

Best Practices for Parks and Outdoor Recreation

Capstone Event – Notes

May 22, 2007

Park and Recreation Role's in Health and Wellness Presentation

Kathy Spangler, Director of National Partnerships (NRPA)

Healthy lifestyles, livable communities

Step Up to Health is a national campaign that recently completed a 37-city tour to foster more healthy lifestyles and livable communities by creating a shared dialogue, more effective partnerships and cooperative strategies between outdoor recreation providers and health professionals. We are facing a crisis of obesity in the U.S. today. This public health crisis impacts the quality of life and life expectancy of those affected by obesity, and challenges the capacity of government to cope with the overwhelming health care costs associated with this problem. The increasing trends in obesity are directly related to increasing trends of physical inactivity, and outdoor recreation providers are playing a more active and engaged role in promoting the connection between health and wellness and outdoor recreation.

Outdoor recreation providers should understand the public health model – the social-ecological model that encompasses society, community, organization, interpersonal, and the individual – and how we fit in to this model and leverage our assets in order to maximize opportunities for outdoor recreation. Where can we influence change? Essentially, it all boils down to individuals – knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of individuals. Interpersonal groups can encourage more healthful behaviors by influencing individuals to make good nutrition and physical activity choices. Organizations can also play a positive role by promoting better health and nutrition through school, places of employment, although this often requires changes to organizational policies and programs. At the community level, residents, groups and organizations can work together to improve nutrition and physical activity. Collaborative, comprehensive strategies are needed to influence societal change. Shifts in social norms and values do not occur overnight but require time, such as our national campaign to reduce smoking.

The NRPA model for health and livability includes social imperatives, shared values, strategic capabilities, organizational initiatives, and institutional capacity. Social imperatives are things with which we connect – shared values in the connectedness people feel with nature, things that matter to us, the common values to which others can relate versus the discipline. Strategic capabilities are about leveraging our assets – enriching or reinforcing the work we already do versus changing our work – parks and recreation have always promoted good health and livability, but we need to renew commitment to addressing obesity and health in the U.S.

Institutional capacity involves the seven Ps: P1 – People; P2 – Partnerships, realizing mutual benefits and value-added that can be achieved through outdoor recreation and public health partnerships; P3 – Programs and Services, such as employee wellness within

departments; P4 – Public Visibility, parks are billboards for health and we need to find ways to maximize the physical activity, as well as the mental and emotional benefits from park experiences; P5 – Places and Spaces, the value of multiple benefits, active recreation, neighborhood access, crown jewel; P6 – Policies and Practices, we have the ability to set policies and practices that encourage activity and participation. We have to adopt new behaviors and practices that are interconnected with what the community envisions, creating opportunities for people to live healthier lives – it is incremental step-by-step change; P7 – Performance Measures, we have to be able to show that this changes people’s attitudes, health, and participation, creating new opportunities to partner with university researchers and others.

This model can be replicated at the local and state levels. In fact, there are numerous examples of this work already being done at these levels. The key is to understand what are the systemic barriers and constraints to participation in outdoor recreation activity. Transportation barriers are the greatest, followed by a fear of the outdoors. These are multi-faceted barriers that are the result of the fact that physical activity has been engineered out of our lives through the built environment, technological developments encouraging a more sedentary lifestyle, and the unintended consequences of increasing levels of stress and multiple responsibilities, creating compression in our day-to-day lives. What we need to do is make connections with individuals – we have to be more mindful of what the individual is seeking in our places, or in our services. We can add value to the system to allow individuals to pursue their own healthy lifestyle. Understanding what the threshold is, what the lever is that makes an individual want to recreate in our spaces is important in promoting increased activity. If we can connect to the intrinsic values of individuals, we can bring them to our spaces. Our past focus has been on retention of motivated individuals versus engaging new participants. We need to engage new participants by tapping into their shared, intrinsic values and find a way to make parks more meaningful to them.

Energy Efficiency and Green Design Presentation

Mike Pasteris, Executive Director, Forest Preserve District

Bringing people and nature together

The Forest Preserve District's Sugar Creek Administration Center – a 20,000 square-foot facility located in a 211-acre forest preserve along Sugar Creek in Joliet, IL – serves as a model of green design. Located within one of the fastest growing regions in the U.S., the Forest Preserve District of Will County, IL is faced with the challenge of preserving open space amid rapid population growth and development. In 1999, a referendum was passed that allowed for preservation of open space, and also provided funding for a new administration center that could provide educational opportunities for the public. The Forest Preserve District envisioned the facility itself to serve as the educational tool – a sustainable, energy efficient LEED-certified building by design.

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of green buildings. LEED promotes a whole-building approach to sustainability by recognizing performance in five key areas of human and environmental health: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality.

Sustainable Site Development:

Stormwater management – captures and flows through a system of pools and vegetated swales before entering Sugar Creek. All stormwater is managed on site, above ground to achieve water purification and infiltration. A major challenge in Illinois is sustaining the water supply. By better managing stormwater, the district is helping increase water supply.

Site restoration – the building site is located on former agricultural land, but the area surrounding the building is being restored to native prairie. Future restoration activities will be focused on restoring the floodplain of Sugar Creek.

Alternate transportation – the forest preserve serves as a primary trailhead for the Wauponsee Glacial Trail, a 24-mile long multi-use trail that will link other regional trails when completed.

Water Savings:

Water efficiency – landscaping with native plants helps with water efficiency and serves as an example of alternative landscaping design for large, new housing development projects.

Water consumption – limited flush systems help relieve stress on existing groundwater and drinking water supplies.

Energy Efficiency:

Energy and atmosphere – building systems fully automated to control energy use and maximize efficiency.

Raised flooring – raised steel floor allows for easy access to data cables and building infrastructure for repairs or enhancements.

Photovoltaic panels – solar panels power all computers and phone systems, producing approximately 14kw/yr, saving \$1,000, and preventing 14.5 tons of pollution a year

Passive solar – passive solar is also included in the building design, with a black wall to collect and store heat and roof overhangs to shield glass windows from direct sunlight.

Materials Selection:

Materials and resources – recycling stations throughout building.

Construction waste – contractors were expected to reduce and control waste and packaging materials during construction.

Recycled content – carpeting, tile and countertops, and concrete all contain recycled materials.

Indoor Environmental Quality:

Indoor air quality, now called indoor air environment, improved through smoke free environment, low VOC paints and glues in materials, chimney and power vents that turn over air within the building every 90 minutes.

Daylight – natural daylight provides much of needed light in the staff office area, light sensors dim fluorescent lighting as natural daylight increase. No incandescent lights used in the building.

Innovation and Design Process:

Open floor plan – movable wall systems and very few permanent walls.

Raised floor systems – allow for greater access and flexibility in design.

For more resources on green county government – state exchanging policies and sharing ideas about green infrastructure – visit any co.org website.

Declining Participation in Outdoor Recreation Presentation

Misty Mitchell, Director of Conservation Programs (Wonders of Wildlife)

Reaching kids through partnerships

The Wonders of Wildlife (WOW) is an outdoor recreation and conservation school with a goal of reaching out to, introducing and educating a large number of kids on the wonders of wildlife and the great outdoors. Those first outdoor experiences as children are what make people life-long outdoor enthusiasts and supporters. But we didn't venture out-of-doors alone the first time – someone introduced us to it. Today, many children are not provided these same outdoor experiences or opportunities. WOW is designed to teach participants how to enjoy a wide range of outdoor recreation activities while practicing personal safety and outdoor ethics.

With meager means by which to achieve this goal (only two full-time and two part-time staff), the key to WOW is their partnerships with leading national and state organizations, such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Missouri Department of Natural Resource, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bass Pro Shops, U.S. Forest Service, and Missouri Conservation Department. These partners actively participate in WOW, giving guidance, leadership, and support to WOW, with assistance from local planning committees where WOW schools are located. WOW courses taught include archery, boating, camping, fishing, natural history, natural arts and crafts, outdoor cooking, and more. The target audience for WOW is families. It is very important to get adults involved in outdoor recreation, because if the parents are afraid of the outdoors, then their children won't be provided these opportunities. The age range for WOW is 4-8 years old for youth camp, and 9 years and older for WOW school.

WOW has been a learning process as well. Mistakes are made along the way, but lessons have been learned, and WOW continues to move forward. After forming in 1997 in Springfield, MO, WOW expanded to Roaring River State Park. With the goal of introducing previously unexposed children to the outdoors, WOW initiated a school at Babler State Park, 30 minutes outside of St. Louis. This school did not hit its target audience, because the distance from the city served as a key barrier to participation. WOW adapted, and initiated a school in Forest Park in the middle of St. Louis and was successful in reaching its target market. WOW continues to introduce new schools, with marketing for these schools through word of mouth, poster and tear offs, websites, mailing lists, newspaper articles/calendars, partner publications, community centers, minority papers, and churches. The key is to market this as an opportunity for family fun, not necessarily skills learned. Benefits for partners include mutual benefits through shared mission, new membership opportunities, positive PR, public education, and more than anything – getting more kids off the couch!

Marketing Parks and Recreation

John Edman, Director (Explore Minnesota Tourism)

Three lessons learned:

1. Change is good.
2. It's okay to be crappy.
3. We really need to be more proud of this state.

Change is good, but it is often a scary and not necessarily easy process. We need to change the way we talk about Minnesota. Consumers have a lot of choices about where to go and spend their time and money. What's unique about Minnesota that makes us stand out – our lakes, parks, scenic byways, opportunities for family fun, and more. My Favorite Minnesota is a new campaign that provides consumer-generated content on Minnesotans' favorite places to see and things to do – and it's based on the idea that “Who knows more about having fun in Minnesota than Minnesotans?”

Explore Minnesota's new campaign is based on the fact that the biggest growth in customers was via web services. Savvy travelers rely on on-line reviews from other travelers. These consumer-generated, YouTube-style videos are all easily accessible on Explore Minnesota's website: www.exploreminnesota.com. This marketing strategy follows the YouTube-type marketing, and has a sort of viral effect with other venues picking up the information (e.g. the potato wrestling webisode on CNN). Consumers want to be inspired and informed by us in a real and authentic way. How do you get plugged-in kids away from their electronics? Show them things they will think are fun. Fun + information is the key to getting kids interested.

“It's okay to be crappy” was coined by the co-founder of Macintosh Computers. These are the computers that didn't really do much for the average user, but had a revolutionary programming interface. Likewise, we're still working out the bugs of programming and how best to sell outdoor recreation in Minnesota. Explore Minnesota is on the cutting edge of marketing strategy, with consumer-based marketing as a key to reaching out to young people. These webisodes provide the opportunity to invoke emotion and draw us in through interest and excitement. It's a matter of using pull marketing rather than push marketing – this strategy pulls new users in.