

# What A Long, Strange Trip

[Click here to read about East Goshen Township's Director of Parks and Recreation, Jason Lang](#)

## But we're gonna make it!

**IT'S SAFE TO SAY** that most peoples' lives came to a screeching halt sometime in March 2020. While many were turning their kitchen tables into makeshift offices, many of you were also dealing with the fallout of cancelled programs and special events, reassigning or losing good employees, and wondering when life would return to normal. Through it all and perhaps most worth noting, people looked to parks and recreation for comfort and you all delivered—in a big way. The following is a tribute to those who stepped up to give their communities what they needed during a raging pandemic—peace of mind.

Please note the majority of these contributions were written in early summer when most were still dealing with limited information and a bevy of restrictions. While the uncertainty was nearly unbearable, the industry kept carrying out the best part of parks and recreation—a mission to serve their communities.

Thanks to all who contributed their personal stories. We salute each and every one of you.



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## The Goal Post Keeps Moving

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, everything we have come to expect as professionals is completely different in many ways. Parks and recreation professionals are generally planners by nature. On July 5, many begin planning for next year's Independence Day celebrations. Summer camps are fully planned by February and game plans for Halloween begin in July.

What this pandemic has brought to many of us is uncertainty. Due to restrictions, executive orders, and curfews, we simply are faced with not knowing what or when we are able to do certain things, which causes a great deal of unrest.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect is that the general public often turns to rec professionals for answers and in many cases, we are unable to give concrete answers.

For perspective, our team consists of four full-time employees and a large team of seasonal workers for a suburban/metro New Jersey town of 14,000. We have more than 50 restaurants, a mass-transit station and a hospital, so we have characteristics of a small city, yet the charm of a small town. Being in New Jersey, our state was one of the most affected in the country in regards to number of infections and death totals.

We are fortunate that our team has not had a reduction in hours, layoffs, or furloughs. Throughout the pandemic, we did our best to offer virtual activities, such as concerts, art contests, youth activities, and more. We also planned (and frequently re-planned) for future events and activities. We headed up social-service campaigns including an on-going Essential Goods drive for the less fortunate in the community. We did our best to stay relevant and more importantly, provide value to the community. Events such as our egg hunt and Memorial Day parade were amended drastically to become drive-through events.

At the time of writing (June), the immediate future looks very uncertain. Like many other communities, our entire spring sports seasons were cancelled. We typically run three different summer concert series, which will be cancelled, shortened, or postponed until later in the year. Summer sports leagues are a question mark as well. Our summer movies in the park, which draw huge crowds is also in a wait-and-see mode. Looking towards the fall offerings of sports leagues, classes, and trips, we foresee some modifications, but it's difficult to assess those specifics right now.

The overarching theme for us remains uncertainty—a phrase we frankly don't like in this business. Our mantra has

been to do “anything we can” for the community, but it's hard to state what that looks like. One lesson learned throughout this experience is to appreciate the positive impact this industry normally makes and the importance of our roles. We also learned how important adaptability is to run a successful department. To use a sports analogy, “the goal post keeps moving” and it has become tremendously difficult to implement a successful department.



**CHARLES HOFFMAN**  
RED BANK, N.J.



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## Flexibility To Change

Currently the hardest thing is that things change all the time. Like I told the limited staff I did hire for the summer, we have to be flexible as things change on a daily basis. Well I was wrong, things change on an hourly basis! Unfortunately a lot of information gets lost in transition and proper staff are not being made aware of this and are giving the wrong information out when the office gets calls from residents. This is something that we are working on and hoping to have everyone on the same page.

**KERRY SULLIVAN**  
WATERFORD, CONN.

## An Exciting Time

I have been in municipal settings for parks and recreation since 1987 and this is the toughest year I can recall. We have weathered hurricanes, floods, recessions, and political changes, but 2020 seems to have encompassed all of these issues at one time. It has challenged me and this department to rethink our services for the city and to re-plan nearly every program and activity that we offer. Throughout the last 13 weeks, we have kept 200 staff members safe and working in our parks to serve as ambassadors for citizens to monitor activity and allow our public-safety folks to focus on larger issues in the community. Our city has avoided layoffs thus far, but will probably need to have some furloughs this fiscal year. Our budget is very dependent on tourism and hospitality and we know it is going to dig into our reserve funds.

As luck would have it, we were two months into our Parks and Recreation Master Plan when the pandemic shut down everything. We have moved into virtual meetings for community input and better use of surveys and technology to engage the residents. The need for great public parks and recreation programs was very evident when things were closed and I am optimistic that we will be able to build upon this groundswell of support and help better position our department with funding and partnership opportunities. Exciting time to be in the profession and serving the public!

**Laurie C. Yarbrough**  
DIRECTOR OF RECREATION  
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## **An Essential Part Of The Community**

**O**ur city, along with the state of Colorado, went into “shelter in place” on March 13. Maybe there was something ominous with the date. We shut down our three recreation centers, golf course, coin-operated batting cages, arts and culture center, active-adult center and asked everyone to work from home. Parks was the only division that had staff members reporting to work in person along with the director, except for the office personnel who could do their work from home. The parks were open except for the amenities in them including playgrounds, courts, skate parks, and dog parks. Staff hiring was frozen which impacted the parks crew negatively as we had just started the process for hiring the seasonal crew. There were no furloughs and many staff members were offered laptops to make the transition seamless. All staff members—including contracted employees teaching particular classes—continued to receive their pay based on their “typical” schedule. Originally planned for two weeks, it led to several extensions as cases of COVID-19 rose in the state.

Colorado has come through quite well and as a department, we have come through as an essential service along the lines of police, fire, and EMS. Over the last couple of weeks, we have begun to re-open amenities and next week open facilities to the public, albeit practicing CDC suggested protocols. Parks were heavily used and we started to gather data with the help of staff members, who transitioned to park ambassadors after their main tasks were completed each day. Their job was to collect data, with a soft glove enforce the physical distancing requirement, and keep people off the closed playgrounds and other amenities. Numbers in the parks trebled over the last few months and even as we slowly open up amenities, the numbers have not abated.

Many of the recreation programs and classes, including those at the Active Adult Center were transitioned to virtual classes early on and in addition to keeping the staff occupied, we had them make wellness calls on the older adult population that typically frequented our Active Adult Center and the three recreation centers. To this day, we have made over 5,000 phone calls to the most vulnerable population and they have been appreciative of the service. In addition, we implemented a staff-initiated food drive that has garnered over 20,000 non-perishable items to be delivered strictly to the three local food banks. Overall, staff members have stayed busy with programs, new initiatives, and overall checking in on patrons. The golf course has been open since late April and doing quite well under the new regime of one

per cart, no clubhouse service, and minimal interactions between staff and public. All that changed on June 5 when we restarted full clubhouse services with physical distancing.

As we open the recreation centers, we are putting in place all the CDC expected guidelines from temperature taking, to physical distancing by not exceeding 50 percent of code-suggested capacities in the centers, no team sports, singles-play in pickle ball and badminton only, and using all available spaces to run fitness, gymnastics, and dance classes with physical distancing in place. We have cancelled many programs, but feel strong about being in a better place as we have pivoted well, and look forward

to transitioning to a new way of thinking, doing, playing, and scheduling.

Thornton is lucky to have a dedicated sales tax of 0.25 percent voted in through 2038 for all capital projects. On the general fund side, we gave back to the city monies saved from the non-hire of seasonal staff, watering less in the parks, and overall cutting back on operational expenses. The future will not see too many changes, other than to formally

request a park ambassador service formally in the budget process. The ambassador program paid off in tracking data for park usage, and educating the community on the practicing of the suggested health protocols. The interactions were positive and the feedback from the community has been positive. Some programs and projects have been delayed but nothing is off the table yet.

Thornton is a great city for parks and recreation and we weathered the storm quite well. We are rated by the Trust for Public Land in their Park Score as having 91 percent of the population with access to a park or green space within a 10-minute walk of their residence. Our per-capita spending is over \$150 and this bodes well for the community and political support for our department as we navigate some potential economic setbacks in the months ahead. We played our role as an essential service quite well too by having our parks open as one place of respite, relaxation, and possible rejuvenation under the circumstances. We look forward to rethinking, rebranding, and overall reimaging our department to fit the changing new reality.



**SEVE GHOSE, CPRE/MOL**  
**DIRECTOR**  
**THORNTON, COLO.**



## Bridging A Revenue Gap

Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) has long been required to generate a significant portion of our operating budget from fees generated from programming. In recent years, a gap has emerged between costs and revenue.

PP&R closed community and art centers, and pools, and canceled all outdoor programming in March to protect public health and to help flatten the curve of COVID-19 in the community. That decision was one result of the governor’s executive order—the Stay Home, Save Lives directive—but PP&R was also forced to lay off or not hire hundreds of valuable seasonal team members.

Those closures and cancellations made it impossible for PP&R to earn revenue through swim lessons, exercise classes, and permitted events. Unable to earn revenue and lacking a critical seasonal workforce, the bureau is now unable to reopen community centers at this time, and we cannot offer traditional summer programming in 2020. This includes summer camps that provide educational, social, and health benefits to almost 23,000 campers a year. We have been communicating with the community that we cannot re-open community centers or swimming pools until at least this coming fall.

We have recently hired a professional polling company who will engage with Portlanders to see how they feel about our parks and recreation system, and to gauge their willingness to support a ballot measure in either November 2020 or May 2021.

“Right now, people understand that our parks and recreation system is more important than ever before,” says Portland Parks & Recreation Director Adena Long. “Our parks and recreation system keeps us healthy and connected as a community. COVID-19 has shown that they are essential to our civic life, and not a luxury we can afford to lose.”

Based on the results of polling, PP&R

will update our Sustainable Future plan and work with community partners and city council to identify the next best steps for improving our parks and recreation system.

**MARK ROSS**  
MEDIA RELATIONS  
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## Same Game, New Rules

Let's turn back time and imagine winter—when the baseball fields were covered with snow and the anticipation of spring was just around the corner. Families and kids were dreaming about playing “America’s favorite pastime” while shopping for new equipment and practicing indoors.

Then a pandemic happened that put everything on hold until the final announcement was made. “For the safety of our community, the youth-baseball season is canceled for the summer!”

The baseball fields sit empty for Youth Baseball Leagues at Independence Township Parks, Recreation & Seniors in Clarkston, Mich. Summer has arrived and you can hear the birds chirp and the bees buzz and see the flowers bloom, but there is no swing of the bat, no cheering, no clapping, and no children laughing.

Statistics prove how youth sports and activities are an important part of a child’s development. Being part of a team teaches kids life experiences, such as social interaction, following directions, becoming better learners, encouraging them to perform at a higher level, helping overcome fears, teaching when to take risks, building self-esteem, helping to set goals, helping learn rules, teaching how to win and lose, giving kids a place of belonging, and teaching commitment.

The benefits are endless and let’s be real—playing is fun! There is nothing like putting on a new uniform every summer and being placed on a team with your friends. How exciting!

With youth-sports guidelines in place, there’s a lot of debate among families whether the risk is worth it for a child to play sports in the COVID-19 era. “Normal” seems to be a statement that’s nearly impossible in times like these, but it’s so desperately

needed. Kids are missing their friends, coaches, and physical activity. Being told they are not allowed to play sports at all is not the best thing for their well-being. Kids need to be outside doing something. If it is baseball, how can we make it safe and minimize the risk? This question is being asked repeatedly, but who really knows?

As parks and recreation professionals, it is our job to make sure we feed a community the physical activity they desire. How can you do this when you are not allowed to have a league or more than 100 people in one place at a time? You can’t share equipment or even give a high five. Let’s not focus on what we can’t do but what we can do.

What we can do is offer skill training, outside, in small groups by practicing safe distancing according to CDC guidelines. If there is close instruction between a child and coach, both should be wearing masks and instruction should last only a few minutes to reduce the risk of getting sick. Participants should be issued their own equipment for training and not share between participants. The goal is to offer the same opportunity to all kids regardless of whether they have their own equipment. Equipment must then be cleaned after class and stored properly for the next class time.

Hopefully COVID-19 is a thing for the history books and will not interrupt our sports and activities in the future.

**LISA J. MCCOY, CPRP, CYSA**  
**RECREATION SPECIALIST**  
**INDEPENDENCE TOWNSHIP**

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## Providing Community Spirit

When the COVID-19 crisis hit the U.S., West Palm Beach's idyllic slice of paradise entered "stay-at-home" mode and all community events were cancelled from mid-March to indefinitely, in compliance with state directives from Governor Ron DeSantis. As the city shut down, the award-winning Community Events Division, within the Department of Parks and Recreation, began to plan for a new iteration of community events.

To help residents recreate at home, the city offered inspiration and instruction for residents to host their own events. A new "DIY Event Guide" was rolled out. While craft projects are included, the guide aimed to inspire virtual gatherings, or "events," to make special moments memorable during quarantine. All projects encouraged residents to craft and create their own mini events using common and inexpensive household items. The DIY series first launched with a how-to video for an at-home egg hunt. Titled "It's Spring and We're Wingin' It," the content was complemented with a drive-up giveaway of treat-filled eggs at city recreation centers on April 11.

"In addition to facilitating food, financial assistance and other basic needs, we are also offering this exciting new guide to elevate our residents' spirits," said Mayor Keith James. "Our events are about uniting the community, and this new initiative is an excellent source for doing so. We are in this together and are here for whatever [our community] needs."

The next in the series was to honor frontline workers. "Hats Off to Heroes! DIY Festival," was a how-to guide to make various hats out of paper and other common household objects. Participants were encouraged to share their stories on social media, especially if they have a special hero who they were saluting, as the virtual salute aimed to create a compilation of the community's collective gratitude. Soon thereafter, "Celebrate Mom!" included step-by-step instructions on how to make a forever flower bouquet for mom, with additional ideas such as a massage and manicure when presenting the flowers for an at-home "spa day." Residents were encouraged to share their events online, using a specific hashtag.

On May 29, the mayor held a press conference to announce DIY 4th of July "POP" (Party On your Porch). The campaign encouraged residents to indulge in a full afternoon of at-home

entertainment, culminating in a fireworks show for the finale. He shared that the fireworks would be launched from two different undisclosed north and south locations, to reach as many residents as possible. Additionally, he shared that they would also be televised as part of a special partnership with Hearst-owned WPBF 25, the local ABC affiliate. WPBF 25 created a special show, WPBF 25'S Project CommUNITY: Fireworks From Home, where it aired interviews and stories on the city's storied history and 125th

anniversary, with a live feed of the fireworks as the finale. As part of the campaign, prior to the start of the show residents were encouraged to support local businesses by ordering takeout through West Palm Beach Eats and then staging their patriotic "POP" using

the Fourth of July themed tutorials in the DIY Event Guide. Everyone was encouraged to post pictures and videos of their POP to social media, using #WPBTogether, to join the virtual celebration.

Residents thus far have also been able to enjoy several other home-grown event ideas, including DIY Concerts, Milestone Moments, DIY Screen on the Green, and Dad's Day.

The West Palm Beach Community Events Division has always been focused on providing free and inexpensive opportunities for family fun. While the preference is always to host events in person, it has not lost sight of its role—and perhaps how much more important it is now than ever before—to lift the community's spirits.



**LEAH ROCKWELL, CPRE**  
**DIRECTOR**  
**DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**  
**WEST PALM BEACH, FLA.**



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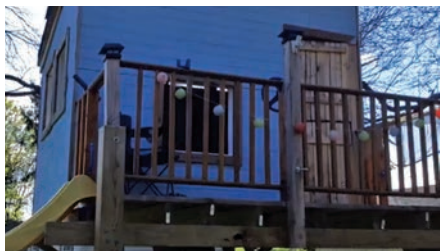


## An All-Time High In Engagement

This year, spring began as many had in the past for East Goshen Parks and Recreation (EGTPR) with interviews with high school and college students looking for summer-camp jobs. We sharpened tractor blades in anticipation of sports fields and open-space maintenance. We forged partnerships to host community-wide special events.

That was before March 17. Here in Pennsylvania on that day, municipal offices across the state closed as the coronavirus pandemic swept across the mid-Atlantic region. I went home that day with a ton of swirling, unanswerable questions. One thing I knew was that the parks and recreation profession would need to adjust, adapt, and remain a vital role as individuals, families, and communities coped with new realities.

Luckily, we live in the age of technology. Work could continue remotely and Zoom meetings followed Zoom meetings. I set up shop in my backyard treehouse, a



surprisingly quiet, comfortable, and creative home office. My initial thoughts were defining which populations would be most negatively affected by COVID-19 and stay-at-home orders. I focused efforts on supporting kids, senior citizens, and parents. From there, I focused on programmatically isolating each group's needs and tailoring efforts.

With respect to families, we understood this would stress families in unknown ways. Family units that were used to some degree of "space" and personal autonomy were thrust instantly into 24/7 contact, which demands an endlessly open and compassionate level of communication. EGTPR crafted a message to encourage

parents to bond with each other and their children and to point out that this may be the most important role modeling they would ever provide during their children's maturation years. We communicated positive outlets for stress management rather than rely on alcohol and drugs, and provided constant reminders of area counsel-



ing and health resources for those in need. To applaud families for their Herculean efforts, we created the Coronavirus "Stay-at-Home" Teacher-of-the-Year award to celebrate parent/guardians who were working while also doing their best to move the classroom to the dining room.

As park and recreation professionals, we are at our best when facing challenges and adapting on the fly. Our best example from the pandemic is how we altered the SE PA Teen Filmmakers Showcase. The showcase is a free film festival for teens interested in film industry careers. This year, closed schools left these filmmakers without access to equipment, so our submission pool dried up. We quickly added a "quarantined" films category with the simple criteria that it must be shot at home, and it really made a difference. We had funny, touching, poignant, and sad films flying in daily from across the country. The showcase was initially planned to focus solely on local teens, but we are adding a second virtual "coronavirus" edition that will highlight these stories from across the nation.

Recently, we had to make the difficult decision to either host or cancel our sum-

mer-camp program. After looking at COVID-19 health and safety-related requirements, cancelling camp was out of the question. We kept coming back to the point that if parks and recreation wanted to be seen as essential, it needed to be essential. As the economy rebuilds, parents need to work as much kids need camp to find



themselves, discover talents, make friends, and become more confident in their identities.

How will the pandemic change the industry over the next few years? The associated economic downturn will pause capital projects, while conversely straining current park amenities. One only has to look at the inability to purchase a bicycle to know that trails and roadways continue to see unprecedented usage. The general public will demand multi-tiered approaches to public-facility hygiene, especially when it comes to restrooms and large public events.

All that said, I am proud of where parks and recreation stands today as a true game changer with regards to public health. EGTPR has always provided exceptional programming and parks for its residents, but we believe our saturation level within the community is at an all-time high.

**JASON LANG, MS, CPRE**  
**DIRECTOR OF PARKS AND RECREATION**  
**EAST GOSHEN TOWNSHIP, PENN.**

## A Treat To Go To The Park

The entire COVID-19 situation has been quite interesting as a supplier to the industry. We have a commercial pet waste bags line that we sell to parks and rec departments, beaches, apartments, camp grounds, etc. and we have a retail line that we sell to pet stores.

It was an amazing shift in business as we saw all of our retail orders fall off the cliff, so we were quite worried. Almost immediately, we saw our online consumer orders skyrocket as everyone was working from home. Shortly thereafter, we started seeing all of our commercial

people to protect our planet, and to how our actions impact the planet, and can quickly be reversed. Nothing makes me and my company more proud than helping people protect our planet.

**PAUL D. CANNELLA**  
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poop bag orders skyrocket! I'm sure it's due to everyone working from home, and instead of the special treat of taking your dog to the park on the weekends, everyone is itching to get out of the house after working at home all day. It's now an extra-special treat for both the owners and their dogs to get to the parks a few times per week!

We're very thankful that we've been through two recessions and now COVID-19, and never really missed a beat. We're also thankful that people, especially those making the buying decisions for others, are going the extra mile and purchasing sustainable pet-waste bags. This entire situation has been a wake-up call for the

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## **Frustrated But Fortunate**

The past few months have been the most challenging in my career. On a daily basis we've been forced to make decisions and adapt operations in ways we never dreamed we would need to. Although it hasn't been easy, our team has adapted to the new normal, being innovative and responsive to constantly changing polices and finding creative solutions to continually meet community expectations.

We are very fortunate to work for a county that has taken care of their workforce. ALL employees—including part-time and merit and employees—have been paid throughout the last several months, even during facility closures. The safety of the workforce was always at the forefront of county leadership and it's shown in the actions taken to protect staff thought out the pandemic.

More than 500 staff members have been reassigned to support operations that remain open; for example, life-guards are working the front desk at golf courses, RECenter managers were monitoring outdoor parks during park closures and waterpark staff members are assisting human resources. We could not have accomplished this without staff members' willingness to be flexible and take on new challenges.

In some cases, attendance at outdoor parks has increased by 50 to 70 percent over fiscal year 2019. As park professionals, this is exactly what we want to see, however, it has come with challenges. Additional staff members were reassigned to parks to remind visitors of park rules, manage large amounts of people, and trash. We placed thousands of signs in the parks to remind visitors about the need to social distance and gather in small groups only. Lack of compliance with facility closures, parking issues, and COVID-19 prevention efforts have been a source of frustration.

The park authority implemented a phased reopening of our system. Golf courses reopened in May, outdoor parks reopened in June, RECenters reopened in July and nature centers reopened in August. The waterpark, outdoor pools, splash pads, concerts and camps were closed/canceled for the season.

During the spring, most of our time was focused on navigating through the pandemic. However, in recent weeks, we're adapting to the new normal and shifting more of our focus to long-term projects outlined in our strategic and master plans.

The elected officials remain committed to investing in our park system. In June, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved including a \$112-million park bond on the November ballot.



**SARA BALDWIN**  
**DEPUTY DIRECTOR/COO**  
**FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY**  
**FAIRFAX COUNTY, VA.**

## Picking Up Programming

The St. Charles Park District has been proactive in keeping the health and safety of the community its first priority. From creating a series of signs that communicate physical distancing to the launch of virtual recreation opportunities, we have taken steps to keep the community safe, informed, and engaged. Signs displaying the slogan, “Be Smart. Stand Apart.” are placed throughout the parks to encourage all guests to keep maintain a safe distance. When facilities opened, we created diamond floor decals to indicate where guests should stand for physical distancing guidelines.

When the Stay at Home order was enacted, the recreation team jumped right

into making sure we continued to offer high-quality recreation experiences to engage the community. With the development of e-Learning and e-Activities web pages, there is an abundance of programming and activities available to keep the mind and body healthy, learn new ideas, be creative, and have fun.

Among the opportunities are a Virtual Beer Tasting for Two for adults ages 21+. We partnered with several local craft breweries that put together beer-tasting kits for pick up. The brewers then share their reasoning behind their selections, history of their special brewing process and answer any questions participants might have—all virtually over a WebEx meeting!



Families can get in on the fun with Corona Clue, an outdoor spin on a classic mystery board game where participants try to solve the mystery of “Who Killed Dr. Corona?” Clues are located throughout several parks in the community. The object is to be the first to figure out who did it, the weapon he or she used and where the crime was committed.

While this may be a challenging time, the St. Charles Park District has continued to enrich the lives of our community, all while being safe. We’re all in this together.

**ERIKA YOUNG**  
**MARKETING MANAGER**  
**ST. CHARLES PARK DISTRICT**  
**ST. CHARLES, ILL.**

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## Finding Strength In Our Weakest Moments

Friday the 13th was the day our district shut down. Interestingly enough there was a California Park & Rec Society conference going on during that week and most of our full-time staff members were there. My director and I stayed behind to manage the department; the conference ended early and staff members were trying to get back home. The nightmare was beginning for all of us that week.

It was a fairly abrupt closure and although we had planned to close on March 17 and posted signs, etc., we ended up closing on March 16. The weekend of March 14 and 15, there was constant communication and decisions made and city department heads had to determine who was “essential” and needed to be in and who was to be at home. In the rec department, only three individuals were labeled essential—the department head and two supervisors, which included me.

We had an all-hands-on-deck staff meeting at lunch on March 16 and the news was given that all operations would cease until further notice. During the meeting, everyone was separated and spaced apart during the announcement that no staff would be in the building, only work if called in, but work from home if able to. After the meeting, a ton of things had to be done—communicate with part-time staff and contract employees and give them the bad news that they would not be working since we were canceling all programs. I had to develop work assignments for my full-time staff members who would not be coming into the office and try and give them enough work to do to keep them busy. We also had to contact customers and inform them of what was going on, although we had no idea how long it was going to be this way; it was difficult to really know what we were up against. Initially, thoughts were for 2 to 3 weeks, but that changed daily in that first week and thereafter.

Luckily, the city was generous and made up the difference for full-time employees who were unable to work 40 hours from home with a new policy. Everyone had to submit all the items they were working on every day and submit it with payroll. It was a tedious element to put down every little thing and the time it took you to do it. This practice lasted through April. In May, a new leave directive was put forth and then we did not have to itemize all the work on a daily basis. I think the hope was that we could submit the work for reimbursement to the federal government.



After the initial shock, things were happening daily with many changes. We were finalizing our budget at the time and so everything had to be looked at again. I think we made five or more attempts at a new budget putting in multiple scenarios. I was checking in with my staff members daily to see how they were doing and direct them on what to focus on. Like many others, we established a Zoom account and started having meetings to disseminate information. I had many long days through this initial phase, as typically it was only me and the director in the office, and I was still doing daily checks on the pools and building as well as helping with future plans. As March faded and April began, I worked with two other aquatic colleagues from different agencies to put together a re-opening plan for aquatic facilities. We each took different segments from general operations to apply to specific programs.

We completed this project in about a week and a half. We received great guidance from the CDC with available information and insight on what they were working on. We had multiple meetings and revisions, but were able to put together a fairly comprehensive set of guidelines that we submitted to the California Park & Recreation Society Aquatic Section who we developed it for. The plan was well received and dispersed throughout the state and was sent to other states as well. Interestingly enough, we submitted the plan to our county and it was vetted and approved two days later.

We felt we were on a great track and making plans to reopen. Unfortunately, as cases continued to climb in our county, we have not been able to implement any of it other than the camp aspects as swimming pools still are not open in our county. Luckily, other counties have adopted much of what we put forth.

Six weeks ago, we were able to offer day camps and we are now in our fourth and final week of our first session. Although we had high hopes of offering up to 60 slots for our first offering, we only got 19 registered for the first go-around. A whole new set of protocols and procedures had to be put in place and implemented, from limiting the number of campers to 12 per camp in their own dedicated space to daily health checks, wearing masks, cleaning every time camps went outside and came back in, washing hands constantly, using hand sanitizers even more. Through all the challenges, we still had a great first camp and as parents relayed their experience, the second session had more than 40 campers, which is a win at this point.

We also became a free food distributor. Initially, it was done as a trial for one Saturday where food boxes were distributed from a drive-up location. The need was so great at the first one that 100 boxes were gone in about 15 minutes, so we began doing it every two weeks on Saturdays and

added a senior center component twice a month. The need has subsided and now we are down to twice a month during the week. This was giving many of us a six-day work week for a while. In hindsight, this was a great community benefit and with so many out of work, there is no way to complain about it.

Like many agencies with continued county "Shelter in Place" orders being changed, things continue to be unsettling with not really having a clear path or knowing what will or will not be permissible. We take it one day at a time and continue to stay on top of what the governor and county public-health director dictates. As we have been one of the most restrictive counties, it has been difficult to watch the other counties around us open things up. But now, other counties are spiking with COVID-19 cases and are pausing and we continue to watch and wait and hope for the next phase of re-opening. This makes trying to plan difficult at best. All of this has had significant financial and emotional impact for staff members as well as customers and the community. We will not truly know the impact until this is over or at least some sense of "new normal" is realized.

As we look forward, all we can do is guess and hope for better days ahead. I look forward to trying to address the gaps that will be in place from limited schooling. I think of how we can program to meet the gaps for kids that truly need that social dynamic that they are lacking and provide them with an outlet. I think of the mental-health issues that have come up from the social isolation.

There is no way to truly express all that has occurred over the past four months and even though I included many things, there is a tremendous amount of things that I have forgotten about or seem trivial. Through it all, I do consider myself fortunate. I have been able to have a purpose and have been able to work through it all. I have been able to maintain my sanity by continuing to exercise and trying to keep to a general schedule. My family and I remain healthy and I have been able to

reconnect with many friends. This time has also afforded me the ability to challenge my thinking and get creative and think outside our normal modalities. I am reminded that we gain our greatest strength and growth from the challenges that we face and learn from it all.

**PETER BEIREIS**  
**SR. RECREATION SUPERVISOR**  
**NEWARK, CALIF.**

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## Feeding Residents' Needs

When COVID-19 broke out, it became quite clear the city of Revere Parks & Recreation Department was in for an adjustment. How could we service residents if we couldn't see them due to quarantine? In order to better serve the community and demonstrate value to maintain employment, part of our department volunteered to be re-assigned to the mayor's office for COVID response. I serve the parks and recreation department as the assistant director, but I was quickly assigned a new title—COVID-19 Outreach Coordinator. Our Sports & Fitness Coordinator became the city's delivery driver, delivering food and supplies to residents under medical quarantine or our most vulnerable seniors. One of our program coordinators became part of our call-taking team, managing interactions with constituents, tracking and facilitating their requests. Our other program coordinator joined the food efforts and even our director jumped in for a time. It was an all-hands-on-deck moment and we answered the call.

My job was to assist city department heads involved in human services such as, Elder Services, Veterans' Affairs, the Commission on Disabilities, Homeless Outreach, and others, in their efforts of combating COVID-19. The city expected me to work with each department, synthesize information, report back to the mayor, and coordinate our public response.

As the Outreach Coordinator, I led the effort in organizing an emergency-response team that recruited over 400 volunteers, city staff members, and community stakeholders. The team was organized into sub-groups to help manage food insecurities, youth issues, financial impact and housing, wellness, mental health and trauma, small business relief, communications and support for new immigrants. For a full list of the team's responsibilities and impact, visit <https://www.revere.org/departments/public-health-division/coronavirus>.

Food was the biggest focus. Thanks to the team's efforts, the city now receives and distributes more than 60,000 pounds of food each week to residents.

• **Grocery Delivery:** The team quickly decided that the best way to fight a pandemic was to keep people home and curb movement. We developed a grocery-delivery system using city staff members (from the parks and recreation department) and

volunteers, combined with community food sources that we scouted, identified, and secured to deliver food and supplies to the most vulnerable residents or those under medical quarantine. The food-delivery program is available Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

• **Pop-Up Food Service Program:** This program brings fresh fruit, vegetables, and dairy products to residents. Pop-ups are held Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday at Rumney Marsh Academy. Supplies are distributed until they run out. We did so well in our efforts that this program now distributes 320 boxes of food to residents three days a week.

• **Grab-and-Go Meal Service:** The team really stepped up to launch this service over a weekend, which was no small feat. It's now open to all on Tuesdays and Fridays from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. at the Rumney Marsh Academy. On Tuesdays, residents can pick up three days of meals and on Fridays residents can pick up five days of meals. To date, nearly 100,000 meals have been distributed.

• **Dinner Meals:** Learning that the food pantry was void of dinner options, the emergency-response team secured a community partnership to provide dinners to residents on Wednesday evenings. Sponsored by Off Their

Plate & World Central Kitchen, ready-to-eat dinners are offered by Pagu Restaurant at the food pantry at Rumney Marsh Academy. Individual and family portions are available every Wednesday from 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Moving forward, the team remains committed to service as a parks and recreation professionals as well as helping the community deal with this public-health emergency. We have canceled all special events moving forward and I don't anticipate them returning until the summer of 2021.

We are strictly monitoring who is in and out of indoor facilities and recreation programs to better serve contact tracing methods should an outbreak occur.



**CHARLES GIUFFRIDA**  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
REVERE PARKS & RECREATION  
REVERE, MASS.

## Modified But Moving Forward

**W**e were very fortunate to have city leadership that believed in keeping their people working through this time.

We are pretty much back to full staffing levels. We do have a few part-time and unfilled full-time positions that are still frozen, but that is very minimal. I worked at home for a few months, but I am back in office now. Our parks are certainly used more than they were before, but we are keeping up with everything just fine.

Many programs and special events have been cancelled and there will likely be more in the future. However, we are trying to be creative and come up with new ways to still move forward with many of our programs and events. We've moved some outdoors, limited the size, required masks, etc.

Everything is different in regard to planning, but we have the best, most creative team who are stepping up to the challenge and still finding ways to engage our community digitally, or in person with modifications. Our senior center is currently closed. Rentals remain limited based on the governor's orders. Special events have seen the biggest impact, but again, we're finding new ways to deliver these in a modified format.



**MICHAEL MASHBURN, MPA, CPRP**  
**DIRECTOR OF PARKS & RECREATION**  
**FARMERS BRANCH, TEXAS**

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## Lake Lottery

We opened the lakes back in late May with limited operations and capacities in order to meet state and local social-distancing requirements. The only way we were able to do this fairly was to offer a lottery system. Our two lakes are open Friday through Monday, 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., so that limits use even further.

Everyone is required to use the lottery system to be entered for a chance to obtain a permit. Lotteries run from 12 a.m. to 6 p.m. the day before the desired launch or bank fishing day. For example, if someone wants to enter for a chance to obtain a permit on Sunday, they would text the number on Saturday between 12 a.m. and 6 p.m. Those who are randomly selected are sent a text once the lottery closes at 6 p.m.

These are the instructions for texting:

Text “LM Launch” to 31996 to be entered for a personal motorized boat launch permit at Lake Michie.

Text “LR Bank Fish” to 31996 to be entered for a bank fishing permit at Little River Lake.

Permits are good only for the date and location for which they were issued.

Here’s what is currently available at each lake:

### Lake Michie

- Only open for personal boat launches and bank fishing.
- Non-motorized boat launches and bank fishing are on a first-come, first-served basis. The first-come, first-served canoe and kayak launches are car top only. The trailered canoes and kayaks need to go through the lottery.
- Personal motorized boat launches require a permit through a lottery system.
- No rentals are available.

### Little River

- Only open for bank fishing.
- Bank fishing require a permit through a lottery system.
- No rentals are available.

**LAUREN MCKINNIS**  
SENIOR MARKETING ANALYST  
PARKS AND RECREATION  
DURHAM, N.C.

## A Shift In Customers

As the pandemic began to spread across the U.S., we monitored the situation closely at Pilot Rock/R.J. Thomas Manufacturing Co. and developed our response. Initially, this included additional sanitation measures and social distancing for our crew. We are fortunate that our facilities—office and factory—are spacious enough to make this possible. Over time, these safety measures evolved to include daily health checks, masks, sanitizers, and restricted access to the campus. As of this writing, no one at R.J. Thomas Mfg. has tested positive for the virus. We are thankful for that!

The virus was slow to gain a foothold in Iowa, and it helps that we are located in a rural area of the state. We were never required to shut down, so our factory has been able to run at full capacity. And we are busy. With so many people around the nation ordered to shelter at home, many of our traditional government and commercial customers were idled. Previous bids and quotes were put on hold for the duration. But all these folks at home apparently turned to online shopping to keep busy. And shop they have! We have received hundreds of orders every week from various online outlets. The biggest effect of

COVID-19 on our business has been a dramatic shift from government and commercial customers to retail customers. Instead of shipping truckload-size orders, we are shipping truckloads of individual orders. Our traditional customers spent the spring coping with facility shutdowns and shifting budget dollars to other immediate needs. We don't expect to see them back at normal volume this year, but hope everyone is back to "normal" next spring.

Until then, we are working to keep our crew safe, and to serve our customers of all types. The parks and recreation industries have a lot to offer during a crisis like this, and we are proud to be a part of it. We will get through this ... together!

**BOB SIMONSEN**  
**MARKETING MANAGER**  
**RJ THOMAS MFG. CO., INC.**  
**CHEROKEE, IOWA**



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## COVID-ifying Programs

We are cancelling special events for the time being, then postponing or modifying everything else. I don't like to use the word "cancel." We are "COVID-ifying" our existing programs to make sure participants are as safe as possible!

We're going through program by program, COVID-ifying everything and

making things safe for participants. We're also getting creative with new virtual programming including e-Sports tournaments and virtual clinics via social media.

Unfortunately, we've lost access to our joint-use school gyms. By not having access to those gyms, the only facility we have is our rec center. That will house all

of our programs, so we are not allowing outside rentals or outside programming.

**BEN BENSHOOF, CYSA  
RECREATION FACILITY MANAGER  
HUNTERSVILLE RECREATION CENTER  
HUNTERSVILLE, N.C.**

## Mental-Health Check

Looking back, the abrupt move to working from home seemed unreal, like it was not a long-term impact. That was three months ago. When the lockdown happened, it became an odd reality. One which turned the spare bedroom into an office as we went from all working away from the home to all three of us working at home. There were conference calls and deadlines, new tasks which were all COVID-related (who's where, doing what, impact on programs, customers confused/upset, etc.). The enormity of this all on the human psyche was not fully understood personally until the work day was over and the only movement in the house was to another room. No going anywhere. No hanging out with friends. Calming family members who were worried about elderly parents. The strong one ... yeah sure ... that became me. Well that, too, took its toll. Before I knew it, I woke up one morning and found myself in total emotional despair. Why? I have a job, a place to live, food to eat—there are so many out there who would give anything just for one of those things on my list, so why am I sad all of a sudden? I had ignored the mental side of my stress. We, in my household, are very fortunate. We have jobs as we are all essential workers (well for now that is). I know so many who have been financially and emotionally impacted by this pandemic. Unfortunately, I also have had three "too-close-to-home" casualties of this disease. I have now found that I work more productively at home, however, will enjoy it more once the balance has been somewhat restored to being able to "leave" work and go say "hello" to friends and family after work.

The struggle with the visitors to the parks has been ... weird ... I cannot think of another term. There are the violators, the public policing of violators, the ones who just seem to not know. No matter how we get the word out, there are issues. The biggest challenge is after the governor says what can open, the next day there are emails and voice mails all asking, "why aren't you open; the governor said we should have \_\_\_\_\_ open." The process to open areas which are in the "now-allowed" phase is much longer than the light switch those stuck at home believe it to be.



It is hard to meet the demand and follow all the guidelines we were given moments before, and do it fast enough to please everyone.

Looking ahead, we have cancelled programming and rentals as well as special events through the month of June as of now, more to come as we learn more. Given we are in a modified Phase 1, it is fluid. Planning is a struggle as we have to virtually go through our facilities and view them in a different light. Capacity, activities that can actually happen, who and how many can enter where and exit where? What ages can understand social distancing? So many questions—all of which we are asking ourselves.

There are so many things being asked of staff members during a time when emotions are high and uncertain. I have found that being aware of self-care and the need for a mental health check is important.

**JULIE CROSS  
BELLVUE, WASH.**