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Parks and Recreation are important to our community - by Joseph Solomon

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In addition to providing our children with a quality education and offering a variety of exceptional municipal services to our residents, it's important to ensure that we're giving those who live in our community any number of programs that will help to enhance their quality of life.

With that in mind, since becoming mayor a little over a year ago, revitalizing the Department of Parks and Recreation's activities and improving our facilities has been one of my priorities. With a new director at the helm for just over a year, we are reaching that goal very quickly.

For many years, the department fell under the Department of Public Works. We have now re-established the Parks and Recreation Department as a free-standing entity. Our director and his staff now regularly attend community meetings in order to gather feedback and provide better services and programming to our residents. They've also performed an in-depth assessment of our recreational facilities in order to transition to preventative maintenance. The department has worked closely with the Planning Department in recent months to write recreation grants and has collaborated with the state Coastal Resources Management Council to restore the waterfront at historic Pawtuxet Park.

Recently, Parks and Recreation worked with the AMC network to turn our popular McDermott pool into a television studio for an upcoming episode for one of their programs, producing revenue and publicity for the city in the process.

In addition, we have reintroduced our swim lesson program – which was received so enthusiastically, additional class options were added even before the first sessions began. We've also expanded our public skate times, involved more community organizations in our Halloween "Trunk or Treating" event, initiated the city's first high school hockey cup tournament, and supported \$100,000 in grant-funded improvements at Salter Grove Memorial Park.

The department has also worked closely with the State Sports Commission, leading to Warwick's role as host for the U.S. Quidditch Regional Tournament for two years. They've also attracted additional hockey, flag football tournaments and the like, all of which have created revenue from facility rentals, and resulted in direct local and statewide economic benefit from hotel rentals and indirect benefit to area hospitality-related and retail businesses.

In the coming weeks, I expect to announce another collaboration with a statewide entity that will further expand revenue and draw attention to the great recreational facilities we offer here. We're also working to create a city parks organization so the various athletic and recreational groups can collaborate with the city to enhance programming and address issues of mutual interest.

As the summer months approach, I also expect that we will further capitalize on our 39 miles of coastline, terrific parks and outdoor recreational facilities for the benefit of all who live in and visit our community. An ongoing collaboration with the Department of Tourism, Culture and Development will again bring our seasonal concert series and food truck nights to locations throughout Warwick. I invite you to come to see all that we have to offer.

Joseph Solomon is the mayor of the city of Warwick, R.I.

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