Last month, nearly 400 IAPD members came to Springfield to attend the IAPD Legislative Conference and Parks Day at the Capitol and to discuss the importance of parks, recreation and conservation with their legislators.

To assist participants during their legislator visits, IAPD developed an easy-to-use pocket card, which contains key talking points on three major themes. These messages share positive information about the benefits of local park and recreation agencies and also address hot topics at the Capitol such as the minimum wage. Although the General Assembly is scheduled to adjourn the Spring Session on May 31, these key messages from the Legislative Conference will still be salient when lawmakers return to their legislative districts in June.

With recreational programming and activities in full swing, the summer months are the perfect time to invite legislators to visit your facilities, show them all that your agency offers to your community and deliver these key messages.

1. Park and Recreation Capital Construction Projects Provide Great Returns

During his annual Budget Address in March, the Governor proposed the establishment of a bipartisan working group to develop a new 5-year capital plan. The prospect of a new capital construction plan highlights the need to continue to remind lawmakers about the significant demand for capital improvement projects at park districts, forest preserves, conservation districts and municipal recreation agencies as well as the substantial economic benefits these projects provide.

As you tour your facilities with your legislators in the coming months, here are some key points to discuss:

- Each year, 83% of Illinois families use park district facilities, recreational programs and local parks.
- Due to the high demand for recreational programming and facilities, the unmet capital construction needs of Illinois' park and recreation agencies is $1.2 billion.
- In 2014, there were 126 grant applications totaling $191 million for the Park and Recreational Facility Construction (PARC) program – more than 7½ times the available funding.
- Park and recreation capital projects are typically matched dollar-for-dollar by local park districts and other recreation agencies, so the State gets twice the return on its investment.

All of these points will be even more compelling when you relate them to your agency. Showing legislators recently completed construction projects or discussing future projects that are on your community's wish list will help tell your agency's story.

Legislative Conference attendees received an easy-to-use pocket card containing a summary of key talking points. IAPD members can download a copy of the pocket card from the Public Policy/Advocacy Resources section of the IAPD website (ILparks.org). Email janselment@ilparks.org if you would like copies mailed to you.
2. Park Districts and Forest Preserves Make Illinois a Better Place to Work and Live

Research is one of IAPD’s most valuable membership benefits. Attendees at the Legislative Conference learned about IAPD’s exciting new research results from a statewide survey of Illinois residents. These results include a number of key findings that confirm that park districts and forest preserves are improving the quality of life within Illinois and that citizens recognize and appreciate all that your agencies offer.

Among the study’s key findings that you should share at every opportunity:

- **Nine out of ten** Illinoisans believe that parks and open space improve property values.
- Parks and recreation rank among the top features that make Illinois communities desirable places to live.
- The vast majority of Illinoisans believe that park districts are good stewards of their tax dollars with 70% of Illinoisans agreeing that their park district represents an excellent / good value.
- Most Illinois citizens believe their park district spends their tax dollars wisely with little waste.
- A majority of adults are willing to pay more in taxes for park and recreation capital improvements.
- Park districts and forest preserves receive the highest esteem ratings when compared to other taxing bodies.

Legislative Conference attendees also received a binder containing more than 200 pages of valuable advocacy resources and other important information such as the results from the IAPD’s recently released Statewide Survey of Illinois Residents, available grant opportunities, and tips on managing and maintaining your agency’s electronic records. A few copies of the binder are still available for purchase by visiting ILparks.org or calling the IAPD office at 217/523-4554.

3. Minimum Wage Increases Have a Distinct Impact on Local Park and Recreation Agencies

As IAPD members know from our weekly Legislative Updates or from attending one of the 12 legislative breakfasts held throughout the State in February and March, the minimum wage has been a major topic throughout the Spring Session. When discussing this issue with legislators, it is important to recognize that members of the General Assembly have varying views.

At the same time, it is also important to remind legislators about the specific impact that minimum wage increases have on park and recreation agencies. As legislators observe all of the youth employed at your agency during their visits to your facilities, you can highlight the following points as they relate to your specific agency:

- Local park and recreation agencies employ more than 50,000 part-time employees in Illinois.
- Most of these employees are teens, and the summer jobs that local park and recreation agencies provide are often their first.
- Local park and recreation agencies operate on fixed budgets, so increasing the minimum wage will necessarily result in fewer summer jobs for youth or an increase the cost of recreational programs for taxpayers.
- Part-time summer positions such as lifeguards, day camp counselors, umpires and referees are critical to programming, so reducing the number of employees will also cause a loss in the number of recreational programs that park and recreation agencies can offer.
- The minimum wage that adults need to support families should be distinguished from the wage paid to youth for valuable, first-time job experience.

Grassroots Advocacy Is a Yearlong Effort

The Legislative Conference is always a great opportunity for IAPD members to hone their advocacy skills, meet one-on-one with their legislators at the Capitol and obtain valuable information that can be used in their grassroots advocacy efforts back in their districts. This year’s Legislative Conference was another huge success, but effective grassroots advocacy programs last all year. When lawmakers return to their districts in June, make sure you continue to convey these important messages that were developed and delivered during the Legislative Conference.

Again, the summer is the ideal time to invite your legislators to tour your facilities. Not only will you showcase all your agency offers and deliver key messages, but you will also help achieve our goal of 118 legislator site visits this year. **Once you complete your site visit, please report the date of the visit and the name of the legislator by emailing me at janselment@ILparks.org.**

SAVE THE DATES
Upcoming Legislative Awareness Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>District</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legislative Golf Outing</td>
<td>July 17, 2014</td>
<td>White Pines Golf Club, Bensenville Park District</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legislative Awareness Picnic</td>
<td>September 6, 2014</td>
<td>Inwood Park, Joliet Park District</td>
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