

Accessibility in Parks, Programs and Philosophy

By JoAnna McCulloch

The **Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission** is dedicated to preserving natural areas and creating recreational opportunities for all residents and visitors. With more than 1.7 million individuals with physical and developmental disabilities in Michigan, and 164,294 in Oakland County alone, the parks system has developed an Adaptive Recreation program to help meet a variety of needs.

“Inclusion is extremely important as it encourages and enhances opportunities for all people to participate and interact together,” said **Sandy Dorey, CTRS.**

“Many times, getting individuals with disabilities involved with recreation is a stepping stone for them to develop friendships. These opportunities are beneficial for individuals with disabilities and others as inclusion often helps break down attitudinal barriers,” Dorey added.

Accessible Programs, Equipment and Facilities

Oakland County Parks incorporates inclusion in all aspects of park facilities and services. The parks system is a leader in meeting and/or exceeding the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) recommendations and maintains five certified therapeutic recreation specialists on staff.

A wide variety of adaptive equipment, facilities and programs are available to ensure that all age groups can partake in unique recreation opportunities. Patrons can enjoy natural areas through paved trails, accessible campsites, cabins and picnic tables. The park system also offers adaptive equipment including hand-operated pedal boats, pontoon boats, pool-transfer chairs, seat canes, and single-rider golf carts for patron use.

The most recent addition is the universally accessible playground at Waterford Oaks County Park. Meeting ADA requirements, the playground was designed to address issues of accessibility and promote inclusive play. Construction on the playground began July 1, 2009 with a \$250,000 Access to

Recreation Initiative grant funded by W.K. Kellogg Foundation and administered by the Michigan Recreation and Park Association Foundation. *[Editor’s Note: At press time, the Grand Opening of the playscape was planned for June 2, 2010 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and youth concert.]* To learn more about the Waterford Oaks County Park project, see page 23.

Creating Partnerships to Promote Inclusion

Oakland County Parks continuously strives to provide clinics, events and programs to encourage individuals of all abilities to be active and involved.

In partnership with BlazeSports, the parks system offers adaptive tennis, golf, kayaking and hiking opportunities. Oakland County Parks is also an official member of the Paralympic Sports Club, a national outreach program designed to introduce students, parents, teachers, coaches and program administrators to Paralympic sports.

“Club recognition is a great benefit because it enables Oakland County Parks to offer more programs, clinics and training,” Dorey said. “More programming is important in continuing to enhance the quality of life of individuals with disabilities.”

Paralympic sports currently offered include goal ball, adult and junior wheelchair basketball, power lifting, table tennis, and track and field. To introduce new Paralympic opportunities, Oakland County Parks hosts Paralympic Academy clinics in the spring and fall, offered in partnership with the **City of Southfield Parks and Recreation**. Some sports that will be featured at the 2010 clinics include sled hockey, fencing, sit volleyball, basketball and tennis.

To truly create a community that includes all ages and abilities, the parks system put a new twist on intergenerational programs. Oakland County Parks works with nursing homes and assisted living centers to take residents on Fall Color Tours, Holiday Light Tours and summer picnics. Through the outings, Oakland County Parks promotes community and builds relationships as elder residents are often accompanied by their adult children.

LEFT: Participants in Oakland County Parks wheelchair basketball programming.

RIGHT: A young Oakland County Parks visitor enjoying adaptive tennis



Promoting Accessibility by Sharing Best Practices

In addition to providing adaptive equipment, programs and services, the parks system also educates the community about inclusion. The Oakland County Parks Adaptive Recreation Toolbox is used in staff training and is also available for other communities and agencies to utilize. The toolbox is used to simulate different disabilities and to assist staff in making and understanding accommodations.

The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission will continue to expand and improve its adaptive recreation programs and services. By working with other agencies, building partnerships, and meeting with parents and participants, the Oakland County Parks Adaptive Recreation program hopes to offer more unique equipment, facilities and services to enhance quality of life for all individuals.



Seat Canes, one component of adaptive recreation equipment at Oakland County Parks, are a small folding chair attached to a cane available for patron use at the parks.

Interested in Learning from the Oakland County Parks Adaptive Recreation Toolbox?

The toolbox mentioned in this article is available to park and recreation departments throughout the state. To reserve the toolbox or check availability, please contact Sandy Dorey at doreys@oakgov.com or 248-858-7596.

Want more information on Oakland County Parks' efforts in accessibility? Interested in accessibility advice from department leaders?

MRPA interviewed Oakland County professionals in therapeutic recreation, management and facility development. Check out their accessibility advice for park professionals within the News & Awards tab of www.mrpaonline.org!

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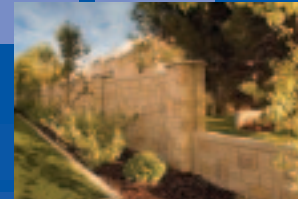
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