

MRPA UPDATE

Leadership Transition • Play Safe Mississippi • 60th Anniversary Conference

Important dates, website updates, fall events and opportunities for members, agencies, universities, vendors, sponsors and friends of MRPA.

FROM THE ASSOCIATION

A Pivotal Month for MRPA

Good afternoon, MRPA members, vendors, sponsors, partners and friends—

August marks an important point in MRPA's transition and rebuilding year. The Association is preparing for new executive leadership, shaping a broader strategic direction, advancing Play Safe Mississippi, reviewing a related youth-sports safety legislative concept, and building toward the 2027 MRPA 60th Anniversary Conference at Centennial Plaza in Gulfport.

This newsletter summarizes the most important dates, current website information, Board priorities and fall opportunities for involvement. Please share it with staff members, elected officials, university programs, community partners and others who should be connected with MRPA.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Important Dates at a Glance

Date	Item	Why It Matters
August 14, 2026	Call for Presentations Deadline	Proposals are due for educational sessions offered February 23–24 during the 2027 Annual Conference.
August 19, 2026	MRPA Board Meeting	The Board will consider executive leadership, Play Safe Mississippi, the legislative concept, conference planning, vendors, sponsors, technology and fall strategic planning.
Mid-September 2026	Membership, Vendors, and Stakeholder Surveys	Members, agencies, vendors, sponsors, universities and partners will be asked to help shape MRPA 2.0, conference services and Play Safe Mississippi.
Fall 2026	District Meetings and Leadership Workshop	District input will feed the statewide strategic-planning process and the next phase of MRPA development.

MISSISSIPPI RECREATION AND PARK ASSOCIATION		AUGUST 2026
Date	Item	Why It Matters
December 18, 2026	Awards and Recognition Deadline	Begin identifying outstanding professionals, programs, agencies, facilities, volunteers and partners.
February 22–25, 2027	MRPA 60th Anniversary Conference	Centennial Plaza, Gulfport. Educational sessions are scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday.

LEADERSHIP

MRPA Executive Director Transition

MRPA is moving toward the selection and onboarding of its next Executive Director. The position is expected to provide year-round leadership for membership, finances, administration, conferences, professional development, communications, sponsorships, vendor relationships, Board and committee support, and statewide initiatives.

- The Board is reviewing the transition process, responsibilities, onboarding needs and continuity of current projects.
- The incoming Executive Director will need an orderly transfer of membership systems, financial procedures, contracts, conference work, website information and association records.
- Belinda and Dr. Kim Beason remain willing to assist the incoming Executive Director during the transition.
- Dr. Beason is also willing to facilitate the fall Strategic Planning Workshop and continue assisting with MRPA 2.0 and Play Safe Mississippi, subject to Board direction and in support of the new Executive Director's authority.

The goal is continuity—not competition with the new leadership. MRPA should protect institutional knowledge while allowing the incoming Executive Director to lead.

FEATURED INITIATIVE

Play Safe Mississippi

Play Safe Mississippi is a proposed MRPA-led statewide framework for safer, healthier, more inclusive and better-prepared recreation and sport. It is intended to be broader than a single course, background check, vendor or law.

SAFE PEOPLE. SAFE PLACES. SAFE PLAY. BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE.

The initiative would begin with youth sports while creating a foundation that could later support community recreation, scholastic and nonprofit programs, adaptive recreation, Special Olympics, adult and masters sports, senior athletics, tournaments and sport-tourism events.

What Play Safe Mississippi May Include

- Coach, volunteer, official and staff education
- Background-screening pathways
- Participant protection and abuse prevention
- Emergency-action planning
- Concussion, heat-illness and sudden-cardiac-arrest awareness
- Codes of conduct and sample policies
- Certification and renewal tracking
- Small-agency tools and practical documentation

MRPA's Proposed Role

- Educate and coordinate—not regulate
- Translate standards into practical local tools
- Connect agencies with qualified resources and providers
- Support affordable implementation for small and rural communities
- Provide templates, checklists, training and technical assistance
- Avoid storing confidential background-check details
- Avoid guaranteeing legal compliance or zero risk

August Board consideration: The Board will determine whether Play Safe Mississippi should be accepted as a priority initiative for further development and included as a major action item in the fall Strategic Planning Workshop.

PUBLIC POLICY**Related Legislative Concept: Mississippi Coach Safely Act**

A related draft legislative concept would require coaches and certain athletics personnel involved in higher-risk youth sports to complete annual injury-mitigation and safety education. Play Safe Mississippi would be the broader implementation and support framework; the proposed bill would address a specific training expectation.

- Emergency preparedness, planning and rehearsal for traumatic injuries
- Recognition and management of concussion and head injuries
- Heat-related and extreme-weather illness
- Sudden cardiac arrest and other dangerous heart conditions
- Prevention of overuse injuries and safe conditioning for youth athletes
- Annual completion records and possible exemptions for certain qualified medical or emergency professionals

The central MRPA concern is practical implementation. Any legislation should protect young athletes without creating an unreasonable or unfunded burden for small communities, volunteer coaches, local leagues or limited-staff departments.

Questions MRPA Should Help Answer

- Who is covered?
- Who approves the training?
- What will it cost?
- How will records be maintained?
- What timeline will communities receive?

Essential Safeguards

- Affordable or no-cost training where practical
- Small-agency flexibility
- Neutral provider standards
- Clear local responsibility
- MRPA protected from enforcement and adjudication duties

CONFERENCE SPOTLIGHT**2027 MRPA 60th Anniversary Conference**

FEBRUARY 22–25, 2027 • CENTENNIAL PLAZA • GULFPORT, MISSISSIPPI

The 2027 conference is being designed around stronger education, better networking, meaningful vendor engagement, student participation and recognition of MRPA's 60 years of service.

CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP**Keynote: Chris Nunes, CPRE**

MRPA is working with Chris Nunes, CPRE, as the proposed keynote and featured leadership presenter. The current concept includes an opening keynote, additional educational content and a possible "Coffee with Chris" leadership roundtable. Final arrangements remain subject to Board and conference-planning approval.

- Opening keynote focused on leadership, organizational excellence and the future of parks and recreation
- Additional session opportunities that extend the keynote into practical application
- Possible small-group leadership conversation before the formal opening session
- A strong national voice to help frame MRPA's 60th Anniversary and renewed statewide direction

DEADLINE: AUGUST 14, 2026

Call for Presentations

Educational sessions will be held Tuesday, February 23, and Wednesday, February 24.

Professionals, educators, agency leaders, consultants, vendors and community partners are encouraged to submit practical, engaging proposals.

- Leadership, supervision and agency management
- Community and youth sport; sport commissions and authorities
- Sport tourism, tournaments, events and destination development
- Facility and venue operations; maintenance; aquatics and risk management

- Therapeutic and inclusive recreation; Special Olympics; senior and masters sport; adaptive and Paralympic programming
- Technology, communications, workforce development, credentialing and small-agency operations
- Play Safe Mississippi, coach preparation, volunteer management and emergency readiness

PARTNERSHIPS

A New Vendor and Sponsor Experience

MRPA is redesigning its vendor and sponsor strategy around value rather than booth volume. The emerging approach can be summarized as:

FEWER VENDORS. BETTER ACCESS. STRONGER ENGAGEMENT. GREATER VALUE.

- A more intentional cap on physical exhibitors based on projected professional attendance
- Outdoor demonstration options for playground, maintenance, equipment and similar vendors
- Year-round sponsorship packages rather than conference-only visibility
- Lunch with Leaders, vendor innovation sessions, case studies and structured networking
- Student, scholarship, keynote, awards, breaks, district and leadership-event sponsorships
- Website, digital directory, email and social-media visibility
- Post-event reporting to help sponsors and vendors assess value

Vendors and sponsors should watch for the approved prospectus following Board review.

Organizations interested in early discussion may contact MRPA so they can be included when final materials are released.

ONLINE NOW AND COMING SOON

Website and Communications Update

MRPA is updating the website in phases to make current information easier to locate. Members and partners should continue checking the site and MRPA email messages for newly posted materials.

- Current Board, leadership and Executive Director information
- 2027 conference dates, Call for Presentations and keynote updates
- Vendor and sponsorship information
- District agendas, minutes, events and professional-development opportunities
- Student membership, conference registration, university packages and scholarships
- MRPA 2.0 and Play Safe Mississippi information
- Employment, internships, member spotlights and community success stories

Help us tell Mississippi's story. Send photographs, program highlights, facility improvements, professional accomplishments, awards, job announcements and community-success stories for possible website, newsletter and social-media use.

[Insert MRPA website address]

MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Fall District Meetings

Each MRPA District will continue meeting during the fall. District meetings are essential because they allow local concerns and recommendations to reach the Board before statewide decisions are made.

- Identify training and CEU needs
- Discuss Play Safe Mississippi and current local safety practices
- Recommend conference sessions, speakers, vendors and sponsors
- Recruit committee members, volunteers and future leaders
- Promote membership, internships, employment and university involvement
- Share practical solutions among agencies of different sizes

District Representatives will distribute specific dates, locations, agendas and virtual-access information.

MRPA 2.0

Fall Leadership and Strategic Planning Workshop

MRPA is preparing for an in-person fall Leadership and Strategic Planning Workshop. The workshop is expected to help determine what MRPA should become over the next several years and how that vision will be implemented.

- Mission, vision and statewide professional role
- Membership growth and member value
- Professional development, CEUs and credentialing
- Active, accountable committees and leadership development
- Support for small and rural agencies
- Student, university and young-professional engagement
- Vendor, sponsor and partner development
- Play Safe Mississippi governance, standards, pilots and implementation
- Financial sustainability, communications, advocacy and measurable outcomes

The workshop should produce decisions, measurable objectives, responsible leaders and deadlines—not simply another list of ideas.

FROM BELINDA

Membership and Agency Account Reminders

- Agency members should confirm who is included under the agency's master account.
- Individual members should update contact information, employer, title and professional credentials.
- Agencies should notify MRPA when staff members leave, retire or change positions.

- Members with expired accounts may contact MRPA to request an invoice.
- Please share membership information with agencies, professionals, students, retirees and allied organizations that should be involved.

Membership and administrative questions: admin@mrpa-ms.org

CLOSING MESSAGE

Help Shape the Next MRPA

MRPA is in a transition year, but it is also a rebuilding year. The Association is working to strengthen leadership, membership, professional development, conference quality, participant safety, partnerships, communication and statewide relevance.

That work cannot be completed by the Board or Executive Director alone. It will require active participation from members, agencies, districts, committees, universities, students, retirees, vendors, sponsors, public institutions, nonprofit organizations and friends of the profession.

Please watch for surveys, District meeting notices, conference information, committee opportunities, scholarship materials and requests for input. Thank you for supporting MRPA and for the work you do to improve parks, recreation, sport and quality of life throughout Mississippi.

Dr. Kim R. Beason, CTRS, CPRE

Interim Executive Director
Mississippi Recreation and Park Association

Belinda Beason

Administrative and Membership Support
Mississippi Recreation and Park Association