
WAUKEGAN PARK DISTRICT

PRESS RELEASE

Waukegan History Museum Recognized with Two Awards of Excellence from the Illinois Association of Museums

Waukegan, Illinois (February 5, 2021) – The Waukegan History Museum was recognized with two Awards of Excellence by the Illinois Association of Museums (IAM) at the IAM Annual Conference. The Awards of Excellence honored the Waukegan History Museum’s History Education Outreach Program and COVID-19 Response. An Award of Excellence recognizes work of excellent quality and that uses available resources well, is creative, and meets professional standards.

The Waukegan History Museum is operated by the Waukegan Park District and Waukegan Historical Society, and is the repository for all of Waukegan’s rich history.

The History Education Outreach Program evolved in 2008 with approximately 90 programs a year, reaching over 2,300 students in Waukegan Public Schools. In 2011, the program expanded with walking tours of Downtown Waukegan. The walking tours served as a capstone for the students, seeing sites and locations that they learned about throughout the academic year. Since 2017, the program has grown to approximately 240 programs a year, reaching over 8,600 students in the school district.

The Waukegan Historical Society was gifted an exhibit from the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History called “Abraham Lincoln: A Man of His Time, A Man for All Times” in 2018. This exhibit was integrated into the History Education Outreach Program as an enhancement to the field trips. In partnership with Waukegan Public Schools, the Waukegan History Museum hosted nearly every fourth-grade class in the school district between 2018 and 2020 to see the exhibit at no cost.

Due to the pandemic, the Waukegan History Museum moved the History Education Outreach Program to a virtual platform, substantially changing how information is shared with the public. Many of the initial programs were featured on Facebook and in remote presentations to classrooms. Eventually, the Waukegan History Museum Companion App was created to host all the digital history information. The app was developed to offer self-guided walking tours to students and the public as a response to the ongoing pandemic. Additionally, with the cancellation of the annual Oakwood Cemetery Walk, staff created videos to highlight certain aspects of the cemetery’s history, which are featured on the app. The programs are led by Ty Rohrer, Manager of Cultural Arts, and Bryan Escobar, Arts and History Specialist, of the Waukegan Park District.

Jeremiah Johnson, President of the Waukegan Park District Board of Commissioners, stated, “The Waukegan History Museum has used innovative ways to present historic information to students and the public. The digital platforms used for history lessons and programs have transformed how the community interacts with local history. The awards are well deserved!”

Jay Lerner, Executive Director of the Waukegan Park District, stated, “The awards from the Illinois Association of Museums are a reflection of the Waukegan History Museum’s exemplary outreach efforts to share the rich history of Waukegan with individuals of all ages. We’re proud to partner with the Waukegan Historical Society to provide such a valuable history resource for our community.”

Josh Bill, President of the Waukegan Historical Society, stated “We are honored to receive these prestigious awards and are proud of the staff and volunteers who work tirelessly to engage Waukegan students in the rich history of our city. We are excited to continue expanding our outreach programming in the years to come.”

Jackie Spencer and Joye Crum, third-grade teachers at Andrew Cooke Magnet Elementary School in Waukegan, stated, “We are grateful for the Waukegan History Museum presentations that brought history to life and connected students to the world around us. During remote learning they adapted their program to continue to support our students.”

About the Waukegan Park District

Established on December 26, 1916, the district has 50 properties and more than 740 acres of land, including the 18-hole Bonnie Brook and 9-hole Greenshire Golf Courses. Properties are managed to the highest environmental and conservation standards. Facilities operated by the district include the Field House Sports, Fitness and Aquatics Center, the Jack Benny Center for the Arts, the Waukegan’s Greg Petry SportsPark, the Waukegan Skate Park, the Waukegan BMX Track, recreational centers, disc golf course, dog exercise area and agility course, outdoor sports fields, picnic areas, playgrounds, splash pads, and sports courts including basketball, tennis and pickleball. A full range of programs and services are offered year-round for all ages, from infants to seniors as well as special needs populations. Healthy lifestyles, wellness initiatives, and a connection with the outdoors and nature are integrated throughout programs, services, and special events. Cultural events are provided by the Waukegan Symphony Orchestra and Concert Chorus, and the Waukegan History Museum. There is something for everyone! The District is a member of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD), and Illinois Park and Recreation Association (IPRA). The District employs 63 full-time and over 230 part-time, seasonal, and temporary employees and is recognized by the IPRA as an Exceptional Workplace. Accreditation is maintained from the NRPA Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA), Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD) Distinguished Agency Accreditation and Park District Risk Management Agency (PDRMA). The District has received Government Finance Officer Association awards for Distinguished Budget Presentation and Certificate for Excellence in Financial Reporting for eight consecutive years. The District was awarded the NRPA National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management in 2013 and named a NRPA Gold Medal Finalist in 2012, 2013, and 2019.

About the Waukegan Historical Society

The Society is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit that was established in 1968. For the past 50 years the Society has promoted Waukegan's history through education programs, scholarship, exhibits, and events. The Society operates, in partnership with the Waukegan Park District, the Waukegan History Museum and the Raymond Research Library and Archives. School outreach is a priority of the Society. In the past five years, over 700 free programs on Waukegan's history have been presented in the schools to over 22,000 students. The Society supports student scholarship in history. Over 1,600 high school students from Waukegan and the surrounding communities have utilized the Society's Library and Archives for the Chicago Metro History Fair, with several projects advancing to the National History Day competition. For the past two years, the Society has received awards from the Illinois State Historical Society for its innovative exhibits.

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