

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

MCRPD's Working Hard So You Can Play: *State of the District 2015*

Fort Bragg, CA – November 19, 2015

Over the past few years, the Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park District (MCRPD) has worked hard to provide coast residents with ample and varied recreational opportunities. It is the District's goal to continue to provide services and expand into areas that are currently underserved.

MCRPD is a large district, encompassing 912 square miles, it reaches from Westport to Gualala. MCRPD provides a wide variety of recreation services, some of which are not well-known to local residents. For instance, did you know that MCRPD has been providing swimming lessons to children in the Gualala and Point Arena area for 25 years? And, did you know that the District has also been providing support to the south coast Redwood Coast Recreation Center (RCRC) in helping them build their own recreation center in Gualala for the past several years? Did you know that MCRPD provides regular fitness classes at the Westport Community Center? MCRPD does all of these things and much more. Some services are provided directly by MCRPD and other services are provided in partnership with other local agencies.

MCRPD owns and leases to the non-profit Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens the 47 acres which comprises the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens. Through the efforts of the non-profit, an estimated 71,000 visitors pass through their gates each year. The Gardens property was acquired and is held by the district for the benefit of local residents and visitors, alike.

MCRPD has been working with the Community Center of Mendocino (CCM) to heal the rifts of the past and focus on the children and community of today and tomorrow. The MCRPD Board of Directors recently approved renewed financial support of CCM with an agreement toward continued talks between the two organizations with the goal of sustaining CCM's valuable community programs.

MCRPD's Recreation Specialist, Natalie Cottrell, working with MCRPD partners on the south coast, CCM and the Giants Community Foundation, created the local Junior Giants program that allowed 191 children between the ages of 5 and 18 to play baseball this past summer without any fees what so ever.

MCRPD partners with both the Fort Bragg Unified School District and Mendocino Unified School District to provide a free session of swim lessons to second grade students at the C. V. Starr Community Center. MCRPD also provides pool time for the high school swim teams at no cost to the schools.

MCRPD also partners with the Fort Bragg Unified School District in providing the Kudos for Kids and ASSETS afterschool programs that serve over 300 students each school day.

Throughout the year, MCRPD provides a wide variety of recreation programs, including adult basketball, adult softball, circus camp, a disc golf tournament, drop-in volleyball, enrichment activities, a fun run, group exercise classes, gymnastics, Just for Kids, skate night, a soccer tournament, swimming lessons, the Interactive Underwater Program, youth baseball, youth basketball, and more.

The District has reorganized the supervisory structure of MCRPD and C. V. Starr Community Center to a single chief executive and a streamlined administrative workforce. The result is a more efficient work team supporting the business functions of MCRPD and C. V. Starr Community Center.

MCRPD and the City of Fort Bragg are working together to best ensure the responsible and sustainable operation of the C. V. Starr Community Center. The most recent operating agreement term increased to three years (previous agreements had been for a single year only), which serves to show the increasing trust and functionality of the partnership between the two agencies.

At C. V. Starr Community Center, MCRPD and City of Fort Bragg have completed a number of facility improvements. Energy efficient variable frequency drives (VFDs) for the large air handler units have been installed. New ADA auto-door openers have been installed on the main entrance doors. The IT system that supports the C. V. Starr Community Center has been upgraded to include improvements to the center's public Wi-Fi system so patrons can connect throughout the building. A new art display system has been installed and new art is scheduled to be rotated through every 6 months.

The MCRPD and City of Fort Bragg decision to offer the Silver Sneakers program at the C. V. Starr Community Center has proven to be a major success. This program provides qualifying, active older-adults free memberships. While initially estimated to cost the C. V. Starr Community Center as much as \$7,222 in lost revenue, it has, instead proven to be a revenue generator with over 1,000 visits each month by Silver Sneakers members.

Recently MCRPD and the City of Fort Bragg also approved 300 free general admission vouchers to be supplied to the Mendocino Coast Children's Fund for the purpose of increasing access to the C. V. Starr Community Center by low-income children.

In a continued effort to reduce unnecessary expense, MCRPD examined their election cycle. The district's last election cost MCRPD \$35,000. This was due to the election cycle. After considerable research, it was discovered that altering elections could result in considerable savings to the district. MCRPD took the prescribed steps to change its election cycle to even numbered years, and received the necessary approval from the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors. As a result, MCRPD will now hold its elections in even numbered years. If MCRPD has an election in 2016, it will more than likely cost the district less than \$5,000.

Because, at times, MCRPD struggles to receive recognition for its contributions towards services, programs and facilities, the Board approved a co-branding program which aims to better inform the public about community activities and involvement.

While MCRPD is focused on positive progress that demonstrates financial responsibility and providing valuable recreation and park services to MCRPD residents, it would be neglectful to say that the district is without its challenges. Most of the challenges revolve around finances. While MCRPD does a lot, it is a small agency with a limited budget and it has some proportionally large debts to resolve. Prioritizing services and sizing its operation to available resources is an ongoing exercise that the Board of Directors and staff are giving continual attention.

Although the district has applied for Chapter 9 bankruptcy, it has been challenged by the bank. The district is not currently in bankruptcy and has not been in bankruptcy. MCRPD owns 586-acres going north and east from Summers Lane and Highway 20 and the property has no liens and no mortgage. The district has approximately \$2.1 million of bank debt and an estimated \$150,000 of private debt. The MCRPD Board of Directors has made it a top priority to become debt free by either selling or developing the 586 acres.

In the meantime, to protect the 586-acre property near Summers Lane and Highway 20 from illegal trespassers who are stealing redwood burls, firewood, and driving ATVs and full-size 4-wheel drive vehicles, MCRPD has partnered with the California Recreation Alliance to help patrol the property, maintain the surveillance cameras, put up no trespassing signs, as well as actively use the property for their free ATV safety classes.

While the road to overcoming the district's financial predicament is likely to be a long one, MCRPD has shown that it is committed to continuing to provide valuable recreation programs and services to best meet the needs of the district community. If the teamwork and achievements of the Board of Directors, staff, volunteers and MCRPD partners are any indicator, MCRPD should hold its head high. Residents of MCRPD should be proud of its district and all the services and programs that it provides.

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