

Building Bridges

Partnerships between municipalities and schools are providing better facilities and programs.

The following excerpts are from the October 2001 *Athletic Business* magazine article, written by Elizabeth Huddleson.

Faced with growing communities and limited budgets, recreation departments and school districts often struggle to keep facilities and programs up to speed. Though not always the most obvious option, partnerships between the two entities are becoming an increasingly popular way to save money while also offering more amenities and activities to residents.

. . . Consider the partnership survey conducted in May 2000 by Elgin, Ill.-based Burnidge Cassell Associates . . . Park and recreation directors and administrators from 32 Illinois municipal parks and recreation districts were asked about partnering possibilities. Eighty-three percent of respon-

dents said they would consider developing a partnership to increase membership and programs. Fewer than half (39 percent) currently had a professional partnership with another agency. Of the participants who would consider developing a partnership, 64 percent would partner with a nonprofit organization such as a school or YMCA. Roughly four in five (81 percent) would want to remain in control of the management of the facility when developing a professional partnership with another agency.

Daniel Atilano, principal at Burnidge Cassell Associates, feels that partnerships are the way of the future. "Partnering is not going to go away," he says. "It's just going to become more important. We all know what the success rate of referendums is and many projects might not be successful the first time on the ballot if it weren't for a partnership agreement. Partnering allows you to do a lot more because you're sharing dollars."

Atilano is currently designing a joint middle school/park district facility in Illinois. His firm is the architect for the Channahon Park District, while the school district has its own architect. A committee made up of the two

architects, the school district superintendent, some board members, the executive director of the park district, two park district directors and a construction manager has worked to plan the facility. With all these people involved, communication is key, says Atilano. "It's important right at the beginning to understand what each of the partners want to achieve," he says. "We kid about it, but it really is similar to a marriage. You kind of have that dating period where you're starting to learn about each other. But even when you're in the same community and you think you know each other, once you start a project and you have millions of dollars invested, some of that kind of goes away and it becomes what each person wants." . . . He says that a good way to neutralize people's demands is to continually remind each other that their objective is to serve the taxpayers, not their individual groups.

Despite the difficulties of the collaboration though, Atilano still strongly encourages partnerships. "A partnership takes more time and planning and it's more work and effort than doing it by yourself," he says. "So it does lengthen the design process, but the end result is well worth the investment."

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