

March 2026

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A group of diverse children are playing on a modern playground structure. One boy is sitting on the structure, smiling broadly. A girl stands behind him, and another boy is sitting to the right. A girl is sitting on the ground to the left. The background shows trees and a brick building.

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“If something is wrong, fix it now. But train yourself not to worry, worry fixes nothing.”

—ERNEST HEMINGWAY

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Editor's Note

Jefferey Spivey | jefferey@northstarpubs.com | (866) 444-4216 x221



In (And Above) The Weeds

Maintenance is one of those industry topics that requires you to get in the weeds, sometimes literally. When it comes to winterizing a bathroom or revitalizing a neglected soccer field, every step of the process matters. The 30,000-foot view is helpful to guide the organization, but the individual details are everything. Zooming in on minute problems—and staying focused on them until they're fixed—is part of the job.

Yet it can be helpful to think about the bigger picture. Seasonal maintenance can be a grind; realizing that your to-do list is half-finished can offer some much-needed motivation to keep going. But also, zooming out gives team members a chance to think about the purpose of the work they're completing.

Maintenance keeps residents safe. Parks and facilities remain open and functional for users, ensuring the community has everything it needs for health, wellness, and connection. The work may not always feel rewarding. Just know, however, that people benefit in ways big and small when public spaces are properly cared for.

That's the underlying theme throughout this issue. Great maintenance is the backbone of every recreational activity that happens in a municipality, whether it's a round of golf, a new youth program, or a cleaner park. There are stories that directly address how that maintenance happens, like Jackie Broach's piece about Georgetown County's new-and-improved waste-collection process. But there are also several stories about what's possible once that maintenance is finished.

And Karen Fischer's feature, "The Frontlines Of Community Health," ties it all together, highlighting how communities are at their best with accessible, well-maintained parks—and questioning what it'll take for *all* communities to reap those benefits.

At PRB+, we strive for a mix of technical know-how, actionable advice, and people-centered storytelling. We want to get those minor details right and not shy away from the weeds. But we also want you to feel seen for the work you do and to be inspired to keep making a difference in your municipality. The mix of articles in this issue checks all these boxes, keeping maintenance front-and-center—the skills required to get it right and the aftereffects that help communities maximize potential.

Jefferey Spivey

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FAT Karting League Crowns Inaugural World Finals Winners

In December 2025, FAT International's grassroots youth racing initiative, FAT Karting League (FKL), announced the winners of its 2025 World Finals race at Willow Springs International Raceway in California. More than 100 of the best youth drivers from the U.K., the Midwest U.S., and California raced to win major rewards—including a fully funded seat in the FIA British Formula 4 Championship for junior drivers.

Shea Aldrich, based out of Orange, Calif., won the Junior category. Ellis McKenzie, hailing from just outside of London, won the Junior Light category. Aldrich started his racing journey when he was just five years old. He has defied the odds in many of his races, going toe-to-toe with older, more experienced drivers at just 14 years old, yet still managing to come out on top. McKenzie, despite having only raced for two years, has achieved a highly decorated racing career, earning numerous champion titles. This year's World Finals marked McKenzie's first time racing outside of Great Britain. Aldrich and McKenzie qualified for the World Finals by winning the California and UK FKL Championships, respectively.

Both youth drivers automatically qualified to advance to FAT Racing's Shootout event in February. This year's Finals organically shaped into a U.S. versus U.K. showdown, a dynamic embraced by fans and families across both regions. With FKL expanding into five new global markets in 2026, future Finals will feature an even broader and more diverse field of drivers competing for the top prize.

"This year's inaugural World Finals was a truly amazing event with the community coming together to showcase the fastest-growing karting leagues on the planet. All of the youth drivers represent the standard we're setting for FAT Karting League across the globe. The competition is tough, but beyond that, we're proud of the team, the wider community, and camaraderie we've built leading up to this moment. We can't wait for what's next in 2026," says Rob Smedley, founder and co-owner of FKL.

"This weekend showed what happens when opportunity meets talent," says Ferdi Porsche, founder of FAT International and co-owner of FKL. "For some of these drivers, it was the first time competing outside their home country. Giving them a platform to race, learn, and a proper chance to pursue their dream is what matters most. The World Finals are another step toward shaping a more inclusive future for motorsport that is built on merit and built to last."

The 2025 World Finals marked a major milestone for FAT International's global effort to diversify and democratize access to motorsports. FKL is designed to

eliminate high costs of entry, promote talent, and provide inclusive pathways for the most promising youth drivers aged 5 to 17.



Shea Aldrich



Ellis McKenzie

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Field Notes

Seed Your Future announced **Broch Martindale** as its new Board President and welcomed **Mari Carasquillo** as a new member to its Board of Directors.



Martindale



Carasquillo



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Knaebel-Ross

Team Horner announced the retirement of **Linda Carroll**, Vice President of HornerXpress® Worldwide, after more than 30 years of service. The company also announced **Gretchen Knaebel-Ross** as General Manager of the HornerXpress® Worldwide division.



Gonzalez

Landmark Aquatic announced the expansion of its design team with the addition of **Reed Gonzalez**, PE.

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BY JACKIE BROACH

Keeping Up

Working smarter to improve waste collection in Georgetown County, S.C.

For years, Georgetown County, S.C., faced a familiar challenge that many coastal and parks communities know all too well: rapidly growing waste output, increasingly constrained staffing, heavy manual labor, and rising public expectations for clean, well-maintained beach access. At peak season, overflowing cans and time-consuming trailer runs made it difficult for the county's parks and recreation department to keep up.

By summer 2024, the problem had become unsustainable.

"It was getting impossible to keep up with the trash," says Beth Goodale, Georgetown County Parks and Recreation Director. "We were running two trailers at a time with four paid staff, and even then, we couldn't stay ahead. We needed to work smarter, not harder."

The department began exploring options that would allow crews to collect more trash more quickly, with fewer injuries and less strain on staff. The result was a major operational shift: transitioning from traditional bulk trailers and 55-gallon liners to a compacting trailer system paired with 92-gallon roll-out cans.



The change has proven transformative—reducing labor demands, improving safety, saving money on supplies, eliminating seasonal complaints, and strengthening the county's ability to manage bulky waste. The lessons learned along the way offer a roadmap for other parks and recreation departments seeking smarter, more sustainable waste-collection solutions.

Identifying The Problem: Labor, Inefficiency, And Safety Risks

Before the upgrade, staff collected trash using two open trailers that required frequent emptying. Collection was labor-intensive and slow, especially during the summer when traffic made landfill trips time-consuming. From the far ends of the county, it could be a two-hour round-trip. With the loss of inmate

labor following the COVID-19 pandemic, the department had to rely solely on paid staff.

“We were spending as much time driving to dump sites as we were collecting trash,” says Goodale. “And the physical strain on staff was concerning. They had to lift partially filled, heavy bags out of 55-gallon drums and over the side of a trailer. It was a horrible job and a real injury risk.”

The bag system also created unintended waste. Liners could never be filled to capacity because they became too heavy to lift, meaning every partially filled bag represented both lost volume and additional cost.

Meanwhile, public expectations for cleanliness were only rising. Holiday weekends often triggered calls about overflowing cans—something Goodale and County Administrator Angela Christian heard regularly. “We knew staff were working hard,” Christian says, “but the system in place didn’t allow them to get ahead of the problem.”



Evaluating Solutions: A Focus On Flexibility And Fit

Goodale began researching alternatives, attending conferences, talking with vendors, and observing different types of compacting equipment. Traditional trash trucks, though efficient, weren’t suited for the county’s conditions. The narrow access points, low tree canopies, and mixed-use spaces along the beach required something smaller, lighter, and more adaptable.

Goodale also wanted a solution that didn’t require dedicating a single vehicle solely to trash collection. “We’re a small county. We have to do more with less,” Goodale says. “A full-size trash truck would limit how we use our fleet. A compacting trailer, on the other hand, can be pulled by a standard vehicle and used in multiple ways.”

After extensive research and cost comparison—leveraging cooperative purchasing to obtain competitive pricing—the county secured grant funding to purchase the compacting trailer system. From there, staff prepared for a full operational shift, including new collection routes and a transition to 92-gallon, roll-out cans that could be filled completely and remain covered to prevent windblown litter and animal intrusion.

Implementation: A Simplified, Safer, More Efficient Process

Once deployed, the system provided immediate benefits. Staff could collect significantly more trash before needing to unload, allowing one team of two employees to complete an entire route without interruption.





“We can get a lot done now,” says Bob Lewis, Crew Chief. In the summer, traffic can bring everything to a halt. But not having to leave the route to dump the trailer changed everything.

The new cans also improved ergonomics. Instead of lifting heavy, awkward bags, staff now roll secure containers directly to the trailer’s intake point—reducing injuries and making the job considerably safer.

Beyond labor savings, the department saw dramatic reductions in plastic waste. By eliminating most 55-gallon liners, the county saved an estimated \$10,000 to \$12,000 per year, while also preventing thousands of plastic bags from entering the landfill.

“That’s a win both economically and environmentally,” Goodale says. “It’s rare that a change hits all those marks at the same time.”

The compactor’s increased efficiency even allowed the department to create a dedicated crew for bulky debris such as tents, furniture, and abandoned items—materials that previously accumulated faster than staff could remove them.



Real-World Impact:

A Complaint-Free Season

Perhaps the most striking result came from the public.

“For the first time in all my years doing this, we didn’t receive a single complaint about overflowing trash cans this season,” Goodale says. “Not one. That has never happened before.”

Christian saw the same impact from the community’s perspective. “The difference was noticeable,” she says. “Our beaches stayed cleaner, our staff felt supported, and residents commented positively on the improvements.”

Data from seasonal operations backed up the perception. Supplemental labor needs dropped to approximately \$10,000 below projected costs, thanks to the compactor’s efficiency and the reduced number of staff required per route.

“This wasn’t just about a piece of equipment,” Christian adds. “It was about modernizing our approach and giving staff tools that allow them to succeed.”

What began as an effort to “work smarter, not harder,” as Goodale describes it, ultimately reshaped the county’s approach to coastal waste management.

“There were real-world impacts across every area,” she says. “Staffing, supplies, environmental benefits—we saw improvement everywhere.”

Christian agrees. “This project shows how targeted innovation can make a huge difference for both employees and the community.”

For departments facing similar challenges, Georgetown County’s experience offers a proven, adaptable model—a reminder that sometimes the right piece of equipment can change far more than the workday. **PRB+**



Jackie Broach is the Public Information Officer for Georgetown County, S. C., and a former award-winning journalist with experience in government and community reporting.

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By Jonathan Batts
and Charles Davis

More Than Mowing

The maintenance blueprint that sustains Inland Greens



Long before Wilmington, N.C., wakes up, before the first golfer tees up the day's opening shot, work at Inland Greens is already in motion. At 6 a.m., crews step onto the course with mowers humming, sand moving, and turf shaking off the night's heaviness. By the time the course opens, every green is rolled, every tee box is prepped, and every detail is refined. With nearly 40,000 rounds played a year, nothing about this routine is optional. Turf doesn't care about tee times, but the community does, so staff members show up early, every day, to make sure the course is ready.

◉ A Course Reborn: From Floodplain To Fairway

Inland Greens was previously privately operated as an 18-hole, Par-3 course. In 2011, the City of Wilmington purchased the property for \$500,000 using funds from a Parks and Greenspace Bond. The goal was transformative and converted the site into a stormwater-friendly public asset that is part park and part golf course.

By 2014, construction began on a \$1.2-million stormwater system designed to alleviate chronic flooding and satisfy state environmental permits. The former front nine became a passive park featuring a walking trail, playground, and picnic shelter. The back nine was reshaped into a newly renovated 9-hole, par-3 course.

When Inland Greens reopened in July 2018 under city ownership, the staff expected around 12,000 rounds per year and roughly \$125,000 in revenue. Reality exceeded every projection. In 2025, the course approached 40,000 annual rounds and nearly \$400,000 in revenue.

🕒 When Growth Meets Gravity: The Challenges Beneath The Surface

Heavy play and natural stormwater runoff have created unique challenges. Within two years of opening, tee boxes needed replacement. Persistent erosion carved away at banks, cart paths, slopes, and transitions. In April 2023, the city elevated all tee boxes by 12 inches and converted them to 12' x 15' artificial turf. Natural turf simply couldn't survive the traffic. The upgrade was strategically executed while keeping the course open, a victory for both operations and players. Other areas demanded immediate structural fixes:

- **Hole 6:** Limited sunlight and water movement toward the pond made Bermuda grass unsustainable. The staff rebuilt the area with fresh soil and installed Zoysia, which thrives in low-light, wet conditions.

- **Hole 7:** The green was mere inches from eroding into the pond. Turning mowers became unsafe due to declining edges. The solution was to build a bulkhead, bring in 30 yards of soil, and lay two pallets of sod. This not only stabilized the shoreline but restored safe mowing patterns and long-term playability. These aren't only cosmetic upgrades; they're essential interventions that preserve the course's future.

🕒 Aerification: The Most Important Closure Of The Year

June is the course's annual reset button. Warm-season turf hits peak growth in June, July, and August, making June the ideal time for full-course aerification. The course closes for three to four days, long enough to breathe new life into the greens and complete projects that can't be done during play.



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☛ Daily Maintenance: Precision At Sunrise

Work during the growing season is structured, intentional, and perfectly timed. Greens-mowing occurs five to six days a week, early in the morning. Verticutting and topdressing take place one to two times a month, and rough and collar mowing are done weekly. Artificial-turf tee boxes help ensure durability, but everything else, including the greens, rough, and collars, must be managed with precision and consistency.

☛ Small Innovations, Big Results

Not all improvements require machinery. This year, staff members adopted a three-hole rotation for cup locations, shifting flag positions weekly. This simple adjustment dramatically reduced wear patterns, extended cup life, and kept greens healthier and more consistent throughout the season. Sometimes the smartest tool is a new idea.

☛ Nutrition And Protection: Feeding The Course Like An Athlete

Healthy turf is built on discipline, not luck. Inland Greens' feeding and protection program includes the following:

- **Granular fertilizers (16-4-8, 15-0-15):** Three to four times/year
- **Liquid fertilizers ("Grow In," "Play On"):** light applications for greens
- **Monthly fungicide rotation:** Daconil Action, Chlorothalonil, Phiticide, Strobe 50WG.

Every application is timed and measured to support strong roots, steady growth, and disease resistance.

☛ Purposeful Closures: Doing The Right Thing, Not The Fast Thing

The staff has never closed the course without purpose. Past closures have allowed team members to repair fairway and pond erosion, construct bulkheads, lay new sod, complete large-scale aerification, and restore safety and longevity in vulnerable areas. Closing the course briefly today protects its quality for years to come.

☛ A Course With Heavy Footsteps And A Strong Heart

Inland Greens is more than turf and tee markers; it is a living, breathing system under constant pressure, strengthened every day by planning, patience, and care. From sunrise mowing to long-term renovation, every task supports one mission—keep the course healthy so the community can continue to enjoy play on the course. **PRB+**

Jonathan Batts is Recreation Supervisor and Manager for Inland Greens. Charles Davis is a Recreation Coordinator for the City of Wilmington and is certified as a Class A superintendent.



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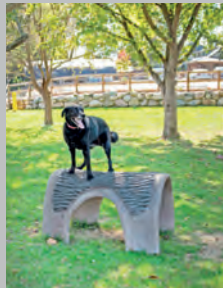
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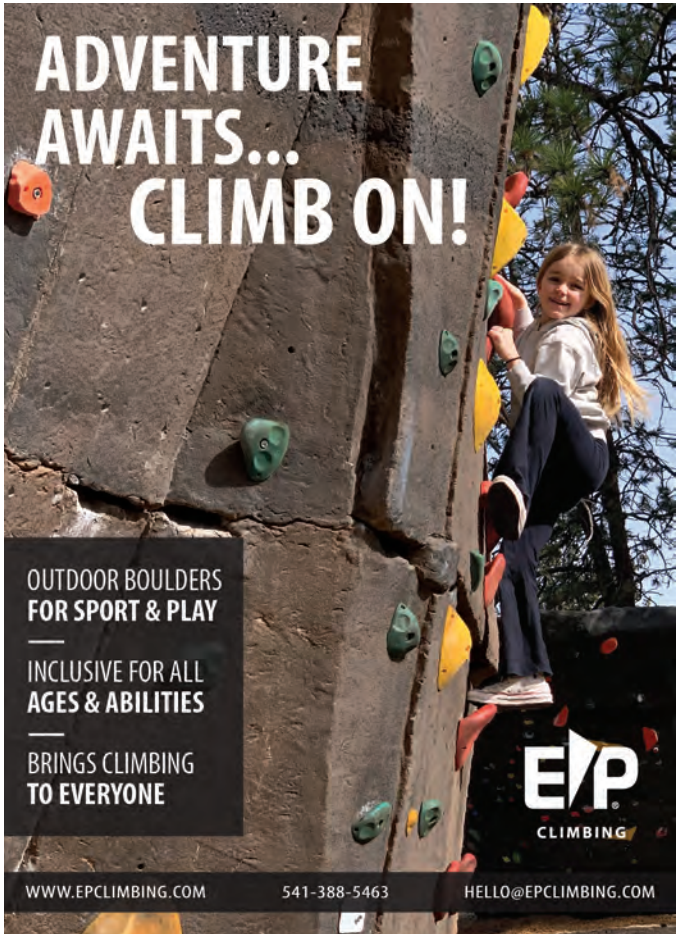


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The Frontlines of Community Health

By
Karen
Fischer

*Parks can be
a prescription,
but who gets
them?*

When you visit the doctor, you'll likely be asked about your diet and exercise frequency, and possibly your sleep habits. But there's another question that may be worth exploring: *Do you go to your local park regularly?*

Increasingly, research has shown the connection between greenspaces and human health. According to the National Recreation and Park Association, British men living in some of the greenest parts of the country had 5 and 11 percent less risk of cardiovascular and respiratory disease fatality, respectively, than men living in the least-green parts. In Seattle, a 2011 study found that access to parks saved city residents \$64 million in medical costs.

Dr. Laura Payne, a professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, who studies the relationship between park use and health, also cited a similar finding in Abilene, Texas.

"Only 32 percent of residents have access to a park within about a half mile," she says. "[If] more people had access to parks, the cost savings in terms of preventable health care [...] would be over \$17 million."

To that end, this is an era of momentum concerning park investments for positive community-health outcomes. In 2025, a record-breaking year, \$12.2 billion was funneled into municipalities across the country. Cities like Buffalo and San Francisco led the pack.

The July 4, 2025 passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill is projected to put extra pressure on state and municipal finances, but it may also create a unique opportunity for the parks and recreation sector: With new data, leaders can recognize improved community health outcomes connected to park access. Therefore, it may be the golden hour to make the case for more investments.

The following are ways that parks and recreation staff members can advocate for more robust partnerships and help local leaders see each park as a social prescription, not only a perk.





Understand The Funding Landscape

One could view the funding that both Buffalo and San Francisco raised for parks and assume the cities are telling the same story, but Will Klein, the Associate Director of Parks Research for the Trust for Public Land, says each situation is different.

“Buffalo had one of the biggest private investments in parks throughout the country,” he says. In San Francisco, the push for more park funding came from a public array of resources, including bond measures, sales taxes, and property taxes that voters specifically earmarked for parks and recreation investments.

There are key differences between these two types of funding. When public resources are allocated for parks, this often means there will be a continual funding stream for maintenance, whereas bulk funding from a donor may launch a new park project with no guarantee that the

space will be staffed for the long term.

That makes conservancies integral to funding talks; they tend to be founded by civic groups interested in securing long-term funding for land preservation. Also, Klein points to cities like Atlanta, where more corporate leaders are partnering with their civic counterparts for park expansions.

“There’s lots of different models [out there],” he says.

Furthermore, 90 percent of all city parks are funded through the local government or philanthropy. While federal dollars don’t necessarily flow into parks, reduced federal dollars for states or municipalities can put park funding on the chopping block when times get tough.

Thus, it’s critical to understand how the public and private sectors work together to launch park projects, making health-focused advocacy more important than ever.



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The Case For Public Health Benefits

Pooja Tandon is the Health Director for the Trust for Public Land and also a pediatrician. Historically, hospitals and health systems haven't considered how local greenspaces can reverse poor health outcomes or prevent disease, but there is a key place to start.

"Every nonprofit hospital has a tax requirement to do a community health-needs assessment every three years and invest into social and environmental determinants of health," Tandon says. "At least half of hospitals in large cities don't have parks and greenspaces on their radar."

Furthermore, for every \$30 per capita spent on park programming, there are lower rates of stroke, heart failure, coronary heart disease,

diabetes, and hypertension locally, Tandon says.

Park leaders should approach local hospital leadership to determine the status of any community health-needs assessments and discuss ways to pool resources to help maintain or open new greenspaces.

Consider Existing Spaces

Almost every municipality already has a park in plain sight: a schoolyard. Klein says that more cities are dedicating dollars to transforming existing school properties into spaces that entire communities can access. In many cases, it's easier than earmarking or acquiring new land, and it serves as a viable starting point.

Parks and recreation leaders also must take stock of which neighborhoods have parks, which don't, and how residents use those



spaces. That can help inform targeted investments for community needs and wants, from social and health perspectives. To that end, schoolyards are a turnkey resource that can unlock greenspace in underserved communities.

“Schoolyards are the number-one way that civic leaders can increase park access and student performance,” Klein says. “There are also greenways, which are one of the most common ways of [developing parks] by taking underutilized land, and making it a place to ride your bike, run, or walk with friends.”

Investment For The Long Haul

For any park, one surefire way to earn a health-focused return on investment is through programming. That’s the key to unlocking continual

community engagement that makes a difference, which then leads to long-term maintenance and staffing investments.

“Existing is not enough,” Tandon says. “Marketing, programming, and investing in those aspects is [just as important] as maintenance. It’s not enough to just have parks exist.”

In the future, Tandon would love to see more doctors providing patients with park prescriptions, or what’s called social prescribing.

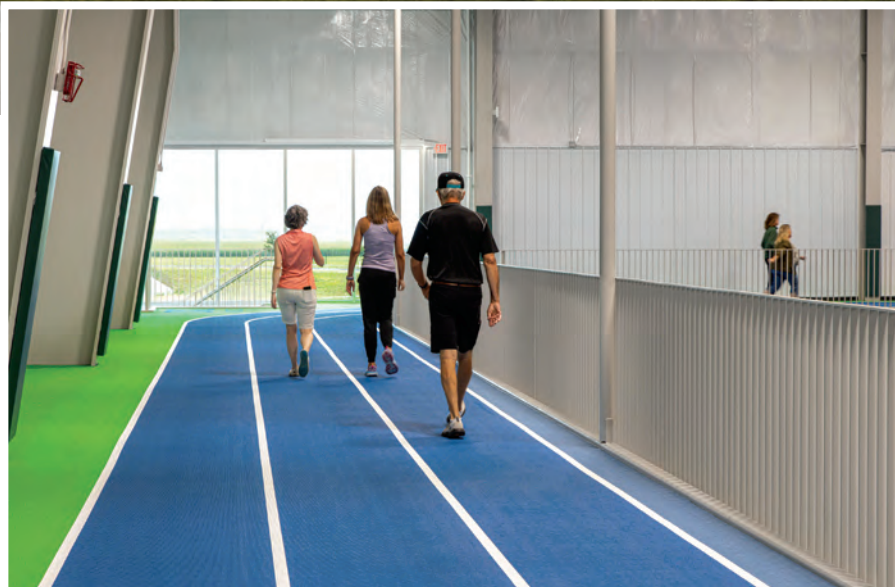
“I hope to see increased recognition by the healthcare sector that behavior and physical activity in nature establishes social connections. So many things are possible in parks that improve our health.” **PRB+**

Karen Fischer is an independent writer based in New Mexico. You can find her bylines in publications like CQ Researcher, The Verge, New Mexico Magazine, and Prism Reports as well as on her website at kfischerwrites.com.

Game On, Year-Round

**Fargo Parks Sports Center
meets demand for an array
of local sports leagues**

BY TRACY NICHOLSON



EXTREME SPORTS

With extreme temperature swings and rising demand for sports venues and fitness, JLG Architects designed Fargo Parks Sports Center to meet the need with active, indoor space that keeps the region at play all year. Setting a high-performance benchmark in multi-use sport and community recreation, the center is now home to a variety of indoor athletics, community activities, sports therapy and training, regional

tournaments, and special events.

“We were honored to help Fargo Park District meet the rising demand for indoor turf, hockey, and hard-court facilities,” says Tom Betti, Principal Sports Studio Leader at JLG Architects. “The Fargo Parks Sports Center is more than a building—it’s a game-changer for the region. It’s a future-ready hub of economic strength and regional resilience, offering endless opportunities for program growth, year-round health, tournament play, and bringing people together in meaningful ways.”

IT HAS BEEN A MONUMENTAL YEAR for Fargo residents, and really, all North Dakota athletes. Thanks to the phase II grand opening of Fargo Parks Sports Center at the Sanford Sports Complex, the northern state’s frozen tundra has warmed up to welcome athletes and spectators from across the tri-state region. Led by JLG Architects and McGough Construction, the nearly 400,000-square-foot facility—recognized with a 2025 AIA ND HONOR award—has become a game-changer for nearly every sport under the Midwest sun.



FARGO PARKS SPORTS CENTER PHASE I

Fargo Parks Sports Center opened its doors on May 29, 2024, with its first phase covering approximately 290,000 square feet. Phase I created a home for Sanford Sports Academy's basketball and volleyball programming, along with a multi-use, indoor turf field, four hardwood courts with cross courts, a championship court and second-floor sky box, community and meeting rooms, food and beverage services, a sport shop, Fargo Park District staff offices, a Midco-sponsored lounge, a 350-meter track, and the Sanford Sports Performance gym.

One of the center's many draws is the 95,000-square-foot, indoor turf field, which houses an elevated three-lane walking track. The track's strategically placed windows, situated toward outdoor horizons, give distance-walkers a destination point around every corner. Just below is a busy, multi-use field house offering an advanced turf system and adaptable field space for football, soccer, lacrosse, rugby,



and baseball, including pitching/batting cages and tilt-and-roll bleachers for spectator events. At the field level, athletes have direct access to Sanford Sports Performance training and therapy facilities.

"The Fargo Parks Sport Center goes well beyond traditional parks and recreation facilities, bridging the gap between community wellness and regionally competitive athletics," says Adam Barnett, Principal Architect at JLG Architects. "This means year-round accessibility with multi-sport programming, collaboratively serving the local schools,



associations, and regional organizations—all collectively contributing to a broader social and economic impact.”

FARGO PARKS SPORTS CENTER PHASE II

Upon completion of Phase II in January 2025, the center added to its amenities with six indoor pickleball courts, four additional hardwood courts, an indoor playground, six party rooms, a tournament room, and additional meeting rooms. The center also unveiled its IcePlex, offering two sheets of ice with enclosed spectator seating and an upper-level arcade and lounge. Each rink has become the home ice to competing hockey programs—

Fargo Angels and Fargo Youth Hockey—now neighbors enjoying the modern facility and major upgrade from their prior aging arenas.

Phase II also opened the main corridor to unobstructed views from end to end within the facility. As JLG Architects’ Project Designer Ty Pritchard explains, “The open central spine brings natural, diffused light and energy to the design, giving guests a clear visual into all of the activity zones.” JLG’s design team ensured the first-floor community space and corridor remained visually open with a ceiling-mounted, second-floor design. This design simplifies wayfinding to ease circulation during fan-heavy tournaments. Even

with simultaneous soccer, hockey, pickleball, and volleyball tournaments underway, this facility ensures visitors never get lost in the crowds.

Each sport zone is glassed in for transparency, with a design that cleverly manages acoustics and commons, separating the masses accompanying each sport. The only connections between the courts, fields, and rinks are cozy gathering hubs and concessions strategically placed throughout two levels.

Designing one of the region’s largest multi-sport-focused buildings has been monumental for the JLG Architects team, which has branched out from its Midwest roots to multi-sport projects across the U.S. The



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POWERFUL PARTNERSHIPS

The Fargo Parks Sports Center is located on 123 acres known as the Sanford Sports Complex at 6100 38th St. S. in Fargo, N.D. This partnership of sports and healthcare, which took shape through the expertise of JLG Architects' Sports and Healthcare Studios, includes land use and a 25,000-square-foot tenant partnership with Sanford Sports and Sanford Health, a major donor and one of the region's primary healthcare systems.

Inside the center, Sanford Sports Performance delivers advanced athletic

inspiration for the center's design grew from the firm's beginnings, retelling the region's history and how glacial movement forged the prairie.

"We envisioned the mass of the glaciers, the fracturing of ice, and the process of melting to design an expansive façade that shifts through perforated vertical panels for diffused daylight and striated patterns," says Pritchard. "These patterns mimic the texture of glaciers as they moved across our landscape. To bring warmth that contrasts the glacial facade, we created well-lit, interior gathering areas, or 'campfire-inspired' moments throughout—all designed to bring people together in a fun and familiar Midwest environment."

training academies, hydrotherapy, sports performance, a hydration station, and Sanford Sports Physical Therapy facilities. Athletes benefit from personalized training across various sport surfaces, including turf, water, hardwood, a plyometrics gym, and a sprint track. Sanford Sports Performance also features 360-degree, motion capture technology to analyze athletes' movements over time.

Members and patients of Sanford Sports Performance, Sanford Sports Academy, and Sanford Sports Physical Therapy enjoy access to exclusive Sanford Sports Academy courts, eight physical-therapy treatment rooms, a 2,213-square-foot physical-therapy gym, therapy pools, an underwater treadmill, a 7,903-square-foot strength





and conditioning area, expanded locker rooms, an indoor turf field, sprint lanes, and Sanford Orthopedics & Sports Medicine athletic-training services.

A REGIONAL GAME-CHANGER

This multi-sport project, informed by a 2015 Greenplay study, was an all-hands-on-deck effort, uniting JLG’s Sports, Community Recreation, and Healthcare leaders with the vision of the Fargo Park District, Sanford Health, and several local athletics organizations.

With these two phases now complete, the Fargo Parks Sports Center fulfills a longstanding need for indoor recreation, sports medicine, and expanded tournament play in Fargo and the surrounding region.

“It was incredibly rewarding to work alongside Fargo Park District and Sanford Health to create a space that furthers athletic performance and year-round physical health,” says Todd Medd, Healthcare Studio Leader at JLG Architects. “In this climate, physical activity and exposure to natural daylight are critical to the health, well-being, and growth of our community.” **PRB+**

Tracy Nicholson is a professional writer at JLG Architects, where she specializes in public relations and communication of architecture, landscape design, sustainable construction, and interior design. With more than 12 years of experience, her work has been featured in over 100 magazine issues and has earned more than 40 local and national journalism awards. Her editorial work has been recognized by the North Dakota Professional Communicators Association, the National Federation of Press Women, the American Advertising Federation of North Dakota, and the Minnesota Magazine & Publishing Association.

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Mower Maintenance Priority One

Why an early start ensures a successful season

BY MATT ANDERSON

The first signs of spring are almost here: warmer temperatures, longer days, and the welcome sight of new grass emerging across sports fields, parks, and backyards.

For grounds and maintenance crews, the start of spring brings a massive to-do list, but one item must be at the top: mower maintenance.

Mowers are arguably a department's most valuable asset. Routine, pre-season maintenance is essential for ensuring longevity, optimizing performance, and saving valuable time and money during the busy months ahead.

Taking place March 1-7, National Lawn Mower Maintenance Week is an annual initiative that drives awareness about the importance of yearly maintenance and ensures homeowners and landscapers alike have the resources they need for success.

Now is the perfect time to get ahead and prep mowers for the full season. First, however, it's important to understand why routine maintenance is so critical to operations. Once the reasoning is clear, leaders can then examine the top items on the department's maintenance to-do list, as well as tasks that often get overlooked.

Maintenance Matters

A mower in a fleet is an investment, and if staff members take care of it, it will pay back the investment and then some. There are many benefits to routine maintenance, but they all add up to improved performance, enhanced safety, and cost savings.

Performance: A well-maintained mower will run smoothly and deliver clean, precise cuts that improve the look and overall health of turf.

Safety: Regular inspection of blades, belts, and cables helps ensure all parts are secure and functioning correctly, reducing the risk of accidents caused by loose or malfunctioning components. A well-maintained mower is a reliable and safe mower.

Money: Routine checks help prevent budget-busting breakdowns. By changing inexpensive items like spark plugs and air filters, a grounds team can reduce the chances of major engine component failures that always seem to happen at the worst time.



Tune-up Checklist

When it comes to maintenance, the operator's manual is the North Star for proper procedures and service intervals. However, the following are the critical "must-do" items that should be at the top of any spring-maintenance list:

- Sharpen or replace blades.
- Check and adjust tire pressure.
- Change the oil and oil filter.
- Inspect and replace spark plugs if necessary.
- Drain old fuel and replace it with fresh fuel.
- Inspect the pull cords and starter system.

While tending to the items on this list, perform a quick visual inspection of all the mower's components. Are there any cracks, frays, or excess wear and tear? What about fluid leaks? Detecting potential issues now will spare the grounds team a few headaches when it comes time for the first cut.

Focus On Blades And Tires

Sharpening blades and checking tire pressure are at the top of the "must-do" list for a reason.

When grounds team members take mowers out for the first time, they will be cutting new, re-emerging growth. Sharp blades ensure they will start the season right by giving

the grass a clean, precise cut. Dull blades tear the grass, leading to frayed ends that stress the plant and increase susceptibility to disease. If relying on a service provider for sharpening, call them now to avoid the inevitable spring waiting list.

It is also crucial to check the tire pressure, especially after the machine has been sitting in storage all winter. Uneven pressure negatively impacts the cut quality and makes the mower more difficult to handle or steer. At this time of year, when the ground is still soft, improper tire pressure can also cause tires to press harder into the turf, potentially leaving marks and ruts on the surface.

Don't Overlook Fuel And Lubrication

Fuel quality is a critical, yet often overlooked, part of pre-season maintenance. Over the winter, gasoline left in the tank will degrade significantly. This degradation can



lead to poor performance, hard starting, or a complete failure to run. The safest practice is to drain and properly dispose of all old fuel before filling the tank with a fresh supply to start the season. Looking ahead, team members can prevent this issue the following year by adding a high-quality fuel stabilizer to the tank before storing the mower for the offseason.

Equally important is lubrication. A thorough pre-season check must include tending to all grease and lubrication points on a machine, as outlined in the operator's manual.

Proper greasing of components, like wheel bearings, reduces friction, prevents premature wear on moving parts, and helps ensure efficient operation.

Caring For Battery-powered Mowers

Battery-powered mowers are increasingly popular, offering quieter operations and fewer maintenance demands compared to gas-powered counterparts. Instead of an engine and fuel system, the longevity of battery-powered mowers depends on offseason storage. Lithium-ion batteries, which power most electric mowers, do not hold up well when exposed to frigid winter temperatures. To ensure peak performance and battery lifespan come spring, batteries must be removed from the units and stored in a dry, climate-controlled space.

When To Start Mowing

Once a mower is ready, the team will be eager to put it to work—but patience is key. In early spring, the grass is in a vital stage of development, and stressing it too soon may affect its long-term health. Give the grass an opportunity to grow and develop strong, healthy roots. A good rule of thumb is to let it grow at least two inches.

Location will also dictate when to start mowing. If temperatures are still low and there's a possibility of frost, it's best to hold off until the temperatures warm up. Additionally, avoid mowing if the ground is still soft or soggy to prevent tearing up the turf or compacting the soil. This is especially important if operating heavy machines like zero-turns.

Start The Season Strong

Lawn Mower Maintenance Week is only seven days, but the time and effort a department puts into simple maintenance ensure that mowers operate at peak performance all season. A proactive approach eliminates downtime, protects a budget from costly emergency repairs, and guarantees clean, professional results. Make the pre-season tune-up a priority, and the team will reap the rewards with a reliable fleet that's ready to tackle any task. **PRB+**

***Matt Anderson** is District Sales Manager for The Toro Company.*

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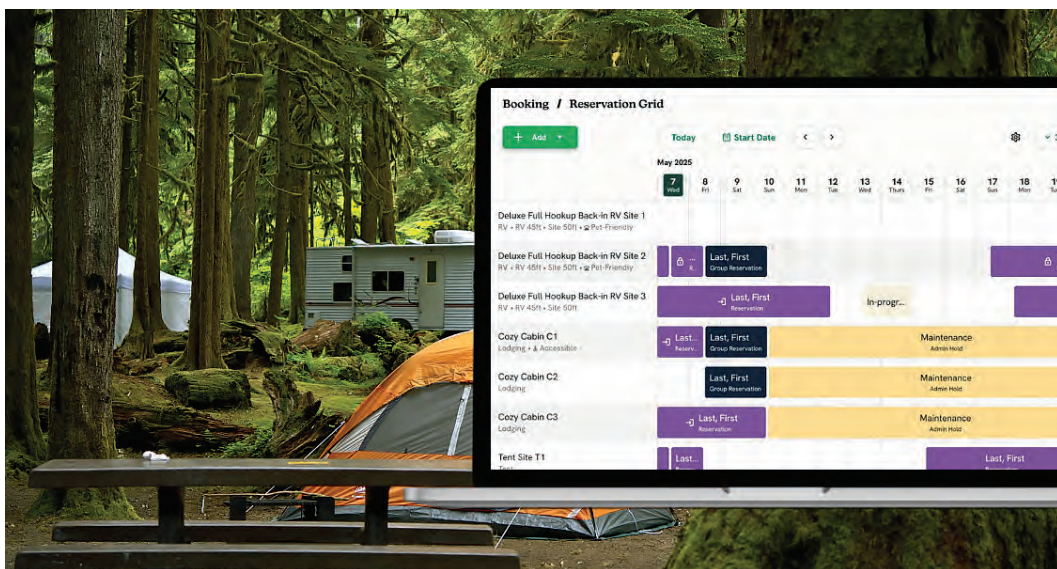


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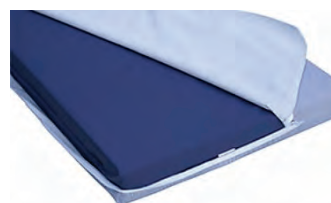
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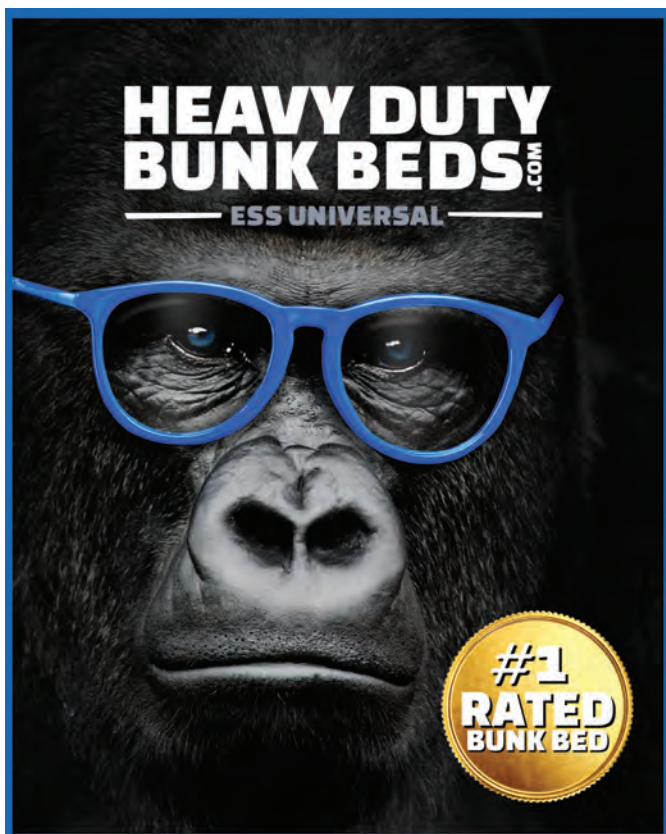


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STAFF ADVANCEMENT

By Christopher Thurber

THE GOSPEL OF BUDDY PAIRS



A non-negotiable way to manage aquatic activities at camp

There is no shortage of “glamour-guarding” in movies and on television. Toned and oiled models flirt, flex, and otherwise find entertaining ways to lose focus. Reality is far more serious and consequential.

True lifeguarding is an enormous responsibility that is both physically and mentally demanding. And although drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury deaths for children ages 0-17 years (behind motor vehicle accidents), it is a rare event. Fewer than 2 children in 100,000, or about 4,000 total children, die by drowning each year in the U.S.^{1,2} Yet even a single drowning death is tragic, traumatic, and can alter the lives of the adults and organizations involved. Therefore, effective lifeguarding is necessary, no matter the setting. Unfortunately, lifeguarding is a job rife with cruel paradoxes.

- **Attention Paradox:** Lifeguards must maintain their attention over shifts that last for many hours, but the human attentional capacity wanes after 10 to 30 minutes of uninterrupted surveillance.³

- **Scanning Paradox:** Lifeguards are trained to scan the water to spot distressed or drowning swimmers, but that optical target is a quick, quiet, low-frequency event, thereby introducing two serious risks to proficiency: boredom and distractibility.⁴



The Prevention Paradox may be the subject of a future article, but this article will focus on the Attention and Scanning paradoxes. These two paradoxes share a solution that is ignored with reckless frequency by many youth-serving organizations: swimming in buddy pairs. Once you understand what a buddy system is and what it is not, you'll clearly see how it saves lives. Armed with a better understanding of their power to prevent drowning deaths, you can then make buddy systems as automatic as putting on seatbelts.

WHAT A BUDDY SYSTEM IS

The Buddy System pairs individuals for aquatic activities. Members are instructed to remain within 10 feet or three meters of their buddy for the duration of an activity. All participants also learn how to respond when the head lifeguard signals a buddy check.

• **Prevention Paradox:** Lifeguards are typically required to surveil swimmers of diverse abilities, in changing numbers, and in dynamic settings (a complex task), but drowning risks can be identified and mitigated before any swimming has begun (a comparatively simple task).⁵

A trained and responsible designee of the head lifeguard holds a notebook, stocked with buddy check sheets printed on waterproof paper. That person, often nicknamed the “tally keeper,” is stationed at the entrance/exit to the



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activity area and monitors the arrival and departure of buddy pairs. His or her one job is to record the current buddy pair count.

If any new pairs of participants join the activity, the tally keeper crosses out the old number and writes the new number, such as 14 15. (This indicates the arrival of one new buddy pair.) Similarly, if one or more pairs of participants choose to leave the activity, the tally keeper crosses out the old number and writes the new number of buddy pairs, such as 15 12, which will indicate the departure of three buddy pairs.

Individual buddy pairs may be together in the water or together out of the water, such as on the dock, deck, or shore. They may not leave the activity area until it concludes, or until they have checked out with the tally keeper.

About every five minutes, the head lifeguard initiates a “buddy check” by blowing a unique whistle blast, after which all the lifeguards shout “Buddy check!” and raise one hand,⁶ in unison. At this point, all buddy pairs stop making noise and grab whichever hand of their buddy is closest. Each buddy pair holds a clasped pair of hands above their heads and remains in the same spot, whether they are in or out of the water. Buddy pairs swimming in water above their heads tread water with their legs and their one free hand while holding their buddy’s hand in the air with their other hand. This stationary, physical joining of buddy pairs permits easy counting.

The lifeguards proceed to silently count the total number of buddy pairs. The head lifeguard then verifies his or her personal count with a few other lifeguards. If there is disagreement, the lifeguards rapidly recount. The head lifeguard then states the valid number of pairs to the tally keeper.

If there is a discrepancy between the valid buddy count and the number in the tally keeper’s notebook, a rapid recount is performed. The time from the start of the buddy check to notebook confirmation should be no more than 30 seconds, 40 if a recount is required. If the head lifeguard’s valid buddy count matches the number in the tally keeper’s notebook, the head lifeguard blows the whistle and shouts, “Swim!” and activity resumes.

If the confirmed number of buddy pairs present does not match the number in the notebook, or if a single swimmer is found to be without a buddy, the head lifeguard initiates the Lost Bather emergency action plan (EAP). This involves directing all participants to exit the water and sit in buddy pairs, under

the supervision of the head lifeguard and the tally keeper. Simultaneously, the other lifeguards perform a systematic, underwater search and rescue. The EAP’s other components proceed, including a land-based search beyond the boundaries of the aquatic activity, until the missing person or missing buddy pair is located.

WHAT A BUDDY SYSTEM IS NOT

A Buddy System is not an arbitrary grouping of participants. In a Buddy System, the term “pairs” is literal. It means two individuals of similar ability in the activity. In cases where one member of the buddy pair is a far better swimmer, the pair is always restricted to swimming in the zone appropriate to the less-competent swimmer. Buddy Systems should never permit “singles” or “triples” or the shuffling of whose buddy is whose. These exceptions





undermine the multiple life-saving benefits of dyadic buddies, explained below.

A Buddy System is not a chalkboard, dry-erase board, or board of hooks and tags. Because so-called “buddy boards” typically require participants to record themselves and/or because physical tags can be mislaid, recording boards introduce unnecessary sources of error. Even if an adult is monitoring the buddy board, and even if the tags are too heavy to blow away (e.g., metal washers), and even if the tags have individual participants’ names painted on them, boards have moving pieces. Therefore, they are inherently more prone to errors than a single notebook, held by a trained adult, who is positioned at the activity’s one access point, and who records one piece of data: the current number of buddy pairs.

HOW BUDDY SYSTEMS SAVE LIVES

Buddy Systems, when properly and consistently implemented, save lives because they help solve the Attention Paradox and the Scanning Paradox.

Regarding attention, “a majority of a lifeguard’s time is spent not responding to an absence of a drowning,” which is a recipe for boredom. With a Buddy System in place, by contrast, most of a lifeguard’s time is spent *responding* to

the *presence* of paired participants. Scanning one’s zone to verify swimmers are in pairs, plus occasionally reminding wayward participants to stay within 10 feet or three meters of their buddy, are practices that sharpen lifeguards’ focus and extend lifeguards’ attention.

Regarding scanning, Buddy Systems give lifeguards a visually salient, high-frequency scanning target. Contrary to popular belief, there is no particular spatial or geometric scanning pattern that helps lifeguards spot distressed or drowning persons.⁸ Indeed, robotically following a prescribed scanning pattern can distract lifeguards enough to cause them to miss visual targets.⁹ What makes scanning effective is *knowing what to look for*. For this reason, a centerpiece of lifeguard training must be realistic videos of distressed or drowning swimmers, as disturbing as that content may be.¹⁰ Unfortunately, as mentioned above, these are such low-frequency targets that maintaining vigilance is extremely difficult.¹¹ Therefore, training must also include how to properly implement a Buddy System.

Buddy Systems also save lives for two other reasons:

- (1) Buddy Systems add a layer of supervisory redundancy to proper staffing of aquatic activities, meaning one buddy can call for assistance if the other buddy needs help; and
- (2) Buddy Systems give supervisors a streamlined way to account for all participants.

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FAQS ABOUT BUDDY SYSTEMS

Q What about kids who come to an aquatic activity without a buddy? Won't they be left out of the fun?

A Buddy Systems require that participants are in pairs, so tell the single participant you're glad he's there, and assure him you'll let him join as soon as another single participant arrives *or* as soon as a buddy pair checks out but has one member who wants to keep swimming *or* as soon as an off-duty staff member comes to take a dip. In 25 summers of being the waterfront director at a traditional overnight camp, I never had a boy wait more than five minutes before I found him a buddy.

Q Why not just add a lone participant to an existing buddy pair? Can't we have a count that goes something like: 7 pairs + 2 triples?

A Absolutely not. One member of the triple always wanders, believing the other two participants are taking care of each other. A Buddy System has no single swimmers and no triples. Ever.

Q Won't inevitable splashes or drizzle turn a paper buddy check sheet into soggy bits of illegible slop?

A Print copies of your buddy check sheet on waterproof paper and use a pen that writes in any weather condition. My favorite brand for both is *Rite in the Rain*.¹²

Q What about water-skiers? Why don't they need buddies?

A Everyone in the water needs a buddy. All towed watersports (e.g., waterskiing, tubing, wakeboarding, kneeboarding) use a notable variant of the classic Buddy System. Waterskiing and other towed watersports place single participants further than 10 feet or 3 meters from their buddy, namely at the end of a 75-foot rope. However, a towed participant's buddy is, by law, the adult "spotter" who sits in the waterski boat facing the stern, watches the participant being towed, and immediately alerts the motorboat driver of the participant's status. Moreover, participants in towed watersports should all be wearing a Coast Guard-approved, properly sized life jacket. Yes, that includes the driver and the spotter, both of whom should share your organization's commitment to leadership-by-example.

Q You don't make staff swim in buddy pairs, do you?

A I sure do. I want to prevent staff from drowning as much as I want to prevent young participants from drowning. I'll say it again: Everyone in the water needs a buddy.



Buddy Systems give lifeguards simple, copious, visual targets, thereby boosting their cognitive engagement with an otherwise monotonous, yet momentous, task. Healthy sleep, polarized sunglasses, frequent breaks, changes in position, adequate hydration, 30-SPF sunscreen, and a wide-brimmed hat also help lifeguards stay alert and spot trouble quickly. Plus, Buddy Systems give every swimmer a friend who can call for help when they cannot.

A few summers ago, a boy asked me to check the deep end of the camp's dock for his wristwatch. He was convinced it had fallen off when he somersaulted from the diving board during free swim that afternoon. After dinner, I followed camp policy (and my own strict advice) by finding a fellow staff member, Jack, to be my buddy. Jack sat in his bathing suit, on the edge of the dock, adjacent to the diving board, watching me dive down repeatedly to scour the lake bottom. I found a few macrame bracelets, a retainer, and a shuffleboard puck, but no watch.

After my last underwater sweep, I pushed hard off the bottom, but I wasn't far enough out from under the dock. I clocked my forehead on the bottom rung of the metal ladder so hard that I concussed myself and opened a two-inch gash between my eyebrows. Waiting three hours in the hospital to get 27 stitches was dreadful. But without a buddy, I'd never have made it out of the water alive. So, yeah, I'm a buddy evangelist. **PRB+**



Dr. Christopher Thurber is a clinical psychologist, father, and professional educator who has presented keynotes and workshops on five continents. He is the author of two books for parents—"The Summer Camp Handbook" and "The Unlikely Art of Parental Pressure"—and two video series for young people: *Prep4Camp* and *Prep4School*, both of which are hosted on ReachBoarding.com. Learn more at DrChrisThurber.com.



FOOTNOTES

- 1 Spencer, R. M., Hedegaard, H., & Warner, M. (2021). "Unintentional drowning deaths among children aged 0–17 years: United States, 1999–2019." *NCHS Data Brief*, No. 413.
- 2 Approximately 8,000 additional children experience a non-fatal drowning each year in the US, often resulting in lifelong neurological impairment. [source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS). Accessed 27 November 2023.]
- 3 Sharpe, B. T. & Smith, J. (2024). "Influence of vigilance performance on lifeguard gaze behaviour." *European Journal of Psychology*, 20(3):220–233.
- 4 Langendorfer, S. J., Pia, F. A., and Beale-Tawfeeq, A. K. (2022). "Effective lifeguard scanning: A review." *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*, 13(4) Article 8.
- 5 Bierens, J.J.L.M. (Ed.) (2014). *Drowning: Prevention, Rescue, Treatment, Second Edition*. New York: Springer.
- 6 The goal of this visible gesture is to signal a buddy check to participants who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- 7 Langendorfer, S. J., Pia, F. A., and Beale-Tawfeeq, A. K. (2022). "Effective lifeguard scanning: A review." *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*, 13(4) Article 8.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Annerer-Walcher, S., Körner, C., Beaty, R. E., & Benedek, M. (2020). "Eye behavior predicts susceptibility to visual distraction during internally directed cognition." *Attention, Perception, and Psychophysics*, 82(7), 3432–3444.
- 10 Pia, F. (1988). "The reasons people drown." *L.S.A. Productions, Inc.*, Larchmont, NY.
- 11 This is a statistically accurate statement, but it should be noted that some aquatic environments, such as crowded waterparks full of young beginner-level patrons, have a relatively high frequency of distressed and even drowning swimmers. Lifeguards in these settings are unlikely to encounter problems with scanning and attention.
- 12 I have no affiliation or sponsorship with this company. They just make the best product. Visit RiteInTheRain.com.



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Lifeguarding For Kids

An empowering approach to water safety at Life Academy Inc.

BY TYLER SULTENFUSS

AT LIFE ACADEMY INC. in Apollo Beach, Fla., water safety is more than a program—it's a mission rooted in generations of aquatic education and community engagement. For decades, the Apollo Beach Racquet & Fitness Club has been a place where local children learned to swim, compete, and connect. Out of that legacy grew the Lifeguarding for Kids program, an innovative curriculum designed to teach children how to recognize danger, respond safely, and protect one another around the water.

The idea came from a simple yet powerful observation: kids are often the first to notice when something is wrong in the water. By equipping them with knowledge and practical rescue tools, they can act quickly and safely while alerting adults. The program bridges the gap between swim lessons and formal lifeguard training, creating confident young leaders who understand that water safety is everyone's responsibility.

Turnkey Training

The curriculum is structured to fit within afterschool programs, camps, and aquatic centers. It combines classroom discussions, demonstrations, and hands-on practice in and around the pool. Children learn how to identify signs of distress, use reaching and throwing assists, and communicate effectively during emergencies. They also develop teamwork, leadership, and situational awareness—skills that extend beyond the water and into everyday life.

Instructors use age-appropriate equipment, including throw bags, rescue tubes, and pool noodles, to simulate real-world scenarios. The focus is always on safety—students are taught never to enter the water for a rescue, but instead





to use tools and teamwork to assist from a secure position. Each session reinforces the concept of “Think, Reach, Throw, Go get help,” helping students internalize safe response habits.

Implementation is straightforward for camps and recreation departments. The program can be offered in 60- to 90-minute sessions or as part of a week-long aquatic-safety module. Staff members who already hold basic lifeguard or CPR certifications can facilitate the program with minimal additional training. For facilities without existing aquatic staff, a short training workshop is available to prepare counselors or teachers to lead basic modules.

From a budget perspective, the materials are inexpensive and easy to source. Most equipment—such as throw ropes and rescue rings—is already available at pools or can be purchased for under \$200. The largest investment is staff time, typically one to two hours per week. Because the program can be integrated into existing schedules, it requires little to no additional staffing cost.

Lasting Results

The program’s results have been inspiring. Children as young as six have demonstrated their ability to identify swimmers in distress and alert adults before situations escalate. In one instance, a student rescued a friend in open water at a boat ramp in Florida. The other child had a panic attack and climbed on top of my student. She went underwater, escaping the grip of the panicked swimmer, calmed her down, and swam her to shore—exactly as she had practiced. During free swim at summer camp, instructors frequently witness campers helping struggling peers before lifeguards are able to respond. Parents share that their children now exhibit greater respect for pool rules and a deeper understanding of personal responsibility around water.

Beyond skill development, the program cultivates confidence. Many graduates go on to participate in junior lifeguard programs, swim teams, or even pursue lifeguard certification as teens. Camps report that the training improves overall pool behavior, reduces incidents, and strengthens communication between staff and campers.

For parks, recreation, and camp professionals considering similar initiatives, a few lessons stand out:

- Keep it hands-on. Children learn best when they can practice skills rather than only hear about them.
- Reinforce teamwork. Pair students to observe and coach one another; have students play the role of victim and rescuer.
- Make it age-appropriate. Focus on recognition and response.
- Partner with local aquatic professionals for staff training and oversight.
- Track outcomes and share success stories to inspire community support.

Challenges do arise—mainly scheduling and maintaining consistent instructor training. These can be mitigated by aligning the program with existing swim times or safety weeks, and by designating a lead instructor to oversee quality and consistency. The program’s flexibility allows it to adapt to various pool sizes, staffing levels, and budgets.





Ultimately, the Lifeguarding for Kids program represents a simple but powerful shift: empowering children to become active participants in their own safety. As aquatic professionals, we know prevention is the most effective rescue. By giving kids the tools, language, and confidence to act, leaders create safer pools, stronger communities, and a generation that values awareness and leadership in and out of the water. **PRB+**

Tyler Sultenfuss is President of Life Academy Inc. in Apollo Beach, Fla., and co-owner of Apollo Beach Racquet & Fitness Club. He can be reached at tyler.abrfc@gmail.com.

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By John Engh

The Many Forms Of Leadership

A conversation with Volunteer Parent of the Year, Gaby Cavins

Quality volunteers are the backbone of any successful youth-sports organization. I'm often reminded of this while reviewing our finalists' nominations for the national volunteer parent and volunteer coach of the year awards.

Rather than write about the importance of recruiting quality volunteers, I've opted to share my interview with Gaby Cavins, our Volunteer Parent of the Year. She has volunteered for years while serving in the U.S. Navy at the U.S. base in Yokosuka, Japan. A born leader, she's known on the base as "The Mayor" for all she does—and her insights can help bolster your programs.

John Engh: You are proactive about positive spectator behavior. How do you go about making that happen at games, and why have you chosen to take on that challenge?

Gaby Cavins: As parents, we have an obligation to demonstrate good sportsmanship—both off the field and on the sidelines. That's a conversation we have with our parents at the beginning of the season and continue throughout the year. We're responsible for setting the example for our kids, and they're always watching us.

I can think of plenty of examples where I've seen kids get a little scrappy on the field—nothing illegal, just competitive and feisty. Then you'll see a parent start to react, and it's like, "Nope, we're not doing that here." The coaches and officials are there for a reason, and we



Gaby Cavins

need to let them handle it. As parents, one of our most important jobs is to model sportsmanship, because our kids are paying attention. You also have new parents coming in—this might be their first season as a sports parent. Those of us who are more experienced have an obligation to mentor, lead, and set the tone. Cheering and having fun are great, but we always need to do things the right way.

And remember, you never have to handle a difficult situation alone. If something happens on the sidelines, use the resources available to you. In one instance, the staff was nearby, and I stepped in instinctively—because

keeping our kids and fans safe and preventing things from escalating is always the priority. Somebody needed to act, and if not me, then who? But I always encourage others: don't go at it alone. There are people, procedures, and systems in place to support you. If you can't handle it, find a staff member immediately—they're trained to step in. That's exactly what I did: I grabbed another parent to help, and we worked together. At the end of the day, we're a community. On your sports team, you're not just parents and players—you're a family.

JE: Many parents want to help but aren't sure how, so what's the key?

GC: At the start of every season, we have that conversation as a team: Who's comfortable helping? Who knows what to do if the coach can't be there? In our military communities especially, that's important—people get called



Here's the thing—a coach is much more willing to step up when they know they'll have help. So, this is really a twofold effort. My job as a team parent is to handle the day-to-day logistics—the behind-the-scenes operations. I always say the team parent is the team's COO. Nothing runs without a good COO in that seat.

The coach is focused on plays, skills, and the game itself. My focus is everything else. If there's an injury at practice, I'm the one who steps in, gets staff involved for first aid, and calls the parent if they're not there. The coach shouldn't have to stop practice for that—they've got a dozen other players to manage.

That's why it's so important to highlight that we're not just recruiting coaches—we're also recruiting team parents. When parents register their kids, I think leagues should ask two questions:

1. Are you interested in coaching?
2. Are you interested in being a team parent or manager?

That way, once teams are formed, the coach already knows who's willing to help. It gives them a ready-made list of reliable parents to lean on, which is a huge relief for new coaches. Personally, I love the team parent role. I enjoy managing things—it keeps me involved with the kids. With a little one of my own, it's tough to get out on the field to coach, but this role gives me a way to give back in a meaningful way.

Recognition is also important. It brings purpose to the community and highlights the value of this role. People want to feel that what they're doing matters—and being a team parent is a great way to contribute, especially for those who aren't comfortable coaching.

Over time, I've worn many hats—providing feedback to our staff, helping implement changes to make our sports programs run smoother, and always looking for ways to improve. I don't do it for recognition. For me, it's enough to know I've made a difference—even if it's just for one person. But being recognized for that is humbling and such an honor. When people see that kind of recognition, it inspires them. They start to think, "I could do that. That's possible for me." And that's exactly what we want—to set an example and show that leadership comes in many forms. **PRB+**

 **John Engh** is executive director of the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) in West Palm Beach, Fla. He can be reached via email at jengh@nays.org. To join more than 3,000 communities by starting a NAYS Member Organization, visit www.nays.org, email nays@nays.org, or call (800) 729-2057.

away, things come up. So, we plan ahead. Before the season starts, we identify our backups:

- Who's the No. 2 if there's no assistant coach?
- Who's No. 3 or 4?
- Which parents can step in to handle equipment or warm-ups?

Because we set those expectations early, it all runs smoothly. If the head coach can't be there, parents already know their responsibilities. As the team parent, I like to think in terms of "COAs"—courses of action. We outline what happens in different situations so everyone's ready. When you build that into your season from the start, everything flows naturally. Parents know their roles, and things get done. If you try to wing it, it's harder. But if you've communicated expectations early and everyone's on the same page, the team runs like clockwork—even when the unexpected happens.

JE: How can recreation leaders get passionate parents like you helping in their programs?

GC: We spend a lot of time saying, "I need a coach, I need a coach," and of course—that's incredibly important. Coaches make or break whether a team can even exist. But we often overlook another key role: the team parent or team manager, whatever you want to call it.

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Finding the good in our worst moments



The miracle of gratitude is that it shifts your perception to such an extent that it changes the world you see.

—DR. ROBERT HOLDEN

Things turn out best for people who make the best of the way things turn out.

—JOHN WOOD

Gratitude turns what we have into enough.

—MELODY BEATTIE

It has been a particularly hard workday. On your way to the parking lot, you grumble, “Man, sometimes I hate this horrible job.” This horrible job—the one that feeds your family, puts your kids through school, provides your upper-middle-class home in your upper-middle-class neighborhood. The job that provided your family’s health insurance when everyone was sick last winter and quarantined for two weeks—while you continued to be paid. *That* horrible job.

You slam the car door and turn the key. Your battery is dead. “Dang!” you scream and rest your head on the steering wheel, remembering that you meant to get the battery replaced last weekend but chose to take your kids fishing instead. A nice reward for being a good dad. You pull the phone from your pocket, call roadside assistance, and fifteen minutes later, a truck arrives, your battery is replaced and paid for with a credit card, and you’re on your way home. While waiting for the service, you spend the idle time returning emails that you would have had to answer later, saving yourself some time. “Stupid car,” you lament. You’ve missed your tee time at the club. You call the guys and apologize. “See ya next week!”

Your wife pulls into the driveway almost simultaneously, and she has a few grocery bags to carry inside. She stopped after work for steaks to throw on the grill this evening. Before she unloads the car, she hugs you hello, and you carry the bags into the house for her. A few minutes later, you’ve both changed clothes, and the steaks are sizzling out back as the kids set the table. Sure, it’s nice to have time with the wife and kids, but you were really looking forward to some golf today. Well, you can’t have everything. “I never get a break.”

The Silver Lining

Alden is failing miserably at his job. His supervisor continues to remind him that he needs to improve his performance. He just can’t seem to pull things together. No one knows his wife has moved out and begun divorce proceedings. Money is tight. He has no one to talk to.

Jenna makes up more symptoms to avoid school tomorrow. She has been bullied online since her school picture was published—her eyes were closed. One person wrote, “Now you look as stupid as I always knew you were.” Jenna will do anything to get out of school tomorrow.

Artie smiles at the hostess as she seats him alone at a corner table. His wife died six months ago, and he just now has the courage to go out in public. A little boy at the next table sticks his tongue out at Artie, who first smiles but then begins to silently cry. The child mocks him even more.

Marilyn gets on the bus and stows her walking crutch out of sight. She rides two stops past her typical destination. This way, she won't arrive at the usual time, and people who know her won't see her use the crutch to hobble out. She exits the bus, catches the one heading back the other way, and gets off at her usual exit. She looks to the sky and is grateful no one she knows sees her becoming an old lady.

Sally's adult son has been diagnosed with cancer. He has a wife and two teenage daughters. Sally made a vow to him that if he didn't make it, she would help his wife raise the girls and help them through college. But Sally's doctor came into the office with a grim face. She, too, has cancer, but advanced, and she will likely pass on before her son. Her heart feels as if it has been shattered. How can she tell her son she won't be there on top of what he is already going through?

Corey lives alone except for her cat, Domino. This morning before work, Domino scampered through the door when the paperboy dropped off the morning newspaper. Corey watched Domino run into the street and immediately get run over, instantly dying. Domino was her whole world, her only companion. She called out of work and spent the day in mourning. She can't imagine life without Domino. The loss may seem trivial to some, but not to Corey. It was all she had.

I bet some of the folks in these examples would gladly take a "lousy day" where he or she was paid handsomely, inconvenienced only momentarily, and had the love and warmth of family without even having to reach for it. There are people whose best day will never come close, in quality, to your worst day—people who can't afford the luxuries you enjoy without even considering them.

Count The Blessings

A friend of mine applied for a job that was a little above his current skill level, but he thought it was "close enough" in order to stretch his resume a little. He claimed to have certain competencies that he was still working on (of course, no one else ever does this, right?). Well, sure enough, he was hired, but within the first few weeks, he realized he had made a mistake in stretching the truth about his abilities. The skills expected from him (mechanical drawing) were not there, and no amount of cramming at night could get him up to speed. Yes, he should have been more honest, but he was only trying to improve his station in life and provide better for his family. He approached management and confessed his mistake, and they were not sympathetic. He was immediately fired. He appealed to his

former company to see if his previous position had been filled, and even though it had not, the company refused to hire him back. He returned home and explained the situation to his wife and adopted son. She was even less sympathetic than the employer, and after he was unable to find work for a couple of months, she moved in with her mother and began to refuse his visits and calls. He couldn't support payments on their marital home and was forced to sell the house that had little equity. When I last saw him, he was renting a basement apartment, was divorced, and was working for a landscape company with no benefits. He hadn't seen his son in over a year. He was a good man and meant well, but he made a costly mistake, and the string of misfortunes that followed his error was more than he deserved.

We may not know it at the time, but the "life string" we dangle from is quite thin, isn't it? Something happens on the job, we lose our source of income, and those who depend on us can no longer do so. This results in a lack of respect from them and for us as well. We realize we have no real professional equity, and must start at the bottom again. It's not so easy when one's self-confidence is low, is it? The finances dry up. We lose our assets. Friends begin to distance themselves.

When I began this story, I decided to go without shaving and grooming and dress in some older clothes. I walked to highway off-ramps and mingled with some homeless folks. My intention was to secretly interview these folks and see where life had gone off-track for them. I expected my conversations to vary; I was wrong. The place where their troubles began fell into one of three categories: Job loss, divorce, or illness (self or partner). The common thread was not having enough spirit to fight at a time when it seemed impossible to muster the will. On the third day of my research, a fellow came along carrying a "Will work for food" sign. He knew several of the regulars I'd come to know. "Hey, I know you," he said to me. I did not recognize him, but he was sure we had met. Though we never clarified whether he'd once met me or someone who looked like me, one thing became frighteningly real that day. He easily could have because I just as easily could have been any one of those guys from under the bridge. So far, I've been blessed, and I thank God every night before bed for keeping it that way. There but for the grace of God go I. **PRB+**



Ron Ciancutti worked in the parks and recreation industry from the age of 16, covering a broad range of duties that included maintenance, operations, engineering, surveying, park management, design, planning, recreation, and finance. He is now retired.

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