



# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



FORT WAYNE  
PARKS AND  
RECREATION



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## Our Mission

The Parks and Recreation Department maintains over 2,840 acres of park land in 89 individual parks and currently manages 22 pavilions, 20 shelters, five recreation centers, four day camp facilities, three aquatic centers, 10 splash pads, three golf courses, two driving ranges, four disc golf courses, two dog parks, a botanical conservatory, an outdoor theater, a zoo and a greenhouse. Additional recreational sites include 57 playgrounds, 45 basketball courts, 50 tennis courts, 42 pickleball courts, 38 ball diamonds, 20 soccer fields, two futsal courts, eight multipurpose athletic fields, eight boat launch sites, 48 miles of trails which include Rivergreenway, park paths and mountain bike trails, 14 ponds and lakes, a campground, a nature preserve, a BMX track, historic facilities and monuments and a 1930s era working farm. Along with hundreds of activities and program opportunities, the Parks and Recreation Department provides free or low cost special events for citizens of our community.

**Our mission is to enhance the quality of life in Fort Wayne by providing positive opportunities for leisure time and by being stewards of our parklands, facilities, public trees and other resources entrusted to our care.**

### Board of Park Commissioners

- Justin P. Shurley**, President
- Cory Miller**, Vice-President
- Richard Briley**, Commissioner
- Jenna Jauch**, Commissioner

### Administrative Staff

- Steve McDaniel**, Director
- Alec Johnson**, Deputy Director of Planning & Development
- Sandra Odisho**, Manager of Finance
- Kathy Pargmann**, Manager Lead of Marketing
- Chuck Reddinger**, Deputy Director of Recreation
- Steve Schuhmacher**, Deputy Director of Park Maintenance
- Rick Schuitemann**, Director of Children's Zoo



## President's Message

**Headwaters Park transition completed**

**Near-record attendance at Botanical Conservatory**

**3 new parks added to park system**

**5-Year Master Plan completed**

**1,069 street trees and 195 park trees planted**

**Highland mini cows introduced at Salomon Farm Park**

To the Honorable Mayor Thomas Henry:

It is my privilege to present the Board of Park Commissioners' 2023 Annual Report. As we reflect on the accomplishments of the Parks Department in 2023, it is with great pride and enthusiasm that I share some key highlights that showcase our commitment to enhancing the recreational experiences for the residents of Fort Wayne.

- The successful transition of Headwaters Park management from the Headwaters Park Alliance to the Parks Department.
- The addition of three new parks: Powell Park, McKinnie Commons Park and Sheldon Park.
- Completion and adoption of the five-year Master Plan, in accordance with the requirements set by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.
- Creation of Park & Play summer mobile recreation program.
- Attendance at the Foellinger-Friemann Botanical Conservatory in 2023 totaled 105,587 visitors, rivaled only by the first full year of operation in 1984.
- Growth of Salomon Farm flower fields operation, winterization of restrooms, increased attendance at events, renovations to the homestead and addition of Highland Mini steers and Nigerian Dwarf goats.
- Foellinger Theater continued to see solid profits in the second year of managing concession and alcohol sales.
- The Lawton Park Greenhouse staff and volunteers produced an impressive 110,503 plants of 284 different varieties, beautifying our parks, Conservatory displays and gift shop, the Zoo and offering quality plants for the annual Mother's Day Plant Sale and plants and seeds for the Children's Flower & Vegetable Association.
- The Great Tree Canopy Comeback (GTCC) volunteers planted 50 shade trees at Rockhill Park and removed invasive Honeysuckle in Headwaters Park.
- The work barge operation removed over 162 tons of logs and navigational hazards from downtown rivers. This ongoing effort ensures a safe and pristine environment for our community.
- Planted 1,069 street trees and 195 park trees during 2023.
- Replacement of the HVAC controls in conjunction with more effective Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies have resulted in a healthier collection throughout the interior of the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory.

On behalf of the commissioners, we are grateful for the opportunity to serve the citizens of Fort Wayne. We continue our commitment to the stewardship of our park system and the furtherance of the Parks and Recreation mission.

Respectfully submitted,

Justin Shurley  
President of the Board of Park Commissioners

# Director's Report

I am delighted to present the 2023 annual report, reflecting on the remarkable achievements and growth of our park system over the past year. The success we've experienced is a direct result of the steadfast support we receive from all who recognize the invaluable role that parks play in fostering community. The unwavering support has allowed our parks to serve as vital public spaces where individuals and families can pursue and achieve health and wellness goals.

The groundbreaking for Phase I of the Franke Park Renaissance project marked a significant step towards improving and expanding recreational opportunities and more efficiently managing this park's significant cultural and ecological resources. Features will include a new access point from Goshen Road, a new bridge over Spy Run Creek, a new Pavilion with capacity for 400 people, a paved multi-use trail and improvements to the mountain biking and hiking trails. The community-driven vision behind this project is a testament to the collaborative spirit that defines our city.

We look forward to a grand re-opening of the Phase One improvements at Franke Park in late 2024.

The approval of the Foster Park Golf Master Plan by the Board of Parks Commissioners is a key achievement. The public input we received from avid golfers as well as park users who value the existing trail infrastructure and connectivity beyond golfing activities played a crucial role in shaping a plan that will offer options for a modern pace of play, work with the topography of the property and ensure a win-win for all residents.

In late summer the City announced a larger than usual allocation from the State of Indiana from local income tax. Working with City-Council, \$2 million in funds were specified for neighborhood park playgrounds in ten Fort Wayne Parks and planting of more than 2,000 street trees. Planning began in 2023. Residents will see results in 2024.

After receiving ARPA grant funds from the City, two neighborhood parks redesign projects are fully funded. Brewer Park and Packard Park plans will progress in 2024 to the bidding process.

Another highlight was celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Jennings Recreation Center. The Center has positively impacted many people over those years with its strong emphasis on education, belonging and team sports. Despite staffing challenges which caused a brief interruption of youth programming and Kids Café at that location, community engagement in the fall and a successful 70th Wassail Reunion in December underscored the center's importance. We are renewing our efforts and plans for staffing to ensure its continued success.

Over 80 park projects were completed in 2023, ranging from maintenance efforts to significant improvements. These projects maintain our existing parks and facilities and also introduce innovative ways for citizens to engage with recreational opportunities.

We extend our deepest appreciation to Mayor Henry, the City Council, the Board of Park Commissioners, the Park Foundation, and our generous donors. Your continued commitment and support are instrumental in advancing our mission to create vibrant and inclusive parks that enhance the quality of life for all residents.

As we look forward to the future, we are excited about the possibilities. Thank you for being an integral part of our journey.

**Steve McDaniel**  
Director of Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation



# Board of Park Commissioners

## Highlights of 2023

### Headwaters Transitions to Parks

After 30 years of direction under The Headwaters Park Commission (in 1993) and the Headwaters Park Alliance (beginning in 2001), Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation assumed management and day-to-day operations of Headwaters Park prior to the 2023 festival season. The transition was smooth and led to a successful operation of the Headwaters Ice Rink with creative recreational programming throughout the season.

### Tree City USA Award

The National Arbor Day Foundation awarded the City of Fort Wayne with its 33<sup>rd</sup> consecutive Tree City USA designation. The Parks Department announced that the city received the Growth Award for the 18<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, for demonstrating environmental improvement and an outstanding level of tree care.

### New Park & Play Program Brings the Fun to Youth

This mobile recreation unit called Park & Play brings a selection of sports, games, arts and crafts, fitness, nature and outdoor educational activities to youth ages five and above throughout the summer. This program supplements other summer activities for youth in neighborhood parks.

### Jennings Recreation Center Celebrates 75 Years

The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jennings Recreation Center was celebrated with a carnival-themed open house. The festivities featured tours of the facility, food and refreshments, games, horse-drawn wagon rides, animals, face painting and a bounce house. The center officially opened in the summer of 1948 as the McCulloch Recreation Center and was renamed in 1992 after longtime director Albert George Jennings. It is known for being a safe haven and meeting location for kids and families and for hosting many special programs.

### Jennings Wassail Reunion Marks 70 Years

The annual Wassail Reunion at the Jennings Recreation Center gathered community members of all ages to kick off the holiday season with a festive program of music, poetry, dance, refreshments and the traditional wassail punch. This annual event is also a celebration of Ubuntu community at the East Central neighborhood center.

### Lifetime Sports Academy Celebrates 25 Years

Teaching the life-long sports of tennis, golf and swimming at no cost is key to the mission of the LSA that was started by Jerry Fox, Tom Jehl and Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation. More than 850 participants in 2023 and over 31,300 since its inception in 1998 have developed skills to use throughout their lifetimes.

### Other Notable Achievements:

- Opened McKinnie Commons with City of Fort Wayne Community Development and Councilwoman Sharon Tucker.
- Powell Park joined Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation via City of Fort Wayne Community Development and the Southeast Strategy.
- Refreshed Sheldon Park with a new playground, sidewalks and benches.
- Accepted the Outstanding Agency Award for 2022 from the Indiana Parks and Recreation Association in November 2023.
- Drafted and presented the Hanna Homestead Master Plan to Board of Park Commissioners.
- Completed the Moody Park Master Plan which was adopted by Board of Park Commissioners.
- Completed Foster Park Golf Master Plan which was adopted by Board of Park Commissioners.



# Financial Report



## Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Condensed Financial Report for the year ending December 31, 2023

### REVENUES

Property Taxes	\$ 19,337,928
Other Taxes	2,838,383
Charges for Services	7,414,415
Grants and Donations	2,162,075
Grant - City Administered	7,111,899
Other Revenues	<u>612,759</u>
Total Revenues	<u>\$ 39,477,459</u>

### EXPENDITURES

Parks and Recreation General	\$ 26,295,609
Capital Outlays	15,183,237
Debt Service	<u>1,255,655</u>
Total Expenditures	<u>\$ 42,734,501</u>

# Board of Park Commissioners

# Recreation Services

## 2023 Accomplishments

**\$14,660**

REVENUE GENERATED FROM U-PICK FLOWER OPERATION AT SALOMON FARM PARK

**16**

SWEET BREEZE SPECIALTY TOURS OFFERED

**75**

YEARS OF OPERATION FOR JENNINGS RECREATION CENTER CELEBRATED

**529**

SENIORS PARTICIPATED IN THE SENIOR GAMES

**500**

FROZEN TURKEYS GIVEN AWAY AT MCMILLEN TURKEY GIVE-A-WAY

**\$22,500**

GRANT FUNDS RECEIVED TO HOST VACCINATION CLINICS

**25**

YEARS OF LIFETIME SPORTS ACADEMY CELEBRATED

**2**

MINI HIGHLAND COWS INTRODUCED AT SALOMON FARM PARK

### Salomon Farm Park

Salomon Farm Park continued to provide a unique farm experience as one of the City's most prominent parks. Patrons showed up in 2023 and seemed to be very excited about events and programs at Salomon Farm Park. The park saw large increases in attendance for all annual events which included, Concert on the Farm, Fall Harvest Festival and Christmas on the Farm.

Two new animals were introduced to the herd in May, quickly becoming extremely popular throughout the 2023 season. Salomon Farm welcomed two highland miniature steers named Frankie and Mickey. An introductory release also offered eight interactive Meet and Greet sessions for the public to purchase and within one hour of the announcement all sessions were sold out. A total of 72 sessions were offered and completed in 2023 with all sessions selling out.

Salomon Farm Park offered Dinner in the Flower Fields in September 2023, the first of which was sold out with 50 guests while the

second drew 46 participants on a Thursday night. These events allowed program staff to use the sunflower field to get creative with more specific programming outside of the standard u-pick sunflower operation. The dinner setting included romantic lighting, blooming sunflowers, wood chairs and beautiful rustic wood tables that were built by the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Department carpenter shop. Participants enjoyed food by Mad Anthony's Catering, live music and a stroll to pick their own bouquet of flowers in the flower fields.

Salomon Farm Park U-Pick Flower operation started at the end of July and ended in mid-October. A beautifully wrapped concession trailer was added to the operation this year making the point-of-sale area much more visible and easier to access for customers. Revenue generated in 2023 from the flower u-pick was \$14,660 which was an increase of \$6,051 from 2022.

### Johnny Appleseed Campground

In the month of September construction began on four new RV sites at the Johnny Appleseed Campground to accommodate the demand for smaller RVs.

### Sweet Breeze

The Sweet Breeze canal boat is a partnership between Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation and the Friends of the Rivers.

Programming staff increased specialty tours from six in 2022 to 16 in 2023 adding new programs such as: Birding Watching on the River, a Gilligan's Island themed tour, Wine Tasting tour, and River Ecology tour.

2023 was the first year for the Sweet Breeze operation to participate and become an official venue for the Be a Tourist in Your Own Hometown event hosted by Visit Fort Wayne. Podlaski Attorneys sponsored the Sweet Breeze cruises which allowed for five free 45-minute tours during the annual September event.





## Day Camps (Franke Park, Salomon Farm Park, and River Camp)

Despite staffing issues, Franke Park Day Camp and Salomon Farm Park were able to increase overall camp enrollment from the previous year. Franke Park Day Camp increased enrollment by 66 additional spaces and Salomon Farm Park increased by 20. While this was an improvement from 2022, staffing levels are still not meeting camps desired goals.

River Camp was full and sold out again this year guiding 40 total campers with 19 on a waitlist.

## Community Youth Centers (Cooper, Jennings and Weisser)

Jennings and Weisser Centers staff continue to provide important services to the community including after-school/summer programming and Kids' Café amidst ongoing staffing challenges. Cooper Center did not operate in 2023 due to these same staffing challenges.

### Jennings Recreation Center

- The Jennings Recreation Center celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a press conference and community celebration on July 26. The celebration continued on December 12, with the 70<sup>th</sup> Annual Wassail. It was well-attended with 116 people.
- Jennings Recreation Center opened for summer programming but had to close for afterschool programming in the fall due to staff shortages. A new Supervisor was hired in August to replace Michael Ayres who retired in March. Jennings reopened on October 23 after the community asked for it to be reopened. An alternative staffing plan was created to enable operation.
- Updates to the community room highlight the long history of the Jennings Recreation Center. The remodel includes photo displays, signage and updated furniture.

### Weisser Park Youth Center

- Hosted the first Annual Family and Friends Trivia and Karaoke Night.



- Collaborated with Ten Point Coalition to host an annual health and wellness music festival.
- Added several new games; a pool table, ping-pong table, basketball game and GAGA pit.

### Community Center

- Added/upgraded kilns to replace ones that were no longer working.
- Introduced a sensory room to provide a space for adults and youth with sensory issues.
- Cultivated more participants for the annual Senior Games, with 529 participates in 2023.
- Added new carpet to the building.
- Regained three office areas from the Foster Grandparents program which did not renew their lease. These spaces have been converted to other uses by the Community Center.

### McMillen Park Community Center

- Introduced Sepak Takraw, also called kick volleyball, to the McMillen Park facility. This is a team sport of two to

four players played with a ball made of rattan or synthetic plastic on a court resembling a badminton court. It is played primarily by Burmese citizens and has greatly increased participation with this community.

- Facilitated adult volleyball in November. The sport seems to be a hit in the Burmese community. Attendance has been consistent at 25-30 participants.
- Gave away 500 frozen turkeys to the community at the McMillen Turkey Give-A-Way. This was made possible through collaborations with the Steve Harvey Morning Show and Social Status of African American Males. Of the total, 120 turkeys went to patients with the Davita Dialysis Center and another 100 went to two independent senior living facilities.
- Hosted the 2023 Harvest Fest with more than 1,000 community members in attendance. This was held in collaboration with the Indiana Autism Society to provide Halloween bags to the kids, a bounce house and candy. Also included were vendors, a sensory room and a haunted room.

# Board of Park Commissioners

Prizes were awarded to youth who won costume contests for their age group.

## Riverfront Fort Wayne

The downtown riverfront, and especially Promenade Park and the Park Foundation Pavilion remain popular downtown attractions.

Ted's Beerhall took over the Promenade Park Café rental space in 2023. The renovations were completed by May and the Café opened up by June. The new café is called Ted's snack+bar and will be the sole provider of alcohol sales for Promenade Park Rentals.

The Headwater Park Alliance completed the transition of the Headwaters Park operations to the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Department in March of 2024. Riverfront Fort Wayne completed contracts with all previous community events at Headwaters Park.

Riverfront opened the operations of the Headwaters Ice Rink on November 18, 2023. The Bunkhouse received renovations to accommodate the new concessions stand and a trailer was put at the front gate to handle admission costs to the Ice Rink.

More family-friendly events were added to Riverfront programming. These events include the new Spring Celebration, River Rangers, Literacy Expo, Halloween Egg Hunt, Family Fishing Day, Storytime at the Park and more.

Riverfront Phase IIa officially opened in the summer of 2023. The City of Fort Wayne Community Development officially handed the public space to the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Department to maintain and operate. This new addition to Riverfront is the first piece in connecting Headwaters and Promenade Park into a walkable public space for patrons.

The annual Dragon Boat Races were held on August 5 and 6. The number of teams increased to 12 in 2023, and a new theme focused on Chinese Culture.

Pontoon boat excursions were offered for the Senior Games, the Community

Youth Centers, other City departments and park staff to showcase our rivers.

The petition by Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation to add a downtown river speed limit was approved and formalized by the State and DNR in June. This speed limit should help to maintain water safety in our downtown waterways.

## Other Accomplishments

- Held a Grand Opening event at McKinnie Commons on June 28, in conjunction with Community Development. This featured a Ribbon Cutting, entertainment, and food provided free of charge for the guests coming to celebrate. Approximately 150 people attended.
- Hosted the inaugural Unity Lighting at McKinnie Commons on Dec. 7 in conjunction with Community Development, Councilman Sharon Tucker, Premier Bank and The Greater Fort Wayne Chapter of the "National Pan-Hellenic Council" (A.K.A. The Divine Nine). Cookies, hot chocolate and hats and gloves were distributed. Approximately 200 attended.
- Introduced the Park and Play mobile playground program in June. Seasonal staff provided sports, games, arts and crafts, fitness, nature and outdoor educational activities to a variety of sites for seven weeks throughout the summer.

- Received a \$20,000 grant to offer vaccine clinics in three facilities (Community Center, Weisser Youth Center and McMillen Community Center). In addition to the \$20,000, Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation received \$10 per vaccine administered up to an additional \$5000. The final grant total was \$22,500.
- Produced the twelfth Winterval event on Saturday, January 28. New activities in 2023 included curling, an Antique Road Show and the Warm Heart Market with great success.
- Celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lifetime Sports Academy in 2023.
- Opened and operated Northside and McMillen Pools smoothly for six days per week. Hiring challenges continued, including the loss of the aquatic supervisor. Hiring improved after increasing seasonal rates and incorporating hiring incentives.



# Marketing & Development

## 2023 Accomplishments

The Marketing Team continued to focus on customer satisfaction which is critical for our Department where positive experiences contribute significantly to overall program success. In addition, utilizing technology resources to improve customer service and to communicate accurately and consistently with our audiences continues to be a priority.

### Customer Service

Recreational staff members are provided Customer Service training that stresses positive interactions with customers. Program evaluations and user surveys were distributed to access all of the programs offered by the Department. A total of 2,433 evaluations received in 2023 were analyzed and reported back to staff. Our 2023 overall Department Customer Service Rating was 95% (the goal is 90%).

Additional input from the public in 2023 includes: 261 Pavilion evaluations, 265 On-line general surveys, 2,554 Foster Park Master Plan surveys and 258 Dog Park surveys.

Complaint processing continues to be a priority. In 2023, 281 total complaints were processed. Ninety percent of the complaints were processed within one business day.

### Web Sites

New Customer Service features were continuously added to the five main Department web sites, including the development of over 21 new web links created to enhance visitor experience. Digital content also required: redesigning existing links as needed, adding additional photos throughout to market our department, adding content to all three calendars, adding special events to the iMap application, making major updates four times a year coinciding with the release of the quarterly Fun Times as well as making continual updates to keep content fresh.

The total web hits for 2023 was 1,575,775. The total web hits continues to increase yearly and represents a 13% increase from 2022. The top five web links continued to be: Foellinger Theatre, Headwaters Park, Salomon Farm Park, Trails, and Community Concerts.

Early in 2023 a total redesign of the Botanical Conservatory web site (botanicalconservatory.org) was started with the City's IT Consultant Company (Resultant). The streamlined redesign was complete in August with apparent customer appreciation.

**2,433**

EVALUATIONS ANALYZED

**95%**

OVERALL CUSTOMER SERVICE RATING

**1,575,775**

WEBSITE VISITS

**33**

21ALIVE "WALK IN THE PARK" SEGMENTS AIRED

**515**

PROMOTIONAL PIECES & PROGRAM PROPS DESIGNED IN-HOUSE

**125,000**

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS

**64**

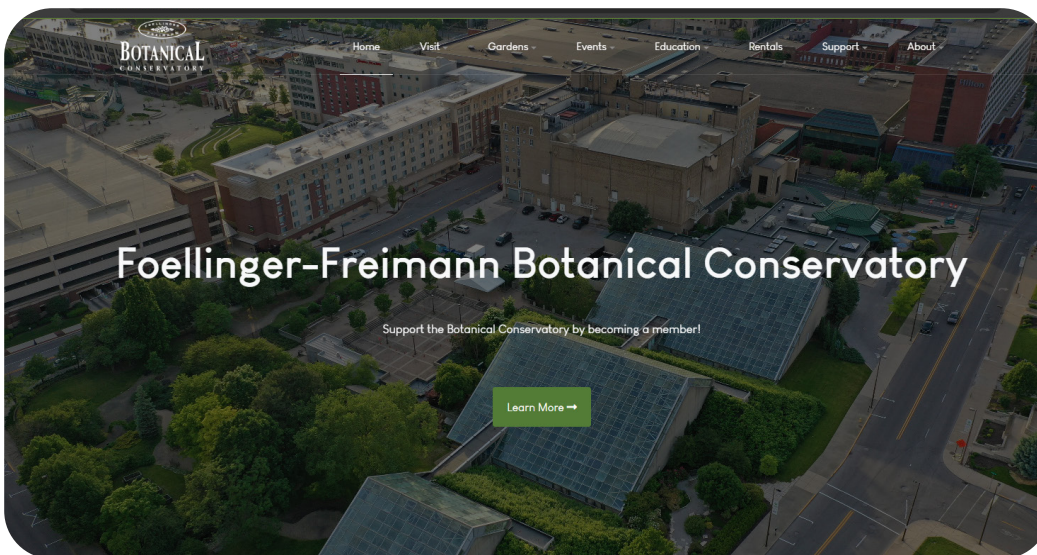
E-NEWSLETTERS PRODUCED AND DISTRIBUTED

**13**

NEWS CONFERENCES HELD

**\$2,162,075**

RECEIVED IN MONETARY GIFTS & DONATIONS



Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory

# Board of Park Commissioners

## Additional Marketing Efforts

In 2023 we worked with an outside consultant to produce two “Leave a Legacy, Support Your Parks” videos of different lengths (full video 5:21 and overview video 1:00). These videos were shared with local media and are being shown as Public Service Announcements in the local market. The Donation videos are also hosted online at FortWayneParks.org and showcased in different social media platforms. The Leave a Legacy videos allow us to Showcase our Department in a unique way and attract potential future donors.

A wide variety of short videos were produced in-house including: various events, Sweet Breeze tours, Aquatics operation, Dragon Boat, Maintenance operation, Headwaters Park Operation, Recruitment, IPRA Awards, Wassail event, Training and more. A total of 48 short video clips were created.

The videos are pushed out on social media and used on the website to promote operations and events. This is a very successful model for us.

## Promotion & Graphic Design

The marketing division uses a variety of methods to promote programs and events, communicate ideas and convey messages. We also produce many program essentials such as tickets, t-shirts, swag, treat bags, etc. Such marketing projects in 2023 included:

Four Fun Times catalogs, 118 flyers and 28 posters, 60 postcards, 37 electronic sign/web slides, 64 social media posts, 42 tickets/passes/punch cards, 41 signs, 25 brochures, 18 newspaper ads, 20 banners, five e-newsletters, two electronic billboards, three invitations, two programs, 10 swag/t-shirt imprints, four corporate sponsor brochures and eight kiosk displays. Another 24 miscellaneous design projects included calendars, stickers, temporary tattoos, certificates, coupons, placemats, tree labels, business cards, a pop-up tent, gift card envelopes, treat bags, lanyards, two coloring/activity books, greeting cards, thank you notes, a van decal and two concession trailer wraps.

## Social Media/Media Relations

The Department maintains 14 individual Facebook pages, six Instagram and four “X” (Twitter) accounts with over 125,000 total followers.

The following news conferences were held in 2023:

- Foster Park Pavilion #3 ribbon cutting
- Arbor Day
- FW Daisies Memorial unveiling (with Tin Caps)
- Senior Games opening
- Riverfront Phase IIa ribbon cutting (with City of Fort Wayne)
- Franke Park Renaissance Phase 1 Groundbreaking
- McKinnie Commons Grand Opening (with Community Development)
- Buckner Park Trail and Picnic Shelter ribbon cutting
- Jennings Center 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary
- Bowser Park Legacy Status (100 years) and Pavilion Improvements
- Riverfront Phase IIb groundbreaking (with City of Fort Wayne)
- Active Aging Week
- Weisser Park Disc Golf Course

In early 2023, local television broadcast station WPTA/21 Alive offered Parks and Recreation a weekly opportunity to showcase recreation and programming in a segment called Walk in the Park. In 2023, over 30 segments were scheduled and broadcast on the 4 p.m. newscast. Various marketing images and videos were collected to be sent as B-roll during the segment. These were also featured online and via social media. This opportunity offers key staff opportunities to showcase events and programs and gain positive interview skills and experience.

## e-Newsletters

Monthly e-newsletters are distributed for Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation customers along with other timely mass emails for specific areas of the department including: Conservatory, Foellinger Theatre, Development and Riverfront



Fort Wayne programming. In 2023, 64 individual e-newsletters (46.2% open rate) were distributed. New graphic creation and updates to already created graphics is a regular part of producing the e-newsletters and e-blasts.



## Parks Podcasts

Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation highlighted staff, programming and other aspects of the department in nine Parks Podcasts in 2023. Podcasts have the potential to reach a younger audience and are growing in popularity in all age groups.

- Winterval 2023
- The Value of Trees
- Play the Parks (Golf)
- It's Cool in the Pool
- On the Water
- A Different Kind of Golf
- Board of Park Commissioners
- Holiday Happenings (Conservatory)
- Headwaters Ice Rink (Prep and Programming)

Local newspaper The Journal Gazette featured the Parks Podcast in a May 6 story along with a couple other municipal podcast producers about how anyone can start a podcast.

Local television broadcast station WANE 15 highlighted how Fort Wayne leaders share information in a December report with Anchor/Reporter Rex Smith in which he highlighted the Parks Podcast.

## Fundraising and Sponsorships

In 2023, Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation was again very fortunate to receive a variety of donations and gifts from community-oriented individuals, foundations and corporations. As always, the

support of our community is what allows us to continue our mission of serving the citizens of Fort Wayne. The programs and facilities that received gifts include the FWPR Community Center, the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory, Lifetime Sports Academy, Sweet Breeze, Salomon Farm Park and Promenade Park. Numerous memorial trees and benches were also donated for placement in various parks.

As always, our major partner supporting the parks and programs is the Fort Wayne Park Foundation. Through their trust donations and tireless fundraising efforts, the Foundation's support helps our department maintain facilities, offer new and enriching programs, and continue to improve the quality of life for the citizens of Fort Wayne.

We have continued to see an increase in online donations in 2023. Gifts can be sent through our online donation site at [fortwayneparks.org/donate](http://fortwayneparks.org/donate) and program participants can also choose to donate during the online registration process. We thank everyone who chose to donate at any level. Your support means we are fulfilling our mission and it helps us continue to do the work we love.

Several area foundations and organizations again partnered with our department to make major projects possible, including the Foellinger Foundation, AWS Foundation, Magee O'Connor Foundation, English Bonter Mitchell Foundation, NIPSCO, Northeast Area Partnership, Southwest Area Partnership and the Journal Gazette Foundation. All of these grant dollars are being used to make important improvements to our facilities and programs.

In addition, dozens of area businesses supported 2023 Parks and Recreation events through sponsorships and numerous individuals donated as memorials in honor of their friends and family. Donations for the entire year of 2023 totaled \$2,162,075. Our department was also fortunate to receive an additional \$7,111,899 from an ARPA grant through the City of Fort Wayne.

Many thanks also to our Fort Wayne media friends who helped us spread the word about our events through media sponsorships. Our 2023 television sponsors were FOX 55 Fort Wayne, PBS Fort Wayne, WANE 15 and 21Alive. Our radio sponsors were 103.9 WAYNE FM, US 93.3, HOT 107.9, XKE 98.9, LOUD 103.3, 101.7 WLDE, MAJIC 95.1, ALT 102.3, WOWO Radio, 97.3 WMEE and 89.1 WBOI.

2023 was another successful year for our department, and that wouldn't be possible without the generous support of our donors and sponsors. The Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation staff, volunteers, and participants would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the positive impact we have made in our community **this year**.

**SUPPORT OUR PARKS**

**YOU CAN MAKE AN IMPACT**

**FORT WAYNE PARKS AND RECREATION**

**FortWayneParks.org**

# Board of Park Commissioners

## Sponsorships, Grants & Gifts: Top Donors

NAME	AMOUNT	PROJECT
Fort Wayne Park Foundation	\$971,259	Various Park Improvements
Foellinger Foundation	335,000	Foellinger Theatre/Botanical Conservatory
Friends of the Parks of Allen County	181,596	Foster 3 Pavilion
Mark and Sarah Music / Ruoff Mortgage	100,000	Brewer Park
AWS Foundation	93,800	Various Accessibility Projects
LWCF/State of Indiana	68,449	Buckner Park
Community Development	61,178	Various Park Improvements
Southeast Area Partnership	55,000	Various Park Improvements
Northeast Area Partnership	40,000	Art Sculptures in Parks
Estate of Eugene Allen	32,868	Shoaff Park
Great Lakes Commission	20,000	Spy Run Creek
Aging & In-Home Services of Northeast Indiana Inc.	19,470	Community Center
Clarke Endowment Fund	10,000	Botanical Conservatory
Magee-O'Connor Foundation Inc.	10,000	Botanical Conservatory
Weisser Park Elementary School - 4th Grade STEAM Project	10,000	Weisser Park Disc Golf Course
Robert and Mary Beverforden Fund	8,040	Botanical Conservatory
Matthew W. Wyatt Advised Fund	7,500	Botanical Conservatory
M.E. Raker Foundation	5,000	Botanical Conservatory
Edward M. Wilson Foundation	4,500	Botanical Conservatory
Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne	4,340	Various Park Improvements
Marvin and Marva Komisarow Foundation	4,261	Botanical Conservatory
Health & Hospital Corp.	4,150	Community Center
NIPSCO - NiSource Charitable Foundation	4,000	Youth Scholarships
FitLot, Inc	3,510	Community Center
Three Rivers Festival	3,000	Junior Golf
The Friends of the Parks of Allen County	2,636	Tree Canopy Trust
AIA Indiana, Inc - Fort Wayne Section	2,500	Junior Golf
David and Mary Pat Nichols	2,500	Memorial Bench
41 North LLC (Independent Senior Living)	2,200	Community Center
T-E Incorporated	2,000	General Parks Needs

For a complete list of 2023 donations visit [www.fortwayneparks.org](http://www.fortwayneparks.org).

# Park Maintenance

## 2023 Accomplishments

2023 brought some staff changes in the Park Maintenance Division.

Mark Stafford, Rob Schenkel, Phil Presenky, Greg Reith and John McIntosh III transitioned to new roles within the Department. We also lost key staff who left to take on new endeavors including Josie Dellinger, Ryan Dellinger and Derek Palmer. One of our team's employees, Mike Heckley retired. We also hired Chris Poppele in the garage operation.

The following reports are the accomplishments for Facilities, Trades, Grounds, Heavy Equipment, Garage Operations, Safety, and Project Administration for 2023:

### Facilities/Trades and Grounds

The goal of the staff is to provide "outstanding services" to each park and facility as required. The Facilities/Trades section consists of two Supervisors, one Working Leader, nine Park Person C's, one Relief Person, eight Maintenance Technicians and two utility seasonal employees. These employees deal with a multitude of tasks.

The Facilities staff cleans and arranges setups for rental pavilions, public restroom facilities and picks up and disposes of litter from all park sites. Facilities also assist the Grounds Management Division in winter with snow removal at our rental pavilions, and many of our other facilities throughout the department. The Facility Staff were busy in 2023 with 2,737 pavilion rentals. This is down 152 rentals from 2022.

Facility staff also conducts annual cleanings in all recreation centers which are; McMillen, Weisser, Jennings, Cooper and the downtown Community Center. These cleanings are designed to thoroughly clean areas of the buildings that do not get cleaned on a daily or weekly basis. Areas such as ceiling joists, light lenses and HVAC vents receive a deep cleaning. Both Weisser and Jennings Centers also receive a fresh coat of wax on specific floors. In addition to the janitorial and annual

cleanings, staff remove or cover up the graffiti that appears in the parks. This year 62 occurrences of graffiti were painted over or removed by power washing.

The Trades staff makes repairs throughout the Parks Department. The maintenance techs ensure that park fixtures, playgrounds, buildings and utilities are in safe, operational order. Each spring, the exterior restrooms and drinking fountains have the water turned back on with care and attention paid to ensure that they are in working condition. This year, Memorial pool did not open so prep work only needed to be completed on Northside and McMillen pools. Maintenance included repainting the Northside Park pools and the spray structures at both pools. Both pools had all electrical and plumbing components checked and made ready for the season. Each fall these processes are reversed so that facilities and services can be winterized for the annual shut down.



**2,410**

WORK ORDERS COMPLETED BY FACILITIES/TRADES

**81**

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN

**14,017**

HOURS OF MOWING, SPIN TRIMMING, SURFACE BLOWING

**2,863**

VOLUNTEER HOURS LOGGED IN THE GREENHOUSE, PARKS AND RIVERS

**61**

SAFETY TRAINING CLASSES HELD FOR STAFF

**149,708**

END OF YEAR DOLLAR VALUE OF INVENTORY IN STOCK ROOM

**29,000**

POUNDS OF FERTILIZER APPLIED TO PARKS AND ATHLETIC FIELDS

**719**

HOURS OF FLOOD CLEANUP IN PARKS AND ALONG RIVERGREENWAY

# Board of Park Commissioners



The Park Department assumed management of Headwaters Park in 2023. In so doing, a new maintenance supervisor was hired to handle issues there as well as at Promenade Park. During this transition phase, Lawton Park maintenance staff have assisted in many facets of training and repairs at both locations. This also means that the Headwaters Park ice rink operation is now a Park department responsibility. With no prior experience in setting up or operating the daily business of the rink, a collaborative effort between Lawton Park staff and the new Riverfront maintenance crews insured that the rink was installed correctly and that the park was brought up to Park Department standards.

In 2023 the Maintenance Technicians had 2,410 work orders/requests for the year. These were broken down into the following categories:

- 365 play equipment repairs
- 331 electrical repairs
- 330 plumbing repairs
- 266 vandalism repairs
- 227 light repairs
- 221 lock/key repairs
- 174 carpentry projects
- 114 HVAC calls
- 112 building repairs
- 106 sign repairs
- 87 painting repairs
- 77 alarm repairs

The Grounds section consists of one Supervisor, three Heavy Equipment Operators, three Working Leaders, 12 Grounds Team Members and six Relief Persons. The Grounds employees also deal with a multitude of tasks.

Heavy Equipment operations used over 120 tons of bulk salt and Grounds operations applied over 8 tons of bagged salt on drives, lots and internal walks and entrances at various park locations, pavilions and centers. This includes Franke Park, Northside Park and Psi Ote Pavilion, Sears Pavilion, Foster West and Pawster Park, Salomon Farm Learning Center, Shoaff Riverlodge Pavilion, Botanical Conservatory, Community Center, Freimann Square, Courthouse Green, Swinney Homestead, Lawton Complex, Jennings Center, Weisser Center, Cooper Center and McMillen Center. Along with the Grounds Operations, they also performed 1082 hours of related snow removal tasks at various parks and facility locations and River Greenway paths.

Heavy Equipment operations performed 96 hours of excavation tasks and projects relating to various types of tile and drain work, irrigation, water line and sewer line repairs, minor excavating, grading and concrete projects. They performed 765 hours of tasks and projects related to hauling, spreading stone, filling holes, grading lots, driveways and boat launches at Salomon Farm, Lawton Park, Franke Park, Hurshtown Reservoir, Foel-



linger Theatre, Johnny Appleseed Park, Shoaff Park and Guldlin Park.

Heavy Equipment and Grounds operations performed a combined 2,242 hours of hauling and debris removal tasks, which includes hauling various products such as wood chips, engineered wood mulch for playgrounds, ball diamond material, stone, sand, topsoil, compost, debris piles and zoo refuse.

Grounds crews performed 14,017 hours of mowing, spin trimming and blowing off hard surfaces. They maintain nearly 1,000 acres of park grounds, within a five-day mowing cycle. The team performed 762 hours of litter pick-up in parks, 1,803 hours of limb cleanup, 1,752 hours of trash removal services, and 3,888 hours of combined tasks related to the maintenance of general turf areas, athletics fields and ball diamond maintenance. This includes spraying, fertilizing, hydro mulching, seeding, watering, mowing, aerating, working and lining ball diamonds and athletic fields. This also includes layout and set up of athletic fields per event scheduling. The team applied nearly 29,000 pounds of fertilizer to small parks, larger general park areas and athletic fields; Grounds crews also performed 1,826 hours trimming overgrowth and clearing undergrowth along the Rivergreenway, and removing tree stumps at various parks. Exactly 719 hours were spent doing flood cleanup in the parks and along the Rivergreenway.



Crews performed 661 hours of transportation duties. This includes transporting/hauling equipment to and from all golf courses in winter and spring, as well as, on an as-needed basis for maintenance and repair services. They also transported/hailed equipment to and from the Johnny Appleseed Campground, Hurshtown Reservoir, Lindenwood Nature Center and Salomon Farm Park.

The Facilities and Trades manager is also in charge of overseeing annual maintenance contracts for HVAC, boilers and management of contract services for: alarm systems, filter replacement, electrical, plumbing, roof and fence repairs, as well as helping to cover the 416 after hours calls.

## Projects completed in 2023:

- Installed two new fountains in the Ivan Lebamoff Reservoir Park pond.
- Replaced drain pipe under the entrance drive at Shoaff Park.
- Installed power for the new kiln at the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Community Center.
- Added/upgraded cameras at Camp Canine, Promenade Park, Jennings Recreation Center, Weisser Community Center, Foellinger Theatre, Shoaff Golf Course, McMillen Golf Course, and Foster Golf Course.
- Replaced glass due to broken sills or vandalism at the Metro office, Northside office, Jennings Recreation Center, Lawton garage doors, and McMillen Golf Course.
- Installed timers at Foster Golf course to help the irrigation system.

## Main Trac Support

The Main Trac system logged 87,004 entries in 2023 and 1,064 for 311 calls. Lynda Heavrin, Eric Ummel, Scott Winling and Kaye C. Jones procured numerous volunteer opportunities for a total of 2,863 volunteer hours for the Parks Department.

New task codes were added to the system due to obtaining new equipment.

These codes will track how much time is spent using specific pieces of equipment.

We worked through many months' worth of glitches in Main Trac and even tried out a new mobile-friendly Main Trac app, but without much success. The employees felt it was very slow and not user-friendly. Additional mobile-friendly options will be considered next year.

Main Trac support assisted Forestry with a Southwest Area Partnership project that will enable Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation to replenish trees lost in the 2022 derecho on the southwest side of town. That area was hit the hardest in the storm and lost hundreds of trees.

## Garage Operations Support

The Garage and Operations Support Section provides logistical and safety support for the various divisions of the Parks and Recreation Department. Major functions include storeroom operations and inventory control, automotive and equipment repair, property accounting and control and logistical support of department programs and functions. A storekeeper and courier/storeroom assistant keep the storeroom and courier functions running. Automotive and equipment repairs are performed by a garage working leader and three fleet mechanics.

The storeroom ordered and delivered materials and supplies in support of numerous programs and projects throughout the department, including the Johnny Appleseed festival, Salomon Farm Fall Harvest Festival, the downtown Christmas lighting ceremonies, Botanical Brew, Fright Night, and Botanical Conservatory showcase changes. Our stock inventory items included approximately 2,034 lines of high usage and critical repair parts and supplies. The end of year stock value was \$149,708.92.

The 2023 year was better than 2022 in regards to maintenance due to a wider availability of replacement parts, less shipping delays, and a reduction in general supply chain issues. However, it was not uncommon to have some needed parts

on back order from the manufacture for months at a time. These delays, along with an increase in the cost of parts and materials meant that funding didn't go as far to purchase needed items. One seasonal employee worked in the garage during the summer months to help out with pressure washing, parts pickups, storeroom tasks, and other garage duties. Staff completed over 800 automotive and equipment maintenance work orders were completed on equipment/vehicles.

Significant new vehicle/equipment purchases received for the year were:

- 4 Chevrolet Silverado Pick-up trucks
- 4 Ford F250 Pick-up trucks
- 1 Sullair 185 portable air compressor
- 1 Toro Dingo TX 1000 with grapple attachment
- 1 John Deere Gator 835M with plow
- 1 J-Pro heavy diesel diagnostic software
- 2 Curtis cabs for golf carts
- 1 Toro 6000 zero turn mower.

There are other vehicles and pieces of equipment that are on order but not received by the end of 2023 due to backlogs within the different industries. This includes two John Deere 7500 golf mowers and a John Deere Aercore 800 aerator for the golf courses.

Several vehicles and pieces of equipment were sent out for major repairs by dealers or manufactures. One of the forestry crane trucks failed its yearly OSHA inspection and had to have two boom sections repaired. A grounds ball diamond tractor had a failure of the rear-end and was sent to Plevna Equipment to have the damage repaired. Lastly, the bed on one of the facilities trucks was heavily damaged by rust and was delivered to Bob Thomas Ford to have the bed reconstructed.

## Parks Safety Training

The Safety Training Manager position allows for training of all full-time and seasonal employees in-house. Training includes General Safety, First Aid, Cardio-pulmonary Resuscitation and Automatic External Defibrillation, Stormwater Pollu-

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tion Prevention, Bloodborne Pathogens, chainsaw safety and various equipment operation classes.

The Safety and Training section provides training to all divisions within FWPRD in compliance with Federal (OSHA), State (IOSHA), and Local (CoFW and FWPRD policy) guidelines. Training such as CPR/First Aid, Stormwater Pollution Control, Bloodborne Pathogens, Personal Protective Equipment, Chainsaw Safety, Hazcom, Fire Safety, and General Safety are essential to making employees more safety conscious in an effort to prevent injuries and control medical services expenses.

Safety and Training is also tasked with tracking and recording mandatory regulatory issues such as Commercial Driving Licenses and Worker Protection Standards. Safety and Training staff participate in the annual inspection of all FWPRD facilities, including pavilions and playgrounds to ensure that they pose no risk to employees or the general public.

In 2023, 46 employees reported injuries resulting in 358 restricted work days and one lost work day. The total cost of the injuries to the CoFW was \$50,376.02. Parks' Department reported 14 vehicle

crashes in 2023. Ten of the crashes were ruled as preventable. No lost time injuries were associated with these crashes. A total of 61 training classes were held in 2023 including 22 CPR/First Aid classes which certified 190 full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees. The remaining 39 training session topics ranged from General Safety to Accident/Injury reporting, Bloodborne Pathogens, Chainsaw Safety and a new Narcan Use module. The annual Stormwater Pollution Prevention inspection was successfully completed with only minor corrections needed. The Parks AED inspection was completed with all needed replacements of batteries and pads. Outdated AED machines were replaced at Salomon Farms and Hurshtown Reservoir.

## Project Administration

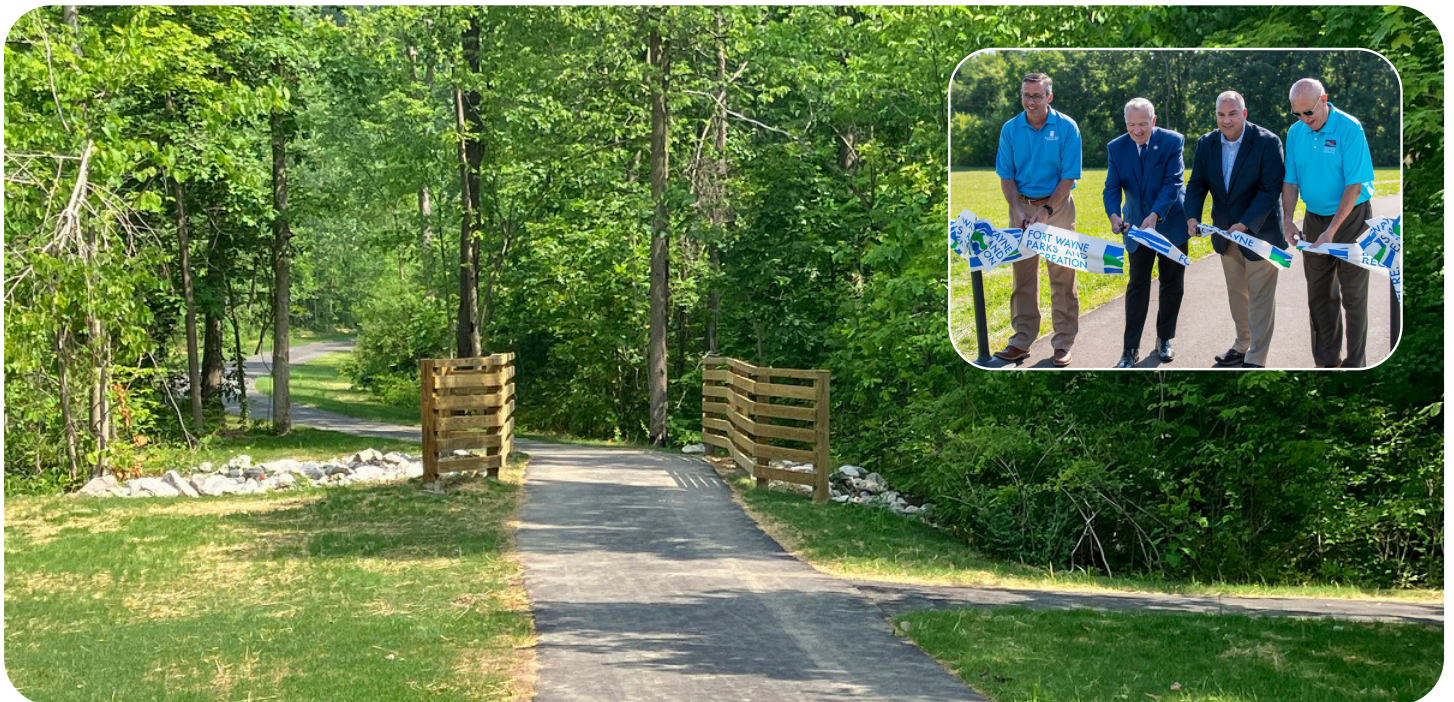
The Project Administration Section is responsible for design, engineering, technical assistance, cost estimating, project management and project inspection either directly or through the procurement of consulting Architects, Engineers or Landscape Architects.

The staff also assists with short and long-range planning, implementation of special projects and assignments, graphic

presentation production and administers most of the Department's capital improvements projects. The staff consisted of a Supervisor, two Project Technicians and one Engineering Intern.

This year brought a new face to the Project Administration Department with the hiring of Brian Fiedler as a project technician in February. Troy Bates, Brian Fiedler, and David Weadock renewed their CPSI (Certified Playground Safety Inspector) playground inspection certifications in 2023. The department hired Maison Summers as project intern. Dave Weadock, being a licensed landscape architect, completed required continuing education requirements for his state licensure design renewal. Multiple webinars and virtual learning experiences occurred throughout the year. The department staff attended product learning sessions through attendance at the 2023 National Recreation and Parks Association this year.

The Project Administration Department provided many utility-locate services for construction, landscape and buildings and grounds projects. This year also brought the completion of many varied construction projects throughout the parks.



## 2023 Completed CIP Projects

- Botanical Conservatory Chiller Replacement
- Botanical Conservatory Control Valves Catwalk Platforms
- Botanical Conservatory Electronic Sign Improvements
- Botanical Conservatory Entry Sidewalk Replacement
- Botanical Conservatory Fire System Replacement
- Botanical Conservatory HVAC Control Upgrades
- Botanical Conservatory Indoor Lighting
- Botanical Conservatory Linkway Roof Design
- Botanical Conservatory North Linkway Roof Construction
- Botanical Conservatory Roof Glass Replacement
- Bowser Park Pavilion Renovation
- Bowser Park Pavilion Roof Replacement
- Buckner Park Construction As-Built Services
- Buckner Park LWCF Trail Project Design
- Buckner Park Trail Construction
- Casselwood Park Playground Equipment
- Community Center Carpet Replacement
- Community Center Roof Improvements Phase 2
- Community Center Roof Phase 2 Construction
- Community Center Shuffleboard Courts Leveling
- Foellinger Theatre Handrail Addition
- Foster Park Golf Course Maintenance Barn Restroom Improvements
- Foster Park Golf Master Plan
- Foster Park Golf Restroom Renovation
- Franke Park BMX Track Building Roof
- Franke Park Diehm Parking Lot Striping
- Franke Park Drainage Improvements
- Franklin Park Fountain Shade Structures
- Hamilton Park Tennis Fence Treatment
- Headwaters Park Building Structures Report
- Headwaters Park Sidewalk Replacement
- Indian Village Sears Pavilion Landscape
- Jennings Center Boiler Replacement
- Jennings Center Interior Waterproofing
- Jennings Center Kitchen Cabinets & Countertops
- Jennings Center Playground Fence
- Jennings Center Security Camera Updates
- Kreager Park Two Houses Demolition
- Kreager Park Shelters Painting
- Kreager Park Tennis Backboard and Fence
- Lakeside Park Sports Courts Lighting
- Lakeside Park Sunken Gardens Landscape
- Lakeside Park Sunken Gardens Staircase Repairs
- Lawton Park Garage Roof Design
- Lawton Park Gasoline Equipment
- Lions Park Pavilion Exterior Concrete Leveling
- Lions Park Pavilion Windows Repair
- McMillen Park Community Center Reception Area
- McMillen Park Community Center Reception Signage
- McMillen Park Pool House Exterior Painting
- McMillen Park Tennis Courts Resurfacing
- Memorial Park Fort Wayne Daisies Memorial
- Memorial Park Sons of Glory Pavers
- Parks System 5-Year Master Plan
- Promenade Park Holiday Lighting
- Rea Building Overhead Door Addition
- Rea Building Water Damage Renovation
- Salomon Farm Animal Pen
- Salomon Farm Buildings Exterior Signage
- Salomon Farm Garden Gates
- Salomon Farm Homestead Exterior Renovation
- Salomon Farm North Garden Fence
- Salomon Farm Rental Barn Exterior Improvements
- Sheldon Drive Park New Playground Equipment
- Sheldon Park Benches
- Sheldon Park Sidewalk and Bench Pads
- Shoaff Park Golf Clubhouse Flooring
- Shoaff Park Golf Clubhouse Improvements
- Shoaff Park Riverlodge Landscape
- Sieling Park Sign Replacement
- St. Marys River Streambank Restoration
- Various Parks 2023 Paving Improvements
- Various Parks Basketball Courts Seal & Stripe
- Various Parks City/Park Street Tree Plantings
- Various Parks Ecosystem Maintenance
- Various Parks Landscape Maintenance
- Various Parks Pavement Sealing and Striping
- Various Parks Sidewalk Leveling
- Various Parks Site Furnishings
- Weisser Center Security Camera Updates
- Weisser Park Center Interior Signage
- Weisser Park Disc Golf Tees Installation

## Park Planning

### 2023 Accomplishments

**110,503**

PLANTS GROWN IN  
LAWTON GREENHOUSE

**43**

NEW ROSE BUSHES  
PLANTED AT LAKESIDE PARK

**18,248**

PLANT CONTAINERS SOLD AT  
MOTHER'S DAY PLANT SALE

**163**

TONS OF LOGS  
REMOVED FROM RIVERS

**1,069**

STREET TREES AND  
202 PARK TREES PLANTED

**895**

RIPARIAN VOLUNTEER  
HOURS LOGGED

**17,312**

SCFVA PLANTS DELIVERED  
TO LOCAL SCHOOLS

**1,074**

311 CALL CENTER REQUESTS  
FOR SERVICE RECEIVED WITH  
A 100% EFFICIENCY RATING

Park planning is important as it defines, quantifies and visually represents our best intentions as stewards of the parks. There are many park users, advocates and stakeholders who propose improvements and projects, thus we must be prepared to respond and react based on established goals. The planning report below highlights much of the coordination necessary to best serve the interests of the public and our park system.

#### Planning Report

The Franke Renaissance Project Phase One has been under construction for most of 2023. This phase of the Franke Park Master Plan includes a new Goshen Road entrance, a bridge over Spy Run Creek, a pavilion, new park drive alignment and supporting parking. The project completion is estimated for October 2024.

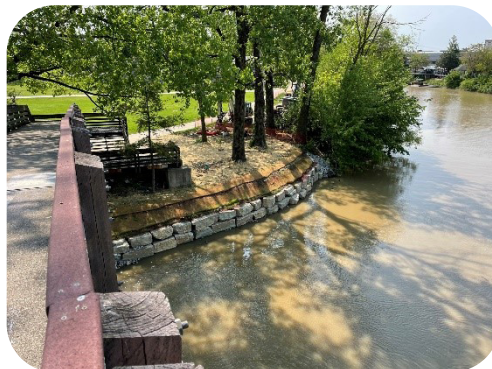
An additional component to Franke Renaissance which will be constructed simultaneously, is the Spy Run Creek Streambank Stabilization: Phase II project. This important project will continue to use similar methods constructed in Phase I, moving upstream towards the Lowther-Neuhaus Ditch. A Great Lakes Sediment and Nutrient Reduction Program grant was applied for and awarded to this project in 2022. This \$200,000 grant, administered by the Great Lakes Commission, was one of eight awarded to projects throughout the Great Lakes states.

Parks Planning Division has continued work with the design team for Riverfront Phase IIB,

led by project consultant Land Collective. This phase includes the left bank of the St. Marys River between the historic Wells Street Bridge and Ewing Street Bridge, public space at the northeast intersection of the Superior Street roundabout and public space between Harrison Street and Clinton Street immediately north of the river. Hagerman Construction is the project Construction Manager as Constructor (CMC). An early bid package, focused on underground utilities, was released in 2023 and work has begun. The remainder and bulk of the project will be presented for bidding when all permits are in hand sometime in 2024. While the Riverfront Development projects are coordinated by Fort Wayne Community Development, the role of Parks staff is to serve as members of the design team throughout planning, offering input on design and maintenance and aiding with a variety of project details.

As required by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, the five-year Master Plan has been completed and adopted by the Board of Park Commissioners. Completion of this plan not only benefits the department by taking a snapshot of community needs and desires, but also allows Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation opportunities to apply for various state funds. Inventory and analysis of the department was completed and community input was gathered via in-person meetings and online surveys by project consultant Designing Local. The plan has been submitted and accepted by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

Design Workshop has been working throughout 2023, along with Park Planning and Project Administration Section (PAS) staff to complete an update to the department's last Comprehensive Plan, which was completed in 2004. Upon completion of this plan, it is our intention to update the plan every five years for DNR compliance and in whole every 10 years. This year, a robust public input process occurred at public open houses, with focus group meetings, physical and online



surveys and with the digital engagement software, Social Pinpoint. This plan will establish the department goals and priorities for the next years, along with a blueprint on how to get there. The plan is expected to be complete in early 2024.

The Moody Park Master Plan was completed and adopted by the Board of Park Commissioners. However, implementing the plan will require funding that does not currently exist.

The Hanna Homestead Park Master Plan draft was completed in 2023. It includes a new rentable pavilion, new playgrounds with an interactive water feature, a perimeter walking loop, new full size and kids' basketball courts with player benches, an event plaza, public art, tree planting and other landscaping. The advisory committee signed off on the plan and it was presented to the Board of Park Commissioners at the end of 2023. The plan will be posted online for two months with possible adoption in February of 2024.

In concert with many other incremental improvements throughout Memorial Park over the past several years, a new hardscape layout has been designed and installed for the Sons of Glory Memorial. This new paver pad provides improved accessibility to the memorial, allowing everyone to approach and enjoy. A new asphalt path connecting the memorial to the adjacent trail, the park driveway and to accessible parking is planned for 2024.

Engineering Resources, Inc. completed construction drawings and permit applications for the redesign of the pedestrian trestle bridge located along the Rivergreenway immediately south of Fourth Street at Lawton Park. The existing bridge has fallen into disrepair, resulting in its closure at the end of 2022. The new bridge will cross Spy Run Creek in a single span, eliminating the current buildup of woody debris within the channel. Permits are still outstanding but expected in early 2024 with bidding and construction to follow as soon as possible. This is a major connection in the River Greenway trail system and its closure has had an impact.

After receiving ARPA grant funding for Brewer Park and Packard Park, both projects are fully funded. Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation has engaged the landscape architecture firm JPR, Inc. to develop construction documents for Brewer Park and Anderson + Bohlander to develop construction drawings for Packard Park. Both projects are expected to be presented for bidding in 2024.

Consolidation sewer projects continue at Foster Park. These projects are having a significant impact on the park both physically and in relation to access, but staff continues to coordinate with City Utilities to try to minimize effects. Tentative completion of these projects is October 2024, so impacts will continue to be seen throughout the year.

The St. Marys River Bank Stabilization project at the Old Fort Park was completed

summer of 2023. This project was a continuation of a similar project—both funded with Local Income Tax (LIT) funds. However, it was discovered that a portion of the recently completed St. Marys Streambank Stabilization project failed, with an approximate 40' section having slumped approximately 30" vertically into the streambank. Coordination is on-going between Parks, our design consultant and project contractor to temporarily stabilize the exposed bank and to devise a path forward to repair the project.

A draft request for proposals (RFP) for the Foster Entrance Design project is complete. Internal reviews of the RFP are ongoing by Parks and City Utilities staff. The document is expected to be released in mid-January, with design kick-off anticipated to begin by April.

Design work continued with consultant Engineering Resource, Inc. for the East Central Docks project. This project will provide a place for the City's various boats to dock daily, to avoid having to launch and remove the boats every day.

Planning staff presented a number of talks and tours throughout the year, including for the Indiana Broadcasters Association, Indiana Parks and Recreation Conference, Visit Fort Wayne Symposium and several Promenade Park tours (Associated Press, Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College) as well as ecological/riparian pontoon and canal boat tours and other presentations.

Planning staff attended the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) annual meeting in Minneapolis.

The Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation has a proud tradition of exceptional development and maintenance of landscape and horticultural displays throughout the system. From stunning annual beds at Freimann Square, the Courthouse Green, Foster Park, Swinney Park, Foellinger Theatre in Franke Park and Lakeside Park—to pastoral park lands with open vistas and mature tree canopies. It is always our goal to maintain this tradition of care with available funding allocated for that purpose.



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## Landscape and Horticulture

Sustainability efforts continue to use all organic-based fertilizer products to maintain the turf at Freimann Square, the Courthouse Green, the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Community Center, Main Street Medians, Meyers Park, the Foellinger Theatre, Franklin Park, Northside Pool, Mc-Millen Pool, Memorial Pool, Nuckols Park, Lakeside Park, Foster Park and the Botanical Conservatory.

Some of 2023's landscape projects included improvements to the Sears Pavilion at Indian Village Park, Lakeside Park Sunken Gardens, Riverlodge at Shoaff Park, and the 'Let's Go Swimmin' monument in Orff Park.

The Great Tree Canopy Comeback (GTCC) supported through volunteer efforts and our partnership with Friends of the Parks, was successful this year with a focus on the maintenance of young trees, removal of invasive Honeysuckle in our parks and planting trees. Fifty shade trees were planted at Rockhill Park. GTCC volunteers also removed Honeysuckle in Headwaters Park along the St. Marys River.

Volunteer efforts were successful this year. With the help of a few different groups, mulch was installed at parks across the city. Volunteers logged over 2500 hours working in the Lawton Park Greenhouse.

Shade Trees Nursery planted 202 trees in over 24 different parks. Nineteen of these trees were Memorial Trees. Landscape staff installed all memorial plaques following the planting of the trees.

Lakeside Park staff installed 43 new roses into existing rose beds and also transplanted numerous others in an effort to better organize, maintain and improve the aesthetics and health of the rose gardens.

Approximately eight acres in Buckner Park were seeded with native wildflowers and grasses. This has been an ongoing project since 2021.

Pfister Sprinkler Systems was given a purchase order to do emergency repairs to irrigation systems in Promenade Park, Freimann Square, the FWPR Community Center, Main Street Medians, the Courthouse Green, Robert E. Meyers, Northside

Park, Foellinger Theatre and Lakeside Park.

Landscape staff attended the Green Expo at the Indianapolis Convention Center in February. Staff spent the day in a variety of educational horticulture courses while earning continuing education credits toward pesticide licenses.

In 2023, the Lawton Park Greenhouse staff and volunteers grew a total of 110,503 plants (including bulbs and seeds). Floral displays throughout Fort Wayne featured 29,320 plants of 284 varieties and over 25,000 bulbs planted in the parks.

Botanical Conservatory Showcase plant production for the four floral changes included:

-Winter Show: 1,260 pots and 3,285 pots of bulbs.

-Butterfly Show: 1,410 pots of annual flowers and vines.

-Summer Show: 1,951 including mums for the fall display.

-Holiday Show: 3,362 pots.

Approximately 1,900 plants were also produced for Conservatory events and programs.

The Tulip Tree Gift Shop and Sales Garden had sales of 2,453 plants produced in the greenhouse of which 512 plants were sold at the Fort Wayne Home & Garden Show. Approximately 18,248 containers of plants were sold at the Mother's Day Plant Sale. The few remaining plants were sold at the Conservatory Gift Shop and Sales Garden.

The School Children's Flower & Vegetable Association program began the year with 4,490 packets of seed sold to students. Landscape/Horticulture staff delivered 17,312 plants to 61 schools in April. Twenty-four volunteers and nine employees judged the shows at 59 schools. The City-Wide Blue-Ribbon Show, held at the McMillen Community Center on September 9, had 316 entries from 214 students representing 50 schools.

The work completed by the Riparian Division improves the riverine environment and usability of the local rivers for our

patrons through the implementation of the Riparian Management Plan. This includes addressing the rivers' waters during their changing levels as well as stewardship of the adjacent land along the riverbanks and providing education opportunities and safe access to the river banks and channel.

## Riparian Management

The work barge removed over 162 tons of logs and navigational hazards from the downtown rivers. The cumulative effect is still apparent as the barge is now used for removing new log jams and navigational hazards caused from rain events. Bridges have been kept clear all year. More than 5,000 pounds of debris and litter was removed.

Docks were installed successfully for the recreational season. Light maintenance was performed on all dock systems as needed. All dock systems were removed for the season successfully and without incident.

Herbivory management involved maintaining previously wrapped trees and the wrapping of new cottonwood trees throughout downtown to prevent beaver damage.

The vines planted in containers in the rip rap along St. Joseph Blvd. are thriving, greatly improving the aesthetics of the rip



rap along the levee. Weeding, watering and maintenance was kept up all year. Existing viewsheds and river access points were maintained. An Ecosystem Maintenance contract greatly aided in maintaining Bloomingdale, Old Fort/Headwaters, Promenade Park, and Franke Park.

The Riparian clean-up attendance numbers continue to increase slowly. Each clean-up session is an opportunity to provide a short presentation on water quality and education on what citizens can do to help improve our environment. Approximately 190 volunteers logged 895 hours in 2023, which represents approximately \$26,760 of volunteer labor. The crew continued invasive removal along Spy Run Creek in the Brookview neighborhood. More than 30 tons of invasive species was removed throughout the year.

Riparian crews assisted with various events on the three rivers including World Rivers Day and Clean Drains Fest, etc.

The crew assisted with the maintenance of the Sweet Breeze Canal Boat Replica as needed to assist the Recreation Division, which included light maintenance, cleaning and planning. Sweet Breeze was successfully launched and retrieved.

The biggest challenge continues to be labor, but the riparian department managed to stay on track for the year's main goals, including keeping the waterways and bridges clear for safe recreational use.

## Forestry

Just like in previous years, 2023 presented the Forestry Division with new challenges. The greatest challenge was addressing 311 Call Center Requests for Service in a timely manner. Although blessed with a relatively mild 'stormy season,' crews responded to 26% more requests for service from last year. The forestry team will continue working into 2024 to resolve the 980 outstanding requests. Our struggles to attract and retain qualified tree care professionals have been resolved. With the support of Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation leadership, a tiered pay structure was implemented to allow additional compensation based on experience, proficiency, responsibility and leadership. A positive work culture that encourages a

team mentality has been reestablished and the results have been profound.

Fort Wayne's commitment to the local urban tree canopy was recognized by the Arbor Day Foundation. The City was named a Tree City for the 33rd year in a row. We also received the Growth Award for the 18th consecutive year. The Growth Award highlights innovative programs/projects and an increased commitment of resources for urban forestry. This commitment was demonstrated by an additional \$500,000 allocation from the Mayor's office for tree planting. In total, these additional funds will result in the planting of nearly 2,000 trees in our parks and along our city streets.

Spring started with our annual Arbor Day celebration on April 28. While most holidays celebrate something that has already happened and is worth remembering, Arbor Day represents hope for the future. The simple act of planting a tree represents a belief that a tree will grow to provide us with clean air and water, cooling shade, habitat for wildlife, healthier communities, and endless natural beauty—all for a better tomorrow. The day began with the Mayor's official proclamation and included a tree planting at McCormick Park. The event concluded with a seedling tree giveaway in partnership with Trees Indiana.

Maintaining a pruning cycle is an important component of our urban forestry management plan. Routine maintenance results in a healthier tree canopy and an improved tree structure to better withstand stresses from wind, ice and rain. While this continues to be a goal, various challenges have led to the suspension of our routine maintenance schedule. Without a structured maintenance schedule, we expect continued increases in forestry-related urgent response service requests and, ultimately, increased maintenance costs. The Forestry Division received 1074, 311 Call Center requests for service this year and earned a 100% efficiency rating. This means that each of the service requests was inspected by a Tree Risk Assessment Qualified Arborist and a response was provided within 5 days. Not all reported customer concerns are determined to be



urgent and warrant immediate mitigation but all work deemed necessary is prioritized based on the associated risk and scheduled accordingly.

It is not possible to maintain trees free of risk; some risks must be accepted to experience the benefits that trees provide. Ideally, trees presenting an elevated level of risk are identified and the associated risk is mitigated before a tree failure occurs. This year, our annual level one tree inspection resulted in 795 trees being identified as high-priority candidates for removal. Many of these trees were removed during November and December of this year. The remaining trees have been contracted and will be removed during the first half of 2024. In total, 1027 trees were removed this year of which 120 had storm-related damage and five were privately owned trees that had fallen into the right-of-way.

This year's tree planting was a success. In total, 1,069 street trees and 195 park trees were planted during 2023. Tree planting is one of the few infrastructure investments that grows with age. We look forward to watching these trees as they grow in their contribution to our community's health and well-being.

The Forestry Division views continuing education as an essential component in providing residents with consistently improved service. This year, four forestry staff members attended the annual conference of the Indiana Arborist Association. This conference offers an opportunity to network with other Indiana tree care professionals and learn from some of the industry's top subject experts.

We look forward to applying the lessons learned in 2023 to the challenges ahead.

# Botanical Conservatory

## 2023 Accomplishments

**105,587**  
CONSERVATORY VISITORS  
IN 2023; 2ND HIGHEST  
ATTENDANCE ON RECORD

**40**  
YEARS OF OPERATION  
CELEBRATED

**105,393**  
RECORD GROSS REVENUE  
FROM MOTHER'S DAY  
PLANT SALE

**9,000**  
SERVICE HOURS LOGGED  
BY 165 ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS

**6**  
MAJOR FACILITY  
IMPROVEMENTS COMPLETED

**10,208**  
DOLLAR NIGHT ATTENDANCE

**1,054**  
ATTENDANCE AT BOTANICAL  
BREW, AN INCREASE OF  
47% OVER 2022

**1,264,277**  
TOTAL REVENUE FOR 2023

### Key Performance Indicators

Attendance in 2023 charted the second-highest visitor numbers in the history of the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory with 105,587 visitors. The highest year on record is 1984's attendance number of 120,347 visitors, which occurred during the first full-year of operation after opening in November 1983. Notably, attendance in 2023 was up 24.48% with attendance revenue increasing 20.09% and 2023 is the highest admissions revenue year in the history of the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory, even when adjusting for inflation. Membership Revenue is up 20.63% on the year, charting the highest membership revenue in the history of the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory, as well.

Conservatory Shop revenue experienced significant year-over-year growth, exceeding revenues of 2022's record year by 12.10%.

Facility rental revenue shows a modest increase from 2022.

Overall, attendance and revenues at the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory, are a source of great pride, as increases in each key revenue category and attendance are illustrative of the enthusiasm the Greater Fort Wayne community has for the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory.

Attendance	105,587	24% increase
Admission Revenue	\$387,661.24	21% increase
Membership Revenue	\$87,406.26	21% increase
Gift Shop Revenue	\$275,905.89	12% increase
Facility Rental Revenue	\$99,606.00	1% increase
Other Revenue	\$413,697.80	8% increase
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$1,264,277.19</b>	<b>6% increase</b>

### Showcase Exhibits

#### California Dreamin'

**Attendance 29,453 or 29%**

**January 14 – April 16**

For the winter exhibit, the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory invited visitors to find their inner beach bum. Thousands of kiddos sprang into the spirit of surf, sand and sun! Complemented by a lush botanical boardwalk accented with sun-loving tropical plants and vivid waves of color, as well as a VW Van, this Cali-cool winter exhibit did not disappoint!



#### Color in Motion: Live Butterfly Exhibit

**Attendance 27,113 or 26%**

**April 25 – June 25**

Live butterflies returned to the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory bringing with them an array of natural beauty and wonder. Visitors watched in awe, butterfly wings in flight, as they flashed with color pigments and refracted light. Also on display were exotic butterflies emerging from their chrysalides and an epic display of multicolored flowers and foliage that truly elevated this annual spring exhibit.





**An Herban Garden**  
**Attendance 27,905 or 27%**  
**July 1 – November 12**

This Summer/Fall, the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory helped the community digest the impact of urban gardening. Visitors saw herbs that flourished, public art that thrived, and took with them a lasting sense of community. Younger visitors were also able to get their hands dirty by potting up a sunflower and parsley plant to take home; also featured was an urban “graffiti” wall, where many visitors left their “mark” during this inspired exhibit.

**Timeless Tradition**  
**Attendance 13,293 or 13%**  
**November 18-January 7, 2024**  
**(as of 12/31/23)**

Holidays at the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory have delighted the community as a family favorite over the last 40 years. Timeless Tradition welcomed visitors to gardens in light and scenes of merriment that contributed to a warm holiday spirit in the heart of downtown Fort Wayne. Fresh cut evergreens, Helene Foellinger’s own horse drawn sleigh, a lush poinsettia tree, and deep ruby undertones were the backdrop to this year’s memories.

**Revenue Development**

The Conservatory observed record revenues in fiscal year 2023 increased visitor enthusiasm and reinvolvement. Revenue increases that stabilized accounts at the Conservatory in 2022 allowed for many facility and visitor improvements in 2023 by strategically directing fee increases to sustain the overall operation of the Conservatory. Generosity observed by the broader community, including the Foellinger Foundation, have also bolstered the ability of the Conservatory to engage capital projects with confidence in the interest of preserving the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory as a community cultural treasure for many years to come.

**Programs & Displays**

**Dollar Night Admission**

The Conservatory continued offering \$1 admission from 5:00-8:00 p.m. every Thursday night throughout the year. The reduced admission actually increased revenue on Thursday nights. The \$1 Nights soared in popularity in 2023 with a 42.99% increase from 2022.

Dollar Nights 2022:  
 Attendance 7,139 | Revenue \$7,139

Dollar Nights 2023:  
 Attendance 10,208 | Revenue \$10,208

Attendance increase of 3,069 or +42.99% & revenue increase of \$3,069 or +42.99% from 2022

**Great Train Connection**

Nine local model railroad groups gathered at the Botanical Conservatory for three days to demonstrate their craft, share in its joy, and educate the public in train safety. In all, 744 children and 1,340 adults (2,084 total) were drawn to the event where youth were given the opportunity to operate train models and solve real-life puzzles with the replicas. Attendance was a significant increase over 2022’s 1,408.

**Bunny Tales in the Garden**

This spring event is regaining its pre COVID-19 level of attraction! In 2019, 2,678 guests visited for a one-day event. Now as a two-day event, Bunny Tales in 2023 attracted 2,713 visitors surpassing the 2019 attendance by 35 visitors. This year also

**Grants & Donations**

Foellinger Foundation	\$500,000*
Fort Wayne Park Foundation	\$177,422
Community Foundation Clarke Endowment Fund	\$10,000
Community Foundation Beverforden Fund	\$8,040
Magee-O’Connor Foundation	\$10,000
M.E. Raker Foundation	\$5,000
Wilson Foundation	\$4,500
Marvin & Marva Komisarow Foundation	\$4,261
Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee - Matthew M. Wyatt Family	\$7,500
Community Foundation - Volunteer Endowment Fund	\$3,999
Howard P. Arnold Foundation	\$1,000
Fort Wayne Metals	\$1,000
Individual Gifts (Trust Donations & Memorials)	\$7,538
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$740,260</b>

\*Anniversary gift of \$500,000 to be paid out over three years - part of the Foundation’s \$1 million gift to the Conservatory and Foellinger Theatre.

## Board of Park Commissioners

exceeded 2022's two-day event volume of 1,398 visitors with nearly double the number. During the event, guests followed a rhyming tale as posted and available on a handout leading them through the gardens where they participated in a craft, received a goody bag, met the Easter Bunny, chose an Easter egg, enjoyed a variety of baby farm animals, and selected a polka dot plant.

### Mother's Day Plant Sale

In 2023, the Mother's Day Plant Sale set records at the McMillen Park Community Center and continues to be the single largest annual fundraiser held by the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory. The 2023 Mother's Day Plant Sale charted record revenues, observing a 11% increase to 2022 (the previous record-holder) and exceeding \$100K for the first time in its history with a total gross of \$105,393.40. The Mother's Day Plant Sale would not be possible without the production and effort of the Lawton Park Greenhouse, which produces all of the sale's inventory.

### Camp ACTiVenture

The Conservatory's active, adventurous camp returned in 2023 guided by the exploration of the four elements: earth, air, water, and fire. Campers hiked, biked, climbed rocks, rode zip lines, kayaked, went to splash pads, foraged for berries, built a fire, cooked over it, orienteered for



an accomplishment necklace and swam in a lake. Each day had an associated value that was discussed and practiced: caring, courage, responsibility, respect, and resilience. There were themes of survival and being adventurers as campers learned outdoor skills, leave no trace principles, and tried new experiences in the outdoors. Seventy-two Campers participated in Camp ACTiVenture in 2023, marking a successful second year for the camp and a highly repeatable program targeting campers ages 9-13.

### Botanical ROOTS Music Fest

A revamped two-day approach to this event was greatly enjoyed by those who attended and particularly by members who took advantage of their attendance benefit. Eleven bands played; four on Friday and seven on Saturday. Four of the five headliners were national and regional acts with the fifth being local talent that performs regionally. Genres included reggae (Lazo & Exodus), zydeco (CJ Chenier & The Red-Hot Louisiana Band), blues (Mississippi Heat), Americana (Debutants), and folk (Grace Theisen Band, featuring The Rebel Eves). A total of 1,068 guests came out for this summer's Botanical ROOTS Music Fest whereas Friday saw significant attendance with 689 guests, and Saturday's drizzling afternoon and rain-soaked evening made out for 348 guests. This event looks to return in 2024

as a revival of the once lauded Roots Concert Series that ended in 2021 due to waning interest.

### Botanical Brew

In its second year, this event grew dramatically! Botanical Brew was enjoyed by 1,054 guests despite the outside drizzle and chill where 13 of the 14 beverage producers and all six food vendors were located. Nine of the 11 beverage producers returned while five new producers joined. All four food vendors returned with two more joining. About a dozen buskers and performing artists were spread throughout the interior and exterior gardens. A variety of artisan vendors participated in collaboration with the Conservatory Shop. Conjure Coffee invited guests inside as did 18 artisans selling their wares. Overall attendance was up 47% from 716 in 2022 with a 33.15% revenue increase to 2022.

### Rocky Horror Picture Show

While there was a wonderful crowd in attendance, numbers dropped to 469 in 2023 as compared to 665 in 2022. The evening was cool with light rain during some periods, and as an outside event, the weather most likely dissuaded some from attending. Thankfully, the viewing format had changed with an ability to show the movie despite the rain! This year, a jumbotron screen was introduced for viewing as opposed to a traditional movie

screen. Attendees favored the new viewing arrangement via local vendor Monster Message.

## Landscape & Horticulture

### CAS at Anthis Volunteers

The Botanical Conservatory Landscape & Horticulture Team has benefited greatly from the weekly volunteer service of students selected by the Center for Academic Success at Anthis (through FWCS). These students have completed a multitude of tasks including outdoor gardening, planting, removal of invasive species, indoor planting work in the Showcase and Desert Houses, and Pumpkin Path display installation. This partnership offers the opportunity for students to have hands-on experience with the horticulture field while greatly benefitting the Botanical Conservatory through enthusiastic labor.

### Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

With a much-needed HVAC control project completed early in 2023, attention was shifted in the second half of the year at fine turning temperatures in the interior garden houses and implementing Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies. Beneficial insects are being regularly released to counter populations of detrimental pests, and weekly pest scouting has been implemented to monitor populations. These IPM strategies will continue into 2024 and beyond in the interest of maintaining a thriving collection.

## Facility Maintenance & Improvement

### Desert House & Atrium Painting

A new coat of paint in the interior Desert House improved aesthetics and reduced visible mildew on walls. This much needed improvement has transformed the Desert House and will allow for further work to be completed within the space. The Atrium and Conservatory Shop were also painted, removing dated wallpaper finishes and creating a cleaner aesthetic to the Botanical Conservatory's entry area.

### Interior Garden Light Improvement

Brand new interior garden lighting shines in the Showcase, Tropical, and Desert Houses replacing inefficient and malfunctioning lighting with very efficient

LED lighting. This lighting improvement has drastically improved safety at the Botanical Conservatory during evening events and allows for work to begin earlier in the morning as needed, because the interior garden houses are now adequately lit.

### Front Sidewalk & Rear Parking Lot Paving

The Botanical Conservatory circle drive sidewalk was redone to allow for improved ADA accessibility; the circle drive was also repaved during this process. Additionally, the rear parking lot was repaved to allow for better circulation, increased parking capacity and improved safety conditions.

### Tropical Linkway Roof

The Tropical linkway roof was fully replaced to prevent further water infiltration, which has been a challenge for several years. This improvement will allow for interior remodel of the linkway to achieve a more contemporary space.

### Fire System & Intercom Replacement

Work has been completed to replace the Fire and Intercom systems that had both fallen into a state of irreparable disrepair. These vital safety improvements maintain the viability of the facility.

### Breakroom Remodel

A comprehensive remodel of an often-overlooked breakroom has provided a much-needed improvement to the space. In addition to being the breakroom, the

space also serves as a catering prep area during rentals and is now compliant with Board of Health guidelines.

## Conservatory Staff

The team at the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory pulled through for a record-breaking year in 2023. Progress made at the Conservatory in 2023 could not have been possible without a growingly positive team culture.

In addition to the 21 full and part time staff members at the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory, over 165 active volunteers offered over 9,000 service hours to the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory and Lawton Park Greenhouse. The contributions made by the volunteers amount to the equivalent of four full-time staff persons and over \$286,200 in labor value each year. It would not be possible to operate the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory at its current level of efficiency without the valued contributions made by its volunteers each year.



## Board of Park Commissioners

# Foellinger Theatre

## 2023 Accomplishments

A positive trajectory continued for the 2023 season at Foellinger Theatre, showcasing a diverse range of events and attracting enthusiastic audiences from several states in the Midwest region. Despite lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic effecting some areas of the U.S. economy, the 23,000 plus music fans who purchased Foellinger Theatre concert tickets came from all across the Midwest and were eager to get back out and enjoy live music at Fort Wayne's favorite outdoor venue.

The season kicked off with an inspiring theatrical performance of "Marian, or The True Tale of Robin Hood" staged by local students from Carroll High School after the show at the school was cancelled by school administrators. Staff at the Foellinger Theatre, students and their parents, banded together with our community to fit in this event one week prior to the Foellinger's expected season opening on May 25. It was a successful team effort which not only received mass attention on social media, but also in national press from several news organizations across America.

Our concert series season opener on May 25 proved to be a smoking hot sold-out show with the return of country music legend Willie Nelson! Fans from all across the Midwest flocked to the Foellinger Theatre to see Willie and Family perform in front of a 60' x 40' American flag with his hits such as "On the Road Again," and cover songs from the likes of Hank Williams with "Move it on Over" and "Good Hearted Woman" by Waylon Jennings.

As we learned on July 10, sometimes the Ventura Highway leads all the way to Fort Wayne, Indiana. The Midwest heat in mid-July didn't stop the 1,500 plus fans who showed up to see America perform their familiar songs such as "A Horse With No Name" and "Daisy Jane."

Passionate music fans will often travel great distances by trains, planes and automobiles to see their favorite artists perform live in concert. Wednesday August 9, was no exception for the 1,833 fans who came to see 90's San Francisco Pop band Train perform along with the band Better Than Ezra.

### Community Concert Series

Despite a cancellation in 2022, the Fort Wayne Area Community Band returned for June, July and August events, showcasing popular band music and special guests. The free admission community concert series, a longstanding tradition, attracted hundreds of local music fans to the theatre in 2023.

### Volunteer Engagement

Once again, a dedicated group of local volunteers contributed time and effort to ensure the success of Foellinger Theatre's events. Across community concerts, corporate and ticketed events, 50 volunteers participated, collectively contributing 1,681 hours.

### Finance and Operations

The second year of concession sales at the theatre proved to be a successful venture again, contributing to solid profits along with the second year of managing alcohol sales in-house.

In late 2023 the Foellinger Foundation awarded Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation \$500,000.00 for upgrades to the Foellinger Theatre. These funds will be used for the design, purchase and installation of efficient LED stage lighting, electrical improvements, structural maintenance and the expansion of merchandise and beverage service areas to better serve patrons in 2025.

Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation is honored to continue delivering a diverse array of entertainment to the community, while ensuring that generations well into the

future can enjoy what Helene Foellinger so graciously gifted to the community in 1949. Celebrating the Foellinger Theatre's 75th Anniversary in 2024 will honor the past, and continue to innovate with diverse entertainment for fans from all across the Midwest.

### 2023 Concert Season

The 2023 Foellinger Theatre's Concert Season By Genre:

#### Theatrical

"Marian, or The True Tale of Robin Hood"

#### Country

Willie Nelson  
Gary Allan and Tracy Lawrence  
The Mavericks

#### American Pop and Soul

American Pop Featuring: The Grass Roots, The Buckingham's, & The Box Tops

#### Classic Rock and Pop

Hotel California - A Salute to The Eagles  
Herman's Hermits  
America  
The Return of Emerson Lake and Palmer  
Stayin' Alive  
Pat Benatar & Neil Giraldo  
REO Speedwagon

#### 90's Alternative Rock

Train  
An Evening with Cake

#### Jazz and Big Band

New Millennium Jazz Orchestra  
The 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Band  
Diana Krall  
Fort Wayne Area Community Band

#### Classical, Choral and Orchestral

The Fort Wayne Children's Choir  
Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back with Fort Wayne Philharmonic

### Volunteer Hours

Fifty volunteers provided 1,681 service hours at 22 concerts/events in 2023.

# Children's Zoo

## 2023 Accomplishments

In August our Board of Directors adopted a new five-year Strategic Plan titled, *Delivering Zoo Excellence*. We reaffirmed our mission of connecting kids and animals, strengthening families and inspiring people to care. As a part of this work, we created a new vision statement and values, as well as four key commitment areas. Our new vision is to create future generations of nature enthusiasts through leadership in animal care, educational experiences and conservation. Our values are purposeful, collaborative, enthusiastic, welcoming and adaptable. Our key commitments areas are: zoo for all, incredible experiences, love for wildlife and organizational excellence. Now that our Strategic Plan and direction has been set, we can begin work on a long-range exhibit and experiences plan.

### Community Relations

Our Zoo for All: Community Tickets Grants program continued to provide complimentary admission tickets to nearly 100 area nonprofit partners who work with children and families who face barriers to visitation. We used a new online application process and through this program, agencies are able to apply for tickets to use for programming, incentives and more. This year 20% of the applications came from new nonprofit partners. In total, nearly \$200,000 in free tickets were distributed to 16 area counties across northeast and north central Indiana and several counties in northwest Ohio. Thirty-five percent of applicant organizations mentioned working with children or adults with one or more disabilities and 51% mentioned working with at-risk youth. Applications for our 2024 program opened in December, and will be due February 15, 2024.

All year-round staff underwent recertification through KultureCity to maintain our facility's Sensory Inclusive™ certification. We expanded our work with the AWS Foundation and Easterseals ARC of North-

east Indiana to make the Zoo not only a great place to visit, but also to work. We conducted a universal design audit of many of our job descriptions and are working on modifications where possible to make some positions even more accessible. Opening Day guests used a new wheelchair accessible ramp and decking for the Endangered Species Carousel ensuring fun for all—if the smiles were any indication. As part of the opening of Red Panda Ridge, we unveiled a new inclusive bamboo maze for guests to enjoy. When our Bamboo Forest Adventure Play and new concessions area opened in the fall, we also unveiled a new family restroom with adult changing area. We know this addition will be warmly welcomed by families who have a need for this space. Additionally, we unveiled a new mother's room in our Guest Services building.

### Attendance & Special Events

In 2023, the Zoo hosted 630,846 guests. New consumer events were a hit with guests and helped the Zoo reach new audiences, including our new adult-only Rock & Roar events which saw 2,600 guests over five evenings throughout the

season. Wild Zoo Wonderland continues to grow, quickly becoming a new family holiday tradition with 16,951 guests visiting during December. Wild Zoo Halloween, our largest annual consumer event hosted two sold-out brunches where kids could interact with their favorite princesses.

Private Events had a busy season hosting a record 84 birthday parties and 69 corporate picnics at the Zoo increasing guest attendance and revenue. With Bamboo Forest now complete, we plan to continue this growth by offering more birthday party options.

### Membership

At the end of 2023, we had just over 17,500 active member households. We kicked off our 2023 season with two Members-only preview days on April 20-21, and provided a number of special member discounts or early-access offerings all season long. Member Appreciation Month was, once again, a big hit with our members and these families also enjoyed free admission to our Wild Zoo Halloween and Wild Zoo Wonderland



# Board of Park Commissioners

events. We introduced a new incentive on Cyber Monday which gave two complimentary guest passes for renewing or gift memberships purchased and sold over 550 memberships that day. Our Wild Zoo Wonderland event was open for more days than ever before and guests enjoyed a walk around the central loop during the mild weather days that we experienced near the end of the year. Another change for 2023 was the rebranding of our supporting-level memberships, from “Donor Club Memberships” to “Safari Society.”

## Animal News

In April, guests noticed a new sign “Asian Trek” on their way to the Indonesian Rain Forest. All exhibits from the switchback and north became part of Asian Trek and featuring animals and exhibits from Asia. Updates were made to the Sumatran Tiger exhibit including a larger water feature and a new enclosed “catio” space designed specifically with Bugara and Indah in mind.

Red Panda Ridge opened in late May as the first addition to the reimagined Asian Trek. Red Panda Ridge, one of the largest Red Panda Habitats in the US, is home to four Red Pandas; Anne, Aurora, Paula and Phay. This new exhibit area not only features Chinese and Himalayan Red Pandas, but also is home to Zoji, a Chinese muntjac deer, five Asian birds including a white eared pheasant, Gretel, Victoria crowned pigeons, Penn and Teller and a pair of red-billed blue magpies, Jingwei and Dallas.

Benedict, a two-toed sloth made a slow appearance in June in his new home in Central Zoo. The Sloth Wild Encounter was popular as it allows guests to get a behind the scenes opportunity with Benedict and to learn more about this awe-inspiring animal.

The Zoo welcomed a new female bat-eared fox, Ripley. She is recommended to breed with our male, Mkhusele, by the Association of Zoos and Aquarium’s Bat-eared fox SSP (species survival plan). Species Survival Plans are in place to create genetically diverse populations of animals to protect them from extinction. The Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo participates in 63 cooperative species survival plans.

More than 1500 animals call the Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo home and are cared for daily by incredible animal care and health teams. Educating guests with more than 80 keeper chats weekly, accessing animal wellbeing, providing zoo animals with choice and control training behaviors allowing the animals to assist in their medical care and providing enrichment to elicit natural behaviors is just part of a day’s work for our Animal Care Specialists.

## Conservation & Research

The Zoo is a conservation leader, providing \$272,000 in direct conservation support with 30 conservation partners around the globe in 2023. The Kids for Nature Conservation kiosk continues to involve guests in conservation, allowing them to vote among three projects with their zoo provided penny at the entrance. A portion of each ticket sale and membership goes to the Zoo’s Conservation Programs along with Corks for Conservation event proceeds, employee giving, guests donations and Wild Things Gift Shop “round-up” program.

The Zoo participates in various research projects initiated by external and internal investigators that want to learn more about the animals that call our Zoo home. For instance, collection of blood samples through routine physical exams and voluntary training will be used to monitor

antibody levels on our Covid-susceptible species. Comparing levels before and after vaccination, as well as tracking antibody levels over time will help understand the efficacy of vaccination, as well as potential exposure events, in our exotic species to continue to keep them safe.

Along with Purdue University, the Department of Natural Resources and several other Midwest zoos, FWCZ continues to be an active partner in the Eastern Hellbender Project. We currently have over 300 hellbenders that are being raised for future release into the wild. In partnership with Purdue University, we are studying their unique spot pattern retention while growth rates are tracked. Additionally, we will investigate if size versus age has a more significant effect on survivability in the wild.

Director of Animal Health and Conservation Dr. Kami Fox represented the Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo by participating in the Mariana Avifauna Conservation program (MAC) in the South Pacific. This year the program focused on an endangered bird, the Rota White Eye, that only exists on the tiny island of Rota. The experience gained in 2023 will be used to work towards future translocates to create insurance populations to secure their long-term survival. The Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo has been participating in the MAC program for more than 10 years.



## Donations & Fundraising Events

Thanks to the generosity of so many across our community, the Zoo received 7,651 gifts, raising just over \$4.1 million dollars in gifts and pledges in 2023. While some of these gifts were earmarked for exhibit renovations, most of the donations received supported daily needs such as animal care, maintenance work, general operations and vital conservation programs. These dollars were raised through a combination of direct mail efforts, grant writing, monthly donation programs, legacy giving, Adopt-an-Animal donations, special events and other fundraising efforts.

Our three signature fundraising events also had great successes in 2023! Zoo-fari was held on June 15, for a sold-out crowd. Guests enjoyed food and beverages at over 50 different stations spread across the Zoo with all fare donated by local restaurants, breweries, wineries, artisan craft distilleries and other specialty shops. Corks for Conservation was held on July 20, and the featured conservation story was our efforts to help save red pandas in their native lands. We finished out our event series with Zoobilee: Toast to the Coast on September 28, when we officially unveiled the plans for Coastal Cove.

As mentioned above, we publicly launched a fundraising effort for our Coastal Cove project in the latter half of the year. This project will reimagine our existing sea lion exhibit, enhancing animal welfare, providing additional spaces for guest to sit and enjoy our daily keeper chats, create a behind-the-scenes Wild Encounter experience and best of all—welcome seals to the exhibit! The new mixed-species exhibit will feature new educational messaging about the differences between seals and sea lions and what families can do to help keep our oceans clean.

## Communications

Social media continues to grow at the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo and is the number one communication vehicle for messaging guests and Zoo members. Facebook continues to be the Zoo's

best platform to use to keep Zoo guests up to date and engaged with all the Zoo animals that call Fort Wayne home.

Fort Wayne Newspapers Reader's Choice Awards, named the Zoo again the Best City Attraction, Best Local Attraction, Best Children's Entertainment and Best Family Friendly Event. This year the community also voted the Zoo as Best Local Historical Landmark.

Conservation education continues to be a focus of the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo educators. In 2023, over 17,000 people participated in 2,479 Zoo education programs. Four hundred sixty-six area school classrooms were visited and Kids for Nature Summer Camp hosted 1,248 campers where Zoo Conservation Educators connected kids to animals and the natural world around them.

The Teens for Nature Volunteer and Leadership program enjoyed 281 participants at the Zoo over the summer, participating in leadership activities, conservation projects, zoo keeping, interacting with Zoo guests and volunteering over 21,609 hours.

Volunteers help the Zoo fulfil our mission by actively engaging with guests during the season and helping behind the scenes during the off season. Active volunteers numbering 459 donated 41,184 hours with a value of more than \$1.31 million dollars (based on The Independent Sector's current value of volunteer hours).

## Construction & Improvements

2023 was a big year for the Zoo with the reimagining of Indonesia Rain Forest to Asian Trek which includes the popular Indonesian Rainforest and now two new areas—Red Panda Ridge and Bamboo Forest. Red Panda Ridge is home to one of the largest red panda habitats in North America and both subspecies of Red Panda with two Chinese Red Pandas and two Himalayan Red Pandas call the



Fort Wayne Children's Zoo home. Also featured at Red Panda Ridge is a Muntjac deer and a beautiful aviary.

Bamboo Forest opened in late September and over 4,200 guests have enjoyed the new two-story ropes style course with 27 different elements. Bamboo Forest Adventure Play is fun for kids of all ages and even includes Sky Tykes for kids under 48 inches tall. The Marketplace combines retail and grab-and-go food offerings in an indoor/outdoor space. Bamboo Forest includes family style restrooms with an adult changing station and spacious beautiful decks to relax and enjoy a fun day at the Zoo.

Additional capital improvements in 2023 included a popular children's Nature Play area in the African Village, the addition of a mother's nursing/family room inside Guest Services, a new Chicken Feeding Experience in the Indiana Family Farm, retheming of the Sumatra tiger exhibit, the addition of accessible ramp and decking for the Endangered Species Carousel to ensure fun for everyone and the addition of a Sloth Wild Encounter.

The Fort Wayne Children's Zoo exists to connect kids and animals, strengthen families, and inspire people to care. The Zoo continues to provide superior animal care, exemplary guest service and outstanding experiences for visitors while serving the community since 1965. In 2023, it was again made clear: All employees are an important part of the mission and success of the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo.



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