



ADVOCACY in Action

The Mainstream Green Coalition is a gathering of nonprofit organizations that work individually for a healthy environment and to tailor arguments to fit that constituency.

The coalition is comprised of approximately 70 nonprofit organizations located throughout the state of Ohio, representing a wide spectrum within the environmental community. The organization meets on a monthly basis and generally has representation from 15 to 20 organizations during any given meeting. Membership ground rules limit delegates to natural-resource, conservation, environmental or recreational organizations. Additional qualified organizations may be asked to send a delegate by consensus of the members. Excluded from consideration are for-profit corporations and government agencies. The executive director of the Ohio League of Conservation Voters serves as the convener of meetings.

In a recent discussion, Jim McGregor, executive director of the League of Conservation Voters, gave an analogy regarding the organization of Mainstream Green Coalition. Jim stated, “A good friend of mine is a successful trial attorney. He explained to me the tremendous investment that is put into trial preparation. Attorneys will hire a dozen people from a temporary employment agency. These individuals will form a mock jury. The attorneys will hire actors to sit as judge and to testify as victims, alleged perpetrators and experts. They will hire psychologists and sociologists to observe. The attorneys will then argue their case before the mock court. The mock jury reaches a verdict, and the social scientists sit down with the attorneys to help them understand what arguments worked, what arguments did not work and why and how to change presentations and arguments in the real trial. This investment regularly pays off in favorable verdicts.”

Mainstream Green took a similar approach. The League of Conservation Voters hired experts to develop for them a sort of environmental media communications 201 course. That material is available to interested organizations.

Each monthly meeting creates an opportunity for organizations to discuss what issues are pressing. The group invites speakers to each meeting. In February, Mike Shelton of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources addressed the group about the agency’s budget problems and potential sources of new income. In March, a speaker was invited to speak on Ohio’s potential rail hub and initial passenger service from Cleveland through Columbus to Cincinnati.

As a member of OPRA, I was asked a few years ago to voluntarily represent them as a delegate to Mainstream Green. At that time, the organization was not called Mainstream Green; it actually was a loose-knit group of individual delegates representing a variety of environmentally related organizations. The League of Conservation Voters’ former executive director, Bill DeMora, brought this group together to better serve the interests of the whole. Under Bill’s leadership, the loose-knit group obtained grants to undergo a “branding” (marketing) project to acquire its current name and purpose.

The League of Conservation Voters convenes the Mainstream Green Coalition, but it is a group of peers rather than an organization. All interested nonprofit groups that meet the coalition’s ground rules are welcome. Additional information concerning the coalition can be obtained by contacting Jim McGregor at jmcgregor@ohiolcv.org.

The organization has come a long way in a short period of time to form a very strong environmental voice within the state of Ohio.

Submitted by Jerry Eldred, Executive Director, Miami County Park District



Advocates for Youth

Girls Institute of Ohio (GIO) Expands To Become ...Youth Institute of Ohio (YIO)

The Ohio Parks & Recreation Association (OPRA) officially created the Girls Institute of Ohio in 2005 to be the organization that is responsive to girls' issues in the state of Ohio. This action was made possible by a Byrne Grant, which provided funding beginning in 2004. In December 2008, the Girls Institute of Ohio (GIO) expanded to become the Youth Institute of Ohio (YIO) and its vision is now for healthy youth. Since many of our service providers serve both boys and girls, the evolution to be inclusive of boys in our work made sense for the consolidation of resources, particularly in these tough economic times, but girls will still be our focus.

Why continue our focus on girls? Simple: they need us. We were initially called to respond to the needs of the fastest-growing segment of the juvenile justice system ... GIRLS!

Since the early 1990s, there has been a steady increase in girls entering the juvenile justice system — a system where services are focused primarily on boys.

The American and the National Bar Associations' May 2001 report, *Justice by Gender: The Lack of Appropriate Prevention, Diversion and Treatment Alternatives for Girls in the Justice System*, identified a gap in the system: the need to have an organization to provide awareness, advocacy and education to

support the improvement of service development and delivery for girls at risk of future or continued involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Ohio Parks & Recreation (OPRA) created the Girls Institute of Ohio to be the organization to fill that need. OPRA, a nonprofit corporation since 1959, has a qualified organizational structure in place, making it a natural choice to implement the goals of the Girls Institute of Ohio.

With a renowned group of thousands of citizens and professionals charged with the stewardship of Ohio's parks and natural resources, OPRA hosts quality education and training programs and more than 25 different workshops and conferences annually.

Girls at risk have even greater challenges than otherwise “normal” teenagers. Our Web site, www.girlsohio.org, contains more detailed information in its report, “Why Girls Are at Risk and How to Prevent and Treat the Problem.” Education is the first step in breaking the cycle of girls at risk of entering the juvenile justice system. The key to intervention and prevention is providing information to adults, professionals, caregivers and teens.

There are several substantial problems facing girls today, including teenage pregnancy and the possibility of sexually transmitted diseases, mental health issues, victimization, substance abuse and delinquency. Given the increase in the number of girls under correctional supervision, as well as the increase in the number of girls being arrested for violent offenses, it is imperative that we begin to develop treatment and prevention programs for girls.

A flagship program, “Working Effectively with Girls,” was developed to train professionals in parks and recreation, juvenile justice and others who care to work proactively with girls. Close to 1,000 people have been trained to date, and workshops are still being offered.

BIG NEWS ... our Working Effectively with Girls program has been developed into an online program. For less than \$50, you can now reap the benefits of this powerful training from the comforts of your home or office with no travel expenses. Proceeds from this online training course will allow for the development of resources to further the goals of this important positive youth development organization.

In conclusion, YIO is dedicated to promoting healthy youth through awareness, advocacy and education. YIO’s goals are to:

- Create a forum for multi-system collaboration, particularly between juvenile justice professionals and park and recreation professionals
- Advance the goals of the Girls Institute of Ohio, developing programs and services to address gender issues throughout the state
- Support programming based on “best practice” principles through awareness and skill-building training
- Coordinate and pool resources to promote quality effective service delivery in different systems that touch the lives of youth
- Maintain current research information, staying abreast of national responses to girls’ issues
- Provide youth in Ohio a voice to share concerns, interests and needs

We are advocates for youth. Providing pro-social activities through parks and recreation can make a big difference in providing healthy options for developing youth. Our counterparts in the juvenile justice system need the decoder ring to figure out how to access the services parks and recreation can provide for the youth they serve. Therefore, a regional approach to collaboration can make a big difference. If you are interested in getting involved,

Given the increase in the number of girls under correctional supervision, as well as the increase in the number of girls being arrested for violent offenses, it is imperative that we begin to develop treatment and prevention programs for girls.

contact us at info@girlsohio.org — we need you, and our youth need you too!

Submitted by Molly McClure, CPRP, GIO/YIO Volunteer Executive Director





Know Your Customers' Requirements in Tough Economic Times

Many interesting ideas come across our desks for review. How do we know which ones to support? That is a fundamental question that comes to mind as we move into more challenging economic times. It applies to many types of decisions, including those related to legislation. At risk are our resources. Where do we allocate our finances? Our time? Our energy? The options are endless. The basic answer is simple. We allocate these things based on regulatory mandates and our customers' requirements. Given that park and recreation agencies are typically government organizations, it is safe to consider our voting community as our customers, even if they can be further segmented into varying user groups.

As we know, legislation can result in regulatory mandates, so we want to be careful to support legislation that is based initially on customer requirements. Customer requirements can originate from a variety of places — from direct input to our operations to the unfortunate behaviors of a few that threaten many. For now, let's focus on customer input. How do we obtain it? Methods used have often included town-hall-style meetings for new construction projects, online surveys, end-of-program questionnaires, feedback logs and direct involvement of customers in planning and

implementation efforts. Another method occurs when customers approach our leadership to lobby for park support of a project they want completed. This final example reflects two potential types of customer input: majority and minority. It is entirely possible that a person or group represents a vocal minority with an interesting project, but they may not reflect the desires of the larger customer group. The usually quiet majority may or may not want the project to occur. It is easy to become emotionally involved in an interesting project with a passionate supporter behind it, but for

the sake of our voting, taxpaying community, we must investigate if it is desired among the majority before we invest our resources in making it happen, especially if the potential impact on those resources is significant.

Determining how the majority feels can be accomplished by asking the lobbying person or group to provide research that meets certain criteria for us, or we may seek the information out ourselves by conducting our own research. When doing research, it is best to be certain that the results are statistically sound. For example, if we were

to conduct a survey of our community, we would want to be certain that it was large enough in size and that it reflected the different demographic and geographic groups within our population. Regardless of the method used, it is important to provide the participant with context for the project. Many participants will indicate that they think something sounds good; however, their tune changes when they realize how much it costs or what other service they might lose in order to implement the project.

Conducting a trial implementation, when practical, can be helpful in further prevention of a poor investment. Trials allow observation of customer behavior. Are they engaged in the new project as anticipated? If not, would changing something make a difference? Again, many people will verbally support something that sounds good, but their circumstances or personal choices may deter them from actual participation.

An ill-researched investment can have many undesirable consequences. A park can end up with a new feature that gets little use and drains maintenance dollars. It can become an eyesore over time because maintenance dollars were eventually redirected to higher-

If poorly researched projects get passed up the chain and become legislation, we may very well be saddled with mandates that require us to invest too many dollars in services that are not the highest priority for our voting community. We may receive dollars that can only be used for items that we don't need.

use alternatives. New staff members can be added unnecessarily, placing parks in the position of potential layoffs.

So how does this relate to legislative issues? In this instance, we become the lobbying group standing in front of a larger leadership and asking for their support of our projects. It becomes important for us to walk our talk and present them with well-researched ideas that reflect what our customers — the majority — require of us. If poorly researched projects get passed up the chain and become legislation, we may very well be saddled with mandates that require us to invest too many dollars in services that are not the highest priority for our voting community. We may receive dollars that can only be used for items that we don't need. We may receive funds for projects we're passionate about and that our community likes but doesn't use.

As we move forward in these tough economic times, it will become increasingly important to ensure that we know what our core services are as required by our taxpaying customers, that we are able to deliver them without interruption, that we support legislation that ensures their continued delivery and that we aptly demonstrate this to our legislators as we lobby for their support. Further, if we support projects above and beyond our core services, we must ensure that they are well-researched and majority-supported and constitute a sound investment of our resources for years to come. Failure to do so creates a potential threat to our core services.

Submitted by Lara Frankenberg, Business Services Supervisor, Metroparks of the Toledo Area





REGION NEWS

Region 1 News

Tim Brugeman retired as director of the Hancock Park District, effective December 31, 2008. Thanks to some options made available to the Board, Tim will continue to work part-time for up to two years to assist the transition to new leadership until a full-time director is appointed.

As part of his 41-year career, Tim has completed 35 years at HPD, starting as the first director in 1973. Prior to coming to Findlay, he worked as a planner for the Erie County Park District and a landscape architect for

Region 2 News

City of Barberton

Our city has a beautification program that was moved under the Parks and Recreation Department early in 2008. We are best known for our annual Mum Festival, which is held annually at Lake Anna Park. Our festival dates in 2009 will be Saturday and Sunday, September 26 and 27.

City of Beachwood

The second Annual Green Dream Eco-Friendly Showcase was held April 17, 2009, and brought 77 businesses and organizations together in an expo style to educate visitors about business, product and lifestyle choices that are environmentally friendly. The annual event is free and open to the public.

Stark Parks Web Site Wins National Award

The Web site of the Stark County Park District has been recognized as the "Best for Kids and Families" in an annual national competition

Region 3 News

Stacy Schweikhart, division manager, programs and special projects, for the city of Kettering Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts Department, is the new OPRA Region 3 Chair.

Welcome New Region 3 Members

Robert Davis, Director of Community Services & Parks and Recreation, Village of Woodlawn

Region 4 News

Jason Shamblin, director, Reynoldsburg Parks and Recreation, is the new OPRA Region 4 Chair.

Welcome New Region 4 Members

Sharon K. Adkins, Receptionist, City of Hilliard

Jason Blane, Student, Ohio University

Zach Brink, Park Maintenance Assistant, Washington Township Parks & Recreation

Vancil Casebolt, Student, Ohio University

Michael Croft, Sports Program Supervisor, Dublin Recreation Services

Region 5 (Out of State) News

Welcome New Region 5 Member

Matthew Smith, Student, West Virginia University

an architectural/engineering firm in Columbus, where he also graduated from The Ohio State University.

Diana Clinebell, secretary, Fremont Parks and Recreation, retired after 32 years of service in the public sector.

Welcome New Region 1 Members

Bruce Eschmeyer, Sales Manager, Hoge Lumber Company

Caryn Patrias, Graduate Assistant/Student, University of Toledo

sponsored by the nonprofit organization American Trails. Eighty-three Web sites competed for 17 awards.

Stark Parks' Web site (www.starkparks.com) was recognized for its Explorer Program section, which "provides incentives for hiking the trails, attending programs, completing environmental service projects and participating in other outdoor recreation."

Welcome New Region 2 Members

Luke Briningstool, Recreation Coordinator, Steubenville Parks & Recreation Department

Dwan W. Johnson, Director, Steubenville Parks & Recreation Department

Amanda Peel, Student, Kent State University

Nicole M. Prendes, Student, Kent State University

Mark Goldick, Parks Supervisor, Springfield Township

Chris Papakirk, Principal/Landscape Architect, Chris Papakirk, LLC

Angie Riviello, Arena Supervisor, City of Kettering Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts Department

Robert Stanford, Recreation Coordinator, City of Piqua

Geoffrey Adam Dew, Recreation Supervisor, City of Hilliard

Jim Dziatkowicz, ASLA, Landscape Architect, EMH&T

Megan Goudy, Aquatic Supervisor, City of Hilliard

David A. Judson, Recreation Supervisor, City of Hilliard

William R. Lobuzzetta, Recreation Supervisor, City of Hilliard

Ronald Matthews, President, Builder Scape, Inc.

Beth A. Simon, Recreation Supervisor, City of Hilliard

Kathryn Siroky, Recreation Supervisor, City of Hilliard

DJ White, Student, The Ohio State University/Intern, Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks



Stark Parks Offers Strategies for



Being an effective advocate for parks and recreation is a 24/7 proposition. It's not a skill that's only in your park director's job description; it should be in everyone's job description, and it is a skill that can be learned.

In practice, there is a lot of overlap between the skills you use to provide good customer service and those needed for effective advocacy. Many of those skills are the same ones you would use if you were preparing a persuasive speech, especially knowing your audience and their needs and concerns.

Working with Constituents

While advocacy is most often associated with interactions with elected officials, such officials may be the smallest audience with whom you need to advocate. Although they are an extremely important audience, the most effective strategy for reaching them is sometimes through their constituents.

An example of effective constituent advocacy took place in Stark County last year, and as a result, the Stark County Park District will soon have an additional 34 acres of beautiful rural property for a new park. County commissioners were planning to sell the property, but Nimishillen Township residents were concerned about the type of development that might come to their quiet, farming neighborhood. Those neighbors attended commission meetings and collected more than 1,000 signatures on a petition in support of turning the property into a park. As a consequence, on Earth Day 2009, Molly Stark Park will open, and a festival planned by the community activists is scheduled for later in the summer. In this case, all our park district had to do was be a willing partner; citizens did the "heavy lifting" to make the park a reality, including supporting the property tax levy that funds our district.

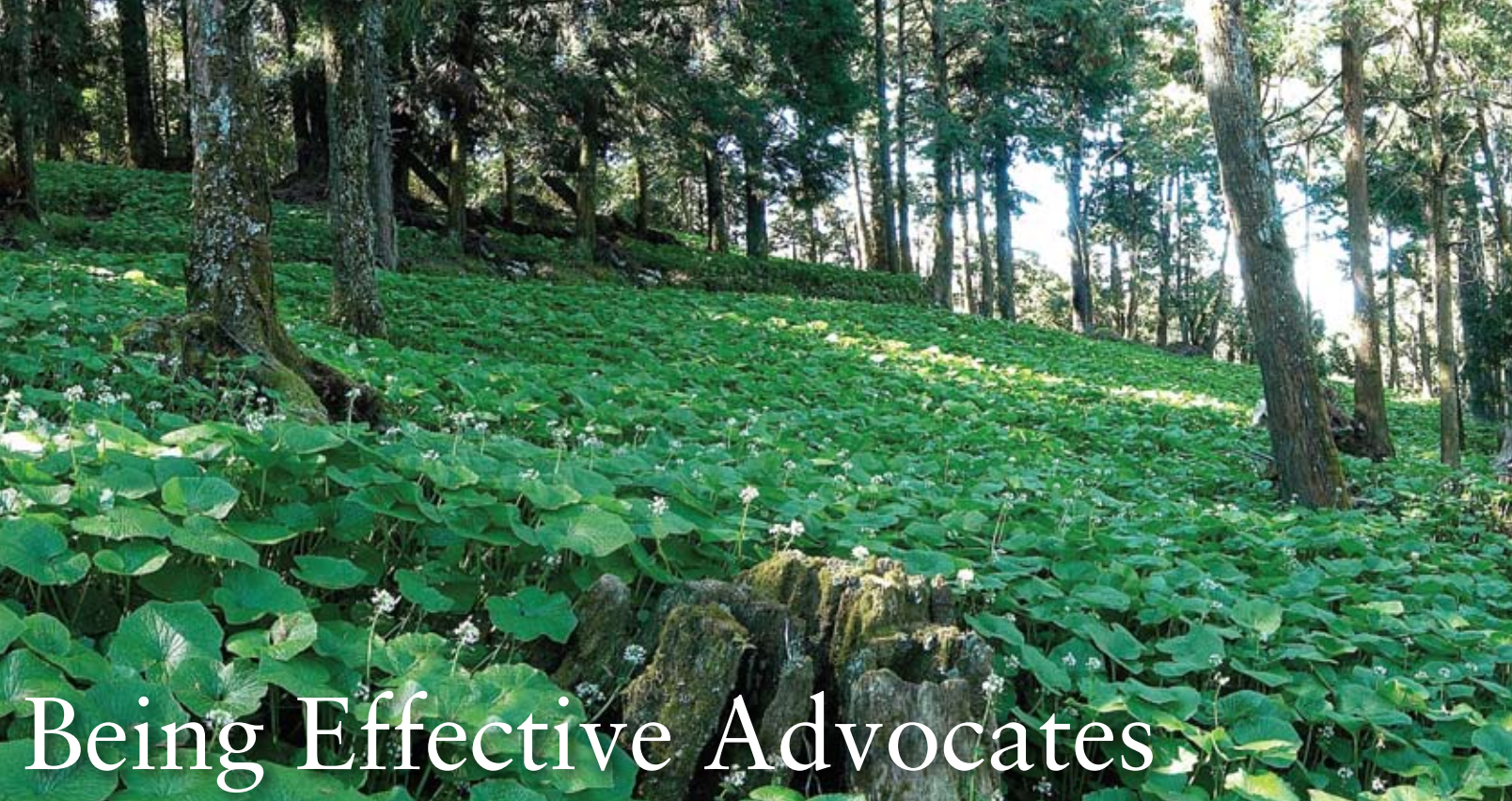
Developing Relationships

Constituent action aside, one of the most effective advocacy strategies is building strong personal relationships with the elected and appointed officials whose decisions may affect your park district or department: city councils, state legislators and members of Congress. Do your research! Know their committees, expertise, extracurricular activities and who donates to their campaigns. That knowledge will give you insights into how they can be supportive and which of their constituents might advocate for you. Officials have hundreds of issues and individuals with whom to deal; we need to realize that they won't likely know the intricacies of our profession, especially the benefits that result from our decisions or programs. However, they are teachable! And our issues are "feel-good" ones that have broad appeal. Our role is to provide them with hard data that supports the need for our programs and facilities.

A perfect example of this strategy was our park district's relationship with former Rep. Ralph Regula. He had a special passion for history, particularly the development of the Ohio & Erie Canal corridor as a linear park. Together, we worked to implement his vision of a 110-mile park through four counties. He helped provide funding for the canal project, which brings us to another positive strategy for building your parks:

Creating a Vision

Rep. Regula's vision was to recycle a 175-year-old historic structure into a recreational resource that could be enjoyed by future generations of Ohioans. The Stark County Park District



Being Effective Advocates

expanded upon his vision and convinced local voters to use the 25-mile towpath trail as the western spine of a proposed 300-mile countywide trail and greenway system, 60 miles of which have been built.

Voters like to see “something in it for themselves” when they go to the polls on Election Day. The creation of Stark County’s “Trail and Greenway Plan,” using hiking and bicycle trails to link the Canal Towpath Trail with parks, lakes, historical districts, schools and other community assets, has proven to be an effective strategy for generating support to expand the Stark County Park District. Similar countywide trail plans have been developed for Summit, Cuyahoga and Tuscarawas counties.

With today’s increased interest in “green living” and concerns about alleviation of flooding, these trail systems serve as a framework for creating a county’s green infrastructure, and citizens throughout northeast Ohio realize numerous benefits: increased resource and environmental conservation, community and economic revitalization, increased health and recreation opportunities, increased livability and alternative transportation options and increased community identity. As park professionals, our advocacy efforts must help all our audiences understand and appreciate these benefits. The alternative is to be seen as an expendable luxury.

Submitted by Connie Rubin, Public Relations Coordinator, Stark County Park District



July Is Parks and Recreation Month!

Recreation facilities and parks across the country annually use July to celebrate the kickoff of summer programming as well as a time to pull their communities together to volunteer, get involved in great outdoor physical activities and advocate for parks and recreation.

NRPA has several resources for local agencies and park and recreation supporters to utilize in proclaiming Parks and Recreation Month in their own communities. Check out these resources at www.nrpa.org.

Each can be personalized by each community to encourage local leaders to proclaim July Is Park and Recreation Month in their own town — in their own way.

As part of a summer full of nationwide activities and community celebrations, help NRPA celebrate this month that highlights the hard work and dedication of public park and recreation supporters across the country and the joy that comes from our places and spaces.

Celebrate by having your board or Council pass a resolution now! Here is a sample:

IN THE NAME AND BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE STATE OF OHIO

PROCLAMATION

Recognizing the Benefits of Parks and Recreation

- Whereas,** parks and recreation activities enhance the physical health and mental well-being of individuals, work forces and communities; and
- Whereas,** participation in recreation programs builds self-esteem and provides positive and constructive alternatives to anti-social behavior; and
- Whereas,** parks and recreation opportunities and open space enhance the desirability of communities as locations for business, industry and residential housing; and
- Whereas,** parks and recreation stimulates tourism revenues and the economic development of communities; and
- Whereas,** parks and open space are vital to the appearance and livability of communities, protect our air and water and balance our ecosystem; and
- Whereas,** it is the right of everyone, regardless of age, race, color, religion, gender, national origin or ability, to participate in parks and recreation programs and activities and enjoy parks and open space.

Now, therefore, be it resolved that all citizens of this community join with citizens of other communities throughout this great state in recognizing that parks and recreation services are essential to the quality of life, not only in July during “July Is Parks and Recreation Month,” but all through the year as well.

Signed this ____ day of ____, 2009.

Signature _____