

# **munster** **PARKS** AND RECREATION

## 2021 YEAR IN REVIEW/ANNUAL REPORT

*Town of Munster, Lake County, Indiana*

### 2021 Board of Parks and Recreation

Dave Cerven..... President

Robyn Paulsen ..... Vice President

Dan Repay..... Member

Mike Sowards ..... Member

Ron Ostojic..... Member, School Board Liaison

Janice Uram, Recording Secretary

Ken Schoon ..... Town Council Liaison



Town of Munster Parks and Recreation Department

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[www.munster.org](http://www.munster.org)

*This document has been prepared to meet IC 36-10-3-10 & 36-10-3-14*

## **DEPARTMENT FULL-TIME STAFF**

Director of Parks and Recreation ..... Mark Heintz, CPRP  
Superintendent of Park Operations ..... Kevin Dark  
Superintendent of Recreation..... Jill Higgins, CPRP  
Maintainer IV - Centennial Park ..... Bob Webb  
Recreation Supervisor ..... Skyler Ramberger, CPO  
Recreation Supervisor - Aquatics ..... Abby Kresal, AFO  
Marketing Coordinator ..... Donna Chant  
Administrative Secretary..... Janice Uram  
Maintainer III ..... Ron Moss, CPO  
Maintainer II..... Christina Edwards  
Maintainer II..... Fernando Lopez  
Maintainer II..... Michael Talarico  
Recreation Intern - summer 2021 ..... Mara DiCarlo



Pumpkins, Witches, & Hayrides Oh My! Volunteers 2021



JoAnne Sills - Keen-Ager volunteer 2021

2021 brought about a few changes to the parks and recreation full-time staff. Long time employee, Linda Dillon retired as of October 1st after 34 years of public service for the Town of Munster. We thank Linda for all her years of service and dedication. With the retirement from Linda Dillon and a previously vacant position, two Maintainer II's were hired to fill vacancies in the maintenance division of the parks and recreation department. Fernando Lopez was hired and started working on October 4th. Christina Edwards, who was working part-time for the department this past summer/fall was hired full-time as of October 18th which brought the department to be fully staffed.

Mara DiCarlo served as an Intern for the summer of 2021. Mara is a current student at Valparaiso University studying communications. The Munster resident served the department well during the course of her internship and has even come back and volunteered a few times since. She plans on pursuing a career in parks and recreation after she graduates in the spring of 2022 due to her positive internship experience with the Town.

Abby Kresal, Recreation Supervisor-Aquatics, became Aquatic Facility Operator (AFO) certified in April. Jill Higgins, Superintendent of Recreation, renewed her Certified Park and Recreational Professional certification from the National Recreation and Park Association in December after completing her continued educational units of professional level training.

The department also employed 106 part-time employees in 2021. These included pool lifeguards and staff, park maintenance assistants, recreation program leaders, referees, sports instructors, camp aides, social center attendants and similar types of positions.

We are extremely grateful for the numerous volunteers that help out with so many recreation programs and special events each year. Without these considerate, community oriented individuals, the program offerings would be much more limited. From National Honors Society and Project X students at Munster High School to Keen-Ager volunteers, Park Pride Day volunteers, and so many more Munster is a better place because of your help! A big thanks to Keen-Ager bingo volunteer, JoAnne Sills, who stepped down in 2021 after 20 years of volunteering!

The department is a participating member of the Cooperative Special Recreation Initiative (CSRI), Indiana Park and Recreation Association (InPRA), Illinois Park and Recreation Association (IPRA), Munster Chamber of Commerce, National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), NWI Parknership, South Shore Arts Partnership, South Shore Convention & Visitor's Authority (SSCVA), Suburban Park and Recreation Association (SPRA), and the LERN Organization.



## **BOARD ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- ◆ Opened the Community Park pool, with certain restrictions, for use by the community during the continuing pandemic.
- ◆ Recommended updated rules for parks to the Town Council for adoption.
- ◆ Approved terms and conditions for shelters, pool, and Social Center user agreements upon advice from legal counsel.
- ◆ Developed and approved a Commercial Enterprises Permit Application which sets rules and conditions for such uses when requested to be done in the park system.
- ◆ Continued operations of the department despite the pandemic challenges including during times of staff isolation or quarantining due to positive covid tests.
- ◆ Directed purchase of new vehicles and equipment based upon replacement schedule or emergency replacement.
- ◆ Met in a timely fashion throughout the year to approve fees and vouchers.
- ◆ Approved salary and wage schedule for part-time and seasonal employees to remain competitive in the current times.
- ◆ Authorized a landscape maintenance services program for Centennial Park, Community Park and West Lakes Park for 2022-2024 as well as a three-year fertilization program for selected parks.
- ◆ Ratified a fire sprinkler system inspection agreement for the Centennial Park clubhouse.
- ◆ Approved construction of a cricket pitch at West Lakes Park.
- ◆ Approved a contract for portable toilet services in the parks for 2022-2024.
- ◆ Made recommendations to the Plan Commission regarding park land dedication for the Community Resources phase 2 development.
- ◆ Adopted new fees for facility use and pool fees.
- ◆ Approved a once a month meeting schedule for 2022.
- ◆ Set a Memorial Program Policy to guide and direct the rules for approved memorial items in parks which include trees, benches, dog park bones and bricks.
- ◆ Filled the vacant Maintainer II position to be at full staff capacity.



Community Park Pool



Maynard Lake at Centennial Park

## **FINANCIAL**

The Parks and Recreation fund is the main budget for day-to-day operations of the department.

2021 Parks and Recreation fund budget .....\$2,029,100.00 (budget was reduced going into 2021 due to effects of pandemic)

2021 Revenues .....\$2,701,492.00

2021 Expenses .....\$1,935,885.55 (95.4% of approved budget)

770 fund ~ A non-reverting fund, separate from the above figures, that is set up to track specific donations, sponsorships and the like to ensure revenues are used as they have been specified for particular activities, events, programs or improvements. In 2021 we received a \$20,000 donation/sponsorship from the South Shore Convention and Visitor's Authority.

2021 Revenues .....\$104,407.56

2021 Expenses .....\$92,702.69

*These are the associated expenses for such activities, events or facilities for which revenue was received.*





## **PARKS AND FACILITIES**

Park usage continued heavily in 2021 as people still looked to be outside for their recreational pursuits. Besides normal day to day maintenance of the park system, the below items were also completed.

- ◆ Received incentive rebate checks totaling \$19,970.67 from NIPSCO for the previous LED lighting upgrades completed in park facilities.
- ◆ Installed trail guideline signage to encourage appropriate use of trails for enjoyment by all.
- ◆ Added a total of 35 trees to Beech Park and Centennial Park following grant award of \$10,000 from Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission.
- ◆ Four memorial bricks and 12 tree memorial plaques were added to Centennial Park. For the rest of the park system, 1 memorial bench and 2 memorial trees were added.
- ◆ The Social Center was updated with new chairs and repainting of the banquet room.
- ◆ Replaced a damaged disc golf basket at River's Edge Disc Golf Course.
- ◆ Purchased and took delivery of a 2021 John Deere 7500A Precision Cut Fairway Mower for the Centennial Park golf course.
- ◆ A John Deere Gator XUV835M utility vehicle was purchased for Centennial Park maintenance.
- ◆ Purchased new trash collection containers for the entire park system and implemented a new procedure for emptying trash containers in the parks and along pathways in Town.
- ◆ Broke ground for a new cricket pitch at West Lakes Park.
- ◆ Accessibility was improved at Frank H. Hammond Park with new pathways from the parking lot to the athletic courts, track and shelter. The main entrance gate to the tennis courts was widened to meet accessibility standards.
- ◆ The Centennial Park Clubhouse facility suddenly had to close after a structural analysis of the facility had determined the building had shifted again. This caused a lot of work to empty areas of the building, secure it as directed by the engineer with shoring, and cancel events/rentals which was cooperatively done between Town and Indigo staff including informing renters and issuing refunds.
- ◆ Improvements were made to the Community Park pool including painting of the locker rooms, installing a new diving board and gel coating the amenities in the zero depth area.
- ◆ Added dirt and reseeded Beech Park in the fall as Midwest Wings temporarily moved to another site out of Town.
- ◆ Purchased an enclosed trailer to store and move white event chairs which were previously stored inside the Clubhouse.
- ◆ A 2022 Ford F-150 4x4 was ordered to replace unit #212, a 2008 Ford F-250 pickup truck but will not be delivered until spring 2022 at the earliest due to manufacturing delays.



Trail Guidelines Signs 2021



Unified Park Trash Receptacles 2021



Accessible Pathways F.H. Hammond Park 2021



2021 J. Deere Gator XUV835M



Centennial Park Clubhouse Shoring 2021



2021 J. Deere Fairway Mower 7500A

## **PARKS AND FACILITIES**

### **RENTAL FACILITIES**

In 2021, Munster Parks and Recreation had the rentals listed below by facility/use. Keep in mind that this does not include any rentals at Centennial Park which were coordinated through Indigo Golf Partners which manages that facility for the department. Altogether, there were 281 'rentals' broken down as follows:

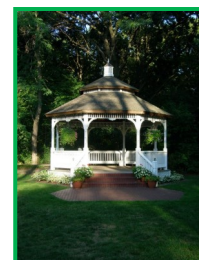
Community Park Social Center .....	156
Park Shelters .....	72
Heritage Park Weddings .....	10
Private Pool Rentals .....	22
Pool Birthday Parties .....	12
Pool Group Rentals .....	7



Community Park Social Center



Community Park Rotary Shelter



Heritage Park Gazebo

### **MUNSTER COMMUNITY POOL**

- ◆ The Munster Pool was visited by 25,614 guests in 2021.
- ◆ This aquatics facility has become a regional attraction as fewer public pools are available in neighboring communities.
- ◆ The pool was open for 11 weeks from May 29 - August 8. It returned to be open to both residents and non-residents.
- ◆ Private and semi-private swim lessons continue to be the largest type of lessons requested and increased by 150%.
- ◆ The two largest challenges in operating the pool in 2021 were swim attire and behavior issues. A lot of guests want to wear 'street clothes' in the water. We updated signage at the pool entrance to inform guests of the rules of the facility and have tried to be proactive to inform guests of the policy prior to entrance to the facility. This led to a lot of conflict that pool management staff had to deal with throughout the season, to the point where the police department was called almost daily. In an effort to combat behavioral issues, the Park Board changed the rule mid-season to require all guests age 16 and under be accompanied by an adult.
- ◆ There were 157 saves/rescues that lifeguards had to perform. This is a drastic change from the 20 performed in 2020.
- ◆ New rules were implemented for private pool rentals in response to some rentals that occurred in 2021.
- ◆ 2021 Pool finances:
 

Revenues:	\$232,893.87	(admission, sponsors, rentals, lessons)
Expenses:	\$151,169.19	(staff, supplies, signage, printing)
Variance:	\$81,724.68	(this will allow for increased staff to combat issues in future years)

### **CENTENNIAL PARK**

Operations of the Centennial Park golf course and clubhouse had a number of changes in 2021. Indigo, our golf and clubhouse management firm, had a number of staff changes. Caleb Warner was hired mid-year as the new Golf Pro. After the Clubhouse was evaluated by a structural engineer, its subsequent final rental and closure on November 21st, the Chef and Event Coordinator were no longer needed. The reservations for outdoor rentals in Centennial Park have now shifted to the parks and recreation office. The year ended by having to operate the pro shop from the doorway to the building since the building was no longer covered for liability insurance. Fortunately, staff has been able to continue to use the facility for cart storage and pro shop operations despite the public not being able to enter but will struggle with this in the future during the busier times of the course. Operationally here are some financial highlights of the 2021 season from Indigo.

Golf Rounds	18,855	-9% from 2020 ( <i>a decline in overall rounds played</i> )
Green Fees	\$204,809	+3.6% from 2020 ( <i>despite a decline in overall rounds, revenue increased due to public play</i> )
Cart Fees	\$63,899	+40% from 2020 ( <i>the absence of COVID restrictions saw a substantial increase in cart fees</i> )
Range Revenue	\$74,308	-4.5% from 2020 ( <i>still popular with beginners that is affordable &amp; socially distant</i> )
Pro Shop Rev.	\$22,153	+11.8% from 2020 ( <i>overall golf revenues were +7.2% from 2020</i> )
Food/Bev. Rev.	\$714,504	+98% from 2020 ( <i>Banquet activity had a dramatic recovery. Strong demand for the Centennial</i>

*Park venue was clearly evident with many brides and families continuing to see Centennial as the optimal wedding and event venue. Cancellations hit late in the year due to facility closure.)*

## **RECREATION PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES**

The Town of Munster still felt a ripple effect from Covid-19 in 2021. While recovery felt like things were returning to pre-pandemic times, a spike in positivity rates and youth not being able to be vaccinated continued to keep some people away from public programs and activities. Most outdoor activities and events were very well attended as many people looked to return to a pre-pandemic 'normal'. As a department we continue to look at new ways to meet recreational need. Indoor facilities became limited late in the year due to the closure of the Centennial Park Clubhouse and increased positivity rates which reduced school facility availability including the cancelation of our annual holiday craft show.

### **PROGRAMMING**

- ◆ Virtual Programming – Best in SNOW contest via Facebook had 20 submissions.
- ◆ A Part-Time Job Fair was conducted via ZOOM in an effort to decrease the risk of covid transmission.
- ◆ Began a partnership with the Southland Center in Lynwood, Illinois – classes were offered there since School Town of Munster facilities were not available due to covid.
- ◆ Due to CDC and School Town of Munster regulations, Summer Camp was limited to 50 campers per week at Frank Hammond School. Entertainment was brought in, special lunches were served on Fridays and pool days were frequent. Safety mitigations helped make camp a success as not one case of COVID was reported.
- ◆ Although soccer was cancelled in 2020, Land O'Frost forwarded their sponsorship along with an additional sponsorship for 2021. The Youth Soccer League had a successful return with 66 teams across four age divisions over the spring and fall seasons.
- ◆ 'Rocket League' was our first attempt at an e-sports tournament. Nine teams registered and Next Generation Gaming sponsored the event. E-sports is a newer trend that we'll continue to seek to offer.
- ◆ Out to lunch trips/tours using the department van sold out each month. Places traveled include: Chicago Crime Tour, Little Traveler, Michigan Wine Tour, Old Joliet Prison and more.
- ◆ Pint-Size Camps ran with 119 children. Silly Scientist was the biggest hit, followed by Munster Ninja Warrior. Nine of the 10 scheduled camps ran.
- ◆ Intro to Skateboarding was offered and popular with 29 participants. Taught by Driftwood Collective, they showed safety basics and skateboarding techniques.
- ◆ Cupcakes and Competition was introduced new this year and had 21 children enrolled.
- ◆ Pickleball Flex league was new this year and ran with five teams.
- ◆ Keen-Ager memberships totaled 182 for the year with monthly newsletter sponsors. Keen-Ager BINGO parties averaged 35 participants monthly and were sponsored by various local businesses.
- ◆ Adult wiffleball continued with five teams competing for the grand prize which was donated by 313 Taproom.
- ◆ Ladies Empowerment Walks increased by over 300% with 119 total participants in 2021.
- ◆ The Craft in a Box series increased by 28% with 33 families participating in 2021.
- ◆ Tennis programs increased in registration by 19% in 2021. Of the 349 registered participants, 62% had never taken a tennis program previously.
- ◆ Indoor private and semi-private swim lessons increased by 158%.
- ◆ Dog Park memberships added up to \$17,516.66 in revenue from 281 member dogs. A 38% increase over the prior year.

### **RECREATION GRANTS**

- ◆ The 'Tennis Lessons' program was awarded a \$2,400 United States Tennis Association 'Grow the Game' grant which was used to purchase tennis supplies.
- ◆ A Tourism Jumpstart Grant was awarded for \$20,000 from the South Shore Convention & Visitor's Authority.



Keen-Ager Bingo 2021



Summer Camp 2021



Tennis Lessons 2021



## RECREATION PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

### SPECIAL EVENTS

- ◆ Daddy Daughter Date Night was offered in two separate sessions in one night at Centennial Park Clubhouse as the school facilities were not made available due to Covid. Although it was double the cost for food and entertainment, it was still a night full of memories.
- ◆ A 'Bridal Fair' was offered in March with one-way traffic flow for guests and social distancing of vendors. 36 vendors and close to 1,000 guests attended at the Centennial Park Clubhouse.



Concert Series at Town Hall 2021



Inaugural Penny Bike Ride 2021

- ◆ Egg Hunts were back at Community Park on the Softball Fields. Over 200 participated. The Flashlight teen hunt had 31 participants. Sponsors included: Albanese, Patti's Gymnastics, SkyZone, Jak's Warehouse and McDonalds.
- ◆ The Car Show was a record-breaking year. With a total of 226 vehicles, 4 food vendors and over 2,000 in attendance, the event exceeded our expectations.
- ◆ A five concert Summer Concert Series sponsored by People's Bank had a combined 1,800+ in attendance. The concerts were held at Munster Town Hall to allow for social distancing and in response to positive comments from concert-goers.
- ◆ 'Hey June', a concert featuring American English was held at Centennial Park for 1,200+ viewers.
- ◆ A 15-mile 'Penny Bike Ride' event was offered by partnering with Schererville Parks and Recreation. This inaugural recreational night-time ride from Rohrman Park in Schererville to Centennial Park in Munster and back had amazing weather and close to 300 riders.

- ◆ Community Market averaged 42 vendors per week and hosted musical and street performers. Partnerships were made with 'Supercuts' and 'Fetch Portraits'.
- ◆ Canine Cannonball had another successful year with 31 pooches swimming at Munster Pool in August.



Bieker Woods Night Walk 2021

- ◆ Walk in the Woods took place at Heritage Park. Attendance was similar to 2020 with 1,135 in attendance for this 2-hour event. Over 175 resident families and businesses helped carve pumpkins. 21 volunteers helped at the event.



'Hey June' Concert with American English 2021

- ◆ Pumpkins, Witches and Hayrides surpassed expectations with 2,000 in attendance. New attractions and entertainment were added with the Tourism Jumpstart Money granted by the SSCVA.

- ◆ Trunk or Treat was combined with the Bieker Woods Night Walk. The combination helped attendance at the Bieker Woods Night Walk reach a record-breaking year. With no Bieker Woods in 2019 (weather) or 2020 (COVID), people were excited to have it back. These events had 2,800 in attendance. They were also helped by the SSCVA grant.
- ◆ Canes and Cocoa participation increased by 25% with 69 children. After, hot cocoa was offered inside the Community Park Social Center and special prizes were distributed.



Pumpkins, Witches, & Hayrides Oh My! 2021



- ◆ The department supported the July 3rd Independence Day festivities at Centennial Park, National Night Out in August at Community Park and the 'Light the Night' holiday tree lighting at Town Hall in December.



## **DEPARTMENT SOCIAL MEDIA AND MARKETING**

Sharing information to those who are interested is always a challenge as people continually seek information in new ways. The newest information on recreational activities, programs and facilities offered by the Town is shared through different platforms to ensure the community is informed. Three 'Recreation Guides' were issued in 2021 which is a traditional way of advertising as is the electronic marquee at Community Park. In more recent years, the department has become more aggressive with social media, by sharing activities and events as more and more people are finding information via those platforms.



2021 Winter/Spring



2021 Summer



2021 Fall



Instagram

The 'Munster Parks' Instagram page is up to 1,694 followers, a 12% increase from 2020. In 2021, 141 posts were made on that platform.

Facebook 'followers' increased by 19% to 7,104 in 2021. Sharing increased by over 19% for a total of 3,033. The largest shared event was for 'Pumpkins, Witches and Hayrides' with 424 shares. \$1,960 was invested to boost 40 Facebook ads. As more people are finding their information on social media, concentrated social media ads have been found to be a great tool for marketing besides the regularly anticipated Recreation Guides for those who like that platform.



The department began partnering with One Region and other parks and recreation agencies to begin the 'NWI Parknership' site which built an initial website sharing holiday events in northwest Indiana. This will continue to be an avenue for us to explore in 2022. Frequent use of the direct email capability using 'Active Network' software is also a tool used by the department to share activity information. Email contacts increased by 11%.



Some marketing efforts are teaming up with local businesses for sponsoring activities and events while also offering advertising opportunities at certain park facilities. In 2021, \$54,685.88 was received for various program and event sponsors while \$25,100 was brought in via advertising. Additionally, some sponsors give in-kind donations to share at activities/events. Bowman Displays continued their commitment to provide complimentary banners to advertise activities and special events for the department in a demonstration of their support of the community while saving the department money.

## **GOALS FOR 2022**

The following is the framework of goals as a plan for the Parks and Recreation department for 2022!

- ◆ Complete the Cricket Pitch at West Lakes Park.
- ◆ Repave the Stewart Park parking lot.
- ◆ Repave the Community Park pool parking lot and south end of Lions Club Drive.
- ◆ Complete 2021 bond issue projects including the replacement of the Centennial Park playground.
- ◆ Create a memorandum of understanding with Munster Girls Softball and Munster Little League to document responsibilities for park use on permitted facilities.
- ◆ Determine fate of landfill generator by determining cost feasibility of rebuilding generator versus energy produced.
- ◆ Continue to make park improvements from remaining balances of bonds prior to 2020.
- ◆ Smoothly transition to booking reservations for Centennial Park facilities from the parks and recreation office.
- ◆ Coordinate plans and initial construction of a new Pro Shop facility for the Centennial Park golf course.
- ◆ Determine fate of current Centennial Park Clubhouse and any next steps with that facility.
- ◆ Replace the original Community Park pool boiler to control the pool water temperature.
- ◆ Offer pool season passes with scanning capabilities for faster entry.

