

59th Annual Maine Recreation and Parks Conference

March 15, 16 & 17, 2026

The Samoset Resort, Rockport, Maine

“RECREATION & PARKS FOR ALL”



Featuring Keynote Speaker:
GABE HOFFMAN-JOHNSON



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Founder and CCO**

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Welcome to the 2026 MRPA Spring Conference!

A message from MRPA President, Sabrina Best



Another year has flown by—one filled with hard work, dedication, meaningful moments, and collective achievements. I want to begin with a heartfelt thank you to our Board of Directors, committee members, MRPA membership, and our incredible Executive Director. Your passion, leadership, and commitment to MRPA- and to the parks and recreation profession as a whole—truly matter. The impact of your work is felt in communities across Maine every single day.

There is simply nothing like Spring Conference. The buzz, the energy, the exchange of knowledge, the excitement of welcoming new faces, and the joy of reconnecting with longtime friends—it's a reminder of why this work is so special. **As my own story continues to evolve, this year's theme feels especially powerful to me: Recreation and Parks for All.** At its core, parks and recreation is about belonging—creating spaces, programs, and opportunities that are designed for everyone.

For me, Spring Conference is about reconnecting with my tribe—a place where I belong, and where everyone else does, too. We are a group of individuals who understand one another's struggles and triumphs, because we live them every day. **We are part of something bigger than ourselves, and there is real comfort in knowing that we are not doing this work alone.**

As we move into another year together, I challenge each of you to reflect, reenergize, and approach new ideas, perspectives, and challenges with a judgment-free mindset—especially when something feels unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Growth rarely happens in spaces where we are completely at ease.

That, my friends, is what the Maine Recreation and Parks Association represents to me—what does it represent for you?

Sabrina Best

MRPA President and

Deputy Director, Brunswick Parks and Recreation

~At A Glance~ MRPA SPRING CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

SUNDAY 3/15/26

- 1:00 PM - 5:00 PM Check-In/Registration
- 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM Pre-Conference Sessions
- 1:30 PM - 5:00 PM Registration
- 4:30 PM - 5:30 PM Decision Maker Social
- 7:00 PM - 10:00 PM Sunday Social Event
- 10:00 PM - 11:00 PM Post-Social in Lounge

MONDAY 3/16/26

- 7:30 AM - 12:00 PM Registration
- 7:30 AM - 8:45 AM Breakfast
- 9:00 AM - 10:15 AM World Cafe Round Table
- 10:15 AM - 10:45 AM Break with Exhibitors and Morning Snack Break
- 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM Keynote
- 11:45 AM - 12:15 PM Break with Exhibitors
- 12:15 PM - 1:15 PM Lunch and Business Mtg
- 1:30 PM - 2:30 PM Educational Sessions
- 2:45 PM - 3:45 PM Educational Sessions
- 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM Exhibitor Social
- 6:00 PM - 7:30 PM Dinner/Awards Banquet
- 8:00 PM - 10:00 PM Monday Night Social
- 10:00 PM - 11:00 PM Post-Social in Lounge

TUESDAY 3/17/26

- 7:30 AM - 9:00 AM Breakfast
- 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM Playground Maintenance Course
- 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM Educational Sessions
- 10:15 AM - 11:15 AM Educational Sessions

THANK YOU to our Spring Conference Committee!



Jill McLaughlin
Conference Co-Chair



Angela O'Connor
Conference Co-Chair



Robin Cogger
Executive Director



Whitney Dorsett
Vendor Co-Chair



Alan Grady
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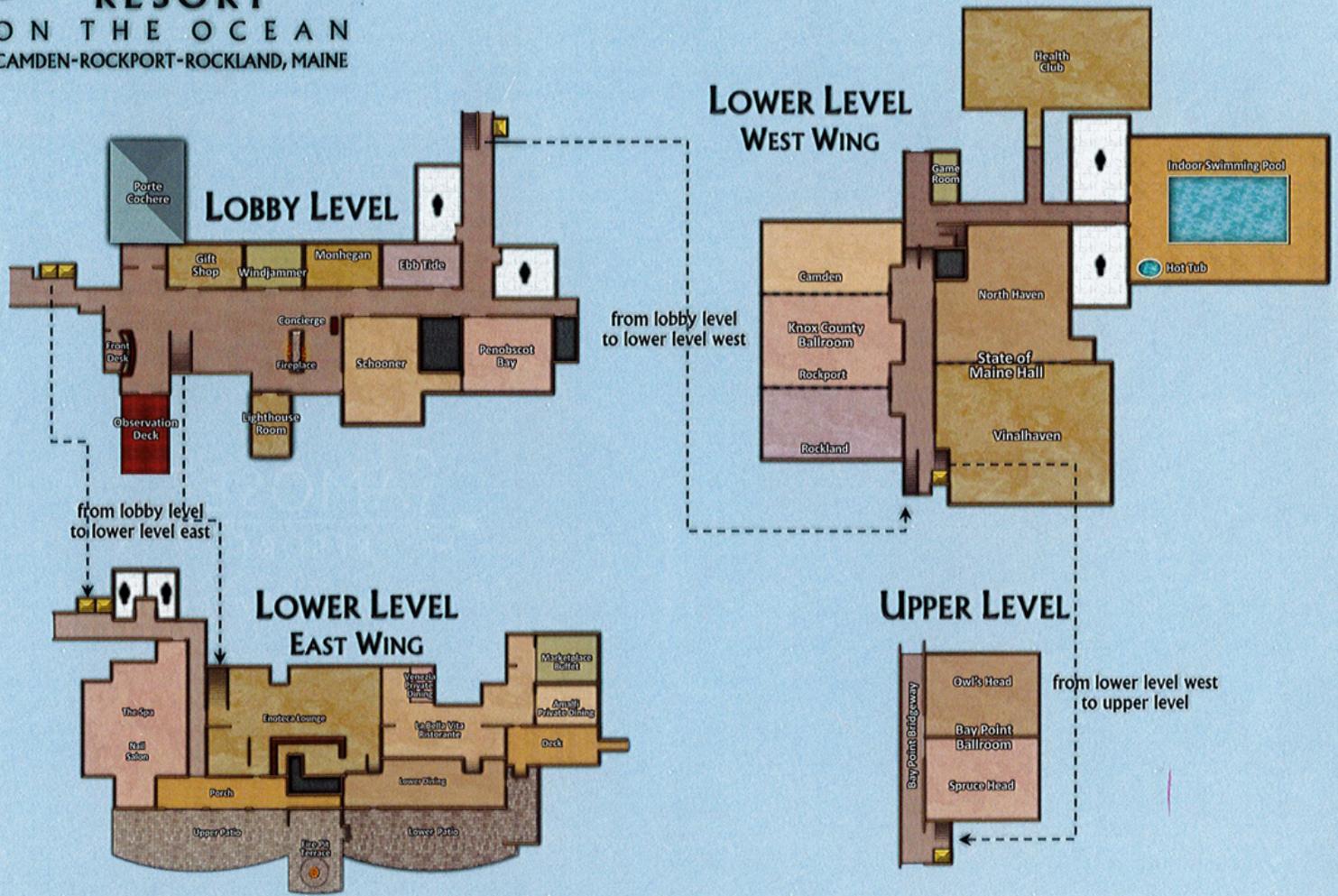


Nicole Welch

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Maine Recreation and Parks Association Community Agreement

A community agreement is helpful for setting the rules of engagement in meetings, with the purpose of building a sense of community and setting clear expectations and boundaries. (Adopted 12/15/23)

RESPECT Listen for understanding and be respectful of each other and the views of others.

EMPOWER YOURSELF Bring your whole self to this space. Respect your own mind, body and spirit, and vocalize and process your experience as you see fit.

ACCOUNTABILITY Accept responsibility for your words and actions. Be aware of your power, positionality, and privilege.

ONGOING LEARNING Engage with materials and new information with curiosity and an open mind. Have courage to challenge ideas and ask questions to seek understanding. Recognize that everyone is at different points in their learning and give room for others to learn without judgment.

SPEAK YOUR TRUTH Say what you know to be true for you and your experience.

CONFIDENTIALITY Personal information shared in workshops or meetings should not be shared outside the session. Lessons go. Stories stay.

WAIT (Why Am I Talking?) Be conscious of why you are (or are not) sharing. Be willing to share air time.

EXPECT NON-CLOSURE Not every question or challenge can be resolved in one session or meeting.

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Supporting Positive Athlete Behavior Through Responsive Coaching

Room: Owl's Head **Time:** 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Presenter: *Tracy Jones, Positive Coaching Alliance*

Every coach has been there: athletes who are not able to follow directions, disruptions during practice, or a player who just can't seem to focus. It's frustrating and it's easy to assume it's all about attitude or effort. But what if it's not? What if misbehavior is a signal, not a choice? This workshop gives coaches the tools to respond with purpose, building connection and accountability while keeping practices productive and athletes growing. *CEU .1*



Positive Coaching Alliance: Sessions Sponsored by Russell Packett Memorial Youth Sports Scholarship

MRPA is offering two educational sessions this conference featuring Tracy Jones of Positive Coaching Alliance. These sessions are both sponsored by the Russell Packett Youth Sport Scholarship Fund.

About the Russell Packett Memorial Youth Sports Scholarship: Russell was a long-time parks and recreation professional from 1993 until he passed away after a brief illness in 2017. He spent his career working in Yarmouth, Freeport, and Cape Elizabeth. Russell was the creator and director of the 130-team travel basketball league for kids in grades 5-8 in Southern Maine and also served for many years on the MRPA Board of Directors as its treasurer. He was passionate about youth sports and promoting training for professionals in the field.



Russell Packett scholarship funds are available to support MRPA member training, education, and other youth sport opportunities that support the mission of MRPA. For more info: merpa.org

MyRec.com User Group Session: Software that Simplifies your Recreation Management

Room: Spruce Head **Time:** 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Presenters: *Marcy Parmenter, Director of Client Success, Renee Prescott - Territory Account Manager/Design Specialist*

This session is for current MyRec.com users and gives our team a chance to give back to our clients when we can! It will cover all features of the software including important updates since we last met and some new accessibility assistance for 2026. We will highlight our newest features and demonstrate how you could and should use the system while giving you tips and tricks to make your life easier. There will be a question/answer period for all involved. Let's share how you simplify your recreation management! *CEU .2*

AI at Play: Streamline, Innovate, and Elevate Recreation Programs

Room: Ebb Tide **Time:** 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Presenter: *Dr. Lori Towle, Founder of Full Circle Classrooms and Full Circle Paddles; Executive Director of Code & Circuit*

As recreation directors and program leaders face increasing demands, AI has emerged as a powerful tool to support efficiency, creativity, and consistency. This hands-on session will explore practical ways AI can assist with drafting and revising policies, standardizing procedures across sites, creating templates for safety protocols and onboarding, summarizing participation trends, and generating public communications. Participants will learn how to responsibly integrate AI into their workflows, maintaining human oversight, protecting sensitive data, and ensuring compliance with state and ethical standards. Attendees will practice using AI for program planning, SOP development, and idea generation, leaving with actionable prompts, templates, and strategies to boost staff efficiency while enhancing program quality and community impact. *CEU.1*



No More Suspensions! Dealing with Behavioral Challengers Through a New Lense

Room: Pen Bay **Time:** 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Presenter: *Lisa Drennan, MERGE Consulting, 2025 NRPA NATIONAL CONFERENCE SPEAKER*

No More Suspensions! This training session emphasizes the importance of disability inclusion and acknowledges the need for intentional efforts to ensure the success of all individuals. *CEU .1*

Building Bridges: Partnering with Families for Successful Disability Inclusion

Room: Pen Bay **Time:** 3:15 PM - 4:15 PM

Presenter: *Lisa Drennan, MERGE Consulting, 2025 NRPA NATIONAL CONFERENCE SPEAKER*

Building trust with families of children with disabilities is key to inclusion. This session shares strategies for welcoming messaging, better intake, and navigating tough conversations. Hear family testimonies on why inclusion matters and gain tools to reduce non-disclosure, and foster collaboration —ensuring every child feels valued. *CEU .1*



Calling all Decision Makers and Department Leadership!

MRPA is setting the stage to connect beyond emails and invoices! If you're a decision maker in your department, this private event is made for you to meet vendors in a relaxed session. Talk about your projects, parks, and programs without the hustle of the vendor hall.

No formal agenda- just good conversation and stronger connections. Light appetizers will be served.



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Trivia and Karaoke with DJ-BRIAN C!

Grab the MIC and your closest colleague - we have an action-packed kick-off social planned! DJ-Brian C will have your favorite tunes lined up, along with trivia challenges where you can win PRIZES!

Appetizers and Cash Bar available.

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REGISTRATION AND CHECK IN RESORT LOBBY 7:30 AM - 12:00 PM

Pick up your name badge, meal tickets, and ask the Spring Conference Committee any questions you have about the day! There are also a few surprises from our sponsors that you won't want to miss!

BREAKFAST KNOX COUNTY BALLROOM 7:30 AM - 8:45 AM

WORLD CAFE: A ROUND TABLE EXPERIENCE KNOX COUNTY BALLROOM 9:00 AM - 10:15 AM

Back by popular demand: World Café!

Join this fast-paced, facilitated group discussion where participants rotate between small groups to share ideas and perspectives on a variety of relative topics. You will not want to miss this speedy networking and learning opportunity.



BREAK WITH EXHIBITORS and Refreshments VINALHAVEN 10:15 AM - 10:45 AM

Head to Vinalhaven to check out the Exhibitor Hall. Find new vendors, contractors, along with a morning snack and coffee!



MONDAY MORNING BREAK SPONSORED BY: O'BRIEN AND SONS

KEYNOTE ADDRESS KNOX COUNTY BALLROOM 10:45 AM - 11:45 AM



Gabe Hoffman-Johnson
Portland Hearts of Pine
Founder and Chief Community Officer

The Hearts of Pine: a "culture-led, community-built, city-backed" vision announced in 2023 that has captured the hearts of thousands of Mainer...

A Mainer since 2002, Gabe has lived in the soccer community, embracing the culture and community benefits that this sport has to offer. From playing in Portland as a child, to playing in college, and then professionally, Gabe credits his love of soccer and helping people to his parents who "instilled an unquenchable desire to use soccer as a way to contribute to the future vitality of Maine." Join your colleagues in this personal, friendly keynote from Gabe. Take advantage of this opportunity to learn how a soccer ball inspired dreams and built bridges, both on and off the pitch.

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What Do Pigs and a Park Bench Have in Common?

Room: Schooner

Presenters: *Jessica Brodie, Executive Director, Vermont Recreation & Park Association*

Collaboration between Parks & Recreation and Agritourism businesses can foster strong, vibrant communities. Parks and agritourism can both serve as engines for local economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social cohesion. This session will explore and discuss the idea of “Farm Parks” and the importance of connecting Agriculture and Parks & Recreation. Together, we will explore numerous ways parks and agritourism organizations can partner to create farm-based programs, cultural events, to educational workshops. We will discuss the importance of cross-sector collaboration in today's society, share examples of successful partnerships, and how the sectors overlap. This session will also explore the connection between indigenous farming practices and community living with the historical contributions of Native Americans to agriculture and parks in the United States. CEU .1



Riding the Wave: How to Identify, Plan, and Implement Successful New Programming

Room: Pen Bay

Presenters: *Rachel Arbige, Recreation Manager, East Greenwich, Rhode Island*

Recreation is far more than youth camps and seasonal offerings—it is a powerful tool for building community, promoting wellness, and engaging residents of all ages. Riding the Wave explores how recreation professionals can stay ahead of trends, respond to shifting community needs, and successfully launch innovative programming that resonates across generations. This session will guide participants through practical strategies for identifying gaps and opportunities within their communities, using data, feedback, and observation to shape relevant and inclusive programs. Attendees will learn how to transform ideas into action through thoughtful planning, effective partnerships, creative marketing, and flexible implementation. Get ready to “ride the wave” of emerging recreation trends while strengthening community connection and engagement. CEU .1



So, You Want to be a Director?

Room: Spruce Head

Presenters: *Sabrina Best, Deputy Director, Brunswick Parks and Recreation Department*

Riley Silva, Parks and Recreation Director, Raymond Parks and Recreation Department

You don't know what you don't know – things Sabrina wish she knew before her first director position. What does CIP stand for? How does a City Council meeting work? Am I REALLY in charge of setting policies? This session will cover everything from budgets and budget presentations, RFP's and bid processes, leading a teams, and town/city council and town manager relationships, with a side of human resources law, self advocacy, and how to get the most out of your department's commission or parks and recreation committee. CEU .1



Pickleball for All

Room: Spruce Head

Presenters: *Dr. Lori Towle, Founder of Full Circle Classrooms and Full Circle Paddles;*

Executive Director of Code & Circuit

Pickleball is one of the fastest-growing sports in the world, offering a fun, accessible, and social way for youth to engage in physical activity. Yet, many underserved and underprivileged communities in Maine lack access to equipment, structured programs, and trained staff to introduce this dynamic sport. This interactive workshop explores practical strategies to expand pickleball opportunities for youth in underserved communities. Participants will leave with actionable strategies, program templates, and inspiration to bring pickleball to youth across Maine ~ helping communities stay active, connected, and empowered. CEU .1



Programs That Stick!

Room: Spruce Head

Presenters: *Nicole Welch, Director, Lewiston Recreation Department*

We all have our briefcase of successful programs, and here is your chance to share your brilliant ideas! Session participants will have 20 minutes to walk around the room, writing their favorite entertainers, youth and senior enrichment programs, family trips, and more, on post its, and stick them into their categories. We will then re-group and hear from our colleagues about their successes! Find out what other communities are offering, and bring some new ideas back to your department! *CEU .1*



Advocacy In Action: Telling Your Story For Real Impact

Room: Schooner

Presenters: *Megan Jean-Gendron, Director of Advocacy and Public Affairs, Frame Strategies*

Advocacy isn't just about facts and figures—it's about telling the story of why your work matters. In this session, we'll explore how Maine's parks and recreation professionals can use personal stories, community impact, and on-the-ground experience to influence decision-makers at every level. Participants will learn practical tools for shaping compelling narratives, framing issues for policymakers, and building long-term advocacy relationships. Whether you're new to advocacy or looking to sharpen your approach, you'll leave with strategies that make your voice more effective, memorable, and actionable. *CEU .1*

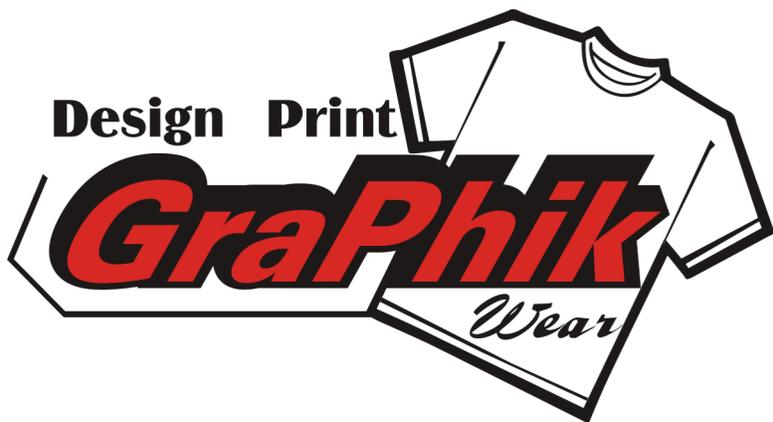


Grant Funding Opportunities for Trails, Parks, Sports Fields, Courts, & Other Outdoor Recreation Projects

Room: Pen Bay

Presenters: *Maine Bureau of Parks & Lands staff members Mathew Henion, Heron DuFault, Adam Fisher, Em Brown*

Are you trying to increase the accessibility of your town's trail network? Is the local playground in need of renovation? Are you looking to meet the demand for outdoor racket sport courts? The staff from Maine's Grants & Community Recreation Program will discuss how the Maine Trails Program, Land & Water Conservation Fund, and the Recreational Trails Program can help fund your public outdoor recreation projects. *CEU .1*



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EXHIBITORS SOCIAL VINALHAVEN 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM

Join our Commercial Members and Conference Exhibitors to find the next "new thing" for your department — from field trip locations and sports equipment to maintenance products and more! Please take a moment to introduce yourself to this year's exhibitors and thank them for their support of the 2026 conference!

MRPA AWARDS BANQUET KNOX COUNTY BALLROOM 6:00 PM - 7:30 PM

Join us for our annual awards ceremony as we recognize and celebrate our colleagues, volunteers, and facilities that have done outstanding work in our profession, have given back to their communities, and continue to create a world that emphasizes the importance of community, kindness and well being. We will celebrate and recognize the deserving 2026 award recipients for their commitment and efforts to our profession. Be part of your state's professional organization and learn about the amazing work happening in Maine.

LOOKING BACK: CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2025 AWARD RECIPIENTS



"William V. Haskell" Distinguished Professional of the Year Award: Todd Souza, Scarborough Community Services



"Dr. Bill Eckart" Young Professional Award: Zachary Lambert, Community Recreation and Events Manager, Gorham Parks and Recreation



Outstanding Parks Professional Award: Mo Russo, Gray Recreation Department



Facilities of Merit Award: Brunswick Recreation Center, Brunswick Parks and Recreation



Citizen Volunteer of the Year Award: Greg Fyfe, York Parks and Recreation Department



Citizen Volunteer of the Year Award: Glynn Ross, Bridgton Recreation Department

MONDAY NIGHT SOCIAL VINALHAVEN 8:00 PM - 10:00 PM



PROJECT FIREBIRD BAND AND GLOW PARTY



Keep the good times going at MRPA's first GLOW PARTY! Project Firebird will bring the noise, playing your favorite 70's, 80's, and 90's tunes, along with a few surprises from today!

Attendees will receive an MRPA Glow Party T-shirt, and we encourage you to wear your favorite fluorescents to pair!

Thank you to our Monday Night Social sponsors:



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BEN SHAFER RECREATION



A Message from Maine Recreation and Parks Association Executive Director, Robin Cogger



Welcome to this, our 59th annual conference! It is inspiring to gather with so many dedicated professionals and partners who believe in the power and purpose of Recreation and Parks.

Your work is about more than programs and spaces — it's about people, community, and quality of life. Recreation and Parks play a vital role in creating places where everyone can belong, stay active, connect with nature, and build meaningful relationships. From youth development to healthy aging, from inclusive programming to environmental stewardship, what you do every day makes a lasting impact. The next couple of days is an opportunity to learn from one another, share innovative ideas, and strengthen our collective commitment to serving all members of your respective communities and ultimately the State of Maine. Thank you for the passion, creativity, and care you bring to this profession. I am grateful for the work you do and excited for the conversations, connections, and inspiration this conference will bring.

- *Robin Cogger*

MRPA Executive Director

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MRPA 2026 Spring Conference: "RECREATION AND PARKS FOR ALL"

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More information on the 2026 Summer Discount Program will be available in April! Keep an eye on the Maine Recreation and Park Association Website: MERPA.ORG

Tuesday, March 17, 2026

TUESDAY BREAKFAST

ROCKPORT

7:30 AM - 9:00 AM

TUESDAY EDUCATIONAL BLOCK 1

9:00 AM - 10:00 AM

8 Dimensions of Wellness

Room: Pen Bay

Presenters: *Danielle Yale, Health Promotion Coordinator, MEMUN*

The 8 dimensions of Wellness include the following: physical, emotional, financial, intellectual, occupational, social, spiritual, and environmental. Each dimension is interconnected and enhancing one positively influences the others as well as negatively can affect a snowball effect in the other areas as well. Focusing on all 8 dimensions fosters a greater sense of purpose, satisfaction, and well-being in both personal and professional lives. *CEU .1*



Next Level Programming Using Registered Maine Guides

Room: Spruce Head

Presenters: *Matt Tobin, Pioneer MFG Sales*

Hiring a Maine Guide can greatly increase the programming for your Department. Lists will be provided of possible opportunities with vast examples given. From the youngest to the oldest in your program, will have successful opportunities to be enriched in more than just the typical team sports. Maine is full of opportunities for all to recreate. Let's find out what these are. *CEU .1*



Beyond the Game: Coaching Character and Community

Room: Owl's Head

Presenters: *Brian Moreau, Director of Parks & Recreation, Baileyville*

Youth sports can be one of the most powerful tools for building confident, resilient, and kind young people — but only if the focus goes beyond wins and losses. This session explores how small-town recreation programs can shape a healthy coaching culture centered on sportsmanship, teamwork, and community pride. Attendees will learn how to set clear expectations with volunteer coaches and parents, handle difficult sideline behavior, and design programs that prioritize player development and enjoyment. The conversation will also highlight strategies for strengthening the connection between recreation departments, schools, and families through positive coaching practices. *CEU .1*





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Age-Friendly Communities and Recreation: A Moving Partnership

Room: Pen Bay

Presenters: *Dr. Patricia Oh, Asst. Director, Community Engaged Research, University of Maine, Gail Platts, Active Adults Program Coordinator, Scarborough Community Services Anthony Dahms, Director, Gray Recreation*



When Age-Friendly Community Initiatives and Recreation Departments join forces, the entire community thrives. Opportunities to recreate and socialize are essential for older adults to lead active, healthy, and engaged lives—and that's where Recreation excels. This workshop explores how age-friendly initiatives and recreation departments collaborate to create a lasting impact. We'll examine real-world examples of collaboration that make spaces more accessible, expand social opportunities beyond traditional activities like bingo and trips, and meaningfully engage older community members in program development. Attendees will leave inspired with practical examples they can adapt in their own communities. *CEU .1*



Next Generation of Parks & Recreation

Room: Spruce Head

Presenters: *Grace Mulherin, Director, Buxton Recreation Zach Lambert, Community Recreation & Events Manager, Gorham Recreation*



Whether you are a student or a seasoned professional, in this session you will hear from up-and-coming young professionals who are the "next generation". This session will be a "town hall" style session. Panelists consisting of Young Professionals will give a brief synopsis of their journey of how and why Parks and Recreation came about, before moving into a Q&A. *CEU .1*



Building Welcoming and Inclusive Youth Recreation Programs

Room: Owl's Head

Presenters: *Soren Erwich, School Engagement Coordinator, OUT Maine*



This training is designed for organizations that provide direct youth programming. It will provide a foundational understanding for those who are new to working with LGBTQ+ youth, as well as updated and in-depth information for those who are looking for a refresher. During this training participants will review: terminology and pronoun usage; risk and protective factors, supporting transgender and gender-expansive youth, student rights, intervening in harmful behavior, creating inclusive forms, and navigating facility needs. This training is based on our published Best Practices for LGBTQ+ Inclusive Programming. *CEU .1*



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