



DEPARTMENT OF
**PARKS &
RECREATION**

RECREATION DIVISION ANNUAL REPORT



2024

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Message from Recreation Manager Niki Wendt

In early 2024, the Recreation Division finalized a comprehensive strategic plan to guide our efforts over the coming years. This process involved conducting thorough assessments of current programs, analyzing survey results, performing a SWOT analysis, gathering input from city leadership and other key stakeholders, and holding focused staff meetings to define our direction and priorities.

Overall, program participation experienced a decline in 2024, which we attribute to not mailing our activity guide to residents for the first time. Despite this challenge, we successfully delivered a diverse range of programs that engaged individuals of all ages throughout the year.

Our aquatics program introduced several new offerings in 2024, including private swim lessons, tot swim time, and the reintroduction of aquatic fitness classes. These initiatives were met with overwhelmingly positive feedback. We are proud to continue serving this city and promoting healthy lifestyles within our community!

Program Mission:

To provide both structured and unstructured recreational services by developing diverse programs and activities that encourage community involvement while striving to enhance the social, cultural and physical well-being of our residents and visitors.

Meet The Team

306
Seasonal
Staff



Niki Wendt
RECREATION
MANAGER



Margaret Collett
MARKETING &
COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT



Leah Thibodeau
CUSTOMER SERVICE
REPRESENTATIVE

486
Volunteers



Liz Konrath
RECREATION
SUPERVISOR



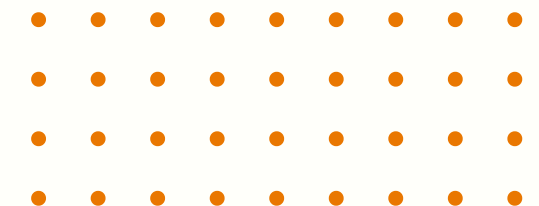
Jeff Brazzale
RECREATION
SUPERVISOR



Krystal Ganz
RECREATION
SUPERVISOR



Laura Tollefson
RECREATION
COORDINATOR





Strategic Direction

Enhance community engagement efforts within the Recreation Division by fostering existing and new relationships internally and externally to expand resources.

Enhance our customer service at all levels by providing consistent, clear, and timely communication to customers.

Develop tools to retain, enhance, and develop employees and volunteers for the Appleton Parks and Recreation Department.

Begin development of a comprehensive recreation emergency plan for assigned recreation areas with the overarching goal of safeguarding the well being and security of participants, staff, and the community.

Research ways to enhance the overall well-being of our community members by providing diverse, accessible, and engaging health and wellness programs that promote physical, social, and mental health.



Marketing Highlights



Facebook Posts: 427
Facebook Reach: 1,505,478
New Facebook Followers: 1,723
for a total of 16,658 followers



Instagram Posts: 345
Facebook Reach: 105,326
New Facebook Followers: 426
for a total of 3,267 followers



Total E-Newsletters sent: 26
Total Targeted Emails sent: 72
Total Emails Sent: 691,241
Open Rate: 66%
Click Rate: 12%



Digital Activity Guides
Spring/Summer Views: 8,667
Fall/Winter Views: 4,043



- Transitioned old Appleton logo to the new city seal, ensuring updated branding on flyers, forms, and website. Also created high-resolution Parks and Recreation logo variations for future ease of use.
- Designed, printed, and distributed flyers for programs at our pools, events, A-frames, bulletin boards, and UDA Studios for promotion in place of a printed activity guide.
- Began design of new Parks and Recreation website that will be hosted under the City's website. Collaborated with GIS on a new interactive park map and user friendly features. Targeting mid-to-late February for launch.
- Created engaging social media content, including videos, photos, polls, and contests, to showcase our department's personality and encourage audience interaction.
- Utilized diverse marketing channels, including the Appleton Engaged Podcast, radio and TV interviews, and magazine advertisements to promote community participation in our programs and events.

Early Childhood

Appletots enjoyed another successful year, offering engaging programs that received positive feedback from participants. While the fall session faced initial challenges, including staffing shortages, the program thrived by providing a variety of classes such as Family Groovy Tots, Color Tots, and exciting new options like Adventure Tots and Transportation Tots. The preschool dance program continued to thrive, several participants commented on the convenience of the new location. Popular Friday Fun classes, including “Paw Patrol to the Rescue” and “All Things Magical,” delivered creative experiences for families, though a drop in enrollment underscored the effects of not mailing the summer guide. The year concluded on a high note with a successful fall session supported by a new instructor, rounding out a year of growth and innovation for Appletots.

Program

Appletots

Friday Fun

Preschool Dance

Participants

298

211

335



Youth Activities

Appleton Parks and Recreation kept kids active and engaged with an exciting lineup of programs this year! Open Gym at Ferber Elementary gave families a free place to play all winter long, while KidStage brought the magic of theater to life with Finding Nemo Jr., Matilda Jr., and Madagascar. Babysitting classes were a hit, teaching essential skills to kids preparing for new responsibilities, and Urban Riders added a third level to help young cyclists master city streets.

Skateboarding lessons, bike tune-ups, and playground programs kept summer rolling with outdoor fun, while the Einstein Project inspired creativity with STEM activities like building robots and boats. Add in Karate Fun classes and Youth Enrichment League (YEL!) hands-on camps in sewing, coding, and robotics, and it's safe to say this year was packed with opportunities to learn, grow, and have a blast!

<u>Program</u>	<u>Participants</u>
Open Gym	748
Kidstage	136
Skateboard Instruction	68
Babysitting Course	153
Urban Riders	23
Einstein Project	214
YEL!	51
Playground Program	812
Bike Tune Ups	60



Youth Sports Camps

Summer Tennis camps continue to be a popular sport for kids to learn and play during our Summer months. The popularity of racquet sports in the last few years has allowed for tennis and pickleball to become more in demand for our summer camps. This trend has continued to older levels and we have had more high school kids and older adults participate in racquet sports that in recent time.

Our Summer sports camps are for kids ages 4-8 years old and are introductory level opportunities for kids that are interested in a new or favorite sport. Our camp instructors focus on teaching the fundamentals of the sport while using games and fun activities to keep the kids engaged and wanting to continue playing each sport. Recently we have expanded our camps to Green Meadows Park and will look to increase the options we have for families outside of our "homebase" of Erb park.

<u>Program</u>	<u>Participants</u>
Sumer Sports Camps (Basketball, Soccer, Sports Exploration, Multisport, Flag Football, Pickleball)	589
Summer Tennis Camps	368
Youth Volleyball Camp	48



Youth Sports Leagues

Our second full year of our A-league branded youth sports leagues was a continued success. The consistency of our youth sports leagues participation is a testament to the structure of our program and the commitment by the community to recreational sports. Our core values of Inclusion, skill development, family balance, lifelong enjoyment led to a fun atmosphere. The A-League branding has made our leagues even more recognizable through the Fox Valley.

A few highlights throughout 2024 included the continued rise in numbers for our youth soccer and youth baseball/softball/t-ball leagues. This increase has allowed us to utilize top level game spaces at Appleton Memorial Park and the USA Sports Complex, while allowing our teams to practice throughout the City of Appleton parks. These parks are also used for our youth football leagues. Our youth basketball league utilizes a longstanding partnership with the Appleton Area School District. The gyms we can use during the winter month provide great space for our games and practices.



A-League Participants:

Basketball	538
Baseball/Softball/T-Ball	845
Soccer	932
Flag Football	200

Adult Activities

This year, our adult programs provided a diverse range of opportunities. Spanish classes continued to provide options for all levels, including a conversational class that concluded with participants practicing their skills at local restaurants. The adult dance program saw steady participation, featuring tap, hip hop, and ballet barre classes held at the Northland Mall dance studios. Pickleball clinics remained popular, helping beginners connect with the sport despite some weather and scheduling challenges. Tennis lessons at Erb Park provided players with an enjoyable way to improve their skills and meet fellow enthusiasts. New offerings, such as Pet First Aid and CPR classes and our popular photography workshops at the Scheig Center, brought fresh options to the lineup. The Seed Guild hosted creative workshops, including a Fire Cider tonic-making class and a Sound Bath experience. While some programs faced challenges, such as canceled sessions or weather disruptions, we continued to deliver valuable and diverse recreational opportunities to the community.



<u>Program</u>	<u>Participants</u>
Pet CPR	18
Dance	152
Pickleball Clinics	81
Photography	20
Seed Guild	26
Spanish	67
Tennis Lessons	54

Fitness/Wellness

This year, our adult fitness programming brought the community a mix of energy, mindfulness, and new opportunities to stay active. Yoga remained the most popular of offerings, with classes taking place indoors and outdoors, including a new Yin and Meditation class introduced this fall. Unique experiences like SNOGA, a yoga class in the snow, and Rock Om, a live music yoga session during Mile of Music, added variety to the lineup. Mindfulness classes with Joy Jordan provided participants with tools to stay present and centered.

Our free fitness partnerships with the YMCA brought yoga and Zumba to Houdini Plaza and City Park, drawing participants throughout the summer. New programs, like an adult running club, aqua fitness, and Nutrition for Life this fall, rounded out the offerings, connecting fitness with broader wellness goals. With plenty of energy and some exciting new additions, our fitness programs kept the community moving and having fun!



<u>Programs</u>	<u>Participants</u>
Adult Running Group	4
Power Hour	42
Pure Strength	107
StrongBodies	83
Snoga	5
Yoga	414
Zumba	78
Nutrition Class	7
Mindfulness	86
Yoga in the Park "Rock Om"	35
YMCA Fitness in the Park	780

Aquatics

Erb and Mead Pools experienced a thriving and prosperous season. The success of the pools was largely attributed to the outstanding staff. The exceptional staff played a key role in the success of the pools. A strong rate of returning employees, as well as a surplus of lifeguard applications, allowed all programming to be properly staffed.

The pool seasons had staggered starts and finishes. Mead Pool opened for the weekend prior to the customary opening with both Erb and Mead opening for the summer on June 7. Mead Pool closed for the summer on August 16 with Erb Pool closing the subsequent week on August 25.

The aquatics program runs a thriving year-round swim lesson initiative, attracting thousands of participants. In an effort to streamline the curriculum, group swim lessons were condensed into eight classes. Starting in 2024, private swim lessons were introduced to better serve the community. During the summer, the pools also offered a variety of aqua fitness classes throughout the week. Additionally, Erb Pool introduced Tot Swim on Fridays, providing a dedicated time for toddlers to enjoy the pool.



<u>Participants</u>	
Attendance	60,032
Swim Lessons	2,388
Passes sold:	2,320
Rentals:	84

Unity Dance & Acrobatics

Unity Dance & Acrobatics had an exciting and productive year, highlighted by a successful recital season and steady growth in enrollment. The annual recital, themed "New Beginnings," celebrated a new studio location, updated branding, and featured 664 participants across four well-attended shows, with over 3,180 tickets sold. This is an increase of 500 tickets from last year. Recital preparations included the help of over 90 volunteers, strong ticket sales, program advertisements, t-shirt orders, and an opening number involving 40 intermediate and advanced students.

The summer and fall dance programs saw increased enrollment, with a 5% rise from the previous year, totaling 693 participants across 64 classes, including the addition of beginner classes and a new genre, Pom and Kick. The year also included several successful workshops, the addition of new staff, and continued popularity of acrobatics, ballet, and hip hop classes reflecting Unity's growth and commitment to meeting community demand.

<u>Program</u>	<u>Participants</u>
Jazz	99
Lyrical	72
Ballet	122
Tap	60
Acrobatics	179
Hip Hop	127
Modern	10
Musical Theater	24
Summer Dance	335



Special Events

Appleton Parks and Recreation celebrated another outstanding year of special events and community engagement in 2024, bringing joy and connection through our various programs. The Toy Ride Along marked its fourth year, delighting children as their toys went on adventures with the Appleton Police and Fire Departments. Mom Prom also returned for a memorable night of fun and generosity, raising \$8,000 to support our fee waiver scholarship program. Appleton Active Adventures encouraged families to explore pickleball, tennis, and disc golf with free equipment rentals, while our bike rodeos emphasized safety with hands-on instruction and on-site bike repairs.

Community members enjoyed family-focused events like Movies on the Hill and Kids Fun Runs. We offered our third Ties and Tiaras event, which provided an enchanting evening for our participants of all ages. U.S. Venture Children's Week showcased a variety of free or reduced cost recreational opportunities, including the Kids Color Fun Run, Kid's Rummage Sale, Dance-a-Rama, and the always-popular Playground Fair, featuring exciting games, music entertainment, and inflatables for families to enjoy.



Special Events cont.

Other events included a Taylor Swift Dance Party, the Great Ball Pursuit, and November's Chicago bus trip. Our holiday programs: Glow in the Park, the Great Holiday Dash, and Letters to Santa received rave reviews from community members and made the season more festive.

Special events are always in high demand, and we're proud to have helped create lasting memories for participants in 2024.

<u>Event:</u>	<u>Participants:</u>
Toy Ride Along	60
Mom Prom	370
Appleton Active Adventures	3
Bike Rodeos	122
Movie on the Hill	300
Flick & Sips	50
Fun Runs	732
Ties and Tiaras	142
US Venture	
Children's Week	8,400
Taylor Swift Party	82
The Great Ball Pursuit	400
Glow in the Park	500
Holiday Dash	220
Letters to Santa	450



Facilities

SCHEIG CENTER

The Scheig Center remains a cherished community space, hosting 97 rentals in 2024 for events like weddings and celebrations. It's also home to Recreation Division programs, including fitness classes, workshops, and library events, while serving as a meeting hub for groups like Friends of the Gardens and a polling station for the City of Appleton.

Scheig Center

97 rentals

WINTER RECREATION

Winter recreation is heavily influenced by the weather, and the warm conditions in 2024 limited the availability of amenities. In January 2024, the Cozy Clubhouse at the Reid Golf Course sledding hill was open for only seven days, while the Goaltender at the Jones Park ice skating rinks operated for six days. Other skating rinks across the city were available for a similar duration. Unfortunately, due to unseasonably warm temperatures and updates to the Reid Golf Course clubhouse, no amenities could open in December 2024.

Winter Recreation

801 participants



Community Connections

ATHLETIC ORGANIZATIONS

- Fox Valley Athletics
- Appleton Little League
- USA Youth Sports

SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

- Appleton East High School Key Club
- Kaukauna High School Key Club
- Police Explorers

INTERNAL DEPARTMENTS

- Appleton Police Department
- Appleton Fire Department
- Appleton Public Library
- Appleton Health Department

COMMUNITY GROUPS/PARTNERS

- Appleton Area School District
- Tanya Rosenthal – Babysitter Training/Pet CPR & First Aid
- Kari Witthuhn- Hennings and the Seed Guild
- Appleton Lacrosse Club
- North East Skateboarding Trust
- Fox Valley Technical College- Even Start Program
- Joy Jordan with Born Joy Mindfulness
- Jacqueline Bluhm with The Whole You Health and Wellness
- Appleton YMCA
- Youth Enrichment League
- Debbie Daanen Photography
- Einstein Project
- Karate America & The Academy
- Wisconsin Geocaching



Community Connections

COMMUNITY GROUPS/PARTNERS CONTINUED...

- Kidstage
- Safe Routes to School (East Central Planning Commission)
- Jim Hansen (Pedalworx)
- Wisconsin Herd
- Mohana Productions
- Fox Crossing, Neenah, & Menasha Parks and Recreation
- Friends of the Gardens
- Hop Yard
- Play It Again Sports
- Appleton City Band
- Fox Valley Rowing Club
- RunAway Shoes
- Sunny Side Up Yoga
- Fox Valley YMCA & The Wave Swim Teams
- Make the Ride Happen





THANK YOU!

