

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



FORT WAYNE
PARKS AND
RECREATION



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Our Mission

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.

Leadership

Administrative Staff

Steve McDaniel, Director
Sandra Odisho, Manager of Finance
Kathy Pargmann, Manager Lead of Marketing
Chuck Reddinger, Deputy Director of Recreation
Steve Schuhmacher, Deputy Director of Park Maintenance
Chad Shaw, Deputy Director of Planning & Landscape
Rick Schuitemann, Director of Children's Zoo

Board of Park Commissioners

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



President's Message

**Master Plan for
Hanna Homestead
Adopted**

**Funding Received
for 6 neighborhood
playgrounds**

**Debuted Events at
McKinnie Commons**

**Phase I of Franke
Renaissance Plan
Completed**

1,004 trees planted

**Celebrated 75th
Anniversary of
Foellinger Theatre**

**Botanical
Conservatory
Marked 40 Years as
Cultural Anchor
in Fort Wayne**

To the Honorable Mayor Sharon Tucker:

It is my privilege to present the Board of Park Commissioners' 2024 Annual Report. I and my associate commissioners take great pride in and have passion for the achievements of the Parks Department this past year which include multiple key spotlights below and throughout the report showcasing our commitment to enhancing the recreational experiences for the residents of Fort Wayne.

- Approved and adopted the Hanna Homestead Master Plan.
- Redesigned and replaced the south tropical path at the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory to enhance accessibility in an area that had become hazardous for visitors. The new pathway is a welcome addition, complete with railings and accessibility-compliant grading.
- Upgraded Parks' payroll system.
- Debuted McKinnie Commons Connection events to welcome the community to gather for entertainment, food and learning opportunities in the summer months.
- Opened and operated pools seven days per week with a full staff for the first time in several years. Increased lifeguard numbers.
- Rehabilitated the historic Mechanic Street Bridge which connects the Nebraska Neighborhood to east Swinney Park. Improvements are expected to be complete in spring of 2025 and will ensure that the bridge is completely functional.
- Renovated the interior tropical linkway at the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory.
- The Lawton Park Greenhouse staff and volunteers produced an impressive 129,714 plants including bulbs and seeds. Floral displays throughout Fort Wayne featured 33,100 plants of 280 different varieties and 33,200 bulbs were planted in the parks. Over 20,400 plants and seeds were distributed through the School Children's Flower and Vegetable Association program to children in over 60 elementary and area home schools.
- Produced and installed new signs at Lakeside Park Rose Garden, identifying each species of rose.
- The Riparian crew removed 134 tons (268,000 pounds) of woody debris and 2.65 tons (5,300 pounds) of litter from the rivers using the work barge. This ongoing effort ensures a safe and pristine environment for our community.
- Fall planting of shade and evergreen trees totaled 1,004 with funds coming from supplemental LIT and Trust funds, earmarked by the City of Fort Wayne and City Council.
- Parks Forestry Division earned a 100% efficiency rating in regard to over 900 Call Center requests (311), inspecting and responding to each call within five days. This system helps to access, prioritize and address reports as quickly as possible for trees located along streets and other public areas.

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 Parks and Recreation.

Respectfully submitted,

Justin Shurley
President of the Board of Park Commissioners

Director's Report

As I reflect on the accomplishments and key messages uncovered in 2024, I'm filled with immense gratitude for the commitment of our staff, commissioners and the unwavering support of our mayor, donors and residents. Generosity with funding has empowered us to create and maintain vibrant public spaces where individuals can pursue health and wellness goals, fostering a healthier and happier community.

Residents provided input on the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation 2024 Comprehensive Plan which will help shape the Parks' system for the next ten years. Key takeaway themes include: Equity, Access, Quality, Community and Environment. The Board of Park Commissioners approved and adopted this plan in August.

The completion of phase one of the Franke Park Renaissance Plan includes a state-of-the-art, year-round new pavilion and shelter, new winding, tree-lined entrance from Goshen Road, bridge over Spy Run Creek and new and improved trails. It is supported with donations from the Fort Wayne Park Foundation, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the City of Fort Wayne as well as bonding and Capital Improvement Project funds. We celebrate this grand success and begin the process to seek funding sources for the next phases of the Master Plan.

The City of Fort Wayne announced an allocation from the State of Indiana from local income tax. Working with City-Council, \$1.2 million in funds were specified for neighborhood park playgrounds in six Fort Wayne Parks. Planning began in 2024. Resident will see results in 2025.

The groundbreakings for two neighborhood park redesign projects marked significant connections for two long-standing communities. Brewer Park in the Mount Vernon Park Neighborhood received input from residents and support from City officials and private donors to improve the amenities which will positively impact all ages, but especially the area children. Packard Park enhancements in the Fairfield Neighborhood complements the goals outlined in the Packard 2030 Neighborhood Plan for active and passive recreation.

Over 60 Park projects were completed and City of Fort Wayne invested approximately \$3 million in improvements in 2024.

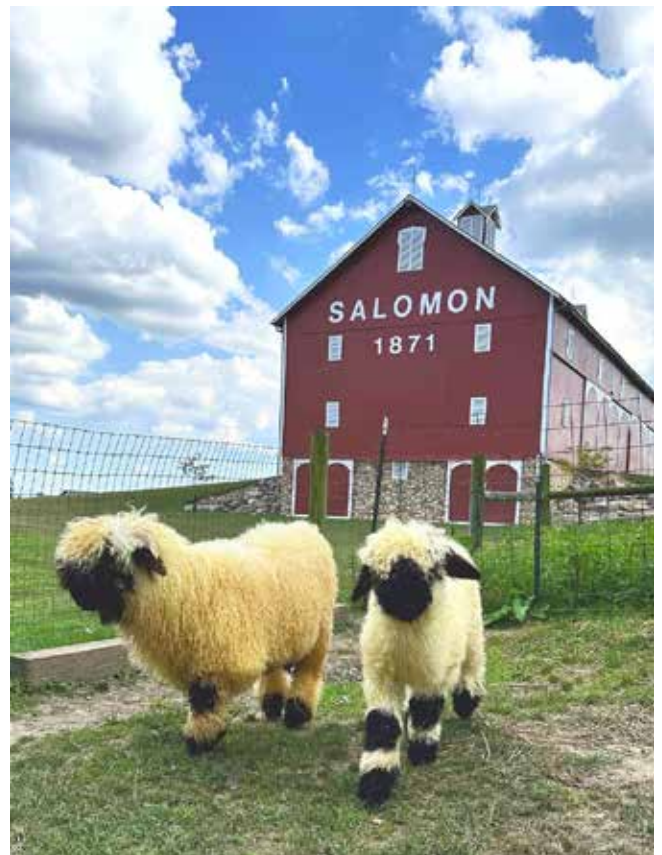
Foellinger Theatre celebrated 75 years of live entertainment. Thanks to a generous Foellinger Foundation award in 2023, the theatre completed designs for a new house and stage lighting system which will be installed in 2025.

The Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory marked 40 years as a cultural anchor in Fort Wayne having welcomed nearly three million visitors from near and far since 1983!

It is an honor to provide vital youth services and diverse programming to inspire all generations to learn new skills, reduce stress and build meaningful connections within our community.

We sincerely thank the late Mayor Henry, the honorable Mayor Tucker, the City Council, the Board of Park Commissioners, the Park Foundation and our generous supporters. Your support is the cornerstone of our mission, enabling us to create inclusive environments where everyone feels welcome.

Steve McDaniel
Director of Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation



Highlights of 2024

Phase I Complete for Franke Park Renaissance Master Plan

On November 8 and Dec. 4, ribbons were cut marking the completion of Phase I of the Master Plan to Improve and Expand Park Experiences to restore/renovate Fort Wayne's largest park and also meet the needs of today's citizens. With statistically valid input from stakeholders (neighbors, BMX, mountain bikers and users of the Fort Wayne Zoo, Foellinger Theatre and Day Campers), 1400 surveys, 4000 unique project website visitors and numerous open house guests, Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation finished Phase I of a multi-phase master plan.

The components of Phase I include:

- A new winding, tree-lined entrance off of Goshen Avenue and a new bridge over Spy Run Creek to accommodate vehicular and pedestrian access.
- A second phase of the restoration of Spy Run Creek began in early 2024. This project stabilizes failing streambanks, increases flood storage and provides ecological benefits through improved water quality and animal habitat, in addition to increasing the recreational value of the stream.

- A new enclosed, state-of-the-art, year-round pavilion with plentiful parking. While its beautiful architecture is reminiscent of historic features in the park, it also introduces soaring views of the natural beauty surrounding it. The multi-use pavilion has a grand panorama of the park, is the largest pavilion in our park system with a rental capacity of 400 people.
- A new open-air shelter to the west of the McMillen Family Pavilion is available on a first come first serve basis.

As we celebrate the significant completion of Phase I, we begin the process to seek funding sources for the next phases of the Master Plan.

2024 Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan Adopted

The official planning document is in place for the next ten years, for the growth and development of parks and recreation opportunities of all citizens of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Residents provided input on the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation 2024 Comprehensive Plan. Key takeaway themes include: Equity, Access, Quality, Community and Environment.





Riverfront Fort Wayne momentum continues with Riverfront Phase IIb

This phase of Riverfront development will extend and build upon the social and recreational opportunities created through the first phases of Riverfront development from Promenade Park along the St. Marys River west to Ewing Street and east to Clinton Street. In addition, the public spaces created through this work will enhance connections to the rivers and advance economic opportunities for the surrounding neighborhoods.

Greenhouse Production

In 2024 the Lawton Park Greenhouse staff and volunteers produced a total of 129,714 plants (including bulbs and seeds). Floral displays in the parks throughout Fort Wayne featured 33,100 plants of 280 different varieties and 33,200 bulbs.

Introduced the Fort Wayne Parks App

This latest tool helps Fort Wayne residents discover recreation opportunities and connect to city parks. The free Fort Wayne Parks digital app allows users to access favorite park services on

the go such as registering for a program, booking a tee time, reserving a pavilion, buying tickets to a concert or a Sweet Breeze cruise, exploring a park map, purchasing a membership to the Conservatory, making a donation and calling the main office.

Botanical Conservatory Raises a Glass to Mark 40 Years

The Raise a Glass! Showcase exhibit welcomed over 33,000 visitors, an incredible feat for the summer to fall exhibit, which has traditionally been a period of slower attendance. Raise a Glass! helped ring in the Botanical Conservatory's 40th anniversary by utilizing key art glass pieces from its 20th anniversary show, Kaleidoscope.

Foellinger Theatre Celebrates 75 Years of Live Entertainment

As the largest outdoor seated theatre in Fort Wayne, it historically pivots from concerts to theatrical performances to movies with an experienced staff featuring nationally acclaimed artists and favorite local performers.

Board of Park Commissioners

Awards Received in 2024

- Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation in association with Design Workshop has been selected for a President's Award in the Illinois Chapter American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Awards Program. The entry was based on the 10-year Comprehensive Planning Project for Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation and is titled Blue-green Heritage: The Plan for Fort Wayne's Parks, Burnham Awards for Planning and Analysis.
- Accepted the IPRA Excellence in Landscape Design Award for 2023 in November 2024. Fort Wayne's Riverfront Phase IIA was completed in June 2023, blending the aesthetics of two surrounding parks while celebrating the city's natural resources. A variety of universal design elements create greater accessibility for park visitors, and a natural bioswale helps to manage stormwater from nearby parks and adjacent major development projects. This public space has been recognized as an important piece of Fort Wayne's park system and the City's overall Riverfront Development strategy.
- Accepted the IPRA Elected Official of the Year Award on behalf of the late Mayor Tom Henry in November 2024. Fort Wayne's Mayor Tom Henry built tremendous momentum for the City over 16 years of leadership. Henry's work was evident in the City's many national accolades, and under his guidance, Fort Wayne had implemented initiatives to support and enhance park spaces in particular. Even after his passing in March 2024, the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation team has continued his legacy by improving their fellow citizens' lives through the City's parks and programs.
- Jeff Ellis & Associates awarded the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Department the 2024 Platinum International Aquatics Safety Award to the Lifeguard Staff for consistently exceeding the criteria for aquatic safety.
- The National Arbor Day Foundation awarded the City of Fort Wayne with its 34th consecutive Tree City USA designation. The Parks Department announced that the city received the Growth Award for the 19th consecutive year, for demonstrating environmental improvement and an outstanding level of tree care.



Other Notable Achievements

- Refreshed the Boone Playground at Boone and Mechanic Streets in the Nebraska neighborhood. The play area offers accessible features through a partnership with the AWS Foundation. This is one of ten Fort Wayne Parks playgrounds which received new playground equipment in 2024 thanks to funding allotted by the City of Fort Wayne and City Council.
- Broke ground for redesign of Brewer Park with Mayor Sharon Tucker, community leaders and funding partners in the Mount Vernon Park neighborhood.
- Broke ground for reconceived master plan at Packard Park. The ground breaking follows five years of Park planning and public input from the highly engaged surrounding neighborhoods.
- Dedicated two Public Art Commission sculptures in City parks. The sculpture in Lakeside Park is called "Crescent Moon Quartet" and the sculpture in Shoaff Park is titled "Mystery of Continuity and Change." Both pieces by local artist Jim Merz are designed to move with the wind.
- Enrolled 525 adults ages 50 and above into the 45th annual Fort Wayne Senior Games.
- Foster Park entrance is reimagined with a new design to serve park users following long-term infrastructure impacts. The design team is preparing a plan which unifies feedback from Parks staff and offers a clear path forward to a new entrance layout. With input from park users at public open houses and in public surveys, priorities for improvements surfaced which are guiding this work.
- The Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Community Center has partnered with KultureCity® to make the center at 233 West Main Street and all of the programs and events that the venue hosts to be sensory inclusive. This certification will promote an accommodating and positive experience for all guests with a sensory issue who visit the Community Center.
- Salomon Farm Park welcomed two Valais Blacknose Sheep to the herd. This rare heritage breed is originally from Switzerland. Their docile temperament will contribute to unique programming for Day Campers and City residents and visitors.
- Newly announced Treeline District will enhance Riverfront area. This exciting project between Harrison Street, the St. Marys River, Wells Street and Second Street will blend indoor and outdoor areas for active uses. Parks staff are active contributors to the design team for the public space portion of the project. This space will serve as an extension to existing and future Riverfront Development, with a unique set of characteristics and activities for residents and visitors. Construction for Phase I of the Treeline District is anticipated to begin in 2025. This new public park area will blend seamlessly with the Tree Canopy Trail and existing Riverfront amenities.

Financial Report



Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Condensed Financial Report for the year ending December 31, 2024

REVENUES

Property Taxes	\$ 22,910,368
Other Taxes	4,265,760
Charges for Services	7,088,327
Grants and Donations	4,123,309
ARPA Grant - City Administered	481,559
Other Revenues	<u>5,491,768</u>
Total Revenues	<u>\$ 44,361,091</u>

EXPENDITURES

Parks and Recreation General	\$ 37,051,201
Capital Outlays	9,081,994
Debt Service	<u>1,252,425</u>
Total Expenditures	<u>\$ 47,385,620</u>

Recreation Services

2024 Accomplishments

1,561

YOUTH ATTENDED FRANKE PARK DAY CAMP IN ITS 77TH YEAR OF OPERATION

14

SWEET BREEZE SPECIALTY TOURS OFFERED

18

TEAMS PARTICIPATED IN THE 2024 DRAGON BOAT RACES

500+

SENIORS PARTICIPATED IN THE SENIOR GAMES

1,273

YOUTH ATTENDED PARK & PLAY ACTIVITIES

1,600

ATTENDED THE ANNUAL HALLOWEEN HAUNT AT THE COMMUNITY CENTER

795

DIFFERENT PROGRAMS & EVENTS COORDINATED BY RECREATION SERVICES STAFF

2

VALAIS BLACKNOSE SHEEP INTRODUCED AT SALOMON FARM PARK

McMillen Park Community Center

McMillen Park Community Center offers year-round programs and activities for people of all ages with special emphasis on sports and athletics. Two arenas, one 31,000 square feet of rubberized multi-purpose flooring and the second with 20,500 square feet of hardwood sport flooring with bleacher seating accommodate the following activities:

- » Four indoor pickleball courts
- » Fitness classes
- » 1/10-mile walking track
- » One full-size soccer court and three practice courts
- » Indoor playground
- » Four volleyball courts
- » Two full size competition level basketball courts
- » Four youth size basketball courts
- » Badminton
- » Burmese game of Sepak Takraw, also known as kick volleyball

Four multipurpose rooms and a computer lab furnish space for community engagement. The center is also one of three park facilities which provides free after-school and summer programming for registered youth, ages five to 17.

McMillen Community Center highlights for 2024 include:

- Provided meaningful learning opportunity to the Ladies First youth group. The youth chose a police officer to be a guest speaker. Officer Bryant discussed what it's like to be a cop in Fort Wayne. Key safety points included the importance of being aware of one's surroundings, stranger-danger, to never touch a gun laying around the house and when to dial 911. A Q & A session allowed the officer to address stereotypes children may have about police officers.
- Hosted the 2024 Community Extravaganza with over 300 patrons attending. Hotdogs,

chips, water and candy were provided. An alumni basketball game showcased skills and sportsmanship. Fifteen vendors provided an array of information, activities and games. The golf game was a favorite.

Community Youth Centers

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 2024 due to these same staffing challenges.

Weisser Park Youth Center

- Hosted the second Annual Family and Friends Trivia Game and Karaoke Night with 102 attending. All enjoyed playing trivia, singing karaoke and sharing a spaghetti dinner donated by a local restaurant.
- Started Microgreens Program which focused on the nutritional value of consuming microgreens, preparing soil and planting microgreens. Youth were also instructed about how to care for the plants so they will grow properly. In a short time, the youth enjoyed a beautiful and tasty harvest and planted a second batch of microgreens. Additional plantings and harvests continued in 2024.
- Facilitated Bucket Drumming instruction with seasonal team lead member, Rob Mauldin. Youth learned fundamentals such as how to grip drum sticks, count and basic beats.
- Continued to work with several community partners to provide purposeful experiences for the youth:
 - » Allen County Public Library
 - » American Red Cross
 - » Center for Nonviolence
 - » Erin's House for Grieving Children
 - » Parkview, Planting Healthy Seeds
 - » Spring-cation Highlights
 - » Hosted a scavenger hunt for the youth
 - » Built marshmallow shooters.

- » Attended the Community Center Book Swap and Sale
- » Roller-skating at Bell's Skating Rink.
- » Competed in the Optimist Club Tri-Star Basketball Skills Competition at the Fort Wayne Boys and Girls Club. One youth came in first in his age category and one youth came in second in her age category.
- Registered 233 youth for Summer Programing with 188 actively in attendance. Average participants per day for the summer were as follows:
 - » June: 77 kids, 72 kids received FWCS Lunch
 - » July: 72 kids, 68 kids received FWCS Lunch
- Partnered with TeenWorks Fort Wayne to assist center team leads to provide fun and engaging activities. TeenWorks facilitates daily arts and crafts. The youth have made Paper Bag Puppets, Ocean Silhouettes, Fish Paper Mache, Puzzle Collages, Rock Paintings, Water Color Paintings and Friendship Bracelets.

Jennings Recreation Center

- Collaborated on first youth published book made possible by Studenttreasures Publishing. Book is titled, "What Kindness Means to Me." Each of the 22 student authors drew a picture and explained what kindness means to them. Each author received a paperback copy of the book and a certificate.
- On July 15, Chanell Ridley became the new supervisor of Jennings Recreation Center.
- Participated in American Red Cross Hands-Only CPR training. The youth were very attentive, asking questions and eager to learn.
- Celebrated the 2024 Total Solar Eclipse with a viewing program. Nine youth monitored the progression throughout the day with solar viewing glasses provided courtesy of Fort Wayne Community Schools. Sixteen adult community members also joined the programming and bonded with youth during this experience of a lifetime.
- Added adult programing including

Yoga, Lunch & Games and Field Trips.

- Registered 212 youth for Summer Programing with 132 youth actively in attendance. Average participants per day for the summer were as follows:
 - » June: 69 kids, 58 kids enrolled in FWCS Lunch
 - » July: 60 kids, 55 kids enrolled in FWCS Lunch

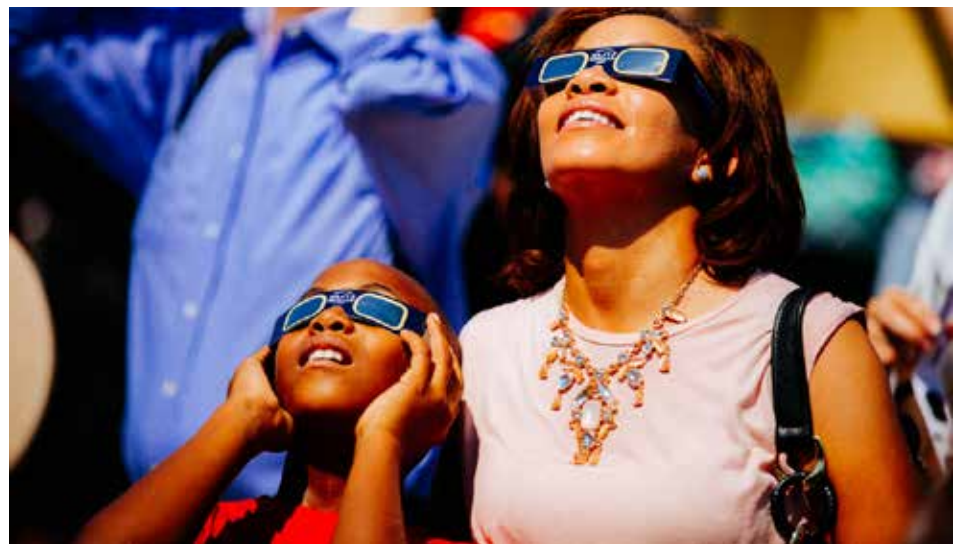
Community Center

The downtown Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Community Center offers year-round programs and activities for people of all ages with special emphasis on programming for adults, age 50 and above.

- Obtained KultureCity certification as Sensory Inclusive Venue.
- Added new sound system to the Center.
- Started new classes including weekly Open Gym for Preschoolers (third quarter), and Drumming and Irish Dance which achieved the maximum attendance.
- Reached out to community to promote Center offerings:
- Attended job fairs at high schools, the Amp Lab and Expos to help promote seasonal jobs with Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation.
- Previewed summer children's pro-

gramming and events to a gathering of Brightpoint program families at Memorial Park with approximately 100 in attendance.

- Hosted annual Volunteer Luncheon to recognize and award volunteer service to the Center for 2024. Sixty-seven volunteers attended. Guest speaker from Old Fort Baseball Co. discussed the history of baseball in Fort Wayne.
- Held Active Aging Week in fall to demonstrate that older adults can take positive steps forward for their health in a safe, welcoming and enjoyable setting. Programming resulted in over 400 event registrations—cornhole and shuffleboard being the most popular. Fifty-five attended the breakfast and health fair.
- Planned and hosted the annual Halloween Haunt (a Downtown Fort Wayne Fright Night event) and saw over 1600 people attend the free family event. Also held a Halloween themed car show in the Center parking lot.
- Presented annual Veterans' Breakfast and Bingo event to acknowledge veterans' contributions to our national security and underscore that all who have served—not only those who paid the ultimate price—have sacrificed and done their duty. A total of 119 attended the free breakfast with concert, flag presentation and bingo game.
- Prepared a one-day Santa's Workshop



Board of Park Commissioners

event in conjunction with the Downtown Fort Wayne Night of Lights on the Wednesday prior to Thanksgiving. Guest enjoyed a lighting ceremony, crafts, refreshments and shopping. Approximately 2,900 people attended.

Riverfront Fort Wayne

- The downtown Riverfront, and especially Promenade Park and the Park Foundation Pavilion remain popular downtown attractions.
- Held first annual Karaoke Jam Night in December seeing a relatively small but lively response. It was created to support the new café tenant, Teds snack + bar to drive business during the slow season at Promenade Park.
- Continued Be Your Own Artist quarterly program.
- Added a new event to our monthly Second Sunday lineup at Promenade. Kickboxing with 9Round started well with approximately 30 people in attendance. It will be tough to add too many more to the crowd as the space needed for the class absorbs most of the Park Foundation Pavilion. Continued monthly Yoga on the Riverfront and the Sunday Heritage Concert Series on Second Sundays with normal crowds.
- Rented Park Foundation Pavilion at Promenade which while slow in winter, reflected the adaptability of the venue. Events include weddings, parties and community events.
- Presented a new program called the “Green Thumb Garden Tour.” This event drew close to 200 people to the Park Foundation Pavilion for workshops on gardening, landscaping, plants and much more. Local vendors sold plants and seeds to get people ready for Spring planting. A plant walk gave away close to 100 different type of plants donated to the event. The City of Fort Wayne Utilities Department attended to talk about the different opportunities they have for grants and other programs to assist in urban gardening.

- Hosted annual family-friendly events such as the third annual “Spring Celebration” with 250 attending, the popular “Paint with Your Pup” activity with 41 dogs and their owners attending, “Muddy River Concert Series” featuring local live bands, and food and drinks from Teds snack + bar and “Dance Promenade: Street Style break dance” classes for all ages.
- Partnered with the Sweet Breeze Canal Boat for an Enchanted River Excursion: Princess Party on the St. Marys River. Sweet Breeze crew hired a princess, and Riverfront staff prepared a craft.
- Nearly doubled the team entries for “The Fort Wayne Dragon Boat Races” over 2023 with 18 teams participating, including teams from Cleveland, OH and Louisville, KY. The Friday evening opening ceremonies were canceled due to stormy weather, but the races happened without issues on Saturday. The winning team was the Cleveland Dragon Boat Association Cleveland Hydranamics (01:13:956 seconds), followed by Don Halls/Buster Astros (01:14:311), and third place went to Schambaugh and Son (01:14:638). Approximately 3,000 people attended on Saturday.

Headwaters Park

Operated the Headwaters Park Ice Rink for the first season mid-November 2023

to end of February 2024, responding as needed as the weather fluctuated. There were five unplanned closures this season.

- » 2023-2024 Attendance 21,366
 - » 2023-2024 Admission \$127,952
 - » 2023-2024 Punch Pass sales \$5,050
 - » 2023-2024 Skate Rental \$55,984
- Debuted new programming at Headwaters Park Ice Rink in January. “Skate it Off”, a celebration of Taylor Swift and her music saw close to 200 participants. “Frosty Flow” featured yoga on ice with a popular local instructor. With single digit temperatures, this unique event brought out nine of the 15 registered participants. “Dancing Through the Decades” treated skaters to a cross generational music playlist. These special events augmented regular operational hours and saw increased attendance.
 - Added “John Crawford Dollar Days” at the ice rink honoring long time City councilman and physician and featuring reduced admission and skate rental. This program proved to be a big hit, drawing an average of 100 or more skaters every Thursday in February. The donation from the Crawford family and the revenue generated through concessions from the influx of skaters kept margins healthy, generated good will and allowed more opportunities for low-cost recreation.



Salomon Farm Park

Salomon Farm Park continued to provide a unique farm experience as one of the City's most prominent parks.

- Two staff members captured awards during the annual employee meeting. Salomon Supervisor Larry Hicks and Program Coordinator DeAnna Harris were both honored with the Employee of the Year award for their outstanding contributions during the 2023 season.
- Transitioned staff positions into the regular part-time category: Animal Care Coordinator and a Maintenance Technician. Given that Salomon Farm Park operates year-round and maintains animals throughout the year, both of these roles will prove to be highly beneficial to the park's ongoing operations. Bethanie Shipman has transitioned into the regular part-time role of Animal Coordinator, while Nick Ventruella has assumed the maintenance position.
- Produced a promotional video to highlight Salomon Farm as a rental venue.
- Welcomed two new animal residents—male Valais Blacknose Sheep, London and Lucky. Known as the cutest sheep in the world, this breed originates from Switzerland and is still quite rare in the United States. Staff sought out these sheep for their unique appearance, friendliness and appeal. They will play a significant role in upcoming animal programming, during Farm Camp and year-round activities. Mayor Sharon Tucker welcomed them to Salomon Farm Park in August. Eight Meet-and-Greet sessions offering community members 30 minutes in the pen with the lambs, to pet them, take photos and feed them sold out. This prompted adding eight more sessions. All but three of these additional sessions also sold out.
- Hosted the annual two-day "Fall Harvest Festival." It featured farm animals, wagon rides, a children's maze, barrel train rides, antique farm equipment demonstrations, a tractor parade, a farmers' market, pony rides and more!

- Expanded the U-Pick Flower operation to include the west six-acre field. The front field was also planted. The U-pick hours were Wednesdays and Fridays from 4:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m., and Saturdays from 11:00 a.m.- 7:00 p.m.
- Held the annual "Handmade Home-made Sale" which invites local vendors to sell baked goods, crafts, personal care products and other handmade or homegrown items. Attendance reached 555 patrons this year, a 55-person increase from 2023. Vendors filled both the Old Barn and the Wolf Family Learning Center.
- Introduced two baby goats, who participated in goat yoga. These goats were purchased through a generous donation from the Fort Wayne Anthony Wayne Lions Club.
- Operated the Farmin' Fun Day Camp for six weeks in June and July. The camp integrates hands-on farming with gardening, animal care, games and nature exploration. 2024 enrollment reached 1,000 youth with a total daily attendance of 5,250. Most sessions sold out.
- Hosted two Dinners in the Flower Garden, accommodating up to 50 people. Staff moved the dinners to the North Flower Garden. Registered guests totaled 89.

Franke Park Day Camp

- Operated for six weeks in June and July. The popular camp in its 77th year continues a strong emphasis on nature education and basic camping skills.
- 2024 enrollment reached 1,561 individual youth, with a total daily attendance of 8,293.

Johnny Appleseed Campground

- Opened for the season May to early November.
- Added four new RV sites.



Sweet Breeze Canal Boat

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

- Officially launched for the season in May, and operated into October.
- Sweet Breeze is operating on a reduced general public tour schedule compared to previous years. Two tours on Saturday and two on Sunday compared to four tours each day. Staff is re-evaluating the tour schedule and planning to try new strategies to gauge interest and understand why sales are lower. Specialty tours, however, seem to be doing well.
- Offered 25 field trips to local schools, four more than in previous years. Per our operating agreement with Friends of the Rivers, the owner of the canal boat, trips are subsidized and only cost the schools \$5 per child with three teachers attending for free. These trips have been extremely popular and Friends of the Rivers agreed to subsidize the additional tours allowing staff to pull from a waitlist.
- Offered reduced admission tours in conjunction with the annual Friends of the Rivers Sweet Breeze Fest. The fourteen tours at \$5 per person sold out quickly over the course of two days.

Board of Park Commissioners

Lindenwood Nature Preserve

- Installed a newly purchased fire pit. This addition will prove highly beneficial to both staff and guests, offering a more permanent alternative to a traditional brick ring. For safety purposes, the fire ring at Lindenwood is designated for Lindenwood programming and is accessible to the public only when staff are present.
- Lindenwood held its annual Invasive Removal Day in October in partnership with the Indiana Invasive Society. Twelve volunteers participated.
- Lindenwood Nature Preserve's annual Feather Fest featured educational interactions with birds from Soarin' Hawk Raptor Rehabilitation, live music by Sam Dell, kids' crafts and activities, hiking and participation from partner organizations such as Little River Wetlands Project and Three Rivers Birding. The free event drew 225 attendees, about 75 fewer than in 2023.

Hurshstown Reservoir

- Opened for the season in May and operated into mid-October.
- Collaborated with Risk Management to reassess the policy to not allow electric wheelchairs around the access road at Hurshstown Reservoir. This rule, which had been in place for many years, required review. Following a risk assessment, it was decided that electric wheelchairs will now be permitted to travel around the access road, similar to walkers and bikers.

River Camp

- Operated for one week at Shoaff Park Riverlodge aiming to expose children aged 8-12 to water activities, outdoor games, fishing, science experiments, canoeing and kayaking, hiking, river clean-up and river safety.
- River Camp sold out with 40 children enrolled and 23 children on the wait-list. The camp which began in 2017 continues to be very successful.

Golf

- Operated beginning in mid-March until mid-November. An overabundance of rain in April hampered play at all three golf courses as well as use of the driving ranges at McMillen and Shoaff. The course at Foster Park was played "as is" with temporary tees and greens as a result of the ongoing work on the Deep Rock Sewer Tunnel, known as the Three Rivers Protection and Overflow Reduction (3RPORT).
- Added 15 new golf carts to the fleet at Foster Park Golf Course.
- Hosted a First Tee Skills Challenge at McMillen Golf Course in May for elementary kids as part of a state-wide competition. Seven schools (62 participants) participated.
- Removed 48 geese from the Mad Anthony Par III in hopes to control the population that was increasing and causing hazards on the golf course.
- Continued relationship with Parkview Sports Management as sponsor of the Junior and Pee Wee Golf Tour.
- Closed all three golf courses the day after Veterans Day. A number of veterans took advantage of the free greens fee special on the holiday.

Pools

- Opened and operated the pools June to early August for seven days a week with a full staff for the first time in several years, approaching the schedule that was in place before the COVID 19 pandemic.
- Hosted the annual Dog Swim for dog park members on the day after the pools closed to the public, which was well attended.

Community Outreach

- Hired Supervisor of Community Outreach Neil Miller in March. Primary tasks are to oversee the Park & Play program, activate McKinnie Commons Park and coordinate with outside organizations for many other events.

- Generated new connections and experiences with a Baseball Skills Workshop for registered youth with partners the Fort Wayne TinCaps, Parkview Sports Medicine and baseball and softball players from The University of St. Francis and Indiana Tech; and a Basketball Skills Contest in collaboration with the Boys and Girls Club and the Optimist Club with close to 50 participants and 150 supporters.
- Operated the "Park and Play" program for second year in June and July. The program visited eight parks weekly, and included community collaborators during "Funtastic Fridays." Total attendance for the summer equaled 1,273.
- Added "McKinnie Commons Connections" events in June and July inviting community organizations, vendors and live entertainment to McKinnie Commons Park to highlight community resources, health, education and culture.
- Participated in Easterseals ARC of Northeast Indiana disabilities training for staff working with children. Lessons included Autism Awareness, Empathy Training, team-building skills and question-and-answer sessions.
- Joined Fort Wayne Futsal Club to put on a Futsal workshop with Demarcus Beasley at Packard Park. The event had about 100 attendees including youth from Weisser and McMillen Centers, Bridge of Grace Ministries, as well as many coming from neighboring homes.
- Partnered with the local branch of the National Pan-Hellenic Council to present the Unity Lighting at McKinnie Commons. Activities included live entertainment, giveaways and speeches from community leaders.



Marketing & Development

2024 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 2,459 evaluations received in 2024 were analyzed and reported back to staff. Our 2024 overall Department Customer Service Rating was 96% (the goal is 90%).

Additional digital input from the public in 2024 includes: 116 pavilion evaluations, 51 online general surveys, 179 Cooper Center interest surveys, 13 Foellinger Theatre surveys and 19 Riverfront Rental surveys. By using an online format in certain program areas, it allows for various users to engage with us and share their input at their convenience.

Complaint processing continues to be a priority. In 2024, 272 total complaints were processed. 92% of the complaints were processed within one business day.

Websites

New customer service features were added continuously to the seven main Department websites, including the development of 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, continuing to add 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 number of web hits for 2024 was 1,721,250. The total web hits continue to increase yearly and represents an 8% increase from 2023. The top five web links for 2024 were (www.fortwayneparks.org): Headwaters Park, Salomon Farm Park, Trails, Park Page Links and Current Brochures.

Early in 2024, a total redesign of the Foellinger Theatre website (foellingertheatre.org) was started with the City's IT Consultant Company (Resultant). The redesign was complete in March and customers and promoters appreciated this streamlined redesign.

In 2024 the City announced a new online platform called Engage Fort Wayne. The Marketing Team, with assistance from other areas of the Department, has designed 25 pages to date that allow citizens to access specific information about projects and give their input. For example, all 10 new park playgrounds are featured on Engage Fort Wayne and six new park playgrounds scheduled to be refreshed in 2025 will be added in the near future.

Additional Marketing Efforts

Thirty-four blogs were created in-house and posted on the web. Some were also shared with the Department social media channels. The addition of blogs to the mix allows us to reach other target markets of interest.

The Marketing Team started working on a Media Room that will be completed in 2025. We are thankful for the support of the Maintenance Team to help create the new Media Room that will be used for podcasts, interviews and small media events.

Promotion & Graphic Design

The Marketing Division uses a variety of methods to promote programs and events, communicate ideas and convey messages. It also produces many program essentials such as tickets, t-shirts, swag, treat bags, etc. Some of these marketing projects in 2024 included:

2,459
EVALUATIONS ANALYZED

96%
OVERALL CUSTOMER SERVICE RATING

1,721,250
WEBSITE VISITS

41
21ALIVE "WALK IN THE PARK" SEGMENTS AIRED

482
PROMOTIONAL PIECES & PROGRAM PROPS DESIGNED IN-HOUSE

139,897
SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS

53
E-NEWSLETTERS PRODUCED AND DISTRIBUTED

9
NEWS CONFERENCES HELD

\$2,173,308
RECEIVED IN MONETARY GIFTS & DONATIONS

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Four Fun Times catalogs; 121 flyers and 27 posters; 44 postcards; 30 electronic sign/web slides; 119 social media post graphics; 32 tickets/passes/punch cards; 58 signs; 24 brochures; 15 print ads; nine banners; six e-Newsletters and two electronic billboards.

Branding and wayfinding signage were produced for Foellinger Theatre.

The travel program was re-instated with new trips beginning in 2025. The marketing team prepared the kick-off campaign in late 2024 with flyers, social media posts, an e-newsletter, a podcast, web pages on our website and copy in the spring 2025 Fun Times brochure.

Marketing/branding efforts at the Headwaters Ice Rink included wayfinding signage, social media post graphics, website updates, postcards, Fun Times entries and a concession trailer wrap.

The marketing team worked with registration staff to create the layout and design of the new Parks and Recreation mobile

app and followed up with a social media campaign to introduce it. The Fort Wayne Parks app has over 1,300 users and will continue to be promoted in 2025.

Marketing/branding efforts for the Sweet Breeze riverboat cruises included a season promotion postcard, dock signage, website and social media post graphics for every specialty trip, and stickers for young cruisers.

Three major fundraising appeals were conducted in 2024, two for the Botanical Conservatory and one for the Department. The goal is to target past and potential donors to increase visibility and raise additional funds to assist with programming.

In an effort to accommodate Spanish speaking individuals, several promotional items were produced in Spanish including the Lindenwood Trail Guide and hike flyers and several programs flyers for Jennings Recreation Center. The translated materials are available on the website and at select locations.

Social Media/Media Relations

The Department maintains 15 individual Facebook pages, six Instagram and four "X" (formerly Twitter) accounts with over 139,897 total followers.

The following news conferences were held in 2024:

- » Arbor Day
- » Neighborhood Playground Projects
- » Senior Games
- » Brewer Park ground breaking
- » Active Aging Week
- » Lakeside Sculpture + Shoaff
- » Packard Park ground breaking
- » New Franke Park Entrance ribbon cutting
- » McMillen Family Pavilion in Franke Park

Local ABC television affiliate WPTA/21 Alive continued to extend a weekly opportunity to showcase recreation and programming from Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation in a segment called Walk in the Park. In 2024, 41 segments were scheduled and broadcast on the 4p.m. newscast. These were also featured online and via social media. This offers key staff opportunities to promote their events and programs.

- WPTA also offered two complementary interviews on their weekday 3:00 p.m. lifestyle show called Insight.
- Local CBS affiliate WANE 15 featured Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation staffers in five Positively Fort Wayne segments.
- WANE 15 also featured four free Living Local 15 lifestyle show segments with Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation staff for large events.

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 2024, 53 individual e-newsletters were distributed (38% open rate). Graphic creation and updates to already created graphics is a regular part of producing the e-newsletters and e-blasts.

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CONNECTED**

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 FORT WAYNE
PARKS AND
RECREATION

Parks Podcasts

Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation highlighted staff, programming and other aspects of the department in eight Parks Podcasts in 2024.

- » Winterval 2024
- » Park Jobs
- » 2024 Comprehensive Plan
- » An App for Parks
- » Foellinger Theatre is Rocking in 2024
- » U-Pick 2024
- » Raise a Glass to Fall
- » Lindenwood Nature Preserve

Podcasts continue to grow. According to the Sounds Profitable report, 45% of people say they are listening to more podcasts today than they were a year ago, while only 17% report listening less.

In-house Video Production/Editing

Over 50 videos were produced and/or edited in 2024 covering a wide variety of programs and events. This is a very successful model for us. The videos were used in the following ways:

- » 19 for social media purposes
- » 21 for Walk in the Park/Living Local 15 (used for broadcast TV)
- » 3 for website/YouTube
- » 2 for IPRA Awards submissions
- » 3 were used to publicize events
- » 8 to assist with Salomon training

Fundraising and Sponsorships

In 2024, 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 Community Center, the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory, Lifetime Sports Academy, Franke Park Day Camp, Salomon Farm Park, Sweet Breeze Canal Boat and many more. 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 our citizens..

We continued to see an increase in online donations in 2024. Gifts can be sent through our online donation site at fortwayneparks.org/donate. Program participants can also choose to donate during the online registration process. We thank all who have chosen to donate. Your support furthers our mission and 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, Headwaters Alliance, AWS Foundation, Magee O'Connor Foundation, English Bonter Mitchell Foundation, NIPSCO, and the Community Foundation of Fort Wayne. All of these donations and grant dollars are being used to make important improvements to our facilities and programs.

In addition, dozens of area businesses supported Parks and Recreation events through sponsorships, and numerous individuals donated as memorials in honor of their friends and family. Donations and grants for the entire year of 2024 totaled \$2,173,308.90.

Many thanks also to our Fort Wayne media friends who helped us spread the word about our events through media sponsorships. Our 2024 television sponsors were FOX Fort Wayne, PBS Fort Wayne, WANE 15, and 21Alive, and 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.

The success of 2024 would not have been possible without the generous support of our donors and sponsors. The Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Department thanks everyone who has contributed to the positive impact we have made in our community this year.

Top 50 Donors – 2024

- » Fort Wayne Park Foundation
- » Foellinger Foundation
- » Headwaters Alliance
- » Kreager Park Endowment
- » Land and Water Conservation
- » Paul E. Shaffer Family Foundation
- » Mark and Sarah Music / Ruoff Mortgage
- » AWS Foundation
- » English Bonter Mitchell Foundation
- » Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne
- » PNC Charitable Trust
- » Arts United of Greater Fort Wayne
- » Fort Wayne Pickleball
- » Magee-O'Connor Foundation
- » Meijer
- » Needham & Associates, Inc.
- » Olive B. Cole Foundation
- » Zollner Foundation
- » Don & Virginia Wolf Charitable Foundation
- » Edward M. Wilson Foundation
- » Marvin and Marva Komisarow Foundation
- » Indiana Donor Network
- » NIPSCO
- » John Park
- » Mari Swaidner
- » Park Place II, LLC
- » Parkview Sports Medicine
- » Community Center Foundation
- » The Grand Marquis of Fort Wayne
- » Design Collaborative
- » Anderson + Bohlander, LLC
- » Forest Park Blvd Neighborhood
- » James Noel
- » Kathleen Menefee/Stella Eber Trust
- » Kathy and Dennis Fredrick
- » Melanie Ferraro-Gillum
- » Philip Rhinehart
- » Sandra Vohs
- » Four D Endowment Fund
- » AARP
- » Aging & In-Home Services of Northeast Indiana Inc.
- » Fort Wayne Metals
- » T-E Corp
- » Evergreen Village at Fort Wayne
- » AETNA
- » Parkview Health
- » Premier Bank Foundation
- » Silver Birch Living LLC
- » Susan Doell

Park Maintenance

2024 Accomplishments

1,726

WORK ORDERS COMPLETED
BY FACILITIES/TRADES

60

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT
PROJECTS COMPLETED

11,400

HOURS OF MOWING,
SPIN TRIMMING,
SURFACE BLOWING

2,176

VOLUNTEER HOURS LOGGED
IN THE GREENHOUSE,
PARKS AND RIVERS

79

SAFETY TRAINING CLASSES
HELD FOR STAFF

2,949

PAVILION RENTALS FOR
WHICH CREWS PROVIDED
SET-UP AND CLEAN UP

26,000

POUNDS OF FERTILIZER
APPLIED TO PARKS
AND ATHLETIC FIELDS

793

HOURS OF CLEANUP ALONG
THE RIVERGREENWAY

2024 brought some new faces and some promotions in the Parks Maintenance Department.

Rob Schenkel was promoted from working leader in grounds to Supervisor of Grounds and Heavy Equipment. Chris Day was hired as a Maintenance Technician. Jason Price was hired as a Relief in Grounds Division, Trevor Prince, Keith VanHorn and Jacob Hatfield were hired as Grounds Equipment Operators. Derik Sands was hired to work in our heavy equipment division. Jesse Sayre moved from Riverfront to the Maintenance division.

The following reports outline the accomplishments for Facilities, Trades, Grounds and Heavy Equipment, MainTrac and Volunteers, Garage and Operations Support, Project Administration, and Safety for 2024:

Facilities, Trades, and Grounds

The goal of the Facilities/Trades and Grounds 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/disposes of litter from all park sites. Facilities also assist the Grounds Management Division in the winter with snow removal at our rental pavilions, and many of our other facilities throughout the department. The Facility Staff were busy in 2024 with 2,949 pavilion rentals. This is up 212 rentals from 2023.

Facility staff also conduct annual cleanings in all recreation centers which are; McMillen, Weisser, Jennings, Cooper and the down-

town Community Center. These deep-cleanings are designed to thoroughly refresh areas of the buildings that do not get attention on a daily or weekly basis—such as ceiling joists, light lenses and HVAC vents, just to mention a few. Both Weisser and Jennings Centers and the Franke Park Day Camp building also get a fresh coat of wax on specific floors.

The Trades staff makes repairs throughout the Parks Department. The maintenance technicians are in charge of ensuring 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 good working condition. The M.T.s perform pre-season start up procedures at both Northside Park and McMillen Park pools, eight splashpads and the water rill at Promenade Park. For both the pools and splashpads, all electrical and plumbing components are checked and made ready for the season. Each fall, these processes are reversed so that facilities and services can be winterized for the winter time shut down.

In 2024 the Maintenance Technicians received 1,726 specific requests for the year. These were broken down into the following categories:

- » 234 plumbing repairs
- » 232 electrical repairs
- » 223 building repairs
- » 180 vandalism repairs
- » 170 lock/key repairs
- » 167 play equipment repairs
- » 121 light repairs
- » 94 painting projects
- » 86 alarm repairs
- » 86 carpentry projects
- » 72 sign repairs
- » 61 HVAC calls



In 2024, 10 new playgrounds were replaced in different locations. The maintenance technicians worked in conjunction with the grounds and heavy equipment departments to remove the existing structures and prep the area for new equipment. The M.T.s also took part in the west wing renovation at the administration office at Northside Park. This included removing the existing carpet, installing new electrical throughout, painting all walls and doors and refreshing a new kitchenette area.

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

Heavy Equipment along with the Grounds Operations used over 120 tons of bulk salt and applied over four tons of bagged salt on drives, lots, 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. They, along with the Grounds Operations crews performed 972 hours of related snow removal tasks

at various parks and facility locations and River Greenway paths.

Heavy Equipment Operations performed 1,202 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 383 hours of tasks and projects related to hauling, spreading stone, filling holes, grading lots, drives and boat launches at Salomon Farm, Lawton Park, Franke Park, Hurshtown Reservoir, Foellinger Theater, Johnny Appleseed Park, Shoaff Park and Guldlin Park.

Heavy Equipment and Grounds operations performed a combined 1,912 hours of hauling and debris removal tasks, which includes hauling various products such as wood chips, wood fiber mulch for playgrounds, ball diamond material, stone, sand, topsoil, compost, debris piles and debris from the playground removals.

Grounds crews performed 11,400 hours of mowing, spin trimming and blowing off hard surfaces. They maintain nearly 1,000 acres of park grounds on a six to eight-day mowing cycle. The team performed 627 hours of litter pick up in parks, 965 hours of limb cleanup, 1,470 hours of trash removal services, 3,621 hours of combined tasks related to the maintenance of general turf areas, athletics fields and ball diamond maintenance. This includes spraying, fertilizing, hydro mulch-

ing, seeding, watering, mowing, aerating, working and lining ball diamonds and athletic fields, including layout and set up of athletic fields per event scheduling. The team applied nearly 26,000 pounds of fertilizer to small parks, larger general park areas and athletic fields; Grounds crews also performed 793 hours related to tasks involving trimming and clearing overgrowth along the River Greenway, and stump removal at various parks.

Crews performed 498 hours of transportation duties. This includes transporting/hauling equipment to and from all golf courses each winter and spring, as well as, on an as-needed basis for maintenance and repair services. The crew also transported and hauled equipment to and from the Johnny Appleseed Campground, Hurshtown Reservoir, Lindenwood Nature Center and Salomon Farm. 1,802 hours were spent repairing, maintaining, and servicing equipment which includes 16-foot large area mowers, 60 and 72-inch zero turn mowers, chainsaws, spin trimmers, push mowers and related parts. The total for the setup, repair and general maintenance on our portable irrigation systems came out to 507 hours.

The Maintenance Supervisor 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, con-

Board of Park Commissioners

tract cleaning, as well as helping to cover the 281 after hours calls.

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, day camps, Conservatory events, press conferences and the Botanical Conservatory showcase changes. Stock inventory items included approximately 2,102 lines of high usage and critical repair parts and supplies. The end of the year stock value was \$138,134.69.

2024 was a busy year maintenance-wise due to the growth of the Headwaters and Promenade staff and a constant and long mowing season. The cost of parts and materials was still high, but with careful spending and prioritizing of repairs, the team was able to finish out the year without going over budget. The garage and storeroom were fully staffed for the entire year. With a full-time mechanic working on preventative maintenance, the garage was able to keep up on basic vehicle services including brake work, oil changes, transmission services and tire replacements. Over 1,900 automotive and equipment maintenance work orders were completed on equipment and vehicles in the department. Of those, 417 were preventative maintenance work orders.

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

- » Orvis remote control mower
- » JLG scissor lift
- » 2 Chevrolet Silverado pick-up trucks
- » Ford F350 dump truck
- » Ventrac tractor with a ball diamond grooming attachment
- » 4 Tenant floor machines
- » 4 Ford F250 utility trucks
- » Ford step van
- » Air-Tow utility trailer
- » Chevrolet Equinox
- » John Deere Gator with a snow plow
- » The first batch of new Motorola handheld radios to replace the department's aging models.
- » The first digital fuel management computer was installed at the Lawton fuel pumps to modernize how the department tracks vehicle and fuel usage. The trial run was a success and 6 more units have been purchased to update all Parks fueling locations.

Several vehicles and pieces of equipment were sent out for major repairs by dealers or manufactures. One of the forestry bucket trucks had an issue with the boom leaking down which was repaired by Hoff Mobile Bucket Truck Repair. A Ford F250 route truck was damaged in an accident caused by a truck

driver running a red light. Body and frame repairs were performed by the Bob Thomas Ford body shop. A Ford F450 dump truck required a replacement engine to be installed due to a major failure for the valve train and a Toro 5910 was transported to Kenney Machinery late last year for hydraulic issues and returned for the 2024 mowing season.

MainTrac and Volunteer Coordinator

The MainTrac system logged 84,738 entries in 2024 and 997, 311 calls. Lynda Heavrin, Eric Ummel, and KayeC Jones procured numerous volunteer opportunities for a total of 2,176 volunteer hours for the Parks Department.

The forestry division started using a new 311 program this year. It started out with a few glitches, but after working with their IT division, it seems to be running a lot smoother.

Six Maintenance Technicians and the MainTrac System Coordinator volunteered at Camp Red Cedar in June. The team built a ramp onto the dock so that the beach is ADA accessible, pulled out posts that were buried in concrete in the sand, removed a tree from a walking path at the camp and also tore apart some old rotting compost bins.

The Botanical Conservatory, Community



Center, Riparian Division and Maintenance Division acquired a new volunteer software program called Galaxy Digital. With this program, people that want to volunteer anywhere in the parks system can answer a few simple questions and be directed towards volunteer jobs they are qualified to do. They can also sign in and out at their job sites with a QR code and fill out volunteer waivers the same way. The program will also compile data and create graphs on which areas acquire the most volunteers and how much time was spent doing certain tasks.

Parks Safety Training

The Safety Training Manager position allows for training of all full-time and seasonal employees in-house. The safety training manager is responsible for training of General Safety, First Aid, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation and Automatic External Defibrillation, Stormwater Pollution 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 2024, 79 training classes were held including 18 CPR/FA classes which certified 138 full-time, part-time and seasonal employees. The remaining 61 training session topics ranged from General Safety to Accident/Injury reporting, Bloodborne

Pathogens, Emergency Action Plans, Chainsaw Safety and Narcan Use. OSHA required Forklift training to be completed. Anthony DeVido obtained a National Worker Protection Standard trainer certification and completed EPA-required training. He also earned a CPR/FA Trainer re-certification from the American Heart Association.

Annual swimming pool inspections were completed with only minor corrections needed. The review of Safety SOPs was completed. Job site inspections were completed at 125 locations. All indoor rental pavilions were outfitted with first aid kits for patron use.

In 2024, 24 employees reported injuries resulting in approximately 200 restricted work days and 17 lost work days. The total cost of the injuries to the City of Fort Wayne was approximately \$26,700. Parks' Department reported 17 vehicle crashes in 2024. Ten of the crashes were ruled as preventable. Two lost/restricted time injuries were associated with these crashes.

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 Manager, two Project Coordinators, and one Engineering Intern.

The Project Administration Department welcomed Aaron Kistler, a student at Ivy Tech Community College, to the team in 2024 as project intern. Troy Bates, Brian Fiedler and Dave Weadock attended the IPRA State Conference in French Lick, IN. While there, they attended multiple continuing education seminars, met with vendors, and partook in networking opportunities. Multiple webinars and virtual learning experiences occurred throughout

the year, along with visits with vendors. The department staff attended product learning sessions.

The department provided many utility-locate services for construction, landscape and buildings and grounds projects.

A list of completed Parks and Recreation Projects for 2024 is on page 22.



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2024 Completed CIP Projects

- Boone Park Playground Equipment Replacement
- Boone Park Playground Surfacing
- Botanical Conservatory Linkway Interior & Electrical Design
- Botanical Conservatory North Linkway Interior Improvements
- Botanical Conservatory Roof Glass Replacement 2024
- Botanical Conservatory Tropical Path Improvements
- Community Center Art Room Renovation
- Community Center HVAC Control Upgrades
- Community Center Shuffleboard Courts Refinish
- Foellinger Theatre Concrete Terrace Replacement
- Foellinger Theatre Electrical Additions
- Foellinger Theatre Lighting Schematic Design
- Foellinger Theatre Rear Sidewalk Handrails
- Foellinger Theatre Stage Deck Improvements
- Foellinger Theatre Ticketing Office Exterior Improvements
- Foster Park Pavilion #1 Ceiling Painting
- Foster Park Playground Equipment Replacement
- Foster Park West Soccer Field Irrigation Design
- Franke Park Pond Pavilion Sidewalk Leveling
- Freimann Square Pumphouse Door & Fence Improvements
- Gren Park Playground Equipment Replacement
- Hanna Homestead Fence Removal
- Hanna Homestead Sidewalk Repair
- Headwaters Park Pavilion Area Concrete Renovation
- Headwaters Park Pedestrian Bridge Renovation
- Irish Town Plaza Construction
- Irish Town Plaza Design
- Jennings Center Window and Door Sealing
- Johnny Appleseed Park Campground Improvements
- Kettler Park Playground Equipment Replacement
- Kreager Park Playground Equipment Replacement
- Kreager Park Soccer Field Irrigation Design
- Kreager Park Taylor's Dream Communication Board
- Lakeside & Shoaff Park Sculptures
- Lawton Park Playground Drinking Fountain
- Lawton Park Playground Equipment Replacement
- Lawton Park Softball Fence Repairs
- Lions Park Pavilion Windows Replacement
- McMillen Park Playground Equipment Replacement
- Multiple Parks Ecosystem Management
- Northside Park Playground Equipment Replacement
- Parks System Comprehensive Plan
- Rea Building Garage Door Addition
- Salomon Farm Barn Entry Doors Replacement
- Salomon Farm Barn Painting
- Salomon Farm Restroom Building Design Services
- Salomon Farm Restroom Building Winterization Construction
- Salomon Farm South Field Watering System
- Shoaff Park Drainage Improvements
- Swinney Park Tennis Courts Recoating
- Tillman Park Playground Equipment Replacement
- Tillman Park Playground Sidewalk Addition
- Turpie Playlot Playground Equipment Replacement
- Various Parks 2024 Paving Projects
- Various Parks Entry Identification Signs
- Various Parks Monument Restoration
- Various Parks Pavement Renovation Projects 2024
- Various Parks Playground Border
- Various Parks Safety Surfacing
- Various Parks Signage Projects
- Weisser Park Basketball Fence Repairs

Park Planning

2024 Accomplishments

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.

The first phase of the Franke Renaissance Project was completed late in the year, with celebratory ribbon-cuttings taking place in November (Goshen Road entrance and Spy Run Creek Restoration) and December (the McMillen Family Pavilion). Improvements to our largest park include a new grand entrance, bridge over Spy Run Creek, pedestrian trails linking surrounding neighborhoods to the park and existing trail system, creek enhancements, a new 400-person rentable pavilion, an open-air shelter, dedicated parking and landscape enhancements. This project is the culmination of years of master planning, design and construction, truly epitomizing Parks' efforts of vision, public engagement and investment.

Through the services of Design Workshop and combined efforts of Parks staff, the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Park System Comprehensive Plan was completed, delivered and adopted by the Board of Park Commissioners in summer of 2024. The plan offers an updated inventory and analysis on the current state of the parks system, consideration of information gathered through robust community engagement, an outline of recommendations based upon five newly-identified principles (equity, access, quality, community and environment) and an action plan illustrating a path towards plan implementation. These principles and actions will be reflected in park projects, programs and planning efforts.

In 2023, Community Development engaged several neighborhoods just south of down-

town in a variety of planning efforts; one product of these efforts was the idea of a new district, dubbed Irishtown. It was determined that an anchor to this district would be a new park space, to be located at the intersection of Taylor and Fairfield (in the area of recently vacated and demolished streets). Design efforts began in that department, and were turned over to Parks to complete planning and construction. Irishtown Plaza construction was completed in late summer of 2024; the space features a seating area, landscape improvements and lighting.

In an effort to improve accessibility at the Botanical Conservatory, the AWS Foundation granted funds for a Universal Accessibility Assessment. Skulski Consulting was awarded a contract to complete inventory and analysis of the physical facility, programs and communications, identify necessary improvements and to provide an action plan for implementation. The final assessment and report are expected in early 2025.

One project at the Conservatory that needed immediate attention was a redesign and construction of a portion of the tropical house pathway. Approximately 85' of the pathway was redesigned for accessibility and improved safety, and a new path was constructed, utilizing new concrete curbing and slab, reuse of existing pavers and new handrails.

Efforts to restore existing sculptures and monuments within the parks continued, with the Aqueduct Club's "Let's Go Swimmin'" monument receiving attention in 2024. Following masonry cleaning and repairs in late 2023, the bronze plaques were repaired and cleaned this year, completing restoration for the sculpture at Orff Park.

Through a partnership with the Public Art Commission, local artist Jim Merz was awarded a commission to complete sculptures to be installed at Lakeside and Shoaff Parks. Work was completed in late summer, with a press conference following.

129,714

PLANTS GROWN IN
LAWTON GREENHOUSE

18

NEW ROSE BUSHES
PLANTED AT LAKESIDE PARK

20,273

PLANT CONTAINERS SOLD AT
MOTHER'S DAY PLANT SALE

134

TONS OF LOGS
REMOVED FROM RIVERS

1,004

TREES PLANTED IN PARKS
AND ALONG STREETS

34

CONSECUTIVE YEARS
NAMED A TREE CITY USA
BY ARBOR FOUNDATION

16,546

SCFVA PLANTS DELIVERED
TO LOCAL SCHOOLS

100%

FORESTRY DIVISION'S 311
CALL CENTER EFFICIENCY

Board of Park Commissioners

After another transfer of project leadership back to Parks, design and construction documentation for Riverfront Phase IIB was completed. The project was bid in fall, with approvals moving through the proper channels late into the year. A final contract is anticipated in the first weeks of 2025, with construction to begin soon afterwards. This phase includes the left bank of the St. Marys River between the historic Wells St. bridge and Ewing St. bridge, public space at the northeast intersection of the Superior St. roundabout and public space between Harrison St. and Clinton St. immediately north of the river. The team continues to navigate challenges with permit conditions, specifically related to FEMA's no-rise requirements for work in the floodway. Currently, the team is working with the agencies towards a conditional letter of map revision (CLOMR) that will set the stage for additional planned improvements.

Planning and design for both Brewer Park and Packard Park was completed mid-year. Bidding took place soon after and construction began in fall for each project. These projects represent the first two realizations of the master planning process carried out by Parks' planning staff. Each plan was led and developed by a neighborhood steering committee, utilizing public engagement and input. Design consultants were hired to complete construction documentation, and funding

was secured for each through a variety of sources, including those identified and provided by the neighborhoods, and through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Completion of these park redevelopments is anticipated in mid-2025.

Work began in an effort to redesign the entrance to Foster Park, following the completion of the deep-rock tunnel drop shaft and consolidated sewer infrastructure by City Utilities. Following the release of an RFP early in the year, Earth Source Inc. was awarded the design contract. The project team, including City Utilities, is working towards completion of schematic design and early project estimating at the end of the year. Design and permitting is anticipated to be completed by fall 2025, with construction to begin by the end of the year.

Permits were received for the construction of a new pedestrian bridge over Spy Run Creek, south of Fourth Street at Lawton Park. This bridge will replace the failed trestle bridge in the same location, but will realign the pathway for better circulation and will provide a clear span over the stream. R.L. McCoy began demolition of the old bridge this fall, and construction will continue through the winter months. The new structure is anticipated to be completed by late spring 2025.

Following completion of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) by Utilities'

Sustainability Division, planning staff has begun work with an intradepartmental group focused on biodiversity and habitat creation. These efforts have been slow to gain momentum, but remain in focus. Project goals have been identified, and mapping efforts have begun. Parks' role is significant, as much of the city's natural space is owned and/or managed by the department.

A number of other instances of coordination with various city departments continued or began in 2024 as well. Park Planning members continue to monitor and communicate with City Utilities on the infrastructure improvements taking place in Foster Park. Meanwhile, the team is building a relationship with the newly formed Department of Neighborhoods, providing input and review of planning efforts in East Central and the near Northwest neighborhoods. Additional coordination is in progress with Utilities on the removal of a low-head dam in Spy Run Creek at Lawton Park, scheduled for demolition in early 2025. Planning has begun for a public space portion of the Treeline District, a private development that will begin taking shape immediately north of Promenade Park in late 2025.

Planning staff continues to serve on a number of local boards in an effort to represent and advocate for the department, including Fort Wayne Trails, the Allen Co. Soil and Water Conservation District,



the Public Art Commission, and Allen Co. CISMA.

A number of presentations were made to various public and private groups throughout the year, including a tour of Riverfront to the White River Technical Committee, Promenade Park to the University of St. Francis Biology Dept., Sweet Breeze Canal Boat tours, accessibility discussions with the Inclusion Institute, master plan presentations to various neighborhood associations and sustainability presentations at PFW's Climate Leadership Summit.

Staff was also able to advance professional development through a number of training and learning opportunities, including certification as an MS4 compliance inspector, completion of the Indiana University Executive Development Program; attendance at the High Line Network's ROOTED symposium in Detroit, ASLA's annual conference in Washington D.C., and the Great Lakes Sediment and Nutrient Reduction Program conference in Muskegon.

Finally, the Parks Department lost a strong ally and advocate as he took on a new opportunity with City Redevelopment. Alec Johnson left his position as Deputy Director of Planning and Development, and was replaced in-house by Chad Shaw. Additionally, the Planning Division welcomes Stacy Haviland as the new Superintendent of Planning, Development and Botanical Conservatory.

Landscape and Horticulture

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 to pastoral parklands with open vistas and mature tree canopies, it is always the goal to maintain this tradition of care, with available funding allocated for that purpose.

Sustainability efforts continued to expand this year as the parks department is now using all organic-based fertilizer products to maintain the turf at both Headwaters Park and Riverfront IIA. Other parks



that continue to be managed using organic-based fertilizers in 2024 were Promenade Park, Freimann Square, the Courthouse Green, the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Community Center, Main Street medians, Robert E. Meyer Park, the Foellinger Theatre, Franklin Park, Northside Park Pool, McMillen Park Pool, Memorial Park, Lakeside Park, Foster Park and the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory.

Some of 2024's landscape projects included a landscape renovation around the Lawton Park Cannon and the Lawton Park Maintenance office; the addition of climbing rose supports in Lakeside Park, the replacement of all rose signage in Lakeside Park, the installation of a dry riverbed at the Foellinger Theatre, upgrading the Robert E. Meyer Park irrigation system and the regrading of recreation space around the Promenade north dock.

The Great Tree Canopy Comeback (GTCC), supported through volunteer efforts and our partnership with Friends of the Parks of Allen County, was successful this year with a focus placed on both planting trees and removing invasive shrubs. Fifty shade trees were planted at Kreager Park. Volunteers also removed invasive shrubs along the St. Marys River in Historic Old Fort Park.

Shade Trees Nursery planted 203 trees in over 19 different parks. Twenty-three of these trees are Memorial Trees. Landscape staff has installed all memorial plaques following the planting of the trees.

Lakeside Park staff installed 18 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.

Over 375 volunteers spent approximately 730 work hours assisting landscape staff by spreading over 325 yards of mulch in Moody, Franke, Kettler, Jehl, Foster South, Camp Canine, Shoaff, and Reservoir Parks.

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

In 2024, the Lawton Park Greenhouse staff and volunteers grew a total of 129,714 plants (including bulbs and seeds). Floral displays throughout Fort Wayne featured 33,100 plants of 280 different varieties and 33,200 bulbs in the parks.

Board of Park Commissioners

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

Winter Show: 1,140 pots of flowering and foliage plants, and 2,680 pots of bulbs.

Butterfly Show: 2,325 pots of annual flowers and vines.

Summer Show: 4,290 including mums for the fall display.

Holiday Show: 3,820 pots.

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

The Conservatory Shop and Sales Garden had sales of 2,812 plants produced in the greenhouse and sold 3,047 pots of “used bulbs” from the spring display of which 681 plants were sold at the Home & Garden Show. Approximately 20,273 containers of plants were sold at the Mother’s Day Plant Sale. The few remaining plants were sold at the Conservatory Shop and Sales Garden or used for mixed herb and vegetable containers for the various centers.

The School Children’s Flower & Vegetable Association program began the year with 3,900 packets of seed sold to students. Landscape/Horticulture staff delivered 16,546 plants to 62 schools in April. Fifty volunteers and eight employees judged the shows at 62 schools. The City-Wide Blue-Ribbon Show held at the McMillen Community Center on September 14 had 291 entries from 186 students representing 44 schools.

Riparian Management

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.

River Maintenance & Management

The work barge removed over 134 tons (268,000 pounds) of logs and navigational hazards from the downtown rivers, and more than 2.65 tons (5,300 pounds) of debris and litter. River levels were dropped on December 2, which allowed crew members to scout the river bottom and plan for future navigational hazard removal work sites. Bridges were kept clear all year and any debris caused by storms was quickly removed.

This was the second year for the DNR implemented Idle Speed Zone law along the rivers. It begins at the Main Street bridge over the St. Marys River on the west side of the City and continues to the Columbia Avenue Bridge on the Maumee River (confluence) and the Tennessee Avenue Bridge on the St. Joseph River. Informational and dam warning buoys were strategically placed in and around the designated Idle Speed Zone and retrieved at the end of the season.

Dock Maintenance & Management

Docks were installed and removed successfully for the recreational season. Docks and ramps were kept clear from all debris, silt and litter continuously. Light maintenance was performed throughout the year.

Herbivory Management

The crew wrapped new at-risk trees throughout downtown to prevent damage from beavers and monitored and repaired previously wrapped trees throughout the year. A contractor provided geese trapping, which proved successful with the removal of 261 geese at Lawton Park, Swinney Park, Lakeside Park, Reservoir Park, Guldlin Park and McMillen Park Golf Course. The crew only added four nests with a total of 16 eggs due to river flooding.

Invasive Species Management

Maintained existing viewsheds and river access points including a substantial clearing at Headwaters Park East in which the crew removed approximately 29

tons (58,000 pounds) of undesirable plant species. An ecosystem maintenance contract aided in maintaining previously cleared honeysuckle sites in the following parks: Bloomingdale, Historic Old Fort Park, Headwaters Park, Promenade Park and Franke Park. Removed more than 66.12 tons (132,240 pounds) of invasive species was removed throughout the year.

Volunteer Program Management

In 2024, 227 volunteers logged 491 total hours, which represents approximately \$16,444 of volunteer labor. Volunteer events and general invasive removal work days were held at Headwaters Park, Spy Run Creek in Brookview neighborhood and Johnny Appleseed Park.

The Riparian crew collaborated with the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Community Center and Foellinger-Freimann Botanical-Conservatory to update volunteer management software which will greatly improve volunteer coordination and record-keeping.

Special River Events

The Fort Wayne Dragon Boat Races provided an opportunity to assist with the installation and removal of the dock extension for the South dock at Promenade to launch dragon boats into/haul from the river. The crew constructed floating fire pits for the opening ceremonies, which were canceled due to storms on Friday.

Safety & Training

The team continues to work toward the goal of improving general safety for daily operations. In 2024, the team collaborated with Risk Management to restart Boat Operator Meetings for better interdepartmental coordination between Risk Management, City Utilities, Flood Control, Police, Fire, Parks, Communications and DNR. The Supervisor acquired a CDL Class-A license and attended fork lift training to better assist operations of hauling and launching the barge and docks. Additional classes in 2024 include: Working On or Near Water, De-Escalation Training, Chainsaw and Chipper Training and numerous River Management Society’s Roundtable Discussions.

Forestry

Whether in parks or along streets, trees are an integral part of the City's character and infrastructure. Forestry strives to provide welcoming, safe and functioning public spaces. A healthy urban canopy maximizes the environmental, social and economic benefits that trees provide.

While most years offer new and unexpected challenges, this year's greatest challenge continued to be addressing 311 Call Center Requests for Service. The City was blessed again with a relatively mild 'stormy season', which helped, and the team inspected a similar volume of service requests in 2024. This year, however, the requests proved to be considerably more time-sensitive. The forestry team will continue working into 2025 to resolve the 850 outstanding requests. Tremendous thanks go to Director Steve McDaniel, the Board of Park Commissioners, the City Council and the Mayor's Office for support to approve two additional full-time employees. These positions will decrease response time to call center requests and improve our reaction to tree-related issues following storm events.

Fort Wayne's commitment to our urban tree canopy was recognized by the Arbor Day Foundation as a Tree City for the 34th year in a row. Fort Wayne also received the Growth Award for the 19th consecutive year. The Growth Award recognizes communities for innovative programs/projects and an increased commitment of resources for urban forestry. The tree care industry has been identified as one of the most dangerous jobs in America. The Forestry Division's commitment to safety was demonstrated by the initiation of weekly 'Tailgate' Safety Meetings.

Spring started with an annual Arbor Day celebration on April 26th. While most holidays celebrate something that has already happened and is worthy of 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 (presented by Deputy Director Alec Johnson) and included a tree planting at Northside Park. The event concluded with a seedling tree giveaway in partnership with Trees Indiana.

Maintaining a pruning cycle is an important component of the 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 the routine maintenance schedule. Without a structured maintenance schedule, it is expected to see continued increases in forestry-related urgent response service requests and, ultimately, increased maintenance costs. With continued support, the goal is to grow the forestry division over the next few years and resume a routine maintenance cycle.

The Forestry Division received (996) 311 Call Center requests for service in 2024, 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 five 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 street tree inspection resulted in 687 trees being identified as high-priority candidates for removal. The removal of these trees is expected to be completed by May. In total, 1,003 trees were removed

in 2024. Of these, 113 were storm-related with 40 being privately owned trees that had fallen into the right-of-way.

This year's tree planting was a success. In total, 801 street trees and 203 park trees were planted during 2024. Tree planting is one of the few infrastructure investments that grows with age. The team looks forward to watching these trees as they grow in their contribution to the 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, seven forestry staff members attended the Indiana Arborist Association Annual Conference. This conference offers an opportunity to network with other Indiana tree care professionals and learn from some of the industry's top subject experts. Additionally, two staff members attended the Partners in Community Forestry Conference. This allowed team members to join leaders across the industry to focus on strengthening the bonds between people and trees, fostering sustainable practices and creating green, thriving urban landscapes.

The department is committed to personal and professional growth to serve the Fort Wayne community better. The team looks forward to applying the lessons learned in 2024 to the challenges ahead.



Board of Park Commissioners

Foellinger Theatre

2024 Accomplishments

The 75th season offering live entertainment at the Foellinger Theatre continued the positive trajectory set in 2023, showcasing a diverse range of events and attracting enthusiastic audiences. Despite the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, music fans across the Midwest were eager to get back out and enjoy live music at Fort Wayne's favorite outdoor venue.

The concert series season opened on May 23, with 80's pop music icon Rick Springfield "Full Band Electric" featuring his new "Automatic" album and performing hits like "Jesse's Girl," "Don't Talk to Strangers," "An Affair of the Heart," "I've Done Everything for You," "Love Somebody," and "Human Touch." Over 1100 fans showed up.

Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation is honored to continue to deliver a diverse array of entertainment to the community and region. Foellinger Theatre introduced new music genres in 2024 with the top selling concerts from Country Music Award recipient Lee Brice, alternative rock band Collective Soul and the bluesy, soulful Tesla.



In 2024, Foellinger Theatre was also able to expand in the following exciting ways:

- New service area on the east lawn providing beverage and merchandise sales.
- Partnerships with new promoter groups.
- New FoellingerTheatre.org website saw a 13% increase in traffic in 2024.
- Theatre Facebook, Instagram and X social platforms continue to grow, with Facebook seeing a 10% increase and Instagram showing a 19.9% increase in followers.

Key Performance Metrics

Tickets Sold: 13,419
Free Concert Attendance: 2,800
Comps: 2,513
Total Fans Entered: 18,732

2024 Concert Season by Genre

90's Alternative Rock

- » Blues Traveler and Big Head Todd & the Monsters
- » Collective Soul

Country

- » Lee Brice

Pop Rock

- » Rick Springfield

Jazz

- » New Millennium Jazz Orchestra

Gospel R&B

- » Gladys Knight

World and International Music

- » The High Kings & Gaelic Storm

Christian

- » Fort Wayne Rescue Mission's Light the Night celebration featuring Matthew West

Theatrical

- » Fort Wayne Civic Theatre presents: The Rocky Horror Show

Classical Choral and Orchestra

- » Indiana Jones and the Raiders of

the Lost Ark™ live-to-film with the Fort Wayne Philharmonic Orchestra

- » Fort Wayne Children's Choir
- » Fort Wayne Area Community Band

80's Classic Rock

- » Tesla
- » Rockin' the 80's with Great White, Slaughter and Vixen

Community Concert Series

The free admission community concert series, a longstanding tradition, attracted many local music fans of all ages and backgrounds to the theatre in 2024 in spite of stormy weather which caused one concert to be rescheduled.

- The Fort Wayne Area Community Band returned June 11 and July 9 to play "Music for All Ages" and "Salute to America" concerts.
- The New Millennium Jazz Orchestra celebrated their 25-year anniversary showcasing popular big band music and special guest artists on July 24.
- The Fort Wayne Children's Choir hosted their annual summer concert July 26.

Volunteer Engagement

A dedicated group of volunteers contributed their time and effort to ensure the success of Foellinger Theatre's events.

Across community concerts and ticketed events, 49 volunteers participated, collectively contributing over 1,000 hours of volunteer time

Finance and Operations

In-house concession and alcohol sale operations continued to contribute to solid profits in 2024. Total concession revenue reached \$137,773.00.

The percent of theatre merchandise commissions totaled \$8,529.39.

2024 saw completion of the design for

a new house and stage lighting system at Foellinger Theatre. Bidding for equipment purchase began in late 2024. Installation will be completed by Parks' in-house technicians in spring in time for the 2025 concert season. These upgrades are in thanks to the \$500,000.00 Foellinger Foundation award in 2023.

Other improvements at the theatre in 2024 include:

- » Twelve roof repairs.
- » HVAC update.
- » Seventy-four seats rebuilt or repaired.
- » Stage resurfacing.
- » Top to bottom reorganization of stage equipment.
- » Audio System Reconfiguration and update by JBL Pro.



Botanical Conservatory

2024 Accomplishments

113,784
 CONSERVATORY VISITORS
 IN 2024, 2ND HIGHEST
 ATTENDANCE ON RECORD

6,816
 STUDENTS VISITED THE
 CONSERVATORY ON
 SCHOOL FIELD TRIPS

\$124,437
 RECORD GROSS REVENUE
 FROM MOTHER'S DAY
 PLANT SALE

9,000
 SERVICE HOURS LOGGED
 BY 165 ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS

4
 MAJOR FACILITY
 IMPROVEMENTS COMPLETED

10,756
 DOLLAR NIGHT ATTENDANCE

1,327
 ATTENDANCE AT BOTANICAL
 BREW, AN INCREASE OF
 26% OVER 2023

\$1,336,030
 TOTAL REVENUE FOR 2023

The Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory celebrates 2024 as a year of remarkable achievements and growth, highlighted by remarkable attendance, increased total revenue driven by strong gains in admissions, memberships and gift shop sales. Showcase exhibits such as Color in Motion, Raise a Glass! and Gnome for the Holidays captivated thousands, while special events like Botanical Brew, Rocky Horror Picture Show and Garden Trick-or-Treat further enhanced community engagement.

2024 also marked significant advancements in educational programming, with a record number of field trip participants and highly successful public events such as the Mother's Day Plant Sale. Facility improvements, including Desert House renovations and accessibility enhancements, demonstrate the Botanical Conservatory's commitment to an exceptional visitor experience. Supported by generous community contributions and dedicated staff and volunteers, the Botanical Conservatory continues to thrive as a cultural, educational and botanical treasure for the region.

Key Performance Indicators

In 2024, the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory experienced an impressive 113,784 visitors—a 7.76% increase over 2023, making it the second-highest annual attendance in the

Botanical Conservatory's history. Total revenue for the year reached \$1,336,030, reflecting a 5.68% increase compared to the previous year. Admissions revenue grew by 6.79%, while membership revenue saw a notable 10.25% increase, and Conservatory Shop sales surged by 16.18%. These gains underscore the continued appeal of the Botanical Conservatory's exhibits, programs and services. Despite a 17.74% decline in rental and catering revenue, other revenue streams, including donations and activity enrollments, increased slightly, contributing to a strong overall financial performance. The year's successes highlight the Botanical Conservatory's enduring role as a cultural and educational cornerstone of the community.

Showcase Exhibits

Botanical Speedway

January 13- April 7
 Attendance 25,172 or 22.12%

Racers revved their engines in the Botanical Conservatory's winter exhibit. Kids pedaled along and burned some rubber on a tropical racetrack as part this exciting family outing that had visitors strolling down victory lane. This fast, not furious, super-speedway was a successful outing for thousands of families. Over 3,000 helmets were given to visitors in partnership with the Indiana Department

	2023	2024	Inc/Dec
Attendance	105,587	113,784	+8,197 / 7.76%
Admission Revenue	\$387,661.24	\$413,990.80	+\$26,329.56 / 6.79%
Membership Revenue	\$87,406.26	\$96,367.00	+\$8,960.74 / 10.25 %
Gift Shop Revenue	\$275,905.89	\$320,547.80	+\$44,641.91 / 16.18%
Facility Rental Revenue	\$99,606.00	\$81,940.00	-\$17,666.00 / 17.74%
Other Revenue	\$413,697.80	\$423,185.19	+\$9,487.39
Total Revenue	\$1,264,277.19	\$1,336,030.79	+\$71,753.60

of Transportation and a model Indy Car wherein visitors could take photos was provided on loan from the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Automobile Museum.

Color in Motion: Live Butterfly Exhibit

April 16-June 23
Attendance 32,531 or 28.59%

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. The addition of a custom butterfly bench truly elevated this annual spring exhibit.

Raise a Glass!

June 29-November 17
Attendance 33,447 or 29.40%

Raise a Glass! was a toast celebrating 40 years at the Botanical Conservatory. Since 1983, the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory has provided a unique botanical venue and served as a cultural anchor in Fort Wayne, having welcomed over three million residents and tourists from near and far! During its 40th anniversary, the Botanical Conservatory captured vivid streams of light and reflected into glimmers for a vibrant future. This exhibit

featured hand-blown glass pieces from the 2004 Kaleidoscope showcase exhibit from regional glass blower James Michael Kahle that were stored for 20 years. As a nod to the future, the exhibit also displayed hand-blown glass flowers made specially for Raise a Glass! by local glass blower Eran Park of The Glass Park.

Gnome for the Holidays

November 23-January 5, 2025
Attendance 19,152 or 16.83% as of 12/31/24

There was no place like Gnome for the Holidays. The Botanical Conservatory's seasonal exhibit celebrated the festive culture of holiday homecoming with a whimsical twist. Imaginative displays warmed the hearts of visitors and offered themed opportunities to capture treasured family photos. Cozy accents tied together a heartfelt display that featured a charming poinsettia tree along with large fresh cut evergreens and playful touches.

Other Attendance 3,482 or 3.06%

Other attendance represents attendance logged between exhibits (Showchange Weeks) at the Botanical Conservatory and the portion of the prior-year's holiday exhibit (Timeless Tradition) that bled into the 2024 calendar year.

Programs & Displays

Youth Field Trips

Field Trip student attendance was up 46.9% from 4,638 students in 2023 to 6,816 students in 2024. Of those 2024 visitors, only 17.6% of the students attended for a Basic Visit with 82.4% receiving some sort of additional educational programming! This was the highest number of students to ever visit the Botanical Conservatory in a single year for field trip programming.

Dollar Night Admission

In 2024 the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory continued offering \$1 Admission from 5:00–8:00 p.m. every Thursday Night throughout the year. Since changing over to \$1 Admission, the Botanical Conservatory has actually increased revenue on Thursday nights as opposed to charging regular admission. Dollar Nights continued their popularity and represent 9.45% of the overall annual attendance at the Botanical Conservatory.

Dollar Nights 2023 Attendance: 10,208
Dollar Nights 2024 Attendance: 10,756
Increase of 548 visitors or +5.36%

2024 Showcase Garden Exhibits

<p>BOTANICAL SPEEDWAY Ready, Set, GROW!</p>	<p>COLOR IN MOTION Live Butterfly Exhibit</p>	<p>RAISE a glass!</p>	<p>GNOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS</p>
<p>January 13 – April 7</p>	<p>April 16 – June 23</p>	<p>June 29 – November 17</p>	<p>November 23 – January 5</p>

Board of Park Commissioners



Great Train Connection March 8-10

Event attendance continues to climb from 2,084 visitors in 2023 up to 2,538 visitors in 2024—a 22% increase in one year! There are seven different train groups and/or individuals who signed up to participate; this is not including the Botanical Conservatory's event contributions such as the G-Scale Garden Display, goody bags and craft. This popular recurring event continues to thrill enthusiasts of all ages.

Bunny Tales in the Garden March 29 & 30

With a total attendance of 3,254 visitors, this favorite public event returned on the Friday and Saturday before Easter Sunday. Event attendance continues to climb from 2,713 visitors in 2023, or +19.94%. Families followed a spring-themed story tale throughout all three indoor gardens and both outdoor gardens while visiting a craft station, live animals from Indiana WILD, pot-a-plant station, goody bag station and finally a visit with the Easter Bunny where they also received candy eggs on their way. Indiana WILD was a new vendor for this year and their presentations, various animals and staff received high praise.

Mother's Day Plant Sale

In 2024, 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 2024 Mother's Day Plant Sale charted record revenues, observing an 18% increase to 2023 (the previous record-holder) and exceeding \$120K for the first time in its history with a total gross of \$124,437.02. 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 June 10–July 26

An active, adventurous camp continued in 2024 and was guided by the exploration of the four elements: earth, air, water and fire. Campers hiked, biked, rock climbed, zip lined, kayaked, went to splash pads, "foraged" for berries, built a fire, cooked over a fire, 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 2024, marking a successful third year for the camp and a highly repeatable program targeting campers ages 9-13.

Botanical ROOTS Music Fest August 2 & 3

In its second year, the Botanical ROOTS Music Fest was maintained as a two-day music event; previously it was hosted as a Friday night concert series bringing in both national and regional acts since 2008. Eight different bands were booked with a total of four performances each evening. Friday's two headliners included reggae band, Zion Lion and the respected 2024 Grammy-winning zydeco performer, Buckwheat Zydeco Jr. & The Legendary IIs Sont Partis Band. Saturday's two headlining bands were soul artist, Aliah Sheffield and 2024 Grammy-nominee bluesman, John Primer & The Real Deal Blues Band. Total event attendance was right at 500 attendees with 229 on Friday and 293 on Saturday. Twenty-two people took advantage of pre-purchasing two-day tickets and Conservatory Members represented 11% of attendees.

Botanical Brew October 4

In its third year, Botanical Brew proved to be even more successful with attendance growing by 26% to a total of 1,327 guests. Beverage vendors held at 14, the same number as 2023, representing coffee, tea, cane juice, cider, beer, wine and spirits. Five different food vendors offered a variety of meals. Also present were artisans ranging from pottery to handcrafted jewelry to wall art, stationary and soaps. Guests greatly enjoyed the opportunity to interact with many different vendors in addition to enjoying musical talent by Joe Justice who performed indoors and Dave Pagan who entertained outdoors as well as several buskers who performed throughout the facility. As an all ages event kicking off the month of October, more families enjoyed Botanical Brew in 2024 than in the previous two years.

Rocky Horror Picture Show October 19

It was the 16th year of screening the Rocky Horror Picture Show in collaboration with Downtown Fort Wayne at the Botanical Conservatory. This year's

event evolved to add a three-category Costume Contest and Fright Night Market before the cult classic movie began. Both were quite popular additions! A jumbotron returned for a second year of viewing the film after being well received in 2023. A marked increase in costumes was noted plus attendance grew by 32% to 619 guests.

Garden Trick-or-Treat October 26

This popular annual event was attended by a record 901 guests, including 363 young trick-or-treaters. The total number of guests continues to rise with an additional 11% increase from 2023. As trick-or-treaters visited each of the nine interactive stations to find Boo the friendly ghost, they were also able to pot their own plant, play pumpkin ring toss, do a photo boo-th, paint a pumpkin, receive toothbrushes, create spooky boo-kmarks and more!

Santa & Reindeer Saturdays December 7, 14 & 21

Returning for three Saturday afternoons in December, professional Santa Mike ("the best Santa in Fort Wayne," per a local



social media influencer) and AnimalGrams reindeer Nutcracker delighted guests of all ages. This event was made possible by 2-3 event volunteers each weekend. A total of 3,053 individuals enjoyed the Santa & Reindeer Saturdays. December 7th saw 899 guests, December 14th brought 999 guests, and December 21st was the busiest Saturday with 1,155 guests!



Board of Park Commissioners

Revenue Development

The Conservatory observed record revenues in fiscal year 2024 maintaining 2023's trend of visitor enthusiasm for the gardens. Revenue increases continued to allow for many facility and visitor improve-

Grants & Donations

Foellinger Foundation	\$332,500*
Fort Wayne Park Foundation	\$182,250
NIPSCO	\$26,086.95
English Bonter Mitchell Foundation	\$10,000
English Bonter Mitchell Foundation	\$10,000
PNC Charitable Trusts	\$10,000
Arts United of Greater Fort Wayne	\$8,628
The Cole Foundation	\$5,000
Zollner Foundation	\$5,000
Magee-O'Connor Foundation	\$5,000
Wilson Foundation	\$4,500
Marvin & Marva Komisarow Foundation	\$4,261
Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne	\$3,000
Fort Wayne Metals	\$2,000
Individual Gifts (Trust Donations/Memorials)	4,581.77
Total	\$612,807.72

*Final payment of the Foellinger Foundation Anniversary gift of \$500,000.

In-Kind Support

Media promotional trade for 16 Conservatory events/exhibits (from 11 media partners)	\$125,440
Indiana Department of Transportation (children's safety helmets for the 2024 Botanical Speedway Exhibit)	\$150,000
Total In-Kind Support	\$275,440

ments in 2024. Generosity observed by the broader community, including the Foellinger Foundation, has 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

Landscape & Horticulture

Desert House Renovations Begin

The Botanical Conservatory Landscape & Horticulture Team has been working diligently to prepare the Desert House for landscape renovation. As of December 2024, new walls have been installed to allow for additional soil installation that will contribute to a greater visual interest within the space. The renovations are contemplated for completion in Fall of 2025 and will transform a permanent collection that has needed attention for some time providing value for educational and enjoyment efforts at the Botanical Conservatory.

Proven Winners Prove Perfect

The Botanical Conservatory purchased annual stock for its beds, allowing for increased production of Mother's Day Plant Sale inventory and breathtaking annual displays throughout the exterior of the Botanical Conservatory.

Facility Maintenance & Improvement

Tropical Linkway Interior

The interior tropical linkway was renovated after the installation of a new roof in Fall 2023 that made the interior water-tight. New tile finish on the walls, a new ceiling treatment, new interior doors and paint made a great deal of difference for visitor experience at the Botanical Conservatory and brought much-needed refreshment to a space that had become quite dated and damaged due to water infiltration.

South Tropical Pathway

The south tropical pathway was redesigned and replaced to enhance accessibility in an area of the Botanical Conservatory that had become a trip hazard for visitors. The new pathway, complete

with railings and accessibility-compliant grading, has been a welcome addition both visually and functionally.

Boiler Replacement

The Botanical Conservatory three boiler system was updated with replacement units and new flue piping to allow for the even distribution of heat throughout the facility in a way that the previous system was unable to accomplish. The new boiler system is tied in with the system controller allowing for digital control of both heating and air conditioning at the Botanical Conservatory.

Meeting Room Improvements

The Jaenicke & Kessler Rooms at the Botanical Conservatory were stripped of their wallpaper and painted an off-white color consistent with prior year improvements, new doors were installed in the meeting rooms to allow for improved locking and accessibility, new tables were obtained for meeting planners needing conference-style tables and new window treatments were installed to allow for the rooms to function more appropriately while providing less visual disruption to windows in the rooms.

Conservatory Staff

The team at the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory pulled through for a record-breaking year in 2024. Progress made at the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory in 2024 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 \$300,000 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.

Fort Wayne Zoo

2024 Accomplishments

The Fort Wayne Children's Zoo had big announcements throughout 2024, including the announcement of receiving accreditation from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' independent Accreditation Commission. The Fort Wayne Children's Zoo has been accredited by AZA since the mid 1970's and was the 13th zoo in the country to receive accreditation. AZA accreditation is not presumed and includes a detailed application with a meticulous multiple-day on-site inspection by an independent team of zoological professionals. The inspecting team analyzed all aspects of the Zoo's operation, including animal care and wellbeing; veterinary care; staff training; safety for visitors, staff, and animals; educational programs; conservation efforts; financial stability; risk management; governance; and guest services. Detailed reports from the inspection team and the Zoo were then thoroughly evaluated by the AZA Commission. Finally, the Commission interviewed top officials from the Zoo at a formal hearing, after which accreditation was fully granted. A thorough review ensures that each facility has met and will continue to meet ever-evolving standards. As a condition of Association membership, AZA facilities must complete this rigorous accreditation process every five years.

At the end of 2024, the Zoo announced the change of its name to the Fort Wayne Zoo, starting January 1, 2025. We have heard the phrase "This is so much more than I expected from a children's zoo", echoed for so long that we've grown used to the surprise in a new guest's voice when they discover that the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo is an accredited institution and more than just an ordinary zoo, or a

small "petting zoo". After almost 60 years, it's an exciting time to make a change. The new name is a better reflection of who we are and what we do, helps widen our audience, engaging more people in our mission, our conservation efforts, and in our future growth. We are more than a children's zoo. We are the Fort Wayne Zoo.

Community Relations

The Zoo for All Community Ticket Grants program continued to provide approximately \$200,000 worth of admission tickets to nearly 100 area nonprofit partners. In addition to providing discounted tickets for area school groups to take field trips to the Zoo, additional discounts or complimentary tickets were provided for schools with students who faced significant barriers to visitation. In 2025, the Zoo plans to expand flexibility in the application process for the Zoo for All ticket program, by providing multiple deadlines throughout the year.

The team also took steps in 2024 to become the first Zoo in Indiana to achieve a Certified Autism Center™ designation. In addition to a Sensory Inclusive™ certification through KultureCity first obtained several years ago, staff took additional training on how to meet the needs of guests with Autism Spectrum Disorder, which now effects one in 36 children. In 2025, as part of this new certification, the Zoo will add additional signage to help those with autism or their caregivers anticipate potential triggers they may encounter as they make their journey through the Zoo. The Zoo continued its partnership with the AWS Foundation as well as Easterseals Northeast Indiana, to become a more inclusive employer for those with disabilities. The Zoo is also working on ways to make the entry process easier for Zoo Members who have service animals in the coming year.

Members of the Zoo's leadership team actively participated in Greater Fort Wayne Inc. gatherings, connected with area legislators about issues that would impact the



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Zoo, and participated in a number of regional or national committees to advance the needs or interests of both the greater nonprofit and zoological communities.

Executive Director Rick Schuiteman received two community awards in 2024. In May he received the Power of Tourism Award from Visit Fort Wayne. This award recognized an individual who had distinguished themselves in the Fort Wayne/Allen County Tourism industry by exemplifying the highest level of leadership and service as well as taking steps to improve and invest in the future. In December, Fort Wayne Magazine named Schuiteman as one of their People of the Year.

Attendance & Special Events

In 2024 the Zoo hosted over 630,000 guests and was open nine months for guests and members extending the traditional six-month Zoo season. The Zoo opened for the first-time during Spring Break and remained opened for the Wild Zoo Spring Preview throughout weekends in April. Extending past Halloween, the Zoo was open weekends in November for Fall Weekends and ended the year with the family favorite, Wild Zoo Wonderland in December.

New consumer events were a hit with guests and helped the Zoo reach new audiences, including the Big Bugaballoo, featuring giant animatronic bugs on exhibit in August. The new adult-only Rock & Roar events saw 2,800 guests over five evenings throughout the season. Wild Zoo Halloween, the largest annual consumer event, hosted two sold out brunches where kids could interact with their favorite princesses.

Private Events had a busy season hosting 66 birthday parties and 61 corporate picnics at the Zoo. All new for 2024 were “buy out” evening events. Two local companies bought out the Zoo and were able to host their staff and guests for an exclusive evening of food, rides, family fun, and Zoo animals.

Membership

At the end of 2024, active member households totaled just over 19,000, around an 8% increase from 2023. The 2024 season kick-off offered an exclusive Member-Day on April 26. Members were provided with a number of special discounts and early-access offerings all season long, including a discount in the Wild Things Gift Shop and a member pre-sale of Zoofari tickets. As part of the AZA Reciprocity Program, zoo members were

able to participate in discounted admission to over 150 zoos and aquariums throughout North America. This included temporary, 100% admission reciprocity with Toledo Zoo and Aquarium. In August, Member Appreciation Month was once again a big hit with our members. Families also enjoyed free admission to Wild Zoo Halloween and Wild Zoo Wonderland events. The Cyber Monday incentive was extended this year from Black Friday through Giving Tuesday, giving two complimentary guest passes to new, renewing, or gift memberships purchased from November 29-December 3. This promotion drove holiday membership sales, with over 660 memberships sold in five days.

Animal News

In April, two male ring-tailed lemur brothers made their grand entrance into a brand-new habitat, nestled next to the giraffe habitat. Their spacious home offers the perfect setting for these energetic siblings to explore and bask in the sun. The lemur habitat allows them to fully embrace their adventurous nature while keeping a close eye on the towering neighbors next door.

The giraffe family grew by one in August with the birth of a sweet female calf, Mela, to proud parents Ezeji and Faye! This little one quickly became a staff and community favorite, delighting visitors with her adorable personality. From her curiosity for her adopted “aunts” to following mom around the yard, Mela has captured hearts all around. It’s been amazing watching this young giraffe grow, and we can’t wait to see how this new addition continues to charm everyone with her big personality!

The Zoo introduced Jasper, a young male snowy owl with a calm demeanor, in October. He resides in a brand-new habitat in the Central Loop area across from the American alligators and is a wonderful addition to the animal family. With his striking white feathers and bright yellow eyes, Jasper is a stunning sight to behold, and he’s already captured the attention of visitors. Jasper cohabitates with an older male black turkey vulture named Vincent.

Over 1,500 animals call the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo home, and they're lovingly cared for each day by dedicated animal care and health teams. Animal Care Specialists not only ensure the well-being of zoo animals through choice and control but also train behaviors that allow the animals to assist in their medical care. They provide enriching activities to encourage natural behaviors, all while offering behind-the-scenes Wild Encounters for guests to connect with the animals up close. It's just part of the daily work that helps to create unforgettable experiences and ensure the best care for every member of the Zoo family.

Conservation & Research

The Zoo is a conservation leader, providing \$272,000 in direct conservation support with 40 conservation partners around the globe in 2024. 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. Funds are generated through ticket sales and memberships, along with Corks for Conservation event proceeds, employee giving, guests donations and a 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 The Fort Wayne Zoo home. One signature conservation program is head-starting Eastern Hellbenders in partnership with Purdue University, the Department of Natural Resources and several other Midwest zoos.

The Zoo currently has over 300 hellbenders that are being raised for future release into the wild. In collaboration with Purdue University, the zoo has completed initial growth rate trends and unique spot pattern retention potential. The data will be used to investigate whether size versus age has a more significant effect on survivability in the wild with their release over the next two years.

As part of the one-year Veterinary Internship, post-graduate veterinarians are mentored and trained in zoo medicine and

conservation research. The current intern, Dr. Emma Zhang, has initiated a research study that aims to determine reference ranges of several gastrointestinal tests in red pandas so that potential abnormal results can be better interpreted. This may assist in diagnosing gastrointestinal disease in this endangered species and guide future treatments. Serum samples are being utilized from red pandas across the U.S. and analyzed at Texas A&M University diagnostic lab, who is collaborating on this endeavor.

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. Heading up the veterinary and research components of this project, she and the team focused on an endangered bird, the Saipan reed warbler, which only exists on the single island of Saipan. With very little information known about this species, data was collected on behavior, husbandry, health, and disease during the trip. Over the next five years, the focus will be shifted to another endangered species, the Rota white-eye, with an extensive recovery plan that involves future translocations to create insurance populations, in hopes of securing their long-term survival. 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 47,885 gifts, raising just shy of \$3.7 million dollars in gifts and pledges in 2024. While some of these gifts were earmarked for exhibit renovations, most of the donations received will support daily needs such as animal care, maintenance work, general operations and vital conservation programs.

A new fundraising event held at the Zoo was Run Wild 5k in May. This run included a path through the Zoo, allowing runners or walkers to experience the zoo in a very different way, visiting the African Journey, Asian Trek, Australian Adventure and Central Zoo.

In addition to fundraising efforts through grant writing, direct mail efforts, monthly donation programs, legacy giving, Adopt-an-Animal donations, special events and other means, the Zoo once again hosted three major outdoor fundraising events; Zoofari, Corks for Conservation, and Zoo-bilee—each of which sold out of tickets quickly.

Zoofari was held on June 20 and guests enjoyed food and beverages at over 50 different stations spread across the Zoo with all fare donated by local restaurants,



craft breweries, wineries, artisan distilleries and other specialty shops. Now in its sixth year, Corks for Conservation was held on July 18, and highlighted some Zoo conservation partners, particularly those in Australia, helping to save endangered species and their natural habitats. The event series finished with a wildly successful Zoobilee: Safari Soiree on September 12, which helped raise nearly \$415,000 (net) to support daily Zoo needs and programs.

In 2024, fundraising efforts continued for the new Coastal Cove project. Reimagining the existing sea lion habitat, this project set out to enhance animal welfare, provide additional spaces for guests to sit and enjoy our daily keeper chats, create a behind-the-scenes Wild Encounter experience, and best of all—welcome harbor seals to the exhibit! Though hopes were to open the renovated habitat during the 2024 season, unexpected challenges were encountered due to extensive wear and tear from 25 years of saltwater flowing through the habitat. The extent was greater than anticipated, and slowed progress. Coastal Cove is now anticipated to open in 2025!

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 honored the Zoo naming it again the Best City Attraction, Best Local Attraction, Best Children's Entertainment and Best Family Friendly Event.

Conservation education continues to be a focus of the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo educators. In 2024, 16,439 people participated in 1,681 Zoo education programs. Area school visits extended to 446 classrooms and Kids for Nature Summer

Camp hosted 1,448 campers where Zoo Conservation Educators connected kids to animals and the natural world around them.

Teens for Nature Volunteer and Leadership participants, 286 in count, spent the summer at the Zoo participating in leadership activities, conservation projects, zoo keeping, interacting with Zoo guests and volunteering for over 23,240 hours.

Volunteers help the Zoo fulfil the mission by actively engaging with guests during the season and helping behind the scenes during the off season. Four hundred fifty-nine active volunteers 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

In 2024, the new Coastal Cove project was in full force; experienced unexpected delays throughout the season and the grand opening is scheduled for spring 2025. Coastal Cove will not only be home to California sea lions Cassandra and Valkyrie, but will add another pinniped species, harbor seals.

Bamboo Forest, a new addition in late 2023, gave guests a bird's eye view while enjoying 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". 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 2024 included Journey Barn update, African Market Oasis retheming, Indiana Family Farm house remodel and Crocodile Creek Adventure Ride updates.

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 2024, 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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