



Following another successful and enjoyable SCRPA Annual Conference, we would like to share the stories of the individuals and organizations who were recognized by the Association's 2019 Awards Program. Congratulations to all recipients!

Champions for Our Community Awards



(L to R): Jordan O'Keefe, Therapeutic Recreation Coordinator, Irmo-Chapin Recreation Commission; Andrea Harris, Seven Oaks Park Director, Irmo-Chapin Recreation Commission

Marty Bridges

A community champion can be defined as someone who gives freely of their time, skills and talents to improve the quality of life for those in their community. The first Community Champion Award winner has served the Irmo-Chapin Recreation Commission for over 40 years. Marty Bridges has coached youth football for 36 years, served on numerous committees and boards for ICRC, including the Saluda Shoals Park Foundation, the Advisory Board for the commission, the Seven Oaks Improvement Committee, and the 2020-2030 Strategic Plan Task Force. Marty has helped secure over \$1.7 million to help build a universally inclusive playground for children and adults of all abilities to enjoy. He secured \$248,000 for naming rights at Saluda Shoals athletic fields and new scoreboards throughout the district. As a small example of his devotion to the community, in lieu of retirement gifts, he asked people to donate to the Park Foundation. Marty is a true community champion!



Rieta Drinkwine, Director,
Union County Library

Union County Library

Serving a small county takes many partners especially when ONE, you are the state's 32nd most populated county, TWO have a high poverty rate and THREE, rank 34th out of 46 counties in health outcomes. The Union County Library System and Union County Parks and Recreation collaborated with staff and utilized other resources to help the citizens of Union County enjoy various recreation programs. Whether it be the summer reading program or the kids fest, the Union County Library has been there to support the parks and recreation department as well as the citizens. Without this community champion, the Union County Parks and Recreation Department could not achieve the outreach that it does. The Union County Library is a true community champion!

The Champion for our Community award recognizes individuals and organizations who support our membership's vision of creating community through people, parks and programs. This year, one individual and one organization received the honor.

Programming Excellence Awards

Population under 30,000: City of Orangeburg



Shaniqua Simmons, Director, City of
Orangeburg Parks and Recreation

Every year during the weekend before Mother's Day, the City of Orangeburg closes Riverside Drive to vehicular traffic and gives citizens and visitors the opportunity to leisurely walk through the entire Edisto Memorial Gardens with their family and friends.

This year marked the 48th annual Festival of Roses, which is held to celebrate the beginning of the rose-blooming season. Appropriately, with over 30,000 visitors, the activities are centered in Orangeburg's Edisto Memorial Gardens, where thousands of roses bloom near the banks of the Edisto River. Providing a variety of food and confections, attendees can enjoy entertainment or take part in fun, games and other family activities.

The City of Orangeburg Parks and Recreation Department is always proud to showcase their award-winning Rose Garden, and the Festival of Roses was

created to highlight the true gem of their City. From its humble beginnings to what it has become today, the format has changed over the years, but the basic concept has remained the same - an abundance of beautiful roses, enjoyable activities, and entertainment for the entire family to enjoy.

Population over 30,000: City of Rock Hill



(L to R): Garnet McKeown, Recreation
Division Supervisor, City of Rock Hill;
Wendy Waddle, Special Populations
Supervisor, City of Rock Hill

The Merry Mosaic Studio, a culmination of the therapeutic art programs coordinated by the City of Rock Hill Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Department, gives artists of all abilities a space to create, share and sell their artwork. The studio offers multiple classes, including Beginner and Advanced Photography, Watercolor and Acrylic Painting, Alcohol Ink and Acrylic Paint Pouring, Hand Built and Wheel Pottery, and the Praise Dance Troup. The Studio hosts a TAP Into the Arts show that displays and sells the artists' work and has grown in popularity each year with over 200 attendees.

The Merry Mosaic Studio provides a space for people with intellectual disabilities to discover

their artistic abilities and helps expand their knowledge with different styles of art that may be out of the participant's initial comfort zone. Therapeutic art programming has been found to be beneficial in managing behavior, increasing self-awareness, developing interpersonal skills and reducing stress. Partnerships with the South Carolina Special Olympics, Area Eleven Special Olympics and other local businesses provide monetary support for supplies needed in the Studio as well as rent-free venue space for the TAP Into the Arts show.

The Merry Mosaic Studio is incredibly unique, being the only space in the community of its kind, giving artists with special needs a space to create exceptional artwork. The growing popularity and positive impact on the artists as well as the community ensure future success for the program. The Merry Mosaic Studio and the therapeutic art programs provide opportunities that enhance the quality of life for Rock Hill residents.

The Programming Excellence award is given to agencies in two different population categories: under 30,000 and over 30,000. The Programming Excellence award honors a recreation program or special event.

Parks Excellence Awards

Population over 30,000: City of Aiken



(L to R): City of Aiken staff - Brett Howell, Pam Royal, Bo McCullough, Robert Kelly, Rasheka Gaines, Jessica Campbell (Director), Jeff Metz, and Tim Behling

Eustis Park has been property of the City of Aiken since 1897, originally consisting of 115 acres. The park currently sits on 7.94 acres with boundaries defined under the restriction of LWCF since 1970. In 2016, 5.59 acres of adjacent property were purchased for development of a Senior & Youth Center. Combined with 1 acre of property owned by the City for storm water management, this makes the park total just over 15.5 acres. Prior to revitalization, the park featured a playground with swings, two picnic shelters, basketball courts, tennis courts, and a short walking trail. Parking was limited, and storm water runoff had created multiple landscape issues with areas of washout throughout the park.

Through Capital Projects Sales Tax funds and a LWCF grant, the Eustis Park revitalization project was launched. Concurrently, the City also proceeded with construction of the Senior & Youth Center, funded with Capital Project Sales Tax funds, Hospitality Tax funds and the South Carolina Department on Aging P.I.P. grant. The first amenity within Eustis Park to be addressed was the two existing tennis courts. One of the tennis courts was converted into 4 pickleball courts during the rebuild project. Next, the old playground was removed and a new inclusive playground was installed to accommodate users of all abilities and levels. The walking trail was resurfaced and expanded around the new playground location. The revitalization included the installation of a surface parking area with ADA accessibility, sidewalks and walking trail connectors to the park. The parking area successfully connects Eustis Park to the adjacent Lessie B. Price Aiken Senior & Youth Center, which opened April 24, 2019. Thanks to this

ambitious project, Aiken residents now have a safer, more attractive recreation facility that is a source of great community pride and will serve citizens for generations to come!

The Parks Excellence award is given to agencies in two different population categories: under 30,000 and over 30,000.

The Parks Excellence award recognizes a new, renovated or revitalized park.



Individual Member Awards

State Merit Award: Cheri Anthony, City of Pickens Recreation Department



Cheri Anthony, Director, City of Pickens Recreation Department

This year's state merit award winner has been involved in SCRPA for over 15 years. Cheri Anthony graduated from Limestone College in 1983 and has been with the City of Pickens Recreation Department since 1995, becoming the Director in 1998. She was most recently the Chair of our Athletic Programming Branch. She was awarded the Athletic Program Professional of the Year in December of 2018. Congratulations to the 2019 SCRPA State Merit award winner Cheri Anthony.

SCRPA Branches and Districts grant their own professional awards throughout the year. Those winners are then submitted to the SCRPA Awards Citations Committee to select a single SCRPA State Merit Award winner.

Young Professional of the Year: Josh Blackstone, Facility Director, Charleston County Parks & Recreation Commission



(L to R): Josh and Jessica Blackstone

Described as hard working, organized, detail orientated, dedicated to the profession, a “gentle giant,” and a mentor, Josh Blackstone has spent his entire career with the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission. He is certified through the NRPA as a CPRP and Aquatics Facility Operator, and is also certified as a pest applicator and a pool operator through the state of South Carolina.

Throughout his young SCRPA career, Josh

has had many roles including serving on the Parks and Resource Management Board, chairing the Awards and Citations Committee and graduating from the SC LEAD Class of 2012.

At CCPRC, Josh was a founding member of the maintenance mentoring committee and was chosen to lead the agency’s

reaccreditation for the Parks division. He is a leader of the “green team,” which focuses on educating staff on topics such as pond management, spraying standards and safety. As Wannamaker County Park Maintenance Supervisor, Josh oversees one of CCPRC’s largest and busiest day parks. Josh and his team also set up, break down and transport CCPRC’s portable swimming pool around Charleston County to facilitate youth swimming instruction, for which they were awarded CCPRC’s Teamwork Award in 2017.

According to Executive Director David Bennett, “As CCPRC transitioned its organizational structure with an eye to the future, Josh proved himself a leader and was instrumental in the implementation, development and success of this new agency structure. Josh’s leadership, creativity, and overall approach made this transition move quickly and efficiently. CCPRC is excited to have Josh’s leadership skillset onboard as we continue toward future projects.”

Josh is happily married to his wife Jessica and they have a beautiful “fur baby” Tucker!

The SCRPA Young Professional of the Year nominee must be in the parks and recreation profession for at least 3 years and no more than 15 years and a member in good standing of SCRPA and professionally certified through the NRPA. This award considers service, leadership, and character.

Professional of the Year: Joe Ross, Director, Town of Clover



Joe and Annette Ross (Center), and family

Joe Ross has served four agencies and communities in South Carolina. He worked his way up through the ranks and has worn many hats along the way, from youth sports coordinator to park manager and beyond. Colleagues describe Joe as one of the most honest, hardworking, dedicated and professional individuals in the parks and recreation industry, in addition to being compassionate, inclusive, diverse and flexible.

In 1999, Joe became park manager of Florence County’s Lynches River County Park. Joe left a legacy by helping with many additions to the park, including the state’s first “Tree Top Canopy” trail among cypress trees, a new environmental center, and an ADA-accessible canoe and kayak launch.

“He’s a person who possesses a vision necessary to grow himself, his department, and many recreation professionals across our state,” said his former supervisor at Florence County Parks and Recreation, Joe Eason.

In 2017, Joe achieved his ultimate goal of becoming a park and recreation agency director when he accepted the director’s position for the Town of Clover.

“Through all of the challenges during his first years as recreation director, Joe has maintained professionalism and courtesy,” said Allison Harvey, Town Administrator for Clover. Joe is an excellent representative of our Town and a valuable member of the Town’s management team.”

Joe holds and maintains CPRP and CPSI certifications through NRPA and was in the inaugural SC LEAD class. He also served the association as president and chaired the PRM Branch, the ELM Branch and the Past Presidents Committee.

Of Joe’s SCRPA presidency, Phil Macchia says, “Joe championed the reorganization of the SCRPA membership. His leadership and push made it possible for this endeavor to become a reality, further enhancing our Association financially, but more importantly, opening the door for all individuals in an organization to be active.”

Joe’s home team includes his wife Annette, daughter Laney and their dog Lucas.

The SCRPA Professional of the Year nominee must be in the parks and recreation profession at least 15 years and a member of SCRPA for at least five years and professionally certified through the NRPA. This award considers service, leadership, and character.

Robert L. Reid Lifetime Achievement and Hall of Fame Award: John Taylor, Exective Director, City of Rock Hill Parks, Recreation and Tourism



(L to R): Bev Carroll, Commissioner, City of Rock Hill PRT; John Taylor, Executive Director, City of Rock Hill PRT

This year's Robert L. Reid Hall of Fame Award recipient, is described by his colleagues with these phrases:

- A hands-on professional; an inspiring leader and visionary;
- A sought-after mentor for young professionals;
- Someone who places a high value on partnerships and inclusion;
- A decision-maker who asks "how will this affect our people?"

- And someone who has never lost his enthusiasm for parks and recreation in his more than 39 years of service.

This year's award recipient describes himself as "a guy who started by painting ball fields" and "a country boy from Batesburg-Leesville".

John D. Taylor, who's spent his entire career with the City of Rock Hill Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department is the recipient of the 2019 Robert L. Reid Lifetime Achievement and Hall of Fame Award. John holds degrees from Clemson University, the NC State School of Sports Management and the Institute of Departmental Management at the USC Institute for Public Service and Policy Research. He started with the City of Rock Hill in 1980, working up through the roles of Recreation Programmer, Cherry Park Supervisor, Parks Division Supervisor and Operations Supervisor and in 2013, he became Department Director. Clemson's Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management Department recognized John in 2015 with the Outstanding Alumnus Practitioner Award.

On the local level, John has served on and chaired numerous boards. At the state level, John has served on the SC Trails Advisory Board, was President of SCRPA, and he received the 2003

Professional of the Year Award. John presently serves on the SC Tourism Expenditure Review Commission.

"Under John's direction, Rock Hill has become a destination for sports in the Southeast and the United States," says Rock Hill City Manager David Vehau. Bev Carroll who has served on Rock Hill's Parks and Recreation Commission since 1989 says, "John has a passion for PRT and our community, and he has been tireless in his efforts."

John is a strong, caring leader to his employees, encouraging all to "keep it positive" and to share their shout outs for their teammates at the beginning of all staff meetings. He works effectively with City Council, City Management, Department Directors and the numerous volunteers who support PRT through commissions and advisory committees.

The Robert L. Reid Lifetime Achievement and Hall of Fame Award recognizes lifetime achievement in the parks and recreation profession and is awarded to a professional or citizen with a minimum of 20 years of service to the profession. The recipient must have actively promoted the parks and recreation profession through presentations, writings and service in their community, the state and our nation.



Congratulations to all 2019 SCRPA award recipients!

You should be proud of all you've accomplished.