

Mishawaka Parks and Recreation Department

Phil Blasko, Director

The Mishawaka Parks and Recreation Department celebrated ribbon cuttings at four new amenities in 2019; Mary Gibbard Park, Central Park Stage, Mishawaka Education Foundation Community Greenhouse, and Veterans Plaza. The newly renovated Mary Gibbard Park is a project that was designed by the students at LaSalle Elementary. The park features a new playground with a number of inclusive amenities for children of all abilities, as well as a new restroom building, BMX bike course, splash pad, pavilion, born learners walking trail, and open play area. By allowing the youth to have a voice in the park design, it not only brought new energy to the neighborhood, but provided them with a sense of ownership of the park.



Mary Gibbard Park

The first Thursday of June kicks off the summer concert series every year for the Mishawaka Parks Department. This year's concert featured a new event stage at Central Park. It enabled us to bring more than just music this summer. Through many new partnerships, the stage featured Story Time in the Park, fitness classes, Color Run, Zoo to You program, and church services.

The leadership of the students in the Mishawaka Garden Club enabled us to successfully complete our second ever Patronicity Campaign and build the new Mishawaka Education Foundation Community Greenhouse. Generous donations from the Mishawaka Education Foundation, service groups, and businesses played a substantial role in the completion of this project. It was featured at the Indiana Parks and Recreation State Conference, showcasing how unique it was for being funded, built and programmed by the students at Mishawaka High School!



Central Park Stage

The greenhouse transformed an unused open grass area into a vibrant space for all residents to enjoy.

The opening of the newly constructed Veterans Plaza is the first step in many changes at Battell Park that will honor the city's veterans. This initial phase of the project included relocating and restoring the Soldiers and Sailors Civil War Monument and creating a gathering place with a flag array honoring each branch of the military. The Flag Raising Ceremony was an event that allowed our city the opportunity to celebrate the things we should be thankful for.

We believe that the Mishawaka Parks and Recreation Department plays a vital role in the enhancement of the quality of life for residents of Mishawaka. Our commitment to engage with the community through new events, programs, and activities has been the primary focus of our department. This year, we proved that our positive momentum is here to stay. We are proud to report that we have provided opportunities for all ages and abilities at the Mishawaka Parks Department.

Special Events and Activities

One of the largest areas of growth in 2019 was in park events. The parks department pushed the envelope from having 36 events in 2018 to over 50 events in 2019! Thanks to an increase in partnerships with local organizations and departments, we were able to host an average of one event per week, with many weeks offering up to 3 events. These events ranged from massive city-wide events to small family-focused gatherings. We were thrilled to offer a variety of options to the citizens of Mishawaka. Our Easter Egg Hunt was a huge success – for the second year in a row a helicopter dropped thousands of pieces of candy over a field filled with 30,000 eggs. Thousands of children left this event with a smile on their face. At Kids to Parks Day, we were able to help provide fun and free food for over 700 children, thanks to partnerships with local organizations and churches. Independence Day Celebration, July 4th Fireworks, Senior’s Night Out, and the 80’s Color Run all experienced a growth in attendance.

The 80’s Color Run continues to be one of our most popular events – with people of all ages getting dressed in their best 80’s gear to walk and run through bursts of color. That event is all about living it up, and Mishawaka does not disappoint. One of our biggest new attractions was our Foam Machine – families loved the good, clean bubble fun! We introduced new events that will continue into 2020: Tent the Island, Wags of Welcome, and Slide the Hill. Tent the Island was our first ever camping trip in the Parks.



Slide the Hill

This year we are bringing it back and giving Mishawaka a taste of good old-fashioned outdoor fun.

At Wags of Welcome, every pet was either adopted or had a request to adopt form filled out. Slide the Hill was a huge success! We had two 300-foot-long slip-n’-slides that launched from the teepee at George Wilson Park. Foam, a DJ, food, and great vibes made for one of the best days ever! We are excited to bring it back in 2020, bigger and better than last year.

We introduced the Mishawaka Farmers Market at Central Park. This is the first ever Farmers Market to launch in Mishawaka! The Market ran from May 12 through September 15 on Sundays from 11am-3pm. We started with 20 vendors and ended our season with 40 rotating vendors. The Market featured local farmers, crafters, and bakers. There truly was something for everyone. We also gave non-profits an opportunity to participate, offered free kids classes cooking with the Health Department, and frequently had live music. This was a popular program not only for vendors, but the citizens of Mishawaka. The success of the market inspired us to extend the season to 20 weeks in 2020. The Farmers Market is quickly growing into a Mishawaka staple. We cannot

even begin to express how excited we are to grow the Market! Be on the lookout for a new mascot in 2020.

We also offered weeknight entertainment for those who couldn't wait for the weekend to get out and explore. Our Summer Concert series was as popular as ever. We provided free family friendly entertainment three nights a week for the majority of the summer. Mondays were at Battell,



Central Park Concert

Wednesdays at Eberhart, and Thursdays at Central Park. This is a program that continues to be a great investment for our city. We also offered free fitness classes at least two nights per week, sometimes three. We provided Story Time in the Park. The popularity of the Story Times has prompted us to increase the frequency of that program to once per week this upcoming summer.

The Big Explorer's Camp experienced a record-breaking year in both attendance and revenue. Each themed week was at capacity. This program provides quality care, creative programming,

lunch, and entertainment for our campers at an incredibly affordable rate. For the first time ever, we offered parents the ability to sign their campers up for swim lessons and we took the campers to those lessons. We ventured to Potato Creek State Park for the first time ever and provided the campers with some hands-on nature learning. This is a program that has continued to grow since 2018 and is on-track to expand in 2020 and beyond.

Eberhart-Petro Golf Course

Although we lost nearly sixty days of golf at the start of spring, we were able to still generate nearly 18,000 rounds in 2019, increasing from the previous season by 2,000 rounds. With this increase in rounds, the golf course bounced back nicely, increasing revenue by \$31,000 over 2018. In placing our focus on engaging with the community, the course grew its participation through the Junior Program, outings and the Men's Metro.

Merrifield Complex

The summer aquatics season started with the 7th Annual Blazin' Buffalo Swim Invitation. Throughout the season, the pool saw a steady crowd of both residents and non-residents enjoying this great amenity. Focusing on expanding what we offer at the pool, we hosted multiple new special events throughout the season, including Neon Glow Swims, Dive-In Movie, and the 21 & Over Beach Bash. For the first time ever, we extended our season for weekend use until Labor Day. Our very popular Central Park Splash Pad was able to stay open from Memorial Day until mid-October.

On December 7th, Merrifield Ice Rink opened for the season to a large crowd at Winterfest. Free ice-skating was offered to everyone at the event. In addition to our public skate hours, Irish Youth Hockey League utilized the facility three nights a week for their practices and games. The growth in skating lessons has allowed us to reach more of the youth in our community. Two nights per week, the ice rink hosted adult and child pick-up hockey.

Landscape Division

The Mishawaka Education Foundation Community Greenhouse was the highlight of 2019 for the Landscape Department. This massive project was made possible by the hard work of the Landscape Department Staff, Mishawaka High School Landscape & Gardening Club, and financial contributions from over 77 patrons from across Mishawaka. This project stands out due to the involvement of our dedicated students in the Club that helped plan, fundraise, and construct the building, which opened in October. Surrounding the building are beautiful pollinator gardens, a community vegetable garden, a small fruit tree orchard, several raised garden beds and a picnic area.

This building allows the Parks Department to host our amazing Landscape & Gardening Club in a true greenhouse where we can expand the involvement of our students in educational and park stewardship activities. Several community partners and Park Staff are hosting monthly classes for the community in 2020. Our partners in the Young Adult Services program through School City of Mishawaka are learning how to tend to the plants and water them throughout the week. Plants and produce from the greenhouse will make their way to our Farmers Market, where students will help run a booth to support our club activities. This building has been a truly amazing project that shines as an example of what a strong community can accomplish when working together. We are excited to see how our programs grow and expand into this new building throughout 2020 and beyond.



MEF Greenhouse

Recreation

The Recreation Division experienced record-breaking participation with nearly four thousand participants. Two highlighted leagues are the soccer leagues and tee ball. The Soccer league doubled in size from the previous year and tee ball has tripled in participation since 2017, with over 300 participants in 2019. Our growth in recreation leagues has opened the door to new camps and clinics to keep kids involved in the offseason. By focusing on making sure kids come smiling and leave smiling, we believe our growth in recreation will continue for years to come.



Battell Community Center

The Battell Community Center is 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. Our daily and free rec clubs continue to meet the social needs of our Mishawaka residents.

Youth programming and special events have grown immensely over the past year. Youth Basketball, Soccer and Volleyball reached maximum participation in 2019, while delivering quality coaching from our wonderful volunteers. We will continue to work with a wide variety of partners and advocates for a combined quality effort. This year's partnerships with Crossroads Community Church, REAL Services, United Way, Mishawaka Public Library, St. Joe Health Systems, South Bend Civic Theater, 574 Theater and the Lions Club have proven to be not only successful, but mutually beneficial to members of our community. Building rentals continue to be in demand with auditorium rentals doubling in revenue from 2018.

This year's Halloween Spooktacular celebration took place over a six-day period as compared to the previous year's three-day period. The Halloween Spooktacular created big scares for a good cause. For the third year in a row, the Haunted House was a food drive benefiting the Mishawaka Food Pantry. Around 3,000 community members stopped by over the course of two weekends! The Spooktacular featured the Haunted House, Kids Fun House, Graveyard Walk, Trunk or Treat, inflatables and a DJ. Trunk or Treat was a huge success with over 35 local businesses and nonprofit groups handing out candy from their decorated trunks. Some additional popular special events included Teen Nerf Night, Daddy Daughter/Mother Son Dances, Grandparent and Me, Magical Moms, Fam-Fam Sale, Holiday Craft Fair, Family Fun Nights, and Chill with a Cop.