



BUFFALO
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DISTRICT



News Release

Contact: Mike Terson
Superintendent of Communications and Marketing
Buffalo Grove Park District
Phone: 847.850.2116
Fax: 847.459.5741
Email: mike@bgparks.org

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Buffalo Grove Park District Receives 2 State Awards

(Buffalo Grove Park District, Buffalo Grove, IL) - On November 12, the Buffalo Grove Park District received two Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD) Best of the Best Awards at their 2020 Awards Gala (virtual this year); the categories that the Park District received awards in were Arts in the Park and The Power of Parks.

The Arts in the Park Award recognizes agencies (park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation, and special recreation agencies) that support the arts, and partner with artists and arts organizations to enhance the quality of life in their communities.

Buffalo Grove Park District's newly renovated Community Arts Center features a state-of-the-art theater, studios, and an art gallery. The facility is home to the arts in Buffalo Grove, and is managed by five full-time staff, and over 40 artists and experts. Collectively, they offer top-notch arts programming that spans across dance, theatre, music, visual arts, instruction, and special recreation.

Under normal, non-pandemic conditions, the Community Arts Center offers multiple performance opportunities yearly that bring in around 10,800 guests per season. These opportunities provide hundreds of participants of all ages and abilities the chance to develop and perform, while offering the community a range of affordable entertainment. When COVID-19 appeared, and the arts landscape changed dramatically, the Park District's team pivoted overnight to offer arts virtually for the first time. Programs offered included dance, theatre, at-home activities, special events, camps, camp counselor-in-training programs, mindfulness check-ins, cast reunions, trivia, and master classes with national artists.

"I am so proud of our entire team, who have all stepped up to do everything we can to help keep our community doing what they love during this pandemic," said Buffalo Grove Park District superintendent of recreation, Erika Strojinc. She added, "Commissioner Rick Drazner, who passed away suddenly last year was our biggest cheerleader; and, he would have been so proud to see our District recognized at the state level like this. He

was instrumental in so many of the things we were able to do for the community in regards to this incredible facility, which is why we dedicated this award to him. His memory is still at the forefront of what we do; and, we want to live up to the expectations and vision he had for the community."

Aside from District programs, the Community Arts Center also serves as a performance venue for a number of cultural groups and organizations in the Buffalo Grove area. They work with a variety of Russian, Chinese and Indian performance troupes, as well as a local synagogue to provide a space for their communities and thriving cultural programs and services. In addition, the District works closely with the Northwest Special Recreation Association to produce the exceptional Broadway Buddies, Choral Buddies, and Dance Flow programs. These programs are wildly popular, and provide meaningful experiences for participants, staff and audiences alike.

The other IAPD Best of the Best award Buffalo Grove Park District received was The Power of Parks Award. This award is intended to recognize an IAPD member park district, forest preserve, conservation, recreation or special recreation agency that displayed innovative and insightful ways to adapt their programs, events and services to best meet the needs of their residents in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With facilities shut down for months, and staff forced to work from home, the Buffalo Grove Park District figured out a way to bring recreational opportunities to residents virtually. They quickly put together a variety of online offerings in areas such as fitness, e-gaming, balloon and animal making, magic, drawing, sports skills, dance, theatre, music and camps. And, with instant budget cuts due to program fee revenue suddenly coming to a halt, the District's marketing department moved from mailing seasonal printed catalogs, to creating monthly online catalogs. They also developed an email newsletter to keep residents informed about program opportunities, and updated on the ever-changing restrictions being implemented from the state.

Once the restrictions started being relaxed, and things began opening back up, the Park District created socially distanced events, such as summer concerts, movies in the park, a kite fly, a drive in movie, and a virtual 5K/10K/25K race. At many of the outdoor events, such as concerts and movies, the District provided social distancing by painting over one hundred 14' circles on the grass to create safe space for families.

As indoor facilities were able to reopen, the Park District staff developed a comprehensive reopening plan. And, as fall approached, the Park District worked with the local school districts to create the Pod Squad – remote e-learning locations at Park District buildings for working parents while schools are closed.

"I tend not to throw hyperbolic adjectives around; but, the way this Park District's team stepped up in a time of crisis and uncertainty when this pandemic first began – when I look back at it now – it was truly exceptional," said Buffalo Grove Park District executive director, Ryan Risinger. He added, "This is one of the best communities out there that a parks and recreation professional can want to work in; and, that holds true even during a pandemic. When you put a group of professionals like we have together, and challenge them to do what seems impossible, and then see how the community responds with such enthusiasm and appreciation for the hard work, it makes doing what we do all the more worthwhile. Sometimes it takes the adversity of a pandemic to help us realize how lucky we are to be in this community, and what we all can accomplish together."

As the Park District begins to make adjustments once again as we move back into phase 3 mitigation, residents can visit the Park District's website at bgparks.org for updates on facility limitations and closings, as well as program cancelations.

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