

Honoring Terry Jennings

HEART of the PARK

Barrington Park District's Resolute Leader

THROUGHOUT THE LAST three decades, the Barrington Park District has grown from a modest and quaint hang-out place to a remarkable portfolio of assets that together function as a monolith of goodness. When you meet Terry Jennings, its stalwart and visionary executive director of 30 years, you sense that behind her crystal-clear blue eyes and beneath her calm and gentle demeanor is a deeply passionate, devoted, and highly intelligent public servant. She makes her job look easy. Perhaps that's because she doesn't go alone. "There is no I. Just we."

Jennings knows how to connect with "everyone" and has keenly listened to people from all sectors, even the nay-sayers, and brought them together to build a cohesive and well-thought-out, multi-award-winning and elite park district. The central forces Jennings has harvested to fruition belong to the people—because through five consecutive and successful voter referendums—she has assembled steering committees, listened to residents' wishes, done her homework and site-visits, and built first-class boards of commissioners. That's leadership at its core.

INVESTING IN HEALTHY LIVES

As a manager entrusted with running the Barrington Park District, (or the "Park," as she calls it), Jennings oversees three large properties—Langendorf Park, which is under a major facilities overhaul and expansion (the newer Splash Pad remains in place); Citizens Park, 45 acres of mostly open spaces and social and sports facilities; and Ron Beese Park, which features a playground and numerous ballfields that most school children will have played on themselves, or cheered their team. There are also the

(Continued next page)

Terry Jennings has served as executive director of the Barrington Park District for 30 years.



Columbus and Concord-Meinhard Parks tucked in neighborhoods. Recreational areas, a fitness center, and if you've ever seen the district's program guide, an unbelievably extensive mix of quality offerings for people of all ages are available. Jennings manages 14 full-time employees, and a rotating part-time staff of up to 250.

Jenning's fiscal stewardship, whose budget is funded as a standalone taxing authority, has been managed with great restraint and cooperative inter-governmental agreements that serve all. She is very tax-payer conscious. This solid fiscal management helps keep overall local taxes down. Being their own taxing status is a plus, as municipal cuts won't affect park district momentum.

A MOM, CARETAKER, AND NEXT-LEVEL LEADER

Terry Jennings grew up in Barrington. She attended St. Anne Catholic School, then Station Middle School until 7th grade. Her family moved to Wayne, Illinois, where she commuted to Elgin for the remainder of middle and high school. She lost her father at age 23, which left her mother in charge of Jennings and 7 more children—four older brothers, two younger sisters and a younger brother.

Jennings attended the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and earned a degree in Physical Education with a minor in Coaching. She envisioned a career in coaching high school or college students. She taught at Elgin Academy where she met her husband. The two moved to Wilmette. Jennings worked in Evanston for 10 years in the city's recreation department. An unexpected move back to Barrington followed her mother's stroke and need for full-time care, a job that would last for 28 years. At this time, Jennings was a single mom who had to earn a living while caring for a parent who was immobile and barely able to communicate.

Jennings ran the volleyball program at Barrington Park District, part-time. She was then approached to become a program supervisor, then recreation coordinator, to supervisor of recreation—to executive director, all in four years. "I was able to make things happen, to clean things up," Jennings said. "I hired more qualified staff, improved programs, and partnered with others." Jennings takes great pride in her accomplishments. "This is a place for everybody. From pre-school to our Silver Sneakers, partnership with Bacoa, the ballfields, athletics, and outdoor spaces we have saved for the community." These offerings, especially the outdoor spaces, were urgently needed during the COVID pandemic.

"Nobody knows that I was almost on the Coast Guard Auxiliary," Jennings said. When she lived near Lake Michigan, she was an avid boater. But her mother's stroke, and Jennings's infection with Lyme disease collided, and the Coast Guard opportunity became a memory. A year later, one of her brothers was diagnosed with leukemia and passed away within two years.

Through these tragedies, Jennings has triumphed. She celebrates her two children and four grandchildren. Her daughter Kelly lives in Longmont, Colorado, and is married to Andrew. They have a daughter. Her son, Matt, was recently the head coach of women's volleyball at Michigan Tech. His wife, Mary, recently landed a job as the executive director of the Grand Rapids Ballet, so they've moved. They have three children.

The next time you see Terry Jennings, we encourage you to say a few kind words to her, for the remarkable job she has done in our community.



A sketch of the Barrington Park District just 31 years ago in 1993. The facilities offered a small gym, and the "Barrington Room," which was space for roller skating, banquets, and programs. Terry Jennings's office was on the top floor. Most of the facilities are gone and replaced with modern architecture and amenities, except for the old gym which was connected to the pool's bathhouse.

HERE ARE SOME WORDS THAT OTHERS SHARED ABOUT TERRY JENNINGS.

Eric Anderson, BPD PUBLIC FINANCE

I met Terry in 1994, as she was taking over the responsibilities of leading the Barrington Park District as its executive director. Over the past 30 years, I've had the privilege of teaming with her professionally as she led the district in its rapid growth phase of several resident-driven referendums, both to improve existing facilities and to add major new programmatic offerings.

Terry's approach of understanding and listening to the community that she grew up in was instrumental in addressing its needs, first with Aqualutions in 1997, through the 2023 multi-purpose referendum. The acquisition of the former Jewel Tea property (now Citizens Park) in 2002 was an arduous process that took major efforts of community, board, and staff. Terry was the leader who listened and coordinated all the parties that sometimes had competing interests and ultimately delivered open space that will be enjoyed by the community for decades to come.

The renovation of Langendorf Park in 2008 provided for needed indoor recreation space that is the centerpiece of its offerings, now to be reimagined into the next iteration of passive and active recreation for future users. Passing five referendums in 21 years, all on the first try, is further evidence of her ability to understand the desires of those she humbly serves. Aside from our professional relationship, I'm proud to call Terry my friend, and join with many in honoring her contributions towards making Barrington a great place to live now and for many decades to come.

Linda Hovde, BPD BOARD PRESIDENT

I'm going to tell the story of how Citizens Park came to be. Much of it is due to Terry's courage and foresight. It was over 20 years ago, in the early 2000s when the Jewel Tea property was up for sale. A small citizens group



“My mission is to get to know everybody—residents, stakeholders, village leadership, library, school district, and conservation groups. There is no “I.” It’s always “we.”
-Terry Jennings



disagreed with the development proposal for an Emergency Critical Care Facility for the 55 acres and went to the Park District Board meeting asking if the BPD would consider buying the land for public park use. The Board was stunned and replied that they had some plans to redevelop Langendorf Park and didn't work with demolition and redevelopment of commercial/industrial land. But the Board said that if the citizens could get 2,000 signatures on a petition for a referendum question, they would put it on the next county voting ballot.

Terry believed in this project and even though much frustration and negativity ensued with a nay-sayer group, the referendum passed to purchase the 55 acres. It was a few years of difficult legal issues and trips to Springfield; yet Terry and the Board stayed true. Ten years passed until the project was opened to the public. Terry also went to the Lake County Forest Preserve Board to ask for the trail connection through the marsh via the boardwalk and that is how we came to have this “gem” in our community.

After this successful project, Terry and the Board continued their mission to update the Langendorf Park building. The Fitness and Recreation Center was another feather in their cap. Now, we have the pool/pickleball/paddle tennis/F shelter work in progress, scheduled for a June opening. What a legacy Terry is leaving us.

Terry has been a strong, thoughtful, and resourceful leader. She is a great

connection between the staff, Board, and the public. It has been my pleasure to work with her for 20 years as a Park Board Commissioner.

Kelly Jennings Monnot, DAUGHTER

When I think of my mom, Terry Jennings, the first words that come to mind are “dedicated” and “visionary.” Growing up in Barrington, I saw firsthand how she poured her heart into the Barrington Park District, transforming it into a cornerstone of our community. Her work goes beyond programs or facilities—it’s about creating a welcoming space where families thrive, friendships bloom, and wellness becomes a way of life.

What sets her apart as a leader is her remarkable ability to balance ambition with compassion. Under her leadership, the Park District has grown immensely, supported by five successful referendums that reflect not just her strategic leadership, but a deep understanding of what our community truly values. She has a gift for uniting people behind a vision, listening to diverse voices, and building consensus.

My mom leads by example, with tireless energy, and a relentless commitment to improvement. But beyond the impressive growth and accolades, it’s her personal touch that makes her so impactful. She takes time to know the people in our community—their stories, hopes, and challenges.

To me, she’s not just a respected community leader; she’s the mom and role model who’s taught me the value of perseverance and serving others. Barrington is a healthier, stronger, and more connected community because of her leadership, and I couldn’t be prouder to celebrate her incredible legacy.

Bill Knapik, BPD COMMISSIONER

I have been fortunate to work with Terry for over 30 years and witness the steadfast dedication and love that she has for the Barrington Park District. Terry has shown that she is a great judge of character as witnessed by the outstanding staff she has assembled.

She has led the way through successful referendums and many award-winning projects enhancing the parks and facilities that many people in the Barrington area enjoy.

Terry worked tirelessly to secure the Jewel property, which became the award-winning Citizens Park. Other projects include the renovation and new build of our recreation facility at Langendorf Park, the Clubhouse, the renovation of the pool 20-plus years ago, and now the current project which includes a new pool, pickleball courts, platform tennis courts, and a shelter.

She has a “hands-on” style, which provides a small-town feel to the Park and often chats with seniors who enjoy bingo and lunch at the recreation center in coordination with Bacoa. And you can occasionally find her sweeping the walks or tending flowerbeds to lend a hand.

Terry’s pride in our parks and facilities shines through every day. Her love for the town where she grew up and raised her family is evident in the way she has dedicated herself to enriching our park district. Our community is so very fortunate to have her leading the way to provide health and recreational opportunities for people of all ages and abilities. Thank you, Terry!

Lauri Meckert, LOCAL RESIDENT

I met Terry over 30 years ago. It was her opening night of volleyball league play at the Barrington Park District. As a new mom in a new home, looking for community, I found myself hesitant about leaving my newborn for the



Citizens Park: 45 Glorious Acres for You

Citizens Park is a 45-acre park located off IL Rte. 14 and Lake Zurich Road in Barrington. The park was the site of the former Jewel Tea Company's headquarters. This award-winning park was officially dedicated in 2005 and offers people the opportunity to rent the facilities, relax by the waterfall, walk the trails, play tennis, cultural events, and playgrounds for children to enjoy.

Citizens Park was the winner of seven different awards, including the 2007 Governor's Hometown Award, 2007 Daniel Flaherty Park Excellence Award, 2007 Illinois Association of Park District's Partnership Award, 2007 Masonry Award, and three awards from the 2007 Council of Barrington Garden Clubs. The Barrington Park District also worked closely with the Lake County Forest Preserve to connect their property to the Barrington Park District. The result is a beautiful bike/running trail that twists through Cuba Marsh and then connects to Citizens Park—a favorite site for dog owners and 5K enthusiasts.

very first time. Arriving with baby in hand, I was lovingly welcomed and embraced by Terry. Before the end of the night, she had even offered to hold my little one so that I could play.

Terry's warm embrace, then and still today, has touched the lives of so many in our village and beyond. She has built more than parks, buildings and bridges, she has built community. Her impact is obvious. It is in the laughter and play at the pool, the grit and determination on the court, the cheers and excitement on the field, the drama and suspense on stage, the conversation and delight at socials, the dancing and singing at summer concerts. And this is just the beginning.

Behind each of these moments is a humble, gifted leader. One who seeks no gratitude or accolades but deserves them. Thank you, Terry, for welcoming me into this community so many years ago with your warm embrace. Barrington is blessed to have you. I am blessed to know you. Signed, President of Your Fan Club.

Dave Nelson, COLLEAGUE

Our first collaboration was for the Pepper Family Tree House when I introduced the Northern Illinois Special Recreation Association and the Barrington Park District to build a handicap-accessible treehouse in Citizens Park. Terry was completely on-board with the project and made it happen. She showed great leadership, enthusiasm, and follow-through. That experience made me eager to work with her on other projects including the BASH Skateboard Park and the Freddie Pederson Splash Pad. It was clear from the beginning that Terry loves this community, works very hard for her Park Board, is dedicated to the residents of the Park District, and her staff loves her! She is always open to new, innovative ideas and ours was one of the first Park Districts in the area to offer Paddle Tennis.

Terry has proven financial responsibility and has been able to navigate referendums to passage when needed, and we all look forward to the opening of the new pool complex. Under her leadership the Park District has won numerous awards, including a State award for Citizens Park.

Sam Oliver, COLLEAGUE

Terry Jennings is a community treasure. If I were to choose a word that stands out in describing her, it would be Perseverance. Over the years in leading the Park District she has built great teams that contribute immeasurably to the quality of life in the Barrington area.

Her leadership is inclusive, positive, accessible, and always open to exploring new and relevant ways to bring health and wellness opportunities to our residents of all ages.

There is an energetic flow to her leadership and under her direction there has historically been outstanding collaboration with governmental entities and non-profit organizations. Just a few examples, among many, include the JourneyCare Foundation Duck Race for many years, community blood drives, and the restoration of the banks of Flint Creek as it flows through the Park District and beyond to Barrington High School.

Terry knows how to cast a vision, then pull together effective steering committees and experts to bring the vision to reality, always being an excellent communicator to all those involved with the project. Terry's concern, caring, commitment, and steadfast determination are extraordinary. She has touched many lives and continues to enrich the fabric of our community.

Jon Stickney, BPD COMMISSIONER

I am privileged to call Terry Jennings a colleague and friend. Terry is a shining example of dedication and passion. A lifelong member of our community, she has championed Barrington Park District's growth through fierce advocacy, loyalty to her staff, and a commitment to community feedback. With immense pride in the Park District's history and accomplishments, including the passage of five successful referendums, Terry has elevated the Park District to new heights. Her collaboration with Village leadership and School District 220 underscores her dedication to uniting Barrington. Beyond her professional achievements, Terry cherishes family, celebrating her two successful children, Matt and Kelly, and the joy of her four grandchildren. Her enduring service reflects a love for the community that raised her, leaving a legacy for generations to come. 