

MILWAUKEE PARKS
FOUNDATION



2024 ANNUAL REPORT



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Park Champions,

As my husband and I welcomed our second child Luca into this unsettling time, I've found myself reflecting a lot on the meaning of community, family, and my own upbringing. Which brings me back to parks.

I always say if you made a coming-of-age movie about my life, it would take place at my childhood park. I grew up three houses down from my elementary school's park, and it remained one of my go-to spots well into my teen years. I had my first kiss at that park (it was on the cheek – but still counted!), I shared and kept silly and serious secrets, whispered on the swing set with my friends, at that park.

That park was more than just play. It was a sacred space for me. A sanctuary.

We used to joke that our house—so close to the park—was “grand central station.” You never knew what friend, cousin, neighbor, would be staying with us for a few nights, or who would be sprawled out on the basement couches to play video games or watch cartoons after we spent the day running around outside. My mom always had a snack plate or baked goods ready to go, and we didn't know a stranger.

Now that I am older, I realize how lucky I am to have grown up not only with the privilege of having multiple sacred, safe spaces, but with a family that understood the importance of community, that “family” means a lot more than just blood relatives.

Working from our foundation office in the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Center, I am reminded of the concept of, “Beloved Community,” often associated with Dr. King. A Beloved Community is one built on mutual respect, justice and liberation. When properly cared for, our parks foster a strong sense of Beloved Community, an antidote to our rugged individualist, disconnected landscape.

The work of Milwaukee Parks Foundation is much bigger than me, or any one individual. It is the work of the parks movement as a whole. That work means building sacred spaces for young people to grow and feel safe.

As you read through this Annual Report, I invite you to reflect on what parks mean to you and the role they've played in building our community.

Thank you for being a part of the parks movement.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Stoner
Executive Director

5 YEARS OF IMPACT

Over the past five years, Milwaukee Parks Foundation has been a driving force in transforming our local green spaces, fostering community, and championing the importance of our parks. This timeline highlights the milestones and impact we've achieved together—one park, one project, one memory at a time.

2019

- Founding Board of Directors is created
- Strategic plan initiated
- MPF officially incorporated in December

2020

- Strategic Planning process begins, including more than 400 resident conversations
- First grant made to the We Care Crew for COVID-19 resource bags

2021

\$77,114 Invested

- Executive Director is hired
- Strategic priorities finalized

2022

\$693,978 Invested

- Seeds and Sprouts Initiative created
- First Go Green event
- Director of Communications is hired
- Director of Strategic Partnerships is hired
- MPF establishes office in the Dr. King Community Center
- County Exec Crowley launches Healthy County Challenge with MPF support
- Healthy Parks Healthy Neighbors launches
- Hosted youth poetry competition for parks
- Board committees initiated
- Harvest Fest launched with Marcelia Nicholson, County Board Chairwoman

2023

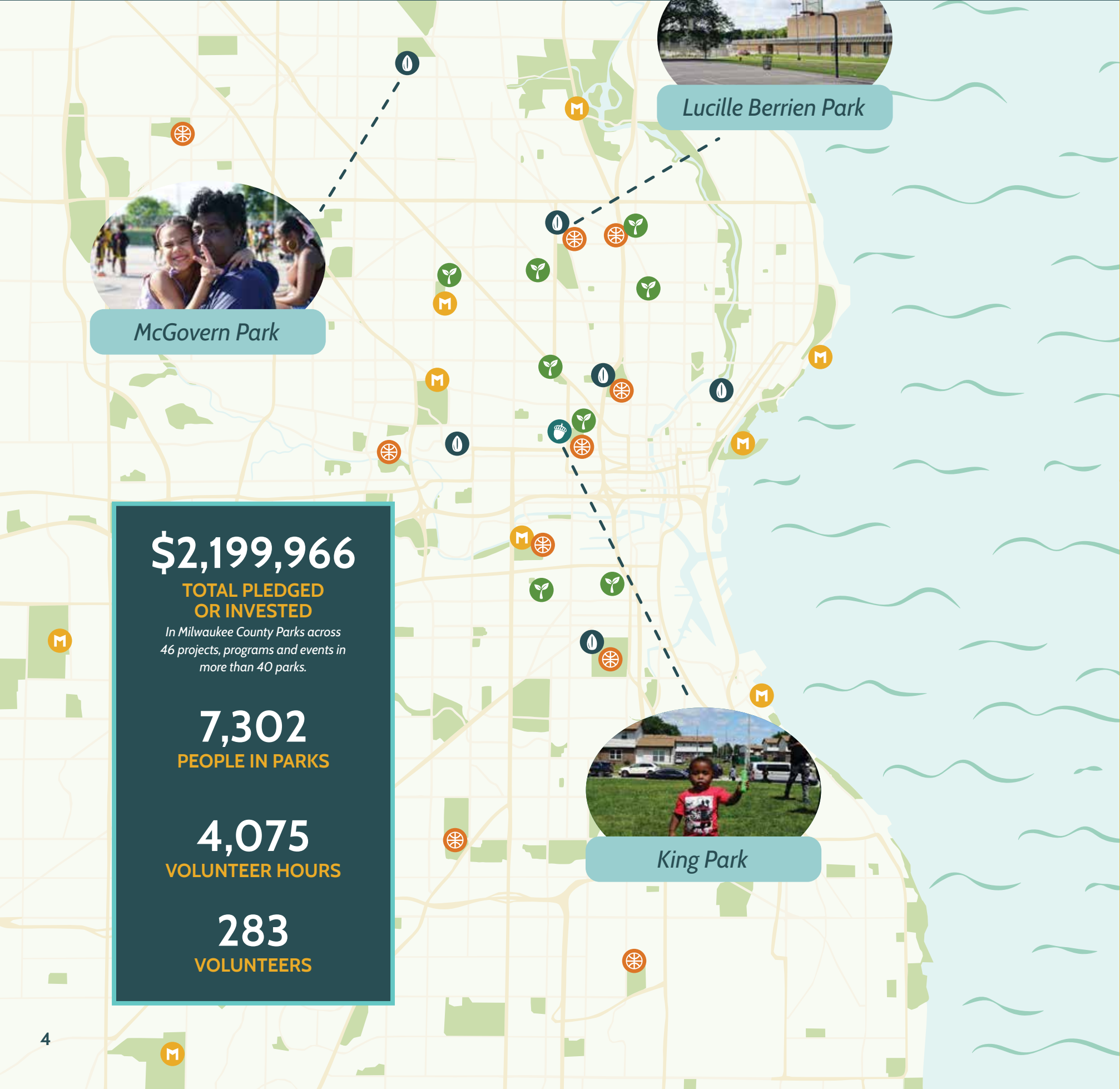
\$869,716 Invested

- Fund development, finance, program, marketing and comms, and nominations and governance board committees are established
- Sprouts RFP launched
- National Association of Counties annual achievement award for MPF partnership
- Sprouts recipients receive grant funding
- A Walk in the Park event series launches
- MPF Merch store launches

2024

\$920,517 Invested

- Event committee established
- MPF awarded Partner of the Year by the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association
- MPF and Milwaukee County finalists for national RWJF Culture of Health Prize
- MPF is inaugural grantee of the Powering Milwaukee Forward initiative
- Outreach Coordinator is hired



Parks Impacted

- Atkinson Triangle Park**
Safe Social Space Community Healing Project With the Village Group - \$13,000
- Clarke Square Park**
Decorate The Park Holiday Event - \$5,000
- Humboldt Park**
Safe Zone Summer Camp - \$8,000
- Johnson Park**
Alice's Garden Programming - \$5,000
- King Park**
Lyrics For Our Sanctuaries Youth Poetry Competition, The Safe Zone Summer Camp - \$14,000
- Lucille Berrien Park**
Mural Honoring Lucile Berrien - \$12,000
- Moody Park**
Amani Youth Council and Friends of Moody Park Programming - \$31,000

- Rose Park**
Mural Rehabilitation - \$20,000
- McGovern Park**
Investment In Partners and Programming - \$121,000
- Walker Square Park**
Summer Farmer's Market Community Programming - \$25,000
- Sherman Park**
Activating Sherman Park - \$31,000
Harvest Fest - \$12,733
- Walker Square Park and Sherman Park**
Community Parks Agendas - \$18,000
- Multiple Park Locations**
Latino Conservation Week - \$16,000
Drums Up Guns Down - \$16,000

System-Wide

Aquatics Ambassador Initiative - \$35,100

Healthy County Challenge

A county wide challenge aimed at bringing residents into parks - \$23,000

SEEDS PROJECTS

Investments to support improvements across the Milwaukee County Parks system

Parks Impacted

- Atkinson Triangle Park**
Investment in a New Open-Air Shelter and Park Programming - \$100,000
- Carver Park**
Baseball Field Refurbishment - \$99,000
- Harley Park**
Complete Renovation - \$350,000
- King Park**
King Community Center Murals - \$80,000
- Kosciuszko & King Parks**
Community Center Fund - \$28,266
- Kosciuszko and Smith Park**
Tree Planting - \$7,125

- Lucille Berrien Park**
Outdoor Basketball Court Renovation - \$30,096
- McGovern Park**
Healthy Parks, Healthy Neighbors Initiative - \$229,000
- Meaux Park**
Basketball Court Renovation - \$195,000
- Pulaski Park**
New Picnic Area - \$5,000
- Multiple Park Locations**
Tree Planting - \$125,000

System-Wide

Capacity building at MCP, support invested in Aquatic Recruitment & Administrative Coordinator, Reforestation Coordinator, Special Projects Coordinator - \$305,000
Trail Improvements including signage, maintenance, and more - \$30,000
Wisconsin Policy Forum - \$10,000
*Cheers To Our Parks! Campaign - \$175,000

Basketball Courts Refresh

Basketball court repainting at 10 courts plus new bleachers at the King Community Center. - \$25,656

**Thanks to a generous \$250k matching gift from Molson Coors we were able to raise more than \$500k for parks. This amount reflects dollars in and restricted for priority park projects in 2024-2025*

Planting Seeds for Environmental Justice: A New Chapter in Reforestation

Milwaukee County Parks is home to 17% of Milwaukee County's overall tree canopy. This natural infrastructure plays a vital role in shaping the health, beauty, and resilience of our communities. However, in recent years, our urban forests have suffered tremendous loss, particularly due to invasive species like the emerald ash borer, which alone contributed to the removal of more than 35,000 ash trees in the City of Milwaukee.

In 2024, Milwaukee Parks Foundation, in close partnership with Milwaukee County Parks, began laying the groundwork for a new approach to urban reforestation—one centered on equity, joy, and community ownership. Recognizing that planting trees is more than just an environmental act, we approached this work through the lens of environmental justice. Every tree planted is a step toward healing not just our landscapes, but our communities.

Since our founding, Milwaukee Parks Foundation has pledged or invested \$350,000 in tree planting efforts, equipment, and supply purchases, as well as critical capacity support for Milwaukee County Parks' forestry team. That investment has directly contributed to the planting or future planting of 5,174 trees across our park system.

The benefits of trees are profound. They purify our air, cool our neighborhoods, absorb carbon, mitigate flooding, and provide vital habitat for wildlife. They also enhance our mental and physical well-being, connect people to nature, and foster social bonds. Simply put, trees make our communities stronger.

At Milwaukee Parks Foundation, we believe that investing in trees, with an intentional focus on equity, is an investment in people and a healthier, more resilient Milwaukee for generations to come.



Photo Credit: Wudeward Urban Forest Products



“MPF's support for Milwaukee County Parks' reforestation program has allowed us to ramp up more community tree projects than previously possible. Since 2024, we have been able to connect with over 400 community members who participated in educational tree walks, tree planting, and more. These hands-on experiences are invaluable in raising awareness of environmental issues, encouraging community togetherness, and cultivating pride in our public parks.”

Sarah Long, Reforestation Coordinator at Milwaukee County Parks

Our Foundation's Sprouts initiative allows us to 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.



Sherman Park Partners

Using violence prevention as a key goal, ComForce MKE, led by Vaun Mayes, hosted a series of pop-up events, including a 3 versus 3 basketball tournament, a music series. This partnership brought together more than 960 individuals to Moody, Washington, and Sherman Parks.

Friends of Sherman Park held a weekly music and makers series for over 20 weeks in Sherman Park. The series included live music, performances, food, and activities with 25-40 people in attendance weekly.

The Sherman Park Community Association offered a range of significant summer programming, including fiber arts workshops, Shakespeare in the Park, and other arts classes, as well as Harvest Fest, in partnership with Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Nicholson drawing over 272 people to the park.

1272 Attendees



Drums Up, Guns Down

Drums Up, Guns Down held 36 evening African drumming and dance classes at the King Community Center. Open to the community, a total of 260 people attended the classes

260 Attendees



3,040
Individuals
brought to parks

12+
High equity
need parks

\$93,500
Invested in
grassroots leaders



Latino Conservation Week MKE

In their second year of programming, Latino Conservation Week MKE had five culturally relevant events across 5 different parks, including Fotos y Flan, Playing y Paletas, Biking y Birria.

123 Attendees

The Village Group

In honor of Community Leader Keyon Jackson Malone, The Village Group hosted a block party, back-to-school event, food pantry, and regular basketball programming for young people in Atkinson Park.

475 Attendees



The Safe Zone

The Safe Zone continued their youth summer camp focused on nature, sports, and safety. Hosted in Humboldt Park, the weekly was a testament to community care as neighbors occasionally sponsored lunches and snacks for the youth campers. Campers also explored Milwaukee through weekly fieldtrips to destinations like the Milwaukee County Zoo, other Milwaukee County Parks and even a Milwaukee Brewers game.

40 Attendees

Friends of Moody Park

Friends of Moody Park hosted programming such as a 3 versus 3 basketball tournament, chess club, pop up events and more for young people. All of the events were planned and led by neighborhood youth.

10 Youth Leaders



DONOR HIGHLIGHT



Cheers to Our Parks, a partnership with Molson Coors, raises \$550,000 for parks in 2024

Milwaukee County Parks has the same budget they had in the 1980s. Staffing has been cut so severely that each County Parks employee is responsible for managing around 41 Lambeau Fields worth of land. To maintain and improve our vast and beloved park system, we need to find creative revenue solutions.

The Cheers to our Parks campaign is one such solution!

In spring of 2024, Molson Coors, Milwaukee Parks Foundation, and Milwaukee County Parks launched a unique public-private partnership in the form of the Cheers to our Parks campaign. With a \$250,000 matching gift from Molson Coors, and an additional \$125,000 matching gift from the David and Julia Uihlein Charitable Fund, the campaign exceeded its goals in record time. By the end of summer, the community came together to raise more than \$550,000 total for our parks.

Dollars raised from the Cheers campaign have already been put to work. Funds have been earmarked for new play areas in Tiefenthaler Park, tree planting across our park system and bleacher installation at Meaux basketball courts. Additional funds are being dedicated to grassroots park programming through Milwaukee Parks Foundation's sprouts partners in parks such as Washington Park, Walker Square and Tiefenthaler in 2025.

Thank you, Molson Coors, for being a true Parks Champion and inspiring others to get involved. Dollars raised, and partnerships strengthened, will build a more vibrant and equitable parks system for all

“ I am so proud to be a part of Cheers to our Parks. This campaign represents everything Molson Coors stands for. With more resources, parks that have seen disinvestment can receive the investment they deserve, bringing even more joy and community into our parks and strengthening neighborhoods. ”

Alison Hanrahan, Community Affairs Manager with Molson Coors and Milwaukee Parks Foundation Board Member





PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

Milwaukee Parks Foundation was proud to partner with the Pat Connaughton Foundation and the Kelben Foundation in 2024 to revitalize the basketball courts at Meaux Park, located on Milwaukee's north side. This transformative project was made possible by a generous \$195,000 donation from the Pat Connaughton Foundation, which funded upgrades including new asphalt, rims, backboards, nets, bleachers, and enhanced fencing. The result is a welcoming recreational space that reflects the vibrant spirit of the neighborhood and supports the holistic development of youth and families who call the area home.

The revitalization of the Meaux Park courts couldn't have come at a more meaningful time. In 2024, the Warning Summer Basketball League, led by the Running Rebels Community Organization, celebrated its 50th anniversary. The league was established to keep young people safe, engaged, and focused during the summer months. Over the years, it has evolved into one of the longest-running outdoor basketball leagues in the country and continues to be a vital part of Milwaukee's community. More than 500 youth participate in the league each year, benefiting from structured play, mentorship, and life-skills training that extend far beyond the court.

“Partnering with the Milwaukee Parks Foundation to bring state-of-the-art basketball courts to Meaux Park is what our mission is all about, creating spaces that inspire and empower youth. Watching the Running Rebels use this court to develop not just basketball skills, but life skills, is exactly why we started the Pat Connaughton Foundation. It gives me tremendous hope for the future.”

Joseph P. Stanton, Development Manager, Pat Connaughton Foundation

The Pat Connaughton Foundation's mission to create access to athletics for the next generation of student-athletes through courts, clinics, and character aligns well with Milwaukee Parks Foundation's vision of a thriving park system that benefits all. For Milwaukee Parks Foundation, this partnership represents more than just physical improvements; it's a testament to what's possible when philanthropy, community, and public agencies work together toward a shared goal.



BEFORE



AFTER



AFTER

Thank you to the Pat Connaughton Foundation, Ted and Mary Kellner, and the Kelben Foundation for their generosity.

MERCH STORE

FINANCIALS



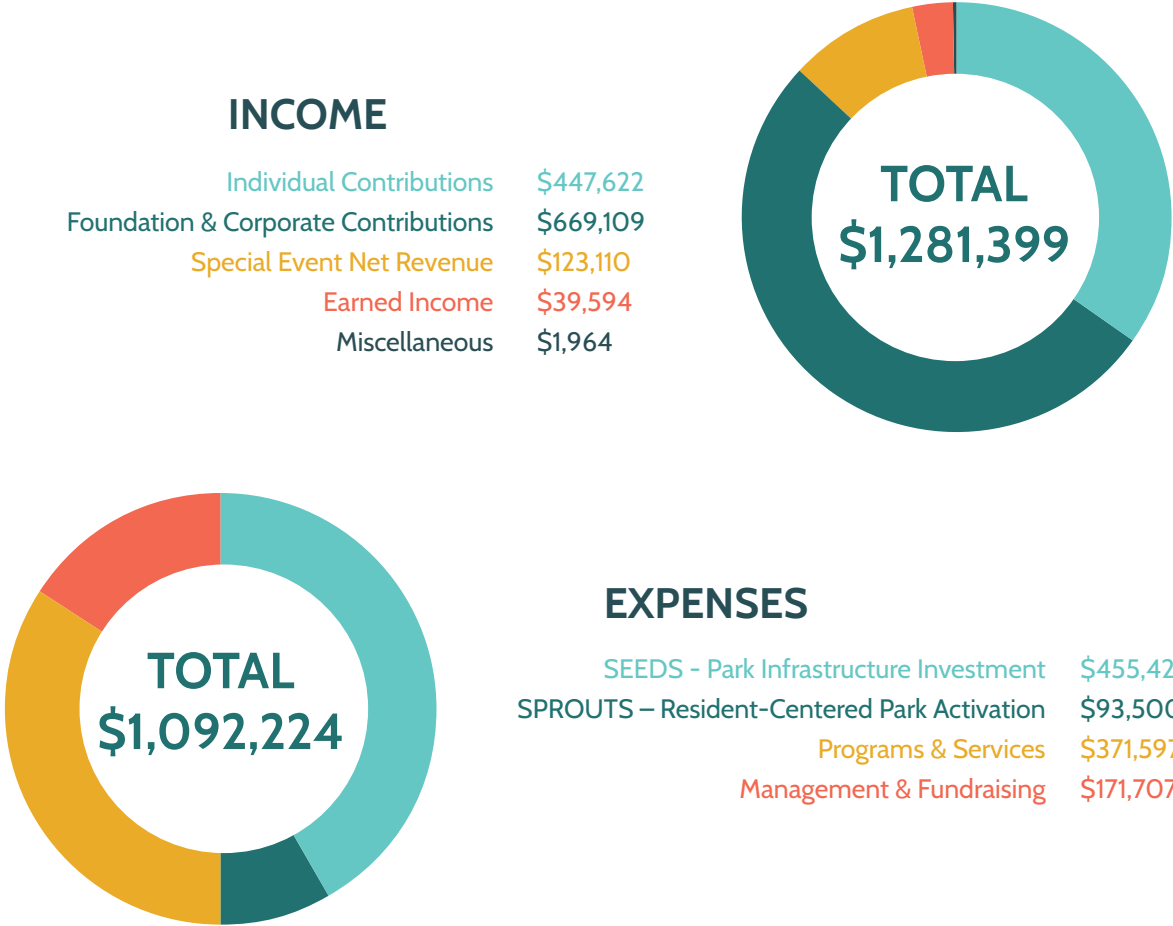


VISIT
OUR
STORE



\$8,288
MERCHANDISE
SALES

MPF merchandise sales benefit our mission



NET REVENUE:
\$210,306 *

**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



Tristen Shorter
Director of Communications



Adam Carr
Director of Strategic Partnerships



Maribel Loera Arista
Outreach Coordinator

OUR PARKS.
OUR COMMUNITY.
OUR FUTURE.

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Marcus White
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Thank you to the supporters below who gave a generous gift of \$500 or more between January 1, 2024 and December 31, 2024.

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Will Belke

OUR PARTNERS

We are grateful for the dozens of incredible partners who help us collectively steward a thriving park system. While we cannot name everyone, below is a list of major 2024 partners.

Beckum Stapleton
Little League

Black Leaders Organizing
for Community

Bronzeville Arts Ensemble

Camille Mays

Chairwoman Marcelia
Nicholson

Clarke Square
Neighborhood Initiative

CommForce

Confluence Graphics

County Executive David
Crowley

CR8TV House

Drums Up, Guns Down

Elijah Moore

Embody Yoga

Emilio Perez

First Tee Southeastern
Wisconsin

Friends of Lincoln Park

Friends of Moody Park

Friends of Rose Park

Friends of Sherman Park

Friends of the Domes

Friends of
Tiefenthaler Park

Friends of
Walker Square Park

Jesse Ambos-Kleckley

KK River Neighbors
In Action

Latino Conservation
Week MKE

Lloyd Seawright

Milwaukee County Board
of Supervisors

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Milwaukee Riverkeeper

Mothers Against
Gun Violence

Nearby Nature MKE

Northwest Side CDC

Palante Visuals

PEAK Initiative

Preserve Our Parks

Rae Johnson

Running Rebels

Safe & Sound

Semillitas

Serving Older Adults

Sherman Park
Community Association

Sixteenth Street
Community Health
Centers

Taylor Made Foundation

The Nature Conservancy

The Park People

The Village Group

True Skool

Walker Square
Neighborhood
Association

Wisconsin Sea Grant

Photo Credit: Nicole Gettelman



OUR MISSION

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

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