

Illinois Park & Recreation Association

# 2024 Annual Report



# Message from the Executive Director

Dear IPRA Members and Stakeholders,

On behalf of the IPRA Board of Directors and staff team, I'm very happy to report that 2024 was an extremely successful year from a financial, innovative, programmatic and overall engagement standpoint. In addition to introducing a number of new educational opportunities and programs selling out in record time, IPRA staff completed over 75% of our strategic plan short-term goals in Year One of the plan.

The strategic plan, available on the IPRA website, focuses on four areas:

- Member development and engagement
- Continued financial strength
- Commitment to operational excellence
- Continuing the culture of development and innovation for staff and members

Membership continues to grow and we have maintained a renewal rate of nearly 90%. With a nationwide median for membership organizations at 85%, IPRA is above average. IPRA has 3,477 Active members (up 3% from last year) representing 475 organizations.

A large part of IPRA's success comes in the form of hard work: the IPRA staff team expertly carries out the vision and mission, while keeping a close eye on the budget and revenue goals. Additionally, IPRA volunteer members serve on and lead boards, sections, committees, joint committees, task forces – and help the IPRA staff in marketing programs and encouraging participation. In 2024, IPRA members indicated high levels of interest in every volunteer role available to them at the association. The member survey showed that more than half the respondents volunteered for or participated in committees or work groups, 20% reported that having volunteer opportunities was one of the most important benefits of IPRA and 16% served in leadership roles for IPRA. As Henry Ford once said, "If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself." Hear, hear!



**Suzi Wirtz, IOM**

Executive Director  
Illinois Park & Recreation Association

# Message from the Board of Directors

On behalf of the IPRA Board of Directors, thank you for your continued support and membership! 2024 was a milestone year for IPRA. We saw record membership growth, reaching an all-time high of 3,510 members—a 3% increase from last year.

We also completed the first year of our Strategic Plan, focusing on four key pillars: providing relevant educational and networking opportunities, optimizing fiscal strength, elevating business operations, and fostering a culture of innovation.

Member engagement remained strong, with 2,362 participants in IPRA learning sessions, offering over 300 hours of education and 234 CEU hours. A new Volunteer Interest Form received 49 responses, showing enthusiasm for event support, conference involvement, and committee participation.

A special thank you to the IPRA staff, board, and all our dedicated volunteers—your passion drives our success. I also extend my gratitude to the Geneseo Park District for their support during my term. It has been an honor serving as your 2024 IPRA Board Chair!

**Andrew Thurman, CPRP**

Executive Director  
Geneseo Park District



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# Mission

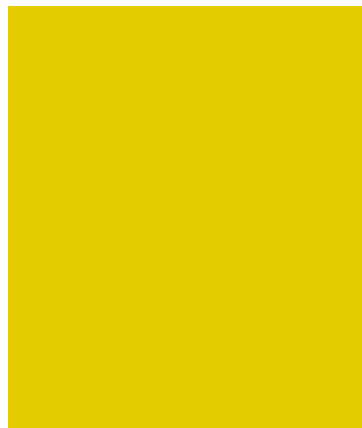
Our mission is to provide and promote exceptional standards of education, networking, and resources for all professionals in the Illinois park, recreation, and conservation communities. IPRA leads the nation in providing premier education, networking, and resources for professionals in parks, recreation, and conservation.

# Vision

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

# Social Equity Statement

At the Illinois Park and Recreation Association (IPRA), we believe in the inherent dignity and worth of every individual. Our commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging is unwavering and integral to our mission of enhancing the quality of life for all Illinois residents and visitors through parks and recreation.



# Board of Directors

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.

Andrew Thurman  
Geneseo Park District  
Chair

Erika Strojinc  
Buffalo Grove Park District  
Chair Elect

Lisa Sheppard  
Glencoe Park District  
Past Chair

Derek Harms  
Springfield Park District  
Secretary/Central Region Representative

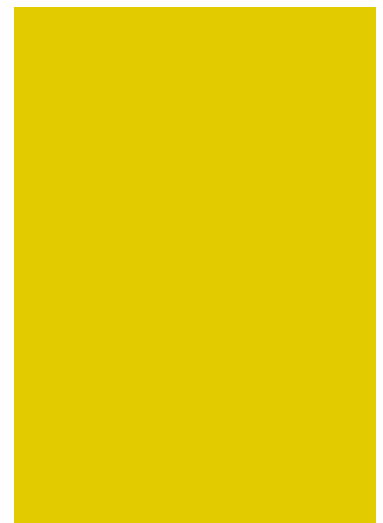
Joan Scovic  
Northbrook Park District  
At-Large Representative

Keith Wallace  
Lincolnway Special Recreation Association  
Chicago Metro Representative

Dan Jones  
Cary Park District  
Northwest Region Representative

Laure Kosey  
Oak Brook Park District  
Section Director Council Representative

Andrew Dallner  
City of O'Fallon  
Southern Region Representative



# Headquarters Staff

The IPRA staff oversees the daily operations of the association, ensuring its continued success and impact. With an average of over **25 years** of industry experience and an average tenure of **seven years**, the team brings a wealth of knowledge, stability, and dedication to serving members and advancing the field.

Suzi Wirtz, IOM  
**Executive Director**

Vince Davis, CPRP  
**Manager, Digital Strategy & Membership**

Barry Franks  
**Senior Director, Finance & Operations**

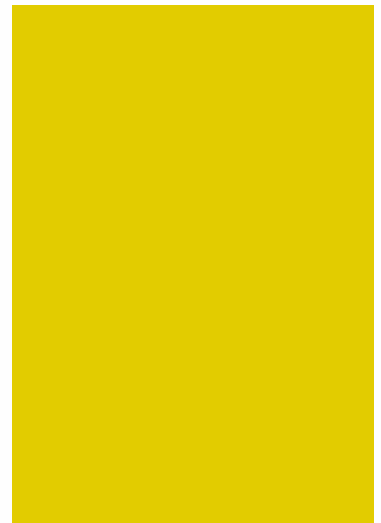
Cindy Galvan, CMP  
**Manager, Conference & Sponsorship**

Heather Weishaar  
**Director, Communications & Membership**

Kim Laper, CPRP  
**Manager, Member Engagement**

Duane Smith, CPRP  
**Director, Education**

Maria McGuire  
**Administrative Assistant**



# Highlights



In the past year, IPRA has made significant strides in achieving the goals outlined in its strategic plan, focusing on fostering professional growth, promoting collaboration, and advancing the field of parks, recreation, and conservation. IPRA staff completed over 75% of our strategic plan short-term goals in Year One of the plan.



IPRA's SIGNature education programs are one-day events designed to provide professionals with high-quality education and networking opportunities in spaces that are specific to industry special interests. In 2024, there were seven unique programs offered, providing a combined total of 40+ hours of education, and drawing 500 attendees from different regions of Illinois.



The Unplug Illinois program grew to 70 statewide events. Highlights included meetings with state legislators, branded promotional campaigns, and extensive media outreach with radio and TV PSAs (including a feature on NBC5 Chicago's Mental Health Monday.)



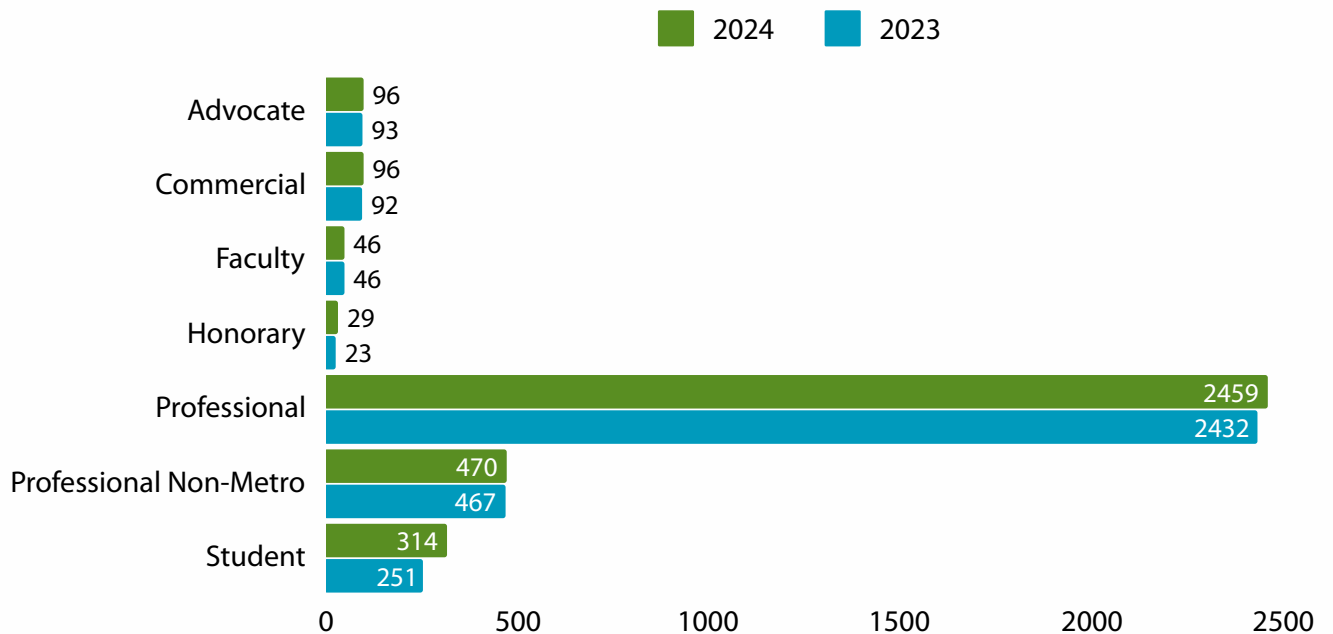
We launched our very first podcast, "The Rec Room"! Monthly episodes feature a variety of guests with inspiring stories, expert interviews, and tips to enhance your community programs.



Themed 'There's No Place Like Parks & Rec', Professional Development School (PDS) had another successful year, with 96% of survey respondents saying they would recommend PDS to a friend/colleague. What usually takes 5 months, PDS registration filled within 3 ½ weeks, reaching capacity before the early-bird registration deadline. The program featured an inspiring keynote by Michael Brandwein about leading ourselves before leading others.

# IPRA Membership

IPRA membership is essential for career growth and agency success, offering networking, volunteer, and leadership opportunities. Members gain access to countless professional development programs designed to enhance skills, foster connections, and inspire innovation. Together, we elevate the park, recreation, and conservation profession for the benefit of our communities.



98%

member experience  
satisfaction rate

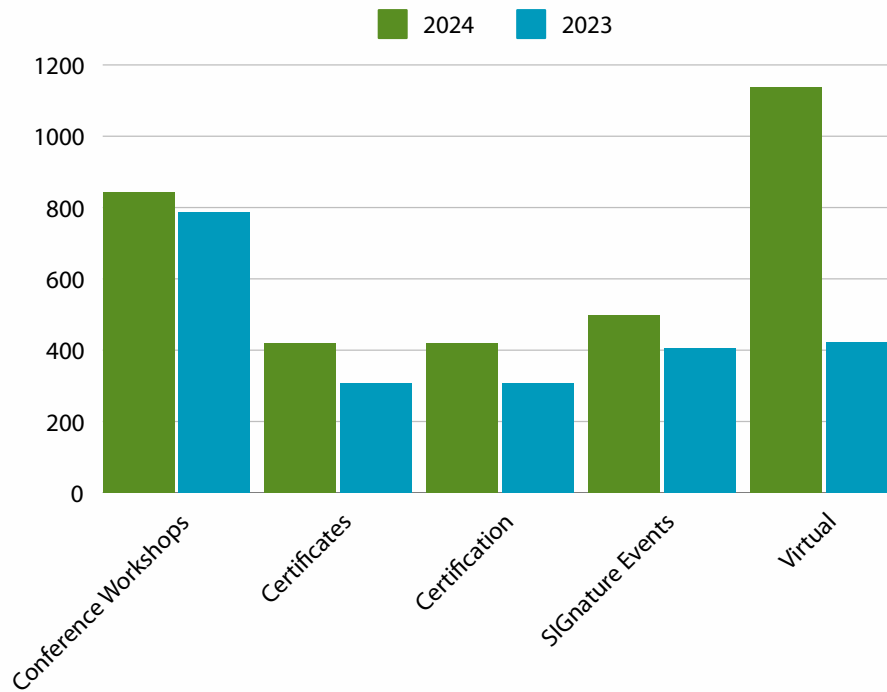


nearly  
250  
volunteer leaders



# 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.



Overall increase of  
**1,015**  
registrations



added  
**NEW! 4**  
programs

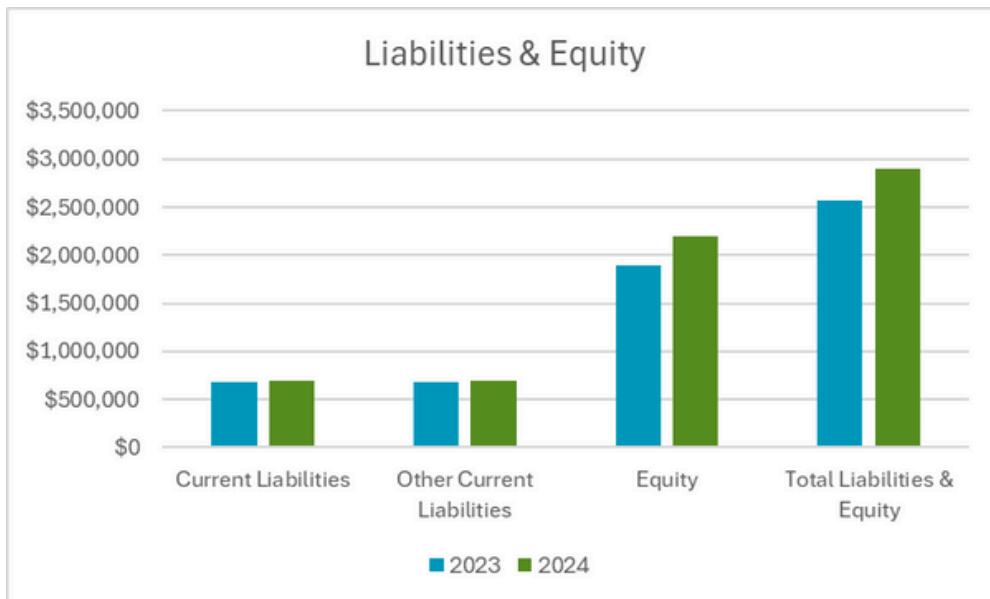
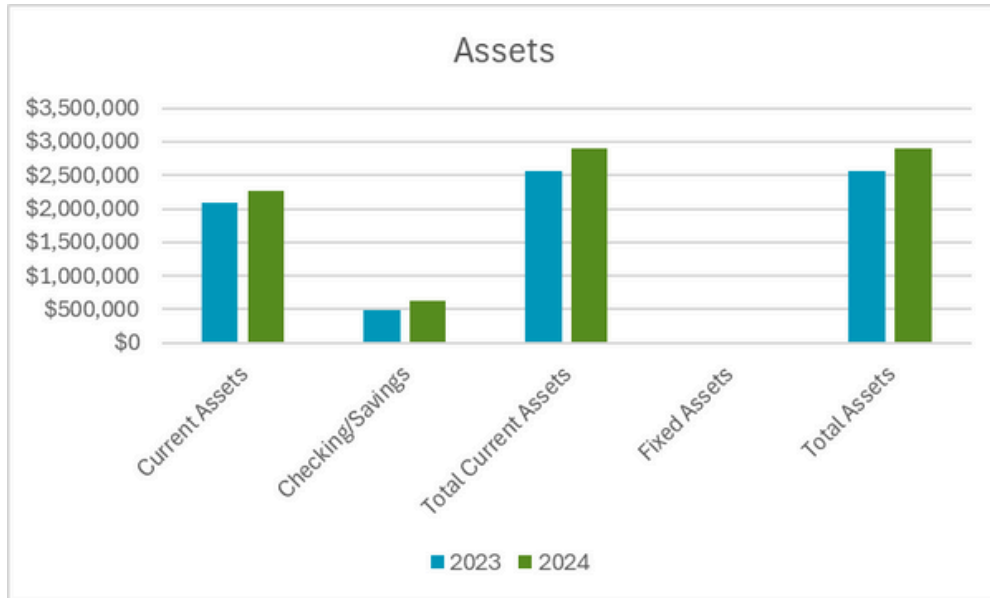


# Balance Sheet

*\*unaudited as of 12/31/24*

	2023	2024
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Current Assets	\$2,088,929	\$2,267,649
Checking/Savings	\$479,837	\$626,415
Total Current Assets	\$2,568,566	\$2,894,064
Fixed Assets	\$3,963	\$0
TOTAL ASSETS	\$2,572,529	\$2,894,064
<b>LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>		
Current Liabilities	\$676,539	\$699,997
Other Current Liabilities	\$676,539	\$699,997
Equity	\$1,895,990	\$2,194,067
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	\$2,572,529	\$2,894,064

# Balance Sheet



# 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

Carrie Fullerton

## Community Impact Award

Deborah Fandrei

## Professional of the Year Award

Jay Lerner

## Young Professional of the Year Award

Sara Witteck

## Champions for Change Award

Park District of Oak Park

## Board Chair Awards

Margaret Resnick

Andy Thurman

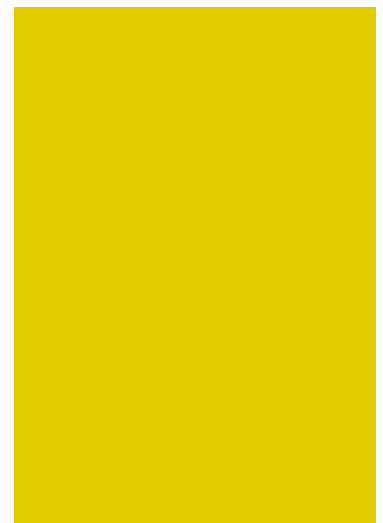
Carlo Capalbo

Rita Fletcher

Amy Charlesworth



Learn about our awards & recognition program here!



# Awards & Recognition

## Distinguished Park & Recreation Accredited Agencies

Batavia Park District

Champaign Park District

Mundelein Park & Recreation District

Plainfield Park District

South East Association for Special Parks and  
Recreation

Vernon Hills Park District

Northwest Special Recreation Association

## Outstanding Program or Special Event

- Program (Division 1) – United City of Yorkville, Future Foxes Preschool & School District  
115 Collaborative Learning Program
- Program (Division 2) – McHenry County Conservation District, Find Your Wild Summer  
Challenge
- Special Event (Division 1) – Freeport Park District, Oakdale Fall Festival
- Special Event (Division 2) – Fox Valley Park District, Big Foot Trail Run 5k

## Outstanding Park & Facility Award

- Facility Division II – Park District of Oak Park, Oak Park Community Recreation Center
- Division 1 Park (Operating Budget Less Than 5 Mil) – United City of Yorkville Parks &  
Recreation Department, Yorkville Storywalk Partnership
- Division 2 Park (Operating Budget Greater than 5 Mil) – Park District of Highland Park,  
Sunset Woods Park Playground Renovation

## Exceptional Workplace Award

Arlington Heights Park District

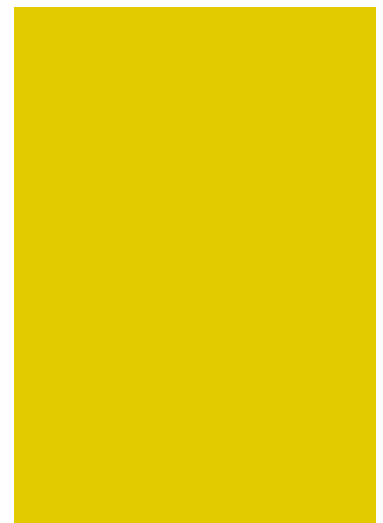
Lemont Park District

Oak Lawn Park District

Park District of Oak Park

SEASPAR

Worth 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

1. Downers Grove Park District
2. Lake County Forest Preserve
3. Glenview Park District

## People's Choice Agency Showcase Winner

Oak Lawn Park District

## Category Honors

Brochure Print: Lake County Forest Preserve District

Brochure Virtual: Wheeling Park District

Integrated Photography: Waukegan Park District

Large Format Marketing: Batavia Park District

Logo Design: Glenview Park District

Marketing Campaign: Downers Grove Park District

Paid Advertisement: Plainfield Park District

Print Communication - Informational: Glenview Park District

Print Communication - Promotional: Northbrook Park District

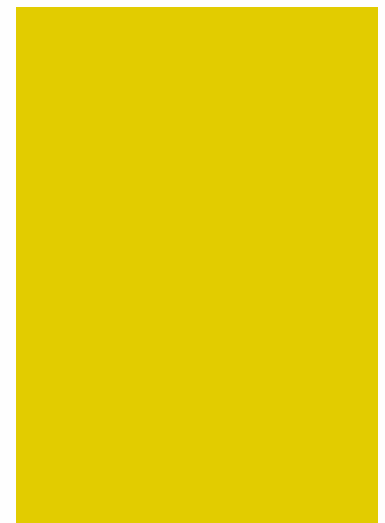
Social Media Campaign: Glenview Park District

Table Display: Wheeling Park District

Videography - Long Form: Park District of Highland Park

Videography - Short Form: Downers Grove Park District

Website: Glencoe Park District



# Volunteers

IPRA's special interest [sections](#) are crucial to the membership experience because members are placed with others that share a common work setting, interests and challenges. Thank you, 2024 Section Leaders:

## Administration & Finance Section

Gina Hassett, Director  
Kara Moss, Communication Director  
Steven Muenz, Education Director

## Communications & Marketing Section

Katie Garrett, Director  
Cassidy Reinhard, Communication Director  
Amy Lewandowski, Education Director

## Diversity Section

Oralethea Davenport, Director  
Haley Colucci, Communication Director  
Andre Cobbs, Education Director

## Facility Management Section

Matt Szytz, Director  
Lacy Marinenko, Communication Director  
Dave Littwin, Education Director

## Forest Preserve and Conservation Section

Anamari Dorgan, Director  
Caitlynn Martinez-McWhorter, Communication Director  
Jenny Heider, Education Director

## Parks & Natural Resource Management Section

Chris Leiner, Director  
Bob Johnson, Communication Director  
Steve Bessette, Education Director

## Recreation Section

Kimberly Barton, Director  
Mark Dolphin, Communication Director  
Cori Veverka, Education Director

## Therapeutic Recreation Section

Mia Ross, Director  
Jerry Barton, Communication Director  
Jordan Chandler, Education Director



*I have absolutely loved my volunteer experiences working with IPRA and have no plans to stop!*

Learn about volunteer options here!

# Volunteers

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 2024 Committee & Joint Committee Chairs:

## [Agency Showcase](#)

Sheri Potter

## [Illinois Urban Forestry Appointee](#)

Kristi Solberg

## [Finance Committee](#)

Nicole Hopkins

## [Section Director Council](#)

Laure Kosey

## [Governance Committee](#)

Lisa Sheppard

## [ProConnect Board of Regents](#)

Sheri Potter

## [Health and Wellness Committee](#)

Shannon Tovey

## [Professional Development School Board of Regents](#)

Erin Collins

## [Illinois Park and Recreation Foundation](#)

Jarrold Scheunemann

## [IPRA Conference Program Committee](#)

Brian Tibbs

## [Joint Conference Committee](#)

Dawn Krawiec

## [Joint Editorial Committee](#)

Kari Felkamp

## [Joint Coordinating Council Committee](#)

Lisa Sheppard

## [Joint Exhibit Committee](#)

Tom Hartwig

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

Dan Jones

## [Joint Legislative Committee](#)

Mike Benard





# Partners & Supporters

The Illinois Park & Recreation Association extends its sincere appreciation to the key supporters and partners who have played a vital role in advancing our mission. Their commitment helps strengthen the parks, recreation, and conservation profession across Illinois. While this report highlights some of our valued partners, we are grateful for the many others who support IPRA in various ways throughout the year.



*IPRA has been a valuable membership for me throughout my career. The opportunities for education, networking, and making lifelong friendships are like no other industry. Keep up the great work. IPRA means so much to many people. Thank you!*

 708.588.2280

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 [ILipra.org](http://ILipra.org)

