

## 2017 NRPA Congress Report

I wish to thank Jim Randall and the Board of Commissioners for the opportunity to attend the 2017 NRPA Congress. It was a unique and exciting experience to attend sessions where I knew the speakers and had participated in their projects. This made the Congress deeply personal to me.

As you know, Jim was invited to speak as part of a distinguished panel of National Gold Medal Award Winners. The head of the Gold Medal Committee introduced this group as the “Best of the Best.” This was a collection of the national champions of the parks and recreation field. What a thrill to be in the audience to hear Jim share his approach to winning two Gold Medal Awards!

Being in the smallest population category, the Frankfort Square Park District does not have the resources that the larger agencies have. While other agencies referred to their head writers and marketing staff, our approach is far different. We use it as an opportunity to establish a direction through surveys and master plans and a method to review the agency’s operations. It is our scorecard on how we are meeting the needs of the FSPD’s residents and developing innovative approaches to district operations. Jim’s hands-on approach to leading his team through this process is extremely rewarding to me, and preferable to leaving it to a marketing department.

I am sure the audience deeply appreciated the opportunity to learn from these tremendous leaders, and their questions mainly focused on the areas of teamwork and motivation.

Another session I enjoyed was presented by Dr. Michael Mulvaney, Association Professor at Illinois State University and longtime friend of the FSPD working on our master plans. Dr. Mulvaney has been studying retirement for a number of years; I participated in his survey of Illinois park and recreation professionals, and have been following his progress.

The FSPD benefits tremendously from the talents and efforts of retired individuals working part-time at the park district. Previously, Dr. Mulvaney spoke on the value these individuals bring to an agency, and how supervisors can understand their motivations and provide a work environment that fits their needs. The FSPD has many job opportunities that offer benefits such as socialization, contributing to the community/team, having fun, and staying active.

According to Dr. Mulvaney’s findings, 26% of park and recreation professionals will retire in the next 5 – 10 years, and the vast majority have interest in continuing to work in a part-time and/or volunteer basis. These “bridge” or “boomerang” employees have strong job knowledge and experience. This, combined with an interest to continue in the field, looks promising for agencies like ours that attract and value these individuals.

In addition to finding very positive results such as strong attachment to work/career, high quality of personal leisure experiences, and low social/emotional anxiety about retirement, Dr. Mulvaney’s results indicated that 1/3 of respondents are not satisfied with their lives. This really surprised us, and if the numbers are this large with a seemingly happy group, what must it be for the general population? There is no better time to emphasize the benefits of recreation, parks, and open space to those in need of friendship, knowledge, accomplishment, nature, and joy.

Thank you again for this wonderful opportunity to learn from those I admire!

Respectfully Submitted,

Audrey Marcquenski