



2017-2018

# Annual Report



## A Message from our Board President

I am fortunate to represent the Vernon Hills community as a Board member of our Park District. Our mission of promoting diverse community based recreational opportunities is one the Board and staff uphold through our vision to ‘address the lifelong needs of all Vernon Hills residents’.

The Annual Report highlights the District’s financial practices and accomplishments, strategic efforts, capital planning, and agency goals. Throughout 2017, the Park District was able to maintain a strong financial structure and has taken significant strides in strengthening our long term fiscal responsibilities.

For our 23<sup>rd</sup> consecutive year, our District has received the Government Finance Officer’s Association Certificate for Excellence in Financial Reporting. Additionally, our Park District has maintained the lowest tax rate of the 18 Lake County Park Districts.

I am proud to report the Vernon Hills Park District also received the Illinois Distinguished Accredited Agency Certification. Staff underwent a thorough, comprehensive evaluation process in every department. The certification, valid for six years, demonstrates that our agency has met state guidelines for exceptional service.

Over the past year, our District has focused on sustainable initiatives within our parks, lakes, and throughout our facilities. Educational programs, utility usage reduction practices, recycling programs, habitat restoration, and water and turf management best practices have been implemented. We continue to improve the Century Park Arboretum with native plant areas and unique tree species adaptable to our Midwest weather.

The Park District thanks our residents for their continued support of our programs, parks, and facilities and we always welcome your feedback.

*David Doerhoefer*

### Vision Statement

Addressing the lifelong leisure needs of all Vernon Hills residents.

### Mission Statement

To promote diverse community based recreational opportunities by providing a variety of programs, services, facilities and natural spaces to enhance the quality of life for our residents.

## Park Board



David Doerhoefer  
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Jim Ballowe  
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Bruce Robbins  
*Commissioner*  
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# Your Park District



24 Parks

24 Playgrounds

10 Miles of Park Paths

460.4 Total Acres

9 Fishable Lakes

2 Boat Ramps

2 Swimming Pools

5 Gymnasiums

3 Community Gardens

Skate Park

Inline Hockey Rink

Cricket Pitch

Horseshoe & Cornhole Courts

## Did you know?

Illinois is the second highest provider of Park and Recreation agency jobs in the United States.



**California:**  
118,677 Jobs



**Illinois:**  
83,637 Jobs

# Agency Accomplishments

- Received the Government Finance Officer's Association Certificate for the 23rd consecutive year.
- Century Park South Expansion Plan. Project to commence Fall of 2018.
- Adopted Capital Improvement Plan 2018-2022



**Adopted 2015-2019  
Strategic Plan**

## Meet Sully!

Meet our new mascot, Sully! Sully joined the Vernon Hills Park District team in the summer of 2017. We thought it was important to have a bear mascot for a few reasons: We are quite fond of Big and Little Bear Lakes in Vernon Hills' signature park, Century Park, and the Little Bear Ribfest mascot is a Sully lookalike!

To name our new friend, we reached out to the Vernon Hills community. We received name suggestions in-person and through our social media channels. The top five names were presented to Park District staff, who then voted for their favorite. Sully was the clear winner, in memory of Dolores Sullivan, founder of the Vernon Hills Park District.



### **Illinois Distinguished Accredited Agency 2018-2023**

Vernon Hills Park District is recognized as an Illinois Distinguished Accredited Agency 2018-2023 by the Illinois Association of Park Districts and the Illinois Park and Recreation Association. The two statewide associations administer the Illinois Distinguished Accreditation program with the goal of improving the delivery of park and recreation services to Illinois residents. It is a voluntary, comprehensive evaluation process to demonstrate that agencies have met state guidelines to provide exceptional services to their community.

### **Illinois Association of Park Districts' Board Member Development Program**

The program gives recognition to local board members who consistently go above and beyond the call of duty through committee involvement, attendance at continuing educational opportunities and achievements at the local, state, and national levels. Recognition levels are based on the activities performed throughout the year earning Board Development Units.

#### **Distinctive Board Members**

**400 Units**

David Doerhoefer

Cindy Kessler

Jim Ballowe

#### **Notable Board Members**

**100 Units**

Mike Meline

Bruce Robbins



# Community Outreach



time to play!  
AT THE PARK

“Time to Play” is our free community outreach program offering year-round family activities that build bonds among residents. Programs are offered in our parks, are suitable for all ages, and involve fun crafts and activities including rock painting, building bird feeders, and story time with Santa.

## GO VERNON HILLS

**GO VERNON HILLS**, presented by the Vernon Hills Park District, is a community walking movement designed to promote community values of health and wellness through activities, education and community collaboration. The Vernon Hills Park District has partnered with the Lake County Health Department on its county wide initiative to improve the health of Lake County residents. Walking is a gentle, low-impact exercise that is easy, free and accessible to everyone.

There are many benefits to walking 30 minutes every day. Walking can help to prevent and reduce the risk of chronic diseases, premature death and supports positive mental health. Vernon Hills Park District is excited to introduce **GO VERNON HILLS** to our community with the support of our local government partners.





# Enhancing Value

Park District programs and services are funded largely through user fees, while property tax revenue primarily funds operational and maintenance costs of park amenities and facilities. The District's tax rate for the fiscal year 2018 was .419 per \$100 of assessed value, compared to .458 in the previous year. The Park District represents 5% of the total property tax bill for Vernon Hills residents.



Government Finance Officers Association

**Certificate of  
Achievement  
for Excellence  
in Financial  
Reporting**

Presented to

**Vernon Hills Park District  
Illinois**

For its Comprehensive Annual  
Financial Report  
for the Fiscal Year Ended

May 31, 2017

*Christopher P. Moriel*  
Executive Director/CEO

## Excellence in Financial Reporting

For the 23<sup>rd</sup> consecutive year, the District received the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officer's Association (GFOA) for its Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR). This is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting.

At the conclusion of each fiscal year, a financial audit and Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) are completed. The audit is a mandated financial report compiled by a professional auditor. The goal of a CAFR is to clearly communicate the Park District's financial story. To achieve this award, the District's CAFR has to demonstrate a constructive "spirit of full disclosure", clearly communicate its financial story, and motivate potential users to read the CAFR. The District's CAFR and budget can be found on the District's website.





## Overview of Vernon Hills Property Taxes

### Vernon Hills Park District at a Glance

Fiscal Year	2018
Population	26,217
Tax Rate	\$0.419
Total Budget	\$12,224,448
Bond Rating	Aa2

### Of the 18 Lake County Park Districts, Vernon Hills has the lowest tax rate.

A bond rating relates to the credit worthiness of an organization. The Park District bond rating improved due to a healthy fund balance and good financial management.

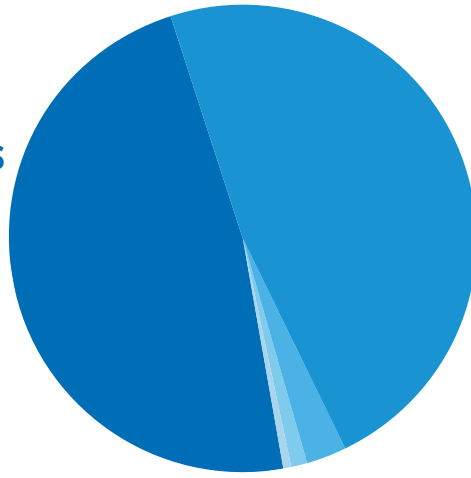
Source: Moody's Investor Service





## Operating Revenues & Resources

For the fiscal year ending May 31, 2018, revenue totaled \$10,120,604. The largest sources of revenue were derived from property taxes (47.8%), and user fees (48%).



### User Fees 48%

User fees are charged for recreation programs. The fees are based on the level of desired cost recovery and vary depending on community or individual benefits. Programs that benefit the community as a whole such as special events have low fees offset by property taxes. Programs that benefit individual users such as swimming lessons have higher fees. Fees are reviewed annually by the Board during preparation of the operating budget.

### Property Taxes 47.8%

As a government entity, the Park District has the power to levy and collect taxes on all taxable property within the District through the preparation of a tax levy ordinance. The Equalized Assessed Value (EAV) of your property will determine the amount of property taxes you will pay to the Park District. In 2017, only 5% of your total tax bill will go to the Park District.

### Miscellaneous Income 2.8%

Miscellaneous income includes monies received from donations, awards, and rebates. The Park District does not receive any sales tax revenue.

### Facility Rentals 0.9%

Facility rental fees are commonly collected from individuals or affiliates, and include athletic fields, meeting rooms, and picnic areas.

### Investment Income 0.5%

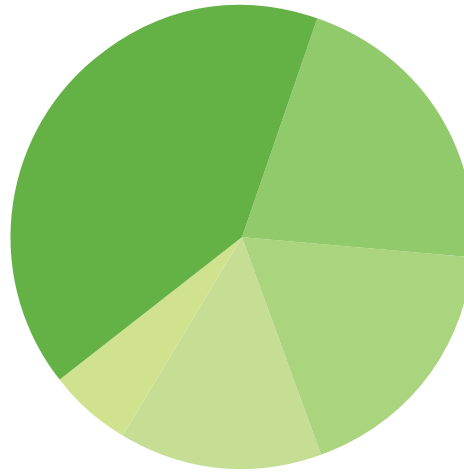
Investment income includes interest payments received from short term investments.





## Operating Expenditures

For the fiscal year ending May 31, 2018, operating expenses totaled \$9,889,225. The Park District funded \$768,708 in capital improvements during the fiscal year 2018.



### Salaries and Wages 41%

The District has 51 full-time and 180 part-time positions. Additionally, 175 seasonal employees are hired annually to fill openings in summer camps, the Family Aquatic Center, and park maintenance.

### Contractual Services 21.2%

These expenditures reflect outside services. The District outsources some mowing, landscape, and cleaning services. Additionally, the District maintains several agreements with recreational providers who perform services that enable the District to offer a variety of programs to all ages.

### Debt Service 18%

Debt service includes principal and interest payments owed on outstanding debt issues. Debt Service expenditures include retirement of general obligation bonded debt, which was accumulated in prior years to finance large scale projects.

### Benefits 14%

These expenditures are for employee health insurance premiums and employer costs associated with social security and pension benefits.

### Supplies 5.8%

Materials and supplies are needed to provide programs and park maintenance services.

## Capital Projects & Bonds Proceeds

\$768,708

\$1,019,205

### Capital Projects

The District maintains a five-year Capital Improvement Plan, which staff and Board review on a regular basis. Expenditures reflect the annual expenses associated with the current fiscal year. Funding of capital projects is provided through the issuance of debt obligations and from operating surplus.

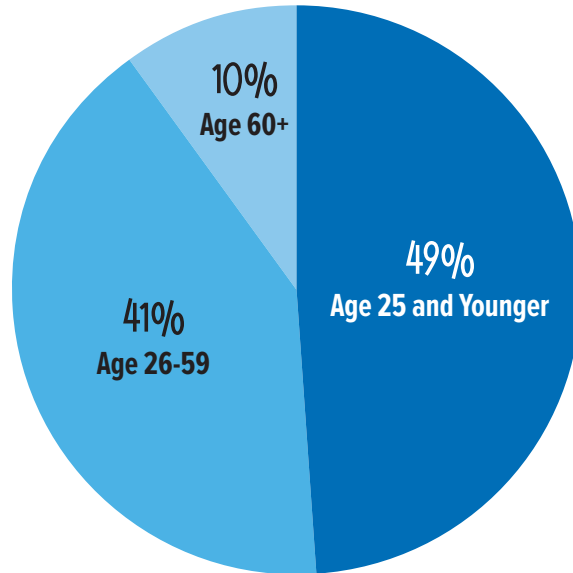
### Bonds Proceeds

Bonds proceeds are monies received by issuing bonds to pay for capital improvement projects.



# Park Districts Employ Youth

In the state of Illinois, almost half of Park District employees are under age 25, and one in ten are older adults (60+).<sup>1</sup>



These agencies are significant job creators, as most employees live within their districts.

Statewide	62%	38%
Park Districts	61%	39%
Forest Preserve & Conservation Districts	75%	25%

■ Live Within District
 □ Live Outside District

<sup>1</sup>Illinois Association of Park Districts



# Recreation for All

Vernon Hills residents have access to recreational opportunities through neighborhood and community parks. Most park paths are inter-connected, providing easy access to multiple parks close to residents' homes. Twenty-four parks (thirteen with ADA inclusion play features) and five facilities provide recreational opportunities for residents of all abilities. The Park District provides scholarships to those in need so no resident is denied opportunities.

## Recreation Participation by the Numbers

*Fiscal 2017/2018*

HAP* Afternoons	300	SRACLCLC Participants	98
HAP* Mornings	120	Programming	11,645
Childcare	66	Lakeview Fitness Members	2,806
Preschool	108	Lakeview Fitness Annual Visits	146,388
Camp	1,185	Group Exercise Participants	44,380

*\*Hawthorn Afterschool Program*

## Vernon Hills Park District Scholarship Fund

The Vernon Hills Park District Scholarship Fund helps underprivileged families pay for summer camps and other programs. Funds for the Scholarship Program are raised through special event proceeds and the District's credit card rebates. In the 2017/2018 fiscal year, \$29,000 in scholarships was provided to 60 Families!

## Healthy Impact Team (HIT)

The Park District's Healthy Impact Team (HIT) encourages employees to be active and lead healthy lifestyles. Over the past year, eleven staff wellness programs were offered to promote mental and physical fitness. Programs have included potluck salad bars, Presidential Physical Fitness Test, weight loss challenge, and cooking demonstrations teaching healthy alternative cooking methods.

## Special Recreation Association of Central Lake County

Special Recreation Association of Central Lake County (SRACLCLC) offers 688 programs annually for special needs residents. Ninety-eight Vernon Hills residents attended 663 SRACLCLC programs. Twenty-two individuals had inclusion services (one-on-one aide) and participated in 63 Vernon Hills Park District programs.

## Charity Donations

The District partners annually with charities including the American Cancer Society, American Brain Tumor Association, Lions Club, National Night Out, Sports Shed, Healing Waters, and numerous others. We open our facilities to these organizations for use in their fundraising efforts. Our partnerships create a sense of community and raise over \$50,000 in charitable donations annually.





# Improving The



**Pictured: The new playground at Hawthorn Club Park**



# Parks



**New Century Park Fishing Pier**



**Dragon Play Feature at Kids' Castle**



# The Year in

## Sullivan Woods Oak Savanna Restoration Update

The Oak Savanna, located in Sullivan Woods, has come to life! Sunlight can now reach the forest floor and prairie plants that have been lying dormant for the last 30-40 years have begun to bloom. Jack in the Pulpits, Wild Geranium, Prairie Onions, Sensitive Ferns, and many others are surfacing across the 7 acres. It has been nearly 2 years since the restoration of the 14 acre Oak Savanna began. In July, 2016, the middle 7 acres of invasive Buckthorn, Honeysuckle bushes and Black Cherry trees that invaded the once pure Oak stand were cleared. In June, 2018, native prairie seeds were spread across the northern 2.3 acres and southern 1.7 acres. The middle 3.1 acres still have Cherry Trees to be removed and will be ready for seeding next spring.

Future plans include clearing an additional 1 acre further south to liberate 3 huge Oak trees that are estimated to be over 300 years old along in addition to several younger oaks that have established near them. A one mile paved path takes you through the Sullivan Woods. Entry areas are in Hawthorn Club Park and Sugar Creek Park.



**Fiscal 2017/2018 Donations**  
11 Trees Donated

## Tree & Bench Donation Program

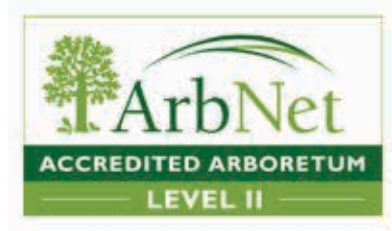
*Donate a tree or park bench in honor or in memory of someone special in your life!*

The District offers thirty species of trees to choose from, in addition to an attractive park bench. Donations can be placed in any District park of your choice and can be personalized with a bronze plaque, all at cost to you.

Currently, memorial benches for Century Park have been suspended, as we have run out of space for benches. Tree donations are still available. Following the future development of the old Opa restaurant site, bench donations may resume.



# Parks



## Century Park is Illinois' First Park District Park to Earn Arboretum Accreditation

The Vernon Hills Park District's Parks Foreman/Horticulturist, Rick Krocza, had a vision for the District in his first week of employment in 2015. While on a tour of Century Park, he quickly counted 60 plus tree species. Aware of the ArbNet Arboretum Accreditation Program, he enlisted the help of District employee, James Schubert, Certified Arborist, and contracted Graf Tree Care, to aid in the inventory of tree species through Geographic Information System (GIS) tracking. Through this process, Rick was able to identify how many more species of trees were needed to achieve Accreditation. Rick explained, "In just three planting seasons, Century Park changed from a beautiful public park into a living collection of uncommon trees to serve as an example of diversification in our urban forest, and I'm just getting started, there are so many more species and varieties of trees to add."

Rick's vision also included presenting the Century Park Arboretum as an educational tool to horticulture programs. "The diversification of trees in Century Park allows others to realize the abundance of trees that can be planted and thrive in the Midwest region of the United States", he added. Moreover, each species of trees in Century Park is labeled with a tag identifying its name. His hope is that people in the park will self-educate themselves on trees that can be planted on their properties. Rick began offering free Arbor Walks to the public in Spring, 2018.

The Century Park Arboretum, the first Park District park in Illinois to earn Arboretum Accreditation, is situated on 113 acres of land and water in Vernon Hills that was developed in 1976. It is a dynamic urban collection of 120 cultivated tree and woody plant species, along with some native grasses and wildflowers with plans to be further expanded to showcase sustainable landscape management and the restoration of urban ecosystems. The Arboretum boasts a walking/biking path system that loops around Big and Little Bear Lakes, with access to parkland for recreational activities.

From vibrant gardens to peaceful trails, habitats for wildlife, active recreational facilities, and a backdrop for nature lovers, our 24 District parks are in excellent condition. Our Park Maintenance teams consists of 10 full time staff plus 8 part-time and seasonal employees.

### 2017/2018 Plantings

135 Trees    173 Perennials    230 Shrubs



## Prairie Planting and Naturalization *behind the Sled Hill in Century Park*

The grassy area behind the sled hill and near the walking bridge is being revitalized into a native prairie. The area was occupied by invasive and common plants that do not provide aesthetic value to the park. A native prairie will make this space more visually attractive while also utilizing park grounds for the conservation of an important ecosystem type in Illinois.

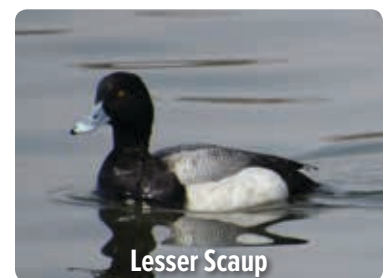
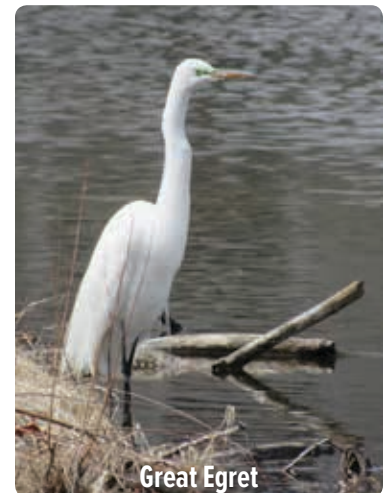
Different species of birds nest almost exclusively in open grasslands. Restoring this habitat will successfully increase reproductive success for these vulnerable bird species and may help restore their populations around the area.

In 2017, invasive Buckthorn, Honeysuckle, Boxelder, Mulberry and re-sprouting Ash trees were cut down. In early 2018, the area was over seeded with Perennial Rye grass. This summer, the area will be temporarily converted to turf grass and unwanted returning broad leaf plants will be treated with selective herbicide to remove permanently. The final goal is to establish native prairie plants and a mix of Oak trees planted across the island and alongside the sled hill.

## Migratory Water Birds

In the late winter and early spring of 2018, the slow exit of cold weather left the lakes in Wisconsin frozen over and covered with snow. Migratory water birds that seasonally pass through Century Park and other northern Illinois lakes were stalled by the lack of open water in Wisconsin. To our benefit, this extended their stay in our lakes. This provided a great opportunity to observe birds that are normally here briefly or not at all.

Big Bear and Little Bear Lakes in Century Park played host to these travelers, providing a place to rest and to feed until the weather broke and they were able to move on. The birds fed heavily on our fish population which has prompted us to increase the amount of fish that we have on order for stocking this year. We are proud that our lakes were able to provide enough food for these travelers and look forward to seeing the regulars return, and hope that any newcomers add these lakes to their migratory route.





# Sustainable Initiatives

## Earth Day Celebration Event

- Educating public about current trends and encouraging sustainable living
- Promoting Park District initiatives and programs

## Partnership with Solid Waste Agency of Lake County (SWALCO)

- Electronic Recycle-O-Rama at Hawthorn Mall
- Reuse-A-Shoe program – Ongoing drop-off location inside Sullivan Community Center

## Reducing Utility Usage Through Monitoring and Current Technology

- LED bulb/fixture replacement moving away from antiquated technology
- Efficiency controls on HVAC systems
- Lighting Controls throughout facilities and park path lights

## Habitat Restoration

- Oak Savanna restoration at Sullivan Woods. Restoring a naturally occurring Oak Stand, preserving old Oak growth (100+ years old), and protecting new Oak growth
- Removing invasive species (buckthorn, honeysuckle, etc.) from invading further into park spaces
- Milkweed/pollinator plants and planting other native species in place of invasive species
- No Mow Zones to preserve and/or establish natural areas for pollinators and other wildlife. Also to reduce carbon emissions into atmosphere from mowing operations

## Water Management Best Practices

- Century Park – Installing fishing structures/habitats for fish and for water fowl alike. Also actively removing decaying organic material from water by mechanical methods
- Deerpath Park – Shoreline stabilization utilizing both stone outcropping structures as well as appropriate vegetation to ease erosion of shoreline
- Active membership with Lake County Public Works and the Illinois Water Management Association as a network to share information. Volunteer water quality testing for Illinois Department of Natural Resources and University of Illinois Extension for grant purposes

## Turf Management Best Practices

- Utilizing more mechanical processes and less chemical treatment by choking out weeds with healthy turf growth

## Vehicle Idle Free Zones

- Please Spare our Air when visiting our parks and facilities by turning off your engine. Help reduce unnecessary carbon emissions into the atmosphere and reduce fossil fuel consumption



## Recycle-O-Rama

Project “Recycle-O-Rama” was an interagency effort, headed by the Park District, to offer our community a convenient means to dispose of electronic materials in an environmentally friendly way. We combined efforts with the Village of Vernon Hills, Solid Waste Agency of Lake County, Vernon Township, Hawthorn Mall and our State Representative. In 3 hours, **40,000+ pounds of electronics** were unloaded from **650 cars**, **420 gallons of latex paint** were safely disposed of, and **10,000 pounds of paper** were shredded for recycling.

## Lake Water Testing

Parks staff volunteers with the Lake County Health Department to do twice-monthly baseline water samplings in District lakes testing for nutrients, temperature, oxygen, clarity, and plant species. This proactive practice uncovers potential threats and recommends risk reduction methods. The commitment to the water quality is vital to the health of plant and marine life in addition to offering safe recreational water activities.

## Fish Structures

### *Big and Little Bear Lakes*

Our lakes suffered from unprotected fish breeding habitats. To remedy this problem, staff developed a unique “fish playground” building structures from man-made materials, to create protected areas. Live discarded evergreens were also sunk to the bottom of the lakes creating a safe haven for smaller fish. These structures are mapped by a Geographic Information System for future testing.

# Celebrating

## January

Winter Fest

## February

Just the Two of Us  
Ski/Snowboard Trip

## March

Craft Beer Tasting  
Hoppin' Holiday Hunt



## April

Earth Day  
Loop the Lakes 5K  
Family Kite Fly  
Pitch, Hit, and Run

## May

Dance Recitals  
Recycle-O-Rama  
GO VERNON HILLS Kick-Off

## June

Mighty Kids Triathlon  
Kids Fishing Day  
Family Campout  
Movie in the Park





# Special Events

## July

Fourth of July Parade  
Flick 'N Float  
Movie in the Park



## August

Summer Splash  
Little Bear Ribfest  
Movie in the Park



## September

Worldwide Day of Play  
Family Trivia Night



## October

Fall Fest  
Trucks, Trunks, and Treats

## December

Polar Express Storytime Train  
New Year's Eve Family Party

# Customer Engagement

Communication systems are in place to share our stories and receive feedback from the community. We look forward to hearing from you and continuing to improve our programs, facilities, and recreational experiences.

## MaxGalaxy

Emails are sent to a participant base based on programs that are offered through the District's registration software, MaxGalaxy. Participants are selected by gender, age, and previous program registration at the Park District.

## Park Pointers

A monthly newsletter is distributed to students in grades K-5 who attend the Hawthorn Elementary Schools. The newsletter contains program and special event information specifically targeted to the Grades K-5 age groups.

## Park Kiosks

Four kiosks are located in Century Park that contain posters promoting programs and special events.

## Park Paths

An email newsletter is sent to a subscriber list of 11,024 through Constant Contact. Newsletters provide event information, program details, and District news.

Average Open Rate (37%)  
National Open Rate (24%)

This type of email is also used to communicate with participants about details of a particular program they have registered to take.

## Social Media

Facebook Likes: 2,948  
Twitter Followers: 399  
Instagram Followers: 736

## Website

The District utilizes reports from Google Analytics to track website activity on a monthly basis. Landing and Exit pages are studied to reveal what the users' interests are.

## June 1, 2017 - May 31, 2018

Avg. sessions per month: 13,750  
Avg. page views per month: 33,115  
Avg. users per month: 7,980

## Web Users Demographics

Male 41.8%  
Female 58.2%

## Age

18-24 – 10.88%  
25-34 – 24.71%  
35-44 – 34.23%  
45-54 – 17.13%  
55-64 – 9.08%  
65+ – 3.97%



**vhparkdistrict** We had so much fun celebrating #EarthDay! There were activities for the whole family including, mural painting, crafts, and a band. #vhparks

**Join the conversation!**  
**#vhparks**

“I am so grateful to have such a friendly, family-oriented Park District to raise my family.”  
-Bonnie G.

“We love our Park District!”  
-Nicole J.

“We are fortunate to have a Park District that gives our community so many opportunities and partners with other community services.”  
-Amy L.

“My entire family has enjoyed many of the offerings from our Park District! Including the fitness center, programs, parks and special events. Thank you for running such amazing programs for all of us residents to enjoy!”  
-Julie R.