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DEAR NEIGHBORS

In 2009 the Homewood-Flossmoor Park District celebrates 40 years since the merger of the two separate and distinct park districts serving Homewood and Flossmoor. That was certainly a time of visionary leaders who saw the greater potential to serve their community working together and combining resources. Since that time, we've grown in so many ways.

At the time of the merger, the district had 12 parks scattered throughout both communities with buildings at Merchants Park in Homewood and Flossmoor Park in Flossmoor. Forty years later we have 32 parks and 13 facilities. These great parks and facilities, along with outstanding programs and community involvement, are three of the reasons our park district was named the best park and recreation agency serving a population of 25,000 to 50,000 in the U.S. in both 1991 and 2006. Of course we're not the same faces from the merger in 1969, but we're just as dedicated to providing outstanding facilities and services to our community in the future.

In January, a new intern started at the park district. Carl is a senior at Chicago State University and this internship is his last requirement before graduating. As is often the case, one of the first things interns are assigned to do is

interview staff. I had the pleasure of sitting down with Carl to discuss my job and career path and some of the joys and concerns of the field of parks and recreation in general and specifically here at the H-F Park District.

I shared several good things, including making people happy, offering a myriad of diverse activities and helping make people's daily routines just a little easier. But when he asked what our biggest challenges were, it really made me think. Of course I know what most of our big challenges are, but I hadn't before tried to summarize them into a few words. Ultimately, I said our challenges can be described in two terms: aging facilities and funding. As we head into budget season, these two topics will be discussed often.

Last year we celebrated the 35th anniversary of the H-F Racquet & Fitness Club. We completed the second year of sprucing up the place with a new color scheme, furniture, carpet, pool deck, fitness equipment, ceiling fans and locker room upgrades. Ultimately, however, the bones of that building are still more than 35 years old. We've repaired water leaks and HVAC systems and we've been patching roof leaks for several years. Soon the full roof will need to be replaced.

The H-F Ice Arena is nearly the same age and also in need of a few major repairs. All these things are expensive, but like in our own homes, if we don't

take care of them now, the costs can be greater down the road.

Probably our biggest concerns with aging facilities and funding lie with Dolphin and Lions Club Pools. Both are older than the park district and cause concern every year as we try to ready them for the next swimming season. We've been discussing options for more than a year now and will be coming to you with ideas in the near future. In light of the country's economic crisis, we continue to look for ways to maintain and improve facilities without asking taxpayers for additional funding. But even with the best intentions, it's always a juggling game.

My closing thoughts for Carl were all positive. A colleague once told me that making fun is hard work. He was right, but there's nothing better than standing at a Starry Nights concert or at Izaak Walton on the 4th of July looking at the crowds of happy faces. That's the real pay off for the work we do. If we make smiling easy for you, then we've done our job.

Enjoy the spring; we hope to see your happy face often!

- Debbie Kopas,
Executive Director

