



**OHIO PARKS AND
RECREATION ASSOCIATION**

Woody Woodward, Executive Director

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Ohio Parks and Recreation Association (OPRA) has announced its 2023 Annual Awards of Excellence winners and a number of local agencies have been recognized. The awards are judged by a panel of parks and recreation professionals from around Ohio.

Locally, the City of Whitehall won the 1st place award in the Sports category for the "Thursday Night Thrillers: Summer Basketball Program" and 2nd place for the "Street Hockey League." The city also won the 2nd place award in the Capital Improvement Projects – Up to \$1 Million category for the "Columbus Blue Jackets Foundation & Whitehall Street Hockey Rink" construction project. Whitehall also won 2nd place in the Management Innovation category for the "Community Connections" program. Whitehall won more awards than any other city in the state and will be competing for its 2nd Governors Award!

Thursday Night Thriller is a youth summer basketball program hosted at John Bishop Park. This partnership is between Real Situations Inc., the Whitehall Police Department and the Whitehall Parks and Recreation Department to curb violence among teens in the summer while providing resources and giveaways to families in the community. The top high school athletes in Columbus gathered every Thursday for 6 weeks to play ball under the lights and support the cause.

Thanks to the Columbus Blue Jacket Foundation's \$250,000 grant, a new street hockey rink was built in Whitehall! With the completion of the rink, Whitehall partnered with Eli Louridge to facilitate youth and adult hockey programs this fall. His three-tiered approach encompassed Learn to Skate, Intermediate/Advanced Youth Roller Hockey, and Competitive and Recreational Divisions in the Adult League. The fall program was a huge success with over 100 participants.

"Community Connections: A Meeting of the Minds for Resource Providers" helps to address the gap between different community organizations around Columbus. This series provides an opportunity for community resource providers to meet and connect; allowing for collaboration across different sectors and finding solutions to best utilize scarce resources.

The OPRA Annual Awards of Excellence will be presented at a banquet hosted by the association on February 6, 2024, at the Kalahari Convention Center in Sandusky, Ohio. One first place award winner will be presented with the 2023 Governor's Award for Parks and Recreation, a "best-in-show" award which includes a \$500 contribution to the parks and recreation foundation of the agency winner.

"Parks and recreation professionals throughout Ohio work every day to improve the quality of life of the people they serve," said OPRA Executive Director Woody Woodward. "This effort is a shining example of that kind of work, and we are pleased to be able to present this award."

Incorporated in 1963, OPRA is a non-profit, public interest organization representing over 2,000 professionals and citizen board members striving to provide quality parks and recreation facilities and opportunities for all Ohioans while protecting and preserving Ohio's natural resources, positively impacting local economies and health and wellness of its citizens.