SPRINGBOARD



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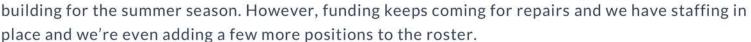


MANAGER'S MESSAGE

AMY CONYERS

There is never a dull moment at Wakulla Springs!

This is the same sentence that started my article at this time last year. It is still as true as ever. Every day brings new challenges and greater rewards. We are still struggling with our boat situation, but the light at the end of the tunnel seems much closer. We are still eagerly anticipating our playground upgrades, but the equipment is onsite! We are still waiting to open the Ferrell Tract, but plans are coming together. As usual, on the approach to summer, things keep breaking and staff are feeling the pressure





We are so grateful to have a new boat, which was a capital investment from our concession partner, Guest Services. It has a bit of a different seating arrangement with the helm at the front of the vessel, but we are finding some benefits to this and adjusting our practices. The new vessel looks much more like it belongs here with the color scheme reminiscent of our former fleet. We are also hearing plans for more new vessels in the near future. We are increasing our tour availability and making more opportunities for visitors to enjoy the river.

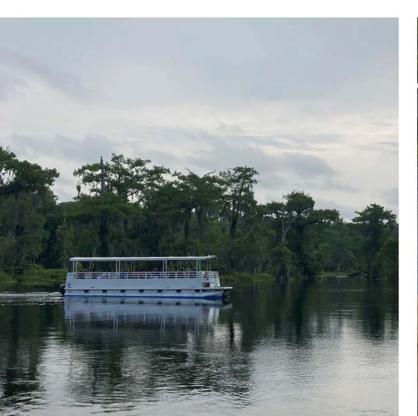
The equipment has arrived for our new playground improvements. Thanks to Duke Energy, the Florida State Park Foundation, and the Friends of Wakulla Springs, we will be adding some great accessible features to the playground. We have some final prep work to do and will soon schedule a volunteer workday to get everything in place. I'm grateful (as always) for our determined and creative, problemsolving park rangers. The truck with the playground equipment arrived, packed full, with no way to move the heavy crates to the doorway where they could be picked up with the tractor. With teamwork, strength, and tow straps, the job was accomplished!

MANAGER'S MESSAGE

We have a dive group who has raised funds to help us open the Ferrell Tract to the public. We are excited to make this happen! We have more approvals to work through, but we are forging ahead. Once we have a parking area secured and some trails marked, we'll be ready. Along those lines, we are close to reopening the River Sink Tract soon as well. We need trails marked (as the area looks completely different) and a fencing contractor is finishing up with fencing that was needed after the restoration.

It seems that everything starts breaking as we approach the end of the fiscal year and the start of the summer season. We have had 2 air conditioner issues, a lodge lighting strike and a failed blower motor at the Park Manager's residence. We have had lawn mower troubles, but thanks to Scott, Alan, and the Friends, we are up and mowing again! We have had water leaks near the shop and in the laundry building. Many of us are much more familiar with our water system now! We've had our UTVs up and down, but thanks to HOSP funding, they are now tuned up, have some new tires, and are ready for the summer. We are looking forward to some big improvements though, including Lodge elevator improvements, fire suppression improvements, a solution to the pipe on the beach, and a new Interpretive Center and Meeting space. Great things are coming!

We have said goodbye to many of the familiar faces at Wakulla Springs in the last year. We will cherish the time we have had with all of our beloved staff as we welcome some new faces and new talents. We have all of our Ranger positions filled with healthy and productive staff. We have a Senior Maintenance Mechanic. We have lifeguards this year (not as many as we would like, but some are better than none!) We have a couple of additional OPS additions for the summer and we even have summer resident volunteers arriving soon! Summer is never easy, but we are as ready as we can be, and we have a terrific team of seasoned staff to pair with some new energy. We can handle all of the excitement that Wakulla Springs throws our way!





EGGCELLENT

RAQUEL LIBELL

Spring is the magical time of year when nature comes to life after a long, dormant winter. It's a time when trees sprout new leaves, flowers bloom, and you witness the changing of the guards as migrating birds leave their winter homes and return to their summer residences. One of my favorite things about Spring is finding bird nests, which are a sign of the new season and the resourcefulness of wild critters.

Finding bird nests can be a fun and rewarding activity for birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts. This year, I found that a pair of Carolina Wrens decided they wanted to return to the successful nesting spot from last year, which happens to be behind a light switch in one of our shop buildings!

During a burn at Torreya State Park, I managed to find a bluebird nest that was in the center of a rotted out wooden fence post. As fun as it is to look at the adorable ugliness that is baby birds, it's always best to make your visit quick. It's important to be respectful of nesting birds and avoid disturbing them, as they may abandon their nests if they feel threatened.

The newness of spring is not just about finding bird nests, but also about the renewal of life in all its forms. The longer days and warmer temperatures provide the perfect conditions for plants and animals to grow and thrive. Spring is a time of hope and optimism, as we witness the beauty of nature's resilience and the promise of a new beginning.







RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

PATTY WILBUR

This has been a very busy year for burning at Wakulla Springs State Park! So far, we've burned all or part of 15 burn zones, for a total of 1,110 acres to date. Over half of those burns have been conducted during the growing season, which may do an especially good job of keeping the hardwood shrubs at bay and encouraging the growth of more grasses and other herbaceous plants instead.

The wildlife seems to approve. We've spotted turkeys, deer and other wildlife moving back into the burned areas very quickly. The Mississippi Kites and Swallowtail Kites often put on a show during the burns. They enjoy congregating in the rising smoke and swooping for grasshoppers fleeing the fires.

Most excitingly, we're reintroducing fire onto the River Sinks and Turner Sinks outparcels for the first time since our timber harvest and restoration project began. We got in a great burn at Turner Sink in April and have completed about half of the burning we plan to do at River Sinks so far. We'd like to light all the upland acres there this spring, with the exceptions of the blocks that were cleared and replanted in longleaf and wiregrass. Those will be burned over the next two years, once the plants there have had time to get better established. Even if we finish everything we hope to do at River Sinks this spring, there are still other areas of the park that we'd love to put fire on this year if possible. It's ambitious, but it makes the park a healthier ecosystem and a more beautiful place.







RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Folks driving by River Sinks may have noticed other changes there as well. Earlier this year, Attack One Fire Management Services did a great job for us by installing new fire lines that were needed before we could safely burn along Highway 319. They also cleared and smoothed along some of the rights of way. This prepared the area for the installation of field fencing by Grove Services, which is set to be completed in a couple weeks. The fencing will limit visitor access once again to bicycles and hikers only, restricting motor vehicles which can degrade the sinkholes and vegetation in the area.

Other good work at River Sinks has been done by park volunteers Randy Smith and Les Campbell. They've put in a tremendous effort over the past month to pick up some of the worst remaining caches of old litter in the park. The bottles, cans, fencing, tires, and other junk they've pulled out of the woods has filled my long truck bed more than four times over! I'm happy to work in such a beautiful place and experience something different every day. There are always new surprises! I had to laugh at what I found while driving through the woods recently. Who else would run over something like this at their job? Ha!!



SUMMER IS HERE

JOHN MELTON

Gremlins! Gremlins I say! What a weird start to March this year. Seems like the little machine killing monsters of lore found their way from the pages of a World War II comic book into Wakulla Springs State Park. In this business you gotta grab Gremlins by the tail and that is just what we did. Best dang team in Park Service! For every bad thing I could tell you, there is of course good...and a whole lot of good things have happened since I last wrote. Aside from fuel issues and having to replace a motor on the Bald Eagle boat we now have ALL our full-time positions filled! Welcome Ranger Taylor Stich who started in early March. OPS Ranger Scott Roylance promoted to Senior Maintenance Mechanic. Welcome Ranger Leo McKibbin who joined our team in mid-April filling the full-time ranger position left open when Ranger Jeff Hicks retired. What did I say about having to take the bad with the good? Yes, we said good by to Ranger Jeffery Hicks who retired recently. Jeff has been a fixture at Wakulla Springs since before we were a state park. He was with the lodge at the transition and came aboard as a state employee in 1986. He has worked as a Lodge staff member, a maintenance technician and ultimately a Park Ranger. Ranger Jeff has been dubbed "The Mayor of Wakulla Springs" for how long he has worked here, and how much he has given to the park. Just because Jeff retired doesn't mean that you will not see him around. Visit anytime, Mr. Mayor!

Other happenings around the park: In mid-April, we dry docked the Limpkin, Big D, Heron and Alligator in a safe spot off the water in the



shop compound in hopes of preserving them historically and possibly even getting them repaired and back on the water. In the meantime, Guest Services has purchased and refurbished The Acuera boat to join our fleet. So, we now have two boats to relieve some of the stress from having only one.

Something fun to look forward to: We have a grand addition to our playground! You will see some awesome changes coming soon. And we are preparing to change the traffic pattern in and out of the park back to the way it was before the construction of the new Ranger Station as soon as the Gate on Hwy 61 is fully functional.

A while back I started to show case Ranger Shifts here at Wakulla Springs. There are more "moving parts" here than at most other state parks. I spoke before of the Late Field Ranger. This time I would like to tell you about the Early Field Ranger. Early Field is usually (if they can beat me in) the first Ranger in the park each morning. Early Field opens the bath house and makes sure its presentable as well as opens the gate to the waterfront area and ensures that there are no hazards. Once the beach area is open and secure, its off to

SUMMER IS HERE

Cherokee Sink to open the parking area, check the "Iron Ranger" for honor envelopes, then drive the mile-long road to the sink to make sure it is presentable and safe. Once back in the park, Early Field cleans grills, picks up litter and rattles cans until the Waterfront Office opens. Then Early Field checks in with Boat Captains to see if they need assistance. During heavy day-use periods like now through Labor Day, Early Field Coordinates with Late Field to patrol and interpret on the beach and in the picnic areas. First Ranger in the field, The Early Field Ranger.

Summer is almost here, and we are looking for Lifeguards! If you are certified and would like to work in the same position where movie stars, like Ricou Browning, got their start contact me today! Speaking of lifeguards, we would like to welcome back Anthony Godwin who was a lifeguard last summer. Anthony is now an OPS Ranger and though most of his duties during the summer will be on the beach, he is also training to be a Boat Captain and OPS Ranger for the rest of the year. Until next time, never let the Gremlins get you down! Stay Tuned!



WE'RE HIRING!

- 🛟 \$15.00 per hour.
- Memorial Day through Labor Day.
- Must be Lifeguard Certified to apply.

Follow the QR code to fill out the application, then print and submit in person or send via e-mail to John Melton, Assistant Park Manager at Wakulla Springs State Park.

John.S.Melton@floridaDEP.gov



THE MAYOR

MARIA WILHELMY

To say farewell to an esteemed colleague is no easy task. Yet on March 28th, 2023, the day came that we all gathered to celebrate the wonderful career of our beloved "Mayor" of Wakulla Springs, Mr. Jeffery Hicks.

Park Services Specialist Jackie Turner spearheaded the surprise retirement party. Jackie and Park Ranger Miranda Capps were busy all week making final preparations including table decorations, banners and centerpieces. Jackie also invited friends, family and former colleagues to come wish Jeff a happy retirement. Grill Master Randy Urling offered to cook for the event, which resulted in some truly delicious food to honor the occasion.

On the day, we had a wonderful turnout with former park managers, park managers from other state parks, former and current staff members, as well as volunteers. People started to gather at the Administration Building in eager anticipation of the guest of honor's arrival. Jeff was asked to come to the park to sit and chat with Jackie, but to his surprise and joy, we were all waiting for him.

After we all ate lunch, we gathered around and thanked him for his service. Former park manager's spoke of his willingness to lend a hand, and park rangers spoke of his lessons on "how to be a ranger". Others spoke of his kind spirit and his ability to bring a smile to our faces after a long day with a kind word, or a pat on the back. Still others spoke about his generosity. At least 4 different people mentioned that on his lunch break, Jeff would wash their cars to clean the dust off after driving on the dirt roads. Near the end of the party, Jeff was awarded a 15 year pin celebrating his time working for the park service. Even though the pin reflected "15 years" Jeff has worked at Wakulla Springs for a lot longer than that.







THE MAYOR

Jeff Hicks has worked at Wakulla Springs since before we became a State Park in 1986. He started working here as a young man in his teens. He worked for the Lodge when DEP was still managing their operations as a houseman, server, and part of the maintenance crew. He's also served Wakulla Springs State Park as a maintenance mechanic, park ranger, carpenter, electrician, and most notably river boat guide. He has guided many young rangers and taught them everything they could ever need to know about the park. The reason we call him "The Mayor" is partly due to his long history working here, but also due to his dedication to serving the people of Wakulla Springs.

Jeff was the first person I saw my first day working at Wakulla Springs State Park. I drove into the park and immediately got lost, should I go left? Should I go right? Where do I go to sign paperwork? Luckily for me, Jeff was weed-eating around the Lodge and I asked him for help. He took the time out of his day to guide me to the administration building and introduce me to my new boss.

Jeff rescued me on the river when my steering cable broke, and he taught me how to use the angle grinder. He comforted me when a branch broke my car window, and jumped my car battery on Christmas Day. He helped me build so many signs, and always knew where we could find a specific tool. Jeff was always willing to lend a hand, or an ear, or even help us get around the park. One day, he was giving me a ride from one side of the park to another and I noticed something pretty remarkable. Years and years before, I had come to the park as a child and had lost a toy. It was a little toy dog that I carried with me everywhere I went. Little did I know, Jeff found that toy on the beach and placed it on his dashboard. This simple act told me how much he loved working here, and loved all the people who came to this special place. Jeff Hicks was not only a wonderful coworker, he is also one of my friends.









t wasn't very long before I realized why they called Jeff Hicks "The Mayor." He was the only one of us who had been at Wakulla Springs before it was even a state park. He wrote the book, and he did the work of two people. More than that, he was happy to share all that he knew. Back when I was green, anything I didn't know how to do, use, drive, fix, build, take apart, put together, chase off, or turn on, I would go straight to Jeff for help. He always had the answers, he was always patient and encouraging, and he never let me feel embarrassed for not knowing more than I did. For as long as I am a park ranger, I'll be in his debt.

Aslan McMullian

When I first started here at Wakulla Springs, Jeff became a mentor to me. I've heard many stories of Jeff's time working at the Lodge and as a park ranger. The impact he's had on this park and its staff will always be unforgettable.

- Carson Goodwin



Jeff Hicks is one of the kindest people I have ever known. He was very patient with me when I was a new ranger and he taught me so much. His knowledge of the park is amazing in every way.

Collin Johnson,

To me Jeff Hicks is one of the "Originals". Someone who has seen the evolution of the park through the years. Being a vast wealth of knowledge, he is the one you would go to for anything. I will miss his smiling face and sunny demeanor, he always tried to make everyone's day brighter. I cannot recall him ever complaining or having a bad day, he is not one to complain.. Thank You Jeff for everything.

-Melissa Moore

Jeff has given as much love and care to Wakulla Springs as a parent gives to their child. He has nurtured this park, the Lodge, the boats, and staff to ensure that there was never a blade of grass out of place or a facility out of order. His hard work was not often witnessed, but the results were noticed. I am so grateful to know Jeff and glad that he has passed some of his knowledge and much of his heart along to us.

Amy Conyers,



Jeff is one of the kindest people I've ever had the joy to work with. He'll greet you with a smile every day and always offer to help you in any way he can. He loves the park and without being asked would do all the little tasks necessary to keep it running smoothly.

-Patty Wilbur

Jeff was one of the first Rangers I worked with when I came to Wakulla Springs. I was completely blown away by his ability to talk to anyone and make them feel completely welcome and at ease. Jeff is a joy to work with and will be missed on the day to day, but I am sure we will see the Mayor every now and again. Enjoy your retirement Jeff. Love you Brother.

John Melton,

PUBLIX SERVES AT WAKULLA SPRINGS

JACKIE TURNER

In March, over 6,000 Publix employees gave back to their communities during "Publix Serves" week. Their attention was focused on the environment. Tallahassee stores offered their service to Maclay Gardens State Park and Wakulla Springs State Park.

In January, Calynne Varble contacted Volunteer Coordinator, Jackie Turner, to offer the service of her group of employees. After input from park managers and corporate review, Jackie and Calynne chose a landscaping project. Calynne's group would trim the historic azaleas around the Administration Building.





Prior to their service day, Calynne reported to Jackie that she had a \$200 budget for their project. Jackie asked that the funds be spent on hand pruners. She provided Calynne with the brand and type needed. Calynne agreed to make the purchase and told Jackie that the tools would be a donation to the park.

Assistant Park Manager, John Melton, supervised the Publix volunteer team. They worked from 9a-12p and had a crew of 12. They worked together well and trimmed a lot of azaleas. John was very pleased with their efforts and enjoyed working with them.

At Wakulla Springs State Park, employees participating in "Publix Serves" cared for the historic azaleas and donated 17 pairs of hand pruners. Their donation will allow for future volunteer azaleas pruning events. Through their service, local Publix employees gave back and paid it forward. Well Done!

UPDATE FROM THE FRIENDS

JULIE HARRINGTON

On April 29th, 2023, the Environmental Learning and Communication Workshop was held at Wakulla Springs State Park and co-sponsored by the Friends of Wakulla Springs State Park. This workshop was led by an interdisciplinary team of experts from Florida State University who shared their knowledge and expertise on microlearning, water testing, and participatory GIS. The main purpose of the workshop was to explore how digital microlearning and participatory GIS can promote community education and empowerment in protecting and maintaining clean water.

The workshop comprised three main components: microlearning for environmental communications and learning, water testing, participatory GIS for environmental community engagement. Each component was designed to engage attendees and provide them with practical skills and knowledge.

Dr. Vanessa Dennen at FSU College of Education gave a lecture on Microlearning. Dr. Dennen's presentation on microlearning covered topics such as what microlearning is and how microlearning works on environmental communication and learning. The presentation also discussed several components of designing a microlearning object (MLO) such as MLO objectives, media, assessments, structure, and credentials. At the end of this presentation, attendees were asked to brainstorm what could be taught using microlearning and how to get people involved. The session was interactive, with attendees asking questions and sharing their thoughts on microlearning. One person asked about the difference between digital microlearning and face-to-face microlearning, and another shared her experience of teaching scientific concepts using microlearning. Attendees also discussed distraction issues, which could impact the effectiveness of microlearning.







UPDATE FROM THE FRIENDS

The second part of the workshop was Friends Board Member Dr. Ming Ye's presentation on water testing. This presentation covered the importance of water testing, and how to conduct water testing using professional equipment. The presentation was practical, with Dr. Ye and a volunteer collaborating to complete water testing experiments. Attendees were interested in the water testing procedures, which were demonstrated step by step. The session provided attendees with a hands-on opportunity to learn about water testing and the importance of water quality in environmental communication and learning.

Next, Michael Core gave a lecture on Participatory GIS focusing on how GIS and maps can be used to tell a story, communicate risk, share information, and make a difference in a community. The presentation discussed the importance of Participatory GIS, the methods and impacts of Participatory GIS, and provided examples of Participatory GIS applications. Two Participatory GIS apps, QuickCapture and Survey123, were introduced, and attendees were shown how to use them. The presentation was informative, and attendees learned about the significance of using GIS and maps to communicate environmental risks and issues.

In summary, the Environmental Learning and Communication Workshop provided an excellent opportunity for attendees to learn about, and engage with, various environmental topics, including microlearning, water testing, and participatory GIS. The attendees' interactions and comments during the workshop demonstrated their engagement and enthusiasm for these topics, and it was clear that many attendees left the workshop with new ideas and thoughts that they could apply in their work or personal lives. Overall, this Environmental Learning and Communication Workshop was a success, providing attendees with a valuable learning experience and the opportunity to connect with others who share an interest in environmental topics.

Your past and ongoing support for the Friends of Wakulla Springs State Park is greatly appreciated! We hope you will please consider becoming a Friends volunteer!

Sincerely,

Email: Friends@WakullaSprings.org

Julie Harrington. President

Website: www.WakullaSprings.org



HISTORY FAIR

ASLAN MCMULLIAN

Ask any park ranger what their favorite part of the job is, and I bet at least half of them will say "interpretation." Few things are more rewarding than sharing your love of the natural and cultural resources of your park with it's visitors and supporters. Pound for pound, Wakulla Springs has some of the best interpreters in the business, and so I was honored to have been chosen to join Julie Harrington from The Friends of Wakulla Springs representing the park at the Tallahassee History Fair hosted by Tallahassee Community College.

We set up a table to celebrate the life and career of Ricou Browning, The Creature From The Black Lagoon. Ricou passed away on February 27th, 2023, leaving behind a rich and entirely singular body of work. As a fan it was a joy being able to connect with so many people about his fascinating career. There's nothing a film geek loves more than talking about their favorite films and filmmakers, and I had the pleasure of talking with some 80 or more people that day, including some of Ricou's family.



The event concluded with a sold-out screening of The Creature in 3-D at the Challenger Learning Center attended by some 200 eager fans. There are good ranger days, and then there are good ranger days - this was one of the best.



ALLIGATORS

MIRANDA CAPPS

One of the coolest facts about the alligator I learned recently is how little they have changed from their ancestors. It is believed that at the end of the Cretaceous period, most of life around North, Central and parts of South America died after a massive meteor hit the Gulf of Mexico. The rest of the world then experienced a food chain collapse as the sun was blocked by ash for several decades. This caused many warm blooded predators to starve as there were less animals to eat. However, the cold blooded reptilians had an advantage as they did not need to eat very often due to their low metabolism. Much like the modern day American Alligator, which only needs to eat about once a month.



FINDING A NICHE

JACKIE TURNER

In nature, wild places with more nooks and crannies (niches) have greater diversity. The higher number of niches provide more spaces for critters to make a living. Small niches often allow for specialists, wildlife with very specific needs, such as a particular type of food. At Wakulla Springs, Eagle Scout, Cole Randolph, found his niche and provided much needed assistance to a group of research and recreational specialists.

FPS's mission requires the protection and preservation of natural communities and cultural relics while providing compatible recreational opportunities. Wakulla Springs State Park (WSSP) is known for the world renowned "Jungle Cruise" boat tour and is the favorite swimming spot for locals. However, the park also provides scuba opportunities, open water diving at Cherokee Sink and cave diving at Emerald Sink.

In summer 2022, Cole offered his Eagle Scout service to the park. He and his father, Roger Payton, met with park staff to review a list of possible projects including updating a previous WSSP Eagle Scout project, the Tree Walk interpretive nature trail. Cole selected the Emerald Sink Dive Bench project. He was familiar with other completed Eagle Scout projects in the area and chose the dive bench project for its uniqueness.

As required for Eagle Scout, Cole was responsible for all aspects of project planning and implementation. For his building plan, he solicited input from park staff, local dive businesses and the Woodville Karst Plain Project (WKPP) research divers. His Scoutmaster, Lambert West, improved the design and sturdiness with a series of probing questions. Cole's design provided ample room for easy unloading of double tanks and other features for smaller gear.

After receiving final park approval, Cole began to solicit funding for his project. Cole met with WKPP research diver, Chris Werner, who reported his organization had money for the project and made a significant contribution. Cole also met with Gulf Coast Lumber, who gave him a discount on materials. Given the rising cost of materials and the recognized need for higher quality metal components, Cole also utilized a "Go Fund Me" page to obtain the additional needed funds.



FINDING A NICHE

Project construction and installation took place in January 2023. Cole led the work crew of his family and his fellow scouts. His Scoutmaster, an Eagle Scout and master builder, assisted Cole with crew and construction supervision. The benches were installed over several days. Boards were cut to specification prior to onsite installation. Cole had to plan for working in a remote area. Preparations included a generator for power tools and plenty of food and water for his crew.

The two benches are built to endure visitor use in a remote area as evidence by a visitor testimonial. On a follow up visit to Emerald Sink, Cole, Roger, and Jackie encountered a park visitor, who arrived after them. Jackie introduced her party and told the visitor of Cole's Eagle Scout project. The visitor was Chip Herrington, the former TCC Construction Manager. He told Cole that he had evaluated the benches on a previous visit and was impressed with the quality of construction.

At the time, the only approved recreational enhancement at Emerald Sink was a set of steps to prevent soil erosion as divers accessed the cave system. Ideally located, the benches are near to the top of stairs to provide easy access for divers without blocking the stair entrance. According to WKPP Director, Casey McKinlay, Cole's benches significantly improve caving diving access at the site, which will assist research divers and benefit recreational divers.

Cole has always enjoyed nature. Wakulla Springs State Park provided a natural place that was wild yet safe to explore. For his Eagle Scout project, he wanted to give back to the park. His contribution filled a specialized niche for the cave diving community. Given their high quality, his benches will continue to benefit research and recreational divers for many years to come. For his Eagle Scout service, Cole met a high bar and made a significant contribution to the park.





