

MILWAUKEE PARKS
FOUNDATION



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Park Champions,

I hope this letter finds you well and filled with the same sense of joy and gratitude that I experienced recently during a delightful picnic with Sophie, my 4-year-old daughter, in Riverside Park. As we sat by the playground, sipping lemonade and munching on cheese and crackers, I couldn't help but reflect on the simple pleasures that our parks provide.

In that moment, accompanied by the beauty of nature and the never-ending stamina of a toddler on a swing set, my shoulders relaxed, and I was reminded that while our parks face challenges, their assets are far greater. From little feet in the sand to teenagers after school laughing and running around in the grass, Milwaukee County Parks and park champions who love them have gone above and beyond to truly make lemonade out of lemons.

The "lemon" we've been handed is the fact that our public park funding has remained stagnant for decades, and that since parks are not considered a "mandated service" of the state, our parks are often last in line for funding for improvements and much needed maintenance. Challenges of public safety, a lack of affordable housing and limited opportunities for youth continue to play out in our parks. It is critical to not ignore the challenges and pain in Milwaukee, but lingering too long runs the risk of ignoring our collective strengths and promise.

In 2023, being on Team Parks truly felt like making lemonade. We won landmark legislation that prevented our parks from

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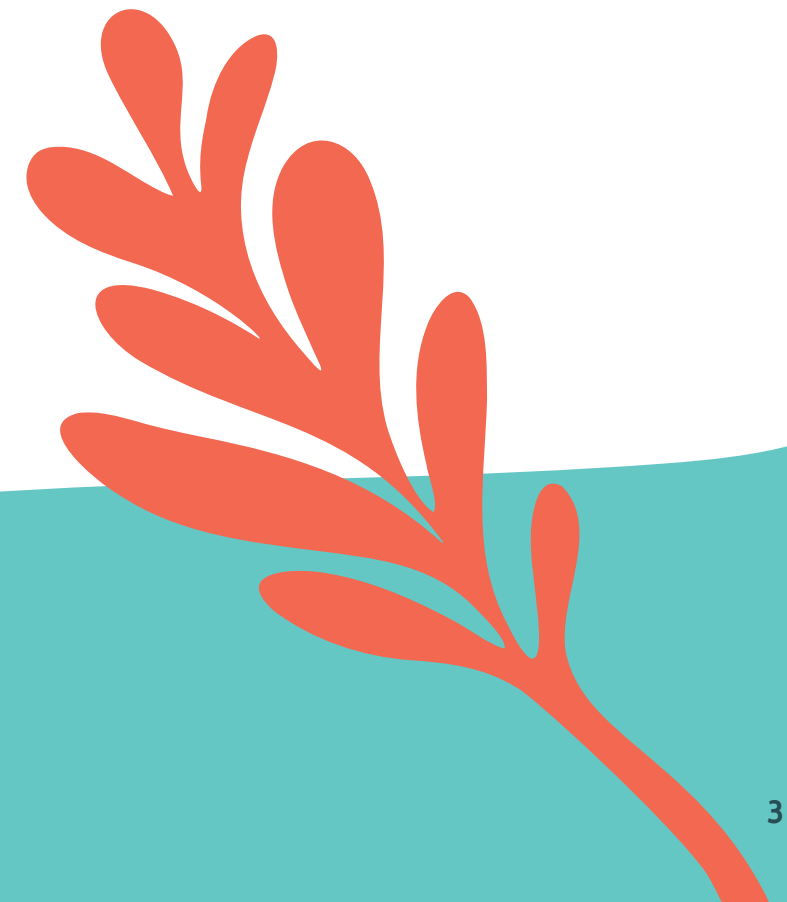


diving off a fiscal cliff. Our sprouts partners launched celebrations of joy and community, big wins for their neighborhood parks that were more safe and active because of their commitment. As of July 2024, we have invested nearly \$2 million in parks thanks to the generosity of our donor community—a huge win for advancing our mission to collectively steward a thriving park system.

Put another way, the community development sector calls this lemonade an "asset based" approach. Taking stock of strengths and leveraging those as much as possible. To me, 2023 put those strengths front and center. We saw it daily: in the thoughtful, entrepreneurial leadership of our parks department, in energized, giving, creative resident park leaders, in the committed, passionate Friends groups rolling up their sleeves to build a more vibrant park system, in donors who are ready for change and willing to contribute to see it happen.

Thank you for your ongoing dedication and support of our parks. Together, we will continue to make lemonade out of lemons, nurturing and enhancing our park system.

Rebecca Stoner
Executive Director





King Park



Sherman Park



Clarke Square Park



Kosciuszko Park

\$1,350,340
TOTAL PLEDGED OR INVESTED
In Milwaukee County Parks across twenty-eight projects, programs and events in more than thirty-five parks

4,608
PEOPLE IN PARKS

1,611
VOLUNTEER HOURS

413
VOLUNTEERS

Parks Impacted

King Park (MPF's Office)
Lyrics for our Sanctuaries youth poetry competition, the Safe Zone summer camp - \$14,000

Clarke Square Park
Decorate the park holiday event - \$5,000

Sherman Park
Harvest fest with Chairwoman Nicholson - \$6,733

Emergency summer safety programming - \$15,000

Activating Sherman Park with Sherman Park Community Association, Friends of Sherman Park - \$8,000

Moody Park
Community Holiday Extravaganza Amani Youth Council and Friends of Moody Park programming - \$13,000

Rose Park
Mural rehabilitation - \$20,000

Clarence and Cleopatra Johnson Park/Alice's Garden
Fieldhands and Foodways program - \$5,000

Lucille Berrien Park
New mural honoring Lucille Berrien - \$12,000

Atkinson Triangle
Safe Social Space Community Healing Project with the Village Group - \$5,000

Walker Square Park and Sherman Park
Community Parks Agenda - \$8,000

Johnson Park
Alice's Garden programming - \$5,000

Multiple Parks
Latino Conservation Week - \$8,000
Drums Up Guns Down park programming - \$8,000

System-Wide

Aquatics ambassador initiative - \$20,000

Healthy County Challenge

A countywide challenge aimed at bringing residents into parks, trails, nature areas, beaches, and other outdoor spaces to foster physical and mental wellness. - \$23,000

SEEDS PROJECTS

Investments to support improvements across the Milwaukee County Parks system



Parks Impacted

Harley Park
Complete renovation - \$350,000

McGovern Park
Healthy Parks, Healthy Neighbors Initiative with Johnson Controls, Inc. - \$300,000

Carver Park
Baseball field refurbishment - \$99,000

Lucille Berrien Park
Outdoor basketball court renovation - \$30,096

Kozy & King Parks
Community Center Fund - \$17,500

King Park
Community Center further investments - \$11,966

Pulaski Park
New picnic areas - \$5,000

Kozy Park
Tree planting - \$3,000

System-Wide

Three new positions at MCP: Associate Director of Aquatics, Reforestation Coordinator, Special Projects Coordinator - \$305,000
Trail Improvements - \$17,000
Wisconsin Policy Forum round 2 - \$10,000
Mural Maintenance Fund - \$5,399

Basketball Courts Refresh

Basketball court repainting and new bleachers at King Community Center indoor courts - \$25,656

At Milwaukee Parks Foundation, we are working to invest in rebuilding intergenerational connections to nature and parks. Through the Healthy Parks Healthy Neighbors Initiative supported by a Johnson Controls Foundation Smart and Healthy Neighborhood Grant of \$300,000, we are making a widespread impact in McGovern Park.



Thanks to the Johnson Controls Foundation and the support of community partners including Milwaukee County Parks, McGovern Park Senior Center, Health Connections, Inc., Friends of Lincoln Park, The Park People of Milwaukee County, Inc., The Taylor-Made Foundation and Nearby Nature MKE, we are further activating the park through year-round programming, hike and bike events, trail improvements and more while also providing opportunities for part-time employment for 3 young people in a trail work crew.



Intergenerational Park Activation and Fun:

The Healthy Parks Healthy Neighbors Initiative (HPHN) is leading a robust slate of year-round programming over the two-year initiative in McGovern Park. Activities include apple orchard cleanups and harvesting, exercise and dance classes, a 3v3 youth Basketball tournament, picnics, and much more. Johnson Controls employees have also been providing support to this initiative by volunteering regularly in the park this past year.



Let's Get Moving! through Trail Activation:

HPHN focuses on cleaning up trails and natural areas with a variety of opportunities to get neighbors connected to nature. Through trail improvements, better signage, accessibility upgrades, invasive species clearing, native species restoration, and more, MCP, partners, and volunteers are actively improving the trail system and natural areas in McGovern Park.

Youth Trail Work Crew:

The Healthy Parks Healthy Neighbors Initiative is providing part-time employment opportunities and green infrastructure job training to three young people. These crews consist of seasonal, part-time employees who report to the Milwaukee County Parks Trails Coordinator and work throughout all parks, with a special focus on McGovern Park.



More than park improvements and programming, HPHN aims to build a coalition of passionate partners and neighbors who can continue building a more vibrant and equitable McGovern Park for years to come.



With our Sprouts strategy, we invest in grassroots leaders and groups that anchor our parks. Community voices must play an active role in shaping the agenda for their park and our system as a whole. We support the ideas and energy of community park leaders as a form of support for Milwaukee County Parks.

During 2023, we launched an RFP process resulting in 61 applications with over \$500,000 in requests. Guided by experienced leaders on our Program Committee, Milwaukee Parks Foundation distributed \$45,000 to six grassroots park activation projects connecting to focus areas of Health and Healing, Community Care, and Collective Joy. Grant awards ranged from \$5,000 to \$8,000 and were implemented during the summer and fall months of 2023.



Activating Sherman Park:

Sherman Park Community Association, Friends of Sherman Park, Program The Parks, United Sports Club and Beckum-Stapleton Little League delivered a slate of intergenerational community activities throughout the summer, including tennis, kickball, environmental education, farmers market.

762 overall attendees participated in weekly events and programs in Sherman Park

Latino Conservation Week in MKE:

Zaynab Baalbaki and collaborators led the first series in Milwaukee celebrating Latino Conservation Week. Events like Biking & Birria, Tacos & Trails, Playing & Paleta, Pájaros y Pan, and Flan y Fotos took place throughout Milwaukee County Parks on Milwaukee's South Side.

150 Attendees **5** Events **5** South Side Parks



3,392
Individuals brought to parks

12+
High equity need parks

\$110,000
Invested in grassroots leaders



MADD 414 Presents Drums Up Guns Down:

Milwaukee African Drum and Dance 414 hosted a youth camp focusing on West African drum, dance, and culture throughout Milwaukee County Parks on Milwaukee's North Side. This project included Drums Up Guns Down drum circles, open to the public.

645+ individuals reached with drumming activities across multiple parks

The Safe Zone:

Driven by a powerful purpose to create safe and constructive opportunities for young Milwaukeean, Trinika Walker and collaborators piloted the Safe Zone camp, which included sports (especially basketball), arts, crafts, and music.

15-20 campers daily in King Park



Amani Youth Council and Friends of Moody Park:

Led by neighborhood youth, Amani Youth Council and Friends of Moody Park planned various youth activation events at their home park. This included a 3v3 basketball tournament celebrating the life of a council member who passed, events focused on mental wellness and a series of young entrepreneur showcases.

65+ Attendees 7 young people under the age of 18 facilitating events in Moody Park

Safe Social Space Community Healing Project:

The Village Group continued its presence in Atkinson Triangle Park, built on longstanding relationships and partnerships in the surrounding community. This included a mobile food pantry, community cookouts, youth programming, crisis intervention, and more.

1,750+ Attendees across multiple weekly events in Atkinson Triangle Park



DONOR HIGHLIGHT



Honoring the Legacy of the late Dr. Geoff Mykleby through Aquatics Ambassadors Milwaukee

As a lifelong swimmer and water safety advocate, Dr. Geoff Mykleby's connection to water translated into support for building a stronger lifeguard pipeline in Milwaukee. Aligned with his passion for getting other people into the pool, keeping local pools open, and promoting equitable access to swimming, Aquatics Ambassadors Milwaukee (AAM) launched in 2023 thanks to a generous gift from Dr. Mykleby. According to Executive Director Rebecca Stoner, "Meeting Dr. Mykleby was an honor, his love for swimming and our public pools was evident in our conversations. I am so grateful his passion and legacy live on through our Aquatics Ambassador program." AAM aims to increase water safety throughout the city by promoting equitable access to swimming and lifeguarding opportunities. We collaborate with the community to grow our local lifeguard pipeline and invite all of our neighbors to strengthen their water connection.



In 2023, our Aquatics Ambassadors supported Milwaukee County Parks' lifeguard recruitment by providing input to the process and amplifying the call in community venues, networks, and organizations. Our Ambassadors developed creative and community-informed approaches to invite Milwaukee County, especially BIPOC communities, to break patterns, engage with water, and level up swimming. To support this work, Milwaukee Parks Foundation also raised funds to support a new full-time Aquatics staff position at Milwaukee County Parks to increase community outreach and lifeguard development capacity.

As a result of AAM and Milwaukee County Parks' combined efforts, there was a 36% increase in lifeguards in 2024, leading to vastly more pool, water park, splash pad and wading pool openings.



AAM is an initiative supported by the Milwaukee Parks Foundation in collaboration with Milwaukee County Parks.

Meet our Ambassadors!



JEREMIAH JOHNSON

"What I love most about being a lifeguard is teaching the importance of water safety to kids that looked like me and seeing their reaction when they learned I was the lifeguard. I'm hoping that will make them more interested in swimming and even one day becoming a lifeguard like me."



JESSE AMBOS-KLECKLY

"When we talk about water safety in Milwaukee, swimming is a life skill, but also a potentially life-saving skill. Lake Michigan is the deadliest of the five Great Lakes and we have too many drownings in our rivers and other bodies of water. Learning to swim can be about developing your stroke, but it can also be breaking through generational and genetic trauma."



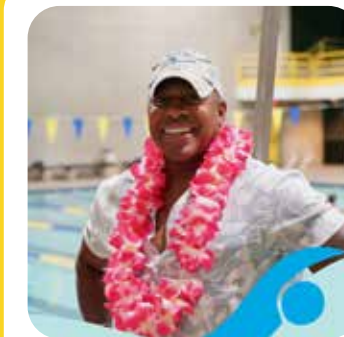
EMILIO PEREZ

"Swimming has opened so many doors for me. My life as a professional swimmer has introduced me to the world beyond Milwaukee, taking me around the country and to international competitions in Mexico and Japan. I've had phenomenal experiences in the pool and the sport has introduced me to an amazing community—teammates, friends and mentors."



ELIJAH MOORE

"It's a social thing, learning to swim. I've met good people in the pool and formed friendships. It's also an important skill because it can be useful in survival situations. Swimming opens up opportunities. I'm glad I went on this adventure."



LLOYD SEAWRIGHT

"Water can be therapeutic on the one hand and induce fear on another. Water can give life and take it away. Water is a balance beam of life. The pleasure and nourishment water provides through our oceans, waterways, and pools will ensure a healthy relationship for all who desire to engage this omnipresent medium—water!"



RAE JOHNSON

"Swimming always felt far away from my life in Milwaukee, but in reality, it's not. I wish I'd known how to swim growing up because it's fun, a low-impact exercise, and a real survival skill. Plus, I think it's a perfect activity for introverts like me."



LEARN MORE

PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

Camille Mays is a longtime Milwaukee advocate and activist, dedicated to supporting families who have lost loved ones to gun violence. Following a tragic family loss in 2019, she has channeled her grief into a mission of community healing, primarily through sound baths and facilitated experiences in nature. Her unwavering commitment and compassionate approach have made a significant impact on many lives.

Milwaukee Parks Foundation has collaborated with her as an unofficial “Parkist-in-Residence” since fall 2022. Mays and MPF have collaborated on a series of events responsive to community needs, ranging from private healing sessions with a youth group suffering loss to the transformative “Heal the Healers” event at the Domes, and a guided healing event at Pulaski Park with resident leaders and Embody Yoga MKE. Camille’s expanding healing practice and deep community expertise have been instrumental in helping MPF develop our Sprouts Strategy. By following the lead of community leaders like Camille, we have been able to unlock the latent potential of our parks in meaningful and impactful ways.



MERCH STORE



In order to raise funds while giving people a way to show their parks pride, we launched our Merch Store in August 2023.

265
TOTAL SALES

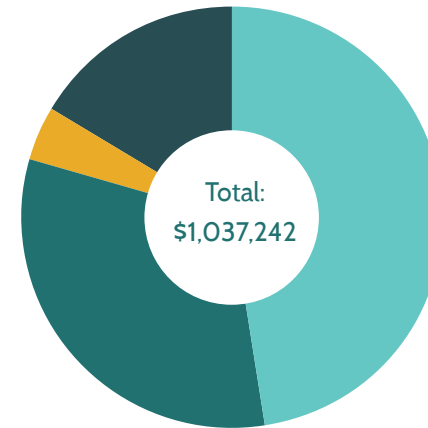
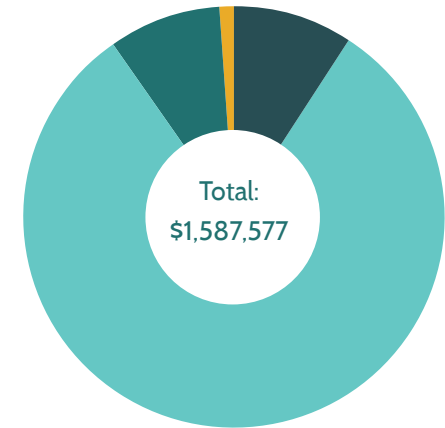


VISIT OUR STORE

FINANCIALS

REVENUE

Individual Contributions	\$146,834
Foundation & Corporate Contributions	\$1,289,436
Special Event Net Revenue	\$137,019
Earned Income	\$14,288



EXPENSES

SEEDS - Park Infrastructure Investment	\$495,049
Programs & Services	\$329,667
SPROUTS - Community Infrastructure Investments	\$14,288
Management & Fundraising	\$167,526

NET REVENUE:
\$550,335*

**Please note, the vast majority of this revenue is held in restriction for multi-year park projects*

84 cents of every dollar contributed to the Milwaukee Parks Foundation is invested directly into Milwaukee County Parks.

OUR STAFF



Rebecca Stoner
Executive Director



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Drums Up, Guns Down

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OUR PARKS.
OUR COMMUNITY.
OUR FUTURE.

OUR MISSION

Engage our community in supporting Milwaukee County Parks to collectively steward a thriving park system.