

# Division of Recreation and Parks

## History

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The year was 1934, and *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* was the best selling novel. Americans were enjoying their first Eskimo Pie while stamps cost 3¢, and a new car would set you back \$625. The Depression was still a fact of life, and Henrico County offered organized summer recreation programs for the first time at three schools. In those days files were kept in a Campbell's soup box. A succession of departments was in charge of the part-time recreation programs until 1969 when the Board of Supervisors created the Division of Recreation and Parks. Since then, the Division has become known for its well-organized and diversified recreation and parks programs.

As the Division grew, the County of Henrico Board of Supervisors saw the need for more citizen participation and established two citizen advisory boards. The Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission was created in 1976. Two members from each of the five magisterial districts and one representative from the Board of Supervisors make up the Commission. The Director of Recreation and Parks and a representative from the County of Henrico School Board serve in an ex officio capacity.

The Historic Preservation Advisory Committee was created in 1990 and advises the Board of Supervisors on the identification, interpretation, rehabilitation, protection, and preservation of historical and cultural resources in the County. Two members from each of the five magisterial districts and one representative from the Board of Supervisors serve on this Committee.

Today, the Henrico Division of Recreation and Parks is a \$17.2 million dollar operation that continues to flourish. The Division has 172 full-time and up to 358 part-time seasonal employees. Several sections all come together to accomplish the Division's goals including Administration, Recreation Services, and Park Services.

Administration oversees all personnel and fiscal management of the Division. Business; park planning, development, and construction; marketing and publicity; and technology services all fall under this section.

Recreation Services manages a variety of community recreational programs for all ages, as well as providing therapeutic recreation programs for individuals with disabilities. The group oversees multiple recreation and community centers, historic sites, as well as Henrico Theatre, Three Lakes Nature Center and Aquarium, Meadow Farm Museum, Dabbs House Museum, and the Henrico Tourist Information Center. This section also includes tourism efforts for Henrico County including sports tournaments.

With the goal of providing a safe and clean environment in mind, employees of the Park Services section maintain the County's 3,900+ acres of parkland, 171 athletic fields, and 57 playground units.

## **Programs**

All ages, from the tiniest tots to seniors, will find a Division program that is just right for them. Preschoolers enjoy Play Pals, kid-sized events, and classes in arts and crafts, nature and outdoors, dance, and sports. School-aged children can choose from an array of programs including dance and fitness, arts and crafts, gardening and other fun classes. During the summer, the Division operates a Summer Blast Camp for youth at various elementary schools and recreation and community centers throughout the County and day camps at Crump Park, Meadow Farm, Three Lakes Park, Dorey Park, and The Cultural Arts Center at Glen Allen. There are more than 11,500 Summer Blast and Teen Scene enrollments each summer. Teens and adults may sign up for classes in visual arts, guitar, dance, fitness, nature and outdoors, home and garden, and other interest areas.

The therapeutic recreation program serves individuals with disabilities by offering a variety of specialized programs. Therapeutic programs include craft classes, leisure clubs, music, fitness. These programs provide opportunities for recreational and leisure skill building for preschoolers, youth, and adults. A summer recreation program for individuals with disabilities has been serving County residents for over 35 years.

Theater, music, and dance programs are very popular every year. The Henrico Theatre Company, formed in 1978, produces five shows a year. In addition, Henrico Recreation and Parks offers a theater group for teens and the On-the-Air Radio Players recreate radio's golden age at several shows each year. For music lovers, the Division sponsors a family concert series and a big band performance by The Continentals. Those who enjoy making music themselves may choose from two community bands and a community chorus. Henrico Theatre hosts monthly movies "on the big screen" as well as concerts and other performances.

Sports programs continue to grow as we work with nearly 100 youth and adult sports associations. Participants play volleyball, basketball, softball, soccer, baseball, cricket and rugby (and more) at both indoor and outdoor locations throughout the County.

Many special events are held each year at various locations. Some of the most popular are the Fourth of July Celebration and Harvest Festival. Other annual special events include KidFest, Kite Day, and Monster Mash. This section works in cooperation with many civic organizations and groups in the development and implementation of community events including Glen Allen Day, Varina Day, and Parade of Lights.

## **Parks & Facilities**

In 1977, Henrico County purchased the Hermitage Country Club, which became Belmont Golf Course and Recreation Center. Albert Warren Tillenghast, one of the best course architects of his time, designed the course in 1916. The course was redesigned in 1927 by Donald Ross and was the host of the 1949 PGA championship won by Sam Snead. The starter house was completed in 1991 housing a pro shop and snack bar. In 2010, Belmont started a customer loyalty program and offered online tee times. In 2009-2010, approximately 32,000 rounds of golf were played on the course. As the first recreation center, Belmont became home to the first senior club "Belmont Travelers" and housed the new Henrico Theater Company. Today, Belmont continues to be a

popular place for recreation classes, programs, events and private rentals throughout the year.

1977 was also the year that Henrico citizen's passed the first Open Space Parks Bond Referendum, which opened the doors for the Division of Recreation and Parks to begin to grow and flourish. Thanks to funds from this bond referendum, Henrico's park system began in 1980 with the opening of Cheswick Park. Next came Meadow Farm Museum and Crump Park, which hosted the first Old-Fashioned Fourth of July Celebration in 1981 and the first Harvest Festival Celebration in 1983. Meadow Farm Museum is a living history museum depicting middle class rural life in the 1860s. Donated in 1975, the county completed sensitive restoration in the late 1970s to preserve and interpret Meadow Farm as a historic house museum. In 2004, damage from Hurricane Isabel presented the County an opportunity to restore the original house and to re-examine documents pertaining to the original house construction. As one of the last remaining 19<sup>th</sup>-century farms in Henrico County, Meadow Farm is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Costumed interpreters provide insight into the lives of Dr. John Mosby Sheppard, the owner of Meadow Farm, and his family. Meadow Farm continues to host the Old-Fashioned Fourth of July Celebration, Harvest Festival, and a variety of living history programs such as Civil War Days and Sheep to Shawl.

Several additional parks were opened in the early 1980s including Robinson Park, Echo Lake Park, Dorey Park and Hidden Creek Park. Dorey Park is one of the largest parks in Henrico and now contains approximately five miles of trails designed for horseback riding and a horse ring. Also featured at this park is the Dorey Disc Golf Course. This unique facility opened in 1996 and was built largely through the efforts of volunteers. Two of the more recent construction projects at Dorey Park include two irrigated and lit Bermuda sod soccer fields with a concession building and four state-of-the-art irrigated and lit Bermuda sod youth baseball fields with a youth baseball concession stand.

In 1987, Three Lakes Park, Deep Run Park, and Crump Park were all officially dedicated. Each of these three parks attracts many visitors every year. Nearly 30 years later, the Division operates over 33 parks. Park visitation in the Division's 11 major park sites with traffic counters totaled 4 million visitors in FY 2009-10.

In addition to new parks, the '80s were also the beginning for the Holly Jolly Celebration for Preschoolers, the Christmas in September Arts and Crafts Show at Dorey Park, Henrico Theater Company's One-Act Competition, Henrico's Two Ball Scramble (Golf) Tournament, and the Bass Masters Classic held at Deep Bottom Boat Landing. The Division also opened its Central Maintenance Facility and the Historical Library, Archives, and Collection Storage Facility at the Human Services Building. The decade ended with the passage of another Parks Bond Referendum in 1989.

Laurel Skate Park opened in 1990 becoming a popular place among skateboarders, in-line skaters, and BMX/Freestyle bikers. The park is open to all ages, and admission is free. It features freestyle and street skate areas, a half-pipe, and a combination bowl. In the spring of 2000, an additional 6,700 square feet was added to the free skate area along with ramps and rails. Each year, the skaters celebrate at the Division's Skater Appreciation Night, which later became X-Festival.

The 1989 bond referendum provided the money to renovate a 1920s dairy barn in Dorey Park. Dorey Recreation Center opened in 1991 and features a multipurpose room, arts and crafts room, activity room, kitchen, and two conference rooms. The center is used for classes, club meetings, special events, and private rental.

The bond referendum also funded the construction of Three Lakes Nature Center and Aquarium which was completed in 1992. The center features a 50,000-gallon outdoor aquarium and many hands-on exhibits exploring the fish, plant, and animal life of this area. The center offers a variety of nature classes and is available to area schools for field trips. An expansion of the nature center opened in January 1999 adding classrooms, an animal holding area, in-wall displays, and office space. Then in 2004, flooding from Tropical Storm Gaston caused a devastating loss of all of the exhibits and mechanical systems. The center was basically gutted and redesigned. The architects and exhibit designers were able to utilize the existing space more efficiently. During the 2010 calendar year, Three Lakes Nature Center and Aquarium ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in visitation at public attractions in the metro region.

In 1996, the 1902 Deep Run Schoolhouse was in danger of being demolished. It was donated to the County and moved to its present location at Short Pump Park. The two-room schoolhouse was renovated and now houses exhibits interpreting early 19<sup>th</sup>-century education and provides meeting space for the community.

Another historic site owned and operated by the Division is Spring Park. It won the Virginia Recreation and Park Society's 1998 Best New Facility Award. This site interprets two elements of historical significance. The first is an important event in African-American history that took place at Young's Spring, adjacent to the site. The spring was a local gathering place for slaves and their families and was the location of many meetings in which Gabriel, a slave of Thomas Prosser, planned a slave rebellion for August 30, 1800. Although Gabriel's Rebellion failed due to sudden torrential thunderstorms, the efforts of early freedom fighters have been recognized and the site preserved through interpretation for the citizens of Henrico County, the State of Virginia, and the nation. The site's second element of significance is the presence of a 1890s granite springhouse that once housed mineral waters. Spring Park was referred to in a 1901 advertisement as an amenity of one of Richmond's earliest suburbs.

A Cultural Arts Foundation was established in 1997 and in 1999 The Cultural Arts Center at Glen Allen opened, providing a home for cultural arts programming in Henrico County. Dance studios, galleries, and an acoustically perfect auditorium make the Center a prime destination for art lovers. The Center is owned by Henrico County and is managed and operated by The Cultural Arts Center at Glen Allen Foundation. The Center is now home to Henrico Theatre Company, Henrico Teen Theatre Company, CenterStage camp, and hosts several of our performance groups.

More new sites from the 1990s include the opening of Springfield Park, Duncroft/Castle Point Park, RF&P Park, Meadow Farm Orientation Center, Dorey Park's Disc Golf Course, and Confederate Hills Recreation Center. Some additional highlights include the start of the Employee Golf League, Hook a Kid on Golf, Senior Theater Company, Henrico Readers Theater (later known as On-the-Air Radio Players),

Urban Fishing Program at Dorey, Bass Masters Top 100 at Osborne Boat Landing, and “Update of the Inventory of Early Architecture and Historical Sites” being published.

Another bond referendum was held in 2000 with funds totaling \$16,000,000. This funded projects like Meadowview Park, Walkerton Tavern, Deep Run Recreation Center, and Osborne Park. Many dedications were held in the early 2000s including Courtney Road Service Station, Forest Lodge, Antioch School Community Center—all with historic significance, and Twin Hickory Recreation Center—a popular site for the Division’s preschoolers.

Deep Run Recreation Center opened to the public in December of 2005. This 24,000 square foot center located in Deep Run Park includes rooms for rentals, meetings, and classes as well as a large ballroom and gymnasium. A full catering kitchen and a large outdoor patio are among its many features.

Walkerton Tavern, one of the County’s renovated historic facilities, won the Virginia Recreation and Park Society’s 2006 Best New Renovation/Addition Award for a locality with a population over 150,000. This award-winning facility was originally constructed in 1825 for John Walker as an inn that served travelers along Mountain Road. It is architecturally notable for its hinged, swinging, and two-segment partition that was used to enlarge an upstairs room to accommodate guests. This specialty center features intimate rooms furnished with period reproductions, a full catering kitchen, and landscaped grounds that include a unique gazebo and other period outbuildings.

The 2005 bond referendum totaled \$22,400,000 and funded projects like The Glen Allen Stadium at RF & P Park, the Eastern Henrico Recreation Center that will open in the fall 2011, Short Pump Park expansion, and the renovation of Henrico Theatre.

RF&P Park, located in Crump Park, is a baseball/softball and football athletic facility that is now home to The Glen Allen Stadium at RF&P Park. Built to invoke the architecture of early baseball fields, the Division incorporated a railroad theme, which includes restored railroad cars. The irrigated and under-drained field provides permanent covered seating for over 600 people. The \$4 million facility opened in March 2007 and was the host of the 2007 Babe Ruth Baseball 14-year-old World Series. In 2008, the stadium was selected as a winner of a NACPRO (National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials) Award and in 2010 was named Baseball Field of the Year (Schools and Parks level) by the Sports Turf Managers Association. The site is privileged to again host the Babe Ruth World Series in 2011.

2007 was also the year the Division celebrated the opening of The Armour House & Gardens at Meadowview Park, Clarke-Palmore House Museum, Henrico Theatre, and the re-opening of Three Lakes Nature Center.

Built in 1915 and 1918, the Armour House and Gardens at Meadowview Park are located directly behind Arthur Ashe Elementary School. This Victorian-style home is rich in Henrico family history. The surrounding property boasts a scenic walking trail, tennis courts, gardens, a flowing fountain surrounded by arbors with blooming vines, and children’s gardens and play areas. The Armour House offers a variety of classes specializing in gardening and crafts and is available for rent.

The Clarke-Palmore House Museum is located high atop historic Marion Hill in Henrico County. The Museum interprets the story of the Palmore family who lived on a small farm during the Great Depression. Built in stages, beginning in 1819, the Clarke-Palmore House originally belonged to John Clarke. His family later donated the house and its 12 acres to the County of Henrico to be preserved as a museum. The Museum is open for special programs and can be toured by appointment.

Henrico Theatre, located in Highland Springs, originally opened as a movie palace on April 25, 1938. Tickets were \$0.25 for adults and \$0.10 for children. The theatre was designated as a bomb shelter during World War II and was open for 61 years as a movie theatre. Henrico Theatre is included in Henrico County's Inventory of Early Architecture as a great example of 1920s/30s art deco design and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Henrico County purchased the building in 1999. The Theatre is available for rentals and also hosts a variety of arts programming including music, dance, theatre, children's programming, and film. This facility was selected as a 2008 Virginia Recreation and Park Society (VRPS) Award winner in the Best New Renovation/Addition category (for a population greater than 150,000).

In 2008, Dabbs House was transformed into a museum. Built in the 1820s, the original two-room dwelling was known as High Meadow. General Lee established the house as a temporary field headquarters in June 1862. In 1883, Henrico County purchased the property to use as an almshouse for the poor. Dabbs House later became the Henrico police headquarters from 1941-2005. The Dabbs House Museum now has office space, a timeline of the history of the building, and displays of General Lee's headquarters. The museum is open several days a week for tours.

2009 was an award winning year for the Division. Recreation and Parks was honored with three Achievement Awards from the National Association of Counties (NACo). The 2009 award winning programs were "AHA Heartsaver First Aid, CPR, and AED Certification Initiative," "Event Management...the ICS Way," and "Playground Replacement and Accessibility/Inclusion Initiative."

Thanks to the Playground Replacement and Accessibility Initiative, several playgrounds were added or upgraded between 2008 and 2010. As equipment is replaced and updated, the playgrounds not only meet standards, but exceed them when it comes to standards for accessibility and inclusion at our playgrounds. A greater understanding of the needs of children of all abilities has been met, and all children (with or without) disabilities are having a great time playing together at our parks. Parks that first received upgrades include Duncroft/Castle Point Park, Highland Gardens, Meadowview, Robinson, and Springfield. Three Lakes Park, Antioch, Dorey, Twin Hickory, Deep Run, and Sandston also received new equipment during this time.

The Division also recently dedicated Hunton Community Center and the Henrico County Tourist Information Center. The Tourist Information Center is located in Dabbs House Museum. The Center offers travelers information about the County's historical and cultural opportunities. In addition to the Dabbs House history video regularly shown, the center will be able to broadcast other Henrico-produced history videos on demand. To commemorate the 400th anniversary of Henrico County, visitors can view a timeline of County events from 1611 to the present.

During 2011 and the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Henrico County, the Division opened the Eastern Henrico Recreation Center. This new facility houses fitness space, a gymnasium, small and large classrooms, activity spaces, and administration offices. The 24-acre site also includes a football field, track, multipurpose field, concession building, large shelter and restroom buildings.

Also in 2011, the Virginia Randolph Museum, the home economics cottage for the Virginia Randolph Training Center, was renovated and re-opened as a museum. The site is dedicated to preserving the legacy of renowned Henrico County educator Virginia E. Randolph.

Late in 2012, Elko Community Center also received a good deal of renovation work. This neighborhood facility was re-opened as a community center that is utilized for programs and a rental space.

In an effort to boost tourism in Henrico County, a tourism section was added to the Division in 2012. An official launch of the "Visit Henrico County" campaign was held in 2013 to attract leisure travelers, as well as youth and adult recreational sports tournaments. Visitors can plan their trip to the area by utilizing the [visithenrico.com](http://visithenrico.com) website and app. Over the past few years, this group has assisted in hosting large scale sporting tournaments and a multi-day civil war reenactment.

Renovated in 2013, Highland Springs Community Center received a whole new look to make this the perfect rental facility for a small group or club event.

2014 was an exciting year for park openings. The first phase of Brook Road Neighborhood Park was dedicated in May with a master plan for future additions and features. Twin Hickory Park opened in July 2014. Park features include walking trails, open play areas, multi-purpose field, landscaping, irrigation, a picnic shelter with restrooms, a playground for ages 2-5 and one for ages 6-12. The most unique characteristic of the park is the "sprayground," a small, whimsical, zero-depth water play feature intended for children 12 or under with adult supervision.

As Henrico County continues to grow, the future will bring more quality parks and facilities for its citizens to enjoy. The growth and development of Henrico County will allow the Division of Recreation and Parks to continue to provide the best parks and recreation facilities in central Virginia.