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*NRPA Life Trustee*

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# kiosk

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WHO, WHAT, WHERE & HOW—AROUND THE PARKS



Paula Bullington, in the middle wearing the purple shirt, poses with Team Saucey—a group of urban teens and adult volunteers who participated in a week-long hike in Colorado wilderness as part of the non-profit Big City Mountaineers outreach program for at-risk kids.

## Into the Woods

**An outdoors mentoring program helps urban youth find their confidence—and adult volunteers their resolve.**

**“A**t first I didn’t want to come; now I don’t want to leave.”

This simple yet profound quote from one young participant in the Denver-based Big City Mountaineers program shows the breadth of experience—from troubled urban teen to accomplished outdoorsman—that is possible in the span of one week.

Big City Mountaineers, a nonprofit that teams adult volunteers one-on-one with kids from less-than-hospitable urban backgrounds, is committed to providing a new start—in terms of greater confidence,

self-awareness, and problem-solving skills—for its young participants.

It was into this mix that I found myself recently, one of a group of 10 who had come together for a week in the Colorado wilderness. Our tribe, a mix of former Outward Bound instructors, volunteers, and teens—Team Saucey, as we came to call ourselves—began as a group of strangers but quickly bonded as we hit the trail.

Big City Mountaineers recruits teens from youth organizations that serve low-income, urban youngsters. Among those chosen, it is considered a privilege to participate, and each kid falls into the category of the three D’s: disadvantaged, deserving, and desiring.

### TALKING POINTS:

Creating, improving and promoting places to be physically active can result in a 25 percent increase in the percentage of residents who exercise at least three times per week.

—Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

## PROFILE:

## Dr. Charles Hartsoe

**W**atching history unfold? Forget about it. Dr. Charles Hartsoe has been part of making it happen.

One of only 13 living life trustees of the National Recreation and Park Association, Hartsoe has served as executive director of the National Recreation Foundation and a founding member and former president of the American Academy of Park and Recreation Administration.



But, perhaps most important, he was an assistant executive director of the National Recreation Association during the creation of NRPA. It was at this time, in 1965, that five organizations—the American Institute of Park Executives, American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, National Recreation Association, National Conference on State Parks, and American Recreation Society—joined forces to create the National Recreation and Park Association.

It was Hartsoe's organization, the National Recreation Association, created by citizen activists who desired healthy play opportunities for America's urban youth, that was at the center of the merger. Today, this balance of professional and citizen remains the lifeblood of NRPA.

In fact, it's impossible to walk the halls of NRPA headquarters in Ashburn, Virginia, today without feeling first-hand Hartsoe's influence on the association. His endeavors include the creation of the Robert W. Crawford Hall of Fame and NRPA's Ralph C. Wilson Award, just to name a few.

The man has taught at some of the nation's most prestigious universities, including Virginia Commonwealth, Temple, and Penn State. He penned one of the seminal tomes of public parks and recreation, *Play for America*, a history of the National Recreation Association's creation and development.

Thumbing through Hartsoe's voluminous body of work—his life's story in defense of public parks and play—it's hard to deny his belief that physical activity is an integral part of a happy, healthy life.

And, believe us, he's not just saying that. He's lived it. ⚙️



Team Saucy taking a map break.

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In a week fraught with challenges, the members of Team Saucy saw even more opportunities. And while a forgotten tent and freak, flash thunderstorm may have gotten us off on the wrong foot, we were fortunate enough to have campsites on two beautiful lakes each night we were out: Savage Lake and Lake Carter, which even allowed us some fishing in its pristine waters.

Why do BCM programs work? I think it's because they combine the different aspects of a mentoring program with a wilderness experience in order to "positively impact the development of personal, social, and community values in the teens" while providing them with opportunities to achieve success by drawing on resources buried within themselves.

Of course, I also think the programs work because they're just plain fun. Sure, our hike included some difficult uphill and downhill sections, but the group conquered this adversity by playing games to keep everyone's minds occupied. It helped with group morale and kept everyone laughing.

On our last full day on the trail, we threw a lunch-time dance party, which had to be the highlight of the trip. BCM trips culminate with dinner out—which is amazing after eating backpacking food for five days—and an awards ceremony. This last night was full of laughter and fun and really brought home the meaning of the program.

So, what did I take away from my adventure? As an adult volunteer, I realized that the program not only affects the teens but the adults, as well. Participants walk away with an experience that will stay with them for a lifetime.

When life offers up challenge after challenge, I'd like to think that our BCM teens will recall this trip and remember what they accomplished. For me, I'm just glad that I was able to be a part of such an amazing experience. ⚙️

*An avid outdoors recreationist, Paula Bullington is a former NRPA employee.*

## TALKING POINTS:

People living in low-income areas and communities of color have less access to recreation facilities, and face unique environmental challenges that may make it difficult for them to engage in regular physical activity.

—Source: *Active Living Research*



# GREEN GIANT

Evelyn Kirkwood

## Transforming the Business of Parks & Recreation From Provider to Facilitator

By Jack Kardys

Director, Miami-Dade County Park & Recreation Department

**F**OR MOST PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES throughout the country, life during the late 1990s through mid-2000s was good—very good. These were the high times of economic prosperity, particularly as it related to the “boom” years of property tax growth, fueled in large part by a then thriving real-estate industry, now gone bust. In Florida, during its 2007-2008 fiscal year, as experts nationwide toyed over the chances for a real-estate bubble burst, and the first palpable signs of a weakening economy were felt with increasing food prices and a very real gas price crisis, the Miami-Dade Park & Recreation



Department experienced a strong foreshadowing of difficult times ahead. How it survived and even succeeded during the first wave of drastic county government budget cuts—to the tune of a \$17 million cut to parks—and the passing of the statewide Amendment 1 property tax cut reform bill was truly a feat, the lessons of which we would like to share with other P&R agencies during these austere times, when even the California park system faces possible closure.

Consisting of 258 parks and more than 12,600 acres, serving more than 25 million people annually, Miami-Dade Parks, a three-time National Gold Medal Award winner and an accredited agency, is arguably, one of the largest, most diverse park systems in the nation. It is comprised of a variety of revenue enterprises including golf courses, marinas, campgrounds, a gun range, and performing arts auditorium; playgrounds; athletic fields; nature preserves; environmental restoration; beaches; the Miami MetroZoo and Deering Estate at Cutler attractions; the Crandon Tennis Center home of the Sony Ericsson tennis tournament; summer camps; after-school programs; sports development; programs for people with disabilities and seniors; and more. As the South Florida tax base began to erode two years ago, Miami-Dade Parks quickly realized a need to transform itself from a provider of facilities and services to a facilitator of such.

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**I**S THAT BIRD INDIGENOUS TO SOUTH BEND? Evie Kirkwood can tell you. Throughout her nearly 30 years at St. Joseph County Parks, Indiana, Kirkwood has become a bit of a local celebrity and go-to-person when it comes to educating residents about natural areas and the plants and animals living there.

Kirkwood began her career as an interpretive naturalist at Beaver Lake Nature Center in New York and now serves as Director of St. Joseph County Parks, Indiana. Throughout the multitude of positions she’s held along the way, Kirkwood demonstrates passion, enthusiasm and commitment to educational programs that connect people to the parks they visit. Kirkwood has received numerous awards in recognition of her environmental leadership, and most recently was awarded NRPA’s Barb King award, which recognizes individuals and park and recreation agencies that have achieved excellence in environmental stewardship.



During her years as front-line park interpreter, she launched the first nature day camp in the community of South Bend and created the first fee-based interpretive program menu based on the Department of Education curriculum and state science standards. She helped establish the Parks as Partners program to provide free or discounted nature programming for underserved children at several places in the community including homeless shelters, and schools for autistic children.

As parks director, Kirkwood inspires the leisure services staff to design innovative programs, including such things as solar cooking and fly fishing – skills that develop appreciation and respect for nature and preservation. Several of the interpretive programs offered by the St. Joseph County Parks Department have received regional recognition. Members of the leisure and interpretive program staff are certified by the National Association for Interpretation.

Perhaps Kirkwood looks familiar? She hosts Outdoor Elements, a half-hour nature show, now in its ninth season on public television. Produced entirely in the field, the show features experts on topics such as light pollution, rain gardens, ice fishing, and fossil finding.

She’s only five foot one, but Evie Kirkwood is a Green Giant. ⚙️



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We rebounded by accelerating our strategic business approach to P&R, streamlining and honing best-business practices both internally and externally. Our efforts were validated in June when we were presented with the 2009 Governor's Sterling Award by Florida Governor Charlie Crist and the Florida Sterling Council, recognizing



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Clockwise: Jack Kardys, Director, Miami-Dade County Park & Recreation Department. Students taking an EcoNature Tour. Ribbon cutting ceremony at South Dade Skate park.



organizations and businesses in Florida that have successfully achieved performance excellence within their management and operations. It marked the first time a P&R agency in the state received the honor. The Sterling is the state's equivalent of the Malcom Baldrige Award.

Today, we are facing the second consecutive budget-cut wave and the most severe yet, in the midst of a national economic crisis, this time calling for a \$22 million cut to the Miami-Dade Parks budget and the loss of 222 fulltime positions and nearly 300 part-timers—a quarter of our workforce—steeply impacting our service-delivery capacity. In an on-going effort to redefine our function

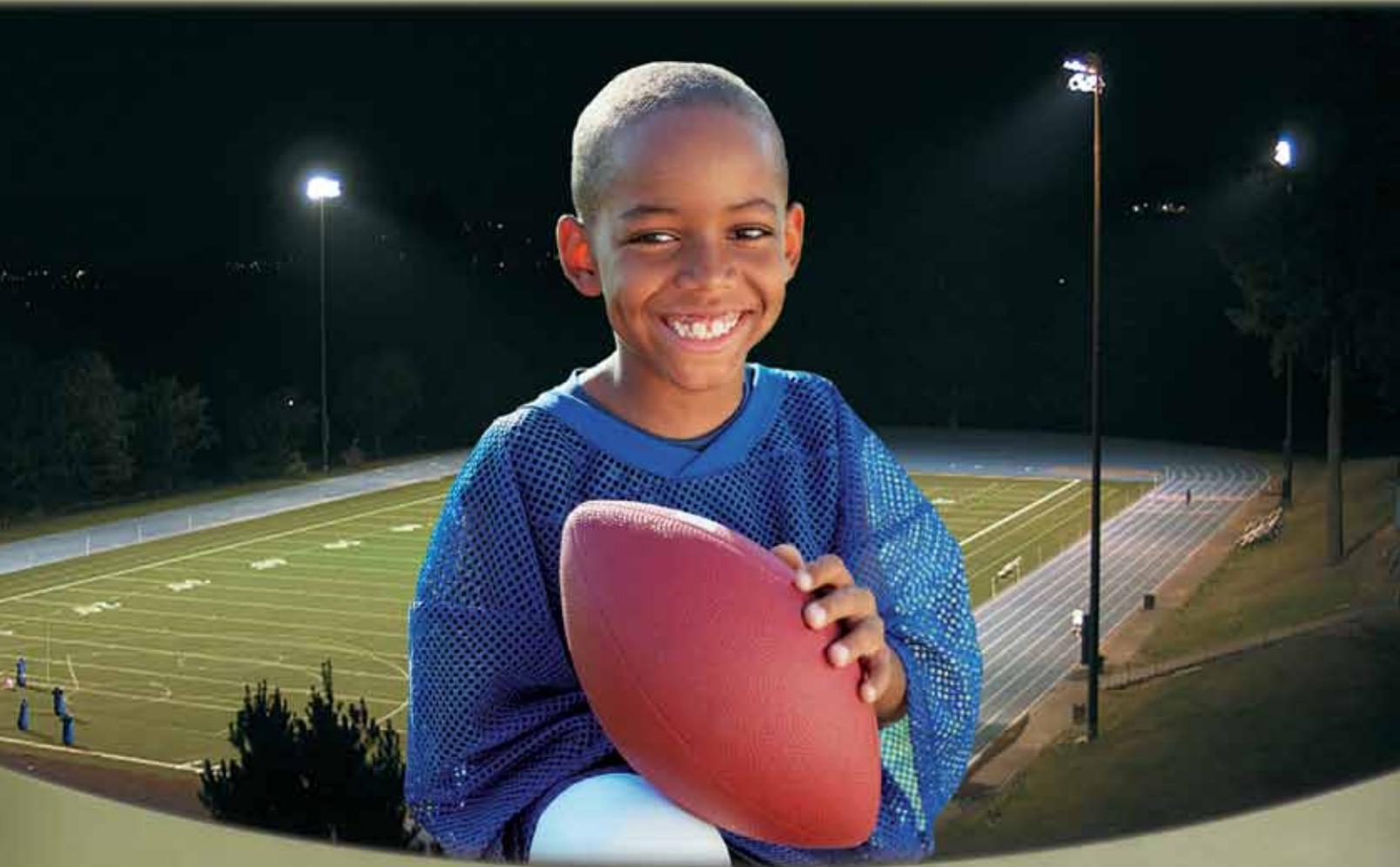
and value to the Miami-Dade County community, we have enacted Service Recovery Strategies designed to achieve greater cost recovery and reduce dependence on ad valorem subsidy through a combination of revenue enhancements, programming partnerships and efficiencies, including:

1. Issue Request for Proposals (RFPs) and carefully negotiate public/private partnerships to restore recreation, pool, arts-and-culture programming services.
2. Issue RFPs to private sector—a “neighborhood economic stimulus package”—encouraging small businesses and mom-and-pops to use facilities for enhanced programming; an affordable alternative to increasing rent costs at shopping centers (e.g. for karate or arts-and-crafts classes).
3. Contract out, where appropriate, grounds-maintenance services for mowing and maintaining neighborhood parks.
4. Establish fee-based programming with minimum enrollments required to make programs self-sustainable; aggressively solicit sponsorships and scholarship fundraising through the Parks Foundation 501c3.
5. Aggressively market attractions and business enterprises to maximize revenue; investing funds to support the greater effort to increase revenue.
6. Reinvigorate Adopt-A-Park and volunteer programs reaching out to all civic, homeowner association, corporate, and individual partners to help with maintenance and securing community and neighborhood parks.
7. Establish a prisoners-service program for maintenance work in outlying areas.



The major lesson we have learned is that in a rapidly changing economic environment, flexibility and self-assessment of significance and efficiency are key to success and progress. As an industry, we must re-engineer ourselves in more ways than one and assume a leadership role in the development of the quality of life in our community beyond camps and ball fields. We have asked ourselves, “Who are we? How are we

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**We Make It Happen.**



## PROFILE:

## David Stringer

**A**t age 15, the entire world changed for NRPA member David Stringer. As a result of a freak diving accident, Stringer went from being an able-bodied teen to a wheelchair-bound paraplegic. The accident would influence Stringer's life—not just his mobility, but his mission.

Today, the human resources director for the Richland County Parks and Recreation Commission in South Carolina, is an outspoken advocate for Paralympics and adaptive sports. In fact, it was as a teen that Stringer worked to help bring to reality the first wheelchair basketball program in Charleston, South Carolina.

"Participation in adaptive sports and recreation changes the focus from the things that can not be done," says Stringer, "to the things that can be done—and helps those who once felt hopeless due to their disability realize the possibilities

of what they can do are endless."

For 32 years, Stringer has worked tirelessly as a participant, coach, and organizer for equal access to sports for all Americans. It was in July of this year that he provided testimony to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs on the rehabilitation, support, and mentoring of American service members who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan with traumatic physical and emotional injuries—and the role that public parks and recreation can play in this reintroduction to civilian life.

Upon returning home, these injured soldiers, said Stringer in his testimony, crave physical activity, but to find it they first need access to "close-to-home spaces, places that are able to meet their needs and aid in their rehabilitation."

Stringer credits partnerships, such as the one between NRPA and the Paralympic Military Program, with helping U.S. service members "regain their quality of life while improving their mental and physical health as they face a challenging return and adjustment."

Beyond accessibility, Stringer believes in excellence of service, and was instrumental in guiding the Richland County Parks and Recreation Commission in becoming the only nationally accredited park and recreation agency in South Carolina. ⚙️



Seniors take part in a group exercise class.

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relevant and valuable?" The answer: We are champions for the improvement of the quality of life in Miami-Dade County with a new, comprehensive Open Space System Master Plan that provides a 50-year vision and trajectory for developing a more livable and sustainable community, one green space at a time. We submit that P&R agencies, because of their expertise, capabilities, resources, and community connection, should be at the forefront of the health "assurance," green and smart growth movements—for the public good, as well as longevity.



The challenges at hand present opportunities for transformation into a leaner, more focused and aggressive organization. The future appears to be calling for self-sustainability, and we aim to meet that need, while delivering a new brand of public services that are very much in demand and necessary. ⚙️

## TALKING POINTS:

We spend 75 cents of every healthcare dollar treating people with chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and asthma, and only 4 cents on prevention.

—Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation