Parks and Recreation
PARKS & RECREATION OVERVIEW

Mission: We are here to provide citizens and visitors with a clean, safe, well-managed, fiscally sound, and environmentally pleasant community.

The Administrative Division is responsible for overseeing all parks and recreation programs, services, and facilities provided to residents including certain Town owned properties and ROW. Facilities managed include two Aquatic Centers, Champion Fields Complex, Community Activity Center, Connie Link Amphitheatre, Ironwood Golf Course, 19 parks and 15+ miles of Constitution Trail.

The Department employed 34 full-time employees and approximately 400 seasonal employees throughout the year. In a year filled with cancellation and adjustments to program and facility guidelines because of COVID-19, the department offered 292 programs and events during the past year.

Highlights

Numerous construction projects were prepared prior to the impact of COVID-19 and some smaller projects were able to be completed by Parks Maintenance staff:

- The large scope work of the Maxwell Park OSLAD grant were delayed, but work continued on the cross-country course route update and the renovation of a 25-hole Disc Golf Course.
- Replacement of a shelter and ADA access at Savannah Park.
- Grant funding allowed us to proceed with the construction of the Eagle’s Landing trail at Grove Elementary.

Department implemented comprehensive COVID-19 health and safety protocols for staff and participants to resume in-person work and programming. Mitigations included schedules and staff groupings, hygiene protocols and resources, public education, and signage.

Continued support of the SOAR program with fiscal and facility resources. SOAR provides aide assistance for program participants.

One new staff member joined the team this year: Matt Frahm, Youth Sports and Teens Supervisor. One staff member stepped into a full-time role: Josh Wozniak, Assistant Supervisor.

Implementation of new programming and events: CLUE Scavenger Hunt, Candy Corn Lane, Summer Soccer Stars, Basketball Clinics, and both virtual and hybrid Fitness classes.
Community Partnerships

Normal Parks and Recreation depends on community partners, and Town departments, to offer and assist with programs, services, and events for the benefit of Town of Normal residents. Together we effectively provide resources and support that directly impact the community.

- Bloomington-Normal Baseball Association
- Bloomington-Normal Girls Softball Association
- Bloomington-Normal Warriors Lacrosse Club
- Children’s Discovery Museum
- Cirquemania, Inc.
- Dust2Glory Fitness
- Eastview Sports
- Friends of the Constitution Trail
- Heartland Community College
- Illinois Fire Juniors
- Illinois State University & Athletics
- Illinois Wesleyan University Athletics
- McLean County Unit 5
- Normal Cornbelters
- Normal Fire Department
- Normal Police Department
- Normal Public Library
- Normal Theater
- Peoria Fencing Academy
- Radio Bloomington
- University of Illinois Extension
- Uptown Partners
- YWCA McLean County RSVP
The Marketing and Communications Department is responsible for providing timely information to our community. Information is delivered through traditional marketing and public relations activities. A variety of communication outlets are used to distribute information including:

- Broadcast Media: Radio
- Print Media: Newspaper
- Eblasts
- Social Media: Facebook & Instagram
- Websites: Parks and Recreation and Ironwood Golf Course
- Official Department Publications: Program Guides (three/year)
- Print Materials: Brochures, Flyers and Posters
- Video: Hiring Videos, Staff How-To Videos
- Community Outreach: Day of Play take-home kits, Winning Wednesday posts

The Marketing and Communications Department goals are to: 1) Educate our community on the benefits of parks and recreation, 2) Help to foster program development, 3) Position the department favorably against its competitors, and 4) Ensure the community has multiple avenues to obtain information about the Department.

**Highlights**

Instagram account @NormalParksandRec had 30% increase!

Facebook followers increased from 5,498 to 6,214 (13%).

Website redesign of the programming and amenities sections of our website. Creating a more visual, and less text-heavy, aesthetic.

Partnered with Normal Public Library for Story Walks in our parks, including Walk the Vote and Poe in the Park themes.
PARK MAINTENANCE

Park Maintenance functions involve the general maintenance and upkeep of parks, trails, and municipal properties and the management of Town-wide horticulture and forestry activities.

Essential responsibilities include providing comprehensive maintenance to the 19 neighborhood and community parks, comprising over 340 acres, and 15-plus linear miles of the Constitution Trail. Maintenance operations are directed by two Park Maintenance Supervisors and field staff is comprised of 16 full-time employees, 8 part-time employees, and various seasonal workers.

At the end of August, Park Maintenance Supervisor Tom Butler retired after 36 years of service to the Town.

Maintenance includes park and trail cleaning, trash and litter removal, ornamental planting and tree care, athletic field preparations and renovations. Park Maintenance staff provides mowing operations to parks, trails, municipal properties, creek banks, retention basins, and street right-of-way areas. Staff also provides maintenance and repairs to all park structures and amenities including restroom buildings, picnic shelters, irrigation and lighting systems, picnic tables, park benches, drinking fountains, and playgrounds. Specialized care is provided to the Uptown area, the Anderson and Fairview Aquatic Centers, the Connie Link Amphitheatre, and Champion Fields.

The Park Maintenance staff provides attention to many other facilities and amenities including the disc golf course, skate park, in-line hockey rink, athletic fields, tennis courts, basketball courts, community gardens, and two off-leash dog parks. Horticulture and forestry staff emphasize urban beautification, landscape improvements, and professional tree care. Horticulture crews design, plant, and maintain over one hundred landscape beds throughout the community including the Uptown area.

Maintenance staff provides support for recreation, athletic, and aquatic programs, Uptown special events and festivals, and various projects and events within the community. Staff is responsible for snow and ice removal operations at various parking lots and municipal properties, including the removal of snow from the Constitution Trail. Staff provides operational and preventative maintenance and repairs to pool mechanical equipment and pumps at the aquatic centers. During the off season, staff performs routine maintenance and repairs to the entire fleet of mowers, trucks, tractors, utility vehicles, trailers, and other park maintenance equipment.
Highlights

Erected a new picnic shelter in Savannah Park, including the installation of a stone seat wall and ADA sidewalk improvements.

Removed the playground surface at the two to five-year-old playground in Shepard Park and added new drainage tile. A contractor installed the new rubberized safety surface.

Laser graded the south ballfield at Shepard Park and at Ironwood Park to improve playability, especially after inclement weather.

Core-aerated the ball diamond outfield turf areas at Champion Fields and Shepard Park. Top-dressed with sand, gypsum, and lime which will help improve the soil composition and drainage.

Constructed a batting cage at Ironwood Park, now the sixth ballfield with a cage accessible to the public.

Through the Living Tribute Program to honor loved ones, park benches with mounted recognition memorial plaques were installed and dedicated in park areas and along the Constitution Trail.

Forestry crews installed seasonal and informational light pole banners and tree lighting for the holidays throughout Uptown.

Seeded native grasses and wildflowers on the old railroad embankment along Constitution Trail at the Vernon Gardens area and at the old horse pasture east of Brander Shelter in Underwood Park.

Installed new perennial landscape plants around the Normal Public Library building. Added new perennial landscape plants in selected landscape beds inside the Fairview Family Aquatic Center.

Installed directional posts and signage on the updated cross-country course in Maxwell Park.

Installed 18 holes of the new disc golf course in Maxwell Park with new tee pads and signs, baskets, and course sign. The final seven competitive holes west of the creek will be installed in summer 2021.

Asphalt was overlayed by a contractor from Veteran’s Parkway to Vernon Avenue, completing a multi-year project to stabilize the embankment and re-pave a section in poor condition.
IRONWOOD GOLF COURSE

The Division is responsible for the administration of all operations related to Ironwood Golf Course. These operations include round play, golf tournaments and outings, driving range, clubhouse rentals, lessons, junior play, and a concessions area. Ironwood is the host course for high school and college golf teams, and nine golf leagues.

Two full-time staff are employed: A Manager/Golf Pro and an Assistant. Approximately 12 seasonal staff work at the clubhouse.

Ironwood Golf Course was closed late March and April to comply with regulations set forth by the State of Illinois. Ironwood opened in May operating at 30% occupancy. Most restrictions were lifted in June.

Highlights

Revenues at Ironwood Golf Course reached $795,000, outperforming recent years - a majority being green and cart rental fees. As area courses adjusted rates, Ironwood continued to offer excellent value on greens fees and season pass options. Total rounds were 23,050.

Junior Golf implemented COVID-19 protocols to run. First session enrollment was limited, while class sizes for second session had increased participation. Ironwood Junior Golf had 188 juniors participate in the programs. Junior High Golf season was cancelled.

Ironwood Clubhouse went through an indoor renovation this past winter. Staff removed outdated wallpaper and trim. Fresh paint and trim were added, and the women’s restroom was renovated.

Ironwood was selected a ‘Best Places to Play’ by voters according to local media outlets. These high standards helped Ironwood be selected as a USGA qualifier site for Amateur Championships and C.D.G.A. qualifiers for Illinois State Amateur and Mid–Amateur.

Ironwood hosted two large outings, a few smaller outings, the B-N Men’s Golf Association Medal Play in August, and a few Prep Tour Junior Events throughout the summer. Others were cancelled.

Ironwood hosted all eight golf teams from Unit 5, both men’s and women’s teams from Illinois Wesleyan, and the inaugural season for Heartland Community College’s men’s team.

Ironwood Clubhouse is utilized 12 months a year for meetings, rehearsal dinners, receptions, birthday parties and golf outings. Ironwood Clubhouse only hosted five small functions for the year.
GOLF COURSE MAINTENANCE

Ironwood Golf Course Maintenance staff includes the Park Supervisor, Maintenance Specialist, and Irrigation and Spray Technician. There are seven part-time staff for nine months of the season. The staff is responsible for daily mowing and grooming of 120 acres.

Ironwood Golf Course is surrounded by an additional 90 acres of native fescue grass. The native grass areas have added a challenge for the golfers while providing a distinct character to the golf course. From an agronomical perspective, these areas require less pesticides and less mowing which allows staff to focus efforts in more manicured areas. Ironwood has continued to make improvements to its overall condition.

Golf Maintenance staff worked to accomplish many of the agronomic practices. Staff was able to aerate and top dress greens in April. Staff worked in the spring to reduce the size of tee boxes. That included re-shaping and combining tee areas to provide a more aesthetically pleasing appearance and reduce the overall acreage from six to three. This will allow us to mow faster, reduce inputs, and provide better playing surfaces for the golfing public. Staff implemented a new soil testing program to help guide future decisions on fertility of the greens. This will allow us to target certain fertility needs, thus providing a better playing surface.

Golfers are always looking for affordable golf prices, yet do not want to sacrifice the quality of course they play. Ironwood Golf Course benefits with this way of thinking. Pricing has been kept affordable by the Golf Course Manager, and the playing conditions are in line with other much higher priced golf courses in the Central Illinois area. As Ironwood maintains the high level of quality that golfers have become familiar with and continues to add new and improved practices to the golf course, it gets the attention of the golfing community. With the recent capital improvements at the course, patrons know the Town is invested in providing one of the best facilities in the area.

The goals set for Ironwood continue to push the maintenance staff to provide the best playing conditions possible. Ironwood is one of the most desired courses to play in the Bloomington-Normal area and the Golf Maintenance staff is committed to keeping it that way.
Highlights

Purchased a **new fleet of 70 golf carts** to replace carts that had outlived their useful life. The carts provide golfers a more comfortable and smoother ride during their round.

Reduced the size of our tee boxes to provide an improved aesthetic and better experience for golfers, while reducing inputs for the maintenance staff.

Implemented a **new soil testing program** to better guide decision making for inputs needed at the course.

Input existing tree information from the golf course into the Town of Normal’s new **TreeKeeper** tree inventory system.

Staff removed years of debris and sediment from ditches in Ironwood. This allowed for **better water flow and improved drying time** for playing surfaces.

Removed hundreds of stumps so new trees can be planted to diversify our tree population on the golf course.

New targets were installed on the **driving range**. These targets will help golfers hone their chipping and short game skills. Golf staff also overseeded the driving range tee to improve its condition.

Seeding of a **pollinator friendly natural area** near the green on hole 17 was completed during the fall. The area will provide a beautiful aesthetic, while providing a new habitat for pollinators.

Ponds on the course and in the subdivision were re-stocked with grass carp, bass, blue gill and catfish to help **improve water quality**.
ADULT SPORTS AND FITNESS

This division manages a variety of adult sports leagues and tournaments, fitness programming for a variety of ages and is responsible for Champion Fields and all tournaments played.

Highlights

Softball leagues were held in early July with 30 teams participating in the combined summer and fall league.

Soccer league in the fall could not be held due to COVID guidelines.

The inaugural Sheryl Smith Pickleball Classic Play Dates, named in honor of a local pickleball advocate who lost her battle with cancer, could not be held due to the pandemic.

Family Baseball Trips were cancelled as Major League Baseball did not permit fans in the stands.

Fitness classes were offered in person in accordance with COVID guidelines. Virtual-only and hybrid classes were introduced for the first time with success.

CHAMPION FIELDS

Champion Fields opened for practices in late May and games started late June. In both instances COVID protocols were closely followed. Signage was installed at all Town of Normal ballfields outlining educational information and guidelines. Large-scale tournaments were not permitted, however small round robins were conducted.

Champion Fields Concessions opened the east stand once games were played in late June. Throughout the three months of operation, staff worked closely with the McLean County Health Department. Despite limited games, the east stand generated over $40,000 in sales.

“COVID has kept us from attending in person but we are so lucky to have Zoom.”
-Mary Anne Schierman, Yoga participant

“BNBA is very appreciative to the Town of Normal for taking the appropriate measures to provide safe facilities for youth baseball during COVID-19. Thank you for making sure our families, players, coaches and umpires all stayed safe!”
- Doug Miller, BNBA Executive Board President
The Aquatics Division provides visitors opportunities to experience outstanding aquatic facilities at Fairview Family and Anderson Aquatic Centers. Aquatics offers recreational swimming, a swim team, water aerobics, swim lessons, private rentals, and birthday parties during the summer months, as well as a strong swim lesson program for the fall, winter, and spring months at Unit 5 high schools.

The Aquatics Division also certifies lifeguard candidates who are employed with Normal Parks and Recreation and surrounding area facilities.

**Highlights**

Fairview Family Aquatic Center and Anderson Aquatic Center did not open for Summer 2020 due to COVID-19 guidelines.

One *Lifeguard Certification and Recertification course* was held at Normal Community High School in March and August. We certified 10 total lifeguards in 2020.

*Swim Lessons* were offered at Normal Community West and Normal Community High Schools for our Winter and Fall programs. Modifications were made to comply with state and district COVID guidelines. Spring and Summer swim lessons were not offered due to COVID-19.

The *zero-depth surface* at Fairview Family Aquatic Center had outlived its useful life. Installation of the new surface was completed in spring 2020. For the surface to cure, the pool was filled with water and treated throughout the summer season.

The Fairview Family Aquatic Center drop-slide structure was repainted under warranty by our contractor. The slides better match our themed colors after being re-done in 2019.
BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL

The Before & After School Program provides students with recreation, education, and social opportunities in a safe environment. Students enjoy playground and gym time, recreation activities, games, crafts and free time to work on homework. The program is offered at eight Unit 5 elementary school sites in Normal.

The Recreation Supervisor, Assistant Recreation Supervisor oversee the program and 80 part-time staff. Volunteers often assist from ISU’s Education Department and Kinesiology and Recreation Department.

The program coordinates on-site learning opportunities through the Children’s Discovery Museum and Normal Public Library.

Highlights

Time Out Programs were offered on five days in January and February of 2020. The remaining Time Out Programs in Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter did not occur because of COVID-19.

A total of 706 participants were enrolled in the Before & After School Program for the third session of the 2019-2020 school year. The fourth session of the program was cancelled due to COVID-19.

Before and After School program continued to react and adjust to Unit 5 schedules to best serve the residents of Normal, while adhering to COVID-19 health and safety protocols.

A School Day Camp Program was offered the first nine weeks of school in fall 2020. This program was offered in place of the traditional Before & After School Program while Unit 5 was remote learning. The program served two locations and 12 participants.

The Before & After School Program followed Unit 5’s hybrid schedule for the second session of the 2020-2021 school year. BSRP/ASRP was offered four days per week, since in-person learning was not held on Wednesdays. 305 participants were enrolled in the program.

Participants in the After School Program made 200 Christmas cards that were mailed to troops for the holidays.

“This job has been a rewarding experience. I have developed good communication skills and think this job has helped me prepare for the future.”

- Before and After School Staff
PERFORMING ARTS AND DAY CAMPS

The Performing Arts division is responsible for performing arts programs, day camps, management of the Connie Link Amphitheatre and Safety Town at Carden Park. Connie Link encompasses summer theatre programs, concerts, and outdoor Dress Up movies.

Highlights

The Argentine Tango program started and completed its winter session. A total of 17 registered participants between the Quick Start and Tango Lab classes and 21 took advantage of the ‘drop-in’ option. The adult ballroom dance program, Let’s Bring Back Dance, meets at the CAC and highlights a different dance style each month. Two of the nine monthly scheduled social dances at the CAC were held in 2020.

The Youth Dance winter session started off very popular - additional classes for Creative Movement and Pre-Ballet were added. There are several formats offered: Heel to Toe, Creative Movement, Pre-Ballet, Ballet, Tap and Hip Hop. Some classes were completed virtually. The fall started off with the following programs adjusted to 8 weeks, Youth Tap, Creative Movement, Pre-Ballet and Hip Hop.

The Tiny Tumblers program remains a popular offering for winter and fall but no summer session in 2020 for those 3-4 years of age. The parent/child programs, Let’s Dance and Tumble with Me, took place early in the year.

There were four Circus Birthday Parties in the months of January and February. We had six participants enrolled in the first session of Circus Art program before it was cancelled in early March.

The Youth fitness programs Zumba Jr. and Zumba Kids did have participants for winter session and fall sessions during 2020. A couple of the sessions were cut short and fall session finished in virtual mode.

Delightful Dairy and No Bake Cooking, a couple cooking and decorating classes were held in the summer and fall. Grown-Up/Child Cupcake Decorating class was introduced. A grade 3-5 cupcake decorating class and a December class was hosted virtually decorating holiday cupcakes in their homes.
CONNIE LINK AMPHITHEATRE

The Sounds of the Connie Link Amphitheatre Concert Series started its shortened season the middle of August. The concerts operated under COVID-19 guidelines allowing a maximum of 150 guests, assigned to three socially distanced seating areas. Masks were strongly encouraged upon arrival and departure. New groups continue to rave about the facility. The new groups included: Ray’s Rockets and AKA. Featured performers included Retro Fit, Mary & The Troublemakers, Turas, Jim Markum Swing Band, and Kevin Hart & The Vibe Tribe.

The Twin City Tale Spinners were part of our Terrific Tuesdays programming via virtual presentation using Facebook for six weeks.

We were able to show two of four indoor Dress Up Movies originally scheduled at The Normal Theater. Those movies were very popular: Toy Story 4 and Smallfoot. The outdoor Dress Up Movie program was postponed until August featuring Frozen 2.

DAY CAMPS

Picasso in the Park was the first program held with COVID-19 health and safety protocols in place. There were eight participants and two instructors, and the program was held at Underwood Park.

Day camps were able to successfully complete two of the three-week sessions. A fourth camp site, Underwood Park, was added this year to help accommodate more participants under the reduced capacities.

Several field trips met the guidelines, including: Moraine View Beach, Clinton Lake Beach, roller skating, laser tag/bowling, Comlara Park, Pheasant Lanes and Miller Park Zoo. Mickey Lower provided unique art activities a couple days each week. The campers were given the opportunity to refine their biking skills with a bike safety program administered by Patrick Dullard and Friends of the Constitution Trail and Bike BloNo.

Indoor space was rented at the McLean County Fairgrounds for inflatables for two days. The Aquatics Supervisor visited the camp sites and provided scheduled exercise weekly.
SPECIAL EVENTS

The Special Event division coordinates a series of holiday-themed and community-focused events throughout the year. Special Events had to adapt to become COVID-19 friendly. Events included a brand new “Clue” Scavenger Hunt, our third annual ‘To The Max’ Obstacle Course Race, the NEW Candy Corn Lane and Phone Calls from Santa. Egg Hunt, Fourth of July and the traditional Haunted Trail events had to be cancelled.

Highlights

Our inaugural Clue Scavenger Hunt was held this summer. Clues were hidden in six parks. Families were given a game piece to solve the mystery of “Who Cancelled Summer?” They had to solve who did it, where it happened, and what weapon was used. Close to 40 families submitted their answers with prizes awarded to three raffle winners.

The third annual ‘To the Max’ 2K Obstacle Course Run had another great year despite COVID-19 modifications. The 2K race had 166 people compete and included 15 obstacles. The race was held at Maxwell Park and utilized Dust2Glory Fitness as an event partner.

Candy Corn Lane was held on October 9 and 16. We had 646 vehicles attend our first ever drive-thru Halloween event and handed out 1,297 treat bags to youth participants. Candy Corn Lane was a modified version of our annual Haunted Trail event.

Phone Calls from Santa were held on December 7 and 9. This event was again offered free of charge to residents. Local volunteers were utilized to help make phone calls to children. Volunteers called 129 children over the two-night event.
YOUTH SPORTS AND TEENS

The Teen and Youth Sports division is comprised of teen, youth, and facility responsibilities. Teen-based programs and a summer camp are coordinated as well as youth sports programs. Two new programs, Summer Soccer Stars and Basketball Skills Clinic, were designed in 2020 to create more sports-based opportunities for children amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

This division also oversees the Community Activity Center schedule and rentals, in addition to all soccer practice reservations.

Highlights

**Pee Wee All Sports** is an introduction to sports program for ages 3-5. Participants experienced baseball, soccer, hockey, track and field, basketball, and football in a winter, summer and fall session.

Due to COVID-19, our soccer programs with Illinois Fire Juniors were cancelled as well as our spring offering of **Youth Soccer**. We pivoted to introduce **Summer Soccer Stars**, a one-time program offering for ages 4-8. Our **Youth Soccer** program returned for the fall for ages 3-8.

**Basketball Skills**, offered to children ages 5-8, was a new program that focused on the fundamentals of basketball in a clinic format. This program was held in the Community Activity Center’s Social Room in the fall.

**C.O.B.R.A. (Children Outside Being Really Active)**, for boys and girls in grades 2-5, gave kids the chance to get outside and be active for two-and-a-half hours twice per week during the summer.

The **Wee Ball, T-Ball and Pre-Ball** programs were adapted to operate under COVID-19 youth sports guidelines. These programs are offered for children ages 3-8 during the summer.

“My son absolutely love playing with the other kids and liked his coaches! They were so patient with him and I felt at ease because of their diligence to abide by the COVID-19 guidelines...”

- T-Ball Parent
Normal and Bloomington continue to partner to offer the **Safe Sitter Babysitting Certification Course**, offered several times throughout the year. This course teaches babysitting skills to students 11-15 years old.

**Fencing** continues to serve as a niche sporting opportunity for children.

**Teen Adventure Camp**, a full-day summer camp offered to students entering grades 7-10, was divided into two, three-week sessions (normally three sessions) and based out of the Community Activity Center. The 2020 camp was adapted to focus on team building, onsite activities and outdoor recreation.

**Youth Pickleball** returned for the third summer, while **Youth Tennis** was taught at four different levels at two different locations (Anderson and Ironwood).

**Lacrosse 101** is an introduction to the sport of lacrosse for children ages 6-13. NPRD partners with the Bloomington-Normal Warriors Lacrosse club.

The **SAT prep course** was reformatted to be completely virtual in 2020 and continues to evolve now that the SAT is not the required test by the Illinois State Board of Education.

**COMMUNITY ACTIVITY CENTER**

The **Community Activity Center** continued to serve as the host location for several NPRD programs such as adult fitness classes, youth ballet and dance classes, fencing and youth sports. The facility continues to be home to Heartland Theatre. Facility rentals were limited due to COVID-19, but the building hosted elections, birthday parties, sound recordings and business meetings throughout the year.