



UPTOWN

a publication of the municipal association of south carolina



2016 Annual Meeting

Make plans now to attend

Charleston will once again host the Municipal Association's Annual Meeting on July 14 -17 at the Charleston Place Hotel. As it has in recent years, the Association will use its in-house registration/reservation process to ensure municipal officials receive priority for hotel reservations.

The online process involves scheduled phone appointments on June 1 and 2 for municipal representatives to make hotel reservations and register municipal attendees for the meeting.

The Association will conduct a drawing on May 19 to determine the order of these appointments. To participate in the drawing, each municipality must select a representative (only one per city/town). The representative must register online by May 17 for the drawing.

Municipal representatives will receive a confirmation acknowledging their entry into the drawing. Following the drawing on May 19, Association staff will notify representatives of their appointment time and will post all appointment times on the Association's website.

During the 30-minute scheduled phone appointments on June 1 and 2, an Association staff member will call the city representative and assist in making online registrations/reservations for all the elected officials and staff from the municipality who will be attending the meeting. Municipal Association staff will allow the representative to register only municipal elected officials and employees during the appointment.

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To complete the registration/reservation process, the representative must have a Visa or MasterCard with a sufficient credit limit and per transaction limit to pay for the registrations and hotel deposits. Nonrefundable hotel deposits and registration fees are collected during the reservation process.

The designated representative must also have completed registration forms, including both housing and meal ticket requests, for each person being registered.

Reservations must be made using the Association’s online registration system.



Important Annual Meeting dates

- April 22** Online registration for the appointment drawing opens
- April 22** Agenda and registration information posted online
- May 6** Registration brochures with meeting agenda mailed
- May 17** Deadline to register for the appointment times drawing
- May 19** Drawing for appointment times and results posted to www.masc.sc
- June 1-2** Online registration process for cities with appointments
- June 3** Online registration opens for cities without appointments and nonmunicipal officials
- June 8** Hotel reservation deadline
- June 27** Meeting registration deadline
- July 14-17** . . . Annual Meeting

Court restricts Taser use

A recent ruling by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals has caused many police departments around the state to change their policies and retrain officers on the use of Tasers, especially when they are dealing with people with mental health issues who do not pose a risk of immediate danger to themselves or others.

Estate of Armstrong v. Village of Pinehurst et al. involved a man about to be involuntarily committed for mental health issues. The Pinehurst, NC, officers used a Taser on Armstrong who later died at the scene. The Estate accused the officers of using excessive force when they were executing the involuntary

commitment order. The Fourth Circuit Court ruled in the Estate’s favor.

“In light of the decision, Tasers should be used only when there is a serious, imminent threat to the officer, suspect or public,” said Todd Williams, public safety loss control consultant with the Municipal Association. “When there is not an imminent threat, officers should focus on de-escalating the situation, not using force.”

In Bennettsville, the Armstrong ruling led the police department to change its “force continuum”—the standard that provides guidelines for how much force officers can use against a resisting suspect. “Now it really has to be a



“Common sense” expungement changes

In February, the General Assembly passed a law that makes more charges eligible for expungement but reduces the number of charges that must be automatically expunged. The law takes effect on May 16. The only time municipal courts must automatically process an expungement is when someone was fingerprinted for a dismissed offense covered by the expungement law.

In 2009, the state legislature passed a bill that resulted in thousands of automatic expungements, placing a huge burden on municipal courts. “These expungements are not ‘automatic,’” explained Tiger Wells, government affairs liaison for the Municipal Association. “A real person has to do the leg work involved in expunging the offenses.”

The 2009 law opened up the floodgates for municipal courts, said Wells.

“This recently passed legislation was a shot at making some common sense changes to how expungements are handled,”

said Wells. “They benefit both the court staff and the person seeking an expungement.”

Under the new law, if a person is charged in municipal court with an offense that is later dismissed or otherwise discharged, the individual may request and receive an expungement of that offense at no charge.

“The idea is that by having individuals apply for these expungements, we lessen the burden on municipal courts,” said Wells.

If a person is charged with an offense and fingerprinted then the charges are later dismissed or otherwise discharged, the need to automatically expunge the offense remains.

While the new law does not require courts to go back and automatically process expungements for past offenses now eligible for expungement, it does allow a person to apply for and receive expungements for past dismissed or discharged charges that are eligible for expungement under the new law.

life-or-death situation before using the Taser,” said Bennettsville Police Chief Larry McNeil.

Even before the ruling, some police department policies already restricted the use of Tasers to situations when a suspect was actively resisting arrest or threatening to harm others.

In Summerville, the police department had already changed its policy to use a Taser only for active resistance, said Lt. Richard Peeples with the Summerville Police Department.

According to Peeples, the Fourth Circuit decision resulted in only a few minor clarifications to the department’s policy. Summerville added a line to its policy that a Taser will be used only when an officer is confronted with a situation that creates an immediate safety risk that could be avoided by using a Taser. Officers

also must now take into consideration any mental health condition of the subject.

Peeples said Summerville officers received training on the new procedures, including watching a video by Jack Ryan, an instructor with the Public Agency Training Council.

In the video, Ryan points out that the use of force is different when arresting a criminal suspect versus picking up someone for a mental health commitment. He discusses the need to distinguish between a person who is a danger to himself and one who is a danger to others. He also cautions



that not all physical resistance constitutes a threat.

“In light of the court’s ruling, all South Carolina law enforcement agencies should review their policies as well as training related to Taser use and the use of force on people with diminished capacity,” reiterated Williams.

NEWS BRIEFS

The **City of Lake City** received the 2015 Silver Palmetto Award presented annually by the SC Commission on Disabilities and Special Needs to the city or town that made the most outstanding contribution to people with disabilities the previous year.

Brian Carter, administrator for the City of West Columbia, was recently selected as chairman of the **SC Municipal Insurance Trust’s** board of trustees to fill an unexpired term. Jake Broom, assistant administrator for the City of Goose Creek, was named vice chair. Scott Tanner, administrator for the City of Manning, was selected to join the board.

Julie Wilkie, assistant city manager for the City of Greenwood, was recently selected to join the **SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund’s** board of trustees.



South Carolina Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman speaking at the 2016 Hometown Legislative Action Day

Spearman suggests city-school team to close learning gap

A packed room of local officials at the February Hometown Legislative Action Day heard state Superintendent Molly Spearman talk passionately about the state of K-12 education in South Carolina.

Spearman acknowledged the many local officials in the room who were in the field of K-12 education and kicked off her remarks saying “If you don’t have something good to say about our public schools, you haven’t been in one lately.”

Spearman said there is a great deal to brag about in our public schools today. She pointed specifically to the growing career and apprenticeship programs. “Our job is workforce development,” she said noting it’s the duty of educators to find a child’s passion and create a pathway for them to get there.

But, she said, “This has to happen everywhere, not just in some districts. Right now, this isn’t happening for every student.”

In districts that are right next to one another, one may be world class and the other mediocre. “We’ve got to work on that and think outside the box,” Spearman said.

Spearman noted one of the major challenges is how to keep students in

school and improve the high school graduation rate. “Let them have fun at school,” she said. “Have engaging curriculum. Show them why they are learning about a particular topic. Answer the question of ‘how will I need this in real life’ by teaching them problem solving.”

This new way of thinking has to include both educators and parents, she said. “We have to help parents understand the present-day workforce and what it takes to be ready. The old mindset of getting a degree in something and a job will come is not the case anymore. Local elected officials can play a role in this effort by helping students and their parents understand what careers are available in their communities.”

One of the proven solutions, she said, is students participating in technical or industrial training programs while still in high school. “This is a place for creating and inventing. We’ve found that students who take four vocational or career classes have a graduation rate of 97 percent.”

Another major challenge is making sure every student is ready to learn. “I recognize this is a lofty goal, and educators can’t do it all themselves,” Spearman said. “Even if we get students up to speed

during the school year, they lose ground during the summer. This just reverses progress and widens the gap.”

After-school and summer learning programs are sorely needed to help students stay on track when they aren’t in school. She challenged local officials to ask “what are the children in our town doing during the summer in the city’s parks and recreation programs?”

This is a great opportunity for collaboration between local schools and a city’s city parks and recreation program, she said. Spearman encouraged local officials to focus on strong summer programs to keep students learning so they stay on track when school starts again. One opportunity for collaboration, Spearman noted, is the Summer Food Program that gives local governments the opportunity to partner with the state Department of Education to provide free meals to children in summer programs.

Bottom line, Spearman said, the vision for K-12 education in South Carolina is that every child that gets a diploma is ready for success in whatever they decide to do.

Learn more about the Summer Food Program at www.ed.sc.gov/districts-schools/nutrition/summer-food-program.

Calculating the right LOST credit factor



Since its creation more than 25 years ago, the Local Option Sales Tax has provided property tax relief to hundreds of thousands of South Carolina homeowners and has become a widely used revenue source for many local governments. Thirty-one of the state's 46 counties have enacted the sales tax.

LOST is a 1-percent levy approved by voters at the county level and applied to taxable sales in that county.

The South Carolina Department of Revenue collects LOST revenue generated in participating counties and remits it to the State Treasurer's Office. There, the total countywide LOST collections are split into two separate accounts: the Property Tax Credit Fund and the County/Municipal Revenue Fund.

The State Treasurer's Office issues two checks each month to the county and its municipalities. The larger of the two checks is the Property Tax Credit Fund allocation. The smaller check represents the Municipal Revenue Fund allocation.

The State Treasurer's Office allocates 71 percent of LOST revenue generated in the county to the Property Tax Credit Fund. The county receives a check for 67 percent of the credit fund revenue, and each municipality in the county receives a check based on the remaining revenue in the fund (33 percent of total) multiplied by their percentage of the county's total municipal population.

Each municipality must use its Property Tax Credit Fund revenue in the fiscal year it is received to reduce taxpayers' property tax liability.

The remaining 29 percent of the countywide LOST revenue collections is allocated by the State Treasurer's Office to the Revenue Fund. The State Treasurer's Office divides the revenue in this fund and issues checks to the county and its

municipalities. The amount each receives is based 50 percent on the county or municipality's population as a percent of the total county population and 50 percent based on the location of the sale.

State law allows municipal councils to use this revenue for general fund purposes. Council can choose to add a portion (or the entire amount) to its Property Tax Credit Fund to provide additional property tax relief.

Determining the tax credit factor

Local Option cities must calculate an annual "tax credit factor" to determine the amount of mandated tax relief to be granted on the tax bill.

Accurately calculating the required tax credit is a critical part of the budget process for all municipalities in LOST counties.

The first step involves determining the total amount of money to be credited against property tax bills. At a minimum, this amount must equal the total projected deposits in the city's Property Tax Credit Fund.

Second, the sum of the projected Property Tax Credit Fund revenue plus accrued interest in the fund plus the amount of any additional LOST revenue that city council may wish to be credited as property tax relief is the numerator. The amount is then divided by the total appraised value of all taxable property in the city (the denominator). The resulting six-digit figure is the tax credit factor.

The tax credit factor is then translated into the dollar amount that will be credited against the municipal property tax for a single parcel. To determine the figure, the tax credit factor is multiplied by the appraised (market) value of the individual property for tax purposes. This credit is deducted on the tax bill from the gross amount of taxes due.

If calculated properly and economic conditions remain stable, a city's LOST revenues typically remain steady from year to year. If the tax credit factor is miscalculated or economic conditions change, a city could find itself in one of two situations.

The first scenario occurs when a city collects more LOST revenues than it provided in property tax relief. State law requires the city hold the additional revenue in an interest-bearing bank account until the next fiscal year.

When calculating the next fiscal year's tax credit factor, the city must add the surplus funds from the prior year, which include the original overage plus accrued interest, to the total projected Property Tax Credit Fund collections and the amount of additional LOST revenue that city council may wish to be credited as property tax relief.

The second situation occurs when a city collects less LOST revenues than it provided in property tax relief. The city must absorb the shortfall. State law does not address recouping unrealized revenues granted as a LOST credit.

These two scenarios underscore the tremendous importance for city officials to monitor LOST revenue closely.

A good starting point for calculating the tax credit factor is to develop and maintain a spreadsheet logging historical Municipal Revenue Fund and Tax Credit Fund receipts and detailed records on the calculation of prior years' tax credit factors. In addition, confirming the county auditor's appraised value figures will ensure a more accurate tax credit factor calculation.

Used together, these tips will help keep the city's revenue stream moving in the right direction and ensure city residents get the property tax relief mandated by state law.



Online resources can satisfy training mandate

All appointees and staff involved with local planning and zoning must complete orientation training as well as receive at least three hours of continuing education training each year. A convenient option for fulfilling the continuing education requirement is taking on-demand courses.

An approved facilitator must present the on-demand courses in a group setting. The facilitator will certify attendance and provide participants with a certificate that must be filed annually with the city clerk. Individuals cannot take these on-demand classes on their own if they want to have the training count toward their continuing education responsibility.

Failure to meet the training requirement can have serious consequences. An appointed official can be removed from office, and a professional employee can be suspended or dismissed. It could also be grounds for a legal challenge of official actions taken by a board or commission.

Municipal Association

Three of the SC Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government on-demand courses satisfy the continuing education requirement.

- Freedom of Information Act in SC (1.5 hrs.)
- Municipal Governance and Policy (1.5 hrs.)
- Municipal Economic Development (1.5 hrs.)

For information about accessing the courses and for group viewing options, contact Urica Floyd, the staff associate for distance learning, at 803.933.4754 or ufloyd@masc.sc.

SCMIT/SCMIRF

Members of the Association's two insurance programs, the SC Municipal Insurance Trust and the SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund, have access to additional on-demand courses. The courses are available

through LocalGovU, Risk Management Services' training partner. Five courses are approved to satisfy the continuing education requirement.

- Ethical Behavior for Elected Officials (.5 hrs.)
- Ethical Behavior for Local Government (.5 hrs.)
- Meeting Management (.5 hrs.)
- Parliamentary Procedures (.5 hrs.)
- Running an Effective Board Meeting (.5 hrs.)

Contact Venyke Harley, loss control manager, at vharley@masc.sc or 803.933.1210 with questions or to access these courses.

APA

In addition, the American Planning Association has on-demand resources available through its website. For more information, visit www.masc.sc (keyword: continuing education).



Garrison's Place, Hartsville

Cities make a difference with **limitless opportunities**

From handicapped-accessible playground equipment to miracle fields that let disabled children play organized baseball to beach accesses wide enough for wheelchairs, cities and towns around South Carolina are taking steps to ensure recreation opportunities are available to all.

The federal Americans with Disabilities Act requires newly built or altered state and local government facilities, including parks and recreation centers, be accessible and usable by people with disabilities. Municipalities are working—often with nonprofits or citizen

advocates—to remove barriers to parks, playgrounds and beaches.

In Hartsville, two residents led the move to add handicapped-accessible play areas to local playgrounds. One was the mother of a physically disabled boy and another runs a children's rehabilitation center in town.

"They really are the heart of it. They are truly the champions," said Mary Catherine Farrell, assistant to the city manager and grant writer. "They brought the requests to the city. How can you turn that down?"

The women became not only champions but also advisers, helping the city

understand exactly the types of changes needed.

"A lot of things are ADA-compliant, but there's a difference with something that's designed for integrated play," said Farrell. "For example, wood mulch is ADA compliant, but then you watch how hard it is for moms to push heavy wheelchairs through mulch."

Hartsville officials committed to adding something in each city playground for handicapped children, and Farrell got busy applying for grants. Grants from a local foundation and the federal Land and

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Piratesville Splash Pad, Hartsville

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Water Conservation Fund have resulted in upgrades and changes at city parks.

Hartsville is now home to Garrison's Place, a fully-integrated playground that includes a wheelchair-platform swing, adaptive swings and a zip line for children with disabilities. The city added aquatic wheelchairs at the Piratesville Splash Pad at the Byerly Park Recreation Complex and is now applying for a grant to upgrade another playground.

Farrell's advice for other municipalities looking to make their recreation facilities accommodating to disabled people: "Identify a champion, involve that champion and be creative. We are a small town, but we did our research to identify funding sources."

In Greer, people from around the Upstate head to Kids Planet at Century Park. In 1999, more than 3,000 volunteers assembled the first playground in nine days. Then in 2001, more than 700 volunteers built the accessible playground, Kids Planet Two, featuring handicapped-accessible swings and play areas.

Steve Owens, Greer's communications manager, suggests partnering with a group such as Able South Carolina, a nonprofit that offers a variety of services and programs that empower people with disabilities to reach their independence.

During the past year, Greer has been inspecting buildings, and parks and recreation facilities to see what type of

improvements should be made. Able South Carolina representatives, who understand the issues and know the landscape, accompanied city staff on the inspections, Owens said.

"That's their wheelhouse. They'd be good for any municipality to talk to," he said.

The coordination between nonprofits and cities is not uncommon when addressing accessible recreation areas.

Summerville's Miracle Field allows children of all abilities to play baseball. The city owns and maintains the facility, while the Summerville Miracle League organizes the games and the teams, said Doyle Best, the town's parks and recreation manager. The scaled-down field with a soft-rubber surface features programming for all ages—from young children to disabled adults.

In Myrtle Beach, where the top recreation destination is the city's 10 miles of beaches, city leaders decided more than seven years ago to offer fully ADA-compliant beach accesses at least every half-mile along the oceanfront. That means having dune walkovers that are accessible to wheelchairs while not harming the dunes.

Parks Superintendent Richard Kirby said the city works closely to meet ADA guidelines while maintaining environmental regulations for dune preservation. The cost averages \$70,000 per beach access, with some costing considerably more.

As for parks, this spring Myrtle Beach will open Savannah's Playground, built on city property by a nonprofit organization. The site is adjacent to Crabtree Memorial Gymnasium in the Market Common district on the site of the former Myrtle Beach Air Force Base.

The enabling playground will be fully ADA-approved to provide children of all abilities the opportunity for social interaction. It includes a ropes and zip line area, accessible swings with a pond view, musical playground equipment, a fishing pier and paddleboats, a fitness trail and more.

The goal is to promote a barrier-free, bias-free world for all children with special needs. It is designed to serve the citizens of Horry County, along with tourists and visitors from all over the world.

"This is pretty amazing; it's a big deal," Kirby said. "There is nothing like it in the Southeast."

Along with making accommodations to playgrounds and parks, municipalities need to ensure their recreation programming is accessible.

The City of Greer, for example, has had children with autism, epilepsy, cerebral palsy and physical development disorders participate in summer camps, football and soccer programs.

"We make accommodations to support individuals with disabilities who would like to participate in our leagues, summer camps and after-school programs every year," said Ann Cunningham, director of Greer's parks and recreation department.

"We meet with our staff, parents and coaches to ensure everyone is knowledgeable about any special needs that must be met," said Cunningham. "Depending on the circumstances, we may ask for a release from their doctor to ensure the child's safety. We also feel that it is important that once the child is placed on a team or in a program, the child is treated just like everyone else."

In Mauldin, the city joined with the Mauldin Miracle League in 2004 to create an accessible baseball field and playground area at Sunset Park. The league provides baseball programs for children

and young adults with physical and developmental challenges. The field is also used by the Mauldin Maulers, a softball league for adults in wheelchairs.

The city supports the programs by providing facility maintenance and program assistance, when needed, during special events, according to Kimberly Hamel, director of business and development services in Mauldin.

The Town of Mount Pleasant has a full schedule of programming to improve the physical fitness, motor skill development, and artistic and social skills of people with disabilities, said Recreation Director Ken Ayoub. The town's Unified Athletic League offers golf, soccer, basketball and Friday socials, while a swim team focuses on swimming technique, fitness and fun.

"Our goal is to remove the barriers that may keep some individuals in the community from participating in recreation activities. Through recreation, participants have the opportunity to become more active, learn a new sport, and improve social skills, all while making new friends," Ayoub said.

"The Unified Athletic League offers the opportunity for all youth and adults to play on a sports team. It joins both youth and adults with disabilities and those without for training and to play together as a team. Smaller fields and modified equipment may be used as needed to ensure fairness and safety for all."

Mount Pleasant offers aquatic programming open to children with severe and multiple disabilities, while instructors offer swim lessons to participants regardless of any limitations. Both of the town pools are ADA-accessible, and each aquatic facility has a set of stairs leading into the pool for easy access for patrons who are unable to climb a ladder. There are two portable aquatic pool lifts that can lift someone up to 300 pounds into the pool, he said.



Open since 2005, Mauldin's Sunset Park features its own "Field of Dreams." Photo courtesy of the Mauldin Miracle League

The town's summer camps offer programs for children and teens with disabilities. New this year will be four weeks of summer Arts for Autism camp for ages 10 to 14. The camp is designed for verbal autistic youth who will work with a team of trained professionals.

Ayoub offered this advice for municipalities working to improve access to a recreation program: "The families and the community of the disabled are a very close-knit group and in many cases will come together to help the recreation department in providing the programs. Keep this group involved in the development of programs and seek out their opinions and recommendations. Don't be afraid to try new approaches and techniques when offering a program. Don't be afraid of failure. Many in the community will appreciate the effort and in most cases will rally around that effort and help the next time."

He also suggested visiting other programs and learning from what is already in place, and involving others outside the immediate community.

"While our program was developing, we had families willing to drive 40 to 50

miles round trip and pay double to get their child involved in programs for the first time," Ayoub said. "Numbers are needed, and if involving participants from outside your community will enable you to offer a program for your residents, then do it."

He also suggested hiring an employee, full- or part-time, who is trained appropriately and who is passionate about the programs and the participants.

Ayoub tells a story that shows the importance of the programs: "When we started our first Unified baseball team, there was a young man who was severely disabled and wheelchair-bound. He became involved in the program. The ball games and socialization of the program became the highlights of his life. He would wear his uniform all the time, even when he was not playing."

"Unfortunately he passed away a few years later. But up to that time, he was involved in the program. At his funeral ... he was buried with his uniform on and his first and only baseball glove with him. That image and story are why we will always do what we do. That is the impact that we have on those in our program."

Play instead of pay



Cities and towns are offering a wider array of parks and recreational activities than ever before. While this means more opportunities for residents, it also increases the potential for injury and liability claims. These activities and facilities attract participants of all ages and abilities, so officials should carefully evaluate all risks to reduce potential liability.

Many municipalities rely on volunteers to fill a number of roles, such as coaches, referees/umpires and aides. Although not employees, these volunteers are generally considered agents of the municipality. As such, their actions can create liability for the city.

To minimize potential exposure, the city should screen, train and supervise all volunteers. “Require background checks and review driver’s license histories to limit exposures,” advised Heather Ricard, director of the Association’s Risk Management Services.

“Consider conducting a criminal history check for coaches, playground leaders or others who have contact with children,” she said. “Also, conduct a criminal history check on volunteers who handle money as part of their duties.”

Municipalities sponsoring sports and recreational activities should provide qualified instructors, adequate supervision, safe and suitable equipment, and adequate medical care, such as emergency procedures and first aid/CPR. For some activities, the city should require signed waivers and releases from participants, as well as medical authorizations from their personal physicians before allowing individuals to engage in any hazardous activities.

City officials should also familiarize themselves with state and federal laws that could apply to recreation activities. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires newly built recreational facilities or those being rebuilt be compliant with the ADA. Other laws and practices can lessen the likelihood of severe claims. In South Carolina, the Tort Claims Act limits liability damages to \$300,000 per person or \$600,000 per occurrence.

Routinely scheduled playground inspections can help city officials determine where work needs to be done to keep playgrounds and play equipment safe. Audits that check for compliance with the Consumer Product Safety

Commission and the American Society for Testing and Materials International standards can identify areas that need attention. “Be sure to document all inspection findings and maintenance performed, and correct any identified hazards,” said Ricard.

With the approach of warm weather and the increased use of swimming facilities, the likelihood increases for claims related to aquatics liability. The spring is a good time to review SC Department of Health and Environmental Control regulations for swimming pools and to make sure staff is properly trained and equipped. Abiding by these regulations and having staff trained in first aid, CPR and AED use will go a long way in making sure that pool facilities are safe and fun.

Having a variety of recreational facilities to choose from enhances a city’s quality of life. Identifying and managing risks associated with park and recreation programs and facilities will give resident and visitors the chance to enjoy these opportunities while keeping these assets from becoming municipal liabilities.

Quidditch Tournament/Photo:
Wendy Waddle, City of Rock Hill



Quidditch, anyone?

Parks and Rec
grow beyond
swing sets and
Little League

Parks and Recreation

Gone are the days when public parks consisted solely of some children's swings and slides. Today, parks and recreation departments offer a wide variety of programming to attract everyone from youngsters to senior citizens, at facilities and fields designed to serve the multiple needs of a community.

One trend in parks and rec has been programming geared toward teens. Many communities have focused on providing a safe place to go and productive things to do to keep teenagers out of trouble. This is a challenge, according to Jim Headley, executive director of the SC Recreation and Parks Association, both in finding programs and activities that interest teens and in providing the staffing and training to keep these programs running.

The Rock Hill Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department is targeting teens with programming—an effort supported

by Rock Hill City Council through the City's Strategic Plan, said PRT Director John Taylor.

The Rock Hill Youth Council and Youth Service League engage youth in volunteer efforts, community projects and event hosting to give them outlets for their free time and socialization. Youth sports leagues and individual activities such as tennis, cycling and kayaking also provide positive ways for teens to spend time, socialize and learn new skills, Taylor said. These activities can also fill a void for those not engaged in middle or high school athletics or other community programs, he added.

The City of Conway has invested in its parks system by building several new parks, a dog park, and a \$6.5 million Recreation Center offering amenities and classes to people of all ages. The city's Police Department also specifically

reaches out to youngsters with a basketball league created to keep kids active and off the streets while building positive relationships with them and their families.

The Outreach Basketball League is offered free to any child in the area, from elementary to high school ages, said Corporal Cassandra Spain. The department has offered the league for the past five years, and currently more than 150 local kids participate.

"It's a chance for us to offer fellowship and be positive role models to kids in the community," Spain said.

Cities want to attract young people and families, and many offer nontraditional activities to grab their attention, Headley said.

North Myrtle Beach has hosted a variety of off-the-beaten-path tournaments that give the city the opportunity

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Ultimate Frisbee/Photo: Pat Dowling, City of North Myrtle Beach

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to bring people to town for the first time, according to John Bullard, director of the Parks and Recreation Department for the City of North Myrtle Beach.

Quidditch—a version of the magical game played in “Harry Potter”—brought 79 college co-ed teams from 30 states and Australia. Ultimate Frisbee brought more than 200 teams to North Myrtle Beach from 28 states and Washington D.C.

Other special events like the Diva Half Marathon brought more than 4,000 women runners from 48 states and several countries. Along with the runners came friends and family members, bringing the total number of visitors to more than 10,000 and a direct economic impact of more than \$4 million, Bullard said.

“The nontraditional events give our community something new and exciting to watch and, in some cases like the Diva Half Marathon, participate in,” Bullard said. “Keeping up with the latest trends is essential to success and adds to the legitimacy of the parks and recreation profession.”

The City of Barnwell has a 9-hole disc golf course at its Fuller Park, which brings in visitors from nearby communities during the spring and summer, according to City Administrator John Zawacki.

“It’s nice to offer something other than the traditional recreation sports,” he said. “This is something that anybody, of any age can do. Families can play this together. It’s easy to do, and it’s fun.”

Recreation is ever changing, Bullard said. While there will always be the tried

and true programs like soccer and baseball, new activities like Ultimate Frisbee and pickleball (a sport that combines elements of badminton, tennis and ping pong) will continue to emerge.

“Activities such as pickleball have gained popularity from all ages, especially from the baby boomers who have been known to decide where to retire based on the local pickleball scene,” Bullard said.

While not all seniors may be such pickleball enthusiasts, city officials know that their recreation offerings do play a role in attracting retirees.

North Myrtle Beach is an area with an influx of retirees and snowbirds, and it’s important to offer a variety of programs to meet their needs, Bullard said. Some of the most popular programs that the city offers include pickleball, board and card games, dancing lessons and Zumba Gold.

“All of these programs are very popular and attract this group because of the fitness and social aspects,” Bullard said. “Focusing on this group ensures that our seniors stay active in the community. By having a supportive parks and recreation department, it makes the city more attractive to potential retirees and vacationers.”

Headley also notes that parks and recreation departments should consider activities for parents and grandparents who are taking children to ball fields for practices and games. Rather than having adults sit on the benches for an hour, get them involved in physical activity by offering a walking trail around the ball field, he suggested.

Designing those ball fields and public parks differently to allow for multiple uses is something Headley expects to see more of in the future. In the 1970s and 1980s, the trend was to design complexes with four or five ball fields, with the goal of attracting tournaments, he said. Today, cities need to consider designs that allow for fields to be used not only for ball games but also for multiple uses that all of the public can enjoy, such as festivals, playgrounds and walking trails.

Headley also foresees changes in how public parks will be funded, with more public-private partnerships.

“There’s only so much money to go around,” he said. “But if we look at public parks and recreation as part of the solution to health and wellness issues, we could find ways to fund them through nontraditional means.”

That includes getting doctors on board with supporting a “prescription for parks” and getting insurance companies to financially support parks, Headley said.

Increasingly, cities also are finding what makes their community unique, and building parks and recreation systems around those amenities.

The new Pacolet River Blueway is currently utilized by both kayakers and fishermen, locals and visitors alike, according to Pacolet Mayor Michael Meissner. Visitors come to town and buy gas and food from local stores, although no official study has been done on the economic impact.

“Expansion of the Greenway next to the Blueway is also something the town is committed to, as it will offer even more outdoor activities for everyone,” Meissner said.

A quality parks and recreation system impacts a community on many levels—it improves quality of life for residents, attracts businesses and visitors, helps the environment, and improves property values.

“People are at work for eight hours a day, but there’s another 16 hours out there where they need something to do,” Headley said. “When you look at any area showing economic progress, they have a quality parks and rec system. Parks and rec is quality of life.”

Sports tourism rolling in Rock Hill

Rock Hill's sports tourism history began in 1985 with the opening of Cherry Park, a softball/baseball facility located in a 68-acre park with trails, a playground and numerous park amenities. Since then, the focus on sports tourism has grown, with the city constructing additional regional parks offering opportunities for local leagues and programs, as well as sports tournament events.

The Rock Hill Parks Recreation and Tourism Department estimates that sports tourism has had a \$121.9 million direct economic impact on the city since 2006, according to Director John Taylor.

Rock Hill's newest facilities are the Giordana Velodrome (track cycling), which opened in 2012, and the Novant Health BMX Supercross Track, which opened in 2014. Both are Olympic-caliber training facilities, open to the public—with the BMX facility being the first of its kind on the East Coast, Taylor said. These facilities offer new rider training and certification, open track riding, and specialized programs in addition to hosting events from the local to the international level.

At the same site, the city is on track to construct a \$2.55 million criterium course with infield parking. The completion of the criterium (closed road course) is expected by early fall 2016 and will enhance the 2016 UCI BMX Supercross World Cup event (scheduled for

September 30 - October 1) by providing a warm-up site for cyclists.

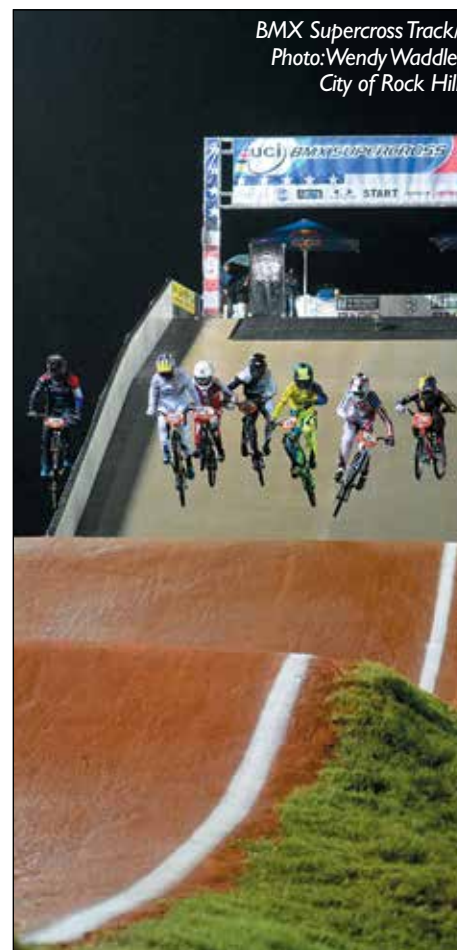
Rock Hill is also hosting the 2017 UCI BMX World Championships to be held July 26 - 30, bringing more than 3,300 cyclists to the area. With plans to construct a cyclocross course in the near future, Rock Hill will be the only cycling destination in the United States featuring permanent facilities for all five cycling disciplines in one location, Taylor said.

Nationwide, communities are looking at ways to break into the sports tourism industry. A 2012 report from the National Association of Sports Commissions found that visitors spent more than \$7.6 billion on sports travel in 2011, most of that spent in the local economy on food, lodging and retail.

There is no formal data on the impact of recreation/sports tourism in South Carolina, according to Dudley Jackson, research director for the SC Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism. Data related to this sector, however, indicates that the impact of sports tourism in the state could be as much as \$3.4 billion annually, he said.

PRT offers a grant program to provide financial assistance to nonprofit tourism or sports-related organizations, applying through their respective local government, for recruiting new sporting events to South Carolina.

The grants provide a match up to \$50,000 per event for common sporting

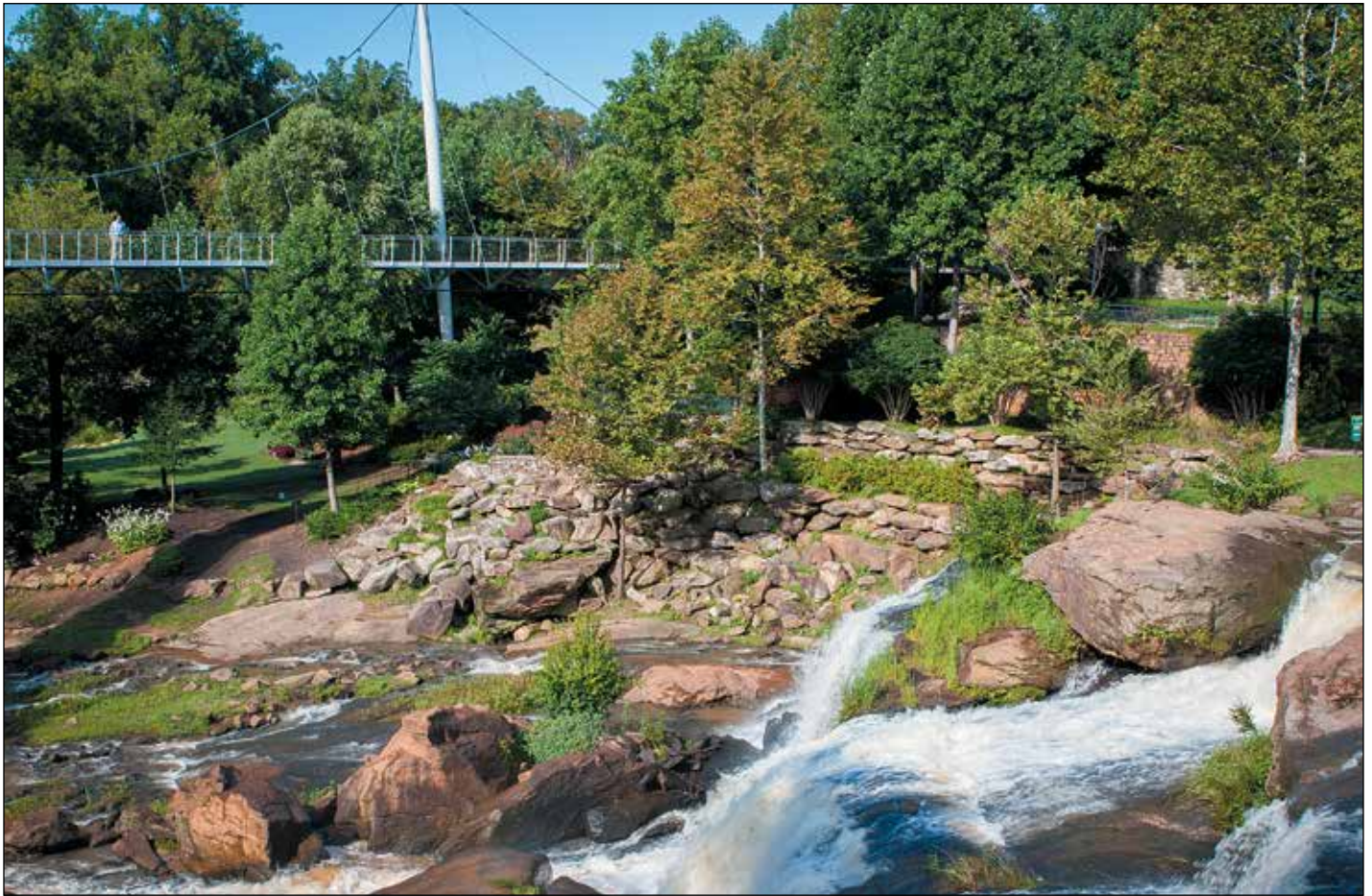


event recruitment costs such as bid fees, event advertising and equipment rentals directly related to the event.

Sports tourism is an underdeveloped segment of the state's overall tourism industry, according to PRT. It's valuable, though, because sports tourism activities provide direct revenues through sales, admissions or accommodations tax collections, as well as drawing new visitors to the state's tourism destinations.

Rock Hill's success shows the positive impact of the sports tourism industry.

"Creating a vibrant, diverse parks, recreation and tourism program is an overall benefit to attracting businesses because new businesses are often looking for a city that values a high quality of life for its citizens," Taylor said. "They want to operate in such an area and have their employees enjoy that same quality of life. Additionally, they are looking for a city with a growing economy, which the positive economic impact of sports tourism certainly supports in Rock Hill."



Falls Park/Photo: City of Greenville

Parks make their mark

Parks serve numerous purposes in a community including connecting people with nature, providing social gathering spots, helping the environment and offering health benefits from physical activity. While active parks such as playgrounds and ball fields may offer the most obvious physical benefits, passive parks, with their benches, trails or greenspace, also play an important role in the community's well-being.

In Greenville, Falls Park is the picturesque epicenter of the downtown and provides an oasis for a variety of users. The park provides a welcoming space where downtown employees, visitors and local residents gather to work, play, picnic, read a book or just sit quietly to enjoy the natural beauty in one of its gardens.

"Falls Park has set the standard for future public space by providing a seamless alignment between architecture, art and nature," said Dale Westermeier, deputy director of parks and recreation for the City of Greenville. "Additionally, it has served as a model for future park development by providing a guiding principal for public and private partnerships. The Carolina Foothills Garden Club, Furman University, corporations and individuals all played a role by providing an endowment, property, sponsorships and other enhancements."

Falls Park hosts a wide array of activities and events, including Shakespeare in the Park, Artisphere, the Reedy River Duck Derby, the Chautauqua festival,

and numerous concerts and gatherings. The park has generated more than \$100 million in economic development with projects including residential, office, retail, hotels, restaurants and mixed-use development.

This has revitalized Greenville's West End, Westermeier said. The park's development transformed a once desolate and neglected space into an urban oasis complete with gardens and visually stunning waterfalls and vistas, he said.

Greenville realized the beauty of its natural resources—the Reedy River and falls—had the potential to draw visitors and play a role in economic development, said Jim Headley, executive director of the SC Recreation and Parks Association.



Walterboro Wildlife Sanctuary/Photo: Jeff Kramer



Charleston's Park Angels/Photo: Charleston Parks Conservancy

“Every single community across the state has its own Falls Park,” Headley said. “They all have something unique in their own backyard.”

For the residents of Walterboro, their backyard contains a 600-acre unspoiled preserve containing four miles of boardwalks, and hiking, biking and nature trails. This habitat for more than 80 species of birds and other abundant wildlife is protected by the Walterboro Wildlife Sanctuary. Its strategic location near I-95 also makes it an inviting destination for vacationers looking for family-friendly entertainment, said Walterboro City Manager Jeff Molinari.

“The Sanctuary serves as a major economic force for Walterboro, creating a demand for expanded tourism amenities such as high-quality hotels, restaurants and shops,” he said.

The city’s park system helps promote a healthy environment for residents and visitors alike, Molinari said.

“Parks greatly enhance the quality of life in Walterboro by providing opportunities for exercise and social interaction, and helping to revitalize neighborhoods,” he said. “City parks also play an important role in beautification which creates a welcoming environment for visitors.”

Work began in Charleston in 2007 to increase the quality, awareness and usage of the city’s parks and greenspaces with the founding of the Charleston Parks Conservancy. Businesswoman and philanthropist Darla Moore founded the group which works closely with the City of Charleston Parks Department and an active group of volunteers.

“The impact has been incredible by bringing citizens back to their parks,” said Jason Kronsberg, Charleston’s deputy director of parks. “This re-engagement has resulted in an elevated level of park beautification and park maintenance by giving people a renewed sense of pride and ownership in their parks.”

Individuals dubbed “park angels” and “aqua angels” volunteer in the parks, working with and learning from the conservancy’s horticulturalist. This learning also takes place in one of the three existing community gardens that the Conservancy operates in city parks, Kronsberg said.

Charleston has more than 120 parks and athletic complexes spanning the peninsula to the neighborhoods of West Ashley, Johns Island, James Island and Daniel Island. Parks in the historic district provide visitors with an activity to pass

the time between tours or before dinner. The city’s waterfront parks offer visitors and residents a place to take in the view, catch a cool breeze or go fishing.

“The value of parks and open space is immeasurable based on the enjoyment provided for the people and the benefits to the environment,” Kronsberg concluded.

Those environmental benefits are plentiful. Parks provide a habitat for birds and animals. They can filter stormwater before it enters the drainage system. A mature tree canopy provided by parks can cool the hot surfaces of rooftops, concrete roads and parking lots in a city, reducing the urban heat island effect. Trees in parks also can help improve air quality by reducing pollutants caused by traffic and other sources.

Studies have shown that the property values are higher—as much as 20 percent—for homes located near passive parks. Many people are willing to pay more for a house located near a park. The higher values mean the owners contribute more to the tax base.

With the many benefits (environmental, economic and health), “cities really have a responsibility to invest in parks,” Headley said.



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Calendar

For a complete listing of training opportunities, visit www.masc.sc to view the calendar.

APRIL

5 Dealing with the Mentally Ill/Drug and Alcohol Testing Procedures. Columbia Conference Center. Open to SC Municipal Insurance Trust and SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund members.

8 Municipal Court Administration of SC Spring Meeting. Columbia Conference Center. Topics include bond estreatments, and protecting and releasing criminal justice information.

20 SC Business Licensing Officials Association Spring Training Institute and Advanced Academy. Columbia Conference Center. Topics include business license legislation, contractor licensing, and business licensing officials' duties and responsibilities.

27 SC Association of Municipal Power Systems Lineman Training. Pine Island, Columbia. Repeated on April 28.

28 SC Municipal Human Resources Association Spring Meeting. Columbia Conference Center. Topics include unemployment insurance, generational diversity, attracting millennials to the workforce, workplace violence response plans, Family Medical Leave Act and Americans with Disabilities Act.

29 Managers/Administrators Spring Forum. Columbia Conference Center.

MAY

5 SC Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government. Council of Governments' offices. Courses offered: "Municipal Governance and Policy" and "Freedom of Information Act in SC." The courses are also offered on demand from the Association's website (keyword: MEO).

11-13 SC Community Development Association Annual Meeting. Marina Inn at Grande Dunes, Myrtle Beach. Topics include brownfields redevelopment, consolidating small water systems, and success stories of local museums and farmers markets.

JUNE

7 SC Business Licensing Officials Association Accrediation in Business Licensing Exam. 1411 Gervais St., Columbia.

9 SC Association of Stormwater Managers Second Quarter Meeting. Columbia Conference Center.

19-21 SC Association of Municipal Power Systems Annual Meeting. Sonesta Resort, Hilton Head Island.

JULY

14-17 Municipal Association of SC Annual Meeting. Charleston Place Hotel. See related article on page 1.