

# Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Annual Report 2012

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRC CHAIRMAN

### Greetings,

Over the past year, your Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department provided outstanding service to you and all of our residents. We actually saw the department have its highest customer satisfaction results, highest attendance and highest record revenue ever!



The department is the proud winner of the National Gold Medal Award which is the “Academy Award” for overall park and recreation management among the largest cities in the country.

As you read through this report you’ll see the accomplishments of our staff, volunteers and partners who brought you these programs and opportunities.

Our collective challenge for the future as a department and community will be to meet the increasing needs for parks, recreation programs and protection of our natural environment with limited funding. We must understand the essential nature of park and recreation services and find ways to not just maintain what we have, but grow the system to meet current residents’ demands and those in the future.

There are no great cities without great park and recreation systems.

### Sincerely,

**Captain Robert “Rob” J. Brisley, Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Commission Chairman**



**Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners**

**Back Row L to R:** Vilma Leake (District 2), Neil Cooksey (District 5), Dumont Clarke (District 4), Karen Bentley (District 1)

**Front Row L to R:** George Dunlap (District 2), Harold Cogdell (Chairman-At-Large), Jennifer Roberts (At-Large), Jim Pendergraph (Vice-Chairman-At-Large), Bill James (District 6)



**Park and Recreation Commission**

**Back Row L to R:** Kristen Shaben, Charlie McRee, Ed Barnhart, Doug Burnett, Brenda McMoore, Sheryl Smith

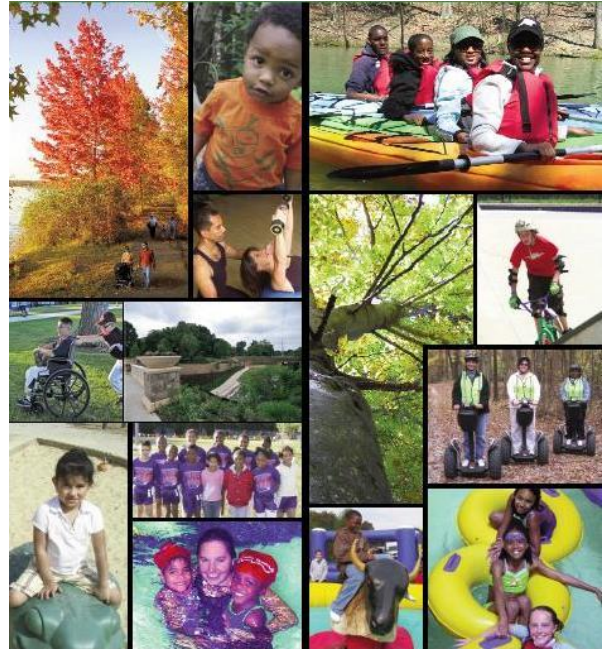
**Front Row L to R:** Joe Pata, Kendel Bryant (Vice-Chairman), Rob Brisley (Chairman), Elaine Powell (Exec. Secretary), Norman Mitchell

**Not Pictured:** Jeff Tarte

## DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

The Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department is home to 210 parks and facilities located on more than 19,000 acres of parkland throughout Mecklenburg County. Through its programs and services, the department is able to provide safe and enjoyable recreation opportunities, contribute to the region's tourism, protect drinking water, improve air quality, and contribute to community social cohesion.

- 200 + athletic fields
- 144 tennis courts
- 100 + playgrounds
- 100 + basketball courts
- 18 recreation centers
- 35 miles of nature trails and 21 nature preserves
- 35 + miles of greenways
- 14 disc golf courses
- 6 golf courses
- 6 dog parks
- 3 nature centers



And countless other unique facilities such as:

- Ray's Splash Planet
- American Legion Memorial Stadium and the Grady Cole Center
- Grayson Stakepark
- Community gardens
- Boat ramps to access the lakes
- Fishing piers
- Picnic areas
- Equestrian center (Latta Plantation Nature Preserve)
- Campground (McDowell Nature Preserve)
- Watershed protection properties
- And partnerships such as the US Whitewater Center, US Sailing Center, and the Carolina Raptor Center

## DEPARTMENT NEWS

### PARK AND REC WINS 2012 NRPA GOLD MEDAL AWARD



Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation has been selected as the 2012 National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Gold Medal Award winner.

Established in 1965, the Gold Medal Award honors U.S. communities that demonstrate excellence in parks and recreation through long-range planning, resource management, volunteerism, environmental stewardship, program development, professional development and agency recognition. Applicants are separated into five classes based on population.

"I'm very proud of the work and professional dedication of our staff and volunteers to earn this recognition," said Jim Garges, director of the Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department.

Agencies are judged on their ability to address the needs of those they serve through the collective energies of citizens, staff and elected officials. Four finalists in each class are chosen to compete for grand honors each year.

As part of the application process, finalists are asked to submit a 12-minute video showcasing their respective departments. View the [video](#) submitted by Park and Rec.

Park and Recreation was selected the winner in the Class I category (population 250,000 and over) competing against:

- City of Henderson (NV) Parks and Recreation Department
- Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Riverdale, MD
- Plano (TX) Parks and Recreation

Learn more about the award [here](#).



## **PARK AND REC MENTORING PROGRAM PROVIDES VALUABLE WORK EXPERIENCE TO LOCAL YOUTH**

In February 2012, Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department began the Recreation Employment Corp program to help local youth gain valuable first-time work experience and positive life skills.

The program provides teens, ages 14 – 17, with the opportunity to serve as mentees at various recreation facilities around the County. Each participant works closely with an assigned recreation supervisor for 10 hours a week through November. Mentees are compensated for their time and are held accountable for adhering to policies and procedures like other County employees.



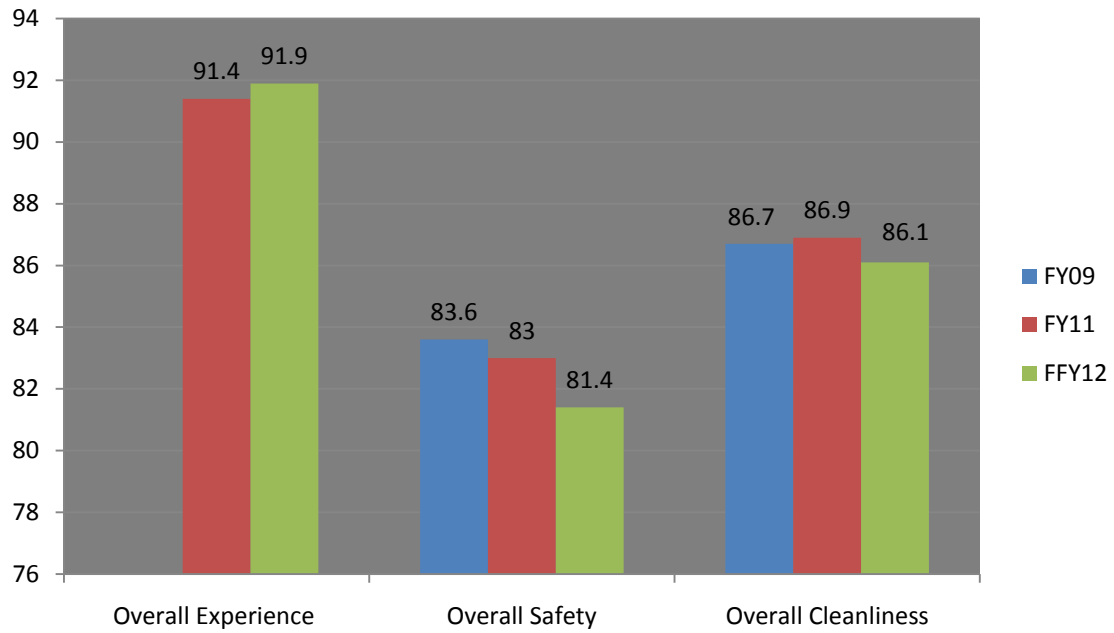
Recruitment for the REC program began in fall 2011. Park and Recreation staff identified potential candidates – teens currently active in Park and Recreation programs – and developed an application process consisting of a written essay and an in-person interview. Sixty teens applied and 20 were selected to participate.

“We are proud to offer this wonderful program which gives students the chance to develop positive working skills and habits which will serve them throughout life,” said Park and Recreation Director Jim Garges. “It is a great example of Park and Rec’s commitment to providing an atmosphere that stresses both education and personal growth.”

Park and Recreation will continue the program with 40 mentee positions in 2013.

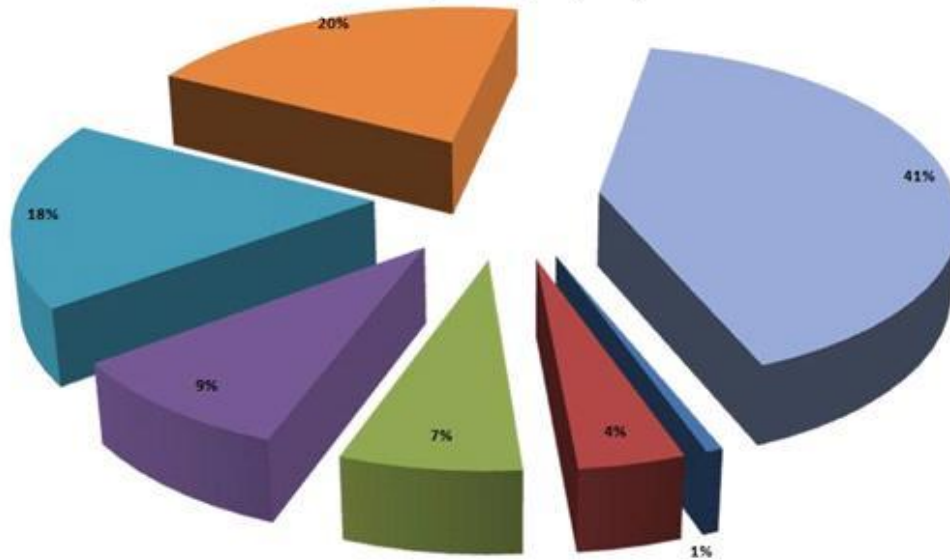
## Community Survey Results

Percentage



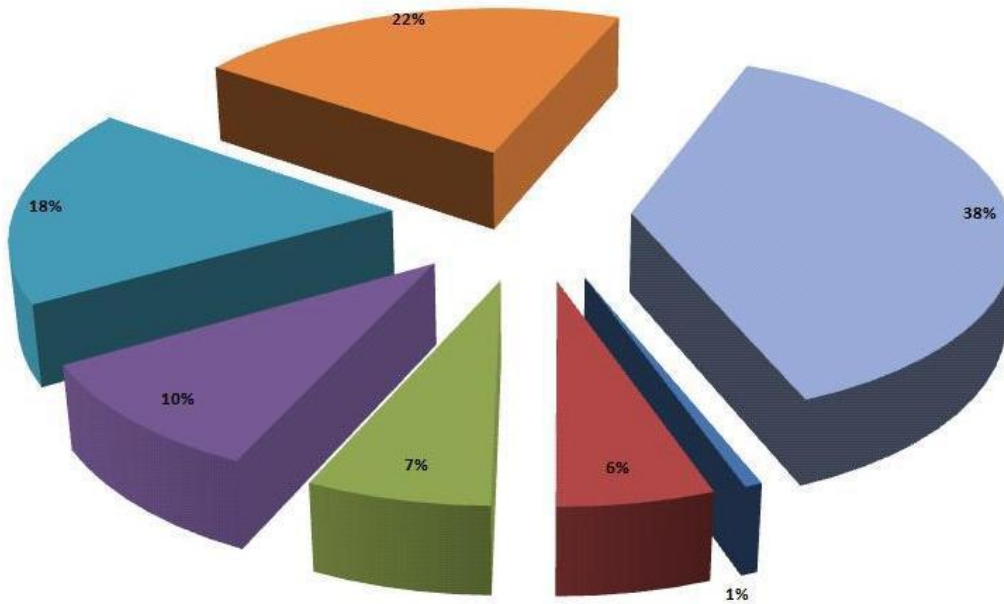
Park and Recreation participates in the County's annual community survey as an effort to gather feedback on department services and facilities. The graph above highlights customer response rates for overall, safety, experience, and cleanliness.

**FY-2012 Operating & Capital Budgets**  
**Total Expenses \$38,214,000**



- Capital Planning Services
- Nature Preserves & Natural Resources
- Community & Recreation Centers Services
- Park Operations & Maintenance
- Administrative Services
- Enterprise & Athletic Services
- Capital Improvements

**FY-2011 Operating & Capital Budgets**  
**Total Expenses \$34,029,000**



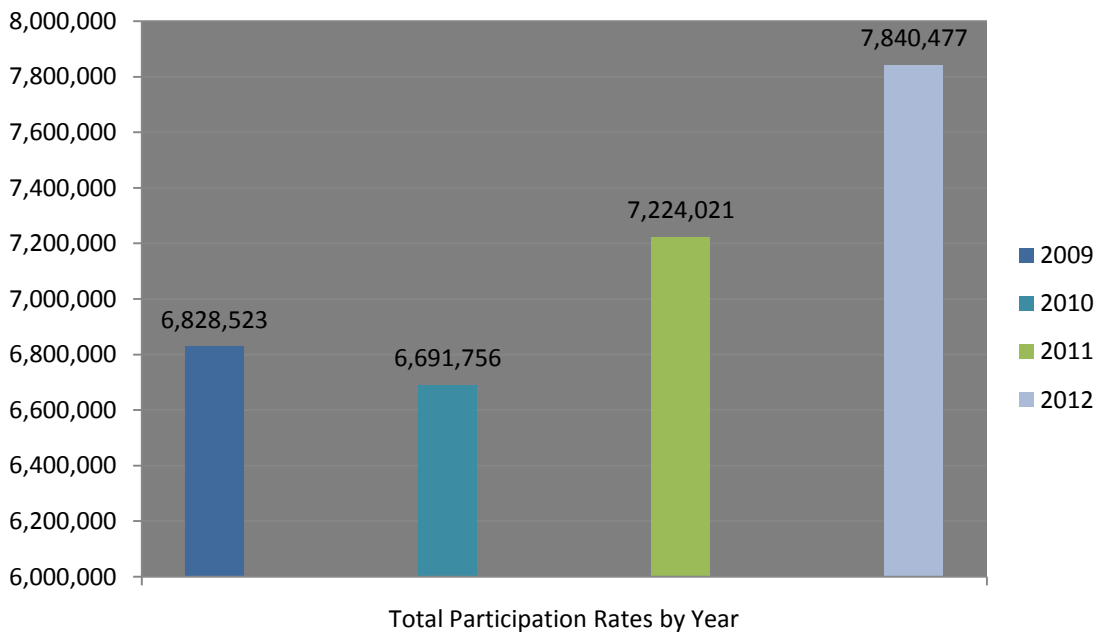
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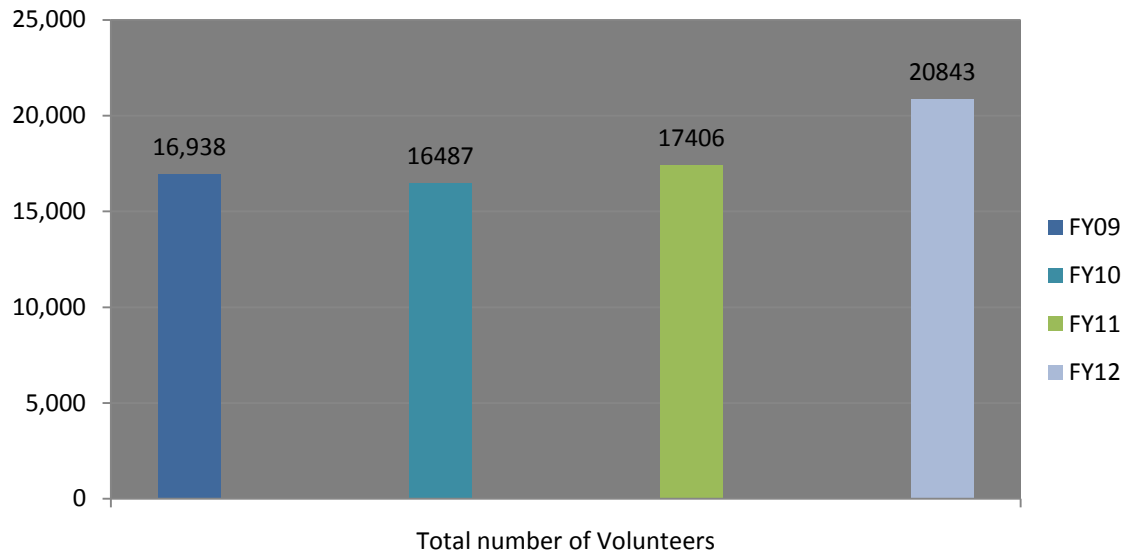
## Park and Recreation Participation by Division

Service	2009	2010	2011	2012
Athletics	4,710,219	4,118,218	4,598,361	4,942,647
Special Facilities	198,134	268,945	247,359	326,943
Outdoor Pools	36,995	42,051	38,553	36,619
Indoor Pools	512,609	509,940	515,598	453,189
Grady Cole Center	149,150	85,370	-	-
Rec Center Programs	637,421	883,634	802,560	930,969
County 4-H / Hort.	37,955	36,070	42,062	9,323
Nature Preserves	534,197	732,852	958,324	1,121,653
Therapeutic Rec.	11,843	14,676	21,204	19,134
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,828,523</b>	<b>6,691,756</b>	<b>7,224,021</b>	<b>7,840,477</b>

Park and Recreation has seen an increase in participation in nearly all areas of service over the past four years, most notably, a 48% increase in the nature preserves/natural resources division.



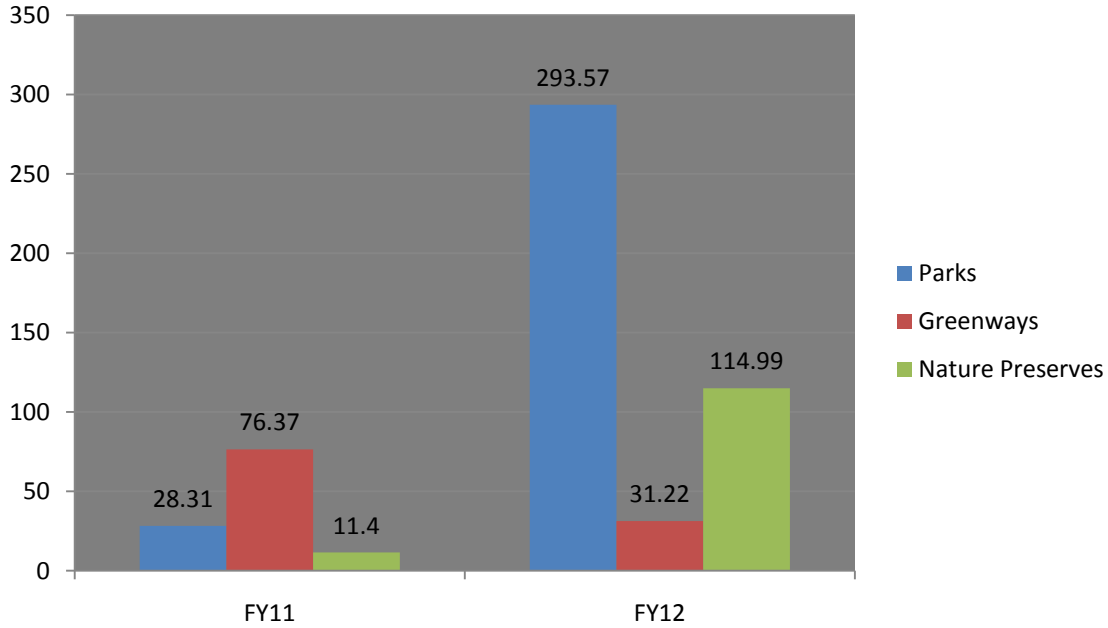
## Park and Recreation Volunteering



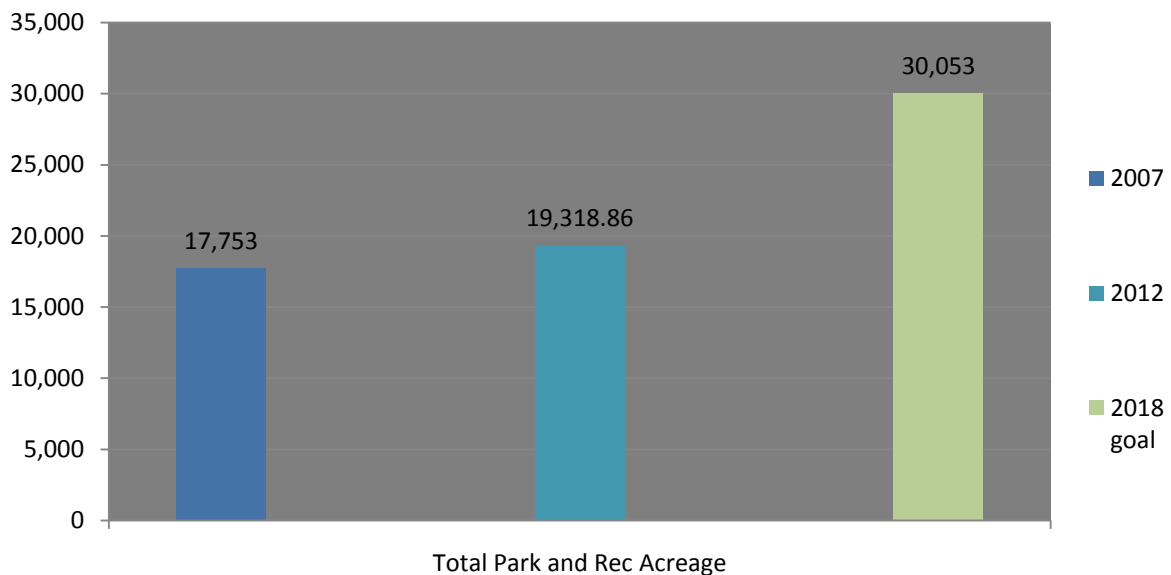
Over the past four years, Park and Recreation’s Volunteer Services Department has increased its involvement in all areas of service including coaching youth sports, helping coordinate special events, landscaping parks, conducting general park and facility maintenance, working with seniors, helping with Therapeutic Recreation programs, and adopting parks and greenways. In 2012, volunteers contributed more than 97,000 hours to the department. According to the Points of Light Foundation, that represents more than \$2,100,000 in avoided costs.

## Park and Recreation Land Acquisition

Acreage



In 2007, the Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department managed 17,753 acres of parks, nature preserves, greenways and recreation centers. As part of the department's 2008 10-Year Master Plan, a goal was set to expand total acreage to 30,053 by 2018. Currently, the department manages 19,318.86 acres.



## MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2012

### New Program/Services/Initiatives:

- In April 2012, a celebration was held observing the completion of [Little Sugar Creek Greenway](#). This achievement means that Mecklenburg County residents can now walk, bike or jog on a paved path from CPCC to the Park Road Shopping Center. Graceful fountains surrounded by rounded plazas, a kiosk for refreshments and an elegant clock tower are special features of the new greenway. Park benches, an arched pedestrian bridge, and public and private art make this promenade a great place to relax, to connect with nature, or to access Center City. [Photos](#)



- Continued the expansion and development of the Therapeutic Recreation's Young Athletes program through a partnership with Special Olympics of North Carolina and Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools Pre-K programs. This expansion increased service delivery on a weekly basis to 280 preschool students who have disabilities, increased services to six schools in 20 pre-K classrooms, and provided an opportunity for 250 pre-school aged children who have disabilities to attend a day long field day of events. Expansion also included a private Pre-K program funded outside of CMS.

- The department started a new youth sports summer camp at Revolution Park Sports Academy that served more than 315 kids covering traditional and non-traditional sports such as boxing, track & field, baseball/softball, soccer, football, wrestling, volleyball and golf.



- In June, Park and Rec participated in the World's Largest Swimming Lesson™, a worldwide event to simultaneously conduct swim lessons across nations. This year, the Double Oaks pool included 60 of the more than 23,000 swim lessons worldwide, breaking the Guinness World Record. This spectacular event was created to spread the word that swim lessons saves lives! The facility will be recognized and listed as a Guinness World Record Holder.



<http://wsls.org/>

- Cooperative Extension's 4-H staff introduced "Juntos" at Hopewell High School. Juntos provides Latino parents and youth with knowledge and resources to prevent 8-12<sup>th</sup> grade students from dropping out of school and to encourage families to work together to gain access to college. The six week program included 26 students and families.
- Cooperative Extension added the 4-H Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program in December 2011. This program teaches and reinforces food and nutrition best practices to school age youth through six hands-on lessons. 4-H EFNEP works primarily in the schools and in after school programs. This fiscal year, the program reached 434 participants, with 384 graduates.

- Park and Rec hosted the 2012 Modern Pentathlon World Cup Series which included fencing, pistol shooting (laser), swimming, horseback riding, and running at the Grady Cole Center, American Legion Memorial Stadium, and the Aquatic Center. More than 200 athletes from 40 countries participated in the games. Two of these athletes qualified for the 2012 Olympic Games in London.



- In May 2012, 29 employees graduated from the inaugural Leadership Academy and earned CEU credits from the NC Recreation and Parks Professional Association. The 12-month program included modules in leadership, management, and industry best practices which were presented in sessions complemented with guest speakers from the County, civic organizations and the business community.



- Partnered with the Carolinas Panthers and the Thomas Davis Defending Dreams Foundation at the Double Oaks Neighborhood Pool to provide backpacks filled with school supplies to more than 350 kids.
- Successfully completed the Lincoln Heights Community Park build with more than 4,845 volunteer hours. Amenities include a playground, community garden and a walking trail.
- Created an Incident Management Unit in coordination with CFD and CMPD. The primary focus of the IMU is to provide support in emergency response situations in parks and along greenways, in addition to supporting departmental special events.
- Began construction of 5.4 acre Romare Bearden Park; total project budget \$11,000,000.
- Groundbreaking at Regional Sportsplex (Matthews) Phase I; total project budget \$7,000,000.
- Porter Byrum property ribbon-cutting and dedication of 27.5 acres of natural area.
- Abersham property dedication and purchase of 243 acres for \$3,753,500.



**Substantial Service Delivery Changes:**

- Increased participation by 20 percent (3,300) in FREE Swim Lesson programs held at Double Oaks and Cordelia Outdoor Pools. Drowning is the second leading cause of unintended, injury related death of children ages 1-14.
- Hosted the 28 Annual Charlotte Ultra Swim that included Olympians Michael Phelps, Ryan Lochte, Natalie Coughlin, Cullen Jones, Rebecca Soni, and Ricky Berens. Eight hundred thirty-seven of the best swimmers in the country participated in one of the last qualifying events before the Olympic Trials leading up to the London Olympics. The Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority reported that the Ultra Swim generated approximately \$804,000 in direct delegate spending at local hotels and restaurants.

**Reduced/Avoided Costs:**

- Hosted more than 20,800 volunteers who performed more than 97,000 hours of community work across the department in recreation centers, parks and greenways, and natural areas. Using the cost per hour as published by the Points of Light Foundation, this effort represented over \$2,100,000 in avoided costs.



- Collaborated with the City of Charlotte and Carolina Thread Trail on Phase II of the Toby Creek Greenway. Carolina Thread Trail provided the local match for the project totaling \$1,810,000.
- Contribution of \$20,000 from Lat Purser and Assoc. for the Four Mile Creek Greenway Parking Lot at Bevington Road.
- Avoided \$7,000 construction cost for the cricket field at Kilborne Park, which was paid for by the South Charlotte Cricket Club.
- Received \$15,000 in repairs and improvement work to Grady Cole Center and Memorial Stadium facilities from CRVA in part to host the 2012 Modern Pentathlon events.
- Partnered with Queens University to replace the score clock, shot clocks and make locker room improvements at the Grady Cole Center for a total cost exceeding \$25,000.
- Development and / or continuation for numerous partnerships with Therapeutic Recreation that resulted in significant cost avoidance of over \$148,500.
- Partnered with the US Federal Probation Office for the use of community services workers at Grady Cole Center and Memorial Stadium and avoided \$6,000 in labor cost.
- Partnered with Ratcliffe Golf Services to start the construction of a 6-hole learner course at the Renaissance Park Golf Course and avoided an expenditure of over \$306,000 through June 30, 2012.
- Opened West Branch Nature Preserve in Davidson with a 0.8 mile natural surface trail. Received a \$35,000 Carolina Thread Trail grant towards the project.
- Recipient of a \$4,000 Arts and Science Council Grant for a Solar Energy Program for youth. The program was run at various recreation centers focusing on utilizing solar energy to cook with and how to power small motors.
- Received a \$125,000 grant from Duke to help acquire 114 acre parcel adjacent to Latta Plantation Nature Preserve. County acquired the property in December 2011.
- Received a \$15,000 matching grant for the division Power2Give programs, which aim to provide outdoor experiences for at-risk youth.
- Raised more than \$25,000 via Hats Off to Parks and other fund raising initiatives to open Clarks Creek Nature Preserve in the University City area.

- Financed the purchase and installation of athletic field lights at Elon Park and Harrisburg Road Park soccer fields, which accelerated the timing of the installation and revenue stream of user fees by four years.
- Received donation from BP Oil for \$20,000 that was utilized to purchase equipment and an equipment trailer for the Paralympic Sports Club Metrolina program under Therapeutic Recreation.

#### **Awards & Recognition:**

- Department re-certified with OSHA Carolina Star exemplifying its leadership in safety policies and practices for staff and park visitors; MCPRD is the only NC Park and Recreation agency to hold this distinction.
- Park and Recreation was named as a finalist for the 2012 Excellence in Youth Sports Award by the National Alliance for Youth Sports.
- Al Simpson, Recreation Specialist- Boxing at Revolution Park Sports Academy inducted into the Carolinas Boxing Hall of Fame.

#### **Three NACo Awards (National Association of Counties):**

- **The Natural Element and Resources (NEaR) GIS tool:** The Natural Element and Resources GIS tool called NEaR was developed as a way to review and communicate between local government agencies and developers in the protection of natural resources in Mecklenburg County. Because of this coordinated and collaborative effort, all large-scale residential and commercial plans submitted electronically to the county are compared to the NEaR GIS layer. If the project occurs within close proximity to wetlands, nature preserve or park properties or where there are known populations of rare species, the County's natural resources staff will work with the developer's project manager to coordinate efforts to minimize environmental impact.
- **Urban Outdoors:** This program was created as after-school clubs that provide Outdoor Recreation and Environmental Education to urban and at-risk youngsters in the Charlotte area. Clubs meet at five different recreation centers, representing some of the most urbanized parts of inner city Charlotte. During each school year, more than 120 club members participate in 18 outdoor sessions that teach young people new ways to experience the outdoors for themselves. These outdoor clubs utilize innovative programs to provide active engagement for youth grades K-5. The clubs are designed to reduce fears of the outdoors, help participants gain knowledge of ethical outdoor treatment and living skills, and assist in achieving a healthier lifestyle through active outdoor play.
- **Cicada Watch: Mecklenburg County Brood XIX Magicicada Monitoring Project:** The 2011 Cicada Watch monitoring project was developed to help document the emergence of periodical cicadas of Brood XIX in Mecklenburg County and surrounding areas. There's been a rapid increase in urbanization and suburban



sprawl since the last emergence of Brood XIX in 1998 and little is known about how these changes have affected local periodical cicada populations. More than 150 local residents including parents, teachers, scout leaders and others generated data on periodical cicada locations. Prior to this project, there was very little data on the abundance and distribution of periodical cicadas. There are only a very small number of records from past emergences in the Charlotte Region and mostly what exists are just anecdotal accounts from long-time residents who remember past emergences.

Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation

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