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Fourth Ward Park

# Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation 2013 Annual Report



# Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation

2013 Annual Report

James Garges, Director

Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation

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## Board of County Commissioners

**Top row L to R:** George Dunlap (District 3), Bill James (District 6), Dumont Clarke (Vice Chair, District 4), Karen Bentley (District 1)  
**Bottom row L to R:** Matthew Ridenhour (District 5), Kim M. Ratliff (At Large), Pat Cotham, (At Large), Trevor Fuller (Chair, At Large), Vilma Leake (District 2)



## Park and Recreation Commission

**Front Row L to R:** Tristan McMannis, Elaine Powell (Executive Secretary), Robert Brisley (Chair), Kendel Bryant (Vice-Chair), Norman Mitchell Sr.  
**Back Row L to R:** Jude Harding, Joe Pata, Ed Barnhart, Sheryl Smith, Doug Burnett, Brenda McMoore, Charles McRee, Travis Dancy



# Department Overview

The Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department (MCPR) is home to over 210 parks and facilities located on 193,118.86 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
- 130 + tennis courts
- 100 + playgrounds
- 100 + basketball courts
- 18 recreation centers
- 35 miles of nature trails and 21 nature preserves
- 35 + miles of greenways
- 10 disc golf courses
- 5 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 Stake Park
- 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 National Whitewater Center, US Sailing Center, and the Carolina Raptor Center



# Department News

## MATTHEWS SPORTSPLEX

After a decade of planning and preparation, the Mecklenburg County Sportsplex at Matthews opened in September 2013. The dedication ceremony of Phase I was held Wednesday, October 30 in a joint effort with Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation and the Town of Matthews.

Phase I features five synthetic multi-purpose fields to host a wide variety of weekend tournaments, leagues and weekday practices. Soccer, rugby, lacrosse, field hockey and football are among the sports being played on the fields. Development of Phase II is slated to begin soon, with an additional seven multi-purpose fields including a 2,700 seat stadium field.

Soccer, rugby and lacrosse tournaments have already been scheduled through June 2014. The Sportsplex is expected to bring in significant revenue for the County and the Town of Matthews.





## ROMARE BEARDEN PARK

Romare Bearden is a 5.4 acre park located in the Third Ward neighborhood of Uptown Charlotte. The plan for the site evolved from a series of community workshops and stakeholder meetings conducted by the department over the course of a year. The design features, among other amenities, two large gardens, a flexible event lawn, a childhood muse plaza, a formal lawn area, an arbor and trellis, and a kiosk area for providing refreshments. The park held its grand opening in 2013.



## VETERANS AND RESERVISTS GOLF CLASSIC

Nearly 300 active duty and retired military personnel played a free round of golf at the Sunset Hills Golf Course on June 27, 2013. In its 8<sup>th</sup> year, organizers of the Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department Veterans and Reservists Golf Classic were honored to provide a day of recreation to America's heroes. Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation hosted the event, which debuted in 2006. Eighty-eight golfers turned out for the first event and the number nearly tripled in the second year. When the total number of participants peaked at 300 in 2008, staff decided to put a cap on it.

The tournament has been played at four of five county-owned golf courses. The first golf classic was held at Sunset Hills Golf Course in 2006.

This year's tournament was held in two flights, one starting at 8 a.m. and another at 2 p.m. In between, a free catered lunch was sponsored by Texas Land and Cattle Steakhouse for the fifth consecutive year. Other longtime sponsors include Speedway Charities, Sonny's BBQ, Carolina Panthers, Squeegee Tees, Dale Jarrett Foundation and Condor Flags.



## WENDY'S INVITATIONAL CROSS COUNTRY MEET

UNCC hosted their Cross Country Invitational on September 28, 2013 at McAlpine Creek Park. The event brought participants from all over the country. Some of the Universities that participated included Davidson, Florida State, Northern Kentucky and many more.

## 2013 NACPRO AWARD

The Recreation Employment Corp received a National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials (NACPRO) award in Houston, Texas on Wednesday, October 9, 2013. The award recognizes a NACPRO member agency that has provided a unique or exceptional program, activity or event that provided an outstanding example that other agencies could adopt or emulate.

The Recreation Employment Corp (REC) is a work-based learning program employing youth between the ages of 14-17 as employee/mentees at neighborhood recreation centers, nature centers and aquatic facilities.

Each employee is paired with a professional recreation staff member who is the supervisor/mentor that provides close supervision and guidance during the 40 week program. Through this structured job experience and training opportunities, youth learn positive work skills and habits which serve them throughout life.



## 2013 POWERADE STATE GAMES

The 27th annual Powerade State Games of North Carolina were held in the Charlotte region in June 2013. Charlotte played host to over 13,500 athletes and 700 teams across 27 different events. Ninety-six out of 100 counties were represented. Facilities at the Mecklenburg County Sportsplex, UNC-Charlotte, Carolina Courts, Extreme Ice Center, American Legion Memorial Stadium, Queens University, Mecklenburg County Aquatic Center, and a host of other area parks and facilities will be used to present the events.



## PARK AND REC MENTORING PROGRAM

The department continued to offer the Teen Mentoring Program, Recreation Employment Corp (REC), for 35 teens. Youth gained valuable first-time work experience and positive life skills training. The program ended on November 18, 2013, with a graduation ceremony at Queens University Sports Complex. De'Ajia McCauley was recognized as the Employee of the Year. The third class of mentees will begin in March 2014.



# Park Operations

The Park Operations Division (POD) provides park operations and maintenance services in all parks, greenways and undeveloped property. The division has been able to secure additional funding through the capital reserve process and has benefited from outside donations to improve facility and park operations. POD staff consistently provides excellent customer service, safe parks and facilities and continue to score highly on customer service surveys and program reviews.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. Supported all Park and Recreation divisions with an estimated park visitor count of 12,100,000.
2. Developed new community gardens at Ezell Farm Park, Merry Oaks Neighborhood and Grier Heights Neighborhood.
3. Funding Partnerships/Savings:
  - NFL Play 60 Grant for Freedom Park: \$250,000 for an athletic exercise/play area for the public.
  - Installed irrigation controllers and weather stations for an estimated annual savings utility cost savings of \$150,000.
  - Assisted the Brookfield Community (Hoskins Park) with submitting and receiving a \$25,000 grant for park improvements, such as expanding the community garden and adding a volleyball court.
  - Worked with the McColl Center and Bright Walk community on enhancing features in Anita Stroud Park that provided a cost avoidance of over \$10,000.
  - Established cost sharing projects for park enhancements at Fourth Ward Park and Frazier Park for a cost savings of \$15,000.
  - Installed a new playground and iron fence at Cherry Park. This was a partnership with the Carter Oosterhouse Foundation and the Charlotte Neighborhood Development staff. There was a realized a cost avoidance of \$50,000.
4. Changed the Park Watch staff to Park Rangers that included new uniforms, truck identification, and name change. This put the department in line with other Park and Recreation Departments across the country. This also helps our customers identify more with staff since Park Rangers are a well-known figure in parks across the country.

*Total FY 2013 savings related to grants and operational efficiencies: \$500,000*

## AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation received the North Carolina Department of Labor's Silver Star Award for excellence in creating safe work environments for park staff.

# Enterprise Services

## AWARDS

- Four Enterprise Division staff earned their Certified Park & Recreation Professional (CPRP) certifications in 2013. (Genni Reel, Jody Corum, Pat Daly & James Alsop)

## NEW TRAINING PROGRAM

- Aquatics Division converted from the American Red Cross Lifeguard Training Program to Star Fish Aquatics. Star Fish includes improved safety procedures, continuous training and completion of audits.
- Mecklenburg County Aquatic Center was audited and received a 3 out of 5-star rating.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Construction of Phase I of the Mecklenburg County Sportsplex at Matthews was substantially completed. Five synthetic turf multi-purpose fields with lights, restroom, storage and parking were completed. Volunteers also completed the construction of a playground.
- Partnered with Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority, Visit Lake Norman, NC Sports, Union County, Cabarrus County and Iredell County to host the 2013 Powerade State Games (amateur athletic) that resulted in more than 13,000 participants visiting the region. Hosted the soccer and swimming portion of the games at six County facilities.







# Community and Recreation Center Services

## MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR FY13

- Youth Sports Development Section implemented the National Alliance for Youth Sports' Parents Association for Youth Sports program (PAYS) on a county-wide level at all the recreation centers to educate parents on their responsibility as a youth sports parent. The PAYS program educates parents on safety, injury prevention, preventing and identifying steroid abuse, modeling sportsmanship, plus more. Each parent is trained via video as well as being required to sign a code of ethics pledge.
- Received an Arts and Science Cultural Connections Grant of \$4,000 to offer the 4-H Biomed Tech and Wireless Communication curriculums at six recreation centers. In these STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Match) programs, participants, ages 8 to 13, built a bionic arm, wireless alarm and TV remote.
- Expanded the Recreation Employment Corp (REC) Program for teens ages 14-17 from 20 kids to 43 kids. Teens were mentored and supervised by our professional recreation staff during the 40-week program while working at one of our facilities. The teens were provided training through job shadowing, work and educational sessions to learn about the different aspects of the park and recreation profession. The training, mentoring and hands on work experience will prepare them for future education and career paths.
- Cooperative Extension Services collaborated with the 500 Gardens project to provide a gardening education pilot program, Get Growing! Gardening with Children in the Child Setting, including STEM principles to over 20 childcare providers in Mecklenburg County. The Extension Master Gardeners and Horticulture agent facilitated training. Participants learned basic gardening skills, hands-on activities to incorporate in current lesson plans, and ways to raise awareness of the importance of local foods. Providers received an opportunity to gain 10 Continuing Education Units (CEUs). Due to demand, the program will host another course next year.
- Recipient of a donation from BP / Mark Oil for \$11,146 that was utilized for the Paralympic Sports Club Metrolina program under Therapeutic Recreation which provides sports and athletic programs to members of the community who have physical disabilities or those who are blind or visually impaired. This expansion includes focusing on injured service men and women, disabled veterans, and youth of the community. These programs include: paratriathlon, bocchia, swimming, archery, tandem cycling and kayaking.

# Nature Preserves and Natural Resources

- Acquired property in southwest Mecklenburg County to add to existing property resulting in Winget Nature Preserve.
- Created a new nature preserve from existing land-banked greenway property in south Charlotte along 4-Mile Creek called Providence Nature Preserve.
- Developed a trail team to focus on sustainable trail design and maintenance for the 30+ miles of nature trails found in the nature preserves.
- Spearheaded the new trail development and implementation initiative known as Dirtways. These are natural surface trails found on greenway properties that allow residents to get out and hike, walk, jog, recreate and enjoy nature along the future greenway trail corridors.
- Coordinated with city storm water services on a major stream restoration project in Reedy Creek Nature Preserve.
- Relocated a population of a federally endangered sunflowers, Schweinitz's sunflower, from a road-side location in Union County, NC to Flat Branch Nature Preserve.
- Provided staff to teach sessions for the Central Carolinas Master Naturalist Program.
- Presented coyote information sessions to elected officials, special interest groups and private citizens regarding this high public interest topic.
- Planned and performed two major special events, Fairy House Festival and Hummingbird Festival, which provided over 3500 citizens with the opportunity to visit and learn more about Mecklenburg County nature preserves and the natural resources found in them.
- Began capital planning projects for several nature preserve properties including Clarks Creek, Evergreen, Flat Branch and the historic Holly Bend house.
- Partnered with Shortleaf Pine Initiative in nature preserves to establish and restore shortleaf pine communities, a southeastern habitat in decline.





# Capital Planning

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. **Toby Creek Greenway - Phase II** – Public workshops and design of a 1.3 mile greenway extension of Toby Creek Greenway from Town Center Plaza at W.T.Harris Blvd. to Blue Rock Drive in the Autumnwood neighborhood.
2. **Barton Creek Greenway** – Public workshops and design of a 1.0 mile greenway trail from J.W.Clay Blvd. to the existing Mallard Creek Greenway in the University City area of the County.
3. **Mooresville to Charlotte Trail** – Three public workshops and initial planning for a 30 mile multi-use trail that will provide a corridor for pedestrians and cyclists in collaboration with Mooresville, Iredell County, Huntersville, Davidson, Cornelius, Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.
4. **Bryant Park Master Plan** – Completion of the Master Plan for the historic, 15 acre Community Park in west Charlotte. Improvements to include ball field renovations, seating areas, public plaza with shelters, greenway trail and children's play areas.
5. **Wesley Heights Greenway** – Public workshops and design of the 1 mile section of greenway trail from Cedar Yards to Bruns Avenue. Construction will include relocating the existing gravel trail from the railroad tracks that will be used by the Charlotte Trolley.
6. **McAlpine Creek Greenway** – Public workshops, stakeholder meetings and design of the existing McAlpine Creek Greenway that will be impacted by the Charlotte Mecklenburg Utility Department relief sewer project. Improvements will include paving the existing gravel trail, new bridges and wayfinding signage.
7. **Clark's Creek Greenway** – Public workshops and design of a 300 foot connector for the greenway trail and bridge. The project extends from Lookout Pointe Drive to a new bridge over Clark's Creek tying to the existing Clark's Creek Greenway serving the Hampton Place and surrounding neighborhoods.
8. **Lynden B. Miller Symposium** – Author of "Parks, Plants, and People: Beautifying the Urban Landscape", Ms. Miller presented her work in New York City on urban garden design following a reception at Little Sugar Creek Greenway.
9. **Duke Energy Right of Way Policy Meeting** – MCPR sponsored a meeting with Duke Energy to discuss the policy for trails within their rights of way. Area stakeholders, landscape architects and planning officials from across the state attended to provide input to new policy.
10. **2012 NRPA Gold Award** – MCPR was selected as the recipient of the National Recreation & Park Association Gold Award in 2012 as the Best in the Nation – Class 1.
11. **CPCC Little Sugar Creek Bridge Design Competition** – Students from CPCC entered a national design competition for a greenway bridge from Little Sugar Creek Greenway (LSCG) to Park Road Shopping Center. Representatives from MCPR critiqued the final design of the bridge prior to the final submittal for the competition.



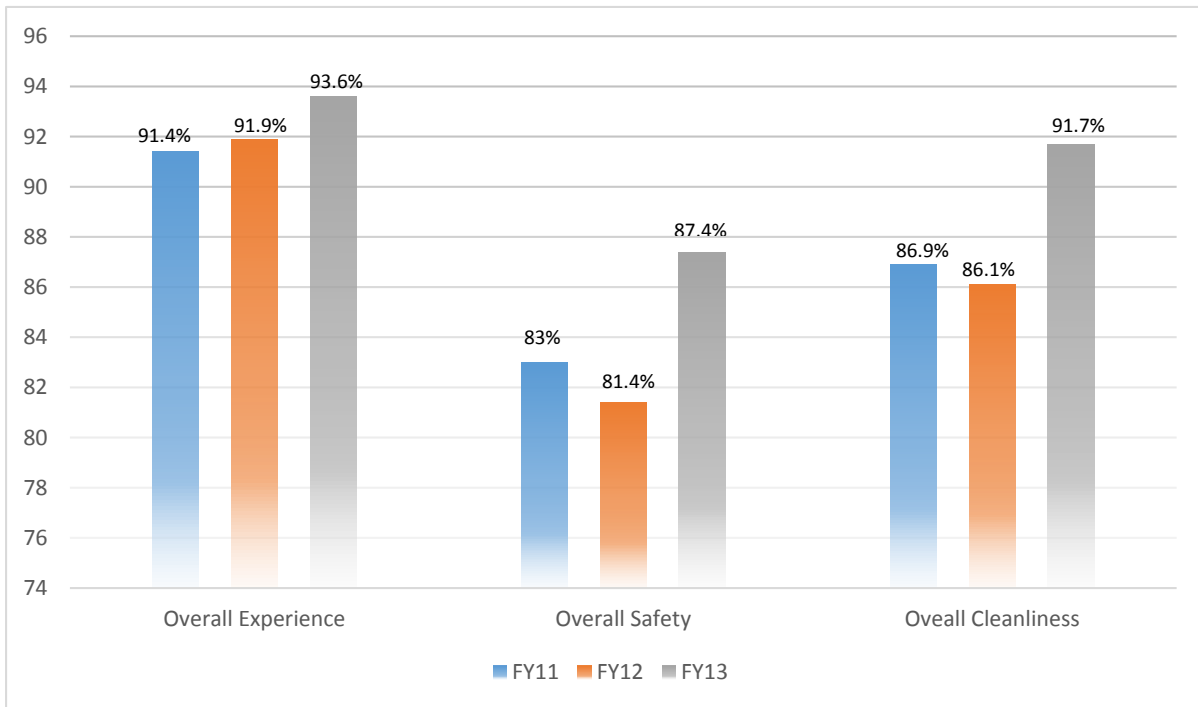
12. **Prosperity Hucks Area Plan / Park Woodlawn Area Plan** – MCPR provided input and attended public workshops for these two significant area plans in Charlotte prepared by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department.
13. **Donated Bicycle Repair Stations** – Five bicycle repair stations were donated by ‘Trips for Kids’ to install on several area greenways. These repair stations are strategically located and are highly used. These are plans for more stations to be donated in the near future.
14. **Belk Health Fair** – MCPR exhibited at the health fair sponsored by Belk at their corporate headquarters focusing on active recreation and the out of doors.
15. **Democratic National Convention (DNC) LSCG Tours/CarolinaFest** – MCPR played an important role in promoting the Charlotte Region during the DNC. Tours, presentations and exhibits showcased our parks and greenways to DNC delegates and visitors.
16. **Queens University Tennis Complex** – Public workshops and design for the proposed tennis complex at Marion Diehl Park for Queens University.
17. **Memorial Stadium Phase 1 Improvements** – Phase 1 demolition and improvements are completed and Phase 2 improvements are currently underway.
18. **Four Mile Creek Greenway/Bevington Parking Lot** – The 40 space parking lot at Bevington Place was completed and open to greenway users. It is full most of the time during nice weather.
19. **Lower McAlpine Creek Greenway/Torington Connector** – This project was for construction of a new, accessible, elevated bridge to minimize damage from floating debris during storm events.



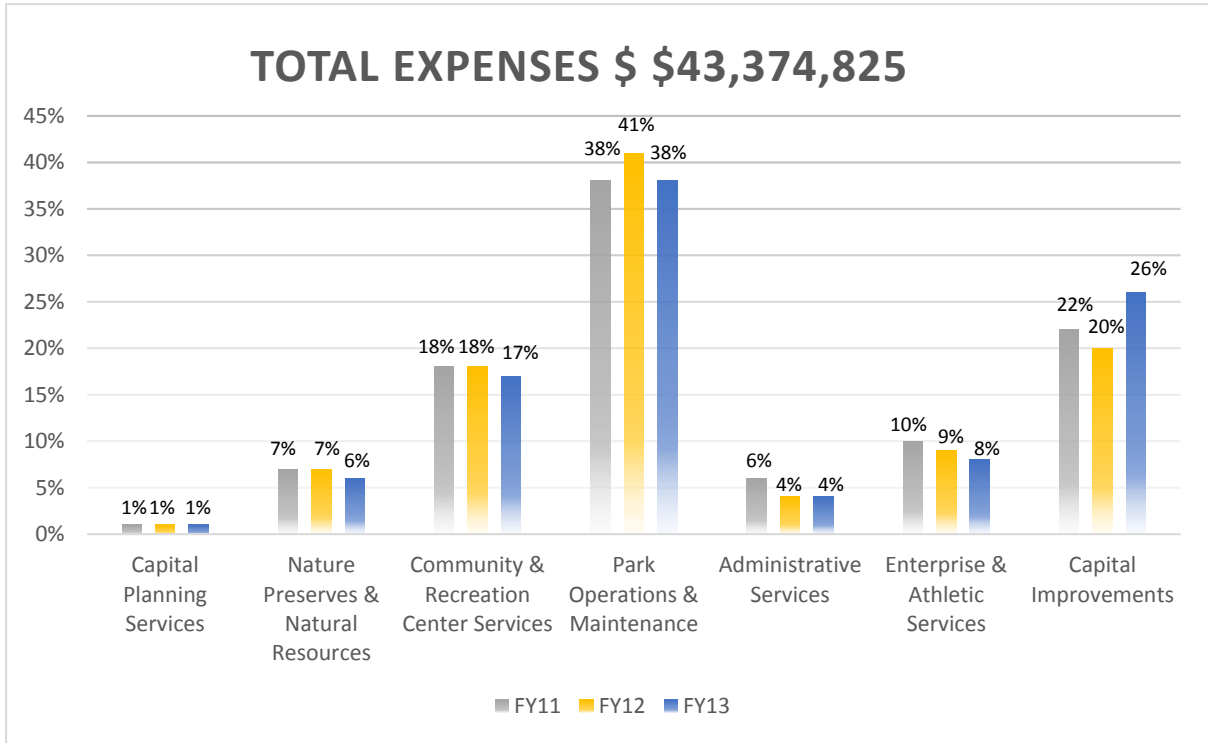


# Community Survey Results

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

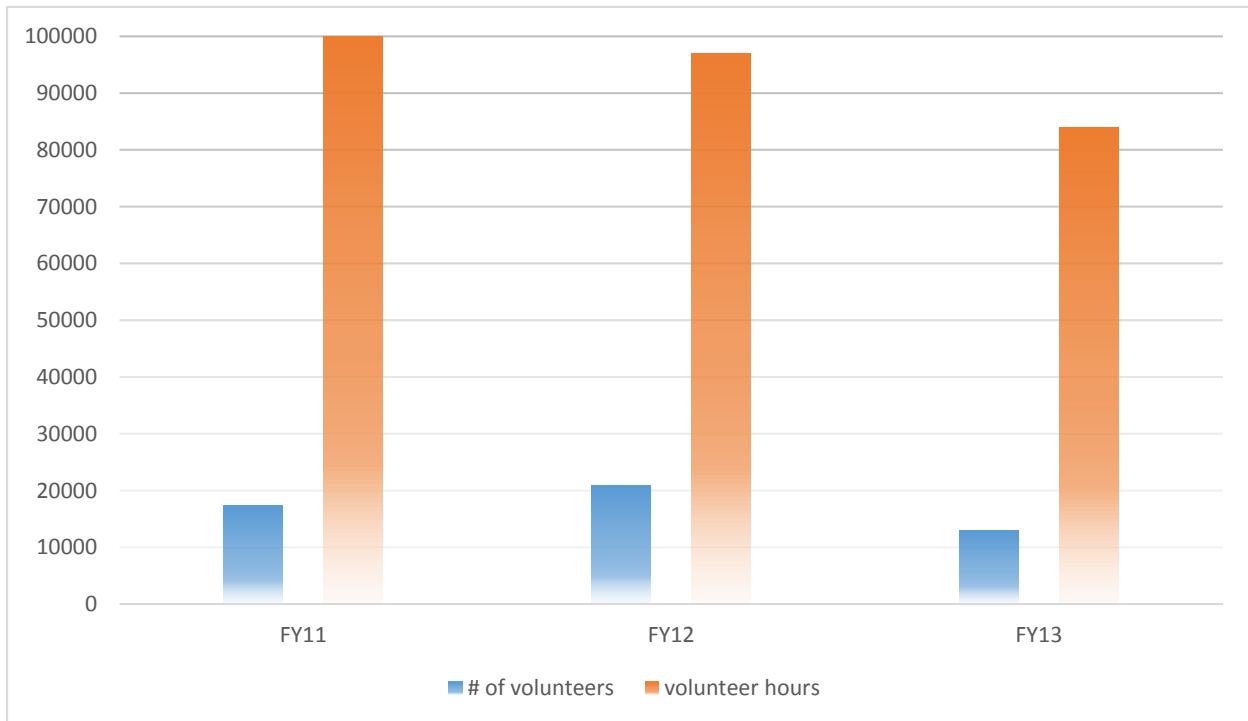


# Operating & Capital Budgets





# Volunteering



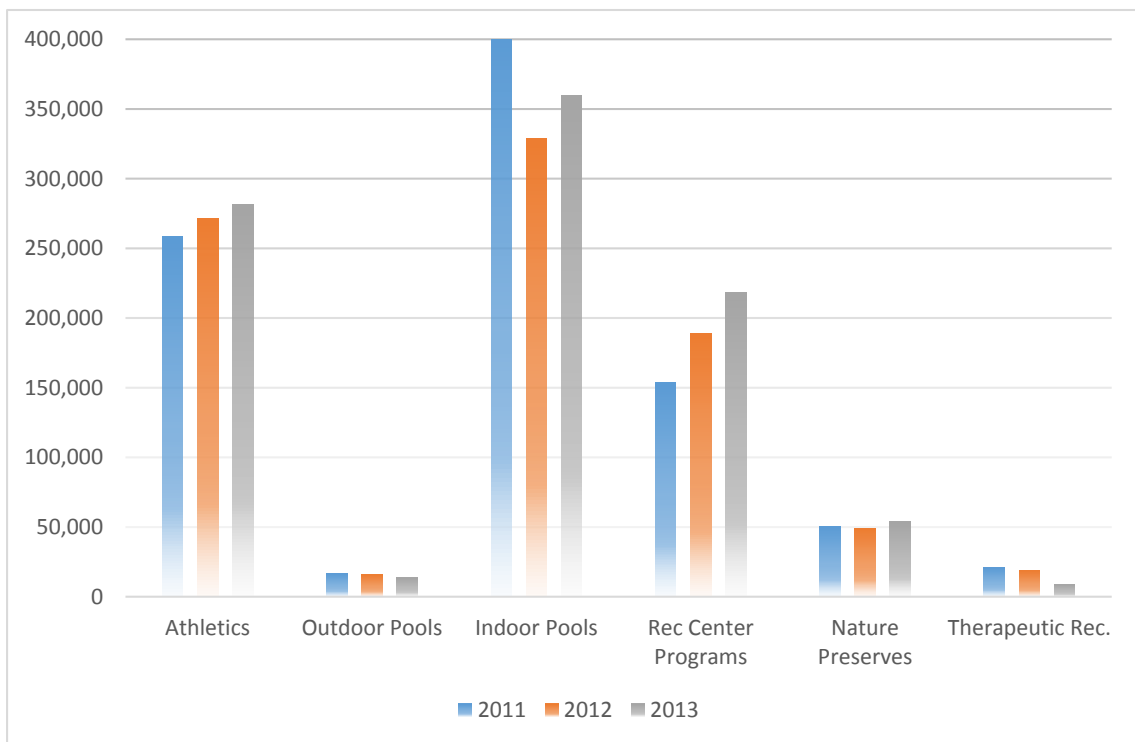
Park and Recreation’s Volunteer Services Department has increased its involvement in all areas of service including coaching youth sports, helping coordinate special events, landscaping parks, conducting general park and facility maintenance, working with seniors, helping with therapeutic recreation programs, and adopting parks and greenways. In 2013, volunteers contributed more than 84,000 hours to the department. According to the Points of Light Foundation, that represents more than \$1,850,000 in avoided costs.

*From July 2011 through September 2013 our approval process underwent a reorganization process. This process change affected the amount of volunteers that were able to get approved for the 2013 fiscal year.*



# Program Participation by Division

Service	2011	2012	2013
Athletics	258,700	271,357	281,236
Outdoor Pools	16,959	16,128	13,739
Indoor Pools	405,370	328,857	359,424
Rec Center Programs	154,064	188,960	218,462
Nature Preserves	50,684	49,190	53,965
Therapeutic Rec.	21,204	19,134	9,042





## THERAPEUTIC RECREATION

During FY13, Therapeutic Recreation had a change in the way partnership programs were tracked and contacts were accounted for. This change made participation numbers appear to decrease but actually provides a more accurate number for participation. Additionally, several community based events and festivals that were historically presented by disability related organizations and agencies in the community were not held during FY13. This resulted in a decrease of participants with Therapeutic Recreation.

## ATHLETICS

The total number of participants reported in 2013 was significantly lower because a management decision was made to change the way participants and spectators were counted at weekend youth athletic tournaments. Prior to 2013 participants and spectators were counted multiple times during events based on calculations that overstated the results. Calculations were modified to include industry standards and best practices used to obtain more accurate head counts that replaced unverifiable numbers.



## OUTDOOR POOLS

The number of program participants reported in 2013 is lower because a management decision was made to offer more free swim lessons at the outdoor pools. The number of swim team practices were decreased to create more time to schedule more swim lessons. The result was a total reduction in the overall number of participants by 475 and an increase in the number of free swim lessons from the previous season by 656 lessons.





# Senior Leadership Team

**Jim Garges**, Director

**Michael Kirschman**, Deputy Director

**James Alsop**, Enterprise Services

**Renea Barber**, Human Resources

**Mario Chang**, Budget Administration

**Lee Jones**, Capital Planning

**Lola Massad**, Community and Recreation Center Services

**Jeff Robinson**, Park Operations

**Chris Matthews**, Nature Preserves & Natural Resources



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