

Nineteen OPRA member agencies received grants ranging from \$500 to \$1,000 for programs designed to assist communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The grants, made available by the OPRA Foundation, helped to cover costs for new programs that were developed in response to the pandemic. Grant recipients include agencies of all sizes and types from all regions of the state.

"These grants were made possible by the generous contributions of our members to the OPRA Foundation over the years. Things like the golf outing, Conference auctions and raffles and individual contributions by OPRA members made this happen," said OPRA Executive Director Woody Woodward. "I am grateful for the creativity of our Foundation Board in creating this program. I know that it is funding that will make a difference in communities around the state."

You can view images, videos and other links from each grant recipient by visiting www.opraonline.org and searching for COVID Grants.

Athens Arts, Parks and Recreation | Athens Rocks!

Put your shoes on, grab your mask, and take your camera as you head out into the City of Athens for an all abilities, touch-free rock hunt.

With COVID-19 hitting the state of Ohio and shutting down many programs, the Program Specialists for the City of Athens Arts, Parks, and Recreation Department came together to create a safe and accessible activity in which all ages and abilities can participate. 'Athens Rocks!' is comprised of twelve brightly colored rocks with each letter of 'Athens Rocks!' painted on them. The rocks were then placed throughout twelve of the city's parks and scenic properties. Rock hunters were given a virtual map and the green light to find each rock. The goal behind the 'Athens Rocks!' project is to keep residents active, engaged, and present in their community, in addition to promoting physical activity and increasing awareness for the lesser-known parks within the City of Athens.

There are only two rules to successfully participating in this program:

1. Leave the rocks behind for others to find.
2. Take only pictures, leave only memories.

Barberton Parks and Recreation | Magic Boxes

Barberton is a city of 26,000 residents with nearly an 18% poverty rate, facing hardships only exaggerated by the trying times of COVID-19. The Magic Box program was created with the intent of maintaining a 'camp like' experience with fun, enriching activities to improve the overall physical and mental well-being of participants, while also providing nutritious meals for those in need.

The Barberton Parks and Recreation Department was able to successfully run the Magic Box program for 13 weeks with funding provided by the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association Foundation, and through partnerships with Children's Hunger Alliance and the Ben Curtis Family Foundation. Thanks to our wonderful group of dedicated volunteers, 9,770 packed lunches, 5,814 Birdie Bags of shelf stable items, and 2,000 camp boxes containing crafts, games, and educational materials were distributed in five city parks at no cost to residents.

Bowling Green Parks & Recreation | Drive-In Movie Night

On Saturday September 12th, the Bowling Green Parks & Recreation Department hosted a "Movie in the Park" to help bring the community together for a fun event, while still keeping everyone socially distanced. With the help of grant funding from the OPRA Foundation and additional funding provided by our own BGPR Foundation, we purchased an inflatable screen, a projector, and an FM Transmitter.

Seating and parking spaces were marked off to ensure ample distance.

After postponing the originally scheduled date due to inclement weather, we still had between 50-60 individuals of all ages come out to enjoy the film. This event helped fill the void of traditional community events held in City Park that had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. Feedback suggests this type of event can be more popular in the future when we asked attendees about potential future events. With the purchase of the equipment, we are positioned to hold similar events in the future. As events like this grow in popularity, we can continue to build on them through sponsorships, restaurants participating as concessionaires, and possibly even some additional programming tied to the theme of the event. We are deeply appreciative of the opportunity provided by the OPRA Foundation's support of this event through its grant funding.

Cleveland Heights Office on Aging | Cleveland Heights Seniors Healthy at Home: Staying Connected

The Pandemic and the closing of senior centers highlighted the urgent need for technology. Grandpad is reported to be the easiest to use, state of the art device available for seniors. It operates without the use of WIFI, through a cellular connection provided by Consumer Cellular. The OPRA Foundation grant allowed the purchase of 2 Grandpads that were given to 2 Cleveland Heights seniors identified as lacking technology. We are aware of seniors living without home computers as before the shut-down they used the computers in our computer center. These are people who are acutely feeling the loss of connection now. Our program will use technology volunteers from our now-closed computer center to provide training on the devices. Our office provided the initial cost of 3 months of cell service and is available for tech support. An agreement was signed by the selected seniors agreeing to take over the cost of the cellular service after the initial 3 months or return the tablet to us. The program will be evaluated after 3 months for feedback. We hope this program will grow to provide access to technology for as many Cleveland Heights seniors as possible.

Cleveland Metroparks | Virtual Classrooms

Cleveland Metroparks is committed to bringing high quality programming to park district residents. During COVID-19, park district educators have worked to engage with people of all ages virtually while fulfilling the Park District's mission of connecting people with nature, inspiring stewardship, and promoting active lifestyles. Daily Virtual Classrooms, offered free via Facebook Live, connect the audience to nature and history. Topics have included native plants and animals, outdoor recreation and conservation, and animal care lessons from Cleveland Metroparks Zoo. The OPRA Foundation grant helped purchase video equipment to improve the quality and scope of the Virtual Classroom.

The Virtual Classroom is valuable to parents, children, teachers, nature enthusiasts, and people who can't visit the parks for health or mobility reasons. Through the Facebook Live platform, participants ask questions and engage with park experts in real time. To date, the Park District has produced more than 156 virtual classes resulting in over 4.95 million impressions and approximately 317,000 engagements. Surveys revealed that nearly half of viewers tuned in with their children or grandchildren. Beyond COVID-19, there will always be people who can't get to the parks. Virtual Classrooms, are an option for education and engagement into the future.

Columbus Recreation and Parks | Educational Garden

Nothing teaches kids about the importance of healthy eating like planting their own garden.

Thanks to support from the CRP Foundation and the OPRA Foundation, Columbus Recreation and Parks was able to offer 150 summer camp participants at 10 community centers the opportunity to participate in the Educational Garden program. The program teaches youth how to plant and harvest vegetables and

the importance of eating healthy. Nutrition education improves children's health, increases food security, and prevents diet-related disease.

Participants planted and tended the gardens throughout the summer, watching produce, such as, peppers, tomatoes, green beans, cucumbers, and watermelons grow. Participants learned about the whole process, including planting, weeding, pruning, and pollinating—and different ways to eat your veggies!

In addition to helping kids develop healthy habits for the future, the gardens serve a real-time benefit – produce is distributed to center participants. This is critical because many centers are located in communities that reside in a food desert and lack access to fresh food due to the limited transportation and dependence on small stores with limited choices, poor quality, and higher prices. Food insecurity has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

This year, the gardens yielded hundreds of pounds of produce—and many smiles!

Five Rivers MetroParks | The Virtual Victory Garden

The COVID-19 pandemic brought challenges to many in the Dayton area including isolation, changes in employment and income, and more time spent at home. Food insecurity increased in our region, as did a desire to grow gardens to feed family and neighbors.

To respond to these new conditions, Five Rivers MetroParks utilized funds from the OPRA Foundation Emergency Grant to develop Garden-to-Go kits complete with seeds, seedlings, and planting information. Community partners such as the Dayton Foodbank, Montgomery County Alcohol, Drug Addiction & Mental Health Services, Children's Hunger Alliance, and East End Community Services helped us distribute kits to families experiencing food insecurity. By June 2020 we were able to provide 370 kits to families in need, many of whom had never gardened before.

To increase the program's impact, garden spaces within our parks were planted as donation gardens. Emails to community gardeners and social media posts encouraged residents to help by bringing produce to the parks to add to the bounty. These efforts resulted in over three tons of vegetables donated to Access to Excess, a local nonprofit. Addressing the needs of the community through this direct outreach is something we look forward to continuing in years to come.

Great Parks of Hamilton County | Naturally Fit Virtually at Great Parks

The world has changed significantly since March because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In southwest Ohio, Great Parks of Hamilton County became one of the few places people could go to decompress, enjoy nature, and exercise. Because many gyms temporarily closed this year, people got creative with their exercise routines. Seeing countless folks head to parks as a place of respite, Great Parks knew we too had to adapt. That's where the Naturally Fit program came in.

Adventure Outpost team members saw a way to help residents get active and retain a sense of normalcy during an anything-but-normal year. Originally planned as in-person programming, with funding through the OPRA Foundation, Naturally Fit transitioned to online. A MovNat-certified trainer incorporates natural movement into a workout routine. Not only do guests set the pace of this workout, but they can continue to exercise in nature. Or, for people who don't feel comfortable being outside currently, they can get active right at home.

As parks professionals, we all know how important connecting with nature and exercising are—and how beneficial both are together. Naturally Fit helps improve people's physical and mental health in a time when both are more crucial than ever.

Grove City Parks and Recreation | Recreation Activity Bags

Through the OPRA Foundation COVID-19 Grant, the Grove City Parks and Recreation Department was able to supply Recreation Activity Bags to members of our community. Since almost all of the spring and summer programs were cancelled, we wanted a way to reach out to build and maintain relationships in the community. We were able to supply 150 kid themed bags and 100 adult themed bags. What may look like basic recreation items really became essential items during the pandemic. Many families and individuals didn't feel comfortable leaving their homes or didn't have the means to go out and shop for activity supplies for themselves or their children. By supplying these bags for families, we were able to be a bright spot during uncertain times for many people. Partnering with the Grove City Food Pantry, we were able to coordinate bag drop off alongside food drop off for community members. The Food Pantry staff were able to quickly identify certain families and individuals in our community that could benefit most from the bags. Staff stated it was a huge success as members were surprised and very thankful for not only the bag, but the activities in the bag to keep them busy.

Johnny Appleseed Metropolitan Park District | Above Yours Parks

Part of our purpose, like others in this field, is to improve our citizens' lives through outdoor recreation and environmental education. Thanks to the OPRA Foundation and the COVID-19 Grant, we were able to put a new, virtual spin on our mission with the acquisition of a drone. The objective of the Above Your Parks! program is to produce high quality aerial images and video tours of the park district and its activities to encourage viewers to engage with and explore the parks.

Above Your Parks! allows people who have limited ability (due to the pandemic or otherwise) to connect with the natural world via their devices on our Facebook Page. In addition, able participants who engage with this program are inspired to get outside and explore for themselves.

With footage from nearly half our parks, this program has already reached thousands of people with video hikes, time-lapse clips, photos, and even a 3D Google Tour. While especially effective with limited in-person programming due to COVID-19, this program is important for our community moving forward, as well. The more we can encourage engagement with nature the better the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of our citizens.

Licking Park District | At Home with Nature Program Series

The Licking Park District (LPD) received a \$500 grant from the OPRA Foundation to expand the "At Home with Nature Program Series". Intended to engage and educate the Licking Park District audience through a combination of virtual programs, Do-at-Home activities, and social media outreach, the series has reached over 23,594 people to date.

Virtual video programs include bird banding demonstrations, species spotlights, and themed walks, including the regular monitoring of an active Bald Eagle nest near Granville. A number of in-person programs were transitioned to an online format. Participants got creative with Paint the Parks and found camaraderie with the Books and the Bees Nature Lovers Book Club in partnership with The Granville Public Library. Continuing education for over 80 educators was provided during a "Zoom Into" Educator Workshop Series held in partnership with The Dawes Arboretum and The Licking Soil and Water Conservation District. Kids were not left out. We created a variety of printable activity sheets that featured family friendly nature activities that can be conducted in backyards and neighborhoods, such as, the exploration of flight using paper airplanes and firefly hunts. Find these and the videos on the LPD website and YouTube channel.

Lorain County Metro Parks | Yours to Explore Box

During the spring of 2020, it was evident that Lorain County Metro Parks needed to find a new way to connect with kids and families. We met this challenge with a plan to deliver educational boxes filled with resources and materials to families throughout the county. To add extra fun, we planned for our Chip E. Munk mascot to assist with deliveries!

Throughout the summer, we selected a different community each month for deliveries, and also provided a pick-up option for additional participants. Our monthly themes included Backyard Explorers, Here Comes the Sun, Wild with Water, and Blast from the Past. We also added features such as a themed Spotify playlist, activity links on our education webpage, and extension activities within our parks. Our Yours to Explore Box program has been wildly successful. Over the past four months, we have provided boxes for over 500 families. Children and adults alike have been overjoyed to see Chip E. Munk from a safe distance. We have made connections with our communities that will undoubtedly last into the future. We appreciate the support that was provided from the OPRA Foundation COVID-19 grant to help us provide this unique opportunity for our communities.

Village of Plain City | Pastime Park StoryWalk®

The Village of Plain City has one main park of 42 acres with a ½ mile walking trail, heavily used by the community. Many in the community take advantage of the trail, which winds past mature Oak and Maple trees.

In 2017, the Library's Public Services Librarian and the parks and recreation director collaborated on a Story Walk® project. Stations were temporarily set up with laminated pages from a book called, "Are You a Horse?" At the end of the StoryWalk®, families were surprised to find a live horse they could actually pet! The inaugural StoryWalk® was a great success, and the parks and recreation department dreamed of installing a permanent StoryWalk® on the trail—one that could be weatherproof and long lasting. However, budgets are tight in small villages, and it seemed to be just a dream...until we learned of the OPRA Foundation grant.

Through a collaboration between the Village, the Plain City Library, the Plain City Lions Club, a grant from OPRA Foundation, and a donation from Friends of the Library, the Village can now offer a new recreational opportunity that will enhance the lives of families in our community.

The StoryWalk® Trail combines outdoor activity, child literacy, and fun! It encourages families to get outside and it combines learning and nature, all while safely social distancing.

Thank you to the OPRA Foundation and all those who contributed to the StoryWalk® Trail's creation. Sometimes, dreams really do come true!

Prairie Township | Virtual Kidz Home Alone

The Kidz Home Alone class was conducted in a virtual format by Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic on August 3 and August 6 from 7-8 pm. In collaboration with Enriching Kidz and with assistance from the OPRA Foundation grant received, Prairie Township was able to offer the class free of charge to 10 participants with ages ranging from 8-12. Every child who signed up received a student manual with information on home alone safety, self-heimlich maneuver, first aid, microwave safety, stranger danger, and fire safety. The class is designed to provide a discussion between parents and children on solutions to "what ifs" in a home alone scenario. This class provided much needed information to teaching children about being home alone safely which was even more valuable during the pandemic where parents may not have an option for childcare. The enrollment for the class filled within one week which proved the need for this type of program in our community.

City of Rocky River | Program Communication Platform Enhancement

Having the opportunity to launch a community-wide e-newsletter has allowed our department to connect with members of our community that otherwise we would not have. Through the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association Foundation grant, our department has been allocated funds to cover the first ten months of "MailChimp." During the downturn in revenue related to COVID-19, we were struggling to find a way to keep our residents connected to programs and keep them aware of what was planned and going on.

For the REcord, (our newsletter) has well over 2,000 subscribers and will serve as a substitute to our typical program guide for the foreseeable future. We understand and anticipate a reduction in spending for the next budget year. The cost of printing and mailing a quarterly newsletter was well over \$9,000.00 per season. With the help of the OPRA Foundation, we are looking at less than \$1,000.00 annually and now have the opportunity to share even more information more often.

The support of OPRA Foundation is allowing our department to keep doing what we do best—program.

Stark County Park District | Nature, Education, & Programming Through Distance Learning

Jennifer panicked when she found a baby cardinal. "It wasn't moving and I felt so bad for it, but I didn't know how to help," she said.

Jennifer phoned the Stark Parks Wildlife Conservation Center and explained the situation. A staff member spoke with her about the bird, but ultimately needed more information than Jennifer could provide. "Normally in these situations, we ask that the animal be brought into the center, but COVID-19 is making people hesitant to do that," said Supervisor Stephon Echague.

Rather than being asked to drive to the center, Jennifer sent photos of the animal directly from her phone to a new iPod Touch, recently purchased through a grant from the OPRA Foundation. Using the photos, staff assessed the situation. "They told me the baby bird was not hurt, that it was a healthy fledgling, and that its mom was still caring for it," said Jennifer. Relieved for both the bird and for herself, she said "I'm so glad I could find out what to do without having to disrupt this baby bird!" The iPod has allowed for safe, virtual resolution to many similar human-animal conflicts and interactions.

Strongsville Parks, Recreation & Senior Services | Virtual Sports Challenges

Largely in part to the grant from the OPRA Foundation, the City of Strongsville Recreation Department was able to offer three virtual programs for the residents of Strongsville to help aid in their physical and mental well-being while trying to navigate through a world pandemic. The programs not only helped get the community more active they also helped facilitate some much-needed family time, but, perhaps most importantly it created a diversion away from the craziness the pandemic has created.

The three programs offered were a Virtual Basketball Trick Shot Challenge, a Virtual Fishing Derby, and a Virtual Sports Scavenger Hunt.

For the Basketball Virtual Trick Shot Challenge, participants were required to record their best trick shot and then upload that video to Twitter using the hashtag #strongvilletrickshot. The boys and girls' videos with the most likes won a basketball.

The second program was a Virtual Fishing Derby. Families were encouraged to get out and fish and then post pics of their catches to Twitter using the hashtag #strongvillefishingderby. There were over 70 fish caught overall! There was even one participant who noted that it was her first fish caught in over 20 years!

The final program was the Virtual Family Sports Scavenger Hunt. Families could complete certain tasks for entries into a drawing for a FREE family membership to the recreation center. They were to email pictures of the completed tasks.

The Strongsville Recreation Department cannot thank the OPRA Foundation enough for providing some of the means for such programming. In a time where people are yearning for some structure, we were able to provide just that and most importantly create memories that will last a lifetime! Thank you!

Washington Township Recreation – Town Hall Theatre | WTRC Virtual Theatre

Town Hall Theatre located in Centerville was starting production of *Fairy Tale Misfits* when COVID-19 hit the scene. With the help of an OPRA Foundation grant, rehearsals went virtual, children crafted their props, sets and costumes at home, and staff recorded scenes for streaming, to rave reviews, on Father's Day weekend.

Since this was our first foray into virtual productions, we offered the production for free, but donations were certainly accepted. The audience was very generous, and we received more than \$700 in donations and more than 130 individuals requested the link.

According to theatre manager Christie Cerio, "While COVID-19 may have stopped live performances, we still wanted to produce our art. I am so proud of our staff and actors who did such a fantastic job with this unique and unexpected opportunity."

Theatre staff made the switch from live to virtual with such aplomb that more Zoom productions are in the works for this fall and winter.

Youngstown Parks and Recreation Department | Share Your Smile Not Your Space

As part of an effort to feel normal, depending on what is normal to each individual, the Youngstown Parks and Recreation Department "Share Your Smile Not Your Space Youngstown" photo contest hit gold! During the campaign, residents, surrounding community members, and those visiting the area were encouraged to send in pictures of themselves making the best out of the "new normal" under the COVID-19 pandemic safety guidelines.

The campaign was a great success and with the use of social media we received pictures from people sharing their smile outside the city limits. Photos were shared of individuals and groups enjoying their park space, home gardens, and community events, while keeping a safe distance and ensuring that participating in public activities did not endanger those who longed for the days of enjoying the outdoors prior to COVID-19. Contest winners received prizes that included membership passes to the recreation center, all day pavilion rental and pool, and golf passes.