



Illinois Park & Recreation Association
15 Spinning Wheel Road, Suite 218
Hinsdale, IL 60521
(708) 588-2280

Contact:

Illinois Park & Recreation Association
Heather Weishaar
heather@ilipra.org
708-588-2280

For Immediate Release

Professional Excellence Recognized at IAPD/IPRA Annual Conference

Hinsdale, IL—On January 30, 2026, the Illinois Park & Recreation Association (IPRA) honored Maryfran Leno, Executive Director at the Itasca Park District with the IPRA Professional of the Year Award, for her commitment and excellent service to parks and recreation in Illinois. Ms. Leno was recognized during the IAPD/IPRA Awards Program at the IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference, held at the Hyatt Regency Chicago.

The IPRA Professional of the Year Award is an honor presented to an individual with more than eight years of full-time service, who has made a major contribution to the park, recreation and conservation profession, and someone who consistently goes above and beyond the call of duty.

Maryfran Leno has been a transformative leader in parks and recreation throughout her distinguished career. Since joining the Itasca Park District in 1994 as Aquatic and Public Relations Supervisor, she has demonstrated exceptional vision, dedication, and leadership.

Under Maryfran's guidance, the Itasca Park District has experienced tremendous growth. She has secured more than \$4 million in grant funding for capital projects, including the Mill Road Land Acquisition, Ray Franzen Bird Sanctuary, Nature Center, Peacock Park, Museum, Franzen Park, and the Itasca Water Park Bathhouse.

Her strong community relationships contributed to the successful passage of a \$3.65 million referendum in 2006, a testament to her ability to unite and inspire broad resident support. Under her leadership, the district has achieved three NRPA Gold Medal Awards in 2003, 2009, and 2017, an extraordinary accomplishment that underscores her commitment to excellence.

Her achievements have been recognized with multiple honors, including the IPRA Young Professional Award, the IAPD Mike Cassidy Commissioner Community Service Award, and Facility Management Section's Director's Award and Aquatic Manager of the Year Award.

Maryfran Leno's impact on her community and our profession is significant, lasting, and deeply deserving of recognition!

‘On behalf of IPRA, I want to congratulate Maryfran on being recognized by her peers with this award for her significant contributions to her community and to the profession,’ Suzi Wirtz, IOM, IPRA Executive Director. ‘Maryfran’s long list of accolades are evidence that her hard work, dedication and leadership makes a lasting impact. We are proud to have her as a member to continue to help advancing the parks, recreation and conservation profession, leading by example and paving the way for the next generation.’

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.

###