrian Steering Committee. The intent was that they would create a list of projects and recommendations to help Worthington become a more bike- and pedestrian-friendly community. I had recently become a project supervisor and was asked to help form and work with the committee. I love the outdoors and am passionate about improving

quality of life, health, and environmental sustainability for our residents. The 15-member Steering Committee first met in September of 2013 and by the fall of 2014 had compiled a list of prioritized recommendations, which were presented to City Council. One of those recommendations was to create an ongoing Bike and Pedestrian Advisory Board. I am a staff liaison to the Board, and we have accomplished quite a few infrastructure projects, education and encouragement activities, and, in 2019, a comprehensive Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan.

### 3. What is your favorite part about your job?

The ability to act as an agent of change in the community. Parks and recreation departments have the ability to directly impact quality of life for our residents through our programs, facilities, parks, and interactions. I also love the fact that we get personal connection with our residents and have the chance to develop relationships. I’m proud of bike trails I’ve helped build and enjoy administrative work, but the memories I’ll treasure most are picking up a snake and talking about it with a group of preschoolers, introducing them to the natural world, or telling a senior gentleman who’s lonely to pull up a chair for a half-hour chat, knowing that nothing else on my desk is more important than that.

### 4. What has been the most beneficial part of being a member of OPRA?

There are three equally beneficial advantages of OPRA to my career. First, it helped me see the larger picture of why what we do is so important. It wasn’t until I’d attended a conference or two that I began to truly think of myself as a parks and recreation professional. Second, the networking opportunities. Connecting and sharing with others in our profession has a huge impact on my work, and it’s a great support system. Finally, OPRA has allowed me to cultivate skills I didn’t previously have. Joining the Partnership Team and learning to be comfortable asking people for money was a valuable skill to obtain.

### 5. What’s something interesting about you that maybe your colleagues don’t know?

I’m an Army brat who attended five elementary schools, two middle schools, and three high schools before college and was lucky enough to live overseas three times (Thailand, Korea, and Germany). I have visited North Korea (briefly!) and was there on German Reunification Day. Military life is one of service, and I’m glad I’ve found another way to serve the public.