

WE ARE PARKS

2021 YEAR IN REVIEW



MAYOR JORGE O. ELORZA
CITY OF PROVIDENCE





YEAR IN REVIEW

The Parks Department truly turned challenges into opportunities in 2021. Like many City departments, the Parks Department was significantly impacted by the effects of COVID-19. These challenges inspired innovation; the increased public demand for safe parks in which people could congregate and play led to new plans and approaches. We believe the Parks Department successfully increased confidence in how we care for, program, and manage our increasingly popular public spaces.

In the past year, we built or revitalized twelve playgrounds, five parks, three fitness centers, two ballfields, one soccer field, and five basketball courts. Many trees were planted and there is now a new trail system at Blackstone Wood. In the fresh outdoor air, our education, play, and fitness programs were able to take place in person. To improve our operations, we fully executed a new work order/asset management system as well as an inventory control system.

The Parks Department team also celebrated the success of its own. Brian Byrnes, Deputy Superintendent of Parks, received the Audubon Society's Partner of the Year award for his work leading RI's stormwater innovation efforts. We celebrated the heroism of David Doti and Gary Kraus who, in the course of their duties, ran into a burning building to rescue a family. We improved our operations by strengthening and reinforcing the role of the Forepersons who manage our projects; this involved a series of events and meetings we named the Year of the Foreperson. We were also able to resume our Parks Academy training program for our talented workers. To cap it all off, we celebrated the retirement of several long-term employees (and the hiring of new staff in every division) and we were able to resume our annual end-of-the-season party in person.

We are grateful for the continued support of the administration, Providence City Council, our community partners, and the brilliant Board of Park Commissioners. Our team is proud to have the privilege of doing this work every day. We think the City is safer, healthier, and shines a bit brighter.

Wendy Nilsson
Superintendent of Parks

Brian Byrnes
Deputy Superintendent of Parks



Mission

Providence's parks are essential components of building a healthy, inclusive and thriving community. Through our Parks Department we aim to provide city residents with inspiring outdoor spaces that dramatically impact the quality of life within each neighborhood. It is our belief that all residents should have access to a public park that is safe, brings community together and encourages our youth to play, learn and explore. By working in collaboration with local friends-groups, we will work to support the needs of each neighborhood and provide programming that is reflective of the children, adults and staff that use these spaces daily.

Goals

Develop parks, public spaces, and programs that engage and inspire.

Develop brand recognition for quality services.

Continue to build the city's tree canopy.

Establish a national reputation for best practices and the creative use of resources.

Be renowned for our responsiveness to community needs and interests.

Continue building a team of dedicated, talented, and committed employees who are proud to make Providence parks exceptional.

Increase biodiversity and ecological habitat as an integral part of parks design.

Priorities

Create safe, healthy, welcoming spaces that meet the needs of Providence's distinct and diverse neighborhoods.

Provide enhanced outdoor recreation opportunities by developing innovative, sustainable, and responsive parks, facilities, amenities and programs.

Develop facilities and programs appropriate for multiple generations of residents including those interested in traditional sports and those interested in alternative forms of recreation.

Connect children and families to nature and strengthen communities through our shared spaces that inspire.

OPERATIONS

The Parks Department currently maintains 120 outdoor spaces. These include traditional parks, athletic fields, basketball courts, playgrounds, conservation areas, walking/running tracks and trails, non-traditional recreation areas (skateboard features, bike tracks, parkour), dog parks, cemeteries, an ice rink, and the flagship Roger Williams Park.

In addition, the Forestry Division manages the city’s 27,400 street trees, as well as all trees in City parks and on public property. It handles more than 2,000 service requests from Providence residents each year, including dead tree removal, tree pruning, pick-up of fallen branches, and stump removal.

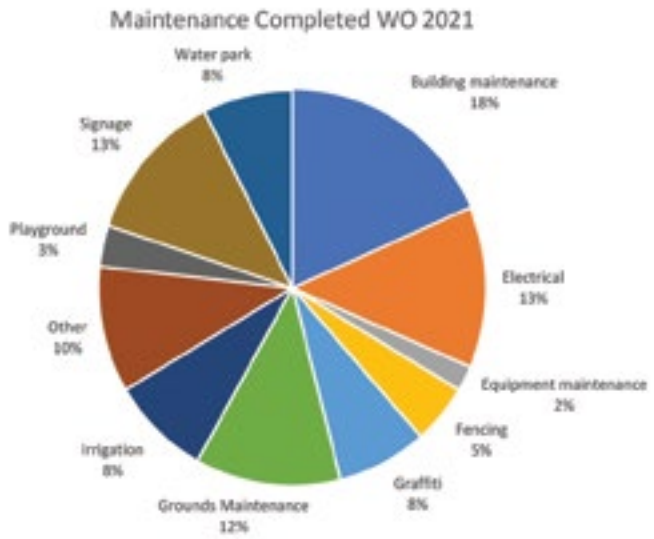


Our Training and Professional Development Program continued with Foreperson Training series, Bloodborne Pathogens, CPR/First Aid, and Arborist Technical Rigging classes and certification

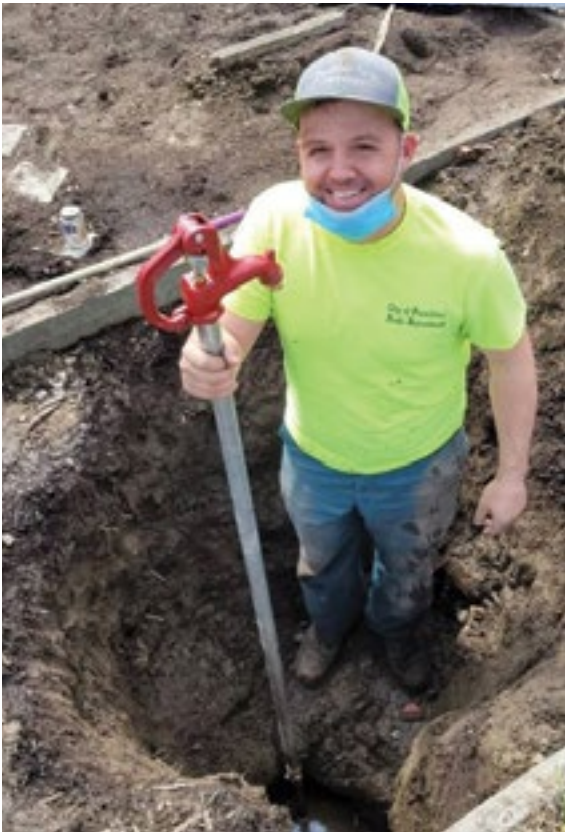
Maintenance

The maintenance department is responsible for 13 buildings, all irrigation systems and fountains, vehicles, equipment, stockroom, warehouse, playground safety, electric systems, graffiti, welding, splash pads, park and playground builds, and so much more. Some key projects from this year include the renovation of the Boathouse second floor offices, installation of fiber cable in Roger Williams Park, replacement benches and railings at Michael Van Leesten Pedestrian Bridge, demolition of old playgrounds, and so much more.

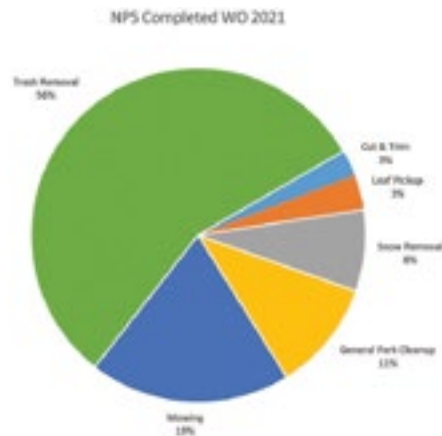
We improved operations and streamlined processes by managing a website of project specifications and manuals, utilizing new inventory and asset management systems, and re-organizing the grounds facility yard and warehouse.



Snow Operations cleared snow in streets of Wards 8 and 9, Roger Williams Park, North Burial Ground, and sidewalks and walkways in downtown and neighborhood parks.



Neighborhood Parks Services



Neighborhood Parks Services is responsible for the seasonal operations of all Providence Neighborhood Parks. This year, they added Roger Williams Park division to their portfolio. They also featured the “Year of the Foreperson” to celebrate, support and train staff in this vital position. Another key project is the initiative to sustainably manage leaves and turf.



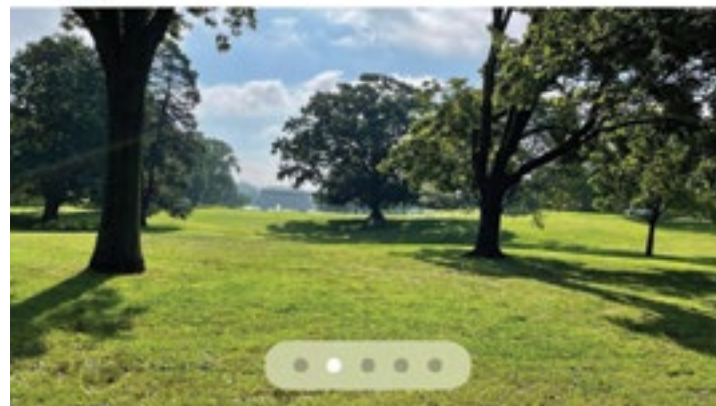
Walking RI: Rediscover Providence's Roger Williams Park on a serene hike around its ponds

John Kostrzewa Guest columnist
Published 12:01 pm ET Nov 12, 2021

View Comments



Belmont Park • 20h



RW Park. I just came back from a ride through the park. I want to thank the workers that maintain the park, it looks beautiful, clean and well cared for. Keep up the great work. THANK YOU!

Like 12

82

Forestry

71 PVD Community Tree Keepers trained in 2021
156 Community Tree Keepers trained since 2016



Volunteers working hard with the Providence Neighborhood Planting Program



Kickoff event for the PVD Tree Plan



564 total trees planted by Forestry:

501 trees planted by PVD Neighborhood Planting Program

36 additional trees planted by other means (City Council, grants, volunteers)

2,294 total trees pruned:

2,164 street trees (including 1,270 through block pruning)

130 park trees



PARK IMPROVEMENTS

17 major completed projects totaling **\$1,151,607**
31 initial phases of multi-phase projects complete totaling **\$8,140,796**



Brown Street Park



Major Park

The 2021 Design Team

Design Team 2021

The design team has grown to five members strong with talents and experience including two Registered Landscape Architects, Urban Planning, Horticulture, Graphic Design, Civil Engineering and CPSI Certification. During 2021, the team has successfully completed numerous projects including:

Playgrounds

Annie Morris Tot Lot
Arthur & Ruby Lawrence Park
Brown Street Park
Joseph Williams Park
Morris Avenue Park
Ridge Street Park

Ballfields & Courts

Ardoene Park
Gano Street Park
Harriet & Sayles Park
Merino Park
Neutaconkanut Park Softball Field

Sustainable Design

Amtrak Station Park

New Fencing

Annie Morris Tot Lot
Ardoene Park
Arthur & Ruby Lawrence Park
Blackstone Park Trail
Cranston Street Park
Joseph P. Hassett Park
Major Park
Morris Ave Tot Lot

Columbarium

North Burial Ground

New Signage

Blackstone Woods Trail
Michael Van Leesten Memorial Bridge

Building Upgrades

Roger Williams Park Botanical Garden, Natural History Museum, Casino, and Dalrymple Boathouse
BankNewport City Center, Esek Hopkins House, Mashapaug Boating Center House



Broad Street Gateway

The Roger Williams Park Gateway, slated to open July 2022, transforms three blighted adjacent lots into a modern, energy-efficient, multi-purpose center. Visitors and residents of the Washington Park neighborhood will be able to access information about free public events, amenities, and year-round programs within the People's Park and along the Broad Street Corridor. This project is in partnership with the Providence Redevelopment Agency, with support from the City of Providence and RI Housing.

DESIGNING FOR NATURE is important for every Parks Department project. In Blackstone Park (bottom left), erosion control measures and new fencing protect the land, plants, and wildlife. We design for nature in urban areas as well, like the bird habitat garden at Station Park and in playgrounds like Father Lennon Park, which incorporates a rain garden and native planting.



Blackstone Park



Annie Morris Tot Lot



Station Park



OUTDOOR FITNESS continues to grow in popularity, and we continue to improve and add to our fitness areas as we develop an inclusive system of facilities throughout the city. Left: new equipment was added to Brown Street Park, one of the most heavily used fitness areas in Providence. Top right: a new fitness area in Joe Williams Park includes street workout equipment and pavement markings for agility training. Bottom right: Amos Earley Park’s new fitness area offers the city’s first outdoor cardio equipment along with calisthenics.



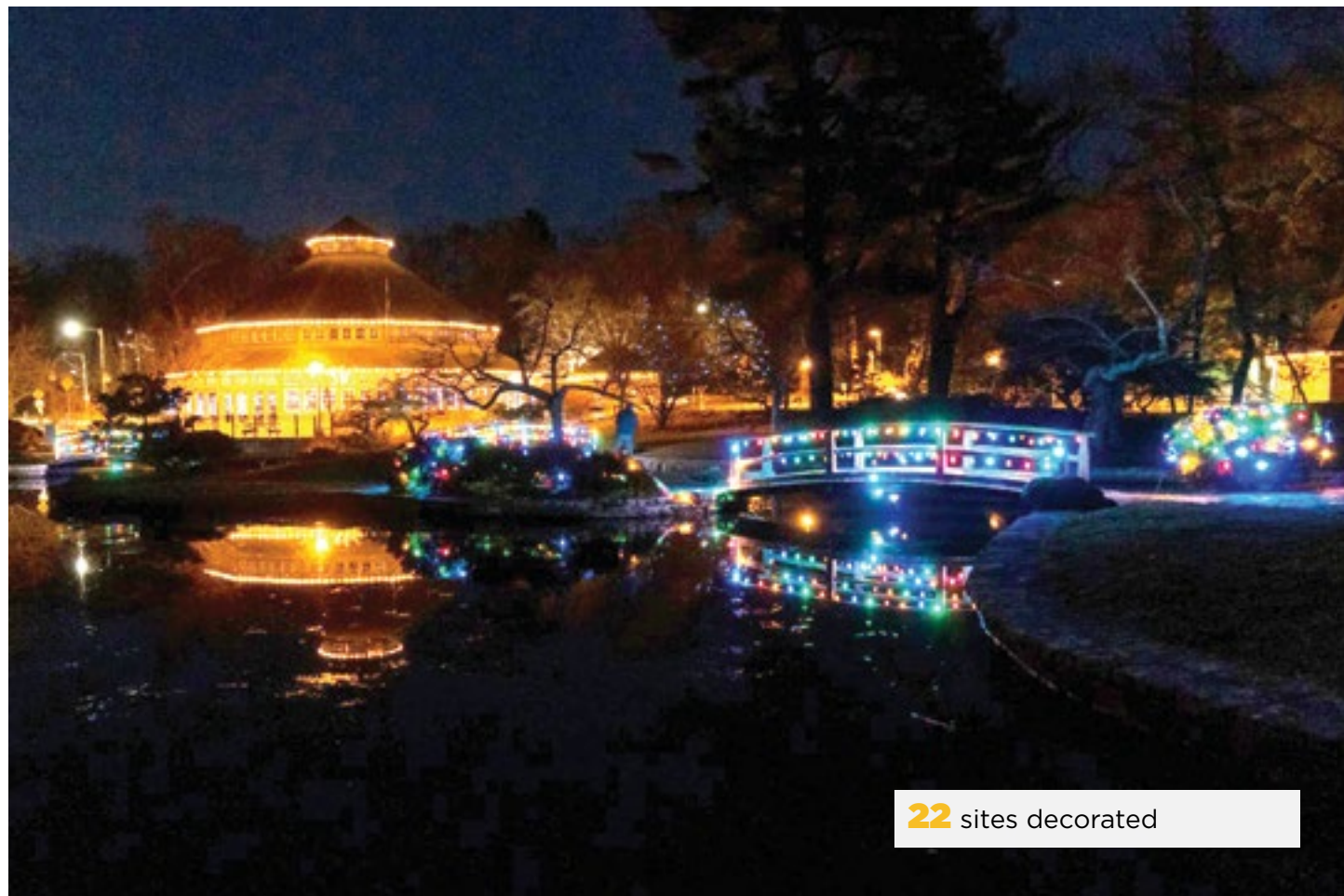
83 public meetings hosted



ORNAMENTAL FENCING makes a huge visual impact on our parks. We have found that replacing old, deteriorated fencing with modern less-visible and less-intimidating fencing results in increased usage by families and a reduction in vandalism. Removing the visible barrier better integrates parks into neighborhoods and is more welcoming to families. The difference is clear at Ardoene Park, above.



Holiday Cheer



22 sites decorated

Holiday Cheer



ROGER WILLIAMS PARK

The Parks Department, ACT, and other City Departments were thrilled to partner with the Rhode Island Foundation, the Roger Williams Park Conservancy, and other sponsors to present the 5th Annual performance of the Rhode Island Philharmonic Pops in the Park. The Roger Williams Park Conservancy and the Parks Department co-hosted over 60 free and low-cost events in arts and culture, health and wellness, as well as nature and the outdoors.

Additionally, the Roger Williams Park Conservancy hosted an Open House to celebrate the \$17 million investments and partnership between the Parks Department, RI Foundation, and Conservancy. Working with the Planning Department and the Museum of Natural History, the Roger Williams Park Conservancy launched “self-guided” tours of the park. The Stormwater Innovation Center hosted several public programs including the popular Rain Harvest Festival and several well-attended regional workshops. The Casino HVAC system, fiber cable installation, a magnolia tree grove, lake management, Rose Maze, new boilers at the Boathouse and Botanical Center, and a new fire safety system at Botanical Center represent a collective investment of the Parks Department and the RWP Conservancy of \$1 million in infrastructure and capital investments this year.



Botanical Center

As of November 2021, membership at the **Botanical Center** increased from 75 card holders in 2019 to 170 for 2021. Over 40,000 visitors enjoyed special programming including Alice in Wonderland, Fairy Garden Days, Yoga for Every Body, Nature Collage portraits and a Botanical Halloween Parade. The Just in Time art sale, Tai Chi and Hollydays brought another 3,500 people to the Center. 200 visitors participated in 20 workshops.

With grant funding, the Flavor Lab was reimagined this year to grow food year-round for soup kitchens and fresh produce boxes. The new food donation program brings fresh produce boxes and all the ingredients needed to prepare a plant-based recipe curated by award winning chef, Ben Sukle of Oberlin, and Johnson and Wales culinary students.



125 new Botanical Center volunteers, added to the existing **400**, logged an impressive **7,256** hours

Yoga at the Botanical Center



Museum of Natural History

On June 6, the Museum celebrated its 125th Anniversary with tours, new visitor experiences designed by Providence MET School High School students, a new planetarium show, and TEN31 Living art.

The Museum continued to:

- Offer virtual programming and transitioned to offering more in-person programming aligned with the COVID safety guidelines.
- Welcomed back field trip groups (schools, homeschool families, camps, community groups) to visit the Museum, view planetarium shows, and participate in hands-on workshops.
- Expanded its walking tour offerings in the Roger Williams Park and welcomed visitors back to the Betsey Williams Cottage.
- Worked with Ten31 Productions and local artists, to host its 2nd annual Night at the Haunted Museum evening experience. Over 800 people attended.
- Offered Reverse Field Trips at Providence Recreation Centers.



In **2021**, the Natural History Museum served **20** teachers and **750** students through distance learning

New this year, the Museum:

- Installed three new exhibits (one of which was funded by NASA RI Space Grant Consortium) and a new planetarium show.
- Hosted the Summer PASA program in Roger Williams Park, welcoming 180 middle school students to the Museum and programming throughout the park.
- Continued distance learning with community partners for 20 teachers and over 750 students.
- Awarded a grant from Rhode Island Department of Education All Course Network to support summer and fall virtual learning STEM experiences that provided hands-on kits and virtual experiences to over 200 students.
- Supported 700 students and 20 teachers, through a NASA grant, including 300 Providence middle school students, to participate in observing plants in space on the International Space Station, at the Museum, and in their classrooms.
- Expanded Museum Lifelong Learners Programming including art classes at the Museum and Betsey Williams Cottage.





While 2021 presented unique challenges, Park Programming maneuvered through the changing landscape of outdoor activities by bolstering commitment to the very same principles and practices it has always adhered to: providing safe, high-quality opportunities for engagement in nature.

The philosophy of Parks Programming is to create fitness opportunities for all ages and abilities, no matter the weather. “Outside Every Day” is a practice we strongly believe leads to healthier minds and bodies and 2021 proved no exception. In addition to adding fitness equipment to many of our City parks, we also offered a diverse menu of organized group classes, with COVID-safe protocols strictly adhered to for everyone’s safety and enjoyment.

From yoga at Roger Williams Park and India Point Park, to boot camp on the Michael Van Leesten Pedestrian Bridge, wildlife walks with the Urban Wildlife Education Center and our new partnership with the Walk with a Doc program, we provided a variety of opportunities for people to use park resources to strengthen mental and physical fitness.

North Burial Ground

The mission of **North Burial Ground** is to memorialize the deceased, comfort the living, and be a historic destination for the community. Community engagement and partnerships were a priority in 2021.

- Cemetery Operation by the Numbers**
- 109** interments, including **31** cremations, averaging about **20** interments per month.
 - 109** total lots purchased, with **21** purchased ahead of loss. **151** headstone foundations were set.
 - 2** days of NBG crew transforming “The Wild Place,” a neighboring park.
 - 200** genealogy requests facilitated via email.
 - \$516,699.00** raised in revenue from January 1 to November 1.
- Raising the profile of North Burial Ground through social media, and re-envisioning social media as an extension of our “historical destination” mission saw an increase in social media metrics across all platforms as well as an increase in community engagement:**
- 627%** increase in impressions, **200%** increase in followers, and **811%** increase in interactions with posts.
 - \$4,000** in donations of plant and floral arrangements from Groden Center Greenhouse partnership.
 - 10** attendees at a meet-and-greet with NBG’s new Director.
 - 247** in-person or virtual individual engagements, including our first annual self-guided Halloween Activity Book.
 - 60** Halloween books distributed.
 - 55** viewers of the virtual Halloween Ghost Tour in partnership with the Friends of North Burial Ground and Elmcrest Films.
 - 12** participants in the guided Director’s Tour.
 - 23** submittals to the Fall Photo Contest.
 - 5** volunteers replaced **800** veteran’s flags for Veteran’s Day.



We held our first annual Dia de Los Muertos event at NBG in partnership with Rhode Island Latino Arts and the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology

Food and Play Access



5000+ pounds of food donated



Our PlayCorps program employed 19 staff members working at five parks each day and two staff members leading a traveling team that visited many additional parks throughout the summer. As in past years, staff facilitated free, unstructured play with play materials available in the parks for visitors to play, create and let their imaginations run wild.

From this free-form play the participants learned to be creative and resourceful with materials provided by PlayCorps, using their imagination to create something from very little. Some kids used materials and played solo, while others merged what they were doing with kids sharing park space with them. Either way, kids were outside, engaged in play and learning valuable interpersonal skills that expanded their minds and physical capabilities - both tenets of the PlayCorps and Park Programming philosophy of how to best spend time in our parks.

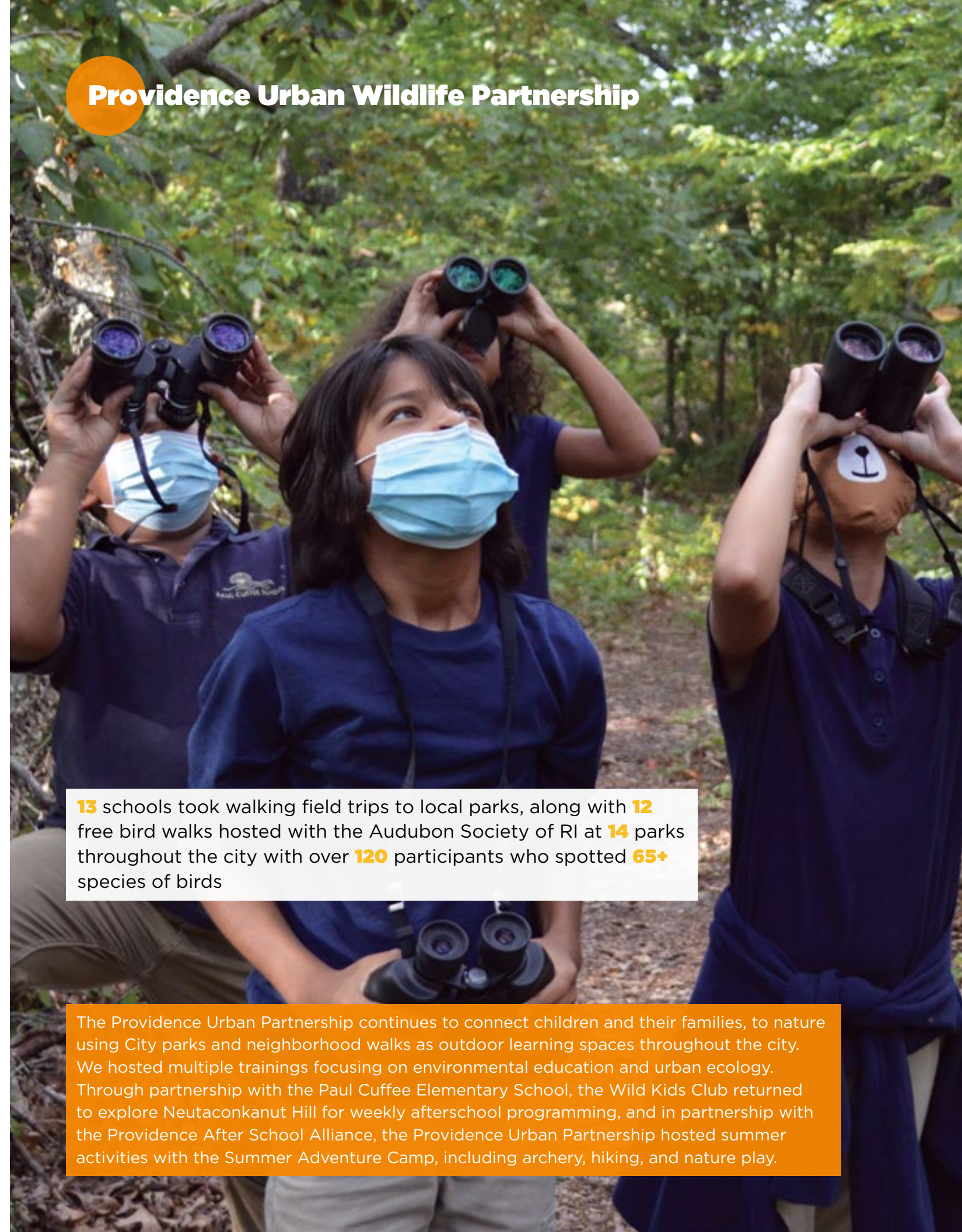
37 recreation & program meal sites

26 parks meal sites

63 total meal sites

117,567 total meals served

Providence Urban Wildlife Partnership

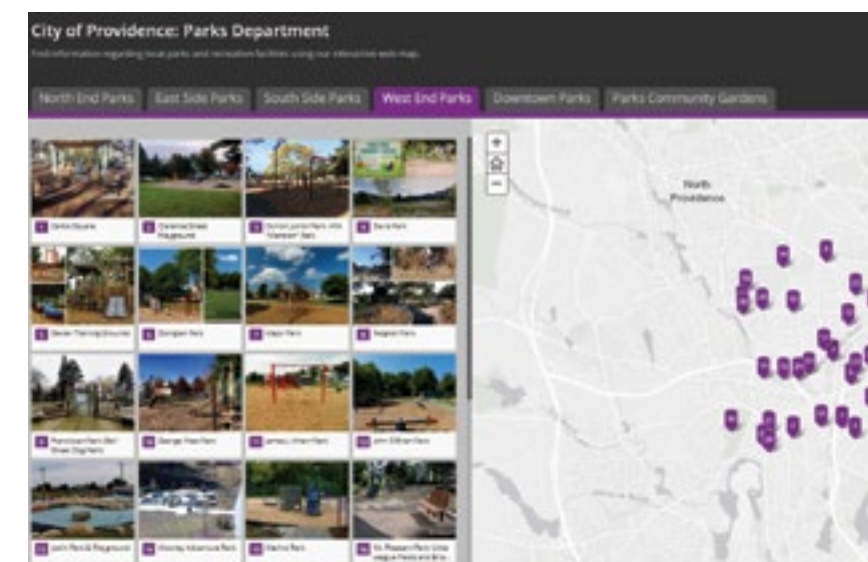
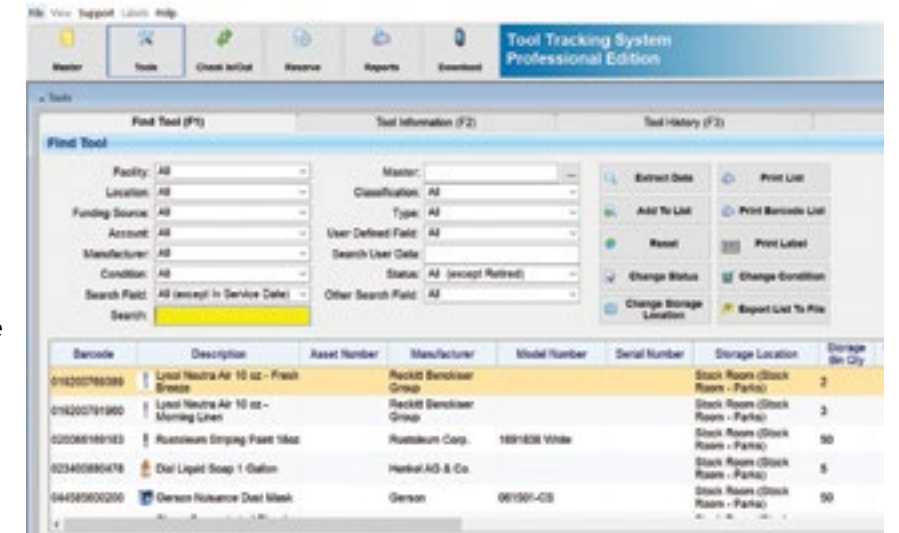


13 schools took walking field trips to local parks, along with **12** free bird walks hosted with the Audubon Society of RI at **14** parks throughout the city with over **120** participants who spotted **65+** species of birds

The Providence Urban Partnership continues to connect children and their families, to nature using City parks and neighborhood walks as outdoor learning spaces throughout the city. We hosted multiple trainings focusing on environmental education and urban ecology. Through partnership with the Paul Cuffee Elementary School, the Wild Kids Club returned to explore Neutaconkanut Hill for weekly afterschool programming, and in partnership with the Providence After School Alliance, the Providence Urban Partnership hosted summer activities with the Summer Adventure Camp, including archery, hiking, and nature play.



In the wake of COVID-19 and the need for essential supplies, the Parks Department implemented GigaTrak's Tool Tracking System to assist in the inventory and asset management of all department supplies and equipment. The system allows the Parks Department to monitor supply levels, track condition and maintenance of equipment, and allow our crews to better serve the City of Providence and its constituents.



We also rolled-out Asset Essentials work-order and project management system to provide vital data to improve and guide our operations.

We began the process of a full website overhaul to make information about the parks system more accessible and easier to find. Additionally, we continue to refine our Parks StoryMap and Park Finder.

FUNDRAISING

\$161,700 from grants and fundraising¹: **\$6,700** Rhode Island Foundation grants, **\$20,000** Space grants, **\$35,000** artful basketball court improvements from My HomeCourt, **\$50,000** from Helen Walker Raleigh Trust for trees, and **\$50,000** federal US Fish and Wildlife Service grants.

MAINTAIN INCOME-GENERATING CONTRACTS
Maintained leases for: Waterplace Pavilion, Subway at BankNewport City Center, Trinity Brewery Annex, RWP Carousel, RWP Swan Boats, La Gondola, Triggs Golf Course, and RWP Todd Morsilli Tennis Courts



\$180,623 net Botanical Center income generated through **64** events and **4** fundraisers.
\$56,194 net Casino income generated, including deposits and refunds: **40** events, with net revenue for Special Event permits through **76** total permits issued, **49** permit fees waived, and **27** permit fees paid. **\$31,010** net revenue for Park permits through **312** permits for small events and **206** permit fees waived due to COVID.



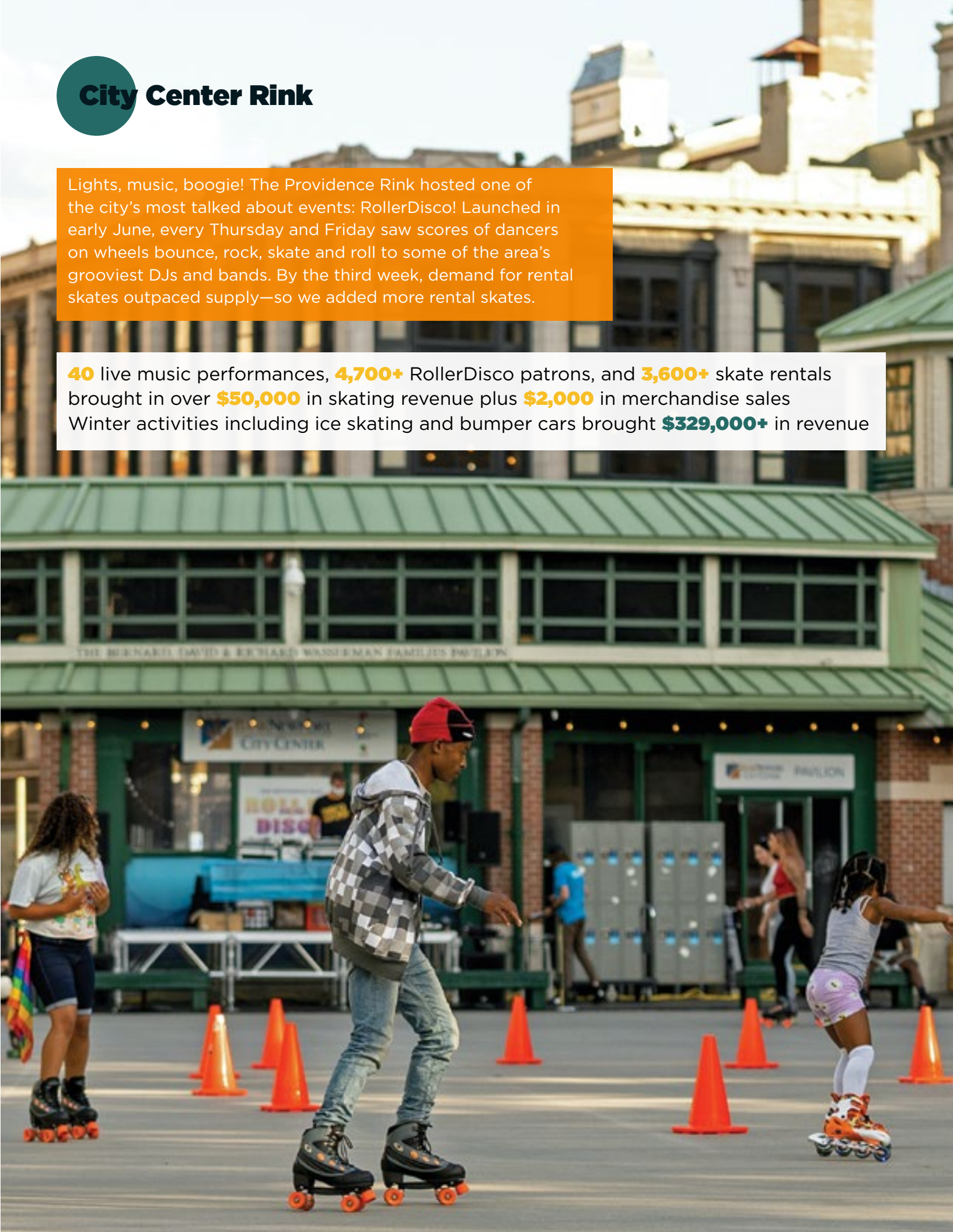
Triggs Golf Course was featured as a best course in three national publications

¹ not including funds from the RIF Campaign for RWP or CDBG

City Center Rink

Lights, music, boogie! The Providence Rink hosted one of the city’s most talked about events: RollerDisco! Launched in early June, every Thursday and Friday saw scores of dancers on wheels bounce, rock, skate and roll to some of the area’s grooviest DJs and bands. By the third week, demand for rental skates outpaced supply—so we added more rental skates.

40 live music performances, **4,700+** RollerDisco patrons, and **3,600+** skate rentals brought in over **\$50,000** in skating revenue plus **\$2,000** in merchandise sales
Winter activities including ice skating and bumper cars brought **\$329,000+** in revenue



LOOKING BEYOND

The Parks Department enters 2022 with a team that is tenacious, dedicated, creative and resourceful; we are unwavering in our commitment to excellent service and outstanding public spaces. We look forward to opening the new Roger Williams Park Gateway and Visitors Center where innovative programs and accessible information will be offered. The Urban Wood Depot on Salem Street will improve Forestry operations and provide the public with trees harvested from city parks and streets. We will renovate parks throughout the city and complete a multi-year effort to revitalize playgrounds in every city park. Two new green schoolyards will open with the critical assistance of the communities and city partners. Roger Williams Park buildings will see essential infrastructure and mechanical upgrades, ensuring that people can continue to explore and enjoy all the magnificent park has to offer. A range of capital improvements will be completed at the Museum of Natural History; with reimagined and renovated space, the museum will become a new destination for events and gathering. Throughout the park, we will continue to implement best practices in sustainable park management and expand the Stormwater Innovation Center.

We are grateful to the Board of Park Commissioners, Mayor Jorge O. Elorza, the Providence City Council, our colleagues in City Hall and our community partners for all the support, collaboration and resources that help us realize our mission. We know 2022 will bring surprises and our goal will be to transform those challenges into opportunities to invite the public to embrace our parks as safe places to play, gather and explore.



