



Awards of Distinction

Category:

Outstanding
Innovation

CARPD Awards of Distinction Outstanding Innovation - Nominee



Outstanding Innovation - Nominee

Criteria: Honors unique or groundbreaking recreation programs, park maintenance practices, or District operations.

Nominee: Hagan Community Park AED Installation

District: Cordova Recreation and Park District

District Submission:



Summary of Nomination

On November 12, the Cordova Recreation & Park District (District), in partnership with the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District (Sac Metro Fire), launched a groundbreaking public safety initiative with the installation of the first automated external defibrillator (AED) cabinet in a District community park, Hagan Community Park. Marked by a ribbon-cutting and hands-on training event, this effort represents a significant advancement in emergency preparedness within outdoor public spaces.

While AEDs have traditionally been limited to indoor recreation facilities, this program reimagines how lifesaving resources can be deployed by extending access directly into park environments where emergencies can occur without warning. Inspired by local cardiac arrest survivor Joe Ellis, the initiative was developed in collaboration with Sac Metro Fire as part of the "Citizen Responders Project," following the HEARTSafe community model. Its core objective is to equip everyday park users with both the tools and confidence to respond during critical moments before first responders arrive.

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What distinguishes this program is its integrated approach to innovation. The District combined infrastructure investment with immediate community education by hosting free, hands-on CPR and AED training alongside the installation event. This ensured not only access to lifesaving equipment, but also community readiness to use it effectively. The program continued to evolve in December 2025 with the addition of NARCAN to AED cabinets, expanding its scope to address opioid-related emergencies. District staff were trained in CPR, AED use and NARCAN administration, further strengthening operational preparedness across parks and facilities.

The measurable impact of this initiative is substantial. Community members and staff have increased their emergency response capabilities through direct training opportunities, while public access to lifesaving equipment has expanded through our strategically placed AED cabinet, findable through the PulsePoint AED mobile app. This allows 911 dispatchers to guide nearby bystanders to the closest device, significantly reducing response time. According to Sac Metro Fire, immediate CPR can increase survival rates to approximately 30 percent, and early AED use can raise survival rates to nearly 50 percent compared to a national average of 8 percent.

By introducing lifesaving infrastructure into outdoor park settings and pairing it with accessible public training, the Cordova Recreation & Park District has established a replicable, forward-thinking model for park operations and community safety. This initiative demonstrates how innovation in recreation services can directly enhance emergency response outcomes and redefine the role of parks as critical assets in public health and safety.

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CARPD Awards of Distinction

Outstanding Innovation - Nominee



Outstanding Innovation - Nominee

Criteria: Honors unique or groundbreaking recreation programs, park maintenance practices, or District operations.

Nominee: CORE Recreation Center

District: Cosumnes Community Services District

District Submission:



Summary of Nomination

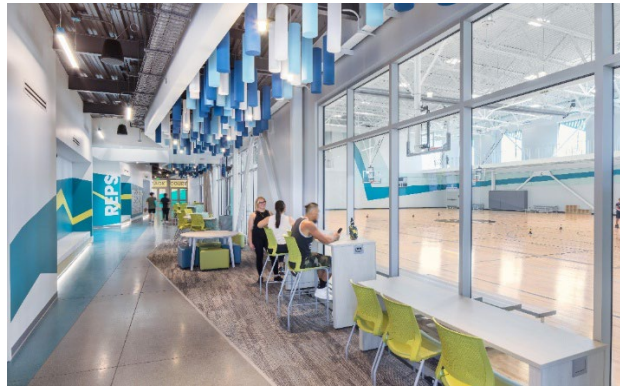
CORE Recreation Center – Outstanding Innovation Award Nomination

Opened in July 2025, the CORE Recreation Center is a 54,621-square-foot, multi-generational facility serving 214,000 residents of the Cosumnes Community Services District. While addressing critical shortages in indoor recreation space, CORE's defining achievement is its innovative integration of facility design, operations, and financial strategy into a unified, self-sustaining model.

Innovative Operations and Financial Strategy CORE departs from traditional subsidy-dependent recreation models by operating as an enterprise system supported by memberships, programs, rentals, and events. Designed to sustain itself, the facility launched with a structured General Fund investment and a three-year repayment plan. CORE is already ahead of schedule with no ongoing subsidy required.

Market response validated this approach: 1,390 members joined on Opening Day, and the Year 3 goal of 2,400 members was reached within six months, stabilizing revenue and reducing financial risk.

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Facility Design as Innovation CORE treats facility design as an operational strategy. Flexible studios, modular program spaces, and dual gymnasiums maximize programming density and allow rapid adaptation to changing community needs without future expansion. Efficient layouts and clear sightlines improve supervision while reducing staffing demands, increasing both service capacity and cost efficiency.

System-Wide Service Innovation By centralizing programming into a single, high-efficiency facility, CORE expanded access, eliminated youth sports waitlists, and reduced strain on aging infrastructure. Digital membership systems modernize service delivery and improve the customer experience.

Strategically located within Morse Community Park, the facility leverages existing infrastructure to expand capacity without new land acquisition, maximizing public investment through system-level planning.

Sustainable and Replicable Model CORE's all-electric, energy-efficient design further supports operational innovation by reducing long-term costs and risk. More broadly, the project provides a replicable framework for special districts, aligning adaptable design, enterprise operations, and fiscal discipline to expand services without increasing long-term burden. The CORE Recreation Center represents a breakthrough in public facility delivery, demonstrating how innovation in design, operations, and financial strategy can work together to expand community services, stabilize revenue, and ensure long-term sustainability.

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CARPD Awards of Distinction Outstanding Innovation - Nominee



Outstanding Innovation - Nominee

Criteria: Honors unique or groundbreaking recreation programs, park maintenance practices, or District operations.

Nominee: Mobile Rec Van

District: Cosumnes Community Services District

District Submission:



Summary of Nomination

One of our District's Strategic Plan Goals was mobile recreation for free pop-up programming within our community. Funding, however, was always an issue, as well as the debate about whether we should purchase a vehicle or lease one. We then came up with a third alternative. Our Special District is a unique one of Parks, Recreation, and Fire. After talking with our Fire Department, we were able to have them surplus one their ambulances to us. This would be our mobile recreation vehicle moving forward. While it was used, it was still functional.

Not only did we have the benefits of a free vehicle to make use of for one of our strategic goals. There were other added benefits. For instance, ambulances have an abundance of storage both on the exterior and on the interior. This would allow us to keep games, prizes, and equipment neatly stored and secured. Even the seats in the back lift up to provide extra

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storage capacity. Next, it came with a PA system as a part of unit. This allowed us to provide amplified sound. It had exterior lights along the side so when it got darker, we could still illuminate our immediate area. The seating cab up front has larger, more comfortable captain's chairs. Another benefit is it has power source outlets. Ambulances come equipped with two – 12-volt DC battery ports, and two – 115 VAC ports to plug in standard household items, or as we use it for, a karaoke machine. The last benefit is that ambulances have a large wheelbase that normal vehicle often times have to get in and out various terrain. This makes it perfect for us to get in and out of parks for our events. Ambulances also don't require a specialized license, so any staff who possess a class C license can drive this vehicle.



While I mentioned in the beginning that funding was an issue, we wanted our mobile ambulance (or Rec Force 1 as we've titled it), to look not like an ambulance but more recreation focused. So we had it wrapped with a recreation theme. The cost of this was about \$1800. Rather than putting forth a budget proposal for this funding we worked with our co-sponsored groups who often times want to do some sort of quid pro quo trade for space/rooms we own. Many of them agreed to fund part of the wrap. Others agreed to purchase games, or equipment (e.g. corn hole, karaoke machine, speakers, cones, etc.) This allowed us to fully stock Rec Force 1 at no additional cost to the District. By looking at this new innovative way to offer mobile recreation, we are able offer various pop-up events with only the cost of staff. We also have an ongoing partnership with our Fire Department to surplus more ambulances in the future should we need a new one or others.

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CARPD Awards of Distinction Outstanding Innovation - Nominee



Outstanding Innovation - Nominee

Criteria: Honors unique or groundbreaking recreation programs, park maintenance practices, or District operations.

Nominee: Prom Dress Giveaway

District: Desert Recreation District

District Submission:



Summary of Nomination

Desert Recreation District's Prom Dress Giveaway is an innovative program that removes barriers, builds confidence, and expands access for youth across the Coachella Valley. Open to all high school juniors and seniors, the program provided free prom dresses in a wide variety of sizes, colors, and styles through scheduled appointments at the Districts Thousand Palms Community Center. Students from schools across the Coachella Valley attended, and DRD was also proud to welcome and assist students from outside District boundaries. The program was centered on one simple belief: every junior and senior deserves the opportunity to take part in prom with dignity, excitement, and confidence.

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What makes this program especially innovative is that it goes beyond a basic giveaway. DRD created a personalized and welcoming experience that made students feel celebrated, not just served. By offering appointments, the program gave each participant time to browse, ask questions, and find something that made them feel special and most importantly, made them feel comfortable with no barriers. It transformed a recreation facility into a place of encouragement, self confidence, and community care during an important milestone in a young person's life.

The program also showcased a unique multigenerational community effort. DRD senior groups volunteered their time to support the event and generously provided new jewelry and accessories for the youth. Their involvement added a meaningful personal touch and turned the experience into more than dress selection, it became a full community effort to uplift local students. This connection between older adult volunteers and local youth reflected the very best of community service and highlighted how recreation programs can bring generations together in impactful ways.

The Prom Dress Giveaway demonstrates innovation through compassion, creativity, and partnership. It responded to a real need, supported students from throughout the valley and beyond, and reimagined how a public agency can help young people participate fully in life's milestone moments.

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CARPD Awards of Distinction

Outstanding Innovation - Nominee



Outstanding Innovation - Nominee

Criteria: Honors unique or groundbreaking recreation programs, park maintenance practices, or District operations.

Nominee: Data-Driven Park Investment and Operations Model

District: Hayward Area Recreation and Park District

District Submission:



Summary of Nomination

Across the United States, public trust in government institutions has declined significantly. Recent research from the Pew Research Center and the Partnership for Public Service shows that 66% of Americans cite government 'incompetence' as a primary concern. Concerns about public agencies' ability to complete projects on time and within budget are also a major community concern. Recognizing this challenge, the Hayward Area Recreation and Park District (H.A.R.D.) developed an innovative, data-driven approach to identify park needs, engage the community, and deliver park improvements quickly and transparently. Instead of relying on conventional decision-making models predominantly influenced by public gatherings or the most outspoken stakeholders, H.A.R.D. adopted a systematic framework that incorporates an expanding array of data sources, along with community feedback and engagement, to guide park investment and operational decisions. The model leverages park usage analytics, maintenance assessments, community input, and operational data to determine priority projects and allocate resources effectively.

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Key components include: visitation analytics from Placer.ai using anonymized mobile data; Board-approved Park Maintenance Standards for park condition and appearance, with staff regularly assessing parks using a standardized tool; community priorities from a statistically valid Districtwide survey and Needs Assessment; and the Capital Investment Plan, which showed where funds were or will be spent on park improvement. This is complemented by publicly available data, such as the American Community Survey for demographics and population estimates, and Cal EnviroScreen for public health indicators, recognizing the parks' critical health benefits.

The District combined data sources—usage analytics, park condition assessments, community input, and demographic and public health data—to create a transparent, systematic framework for prioritizing projects. This model helps staff and officials identify high-impact investments that reflect community needs and preferences, and promotes equity in public investment by relying on data and broad engagement rather than an ad hoc approach, ensuring decisions are not solely influenced by communities with more resources or greater meeting access. This is especially important for special districts like H.A.R.D., serving both incorporated and unincorporated areas with varying representation and advocacy opportunities.

The effectiveness of this model was demonstrated when the H.A.R.D. received Park Impact Fee funding designated for improvements within a specific unincorporated Census Designated Place. Using the integrated decision-making framework, Meek Park was identified as the optimal site for the funding to yield the greatest benefit. Data revealed relatively low park utilization, an unused portion of the park, and a dilapidated historical building used primarily for storage, all in the park's poor, unincorporated CDP of Cherryland. Additionally, the Needs Assessment Survey underscored that the community's highest-priority investments are in amenities for the community garden and in farm-to-table programming, both of which ranked highly. Based on these findings, the District leveraged multiple funding mechanisms, including Park Impact Fees and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, to build the Alameda County Agricultural History Center at Meek Estate—renovating a carriage house into a history museum, restoring the orchard, creating a demonstration and community garden, and developing farm-to-table programming with the adjacent community center. Using this data and available information, they have turned this park into a community hub that will serve as a gathering place for the entire unincorporated community.

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From the County releasing the Park Impact Fee balances to requesting funds, the process took under 2 months. Staff analyzed the project, presented recommendations to advisory committees, and gained approval from the District's Board. This streamlined timeline shows how a structured, data-driven approach accelerates planning and delivery while maintaining transparency and oversight of public involvement. These innovations form a comprehensive approach to modern public service delivery. By integrating technology, data analytics, and community engagement into a unified decision-making framework, H.A.R.D. has created a system that delivers projects and services more efficiently, equitably, and transparently. This model shows how special districts can evolve from reactive, complaint-driven approaches to structured, data-informed systems that prioritize community needs. Through this approach, H.A.R.D. is restoring trust in local government by delivering high-quality park improvements and services at 'the speed of trust.'

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CARPD Awards of Distinction Outstanding Innovation - Nominee



Outstanding Innovation - Nominee

Criteria: Honors unique or groundbreaking recreation programs, park maintenance practices, or District operations.

Nominee: Park Ambassador Program

District: Jurupa Community Services District

District Submission:



Summary of Nomination

In January 2025, the Jurupa Community Services District (JCSD) Parks & Recreation Department launched the Park Ambassador Program (PAP), a structured, volunteer-driven initiative designed to enhance park stewardship, improve maintenance responsiveness, and deepen community engagement.

JCSD operates and maintains 15 parks and three facilities spanning more than 220 acres and serving approximately 60,000 residents in Eastvale. As park usage increased, so did the need for proactive oversight and timely issue reporting. Rather than relying solely on internal inspections, JCSD developed an innovative model that integrates trained resident volunteers directly into operational workflows.

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Outstanding Innovation - Nominee



Unlike traditional volunteer programs focused on one-time events, the PAP embeds community members into structured, bi-weekly park inspections aligned with JCSD maintenance standards. Each Park Ambassador is assigned to a specific park, ensuring consistent, localized oversight across the entire park system, a goal that was achieved within the program's first year.

Ambassadors utilize standardized evaluation tools to document park conditions and submit reports directly into JCSD's service workflow. These submissions are tracked, reviewed, and assigned, transforming community observations into actionable service requests and measurable operational performance. This reliable inspection cadence has shifted JCSD from a reactive maintenance model to a proactive, data-informed approach.

First-year results demonstrate the program's impact:

- 26 active Park Ambassadors
- 360+ park inspections completed
- Approximately 800 service requests generated
- 775+ requests completed (97%+ completion rate)
- 500+ volunteer hours contributed

The PAP expanded operational capacity without increasing staffing levels, representing a cost-effective innovation in public park management. Recurring issues are identified earlier, response times have improved, and overall park conditions have been elevated.

Beyond operational efficiency, the program has strengthened the relationship between JCSD and Eastvale residents. Quarterly Ambassador meetings foster collaboration, shared ownership, and alignment with JCSD priorities. The program has increased civic pride, heightened awareness of JCSD services, and reinforced JCSD's commitment to transparency and accountability.

The PAP represents a forward-thinking model of community-integrated park management. By embedding residents directly into inspection and reporting processes, JCSD has enhanced service responsiveness while cultivating a culture of stewardship and shared responsibility. For these reasons, the Park Ambassador Program is a deserving candidate for the CARPD Award of Distinction for Outstanding Innovation.

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CARPD Awards of Distinction

Outstanding Innovation - Nominee



Outstanding Innovation - Nominee

Criteria: Honors unique or groundbreaking recreation programs, park maintenance practices, or District operations.

Nominee: Connecting Neighbors-to-Neighbors to Combat the Epidemic of Loneliness

District: Paradise Recreation and Park District

District Submission:



Summary of Nomination

In 2024 the Paradise Recreation and Park District (PRPD, District) received a \$750,000 Neighbor-to-Neighbor (N2N) grant from California Volunteers Office of the Governor to help address the epidemic of loneliness. PRPD staff coordinated and collaborated with 27 community partners on the N2N project and strengthened social connection and resilience across ridge and valley communities within the 170 square mile District. From June 2024 to March 2026, the initiative addressed the unique challenges of rural, wildfire-impacted communities through inclusive, place-based, and interest-driven programming to help foster a sense of belonging, nurturing communities, and connectivity of residents.

Project snapshot

From the onset, PRPD approached the project to model how an organization can be a “good neighbor” to sister organizations to help deliver a breadth of activities for residents. Working with partner organizations composed of local arts groups, environmental organizations, service providers, educational institutions, and community-based nonprofits, PRPD created diverse and inclusive opportunities for residents across the District. PRPD and partners

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supported programs that strengthened social ties, promoted resilience, and addressed a wide range of community needs through arts, wellness, environmental action, and disaster preparedness.

Neighbors Engaged	Events Hosted	Volunteer Hours
13,202	671	2126

Needs

The Camp Fire and the Covid pandemic left lasting emotional and social impacts that continue to shape daily life throughout the District. Once deeply rooted and multi-generational, many neighborhoods experienced significant displacement, loss, and isolation. New and returning residents often lacked opportunities to reconnect, build trust, and establish a sense of belonging.

Pre-program survey findings highlighted the importance of supporting community-based organizations already doing meaningful work. Rather than duplicating efforts, the project focused on resourcing and coordinating partners around shared goals. Collaboration across climate action, wildfire preparedness, arts, and wellness organizations helped break down silos and expand program reach. The Good Fire Festival exemplified this approach, bringing multiple partners together to promote beneficial fire, community celebration, ecological learning opportunities, and pyrotherapy to reduce stress and anxiety triggers when seeing fire or smelling smoke.

Connecting Neighbor to Neighbor Project Approach

Very few residents within the District live in traditional, easily defined neighborhood blocks. Rural foothill and valley communities are characterized by large lots, limited pedestrian infrastructure, and numerous privately maintained roads, resulting in dispersed housing patterns and varying degrees of accessibility. To account for these conditions, the District organized the service area into four primary neighborhoods based on unincorporated community names—Butte Creek, Concow/Yankee Hill, Magalia—and the incorporated Town of Paradise. Paradise was further divided into six neighborhoods aligned with major roadways and established emergency evacuation zones to reinforce the “know your zone” preparedness model.

Recognizing that connections in rural communities are not defined by driving distance and extends beyond geography, the District also defined communities by shared interests. For example, residents may identify more with activities (walking, sport, nature exploration, art, kayaking, physical fitness, and others) or life stage (such as parents of young children, or seniors), allowing the nurturing of interest communities that may not live near each other but are bound by common interests.

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Incorporating interest-based communities was essential to the program's success, allowing a broader range of partners to host events across the District and expanding opportunities for residents of diverse ages, abilities, and interests to participate.

Key Takeaways: Lessons Learned, Sustainability & Next Steps

The Neighbor-to-Neighbor project demonstrates the transformative impact that intentional community building can have on a community shaped by distance, loss, and resilience. Throughout the program, several themes emerged as essential to strengthening social connection across the District: providing opportunities for residents in welcoming third spaces where people can gather, fostering meaningful collaboration with partners, and offering consistent opportunities for residents to engage with one another. Weekly activities proved especially powerful, enabling relationships to grow steadily over time and cultivating a sense of trust, belonging, and shared interests.

Equally important was the project's commitment to listening—both to community members and to the organizations already serving them. By valuing partner insight, remaining flexible, and centering collaboration, the District modeled good neighbor practices, broadened the project's reach and deepened its impact. Residents repeatedly voiced appreciation for accessible, no-cost programming, underscoring how critical it is to remove financial barriers and ensure that everyone can participate fully in community life.

The partnerships forged during this project are strong, enduring, and full of promise. Many collaborators expressed gratitude for the opportunity to work together and a genuine desire to continue building on this momentum. PRPD is committed to carrying this work forward by embedding intentional connection points into all events and volunteer opportunities, ensuring that community-building remains at the heart of our work.

Looking ahead, sustained funding toward partner collaboration and the continuation of an effective marketing and outreach campaign will be key to amplifying the project's reach and supporting long-term resilience across the District. With continued support, the N2N initiative can keep expanding opportunities for engagement, strengthening relationships, and cultivate a community where every resident feels seen, supported, and connected.

Together, we are rebuilding more than shared spaces we are rebuilding belonging and strong community ties. Here is a quote from a program participant:

"After the Camp Fire, many of us didn't just move back to a place, we rebuilt relationships and trust alongside our homes. Over the past year, I've noticed neighbors making more effort to check in on one another, attend local events, and participate in programs that bring people together. There's a shared understanding that connection matters here, especially in emergencies, and that sense of looking out for one another continues to grow."

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Outstanding Innovation - Nominee**



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CARPD Awards of Distinction Outstanding Innovation - Nominee



Outstanding Innovation - Nominee

Criteria: Honors unique or groundbreaking recreation programs, park maintenance practices, or District operations.

Nominee: CIMIS Weather Station at WildHawk Golf Club

District: Southgate Recreation and Park District

District Submission:



Summary of Nomination

The California Irrigation Management Information System (CIMIS) Weather Station at WildHawk Golf Club is a strong example of innovation that is practical, measurable, and rooted in public service. Installed as California Irrigation Management Information System Station 273, the station brings state-supported, site-specific weather data directly to a major public golf course in South Sacramento. Its purpose is clear: to improve water conservation by providing accurate data for the community to make better irrigation decisions using real conditions at WildHawk Golf Club, not broad regional estimates.

Based on the publicly listed active CIMIS stations and Regional Water Authority meeting records, WildHawk Golf Club is the Sacramento region's only active golf-course-hosted CIMIS station, emphasizing how distinct the WildHawk Golf Club installation is in the region. The station's data is reported online, making it easily accessible to the public and available to

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support informed irrigation and water management decisions. View the station's data on the CIMIS website at <https://cimis.water.ca.gov>.

CIMIS works by collecting weather data minute by minute, retrieving it hourly, and calculating reference evapotranspiration, which shows how much water a standardized plant surface is losing under actual local conditions. That matters at WildHawk Golf Club, where course operations already use computerized irrigation systems, weather stations, and soil moisture sensors to apply water only where and when it is needed. Together, these tools help staff protect turf quality while using water more responsibly.



The WildHawk Golf Club CIMIS station also serves a broader purpose beyond the course itself. Regional Water Authority selected the site in part because it adds climate data from a hotter, drier part of the county, helping balance older readings from Fair Oaks' more riparian setting. The station supports Spatial CIMIS and outdoor water-budget work tied to conservation regulation, serving many communities in the Sacramento Region. Department of Water Resources has also highlighted that CIMIS stations help urban landscapes such as parks, residential areas, and golf courses maintain healthy vegetation while conserving water.

This installation was not an overnight effort. It was a two-year process, with Sacramento County Water Agency supporting maintenance and a public grand opening by Southgate Recreation & Park District on May 22, 2025. That long lead time reflects the care required to bring a specialized station online and integrate it into public-facing water management.

The CIMIS Weather Station at WildHawk Golf Club demonstrates what outstanding innovation should look like in recreation and parks districts: a smart local investment that improves daily operations, strengthens water stewardship, and creates value beyond a single site. By hosting the region's only active golf-course CIMIS station, Southgate Recreation & Park District has advanced an innovation that is quiet in appearance, but significant in impact. It is a model of what outstanding innovation should be: useful, measurable, forward-looking, and grounded in responsible care for public spaces and resources.

**CARPD Awards of Distinction
Outstanding Innovation - Nominee**



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CARPD Awards of Distinction Outstanding Innovation - Nominee



Outstanding Innovation - Nominee

Criteria: Honors unique or groundbreaking recreation programs, park maintenance practices, or District operations.

Nominee: EmpowerHER Program

District: West Side Recreation and Park District

District Submission:



Summary of Nomination

EMPOWERHER started with a simple belief that every young girl in our community deserves the opportunity to feel seen, supported, and capable of something greater.

In a small, rural community like ours, those opportunities are not always easy to find. That is why EMPOWERHER means so much to us. It was created to be more than just a program, it is a place where girls can come in as themselves and begin to grow into who they are meant to be.

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Through EMPOWERHER, girls are introduced to hands-on STEAM experiences like coding, creative design, and problem-solving, while also learning entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and how to bring their ideas to life. But what makes this program special is not just what they learn, it is what they begin to believe about themselves.

We have watched girls walk in unsure and leave with confidence. We have seen them find their voice and use it in meaningful ways, like the group who created the *Talk Pretty* podcast to share their thoughts and experiences. We have seen others take pride in building their own clothing brands, turning their creativity into something real. These moments mean everything to us because they show that the girls are not just participating, they are growing. We are also incredibly intentional about surrounding them with strong female mentors from our community, women who take the time to listen, guide, and encourage them. Those relationships matter. They create a sense of belonging and show these girls that they are not alone in their journey.

One of the things we care about most is making sure every girl has access to this opportunity. We do everything we can to remove financial barriers because we believe no one should be left out of something that can truly change how they see themselves and their future.

This program is something we care deeply about. It is something we are proud of, not because of what it looks like on paper, but because of the growth we see in these girls every day.

EMPOWERHER is not just about teaching skills. It is about lifting young girls up, giving them a place where they feel valued, and helping them understand that they are capable of more than they ever imagined.

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