

Parks and Recreation

Phil Blasko, Director

Thanks to the commitment of our full time and seasonal staff, the Mishawaka Parks Department took on the challenges of 2020 and continually found ways to engage with community through programming, events, and enrichment. We are very thankful for the trust our residents put in us this year in keeping their safety in mind when offering opportunities to enjoy everything the Parks Department had to offer.

We kicked off the summer with the Mishawaka Farmers Market at its new home at the Ironworks Plaza. The change in location led to increased attendance by vendors and the community. In 2020, the Market ran for 15 weeks on Sundays from 11 am – 3 pm. We started with 20 vendors and ended our season with 40 rotating vendors.



Ironworks Plaza



Farmer's Market

The Mishawaka Parks and Recreation Department successfully cut ribbons on three parks projects in 2020: Twin Branch Park, the Ball Band Biergarten, and Veterans Plaza. The Twin Branch Park project consisted of ping pong tables, cornhole boards, and the first permanent Pickleball courts in the city; as well as an upgrade to the basketball court, two new pavilions, and a new restroom. Through this new project we witnessed record breaking numbers in our fall youth soccer program that takes place at Twin Branch Park.



Twin Branch Park Pickleball courts

The one-of-a-kind Ball Band Biergarten allowed the department to engage in ways we have never witnessed before. Thanks to community partnerships, we were able to provide COVID-compliant activities for people to enjoy. We hosted Happier Hours on Friday and Saturday evenings, the 1K Café on Monday mornings, concerts on Wednesday evenings, and Food Truck Fridays.



Ball Band Biergarten

The relocation and restoration of the Soldiers and Sailors Civil War Monument became the centerpiece of the new Veterans Plaza at Battell Park. This project fits perfectly into our most historic park and allows us to pay tribute to the great history of veterans in our community.



Veterans Plaza at Battell Park

Through a collaboration with School City of Mishawaka the Parks Department was pleased to announce the award of \$191,500 by the United States Department of Education to target internet connectivity deserts in our Mishawaka community that negatively impact children who are learning remotely. This grant will be used to provide public wifi in Mishawaka Parks and Comcast Internet Essentials for families who qualify.

In keeping with the goal of community buy-in, the Hums Park improvements is one that brings teens and city government together. This project focused on bringing something into the community that would encourage teens to interact with our community. Through a partnership with the Parks Department and the Mayor Dave Wood Youth Advisory Council, the first teen centric park in the state of Indiana is coming in early Spring of 2021. The park will consist of cornhole boards, ping pong table, gaga pit, hammock station, new playground, walking paths, fruit orchard, and a Ninja Warrior Course. Giving the youth a voice is something we strive for in designing a park and this renovation will benefit generations to come.

Special Events and Activities

Our annual Easter Egg Hunt became a virtual egg hunt. People were asked to submit their child's Easter decorations. The top 15 decorations were selected to win prize baskets that were delivered to the community. Our annual fall event became a virtual Pumpkin Carving Contest. Winners won bags of candy from the Parks Department. Finally, we did a free stocking hand out. 200 kids received a free stocking from the Parks Department. We offered different virtual fitness challenges, cooking classes, and jokes throughout the year.

This summer we focused on free community activities. We introduced a Story Walk that traveled between Central Park, Merrifield Park, and Mary Gibbard Park. A children's book was set up page by page on yard signs so people could walk and enjoy the story. The community loved the program and we will bring it back in 2021. Thanks to our partnership with the Mishawaka Penn Harris Public Library, we featured 4 different books. We also created various scavenger hunts for people to complete at various parks. Almost every Mishawaka Park had its own personalized walking map and scavenger hunt.

This summer we offered a ton of opportunities to get out and get active – both free and charged. We were still able to host our brand-new Virtual Riverwalk 5K. People would sign up for the 5K and have a month to complete the 5K on their own time. Many people expressed that it was their first 5K ever! Thanks to our community partnerships, we were able to offer The Bar Method, Pure Barre, Zumba Toning, and Family Fitness at Central Park. We were also able to offer Aerobics and The Bar Method at Battell Park. All of these outdoor fitness classes were free to attend. The community really appreciated a safe way to get out and get active this past summer. We look forward to these classes growing in the future.

The ever-popular Summer Concert Series ran for the second half of the summer. We painted social distancing circles and posted signage to encourage people to follow Indiana guidelines. Concerts ran at Battell Park, Central Park, and the Ball Band Biergarten. The community loved that we found a way to safely run concerts. All concerts were well attended.

This summer we opened the new Ball Band Biergarten. Thanks to community partnerships, we were able to provide COVID-compliant activities for people to enjoy. We had Happier Hours on Friday and Saturday evenings, the 1K Café on Monday mornings, concerts on Wednesday evenings, and Food Truck Fridays in the fall. We are excited to continue this programming, and more, in 2021.

2020 saw the move of the Mishawaka Farmers Market from Central Park to Ironworks Plaza. The change in location led to increased attendance by vendors and the community. In 2019, the Market ran for 15 weeks on Sundays from 11 am – 3 pm. We started with 20 vendors and ended our season with 40 rotating vendors. In 2020, the Market ran for 20 straight weeks on Sundays from 11 am – 3 pm. We had 19 season vendors and 22 rotating weekly vendors. The Market featured local farmers, crafters, and bakers. There truly was something for everyone. This was a popular program not only for vendors, but the citizens of Mishawaka. The Farmers Market is quickly growing into a Mishawaka staple – as of January 2021 we have 30 confirmed season vendors. We cannot even begin to express how excited we are to grow the Market! Be on the lookout for new additions to the market in 2021.

Landscape Division

A vision of the Landscape & Garden Club students came to life this past year through the new Mishawaka Education Foundation Community Greenhouse. Garden Club Students and Young Adult Services were able to utilize our new Greenhouse to help us produce a plethora of annual and perennial flowers to add an extra splash of color around Mishawaka. The department planted more than double our usual number of annual flowers this past year totaling over 450 flats that made their way to our downtown, parks, and Riverwalk. Grandma Barkers Garden around the outside of the Greenhouse grew a wide range of you-pick vegetables that aided several local families during the summer months and offered yet another new way for us to engage with our community. We are all excited to see what comes next out of this incredible space.

Camp and Community Engagement

With not knowing the future of in-person camp, the department came up with the idea of four innovative Camp in a Box virtual programs from April through May of 2020 as in-person options for programming came to a stop due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We assembled the materials for 5 craft and 5 science activities for children to complete at home. We used Facebook live to guide families through the completion of each activity. We are proud of our creative response to the pandemic and the ability to try new things to continue to positively engage with our community.

Adventure Day Camp operated for 8 of the 9 planned weeks during the summer of 2020. The first week of camp was canceled due to COVID-19 and Governor Holcomb's phased reopening plan for the state of Indiana. The Big Explorer program at Merrifield Park/Castle Manor and the Lil' Explorer program at the Battell Community Center served 131 campers and had no known COVID-19 cases. This was due to the 23 dedicated counselors and site supervisors who followed all the required precautions, social distancing measures, and mask requirements. The restrictions in place due to COVID-19 required us to decrease our enrollment capacity and eliminate one week of camp. This meant a slight decrease in revenue from 2019. Despite revenue decreases, camp served a vital role in supporting the community last summer, particularly for parents who were going back to work and needed a safe and affordable place for their children.

We introduced a 2 day Fall Day Camp at Merrifield Park this year with a successful enrollment. The Fall Day Camp was held over the School City Mishawaka break and provided a place for working parents to send their kids for some outside fun. It is something we can continue to offer and grow as the community comes to expect this option for their children each Fall.

Despite the pandemic, we were able to put together a sponsorship guide and continue the partnerships with individuals and businesses in Mishawaka. We secured \$22,000 in sponsorships for our 2021 events, programs, and activities. We continue to seek partnerships with the community that allow us to provide diverse programs and events.

The Mishawaka Parks and Recreation Foundation was officially announced to the public in November with the purpose of engaging the community to benefit Mishawaka Parks and Recreation in order to further the charitable and educational programs and projects of the city.

Recreation Department

With the spring soccer season canceled in May 2020, youth t-ball was the first youth sports league we were able to offer. The league consisted of 134 kids. 16 teams participated in the league which was happily received by parents looking for recreational activities for their children. Track & Field was held in July with 80 kids participating in practices and meets held at Mishawaka High School. Moving into fall and expecting to see lower registration numbers from the previous years due to the pandemic, it was a pleasant surprise to see slight increases in registration numbers for our fall soccer and flag football leagues. Even with being closed for almost 2 months and not collecting disc golf admissions, George Wilson Park experienced a boost in revenue brought in for the 2020 disc golf season.

Merrifield Complex

Merrifield Ice Rink opened for the season on December 11th. This season we focused on adapting to ensure safety and peace of mind for the patrons that came to enjoy the facility by creating a new outdoor seating area. New this season we offered a private birthday party rental that allowed the public to rent the entire rink for 1-hour. In addition to our private birthday parties and public skate hours, Irish Youth Hockey League utilizes the facility four nights a week for their practices and games. Two nights per week, the ice rink hosted adult pick-up hockey. Despite the uncertain times we are facing, the community utilized the facility and enjoyed the ability to get out and have fun!

The Battell Community Center

The Battell Community Center remained dedicated to providing organized programming for the development of our children and teens, activities and services for adults and senior citizens and affordable recreational, social, and educational activities to community members of all ages. Some of our reimagined community efforts this year included a school supply drive, free flu shots, multiple food drives, free virtual art classes, teen nights, a community yard sale and more! We partnered with our good friends at Crossroads Community Church to Stuff the Bus. The supplies collected were then given to School City of Mishawaka to help supplement classroom supplies throughout the 2020 school year. During the drive, \$1,929 in cash donations were raised which Crossroads Community Church then matched for an additional cash donation of \$3,858! During our You Are Loved Week we collected 621 pounds of food, enough food for 478 meals benefiting the Mishawaka Food Pantry. Table or Treat was a spooky success with 46 local business and nonprofit groups passing out candy from their decorated tables along the Riverwalk. We enjoyed this new location so much we have decided to keep it there in 2021. Some additional programming included Daddy Daughter/Mother Son Dances, Glow Dodgeball, Teen Game Night, Quarantine Kids Art Club, and a virtual Gingerbread House Contest. We will continue to work with a wide variety of partners and advocates for a combined quality effort. This year's partnerships with School City Mishawaka, Crossroads Community Church, The Young Adult Program, REAL Services, Mishawaka Public Library and St. Joe Health Systems have proven to be not only successful, but mutually beneficial to members of our community.

Eberhart Golf Course Maintenance

Maintaining the golf course during the 2020 season had challenges as well as successes. Protecting our employees and the public played a major role in how tasks were done. Normal maintenance

practices were performed when Covid-19 mandated closing the course and continued after the public received the green light to use the course. Measures, such as sanitizing and distancing, were taken to provide a safe and enjoyable space throughout the season. New mowers were purchased to increase the quality and efficiency of our efforts. Improvements were made to several areas of the course to promote better health of the turf as well as the experience of our customers. Careful planning and implementation of safe practices allowed our crew and patrons to have a productive and pleasurable golf season.

Eberhart Golf Course

The golf course generated nearly 25,000 rounds in 2020 which is an increase of 7,000 2019. Although we were operating during a pandemic, the golf course remained busy increasing revenues by almost \$40,000 over 2019. 2020 was the best year we have had since 2016 generating over \$426,000 in revenue.