

CHAPTER SEVEN - RECREATION PLAN

Integral to the development of the Master Plan, an assessment of the City of Durango Parks and Recreation Department's program offerings was completed. The Recreation Program Assessment offers an in-depth perspective of the recreation program offerings and helps to identify the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities in the program offerings. The Assessment also assists in identifying core programs, program gaps within the community, and future program offerings for residents.

Assessment findings were based on household survey results, public input comments, program assessment forms, discussions, and interviews with the recreation staff. In addition, marketing materials were reviewed. The PROS Team completed a program assessment focus group with staff and reviewed the existing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The Recreation staff, in conjunction with the PROS team, selected the core programs to be evaluated and entered the data into a PROS matrix. This Plan addresses the program offerings from a macro-perspective. It identifies system-wide key issues and presents recommendations for these issues, while also offering recommendations to elevate the core programs to the next level.

The content of this section is organized as follows:

- Program Assessment and Overview
- Lifecycle Analysis
- Age Segment Analysis
- Core Program Identification
- Recreation Programming Standards, Customer Requirements and Measures
- Program Findings and Recommendations
- Pricing and Cost Recovery
- Strategic Partnerships
- Service System Review
- Marketing Approaches
- Website Review

7.1 PROGRAM ASSESSMENT AND OVERVIEW

During the public input process, community members expressed positive comments about the program offerings by the City of Durango Parks and Recreation Department. Most frequently, residents mentioned the variety of offerings and the significant number of programs for youth. Program registrations have grown every year, which is an encouraging sign. The Department has excellent brand recognition in program areas such as gymnastics, hockey, figure skating, soccer, volleyball, softball, Gametime, and special events.

The most significant challenge facing the Department is its ability to accommodate the demand for programs. The Mason Center has significant limitations to its ability to meet the needs of its users. The Community Recreation Center is well used, but is constrained with

what it offers, based on space restrictions. Many residents mentioned the need for additional fitness and wellness opportunities.

During the last four years, program registrations have shown an extremely significant level of growth as follows:

Year	Recreation Center	Recreation Division
2005	5,617	23,172
2006	5,950	29,831
2007	6,141	29,131
2008	5,918	29,915

This represents an approximate 5% increase for Recreation Center programs and a 22% increase for the Recreation Division. As evidenced by these numbers, the most significant challenge facing the Department is the ability to accommodate the ever increasing demand for recreation program services.

According to the Leisure Vision household survey, household participation rates are 42% which compare favorably to a Leisure Vision benchmark of 30%. However, best-in-class systems have program participation rates of over 50%. The 50% participation rate may be difficult to achieve, unless new programming space is identified.

7.2 LIFECYCLE ANALYSIS

The program assessment included a lifecycle analysis by staff. This assessment helps to determine if the Department needs to develop newer and innovative programs, retrench programs that have been declining, or continue the current mix of lifecycle stages. This assessment was not based on quantitative data, but on staff’s opinions of how their programs were categorized according to the following criteria. The listing of the areas also includes the distribution of current programs in the specific lifecycle categories programs:

- Introduction stage 2%
- Take off stage 27%
- Growth stage 34%
- Mature stage 32%
- Saturation stage 5%
- Decline stage 2%

The PROS team recommends a distribution of 60% of programs in the introduction, take off and growth stages. For Durango Parks and Recreation, the percentage is 63%, which is an excellent distribution of newer and older programs. The specific area worth watching is the mature area as it is a fairly significant percentage, and programs can easily fall into saturation and decline. Staff should complete a lifecycle review on an annual basis and ensure the percentage distribution closely aligns with how programs are currently performing.

7.3 AGE SEGMENT ANALYSIS

The core programs were categorized according to age segments covering the continuum of ages from preschool to adults over 65 years. The age distribution percentage was as follows:

- Preschool - 10%
- Kindergarten through fifth grade - 20%
- Sixth through eighth grade - 20%
- Ninth through twelfth grade - 15%
- Ages 18-24 - 10%
- Ages 25-44 - 10%
- Ages 45-66 - 10%
- Age 65+ - 6%

This distribution reflects programs skewed toward younger aged youth, which is typical of parks and recreation agencies. Half of the core programs are geared toward youth, from preschool through senior high school. However, given the continuation of an aging population, there is room to grow programs for older adults, ages 55-64 and 65+. In the year 2000, residents aged 55 or over represented 16% of the population. This percentage will increase to 25% by 2023, which is a significant percentage increase. The young adult age segment of 18-24 will also maintain a robust percentage of the population. According to recreation trends, this is an age segment that should be targeted for growth in outdoor and extreme sport activities.

7.4 CORE PROGRAM IDENTIFICATION

The ability to align program offerings to community need is of vital importance in successfully delivering recreation services. At the same time, it is also important to deliver recreation programs with a consistent level of quality, which results in consistent customer experiences. The PROS team advocates developing core programs. In assessing the categorization of core programs, many criteria are considered and a partial list is provided below:

- Has been provided for a long period of time
- Is offered 3-4 sessions per year
- Has wide demographic appeal
- Includes 5% or more of recreation budget
- Includes a tiered level of skill development
- Requires full-time staff to manage the program area
- Has strong social value
- Demands high level of customer interface

- Has high partnering capability
- Facilities are designed to support the program

Core programs, by definition, meet at least the majority of these criteria. The establishment of core programs helps to provide a focus for program offerings. This focus, in turn, creates a sense of discipline for quality control of these program areas and helps to reduce variation of service for the program participants.

During a programming discussion with staff, the following list of programs was identified as core program areas:

- Youth Aquatics Programs
- Gymnastics Programs
- Gametime/Daycare Programs
- Youth Specialty Programs
- Youth Sports Programs
- Adult Specialty Programs
- Adult Sports Programs
- Special Events

It is somewhat difficult to recommend additional core program areas, given the space constraints and the existing demands for programs. However, based on survey data, it is clear that additional core program areas need to be considered in the future, including general fitness and wellness activities, for both adults and youths. Adult fitness and wellness programs were rated as being most important to households in the household survey. With the growing interest in combating childhood obesity, opportunities may exist for partnering with the school district to promote healthy lifestyles. Examples exist throughout the country of park and recreation agencies taking a leading role in promoting youth fitness and wellness activities.

Sixty year plus programs could also be included as a future core program area given the aging population. Life skill classes had the lowest level of need being met in the household survey. This program area had a relatively high level of importance to Durango households. In order to grow this program successfully, it is recommended to have the senior age groups differentiated between younger and older groups. Recreation needs for 60 year olds are generally substantially different than the needs of 80 year olds. Some systems nationwide have developed targeted marketing toward the older audience with its own brand and image. This includes a separate program guide for the older audience. Given the interest in active programs, Durango should concentrate on active programs for seniors, with life skills and more passive activities as well.

The other programming area to develop is the nature/environmental program area. With all the focus and attention on sustainability throughout the United States, demand for programs such as home energy conservation, green household practices, community gardening, and green design will grow. Currently, nature programming and environmental

stewardship are not included in the Department's program inventory. Partnership opportunities with other local recreation agencies and non-profit groups may exist.

In addition, Durango can market its services within the 'No Child Left Inside' campaign, which is a national effort to highlight the importance of environmental education. As part of the Federal Government's Stimulus Funds for Education, funds may be available for the development and implementation of environmental literacy plans, and for model environmental education programs. Parks and Recreation agencies can develop partnerships with school districts across the state to accomplish this.

Adventure programming also shows evidence of increasing growth. This includes activities such as kayaking, canoeing, climbing, and mountain biking. These activities fulfill a significant household need, but also contribute to economic benefits to the City through increased tourism.

Existing programs should generally continue. There is a need for continued expansion of preschool, before and after school programs, and summer camps, as these program areas had significant unmet needs in the household survey.

As part of the Master Plan process, the PROS team prepared a priority needs assessment of facilities and programs based on community survey data, community input, and consultant evaluation. Based on all of the analysis, the PROS team recommended core programs include the following:

- Fitness and Wellness Programs
- Gymnastics Programs
- Gametime/Daycare Programs
- Youth Specialty Programs
- Youth Sports Programs
- Adult Specialty Programs
- Adult Sports Programs
- Community/Special Events Programs

This reflects the addition of fitness and wellness activities to the core program area. It does not suggest an absence of existing fitness and wellness programs, but more of a need to have a core focus and importance to the program area.

As mentioned previously, older adult, adventure recreation, and nature related programs may also grow into core programs in the future.

Along with tracking participant interest and participation in various programs, another important attribute to investigate further is to examine reasons why people do not participate in City of Durango Parks and Recreation programs. According to the household survey, 58% of households did not participate in a recreation program during the last year. Focus groups could also assist in finding out more about the root cause of lack of program participation.

7.5 PROGRAM STANDARDS/MEASURES/CUSTOMER REQUIREMENTS

Currently, the Department operates with a variety of program standards throughout all recreation program areas. Within the Recreation Center procedural manual, standards exist for service, telephone procedures, custodial cleaning, uniforms, safety, and handling customer concerns. The manual is an excellent tool to assist with high quality service delivery. Many of these standards should apply consistently to all programs. Examples of these include:

- Instructional quality standards, such as instructor toolkits
- Internal communication standards for part-time and seasonal staff, such as instructors
- Class minimums and maximums
- Staff uniforms
- Signage
- Telephone answering

Staff should also identify customer requirements for core program areas. Again, this is important to emphasize with staff that directly interface with customers. Customer requirements relate to those service and product attributes that are most important to a customer. A core program area should include a listing of approximately five key customer requirements. For example, in a youth gymnastics program, key requirements could include:

- Overall safety of the program
- Instructional quality
- Convenience and ease of registration
- Cost of the program
- Skill development opportunities

Key requirements should be identified by customers and can be included as part of an importance/performance matrix. This determines how important a requirement is and how the Department is performing. Key requirements should also be reinforced in the training process. Additionally, when developing surveys or program evaluations, the survey questions should relate to the key requirements.

In reviewing the program assessment information, there are limited numbers of performance measures used throughout the system to gauge performance. Current measurements include tracking number of participants, surveys, and revenue and expense associated with programs. This information is tracked monthly, quarterly, and annually, in the Annual Report. A robust measurement system generally includes a more comprehensive set of measures, including:

- Customer retention

- Customer satisfaction toward the registration system
- Cost recovery rates by core program area
- Household percentage of program participation
- Percent of programs in introduction and growth stage
- Market penetration by age group
- Program distribution by age group

7.6 PROGRAM SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.6.1 ADULT SOCCER LEAGUE

This program area is targeted toward young adults and adults, ages 18-44. Secondary markets exist for high school and middle aged adults of 45-64 years of age. The program area is in the mature lifecycle. The only similar provider for this activity is in Bayfield, which is 21 miles away. The size of the program has been relatively flat with the number of teams remaining somewhat consistent, between 33 and 39 teams. The program experiences a customer satisfaction rate of 87%, which is an excellent percentage.

Staff currently does a variety of marketing efforts for the program, including the use of the program guide, web site, flyers, email, newspaper, radio, and pre-programmed messages. A newsletter may also be a popular addition. Furthermore, the use of social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook should be considered in the future, as there will be growing interest in creating social networking opportunities for people interested in connecting with others that have a similar interest.

7.6.2 ADULT SOFTBALL

The primary and secondary market areas appeal to the same age segments as adult soccer. Adult softball includes both men's, women's and coed leagues. The similar providers are the Sun Ute Community Center, which is 25 miles away and Bayfield Sports Park, which is 21 miles away. Both of these providers charge much less for team registration than Durango. This is a result of Durango Parks and Recreation having to pay the lease with Fort Lewis College for the use of fields. However, given the geographical distance from other similar providers, this ultimately does not affect registration numbers to any great extent. There are no program cancellations due to lack of registrations. The program could accommodate more teams. The program has an 87% customer satisfaction rate, which is a good rate.

Promotional efforts include the same approaches as adult soccer. Program evaluations and surveys are typically used to determine customer satisfaction. The number of teams has been relatively stable, from 106 teams in 2005 to 106 teams in 2008 with 1,590 participants. In addition, the Department should consider a text messaging service for rainout information for participants through text messages by cell phone or PDAs.

7.6.3 GAMETIME AFTER SCHOOL

Gametime After School programs are offered for elementary and middle school youths, with a primary market focus of elementary aged children. The similar providers include the Boys

and Girls Club, which is located next door, and the 9-R School District which offers an after-school program in seven schools. The Boys and Girls Club offers a lower price for its programs. From a marketing perspective, it is important to differentiate services from similar providers through value propositions. This becomes more important as the program area has been designated as a mature program area. The program area did have a drop-off in number of registrations between 2006 and 2008 from 3,620 to 2,882 registrants, which is a drop of about 20%. Registrant numbers should be closely monitored.

The program enjoys a 97% satisfaction level, which speaks to the quality of the program. The Parks and Recreation Department offers a scholarship program and partners with the Department of Human Services. The scholarship program exists for all other programs as well. As for program promotions, the program area desires to expand marketing approaches through email blasts, public service announcements, and newsletters.

7.6.4 GAMETIME SUMMER

Gametime Summer is priced similarly to its single similar provider, the Boys and Girls Club's summer program. Similar to Gametime After School, the Gametime Summer program is in the mature lifecycle. This program area also has a 97% satisfaction rate, which is excellent. Both Gametime and Gametime Summer programs have excellent brand and image in the community.

Fourteen and fifteen year old former participants are used as program volunteers. This program area also uses an extensive number of partners; seven public partners and two non-profit partners.

7.6.5 RECREATIONAL GYMNASTICS

The Recreational Gymnastics program also has a strong brand and image in Durango. The primary market of the program is geared toward preschool and elementary aged children. Middle and high school students are a secondary market. Program participation has shown consistency with 1,657 participants in 2005, 1,569 in 2006, 1,729 in 2007, and 1,761 in 2008.

The program area has a nice lifecycle distribution, between introductory and take off classes with mature and saturated programs. Customer satisfaction is 90%. This program's greatest challenge is the limitations of the program due to constraints of the Mason Center. Strategically, the Department needs to identify how to best offer sufficiently sized space for this program.

Gymnastics is a program area that is showing growth nationwide due to the Beijing 2008 Olympics and USA Gymnastics' success. With sufficiently sized space, Durango could also offer more programs and host competitions. From a marketing perspective, the program area would like to add email blasts and a newsletter to help promote the program.

7.6.6 GYMNASTICS TEAM

This program area comprises competitive gymnastics and is targeted primarily to elementary school aged children and, secondarily, to middle school students. This program area is a specialized area, rather than a core program area. Similar to recreational

gymnastics, this program area would like to expand its marketing efforts by adding email blasts and newsletters.

7.6.7 ADULT HOCKEY LEAGUES

This is a core program area that has a primary age segment market of 25-44 and 45-64 year olds. The secondary markets are for age segments of 18-24 and the 65+ market. There are no similar providers for this activity. Its growth is restricted only by the ice time limits, as a result of all of the competing demands for ice time in a seasonal rink.

This is a program area that has experienced tremendous growth in the last four years, from 385 participants in 2005 to 1,039 participants in 2008, which is a 170 percent increase.

This program area does not track many measures of performance, aside from registration and revenue and expense numbers. This should expand to include customer satisfaction information. As for marketing of the program, this area would like to add direct mail, email blasts, and newsletters.

7.6.8 LEARN TO SKATE

This program area is geared for youth aged 3-17, although the primary age group is the 6-10 age group. This is another program area having excellent brand and image. There are no similar providers to this program area. During the last four years, the program has remained consistent in registration numbers from 2,039 participants in 2005 to 2,044 participants in 2008.

100% customer satisfaction exists for this program area. Program evaluations and surveys are used to measure satisfaction. This program area would also like to add direct mail, email blasts and newsletters to its promotional mix.

7.6.9 MAGICAL AFTERNOONS

This is a preschool program, offered during nine months of the year. There are no similar providers for this program. This program area has experienced a drop in registration from 178 participants in 2005 to 39 participants in 2008 and is in the mature lifecycle. It may be worthwhile to reposition the program to draw more participants. In the 2008 Summer/Fall cycle, the program is offered just on Tuesday afternoons. A suggestion would be to complete a focus group of parents currently enrolled in the program to see if different times, length of time, or multiple days of the week are worth considering, if space is available. Lost customer research may also offer suggestions for changes and improvements.

7.6.10 SWIM LESSONS

The swim lesson program is a core program geared toward preschool and elementary school aged children, families and a secondary market geared toward middle school students. The Durango Sports Club, five minutes away, and the Sun Ute Community Recreation Center, forty minutes away, are similar providers for this program. According to the lifecycle information provided by staff, preschool levels 1,2,3 are in the take off stage, youth levels 1,2,3 are in the growth stage, and youth levels 4,5,6 are in the mature stage.

This is another program area that has experienced some registration decline over the last four years. There were 911 registrants in 2005 and 731 in 2008, which is a 20 percent drop. It may be beneficial to cross promote the Magical Afternoon program with the Swim Lesson program as a way of building registration in both areas. Based on the lifecycle distribution, it is suggested that retention participation rates are tracked. Knowing these rates will help determine what types of customer loyalty ideas can be implemented in order to build retention.

The program area has a 97% customer satisfaction rate, which is an extremely good performance. Program evaluations, surveys, and comment cards are used to measure satisfaction. The teaching staff is Red Cross certified, and volunteers are used as water safety aids. This program area would like to add email, newsletters and in-house promotions to its promotional mix.

7.6.11 TRAIL SERIES

This is a fast growing program that includes races for hikers/runners on three trail systems. According to the household survey results, this is a significantly important program area and one poised for growth, as long as staffing is sufficient to generate more program growth. The primary age groups are 18-24, 25-44, 45-64, and 65+. The secondary market is geared toward elementary and middle school youth. There are three similar providers for this program area: Durango Motorless Transit, Fort Lewis College, and Three Springs. According to the lifecycle breakdown, the Mountain Park Classic and Town Series are in the take off stage, and the Mother's Day Telegraph and Animas Mountain Mug Run are in the growth stage.

Participation rates in this program area have grown from 76 in 2005 to 275 in 2008, which is a 261% increase. Currently, there are no measures for customer satisfaction and retention, which are measures that should be tracked in the future.

There are volunteers involved in the program, including Durango High School Cross Country, First National Bank and members of the community. Zia Taqueria is a corporate sponsor. This program area would like to add email blasts, paid advertisements, and newsletters to its promotional mix.

Additionally, the Department should continue to offer youth triathlons. This is a program area that is growing regionally and nationally. Youth triathlon activities are the fastest growing market segment of the triathlon market and fits well within the Durango program mix.

7.6.12 YOUTH BASKETBALL

This is a program area geared toward elementary aged youth, grades one through six. There is one similar provider for this program, the Four Corners Youth Basketball program. This is a competitive travel league, which has a different focus than Durango's basketball program. The Youth Basketball program promotes healthy lifestyles by playing sports. Its emphasis is on fun and skill development, not competition.

This program area is designated as a program in decline. Participant numbers have been dropping from 478 in 2005 to 368 in 2008, which is a 23% decline. The Department should conduct lost customer research to determine the root cause of the decline.

Youth basketball uses the 9-R School District gymnasium and is charged \$9.00/hour for its use. Four Corners Materials provides \$3,500 for youth jerseys.

The program area would like to add email blasts and newsletters to its repertoire of promotional efforts. The program area completes surveys, program evaluations, and on-site surveys to measure customer satisfaction. The current customer satisfaction measurement is 100%.

7.6.13 SENIORS

This program area could grow as well from the creation of branding targeted toward older populations, complete with a tag line and logo. As mentioned earlier, rather than identifying older populations as one market, it is important to differentiate between “active adult” and senior programs. Some organizations such as Ft. Collins, Colorado Arlington Heights, Illinois, and Arlington, Texas have separate marketing pieces and brochures targeted to this growing market.

7.6.14 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

Program growth areas could include adventure sports and extreme sports market. As nationwide trends have shown, this is a fast growing market and is poised for even greater growth in the times to come. Other opportunities include the senior market for softball, volleyball and other activities.

There may be ancillary cross-marketing opportunities in combination with other programs such as youth yoga, nutrition, personal fitness training, etc. Given the success of the various sports leagues, it would also be beneficial to promote the different leagues and tournaments on a system-wide scale.

Keeping in mind the high number of youth events, email blasts and web promotions through MySpace/Facebook profiles is an important option to consider. The teen population is a difficult age segment to target for programs. One idea for connecting with these youth is to offer volunteer opportunities for sustainability initiatives. Younger generations have increased awareness and willingness to volunteer in environmental stewardship and sustainability initiatives.

Special populations should have more importance in the program inventory. The need for more attention to special populations occurred during the public input process. In addition, there were a significant percentage of households who felt there is unmet need for this program area. A specific needs assessment process for people with special needs may be a starting point for program expansion. Special populations generally attract partners and corporate sponsors. A separate foundation may be helpful as well in increasing funding sources.

7.7 PRICING AND COST RECOVERY

There are no non-resident fees due to an agreement with La Plata County for the use of the Fairgrounds for the Recreation Center. During the community input phase of the Master Plan, there was some sentiment for having non-resident fees. This should be researched further. One way of doing this is by providing 'resident discounts' instead of non-resident fees. This also creates a positive sentiment in the local users' minds as they see value for their tax payer money.

The senior age is 60 for reduced fees at the Recreation Center and Chapman Hill. Youth also receive reduced fees for these same facilities.

The Recreation Division overall has a cost recovery goal of 80%. For the last six years the Recreation Center has had an average cost recovery of 82% of direct costs. This cost recovery percentage exceeds the normal cost recovery of Colorado indoor recreation centers.

Recreation Division programs have increased their cost recovery from 60% in 2002 to 81% in 2007 and 78% in 2008, which is excellent performance. It may be helpful to have identified cost recovery rates for core program areas in order to establish accountability for financial performance, as well as serve as an indicator of more individual performance. Currently no revenue policy is in place. A policy assists staff in the establishment of fees that are appropriate to each program and service, and provides a framework for pricing. In the absence of a revenue policy, staff tends to use competitive pricing as the sole pricing criterion.

Parks and Recreation currently follows a 70/30 contractual split when the contractor works in City facilities and PROS recommends that it should be closer to 60/40.

7.8 STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Scholarships have grown from \$7,368 in 2003 to \$21,987 in 2008, which is approximately a 200% increase. The County contributes equally to the provision of scholarships. There may be opportunity to grow these numbers even more with the addition of corporate donations, or a dollar check-off for program registrations.

The corporate support area should be an area of emphasis for the Department. This area suggests room for growth. The framework for a strategic development of corporate support includes developing and implementing sustainable strategies for increasing revenue from public-private partnerships. Some park and recreation agencies have a full-time staff person dedicated toward this area of responsibility. While Durango may not be a large enough Department to staff this with a full-time person, there should be at least part-time or contractual hours dedicated to this area.

7.9 SERVICE SYSTEM REVIEW

The relationship between the service delivery process and program revenues is of critical importance. Understanding this important dynamic, PROS Consulting, LLC reviewed the service system and has recommendations to build on the service framework that already

exists in the Department. As noted in the community needs assessment survey, Parks and Recreation currently experiences a high level of customer satisfaction. Therefore, this section is intended to move the agency to a higher level of sophistication in its service approaches.

It is important for Durango Parks and Recreation to develop an overall system in which all program areas consistently apply similar service standards. A systems approach could be strengthened. This is first and foremost in working on continuously improving overall service excellence. One method to achieve this is to reinforce established standards for customer satisfaction. This can be accomplished through a cross functional 'voice of the customer' team. A cross functional team's role is to be responsible for the overall service system of the Department.

ISO 9000:2001 (International Standards Organization that develops standards for various industries worldwide) includes four important components in developing an overall excellent customer satisfaction system. These four components include:

- Top management commitment
- On-going needs assessment of customers
- Overall customer satisfaction system
- Overall customer dissatisfaction system

Top management commitment is demonstrated by allocating resources to continuously improving services, such as technology, registration system improvements, staffing to support excellent service, development of overall service training, and recognizing staff for excellent service. Furthermore, top management should be connected to data regarding customer satisfaction. This can be achieved by including customer feedback as a regular discussion item in staff meetings.

The needs assessment, as part of the Master Plan, is a good starting point in determining customer needs. This formalized approach should be completed every five to seven years. In the interim years, it is helpful to undertake less formal approaches in determining customer needs by core program areas through program evaluations, consumer advisory panels, lost customer research, and focus groups. Good service systems identify future customer needs as well as current needs. This should be a future goal of the Department.

As for customer satisfaction, it is suggested to have a system-wide approach to measuring satisfaction. Currently, most program staff complete satisfaction surveys and program evaluations on an annual basis. Most satisfaction rates range from the middle 80's to upper 90's percentile of satisfaction. The target should be to grow that number to 90%. It is also worth tracking highly satisfied customers, rather than all merely satisfied customers. Highly satisfied customers or "apostles" have a much greater propensity toward repurchasing and advocating services. A rate of over 50% of highly satisfied customers is desired.

In addition to surveys and program evaluations, some program areas use on-site surveys or comment cards as other methods of determining customer satisfaction. Systems for measuring satisfaction should be consistent across all program areas. There should also be a standardized process in place to ensure follow-up on data provided from survey and program evaluation results. Many times organizations do a good job capturing information,

but there is no effort to close the loop in analyzing, responding to customer about improvements being made, and verifying the improvements have a positive effect on program registrations.

Customer satisfaction rates should be included as part of a performance measurement system. Results should be shared with City Management, Councilors, boards and commissions, staff, and the public. Results should be posted on the web and used as part of testimonials to promote programs. It is important to ensure that the evaluation criteria match the key customer requirements that should be established for each program area.

One additional suggestion for enhancing the customer satisfaction process is to use the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) score criteria, developed at the University of Michigan. Their customer satisfaction index includes three overall satisfaction scores:

- How satisfied are customers with the Department?
- How likely is the customer to repurchase?
- How likely is it that the customer will refer the service to a friend?

The averages of all three percentages are then combined into one overall score. These questions should be included on all surveys and program evaluations. Survey questions need to correlate with the most important customer requirements. No standardized process exists for determining customer requirements. The most effective method to determine important customer requirements is through interviews/focus groups with customers. Staff input into the process is valuable as well; particularly staff who interface with customers on a regular basis.

Good satisfaction measurement systems include performing additional methods beyond surveying and program evaluations. It is suggested that the Department look at a variety of methods in measuring satisfaction as well as formalizing processes mentioned above. This includes focus groups, lost customer research, transactional surveys, mystery shopping, customer interviews, and trailer calling. Transactional surveys are on-the spot surveys, completed at the time of the service. These are particularly useful at special event activities.

Mystery shopping involves hiring objective users of services to “shop” Durango parks and recreation services. Mystery shopping firms exist, or another less expensive option is to use trained volunteers. The shoppers report back to management about the quality of their experience. Trailer calling involves contacting program participants after the first couple of weeks of classes are held. This provides just-in-time feedback in the event any adjustments are needed to the program. This feedback is provided to the instructor, and adjustments can be made immediately to improve the program.

The last component of excellent standards for customer satisfaction is the development of a system-wide approach to handling customer dissatisfaction. Standards do exist for handling complaints and concerns. A database tracking all of the inquiries or comments about needed improvements should be created. This information should be reviewed on a quarterly basis by the senior management team. Consistent suggestions for improvements or dissatisfaction areas should become a focus for the following year’s strategic objectives.

In addition, the Department should consider ways to build customer loyalty. Knowing how loyal customers are is an extremely important indicator of success. There should be a

process that identifies how to reward frequent and loyal customers. The goal should be to increase the percentage of existing customers that participate in more than one program a year. This can be accomplished by developing a “frequent flyer” type of program that awards points for recreation purchases, or developing partnerships with nearby retailers and giving frequent guest gift cards. Additionally, 69% of program participants learn about programs and activities through their friends and neighbors, which is a healthy percentage. Encouraging discounts by bringing a friend may be another means of increasing participation.

The final area of consideration is to develop an audit system to verify that specifications are being met by staff. The audit system could be performed by secret shoppers or staff members who do not have direct responsibility for an audited area. Audits can be as simple as a listing on a check list of important service requirements.

7.10 MARKETING APPROACHES

This section reviews the marketing approaches of the City of Durango Parks and Recreation Department. Included in this analysis is a review of the program guide and other marketing approaches, branding and image, Web site review, corporate support, and public relations.

The program guide is mailed twice a year to the RecTrac data base. Printed brochures in the Summer/Fall 2008 guide included a total of 9,800 guides and 7,049 mailed to households in the database. One barrier to participation in programs may result from households not receiving the program guide as a result of not being a current participant. Since newspaper readership is so high, it is important to publish notices of upcoming program sessions in newspapers and directing residents to the Web site.

There are several examples of park and recreation agencies across the United States that have found success in marketing programs through the use of ‘stimulus’ packaging of programs and services. There may be opportunity to cross market and bundle program and facility offerings in more affordable ways to help those who are experiencing financial problems in the current economic challenging times.

Currently, the Department spends about 1.3% of its Recreation operating budget on marketing. The Durango Community Recreation Center spends less than 1% of its budget on marketing. This is below the general recommendation of the PROS Team, in which 4% of the operating budget should be dedicated toward marketing. This is based on a national inventory of best-in-class providers of recreation services. However, it should be noted that most of Durango’s programs are full. Increased marketing may only result in an even higher percentage of customers not being able to be accommodated due to lack of space. However, it may be possible to manage program scheduling to offer some in - demand programs in non-prime time slots as well for those who are flexible and can make the shift. As a way to incentivize them, those non-prime time programs could be offered at a cheaper rate.

Marketing can also help with overall brand and image of the Department by creating visibility and leadership in important areas of emphasis, such as sustainability practices, emphasis on improving community fitness and wellness, and helping to combat childhood obesity.

Marketing needs to move from being reactive and random in its approaches to developing a more strategic focus. Marketing should align itself with the Master Plan. In addition, marketing becomes more strategic and less reactive as a result of developing an overall marketing plan. This plan should include major strategic themes for marketing support in the future. Individual core program and facility business plans should also exist, in alignment with a marketing plan.

7.11 WEBSITE REVIEW

The following section of the Plan is a brief summary of the Website, its strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. On the home page, there are benefits listed, which is good practice.

The information on the Website is easy to navigate and follow. On the home page, it is easy to find the information desired. It is now common practice to have the program guide included in the Website and allow for customer convenience in registering on-line. Durango Parks and Recreation Department has a good on-line registration process in place. The link on the City's home page for people looking to register for recreation programs is a good idea. The suggestion for improvement includes more frequent updates, providing more visually dynamic information, and including more information on the web, particularly agency information.

Users could also be asked to send pictures from their time at the parks, programs and facilities and there could be a monthly or a quarterly contest for best picture. This would also build advocacy, encourage greater click throughs on the Website and make it a more interactive site.

The staff listing and email contacts for the Department are good. There are many agencies that make it difficult to find contact information. Durango makes it easy to find staff, making the organization more transparent.

It is easy to find the facilities, parks, and recreation program listing on the home page of the Parks and Recreation Website. Consideration should be given to developing virtual tours of the facilities, which would make the site more dynamic. An example is the ability of a potential rental customer to be able to view rooms available for reservations. This may result in increased revenues. Eventually room reservations should be accommodated online.

The 2001 Parks, Open Space and Trails Master Plan was hard to find on the City's Web site. The current Master Plan document should have a link on the home page. Other agency information would be beneficial to have linked on the home page, including budget information, results of customer satisfaction, and the Annual Report.

The listing of current events each year is important to have. Parks and recreation agencies frequently receive requests for calendar of events. Durango Parks and Recreation recognized this as a need and is probably well received by the residents.

It may also be helpful to include a brief educational review of maintenance practices on the website. Residents have an interest in knowing the environmental practices the Department uses. Having information on the web may better inform users of the significant demands and challenges the parks staff face in their daily tasks.

Party service opportunities are listed according to facility locations. Many agencies centralize this service as it usually is a service area with high demands from the public. Rather than having parties listed under facility headings, there may be some benefit in having a party page.

A process should be put into place to constantly assess the Website, as this is the first introduction of the agency to many potential customers. An assessment should include a review of the following items:

- Content
- Maintainability
- Accessibility
- Customer usage
- Internal support

A Website assessment should be completed at least annually. The assessment should include external customer feedback. In addition, it is helpful to have recreation program staff review the site and provide suggestions in areas of improvement, based on their use of the site and suggestions they hear from customers.