



# ANNUAL REPORT

# 2023

## MISSION

Provide and promote exceptional standards of education, networking, and resources for all professionals in the Illinois park, recreation, and conservation communities.

## VISION

IPRA leads the nation in providing premier education, networking, and resources for professionals in parks, recreation, and conservation.

## WHAT WE BELIEVE

- Inclusiveness of diverse stakeholder groups
- Intentionally improve all lives
- Fiscal responsibility, accountability, and transparency in all of our activities
- Creating a forum for uniting the diverse IPRA community around common ideas and future trends

## HEADQUARTERS STAFF

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Suzi Wirtz, IOM  
Executive Director

Cindy Galvan, CMP  
Conference & Meetings Manager

Vince Davis, CPRP  
Membership Manager

Kim Laper, CPRP  
Community Engagement Manager

Nicole Dotson  
Administrative Support Specialist

Duane Smith, CPRP  
Education Director

Barry Franks  
Finance Director

Heather Weishaar  
Communications & Marketing Director

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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### Chair

Lisa Sheppard, CPRP  
Executive Director, Glencoe Park District

### Southern Region Representative

Andrew Dallner, CPRP  
Director of Parks and Recreation, O'Fallon Parks and Recreation

### Chair-Elect

Andrew Thurman, CPRP  
Executive Director, Geneseo Park District

### Central Region Representative

Derek Harms, CPRP  
Executive Director, Springfield Park District

### Past Chair

Trisha Breitlow, CPRP, CTRS  
Executive Director, Maine-Niles Association of Special Recreation

### Chicago Metro Region Representative

Matthew Fairbanks, CPRP  
Director of Parks & Recreation, Palos Heights Parks & Recreation

### Secretary/Membership Council Representative

Erika Strojinc, CPRP  
Executive Director, Buffalo Grove Park District

### Northwest Region Representative

Dan Jones, CPRP  
Executive Director, Cary Park District

### At Large Representative

Keith Wallace, CPRP  
Executive Director, Lincolnway SRA

## TO OUR MEMBERS

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On behalf of the IPRA Board of Directors and the IPRA staff team, I'm excited to report that 2023 was yet another successful year by many standards, with a variety of innovative programs and initiatives to benefit all members.

Membership is at an all-time high, and a current renewal rate of 89%. The nationwide median for membership organizations is 85%, according to Marketing General's annual benchmarking survey; so IPRA is above average and doing a fabulous job of retaining members! This is, in large part, due to the stellar programming and educational opportunities, both at the Annual Conference and throughout the year. It is also a testament to the volunteers who spread the word across the state, and the staff team who carries out the vision and mission on a daily basis.

We have **3,391** Active members representing **741** Organizations, which includes:

- Professional Members: **2421** (71%)
- Professional Non-Metro: **470** (14%)
- Student: **248** (8%)
- Commercial: **89** (3%)
- Other: 4%

The newly implemented association management software, in just six months, has proven to be well worth the investment and the time staff spent to learn the new system. It allows greater ease for members, greater efficiency for staff, and a lot of opportunity. We are able to customize and automate more for more targeted messaging. Ultimately, this affords IPRA staff more time to focus on developing additional programs and partnerships, and delivering even greater value for every member.

Programming adds value to an IPRA membership, and this was proven in the many workshops and events that were sold out in 2023. In addition, we launched new programs:

- Financial Sustainability Certificate Program (in collaboration with IAPD)
- Volunteer Management Certificate Program
- Playground Maintenance Program
- Safety Symposium (A&F Section)

Some of the most critical work in 2023 went into the new, three-year Strategic Plan, which we will monitor and update for the membership via the IPRA website. Overall, our four areas of focus are: member development and engagement; continued financial strength; a commitment to operational excellence; and continuing the culture of development and innovation for staff and members alike. With respect to the Strategic Plan, it's important to keep in mind what Benjamin Franklin once said, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." Followed closely by Dr. Seuss, stating, "And will you succeed? Yes! You will, indeed! (98 and 3/4 percent guaranteed.)"

Thank you to every member, volunteer, sponsor and stakeholder who played a role in the success of 2023.

Suzi Wirtz, IOM  
Executive Director



## MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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On behalf of the IPRA Board of Directors, thank you for your continued support and membership with IPRA! 2023 was a great year for the association! We welcomed our new Executive Director Suzi Wirtz, an experienced association executive whose attributes include relationship building, leadership, communication, and collaboration, making her an ideal leader for IPRA.

We reorganized the section leadership and believe by eliminating redundancy, clarifying roles, and encouraging cross-sectional relationships, we will enhance communication and collaboration in alignment with our mission to learn, connect, and inspire. The IPRA Board has also been diligently engaged in developing and approving the Associations Strategic Plan for the next three-five years. I want to thank our members for the invaluable input received, whether through completing surveys or participating in focus groups, your contributions played a crucial role in shaping the direction for IPRA's staff and Board. Financially, IPRA experienced an excellent year, rebounding admirably from the challenges posed by the pandemic.

I encourage you all to take full advantage of what IPRA has to offer this year. Become more involved in your section, volunteer for a committee, grab a group to participate in Park Pursuit, or join in on a Lunch and Learn. Make the most of what IPRA can offer you! I can guarantee you will not regret getting involved.

Lisa Sheppard, CPRP  
Executive Director  
Glencoe Park District



The IPRA Board of Directors convenes regularly throughout the year, at in-person and virtual meetings. Visit the IPRA Event Calendar for upcoming meeting information.

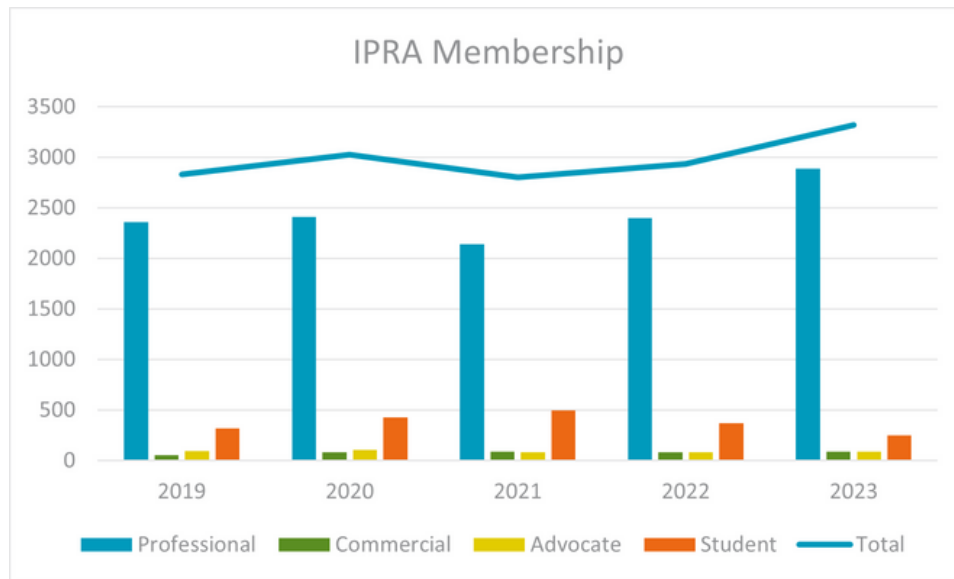


The Illinois Park & Recreation Association Board of Directors is responsible for setting the strategic direction, establishing policy, and ensuring the fiscal integrity of the Association.

## Highlights

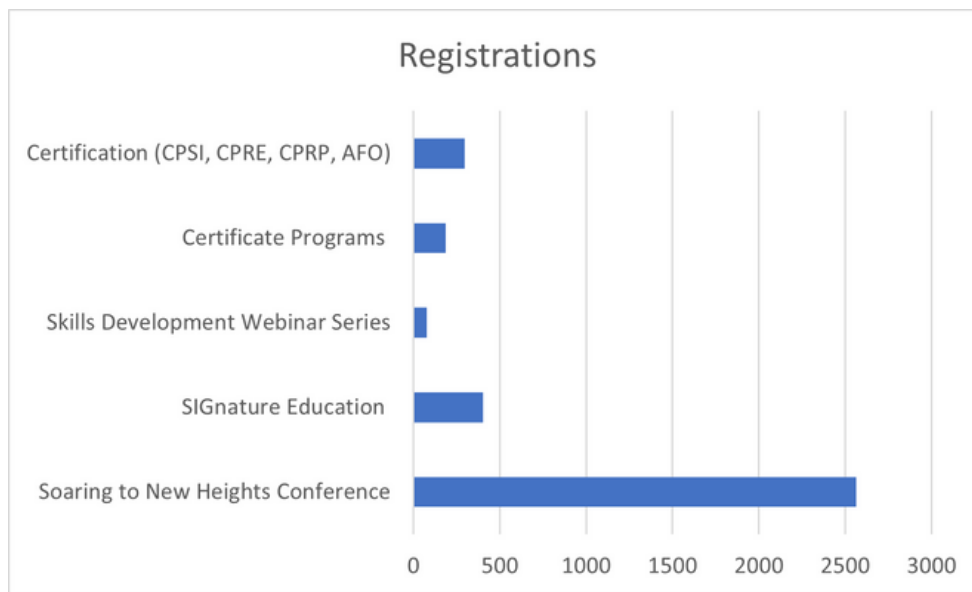
- In early 2023, IPRA revisited its [Strategic Plan](#), engaging input from members, leaders, partners, and stakeholders to shape new goals. This strategic roadmap reaffirms IPRA's mission, vision, and values, addressing evolving needs in the park, recreation, and conservation sector in Illinois. The plan builds on past successes, positioning IPRA as a trusted resource for its members, aligning with its commitment to supporting the field.
- Implemented a new [association management software \(AMS\)](#) - refreshed website, improved members experience – including allowing members to track their CEUs, access to a mobile app, easy registration and payment process.
- The [Workplace Task Force](#) completed an assessment of the workplace issues that the membership is encountering. They highlighted the following areas of focus: creating videos and toolkits for agencies, working with universities and high schools, and consider hosting regional job fairs. Stay tuned for additional information and next steps!
- Twenty-five park and recreation agencies were awarded [\\$1.8 million in playground grants](#) for 32 parks through the IPRA, PlayCore, GameTime and Cunningham Recreation Education & Funding Initiative. These matching funds support the deployment of National Demonstration Sites across Illinois to create outdoor play and recreation spaces that align with evidence-based best practices.
- Maintained our relationship with [Sourcewell](#), premier partner of IPRA programs such as the Skills Development Webinar Series, IPRA Member Social @ NRPA and Certification Prep Courses.
- At the 2023 IAPD/IPRA Conference, we partnered with a local charity to bring [puppies](#) into the exhibit hall. We increased excitement and traffic for the exhibit hall while helping the charity raise awareness and get five puppies adopted!
- The Membership Council and section board members worked on [resolving section structure challenges](#) through multiple meetings and incorporating feedback from various sections. This effort has led to a new framework, offering clearer leadership roles, simplified elections, improved volunteer experiences, and enhanced mentoring opportunities for members.
- CPRE & CPRP Virtual Exam Prep Courses drew [155 exam candidates](#) from all over the United States to work with Katie Troline of Gold Medal Force and prepare to become certified professionals and executives in parks, recreation, and conservation.
- Unplug Illinois: 2023 was the 5th Annual Unplug Illinois Day. We had [over 60 unplug events](#) happening throughout Illinois. State Rep Charlie Meier issued HR-275, proclaiming July 15 Unplug Illinois Day in Illinois, and State Senator Laura Fine (D-Glenview) issued SR-375 declaring July 15 Unplug Illinois Day.

## IPRA Membership



## Professional Development

The Illinois Park & Recreation Association's continuing education offers something for all levels of experience within a broad range of roles in the field of parks, recreation and conservation. The platforms provided for continuing education range from webinars to multi-day schools throughout the state.



- Over 4,000 attendees registered for events (April '23-December '23)
- Nearly 500 members have attended at least one event – and 800 members have attended at least two events (not including the annual conference.)



# Balance Sheet

Unaudited as of 12/31/23

	2022	2023
<b>ASSETS</b>		
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>		
Checking/Savings	\$497,832	\$479,837
Other Current Assets	\$1,936,277	\$2,088,929
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>\$2,434,109</b>	<b>\$2,568,566</b>
Fixed Assets	\$11,638	\$3,963
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$2,445,747</b>	<b>\$2,572,529</b>
<b>LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>		
<b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		
Other Current Liabilities	\$653,604	\$676,539
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$653,604</b>	<b>\$676,539</b>
Equity	\$1,792,143	\$1,895,990
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>	<b>\$2,445,747</b>	<b>\$2,572,529</b>

# Volunteers

The IPRA [Membership Council](#) consists of one representative from each IPRA special interest section. The Membership Council serves to improve efficiencies and to reduce redundancies of the various sections as well as to ensure the existence of quality educational offerings at section meetings throughout the year.

## Chair

Erika Strojinc, CPRP

## Facility Management Section Representative

Katy McKinnon, CPRP

## Administration and Finance Section Representative

Bret Fahnstrom, CPRE

## Forest Preserve & Conservation Section Representative

Laurie Metancuk, CPRP

## Communication & Marketing Section Representative

Deanna Angelini Johann, MSIMC, CPRP

## Parks & Natural Resource Management Section Representative

Chris Leiner, CPRP, CPSI

## Diversity Section Representative

Jonelle Bailey, CPRP

## Recreation Section Representative

Mike Gianatasio, CPRP, CPO

## Therapeutic Recreation Section Representative

Beth Corso

IPRA's special interest [sections](#) are crucial to your membership experience because we can place you with others that share a common work setting, interests and problems. Thank you, 2023 Section Directors:

## Administration & Finance Section

Gina Hassett, CPRP

## Forest Preserve and Conservation Section

Anamari Dorgan, CPRE

## Communications & Marketing Section

Katie Garrett, CPRP

## Parks & Natural Resource Management Section

Chris Leiner, CPRP, CPSI

## Diversity Section

Mark Burrage & Oralethea Davenport, CPRP

## Recreation Section

Mary Liz Jayne, CPRP

## Facility Management Section

Matt Szytz, CPRP

## Therapeutic Recreation Section

Lauren Jevaney, CTRS, CPRP

Participation and leadership in an IPRA [committee](#) provides opportunities for individuals to share and develop personal skills, while developing resources and professional development opportunities for the membership. Thank you to the following 2023 Committee & Joint Committee Chairs:

[Agency Showcase](#)

Jessica Cannaday, CPRP

[Illinois Urban Forestry Appointee](#)

Kristi Solberg, CPRP

[Diversity Leadership Task Force](#)

Oralethea Davenport, CPRP

[Membership Council](#)

Erika Strojinc, CPRP

[Finance Committee](#)

Andrea Chiappetta, CPRE

[ProConnect Board of Regents](#)

Jackie Iovinelli, CPRP

[Governance Committee](#)

Trisha Breitlow, CPRP, CTRS

[Professional Development School Board of Regents](#)

Adam Dagley, CPRP

[Health and Wellness Committee](#)

Shannon Tovey

[Program Committee](#)

Dawn Krawiec, CPRP

[Illinois Park and Recreation Foundation](#)

Mike Kies, CPRE

[Joint Conference Committee](#)

Lacey Marinenko, CPRP, AFO

[Joint Editorial Committee](#)

Kari Felkamp, CPRP

[Joint Coordinating Council Committee](#)

Trisha Breitlow, CPRP, CTRS

[Joint Exhibit Committee](#)

Tom Hartwig, CPRP

[Joint Distinguished Park And Recreation Accreditation Committee](#)

Carlo Capalbo, CPRE

[Joint Legislative Committee](#)

Mike Benard, CPRE



# Illinois Park & Recreation Foundation (IPRF)

The mission of the Illinois Park & Recreation Foundation is to be a sustainable philanthropic organization benefitting members of Illinois Park & Recreation Association (IPRA). Thank you to the IPRF Board for their volunteerism!

## Chair

Michael Kies, CPRE  
St. Charles Park District

## Vice-Chair

Jarrod Scheunemann  
Champaign Park District / Campfire Concepts

## Treasurer

Kevin Romejko  
Rolling Meadows Park District

## Trustees

Cam Bettin  
Pekin Park District

Lauren Koszola  
Channahon Park District

Carlo Capalbo, CPRE  
Plainfield Park District

William McAdam, CPRE  
Downers Grove Park District

Michael Clark, CPRP  
Palatine Park District

Tim Reinbold, CPRP  
Warrenville Park District

Tracey Crawford, CPRP, CTRS  
NWSRA

Joan Scovic, CPRP  
Northbrook Park District

Dave Dillon  
The Larson Equipment & Furniture  
Company



## Awards & Recognition

Designed to recognize the best-of-the-best in Illinois parks, recreation, and conservation, the Awards & Recognition Program gives professionals an opportunity to recognize colleagues and community members for their extraordinary work and contribution to the industry.



Robert Artz Lifetime Achievement Award  
Tracey Crawford



Professional of the Year  
Molly Hamer



Community Impact Award  
Sandy Vangundy



Young Professional of the Year  
Lacy Marinenko



Champions for Change Award  
Glenview Park District

## Board Chair Awards

Lisa Barrera  
Oralethea Davenport

Park District of Highland Park Staff & Board  
Tim Reinbold  
Michael Selep

## Distinguished Park & Recreation Accredited Agencies

The Illinois Distinguished Accreditation program's goal is to improve the delivery of park and recreation services to Illinois residents. A park district or recreation agency interested in applying for Distinguished Accredited Agency recognition undergoes a detailed, lengthy process of application and evaluation. A Joint Distinguished Park and Recreation Accreditation Committee (JDPRAC) comprised of members from IAPD and IPRA coordinates the process. Congratulations to the agencies below for their new & renewed recognition status!

Bartlett Park District  
Freeport Park District  
Hoffman Estates Park District

Lemont Park District  
Oak Brook Park District

## Outstanding Program or Special Event

**Outstanding Program & Special Event Overall Winner:** Warrenville Park District - Multicultural Festival

**Outstanding Program Division II:** Hoffman Estates Park District - M.O.R.E (Mobile Outreach Recreation and Education)

**Outstanding Special Event Division II:** Park District of Highland Park: Dia De Los Muertos

## Outstanding Park & Facility Award

**Outstanding Park & Facility Overall:** Elmhurst Park District - Centennial Park

**Outstanding Park Division II:** Hoffman Estates Park District - Poplar Park

**Outstanding Facility Division I:** Morton Grove Park District - Harrer Pool Replacement

**Outstanding Facility Division II:** Elk Grove Park District - Fox Run Golf Clubhouse & Maintenance Facility

## Exceptional Workplace Award

The IPRA Health & Wellness Committee was developed to help agencies identify and achieve a high level of health and wellness for their employees and recognize their achievements, through the awarding of the Exceptional Workplace Award.

Elk Grove Park District  
Oregon Park District

Warrenville Park District  
West Chicago Park District

# Agency Showcase

Agency Showcase is a spirited competition spotlighting bright ideas exhibited by park, recreation, and conservation agencies. This professionally judged competition recognizes Illinois agencies for their marketing and communication efforts ranging from print to multimedia.

## Overall Agency Showcase Winners

1st Place: Downers Grove Park District

2nd Place: Northbrook Park District

3rd Place: Wheeling Park District

**People's Choice Agency Showcase Winner:** Northbrook Park District

## Category Honors

Brochure Print: Batavia Park District

Brochure Virtual: Naperville Park District

Integrated Photography: Wheeling Park District

Large Format Marketing: Oswegoland Park District

Logo Design: Sycamore Park District

Marketing Campaign: Northbrook Park District

Paid Advertisement: West Chicago Park District

Print Communication – Informational: Downers Grove Park District

Print Communication – Promotional: Northbrook Park District

Social Media Campaign: Wheeling Park District

Videography - Long Form: Northbrook Park District

Videography - Short Form: Des Plaines Park District

Website: Park District of Highland Park

Table Agency Display: Orland Park Recreation Department



# Thank you, Partners & Supporters

**a5** Branding  
& Digital

BENCHMARK  
IMAGING & DISPLAY

**FGMA** ARCHITECTS

est. 1966  
**CR**  
Design • Build • PLAY!  
CUNNINGHAM RECREATION

**GameTime**<sup>®</sup>  
A PLAYCORE Company

 **HR Source**<sup>™</sup>

**IPDLAF+**  
**CLASS**

Sourcewell 

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