



July is Parks & Recreation Month

One of things missing from our monthly board meetings are the proclamations and special presentations each month highlighting so many invaluable members and organizations in our community and their good works. In an abundance of caution, the presentations were one of the first things postponed to help slow the spread of Covid-19.

Eric Call, Director of Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department, wrote an internal piece that resonated with me on so many levels with regard to all that is happening in our world. Rather than providing you with more information on coronavirus or hurricane preparation, which you already have, I thought I would rather share this with you now.

As we approach the month of July, and the annual celebration of Parks and Recreation Month, I find myself reflecting on how different things are in 2020. Rather than request a proclamation to mark this time of year, I thought I would share my thoughts on how Parks have impacted and continue to shape our world.

Parks have always served as a place where people can find peace, relaxation, enjoyment and restoration. Never has this been more evident than during the public health crisis that has gripped an entire nation for months. We know that the CDC has identified mental and physical wellness as a top concern associated with COVID-19 and parks provide the perfect outlets for people to recharge and rejuvenate. The mere presence of parks and green space promotes psychological well-being and a greater quality of life. The desire and need for parks and open space that our residents have called for over the past few months has been overwhelming. Whether it's something fast-paced like boating, basketball, golf, sports, swimming and summer camp or something more relaxing such as hiking, fishing, bicycle riding or exploring nature, our parks have proven to be important and essential in the lives of all people.

One of the primary pillars of Parks and Recreation is to make parks and open spaces accessible to everyone and to be a champion of inclusiveness, fairness and social equity. This has been our mantra and part of our guiding principles for years and we will continue to maintain our fundamental belief that everyone deserves access to a great park. The recent incidents of systemic injustice around the country bring light to the need for greater dialogue and change in America. Parks have historically been a catalyst in bringing people together from all walks of life and they've been at the center in building community cohesiveness and unity. You've often heard me say that "every great community has a great park system" and I'm excited that we can be on the front line during this very important time. Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation will continue to prioritize social equity, diversity and inclusiveness in everything we do and be an ally in this time of change.

So during Park and Recreation Month 2020, I want to recognize and commend all of our staff that have worked so hard to keep our parks maintained, safe and enjoyable as they reopened for our residents during the pandemic. And, I want to pledge that all parks and recreation programs and services will continue to be available to all people on an equal basis. Remember, PARKS truly have the power to bring people together!

As always, I invite your comments on any issue of interest to you. As your Commissioner, I am here to help you. You may write me at 301 N. Olive Ave., West Palm Beach, 33401 or at MBerger@pbcgov.org. You can call me or my staff at 561-355-2205 or toll free at 877-930-2205. Please visit me on the Web at www.pbcgov.com/d5.

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