

Making its 'mark

Bismarck honored as SI Sportstown for North Dakota

By Andrew Schulman, Sports Illustrated



At first glance, it's clear that the Bismarck Parks and Recreation District (BPRD) provides excellent programming and facilities for its residents. But upon further inspection, it's also evident that the BPRD's myriad partnerships are what have pushed it to the head of the class in North Dakota and have earned Bismarck the title of Sports Illustrated Sportstown.

Among its many partnerships, first and foremost is the District's collaboration with the community itself. With its unique political structure- the BPRD is managed by five board members who are publicly elected every four years – city residents have an important voice in guiding the direction of the District.

To augment that voice, every five years the BPRD carries out an extensive strategic planning process, which includes large-scale surveys, smaller focus groups and one-on-one interviews with citizens, local sports organizations and a host of others, to better understand which issues are most important to the community at large and help set the District's agenda.

"The strategic plan allows us to gather information from as many people as possible-the people and groups that we interact with on a day-to-day basis," said

Steven Neu, Director of the Bismarck Parks and Recreation District. "The information helps us define future projects and programming, and guides the decisions of our Board".

And the quinquennial planning process is only the start. The BPRD regularly works with more than 100 local sports and recreation organizations, coordinating master schedules and facility use, loaning out staff and facilitating these groups' programming and events.

Said Neu: "We're kind of the hub for programming and facility development and operation, but our community wouldn't be where it is today without our many partner organizations. And since many of our local partner groups may not have the staff to handle all aspects of putting on a particular event or sports program, we assist them with as many of the organizational aspects as possible, leaving the groups themselves to focus on the programs and make them the best they can be."

This setup is clearly working residents who participate in the many programs that fall under the BPRD umbrella give the organization high marks on customer satisfaction surveys distributed at the conclusion of each season or event.