

SOARING TO NEW HEIGHTS

Preliminary Program

January 29-31, 2026

IAPD
Illinois Association of Park Districts

ILLINOIS
ipra
PARK & RECREATION ASSOCIATION



Hyatt Regency Chicago | 151 E. Wacker Drive, Chicago, Illinois

ILparksconference.com

WELCOME

WELCOME AND GREETINGS!



Twenty-nine years ago, the movie Happy Gilmore was released, unleashing a barrage of catchy, comedic quotes that golfers – and fans of The Price Is Right – still repeat today. This year, we were treated to a sequel brimming with nostalgia, cameos, and of course, quippy one-liners that will undoubtedly stick with us for another 29 years.

Movie sequels extend a story's narrative universe and foster brand loyalty, ensuring a franchise's longevity by appealing to both existing fans and new generations. Does that sound familiar?

Those of us dedicating our time and talents to Illinois park districts, forest preserves, conservation districts, recreation, and special recreation agencies are building programs, parks, facilities, and trails that not only appeal to existing residents, but also provide a solid foundation for generations to come. The countless hours of service to our communities and the work that we are doing is our legacy - shaping the future, inspiring others, and leaving a meaningful mark on the world.

Just as a sequel continues a story or develops the theme of an earlier one, the IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference comes back every year, bigger and better with an abundance of opportunities for us to continue our stories and develop ourselves as board members, professionals, and staff.

Our Joint Conference Committee, volunteers, and staff have been working for more than a year to create a power-packed program with an impressive educational curriculum, a diverse array of opportunities to connect with colleagues, and an engaging Exhibit Hall showcasing the latest products and services at more than 300 exhibits.

We are excited to present this Preliminary 2026 Conference Program, complete with details about this year's NEW Opening Keynote on Thursday morning, featuring speaker Joe Fingerhut, author of the best-selling book Permission to Play; Thursday night's social with lawn games and The Breakfast Club, a high-energy rock/dance 80's tribute band; Friday afternoon's Awards Luncheon, recognizing the stars of our field; Saturday morning's Keynote Address, Finding the Funny in Change, with writer and comedian Jan McInnis; and Saturday evening's Closing Social at the House of Blues, where No Turn On Red will deliver killer grooves infused with a distinctive New Orleans brass band flair.

New for 2026, the IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference has its very own dedicated social media pages. We would love to have you follow along on Facebook and LinkedIn by searching IAPD IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference.

A heartfelt THANK YOU goes out to the many exceptional conference volunteers, as your countless hours of work and steadfast dedication are instrumental to this event's continued success. To our exhibitors and speakers, thank you for your unwavering support. Lastly, to our attendees, in the words of Happy Gilmore, "You gotta go to your happy place," and for anyone connected to the park, recreation, and conservation world, that place is the Soaring to New Heights Conference at the Hyatt Regency Chicago January 29-31.

We look forward to seeing you there!

MARY ANN CHAMBERS

Commissioner
Northbrook Park District

BRIAN TIBBS

Executive Director
Washington Park District

Published by:

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SCHEDULE - AT - A - GLANCE

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28

3:00 pm – 5:00 pm Conference Registration Open

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

8:00 am – 5:00 pm Conference Registration Open
 8:00 am – 5:00 pm Quiet Room
 9:45 am – 11:00 am Opening Keynote (0.1 CEUs)
 11:00 am – 5:00 pm Grand Opening of the Exhibit Hall
 11:00 am – 12:00 pm Exhibit Hall Dedicated Hour
 12:00 pm – 12:30 pm Speed Sessions (0.05 CEUs)
 12:30 pm – 2:00 pm Conference Workshops* (0.15 CEUs)
 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
 2:30 pm – 4:00 pm Conference Workshops* (0.15 CEUs)
 3:00 pm – 4:00 pm General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
 4:00 pm – 5:00 pm Exhibit Hall Dedicated Hour
 5:00 pm – 6:00 pm IPRA Section Meetings
 5:00 pm – 6:00 pm Professional Connection
 6:00 pm – 7:15 pm IPRA Conference Kick-Off - Tailgate!
 9:00 pm – 11:30 pm Welcome Social featuring The Breakfast Club

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30

7:00 am – 5:00 pm Conference Registration Open
 7:00 am – 7:45 pm WERQ Dance Fitness
 8:00 am – 5:00 pm Quiet Room
 8:30 am – 9:30 am Conference Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
 8:30 am – 4:00 pm Agency Showcase
 9:00 am – 12:00 pm Exhibit Hall Open
 10:00 am – 11:00 am General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
 11:00 am – 12:00 pm Exhibit Hall Dedicated Hour
 12:00 pm – 2:00 pm All-Conference Awards Luncheon*
 12:00 pm – 12:30 pm Speed Sessions (0.05 CEUs)
 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm Conference Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm Exhibit Hall Open
 2:00 pm – 3:00 pm Dessert in the Exhibit Hall*
 3:30 pm – 4:30 pm General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
 5:00 pm – 6:30 pm IPRA Annual Business Meeting
 5:00 pm – 6:30 pm Commissioners' Reception
 9:30 pm – 11:00 pm Leadership Reception**

SATURDAY, JANUARY 31

7:00 am – 7:45 am Core & More Fitness Class
 7:45 am – 11:00 am Conference Registration Open
 8:00 am – 3:00 pm Quiet Room
 9:00 am – 10:15 am Closing Keynote (0.1 CEUs)
 10:45 am – 11:45 am General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
 12:30 pm – 1:30 pm General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
 2:00 pm – 3:00 pm General Sessions (0.1 CEUs)
 3:30 pm – 5:00 pm IAPD Annual Business Meeting
 7:00 pm – 10:00 pm Closing Social at the House of Blues featuring No Turn on Red*

* Ticketed Event

** By Invitation Only

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* Ticketed Event

Event photography provided by JHyde Photography.

GENERAL INFORMATION

ACCESSIBILITY

Meeting Rooms, Parking, Restaurants, Restrooms, Sleeping Rooms:

All are accessible at the Hyatt Regency Chicago and the Swissôtel Chicago. If you need an accessible room, please be sure to notify the respective hotel when making your reservation.

ADA AND SERVICES FOR THE HEARING IMPAIRED

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, the IAPD/IPRA Joint Conference Committee will make all reasonable efforts to accommodate persons with disabilities. Please indicate any special needs on your registration form or contact Cindy Galvan at IPRA at Cindy@ilipra.org no later than January 12, 2026. If you have special needs regarding hotel accommodations, please contact the Hyatt Regency Chicago at (312) 565-1234 or the Swissôtel Chicago at (312) 565-0565. Individuals who require TTY may call (800) 526-0844 and the Illinois Relay Center will transmit the message to IAPD or IPRA.

ALL-CONFERENCE AWARDS LUNCHEON

Delegates who register for the conference "Full Package" will receive a ticket for this event. Additional tickets may be purchased through your registration or on-site. Please join us as we recognize and honor the leaders and volunteers of park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation, and special recreation agencies.

ALL-CONFERENCE AWARDS LUNCHEON PREFERRED AGENCY SEATING (Includes Legislator Tables!)

DEADLINE: Monday, January 12, 2026

Preferred Agency Seating is available for all delegates from the same agency/organization who wish to be seated together at a table during the Friday All-Conference Awards Luncheon. An agency that opts to attend must indicate so on the registration form on page 32 or at the time of online registration. There is a \$60 nonrefundable fee (per table) to participate, which must be paid when registering for the conference. **If you plan to invite your legislator(s) to join you at your table(s), you should indicate/register for a Legislative Table following the same process, above.** The individual who registers/pays for the table(s) will be the designated agency contact (table host) and will receive all emails with details and instructions on the seating process. The table host will be responsible for notifying those seated at their table(s) of the table assignment(s). **After January 12, 2026, table reservations WILL NOT be accepted, and no on-site requests will be made.** All tables will be set for **twelve people**.

Non-reserved tables for open general seating will be noted. There is no guarantee that you and your agency will be able to sit all together in open, general seating. These seats are first-come, first-served.



Since 2009, Agency Showcase has highlighted the brightest ideas exhibited by parks, recreation, and conservation agencies.

This professionally judged competition recognizes Illinois agencies for their marketing and communication efforts ranging from print to multimedia.

Division 1: Overall Agency Showcase

Your agency submits in eight of the thirteen individual categories and creates a tabletop display that showcases how your marketing efforts represent your agency as a whole. Scores from each category as well as the display are compiled to determine the overall winners. The eight categories that you select will be eligible for recognition in the Individual Category division. First, second, and third place are awarded in the Overall Showcase division. First place will be announced at the Awards Luncheon on Friday.

Division 2: Individual Category

This division allows you to select up to four categories below to enter your work for the judges to critique. There will be one outstanding submission recognized in each category.

Categories

- Program Brochure Print
- Program Brochure Virtual
- Integrated Photography
- Large Format Marketing
- Logo Design
- Marketing Campaign
- Print Communication - Informational
- Print Communication - Promotional
- Social Media Campaign
- Videography Long Form
- Videography Short Form
- Website
- Written Content

For more information on the Agency Showcase competition, please visit ILparksconference.com.

Proudly brought to you by IPRA and IAPD.

GENERAL INFORMATION

ANNUAL MEETINGS FOR IPRA AND IAPD

The Illinois Park & Recreation Association's (IPRA) Annual Meeting will be held on Friday, January 30 at 5:00 pm. The Illinois Association of Park Districts' (IAPD) Annual Meeting will be held on Saturday, January 31 at 3:30 pm.

The associations have staggered their annual meetings to accommodate elected officials and professionals who would like to attend both meetings.

IPRA CONFERENCE KICK-OFF: TAILGATE!

Attention all IPRA members!

Please join us on Thursday, January 29 at 6:00 pm. Be a part of our 2nd annual IPRA Conference Kick Off – bigger and better than last year! Network with your fellow conference attendees, enjoy light apps and tailgate to kick-off an amazing first day of conference! IPRA Board and Staff will be in attendance to celebrate with members.

COMMISSIONERS' RECEPTION

Attention all IAPD members!

Please join us on Friday, January 30 at 5:00 pm. This reception will be an excellent opportunity for commissioners to exchange ideas, network, and socialize. The IAPD board and staff will be present to answer questions and offer the perfect venue to visit with fellow commissioners.

CEUs and CLEs Are Ticketless!

CEUs and CLEs are and fully digital through the conference mobile app. Attendees are required to attend entire sessions and complete session evaluation to obtain CEU credit.

You will need to ensure that you provide a unique and valid email so that you will be able to access the mobile app.

Attendees will be able to login to the app at any time during the conference to manage, earn, and track their CEUs.

You must register and pay for CLEs. See details under CLEs.

CONTINUING EDUCATION UNITS (CEUs)

Attendees will be able to earn up to 1.25 Continuing Education Units (CEUs) by attending a variety of workshops and general sessions. CEUs can be earned based on the number of sessions attended during the Soaring to New Heights Conference.

- Concurrent sessions, Opening and Closing Keynote Sessions scheduled for 60 minutes award 0.1 CEUs.
- Conference workshops scheduled for 90 minutes award 0.15 CEUs.
- Conference speed sessions scheduled for 30 minutes award 0.05 CEUs.
- No additional CEU fees for Thursday, Friday, and Saturday sessions apply.
- CEU tracking is available on-demand via the mobile app. No hard copies will be distributed. Official CEU Transcript will be sent via email post-conference.

CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION (CLE)

The CLE credit is educational credits that attorneys elect to earn by attending educational offerings certified by the Supreme Court of Illinois.

Sessions scheduled for 60 minutes award 1.0 CLE. Please note not all sessions are eligible for CLE credits. If you would like to apply for CLE credits, you must register, provide your ARDC number and pay for the CLEs with your conference registration. See page C32.

Four different CLE packages are offered:

- (3) CLE credits are \$60 plus registration
- (4) CLE credits are \$80 plus registration
- (7) CLE credits are \$140 plus registration
- (8) CLE credits are \$160 plus registration

Attorneys will receive their CLE attendance receipts within two weeks of the conclusion of the conference.



GENERAL INFORMATION

CONFERENCE TRACKS AND NUMBERING SYSTEM - Website

To help attendees identify sessions and workshops relevant to their field/interests, the conference program is organized around twelve different topic tracks: Boardmanship, Diversity, Facilities, Finance/Information Technology, Forest Preserve/Conservation, Governance/Legal, HR/Risk Management, Leadership/Management, Marketing/Communications, Parks/Natural Resources, Recreation and Therapeutic Recreation.

Additionally, a numbering system is used to provide attendees with another avenue for identifying sessions/workshops that may be beneficial to them. The numbering system indicates the host sponsoring the session/workshop. Attendees can use the numbering system to quickly identify any session/workshop pertaining to a specific host across multiple tracks. The following is the numbering system legend:

0-9: IAPD & IPRA
10 – 99: IPRA
100 – 199: IAPD
200 – 299: Parks and Natural Resource Management Section (PNRMS)
300 – 399: Administration and Finance Section (A&F)
400 – 499: Recreation Section (REC)
500 – 599: Therapeutic Recreation Section (TR)
600 – 699: Facilities Management Section (FM)
900 – 999: Communications and Marketing Section (C&M)
1000 – 1099: Diversity Section (DIV)
1100 – 1199: Forest Preserve/Conservation (FP/CONSV)

EXCEPTIONAL WORKPLACE AWARD 2025

The Exceptional Workplace Award application requires the completion of an online survey, the link to which will be available on the event registration confirmation page. It includes a series of questions, which are used to determine whether award criteria have been met. Surveys must be completed by November 8, 2025. The application fee is \$60.

If the park and recreation agency meets the award criteria, the recognition as an IPRA Exceptional Workplace is five years. Park and recreation agencies may re-apply 5 years after receiving the IPRA Exceptional Workplace award for subsequent consideration. If a park and recreation agency does NOT meet the minimum award requirements during their application year, they may re-apply the following year at no additional cost.

Agencies that meet the criteria will be recognized at the Exceptional Workplace Award at the 2026 Soaring to New Heights Conference, during the IPRA annual business meeting.

If you have questions about the EWA program, please contact: Shannon Tovey, SEASPAR, stovey@seaspar.org

EXHIBIT HALL

The Exhibit Hall will be open on Thursday and Friday, with [dedicated hours](#) on both days.

Visit more than 300 commercial manufacturers, distributors, designers, and educational booths. The exhibits will showcase the newest equipment, supplies, ideas, and services available to park, recreation, forest preserve, conservation, and therapeutic recreation agencies. Plan to spend several hours in the exhibit hall viewing the displays and visiting with exhibitors.

Each registered delegate will have multiple opportunities to win great prizes. Drawings will take place throughout the day Thursday and Friday. Entry blanks will be in the registration materials that you must pick up at conference registration. You must be present to win. Rules and regulations will apply.

The IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference has the largest exhibition of any state park and recreation conference in the country. Be sure to visit!

EXHIBIT HALL HOURS

Thursday, January 29:

11:00 am – 5:00 pm, Grand Opening
11:00 am – 12:00 pm; 4:00 pm – 5:00 pm (*Dedicated Hours*)

Friday, January 30:

9:00 am – 12:00 pm
11:00 am – 12:00 pm (*Dedicated Hour*)
1:00 pm – 3:00 pm
2:00 pm – 3:00 pm (*Dessert Reception and Dedicated Hour*)



HOUSING INFORMATION

Hyatt Regency Chicago (Host)

151 E. Wacker Drive

Chicago, Illinois 60601

Reservations (877) 803-7534

Group Code Refer to the group name IAPD/IPRA and group code **G-ZAPD** when making a reservation by phone.

Rates \$134 Single/Double; \$144 Triple; \$154 Quad

Note: Surcharges apply to upgraded room types including Deluxe, Regency Club and Business Plan rooms.

Swissôtel Chicago (Overflow)

323 E. Wacker Drive

Chicago, Illinois 60601

Reservations (888) 737-9477

Group Code Refer to the group code **IAPDI0126** when making a reservation by phone.

Rates \$134 Single/Double; \$164 Triple; \$194 Quad

Note: Surcharges apply to upgraded room types including Lakeview and Corner King rooms.

For online reservations for either the Hyatt Regency Chicago or the Swissôtel Chicago, visit [ILparksconference.com](https://ilparksconference.com).

Rooms are reserved on a first-come, first-served basis.

- The cut-off date for reservations for both the Hyatt and the Swissôtel is January 5, 2026. Reservations made after this date may be assessed at a higher rate and are subject to availability.
- One (1) night's room and tax advance deposit by check or credit card must accompany each reservation. This deposit is fully refundable on or before December 29, 2025. After this date there will be no refunds for cancelled rooms.

Suites: IAPD member agencies or IPRA members interested in reserving a suite must first contact Cindy Galvan at IPRA (cindy@ilipra.org). Once IPRA has given approval, you will be put in contact with the Hyatt Regency Chicago directly.

Exhibitors interested in reserving a suite must first contact Sue Triphahn at IAPD (striphahn@ilparks.org). Once IAPD has given approval, you will be put in contact with the Hyatt Regency Chicago directly.

MEETING SAFETY AND RESPONSIBILITY POLICY

IAPD/IPRA are committed to providing a safe, productive, and welcoming environment for all conference participants and staff. All participants are expected to abide by this Meeting Safety and Responsibility Policy. Please visit <https://www.ilparksconference.com/> for full details.

PARKING

Overnight Attendees: Attendees staying overnight at the Hyatt Regency Chicago will receive a 50% discount off the existing published parking rate for overnight valet (no self-park on-site). Attendees staying overnight at the Swissôtel will receive a 50% discount off the existing daily parking rate (not applicable to self-park).

Daily Commuters: Delegates not staying at the hotels can park in any of the downtown garages at regular rates. Additional parking in the area can be viewed at www.chicagoparkingmap.com.

POLICY ON CHILDREN

To preserve a professional business environment and ensure a quality educational atmosphere at the IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference, no one under the age of 18 will be allowed to participate in pre-conference workshops, conference sessions, Welcome Social, Exhibit Hall or the Closing Social. An exception will be made if the person is a speaker or a registered full or part-time college or university student and is attending the conference for the purpose of professional development and networking opportunities.

POLICY ON MEMBERS AND NONMEMBERS

The following persons will be allowed to register at the member rate:

- Members of the Illinois Park & Recreation Association in current standing through 12/31/25. **IPRA memberships not renewed for 2026 will be charged the difference between the member and non-member conference registration fees upon their check-in on-site at Conference Registration.**
- Commissioners/park board members, attorneys, board treasurers, and board secretaries of agencies that are members of the Illinois Association of Park Districts.
- A maximum of six **support** staff from IAPD member agencies (**"Support staff" is defined as front desk/clerical and maintenance personnel only.**)

Requests from other persons or agencies asking for member rates will be presented to the Joint Conference Committee for approval prior to conference.

RECORDING/VIDEOTAPING

Recording or videotaping from attendee smartphones or other electronic devices is not permitted during any part of the educational program, including pre-conference workshops, sessions, or the Opening or Closing Keynote Sessions.

GENERAL INFORMATION

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Early Bird Registration Deadline Friday, December 19, 2025

Registration Methods:

- Online at ILparksconference.com; online registration **must be** accompanied by credit card for payment. We do not invoice or accept check or ACH payments.

Registration Information:

- Online registrations will be accepted until January 16, 2026.
- **IAPD/IPRA will not invoice agencies or individuals for conference registrations.**
- After registering you will receive an email confirmation – **please bring this with you to conference.** This confirmation and a photo ID will be required to pick up your registration materials.
- Each registered delegate will receive their name badge and event tickets on-site at conference.
- Once on-site there will be a \$5 charge to reprint your name badge and **EVENT TICKETS WILL NOT BE REPRINTED. You must purchase new tickets at the current on-site price in order to attend any ticketed events.**
- You will not be permitted into conference workshops, sessions, or the Exhibit Hall without the proper name badge.

On-site Registration Hours:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| • Wednesday, January 28 | 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm |
| • Thursday, January 29 | 8:00 am – 5:00 pm |
| • Friday, January 30 | 7:00 am – 5:00 pm |
| • Saturday, January 31 | 7:45 am – 11:00 am |

Registration Questions?

Alan Howard at ahoward@ilparks.org.

Soar in sessions and beyond Conference!

Follow the IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference on our **brand new social media accounts!**

 @IAPDIPRASoaringtoNewHeightsConference

 @IAPDIPRASoaringtoNewHeightsConference



SILENT AUCTION

The Illinois Park and Recreation Foundation (IPRF) provides resources to park and recreation agencies and professionals statewide.



Part of our commitment to the profession is ensuring that future and current park and recreation professionals have the tools they need to be successful. IPRF will hold a Silent Auction at the IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference to provide support and funding for educational programming, research that will benefit the Illinois Park & Recreation Association and its members, and funding support for professional development for students studying parks and recreation within Illinois.

If you would like to make a donation or need more information, please contact Anne Kiwala at akiwala@nwsra.org.

SPECIAL DIETS/ACCOMMODATIONS

Attendees with allergies should indicate their needs when registering for the conference online. If you have questions or need additional assistance, please contact Cindy Galvan at Cindy@ilipra.org.



GENERAL INFORMATION

SPOUSE/GUEST PROGRAM AND REGISTRATION

All spouses or guests must register in order to participate in the conference, visit the exhibit hall, and attend special programs.

Spouses or guests must have no affiliation with or be employed by any park district, forest preserve, conservation district, recreation or special recreation agency. Registration will include a name badge for admission to the Exhibit Hall, Welcome Social on Thursday, all 60-minute educational breakout sessions, and the Opening and Closing Keynote Sessions. Tickets for the All-Conference Awards Luncheon and the Saturday evening Closing Social will be available for purchase. See page C32 for registration information.

STUDENT EVENTS

Professional Connection

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29 5:00 pm – 6:00 pm

Don't miss this unique opportunity to network with professionals in the field. The Professional Connection provides a relaxed, social atmosphere and an informal setting for talking with and getting to know professionals currently working in your area of interest. It is a great opportunity to learn about current and upcoming internships. Everyone who attends is invited to the IPRA Conference Kick-Off: Tailgate! for complimentary beverages and light bites. Be sure to register online.

Mock Interviews/Resume Review

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30 10:00 am – 11:00 am

The Mock Interviews/Resume Review offers students the opportunity to receive critique on their resume, along with practice to improve their interviewing skills by being paired with a professional who will engage them in a simulated interview experience. At the conclusion of the interview, students will receive constructive feedback and advice to help them be more prepared and to do well in a real-life interview.

Matched student-professional pairs will be communicated with prior to the conference. Dedicated meeting space will be available on Friday, January 30 from 10:00 am – 11:00 am for the Mock Interviews/Resume Reviews to take place. However, since the goal is to help students connect and gain career advice from professionals, matched student-professional pairs are welcome to meet at a time and location that is most convenient for them.

In order to participate and be matched in the program, advance registration is required. Be sure to register online.

VOLUNTEERS... CALLING ALL COMMISSIONERS, PROFESSIONALS AND STUDENTS!

Volunteering at conference offers numerous benefits, including the opportunity to expand your professional network by connecting with industry leaders and peers. It provides a platform to enhance your skills, gain hands on experience, and demonstrate leadership qualities. By contributing your time, not only do you become an important part of the conference team, but you also gain visibility within your industry, which can lead to future career opportunities and personal development.

We need your help! The conference team is recruiting volunteers for registration, session moderators, the awards luncheon, and the dessert reception in the Expo Hall. Upon completion of on-line registration, conference delegates will have the option to sign up for several different opportunities.

QUESTIONS?:

Registration: Alan Howard, ahoward@ilparks.org

Moderator: Kim Laper, kim@ilipra.org

Luncheon, Expo Hall, or Student Volunteers: Heather Rabbit, heatherr@vhparkdistrict.org



GENERAL INFORMATION

WERQ DANCE FITNESS

Friday, January 30, 2026

WERQ Fitness is the wildly addictive cardio dance class based on today's hottest pop and hip hop music. The workout is nonstop with repetitive athletic moves and fresh dance steps, so you get the best sweat - all while challenging your inner diva! Please wear comfortable clothes, gym shoes, and get ready to WERQ!

CORE AND MORE FITNESS CLASS

Saturday, January 31, 2026

Get ready to ignite your Saturday morning with a Core and More class, designed for every level of fitness enthusiast!

Expect a dynamic blend of core-focused exercises that target your abs, back, and glutes so that you can tone, strengthen, and enhance overall endurance. This morning class brings infectious energy and motivational vibes, ensuring you feel empowered and engaged from start to finish. Join us for an inclusive, fun-filled session where you'll sweat, smile, and celebrate every achievement. This session is tailored to accommodate and challenge all fitness levels, providing modifications and progressions to match your pace. Come as you are, leave feeling invigorated and accomplished. See you in class and start the morning with a step towards a healthier, happier you! Please bring a towel/yoga mat as we will be on the floor for a portion of the class.

Both fitness sessions are free but pre-registration online is required and you must check box for waiver.

QUIET ROOM

The Quiet Room is intended as a quiet, calm space where conference attendees can spend time away from noise, lights, and other stimuli of conference spaces. The quiet room is not available for conversations or meetings.



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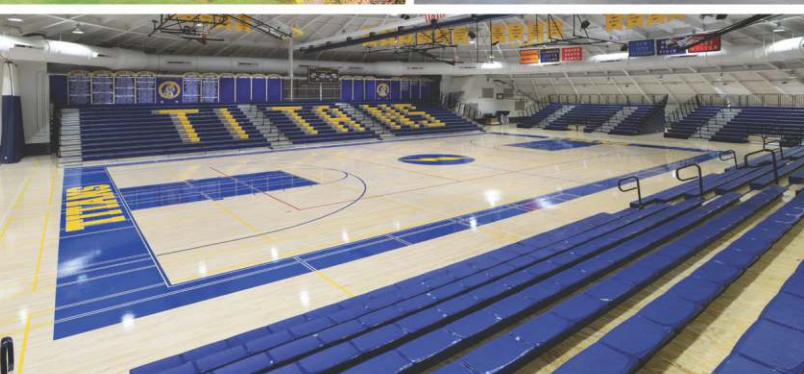
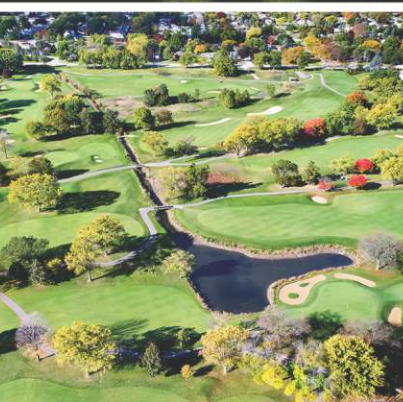
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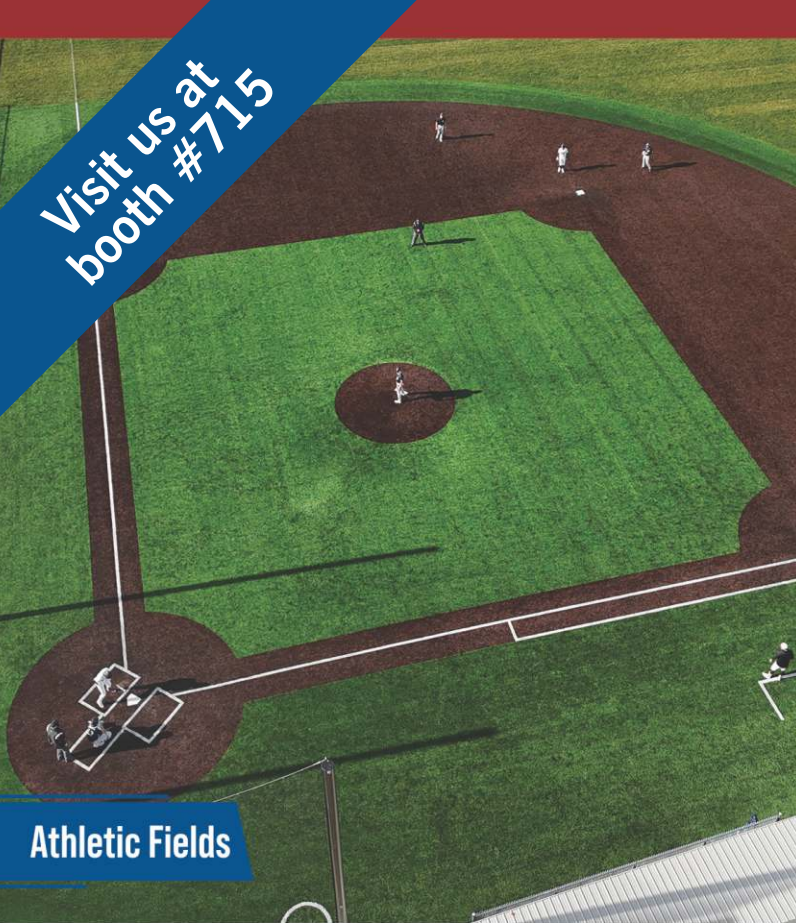
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ABOUT GHA

Parks are the heart of a community. That's why GHA partners with park districts to design, enhance, and revitalize recreational spaces through full-service civil engineering. Our personal approach goes beyond infrastructure to help create trails, playgrounds and accessible environments that communities enjoy for years to come.

PRIMARY SERVICE LINES:

- Park Master Planning ✓
- Recreation Facility Design ✓
- Funding Assistance ✓
- Natural Area Restoration ✓
- Multi-Use Path Planning ✓
- Athletic Field Design ✓



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Market Lead
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Opening Keynote with Joe Fingerhut

Thursday, January 29, 2026

9:45 am – 11:00 am

CEUs: 0.1



About the Speaker

Joe Fingerhut is an international speaker, author, and mindset specialist who inspires audiences to unlock their potential through his signature "How Can I?" approach to life's challenges. With over two decades of experience speaking and performing across six continents, Joe combines storytelling, humor, and practical strategies that help attendees transform obstacles into opportunities. His journey from college mascot to teaching English in Japan to riding unicycles with his family demonstrates his philosophy of embracing possibilities rather than accepting limitations. Joe's bestselling book "Permission to Play" and his transformational keynote speeches blend the powerful elements of Grit, Grace, and Gratitude to help professionals reimagine what's possible in their careers and organizations. A master at creating contagious joy, Joe delivers high-energy presentations that leave audiences with actionable tools to implement immediately and inspiration that lasts long after the event ends.

The "How Can I?" Mindset: Unlocking Potential and Creating Contagious Joy

In a world where challenges can seem insurmountable, the "How Can I?" Mindset transforms obstacles into opportunities for growth, innovation, and success. This dynamic opening keynote introduces a powerful framework that helps professionals shift from "I can't" thinking to a mindset of possibility that creates tangible results in both professional and personal environments.

Joe Fingerhut combines captivating storytelling, practical strategies, and interactive experiences to demonstrate how the three elements of Grit (perseverance), Grace (compassion), and Gratitude (appreciation) can supercharge the "How Can I?" approach. Attendees will learn how to apply this mindset specifically to parks and recreation challenges, empowering them to enhance program offerings, improve community engagement, and strengthen team dynamics throughout the conference and beyond. This high-energy presentation provides the perfect foundation for embracing new ideas and possibilities throughout the entire conference experience.

Learning Objectives:

1. Attendees will be able to identify the three key components of the "How Can I?" Mindset and understand how to apply them to overcome specific parks and recreation challenges.
2. Participants will discover how to use the HOW-CAN-I framework to transform "I can't" barriers into actionable possibilities that enhance program innovation and community engagement.
3. Attendees will learn specific techniques to cultivate Grit, Grace, and Gratitude to improve team dynamics, boost resilience, and create a culture of possibility within their organizations.

CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

12:30 pm – 2:00 pm

All conference workshops award 0.15 CEUs. Pre-registration is required. Register online at ILparksconference.com or see page 32.

1

Elevate Your Team: Become the Coach Your Team Can't Wait to Follow

What if the biggest threat to your team's performance... is it you? Research shows that 70% of team engagement hinges on the manager. That means your leadership style is either fueling performance—or quietly driving people out the door.

In this high-impact, interactive session, you'll uncover the hidden habits that sabotage motivation and learn how to flip the script—fast. You'll discover what it takes to go from boss to coach—the kind of leader your team raves about, rallies behind, and remembers for life.

This isn't fluff. This is your moment to master the mindset and tools that separate high-performing leaders from everyone else. Packed with real-world strategies, surprising insights, and coaching skills you can use immediately, this session will leave you saying, "Why didn't I learn this years ago?"

Leaders who attend this session will walk away with the playbook to ignite engagement, loyalty, and results—while everyone else keeps wondering why their teams are burned out and disengaged.

Track: Leadership / Management

Speakers: Nan Gesche

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to ...

1. Identify three behaviors that instantly increase motivation and trust.
2. Outline a simple coaching framework that will help boost engagement and accountability.
3. List smart methods for tailoring feedback, support, and recognition without adding time to the day.

200

Can Grass be Greener? Native Lawn Alternatives as a Conservation Tool

While lawns within parks are important for recreation, not all these grassy spaces are actively used. The conversion of non-recreational turf lawns to natural areas can yield significant environmental benefits. However, transforming these spaces into areas with tall-growing plants can raise concerns related to visibility, safety, aesthetic, and management. Accepting this reality, how might we alter these spaces to enhance their utility for both people and the natural world.

This session will introduce a suite of middle-ground landscape options featuring native plants that are shorter and more lawn-like than a typical tallgrass prairie, yet capable of delivering ecosystem services, including pollinator support, stormwater management, carbon storage, and air cooling. These services are critical to sustain urban and suburban communities. In partnership with local research institutions, the Chicago Park District has installed multiple test sites, exploring a variety of landscape options and will present preliminary data on installation, maintenance, public perception, educational opportunities, and key ecosystem services provided by lawns and other "native lawn alternatives"

Track: Parks and Natural Resource Management

Speakers: Lauren Umek, Chicago Park District; Rebecca Barak, Chicago Botanic Garden; Liz Anna Kozik, Chicago Botanic Garden

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to ...

1. Gain better understanding of potential ecosystem services provided by native plants in a park landscapes and how those are measured.
2. Recognize the costs, challenges, and methods of site preparation, installation, and maintenance associated with converting existing turf grass into more sustainable options.
3. Explore techniques to engage, communicate, and educate park visitors on the sustainability value of native plants in public spaces.

300

Yes, We're Ready: Heroic Improv to the Rescue

Build reflexes and not just plans through using improv exercises for emergency training that sticks. Parks staff are often first responders when things go wrong at public events, yet a "practice gap" exists between safety drills and real-world readiness. Heroic Improv (HI) bridges this gap with engaging exercises based on the 5-step HI Cycle: Alert, Ready, Connect, Focus, Move. This cycle, developed from research on hundreds of rapid rescues, shows how small groups naturally respond in emergencies. HI training helps everyone practice the 5 abilities you need to effectively respond in an emergency.

HI exercises are imaginative, interactive, and brief—5 to 15 minutes—easily fitting into staff meetings or training days. They build "sticky" abilities like communication, adaptability, and decision-making that transfer to real crises. Used by Navy SEALs, educators, and recreation professionals, HI exercises require no special equipment and are simple to lead, making them ideal for busy teams. Come to our session to experience focused, flexible emergency training that delivers immediate value without disrupting your schedule—and boosts your team's ability to respond effectively when it matters most.

Track: Human Resource and Risk Management

Speakers: Mary Tyszkiewicz, Heroic Improv

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to ...

1. Understand how Heroic Improv bridges the gap between routine safety drills and real emergency response by building adaptable small group abilities for all staff.
2. Explain how using imagination and interaction makes training sticky and valuable in actual emergency response.
3. Experience boosting emergency readiness and teamwork using quick, high-impact improv exercises that build essential response abilities.

500

Looking at Sticky Problems from New Angles

Some problems don't ever seem to go away. They resist quick fixes, frustrate teams, and leave us stuck in the same old conversations. This interactive workshop is designed to help you tackle those sticky challenges from fresh perspectives. You'll learn techniques that encourage you and your teams to get the issues out of your head and down on paper so that you can reframe complex issues, spark new thinking, and uncover hidden assumptions that may be holding you back. Through hands-on exercises tackling real-world problems, you'll leave with practical techniques you can use to work through and collaborate on your own sticky problems you're facing now and those that you will face down the road.

Track: Therapeutic Recreation

Speakers: Bobbi Nance, Recreation Results LLC

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to ...

1. Identify and reframe persistent challenges in a way that helps open up new possibilities for action.
2. Apply creative thinking frameworks to generate innovative approaches.
3. Recognize and challenge hidden assumptions that may be limited problem-solving efforts.



600

The 10¢ Decision: Small Change Elevates Service and Community Experience

In a field where passion meets public service, it is easy to feel grounded by tight budgets, staff fatigue, and growing community demands. But what if your biggest wins came not from sweeping change, but from the smallest shifts? In this high-energy workshop, Hall of Fame speaker Laurie Guest introduces The 10¢ Decision—a game-changing approach to customer service and team morale built on tiny, intentional choices that cost little but deliver big results. Through relatable stories and real-world strategies, Laurie shows how park and rec professionals can boost guest satisfaction, staff engagement, and community trust without adding more to their plates.

Attendees will walk away with practical, easy-to-implement tools to improve the service experience, re-energize their teams, and build a culture people want to be part of. This session delivers laughter, lightbulbs, and lasting impact—perfect for anyone looking to reignite their “why” and help their agency soar above the status quo. Laurie's interactive style invites participation while her insights inspire action, making this workshop the perfect launchpad for meaningful change in your organization.

Track: Facilities

Speakers: Laurie Guest, Guest Enterprises, Inc

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to ...

1. Identify small, cost-free actions that can immediately improve guest and team interactions.
2. Apply the “10¢ Decision” framework to boost morale and reduce service fatigue.
3. Every attendees receives a digital resource for Busting Out of Service Fatigue.

CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

2:30 pm – 4:00 pm

All conference workshops award 0.15 CEUs. Pre-registration is required. Register online at ILparksconference.com or see page C32.

2

The Solution Mindset: How To Use Innovation from Other Industries in Yours

Some of the most game-changing ideas aren't born in your own industry—they're borrowed from somewhere completely different. Think about it: what if the breakthrough your organization needs is already out there, thriving in another field, just waiting for you to bring it home?

In this high-energy, hands-on workshop, innovation expert Nir will take you on a fast-paced tour of creative problem solving like you've never experienced before. You'll discover his proven 10-step approach—sharpened through years of work with top consulting firms, powerhouse companies, and influential associations nationwide. And here's the best part: you won't just listen, you'll *do*. You'll roll up your sleeves, try the techniques in real time, and see how quickly you can turn fresh ideas into action.

Whether you're a seasoned leader, a rising star, or somewhere in between, you'll walk away with tools you can use immediately—tools that will make you the “go-to” person in your organization when challenges arise. Expect to laugh, think differently, and leave buzzing with ideas you can't wait to try. Because when you learn to see beyond your own walls, there's no limit to what you can create.

Track: Leadership / Management

Speakers: Nir Bashan, The Creator Mindset

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to ...

1. Discover and practice a proven 10-step creative problem-solving method used by top innovators across industries.
2. Apply these techniques to everyday workplace challenges—turning routine tasks like emails, meetings, and projects into opportunities for innovation.
3. Leave equipped with practical, easy-to-share tools that empower colleagues and spread a culture of creative problem-solving throughout the organization.

400

Staff Well-Being Before Burnout

Each generation approaches the work-life balance uniquely and younger employees are challenging historical beliefs. Younger employees may recognize the feeling of stress, but their understanding of the underlying causes and techniques for addressing stress are becoming less predictable in the workplace. This situation inevitably creates more stress for park and recreation managers, as you try to find the balance between maintaining workplace expectations and employee well-being and growth. This session will present a broader approach to employee well-being and provide managerial techniques that address general well-being before employees burnout.

Track: Recreation

Speakers: Megan Owens

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to ...

1. Enhance their understanding of employee well-being.
2. Develop a new strategy to assess workplace expectations within an evolving scope of employee well-being.
3. Identify managerial techniques to address employee well-being while maintaining workplace expectations.

900

Next-Level Digital Marketing: Strategies to Elevate Your Impact

Ready to supercharge your digital marketing game? This session dives into cutting-edge tools and tactics designed to elevate hyper-local marketing for park and recreation agencies of any size. Learn how to automate social media like a pro, create and leverage engaging video content with confidence, and streamline your workflow with powerful tools like Make.com. Discover smart ways to maximize paid advertising on a budget, harness the power of analytics to drive results, and unlock DIY tricks to boost your website's SEO. Get ready to work smarter, amplify your reach, and make a bigger impact with your marketing efforts!

Track: Marketing and Communications

Speakers: Len Davis, PUREi

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to ...

1. Create a digital marketing plan that maximizes impact while working with limited resources.

2. Gain practical knowledge of key digital marketing platforms, data analytics, and automation strategies to enhance engagement and efficiency.

3. Leverage social media automation, video content, SEO, and paid advertising insights to drive measurable results with minimal time and budget.

1000

Culture That Performs: Organizational Agility That Lifts Productivity 30%

In today's rapidly shifting landscape, park and recreation agencies face mounting pressure to do more with less—while serving increasingly diverse communities and managing diverse teams. But without cultural agility, communication breaks down, morale suffers, and innovation stalls.

This interactive session introduces a breakthrough framework: Organizational Intercultural Agility—the key to unlocking stronger collaboration, smarter leadership, and measurable results. You'll learn how leveraging cultural awareness and inclusive team design can yield up to a 30% boost in productivity within 90 days, based on real-world implementation and proven strategies. Through live storytelling, reflective discussions, collaborative dialogue, and tech-enhanced activities like Slido and scenario-based learning, attendees will leave with ready-to-use tools that help reduce misunderstandings, energize staff, and build resilient workplace cultures.

Track: Diversity

Speakers: David Myles, David Myles Group Inc.

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to ...

1. Understand the core principles of Organizational Intercultural Agility and how it goes beyond traditional diversity and inclusion efforts to meet the demands of today's evolving workforce.
2. Discover and apply three actionable strategies to reduce cultural friction, foster inclusive communication, and build high-trust, collaborative teams.
3. Develop a 90-day action roadmap to create a culturally agile workplace environment that boosts team productivity, innovation, and morale by up to 30 percent.

1100

Calling All Educators: 10 Inclusion Tips to Meet All Needs

Together we will explore powerful, practical strategies that will make educational programming more inclusive, from design, to registration, to implementation and every step in between. Interactive small groups will apply inclusion frameworks to lessons and activity plans. Participants will collaborate on accommodation planning and adaptation making to meet diverse ranges of strengths and needs. We will discuss, reflect, and propose common barriers to engagement. Then, we will brainstorm solutions that are universally beneficial. Participants will walk away with ready-to-implement ideas, resources, and tools to put into practice right away. Each session activity reinforces the belief that inclusion is an action not an idea and that inclusive programming benefits everyone—not just “some”one.

Track: Forest Preserve and Conservation

Speakers: Amanda Kloo, National Inclusion Project

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to ...

1. Apply the BEST design framework to evaluate the inclusivity of program lessons and activities.
2. Develop CAN plans to maximize engagement in programs.
3. Use the ADAPT strategy to implement accommodations and make adaptations to increase access and foster inclusion.



BREAKFAST LUB



Thursday, January 29 9:00 pm – 11:30 pm
Hyatt Regency Chicago, Grand Ballroom, East Tower/Gold Level

COME TEST YOUR SKILL AT LAWN GAMES!

The Breakfast Club is a high-energy rock / dance 80's tribute band, whose every song is a hit that brings the house down with spontaneous, exuberant 'I know this song!' singalongs. Moonwalk down memory lane with the Breakfast Club as they spin you right round to all the radical sounds, styles, and way cool dance steps from the 1980's in over-the-top retro 80's attire.



This is not a ticketed event... everyone is welcome!
Get to know your fellow conference attendees in a relaxed atmosphere!

IGNITING THE GROOVE WITH FUNK AND BRASS FUSION!

No Turn On Red is a powerhouse funk band that delivers thick, killer grooves infused with a distinctive New Orleans brass band flair. The group is made up of seasoned professional musicians who have honed their craft and risen through the ranks of the Chicago music scene. Their performances are a testament to their dedication and expertise, offering audiences a rich blend of old school funk, danceable grooves, and meticulously chosen covers.

The band's music lineup is deeply rooted in funk traditions, drawing inspiration from influential acts like The Meters, Rebirth Brass Band, and James Brown. Their repertoire also reflects the innovative spirit of artists such as Jimi Hendrix, The Dirty Dozen, Lettuce, Tower of Power, Galactic, and Stevie Wonder. This eclectic mix of influences ensures that No Turn On Red delivers a sound that is both familiar and refreshingly original.

Since its inception, No Turn On Red has been committed to producing high-energy shows that captivate audiences with their provocative and engaging style. Their performances are characterized by a seamless fusion of classic funk elements with contemporary twists, creating a unique and dynamic musical experience. The band's ability to blend old school charm with modern sensibilities is a key aspect of their appeal.

No Turn On Red's live shows are designed to keep audiences on their feet, dancing and enjoying the infectious rhythms and vibrant energy. Their ability to merge various styles while maintaining a cohesive and exhilarating sound makes them a standout act in the funk genre. The band's engaging performances and tight-knit musicianship ensure that each show is a memorable event.

With their rich musical heritage and commitment to delivering top-notch entertainment, No Turn On Red invites fans to experience their exhilarating funk-infused performances. Whether you're a longtime funk enthusiast or new to the genre, their shows promise a high-energy, immersive experience that will leave you wanting more.



Saturday, January 31
7:00 pm – 10:00 pm

House of Blues
329 North Dearborn

THIS IS A TICKETED EVENT!

Ticket includes:

- Round trip shuttle service from the Hyatt Regency Chicago
- Admission to House of Blues
- Dinner buffet with unlimited beer, wine, and soft drinks
- A great night of music featuring No Turn on Red

TICKET INFORMATION:

- Delegates who register for the Full Package or the Saturday Only Package will receive one ticket for admission.
- Additional tickets may be purchased for \$145 per ticket through the pre-registration process or on-site from Conference Registration.
- Tickets will not be sold on-site at the Closing Social.
- This is an adult only event.

BOARDSMANSHIP

General Sessions

- Accountability in Action: The Board's Role in Executive Evaluation
- Beyond the Basics: How to Respond When OMA and FOIA are Weaponized Against Your Agency
- Board Member to Board Leader, Part 1
- Board Member to Board Leader, Part 2
- Boardmanship Essentials Part I
- Boardmanship Essentials Part II
- Commissioners in Conversation: Addressing Today's Top Issues
- Government Finance for Non-Finance Board Members & Professionals
- IDNR Grant Outlook 2026
- Leading Together: Developing Board, Executive, and Staff Relations
- Planning for the Future: A Board Member's Role in Strategic and Master Planning
- Robert's Rules of Order
- So You Want to Stay Out of Jail? What Park District Leadership Must Know About Ethics Requirements
- The Process of Amending a Motion
- Understanding Your Tax-Capped Levy
- You Really Should Read Your Board Policy Manual (And Keep it Updated)

DIVERSITY

General Sessions

- Driving Innovation, Inclusion and Well-Being
- Girls Just Wanna Have Fun: Designing Parks with Teen Girls in Mind
- Inclusion of All Sizes: Inclusive Design Strategies for Every Budget
- Know Your Rights in Public Spaces
- Master the Art of Connection: Navigating Difficult Conversations with Confidence and Compassion
- The Language Has Changed, But the Work Remains the Same
- The Side by Side: Cross Cultural Exploration

Speed Sessions

- Everybody Moves: A Policy Scan of Disability and Diversity in Leisure
- Exploring Adaptive Physical Activity Organizations: An Environmental Scan

FACILITIES

General Sessions

- Aquatic Roundtable
- Beyond Access: When "Accessible" Falls Short of Functional
- Creating a Safety Plan: Mitigating Risks and Ensuring Safety
- Everything's for Rent
- Handling Patron Complaints Like a Pro: From Frustration to Loyal Fans!
- How to Speak Aquatics
- Sexual Predators: Is Your Agency Prepared?
- The Wonderful World of Facilities (An Intro to Facilities Management)

Speed Sessions

- Soft Surface Power Hour —Managing Soft Surface Playground Maintenance
- Wheels of Change: Urban Mobility and Parks

SESSIONS AT-A-GLANCE

Please visit ilparksconference.com for session dates and times.

FINANCE/INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

General Sessions

- Back to Basics: Issuing Debt 101
- Beyond the Buzzwords: Cutting-Edge AI Technologies Explained
- Bonds 101 – Legal Requirements and Best Practices
- Cybersecurity in the Parks: How to Protect Your District
- DIY GPT: Building a Custom AI Assistant for Parks and Recs Professionals
- Financial Policy Revamp: Policies for Lasting Impact
- From Ballot to Victory: Strategies for Successful Referendums
- Look Ma, No Wires!
- Municipal Market Impact from Washington's Policies
- Smart, Simple, and Streamlined: Using Microsoft Forms

Speed Sessions

- Practical AI Usage for Parks

FOREST PRESERVE & CONSERVATION

General Sessions

- Adaptive Reuse and Preservation of Extant Buildings for Sustainability
- Beavers: Partners in Climate Resilience
- Beyond Access: Inclusion Standards for Meaningful Engagement
- Conservation@Home: Supporting Biodiversity Beyond The Preserve
- Forest Preserve & Conservation Roundtable
- Making a Case for Bison: Early Wins for Wildlife and Ecosystem Health
- The Story of Illinois' First (and only - so far) Dark Sky Park

Speed Sessions

- Stronger Together: Expanding Reach & Programming w/o Expanding Your Budget
- Talking Trash with your Community: Adventures in Sustainability

GOVERNANCE & LEGAL

General Sessions

- 2026 Employment Law Update
- Be Prepared for Your First Amendment Audits
- Bidding and Managing a Successful Construction Project
- Can We and Should We Have Video Surveillance in Park and Facilities?
- Legal/Legislative Part I
- Legal/Legislative Part II
- Park District Finance - It's Not Intuitive
- Parks Role in Successful Planning and Economic Development
- Policies in Practice: Preparing for Shifts in Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Enforcement
- Real Estate 101
- Regulating Controversial Park Activities
- Solar and Green Energy Options
- Understanding Social Media: Facebook? Instagram? X?

HR/ RISK MANAGEMENT

General Sessions

- Change Your Organization's Safety Culture In Sixty Minutes!
- Glass Half Full - Understanding Your IMRF Benefits
- How to Create a Workplace Where Everyday is a Walk in the Park!
- Managing Teen Takeover Events: Strategies, Challenges, and Collaborative Solutions
- P is for Prevention, R is for Risk: An Alphabet for Safety
- Supporting the Front Line: Leadership Practices for Stronger Teams
- The Leadership Trailhead: Equipping New Supervisors for the Journey Ahead
- The Switchback Career Path: Navigating Nonlinear Journeys in Parks and Rec
- Working Smarter with HR: Strategies for Mid-Level Managers

Speed Sessions

- Crisis Case Study

LEADERSHIP/MANAGEMENT

General Sessions

- Agency State Accreditation - A Blue Print to Excellence
- Career Development Bootcamp - How To Improve and Standout
- Charting the Course: Strategic Planning for the Journey Ahead
- Department Head Training 101
- Executive Director Panel Discussion
- Getting Started: Your First Five Years in Parks and Recreation in Illinois
- Girl Power - Advice I'd Give My Younger Self
- Girl Power - Get Empowered Now!
- Innovate to Elevate
- Ladies, What's Holding You Back?
- Mining for the Golden Nugget: Uncovering Critical Insights in Survey Data
- Municipal Roundtable
- Q + A: The Best Way to National Certification Exam Success
- Story-Driven Leadership: Unlocking Engagement, Accountability, and Results
- Time Management--How Billionaires Do It!

Speed Sessions

- Disagreement Doesn't Have to Be Divisive
- Reimagining Leadership: Cultivating Connection, Creativity, and Commitment
- The Burnout Buster Bootcamp for Leaders
- The UN - Keynote: Breaking the Mold with Innovation and Creativity

MARKETING & COMMUNICATION

General Sessions

- Before, During & After: Communications for Every Phase of Your Referendum
- Bridging the Gap: Turning Parks Projects into Powerful Social Media Stories
- How to Work with the Media
- Marketing and Communications Roundtable
- Marketing with AI: Practical Tools for Promotion, Engagement, and Growth
- Name It To Claim It: Unlocking the Power of Naming Rights Partnerships
- The Marketing Playbook: Winning Strategies
- The Struggle Is Real: Building a Social Plan That Actually Works

Speed Sessions

- Connecting Communities: Mastering Communication for Park District Success
- How to Be Successful in Sponsorships When It is Not Your Full-Time Job

SESSIONS AT-A-GLANCE

Please visit ilparksconference.com for session dates and times.

PARKS & NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

General Sessions

- An Environmentally Friendly Approach to Converting Low Use Areas in Parks
- IPRA Healthy Play Initiative: Celebrating Collective Park Impacts
- Integrating Equity Into Park Planning - A Case Study
- Introduction to Forensic Tree Analysis
- Leveraging OSLAD for Inclusive, Future-Ready Parks
- Nature Play and Playspaces: Learning From the Past, Planning For the Future
- Rethinking the "Services" in Park Services

Speed Sessions

- Introduction to Early Tree Care
- Sunnyside Park: Revitalizing Communities with Nature-Based Solutions

RECREATION

General Sessions

- Beyond the Playground: What Millennial Parents Really Want
- Build Your Bash
- Creating Unforgettable Experiences: Elevating Service in Parks & Rec
- Designing for Demand: Creating Programs & Services More Likely To Sell
- Embracing Life One Step at a Time Through Line Dancing
- Engage, Excite and Evolve: Modern Approaches to Adult Programming
- From Chaos to Control: Transform Your Programs and Facilities
- From Small to Spectacular: The Power of Partnerships in Event Planning
- It's Not the Size of your Agency; It's How You Use It!
- Leaders Linking Up - School Age and Day Camp Round Table
- Scrap the Crap: Make your Programs Greener, More Sustainable, & Purposeful
- Targeting Success: Launching an Archery Program at Your Agency

- The Art of Dealing With Difficult People in Youth Sports
- The Power of Plain Language
- The Wild World of Affiliates

Speed Sessions

- From Parks to Places: Transforming Community Spaces
- Understanding the Role of Technology: Bridging the Generational Gap

THERAPEUTIC RECREATION

General Sessions

- Brain Hacks: Happiness Chemicals and Hope Molecules
- Climbing the Ladder: Navigating Growth & Balance in SRA Careers
- Designing with Sensory Needs in Mind
- Inclusion 101
- Priorities and Presence: Navigating Career and Family in Special Recreation
- Recreation Reimagined: Integrating Sensory Tools for Inclusive Fun
- Tough Conversations Don't Have to Be Tough

Speed Sessions

- Evolving Supports: How Can We Better Serve Adults with Disabilities
- From Classroom to Day Camp: Strategies for Summer Success

Closing Keynote with Jan McInnis

Saturday, January 31, 2026

9:00 am – 10:15 am

CEUs: 0.1



Finding the Funny in Change

Get ready to transform the way you and your team deal with change! The pace of change is faster than ever, leaving many leaders and organizations feeling overwhelmed and uncertain. In Jan's electrifying keynote, "Finding the Funny in Change," she shows your attendees how to turn tension into laughter and get your point across with ease. She'll equip your team with the humor tools to diffuse tension instantly, initiate those tough conversations, and facilitate communication through using well-placed, appropriate humor. By using Jan's tips, your attendees will not only keep their teams more engaged, but also more likely to remember their message.

Your group will walk away with a fresh perspective on change, and best of all, they'll be laughing all the way to the next level of success. Don't miss out on the opportunity to bring a unique and unforgettable experience to your team. Book Jan as your keynote speaker now and get set to find the funny in change together!

About the Speaker

Jan McInnis, has written for Jay Leno's Tonight Show monologue as well as many other people, places and groups – radio, TV, syndicated cartoon strips, guests on the Jerry Springer show (her parents are proud!). For the past 25+ years she's traveled the country as a keynote speaker, and comedian sharing her unique and practical tips on how to use humor in business (yes it's a business skill!). Jan has spoken to thousands of organizations from the Federal Reserve Banks to the Mayo Clinic. She is author of two books: "Finding The Funny Fast," and "Convention Comedian," and has been heard on hundreds of radio stations. Jan was also featured in the Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, and the Huffington Post for her clean comedy.

Learning Objectives:

1. Participants will have immediately useable skills for handling change using humor, including how to diffuse tension instantly, kick off tough conversations, and open lines of communications.
2. Participants will be able to understand what they should AVOID doing when faced with change.
3. Participants will understand the importance of adapting to change.



REGISTRATION INFORMATION

	EARLY (BY 12/19/25)		REGULAR (12/20/25 - ON-SITE)		
PACKAGE	MEMBER	NON-MEMBER	MEMBER	NON-MEMBER	
Full	\$415	\$745	\$495	\$905	
No Frills	\$350	\$615	\$440	\$800	
Thursday Only	\$170	\$285	\$190	\$325	
Friday Only	\$310	\$535	\$345	\$615	
Saturday Only	\$330	\$580	\$365	\$655	
Student	\$170	\$275	\$170	\$275	
Retiree	\$200	\$425	\$235	\$510	
Guest/Spouse	\$200	\$200	\$230	\$230	
Workshop Tickets	\$90				
No Charge for CEUs					
A LA CARTE TICKET OPTIONS					
• Friday, Awards Luncheon Ticket (includes one (1) dessert ticket) • Friday, Dessert Ticket (dessert served in the Exhibit Hall immediately following the luncheon) • Friday, Awards Luncheon Preferred Agency Seating (non-refundable fee) - Specify preferred agency table OR preferred legislative table (if you will be inviting a legislator to join your agency). • Friday Morning WERQ Dance (7:00am - 7:45am) • Saturday Morning Core and More Fitness (7:00am - 7:45am) • Saturday, Closing Social Ticket - House of Blues (Adults Only) • CLE Credit Packages (3=\$60; 4=\$80; 7=\$140; 8=\$160)					\$85 \$25 \$60 Agency Legislative FREE FREE \$145 \$60 \$80 \$140 \$160

SPECIAL EVENT REGISTRATION (Space is limited - REGISTER EARLY!)		
Professional Connection: Thursday, January 29, 5:00 pm – 6:00 pm		
PCS	Professional Connection – Student	FREE
PCP	Professional Connection – Professional	FREE
Mock Interviews/Resume Review: Friday, January 30, 10:00 am		
MIS	Mock Interviews/Resume Review – Student	FREE
MIP	Mock Interviews/Resume Review – Professional	FREE
Executive Director Panel Discussion: Friday, January 30, 3:30 - 4:30 pm		FREE



IMPORTANT REGISTRATION INFORMATION

REGISTRATION FOR CONFERENCE AND ANY FEE-BASED CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS MUST BE DONE AT THE SAME TIME.

	Full Package	No Frills	Thursday Only	Friday Only	Saturday Only	Student/Retiree	Spouse/Guest
All-Conference Awards Luncheon (Friday)	✓						
Closing Social (Saturday)	✓				✓		
60-Minute Sessions * (Thursday-Saturday)	✓	✓	✓**	✓***	✓****	✓	✓
Exhibit Hall Admission (Thursday & Friday)	✓	✓	✓**	✓***		✓	✓
Opening & Closing Keynote Sessions (Thursday & Saturday)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Welcome Social (Thursday)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

* 2-hour workshops not included and are available for an additional fee.

** 60-minute sessions and access to Exhibit Hall on Thursday only.

*** 60-minute sessions and access to Exhibit Hall on Friday only.

**** 60-minute sessions on Saturday only.

FULL – Includes All-Conference Awards Luncheon ticket, Thursday - Saturday 60-minute sessions, Welcome Social, admission to the Exhibit Hall, Opening & Closing Keynote Sessions, and Closing Social ticket.

NO FRILLS – Includes Thursday - Saturday 60-minute sessions, Keynote General Session, admission to the Exhibit Hall, and Welcome Social.

THURSDAY ONLY – Includes Thursday 60-minute sessions, admission to the Exhibit Hall, Opening Keynote session and Welcome Social.

FRIDAY ONLY – Includes Friday 60-minute sessions and admission to the Exhibit Hall.

SATURDAY ONLY – Includes Saturday 60-minute sessions, Closing Keynote Session, and Closing Social ticket.

STUDENTS/RETIREES – Includes Thursday - Saturday 60-minute sessions; admission to the Exhibit Hall; Welcome Social, and Opening and Closing Keynote Sessions.

GUEST/SPOUSE/FAMILY/FRIEND (Must not be affiliated with or employed by any park and recreation agency.) Includes Thursday - Saturday 60-minute sessions, admission to the Exhibit Hall, Welcome Social, and Keynote Session.

CANCELLATION POLICY:

Cancellations must be submitted in writing to ahoward@ilparks.org and received **by December 23, 2025**, in order to receive a refund less a processing fee of \$25. Refund requests received after this date will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

ADDITIONAL REGISTRATION POLICIES:

- IAPD/IPRA will not invoice agencies or individuals for conference registrations.
- All pre-registrations must be submitted electronically via the ilparksconference.com website and submitted with credit card payment (Visa/Mastercard/Discover).
- Please complete a separate registration form for each individual registering.
- The deadline for Preferred Agency Seating is JANUARY 12, 2026.** No preferred seating will be taken on-site.

QUESTIONS:

- Email your questions to Alan Howard at ahoward@ilparks.org.



IAPD
Illinois Association of Park Districts

ILLINOIS
ipra
PARK & RECREATION ASSOCIATION

2026 EXHIBITORS

Exhibitors as of September 2025

COMPANY	BOOTH#	COMPANY	BOOTH#
390 Golf Experience	631	Entertainment Concepts	917
Acuity Brands / Holophane	626	Eriksson Engineering Associates, Ltd.	333
All Inclusive Rec	524	Farnsworth Group, Inc.	619
American Ramp Company	343	Featherstone, Inc.	612
American Red Cross Training Services	316	Fehr Graham	325
Amilia	137	FGM Architects	600
Anthony Roofing - Tecta America	114	FieldTurf - Tarkett Sports Indoor	820
 Aqua Pure Enterprises Inc.	431	Fifth Third Bank	522
Aqua Tile	701	FMX	407
ARCO/Murray Design Build	702	ForeverLawn Chicago	427
Arndt Municipal Support Inc	129	Frederick Quinn Corporation	738
Aurora Area Convention & Visitors Bureau	235	 Gewalt Hamilton Associates	713
Bailey Edward Design, Inc	326	GMIS Illinois	638
Baird Public Finance	446	Gold Medal Products	313
Baxter & Woodman, Inc.	722	GovDeals	708
 BCI Burke	122	Graffiti Solutions, Inc.	334
BEAR Construction	607	Greenfields Outdoor Fitness	118
Bid Evolution	220	H.E. Hodge Company	523
BLICK Art Materials	633	H2I Group	412
Bluestem Ecological Services	127	Halogen Supply Company, Inc.	438
 Boller Construction	203	Hawkins Inc.	345
Bounce Houses R Us	201	Henry Bros. Co.	444
Bronze Memorial Company	340	Hey and Associates	411
BS&A Software	344	Hitchcock Design Group	419
Buck Services	448	Homer Industries, LLC	309
Byrne & Jones Construction	728	HR Source	628
Camosy Construction	602	HydroApps	226
Capri Pools & Aquatics	428	IHC Construction Companies LLC	527
Chicagoland Pool Management	133	Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD)	503
Chicago's North Shore CVB	237	Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund	306
CivicPlus	528	Illinois Park & Recreation Association (IPRA)	500
Clowning Around Entertainment	229	Illinois Public Risk Fund	533
Columbia Cascade Company	322	 Imagine Nation LLC	335
ComEd Energy Efficiency Program	714	Innova Disc Golf	125
 Confluence, Inc.	243	IPARKS	606
Cooper - Ephesus Sports Lighting	622	iStrike by AnythingWeather	244
Cordogan Clark & Associates, Inc.	143	iZone Imaging	920
Correct Digital Displays, Inc.	400	Jeff Ellis and Associates	312
Counsilman-Hunsaker	413	Johnson Commercial Fitness	905
 Cunningham Recreation	703	 JSD Professional Services, Inc.	324
Custom Bridges and Boardwalks	601	Kaizen Labs	323
CXT Inc	700	Kankakee Nursery Company	529
DEO Consulting, Inc.	919	Keeper Goals	620
Design Perspectives, Inc.	711	KI Furniture	434
Dewberry	520	Kiefer USA	604
Direct Fitness Solutions	640	KOMPAN, Inc	212
Divine Signs and Graphics	338	KWIKGOAL	337
 DLA Architects Ltd.	216	L6 Technology Inc	805
Doty & Sons Concrete Products, Inc.	320	Landmark Aquatic	639
DoubleSpot AI	304	Legat Architects	349
DynaDome	707	Life Floor	221
Engineering Resource Associates	215	Mad Bomber Fireworks	424

2026 EXHIBITORS

Exhibitors as of September 2025

COMPANY

BOOTH#

Matrix Fitness 115
 Mesirow Financial, Inc. 145
 MGT 613
 Midwest Institute of Park Executives 806
 Midwest Sport & Turf Systems 456
 Modernfold Chicago, Inc. (SKYFOLD) 350
 Mulch Magic 210
 Musco Sports Lighting 319
 MyRec.com Recreation Software 720
 NexGen/S&G Communications 801
 NiceRink 518
 ☆ **Nicholas & Associates** **532**
 NobleTec LLC 630
 Nordot Adhesives 621
 NuToys Leisure Products, Inc. 420
 Official Finders 423
 Omega II Fence Systems 336
 Original Jumping Pillows 609
 Outdoorlink Inc. 706
 Paddock Pool Equipment 223
 Parkreation Inc. 449
 PDRMA 303
 Perkins&Will 623
 Perry Weather 409
 PFM Asset Management/ IPDLAF+ Class 401
 Planning Resources Inc. 426
 Play & Park Structures 934
 Play Design Scapes, Inc 632
 Playground Guardian 705
 Pleva Commercial Pools Inc. 225
 Premier Polysteel 308
 Productive Parks 719
 Products4Parks 425
 Progressive Business Solutions 539
 Public Restroom Company 813
 QuickScores 238
 Rain Drop Products 232
 Ramaker 627
 Ramuc/Tuff Coat Paint division of MRT 834
 RCP SHELTERS, INC 113
 Record-A-Hit Entertainment 404
 Recreonics 430
 Red Star Inspections 625
 Reinders 300
 Reinders Holiday Lighting 204
 RenoSys Corp 721
 Romtec, Inc. 525
 Russo Power Equipment 234
 School Health 712
 SFI Topsoil 123
 Smart Industry Products 332
 Soccer Made In America 329

COMPANY

BOOTH#

Sol by Sunna Design 624
 Sourcewell 614
 Spartan Sports Lighting 310
 SPEC Athletic 733
 Speer Financial, Inc. 239
 Splashtacular 938
 Spohn Ranch, Inc. 916
 Sport Court Midwest 147
 Sportsfields, Inc. 240
 Starfish Aquatics Institute 222
 Stifel 734
 StreetBond 540
 ☆ **Team REIL Inc** **715**
 TERRA Engineering, Ltd 330
 The Fitness Connection (TFC) 200
 The Forge: Lemont Quarries 231
 The Mulch Center 327
 The Pizzo Group 615
 The Spargo Group 233
 TinyMobileRobots 629
 TIPS - The Interlocal Purchasing System 807
 Trane Technologies 135
 TRIA Architecture, Inc. 819
 Triple H Mulch 328
 Turf Tank 723
 Tyler Technologies 610
 UKG 611
 ☆ **Univar Solutions MiniBulk** **219**
 Vermont Systems 519
 Vernon and Maz, Inc 311
 Visual Image Photography 421
 Vortex Aquatic Structures 605
 W. B. Olson, Inc. 339
 Warehouse Direct 104
 Water Solutions Unlimited 347
 Water Technology, Inc. 538
 Wight & Company 534
 Williams Architects 603
 Wintrust Financial Corporation 531
 WT Group 410
 ◎ **Xplor Recreation** **119**

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◎ = Conference A-La-Carte Sponsor



JANUARY 30-31, 2026
HYATT REGENCY CHICAGO
 Riverside Center, East Tower, Purple Level



EXHIBITOR REGISTRATION

EXHIBITOR LOUNGE

