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For Immediate Release

Professional Excellence Recognized at IAPD/IPRA Annual Conference

La Grange IL– On January 26, 2024, the Illinois Park & Recreation Association (IPRA) honored Jay Lerner, Executive Director at the Waukegan Park District with the IPRA Professional of the Year Award, for his commitment and excellent service to parks and recreation in Illinois. Mr. Lerner was recognized during the IAPD/IPRA Awards Program at the IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference, held at the Hyatt Regency Chicago.

The IPRA Professional of the Year Award is an honor presented to an individual with more than eight years of full-time service, who has made a major contribution to the park, recreation and conservation profession, and someone who consistently goes above and beyond the call of duty.

Jay Lerner, with over 25 years as a park and recreation professional, has significantly shaped the landscape of the Waukegan Park District as its Executive Director. Managing a substantial budget, vast acreage, and numerous parks and facilities, Jay's visionary leadership brought forth state-of-the-art amenities like the Field House Sports, Fitness & Aquatics Center and the nationally acclaimed Greg Petry SportsPark, making a substantial economic impact on the local community. His commitment to diversity is evident in initiatives such as the first-ever Spanish program guide and revitalizing a vacant property into a dedicated facility for special recreation services, offering cutting-edge amenities for individuals with disabilities.

Under Jay's guidance, the district secured over \$9 million in grant funding, supporting park renovations, special recreation services, and the restoration of the historic Carnegie Library in downtown Waukegan. Jay's progressive management style prioritizes employee well-being, increased benefit days, and the conversion of part-time positions to full-time, living wage jobs. His impact extends beyond the district, fostering partnerships for community health and wellness, supporting youth employment programs, and earning the district accolades such as the Exceptional Workplace Award. Jay Lerner's dedication has elevated the parks and recreation field, benefiting the community with enhanced opportunities for recreation and youth development.

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‘On behalf of IPRA, I want to congratulate Jay on being recognized by his peers with this award for his long-time leadership and significant contributions to the profession,’ Suzi Wirtz, IOM, IPRA Executive Director. ‘Jay’s positive, progressive and collaborative style is clear to see within his long list of accolades. We are proud to have him as a member to continue to help advancing this important profession.’”

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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