

Parks and Recreation Department

Phil Blasko, Superintendent

Our focus for 2017 was on reinventing ourselves through community engagement, partnerships, and new programming. We are proud to report that the students from Twin Branch School were able to cut the ribbon on a brand new playground at Twin Branch Park, featuring inclusive play for kids of all abilities.



The students from LaSalle Elementary had the opportunity to act as architects and were able to share their ideas to help design the new Mary Gibbard Park. The renovations will feature a new splash pad, inclusive playground, BMX bike park, large pavilion, sports fields, and a new restroom. Lastly, the renovations to Merrifield Park will bring new life to Castle Manor, add new pavilions and extend the Riverwalk.



Our departments, focus on reinventing ourselves has also given us the opportunity to offer an Adopt-a-Park program, gardening club, seven new youth sports leagues, monthly Brunch and Classic movies, indoor summer day camp, preschool programming, our first annual Independence Day Celebration and Haunted House. Through new programs and events, we are now reaching our community, from preschool age children to senior citizens. We are proud to report that we have something for all ages and abilities at the Mishawaka Parks Department.

Partnerships

The department is excited to report new partnerships with the following organizations: Crossroads Community Church, Young Adults program through School City of Mishawaka, The Indiana DNR, The Village at Arborwood, American Senior Communities, Mishawaka Business Association, Comcast Cares Day, National Fitness Campaign, and Patronicity. These partners have brought new life, opportunities, and programs and events, allowing community engagement at a level never before experienced.

Battell Community Center

The Community Center has also continued with the overall vision for the Parks Department by expanding on new special events, youth and adult activities, partnerships, sports, and evening and weekend rentals. We're pleased the community is becoming more aware of the Battell Community Center and all that it has to offer. As a result, our evening rental space has become quite limited, with groups consistently utilizing the facility. We are active on Facebook and Instagram, allowing us to significantly increase event and program visibility, helping us to better reach and interact with the community.

The newly designed special events have not only grown in selection, but in attendance as well. The new Battell Community Center's "Spooky Night" was massively popular and benefited the Mishawaka Food Pantry. Our Trunk or Treat and The Haunted House proved to be a fun, safe and affordable alternative to trick-or-treating door-to-door. Candy was passed out by local businesses and city departments. A few additional special events include the Mom-to-Mom Sale, Small Business Saturday Craft Market, Family Fun Nights, Brunch and a Classic Movie, Grandparents and Me Series, and National Coffee with a Cop Day.

In June, we kicked off the new Lil' Explorers Adventure Day Camp! This was the perfect first camp experience and proved to be a nurturing introductory program for preschoolers. Our camp counselors did a wonderful job embracing the creativity and imagination of each child to create an inventive and inclusive environment.

Our partnership with Crossroads Community Church has been mutually beneficial, as they've become greatly involved in every event the Parks Department has hosted thus far. We look forward to continually building and maintaining these positive partnerships within the community.

Merrifield Complex

The Merrifield Complex hit the ground running with new events and programs, as well as changes to the pool season fee structure. This pool season was kicked off by hosting the 5th Annual Blazin' Buffalo Swim Invitational. New to this pool season was our DJ night, where the community danced in the water and on the pool deck, the showing of *Moana* with the screen visible from inside the pool, and the birthday party area. All of these events and additions helped to raise our admission and concession revenue compared to 2016. This year, we were able to cut back on our seasonal costs greatly. Our very popular Central Park Splash Pad was able to stay open until September 17th.

The Merrifield Ice Rink closed early in February, due to the warm temperatures, but December turned out to be a successful month. Utilizing a new combination season pass with George Wilson Tubing Hill has given our community the opportunity to visit both amenities by purchasing one season pass. We were able to accomplish all of this, while also having no major injuries reported for patrons or employees.

Recreation

With the expansion of the youth sports programing, we are experiencing positive momentum in the recreation division. The new energy is coming from the implementation of new t-ball, cross country, flag football, winter skills clinics, volleyball, and three soccer leagues. These new programs have grown in popularity, allowing us to connect with school age children, a population that we have worked hard to involve more consistently.

Special Events

Our first ever Independence Day Celebration with a crowd of nearly 10,000 people was held at Central, Beutter and Kamm Island Parks. The day-long festival was filled with events and activities for people of all ages. The Mishawaka Heritage Festival paid homage to the ethnic, religious, and industrial heritage of the Mishawaka Community and featured local musicians, food vendors, and a new decorated bike parade. Our Winterfest experienced one of its largest crowds, which featured a new winter wonderland for Santa and the Elf Spaghetti Eating Contest. The Summer Concert Series was as popular as ever, featuring free family-friendly music at Beutter Park, Battell Park Bandshell, and the Eberhart Golf Course Clubhouse Deck. We are excited to offer our Thursday evening concerts this year at Central Park.



The Department partnered with local businesses to bring the first ever Small Business Saturday event. The new event concluded with the lighting of the Christmas Tree and the arrival of Santa. We also had the opportunity to host the Lineman’s Rodeo at Central Park. The Lineman’s Rodeo brought in teams from across the state to compete to find which city had the “best of the best” lineman.

Landscape Division

In 2017, the Landscaping and Urban Forestry Division accomplished many significant goals, but three achievements stand out above the rest. The Department created an official Adopt-a-Park program to engage the community in park stewardship and conservation. We had over fifteen organizations and several individuals take part in a variety of tasks around the City and we expect this program to continue to grow and expand this year. Our most significant partnership in the Adopt-a-Park program is with the Young Adults program through School City of Mishawaka. This program, working with special needs students, has yielded rewarding work experiences with the students involved in the program. Weekly job shadowing and projects engage these students in the community, help provide valuable work experience, and bring joy to both the students and Landscape staff.

Our partnership with School City of Mishawaka has allowed the Department to utilize the Greenhouse at Mishawaka High School. The Landscape and Gardening program started last year, allowing students to become involved in growing flowers, learn about horticulture, and become involved in various park projects such as our wildflower planting areas. Students in this program were able to learn a great deal and two of them came to work on the Landscape Staff last year. These three partnerships have allowed the Department to expand the scope of what can be done in a year without having to increase or strain our budget. Partnerships will continue to expand and grow in the years to come and are a rewarding way to engage the community in outdoor activism.

The Landscape Division partnered with Comcast Cares Day, bringing the community together to clean the parks along the Riverwalk. Over 300 volunteers gave their time and effort to clean debris, rake mulch, lay mulch, plant flowers and complete other jobs to prepare the parks for the summer season.

Eberhart-Petro Golf Course

The season began with the purchase of twenty-six new Club Car golf carts, featuring our new GPS system for a better experience on our course. The GPS system gives us the capabilities to not only play more often during rain events, but golfers may now order food from their cart. The Eberhart-Petro Golf Course installed nineteen new bentgrass greens, which will give a new fresh look and experience for our patrons. The newly sodded greens are a blend of grass varieties that will improve putting and be more disease and drought tolerant.

Park Board

The City’s Park and Recreation Board has continued its dedication and devotion to the city patrons as well as our agency. The Board’s passion and drive to meet the needs and desires of the community is proven through the continued growth of recreational programs offered each year. Through their guidance, recreation and special events will continue to evolve for people of all ages now and well into the future. Members of the Mishawaka Park Board for 2017 were:

2017 Board of Parks and Recreation	
Reg Wagle	President
John Coppens, Jr.	Vice President
Carolyn Teeter	Secretary
Ellen West	Member
Tony Violi	Member
Michael Faulkner	Member