

munster **PARKS** AND RECREATION

2024 YEAR IN REVIEW/ANNUAL REPORT

Town of Munster, Lake County, Indiana

2024 Board of Parks and Recreation

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Janice Uram, Recording Secretary

Town of Munster Parks and Recreation Department



1005 Ridge Road, Munster IN 46321

(219) 836-7275

www.munster.org

PARK BOARD & DEPARTMENT FULL-TIME STAFF

FULL-TIME STAFF

Director of Parks and Recreation	Mark Heintz, CPRP
Superintendent of Park Operations	Kevin Dark
Superintendent of Recreation	Jill Higgins, CPRP
Maintainer IV - Centennial Park	Bob Webb
Recreation Supervisor - Aquatics	Abby Kresal, AFO
Recreation Supervisor	Mara DiCarlo
Marketing Coordinator	Donna Chant
Administrative Secretary	Janice Uram
Maintainer III	Ron Moss, CPO
Maintainer III	Christina Edwards, CPO
Maintainer II	Fernando Lopez
Maintainer II	Michael Talarico
Maintainer II	Anthony Magnabosco
Recreation Intern - summer 2024	Faith Kuhns, Indiana University Indianapolis in Sport Management



Cart Storage Garage 2024

The full time staff remained the same for the department in 2024 however a few items are of note. A vacant Maintainer II position was filled in April when Anthony Magnabosco became a full-time employee. Jill Higgins renewed her CPRP certification. Faith Kuhns, a Sport Management major at Indiana University Indianapolis, was the intern for the 2024 summer season for the department.

The department also employed 150 part-time employees in 2024. These included pool lifeguards and staff, park maintenance assistants, recreation program leaders, referees, sports instructors, camp aides, social center supervisors, and similar types of positions.

The maintenance division of the department spent a lot of time catching up on deferred maintenance as well as the on-going daily trash pick-up, washroom cleaning, social center set up, gas plant monitoring/maintenance, and leachate pump operations that absorb a significant amount of time. The continued closure of the Centennial Park Clubhouse also helped to reduce the work load which allowed maintenance staff time to help with other related tasks at the park for special events, on-going maintenance, and new projects due to the new golf pro shop construction. Two additional full-time maintenance staff positions were approved in 2024 which will be filled in 2025 so the department can seek to maintain all park facilities as desired by the community.

Numerous volunteers really make Munster Parks and Recreation a special department which builds a stronger community! Volunteers help out with recreation programs, special events, maintenance tasks and improvements each year. Munster is a better place because of the dedication to these civic minded individuals including National Honors Society and Project X students at Munster High School, Keen-Ager volunteers, Earth Day volunteers, Park Pride Day volunteers, Munster Garden Club members, Scout troops, and so many more.

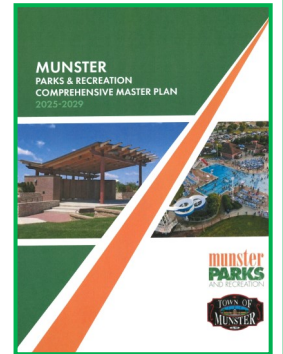
The department participates as a member of the Cooperative Special Recreation Initiative (CSRI), Indiana Park and Recreation Association (IPRA), Illinois Park and Recreation Association (IPRA), Munster Chamber of Commerce, National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), NWI Parknership, South Shore Arts Partnership, South Shore Convention & Visitor's Authority (SSCVA), Suburban Park and Recreation Association (SPRA), and the LERN Organization.

BOARD ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ◆ Approved the 2023 Annual Report, replacement vehicle purchases (ztrak, gator, triplex mower, trucks 142, 144 & 146), twelve batting cage net replacements at Community Park, and new windows and doors for Social Center.
- ◆ Engaged SEH to complete a grading plan for Community Estates Park. Approved purchase of utility vehicle for golf course and the 2023 fertilization contractor award.
- ◆ Awarded improvements to the Centennial Park stage sound system.
- ◆ Resolved that the Centennial Park Clubhouse would be demolished once the new Pro Shop is available to be used.
- ◆ Awarded improvements to the White Oak Park pickleball courts.
- ◆ Approved repaving the track at Frank Hammond Park.
- ◆ Awarded playground safety surfacing improvements to replenish the wood fiber surfacing.
- ◆ Passed resolutions for each season updating the program fees as advertised in each seasonal brochure.
- ◆ Approved an encroachment agreement for Community Estates Park with Wolverine Pipeline.
- ◆ Adopted the 2025-2029 parks and recreation master plan.
- ◆ Approved several change orders to the Pro Shop and Cart Storage Building project.
- ◆ Supported a request from Humane Indiana for their Paws in the Park event.
- ◆ Researched and considered the request to extend the pool season by opening on weekends only after school was back in session but declined after learning the cost to do so proved to be significant. Approved operational details for the 2025 season.
- ◆ Approved the monitoring system proposal from Alert Alarm for the Social Center.
- ◆ Supported the updated park shelter user agreement.
- ◆ Approved the resolution to change the name of the Social Center to the Munster Lions Club Social Center.
- ◆ Joined the BuyBoard purchasing cooperative by approving the interlocal participation agreement.
- ◆ Approved the purchase and installation of new replacement playgrounds at Briar Creek Park and Cobblestones Park.
- ◆ Supported a salary and wage schedule for part-time and seasonal employees for 2025.
- ◆ Approved of changes for Residents to the Centennial Park parking vehicle registration process.
- ◆ Extended the landscape maintenance services contract with Great Lakes Landscaping for 2025.
- ◆ Approved an easement for NIPSCO at Evergreen Park for a guy wire for a replacement service pole.
- ◆ Backed the request from Munster Babe Ruth to run a 40+ league on the fields at Community Park in 2025.
- ◆ Approved the meeting schedule for 2025. Met in a timely fashion throughout the year to approve fees and vouchers.



Golf Pro Shop 2024



Parks & Recreation Master Plan

FINANCIAL

The Parks and Recreation fund is the main budget for day-to-day operations of the department.

2024 Parks and Recreation fund budget.....	\$3,206,580.00
2023 Revenue	\$3,140,208.79 including taxes; \$876,320.66 without taxes
2023 Expenses	\$2,715,752.71 (84.7% of budget was expended)

'2370 fund' ~ is a non-reverting fund, separate from the above figures, that is set up to track specific donations, sponsorships and the like to ensure revenues are used as they have been specified for particular activities, events, programs or improvements.

2023 Revenue	\$162,149.07
2023 Expenses	\$157,517.42

These are the associated expenses for such activities, events, or facilities for which revenue was received.

Parking fund: Budget	\$171,662.00
Expenses	\$112,218.57
Gross Revenue.....	\$190,044.90 (includes end of 2023 and fund interest)



PARKS AND FACILITIES

2024 park usage continued to be busy as people looked to be outside for a lot of their recreational pursuits. Besides normal day-to-day maintenance including trash pickup, washroom cleaning, Social Center set up, gas plant monitoring/maintenance, leachate pump operation/recording, the below items are also noted.



Bike repair station 2024

◆ A two-year program concluded at the Social Center to replace all doors and windows. Additionally, a commercial fridge, freezer, warmer and oven were brought over from the Clubhouse. With help from the Munster Lions, some cabinets and counters were moved. Signage, flyers and website information has been changed to reflect the new Munster Lions Club Social Center name of the facility. Other improvements also include new blinds, paper towel holders, light fixtures, card tables, banquet tables and tuckpointing of the building.

◆ Per the vehicle replacement schedule, a new Z-Trak mower, a triplex mower, two golf utility vehicles, and four new Ford trucks (unit #142, #144, #146), were purchased.



Briar Creek Park bridge 2024



Railroad mile marker kiosk 2024

◆ Donations for two memorial bricks, ten memorial trees and two memorial benches were added to the park system as a benefit to the community.

◆ Accessibility improvements were made to the pedestrian bridge approaches at Briar Creek Park.

◆ Construction concluded on the new Golf Pro Shop and Cart storage buildings at Centennial Park.

◆ Fencing was replaced at the Centennial Park maintenance garage yard to gain extra space.

◆ The walking path at Burlwood Park was sealcoated.

◆ The track at Frank Hammond Park was repaved and striped.

◆ The pergola at the Monon Trailhead was repaired and repainted.

◆ The swivel panels and the exposed rafter tails were stained on the Centennial Park stage.

◆ New netting was installed on the 12 batting cage nets at Community Park.

◆ The poured-in-place surfacing at Community Park was repaired in the fall.

◆ Maintenance shops were cleaned and brought into MS4 compliance.

◆ All picnic tables at shelters were bolted down to ensure each shelter as the advertised seating capacity.

◆ Landscaping was completed near the Kaske House at Heritage Park with support from the Munster Historical Society and the Munster Garden Club.

◆ The 'Togetherness' sculpture at Centennial Park was shell blasted and repainted.

◆ Vinyl dumpster fencing at the skate park was replaced with chain link and slats after several occurrences of vandalism.

◆ Drainage was installed at the dog park at Centennial Park following a grading plan review by SEH.

◆ There are frequent irrigation system leaks at Centennial Park during that season which requires multiple repairs each week.

◆ Everything in the Clubhouse was drained down before the winter season to avoid any lines freezing.

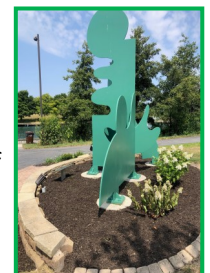
◆ Many items were moved and installed to the new golf buildings in advance of moving golf operations over.

◆ Drainage was installed at the Babe Ruth fields.

◆ A bike repair station and an historical train mile marker kiosk were installed along the Penny Greenway at Centennial Park.



Babe Ruth field drainage 2024



Togetherness Sculpture 2024



White Oak Park Pickleball Courts 2024

◆ Pickleball courts at White Oak Park were refinished.

PARKS AND FACILITIES

RENTAL FACILITIES

In 2024, Munster Parks and Recreation had the rentals listed below by facility/use. Altogether, there were 358 ‘rentals’, a 13% increase over 2023, broken down as follows.

Community Park Social Center	137	Park Shelters	108
Weddings (Heritage Park 8, Centennial 13)	21	Private Pool Rentals	35
Pool Birthday Parties.....	8	Pool Group Rentals	7



Lions Club Social Center



Munster Pool 2024

MUNSTER COMMUNITY POOL

- ◆ The Munster Pool had 19,198 visits in 2024 which was a 14% increase from the prior year.
- ◆ The pool was open from May 25 - August 11.
- ◆ 983 season pool passes were sold in 2024 which was up 17% over the year before.
- ◆ Getting all patrons to wear proper swim attire is still the biggest challenge for staff but signage and other efforts have helped to make visitors aware of the policy.
- ◆ The biggest challenge for operating the facility is having an adequate number of pool staff. There are times when pool staff must be paid overtime to keep the facility open when other staff calls off or doesn't show up.
- ◆ There were 61 saves/rescues that lifeguards had to perform which was a 20% decrease from the previous year.
- ◆ Capital improvement projects included: gel coated the slides, repaired the large deck pressure washer, installed a heat/air conditioner unit in the manager's office building and in the pump house after both failed.
- ◆ 2024 Pool finances:

Revenues:	\$261,196.05	(admission, sponsors, rentals, lessons)
Expenses:	\$268,779.77	(staff, supplies, signage, printing)
Variance:	\$-7,583.72	(Park Board approved increases to 2025 fees to help cover expenses)

CENTENNIAL PARK PARKING

2024 was the second full season and 3rd season overall of pay-to-park fees along with enforcement. Asta Parking Inc. is the parking management contractor for the Town and dealt with collection of fees and enforcement of violations. The net income generated from 2024 for hourly, daily, annual, and violation enforcement fees totaled \$127,540. Revenue from the parking system is used to help operate and maintain Centennial Park. The office receives calls daily about violations during the parking season. Efforts have been made to reduce call volume to the office and have them directed to the parking management contractor. All office staff deals with parking calls on a daily basis during the pay-to-park season.



CENTENNIAL PARK GOLF

The Town has contracted with Centennial Park Golf Management LLC to manage the Golf Course/Clubhouse facility at Centennial Park and concessions at Community Park. Centennial Park Golf Management LLC, is a wholly owned subsidiary of Indigo Sports, a Troon Company. They have three full-time staff at the golf course and a number of seasonal staff to operate and maintain the facilities. The Clubhouse facility was closed due to structural issues but was continued to be used for Pro Shop access and to store golf carts through 2024. Closing the banquet operations significantly hurt the bottom line over the last three years. Charging to park at the site is also mentioned as a reason why golf rounds and driving range revenues are not significantly higher despite validating parking for those users. Below are some financial highlights from the 2024 season. Golf staff will make a full presentation at the February Park Board meeting as a year-in-review.

	2022	2023	2024	% change from 2023
Golf Rounds	13,783	15,769	17,345	+10.0%
Green Fees	\$187,521	\$161,488	\$195,013	+20.8%
Cart Fees	\$60,894	\$57,571	\$78,620	+36.6%
Range Revenue	\$40,111	\$35,824	\$58,095	+62.2%
Pro Shop Rev.	\$12,215	\$14,200	\$17,778	+25.2%



CENTENNIAL PARK
GOLF COURSE



RECREATION PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Indoor recreation programming is our biggest challenge. The recreation staff is always looking for ways to increase programs at existing Town owned facilities while also looking to partner with local establishments or other organizations with available space for increased activities.

PROGRAMMING

- ◆ The Youth Soccer League was again successful with 934 players, 110 coaches and 12 referees. In all, there were 68 teams across four age divisions in 2 seasons. Both leagues were sponsored by Land O' Frost. The spring season was delayed by a week due to heavy rain for better field conditions.
- ◆ 2024 Summer Camp reached 110 campers per week – this is 10 more/week than 2023. Entertainment was brought in, special lunches were available on Fridays, ice cream treats were available on Monday, and pool days were included. Communication was made to parents via email and posted to our Facebook group page: "2024 Munster Parks Summer Camp" which has 520 members. New field trips included Sloo Moo Institute and Washington Park Zoo. Enrollment was 95% full within 3 hours of making it public.
- ◆ A new tennis director was hired and during the summer season, over 150 students participated in tennis lessons.
- ◆ Parks rekindled their partnership with Susan's School of Dance. A new partnership was also formed with Patti's All American throughout the 2024 season.
- ◆ Pint-size camps ran with 60 enrolled. 'Diggers & Dents' and the 'Science Camps' had the highest enrollment of the five camps offered.
- ◆ 2024 Keen-Ager memberships were similar to 2023 with 265 members.
- ◆ Five special BINGOS were offered. A local business sponsored each lunch to our average attendance of 70 Keen-Agers.
- ◆ Swim Lessons are always a huge program. The winter season had 121. The summer had 232.
- ◆ A new location was found for the Keen-Ager Holiday Party. 76 Keen-Agers joined for a plated meal, live music, a raffle and a favor. All raffle items were donated by the Holiday Arts & Crafts Fair Vendors. This event will return to Cloister in the Woods again in 2025 due to rave reviews.
- ◆ Lunch and shows for the Keen-Ager group were a hit. Shows included: Joan and Betty, Ruth Handler, Donna Reed, Edith Wilson, and Hedda Hopper. 130 participants enjoyed the lunch and shows.
- ◆ Dog Park memberships added up 247.
- ◆ Birding classes continue to be popular. 35 bird seekers participated throughout the year.
- ◆ Big bus trips were hit or miss; however, some favorites were: Lavender Hills Farm in Niles MI, The Fly Over Experience at Navy Pier, CET Chicago Architectural Tour, and the Chicago Bakery Bus Tour.
- ◆ The partnership with Premier World Discovery was canceled due to lack of communication. We renewed the partnerships with Collette and Mayflower Tours. We have booked multiple overnight trips; the most sold trip was to New York with seven. Other popular trips were to Ireland and Yellowstone.
- ◆ Other popular programming included: Drama Kids Workshop, Spanish, Robotics, Coffee and Canvas, Nana Clare's workshops, ASL, Skincare, Hispanic Heritage Dance, Computer coding and Wado-Ki Karate.



Pint Size Camp



Keen-Agers 2024



Pumpkins, Witches & Hayrides

RECREATION PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

SPECIAL EVENTS

◆ Daddy Daughter Date Night sold out before the early-bird deadline passed with 201 Father/Daughter duos. Everyone ate a catered meal, danced the night away and special winners walked away with a raffle prize donated by local kid-friendly businesses. An after-dinner option was offered and sold out at 31. A new favor, dipped pretzel rods and hot chocolate bombs, were a big hit.



Daddy Daughter Date Night 2024

◆ The 2nd Annual Home Improvement Fair ran in 2024 with 17 vendors.

◆ Cash for Clutter, as usual, had a great turnout with awesome weather. Both events ran with 201 sellers in total.

◆ The Community Egg Hunts were quite frigid with 160 participants.

◆ Winter swim lessons were cut short, and the Underwater Egg Hunt was cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances: a mechanical problem at Munster High School. Staff had to issue 76 swimming lessons and 40 underwater refunds.



Munster Car Show 2024

◆ The Munster Car Show had a Star Wars theme since it took place on May 4th. 221 vehicles, 16 vendors, 8 food vendors and 9 sponsors enjoyed beautiful weather.

◆ People's Bank again sponsored the Summer Concert Series at Munster Town Hall with a combined 2,000 in attendance.

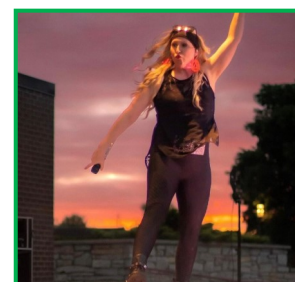
◆ The Munster CIVIC Foundation donated \$40,000 to fund Centennial Park concerts. This included 10 Monday Night (including Symphony) and 2 Friday Nights. Combined attendance was 2,000+.

◆ For the 2nd year in a row, Kid's Fest was rescheduled to July due to torrential forecasted rain. With about 1,200 in attendance, 412 wristbands were sold. The wristbands included seven special activities, while there were over twenty free stations.

◆ Touch-A-Truck was run by our summer intern. Over 20 trucks showcased their vehicles. A bounce house and ice cream truck were added in 2024.

◆ Incredible Bats was a new show we brought in with over 60 people in attendance. Families got to see not only bats, but sloths, skunks, an armadillo and more.

◆ Movies are always well-attended events. All three summer movies shown had an average attendance of 450. The glow vendor was welcome back and 2 food vendors were secured for each movie. Next year, we will be adding a vendor aspect to the movies.



Civic Monday Concert 2024

◆ The Pennsy Bike Ride was boosted in on-site registration due to the fabulous weather that evening. Between our registration and Schererville's, there were over 120 in attendance.

◆ Regions Eats Food Festival was moved from July to June for not excruciating heat during the event. 22 food vendors were secured, 15 vendors and live music was offered by 'The Elvis Diet'.

◆ Bark in the Park continued in 2024 with 25 vendors, 4 food vendors and 6 sponsors. Demonstrations, a superlative contest, and a photo booth for the dogs was offered. This event will move to May next year, so it's not too close to Humane Indiana's event.

Bieker Woods Night Walk

◆ Bieker Woods Night Walk ran with 996 in attendance. Munster Girl Scouts sold glow items, Munster Boy Scouts sold popcorn, and food vendors were onsite. This event is always very popular with High School volunteers.

◆ Park staff worked cooperatively for months with the Munster Civic Foundation and Munster Chamber to run a successful Light the Night event for about 1,000 in attendance. The highlights were the meet-and-greet with Santa and reindeer visit.



Cash for Clutter 2024

◆ The Holiday Arts and Crafts Fair was extremely well attended. 125 vendors displayed; 31 of which were new. There is also a waitlist of 20 more vendors. 39 vendors have already submitted their application and payment for next year.

◆ The department continued to support the Weed Wrangle at Heritage Park, Independence Day Celebration at Centennial Park, National Night Out at the Pool and the Monarch Festival at Heritage Park.

DEPARTMENT SOCIAL MEDIA AND MARKETING

The department shares information in many different ways to help get the word out to the community. Information on recreational activities, programs, and facilities offered by the Town is shared



through different platforms. Three 'Recreation Guides' and use of the monthly 'News You Can Use' utility



2024 Winter/Spring



2024 Summer



2024 Fall

bill newsletters are traditional ways of advertising as are the marquees at Centennial Park and Community Park. In more recent years, the department has become more aggressive with digital advertising using social media and direct emails, to share activities and events as more people are finding information via those platforms.

The department Facebook page was hacked in late 2023. Numerous attempts to recover the page were unsuccessful and a new



page had to be created in January, 2024. The new page is up to 1,500 'followers'. The Summer Camp group page was also recreated and 520 have followed that group. Posts were shared 955 times in 2024. The

Holiday Arts and Crafts Fair had the highest amount of shares with 225. Staff will boost Facebook ads with funding from time to time. As more people are finding their information on social media,

concentrated social media ads have been found to be a great tool for marketing besides the regularly anticipated Recreation Guides. Posts can now be scheduled for both Facebook and Instagram to keep



sharing of information consistent across both platforms.

Email marketing is frequently used to get direct contact to customers. The 'Active Network' registration software used by the department is a tool that is relied upon to share activity information with participants. The email list grew 5.2% in 2024 and is up to 9,355 contacts. The department will also utilize the 'Smart 911/RAVE' text message system for event notices which increased by 7.1% to 4,097 subscribers.



Other marketing efforts are teaming up with local businesses and organizations for sponsoring activities while also offering advertising opportunities at certain park facilities. In 2024, \$71,100 was received for various program and events sponsors. The largest sponsor was Munster Civic Foundation giving \$40,000 to sponsor the Centennial Park Concerts and the NWI Symphony. Advertising opportunities brought in an additional \$44,995. Additionally, some sponsors gave in-kind donations to share at activities and/or events. Bowman Displays continued their commitment to the Munster community by providing complimentary banners to advertise activities for the department which helps the department save money and advertise.

GOALS FOR 2025

The following is the framework of goals as a plan for the Parks and Recreation department for 2025!

- ◆ Replace the landfill gas-to-energy generator at Centennial Park.
- ◆ Proceed with the next steps to demolish the Centennial Park Clubhouse and plan the redevelopment of that area.
- ◆ Fill the vacant Maintainer II and IV positions for the maintenance division.
- ◆ Replace playgrounds at Briar Creek Park and Cobblestones Park which will be delivered in January.
- ◆ Design, bid, and construct a new washroom and storage building at West Lakes Park.
- ◆ Bid and construct the 'Bridges over Ditches' project which is 20+ years in the making to connect a pathway from Munster to Highland.
- ◆ Repave the Fisher Street bike trail.
- ◆ Complete 2024 bond issue vehicle replacement purchases including a new golf cart fleet.
- ◆ Determine next steps for redevelopment of the current tennis courts at Cobblestones Park.
- ◆ Improve the Centennial Park shelter washrooms with new flooring and lighting.
- ◆ Explore opportunities to further meet the recreational demands of the community by reassessing current parks and recreational facilities to best meet those needs using the 2025-2029 master plan as a guide.
- ◆ Partner with the School Town of Munster on new tennis courts at Community Park.

