

2026 NOMINATION INFORMATION

Nomination Deadline: Noon on Monday, August 10, 2026

THE BEST OF THE
Best
AWARDS GALA

Presented by the

IAPD

Illinois Association of Park Districts

October 9, 2026

THE BEST OF THE *Best* AWARDS GALA

Friday, October 9 at the Wheeling Park District's Chevy Chase Country Club
6:30 p.m. Cocktail Reception / 7:00 p.m. Dinner & Program
Reservations for the IAPD Awards Gala can be made online at Ilparks.org until October 5, 2026.
Prices for the cocktail reception and dinner are \$150 per person.
\$295 per couple and \$65 for children ages 12 and under.
A table of eight may be reserved for \$1,190.
Your agency/organization will be recognized as a table sponsor at the event.

Award nomination deadline is by
noon on Monday, August 10, 2026.



Illinois Association of Park Districts

211 E. MONROE STREET
SPRINGFIELD, IL 62701
217.523.4554
Ilparks.org



Dear Members and Friends of the Illinois Association of Park Districts:

Are you looking for a meaningful opportunity to give statewide recognition to those who have made significant contributions to your agency? The Illinois Association of Park Districts' Best of the Best Awards Gala provides a public platform to thank those who give so generously of their time, talents and resources to further the park, recreation and conservation mission.

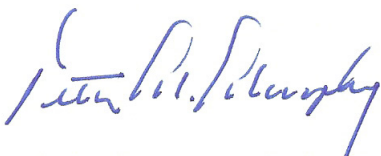
Across the state of Illinois, board members, professionals, citizen volunteers, local businesses and the media deserve to be acknowledged for going above and beyond to advance parks, recreation and conservation. The Best of the Best Awards Gala is a prestigious way to express gratitude for the countless hours they dedicate to making Illinois' park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation and special recreation agencies the envy of the nation.

This year's awards gala is the evening of Friday, October 9 at the Wheeling Park District's beautiful Chevy Chase Country Club with a cocktail reception at 6:30 p.m. and the dinner and program at 7:00 p.m.

The gala will recognize our members' anniversaries celebrated in 2026 and award their outstanding accomplishments. I encourage you to review the enclosed criteria and submit multiple nominations online at Ilparks.org. You will not want to miss this great opportunity to give statewide recognition to those who have made lasting contributions to your agency.

Please submit your nominations today and plan to join us for this black tie optional program and dinner. You will enjoy a motivational evening that will leave you inspired with stories of success, dedication and innovation. I look forward to seeing you there!

Sincerely,



Peter M. Murphy, Esq., CAE, IOM
President and Chief Executive Officer

Award Criteria

2026 IAPD Awards Gala

Agencies must be IAPD members to submit nominations.
Multiple awards may be given in each category.

Applicants will go to Ilparks.org and click Member Services/Awards/2026_Awards Gala to access nomination information for each award. Once the nomination fee is paid for each award, applicants will be sent a link to a SurveyMonkey form with instructions to complete the award nomination process. As applicants make their way through the SurveyMonkey nomination form, questions may be directed to IAPD at (217) 523-4554 or bjhill@Ilparks.org. ***Please complete a new form for each submission, if submitting multiple nominations.***

Be advised that photos of board members who are attending the *Best of the Best Awards Gala* to receive **Board Member Service Anniversary Awards** will need to be uploaded via the SurveyMonkey form.

Agency Anniversary Award nominations will require a brief history of the agency, as well as the agency logo, uploaded via the SurveyMonkey form.

All other awards will require the following as part of the SurveyMonkey form:

Two summaries will be required. The first is a **full description** of the nomination, not to exceed 750 words. This full description should be a detailed explanation of the nomination. The second summary is a condensed summary, not to exceed 200 words. The **condensed summary** is how you would present your nomination to an audience. These two documents must be uploaded via the SurveyMonkey form that you will receive via e-mail after submitting payment. The following format should be followed:

- Times New Roman or Arial Font, 12-point size
- Agency name, nominee name and award nomination title centered at the top of the page
- Contact name, phone number and e-mail address centered at the top of the page
- Single spaced
- Your agency's logo uploaded as a .JPEG or .PNG file with a resolution of no less than 300 dpi
- Photo of nominee or logo of nominated business/organization uploaded as a .JPEG or .PNG file with a resolution of no less than 300 dpi.
- Supportive materials including newspaper clippings, photos, etc. (not to exceed 5 pages or 5 uploads) can be uploaded via the SurveyMonkey form.

1 BOARD MEMBER SERVICE ANNIVERSARY AWARDS

Agencies may honor board members who have served 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40 and more than 40 years with an award from the Illinois Association of Park Districts.

10 and 15 Year Awards = \$50

20 Year Awards = \$110

25 Year Awards = \$135

30 Year Awards = \$160

35 Year Awards = \$160

40 Year Awards and Up = \$185

** Other, please contact IAPD at 217-523-4554 or bjhill@ilparks.org for pricing.*

2 AGENCY ANNIVERSARY AWARDS

This award recognizes a park district, forest preserve, conservation, recreation or special recreation agency celebrating its 25th, 50th, 75th, 100th or more than 100th-year anniversary.

There is a \$75 fee for this award. Agencies must be IAPD members to receive this award.

3 ILLINOIS PARKS' TOP JOURNALIST AWARD

This award recognizes a print, radio and television medium (or individual reporter or journalist) that has provided responsible and comprehensive coverage of Illinois park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation or special recreation agencies at the statewide and/or local level including, but not limited to:

- Bringing recognition to agency programs, festivals or other activities through in-kind sponsorships, feature stories and/or other promotional efforts.
- Bringing recognition to park district, forest preserve, conservation, recreation or special recreation agency initiatives on the statewide level (e.g., the need for grant money, Park District Youth License Plate promotion, etc.).
- Bringing an awareness of the impact Illinois' park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation and special recreation agencies have on critical issues citizens face such as, but not limited to:
 - Childhood obesity (creating programming to address this epidemic)
 - Youth at risk (providing safe alternatives for youth)
 - Beyond school programming (offering a safe, healthy place for children to go beyond school hours)
 - Senior programming (filling the need for seniors to address issues of loneliness and inactivity)
 - Preservation of open space and natural resources
 - The economic impact of local parks, conservation and recreation

There is a \$50 processing fee for this nomination.

BEST FRIEND OF ILLINOIS PARKS – BUSINESS CATEGORY

The Best Friend of Illinois Parks is awarded to a business or corporation that has demonstrated exemplary support of a local park district, forest preserve, conservation, recreation or special recreation agency including, but not limited to:

- Providing staff to serve as committee members and/or volunteers to assist with an agency event, activity or festival.
- Contributing to an agency through monetary, open space or in-kind donations.
- Maintaining significant efforts to provide awareness or support of the value of park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation and special recreation agencies.
- Advocating quality of life experiences as they relate to park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation and special recreation agencies.

This award is divided into three subcategories for the size of the nominated business or corporation. Awards are given for each of the three following subcategories:

- Small Business (fewer than 100 employees)
- Mid-Sized Business (100-500 employees)
- Large Business (more than 500 employees)

There is a \$50 processing fee for this nomination.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION AWARD

This award recognizes agencies (park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation, and special recreation agencies and the units of government with which they have an agreement) that have created successful intergovernmental agreements or partnerships that maximize tax dollars and benefit residents throughout the community.

There is a \$50 processing fee for this nomination.

A copy of the intergovernmental agreement must be submitted via the SurveyMonkey form.

PARTNERSHIP AWARD

This award recognizes non-governmental organizations (churches, YMCAs, foundations, associations, not-for-profits, corporations, etc.) that have collaborated with a park district, forest preserve, conservation, recreation or special recreation agency in a significant manner, thereby enabling the public agency to initiate a major capital improvement program, or pursue a campaign, initiative or project that enhanced residents' quality of life and would not have been achievable without this partnership.

There is a \$50 processing fee for this nomination.

ARTS IN THE PARK AWARD

The Arts in the Park Award recognizes agencies (park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation and special recreation agencies) that support the arts and partner with artists and arts organizations to enhance the quality of life in their communities. Applicants are encouraged to discuss the full scope of arts activities they support, however, outstanding individual programs or events will also be considered. Application summary should address the following:

- How your agency actively and intentionally demonstrates its commitment to the arts
- How your agency integrates the arts into overall strategies to strengthen the community and address community needs
- How your agency partners with artists and arts organizations to implement its initiatives

Applications will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Equity of access to arts programming among all citizens
- Variety of artistic opportunities and experiences across multiple disciplines (i.e. dance, performance, visual art, media, music, etc.)
- Evidence of collaboration with a broad range of partners, including teaching artists and organizations
- Integration of the arts in non-arts programs
- Diversity of ethnic and cultural programming represented
- Long-term commitment to arts in the community
- Development of new relationships with arts providers and experimentation with innovative program offerings
- Sustained relationships with existing arts partners
- Community impact and engagement
- Press coverage that highlights the importance of the arts in the community

There is a \$50 processing fee for this nomination.

BEST GREEN PRACTICES AWARD

The IAPD Best Green Practices Award is presented to a park district, forest preserve, conservation, recreation or special recreation agency that has taken the initiative to incorporate and encourage environmentally-friendly business practices and policies. The winning agency will have demonstrated practices that could include, but are not limited to, the following examples:

- Recycling and Solid-Waste Reduction – Agency consistently and conscientiously practices standard recycling of glass, plastic, aluminum, office paper, newspaper and cardboard. Agency makes extra effort to properly dispose of or re-purpose items that are not as commonly recycled, for example batteries, construction materials and electronics.
- Education and Advocacy – Agency provides programs or opportunities for the continued education of employees in green practices. Agency provides education and outreach to help citizens and/or local businesses engage in environmentally-friendly practices.
- Conscientious Purchasing – Agency purchases recycled, renewable or non-toxic supplies and materials.
- Green Building – Agency builds property to conserve resources and/or incorporate recycled products.
- Conservation – Alternative Transportation: Agency makes a strong effort to reduce energy used in transportation by encouraging bicycle riding or walking to work, establishing carpooling programs or using high-efficiency or alternative fuel vehicles, etc.
 - Energy Conservation: Agency makes a proactive effort to reduce building energy use or use of renewable resources. This can include upgrading building systems, use of compact fluorescent bulbs, winterizing windows, use of energy-efficient appliances, etc.
 - Materials Conservation: Agency makes a proactive effort to reduce materials used including paper, coffee cups, disposable utensils, paper towels, etc.

There is a \$50 processing fee for this nomination.

IAPD GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD

This award recognizes the efforts of citizen volunteers who are coaches for park district, recreation or special recreation agency youth athletics including, but not limited to, basketball, baseball, indoor and outdoor soccer, softball, hockey and volleyball. This award is not intended for a park district or recreation agency, but rather a volunteer or coach within an agency's sports program. This volunteer or coach has displayed (but is not limited to) the following qualities:

- Good sportsmanship at all times
 - Teaches individual skills for all players
 - Teaches team skills and teamwork
 - Teaches the team to play hard and fair regardless of the score
- Exemplary leadership skills
 - Leads parents in positive teaching, cheering, encouragement and discipline
 - Promotes a healthy relationship among the team, fans and parents
 - Creates a "fun by playing the sport" atmosphere for players, fellow teams, parents and fans
 - Creates healthy competition among the players and opposing teams
 - Involves parents in the coaching process from assisting with drills to planning team events, such as team parties and after-game snacks

There is a \$50 processing fee for this nomination.

OUTSTANDING CITIZEN VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD

This award recognizes citizens' volunteer efforts to enhance a park district, forest preserve, conservation, recreation or special recreation agency program, service, parkland, open space or facility. This award is not intended for a park district, forest preserve, conservation, recreation or special recreation agency board member, but rather an active citizen volunteer. This volunteer assistance includes, but is not limited to:

- Ongoing assistance with agency events, programs or festivals
- Volunteering to help with an agency's day-to-day operations
- Making outstanding contributions while serving on an agency committee, task force or foundation
- Contributing land, art, facilities, equipment, etc. to a park district, forest preserve, conservation, recreation or special recreation agency
- Helping to stimulate community appreciation for agency programs and services
- Working to pass agency referenda through garnering community support

There is a \$50 processing fee for this nomination.

***Thank you to all nominators for giving freely of your time
and talents to help strengthen and further the park, recreation
and conservation mission***

IAPD AWARDS GALA

NOMINATION DEADLINE

All nominations must be received by NOON on Monday, AUGUST 10, 2026.

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