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—WILLIAM JAMES

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Editor's Note

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Making Noise

This past June, while vacationing in the Northeast, my family and I spent an afternoon at Mass MoCA, an incredible (and gigantic) contemporary art museum in North Adams, Mass. There were many memorable exhibits: one where visitors could have their fortunes told using coffee grounds, another where oversized Indigenous garments hung from the ceiling as a soundtrack of booming house music played.

The one I remember most vividly was “No Experience Required,” by the artist Gunnar Schonbeck. The room was filled with countless instruments, all roughly constructed and made of atypical materials. They were small and huge, pretty and grotesque, but all made music—and anyone who wanted could use them.

So often in museum spaces, the viewer is there as a witness only. Snap a photo with your phone, hold the image in your mind's eye, buy a souvenir at the gift shop. Just don't touch. Not in this case. Throughout this room, children and their parents banged every instrument they could find with mallets provided at the entrance. The goal was to produce sounds, no matter how loud or disorderly, without needing an ounce of training. My kids especially had a ball, attempting ad hoc compositions and letting loose all their pent-up, art-museum energy.

Something else happened, though. The most genius part of this exhibit wasn't the invitation to bang on the instruments. It was its pure existence,

tactile and imperfect, in a world that's increasingly frictionless.

When I think about the value of this month's issue, our annual Idea Book (and to a greater extent, all magazines, all physical cultural products), that's the redeeming quality—the texture of a printed page under your fingertips, the order of information as curated by a trusted

third-party, the potential to spark ideas haphazardly yet organically. Consider this abundance of products, services, and top-notch vendors our version of

that music room at Mass MoCA.

Flip through for as long as you want, zero in on what you like, make decisions about what happens next. There's no predetermined path and no expectation. The Idea Book is your tool for discovery, a place to bang around and make some noise, a place where you can do a lot more than just look.

When you're ready to take those next steps, whether it's placing an order, making a connection, or building out a step-by-step plan, Ask PRB+ is the assistant who can do it all. Trained on all of our journalism (including thorough resources like this very Idea Book) and cut off from the rest of the web, our AI agent is the only one custom-built for your industry, designed to take your ideas to the next level. Visit prbplus.com to start prompting.

Jefferey Spivey
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IRRIGATION AND DRAINAGE

By Mary Helen Sprecher

Why these complex subjects are
anything but cut-and-dried



Irrigation (and subsequently, drainage) are some of the most important topics in sports facilities, but they often receive the least attention.

Maybe it's because they're not as exciting as a new set of lights or upgraded Wi-Fi. Maybe it's because most people don't understand them very well, and as a result, avoid paying attention to them.

The problem, however, is that avoiding this particular topic will set up sports facilities to fail. After all, it doesn't matter how great the Wi-Fi is if the field is a muddy mess. And if tennis, pickleball, or basketball courts have puddles of water that gather dirt and become slippery, all the lighting in the world won't help.

The following is a primer on irrigation and drainage and how one can harness them to put sports facilities on the path to success.





FOR COURTS

First, the basics. Most courts in park and rec installations have hard surfaces (made of concrete or asphalt and covered with sport-specific acrylic surfacing).

Proper drainage for these courts starts with the correct slope, which, according to the publications *Tennis Courts: Construction & Maintenance Manual* and *Pickleball Courts: Construction & Maintenance Manual*, should be one inch in 10 feet with a permissible maximum of one percent. (More than this is bothersome to players.)

Courts should slope in one true plane, either from side to side (net post to net post), end to end (baseline to baseline), or diagonally (corner to corner). In a bank of courts, courts should slope end to end in order to avoid water running across multiple courts.

Slope allows courts to shed water effectively during a rain event (or following cleaning, such as power washing) and to dry more quickly.

Puddles on the court can be a safety problem as well as an aesthetic issue. Low areas, or “birdbaths,” are defined as any areas where standing water more than 1/16” (1.58mm) deep (commonly measured using a nickel) remains after drainage of the area has ceased or after one hour at 70 degrees Fahrenheit or above in sunlight.



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If one notices such puddles on the court, a court contractor can be called in to provide ideas. Do not attempt to patch or fill the areas as part of a DIY project; wait for a professional recommendation.

According to John Schedler of Baraka Sport, staying on top of drainage problems starts with regular inspections of all facilities. Do not wait until an athlete slips and falls to investigate.

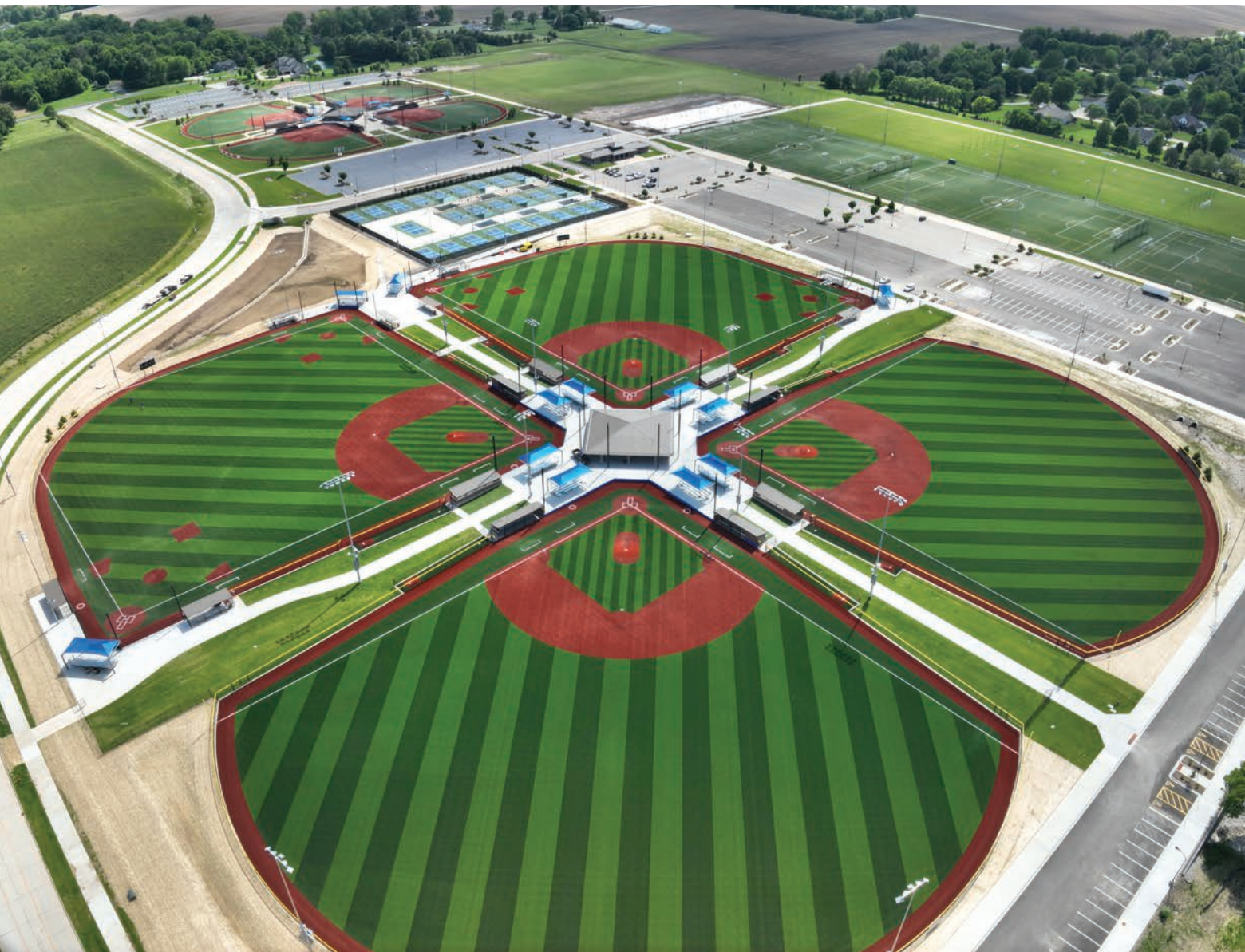
“Regular inspections with knowledgeable, experienced, or professional staff, consultants, vendors, and others are key,” Schedler says. “I’ve seen many surfaces that were left without any repair, advice, or attention for way too long. This typically ages the facility more quickly, making early replacement more likely.”

Early intervention often results in a less expensive fix, Schedler adds.

FOR FIELDS

Whether fields are diamonds (for baseball and softball) or rectangular (such as those used for soccer, lacrosse, football, and other sports), good drainage is absolutely imperative.

If diamonds are natural grass, be sure to rake regularly to avoid a buildup of loose material and grass clippings where the infield meets the outfield. That



buildup can create a dam that keeps water from draining effectively. (Additionally, it can cause a ball to take a hop that may injure a player.)

Many natural fields have drainage around the perimeter; builders note the importance of keeping drains clear of material like grass clippings, mud, leaves, and other debris that can cause clogs and inhibit drainage.

Todd Smith of R&R Engineers & Surveyors, Inc. says that all too often, attention is paid to grass fields in a reactive rather than a proactive manner. Mowing is only one aspect of field care.

“The main mistake I see is not doing a little maintenance each day or each time the field is used,” he says.

It is also essential to understand the lifecycle of grass and how it responds to stress, Smith adds.

“Overwatering is the most common problem. Just because a grass blade turns a bit tan or brown, that doesn’t mean it needs more water. It may need rest as every living organism does. It may need more phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) fertilizer to help store energy reserves, or it may be out of its natural range.”

The latter problem is common. Some grass species,



by nature, want to go dormant at a specific temperature; however, if a field owner continues to fertilize the grass, it will maintain its vibrant, green color, but will lack a strong root system.

Consult with a local agronomist who can provide care recommendations on water and fertilization for grass in a specific installation.

Synthetic fields have integrated drainage systems; these



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should be checked regularly by turning on the irrigation and flooding the field, then watching to see if any areas remain wet.

It's also important to look for other telltale symptoms of problems, says Schedler.

"Look for obvious issues like visible seams, but also for planarity issues, which will present as wavy-looking playing lines. You can also inspect for contamination—dust, sand, dirt, and organics, usually from the surrounding landscape—as well as damage in high-wear areas and loose fibers. Look out for encroachment of weeds and grasses, as well as problems like discoloration and uneven areas of infill level."

IRRIGATION

Perhaps one of the first (and most easily addressed) issues with irrigation is keeping it directed only where it should be.

If, for example, fields have an in-ground irrigation system, it is essential to make sure water falls only on the field and not onto bleachers, dugouts, and other adjacent structures. Additionally, waterwise systems are now available; if precipitation is sensed, the system stops watering the field.

By contrast, if courts are surrounded by landscaping with an irrigation system, water should be hitting only the landscaping. Be careful of any system that might not only get the courts wet but might wash dirt, mulch, or other debris onto the surface.

Problems with a sprinkler system are among the most easily remedied; however, if the issue goes beyond the capability of the park maintenance crew, contact a sports-specific contractor or a sprinkler vendor.

The publication *Sports Fields: Construction and Maintenance Manual* can provide in-depth information on field care. Information is available from the American Sports Builders Association, www.sportsbuilders.org.

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Mary Helen Sprecher is the technical writer for the American Sports Builders Association (ASBA) and also the editor of two of ASBA's publications, Sports Fields: Construction and Maintenance Manual and Courts & Recreational Surfaces: Construction and Maintenance Manual.





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All About Trees



*How three counties used federal grant money
for tree removal and replacement*

BY LINDA LANGELO

In small, rural communities, tree management is vital for maintaining a healthy tree canopy where shade, beautification, and wind protection are crucial for quality of life. During the hot summer or when cold winter winds lash the surface of anything vertical in eastern Colorado, just two or three trees can make the difference between finding a moment of peace in a country cemetery to remember a friend or loved one, or looking at his or her gravestone from a distance while standing beside a truck.

It can be tough to justify spending public funds on tree planting in these communities with 3,000 to 10,000 residents when other urgent priorities strain local budgets. Most of these communities also lack an ISA-certified arborist. They depend on funding to start or maintain programs that local resources might not cover.

In 2024, a grant became available through the Colorado State Forest Service for communities disproportionately impacted by a successful national grant awarded to the US Forest Service. Carrie Tomlinson, the Urban and Community Forest Manager, shared this opportunity with the CSU Extension in rural Northeast Colorado in May 2024, during a meeting with local community leaders. As a result of that meeting, a series of grants was developed.



Putting Funds To Work

Funding was provided on a reimbursement basis to selected communities. This sometimes required mayors or town managers to allocate funds in their budgets to start the projects and be reimbursed through the grants. Towns could use budgeted funds to trim trees that conflicted with overhead electrical lines in alleys, along streets, or in parks.



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Towns with an established tree board, such as Wray, Colo., used funding from the parks and recreation department. After removing dead, compromised, or diseased trees, each town had to develop a replanting strategy. The grant included the following criteria: forming a tree board, engaging community volunteers, offering a stipend for a tree steward, and inventorying trees. The CSU Forest Service and Extension helped educate citizens and volunteers on tree planting and long-term care.

In Northeast Colorado, three counties—Sedgwick, Phillips, and Yuma—were jointly awarded \$429,999 based on an initial assessment of trees in their towns. The first challenge was raising awareness among town leaders and building trust in the reimbursement grant process. There was concern the counties would spend the money and never be reimbursed. The initial issue was some towns preferred not to have clerks track funding, collect invoices, and make payments; instead, they used a nonprofit as a pass-through. This required engaging the Sedgwick County Economic Development nonprofit as a collaborator of the co-principal investigators on the grant. The second issue involved over 200 dead and diseased trees, of which 119 were removed, and 125 were scheduled to be replanted in April 2026. The third challenge was finding enough





qualified tree trimmers or certified arborists locally to manage the workload while keeping costs reasonable. The grant only required liability insurance and workers' compensation, not certification. In Holyoke, in Phillips County, and Wray, in Yuma County, tree trimmers operated without certification but filled the roles. During interactions

with these trimmers, CSU Extension staff discovered that many still used improper pruning techniques, including lion-tailing and topping cuts. As a result, these arborists received formal training to ensure proper techniques are used now and in the future. Randy Thompson, one of the arborists, was certified as an ISA arborist as a result.

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Lion-tailing creates liability due to the following reasons:

- 1) Increases wind load at branch ends
- 2) Weakens branch attachments
- 3) Raises the likelihood of limb or whole-tree failure.

The beginning of the tree-removal process raised awareness about how important funding was in helping small towns that don't generate enough tax revenue to pay for the work. Sedgwick County Manager Chris Beckman (assistant clerk during the grant period) says, "We realize now how much more we could have asked for in funding initially and been awarded. Though a lot of trees were removed, there is still more we could have accomplished." The town board initially opposed the plan because it worried that reimbursement might not be received.

This grant created an opportunity for certified arborists in small towns who own their own businesses. The towns are now able to find qualified certified arborists. Thompson Tree Service says, "I was grateful to have this opportunity to become certified."

CSU State Arborist Carrie Tomlinson says, "By ISA-certifying arborists, we are protecting the future of tree canopy in Eastern Colorado. All it takes is one bad pruning job from someone with a chainsaw to permanently damage it, causing it to become hazardous in the near future."



Long-Term Impacts

This grant involved community engagement with residents who volunteered to conduct an inventory and attend training workshops on tree care and planting. Town councils that did not have a tree ordinance now have one. Those without a tree board are considering forming one. Youth participated in planting trees on Arbor Day. Towns are considering becoming Tree City USA.

Private residents' feedback prompted contacting CSU Horticulture Specialist Linda Langelo to assess their private trees. Residents expressed interest in taking part in the tree-removal process.

Ultimately, residents from all communities became volunteers who attended training sessions and practiced inventorying trees with CSU arborist interns. During this process, the volunteers gained hands-on experience in tree identification. In fact, everyone involved with the grant learned more about maintaining a healthy tree canopy in their towns. They discovered how to strengthen their town ordinances to prevent future liability issues. They also understood the purpose of the Tree City USA designation, which helps protect the town's canopy over the long term by ensuring the right structures are in place.

Angie Wade, Director of Community Service of Wray, Colo., who coordinated funding and events, believes the IRA Grant and the collaboration improved her community in four ways:

1) Removed all trees that were diseased or dead and had potential liability in public places

2) Created an opportunity for a local tree trimmer to become a certified arborist

3) Achieved a heightened awareness among city staff, residents, and volunteers about the impact trees have, signs to notice different tree issues, and how to respond

4) More openness to continuing future tree planting.



A total of 139 trees were removed across the three-county area, with replanting efforts beginning in spring 2026. These towns now have community forestry programs in place to prepare for the effects of climate change and replace the canopy trees that have existed since the Dust Bowl. **PRB+**

Linda Langelo is a Colorado State University Extension Horticulture Specialist, a member of Garden Communicators International, and a regular contributor to *MarthaStewart.com*'s gardening articles. She also produces *The Relentless Gardener Podcast* and the *Relentless Gardener Column*, which won a Laurel Award from Garden Communicators International. She is a guest blogger for AARP Colorado and AARP Maryland.



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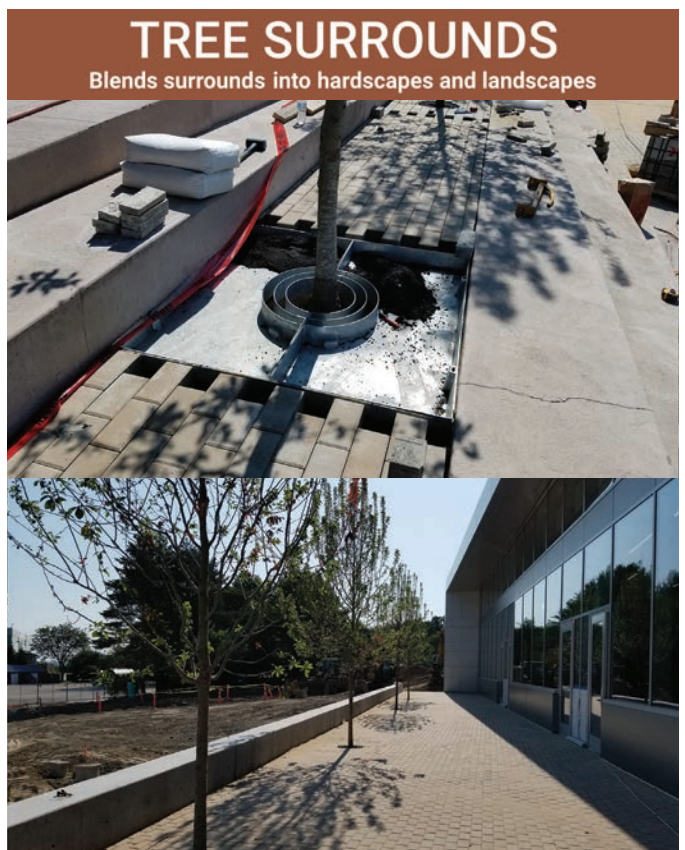
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» BY TROY SMITH

Addressing Drainage Issues In High-Traffic Turf Areas

How parks and recreation professionals can spot early warning signs, improve playability, and prevent costly repairs

High-traffic turf areas on sports fields, golf courses, or large public greenspaces are often the first to show signs of stress. Constant foot traffic, maintenance equipment, and repeated play put constant pressure on these surfaces, which can lead to poor drainage. When that happens, the impact goes well beyond appearances. It affects safety, playability, and long-term maintenance costs, often forcing difficult decisions around field closures or costly repairs. The key to avoiding these issues is identifying them long before it gets to that point.

Unfortunately, what makes drainage issues particularly challenging is they rarely begin as obvious failures. Instead, they build gradually beneath the surface. By the time standing water or turf loss becomes visible, the underlying problem has often been building for months or longer. For parks and recreation professionals managing high-use spaces, understanding the early warning signs—and knowing how to

act on them—can make the difference between routine maintenance and full-scale reconstruction.

Why Drainage Breaks Down In High-Use Areas

High-use areas compact faster than the rest of the field. Repeated traffic reduces pore space in the soil, making it more difficult for water and air to effectively move through it. When that happens, moisture lingers near the surface after rainfall or irrigation, creating conditions that stress turf and weaken root systems.

Soil type and composition also play a critical role in how quickly these issues emerge. Fine-textured soils, such as clay, tend to hold moisture longer. Sand-based areas may resist compaction initially but can still develop layering or stability issues over time. Organic matter and thatch can also accumulate and restrict water movement, further compounding the problem.

Weather, the environment, and

field conditions can add another layer to the breakdown. Seasonal rainfall patterns, irrigation, and freeze-thaw cycles all influence how water moves, or doesn't move, through the soil. Even subtle grade inconsistencies can create low areas for water to collect, particularly in heavily used zones where the surface may be deformed.

Early Warning Signs To Watch For

One of the biggest challenges in managing drainage is the tendency to react only after visible failure occurs. By that point, the cost—both financial and operational—is significantly higher.

Reactive approaches often lead to emergency repairs, unexpected field closures, and increased labor demands. Proactive monitoring allows for smaller, more manageable interventions that extend turf life and maintain consistent playing conditions. Common things to watch for include the following:



- Soft or spongy footing in high-traffic areas
- Water lingering on the surface after light rainfall or irrigation
- Thinning turf or inconsistent growth in wear zones
- Shallow or discolored roots, indicating limited oxygen availability
- Persistent wet areas that may develop algae or surface discoloration.

These are all signs that water is no longer moving efficiently through the soil, and intervention may be needed.

Diagnosing The Problem

The first step to determining what's happening beneath the surface is a quick field check. Simple tests like checking how firm the surface feels, how long moisture stays around, or how deep roots are growing can give field crews an idea of what's going on.

From there, the goal is to connect what was observed to the underlying issue. Compaction is usually the culprit when the surface feels hard and dense, and roots stay shallow. Water may sit briefly before slowly soaking in, but the soil lacks the pore space needed for consistent movement.

Drainage issues tend to show up as water lingering on the surface or in low

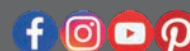


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spots well after rain. These areas often feel soft or unstable, especially under repeated use.

Organic buildup or layering can act like a barrier in the soil. If you notice a heavy thatch layer or distinct changes between soil layers, water may be getting trapped above that zone instead of moving through it. Over time, that can lead to soft spots or recurring problem areas.

Proactive Maintenance That Restores Drainage

In many cases, drainage performance can be improved through targeted cultural practices that restore the soil's ability to absorb and move water.

Aeration is one of the most effective tools to relieve compaction. Depending on the turf type and seasonal growth, field crews can use solid tines, hollow tines, or needle tines to reopen pore space and improve infiltration. Topdressing—applying a thin layer of sand or soil over the surface—can help prevent or correct soil layering. Organic matter

can be managed through practices like verticutting, which removes excess thatch and helps keep water from being blocked at the surface. If there are only minor irregularities that impact surface drainage, rolling or light smoothing may solve the problem. These practices work best when turf is actively growing and can recover quickly.

Additional tools can also support long-term drainage performance as part of a broader maintenance plan. Soil testing can help crews better understand moisture movement, compaction levels, and nutrient needs in high-traffic areas. Soil surfactants may improve water distribution in zones with uneven infiltration, while balanced nutrient programs can help turf withstand stress during periods of heavy use. In areas where turf loss occurs repeatedly, traffic-tolerant seed blends may help establish a more resilient playing surface.

It's also important to make the proper adjustments to irrigation systems. Overwatering already stressed areas can make drainage

issues worse. During seasonal changes, it's important to consider recalibrating watering schedules.

When implemented consistently, these strategies can significantly improve surface performance without the need for major reconstruction.

When Surface Fixes Aren't Enough

While cultural practices can address many drainage challenges, they may not be sufficient in areas where water continues to accumulate despite regular maintenance.

In these situations, structural solutions may be necessary, depending on the situation. Slit drainage systems—narrow channels cut into the surface to move water down and away—can provide rapid water removal. French drains or interceptor drains, which use gravel and piping to redirect water, can help move excess moisture away from problem areas. Catch basins and channel drains can also be effective in zones that remain consistently saturated.

In some situations, underlying



construction factors may also need to be addressed. A stable, well-graded base is essential for long-term drainage performance. If the sub-base does not move water efficiently, the entire system becomes vulnerable to issues like settling, soft spots, or surface deformation.

Planning these types of

improvements during off-peak or shoulder seasons can help minimize disruption to high-use areas.

Building A More Resilient Surface

High-traffic turf areas will always be subject to stress, but drainage failure does not have to be inevitable.

With a clear understanding of how and why these issues develop, parks and recreation professionals can take a more proactive approach.

Healthy, playable turf depends not only on what is visible above ground, but on the structure and performance of the soil beneath it. By combining early detection, targeted maintenance, and, when necessary, structural improvements, managers can create more resilient surfaces that stand up to heavy use season after season. **PRB+**

Troy Smith, CSFM, is the Sports Fields Segment Manager at SiteOne Landscape Supply. He can be reached at TSmith5@SiteOne.com.

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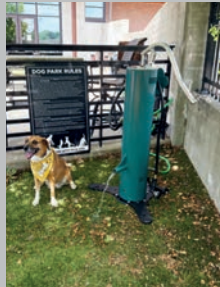
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Where Young People Grow

Why great camps still change lives and what smart camp leaders are doing differently



BY JAMES MCLAMB

recently spent several days with camp leaders from across the Carolinas and Virginias, and somewhere between conversations about staffing shortages, insurance increases, counselor burnout, and whether middle school boys are physically capable of walking past a lake without throwing something into it, I kept coming back to the same thought: Camp professionals are carrying far more than most outsiders realize. Camp leaders reading this already know that. You know this work is no longer only about activities and schedules. Camp today sits directly at the intersection of youth mental health, emotional resilience, leadership development, social growth, risk management, and human connection.





That is a heavy assignment.

I say that personally because camp shaped my life, too. I served as a summer-camp counselor. My wife served as a counselor. All three of our children have worked on camp staffs as well. Around our house, camp stories are family history.

Some families pass down recipes.

We pass down stories about thunderstorm evacuations, talent show disasters, homesick campers, and the mystery of how every cabin somehow produces twelve missing water bottles and one completely unexplained wet towel hanging from the ceiling.

Camp gets into your bloodstream.

But after years of working professionally in youth-leadership development, I have become convinced of something important: Great camps are not successful because they entertain kids well. Great camps succeed because they intentionally create environments where young people grow.

Camps Are Competing Against A Completely Different World

Twenty years ago, camps competed against television and video games.

Now camps compete against algorithms engineered to hold teenagers' attention every waking minute. Many campers arrive emotionally overstimulated, socially exhausted, and deeply uncomfortable with silence. They are used to constant entertainment, curated digital identities, and communication that happens almost entirely through screens.

One veteran camp director told me recently, "We used to spend most of our energy getting campers to open up. Now we spend half our time helping them slow down."

That observation perfectly captures what many camps are experiencing.

Young people are drowning in noise, and camp interrupts the noise. Within a few days, campers begin to change. They laugh more naturally. They look people in the eye again. They start participating instead of spectating.

By midweek, they are passionately arguing over the four-square rules as if international trade negotiations are hanging in the balance.

Honestly, it is beautiful to watch.

The Best Camps Understand That Environment Is The Curriculum

One mistake many organizations make is believing youth-development happens primarily through programming.

Camp professionals know better. The environment itself teaches.

The emotional tone in the cabin teaches. The way counselors handle conflict teaches. The way adults



respond to mistakes teaches. The way staff members talk to each other teaches.

That is why experienced camp leaders obsess over culture. Two camps can run identical activities with completely different developmental outcomes depending on the environment surrounding those activities.

A climbing wall alone does not build confidence. A climbing wall paired with emotional safety, encouragement, trusted counselors, and healthy challenge absolutely can.

The activity is not the magic. The environment surrounding the activity is.

Counselor Culture Is The Real Program

Many younger leaders eventually learn this lesson the hard way: Your staff culture becomes your camper experience.

Not your mission statement.

Not your social media feed.

Not your beautifully edited promotional video with drone footage and acoustic guitar music.

Your counselor culture drives everything.

If staff members are emotionally exhausted, disconnected, unsupported, or relationally divided, campers

will feel it immediately. Teenagers are emotional smoke detectors. They detect tension faster than adults realize.

Several camp directors I spoke with admitted that staff burnout has become one of the greatest threats facing camps. One experienced leader completely redesigned a program's summer structure after realizing constant exhaustion was damaging team culture.

The director added decompression periods, rotating responsibilities, stronger mentoring systems, and more intentional leadership coaching throughout the summer.

The results were significant: Camper behavior improved. Staff conflict decreased. Retention increased. Leadership depth improved.

Because regulated adults create healthier environments for dysregulated teenagers. That lesson matters far beyond camp.

What The Camps Getting It Right Are Actually Doing

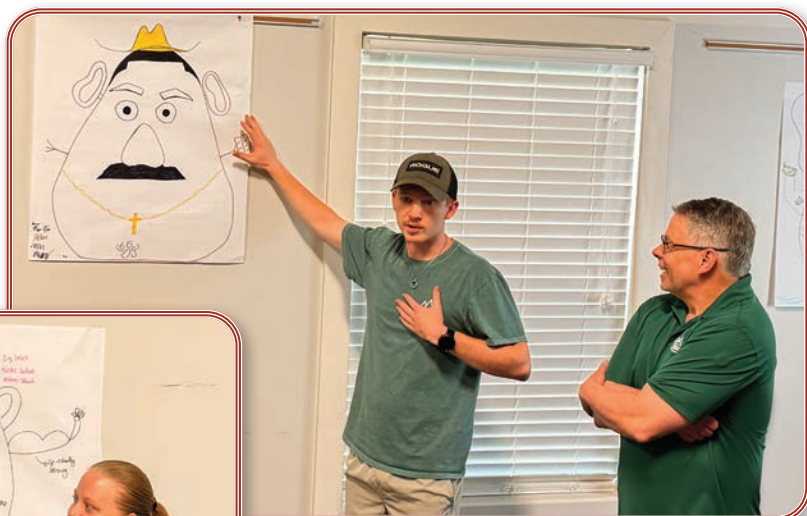
The strongest camps I studied are not simply complaining about changes in today's campers. They are adapting intentionally. Here is what that looks like in practice:

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campers. Not every moment needs amplified music. Not every activity needs a microphone. Not every transition needs to feel like a pep rally. Some camps are intentionally creating quieter free-time spaces, lower-pressure activity options, and calmer transitions throughout the day. Surprisingly, several leaders told me that camper engagement actually improved once the environment became less chaotic.

1 Build margin into the schedule and protect it.

Several directors admitted they had overprogrammed their days for years because they felt pressure to constantly entertain campers. Now they are intentionally protecting margin for cabin conversations, slower transitions, shared cleanup, and unstructured interaction. One director laughed and told me, “You cannot schedule vulnerability for 3:45 right after archery.” He is absolutely right. Look at your current schedule and find two places where you can slow down. Start there.

2 Redesign staff training around relationships, not only logistics.

Instead of focusing almost entirely on logistics and discipline, many camps are now spending significant portions of staff training teaching emotional intelligence, conflict coaching, active listening, and group dynamics. One director shared that leaders now role-play camper conflict scenarios during training week because many younger staff members have never personally learned healthy conflict resolution. That one adjustment dramatically reduced cabin tension by midsummer. The cost is minimal. It only requires rethinking how you use the time you already have.

3 Reduce overstimulation intentionally.

Several experienced directors realized that constant hype was actually increasing emotional fatigue and anxiety for many

4 Invest heavily in returning staff. Almost every healthy camp culture has one thing in common: experienced counselors who stabilize the environment emotionally. One director told me, “Returning staff members create emotional consistency for campers before the first activity even starts.” Because of that, some camps are shifting resources away from flashy recruiting efforts and investing more heavily in staff retention, mentoring systems, leadership pathways, and counselor support. The payoff has been significant, resulting in lower staff conflict, healthier cabin culture, fewer behavior issues, and stronger leadership continuity.

5 Train counselors to notice who is on the edges.

Experienced camp staff members understand that disconnected campers rarely announce themselves loudly. The camper who hangs quietly at the edge of the table. The teenager who hangs slightly behind the group. The child who participates physically but not socially. The best camps train staff to notice these patterns quickly and intentionally pull campers into connection instead of awkwardly spotlighting them. One director told me, “Most isolated campers do not need attention. They need a bridge.” That may be one of the smartest youth-development statements I have heard all year, and it is one any camp can begin acting on immediately.

Why Camp Still Matters

Despite all the cultural changes surrounding us, healthy camps still create something young people increasingly struggle to find anywhere else: human connection, meaningful challenge, encouragement, responsibility, belonging, and room to grow.

The world has changed dramatically. Human development really has not.

Give young people healthy relationships, strong mentors, meaningful experiences, and opportunities to discover courage, and they will often rise far beyond what adults expect.

That is why camp still works.

And after spending years around camp professionals, I believe the people doing this work are far more influential than they sometimes realize. **PRB+**



James McLamb is a national youth-empowerment strategist, speaker, and founder of Generation Youth. You can contact him at james@generationziglar.com.

The advertisement for Campspot features a lush green forest background with tall trees and a stream. A green wavy line separates the top logo from the main text. The Campspot logo is in the top left. The main text 'TURN DATA INTO DECISIONS' is in large, bold, yellow and white letters. Below it, smaller white text describes the software's features. A green button with white text is at the bottom.

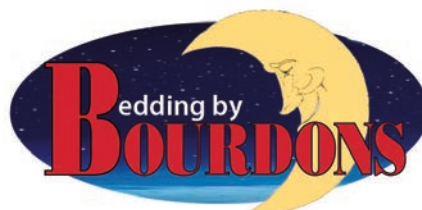
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By Christopher Thurber

Forget About It

*What obsessing
and letting go
can do to
our psyche*



My mother-in-law Tashta grew up in former Yugoslavia—now the countries of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia^[1], and Kosovo^[2]—under a communist government. I can only imagine what it was like...but those images are vivid, thanks to the detailed narratives Tashta has repeatedly shared. This is a story about how her emotional high tides, which crested at least a couple of times each day, changed to a peaceful and permanent low tide.^[3]

People respond to trauma in different ways, but for Tashta, frequently recounting what she endured was her default coping strategy. To friends, family, and perfect strangers, she would tell the story of how her grandfather was murdered by the Ustaše, a group that evolved from a separatist movement opposed to the royal monarchy to an ultranationalist organization that committed genocide in the name of creating an ethnically homogenous state.

Here, I should pause to clarify that my intention in this article is not to cast aspersions but simply to share my experience living with a witness to this time and place. The atrocities committed by the Ustaše are difficult to verify with precision and remain an emotionally sensitive topic. Equally difficult to verify with precision and

equally emotionally sensitive are the atrocities committed by Serbian groups during the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s.

Recent scholarly estimates, based partly on archives from Ustaše concentration camps, suggest the organization murdered more than 300,000 ethnic Serbs and nearly 100,000 Jews, Roma people, and political dissidents.^[4] This tragic and bloody chapter in World War II history is seldom mentioned in high school history books, though the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem do include the Ustaše regime in Holocaust history. They recognize it as a devastating example of fascism, Nazi collaboration, and state-sponsored genocide.^[5]

To Tashta, growing up in Belgrade, the capital of former Yugoslavia, meant witnessing the murder of family and friends, living at times in poverty, having property seized by the government, and enduring decades of corrupt leadership. These experiences were scarring for a little girl, as they would be for most people, at any age. Interestingly, Tashta mentally coupled those frightening decades of her youth to another historical period—one that ended long before she was born: the Ottoman Empire’s rule over Serbian lands. What she refers to as “500 years of Turkish domination” lasted from about 1400 to 1900.^{[6][7]} The point Tashta drives home, whether at the grocery store, Thanksgiving dinner, a backyard barbecue, or a post-recital reception, is that Serbs have suffered, that she has suffered, that she is *still* suffering. Objective historical analysis notwithstanding, it is this perception that interests me and has relevance for your leadership in a youth-serving organization.

◆◆◆ A Transformation ◆◆◆

I am a clinical psychologist, which means I try to help people who are suffering. I try to help people understand and overcome all kinds of emotional distress, from homesickness to major depressive episodes and even wartime trauma. Naturally, I tried to help Tashta. I don’t mean she became my therapy client, but ever since her daughter and I were married, I’ve been pointing out the many positive things in her life and in the world around us. A beautiful home in New Hampshire. Enough money for food, clothes, and summer camp. Wonderful grandchildren. Democracy (such as it is). The list goes on.

Although she expressed gratitude from time to time, Tashta expressed her resentment daily, sometimes multiple times a day. Whatever went wrong, it was either the fault of the Ottoman Empire, the Ustaše, or the communists. Once, while driving with Simo and her mom to visit an Eastern Orthodox monastery in Serbia, I hit a huge pothole.

Tashta’s reaction: “What do you want, Kristivoje? That’s 500 years of Turkish domination!” Another time, back in New Hampshire, our toaster broke. “Where this toaster was made?” Tashta asked. I looked. China. “What do you want? That’s communism!” No amount of thoughtful reasoning, no amount of calm, open-ended questions, and no amount



of positive psychology was ever successful at curbing her resentment or redirecting her preoccupation with past wrongs.

So obsessed was she with lecturing everyone about the Serbs’ suffering at the hands of despots that my boys and I started timing the number of minutes from the start of a holiday meal—beginning immediately after the blessing—to the start of one of Tashta’s bitter lectures. Once we got all the way to 23 minutes. And if an innocent guest dared point out that the Ottoman Empire ended decades before



paved roads were common in rural Serbia, or that some parts of former Yugoslavia have mostly recovered from various forms of rule and conflict,^[8] Tashta's terse reply was always, "Eh. Doesn't matter." What *did* matter, at least to me, was how her biased memory shaped her daily mood and interpersonal interactions.

Then, suddenly, two things transformed her chronic resentment. First, her gallbladder became inflamed, burst, and nearly killed her. The surgeon who saved her life with an emergency laparoscopic cholecystectomy was Turkish. "Turks are not all bad," she declared from her hospital bed. I nearly fainted.

Second, she started forgetting everything. Small arguments. Big arguments. Movies she had watched earlier in the day. (I once cued up the synchronized swimming classic, *Bathing Beauty*, three times in one day.) The name of the town where we lived. Whether she had eaten lunch. Everything. Yet, unlike some people with dementia, who become paranoid, fearful, aggressive, or emotionally volatile, Tashta became affectionate and cheerful. And then the obvious dawned on me: resentment requires remembering. Her brain had mostly lost that ability, so her mood and mindset had radically transformed. Indeed, without a minute of mindfulness meditation, all she has been able to do for the past couple of years is focus on the present moment. Unencumbered by the muddy filter of

resentment that was central to her identity, she has been able to see, clearly and for the first time, the true beauty and good fortune that surrounds her.

◆◆◆ The Key To Happiness ◆◆◆

Why share this weird, graphic, and personal narrative? Because it highlights two important truths, two insights that should not require emergency surgery or senility to realize. First, one should judge individual people by how they treat others, not by their appearance, their ethnicity, their religion, or their ancestors' grievous behavior.^[9] And second, one can savor the present only by releasing parts of the past from mental captivity. For most people, this means forgiving. For Tashta, forgiveness was short-circuited by her memory loss, but the social-emotional result has also been positive.

In his 1905 book, *The Life of Reason*, the philosopher George Santayana wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." I believe he was correct. For example, only by first understanding how genocides happen can we prevent them. But Santayana's wise admonition is incomplete because those who obsess about past negative events are condemned to bitterness. As Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski and syndicated columnist Ann Landers have both written, resentment is like letting someone or something you dislike live in your head rent-free. Resentment can prevent us from experiencing a joyful present, from moving toward a healthy future, and from contributing in positive ways to contemporary culture. It is, like so many things in life, a balancing act. What we keep front-of-mind matters as much as what we set on the back burner.

We live in a fantastic world, a world where both very good and very bad things have happened and continue to happen. And on an individual level, just as all of us experience joy, we will also experience sadness, anger, and other negative emotions. For Tashta, two kinds of biological decline forced a change in her mindset. For you—healthy as you are—there is a conscious choice. You can perseverate on pain, or you can choose to complement the wisdom you have gleaned from the past with a grateful focus on the present. That equilibrium, I see more clearly now than ever, is the key to happiness. **PRB+**



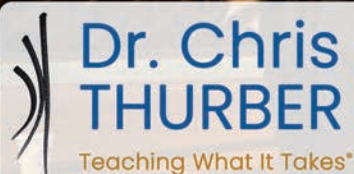
Dr. Christopher Thurber is a clinical psychologist, father, and professional educator who has presented keynotes and workshops on five continents. He is the author of two books for parents—*The Summer Camp Handbook* and *The Unlikely Art of Parental Pressure*—and two video series for young people: *Prep4Camp*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

Foot Notes

- [1] Formerly just Macedonia
- [2] Partially recognized
- [3] Readers interested in the complex history of the region—both before and after Yugoslavia existed—are encouraged to read John R. Lampe’s *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country* and Marie-Janine Calic’s *A History of Yugoslavia*, as well as to speak with people who lived through part or all of the period between about 1929 and the present.
- [4] Readers interested in more data-driven details are encouraged to read *Jasenovac* by Croatian historian Ivo Goldstein, published in 2018.
- [5] The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum also acknowledges the war crimes and genocidal acts committed by Serb-dominated forces during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s and formally labels the July 1995 Srebrenica massacre as a genocide.
- [6] One has to say “about” because different parts of former Yugoslavia were under Ottoman rule for different periods of time.
- [7] Here and elsewhere, I have put Tashta’s sentence in quotes to distinguish how she describes her experience of the world from how I would politely paraphrase her experience.
- [8] “Recovered” is a relative term, which one must contextualize region-by-region, with compassion. Before 1918, some parts of former Yugoslavia were Ottoman-dominated; others were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Prior to that, former Yugoslavia was comprised of an assortment of medieval kingdoms. And before that, it was all part of the Roman Empire.
- [9] Of course, whatever individuals can learn about their ancestors is important. Ancestral history can contribute to personal pride, sadness, confusion, insight, and identity, as well as influence how we treat others. It is that treatment on which I put a premium.

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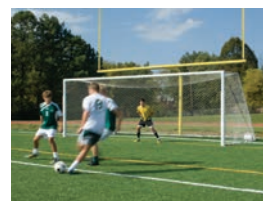
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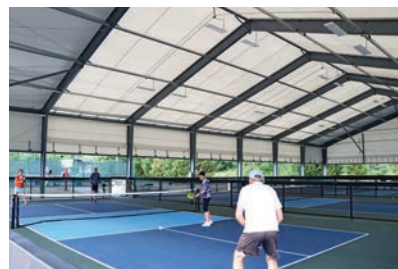
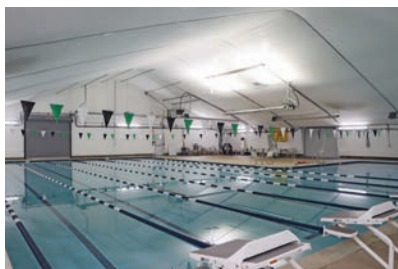
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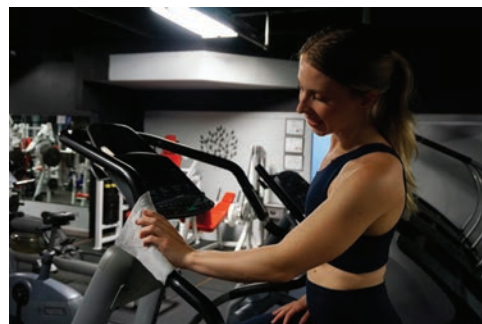
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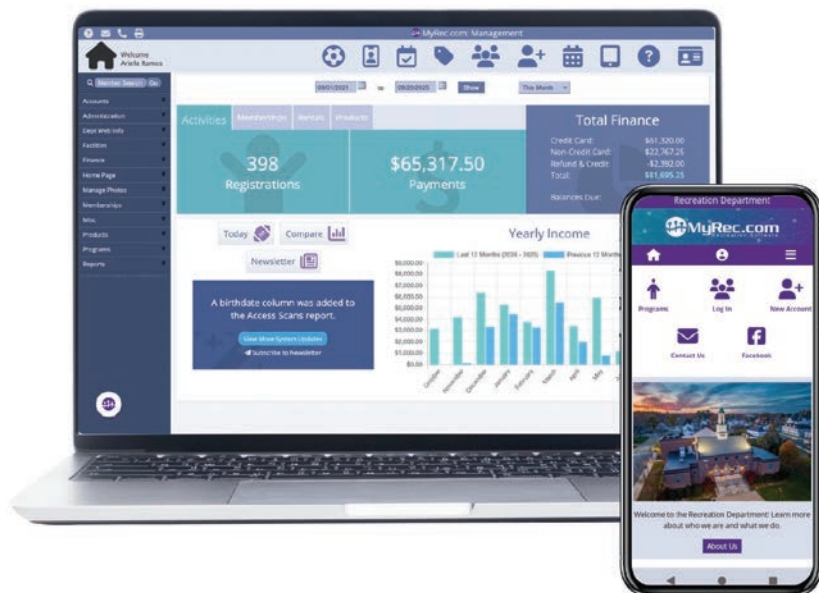


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Phelps Honey Wagon

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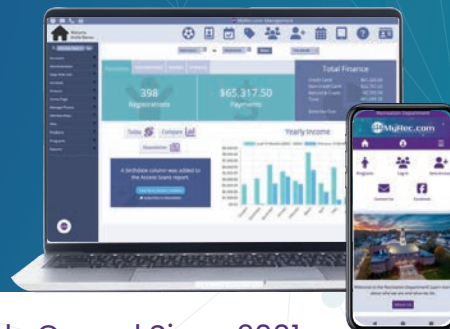


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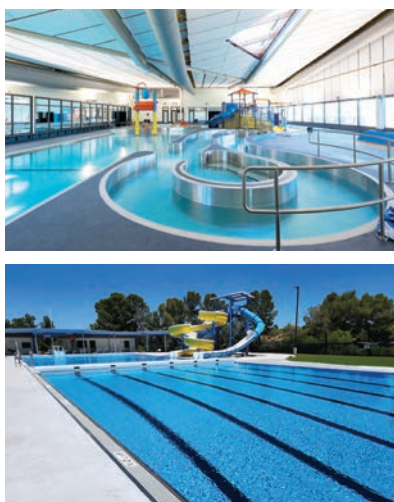
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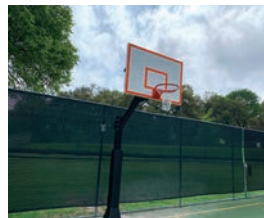
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Kay Park Picnic Tables

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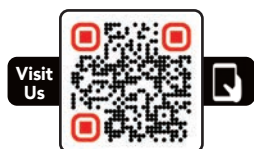
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Phelps Honey Wagon, Inc.

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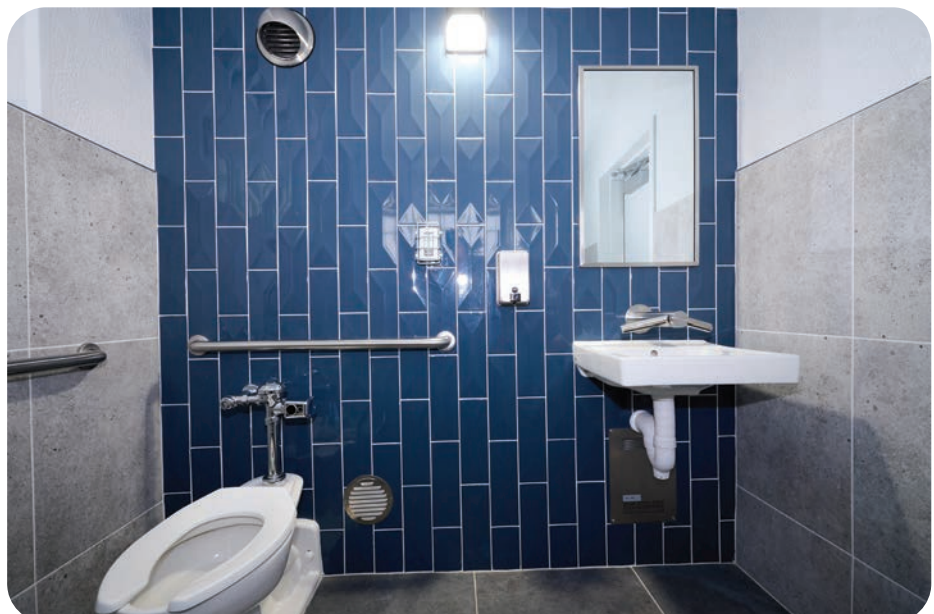
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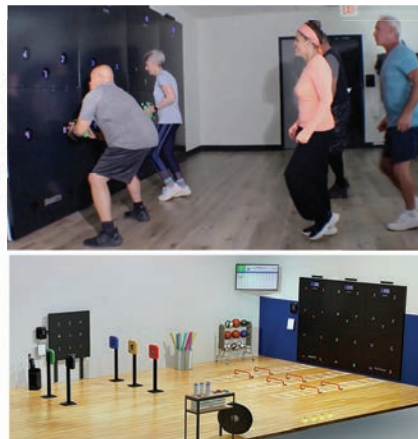
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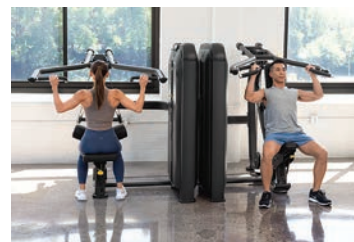
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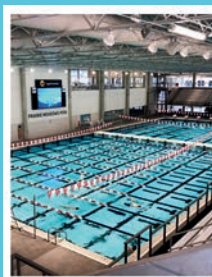


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