

# Collaborative



It is amazing to see what communities can do when they work together in the face of adversity. Even before Covid-19 forced the closures of schools and public spaces in Illinois mid-March, the governmental leaders of Glenview and Northbrook were meeting to address their shared community needs.

A history of collaboration has long existed in these neighboring villages. Northbrook leaders meet bi-monthly for lunch and leaders in Glenview meet for breakfast quarterly. As valuable as these efforts are individually, it has been inspiring to see these local officials come together as a cohesive working group to learn, coordinate decisions, and speak with one voice throughout this complex global pandemic. Out of this innovative effort to streamline information in this sudden age of COVID-19, the Glenview/Northbrook Coronavirus Response Task Force emerged.

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# Communication

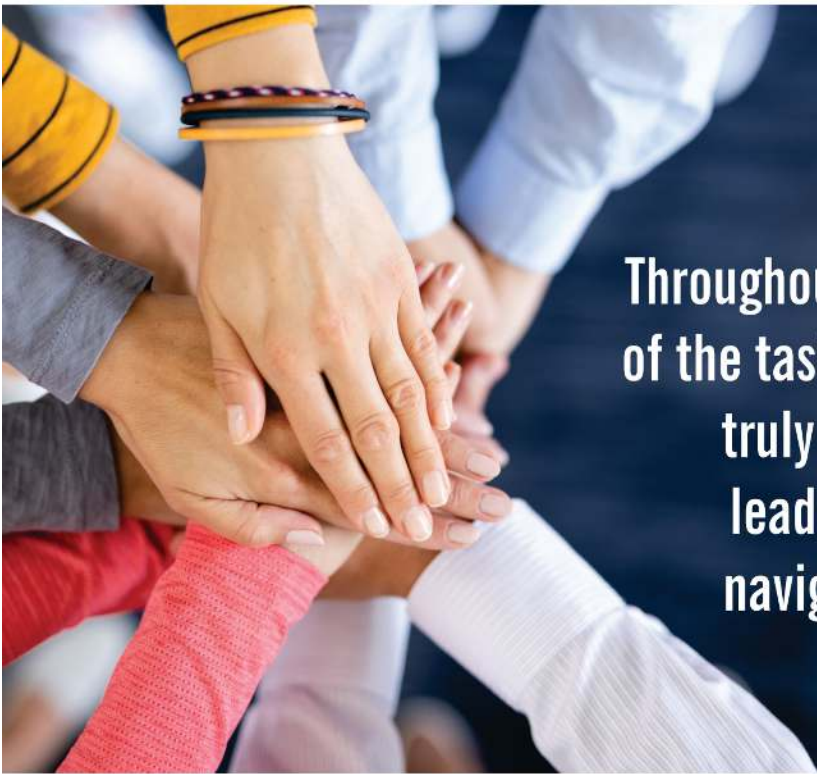
## Serves Two Neighboring Communities



These local leaders realize the importance of harmonious decision making and clear communication during a crisis. Village Managers Matt Formica and Rich Narstadt helped guide the task force leaders from both villages as well as Northfield Township. The president of Glenbrook Hospital from the NorthShore University HealthSystem is also included, providing valuable education as well as local positivity rates, testing numbers and hospital bed availability. Local chambers of commerce share awareness of the importance of shopping local and supporting businesses and employees in both communities during the pandemic.

Brian Wegley, superintendent of Northbrook|Glenview School

District, communicated on behalf of the schools and hosted the first joint meeting on March 4. He said he was honored to organize the meetings, which occurred weekly through June and continue to meet every two weeks. He added that it has served all jurisdictions and communities well.



**Throughout this cooperative effort, members of the task force have come to realize that it truly does take a village, or in this case, leaders from two villages, to effectively navigate through a broad-ranging crisis.**

Early task force meetings served to exchange vital information and updates as facilities closed, schools switched to virtual learning, hospital visits increased, and emergency efforts pivoted to deal with the unknown. The fact that these organizations already had a system in place for inter-organizational communication was a tremendous asset as the year began with a world-wide health crisis. This cross-community collaboration also helps local leaders create a unified approach to advocating with county, state and federal legislators on issues related to funding needed for local government, park districts and schools. Dane Delli, superintendent of Glenview School District 34, said the collaboration and increased communication among all of the public entities has allowed the task force to better understand the needs of the area and enabled the team to work together to meet those needs.

Through the task force, communication efforts are coordinated across all groups to provide consistent, relevant, and accurate information to the community. Following each meeting, emails are crafted to update the public on the coordinated response and sent through the communication channels of each organization on the task force. Widely distributing messages in this way helps fully inform all members of the Glenview and Northbrook communities. The Village of Glenview decided in the early days of the pandemic to communicate regularly with Glenview residents via its e-mail newsletter. Village Manager Matt Formica said the newsletter helped residents feel a little less isolated.

Early communication topics included health and safety

information from oversight organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH). Closure decisions for the local schools as well as the village halls, township offices, libraries and park districts were outlined in cohesive messaging shared throughout the community. To make these efforts as inclusive as possible, the weekly emails are translated into Spanish, Korean and Mongolian.

To provide a hub of information for the task force, Northbrook Public Library staff created the Glenview-Northbrook Coronavirus Response website: [www.glenviewnorthbrookcoronavirus.info/](http://www.glenviewnorthbrookcoronavirus.info/). The site includes relevant health and safety information as well as weekly communication updates and community resources for those in need. Kate Hall, executive director of the Northbrook Public Library, said libraries exist to provide people with reliable information and that assisting in the creation of the joint website allowed the task force to keep communities informed and aware of safety measures their units of local government were taking.

The impacts of these efforts go beyond the simple sharing of organizational updates and safety information. Through the first six months of the pandemic, the Northfield Township Food Pantry experienced a 30 percent increase in use. Overall financial assistance provided by the township from January through September 2020 is already

more than double the assistance provided for all of 2019. Jill Brickman, Northfield Township supervisor, said the food pantry benefited from increased community awareness, resulting in new volunteers, increased donations and getting more help to people in need.

As the Glenview and Northbrook Park Districts were able to gradually open outdoor spaces and certain facilities, task force messaging to the wider community included safety reminders for the public as well as explanations regarding continued facility closures. As some restrictions were lifted and people started to venture outside, large groups began to gather in community parks and fields. Because of the collaborative communication fostered by the task force, park districts were able to work closely with the local villages and police departments to monitor and address these gatherings, while the member organizations shared safety messages and reminders to their combined audiences.

In April, messaging moved from crisis mode to the “new normal,” so the group added a good news section to the weekly emails. Messages included highlights of those giving back, appreciation for local essential workers, comfort for students who missed out on milestones, virtual musical collaborations, and physically distanced special events and recreational opportunities offered throughout the community. The group also created a photo montage video featuring task force members encouraging the community to wear masks to slow the spread of the virus.

### **Collaborative Efforts Lead to Community Support at the Northbrook Park District**

From sharing facilities and green space to providing care for school age children, the Northbrook Park District has been a partner with many local school districts for decades. The district has continued and expanded upon these cooperative efforts as students returned to school this fall.

To provide more physical space for our youngest students, Northbrook School District 27 approached the Northbrook Park District regarding the use of seven classrooms at the district's Leisure Center for their kindergarten classes. This request became a reality in August, bringing a long-standing partnership full circle with the creation of a Kindergarten Center in this park district facility, which was originally purchased from the school district in 1984. By moving the kindergarteners to this new space, District 27 was able to lower classroom numbers for first and second graders – providing a safer environment for the nearly 400 students at Hickory Point School. The park district also provided support to Northbrook School District 28 for outdoor learning spaces including tents at Meadowhill Park and picnic tables at various school locations to serve as outdoor teacher “desks.”

In response to requests from several school districts including Northbrook School District 28 and Northbrook/Glenview School District 30, the Northbrook Park District created Community TIES – Together In Educational Support, an in-person day program for children in grades K-8 with hybrid and virtual school schedules. The park district is also partnering with local school districts to ensure continuation of more flexible scheduling options for the 2020-2021 before and after school program. Molly Hamer, executive director of the Northbrook Park District, said strong and supportive partnerships with school districts have a positive impact with the families throughout the community.

In addition to these important collaborations with the school districts, the Northbrook Park District partnered with the Northbrook Public Library to create a summer book stroll installation. The pages from two different stories were placed along the walking paths in several parks to combine nature and literacy in a popular new way.

### **Providing Services through Partnership at the Glenview Park District**

Michael McCarty, executive director at the Glenview Park District, said that communication and collaboration have driven success in both communities. The approach to work together guided the Glenview Park District in the development and delivery of services to the community as the district moved to reopen, rebuild, and recreate.

From the very onset of the pandemic, the Glenview Park District has been dedicated to ensuring safe recreation opportunities. The park district transitioned to monthly digital program guides and partnered with the Glenview Public Library to feature community virtual programs and resources. In addition to virtual programs, the Glenview Park District created new options for summer camp with small group pods and opened one outdoor aquatic facility with strict safety guidelines. Historic Wagner Farm, a facility of the park district, transitioned from programming to a working farm and produced thousands of pounds of food for the Northfield Township food pantry and local residents.

Traditional events such as 4th of July festivities presented challenges, but Glenview Park District staff were committed to finding new ways to celebrate. Rather than the traditional parade and fireworks, residents were encouraged to decorate their cars and reserve a time to drive through a display of stationary floats from community organizations and partners. The local churches got involved, and the Glenview community was filled with the sounds of ringing bells in honor of our nation at 8 p.m.

**UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE® (All Periodicals Publications Except Requester Publications)**

**Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation**

1. Publication Title: Illinois Parks & Recreation

2. Publication Number: 0019-2183

3. Filing Date: 10/20/2020

4. Issue Frequency: bi-monthly

5. Number of Issues Published Annually: 6

6. Annual Subscription Price: \$30.00

7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Not printer) (Street, city, county, state, and ZIP+4®): 211 E. Monroe St., Springfield, IL 62701

Contact Person: Alan Howard  
Telephone (include area code): (217) 970-7317

8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher (Not printer): 211 E. Monroe St., Springfield, IL 62701

9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor (Do not leave blank)

Publisher (Name and complete mailing address): Illinois Association of Park Districts, 211 E. Monroe, Springfield, IL 62701

Editor (Name and complete mailing address): Wayne Uitterback, 211 E. Monroe, Springfield, IL 62701

Managing Editor (Name and complete mailing address): Peter Murphy, 211 E. Monroe, Springfield, IL 62701

10. Owner (Do not leave blank. If the publication is owned by a corporation, give the name and address of the corporation immediately followed by the names and addresses of all stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of the total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, give the names and addresses of the individual owners, if owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, give its name and address as well as those of each individual owner. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, give its name and address.)

Full Name: Illinois Association of Park Districts  
Complete Mailing Address: 211 E. Monroe, Springfield, IL 62701

11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities. If none, check box  None

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Complete Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

12. Tax Status (For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at nonprofit rates) (Check one)  
 Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months  
 Has Changed During Preceding 12 Months (Publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement)

PS Form 3526, July 2014 (Page 1 of 4 (see instructions page 4)) PSN: 7530-01-000-9031 PRIVACY NOTICE: See our privacy policy on www.usps.com

13. Publication Title		14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below	
Illinois Parks & Recreation		08/01/2020	
15. Extent and Nature of Circulation		Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies (Net press run)			
(1)	Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)	5084	4790
b. Paid Circulation (By Mail and Outside the Mail)			
(2)	Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)	0	0
(3)	Paid Distribution Outside the Mail Including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS®	0	0
(4)	Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail®)	0	0
c. Total Paid Distribution (Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), and (4))		5084	4790
d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (By Mail and Outside the Mail)			
(1)	Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies Included on PS Form 3541	189	189
(2)	Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies Included on PS Form 3541	0	0
(3)	Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail)	0	0
(4)	Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means)	0	0
e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3) and (4))		189	189
f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)		5273	4979
g. Copies not Distributed (See Instructions to Publishers #4 (page #3))		54	45
h. Total (Sum of 15f and g)		5327	5024
i. Percent Paid (15c divided by 15f times 100)		96%	96%

\* If you are claiming electronic copies, go to line 16 on page 3. If you are not claiming electronic copies, skip to line 17 on page 3.

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**Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation**

16. Electronic Copy Circulation

	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Paid Electronic Copies	0	0
b. Total Paid Print Copies (Line 15c) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a)	5084	4790
c. Total Print Distribution (Line 15f) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a)	5273	4979
d. Percent Paid (Both Print & Electronic Copies) (16b divided by 16c x 100)	96%	96%

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17. Publication of Statement of Ownership  
 If the publication is a general publication, publication of this statement is required. Will be printed in the 12/1/20 issue of this publication.  Publication not required.

18. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 10/20/2020  
 Director of Finance & HR

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The Glenview Park District continues to reinvent programming, including Camp REC, a learning-pod program designed for Glenview students enrolled in virtual or hybrid learning. The park district partnered with local nonprofit Wesley Childcare Center to provide experienced childcare professionals and is currently working with Glenview School District 34 to provide transportation options for students to and from the program and school. The park district also partnered with the Glenview Public Library to provide additional space for the program. Glenview Public Library Director Lindsey Dorfman said the library jumped at the opportunity to provide space for the Camp REC program, which assisted in providing safe and structured assistance to District 34 students attending school virtually.

**Working Together to Serve Neighboring Communities**

Resident perception has been a key element in the decision making process for both park districts. The Glenview and Northbrook Park Districts worked with the public opinion research firm Public Opinion Strategies, to develop a joint survey to gauge the communities' sentiments during the pandemic. Questions focused on a variety of topics from readiness to return to recreational programs to safety measures and communication efforts. The impact of the collaborative task force was evident in the survey results, which reflect high satisfaction levels for district-wide communications as well as the safety restrictions implemented by both districts.

The survey was conducted in April and again in June, providing important local data that allowed both districts to make early decisions regarding the reopening of facilities and restoration of programs for their respective communities.

With the end of an unusual and unpredictable year approaching, the task force continues to meet bi-weekly to continue the partnership started in March. Throughout this cooperative effort, members of the task force have come to realize that it truly does take a village, or in this case, leaders from two villages, to effectively navigate through a broad-ranging crisis. In the words of Helen Keller, "Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much."