

# The Alabamian

A PUBLICATION OF THE ALABAMA RECREATION AND PARKS ASSOCIATION



Alabama Recreation .....

**Bounces Back**

**Natalie Norman, CPRP**  
Executive Director  
Alabama Recreation and  
Parks Association

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from the  
**President**

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WOW, this year has been really busy!

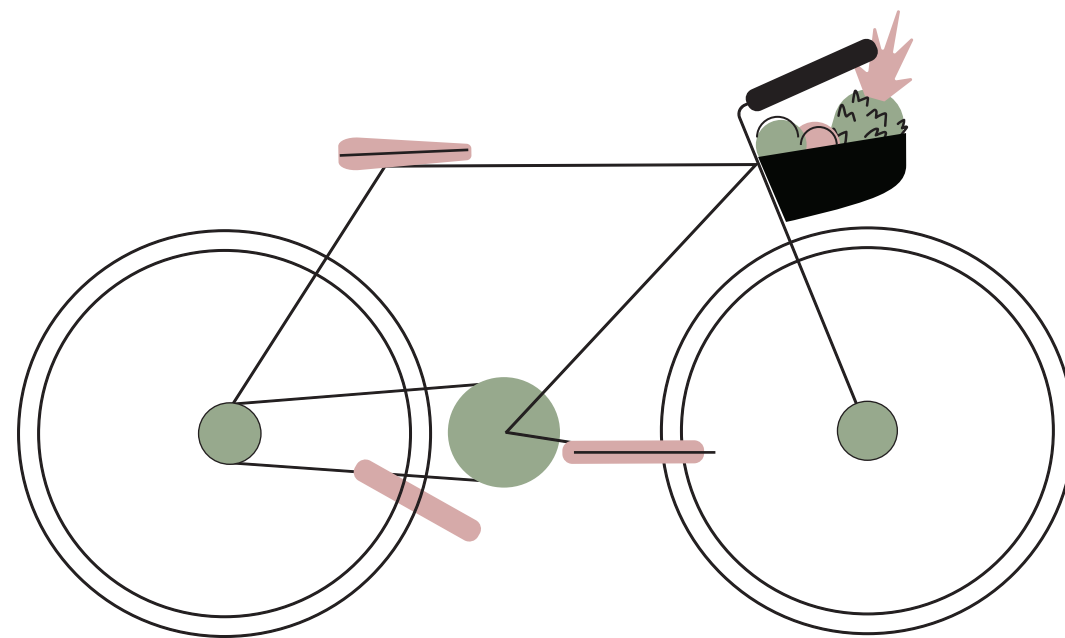
As we have resumed more normal activities, it seems like we are even busier than ever. I hope that you have been able to take some time away from your busy schedule and take advantage of some recent learning opportunities.

The ARPF Fall Workshop was once again a success with good education sessions, and great fellowship. The NRPA annual conference was recently in our backyard (Nashville) and provided a great chance to learn, meet new people, and expand our professional network. Also, the LEAD program is right around the corner (November 3-5) and provides an excellent opportunity for professionals young and old to build their leadership skills and foster new relationships.

As we move forward, the 2022 ARPA conference is right around the corner and will be yet another chance to build your knowledge and network.

In closing, I would like to wish everyone a wonderful Thanksgiving, a Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year.

Gary Minor  
2020 ARPA President



Hello ARPA Members!

I know this will find everyone having had a much different Spring and Summer than last year. Thank you for all that you do!

Parks and recreation definitely had some uphill challenges since March of 2020, but as an essential profession, we have met those challenges with gusto, as we always do, leaning in.

So far this year, we have had successful state events through our Recreational Sports program. Seeing our kids across the state playing and competing has been a true blessing. Many thanks to our event hosts for putting so much time and effort into making them successful! Thanks to Sand Mountain Park and Amphitheater for hosting basketball, swimming & diving, and flag football. Thanks to Trussville for hosting track & field. Thanks to Vestavia Hills for hosting softball. Thanks to Dothan for hosting Archery. We look forward to volleyball at Sand Mountain Park in Albertville and soccer in Dothan, in order to finish out the recreational sports schedule.

We had a wonderful Fall Workshop, COPP Golf Tournament and LEAD program! We look forward to an outstanding state conference in Huntsville to be held January 23-25, 2022. Please be looking for registration materials on our website.

Our membership campaign for 2022 is in full swing! Thanks so much to all of our members for making ARPA active and engaged. Each member should be receiving the 2021-2022 ARPA Membership Directory & Buyer's Guide in the next couple of weeks. We will also send out a 2022 only directory next February.

Thank you for every program that you facilitate, in order to keep our communities mentally and physically healthy. It is a privilege to serve!

Sincerely,  
Natalie



from the  
**Executive Director**

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## District 1

# Florence Lifeguards Bounce Back

**back row, right to left:** Sydni Alexander LG, Lanigan Burke LG, Issabella Thompson LG, Sam Watson LG, Brady Carson LG, Grayson Abernathy PA, Jack McKinnon LG, Davis Fisher LG, Patrick Burke LG.

**front row left to right:** Mary Grace Kelley LG, Paige Prince PA, Katilyn Daniel PA, Kate Powell LG, Maylea Perry LG, May Beth Youngblood LG, Lauren Kelley LG

**laying down:** Dawson Fisher LG

**not pictured:** MKenzie Burnett PA, Mai Currott LG, Ella-Ross Edwards LG, Sydney Leach PA, Taylor Leach PA, Macey Richardson LG, William Noel PA

“

The City of Florence's Royal Avenue Pools and Handy Pools Lifeguards and Pool Attendants have outdone themselves this summer with our community trying to "Bounce Back", recuperate and overcome the adversity caused by CoVid. Each and everyone of these employees have worked long and hot hours on short notice numerous times this season. They have my respect and admiration always.

”

## District 2

# The Grand Return of SugarFest

The want for a fireworks show led to the creation of a new festival in Arab – SugarFest – which launched in 2019. The festival was a huge success for citizens and visitors in attendance on that Labor Day weekend.

The much anticipated second year was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but SugarFest 2021 happened and BOY, it was the largest one day event in Arab's history! It was, by far, the largest Labor Day event in North Alabama.

**The History of How SugarFest Began** - Years ago, the city of Arab had a fireworks show hosted by a local citizen. It was a grand show but wasn't a long term event. Since that time, there had been no fireworks lighting the sky above Arab, which left a hole in the community's happenings.

That changed when a group of residents, business owners, and community stakeholders came together to make sure the Arab community and visitors alike could enjoy, yet again, a spectacular fireworks display.

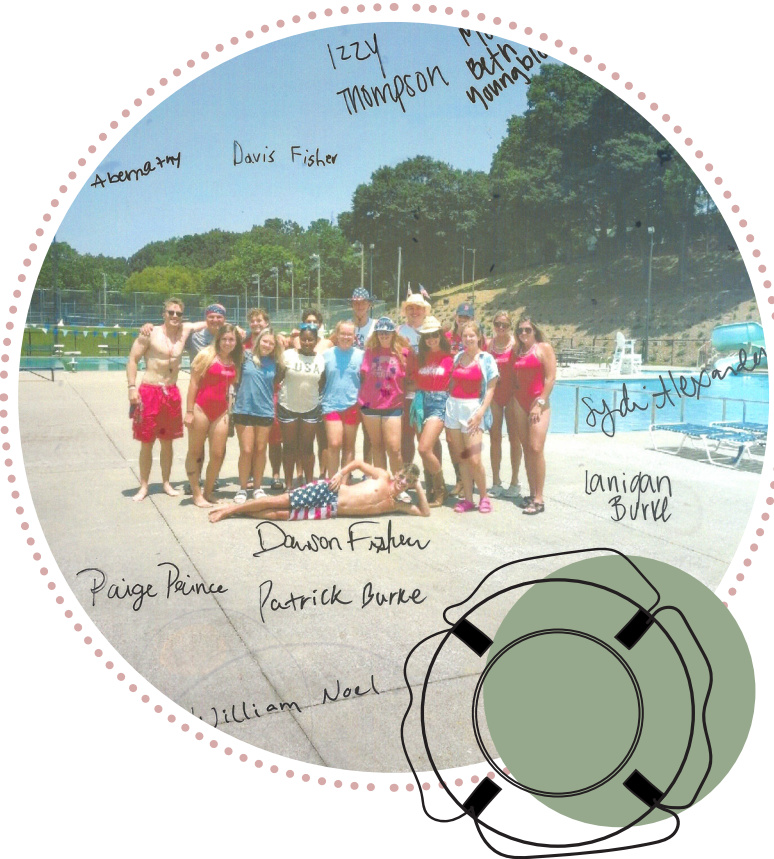
During the planning of the illuminations display, other ideas for the community were thrown out left and right –until the fireworks show had grown into a one-day community festival.

But where did the SugarFest name come from? "It's in the South and nothing is sweeter than the sugar in the South, right?" says the event's website. "And there it was. SugarFest! Taking place annually on the Saturday of Labor Day weekend at Arab City Park."

The day kicked off with a 5K race through the beautiful streets surrounding Arab City Park, followed by the Miss SugarFest pageant set in the old schoolhouse in the Historic Village.

Over 100 quality arts and craft vendors covered the landscape of Arab City Park from 8 am to 4 pm. The artisans boasted many unique and distinctive items for the festival goers to purchase.

Kids enjoyed areas designated for both the 12 and under and the 13 and above areas filled with inflatable bounce houses, an obstacle course, a petting zoo, climbing wall, mechanical bull and so much more. The Arab City Pool and Splashpad were opened for the public to cool off. These were sponsored by generous churches and businesses so that they could be offered free of charge.





There was no shortage of delicious food options this year from the over 25 food vendors. They were positioned throughout the park serving up everything from Philly cheesesteaks, gourmet burgers, fried sushi, hot dogs and barbeque to funnel cakes, cotton candy, and beignets. And you can't miss out on the homemade lemonade and old fashioned ice cream floats- best sellers from the inaugural event.

The Classic Car Cruise-In was back, a big hit from day one, from 4-7 pm. And this year, the committee had a few surprises up their sleeves. A new and highly requested addition to SugarFest- a cornhole tournament - took center stage of the horse arena, tossing bags all afternoon and evening. A beverage tent and food truck in a designated area were available for everyone's enjoyment beginning at noon until the end of the all-day event.

To add even more fun- there was live music at the SugarFest After Dark event at the Arab City Park Amphitheater beginning with local favorite Rippy Dippy and the Hidden Hippies at 4:30 pm, followed by much loved Trotline at 6:30 pm. And of course, the main event that started it all, the Fireworks Spectacular which lit up the sky at 8:15 pm, followed by music headliner, Everette, at 8:30 pm. Lots of food, drinks and adult beverages were available for purchase in the designated area.

The whole day was made possible through the generosity of many great sponsors. The Arab Park and Recreation Department were superstars in their work to make sure the park was pristine and manicured.

It was a fabulous, relaxing day of fun spent with family and friends, making great memories at SugarFest 2021. For information on SugarFest events or to be a vendor, visit their website at [www.thesugarfest.com](http://www.thesugarfest.com).



## Welcome to the ..... Team

Boaz Parks and Recreation's new facility is striking and has created the opportunity to work with individuals who bring an impressive set of skills to the table. With the team we have in place at Boaz, we are confident in our ability to implement our vision for the community.

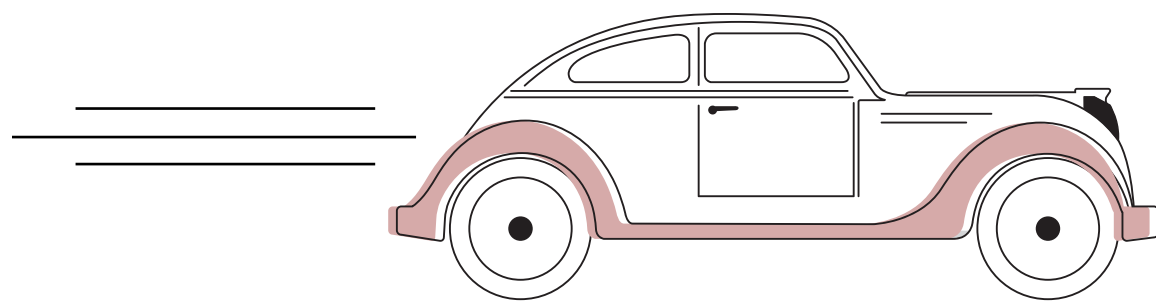
New to the team is Todd Russell, our Aquatics Coordinator. Todd was born in Birmingham, AL where he started swimming at the age of two and quickly moved on to jumping off the diving board at the age of three. With a Bachelor's in Recreation Management, Todd has cultivated a career in Parks and Recreation. Starting out as a scorekeeper in Anniston under Gene Cornett and Harry Harner, Todd has been in the business for almost 28 years. His love of water has stayed with him over the years as he taught swim lessons, water classes, swim teams, and lifeguard classes. He is married to Anita Russell and they have three children: Blaine age 26, Giovanni age 20, and Isabella age 15. We are excited to have Todd on board as he has already implemented two new programs, a water aerobics class, and a SCUBA course. We look forward to many more great ideas from him to take Boaz Aquatics to the next level!

Another new face, Chris Saint, has joined the team as our Assistant Director. Chris graduated from Albertville High School in 2007 and went on to play baseball at Snead State Community College. He graduated from Jacksonville State with a degree in Recreational Leadership in 2014 and became the Athletic Director with the City of Fort Payne the following year. After six and a half years with Fort Payne, Chris followed his love of sports back to Boaz as a field crew worker. In September of 2021, Chris was promoted to Assistant Director of Boaz Parks and Recreation. Chris is married to Tiffany Saint and has a son, Grayson age two. He claims his success is due to the leaders he has been fortunate to work under including E.R. Brown, Greg Conkle, and Sonja Hard. We are extremely excited to be working with Chris and his optimistic attitude. He has launched himself into this new position with a passion and we expect great things from him in the future!



## Caps for a Cause

Fort Payne Parks and Recreation held the inaugural Caps for Cause in September. Caps for A Cause is an art show featuring art from all ages using upcycled bottle caps. The art was displayed in the Wills Valley Recreation Center lobby where people could vote on their favorite piece. Votes were a dollar a piece with all the proceeds going to St. Jude's. This will be an annual event in September in conjunction with Childhood Cancer Awareness.





## A Life of Service

# Bernita Reese Takes Helm at Huntsville Parks & Rec

by Don Foley

Raised in Atlanta, a block away from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s home and the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church, Bernita Reese was a toddler when the world learned the news.

"Dr. Martin Luther King, the apostle of nonviolence in the Civil Rights Movement, has been shot to death in Memphis, Tennessee," Walter Cronkite reported on April 4, 1968.

It was in that moment that Bernita's calling to serve people from all walks of life began. A preacher's daughter, she's familiar with what it means to be "called." She also believes the experiences of her youth and her family's faith motivated her to serve.

"It is all about the people," Bernita said. "I definitely have always felt an urge to help others. Just helping people of all ages and walks of life."

### Bernita Reese Speaks

Huntsville Parks & Recreation Director Bernita Reese speaks at the opening of the new Community Foundation Park on May 6, 2021.

In March 2021, Mayor Tommy Battle appointed Bernita director of the City's Parks & Recreation Department. Her educational and real-world experiences speak for themselves – she earned her bachelor's degree in recreation and park administration from Savannah State University in Georgia and her master's in sports management from Western Illinois University.

She is currently pursuing her doctorate in Organizational Leadership through Franklin University in Ohio.

"Bernita brings more than 25 years of parks and recreation management experience and fresh ideas and perspectives to the City of Huntsville," Mayor Battle said. "We look forward to seeing how she takes our Parks & Recreation Department to the next level."

### The Love of a Family

Bernita's parents, Rev. Stewart Reese, Jr., and his wife, Navoria, moved from Seattle when she was an infant. The Reeses and their five children would eventually land in Atlanta.

"My father said he felt a calling to start a church," Bernita said.

About a year after King's assassination, Rev. Reese opened Bethesda Cathedral Church in Decatur, Ga. The church still stands today with Bernita's older brother, Stewart Reese III, behind the pulpit.

"My parents began a legacy of love for its family and others," she said.

She credits much of her personality and passion to her older brother, Bernie, who lived life with multiple physical and mental handicaps. Bound to a wheelchair for most of his life, Bernie's experience helped shape his younger sister.

"It's been 30 years since he passed," Bernita said. "However, who he was then really opened my eyes in a way that allowed me to become compassionate to so many needs and so many different walks of life today."

Ten years ago, her family's legacy of love and giving moved Bernita to give back to her father.

"His kidneys were failing, and we were a match," she said. "I asked the doctor if I would be fine with one kidney, and the doctor said, 'Yes.' So, six months later, we did the transplant."

Rev. Reese, 83, and his wife, Navoria, 81, now live in Lithonia, Ga., and are doing well.

"I celebrate two birthdays for my dad," Bernita said. "Feb. 22 is his actual birthday. Then, May 15, the day of the kidney transplant, is like a second birthday for us."

### A Parks and Rec Kid

From the time she was in elementary school, Bernita had a connection with her neighborhood rec center in Georgia.

"I still remember being tossed in the Piedmont Park Swimming Pool over and over," she said with a grin. "It was a different time and I was learning how to swim the hard way."

A graduate of Columbia High School, Bernita was a member of the varsity basketball and track and field teams.

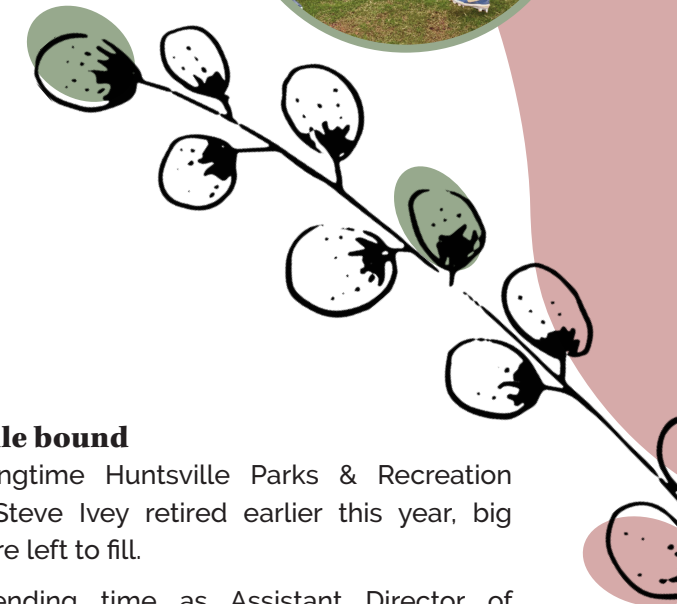
"All of that was spurred on by my days at the rec center," she said, adding she and her friends would run and play basketball at the Mark Trail Recreation Center in DeKalb County, Ga. "It definitely led to my participation in student athletics."

As I began looking for the right move for me, Huntsville quickly became the obvious choice."

It wasn't only rec department games that drove Bernita's desire as a child. It was also the artistic side of recreating that piqued her curiosity during high school.

"A teacher of mine, Ida Boler Royal, got me involved with drama and the art of the world," she said. "She had such a huge impact on me to the point that I even became an honors student in the International Thespian Society."

With all those experiences under her belt, and a passion to work in either sports or acting, Bernita saw her first real experience in her 20s when she ran a sports camp for the Parks & Recreation Department in Sierra Vista, Ariz.



### Huntsville bound

When longtime Huntsville Parks & Recreation Director Steve Ivey retired earlier this year, big shoes were left to fill.

After spending time as Assistant Director of Recreation and Parks for the City of Columbus, Ohio, Bernita wanted a challenge that would take her passion to the next level. She had just managed two major capital projects in the Buckeye State worth more than \$40 million.

"Columbus was a great town and I couldn't be prouder of the work done while I was there," she said. "As I began looking for the right move for me, Huntsville quickly became the obvious choice. It's just a very progressive town. I loved learning about the parks, the greenways and all the recreation options already in place. The idea of getting to take part and help make a change really excites me."



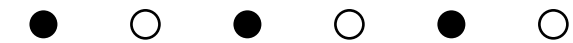
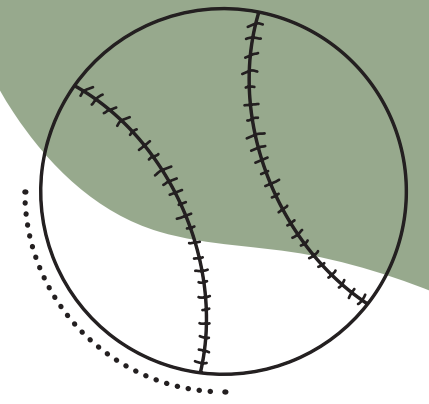
Sand Mountain

# Miracle League

Sand Mountain Park & Amphitheater recently started a Miracle League at their facility. The Miracle League removes the barriers that keep children with mental and physical disabilities off the baseball field and lets them experience the joy of America's favorite pastime. Since the main barriers for these players arise from the natural grass fields used in conventional leagues, Miracle League teams play on a custom-designed, rubberized turf field that accommodates wheelchairs and other assertive devices while helping to prevent injuries. The Miracle League is also affiliated with MLB across the nation, and offers opportunities to get players and teams involved with the leagues.

In addition to having a specialized Miracle League field at the Sand Mountain Park & Amphitheater complex, they ensure that each kid and/or adult has a volunteer buddy who helps them. The entire Snead State Community College Baseball Team comes every Thursday night and volunteers their time to be buddies for the players. Thursday nights at the Miracle League field are electric with each player jamming to a walkup song that is played, and lots of cheering from the crowd. The amount of joy seen in the players during this league is incredible.

The Sand Mountain Park & Amphitheater team is thrilled to have a program that encompasses their mission of improving the mental & physical health of the local region. A special shout out to Sports Programming Coordinator (Lisa Hansford), Tournaments & Programming Manager (Marty Allen), and all the volunteers for being instrumental in launching this league. The Miracle League is going to be a staple feature each year at Sand Mountain Park, and we're so excited to be able to positively impact the lives of all who are involved.





Fit For The Future

# SMPA Provides Engine For Community Health, Economic Impact

by Daniel Taylor | The Reporter

The Sand Mountain Park and Amphitheater is arguably one of the largest endeavors the City of Albertville has ever undertaken.

With nearly 130 acres of recreation area including multiple baseball, soccer and football fields; tennis, basketball and sand volleyball courts; playgrounds; a 4-mile walking trail; dog park; RV camp site; 7,600-seat outdoor amphitheater; and state-of-the-art sports complex complete with workout room, indoor basketball and racquet ball courts and aquatics center, there's nothing else like it in north Alabama, let alone Sand Mountain.

What began as an \$8 million plan to repair the pool and basketball court at the old Albertville Rec Center in 2017, evolved into a nearly \$86 million complete overhaul that will impact the future of Marshall County and the surrounding areas in terms of business, tourism and health for years to come.

## The Master Plan

Albertville Mayor Tracy Honea said when he first came into office in 2012, discussions regarding upgrading the Albertville Parks and Recreation area were already in the works.

"There has been a plan to redo the facilities for several years. The old facility was 50 years old, give or take," he said.

In 2015, the city installed a new, handicap-accessible pavilion that still stands today next to the football fields at the new park. Beyond that, the park in general needed upgrades and repairs, not the least of which was a costly, leaky swimming pool, he said.

That's why in 2016, a "master plan" to do renovate and expand the park was introduced with a proposed initial budget of \$8 million. The city council discussed ways of funding the project including seeking a \$10 million bond, \$2 million of which would go toward aesthetic improvements in the downtown area and to paving projects.

However, a few months later in April 2017, the council proposed another, more ample budget of \$36 million for park renovations along with a 1-cent sales tax increase to provide the funds.

"This may seem fast to the public," Albertville City Council President Nathan Broadhurst said at the time. "But, for nearly five years, we've been putting a plan together for what people feel needs improving — the recreation center and roads. We've been financially responsible with our money and know where every penny goes. But, we've done everything we can do with what we have."

About 40 people attended the public hearing before the council voted on the issue in 2017, but no one spoke against the multi-million-dollar bond or tax increase.

Business consultant David Langham told The Reporter the initial \$8 million budget proposal was part of a plan to do renovations in phases. However, he said the conversation started turning toward a much larger budget once the time and long-term costs of a phased approach became more apparent.

"That [\$8 million] sounds like a lot of money, but when you start talking about facilities of that amount of square footage, you start talking about a pool that's been in the ground as long as that one had, those dollars were not going to be able to do everything that the administration and I think, with the feedback from the community, that they want to do," he said.

"Everybody quickly realized, if we patch this up and then we try to do something with the baseball fields and we try to come over here and do something with this or that, that is going to be extremely expensive and it's going to take a really long time."

Langham said the same project proposed under the initial Phase 1 \$8 million in 2017 would have cost about \$2.5 million in 2005.

With approximately \$3.2 million expected to be generated annually for the city by the 1-cent sale tax, the council was able to secure a 30-year, \$36 million bond. Since then, Langham said the tax income has "far outpaced" their projections.

"You guys were in a unique position here in Albertville that at the time the total sales tax levy here was only 8%," he said. "I would say 90% of Alabama communities were at 10%... We knew that adding one penny and going to 9%, we were still going to be competitive."

Once the \$36 million was approved as a "ball park estimate," the city began working with architecture firm Chambliss King on the park's design. Mayor Honea said they held focus groups and toured facilities throughout the southeastern U.S. in order to see what may be possible for Sand Mountain.

"The economy's doing well. Things are going well, new businesses are open," Langham said. "New restaurants are opening, jobs are being created, people are spending more here. These are all things you want to see. You get into 2018, and you

begin to see what we need to do in SMPA based on feasibility studies, focus groups and everything else is going to be a little bit more than \$40 million."

By the time the city officially broke ground on the project in January 2019, the size of the project had grown to include the aforementioned amenities and expansions, which necessitated a budget of more than \$58 million.

Construction went relatively smoothly, all things considered, Honea said. The crews had to deal with the COVID-19, labor and materials shortages and inflation like every other construction project did, he said. That combined with having to remove unexpectedly a large section of rock before continuing the project added millions more to the budget. But while aspects of the economy were struggling and even shut down, Langham said the 1-cent sale tax revenue kept increasing throughout the pandemic allowing the city to safely take on more upfront debt to complete the project.

At last estimate in July 2021, the cost of the park totaled near \$86 million — more than 10 times the original budget — with more projects still to be added including another parking lot and disc golf course.

## Economic Impact

Based on a study done by Jacksonville State University, Albertville Economic Developer Mike Price said the park has the potential to generate approximately \$42 million annually, which is not including sports tourism and entertainment opportunities.

According to Kelly Baine of Sports Facilities Companies, which manages the park, the amount of money spent in and around the park by visiting teams and others who live outside of Sand Mountain was forecasted to be around \$4.1 million this year. However, as of mid-July, the number was calculated at over \$10 million in direct economic impact, which could be much higher by the end of the park's fiscal year ends Sept. 30.





Many local establishments have already seen a bump in their business as out-of-towners flock to SMPA for tournaments, concerts and other recreation, often leaving hotels booked and restaurant dining rooms full.

Local Joe's, which is located on Main Street in downtown Albertville about a mile from the park, said it has benefitted from SMPA and were "proud" to have it in the community.

"We are so proud to have a facility as wonderful as SMPA in our community," the restaurant's co-owner, Karen Stanfield, told The Reporter. "We appreciate, very much, the patience of all of our loyal customers when they come in and see that there are multiple teams dining at the large 'team and family tables' as well as other visitors to the area because of the SMPA... We receive calls for catering, etc., and are extremely grateful for the new business. All of our communications with the staff at SMPA are magnificent. They are a top-notch group of folks.

"We may be on a wait sometimes, but our excellent staff have mastered the art of seating, serving and turning the tables in a manner that allows them to visit with the newcomers and recommend other areas in Albertville and the surrounding area for them to visit while they are in town," she added.

She said she hopes to be able to soon offer park memberships as an extra benefit for her employees.

From an industry standpoint, President and CEO of the Marshall County Economic Development Council Matt Arnold said he's excited for what the park could mean for the future of Sand Mountain.

"This was unfathomable just a few years ago that this [park] would be here," he told The Reporter. "I have talked to people all over the place ... who come here and say, 'I can't believe that's in Albertville, Alabama...' It is a gamechanger for everybody. I knew it the day Mayor Honea told us his plans."

As a premiere attraction, Arnold said the park will help him recruit more industry to the area moving forward.

"Companies right now are looking for ways to attract workers and every little thing counts," he said. "We don't normally have this conversation up front about quality of life. Our community has got to meet certain criteria [to attract more industry]."

In addition to being in the right market and location,

he said industry leaders look at the area's workforce numbers, which is affected by local attractions and commerce.

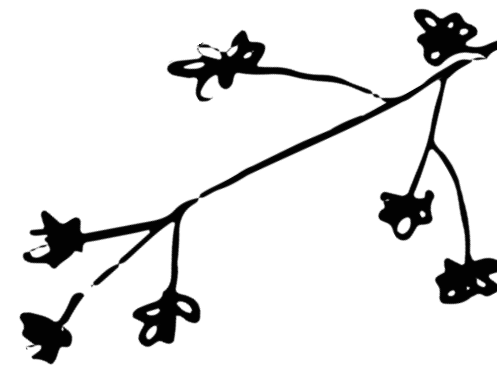
"Once you they figure that stuff out, then it comes down to quality of life. What the [park] will do is attract amenities like restaurants, like other retail... It just adds to the overall quality of life experience that ultimately, they are looking for. That's just not the first thing they're looking for."

Competition for labor force has increased so much that companies are discussing quality of life issues earlier and earlier in the negotiation process, and something like the park that may attract workers is enough to set the area apart from other regions, Arnold said.

With new businesses already moving into the area, many citing the park as a prominent reason, other cities near and far are taking notice.

"We're already seeing the basic, low hanging fruit like the hotels and restaurants, and overtime, those are going to contribute to our ability to recruit manufacturing and business here," Arnold said.

In addition to the business it attracts, the park itself has contributed to job growth for the area in the hiring of its own staff, which has included over 200 jobs, 30 of which are full time, according to Park General Manager Patrick O'Brien.



### Inside The Park's Success

"It's getting national attention, there is no question about it," O'Brien said. "We get calls from municipalities almost every week. 'How did you guys do this? What's the secret?' From our company perspective, we are a flagship venue."

When he joined the SMPA team two years ago as park director, O'Brien said he was struck by the City's vision for what the park could become.

"The thing that struck me about Albertville and the park itself is just growth," he told The Reporter. "There was a strong appetite for growth and improving quality of life. And those two things really resonated with me."

O'Brien said his focus has been to provide a clean, safe and fun experience that helps improve the mental and physical health of the community while also generating a positive economic impact for the area.

Coordinating with multiple contractors during the construction phase on top of dealing with the COVID pandemic, O'Brien said the process leading to the grand opening last April wasn't easy, but it's been worth it.

"There's been some challenges for sure, but you know, I think the other theme throughout that journey is perseverance," he said. "We didn't really stop. We adapted. Of course, we did," he said. "We had to change how we operate but we were lucky and very fortunate that the construction continued."

Since opening the ball fields last fall, he said the park has been drawing in teams for tournaments from all over the southeast, consistently from three to five hours away and sometimes even as far as California.

"A huge part of why we took this park on was to get a better recreation experience for the kids. So, it's

exciting to see that happen," he said. "You talk about improving mental and physical health; it's just, it's having fun, getting out there competing a little bit, getting some exercise and social engagement, especially coming out of COVID. I think that's really had a big impact."

Between the adult and youth sports leagues, more than 3,000 people have registered to play at the park, O'Brien said, while the number of paying members for the main indoor facility has far exceeded year-one expectations. According to Baine, the park has far surpassed its first-year goal of 1,200 memberships by registering more than 5,750 individual members and a total of 1,800 memberships. Of that, more than 1,300 members check-in on average each week, she said.

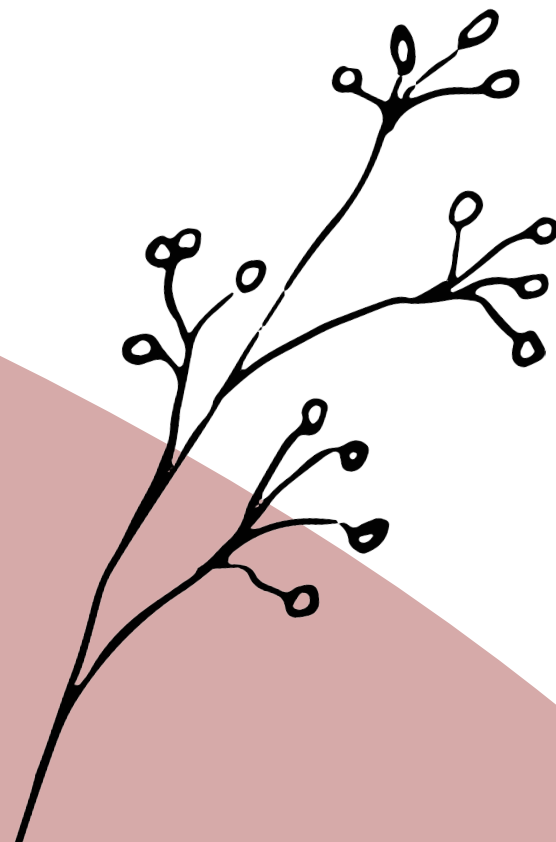
"Even more important than the numbers, I would say is just the experience," O'Brien said. You know, the experience that people are getting here on the fitness side is really, really good — our equipment, the cleanliness, the quality of instructors that we have in group fitness and the variety."

In seeking ways to continue to engage the community, O'Brien said the park offers a slew of free amenities, even more than the old park had, such as the walking trail, dog park, playgrounds and outdoor courts.

"Just coming here to walk and coming here for the playgrounds and the dog parks, part of the city's vision was that we wanted to expand on the offerings that the previous park had and that didn't cost any money."

Use of the indoor gym, workout room, tennis courts and pools currently costs around \$79 monthly for an individual membership or \$15 for a day pass, which is more than some local residents may be willing or able to pay. To help address this disparity, O'Brien said the park has offered "Twilight swims," where the day pass price was reduced to \$5 per person, and free family movie nights at the amphitheater. But it also provides scholarships, on a case by case basis, to kids who can't afford league registration fees.

"We will never turn a child away," O'Brien said. "We do have a foundation that's established through



the City, and it's a foundation primarily focused on rec sports at the youth level. But I think there's continued conversations about how we can engage the entire community. And membership is a part of that conversation."

He added that the park is also considering expanding the scholarship program to include memberships as well.

#### **About Sports Facilities Companies**

Sand Mountain Park is owned by the City of Albertville, but it is operated by Sports Facilities Companies (SFC). The following information was provided by SFC:

SFC is the largest network of community-based sport/recreation centers and parks in the U.S. allowing Sand Mountain to attract events, talent, sponsorships, and best practices that have played a vital role in the success of the Park.

Founded in 2003, SFC has served more than 2,500 communities in planning, developing and operating municipally funded sport and recreation centers. The firm has served the U.S. National Parks Service, and hundreds of local, state, and national agencies seeking to improve quality of life through sports recreation and events destinations. As a result of this lengthy track record of public serve, SFC is the only parks and recreation firm to ever be named a strategic partner to the International City Managers Association (ICMA). As the gold standard in accurate financial forecasting and oversight of public recreation assets, SFC financial modeling division was engaged to produce the economic impact calculators now used by Florida Parks and Recreation Association, the State of Kansas Parks and Recreation Association, and Pure Michigan Tourism to calculate the impact of sports tourism in the State of Michigan.

With more than 1,300 employees and under the leadership of its original founders, the SFC allows small to mid-sized communities to create and operate transformational destinations that change outcomes for attendees, communities, and local businesses. SFC is an owners representative outsourced manager which means that its business and financial practices within venues are highly transparent and undergo annual auditing alongside other government agencies.

## District 3

A Catalyst for

# Tuscaloosa United Soccer Club's Success

PARA Soccer Executive Director  
Barry Spitzer's Background

Barry Spitzer has been playing soccer ever since he can remember and his passion and love of the game has never waned. Spitzer, born and raised in Homewood, Ala., is a Florida State University graduate, who earned his Master of Education degree in Exercise Science from the University of South Alabama. His journey to Tuscaloosa is impressive, paved by many feats and accomplishments over his more than 36 years of coaching youth, high school, club, and college soccer teams. His accreditations include a United States Soccer Federation "A" license, a National Soccer Coaches Association of America Premier Diploma, a National Soccer Coaches Association of America Level II Goalkeeper Diploma, along with certifications from the World Football Academy in the Netherlands and TOVO Academy in Spain.

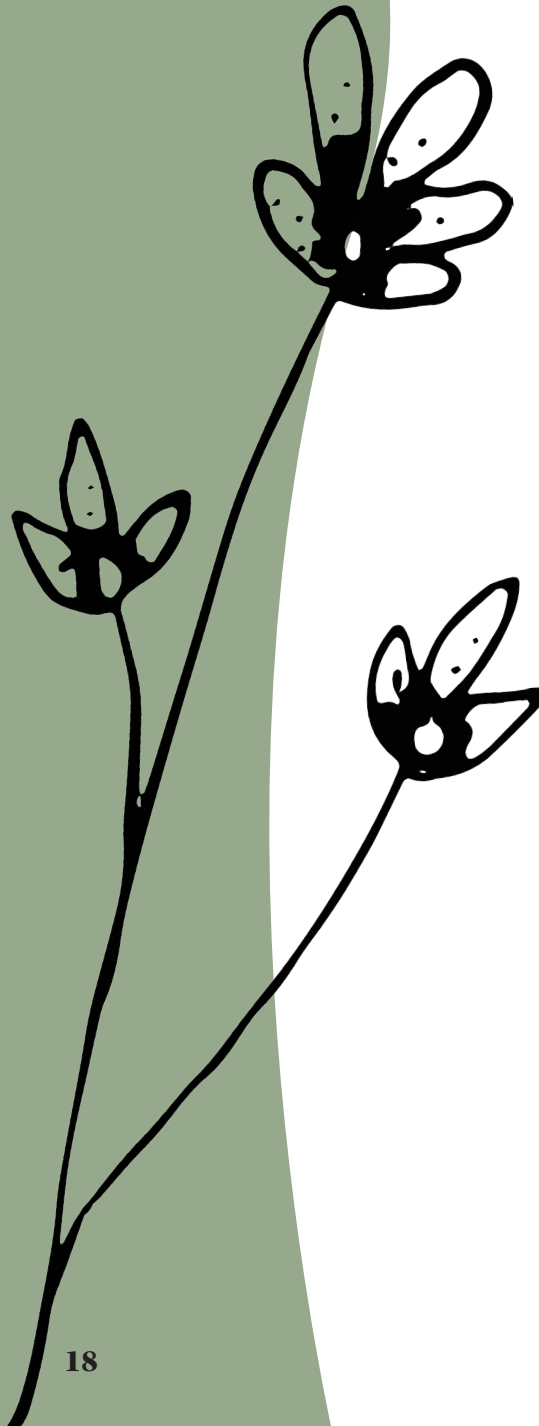
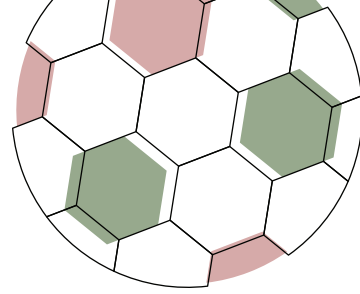
Spitzer's head coaching career can be traced back to John Carroll High School in Birmingham. From there, Spitzer found himself coaching at Tallahassee, Fla. high schools, until landing at Samford University where he helped start the NCAA Division I Program and coached the women's team from 1996-2001. Spitzer then coached at Wallace State Community College from 2005-13 where he was a two-time Region 22 Coach of the Year, produced several scholar-athletes, and left behind a record of 98-18-8 with five Regional Championships, to coach the men's team at Lourdes University in Ohio from 2014-18.

While Spitzer is no stranger to success at the collegiate level, he recognized his potential to reach hundreds of youth players instead of a smaller number of college players. Spitzer interviewed with a few different clubs and organizations in the South until finding what he knew was the "right fit"

as Executive Director of Soccer, taking over the Tuscaloosa United Soccer Club known as TUSC.

TUSC was originally founded by a soccer advisory committee who first met in late 2010. TUSC, with the mission "to provide soccer players in Tuscaloosa County the opportunity to reach their highest potential based upon each player's abilities, goals, and motivation," was officially brought to life in 2011 with the first season being played that spring. While TUSC was successful, Spitzer's prior experience coupled with his influence has led to immense growth and a robust soccer club over the past two and a half years.

Currently, TUSC offers recreational and competitive soccer for various age groups, skill, and competition levels, and includes the following programs: Recreational, Competitive, Academy, West End Soccer Strong, and Adult League Soccer. The Recreational Program is broken up into four different age groups and is designed to be a fun soccer experience for players of any skill and ability level. Spitzer explained that while all TUSC programs are centered on fun, both the Academy Program for ages 8-11 and Competitive Program for ages 12-18 are invitation only and are better suited for experienced and advanced players, with evaluations held twice a year. The Competitive Program provides high-level skills training by highly qualified, credentialed coaches and the Academy Program emphasizes player development over team development, which is just one way Spitzer has been able to focus on increasing enjoyment, retention, and love of the game. The newest TUSC program, West End Soccer Strong for ages 4-10, offers the opportunity for new players to learn the game in a fun, safe environment, where no child





is turned away. Spitzer also offers additional ways to better skills and techniques through the "Barry Spitzer Soccer Camp" with different variations taking place in both summer and winter.

Spitzer attributes his ability to engage both players and coaches in part to using "steady, consistent communication" through email, Constant Contact software, the TUSC website, and social media such as Facebook and Instagram. Spitzer also has virtual meetings for coaches and parents at the beginning of the season with pertinent information and expectations. Spitzer credits the TUSC website with being a great resource for all the programs offered and says it is frequently updated, especially at a time when in-person parent meetings have been a challenge due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Spitzer also notes that TUSC numbers have continued to grow despite COVID-19, which he thinks may be due to people enjoying the outdoors more.

Spitzer has worked to increase engagement through community involvement by holding events throughout the year such as the Tuscaloosa United Night at Alabama Soccer vs. LSU. The event featured raffle prizes, poster making, pictures with Big Al, and free Alabama Soccer t-shirts for the first 100 Tuscaloosa United kids that wore their jerseys. Spitzer also focuses on making sure the community knows TUSC exists, which is another way he recruits volunteer coaches. No soccer experience is required to coach players in the Recreational Program, but Spitzer believes the most important coaching qualities are having a high level of patience, being able to objectively observe and make decisions, and having the capability to facilitate practices

where kids will learn while also having fun. Spitzer holds clinics specifically for coaches and uses the MOJO Sports: Youth Sports Coaching application, which he says has been extremely helpful to those volunteers.

While Spitzer enjoys winning as much as anyone, he has found other ways to measure success by "looking at the bigger picture." Spitzer looks at how soccer impacts life overall as well as balancing an eagerness to win versus development and having fun. He sees success through "former players who are now coaches whether it be at the youth, high school, college, or professional level." He also sees success as kids who continue to work to develop their skills and become better decision makers during games. Spitzer always goes back to emphasizing the importance of having fun and truly enjoying the game, "Whether a kid plays for two years, four years, or all the way to college and beyond." Spitzer has ultimately found the most important measure of success to be "exponentially growing the love of the game" by seeing kids "buy into" the program and the joy it brings them. Spitzer recalls one of the players excitedly telling him that his grandfather had bought soccer goals for the backyard, which is one way he sees "every day success."

Spitzer, who has become a mentor himself to so many, said he has had several mentors over the years, and Penn State's all-time winningest soccer coach and NSCAA former President and Director of Education, Barry Gorman, is someone he looks up to. Similarly, Spitzer's passion for the game does not go unnoticed by TUSC players who are always excited about "Coach Barry" attending their games to watch them play. Spitzer says he would like to think he has a positive influence as the Executive Director of Soccer.

When asked about any challenges TUSC faces, Spitzer says he foresees one in the future that he actually welcomes: so much growth that facilities require expansion and additional fields are needed. Spitzer also hopes to grow programs beyond Sokol Park by starting more satellite leagues, similar to West End Soccer Strong, at other PARA facilities in Tuscaloosa County. It is clear that TUSC numbers will continue to grow under Spitzer's exceptional guidance.



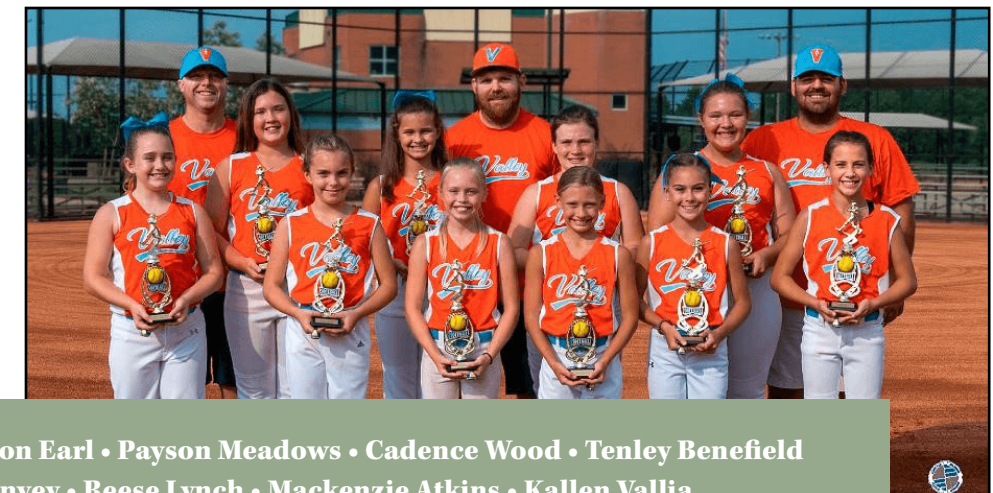
**District 5**

# The Opening of Dinius Park



Auburn Parks and Recreation is excited to announce the opening of Dinius Park the City of Auburn's newest park! The land was donated to Auburn Parks and Recreation by Dr. Bob and Dr. Sally Dinius. They also left funds in their will to develop the park. The only stipulation was the park would be a passive park focusing more on the park's nature not athletic complexes. The 13-acre park is located off Glenn Avenue and has two dog parks, a playground, a pond and many walking trails. All viable trees were left so the park is primarily shaded. Come out today and enjoy Dinius Park.

# Alabama 10U State Champions



**Aubree Wilkins • Payton Earl • Payson Meadows • Cadence Wood • Tenley Benefield  
Abby Tillery • Lilly Hanvey • Reese Lynch • Mackenzie Atkins • Kallen Vallia**

Coaches: Chase Earl • Bryse Benefield • Blake Meadows



Dothan Leisure Services

# Bounces Back

### Aquatics

Our aquatics facilities came in hot this summer, filled with citizens eager to get outside and have a normal summer again! Although some of our numbers are still rebounding from Covid closures, we are very encouraged by participation levels throughout the city! Our Aquacise numbers have rebounded quickly, with over 450 participants enrolled in our 10-week summer session. We experienced an increased summer demand for Guppies (4-5 year-olds) and Level I & II Beginner (ages 6-14) classes. Our largest attendance rebound was at Water World, where over 50,000 guests have visited so far this summer to enjoy the new slides and Kids Cove – both of which were only open for 18 days in 2020! We're pleased that the public has decided to jump right back into the deep end this summer!

### Summer Camps

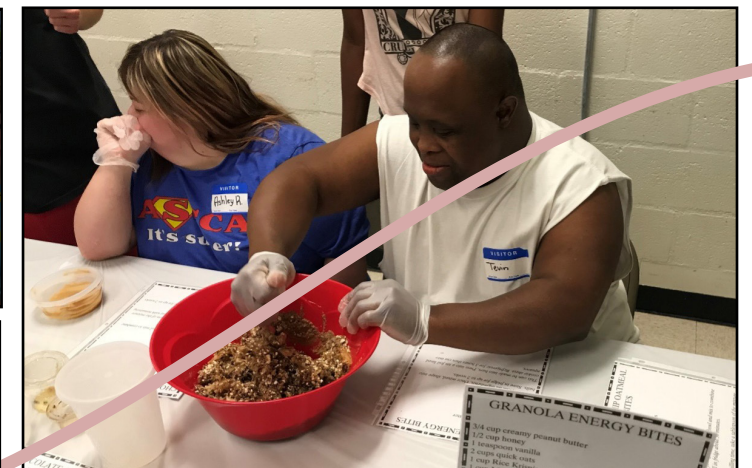
Even after the COVID-19 Pandemic, our camps still flourished. Every camp was full, and we accumulated a waiting list. Participation numbers for each camp are as follows: Camp Choctaw with 80, Camp Champion with 60, Camp Olympian 40, Camp Victory with 20, and Camp Triumph (partnership with Dothan City Schools) with 35. Camp Triumph offered Education Enrichment in the morning at Dothan City School and transportation in the afternoon to our recreation centers for recreational activities and field trips. Our camps offered: free swimming lessons, arts & crafts, archery, disc golf, cycling, bowling, swimming, fishing, skating, movies, trampoline park, swimming, and the Zoo. We also conducted a STEM and Coding Camp.



### Therapeutics Bounces Back

The Dothan Leisure Services Therapeutic Recreation Program kicked off several virtual programs in spring 2021 and several outdoor, socially distanced, programs. Those programs included virtual trivia and bingo, parking lot bingo, monthly picnic in the park, outdoor yoga, cycling, archery and an outdoor movie. All programs had good participation with Picnic in the Park, cycling, archery and movie being the most popular.

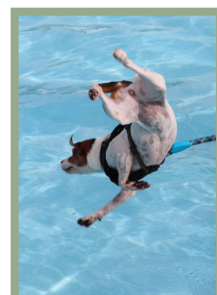
The Therapeutic Recreation Program offered several summer camp opportunities that were at capacity to include Camp Smile, TR Summer Camp, Sports Camp, archery and cycling. Space camp was the theme for Camp Smile and all activities to include games, snacks, and crafts were related to space. TR summer campers enjoyed games, dancing, learning about geodes, arts and crafts as well as field trips to pools, Wiregrass Museum of Art, Forever Wild Trails scavenger hunt, cooking activities and much more. Participants and families were thrilled to get back into programs/activities and especially excited about socializing with friends. We were also very fortunate to have several volunteers assist throughout the summer with all our camps to include Jr. Camp Counselors, church youth group and community volunteers.





# Doggie Dip

Water World opened its gates to Dothan's furry friends for the first time on September 18th, 2021 after closing for the regular season. Big, small, fluffy you name it and you could find it at the first Water World Doggy Dip! The over 140 wagging tails that could be found throughout the park proved that the dogs might love Water World just as much as their humans. They showed off their swimming and splashing skills, but also and their tricks and speed as they ran after Frisbees. Our furry friends also got to enjoy pupsicles, giveaways, and a photo booth. Photo awards were given for different categories like best family photo, coolest crew, staff favorite, and many others. Our onsite vendors included Dothan Animal Hospital, Lucky Dog, Mills Holistic, Brit & Bear, Wags and Whiskers of the Wiregrass, Dothan Ice Cream, and Kitty Sprinkles Food Truck. The best part of the event was the monetary donation that was made to our beneficiaries! Our first Doggie Dip raised over \$1700 to be donated to The Dothan Animal Shelter, Wiregrass Spay and Neuter Alliance, and Angel Paws! It is our goal to grow the event and make it better each and every year, we will see you with even more fun and vendors next year on September 17th, 2022!



# S'mores & Snores

Dothan Leisure Services is excited to offer our first ever Eagle Eye Outfitters S'mores & Snores overnight camp out at Eastgate Park. A passive park located on 198 acres, Eastgate Park amenities include two fishing ponds, a walking trail, a picnic pavilion, an archery range, a dog friendly park, an 18-hole disc golf course and more all in a picturesque, rural setting. The campout will be held October 15-16 with check in beginning at 4 p.m. Activities will include a scavenger hunt, a night hike, outdoor games, a cookout, s'mores and roasted marshmallows, campfire stories, and a sing along. The cost is \$10 per person and includes a t-shirt, a campfire supper, and a tent site. We are grateful for the generosity of our sponsors, including Eagle Eye Outfitters, Gander RV, Chick-fil-A East Dothan, Publix, Sam's Club and Playmaker. For more information or to register a campsite, please visit us online at [dothanleisureservices.org](http://dothanleisureservices.org) or Like the event on Facebook.



# Water World

Water World, known in the Wiregrass as Dothan's Most Exciting Beach, opened to record crowds this year! In total, over 76,000 guests visited during our 89-day 2021 season. We also had a record number of birthday parties, cabana rentals, and season passes in 2021. These numbers can be attributed to the four new body slides (including a speed slide, a bowl slide, and two serpentine slides) the new Kids Cove pool. We also had a Summer Movie Series with one movie each month, including a special Christmas in July event.

The Water World additions are part of a phased renovation to update the 40+ year old park. The next phase of renovations this winter will include restroom and kitchen renovations, new wave generation equipment, and refinishing the 21 year-old Great White Water Slide and tower. For more information about Water World, visit us online at [www.waterworlddothan.com](http://www.waterworlddothan.com), or check us out on Facebook and Instagram @waterworlddothan.





# Something Old. Something New.

## Something Old: Senior Aerobics

Enterprise Parks and Recreation has been proudly hosting Senior Aerobics at our recreation center for over 30 years. Senior Aerobics is a free program designed for the seniors in our community to stay connected and active. The class takes place twice a week and is adaptive for seniors of all ages and comfort levels.

Our participating senior citizens enjoy the program not only for the exercise but for the social engagement. For some of our participants, this is their only regular outing every week. The group even began a tradition of eating lunch together once a month just to enjoy the company of one another. Due to COVID-19 concerns, that tradition is temporarily on hold but they look forward to returning to it soon.

Overall, the Senior Aerobics program has developed over the years into a growing group of fun senior citizens exercising, socializing, celebrating and learning together.

We are incredibly proud to host such a long-standing, beneficial, free program for our community.



## Something New: Volleyball

The Enterprise Parks and Recreation third/fourth grade and fifth/sixth grade volleyball teams brought home the Alabama Recreation and Parks Association State Championship trophies for the first time ever in just the first year of the league's existence.

Enterprise Parks and Recreation Assistant Director, Blake Moore, started the volleyball program three years ago as a clinic, with the help of Janie Wiggins. Thirty girls attended. The next year, the clinic attendance doubled to 60 participants. Moore decided to form an all-star team of third/fourth graders as well as fifth/sixth graders to see how they would perform in competition. The fifth/sixth grade team went 0-2, but won the Sportsmanship Award. The third/fourth grade team finished third in the state.

Despite COVID-19, the department decided to move forward with the program for a third year, but this time as a recreation league instead of a clinic. The volleyball league had 80 participants. They again formed the all-star teams, this time with the

addition of another fifth/sixth grade team coached by Moore's wife and Enterprise High School junior varsity coach Hannah Moore. This year's third/fourth grade team, Enterprise Columbia Blue, was coached by Brynn Milliner, and the other fifth/sixth grade team, Enterprise Powder Blue, was coached by Adam Blackstock.

Hannah's team made it to the semifinals, while Milliner and Blackstock made it all the way.

Enterprise Columbia Blue ran the table at the tournament hosted at Winfield High School and defeated Sylacauga for the trophy, while Enterprise Powder Blue defeated Russellville in a come-from-behind victory. After losing to Russellville earlier in the day and being down 14-5 in the third set, they fought and won 18-16 for the title.

Both coaches agreed they were immensely proud of their girls.

"We made a lot of strides from the end of regular season through all-stars and I think that really showed," Milliner said.

"More than half of the all-star team had never played organized volleyball before, and for them to achieve what they did was extraordinary," Blackstock said.

While the coaches knew the talent was there, to have won a double state championship in just the first year of league play was surprising, for Blackstock more than Milliner.

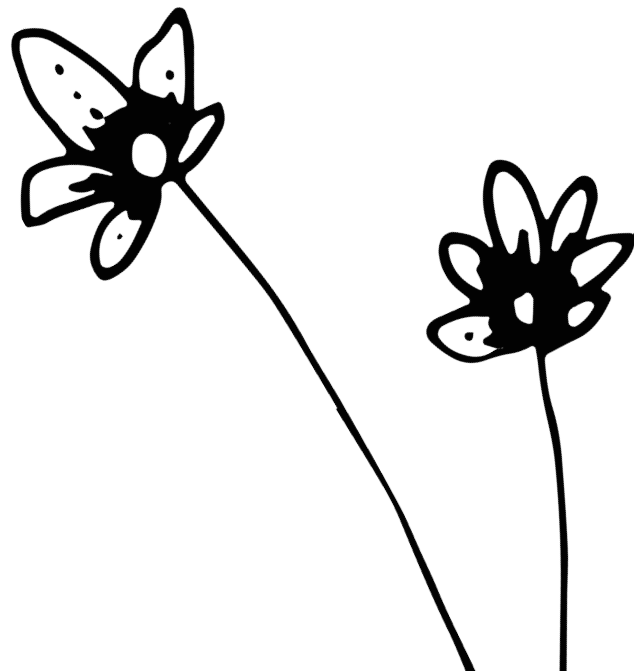
With so many girls getting to learn the fundamentals and being able to practice them in a game setting from such an early age, the future of girls' volleyball in Enterprise is extremely bright.

"It's like anything else—the earlier that they start in life, the better they're going to be. The younger you can instill the fundamentals of any activity, the better," Blackstock said. He anticipates that the players experience will positively affect the school systems Junior High and High School volleyball programs.



Moore extends his thanks to Kevin Rhoades for providing the net and poles for their gym and for finding the right people to install them; to Janie Wiggins who was instrumental in helping form the clinics and helping provide referees for their games; and to his wife Hannah for pushing him to start the league and getting her girls to help.

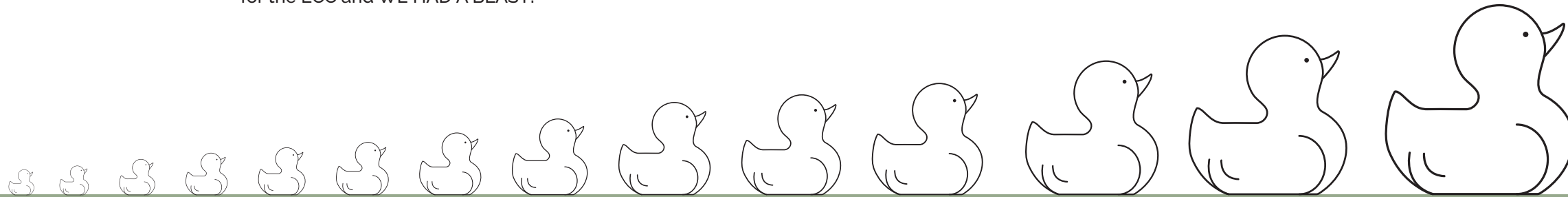
"This was a huge victory for the City of Enterprise, for the game of volleyball and girls sports in Enterprise," Moore said.





# Duck Race

We hosted our first ever Duck Race in the Community Center pool October of 2020 and it was a huge hit!! Supporters purchased rubber ducks for \$5.00 each and then watched live on Facebook as they (all 1,000 of them) raced to the finish line! First place was awarded a \$500.00 Walmart gift card, courtesy of our sponsors, Walmart & Alabama Classic. It was such a fun and successful fundraiser for the ECC and WE HAD A BLAST!



# Help Soccer Coaches Bounce Back

by Daniel Taylor

*Barry Spitzer, of the Tuscaloosa United Soccer Club, could see the difference right on the field.*

On any given weeknight last spring, when Barry Spitzer walked from field to field at the Bobby Miller Center in Tuscaloosa, he could easily see which soccer coaches were using the MOJO app to run practice — even from a distance. “Without a doubt, when kids are running around, laughing and moving with a soccer ball, they’re using MOJO,” he said. “I just know they are.”

The other teams on the field were still having fun, but the kids were less focused, and standing in lines, he said. “There’s not that same energy.”

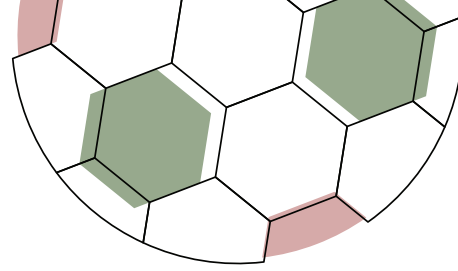
Spitzer — executive director of Tuscaloosa United Soccer Club, part of the Tuscaloosa County Parks & Recreation Authority (TCPARA) — knows a thing or two about what a great soccer practice looks like. He has 34 years of coaching under his belt, from little kids to college players — as well as an infectious passion for the game.

Today, Tuscaloosa United Soccer Club serves some 1200 players ages 3 to adult, at the recreational, academy and competitive levels. And, said Spitzer, he has seen how the MOJO coaching app — which is also the Official Grassroots Coaching Partner of Alabama Soccer Association — has made a difference for first-time grassroots coaches to seasoned coaches, alike. Here’s how.

**Anyone can coach.**

Really, *anyone*.





Without knowing much about the sport, a brand new coach can run an end-to-end practice that keeps kids engaged and develops their skills in the context of games and activities. The result is player-centered practices that help kids learn by doing.

Parents who volunteer to coach — or, more likely, who are voluntold — can also learn by doing, following custom practice plans based on the age and skill level of the team. The app even adjusts practices based on the number of players who show up and the size of the available field.

Plus, by reducing the barriers to coaching, it's easier to recruit.

"When I talk to a parent in the community and say, Why don't you coach? I often hear, Oh, I don't know anything about soccer," Spitzer explained. "Now I can say, It's OK, we have an app and it's got all the videos and diagrams and practice plans. That is part of my process."

**Practice is Fun.**

MOJO practices look different because they are different. Kids actually want to be there, because, with MOJO, the game is the teacher. No drills. No lines. No laps. No lectures. Just lots of learning and development — and fun.

And fun is what keeps players coming back, season after season.

**It's Easy.**

A coach enters a couple details about his or her team, and the app does the rest. MOJO worked with coaches from US Youth Soccer and United Soccer Coaches, as well as child development experts, to create a soccer curriculum that is easy to follow — and easy to teach. The app, too, is simple and easy to use, whether it's a coach's first or 51st soccer practice, and regardless of the experience of the team.

"That's the beauty of it for me," says Spitzer. "The app can serve a wide range of coaching knowledge, and from beginning kids to advanced kids."

Spitzer even used the app himself, when, because summer camp registration had surged, he was recruited last minute to be the lead soccer coach.

"I used the app to get a quality session," he said, and it saved him valuable time.

**Coming Soon**

The MOJO app launched in February 2021 with its inaugural sport: soccer. This fall, MOJO will launch flag football, as well as a premium soccer curriculum shot with F.C. Barcelona's Youth Academy and custom at-home activities for players to do outside of practice.

"It's going to be a big fall," said MOJO founder and CEO, Ben Sherwood. "We can't wait to help make youth sports fun again for millions of kids across the country who are ready to get back out there and play."





**Alabama Recreation & Parks Association**

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