



DEPARTMENT OF
**PARKS &
RECREATION**

RECREATION DIVISION ANNUAL REPORT



2025

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Message from Recreation Manager Niki Wendt

In 2025, Appleton Parks and Recreation focused on expanding inclusive programming, strengthening community partnerships, and enhancing participant experiences. Highlights included growth in sponsorships supporting programs such as our youth sports leagues and Movies on the Hill, along with successful community events such as Mom Prom and the Playground Fair. These sponsorships helped support program costs, raise funds for the youth fee waiver scholarship program, and reduce barriers to participation. Planning efforts also began for future inclusive offerings, including Sensory Swim, in collaboration with community partners.

Internally, staff development and operational improvements remained a priority, with continued leadership training, efforts to streamline seasonal hiring, and creating efficiencies through our registration/facility reservation software. Through teamwork, innovation, and dedication, staff delivered high-quality programs while reinforcing our mission to connect the community through recreation, wellness, and welcoming spaces.

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

263
Seasonal
Staff



Niki Wendt

RECREATION
MANAGER



Margaret Collett

MARKETING &
COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT



Leah Thibodeau

CUSTOMER SERVICE
REPRESENTATIVE

510
Volunteers



Liz Konrath
RECREATION
SUPERVISOR



Jeff Brazzale
RECREATION
SUPERVISOR



Carly Mattson
RECREATION
SUPERVISOR



Laura Tollefson
RECREATION
COORDINATOR



Strategic Direction

Strengthen relationships with local businesses and organizations to support programs and events such as playground activities, Movies on the Hill, Mom Prom, and Children's Week events, while increasing resources for the youth fee waiver scholarship program.

Enhance customer service at all levels through consistent, clear, and timely communication with participants and the community.

Prioritize leadership development, training, and employee engagement while working collaboratively with Human Resources to improve seasonal hiring and onboarding processes for staff and volunteers.

Continue 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.

Advance community well-being by expanding accessible and engaging health and wellness programs that support physical, social, and mental health.



Marketing Highlights



Facebook Posts: 362
Facebook Views: 2,735,074
New Facebook Followers: 1,193
for a total of 17,899 followers



Instagram Posts: 290
Instagram Reach: 111,835
New Facebook Followers: 513
for a total of 3,300 followers



Total E-Newsletters sent: 26
Total Targeted Emails sent: 91
Total Emails Sent: 838,336
Open Rate: 67%
Click Rate: 15%



Digital Activity Guides
Spring/Summer Views: 10,863
Fall/Winter Views: 3,952



- Successfully transitioned Appleton Parks & Recreation to the City's Revize website, enhancing content clarity, introducing interactive park and trail maps with RecTrac integration, and collaborating with IT, Communications, and GIS to deliver a cohesive, user-friendly digital experience.
- Introduced a new centralized events and social media calendar for Recreation staff, improving team communication, organizing promotional priorities, and supporting consistent, timely updates to the Park & Rec website's upcoming events and social media platforms.
- Rebranded the department's email marketing through the Up & Coming newsletter, updated the subscriber list, reaching nearly 20,000 recipients per campaign, and maintaining a 45% open rate. This makes email one of the department's highest-performing marketing channels.
- Expanded use of Facebook and Instagram Reels, reaching 516,856 views and 34 days, 12 hours of watch time, boosting engagement through short-form video.
- Expanded cross-promotion across City departments and within Recreation programs. Increasing visibility of programs and events, strengthening internal collaboration, and maximizing reach by leveraging shared audiences and platforms.

Early Childhood

Appletots Learning Center experienced a strong and engaging year, with consistent growth and positive feedback across winter, spring, summer, and fall programming. Winter sessions at the Scheig Center and increased preschool dance and tumbling offerings saw strong enrollment, particularly in Family Groovy Tots and Wednesday evening classes, with parent/child formats continuing to be well received. Spring and summer programs expanded to include interactive movement, science-based learning, and themed Friday Fun classes, all of which maintained steady enrollment and strong community interest, even with slight staffing limitations. Summer Friday Fun sessions showed notable growth among ages 2–4, offering flexible scheduling and high-quality experiences through crafts, movement, sensory play, and storytelling. Fall Session one launched successfully with new and returning Appletots classes for ages 0–5, while preschool dance and tumbling classes faced a modest enrollment decline but still delivered a positive and well-managed program overall.

Program

Appletots

Friday Fun

Preschool Dance

Participants

267

207

217



Youth Activities

Appleton Parks and Recreation kept kids busy and smiling all year with programs designed to get them moving, learning, and trying something new. Open Gym at Ferber Elementary gave families a free place to play during the winter, while KidStage brought young performers together for productions of *Annie* and *The Little Mermaid*. Babysitting classes helped youth build confidence and responsibility, and Urban Riders taught bike safety in an active, hands-on way.

Our summer playground program filled the parks with games and friends, while the Einstein Project sparked curiosity through STEM activities like building robots and boats. Youth Enrichment League (YEL!) camps added even more variety with experiences in sewing, coding, rocketry, and magic. These programs gave kids opportunities to stay active, learn new skills, and have fun throughout the year.

<u>Program</u>	<u>Participants</u>
Open Gym	648
Kidstage	117
Babysitting Course	98
Urban Riders	22
Einstein Project	255
YEL!	82
Playground Program	790



Youth Sports Camps

In 2025 the APRD Summer Tennis camps were strong for ages 8-12 years old. This along with a large amount of kids signing up for our beginner pickleball camps prove that racquet sports continue to be in demand in Appleton. Numbers were not as strong as other years, and we hope to have more tennis players during the coming summer.

Our Summer sports camps continue to be a great way for kids to try new sports when they are of the ages 4-8 years old. Basketball and Soccer continue to bring in interested new players to our program and we have had success with offering these camps over a four week session during the summer. In 2026, we look to take some of these sports that have been so popular with kids during the past few years and offer week long sports programming that will continue to teach kids the fundamentals of the sport while using games and fun activities to keep the kids engaged and wanting to continue playing each sport.

<u>Program</u>	<u>Participants</u>
Sumer Sports Camps (Basketball, Soccer, Sports Exploration, Multisport, Flag Football, Pickleball)	525
Summer Tennis Camps	302
Youth Volleyball Camp	37



Youth Sports Leagues

Our A-League youth sports leagues have been branded for three years and have continued the strong tradition of youth recreational sports at the Appleton Parks and Recreation Department. As we look to the future we look for other ways to continue our increased participation in our four core sports leagues. Basketball, Baseball/Softball/T-Ball, Soccer, and Football are all healthy programs providing great opportunities for City of Appleton kids.

A few highlights throughout 2025 included the continued rise in numbers for our youth soccer league that takes place at the USA Sports Complex. This league continues to grow, almost reaching pre-pandemic numbers. Our partnership with the USA Sports Complex is a great way for us to use high quality facilities while increasing the amount of soccer players in the area. Flag football and Baseball/Softball/T-ball are fortunate to have such a great space at Veterans Memorial Park. This facility offers children valuable play opportunities that enhance its appeal to the community.



A-League Participants:

Basketball	535
Baseball/Softball/T-Ball	835
Soccer	956
Flag Football	247

Adult Activities

This year, our adult programs continued to provide a variety of recreational opportunities for the community. Spanish classes remained a strong offering, with beginner and conversational classes performing well. Due to lower enrollment, the intermediate and advanced levels were merged to better align with demand. Adult dance classes (tap, hip hop, and ballet barre) maintained steady participation at the Northland Mall dance studios. Beginner pickleball clinics continued to be more popular than intermediate offerings, highlighting strong interest from new players. Tennis lessons at Erb Park saw continued declines in enrollment over the past few years, and we will continue to explore the reasons and overall community need for this program. Photography workshops at the Scheig Center remained well received. Following ongoing low registration and frequent cancellations, we made the difficult decision to discontinue our partnership with Seed Guild. Despite adjustments, we remained focused on providing meaningful and engaging adult recreation opportunities.



<u>Program</u>	<u>Participants</u>
Pet First Aid/CPR	5
Dance	103
Pickleball Clinics	43
Photography	8
Spanish	75
Tennis Lessons	20
Seed Guild	35

Fitness/Wellness

Adult fitness programming in 2025 continued to give the community a variety of ways to stay active. Yoga remained our most popular offering, with strong participation across classes. A familiar favorite, Forever Fit, returned this year and quickly became a hit, replacing StrongBodies and drawing in many participants. Aqua fitness classes were offered throughout the summer with mixed participation, providing helpful insight as we look ahead to refining future water-based programming. At the end of the year, the recreation team transitioned to the Scheig Center, requiring several fitness classes to relocate to the Northland Dance Studios. This shift was seamless, allowing programs to continue without interruption.

In December, we launched a new partnership with Full Women Rising, with classes beginning in 2026. Overall, 2025 fitness programming remained consistent, flexible, and responsive, keeping the community moving while setting the stage for future growth.



<u>Programs</u>	<u>Participants</u>
Forever Fit	33
Power Hour	34
Pure Strength	81
StrongBodies	32
Yoga	314
Zumba	87
Mindfulness	75
YMCA Fitness in the Park	600

Unity Dance & Acrobatics

Unity Dance & Acrobatics experienced a successful recital season running from September through May, with staff preparing throughout the year for the annual recital held May 2–3 at Appleton West High School. Our “A Night at the Movies” themed recital featured 694 participants across multiple dance styles, including a 45-student opening number and a senior dance, and was presented across four well-structured performances supported by more than 75 volunteers. Ticketing was managed smoothly through Showtix4u, with approximately 3,049 tickets sold, and additional revenue generated through sponsors, dancer advertisements, and recital t-shirt sales. Facility improvements were completed during the season with the replacement of studio flooring in early January, and dance photos were successfully held in March.

Looking ahead, summer programming launched on June 9 with 400 participants enrolled, while the fall season began September 22 with a 5.5% enrollment increase, 731 participants, expanded class offerings, and the addition of new instructors, assistants, and student volunteers to support continued program growth.

<u>Program</u>	<u>Participants</u>
Jazz	116
Lyrical	74
Ballet	120
Tap	61
Acrobatics	177
Hip Hop	139
Modern	12
Musical Theater	32
Summer Dance	400

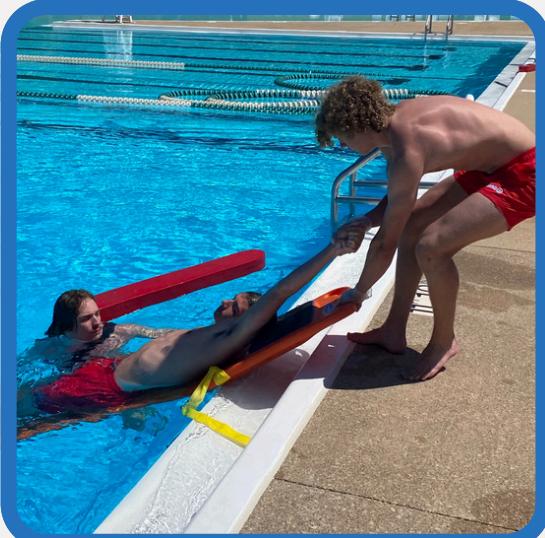


Aquatics

Erb and Mead Pools both had great seasons, despite being down in attendance slightly. The success of the pools was largely attributed to our dedicated staff. We saw a strong rate of returning employees, as well as a surplus of lifeguard applications, and that allowed all programming to be properly staffed throughout the summer. Even with the transition in our Recreation Supervisor role, staff stayed committed to their roles and consistent in their training.

Pool seasons operated on staggered schedules, with Mead Pool opening early for a pre-season weekend ahead of the customary opening. Both Erb and Mead Pools officially opened for the summer on June 6. Mead Pool closed for the season on August 15, followed by Erb Pool on August 24.

We also offer a successful year-round swim lesson program serving thousands of participants. This program plays a vital role in promoting water safety while building confidence and lifelong swimming skills for participants of all ages. During the summer, the pools also offered a variety of aqua fitness classes throughout the week.



Participants

Attendance: **57,505**

Swim Lessons: **2,256**

Passes sold: **914**

Rentals: **111**

Dog Swim: **50**

Special Events

Appleton Parks and Recreation enjoyed another strong year of special events and community connection in 2025, offering a wide range of experiences for residents of all ages. The Toy Ride Along continued to be a community favorite, with toys heading out on special adventures alongside the Appleton Police, Fire, and Department of Public Works, creating excitement for children throughout the city.

Mom Prom returned for an unforgettable evening while also serving as a successful fundraiser, generating \$12,000 in support of the fee waiver scholarship program. This represented a \$4,000 increase over 2024, largely driven by the addition of a raffle license and expanded raffle ticket sales.

Bike rodeos once again emphasized bicycle safety through interactive instruction and on-site bike repairs. Families gathered for Movies on the Hill, Flicks & Sips, Kids Fun Runs, and Ties & Tiaras, which offered a magical night of dancing and celebration for participants of all ages.



Special Events cont.

U.S. Venture Children's Week showcased a variety of free and reduced-cost activities, including the Appleton Parks and Recreation's Kids Color Fun Run, Kid's Rummage Sale, Dance-a-Rama, and the Playground Fair, featuring games, music, and inflatables.

Other popular offerings throughout the year included a Taylor Swift Dance Party, the Great Ball Pursuit, a Chicago bus trip, and festive seasonal events such as Glow in the Park, the Great Holiday Dash, and Letters to Santa.

Special events remain highly anticipated, and we are proud to continue providing opportunities that bring people together and create lasting memories in our community.



Event:

Toy Ride Along

Mom Prom

Bike Rodeos

Movie on the Hill

Flick & Sips

Fun Runs

Ties and Tiaras

US Venture

Children's Week

Taylor Swift Party

The Great Ball Pursuit

Glow in the Park

Holiday Dash

Letters to Santa

Participants:

64

360

91

100

150

744

122

9,000

77

400

300 (registered)

200

342

Facilities

SCHEIG CENTER

The Scheig Center continues to be a cherished community space, hosting 107 rentals in 2025, an increase of 10 rentals from last year, for events such as weddings and other celebrations. The Scheig Center also supports a wide range of recreation programs, including fitness classes, Spanish classes, preschool classes, adult workshops, and serves as a meeting hub for community groups like Friends of the Gardens, as well as a polling location for the City of Appleton. During the Park and Recreation building remodel, the Scheig Center has served as a temporary home for the Recreation Division and Customer Service operations.

Scheig Center

107 rentals



WINTER RECREATION

Winter recreation is heavily influenced by the weather, and 2025 showcased just how variable conditions can be. The year began with limited opportunities: in January 2025, the Cozy Clubhouse at the Reid Golf Course sledding hill was open for only two days, while the Goaltender at the Jones Park ice skating rinks operated for 18 days. December 2025 saw conditions that were great for winter rec with the Cozy Clubhouse open eight days, and the Goaltender welcomed skaters for 10 days at the end of the year.

Winter Recreation 1,835 participants

Community Connections

ATHLETIC ORGANIZATIONS

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

SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

- Appleton East High School Key Club
- Police Explorers
- Altrusa International

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
- Appleton YMCA
- Youth Enrichment League
- Debbie Daanen Photography
- Einstein Project
- Karate America & The Academy
- NEW HMong Professionals



Community Connections

COMMUNITY GROUPS/PARTNERS CONTINUED...

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





THANK YOU!

