



PARTNERSHIPS HELP PEOPLE

Enjoy Life

By Laura Gibbs-Green, Rockford Park District

Partnerships play an important role in the Rockford Park District. The **Rockford Park District** maintains **partnerships** with approximately 70 community organizations and service providers in our community. While we provide services directly and do what we do “best,” we support the efforts of these recreation and leisure providing partners, and work in collaboration so that we don’t compete with them, to let them do what they do “best.”



ROCKFORD

PUBLIC SCHOOLS & PARK DISTRICT

Teaming Up for Youth

Growing the Game of Golf

Golf has played a major role throughout the history of the Rockford Park District, dating back to 1912, when the District's first nine-hole golf course opened inside Sinnissippi Park. To ensure that people in the community continue to enjoy the game of golf for decades to come, the District plans to rejuvenate the game through operational changes, along with new programs and partnerships.

Recently, the Rockford Park District and The First Tee of Greater Rockford announced the completion of a merger that will bring golf and invaluable core values to thousands of 5 -to 18-year-olds in the area. The new outreach program will complement existing fee-based, instructional programs, camps, and clinics. Under the new structure, the Rockford Park District will fully adopt The First Tee of Greater Rockford program for its outreach and school initiatives, targeting thousands of children in various summer programs, community centers, partner organizations, and local schools. The First Tee program will be based at Ingersoll Golf Course and Learning Links, 101 Daisyfield Rd., Rockford, IL. A golf facility at Patriots' Gateway Community Center, 615 S 5th St., Rockford, IL, will also be utilized. The Rockford Park Aldeen Golf Club and Practice Centre, 1902 Reid Farm Rd., Rockford, IL. Alpine Hills Junior Golf Club, 4402 Larson Ave, Rockford, IL will be a unique facility designed specifically for youth involved in The First Tee and PGA/LPGA programs. The location will serve as a common-ground gathering place, centrally located in the community, for children and their families to come together and develop their love of the game of golf.

The mission of the Rockford Park District is to "Help People Enjoy Life" by offering lifelong recreational opportunities for all. The First Tee is an internationally respected youth organization whose mission is to impact the lives of young people by providing educational programs that build character, instill life-enhancing values, and

promote healthy choices through the game of golf. "Through the incorporation of each organization's mission, vision, and goals, it is our commitment to introduce and develop thousands of lifelong golfers each year through the guiding principles of each organization," says Mick Hockinson, executive director of the First Tee of Greater Rockford/outreach coordinator, manager of Ingersoll Golf Course.

The First Tee of Greater Rockford and the Rockford Park District met with area golf course owners, the Rockford School District, and other key stakeholders to develop a successful youth golf model. From there, a Partnership and Program Development Committee was formed. The group developed a rough draft vision statement to help guide future work and decisions. The vision statement is: *to provide holistic opportunities to attract, support, and retain youth golfers of Rockford.*

The committee agreed to develop a holistic program that will:

- Have no gaps and leave no child behind
- Have options and opportunities for children and their parents, no matter where they live, how much money they have, and whatever their personal goals may be

"We believe this vision will help reverse current local golf trends, and could serve as a model on the national level. We are committed to growing the game of golf through youth development, offering unique, fun, challenging, and welcoming golf courses for all levels of play," said Jay Sandine, Rockford Park District's deputy director of operations.



Rockford Park District and Rockford Public Schools "Team Up for Youth"

For many years, Rockford Park District (RPD) and Rockford Public Schools (RPS) have worked side-by-side collaborating on sports events and activities, arts opportunities, and summer academic programs to serve youth in our community.

In 2011, Rockford Public Schools, Rockford Park District, and the YMCA of Rock River Valley issued a challenge to elementary and middle school students in District 205. The Summer Challenge Program: Read, Write, and Bloom! served over 2,200 kindergarten – 8th grade students by providing activities that included math, literacy, arts, science, sports, reading, fitness, and nutrition. The program took place at six different Rockford public schools. Rockford Park District Executive Director Tim Dimke says, "The Rockford Park District not only believes in helping our youth learn lifelong skills, but we want to provide ways to stimulate their minds over these summer months. We know that a little extra one-on-one attention academically, combined with healthy activity options, can improve a student's overall well-being."

The Summer Challenge program has continued year after year, and is now called Camp to the Future. Last summer, 1,850 youth and teens spent their summer participating in enrichment activities. Rockford public school teachers and Rockford Park District staff provide each child with a safe, fun, and beneficial experience. Transportation, along with two meals daily, was provided to all participants. Federal grant dollars helped fund Camp to the Future to provide the program to students at no cost.

Rockford Public Schools Superintendent Ehren Jarrett is delighted that an effort that began informally with the two staffs working together can now be expanded at the board level. "Camp to the Future summer school and more opportunities for youth in sports were just part of the payoff for working cooperatively. Kids and taxpayers win, and I know more wins are around the corner," he said.

On July 23, 2013, the Rockford Park District Board of Commissioners and the Rockford Public Schools Board of Education held a joint meeting to pledge their support toward a new partnership called "Teaming Up for Youth." The initiative recognizes the need to work together in a more efficient and effective manner, which will benefit the community by offering even more opportunities for youth, and more cost savings for taxpayers.

Teaming Up for Youth focuses on four key areas:

1. Holistic Sports Program/Building and Facility Use
2. Recreational and Educational Programming
3. Strategic Land Management/Joint Playground Repair and Replacement
4. Operational Efficiencies and Leveraging of Tax Dollars

"By working together strategically, we can work toward reducing duplication, improving efficiencies, and enhancing sports and education programs and opportunities for students. Collaboration is key. We have seen successes in working together, and the development of a partnership agreement will further enhance our strong commitment to area youth," said Rockford Park District Executive Director Tim Dimke. In January 2015, both boards viewed and approved an official intergovernmental agreement that focuses on joint facility use.

"The Rockford School District and the Rockford Park District already have a well-established partnership, and we are excited to continue working together in a strategic manner, by which we can better serve the citizens, particularly our youth, and leverage taxpayer dollars," said Board of Commissioners President Tyler Smith. Both organizations will continue working together to identify further educational and recreational opportunities along with other operational efficiencies to better serve taxpayers.

Retain. Regain. Grow.

RECLAIMING FIRST

The Reclaiming First sports tourism initiative is a highly cooperative partnership of 10 governmental entities joining together to benefit the Rockford region with new sports amenities for local citizens to use, while generating new tax revenues from visitors.

Partnerships Help Retain, Regain, and Grow Sports Tourism

By the mid-2000's, it was becoming evident to area leaders that the Rockford region was beginning to lose significant amateur sports tournament market share to other regions throughout the Midwest. Nationwide, the trend was for regions either firmly entrenched in the market or looking to expand their market share to develop or enhance their amateur sports tournament facilities (ASTFs). Rockford's once dominant position in the basketball and soccer tournament markets was beginning to erode.

In 2011, a partnership between the Rockford Park District, the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB), the City of Rockford, the City of Loves Park, and Winnebago County, along with other area leaders, began the "Reclaiming First" initiative that would retain, regain, and grow new events in the region. The \$54 million capital project includes the re-development of an existing industrial building into a modern, sports and recreational facility in downtown Rockford, the expansion of the existing Indoor Sports Center, potential improvements to an existing outdoor recreational complex known as Sportscore One, and the re-configuration and expansion of another existing outdoor recreational complex known as Sportscore Two. Amateur sports tourism at Sportscore One and Sportscore Two currently accounts for \$15.25 million in income for the Rockford region that would otherwise not occur. "The multi-facility, multi-year project will stimulate our regional economy, and provide world-class recreational facilities to our citizens," said Rockford Park District Executive Director Tim Dimke.

The Reclaiming First sports tourism initiative is a highly cooperative partnership of 10 governmental entities joining together to benefit the Rockford region with new sports amenities for local citizens to use, while generating new tax revenues from visitors. This unprecedented intergovernmental, regional collaboration and community coordination involves the following: Rockford Park District, Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, City of Rockford, City of Loves Park, Village of Machesney Park, City of South Beloit, Village of

Rockton, Village of Roscoe, Village of Cherry Valley, and Winnebago County. A joint effort of regional municipalities, along with state legislative members, assembled to achieve passage of legislation authorizing local implementation of a 2% hotel/motel tax to help fund the sports complexes expansion, and institute the Winnebago County Regional Tourism Facility Board (WCRTFB) to govern the tax funds. In addition to formal approval of the hotel tax by each WCRTFB member entity, financial pledges have been made from their operational budgets. Construction on this project kicked off on August 1, 2014. "Reclaiming First is a legacy project not because of the structures built, or the monies raised. The true legacy of this project is the unification of this region working closely together in dedicated service to its citizens," said Rockford Park District Executive Director Tim Dimke. For additional information about Reclaiming First, see www.reclaimingfirst.org.