

## **Programming Assessment and Recommendations**

Programming provides a variety of benefits to community residents, and should therefore be a key focus of the parks and recreation department. Since the establishment of a devoted parks and recreation department in Pender County in 1996, the department has offered limited recreational programming opportunities, with some programs being managed wholly by the county and partnerships created to manage other offerings. The purpose of this section is to examine some of the recreational program offerings within the county and recommend new programs that should be pursued based on the deficiencies revealed through the assessment and the needs expressed during the public input period.

### **Benefits of Recreational Programming**

Recreational programming offers community residents many benefits, typically categorized into four types: personal, social, economic, and environmental. Many studies and facts exist to support the benefits that are realized through parks and recreation offerings, and the following summarizes some of the benefits in each of the categories.

#### **Personal Benefits**

Recreational opportunities provide a number of benefits on the personal level. Recreation provides persons of all ages and backgrounds opportunities for relaxation, rest, and revitalization through leisure activities, all of which are important for stress management in today's hectic and demanding society. Recreational activities provide individuals with positive self-esteem and self-image, and a sense of satisfaction and improved quality of life. Recreation provides a host of health benefits, including reducing an individual's risk for heart disease, diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, cancer, and also improves the immune system. America's growing trends of less physical and more sedentary and car-oriented lifestyles are directly correlated with increasing obesity, heart disease, and other health problems that may be prevented through increased physical activity. Recreational opportunities also provide alternatives to self-destructive behavior and negative lifestyle choices that can deter one's ability to live a full, balanced, and satisfying life.

#### **Social Benefits**

A variety of social benefits may be realized through a well-rounded parks and recreation system. Recreational programs offer residents opportunities to interact with fellow community members and strengthen their sense of community while simultaneously promoting ethnic and cultural harmony. Family bonds may be strengthened through recreation, which arguably provides the foundation for a stronger society. Community recreation also reduces alienation, loneliness, and criminal and anti-social behaviors, all of which may be linked to depression within a community. In summary, parks and recreation opportunities provide substantial social benefits to communities.

#### **Economic Benefits**

A community's investment in parks and recreation also yields many direct and indirect economic benefits. Parks and recreation opportunities often catalyze the tourism industry; the American Hotel and Lodging Association reported that Americans spent over \$150 billion on leisure-related stays in 2000, or over 59% of the total national hotel/motel industry for the entire year. The availability of parks and recreation opportunities also influence the location decisions of major businesses and industries; communities with ample and varied parks and recreation opportunities are more highly favorable for business relocation and expansion. Also, the presence of parks and open spaces generally increase property values in a community. Other economic benefits of parks and recreation that may be realized by a community include reduction in criminal activity, preventative health care, and increased productivity of the community's work force.

#### **Environmental Benefits**

Parks and recreation can also provide a variety of environmental benefits. Primarily, lands utilized for recreation are often held in perpetual conservation and therefore provide areas for natural buffers and habitats that retain or enhance a host of environmental functions including biodiversity, surface and groundwater protection, flood and fire prevention and mitigation, and others. Parks and recreation facilities that promote bicycle and pedestrian use within a community reduces the vehicle-miles traveled, resulting in a net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and the negative effects associated with them. Finally, parks and recreation areas provide venues for environmental education, instilling environmental responsibility in community members and insuring a healthy environmental future.

## Programs and Services Overview

Pender County Parks and Recreation currently offers a very limited selection of programs and special events to county residents and visitors, with the majority of the programs being managed by recreation partners. Programs offered are focused towards youth, with opportunities for children to participate in organized league play for baseball, softball, basketball, football, and soccer. Pender County Parks and Recreation currently offers summer day camps in several areas of the county, and plans to offer summer day camp opportunities in supplemental areas in the future.

### Core Services Analysis

The recreational program opportunities offered or partnered by the county are very limited in both the types of programs and the target market they service. Recreational opportunities are largely focused on providing organized team sports for youth, which are geographically limited to certain areas within the county. Limited funding, staff resources, and existing facilities within the county are contributing to the programming needs within Pender County Parks and Recreation.

Through the public input solicited during this project, county residents expressed similar needs for more recreational programming opportunities, and indicated desires for programs that cater to users of all ages and interest. Residents also indicated desires for programs to be offered in more areas in the county, as long commutes or lack of available transportation prohibit some residents from participating in the existing recreational program offerings. Some of the program ideas indicated by residents during the public input process include afterschool programs, literacy programs, arts and crafts, health and wellness education, fitness and exercise classes, self-defense classes, first aid and CPR classes, vocational and computer training, cooking classes, and many others.

Despite the consensus of the public input indicating a desire for additional recreational programs, survey respondents indicated a general satisfaction with programs that they had participated in. However, a large percentage of respondents also indicated that they never participate in programs and services provided by the county. Many residents also indicated through written-in survey responses that they were unaware of any programs and services offered by the county at all.

Funding and staffing limitations within the department also impair the ability to expand the recreational offerings. While an increase in recreational programs would warrant the justification for additional staff positions within the department, it has proven challenging to increase the program offerings without additional staff resources to implement and facilitate new programs. Similar to the development of new parks and recreational facilities in the county, the implementation of new recreational programs offered by the county will require the county to invest in additional staff resources as well as adequately allocate funding for the programs. More information on organizational recommendations may be found in the previous chapter, *Department Organization and Analysis*.

### Fitness

Fitness-based recreation opportunities are available through several alternative recreation providers in the county, such as Fitness Fusion, Second Wind Fitness, Curves, and others. It may be feasible for Pender County Parks and Recreation to pursue a partnership with these recreation providers to ensure that fitness-oriented programs are available to a wide user group and in all areas of the county. Additionally, it may be feasible to explore Pender County-sponsored fitness programs within the existing private community centers in Pender County.

### Athletics

Organized team sports opportunities are available through Pender County's recreation partners, who provide leagues for youth soccer, football, cheerleading, baseball, softball, and basketball. Games are played at Hampstead Kiwanis Park, Pender Memorial Park, Rouse Field in Hampstead, or utilizing some of the schools' athletic fields and gymnasiums.

### Senior Programs

Many opportunities for recreation are available for senior residents in the county through Pender Adult Services, Inc. This group operates programs at the Heritage Place in Burgaw, the Topsail Senior Center in Hampstead, and the Maple Hill Recreation Center in Maple Hill. A variety of classes, programs, and support groups are available at the centers

during the weekdays, including arts and crafts classes such as basket making and oil painting, fitness and health classes such as yoga and Weight Watchers, and other recreation such as bingo and pinochle.

Pender Adult Services, Inc. also sponsors the annual Spring Senior Games in April and May, which take place in various locations in the county. The Heritage Place, Topsail Senior Center, Fitness Fusion, Olde Point Golf Club, and Second Wind Fitness Center help register participants and provide assistance for the games, which are available to community residents ages 55 and up. The games include outdoor events such as croquet, horseshoes, bocce ball, basketball shot, and spin casting. Throughout the week, seniors have the opportunity to participate in tennis, golf, track and field, swimming, and bowling. Also, the Silver Arts events held during this time gives seniors a chance to display their crafts, handiwork, visual and literary artwork, as well as their performing talents. Crafts displayed include quilts, baskets, woodcarving, knitting and crochet; Visual Arts category includes paintings, sculptures, and photography. Literary arts included in the games are poetry, short stories, and life experiences; seniors with musical talent or interest in dance or drama may participate in the Performing Arts.

### ***Special Events***

In April 2010, Pender County Parks and Recreation in cooperation with Hampstead Kiwanis Park, Inc. held the first annual Pender County Earth Day Festival at Hampstead Kiwanis Park. The festival turned out to be a great success, including games and activities for children, arts and crafts, music from local performers, various exhibits, an art contest for Pender County students, vendors and concessions, and much more. Parks and Recreation Staff along with Hampstead Kiwanis Park, Inc. look forward to improving and expanding this new special event in Pender County, as well as exploring other special event opportunities.

### ***Persons with Disabilities***

Limited recreational opportunities are available for county residents with disabilities, including the Pender County Special Olympics, which are held each spring and winter. The Special Olympics are coordinated and implemented by Pender County Schools, with assistance in past years provided in part by Pender County Parks and Recreation.

While the Special Olympics offers an opportunity for recreation for persons with varying disabilities, it should be a priority to provide additional programs and recreational opportunities for this unique group of residents with specialized needs. As more parks and recreation facilities are developed within the county, the possibilities for recreation opportunities for persons with disabilities will increase; for instance, the development of an ADA-accessible overlook at Millers Pond Park will provide persons with disabilities opportunities for enjoying and interacting with the natural environment within the park. As further detailed in *Facility Assessments and Recommendations*, existing parks within Pender County should be evaluated for ADA compliance and accessibility, and future facility should be planned to accommodate users with special needs.

## **Partnerships and Alternative Providers**

### **Partnership Analysis**

Pender County Parks and Recreation relies heavily on recreation partners to provide structured recreational opportunities to county residents, with the majority of opportunities available to youth. Some of the partnerships include:

- Burgaw Dixie Youth
- Eastern Pender Pop Warner Association
- Pender Adult Services
- Pender Youth Basketball Association
- Pender Youth Football and Cheerleading Association
- Pender Youth Soccer Association
- Pender United Football and Cheerleading Association
- Port City Soccer Club
- Topsail Ball Club
- Topsail Basketball Association
- Topsail Girls Softball Association

These recreation partners generally receive funding support from the county, as well as the use of parks and recreation facilities at Hampstead Kiwanis Park, Pender Memorial Park, and the gymnasiums at several Pender County schools. Additionally, Pender County Parks and Recreation provides staff support for program implementation and coordination, as well as grounds and facility maintenance. While Pender County receives the benefit of program opportunities for county residents, the county receives no revenues from the programs to help offset the resources devoted to each recreation program. It is recommended that a complete cost-benefit analysis be performed to evaluate the relationship between Pender County Parks and Recreation and the private recreation partners.

### **Alternative Providers**

Aside from the programs offered through Pender County Parks and Recreation and its recreation partners, a number of recreational opportunities are available through private and non-profit as well as other public organizations and agencies. As program opportunities are explored by Pender County Parks and Recreation, consideration should be given to the opportunities available through these alternative recreational providers to maximize opportunities and avoid duplication of efforts.

### **Private and Non-Profit Providers**

Many private and non-profit organizations provide recreational opportunities within Pender County, including many churches, community groups, and private businesses. Some of these opportunities include fitness and exercise classes, dance, martial arts, gymnastics, paintball, and charter fishing opportunities. *Facility Matrix 2: Existing Private Facilities*, found in the *Appendix*, includes a list of many of the private recreational providers in Pender County. It is recommended that Pender County Parks and Recreation focus particularly on strengthening partnerships with the community centers within the county to expand and improve program offerings and other recreational opportunities.

### **Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments**

Of the six municipalities in Pender County, only the Town of Surf City provides recreation program opportunities to residents and non-residents. These programs include various cards and games programs, writing forums, several dance classes, three yoga classes, Pilates, aerobics, martial arts, tennis lessons, personal training, and several other fitness and non-fitness oriented programs. More information on Surf City's recreational opportunities may be found on the town's website at [www.townofsurfcity.com](http://www.townofsurfcity.com).

## **Recreation Trends**

The recreational needs within a community are often changing, and programming opportunities should be flexible to account for variation in the community's recreational need. A multitude of factors influence the type of recreation programs desired in a community, including individual, community, and national trends.

### **Population-Based Programming**

#### **Youth**

After-school activities, whether team-oriented such as basketball, soccer, or baseball, or individual-oriented such as crafts, dance, or painting, have been proven to reduce juvenile crime and violence, decrease drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, and reduce teen pregnancy. Families are also increasingly looking to parks and recreation agencies to fill the void resulting from waning budgets supporting physical and arts education in public schools. Reduced physical education in schools combined with increased sedentary lifestyle and poor eating habits have led to sharp inclines in a variety of health problems, including obesity, diabetes, attention deficit disorder, and others. Related, a variety of grant opportunities have been created that may be utilized by Pender County Parks and Recreation to create and facilitate programs to combat these aforementioned problems.

#### **Retirees and Seniors**

Americans are retiring younger, healthier, and wealthier than past generations, therefore having more time, money, and energy to devote to leisure activities. A growing number of older Americans and retirees are taking part in physically-oriented programs, educational classes, travel, as well as other recreational leisure activities that allow them to interact with other persons from their generation in a fun and challenging environment.

### ***Special Needs Populations***

Like parks and recreation facilities, recreational programs should also cater to persons with unique needs or disabilities. Parks and recreation agencies can play an active role in providing opportunities for recreation and leisure activities for persons with disabilities or special needs, as opportunities for community interaction and recreation for these persons are not readily available outside of the school environment. Investment in facilities and opportunities for special needs populations should be a focus to ensure this user group is not overlooked in Pender County.

### ***Activity-Based Programming***

#### ***Less Time for Recreation***

Americans' recreational habits have changed in recent times as a result of less available time for recreation after taking care of daily obligations. As such, recreational programs are changing to cater to this trend by becoming less structured and more flexible to accommodate the varying schedules of individuals. Consideration should be given to the scheduling and availability of current and future programs to ensure that opportunities are available at a variety of times and locations.

#### ***Drop-in Programs***

"Drop-in programs" are programs that require no advance registration or monetary commitment from attendees. These types of programs allow individuals to participate in a recreational program at their discretion, which is beneficial to those with hectic schedules or who do not want to commit to several weeks of a program, but instead prefer to attend as their schedule permits. It may be feasible to allot several drop-in slots within each recreational program, offering individuals the option to pay per class rather than per semester.

#### ***Alternative Sports and Activities***

Participation in alternative sports and activities has increased over the past several decades. Often referred to as "extreme", these sports include skateboarding, in-line skating, rock climbing, adventure racing, mountain biking, and BMX racing. As participation in these sports and activities increase, it is necessary to ascertain Pender County's residents' need for special facilities and programs to accommodate these sports and activities. Often, specific clubs and organizations are willing to build, manage, and maintain facilities under an agreement with the county; Planning Staff was approached by the local chapter of the Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association (SORBA) during one of the public input meetings to begin preliminary discussions on mountain bike trails that the organization would be willing to build and maintain within a county park. A similar request was made for a radio-controlled car race track. These types of partnerships prove beneficial by empowering the interest group to invest in and maintain their facility or program, while the county benefits by providing the facility or program opportunity to the residents and visitors.

#### ***Environmental and Outdoor-based Recreation***

Domestically and worldwide, there has been a strong interest in environmental issues in recent years. Consumers are making more purchasing and lifestyle choices based on their environmental impact, and these choices are transferring over to recreational activities. Environmental education and outdoor-based recreation opportunities are of high demand, as apparent in the public input survey results that indicate Pender County's citizens' desires for nature areas, camping and fishing opportunities, and other outdoor-based recreation. Fortunately, Pender County is host to a variety of significant natural areas that may be utilized for environment-based recreation and education.

#### ***Fitness and Obesity Concerns***

Obesity rates, largely attributed to less time spent exercising and participating in recreation, are increasing for nearly every age group in the nation, and Pender County residents adhere to the trend. According to *Eat Smart Move More NC* statistics obtained from the Pender County Health Department, 60 to 65% of adult Pender County residents are obese and 45 to 50% are not meeting the recommended activity requirements. Over 25% of children in the county are overweight, while an additional 16% of children in Pender County are at risk of becoming overweight. Nearly 40% of teens and young adults (ages 12-18) in Pender County are overweight, while another 15% are at risk of becoming overweight. Obesity rates have also been rising in younger children; according to the *North Carolina Statewide and County Trends in Key Health Indicators* report for Pender County, the prevalence of obesity in children ages 5 to 11 has risen from 18% in 2000 to 36.8% in 2008. As mentioned, reduced rates of physical activity and recreation may be attributed to the increasing obesity rates; the 2009 North Carolina Child Health Care Report Card reports that only 44.3%

of students grades 9 through 12 across the state are physically active for a total of 60 minutes or more per day five or more days per week.

These alarming statistics support the need for opportunities for physical activity and recreation to be available to county residents of all ages. Pender County should continue to encourage residents to partake in physical activities and recreation to ensure a healthier, happier, and more productive population.

### **Programming Recommendations Summary**

The recreational program opportunities offered by the county through the parks and recreation division as well as through the recreation partners provide limited opportunities for a small segment of the county's population. County residents strongly expressed the desire for more of a variety of programs for residents of all ages, capabilities, and interests, as well as a desire for these programs to be offered in additional locations within the county. Many local and national trends should be taken into consideration when the county approaches expanding the available program opportunities, including the need for programs for youth residents as well as the older adults living in the county. The limited existing parks and recreation facilities within the county also create an impediment to creating new programs within the county, as the limited facilities are already experiencing signs of exhausted use. Additionally, in order for the county to adequately expand and improve recreational program opportunities, it will be necessary to provide appropriate funding and staff resources for program implementation and coordination. Because of the limited program opportunities currently offered in Pender County, there are many opportunities for expanding program offerings in order to diversify the types of programs available and increase the population segments targeted for programming. It is recommended that a future plan update include a more detailed recreational programming implementation and expansion plan once the county is better positioned to hire additional staff and once additional facilities become available.