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Community Welcome

Manasquan adds all-inclusive playground



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Manasquan upgraded and renovated its Curtis Park, adding an all-inclusive playground for all of the community to enjoy.



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Please read
our preliminary
information in this
month’s preview
and take the
opportunity to
start planning for
the must-attend
event of the year for
local government
elected officials
and professionals.”

Making Communities a Home for All

Through my many years here at the League, and thousands of conversations with local elected officials, there’s always been one consistent, underlying theme: making our communities an even better place to be.

Among the efforts to make our communities home is the challenging implementation of the Americans With Disabilities Act Standards for Accessible Design, which were published in 1991. Event now, communities still struggle to find the funding and tools to make their public spaces navigable for everyone.

Thanks to programs like the Local Recreation Improvement Grant (LRIG), with an estimated 462 applications to be serviced for FY2024, more communities are making their outdoor play spaces welcoming for all. And that means more than a fun day at the park.

It also means a true feeling of inclusion in the community. After updating one of the town’s parks and upgrading it for accessibility, Manasquan Parks and Recreation President Maureen Anderson said it best: “Inclusion is about more than access. It’s about a sense of belonging and being a part of something. It’s about making a difference in the lives of others because it’s the right thing to do.” (See feature on page 6.)

In Oradell, Project Sidewalk brought together township officials, representatives from the local hospital, academia, and Girl Scouts to identify obstacles in the town for people with mobility issues. The project is a model for other towns to identify and correct impediments to mobility and improve accessibility to their streets for people of all ability levels.

Data gathered showed that streets lacked sidewalks, uneven pavement, and no curb ramps, as well as obstructions from vegetation and trash cans, particularly in residential areas. Understanding these obstacles the community must manage is often the first step in compliance to the law and meeting the needs of the community as a whole.

But accessibility isn’t limited to the physical world. Towns must also address the accessibility of their cyber services, including websites, online forms, and apps. The League will be helping members consider options and opportunities for improvement during a session on the topic at the League Conference in November (See box on page 46).

And that’s not all that’s happening at the Conference. We are looking forward to providing you with high-quality information, services, and networking opportunities with a vibrant exhibit floor and active classrooms.

Please read our preliminary information in this month’s preview (page 47) and take the opportunity to start planning for the must-attend event of the year for local government elected officials and professionals.

The hotel reservation system opens on June 1 and our updated and upgraded Conference registration system opens August 1.

We look forward to providing you with more information when *New Jersey Municipalities* returns in October. Until then, please let us know if you have any stories that you’d like to share by emailing us at magazine@njlm.org. 📧

Michael Cerra

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Accessible Upgrades

Manasquan introduces all-inclusive playground

Erik Ertle, Recreation Director, Manasquan

Friends of Manasquan Parks and Recreation President Maureen Anderson said it best; *“Inclusion is about more than access. It’s about a sense of belonging and being a part of something. It’s about making a difference in the lives of others because it’s the right thing to do.*”



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Accessible Upgrades

In 2018, members of the Manasquan Department of Public Works and Recreation Department conducted a town-wide analysis to determine which parks were in need of an upgrade based on factors such as the age and condition of existing equipment. The analysis of the seven borough parks that have playground equipment was presented to the governing body and the decision was made to direct resources toward one of our smaller parks, Skokus Park. New equipment and a rubberized surface were installed at Skokus, much to the pleasure of the area residents. The Skokus project would also serve as a template for upgrades to other borough parks.

In 2019, Manasquan resident Maureen Anderson approached the borough's Recreation Committee with an idea to transform an existing park in town to one that welcomes all children. After some discussion, Curtis Park, a centrally located park that entertains many visitors throughout the year, was selected to not only be the next park in line for an upgrade but a park that would meet the needs of all children regardless of their physical limitations. The Manasquan Recreation Committee and governing body both realized that play is a vital part of being human and is the right of every child and it is how kids learn and grow. Other locations were considered, however, Curtis Park was chosen for the next upgrade and renovation.

Inclusive plans

The initial idea for the Curtis Park upgrade was not to make this an exclusive park, rather an inclusive one. The park would be designed not just for children with disabilities but for all to enjoy and share in the physical sensory and social benefits of play.

The funding initiative began with the submission and awarding of two grants (thank you Kelsey Howard of Colliers Engineering) that would be matched by the borough to fund the project.

In addition, the Friends of Manasquan Parks and Recreation, Inc., a 501c3, was created in December 2021 by residents of the town to not only assist with funding Curtis Park, but all parks in town that are in need of upgrades.

Response to their call for donations was overwhelming as businesses, families, civic groups, and individuals all stepped up and contributed over \$60,000 to offset the costs. The biggest contributor was Manasquan Elks Lodge #2534 who raised \$25,000. The annual Manasquan 1-mile and 5-mile Turkey Run, which attracts thousands of runners from all over and is held the Saturday before Thanksgiving, generously donated \$10,000 to the cause.





Accessible Upgrades

topping the park off with shrubbery, plants, irrigation system upgrades, and pavers.

Friends of Manasquan Parks and Recreation President Maureen Anderson said it best; “Inclusion is about more than access. It’s about a sense of belonging and being a part of something. It’s about making a difference in the lives of others because it’s the right thing to do.”

From beginning to end, the Curtis Park project took approximately three years to complete and included several community-based meetings, with discussions at several Mayor, Council, and Recreation Committee meetings to ensure everyone had a say. It was truly a community-wide effort to see this project through.

Today, throughout the year, children along with their parents and grandparents, can be found enjoying all that Curtis Park has to offer.

The final phase is underway,



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The League's Hometown Security Task Force Hosts Tour

The New Jersey League of Municipalities' Hometown Security Task Force met on April 28 for the first time since the start of the pandemic for an update on issues and concerns impacting member municipalities. It was hosted by AT&T at its network disaster recovery facility in Burlington County and included a public safety forum featuring FirstNet.

The event included guest speakers from AT&T on FirstNet, two representatives from the New Jersey State Police on current priorities and policies, an update from the NJ Office of Homeland Security, a working lunch, a tour of the facility, and more.

The Task Force is chaired by Hope Mayor Tim McDonough, League Past President. The event was open to Task Force members and interested New Jersey Mayors.



Hometown Security Task Force Tour

Middlesex County Mayors Meet

NJLM President Millstone Borough Mayor Heck met with mayors from Middlesex County to discuss important municipal issues. In attendance were Mayor Ray Heck, Edison Mayor Sam Joshi, Piscataway Mayor and League Past President Brian Wahler, Old Bridge Mayor Owen Henry, Highland Park Mayor Elsie Foster, North Brunswick Mayor Mac Womack, Perth Amboy Mayor Helmin Caba, and East Brunswick Mayor Brad Cohen.



Middlesex County Mayors Meet



Internet for All

Internet for All

On April 17, Piscataway Mayor and NJLM Past President Brian Wahler spoke at "Internet for All," a day-long workshop in New Brunswick to discuss coordination on broadband efforts and connecting all New Jersey residents to affordable and reliable high-speed internet. Hosted by federal and state organizations, including the League, it was the third informational meeting for the public as part of an initiative to make high-speed internet accessible to the public.

Take Your Child to Work Day

Potential future local government officials visited the League on Take Your Child to Work Day. The youngsters were given a tour of headquarters, including a challenging scavenger hunt through the League's departments, as well as a tour of the State House.



Take Your Child to Work Day

Recent Topics on the Blog:

- *Mayor Brindle Testifies on Liquor Licenses Reform*
- *Annual Financial Disclosure Statements Guidance Issued*
- *Local Government Employer Group Mid-Year Experience Analysis*
- *FY24 Congressionally Directed Spending/Community Project Funding Application Process Opens*
- *Governor's Proposed FY2024 State Budget: Impact on Municipalities*

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The League's Legislative Blog provides detailed information on bills and in-depth bill histories.



 www.njlm.org/Blog

NJ Institute of Local Government Attorneys Accepting Michael A. Pane Memorial Award Applications

Nominations are requested by September 15 for the 20th Annual Michael A. Pane Memorial Award, to be presented at the New Jersey State League of Municipalities Annual Conference in Atlantic City Thursday, November 16, at the Institute of Local Government Attorneys' annual social event.

The award, an honorarium of \$500, recognizes a local government professional (attorney, engineer, or planner) who exemplifies the highest standards of ethics and whose work has significantly enhanced the integrity of local government.

Nominations should include the reason for your nomination and a biography of the nominee. The nominating application can be found at www.njlga.org or by contacting Johnnifer Harris at jharris@njlm.org.

Please mail, fax, or email your nomination to Johnnifer Harris; c/o NJLM Educational Foundation, Inc.; 222 West State Street; Trenton, New Jersey 08608; Fax: 609-695-5156.



After receiving the award, the honoree will provide an essay of 500 words or less on the topic: ethics in government for publication in *NJ Municipalities* magazine. Upon receipt of the essay, the honorarium will be issued.

The Michael A. Pane Memorial Fund was established to support the funding of educational courses and similar endeavors promoting ethics in local government. 



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- Veterans & Senior Citizen Tax Deductions
- Vacant Properties
- Effect of COVID on Municipal Finance & Budgets

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