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For Immediate Release

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Waukegan Park District Recognized for Diversity and Inclusion Efforts

Hinsdale, IL – On January 30, 2026, the Illinois Park & Recreation Association (IPRA) and the Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD) awarded the Waukegan Park District with the Champions for Change Award, honoring their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Waukegan Park District was recognized during the Awards Program at the IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference held at the Hyatt Regency Chicago.

The Champions for Change Award recognizes agencies with unique and exemplary practices of increasing access and fostering diversity and inclusion within their community or organization. These are measurable practices that improve the working experience and engagement levels of employees and/or the lives of all people within the community through the delivery of excellent services that improve social equity and access in the community.

For the Waukegan Park District, diversity, equity, and inclusion are not new initiatives. They are the heart of who they are. Every day, they meet the community where they are, ensuring that everyone, regardless of color, age, background, or ability, feels welcomed, supported, and celebrated.

In a community where nearly 60% of residents identify as Hispanic, many face barriers related to language, transportation, and financial access. To address these realities, the Recreation Department hires bilingual staff as a priority, provides scholarships for all programs, creates bilingual flyers, and offers free or low-cost programming.

Waukegan's arts programming transformation exemplifies this commitment. Today, programs like the Youth and Adult Arts Academy, Arts Park, and Oakwood Cemetery Walk bring art, history, and culture directly to the community. The Arts Park Program travels to all areas of the District, eliminating transportation barriers. In 2024, more than 800 participants received art classes steps away from their homes.

At the Waukegan Park District, their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is their purpose. When people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities have equal opportunities to participate, the entire community thrives!

‘The Waukegan Park District exemplifies what it truly means to be a Champion for Change,’ said Peter Murphy, IAPD President/CEO. ‘Their deep-rooted commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is both inspiring and transformative. By removing barriers to access, they are creating meaningful opportunities for all and setting a powerful example for park districts throughout Illinois.’

‘Congratulations to the Waukegan Park District on being selected by its peers for this meaningful award. IPRA is proud to showcase their dedication to meeting their community where they are, ensuring that everyone feels welcomed, supported and celebrated,’ Suzi Wirtz, IOM, Executive Director of IPRA. ‘It is truly inspiring to see the impactful work being done that will ultimately not just help one community thrive, but make the world a better place.’

Established in 1944, the Illinois Park & Recreation Association (IPRA) serves over 3,000 park, recreation, and conservation professionals throughout the state, and is a national leader in providing premier education, networking, and resources. For more information about IPRA, its board and mission, please visit the IPRA website: www.Ilipra.org.

Established in 1928, IAPD is a nonprofit service, research and educational organization representing more than 360 park districts, forest preserves, conservation districts, recreation, and special recreation agencies throughout Illinois. IAPD’s mission is to advance these agencies in their ability to preserve natural resources and improve the quality of life for all people in Illinois.

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