



# PLAY AS A WAY OF LIFE

An interview with Ken Fisher

**PCMC Community News:** You recently celebrated your 12th year serving as Recreation Manager for Park City. When did you first become involved in the organization?

**Ken Fisher:** I was hired as a soccer referee in 1991, and I worked for the city part-time for four years until I was hired as a recreation coordinator in 1996. Then in 2003, I was promoted to Recreation Manager. So all told, I've been with the city for 24 years—although time certainly flies when you are having fun.

**PCMC:** Yes, that's the key thing, isn't it: putting fun front and center in Park City. As you say, it's a way of life of around here.

**KF:** Absolutely. It's always been an important reason—perhaps the most important reason—that people relocate here. So we need to make sure that the city takes that seriously and reflects it in the way it runs municipal services.

**PCMC:** How does this “commitment to play” translate for Park City residents?

**KF:** In a lot of different ways. The city doesn't just pay lip service to the concept. Contrary to other communities—where recreation budgets are constantly being cut—Park City continuously reaffirms its commitment to Recreation. We all realize that it's integral to the city's other priorities and initiatives.

**PCMC:** How does this translate in terms of actual municipal dollars allocated?

**KF:** Well, the city does hold us to a pretty strict standard with regard to tax-dollar stewardship. We are held to a cost-recovery minimum 70%, and we are not allowed to exceed a subsidy of \$900,000 a year. Last year, we maintained a 76.9% cost recovery, and our subsidy was \$556,225. I should mention that this was also the first year that the city reallocated the cost of our utilities into our budget, which average about \$241,552 (previously, they had been accounted for in a separate budget). So I am very proud of our financial stewardship, and I think the numbers show that we provide a solid return on investment of tax dollars.

**PCMC:** Tell me about the Recreation Team. How do they reflect on the department's tag line of a “Higher Degree of Play” or the mission statement of “Enriching the lives in our community through exceptional people, programs and facilities”

**KF:** The Recreation team is the best example of our commitment to this ideal. Over the past several years there's been an increased emphasis on professionalism and excellent customer service. All of our Rec supervisors are CPRP (Certified Parks & Recreation Professionals). In addition, all of our tennis pros are USPTA- or PTR-certified.

We also have very little turnover. For example, we have several full-time and part-time team members who have worked for the city since the 1980s.

**PCMC:** As you know, there are a lot of fads in health, recreation, and sports. How do you guard against this? You don't want to commit a lot of city resources to an emerging sport, just to see it fall out of favor a few years later.

**KF:** This is something we think about all the time. Of course, you have to be nimble, in order to be responsive to customer requests. But—as you say—we are very mindful that we are working with tax dollars, so we need to be careful where we allocate resources.

Our primary metric is customer feedback. We spend a lot more time assessing the quality of our programs than we do watching external trends. For example, a lot of people might be surprised to learn that one of our most popular classes is step aerobics. Our step class is consistently rated one of our highest, and our instructor has been teaching the class since the late '80s.

And I just love hearing ideas straight from the community. Take the example of our dirt-jump park (in Creekside Park). The idea for this came directly from the community. A group of residents brought it to our attention, and—with their support—we were able to turn it into something real.

Similarly, we have a group of residents who are great pickleball enthusiasts. At their urging, we began a pickleball clinic, and now I'm happy to say we have four pickleball courts at the PC MARC. It's always gratifying when an initiative from the community gains steam and becomes a sport in our community with real staying power.

**PCMC:** And what about sporting trends that really have become part of the everyday fabric of our society?

**KF:** Well, just look at something like skateboarding. It's commonplace now, but I think we were probably the first rec department in the country to offer actual skateboard clinics. And it's amazing to see how many other sports skateboarding has influenced or inspired, including snowboarding and slope style skiing!

**PCMC:** What benchmarks do you use to ensure that you are delivering the level of service that you think you are?

**KF:** We use several benchmarks to ensure that we are meeting our goals for quality and responsiveness. Externally, we benchmark against results from both the National Recreation & Parks Association surveys and the National Citizens Survey. Those have both helped underscore that PC Rec is really a model across the county for municipal recreation departments in three key areas: quality of staff, quality of programs, and quality of facilities.

But we also, of course, constantly benchmark internally. We conduct surveys after every program because we want the feedback loop to be as short as possible. The key question we always ask is, “Would you recommend this program to family and friends?”

**PCMC:** You mentioned you've been full-time with the city for almost 20 years. Do you have a favorite moment from your tenure, or a moment of which you are most proud?

**KF:** There are a lot of highlights—including the development of neighborhood parks, the opening of new fields, the opening of the PC MARC, and the christening of great amenities across the city. But my single favorite moment was the renaming of City Park field as Jack Sutton Field. Jack lived most of his life in Park City. He was born with some developmental challenges, but he could be found almost every day of the season cheering on his team at the softball field. We renamed the field in his honor in 1996, and he just passed away last year. We held his memorial service at the field, and the mayor signed a proclamation in his honor. He was—and still is—one of my favorite Park City residents. He certainly embodied the spirit of Play as a way of making life better.

**PCMC:** Let's talk about what you have in store for the future.

**KF:** Of course, we're always looking to improve upon what we're doing now, in terms of customer responsiveness and programming. But beyond that, we've talked about building and maintaining an indoor aquatics center, as well as a second ice rink. And we would love to put in more fields—both indoor and outdoor.

**PCMC:** That all sounds very ambitious!

**KF:** Well, we only want to develop capital projects for which we see the need in the community. And everything I mentioned would certainly be utilized at a very high level.

**PCMC:** Well, thank you for being such an enthusiastic and responsible steward of our city's recreation facilities, and helping ensure that play is honored as a way of life around here.

You can download and read the 2014 Park Recreation Annual Report here:  
<http://www.parkcity.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=14596>