

# 2021-2022 ANNUAL REPORT



CHARLESTONCOUNTYPARKS.COM



*Yellow-crowned Night Heron at  
Caw Caw Interpretive Center*

# Message from the Executive Director



**Kevin Bowie**

Dear Charleston County Residents:

It is my pleasure to share with you the Annual Report that includes many of our accomplishments for the 2021 - 2022 fiscal year. I have enjoyed a long career with Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission, and I'm pleased to be introducing myself as the agency's new Executive Director. You can read a little bit more about my background on pg. 10. I am honored to be in this role and am excited to build upon the incredible foundation that the CCPRC team has created.

The 2021-2022 fiscal year was one of growth, working to make our parks and programs more accessible, overcoming staffing challenges, and planning as we kicked off our ten-year comprehensive plan.

We were pleased to introduce several new events this year including the Grind for Life skate competition at SK8 Charleston and Palmetto Park Jam at Palmetto Islands County Park. We have been making excellent progress with our ADA transition plan that will make our parks more accessible for all. A good example of this work are the improvements that were made to the Sol Legare boat landing. We are also happy to have partnered with KultureCity to better assist our guests with sensory needs.

Like many of our neighbors we did face some hiring challenges in 2021. As with any challenge it's not only how we faced it, but what we learned from it. I'm very proud of how our team managed the shortages, and the good news is we were able to develop several new strategies that should help us in our recruitment efforts next year.

This past fiscal year we also began work on our comprehensive planning process. The resulting plan will be called 2033: Parks and Recreation for ALL (abbreviated as PARFA). This is a very important time for us as we determine what the needs of our community are today and what they will be in the coming years. During this process, we will be actively engaging with the community to ensure as many voices as possible are heard.

As we move into the coming year we have much to look forward to. The new Folly Beach Fishing Pier is slated to open in early 2023. The apron area opened in 2021 and that has allowed visitors to get a bird's eye view of the construction. The Folly Beach Fishing Pier has always been considered an iconic landmark, and we feel privileged to be creating the next pier that will serve our community for generations to come.

Finally, I want to say thank you to each of you for supporting your parks. I meet people every day who are passionate about these beautiful places. We appreciate your commitment to us, and in return we look forward to providing you with another great year of programming, events and outdoor adventures.

I look forward to seeing you in the parks soon!

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Kevin Bowie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kevin Bowie  
Executive Director  
Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission

# Agency Overview

The Charleston County Park & Recreation Commission operates over 11,000 acres of property, including regional parks, beach parks, a historic plantation site, fishing piers, waterparks, boat landings, a climbing wall, an interpretive center, an equestrian center, a skate park, vacation cottages, campground, a marina, and event facilities. We also offer a variety of recreational services - festivals, concerts, races, camps, classes, and more.

# Mission Statement

The Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission will improve the quality of life in Charleston County by offering a diverse system of park facilities, programs and services.

# Vision Statement

To be distinguished as a nationally accredited and financially sustainable park and recreation agency through our commitment to preserving our natural, historical and cultural resources, offering a clean, safe and exceptional visitor experience that is accessible to all.

# Core Values

## **Community Enrichment**

Enabling lives through education and programs

## **Leadership**

Providing professional staff development

## **Fun**

Delivering fun to customers

## **Exceptional Customer Service**

Always focusing on you

## **Health and Wellness**

Providing and promoting healthy lifestyle opportunities

## **Quality**

Striving for quality throughout the park system

## **Diversity and Inclusion**

Creating a park system that reflects the diversity of our community

## **Safety**

Ensuring safe and secure environments

## **Accessibility**

Removing barriers to make programs and facilities accessible for all

## **Stewardship**

Preserving and conserving cultural, natural, and historical resources

## **Building a Legacy**

Maintaining a vision for the future while sustaining a healthy park system



# FY21/22 BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



**Collin Brunner**  
**Chair**



**Eduardo Curry**  
**Vice-Chair**



**Michelle Brandt**



**Lisa S. King**



**Mattese Lecque**



**Teddy Manos**

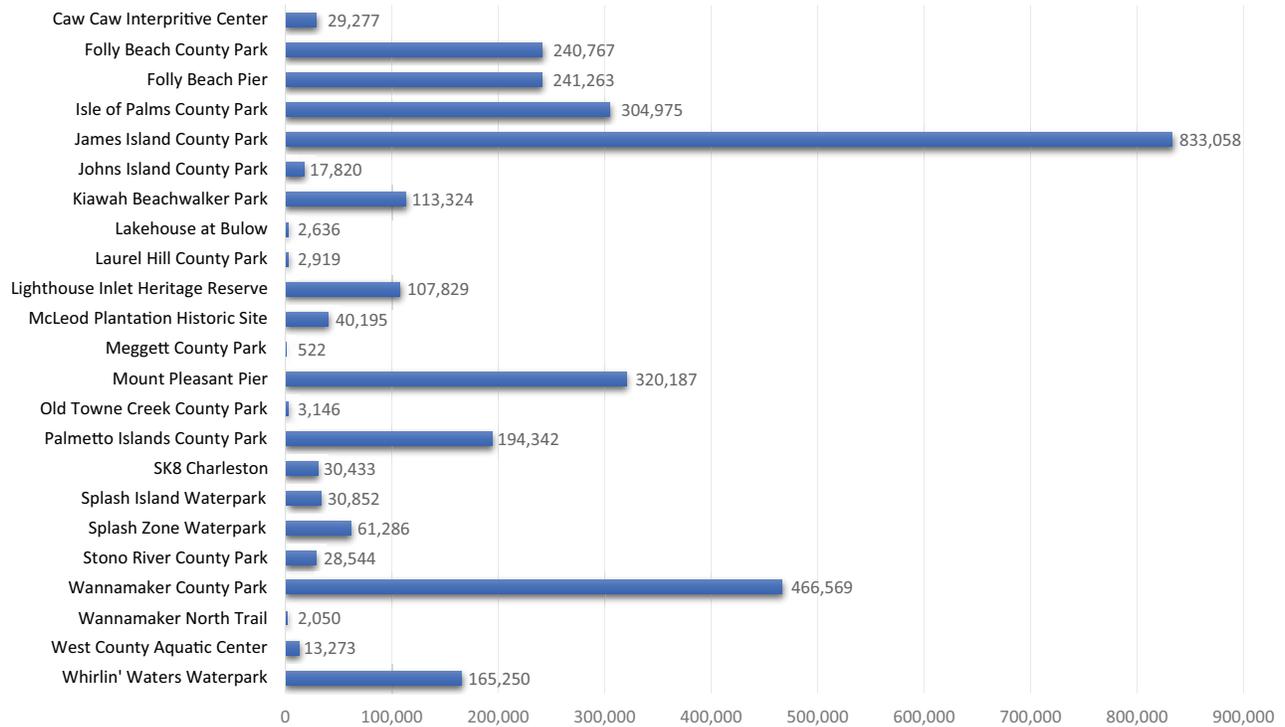


**Brad Taggart**



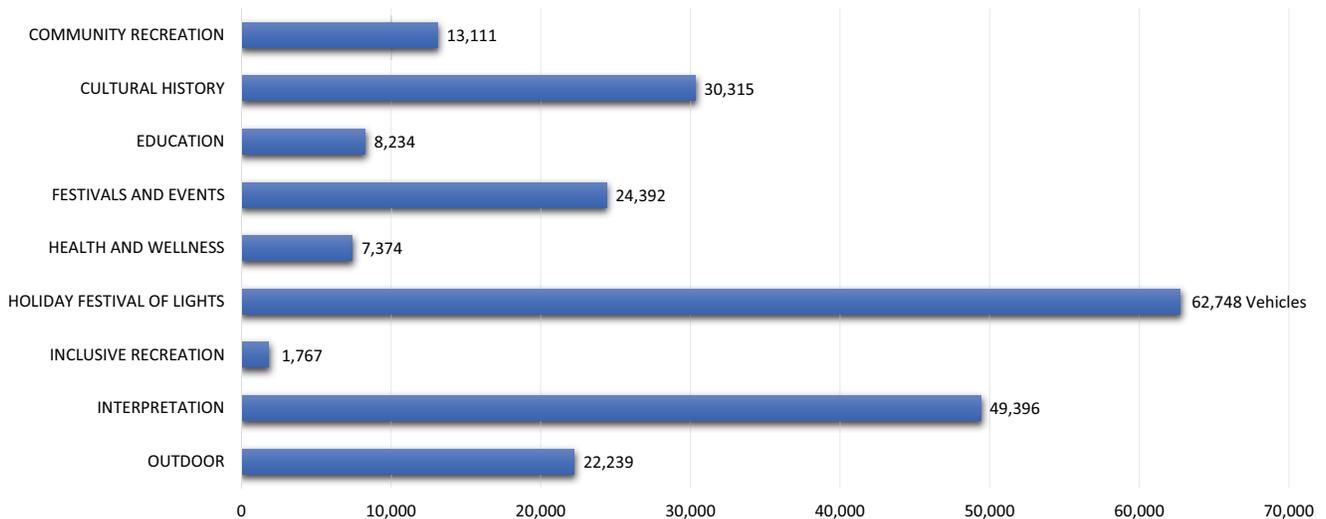
# Patrons at Play

## FY21/22 Park & Facility Attendance Total: 3,249,634



\* FY20/21 Park and Facility Attendance Total: 2,798,935

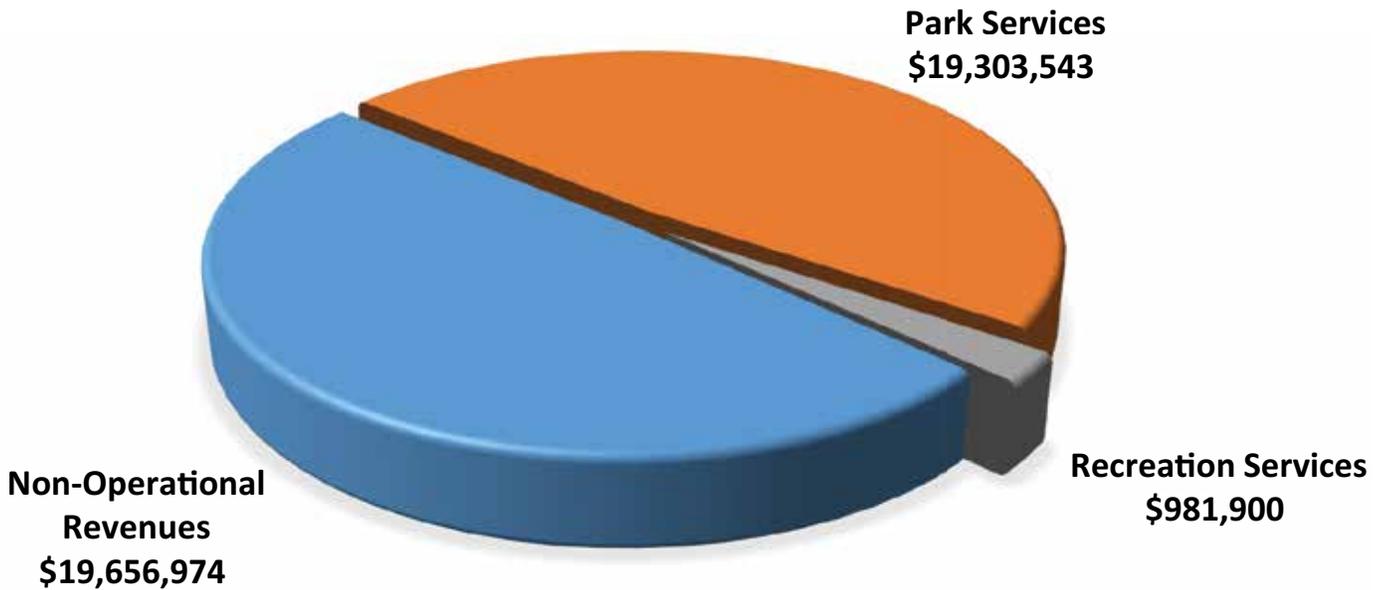
## FY21/22 Special Event & Program Attendance Total: 181,027



# *Your Dollars at Work*

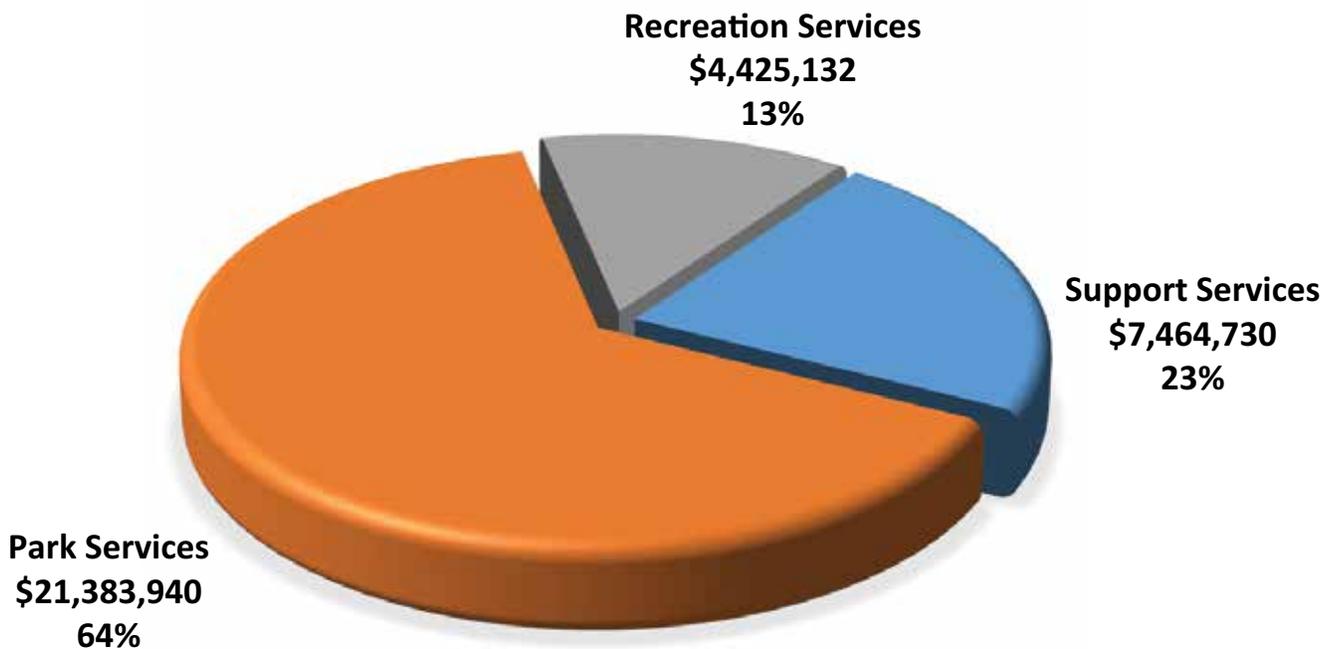
## **FY21/22 TOTAL REVENUES**

**TOTAL: \$39,942,417**



## **FY21/22 TOTAL EXPENDITURES**

**TOTAL: \$33,273,802**





Palmetto Park Jam



*Kevin Bowie*

# Growing

## **Kevin Bowie Named Executive Director**

Effective July 1, 2022, David Bennett began the transition into retirement from his executive director role with the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission. The Commission appointed Associate Executive Director Kevin Bowie as the new executive director at their June meeting. Bennett will continue to serve as an advisor, a special project manager and the executive director of the Charleston County Parks Foundation to ensure a smooth transition over the next 24 months. Charleston native Bennett started with the agency over 35 years ago.

New CCPRC Executive Director Kevin Bowie was born and raised in Charleston. He began his career with CCPRC in 1986 at Palmetto Islands County Park. In 1991, Bowie was selected as the assistant park manager at Palmetto Islands County Park and was promoted to James Island County Park manager in 1994. In 1998, Bowie became assistant director of operations, then became director of operations in 2008, superintendent of administrative services in 2010, superintendent of general services in 2014, and associate executive director in 2016.

“I am honored to be the next executive director of the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission,” said Bowie. “As I reflect on my 36 years with this agency, it is incredible to see how CCPRC has grown and expanded into the diverse organization we are today. At the heart of our work is the CCPRC staff, who bring a five-star level of commitment and service to everything they do. I am dedicated to working with our staff and the community to uphold our agency’s mission to improve the quality of life in Charleston County.”

# Growing

## **Debut of Grind for Life Skateboard Competition**

On Oct. 2021, SK8 Charleston proudly hosted a contest with Grind for Life, a national competitive skateboarding series that raises funds to assist cancer patients with travel expenses for treatment. Over 700 people attended, with contestants and spectators observing some of the highest skill level skating the park has ever witnessed. Competitors included skaters from Hawaii, Costa Rica and Arizona, as well as Olympian Bombette Martin and a crew of skaters from New York City. SK8 Charleston's event set a number of records for the eight-year history of this series, including: most competitors, most first-time skaters, most female skaters, and highest number of entries for any of their contests. SK8 Charleston's event raised \$3,700, which was the most raised of any competition in the year's series. Charleston County Parks looks forward to having Grind for Life return to SK8 Charleston in 2022!

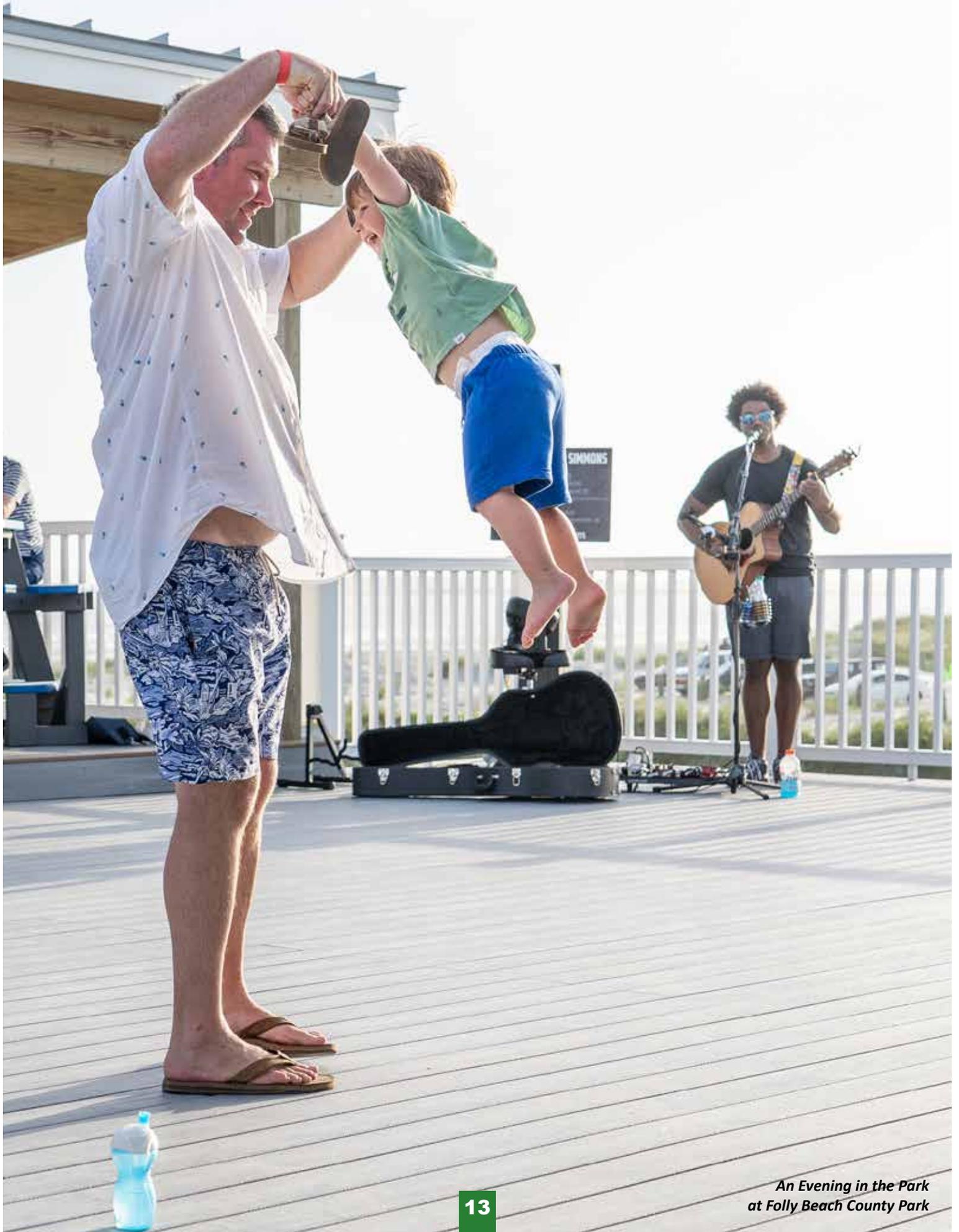
## **2033: Parks and Recreation for All**

Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission began a comprehensive planning process to establish community goals and recommendations for the agency's parks and facilities, open spaces, trails, programming and land acquisition strategies for the next 10 years. The plan is called "2033: Parks and Recreation for ALL" (abbreviated as PARFA). This title points to the importance of creating a truly inclusive and community-driven planning process where the recommendations are directly informed by community priorities, needs and ideas. To support the plan a community survey was created and a series of public engagement opportunities will be held.

PARFA is CCPRC's second 10-year comprehensive parks, recreation, open space and trails plan; the first comprehensive plan (called Parks for Tomorrow) was completed in 2013. As Charleston County Parks' foundational comprehensive plan, Parks for Tomorrow laid the groundwork for enhancements at existing parks, the acquisition and development of new parkland, and the expansion of programs and services.



*Grind for Life at  
SK8 Charleston*



# Growing

## **Folly Beach Fishing Pier Progress**

Construction on the Folly Beach Fishing Pier continued with the apron area and renovated gift shop opening in May 2021. The apron area included new picnic tables, ADA improvements, and an enhanced showering and changing area underneath the pier. Meanwhile, construction continued on the pier itself including complete demolition of the old pier and construction of the new diamond pierhead and gazebo and connecting the new pier to the landside. The new pier is slated to open in 2023.

## **An Evening in the Park**

A new event was debuted in August 2021 called Evening in the Park. The event held at the Folly Beach County Park Dunes House featured live music drinks, snacks, and ice cream. While the adults danced and listened to the music, the children in attendance joined our Interpretation team for special programs such as shark tooth hunting.

## **Palmetto Park Jam Brings Grateful Tunes**

On March 26, Palmetto Islands County Park hosted the first ever Palmetto Park Jam. This expansion of the previous Reckoning in the Park event featured Grateful Dead Tribute Band The Reckoning in a music festival atmosphere. An opening band kicked off the day in the meadow, while guests enjoyed beverages and local food truck fare throughout the day. This very successful inaugural event hosted 966 people and the Festival and Events team plans to continue it at Palmetto Islands.

## **Charting New Paths with Compass Course**

The Compass Course at Laurel Hill County Park was designed and installed by Eagle Scout candidate Hunter Sutcliffe of Troop 529. Hunter sought to install the orienteering course as a scout badge. The object of orienteering is to locate control points by using a map and compass to navigate through the woods. The activity is for all ages and degrees of fitness and skills and it provides the suspense and excitement of a treasure hunt. Visitors need a compass or a phone with a compass, and other than paying the per person park admission fee, there is no additional fee to use the course.

# Enhancing

## **Sol Legare Boat Landing Improvements**

The Sol Legare boat landing received many upland improvements including ADA parking and connections, a kiosk, rumble strips and markings at the road ends. Improvements were also made to the parking areas and the circular turn-around was paved. The project was funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Sport Fish Restoration Fund and Charleston County Water Recreation Fund.

## **Changes at the Holiday Festival of Lights**

For the first time, the Holiday Festival of Lights offered a discounted rate for guests who purchased their tickets in advance online through ActiveWorks. Advance ticket sales were introduced in 2020, but this was the first year that attendees could receive a discount for purchasing through this option. Also in 2021, the festival introduced “peak” and “regular” nights, with a \$10 price differential between the two nights. The implementation of these changes in fees offered a great incentive for guests to visit on less-busy nights and to purchase their tickets in advance. It offered not only a wonderful experience from a customer service perspective, but it also helped immensely from an operations standpoint. Festival guests saved \$5 per vehicle by purchasing their vehicle entry pass in advance and \$10 for going on a non-peak night, and also streamlined their entry process and helped cut down on face-to-face contact while COVID-19 rates remained high. More advance ticket sales also allowed for vehicles to enter the park more quickly on peak nights, thus cutting down on wait times as well as traffic on Riverland Drive.

CCPRC’s had a goal of 25% advance ticket sales for the 2021 Holiday Festival of Lights, and surpassed that goal with 28% of visitors taking advantage of advance ticket sales. Additionally, the “regular” (non-peak) evenings saw an increase in attendance of 23%, taken from a three year average.

Overall, the Holiday Festival of Lights experienced a very successful year in 2021, with over 232,000 guests attending the event.



ADA parking at  
Sol Legare Boat Landing



*Queso Mania  
at Whirlin' Waters Adventure Waterpark*

# Enhancing

## **Seizing a Viral Moment**

One of CCPRC's customer service representatives rocketed to national stardom with a witty response to a customer request to turn the Whirlin' Waters Lazy River into a queso cheese river. The perfectly crafted e-mail reply as to why that was not possible brought us incredible national social and media attention - including the Today Show! We kept the momentum going by partnering with Moe's Southwest Grill and holding a contest for 100 people to win a custom chip float and free queso for a year.

What became known as Queso Mania garnered CCPRC \$100,000+ in free publicity and hundreds of new social media followers.

## **Becoming Better Connected at James Island County Park**

James Island County Park became much better connected with the laying of fiber optic cable between the Splash Zone Waterpark's administrative and mechanical sites, Edisto Hall and the Holiday Festival of Lights building. The new cable creates a more reliable network in a very busy park.

## **ADA Improvements Creating Better Access**

The agency continues to work through items on its ADA transition plan which was conducted by a consulting firm in 2019. Mapping out improvements, increasing access across the park system, and ongoing staff training remains a crucial part of this process. For two days in March, more than 40 staff members received training in applying ADA standards and requirements to park sites and facilities.

Improvements at facilities over the past fiscal year included two new concrete pads at SK8 Charleston which created an accessible pathway to both shade umbrellas and provides multiple accessible tables on a firm, stable surface. An accessible charcoal grill was added to the concrete pad by the Pro Bowl, as part of this project. An accessible picnic area and a concrete pad was also installed at Kiawah Beachwalker County Park. Isle of Palms County Park received additional ADA parking.

# Enhancing

## **New Charleston County Parks Comprehensive Brochure**

The Marketing Division did a major revision of the Agency brochure. This is a printed piece that is available in our park and facilities and in brochure racks throughout the county and in statewide visitor's centers and attractions. The new brochure includes a map with all of our locations along with details about their attractions and features.

## **Seasonal Employee Recruitment**

In 2022, many parks and recreation agencies experienced staffing shortages like never before. CCPRC's popular waterparks experienced a lifeguard shortage of about 50% going into the season.

Recruitment efforts increased greatly. Marketing initiatives included paid advertising, free publicity opportunities through press releases and interviews with news media outlets, social media posts, on-site signage and much more. The parks hosted job fairs, where potential employees could quickly apply and even be made conditional job offers on site. Our recruitment presence in local schools and other entities increased; for schools with limited visitor opportunities, we provided marketing material to share with the students via email and the school's media. HR staff attended career chats during school lunches, partnered with career centers, and shared employment information with local senior centers, community centers and churches.

Wages were raised, and the many additional benefits of working for the park system, including free park admission and admission to other local attractions, were highly publicized. CCPRC also made a concerted effort to advertise the monetary benefits for lifeguards, including free uniforms, paid trainings and paid certifications. And, as our training was provided in-house, prospective lifeguards did not need previous lifeguarding experience prior to working for CCPRC. We typically offer six training sessions for waterpark lifeguards, but in 2022, 13 trainings were offered to capture potential guards who applied later in the season.





*Dancing on the Cooper  
at Mount Pleasant Pier*

# *Enhancing*

## **Recruitment Issues (continued)**

As summer drew closer and the waterparks opened, these efforts helped grow our lifeguard staffing to 80% capacity. To maintain the highest safety standards with the staff we had on board, we chose to close Splash Island and Splash Zone on select days, and close one attraction at each of those parks, reducing admission rates accordingly. As the summer progressed, staffing flexibility allowed us to reopen the closed attractions, as well as expand the limited waterpark operating hours.

To learn more about CCPRC's current employees, we did a seasonal employee survey featuring an AirPods giveaway, and conducted interviews to be used for recruitment next winter. To reward staff for a great season, all CCPRC part-time staff were invited to an appreciation party to enjoy free food and socialize; many of the individual parks also held parties for their seasonal staff to celebrate and reward them.

We hope the fun and bonding our staff experienced this season will help with retention and recruitment next season. Going forward, CCPRC will focus on recruitment and employee retention early each year.

## **Dancing on the Cooper**

In 2022, the Festival and Events team kicked off Dancing on the Cooper, a new multi-generational dance series at the Mount Pleasant Pier. Taking the place of Shaggin' on the Cooper, the new series features performances from bands playing a variety of musical genres on select Saturday evenings. The first Dancing on the Cooper was held on April 23, with live country music from Mason Dixon Band and 539 people in attendance. The second event, held on May 21 and featuring shag and beach music from the Shem Creek Boogie Band, sold out on site. The new series has already proven to be a very popular offering.

# *Honoring*

## **Golden Pineapple Award presented to David Bennett**

On June 30, CCPRC's Outgoing Executive Director David Bennett received the Golden Pineapple award at Explore Charleston's annual meeting. The award recognized Bennett for a lifetime of service to the citizens of Charleston County.

The Charleston Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, doing business as Explore Charleston, has presented the Golden Pineapple award to recognize individuals and organizations who promote positive tourism development since 1985. Bennett has been with the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission for over 35 years, serving in a number of roles throughout his career before being appointed as executive director in 2017.

"I would like to extend my most sincere thanks to Explore Charleston for this very special recognition," said Bennett. "It has been a great honor to serve the Charleston community, where I was born and raised, for over 35 years."

## **Golden Scoop Award Goes to Folly Beach Fishing Pier**

For the fourth year, Hershey's Ice-Cream Company awarded the Folly Beach Fishing Pier the Golden Scoop Award in recognition of outstanding performance in the sale and promotion of their product.

From milkshakes to root beer floats and waffle cones to sundaes, the gift shop serves up a taste of summer all year long.

## **Beachwalker Named a Visitor Favorite**

Kiawah Beachwalker Park was honored with a 2021 Traveler's Choice Award from Tripadvisor. The beach park continues to be a top destination for both locals and visitors.



*David Bennett*



*Nikki Bowie*

# *Honoring*

## **USLA Life Member Nikki Bowie**

CCPRC Safety Program Manager Nikki Bowie was honored this year as a Life Member of the United States Lifesaving Association (USLA). USLA Life Memberships are an incredible honor, with only 53 people ever having been recognized. Bowie is the only Life Member in South Carolina.

Bowie has spent her life protecting swimmers. She began her career as an ocean rescue lifeguard with CCPRC in 1986. She later served as manager of Kiawah Beachwalker Park, manager of Folly Beach County Park, and aquatics coordinator, before moving into her current role in 2008. As safety program manager, today Bowie oversees lifeguarding and emergency safety programs throughout the beach and waterpark facilities. Bowie's role as safety manager has led to innovative programs serving the Charleston community including CCPRC's portable pool program, which brings swimming lessons directly to children in underserved communities.

Bowie, a member of the USLA's South Atlantic Region since its inception in the 1990s, has been instrumental in hosting regional lifeguard championships and as a member of the region's leadership team. She served on the region's executive board for 10 years, and even lends her expertise to other chapters and agencies. She has served on the national executive board of the USLA for the past 16 years as the secretary and was the Heroic Acts Committee chairperson prior to being elected to the board.

## **Expert Training Helps in an Emergency**

In May, two CCPRC employees helped rescue a woman in the Saluda River near Columbia. Outdoor Adventure Manager Josh Hall and Outdoor Recreation Coordinator Ande Oliver were leading a group of Adventure Camp counselors on a kayak training exercise in the river near the Riverbanks Zoo when they became aware of a woman in trouble. They were able to ensure the woman was safe and the situation was a good lesson in the importance of training for the new camp counselors.

# Supporting

## **Small Projects Grant Award - South Santee**

The agency awarded its third small project grant to the South Santee Senior and Community Center. Our Planning and Development division then engaged with stakeholders at the center to help them build a new playground and refurbish their basketball court. New swings and picnic tables were also added nearby.

This work is done outside of the agency's normal scope to lend local communities a helping hand in meeting their own unique recreational needs.

## **Preservation of Historic Cemeteries**

As part of the agency's work to preserve historic cemeteries on park property, the Planning and Development Division engaged cultural resource management company New South and Associates to begin flagging burial sites and taking soil tests at McLeod Plantation Historic Site. This important work will support an agency-wide Cemetery Preservation Management Plan, completed in 2021. New South is currently working on the first phase of the project which will continue through the summer of 2022.

## **A renewed partner: The Charleston Battery Soccer Team**

In 2021, Charleston County Parks concluded its first year of a renewed partnership with the Charleston Battery soccer team. As a proud sponsor of the team's 2021 season, Charleston County Parks had signage on site and ads on the video board during home matches. We also teamed up with the Battery on several fun social media posts, and their stadium hosted Charleston County Parks on a special night in September. On this evening, Gold Pass holders received discounted tickets to the match, and Charleston County Parks was on site to greet game attendees and share information on all the park system has to offer. This partnership is a wonderful opportunity to partner with another like-minded organization as well as reach new audiences through their fanbase.



Headstone at  
McLeod Plantation Historic Site



*Inclusive Santa visits at  
the Holiday Festival of Lights*

# Supporting

## **Partnering with KultureCity to welcome guests with sensory needs**

In an effort to improve Charleston County Parks' ability to assist and accommodate guests with sensory needs, the agency partnered this year with KultureCity. This organization is the nation's leading nonprofit on sensory accessibility and acceptance for those with invisible disabilities.

The objective is to provide an inclusive and seamless experience for all guests, including those with sensory needs, at select events this year by offering resources and accommodations. KultureCity offerings were made available to individuals with sensory processing disorders at the Johns Island County Park Concert Series and the Latin American Festival in 2021. Resources included sensory bags with VIP badges, fidget tools, noise canceling headphone and other resources available for checkout, as well as weighted lap pads.

CCPRC also raises awareness of the needs and challenges faced by individuals with sensory processing disorders by supplying staff with continuous training.

## **Inclusive Santa visits the Holiday Festival of Lights**

On Sunday, Dec. 12, people with disabilities and their families were invited to enjoy meeting and taking photos with Santa during the day at James Island County Park. Each guest scheduled a private, dedicated 30-minute period for their visit, which took place in a calming, subdued environment. Santa was even fluent in American Sign Language. A professional photographer captured the experience with each group of up to 5 people, and a printed photo was included with each registration. Inclusive Santa was incredibly popular and we are excited for him to return in 2022.



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