

THE ALABAMIAN

A PUBLICATION OF THE ALABAMA RECREATION AND PARKS ASSOCIATION • SUMMER 2020



Staying Connected Apart

How Parks and Recreation Will Change Forever



Alabama Recreation and Parks Association

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ALABAMA RECREATION & PARKS ASSOCIATION

People
We represent more than 900 dedicated Alabama Recreation and Parks Association professionals.

Places
We have member agencies in over 92 cities and towns in the state of Alabama representing a majority of the state's population.

Programs



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2020 Publications/Marketing Chair

Natalie Norman
Executive Director
Alabama Recreation and
Parks Association

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8

IN THIS ISSUE

From the President 4

From the Executive Director 5

ARPA Recreational Sports State Championship Summary 6

ARPA Fall Workshop 7

Staying Connected Apart 8

Durrell “Duke” Smith Memorial Scholarship 21

ARPA Teams up with NFL Flag 22

How Parks and Recreation Will Change Forever 24

2020 Calendar Back Cover

The Alabamian is the official publication of the Alabama Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA), an affiliate of the National Recreation and Park Association. The magazine is published by the Alabama Recreation and Parks Association, Inc. as a service to its membership. Submissions of parks and recreation-related articles are welcomed. Opinions expressed in signed articles are those of the authors and not necessarily those of ARPA. Comments/responses should be sent to:

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From the
President
Gary Minor

Hey Everybody!
Man, 2020 has been a different kind of year. Really screwed up, but we keep on chugging along. Our parks have remained open for the most part, as people learned that outside is healthier and safer than inside. As parks and recreation professionals we like to plan for things, like the next season or the next program. That has been a nightmare with governments changing regulations frequently, but we keep chugging along. We are like the little engine that could. What do you want us to do? Just tell us. We'll do it. We will do just about anything.

I really appreciate everyone participating in the phone and video calls the ARPA has hosted. It has been interesting to learn what other agencies are going through and how they are responding to the challenges of the pandemic. It has been a tough year on the state office as revenues from ARPA tournament bids have been returned, due to state bans on events and gatherings, but we keep chugging along, getting things done.

In my position this year, I have come to appreciate Natalie Norman even more than before. She is competent and professional; she understands budgets and respects people's opinions. We are lucky to have her. In addition, we have the same quality of people working on a part-time basis and volunteering for the state office. Recently, we reduced our budget to live within our means, added a potential revenue source with NFL Flag football, successfully lobbied legislators for Coach Safely funding, bid out future ARPA recreational sports tournaments, hosted Zoom meetings, prepared for the fall workshop and are finalizing the state conference education slate. We just keep chugging along, taking care of business and it is because of quality people like you that our future is bright.

Best,

Gary Minor
2020 ARPA President

ARPA STATE ARCHERY TOURNAMENT
AUGUST 8, 2020
EASTGATE PARK
DOTHAN, AL

For more information contact
Roy Kitts, Assistant Director
334-615-3700



DETAILS ON BACK

DOTHAN
LEISURE SERVICES



From the
Executive Director
Natalie Norman

Greetings ARPA Members,
Looking back to March 13, which sticks in my mind as the beginning of our Covid-19 navigation for our Association and, you, our members. Through twelve Town Halls, twenty-four group meetings and various other avenues, we have remained connected, apart. Virtual communication has become standard operating procedure. While developing a deep appreciation of being able to see and hear friends and colleagues via a screen, I so look forward to the day that we are back in the same room, hugging and high fiving.

Just as parks and recreation has already been on the front lines in serving our citizens, you will continue to fulfill critical needs for the recovery and revitalization of our communities.

Thank you for the tremendous job that you do, each and every day.

Sincerely,
Natalie Norman, CPRP
Executive Director

We all continue to get things done. We continue to look forward to the ARPF Fall Workshop in Orange Beach.

Registration is open and on our website. Also, we are super excited to announce ARPA's partnership with NFL Flag and the beginning of a great collaboration. Finally, just a reminder, the 2021 membership campaign and renewals will begin September 1st. There would be no ARPA without our members, and we thank you for making us what we are!

A crisis should bring character and strength to the surface, and you have certainly shown that to be true.

A blue poster for the ARPA Annual Conference. At the top, it says 'ARPA ANNUAL CONFERENCE'. Below that, in large white letters, is 'CALL FOR SESSIONS'. Underneath, it reads: 'Sessions are needed for the 2021 Annual Conference! Sessions are needed in areas of Aquatics, Maintenance, Athletics, and TR. Help us make this year's conference great!'. At the bottom left is a small logo of a triangle containing a stylized figure. At the bottom right, it says 'Submit your session proposal to arpaonline.org by August 31'. There are small white circles in the corners of the poster.

ARPA Recreational Sports State Championship Summary 2021

Event	Site	Date
Adult Basketball	Albertville/Sand Mountain Park & Amphitheater	Mar 6-7
Youth Basketball	Albertville/Sand Mountain Park & Amphitheater	Mar 12-14
Track & Field	Trussville	May 15
Softball	Vestavia Hills	Jul 9-11
Swimming & Diving	Albertville/Sand Mountain Park & Amphitheater	Jul 22-24
Archery	Dothan	Aug 14
Adult Flag Football	Albertville/Sand Mountain Park & Amphitheater	Nov 5-6
Youth Flag Football	Albertville/Sand Mountain Park & Amphitheater	Nov 5-6
Volleyball	Albertville/Sand Mountain Park & Amphitheater	Nov 13-14
Soccer	Dothan	Nov 20-21

ARPF FALL WORKSHOP

ALABAMA RECREATION & PARKS FOUNDATION

FALL WORKSHOP SEPTEMBER 29-OCT 01

Sponsored by:

Alabama Recreation and Parks Foundation

The registration fee is \$125 per person and due no later than Friday, September 11. Please make checks payable to **ARPF (Foundation)** and mail to: Alabama Recreation and Parks Foundation/PO Box 230579/Montgomery, Alabama 36123. If you have any questions, please contact Natalie Norman, 334.279.9160, nnorman@arpaonline.org; or Tiffany Wade, twade@arpaonline.org.

For online reservations: (room block valid until 8/29 or until full)

http://hamptoninn.hilton.com/en/hp/groups/personalized/M/MOBOBH-ARP-20200926/index.jhtml?WT.mc_id=POG

FALL WORKSHOP SESSION INFORMATION

Tue 9/29 2P-4P Committee Meetings
4:30P-6:30P ARPA Coach Safely Initiative/Government Affairs/Issues

Wed 9/30: 9:00A-11:00A Education
11A-Noon ARPA Board of Directors Meet
1P-4P Committee Meetings
5P-7P Networking with attendees

Thu 10/01: 9:00A-Noon Education



Alabama Recreation & Parks Association

FALL WORKSHOP HOTEL INFORMATION

A room block has been set up for your convenience with the Hampton Inn & Suites.

Please note that the block rates are valid through August 29, or until full.

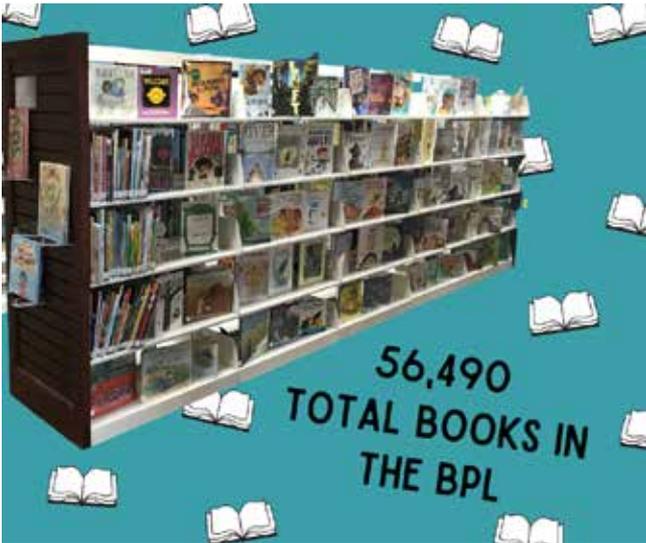


The Hampton Inn & Suites
Orange Beach
25518 Perdido Beach Blvd
Orange Beach, AL 36561
251-923-4400

Staying Connected Apart



Boaz - Summer Reading



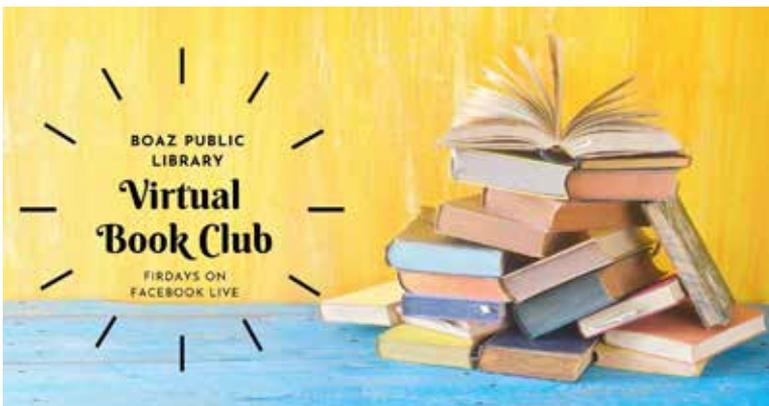
Book # Guessing Game

The Boaz Public Library does a fantastic job of staying connected with the community. Every day is something new, whether it's a guessing game or a post about new books on the shelves, they make sure to interact with their patrons on a regular basis.



BPL Virtual Book Club

A Virtual Book Club is available for kids, teens and adults. Book discussions are held online led by the Children's Librarian, Savannah.



Summer Reading Program

The Summer Reading Program is usually packed full with activities every week. In order to ensure the safety of the community, the Boaz Public Library decided to move everything online. There are chances to win prizes, enjoy live videos of different programs, and more exciting activities included with this year's Summer Reading Program.

Huntsville - Fitness in the Park

Every year Healthy Huntsville and Huntsville Parks & Recreation host Fitness in the Park each Saturday morning in May and June. This series of free fitness classes take place in Big Spring Park East and range from yoga to Zumba to POUND to fit camp! They knew that with the state of Alabama under a stay-at-home order, this year was going to have to look different. Instead of canceling Fitness in the Park Healthy Huntsville decided to record each class in May with only the instructor and then to put the class up on Facebook. With June restrictions relaxing, Fitness in the Park went back to in-person classes, with lots of social distancing and hand sanitizer. The easy part is a yoga mat is about 6 feet long, so when you add some space on either side you know you have more than the recommended amount of social distancing space!



Sand Mountain - Park & Amphitheater

Sand Mountain Park and Amphitheater is currently under construction and is set to open late summer of this year. In the interim, we have postponed our baseball and soccer leagues until further direction from the CDC and completion of our fields. We also integrated hand sanitizer stations throughout the office for our employees as well as posted COVID-19 Screening and Identification Guidelines upon entering our building.

Sand Mountain Park & Amphitheater will be a premier sports vacation destination encompassing 130-acres in Albertville, Alabama, located 7 miles from Lake Guntersville, 45 miles from Huntsville and 70 miles from Birmingham. Sand Mountain Park & Amphitheater is managed by The Sports Facilities Management (SFM).



Call for Articles!

If you would like to be published in a future issue of The Alabamian Magazine, please send your article and any graphics to the State Office at nnorman@arpaonline.org.

The theme for the next issue is “Innovation.”

How has your park and recreation agency innovated and adapted lately? What tips, tricks and tools can you recommend to foster creativity in your agency’s efforts? What programs, facilities, and people at your agency are trailblazers and trendsetters?

The deadline for consideration in the Fall 2020 issue is October 5th. Please call 334-279-9160 with any questions.

Tuscaloosa - PARA Employees Earn National Certification



Becky Booker



Bradlee Colburn

Tuscaloosa County Park & Recreation Authority announces that two employees have earned national certification as Certified Park and Recreation Professionals or CPRP by the National Recreation and Park Association.

Becky Booker, Public Relations and Marketing Manager and Bradlee Colburn, Marketing and Sales Specialist successfully completed the exam on July 1.

Booker and Colburn are the first two PARA employees to earn the certification. There are less than 30 CPRP certified park and recreation professionals in the state of Alabama, according to the NRPA.

“This certification shows a high level of commitment and dedication to the community we serve,” said Colburn.

According to the NRPA, “The Certified Park and Recreation Professional certification is the national standard for all parks and recreation professionals who want to be at the forefront of their profession. Attaining the CPRP designation shows that you have met education and experience qualifications and illustrates your commitment to the profession as well as your knowledge and understanding of key concepts within parks and recreation.”

Competencies are tested in five core competency areas of Communication, Finance, Human Resources, Operations and Programming.

Booker has been employed with PARA in Communications since 2006. Colburn has worked with PARA since 2011, first with youth athletics and currently in Communications.

Tuscaloosa - PARA Foundation Announces LEAD TAPP Gift

During its regularly scheduled meeting on June 24, the Tuscaloosa County Commission unanimously voted to approve a \$514,000 cash or in-kind donation for the Tuscaloosa All-Inclusive Playground Project to be built in Sokol Park. The monies will be directed toward civil engineering work which includes site preparation, utilities, and handicap accessible parking required to complete the playground.

The TAPP is the current focus of the PARA Foundation and is designed for people of all ages and all abilities to play together and specifically addresses physical, social, cognitive, communicative and sensory needs. The design features a Tuscaloosa theme that speaks to the history and iconic elements of the Tuscaloosa area.

“The County Commission’s donation will allow for the completion of Phase One of the playground. This is key to its construction timeline and overall success,” said Caroline Lasseter, director of outreach.

“We are thrilled that all three of our local governing bodies are on board to support the inclusive playground in a big way. This will be an outstanding asset for all families in our community to enjoy,” she said.

Playground equipment for Phase One has been delivered and the pavilion bid will be announced in July.

For more information about the TAPP, please visit <https://www.tcpara.org/donate> or contact Lasseter at 205-562-3220 36 or lasseter@tcpara.org.



Auburn - City Market

Auburn Parks and Recreation hosts a farmer's market every Saturday during the summer months. It's called the City Market. The City Market is held at Town Creek Park from 8 – 11 a.m. The Market has been a great success. The parks and recreation staff have implemented safe guards to help keep the market as safe as possible. City Market staff position the vendors side by side, with ten feet between the vendor booths, in straight line. This enables patrons to line up in a single line and to social distance while waiting to make their purchase. City Market Staff have grass safe spray paint and mark an X showing people where to stand and making while people wait in line they maintain a six feet distance.

All market patrons are encourage to wear masks and most do. All vendors follow the state sanitation guidelines regarding farmers markets, including:

- Food samples will not be served, and cooking demonstrations will not be allowed.
- Vendors will maintain a 10-foot distance from one another.
- All vendors will wear food-safe serving gloves and will designate one worker to handle payment.
- We recommend that vendors wear face masks.
- All available products will be prepackaged.

The event has been a huge success with attendance of over 300 people per market.



Opelika - Senior Population is Thriving during COVID-19

Adjusting to COVID-19 has been hard on everyone, but it has been especially hard on senior adults. For a population that struggles with social isolation during the best of times, COVID-19 has left Opelika's seniors in a precarious position.



According to Opelika Parks and Recreation's Adult Activity Director, Valeri White, social isolation has potentially wide-ranging implications including poorer health outcomes, reduced meaningful activity, reduced social and emotional support, loneliness, limited access to resources, reduced physicality and potential grief, loss and trauma responses.

for the group and weekly Zoom Bingo games. They called every member weekly to check in one-on-one.

The Opelika SportsPlex's Adult Activity Center staff have been coming up with ways to keep their "peeps" engaged. When attendance began declining in March, the AAC staff began streaming exercise classes online for those unable to come in-person. Knowing a mandatory closure was imminent, the staff worked with the fitness department to film numerous classes to be released after the SportsPlex shut down.

Knowing that digital and telecommunication would only go so far, they also popped a ton of popcorn and delivered it curbside to all of their members with a note that said "Just popping in to check on you!". They also organized a few drive-by parades for members who were struggling with health issues.

The SportsPlex AAC knew that their seniors' mental health was also at risk, so they began coming up with innovative ways to keep them engaged and having fun. They organized daily Zoom video chats

When restrictions were loosened in June, the AAC staff organized a "socially distanced picnics" where member gathered outside and enjoy a meal together, albeit 6 feet apart. Seeing each other's faces really did a world of good, so it turned into a weekly gatehring with more and more attending each week.

Opelika is looking forward to resuming normal activities, but until that time rest assured that Opelika's senior population will continue to be active.



Dothan - Events

Rose Hill Senior Center is proud to support the Covid-19 relief effort. We understand that our senior population is at the greatest risk right now because of the pandemic. We have increased our feeding program to mitigate the strain on Dothan seniors. Rose Hill serves 107 hot meals a day. We are able to deliver the meals to the seniors that no longer can drive and provide drive-thru pickup for those seniors who can still drive. A nutritionist plans every meal to ensure it provides 1/3 of the daily recommend nutrition.

During the pandemic seniors cannot attend our center. This can increase the feeling of isolation and loneliness that the seniors experience. We are reaching out to the seniors in new ways to make sure that they know they are cared about. We have provided online activities, activity sheets, quarantine goodie bags, personalized phone calls, and socially distanced visits from staff. We will continue to serve our seniors during this time but we sure do miss seeing everyone.



Dothan Therapeutic Recreation Program Summer Camps/Events

The Dothan Therapeutic Recreation program hosted two 2-week sessions of summer camp for intellectually challenged teenagers and adults at the Westgate Recreation Center. Camp was held and social distancing guidelines was followed. Campers enjoyed games, talent show, trivia, arts and crafts, music, history lessons, story time, swimming, life skills, movies, dancing and other fun activities. Fifteen campers attended each session. Campers did an amazing job adhering to the social distancing guidelines and wearing a mask during summer camp.



Campers enjoy swimming at Andrew Belle Pool

Dothan - Events



Campers get a history lesson about the Statue of Liberty



Campers get creative with arts & crafts

The Alabama Recreation and Parks Association held a Virtual Art Show for individuals with disabilities during June. Dothan had 7 participants that entered amazing artwork for the art show. We are extremely proud of the participation that we had and was excited that Julie P. from Dothan won 1st place with her art titled "Painted Paper bag fish."



Julie P. winning art entry "Painted paper bag fish"

The TR program has also started their archery program getting ready for the ARPA state tournament to be hosted by Dothan Leisure Services and has implemented social distancing guidelines and CDC safety recommendations.



Aiming for a bullseye

Eufaula - Staying Connected

It's been our top priority at Eufaula Parks & Recreation to stay connected with our community during this time.

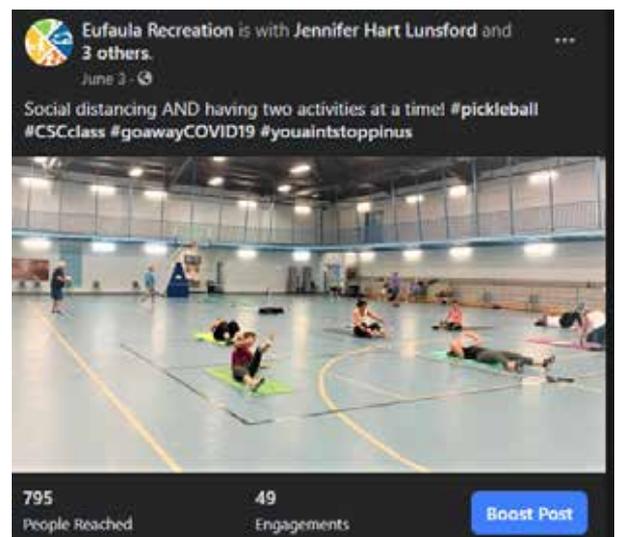
The first thing we did was link a Virtual Recreation page to our website. We want to ensure our customers stay active & have plenty to do while they are at home. This page gives access to kid's activity ideas, online exercise videos, at-home sports drills, dry land swim training & exploring ideas (local attractions, scavenger hunt ideas & virtual travel access).

We kept the public updated on what we were doing during the closing & also what steps we were taking to ensure they would be returning to a safe & healthy environment. We also frequently posted encouraging words on social media, along with a personalized video from our staff letting the public know that we were missing them during our closure.

Since reopening we frequently post pictures of our programs on social media, letting our customers know that we have found a balance in practicing our new safety measures while also staying committed to keeping them active.

We hope our efforts in staying connected with our customers during this time, will not only encourage them to stay healthy, but will also be a reminder of our commitment to our community.

#WeAreParksandRec



Mobile - Socially Distant Events

Virtual Participation and Drive Thru Events

Surprising Participants of virtual participation. Filming virtual education with materials around the house for arts and crafts. Blessing bag giveaways from our foundation members. These bags included common items that are hard to find. Drive Thru snack giveaways from partnering agencies with the community. Members brought their questions thru a drive thru event. Drive thru snow cone socials to beat the heat. Surprise drive-by parades.

Senior Programs and Centers

City of Mobile Parks and Recreation Senior Programs and Centers are staying connected through Virtual Recreation which include crafting, technology webinars, at home workouts, bingos, cooking demonstrations, and field trips, Drive Thru Socials, Surprise Parades, and Quality Check-In Calls during COVID-19.



Mobile - Virtual Events

City of Mobile: Parks & Recreation · May 11 · 🌐

Yoga can be fun for kids as well as adults. Grab your kids and follow along with this yoga video.



Children's Yoga

We have a children's yoga video taken in the park.

City of Mobile: Parks & Recreation · May 5 · 🌐

Watch as one of our talented art instructors shows how to draw "Combo Animals". Drawing, coloring, or a... See More



Music Trivia

One way we are staying contacted with our friends is by live streaming on FB. This week was music trivia. People are able to comment and interact with us. Next week will be "name that tune".

City of Mobile: Parks & Recreation · May 29 · 🌐

June Jones is one of our programmatic partners. Boom Mind is a combination of Yoga and Pilates. Please enjoy this relaxing video and possibly follow along.



June Jones Yoga

June Jones teaches yoga at the Adult Center, she has provided videos for her people to keep in touch.

City of Mobile: Parks & Recreation · May 6 · 🌐

Enjoy this beautiful virtual nature walk with our special activities department, or go outside and enjoy a nature walk in one of our many beautiful parks. If you do choose to visit a park, remember to practice proper social distancing. #mprd



Mobile Nature Walk

The special activities department employees took a nature walk in one of the city parks.

Durrell “Duke” Smith Memorial Scholarship

Claire Aplin of Ashford and a senior of Ashford High School, is the 2020 recipient of the annual Durrell “Duke” Smith Memorial Scholarship.

“There were a great number of qualified applicants, and it was a very difficult decision for our committee,” said ARPA District VI Awards Chair Tony Thorne of Dothan Leisure Services. “ We were very impressed with Claire’s involvement and accomplishments not only in school, but the church and community as well. We know she has a bright future in all things.”

The Duke Smith Scholarship is presented annually from the Alabama Recreation and Parks Association District VI, which is composed of high schools with graduating seniors that have park and recreation agencies in the counties of Barbour, Butler, Coffee, Covington, Crenshaw, Dale, Geneva, Henry, Houston and Pike. The winner receives a plaque and a cash award of \$500. The Durrell “Duke” Smith Award recognizes students based on academic achievement, sports involvement, civic involvement and community service.



Claire Aplin and Tony Thorne of Dothan Leisure Services



ALABAMA RECREATION AND PARKS TEAMS UP WITH NFL FLAG

CHICAGO, June 16, 2020 – NFL FLAG has been named the official flag football program of the Alabama Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA).

Flag football is growing in popularity in Alabama, with several ARPA member agencies already offering NFL FLAG football to their participants. ARPA will help promote the game of flag football and NFL FLAG programs across its member agencies.

As part of the partnership, NFL FLAG will provide official NFL licensed jerseys to ARPA member agencies and support ARPA's statewide flag football tournament with digital branding and marketing support. The winner of the ARPA statewide tournament will be invited to participate in the official NFL FLAG regional tournament.

“As a native of Dothan, Alabama, I’m proud to help bring NFL FLAG to my home state and work with ARPA to create more opportunities for all athletes to play the game of flag,” said Izell Reese, former NFL safety and executive director of NFL FLAG. “Our hope is that we can work with other state agencies to help create quality flag football experiences for boys and girls across the country.”

NFL FLAG also will organize and plan a virtual flag football coaching clinic for ARPA member agencies, with plans being discussed to hold in person events in future years. NFL FLAG will host a virtual kickoff session to introduce the program to all ARPA member agencies this summer.

“The Alabama Recreation and Parks Association is excited to partner with NFL FLAG and RCX Experiences in providing NFL FLAG football to the kids in our ARPA communities,” said ARPA Executive Director Natalie Norman. “This is a tremendous opportunity for our Association. We know that through this collaboration, we will take part in offering the gold standard in flag football to the youth of our state. This partnership is one that will further our ability to keep our kids physically and mentally fit.”

All NFL FLAG coaches in Alabama will be trained in injury recognition and prevention in compliance with the state's 2018 Coach Safely Act as part of the ARPA/CoachSafely Initiative. The CoachSafely online course educates youth coaches on a comprehensive group of topics, including concussions, infectious and communicable diseases and mental health.

NFL FLAG is an NFL licensed property of more than 1,600 locally-operated leagues and over 500,000 youth athletes across all 50 states. With regular participation of more than 3 million youth and adults in the United States, NFL FLAG is a fun and accessible non-contact league made available for

SAVE *the* DATE



ALABAMA RECREATION & PARKS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE

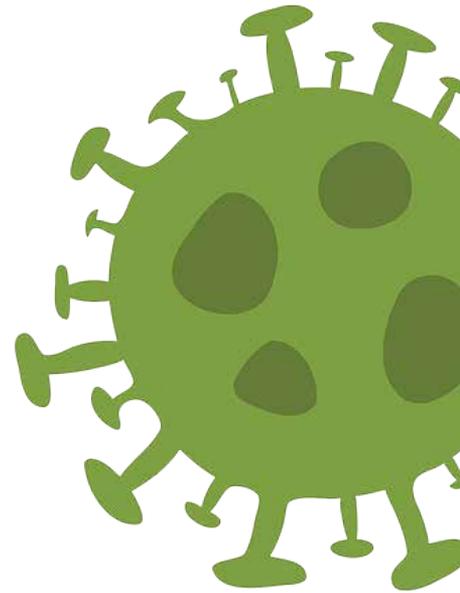


January 24 - 26, 2021
Orange Beach Event Center
ARPAonline.org



How Parks and Recreation Will Change Forever

by Richard J. Dolesh

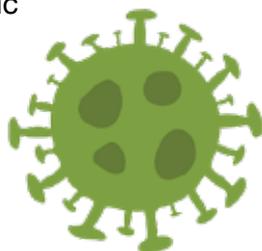


Editor's note: The following article includes recent corrections and updates.

A closer look at the new normal that looms ahead

Just six months ago, our entire world was turned upside down by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Nationwide, most businesses, schools, churches, parks and recreation facilities shut down. Many believed it would just be a short time to “flatten the curve” of the rate of infections and get back to normal. Yet, now in the heat of summer, we find that coronavirus infection positivity rates have surged, and more than half of U.S. states are facing increasing rates of infections. And, this is all before a second wave of infections that epidemiologists predict is virtually certain to strike America this fall. In addition to the pandemic and the resulting economic recession that has profoundly affected hundreds of millions of people, there are also momentous changes taking place across the country in support of racial equality and social justice that are embodied in the Black Lives Matter movement. As change piles upon change, there is one outcome that is increasingly apparent: parks and recreation will change forever.

Because of the pandemic, public parks have become more important to people and more essential to our health and well-being than perhaps at any time before this pernicious disease threatened our health



and freedoms. Mike Kelly, general superintendent of the Chicago Park District and NRPA board member, says, “This pandemic hits us at every level — financial, health, economic, even emotional. One thing it has shown us is how important parks are to every walk of life.” Phil Ginsburg, director of San Francisco Parks and Recreation, agrees: “Parks are not just ‘nice to have,’ they are ‘must have.’ They are critical infrastructure and vital to the public.”

Despite widespread disruptions to our society, the pandemic is demonstrating that community-oriented public systems that are grounded in the needs of local communities and neighborhoods, such as public parks and recreation, will be strengthened rather than fractured by the pandemic. Parks and recreation has already proven to be highly resilient and attuned to serving public needs. Responding to the pandemic, park and recreation systems have ramped up daycare for the children of first responders, provided shelter for people experiencing homelessness, continued meal programs for children and offered health services at community centers. The pandemic is showing how the mission of parks and recreation is evolving to include serving as a provider of social and health services in the effort to rebuild and reconnect communities.

So, what has changed and why, and what will inevitably change in the future?

The Shape of Parks

Parks and recreation facilities will look different than they do today. Already, park planners are looking at the redesign of common areas and



public gathering spots with an eye to improving the flow of pedestrian traffic and maintaining physical distancing. For indoor facilities, the reconfiguration of existing spaces may not be all that expensive, but the retrofits of HVAC and air handling systems to reduce coronavirus loads will be expensive and complicated.

Interestingly, COVID-19 is causing expansions of the public realm in ways that few would have predicted. Urban public space that was once heavily tilted toward providing vehicular access is rapidly transitioning to accommodate human powered travel, outdoor dining and public recreation space, boldly claiming territory for outdoor activities and new kinds of urban parks.



In the future, the public will be giving up a lot of privacy to use indoor recreation facilities and participate in programs. There will likely be temperature testing at entrances, greater visual surveillance and possibly even facial recognition scans. At a minimum, the public will need to provide personal information to participate and many may opt in to using phone apps to give personal location data to inform health departments for potential contact tracing. Certainly, there will be less human touch, figuratively and literally with contactless payments and no-touch transactions.

The Shape of Recreation

During and after the shelter-in-place orders due to COVID-19, visitation at state and local parks exploded. The crush of public use has required agencies to be as flexible and adaptable as possible. Early in the pandemic, local parks and trails were inundated with visitors who just wanted to get out daily for physical activity. Now that some jurisdictions are well into phased reopening plans, visitation has been greatest at recreational hotspots, such as beaches and waterfronts, which have been overwhelmed with visitors. As a new round of infections spiked in states such as Florida, Texas and California, some jurisdictions opened and then completely closed their beaches, whipsawing the public's expectations of how they could use their parks, and what was expected of them when they did.

In Florida, Miami-Dade County's reopening experience with overcrowded beaches and parks exemplifies how park and recreation agencies have demonstrated incredible adaptability and resilience in meeting the challenge of keeping people safe. "We realized that we needed to deploy a whole higher level of awareness and education to keep the public safe," says Maria Nardi, director of Miami-Dade Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces. "The mayor decided that the first thing to reopen was parks. These would be the test sites to ensure that things would work smoothly."

The department had to mobilize in a matter of weeks. It hired more than 600 park and beach ambassadors to patrol the beaches, waterfronts and marinas to encourage people to wear masks and respect physical distancing. Since there were no concerts or sports events, the department contracted with an event management company to employ those who were temporarily unemployed. School crossing guards who had been out of work were also recruited. In all, Miami-Dade has hired 800 people to serve as information providers and goodwill ambassadors. "People realize they have to watch out for themselves and others," Nardi says. "We have had challenges, it is true, but recently, I really saw the value of our approach. One of our ambassadors asked a young man playing basketball on an outdoor court to put on his mask. A friend who was playing with him said, 'Hey man, I want to play basketball, put on your mask.' He did, and he came back the next day and the day after, wearing his mask every day."

Programs and activities for older adults, beyond virtual or highly physically distanced activities, are likely to be seriously impacted for a long time — perhaps up to two years or longer. Recreational activities for the most vulnerable populations will remain limited until there is widespread community testing and development of an effective vaccine. P&R staff may employ creative ways to increase virtual programming and offer telehealth and chronic disease prevention services for older adults, but they are not likely to return to in-person activities for a long time.

The impacts of the pandemic on youth activities, especially sports, have been abrupt and will likely be long-lasting. While youth who are participating at the elite level on travel teams or school teams will be most likely to return fairly quickly to skills

development and competition, youth who are at the margins, especially those in underserved communities without access to team sports or without the ability to ‘pay-to-play,’ will be the most negatively affected. The longer the disconnection from sports lasts, the less attraction youth may have to returning to or even trying organized or team sports.

The Business of P&R

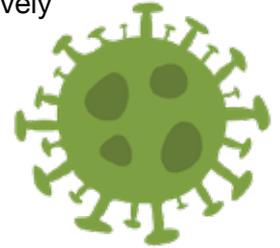
Budget reductions spawned by the COVID-19 recession are likely to last for years and, in turn, will result in significant reductions in staff, operating budgets and capital construction. Budget challenges will be aggravated by the likely long-term loss of fees and charges from reduced operations.

Even when the economy begins to recover, park agencies are likely to be among the last public sectors to rebound. Analysis of the recessions of 1980 and 1991 by Dr. John L. Crompton of Texas A&M University showed that there was a one- to two-year period of recovery in terms of expenditure levels, but parks and recreation took almost a decade to recover as a proportion of government spending. More recent analysis of data from the Great Recession of 2008 to 2009, by Drs. Andrew Mowen, Nick Pitas and Austin Barrett of Penn State University, showed that as of 2016, park agencies have still not recovered to prior spending levels nor to prior proportion of government spending. Dr. Mowen says, “It took about a decade to recover from past recessions, but this one may take even longer.”

Ginsburg of San Francisco says that revenue recovery plans are critically important. “City budgets are being decimated. Some of our critical sources of revenue from music festivals and other large group events will not come back for a long time. We must develop sustainable sources of revenue because we are headed for a couple of years of really hard times.”

“Parks are no more immune than any other public-sector agency or corporation,” says Kelly of Chicago Park District. Many agency directors agree that workforce planning is critical but exceedingly difficult right now. “Retaining benefits will be part of the great debate,” he says. “If you want to attract good workers and talent, you have to look at what you are offering employees.”

The uncertainties of future funding could lead to the greater employment of “disposable workers,” a term that has gained prominence in the gig economy. Even before the pandemic, many agencies turned to hiring part-time and contractual staff to perform what are effectively the functions of full-time employees. Such workers supplement the workforce, but are often prevented from gaining critical benefits because they work less than the number of hours that would qualify them for benefits. When annual budgets must be cut, these workers and other part-time workers are the first to go. Will this be the future workforce of parks and recreation — a contracted out workforce or an employed class of “disposable” workers who have little or no benefits and even less job security?



Post COVID-19 workforce planning can no longer depend on attracting top-quality workers without offering certain benefits, and health insurance will be critical from now on.

A Greater Orientation Toward Health and Equity

Institutionally, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, parks and recreation will become integrally linked to health equity, food security and hunger prevention. This will be especially true in low-income and communities of color. Park agencies have become essential meal providers to children and youth, where meals are provided in before-school, after-school and summer meal programs. The pandemic exposed deep-seated disparities when meal distribution networks, primarily through schools, were disrupted. Basic nutritional needs that were augmented by schools ceased to operate or had to shift gears and rely on community partners for distribution, including parks and recreation. These conditions are likely to persist when schools reopen with different operational structures this fall. Out-of-school time programs will be relied on to provide safe childcare and expanded food access services; however, racial and equity disparities exacerbated by COVID-19, including access to healthy foods, will continue to widen unless there are interventions directly addressing the inequities.

Regarding the disparities in nutrition and food security, parks and recreation can make a real difference for vulnerable children. The existing crisis can be reversed if federal, state and local governing bodies act to repair the damage to deprived children who can no longer participate in quality meal programs. Funding must be purposefully redirected to nutrition and meal programs where they are needed most. Restoring these programs, however, may come at the exclusion of funding other priorities, particularly for those communities that have adequate park and recreation services and facilities. NRPA, through its Walmart Foundation grant program, will be piloting interventions linking people of color and under-resourced communities to needed social services and healthcare through a nutrition lens, with the intent to contribute to building more effective food security systems in communities.



Many park agencies have already embraced their role in helping to provide greater food security for poor and under-resourced communities by facilitating community gardens, farmers markets, and farm-to-table or community supported agriculture (CSA) cooperatives. Greater opportunities exist to convert parkland to urban farms, community orchards, and sites for training programs for sustainable food supply and green infrastructure management.

Social Justice and Racial Equality

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed fault lines of inequality in our society. Disparities in healthcare, social services, public safety, and yes, even in parks and recreation, that were largely under the radar have been laid bare and are all the more painful for their sudden prominence.

“Low-income families have been hit the hardest,” says Kelly about the impacts of the pandemic. “It has been very clear that minorities have been disproportionately affected. We see greater rates of infection, more hospitalizations and more deaths in African American communities. This is why we as a city have to invest greater amounts in those communities that have been most affected. We must make the kinds of investments in parks and recreation facilities that will help the families of these communities in our city. If this isn’t a wake-up call, I don’t know what is.”

As reported by the PEW Charitable Trust citing multiple public health studies, there is growing proof that racism is a public health emergency, and more than 20 cities and four states have now passed resolutions declaring racism a public health emergency. The disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on Black, Latino and Indigenous U.S. residents with up to four times the number of infections than non-Hispanic white persons, have been shocking.

Detrick Stanford, former park and recreation director and now chief operating officer of Clayton County, Georgia, says that the Black Lives Matter movement and the growing awareness of racial injustice will have a profound effect on parks and recreation. “How parks and recreation delivers services to the community will forever change.” The overriding message of the Black Lives Matter movement is inequality, he says. And because parks and recreation is on the front lines of societal change, we must also be at the forefront of addressing social and racial inequalities. “If we are fighting health inequalities, we are fighting racism,” he says about the grave inequities in healthcare, access to good nutrition and environmental pollution that black communities encounter. “Addressing health disparities involves a range of social, economic and health factors,” Stanford says. “Parks and recreation [has] real solutions for addressing public health outcomes. We have great resilience in our country, but we must provide the context to why things must change and then be courageous enough to make the changes we need to make. We can do this.”

Will parks and recreation change forever? As far as a return to normal, Kelly says, “I think Americans are incredibly resilient. There will be a return to normal someday.” But the next normal may be so far down the road that it will not ever feel like the old normal again.

Thanks to Allison Colman, director of health at NRPA, for contributing to this article.

Richard J. Dolesh is an Editor at Large for Parks & Recreation magazine.

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2020

Calendar of Events

August

11 ARPA State Archery Tournament
Dothan, AL

September

22-24 CPSI Course
Virtual Training

29-Oct 1 ARPF Fall Workshop
Orange Beach, AL

November

4-6 LEAD
Camp Skyline, Mentone, AL

6-7 ARPA Youth Flag Football
State Tournament
Trussville, AL

21-22 ARPA Soccer State Tournament
Dothan, AL

January 2021

24-26 ARPA State Conference
Orange Beach, AL