

# Programming Assessment

## Program Analysis

The Cherokee Recreation and Parks Authority (CRPA) offers programming for athletics, seniors, special populations, instructional courses and special events throughout the year. In recent years CRPA has added new and diverse programs, but emphasis appears to be on athletics. Public input indicates a strong desire for a greater diversity of programs, beyond athletics. Programming, whether in house or through partnerships with associations, is key to involving a community in a parks system, and the creation of a more comprehensive program will produce additional recreation opportunities for the people of Cherokee County.

## Existing Program Offering

Review of Cherokee Recreation and Parks Authority's program offering reveals youth and adult athletic leagues, youth camps, instructional courses for all ages, senior activities, activities for people with special needs and special events. The CRPA publishes these programs in their quarterly guide, *Leisure Pursuit*, and on their website. The following discussion highlights some of the programs offered by CRPA.

### *Athletics*

Athletic programs, especially adult leagues, are the most popular programs offered by CRPA. Adults have the widest selection of leagues, including basketball, flag football, volleyball, softball, and most recently, kickball. The most popular adult league is softball, which is played in the spring, summer and fall. Hundreds of teams in men's, women's, co-ed, senior and church divisions participate every year. Basketball is another popular program, with over 42 teams participating in the spring, summer and fall/winter seasons. The co-ed volleyball league plays one night a week year-round.

During the summer, boys and girls, ages 5 to 8, can participate in T-ball and Coach Pitch baseball. Fun Ball, offered in the fall, teaches 8 to 12 year-old girls fast pitch softball. Indoor soccer is also offered to boys and girls, ages 8 to 14, in the winter. In comparison to adult athletics, the youth programs are not as diverse; however, CRPA holds partnerships with several youth athletic associations.

Recently these youth associations entered into the Youth Sports Council (YSC). Associations who use CRPA facilities and volunteers in the youth sports programs are required to be members of the YSC, which conducts background checks of coaches and provides scholarship opportunities. Associations offer athletic opportunities in youth baseball, basketball, cheerleading, football, softball, track and field, swimming, wrestling, in-line hockey, and youth and adult soccer. Youth athletic associations include:

- Cherokee Reds Baseball
- Cherokee Soccer Association (youth and adult leagues)
- Cherokee Summer Swim League
- Cherokee Youth Basketball Association

- Cherokee Youth Football Association
- Hobgood Park Youth Association (youth baseball and softball)
- Hockey Time USA (in-line hockey)

### ***Camps***

Several youth camps are offered throughout the year to children and teens. Camps range in interest and theme, but are primarily geared toward athletics. The Adventure Express Day Camp is offered in the summer and over spring break. Children, ages 6 to 12, participate in activities such as field trips, arts and crafts, sports and drama, to name a few. One of the newer and more unique offerings is Magic Camp. Children, ages 9 and up, learn several tricks throughout the week, which they perform in a show on the last day. Teens, ages 13 to 15, may partake in Teen Adventure Camp, which includes horseback riding, swimming, indoor rock climbing and field trips. The CRPA also offers camps designed for specific sports, including fast pitch softball, gymnastics, baton and hip hop/dance.

### ***Instructional Courses***

The instructional courses provided by Cherokee Recreation and Parks Authority offer the most variety. Courses range from arts and crafts and music to athletics. The Smart Start series teaches children, ages 3-6, the fundamentals of baseball, basketball and soccer, in a non-competitive environment. Tennis lessons are available to participants, ages 4 and up, at beginner and intermediate levels. Fencing, Tang Soo Do, baton, gymnastics, dance and a variety of aerobics courses round out the more athletic driven program options.

Several non-athletic options, including music, dance, and arts and crafts, are available to all ages. Music Together teaches children, from birth to age four, music as a language. Kids on Stage, band and orchestra classes are also available to foster children's musical interests. Teens and adults may choose from courses in watercolor, beading, fashion and bracelet making.

### ***Seniors***

Senior activities, ranging from socials to fitness, are designed for people 50 and older. While seniors may participate in many of the programs already mentioned, other activities are available that are specifically geared toward seniors. The Silver Roamers Club, which has nearly 100 members, takes day and overnight trips, typically twice a month. Lunch and a Movie, Afternoon Tea, and Bingo and Potluck Lunch are popular social events. CRPA also offers special low impact fitness classes, which provide a less strenuous alternative.

### ***Special Populations***

In recent years, Cherokee Recreation and Parks Authority has made great strides in therapeutic programming for the special populations in Cherokee County. Most programs are only available to children and are primarily athletic; however, the CRPA has recently offered activities for teens and young adults with special needs. Soccer All-stars, Hopeful Hoops, summer baseball, tennis lessons and sports development are designed specifically for children with special needs. These classes teach the fundamentals in a safe, inclusive

environment. The My Buddy program pairs children with special needs with a buddy to assist them in non-therapeutic recreation programs.

### ***Special Events***

A variety of special events take place throughout the year, ranging from holiday related celebrations to family activities. Magic and Munchies and Twisting and Tacos are part of CRPA's summer family activities that include lunch and a magic show. Fall Hay Day is an annual event in October that includes games, hayrides and a haunted house. Other special events include gymnastics birthday parties, Mom Prom and Breakfast with Santa.

### **Other Recreation Providers**

Several privately owned and operated recreation outlets, such as churches, camps, planned communities, athletic leagues and recreation centers exist within Cherokee County. These private operations provide some of the same programs as CRPA, but they also offer various options not provided by the Authority. Art centers, such as the Cherokee Arts Council and the Funk Heritage Center of Reinhardt College, offer workshops for adults and teens, as well as camps for children. The Towne Lake Arts Center provides drama classes and productions for all ages. Over two dozen equestrian centers, including Atlanta Riding Club, Falcon Ridge Stables and Sonora Farms, offer riding lessons and camps to participants of all ages.

The South Cherokee Recreation Association (SCRA) offers youth baseball, softball and football at their complex in Woodstock. They operate baseball and softball leagues in the spring and fall and football leagues and cheerleading in the summer and fall. In addition to the leagues, SCRA provides football and cheerleading camps in the summer. They also offer a program called Challenger Baseball for children with special needs. The Association offers this program at no cost. Other athletic associations include Canton Dizzy Dean, North Cherokee Softball and North Cherokee Baseball.

The Parent and Teacher Associations (PTA) at Bascomb, Carmel and Chapman Elementary Schools organize a fall/winter basketball league for boys and girls in kindergarten to sixth grade. For the 2003-2004 season, Bascomb Elementary School had 460 participants. Chapman Elementary School had 32 teams with a total of 256 participants in their 2003-2004 season.

The Cherokee County Boys & Girls Club runs after-school programs out of Tippens Elementary School in Canton. The programs run during the school week from 2:00-8:00 p.m. Children and teens ages six to 18 participate in a range of activities from games and athletics to drug prevention workshops. Specially designed programs concentrate on developing job readiness, study skills, leadership, self-esteem, good health and social responsibility among Boys & Girls Club members. The Club also offers an eight-week summer program.

Lake Allatoona is home to many Corps of Engineers campgrounds and trails, as well as Cherokee Outdoor YMCA, a 225-acre camp set on four miles of the lake's shoreline. The YMCA offers youth retreats, summer camps, swimming lessons, soccer instruction

and outdoor education workshops throughout the year. Nearly 1,200 children, ages 4 to 13, participate in soccer every spring and fall. Swimming lessons, for ages 3 and up, attract over 500 participants every year.

Additional providers include:

- Cherokee Golf Center
- North Metro Gymnastics Center
- American Sportsplex
- Gold's Gym
- Towne Lake Fitness Center
- Cherokee County Senior Center
- Woodstock Aquatic Center/Chattahoochee Gold
- World of Swim
- Progressive Skatepark
- Woodstock First Baptist
- Towne Lake Community Church (youth basketball, youth soccer, softball, volleyball, t-ball)

Cherokee County is home to several planned communities. Among those communities are Towne Lake, Bridgemill, Woodmont, Bradshaw Farm and River Green. At about 8,000 households, Towne Lake is the largest and oldest planned community, while Bradshaw Farms is the smallest development at just over 150 homes. These planned communities have several facilities and programs available to their residents. Each has golf courses, tennis courts, pools and other amenities that provide recreation for their residents and most offer swimming, golf and tennis lessons. Bridgemill also has a large recreation center where residents can take various fitness classes with provided child-care. Most of these communities have a recreation or activities director who helps plan special events and activities for residents. While these programs are only open to a select group of people, there are thousands of families living in these communities who participate in them.

## Public Opinion

Public input suggests that Cherokee County citizens would like to see more programs and activities in the outlying areas of the county. Citizens in the northern and eastern portions of Cherokee raised concerns about whether CRPA was reaching all of its potential customers in the county. Other citizens were concerned with the program registration process and requested the implementation of online registration, which would make it easier for people to sign up.

Input on programming varied and included many suggestions such as diversity in youth athletics, more options for teens, a greater focus on children with special needs, educational summer camps and classes, additional weekend and night hours for popular fitness classes and the addition of aquatic programs. Topping the list of additions to youth athletics were golf, volleyball and swimming, with emphasis placed on programs for all ages and levels of skill. Another suggestion was the addition of non-competitive or fun leagues for children. Aside from athletic leagues, many adults felt there were not enough

program options, while others felt that teens had the most limited choices of any group. Another popular request was for more cultural events, including concerts in the park, theater productions and festivals. Greenway trails and linkages between parks were often mentioned as desirable additions to the CRPA.

In general, Cherokee County citizens would like to see more versatility in programming to better serve the county's growing and dynamic population. Comments on the public survey, as discussed in Section 3, often compared CRPA to the City of Roswell Recreation and Parks Department in neighboring Fulton County. Roswell, located to the southeast of Cherokee County, offers over 200 programs throughout the year and many Cherokee citizens in the eastern portion of the county pay non-resident fees in order to participate. The Roswell Recreation and Parks Department has a comprehensive program that includes aquatics, special events, adult and youth athletics, athletic and educational camps, youth and adult recreation and visual arts classes, special populations classes and mature adults programs for ages 50 and up. A look at the programs and successes of the Roswell Recreation and Parks Department may give CRPA ideas for the development of new programs and activities, as well as the expansion of current ones.

## **Program Benefits, Trends**

### ***Programming Benefits***

A well-rounded and diverse parks and recreation department provides many benefits to the community it serves. As discussed in the National Recreation and Park Association publication *Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines*, the four categories of benefits are personal, economic, social and environmental. Each benefit is consequential to the community and has specific rewards.

- Personal benefits of a comprehensive delivery system include: a full and meaningful life, health insurance, stress management, self esteem, positive self image, a balanced life, achieving full potential, gaining life satisfaction, human development, positive life-style choices and improved quality of life.
- Economic benefits include: preventive health care, a productive work force, big economic returns on small investments, business relocation and expansion, reduction in high cost vandalism and criminal activity, tourism growth, and environmental investments that pay for themselves.
- Social benefits comprise: building strong communities, reducing alienation, loneliness, and anti-social behavior, promoting ethnic and cultural harmony, building strong families, increasing opportunity for community involvement, shared management and ownership of resources and providing a foundation for community pride.
- Environmental benefits involve: environmental health, environmental protection and rehabilitation, environmental investment increasing property values and insurance for a new environmental future.

### ***Recreation Program Trends***

Parks and recreation departments all over the country are developing programs to meet the changing needs and interests of the dynamic populations they serve. The Cherokee Recreation and Parks Authority also works hard to provide well- rounded programming, but a look at other departments illustrates additional recreation opportunities that may exist for the people of Cherokee County.

### ***Special Events***

Fishing rodeos, parades, Read to Succeed Reading Rally, Art in the Park, trail runs and golf tournaments make up just a few of the special events taking place in Knox County and Murfreesboro, Tennessee. In Roswell, Georgia the Chattahoochee Race and Festival welcomes kayakers and canoeists of all ages and abilities to race down the Chattahoochee River. In Fort Collins, Colorado a Youth Fest is held on the last day of school. The parks and recreation department coordinates bands, games, food and crafts to initiate summer vacation for youths of the community.

### ***Athletics***

In the city Germantown, Tennessee, the parks and recreation department offers programs for adult golf, racquetball, pickleball, and croquet, as well as a noncompetitive youth basketball-training league. In the Canadian city of Calgary, Alberta many unique sports programs are available including badminton, running, rock climbing, trampoline, public and family skating, and tumbling.

### ***Special Populations***

The inclusion of people with special needs is also important to the Therapeutic Division of the parks and recreation department in Williamson County, TN. During the year several special events take place for people with special needs, such as Karaoke and Pizza Night and Super Saturday Respite. These social events bring participants together for fun and games. In Roswell, special events, aerobics, music therapy and art classes are available to young adults, ages 18 and up, with special needs.

### ***Educational Activities***

Many departments utilize historical, natural and agrarian features for educational programming. In Prince George County, Maryland one is able to experience the past and appreciate the advancements of technology through visiting historical sites and archeological explorations.

In Ann Arbor, Michigan and Fort Collins, Colorado there are working farms that teach children about agriculture, animals and plants. In Boynton Beach, Florida the recreation and parks department offers after school programming to teach children about the local fragile Florida Scrub environment to promote awareness and preservation through future generations.

### ***Ethnic Population***

Projections in the Demographic section estimate that the Black population in Cherokee County will increase from 1,963 in 1990 to 8,880 in 2008 – a 424.5% increase. The

Hispanic population is projected to grow from 1,059 in 1990 to 17,859 in 2008 - a 1,586.4% increase. Traditionally, Blacks have participated in the same sports that the white population does, and marketing to them and planning for programming is not affected by the percentage Black population.

Hispanics, however, are heavy, heavy soccer players. Soccer for them also becomes a family outing with picnicking, cook-outs and all-day gatherings. According to a recent article in the Gwinnett Daily Post, Georgia has become one of the nation's fastest-growing Hispanic population centers.

What is the cause of the recent Hispanic population explosion, not only in Georgia but nationwide? The most likely reasons are jobs, affordable housing and a sense of community. Many Hispanics journey to the United States because the economies of their own countries are not supporting them. They come here to survive. Despite the challenges they face in a new country, new culture and new community, they come here and encourage family and friends to follow them because they can have a better way of life here. The ongoing construction boom is a draw to North Georgia. According to the article in the Gwinnett Daily Post, most of the Hispanic growth in the state occurred in metro Atlanta and north Georgia, and this is likely linked to construction projects in the area, as well as other service, retail and professional jobs.

For those in the field of parks and recreation, the implications of these demographic trends are numerous. The city of Dalton, Georgia, has also experienced tremendous growth in its number of Hispanic residents due to jobs generated by the local carpet industry. A quick check on the Census Bureau's County and City Data web site reveals that in 2000 Dalton's population was 40.2% Hispanic – bear in mind that these numbers account for only those residents who participated in the census, not those who did not want to be counted (i.e. illegal immigrants). To meet these changes, public agencies in Dalton have made great efforts to reach out to and integrate the Hispanic community in order to ensure that services provided are matching their needs. For example, the parks and recreation department includes a Spanish-language link on their web site and prints bi-lingual promotional fliers to be distributed in local schools with English on one side and Spanish on the other.

When discussing the challenges they faced when initially trying to service the needs of the burgeoning Hispanic community, John Haley, assistant director of the Dalton Parks and Recreation Department, explained that his department was overwhelmed by the need for soccer fields and programs. That was the #1 demand they faced from Hispanic residents. The department constructed three large soccer fields to meet these needs; however, they found that not only did they need more fields, but also needed fields that could withstand the intense volume of play they were experiencing. Among their Hispanic residents, soccer is not seasonal; it is a year-round sport, with brief breaks taken only during times of extreme cold. The department couldn't keep natural grass on their soccer fields, so they installed artificial turf. More fields are planned, and two existing fields already need to have artificial turf replaced. To keep up with demand, in addition to constructing large fields, the department also converted two little-used tennis courts to mini soccer fields in a park where tennis was not a priority. With regard to

programming in these facilities, Mr. Haley explained that while the Hispanic community is becoming more and more integrated into the social fabric of Dalton, there have been some challenges in incorporating these residents into the department's existing programs and leagues. One answer has been to facilitate the Hispanic community's own programs and leagues through the city's parks and recreation facilities – and soccer isn't the only activity in which these residents are participating. In Dalton, Latino residents are maxing out all public facilities, especially on the weekend, including picnic shelters, pools, baseball fields, etc. Because of its central location, the city's parks and Hispanic sports leagues have become a hub for outlying communities in north Georgia. Latinos from around the area also participate in an active local Hispanic adult baseball league during the spring and summer.

“The key to building a successful relationship with the growing Hispanic population,” Haley says, “is to find out who the leaders are in the community, and that's not an easy task.” It's essential to get community leaders involved and on your team; in fact, for the past 5 years, there has been a Hispanic member on the Dalton recreation board. As Haley points out, to make sure your department is meeting the demands of all residents, you must have the flexibility to adjust to changing times and needs.

### ***Other Trends***

In Calgary, Alberta many sports programs are available on a drop-in basis. The term, 'drop-in sports' means that no registration is required and no additional fees are applied to the participant. This type of programming allows people to participate in recreation activities without a consistent attendance and monetary commitment.

To provide an environmental education field trip for school groups to a local park facility, the city of Ann Arbor, Michigan had created Adopt-a-Class. The parks and recreation department has coordinated with local businesses, which generously donate funds making the programming possible. This fundraiser can be applied to other recreation programs, just as the Adopt-a-Park and sports associations have come together to sponsor those specific recreation endeavors.

### ***Integrating Trends***

These trends offer some insight into recreation opportunities that may be underdeveloped or absent from the current program offering. A program will only be successful if there is enough interest, demand and participation from the community. In the development of new programs, CRPA should consider what groups (age/gender/culture) are being left out, what the changing interests and trends of the community are, what programs parks and recreation departments in neighboring counties offer and whether or not there is enough interest within the community to support a new program. By offering a diverse selection of programs CRPA can involve a greater number of Cherokee citizens in recreation.

## **Programming Recommendations**

Having reviewed the existing programs, opportunities and constraints faced by the Authority, community concerns and desires, and recreation program trends, the planning team has identified issues and opportunities and made recommendations accordingly.

Aside from the issues identified from public input, such as the request for a greater diversity of programs, most issues regarding programming are facility related. While athletic programs are offered at parks throughout the county, non-athletic programs, such as arts and crafts and dance, are only offered at the Activities Center and Recreation Center. Both of these facilities are located in Woodstock, which is a 20-30 minute drive from north Cherokee County. The Authority should explore what partnership opportunities may exist for the use of facilities, such as schools and community centers, in other portions of the county.

Another issue relating to facilities is the overuse of existing athletic fields. As the county's population continues to grow and certain sports, such as soccer, gain popularity, a great deal of stress is put upon athletic fields. Recommendations for new fields and improvements to existing fields (see Section 7) will help with scheduling and allow the Authority to expand current programming.

There are several programming opportunities for the Authority. Cherokee County is rich with natural and historical resources. The rivers, streams and Lake Allatoona provide excellent opportunities for environmental education, such as river ecology. They also provide an opportunity for canoe and kayak instruction, as well as boating trips and races. Cherokee County, as demonstrated by its name, has a wealth of Native American history. Special programs in Native American education could include trips to historic sites or learning skills used by the Cherokee tribes, such as dye making, basket weaving and fishing and hunting skills.

Additional programs for teens, seniors and special populations should be considered. Special activities for teens, such as a movie and pizza night, provide a safe, fun and social atmosphere. The therapeutic recreation programs currently serve ages 6 to 16, but additional programs should be added for older teens and young adults, up to age 24. Activities such as bowling or karaoke night could become monthly therapeutic recreation events. As the baby boom population moves from the 45+ age group into the 65+ age group, the interests of those participating in senior activities will change. This will be a more active group with a broad range of interests and abilities. Expansion of senior programming should include additional fitness classes and athletic leagues.

*Bulleted programming recommendations include:*

- Continue to monitor state and local program trends to determine what programs might work in Cherokee County.
- Continue to work on diversifying programs to reach all populations, with special efforts in teen, seniors and special populations programs.
- Consider educational/nature and recreation programs that utilize existing natural resources, such as the Etowah and Little Rivers and Lake Allatoona.
- Develop and aquatics program for all ages and skill levels.
- Build upon existing partnerships with volunteers and athletic associations to expand existing programming.
- Determine what programs can work at existing facilities and what new programs may require additional facilities.

- Determine if new partnership opportunities exist to meet new recreation trends.
- CRPA needs to promote all the benefits of recreation as part of its marketing and public-awareness program.
- Implement a strong marketing plan to educate the public about use of the website for programming information.
- Explore opportunities to market the programs such as partnerships with establishments that will either post information or hand out flyers.
- Explore the possibility of using online registration through the CRPA website.