



**Best of Aquatics celebrates the industry's outstanding aquatics facilities that excel in one, highly relevant area. Learn how these winning teams have adapted to increase safety, inclusion and satisfaction among their visitors, community and staff.**

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Click here to view the #SplashSavvy video

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

### TOWN OF MARANA PARKS AND RECREATION

Marana, Ariz.

Every year in the United States there are an estimated 3,960 fatal unintentional drownings, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That's an average of 11 drowning deaths per day.

To effect a reduction in local drownings, the Town of Marana Parks and Recreation aquatics division took a collaborative approach to educating its community about drowning. It worked with local first responders as well as communications, safety and emergency management personnel to create the #SplashSavvy campaign.

There is no shortage of drowning-prevention information,

yet the numbers of drownings remain staggering. So #SplashSavvy focuses on teaching everyday citizens how to respond if a drowning incident occurs.

"Lifeguards, paramedics, firefighters, police officers, dispatch and healthcare workers are the leading first responders when it comes to a drowning emergency," says Kevin Goodrich, recreation supervisor for the Town of Marana Parks and Recreation. "However, when it comes to your backyard pool, a visit to a friend's house with a pool or just the average bath time routine, you will be the most crucial first responder on scene. And who better to learn from ... than the responders who

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**HIGHLIGHTS**

- #SplashSavvy educates the community about drowning response, prevention and the importance of knowing how to act as a first responder.
- The campaign helped the team emphasize the often overlooked role of lifeguards as first responders.
- The team created a unique tag that can be attached near the pool at home and includes space for information needed when calling 911 during an emergency.



do it on a regular basis?"

As part of #SplashSavvy, prevention is still promoted as the best defense, but Goodrich and the team take it further by teaching the community critical information, such as knowing the exact steps for responding to a drowning emergency and understanding how to support the professional first responders when they arrive on the scene.

"We also used the campaign as an opportunity to highlight lifeguards as first responders in our community, which is a push that we have been working on for some time," Goodrich says. "Lifeguards play an important role

in keeping others safe and are professional rescuers with an important responsibility to respond quickly and efficiently."

The cooperative team includes internal Parks and Recreation departments, Northwest Fire District, Marana Police Department and Police Communications, and Marana Health Center's Counseling and Wellness Center.

The informational campaign makes use of myriad communication methods, including social media, infographics and events, and has reached a high level of exposure throughout the community, Goodrich says. The team also created a handout called

"Create Your Own Drowning Drill," which encourages individuals to map out what a drowning emergency could look like and what their plan would be as individuals or households should an emergency occur.

"#SplashSavvy provides an alternative view on drowning awareness and the first responders ... and we believe that these different perspectives better prepare everyone to view themselves as the most crucial first responder," said Goodrich. "It's a campaign that is meant to live on and adapt as needs and information changes through the years."

— KAITLIN SCHULER





## ■ TARGETED PROGRAMMING

# CITY OF IOWA CITY PARKS AND RECREATION

Iowa City, Iowa

A strong community features many clear hallmarks, two of which are collaboration and inclusivity. The Iowa City Parks and Recreation team illustrated both with this year's introduction of their Pride at the Pool event to recognize the local LGBTQ+ community.

While this marked the first Pride event for the Parks and Rec department, Iowa City itself celebrated its 50th year of Pride.

"We partner in the city and county-wide Pride celebrations, so adding in a recreational program that honored Pride was important for us," says Kate Connell, aquatics program supervisor for the Iowa City Parks and Recreation Department.

This seemed particularly appropriate, since people sometimes don't feel completely safe to visit or participate, she adds. "While we are always focusing on policies and staff training that ensure everyone has an equitable pool and program experience, we felt a celebratory event was also a great way to blend together aquatics and pride," she says.

Admission was free, and at least 300 guests attended the June event.

Of course, the team made it a priority to create as inclusive an environment as possible. To that end, they provided guests with pronoun pins and posted additional signage regarding single-use restrooms.

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Iowa City Parks and Recreation's inaugural Pride at the Pool welcomed at least 300 guests, free of admission, to the aquatics center as part of the city's Pride celebration.
- It required minimal planning. Early-stage organization and marketing occurred in collaboration with the local Pride organization.
- This presented an opportunity for the agency to reiterate pre-existing policies to ensure inclusivity.



Before the event, they reviewed with staff the policies regarding bathing attire so they could field any questions that came up.

"We made sure to reiterate our team's understanding of our pre-existing policies, including allowing anyone to use whatever bathroom they wish, offering a single-user bathroom option to folks who preferred not to use our communal locker rooms, and emphasizing people's freedom to wear the swim attire of their choosing," Connell says.

The staff also discussed how they should respond to discriminatory comments or complaints. Fortunately, they didn't receive any

at the Pride event.

Iowa City Parks and Recreation partnered with the local Pride organization to brainstorm ways to make the event memorable as well as accessible. To accomplish this, they chose to include more passive programming that allowed guests to feel safe while enjoying recreational swimming.

Pride at the Pool's passive programming included a bracelet-making station and Drag Storytime, during which local drag performers read water-themed books with a wide variety of characters.

A Pride flag hung from the diving board, and participants could enjoy swag such as mini Pride flags

and temporary tattoos. To top it all off, guests also were treated to free food and entertainment throughout the event.

Iowa City Parks and Recreation plans to offer this event again next year, in hopes of continuing to increase its impact.

"We wanted to give folks, first and foremost, an opportunity to recreate in a public pool through swimming, playing and sunbathing in a safe aquatics space," Connell says. "Adding in a recreational program that honored Pride was important for us, and we look forward to doing it again next year!"

— KAITLIN SCHULER





## ■ TRAINING

# BRUSHY CREEK MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT AQUATICS PROGRAM

Round Rock, Texas

The Brushy Creek Municipal Utility District Aquatics Program in Round Rock, Texas, chose a personal touch as a key strategy to success. The organization reports a 100% success rate for its lifeguard and water safety instructor training, largely due to its approach of guiding each new lifeguard every step of the way.

"New student lifeguards are ... guided along the way by expert mentors from day one," said Aquatics Supervisor Sheila Kieser.

Leaders meet one-on-one with lifeguards before they're even hired to assess a trainee's skill level and needs so they can be matched with a well-suited mentor. "I emphasize accountability and responsibility

right from the start," Kieser says. "So mentors and mentees aren't required to hold a set number of meetings. They can meet as often as they like and can determine what works best for their situation."

To prepare team leaders for their role as mentors, Kieser implemented Head Lifeguard Bootcamp this year. They had held training sessions and created manuals for the facility's processes, but this year they pulled together all the information and drills into one single event. Head Lifeguard Bootcamp brought the facility's head guards together to refine their skills, encourage teamwork and get everyone in the mindset for a successful season.

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Brushy Creek MUD's inaugural Head Lifeguard Bootcamp helped mentally and physically prepare its leaders for the season and emphasized the importance of creating a cohesive, respectful team.
- Staff who worked different shifts could work together and operate as a unit.
- The Bootcamp includes responses to common questions and complaints from parents, enforcing the rules firmly but respectfully.

## BRUSHY CREEK MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT AQUATICS PROGRAM



“Some of our lifeguards work only mornings, others only evenings, so holding a full-day bootcamp gives them the opportunity to come together,” Kieser says. “They review the American Red Cross training manual, set goals for the summer, and review what is expected of them as leaders at this facility, of course, but with an added element of a competitive relay.”

Lifeguards are assigned partners and compete against other pairs in a variety of challenges: pump room drills, customer service scenarios, a missing child emergency action plan, and a submerged victim EAP. They then

walk the park with their partner and wrap up the day by joining hands and jumping in the water. Head Lifeguard Bootcamp also gives team leaders the opportunity to work on their mentorship skills and prepare to set a good example of work ethic and teamwork.

“With the addition of Head Lifeguard Bootcamp, Brushy Creek MUD’s leadership team dove into summer as a team that communicated well and felt confident in accomplishing the tasks at hand,” Kieser says.

Before the training, Kieser had noticed the staff was prone to argument, critical of one another, and had low morale. Seeing the

potential to form an incredible team, she worked with all members to agree upon social expectations.

“Team relationships, like in any medical emergency, are crucial to building trust and camaraderie,” she says. “We discovered that when you set the expectation of teamwork, respect and grace ... team members envelop it. By reviewing and agreeing to social expectations, we were able to squash disagreements, decrease punctuality issues, and create an environment that the team described as a family. This keeps us and our community safe.”

— KAITLIN SCHULER





## ■ TARGETED PROGRAMMING

# FARMERS BRANCH AQUATICS CENTER

Farmers Branch, Texas

In 2020, the pandemic changed how the world operates and the ways people socialize and connect.

Management at Farmers Branch Aquatics Center made it a top priority to address the isolation that youth and teens in particular have experienced during this time. To do so, they created a program called Water.Adventure.Leader.Knowledge (W.A.L.K.), to introduce teens to the world of aquatics and give them an opportunity to meet other like-minded young people.

“In Farmers Branch, we pride ourselves on growing our own by investing time in them and their education, and teaching the importance of dedication,” says Aquatics Manager Paul Macias.

“It’s an attitude that is valuable to any employee or employer. For our center in particular, it helps us have a consistently staffed lifeguard and swim lesson program.”

This mindset helped Farmers Branch sidestep the lifeguard shortages and remain 99% staffed for the 2021 summer season, Macias reports.

“Our focused efforts on recruitment began back in 2016 and have allowed us to reach individuals who didn’t have a swim background and who would never have thought of becoming a lifeguard,” he said. “We wanted to take the time to invest in each person who had the desire to become a lifeguard, and the W.A.L.K. program extends



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**HIGHLIGHTS**

- The W.A.L.K. program brought together adolescents interested in becoming lifeguards or swim instructors, while helping battle the isolation felt throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Participants shadowed working lifeguards and swim instructors and practiced CPR, lifeguarding and swim instruction skills.
- The in-person training gives them a leg up in obtaining certifications and builds up the confidence needed to succeed in aquatic roles.



that philosophy to the community's youth who may not be old enough to work but are interested in aquatics and lifeguarding."

Adolescents in the W.A.L.K. program completed the center's Junior Lifeguarding and Junior Swim Instructor courses and attended a week-long aquatics summer camp that allowed them to put their skills into action. They learned how to perform myriad water rescues, along with proper CPR technique and how to teach swim lessons and water safety.

"Receiving in-person instruction like this also gives these kids a leg up in obtaining their certi-

fication for lifeguarding or swim instruction," Macias says.

As part of their learning, students shadowed working lifeguards and swim instructors during one of two sessions in June and July. The program also offered them the opportunity to socialize in-person with fellow participants and mentors, helping counteract the effects of a year's worth of online learning and interactions.

"The most significant impact was that they were able to create a special bond with potential future coworkers and friends," Macias says. "After a year spent almost entirely online, this was huge."

Several parents told Macias about their children's excitement with him and the Farmers Branch Aquatics Center team.

"Across the board, we heard about how much fun the teens had... and how wonderful it was to see their kids come home every night with exciting stories and new lifesaving skills to share," he says.

"This summer finally allowed us to come together in a safe environment, and an immense joy for management was seeing staff come together as one team and take pride in paving the way for future aquatics professionals."

— KAITLIN SCHULER



## ■ GENERAL PROGRAMMING

# PARKER RECREATION CENTER

Parker, Colo.

Many children have picked pumpkins in a patch, hunted Easter eggs at a local park, or visited Santa at a mall or festival. But how many have made those memories at the pool?

That was the inspiration for the core events in the Aquatics Events Series at Parker Recreation Center. Over the past year, the Parker Parks and Recreation Aquatics Division launched several new or improved events for families to create unique memories and traditions.

“We were able to provide a glimpse of normalcy during a period in history where ‘normal’ didn’t exist,” says Hannah Quaney, aquatics programming

coordinator at the center.

Before these events, Quaney said, existing examples were few to none, so she had to start from scratch. “I only had one to two meetings with our marketing team to get word out to our community, and one to two meetings with my supervisor to ensure I was on the right path,” she explains.

She used the first event, Pumpkin Patch Splash 2019, as something of a template. Once it was over, she created a timeline and checklist on how to coordinate, program, and execute the event. Then she adjusted the template for other events. “My main meetings are with our marketing team to ensure we’re targeting



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- This team kicked up the special events to provide a sense of normalcy and community in a time of isolation. Children could pick pumpkins, hunt Easter eggs and visit Santa in an aquatics environment.
- H<sub>2</sub>O Glow Swim, the most well-attended event, was created especially with pre-teens in mind.
- The only support staff utilized for these events were the lifeguards.



proper audiences and that information was clear in registration,” she says.

She developed detailed descriptions of each event, with proper timelines and responsibilities outlined for volunteers and support staff ahead of each event.

The series consists of five events in 2021:

- **Pumpkin Patch Splash:** This sold out in 2020, even with COVID-19 restrictions and precautions in place. They added several sessions to keep within guidelines, and all of them filled.
- **Egg Splash and Dash:** Quaney’s team filled more than 2,000 Easter eggs with safe, pre-

packaged goodies and placed them all over the pools. Some even had “golden tickets” for large gift baskets and other prizes. The three sessions sold out during pre-registration, and the Easter Bunny made a visit and took photos with families around the pool.

- **H<sub>2</sub>O Spirit Week:** This week-long extravaganza included free fun for guests and staff, and allowed staff to accrue points toward their end-of-season Lifeguard Olympics. Themed days included First Responder Day, Superhero Day, Tacky Tourist Day and Luau Day.

- **H<sub>2</sub>O Glow Swim:** To close the summer, the team employed

thousands of LED rope and Christmas lights, hundreds of glow sticks, glowing glasses, hats, beach balls and a few lanterns to transform the pool deck into a luminescent aquatic shindig. Safety was a prime concern for this event, thus the pool and building lights were left on and all egress pathways were lit by worksite lanterns.

- **Swim with Santa:** The inaugural event will take place in December, providing the opportunity for community members to not only take photos with Santa in the pool, but to splash around with jolly old Saint Nick.

— KAITLIN SCHULER