Every agency has unique challenges. Many times these challenges can be addressed through partnerships. Finding a partner that shares your values and culture can bring even greater success.

Many times networking, or “net worlding,” can bring about the most amazing connections that eventually become solid, productive relationships. What starts as a small initial sponsorship can grow to become a major partnership as trust and mutual respect build.
Stratford Square Mall

One such example is Bloomingdale’s unique partnership with Stratford Square Mall. The relationship advanced from the Bloomingdale Park District (BPD) exhibiting at the mall’s expos and trade shows when the Bloomingdale Parks Foundation, the not-for-profit organization dedicated to helping BPD, began regularly offering gift wrapping to shoppers over the holiday season in 2009. Not only did the mall not charge for the space provided, but it also supplied all of the wrapping paper, boxes, tape, tags and more for FREE! Several mall staff even stepped in to help when volunteers got extra busy. The Holiday Gift Wrap enters its seventh year in 2015 and has evolved into the foundation’s largest fundraiser.

The foundation advanced the relationship further in 2012 and 2013 when it held its annual 5K at the mall to accommodate the title sponsor at the time, Ballydoyle Irish Pub & Restaurant. Again, the mall was more than gracious, and opened its doors and restrooms to runners and walkers at 7 a.m. on a Sunday morning. Mall security staff was also provided to help with crowd control and course management. Runners received over $100 in coupons from mall stores in their runner goodie bags thanks to solicitation by the mall’s marketing team.

Bloomingdale Park District began regular programming at the mall in the summer of 2013 when it offered free crafts and giveaways every third Saturday of the month. Also that summer, the mall faced a growing number of employees needing on-site daycare. BPD was contacted about providing such a service. What ensued was a relationship unparalleled in parks and recreation.

Stratford completely renovated and updated one of its empty stores to accommodate Bloomingdale Park District, picking up a significant tab in the process. The 3,000-square feet of additional programming space for BPD includes a bathroom, check-in desk and security gate. The Bloomingdale Park District has expanded beyond the camp and now offers a variety of programs and classes in the space.

Stratford has also left a legacy in Bloomingdale’s park system, contributing the resources necessary to pay for an accessible drinking fountain at BPD’s Sunnyside Park.

It should also be noted that Stratford Square Mall has served as a sponsor for a number of Bloomingdale Park District’s special events and programs. Of particular note, the mall is a platinum sponsor for the park district’s Festival of Lights event, which includes an abundance of lighted structures and festival programming in Old Town Park. Most recently, the mall has signed on to become Bloomingdale Park District’s brochure partner, appearing on the back cover of its seasonal program catalog. It also recently, agreed to sponsor the park district’s summer concert series.

“Our partnership with Stratford Square Mall allows the park district to extend its reach into the community and support Bloomingdale’s economic engine,” said BPD Executive Director, Carrie Fullerton. “We have been able to support mall management in their mission to attract and retain our residents, and they have supported us in our goal to extend our agency into our community beyond our recreation center and parks.”

“Stratford Square Mall is trying to reposition itself with high quality entertainment options and Bloomingdale Park District, with its excellent reputation in the community, is a perfect partner for our mission,” said Stratford Square Mall General Manager, Doug Kiehn. “It’s a group of high energy people that get things done. From our perspective, it’s one of the key resources of the community. All of its programs are so well received and have a very positive impact. That’s why we do everything we can to support the Bloomingdale Park District.”

Stratford Square Mall was honored as Best Friend of Illinois Parks – Large Business by the Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD) in 2014.

Other Bloomingdale Park District corporate partner success stories include:

Adventist GlenOaks Hospital

The similarity in core values and beliefs power this partnership. The official motto of the park district is “Where Recreation Revolves Around You.” The welcome message from Chief Executive Officer, Bruce Christian, on the Adventist GlenOaks (AGH) website begins with, “At Adventist GlenOaks Hospital, we are Always Here For You.”
The hospital has provided health screenings, seminars and educational programs covering issues such as smoking cessation, childhood obesity, heart health and more to park district residents – all at no cost. It serves as a major sponsor for several special events. The last two summers, AGH employees have been treated to a free day of “splashtastic” fun at the district’s Oasis Water Park. Residents benefit as well, as AGH employees pass out lip balm and suntan lotion. In 2013, Adventist GlenOaks Hospital was honored as Best Friend of Illinois Parks - Large Business by the IAPD.

Bloomingdale Bank and Trust
The park district’s longest-tenured partner was honored as IAPD Best Friend of Illinois Parks in 2009. Bloomingdale Bank & Trust has partnered with the park district over the past eight-plus years; exhibiting leadership and dedication to all who reside and work in the community.

The annual Coin Dive is a highly-popular community event created just for the bank. Bank representatives disperse coins of all shapes and sizes into The Oasis Water Park’s two pools. Children dive for coins and several of these coins can be redeemed for special prizes.

The bank also is host to the district’s annual outdoor movie. Seeking to show off its building and get potential customers on site, the inflatable movie screen was moved from a nearby park to the bank’s parking lot. In addition to bank representatives operating on their home turf, the movie attracts additional drive-by attention as it’s located near a major street.

Bloomingdale Bank & Trust also sets up an inflatable money machine in the shape of an ATM at the district’s annual Bunny Bash. The machine dispenses play money, which can be redeemed by the bank for opening a new account by game participants.

Associated Dental Care
This local business is essential to the community’s health. They help residents keep teeth functional and healthy, find and treat dental problems before they become major, and stay informed on the latest cosmetic dentistry to allow everyone to smile brightly. In addition to sponsorship of multiple events, the dental practice also visits preschool, kindergarten, before-school and after-school programs to demonstrate proper dental care.

Sports Authority
The sporting goods chain works closely with the park district’s youth athletic organizations by supplying coaching kits including water bottles, balls, coupons and more while serving as a registration site several times a year. It also sponsors several special events and is the t-shirt sponsor for summer camps.

Bloomingdale School of Music
A major sponsor for Bloomingdale’s Got Talent, the local music school not only helps encourage entry into the competition, but supplies judges as well. Bloomingdale School of Music also offers programs in the park district’s program catalog.

In addition to all of the private business partnerships above, the Bloomingdale Park District also partners with local restaurants, chambers of commerce, surrounding park districts and school districts, the Village of Bloomingdale, the Bloomingdale Public Library, the Bloomingdale-Roselle Rotary Club, the Bloomingdale Fire Protection District, the Bloomingdale Police Department and Western DuPage Special Recreation Association.

As you grow this area of your agency, it’s important to remember that “partnership” is synonymous with “relationship.” All parties must benefit – it cannot be one-sided. Important skills for staff seeking partnerships include listening, communication, follow-through, follow-up, analysis, patience, likeability and flexibility. These are indeed the “tickets” to creating and maintaining solid partnerships.

Going down the path of partnering with others to advance your agency is not a trend – it’s a function of a successful agency that is here to stay. The better you get at creating and maintaining partnerships, the more people you’ll serve – and isn’t that why we’re here in the first place?