

Why Parks Should Go to the Dogs

November 2, 2018, Department, by Gina Mullins-Cohen

Editors Letter



Did you know studies have shown that owning a dog may lead to a healthier heart? Experts from institutions, such as Harvard Medical School, say there is growing scientific research that shows dog owners have a decreased risk of cardiovascular disease compared to people who don't own a canine. Perhaps it's because caring for our four-legged friends requires regular dog walks and playtime and, therefore, owners stay fit and active in the process. I mean, have you ever played fetch with a dog? Research also shows that having a dog in a household can lower stress levels in adults, as well as children.

And, because dogs offer so much joy to people — and clearly provide health benefits to their owners — doesn't it make sense for park agencies to help return the love by providing communities with parks and amenities designed especially for our canine companions? In

this month's cover story, "Designing and Managing Innovative Dog Parks," NRPA's Richard J. Dolesh explores how quickly dog parks are growing throughout the United States. Since 2009, the total number of dog parks has increased by 40 percent, according to research by The Trust for Public Land.

This could be a great education topic for our 2019 annual conference in Baltimore, Maryland. Last month, some 8,000 park and rec professionals gathered in Indianapolis for the 2018 NRPA Annual Conference. *Parks & Recreation* magazine's Sonia Myrick and Suzanne Nathan provide a complete wrap-up of this year's conference on page 56, featuring noteworthy moments from the Opening General Session, the keynote presentation, as well as the story behind the visit to the exhibit hall by K-3 students from Nashville's Explore! Community School.

The NRPA Annual Conference, however, wasn't the only event to attract the park and recreation community in 2018. Innovation Labs have become must-attend gatherings in major cities across the country this year. Be sure to check out highlights from the Seattle Innovation Lab on page 62. The conference theme, "#Winning: The Art of Getting Voters to Open Their Wallets for Parks," featured education sessions, panel discussions, a keynote and workshop designed to provide strategies for developing effective political campaigns.

Lastly, congratulations to Sam Waldorf with Austin Parks and Recreation in Texas, who won our November cover contest. And, thanks to everyone else who submitted entries. We're sorry you weren't selected, but we make no bones about it...the competition was ruff!

