



# The Town of Wake Forest and its Integrated Approach to Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Arts

by Alaina Brandenburger and Art Thatcher, CPRP

**P**ublic parks and recreation agencies often wear many hats in a community, providing services that contribute to public health, a connected community, and the overall quality of life. In many agencies across the country, the Parks and Recreation Department is also in charge of cultural arts and similar services. Many recreation agencies provide arts-based activities like art classes, cooking classes, and similar programs, but in some agencies, these cultural activities are broader, often encompassing management of historical sites, museums, and similar facilities.

GreenPlay recently completed the Town’s Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Arts Master Plan branded “Play it Forward.” The year before the process began, the Town added Cultural Arts and Urban Forestry to the Parks and Recreation Department. The Town had also recently opened its new Renaissance Centre, which serves a bulk of the Cultural Arts programs. The Centre offers a broad array of classes, events and activities to Town residents, including classes in arts, music, textiles, performance, and more, as well as performances by the Carolina Puppet Theater and events like Murder Mystery Dinners. The Renaissance Centre was built as part of an overall objective to revitalize the Downtown area of Wake Forest. Its mission statement reads, “The Wake Forest



Renaissance Centre is a multi-purpose facility providing visual and performing arts programming for people of all ages, while also serving as a popular venue for a variety of community events.”

The addition of Urban Forestry to the Department offers a central division responsible for managing the tree canopy and other vegetation on lands owned and operated by the Town. Wake Forest has been a “Tree City USA” (Designated by the Arbor Day Foundation) for 36 years, and has received the Foundation’s Growth Award for the past 15. The Town of Wake Forest understands the role that trees and other vegetation play in contributing to the quality of the parks and recreation system, and its Urban Forestry Division takes great pride in maintaining this important resource. The Division also holds residents accountable by encouraging them to take care of the urban forest. It offers Green Medal Awards to individuals and businesses that go above and beyond in protecting the Town’s environmental resources.

GreenPlay kept these new additions to the Department in mind when developing recommendations for the Master Plan. For example, one recommendation with regard to urban forestry was as follows. “Natural play and exposing people (especially children) to nature is a growing trend. Wake Forest is in a good position to respond to this trend by incorporating natural areas that are already found at its parks into the overall design of the parks in a cohesive way.”

Through the Plan, the Town learned that it has a number of desirable community assets, but they could be better integrated. Since the Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources Department is now one cohesive department, the system can benefit. Since all aspects of Parks, Recreation, Cultural Arts, and Urban Forestry are overseen by one department, the Town is in an excellent position to integrate all of its resources, capitalizing on the popularity of some assets and using them to effectively build awareness of others.



*A Princess-themed tea event at the Wake Forest Renaissance Centre*

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