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For Immediate Release

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Park District of Oak Park Recognized for Diversity and Inclusion Efforts

La Grange IL– On January 26, 2024, the Illinois Park & Recreation Association (IPRA) awarded the Park District of Oak Park with the Champions for Change Award, honoring their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Park District of Oak Park was recognized during the IPRA Awards Program at the IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference held at the Hyatt Regency Chicago.

The IPRA Champions for Change Award recognizes agencies with unique and exemplary practices of increasing access and fostering diversity and inclusion within their community or organization. These are measurable practices that improve the working experience and engagement levels of employees and/or the lives of all people within the community through the delivery of excellent services that improve social equity and access in the community.

The Park District of Oak Park (PDOP) established its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Staff Committee in 2018 concurrent with the adoption of a Social Equity policy by the Board. The committee, meeting monthly, is dedicated to fostering awareness and intentionality among staff in embracing differences and promoting inclusion across parks, facilities, programs, and operations. The Committee's objectives include fostering a shared understanding of equity, identifying opportunities for improvement, providing space for reflection and growth, and serving as thought leaders in integrating equity into internal and external processes.

The Committee assumes a role as a knowledgeable and objective group, overseeing leadership in creating an inclusive work environment, ensuring equitable access to park benefits, assessing organizational needs for inclusion and equity, and spearheading efforts for cultural training and institutional change. In 2021, the PDOP hired a full-time recruiter to enhance outreach to Black/brown candidates, resulting in increased diversity in the District's staff. Moreover, the District implemented Safe Zone conversations on racism, LatinX, and LGBTQ, along with a series of online trainings for all staff. The strategic planning process for 2022-2024 led to the formalization of a DEI goal, emphasizing inclusivity as a core value.

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As part of their ongoing commitment, PDOP extends their impact by sharing insights and collaborating with other districts. Notably, they collaborated with the Oak Brook Park District, sharing their expertise in creating a training video for working with transgender youth. PDOP remains enthusiastic about continuing its DEI journey and engaging staff in these crucial efforts.

‘Congratulations to the Park District of Oak Park on being selected by their peers for this prestigious and meaningful award. IPRA is proud to showcase their dedication to and efforts related to DEI,’ Suzi Wirtz, IOM, Executive Director of IPRA. “It’s inspiring to see the work being done that will ultimately not just change one community, but make the world a better place.”

A complete list of IPRA award winners is available on the IPRA website, ILipra.org.

Established in 1944, the Illinois Park & Recreation Association (IPRA) serves nearly 3,000 park, recreation, and conservation professionals throughout the state, and is a national leader in providing premier education, networking, and resources. For more information about IPRA, its board and mission, please visit the IPRA website: www.Ilipra.org.

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