

2025 | Quarter 4

# PALM COAST PARKS AND RECREATION PROGRESS REPORT

Presented by:  
**James Hirst - Director**



# City of PALM COAST

## Parks & Recreation Department

To: Lauren Johnston, Acting City Manager  
Date: 10/6/2025  
Department: Parks & Recreation Department  
Director: James Hirst  
Reporting Period: EOY Report FY 2025

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### Department Summary:

*Mission Statement: We strive to make Palm Coast a great place to live, visit, and recreate! Our staff is dedicated to bringing the citizens of Palm Coast quality Parks & Recreation experiences and to improving the quality of life through facilities and programs.*

*Why Statement: To enhance community, so that everyone feels welcome!*

Fiscal year 24-25 was a year of accomplishments, record breaking statistics, continued excellence in enhancing community programming and events. With City Council's support, we passed two initiatives that will better serve our residents now and for the future. The City adopted a smoking ordinance that restricts smoking in all City parks and a public art ordinance supporting the continued growth of arts, culture, and history in Palm Coast.

Programs and events remain at the heart of Parks & Recreation. Our staff have noticed that pickleball appeals to all ages and is gaining strong interest among younger players. We delivered 320 programs to our residents, including 18 new offerings, and we set another attendance record with 86,864, which is an increase of 6,864 from the previous fiscal year. This year we launched the City's first youth pickleball program, and because of its popularity, expanded from a beginner program to youth camps and youth tournaments. Other new programs included Steppin' in the Coast, PC Cyclist, and Lunch with Littles. Lunch with Littles paired some of our camp kids with Community Center seniors to share lunch and conversation, bringing generations together.

After more than ten years of hosting the Palm Coast Open professional tennis tournament, we hosted Palm Coast's first professional women's tournament. The inaugural women's event was a success, and players, staff, and spectators enjoyed two weeks of professional tennis. Palm Coast is now a recognized stop on the professional tour for both men and women.

Through a coordinated effort by Parks & Recreation staff, we planned and executed 35 special events, up from 28 from last year. To help connect our community, we also partnered on other City events and coordinated with local organizations to support their events. Feet 2 Feast, the City's annual Thanksgiving run, broke another attendance record with 1,100 registrations compared to 800 last year. An estimated 44,354 residents enjoyed our special events, an increase from 39,000 last year.

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### Key Performance Indicator Updates:

Department KPI	KPI Goal	Quarter 4 Progress	FY Progress to Date	Comments
To continually promote Parks & Recreation services and expand our reach to residents and visitors.	The creation of 2000 new CivicRec accounts for first-time users.	305 new accounts created	2,071 new accounts created	



## Explore *Connect* Play

The residents of Palm Coast can enjoy a richly varied active lifestyle thanks to the myriad of amenities overseen by Parks & Recreation. We offer programs that cover a range of topics, from athletics to cooking to environmental education. The words explore, connect, and play succinctly encapsulate not only the high quality of life residents have come to expect, but the core purpose of Parks & Recreation. This report highlights how we are meeting our purpose in each section and providing for the residents of our community.

# Explore *nature, parks, and trails*

As our city continues to flourish, Parks & Recreation plays an integral part in enhancing the quality of life for our community, through our Parks and Recreation Master Plan, maintenance operations, and capital improvement projects. Parks & Recreation employees are dedicated to our values of protecting environmental resources and connecting residents with nature.

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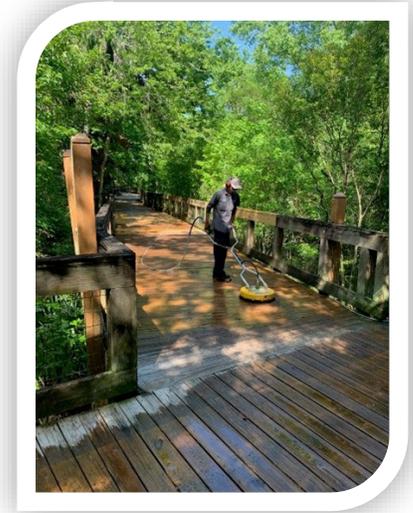


# City of PALM COAST

## Parks & Recreation Department

### *Parks Maintenance Level of Service*

With 827.20 acres of parks and a wide array of amenities to care for, our Parks Maintenance staff continues to go above and beyond, providing exceptional customer service and safe environments for all park, sport field, and trail users. Each year, the Parks & Trails division keeps up with daily operations and maintenance while delivering upgrades and repairs to amenities. By year's end, our Parks & Trails crews spent 26,193 hours maintaining parks, trails, the splash pad, playgrounds, and supporting special events. Our Fields Maintenance team delivers proactive, season-to-season care to keep our athletic fields game ready for local youth sport organizations and tournaments. Together, their work helps ensure safe, enjoyable spaces for all residents and visitors.

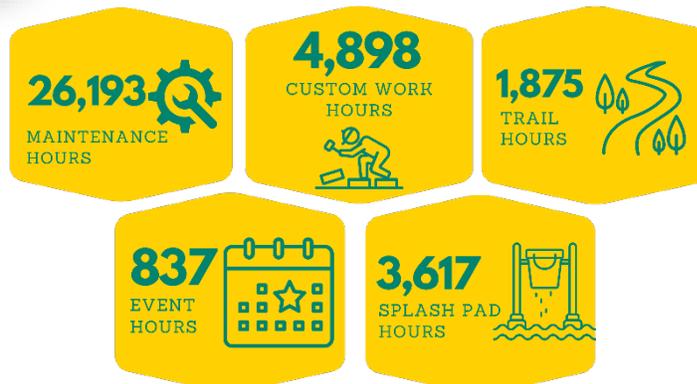


### *Highlights*

- The James F. Holland Memorial Park dog park underwent improvements that removed worn turf, regraded the area, added fresh Bermuda sod, and upgraded the irrigation system.



- Ahead of the City's annual Memorial Day observance, crews completed enhancements at Heroes Memorial Park with new sod, irrigation lines, new plants, and a paver reset.
- The Parks & Trails team represented the City at the North Florida Turf Rodeo in Clay County and earned several medals across events ranging from equipment operations to plant identification, showcasing both technical skill and industry knowledge.



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- Ralph Carter reopened in early January following the completion of major sports field renovations. The refreshed 6.5-acre area includes upgraded irrigation and new fencing, and it welcomed the community back in time for the Mad Dogs Flag Football winter season, which saw strong participation throughout the second quarter.
- Indian Trails Sports Complex hosted the 9-wicket National Croquet Championship for the first time in Palm Coast, a tournament sanctioned by the United States Croquet Association (USCA). This debut marked the championship's first appearance in our city. Organizers were impressed and plan to return in 2026.
- The Florida United Father's Day Lacrosse Tournament set a record this year with more than 150 teams participating and generated an estimated \$1.8 million in economic impact to Palm Coast.



### *Enhancing our Community*

**Indian Trails Sports Complex Lighting:** Construction began in Q3 and concluded in Q4, with new LED light poles installed and all underground wiring completed. The lighting upgrade is now 100% complete.

**Southern Recreation Center Expansion:** On June 18, 2024, City Council approved a "Growth Grant" agreement with the USTA, funding \$700,000 to cover the construction of additional tennis courts. The Southern Recreation Center has added 4 clay courts, new efficient LED lighting, an expanded viewing deck, an outdoor

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bar, and its first show court. Our show court now officially named “The Friends Court”, is an open-air tennis stadium that seats over 140 spectators. This project is 100% completed.

**Long Creek Nature Preserve:** Phase 2 began in Q1 and reached 100% completion in Q2. This project included an expansion of connecting trails, overlooks, and boardwalks throughout the preserve. An analysis identified areas of historical significance within the park, which led to an adjusted and narrowed scope, with plans to address and preserve the historical elements in future phases.

### ***Making Progress in our Community***

Adopted by City Council in December 2023, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan will guide the city in delivering the highest quality Parks & Recreation experiences. This plan provides a roadmap for ensuring an appropriate balance of facilities and amenities throughout Flagler County for the next 10 years. Community feedback was integrated into every step of this plan. The plan outlines 4 overarching goals. The following is a Q4 update of each of the four goals:

Goal 1: Invest in current infrastructure and address aging facilities.

#### **1.3: Expand open spaces and parks:**

- **Q1:** City Council approved a 9-acre park expansion off White Mill Dr. and Pine Lakes Pkwy.
- **Q2:** Phase 2 of Long Creek Nature Preserve expansion concluded, adding new connecting trails, overlooks, and boardwalks that improve accessibility and natural beauty.

#### **1.4: Develop additional outdoor recreational facilities and amenities:**

- **Q1:** The City approved a disc golf course that will introduce disc golf to Palm Coast and Flagler County.
- **Q2:** The Southern Recreation Center’s Phase 2 expansion added four new clay courts, an open-air show court with seating up to 140 spectators, and LED lighting on both new and existing courts.

#### **1.12: Address current and future needs for athletic fields:**

- **Q3-Q4:** Construction on new LED lighting for baseball/softball Fields 6-8 at Indian Trails Sports Complex began in Q3 and was completed in Q4. An expanded parking project is slated to begin in Q1 of FY25-26.

Goal 2: Improve and enhance programming and outreach.

#### **2.2: Utilize technology to improve customer service and efficiencies:**

- **Q1:** Implemented QR-code access for day-of registrations at Pink Army 5k and Feet 2 Feast 5k, enabling credit card payments. Additionally, we introduced text updates for program cancellations and schedule adjustments to keep participants informed in real time.

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- **Q2:** Supervisors utilized survey software to gather timely feedback on programs and facility operations, helping us note what works and refine what needs improvement.

### **2.3: Explore opportunities for non-traditional recreation opportunities:**

- **Q3:** Indian Trails Sports Complex hosted the 9-wicket National Championship for Golf Croquet. In the lead-up to the championship, the schedule also included open community days.

### **2.6: Enhance special event programing:**

- **Q1:** The Palm Coast Concert Series and the Palm Coast 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary events were added to our lineup, with additional Concert Series installments in Q3 and Q4.
- **Q3:** In collaboration with the Palm Coast Historical Society, we introduced History in the Park, a new special event that promotes Palm Coast history and encourages visits to the museum at James F. Holland Memorial Park, with an additional installment in Q4.

### **2.7: Partner with other service providers, when possible, to develop programs and service to meet demand and trends:**

- **Q2:** Our partnership with the Florida Pickleball League (FPL) continues to grow, with league members helping to promote and enhance our pickleball events and tournaments through volunteer support.

Goal 3: Improve organizational operations.

### **3.3: Review current operating agreements, and how they can benefit and maximize potential for each Department:**

- **Q1:** The City updated the MOU with the Palm Coast Historical Society and implemented the agreement for the administration for the Cultural Art Grant with the Flagler County Cultural Council (FC3).
- **Q2-Q3:** Pickleball and Tennis pro contracts progressed from implementation to completion, enabling high-performance instructional opportunities. Staff continues to assess the benefits this brings to the Southern Recreation Center.
- **Q4:** The City approved a MOU with the Saving Missing Animals Response Team (S.M.A.R.T.) for the construction of the Rainbow Bridge in James F. Holland Memorial Park.

Goal 4: Increase financial opportunities.

**4.2: Explore developing and implementing cost recovery and pricing philosophy and practice**  
Cost Recovery practices continue to be part of our operations and regularly evaluated and reported on. Please see our “Play Report” at the end of this report.

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## Parks & Recreation Department

# Connect

history, culture, and events

**Building and creating relationships is part of our connect values. We partner with organizations to advance history, culture, and community events. We consistently listen to our residents and welcome feedback to ensure we are providing the very best.**

### *Connecting our Community*

This was one of our busiest years for community events. Our Special Events division directly coordinated 35 community events. Alongside annual favorites such as the Starlight Parade, Tree Lighting Ceremony, Feet 2 Feast 5k, and Food Truck Tuesday, we added some new offerings for the community, including History in the Park, Pie Day, and the Summer Concert Series

### *Highlights*

- In partnership with the University of North Florida (UNF), the fourth annual UNF Mednexus Innovation Challenge took place at the Palm Coast Community Center and showcased local high school students pitching ideas in the Social Media Wellness Influencer field. Most groups focused on the importance of mental health. The winning team received a \$4,000 scholarship from UNF.
- Egg'Stravaganza returned in April bigger and better than ever with more vendors, games, eggs, and even more hay. 20 local organizations hosted interactive booths, families enjoyed photo ops with the Easter Bunny, and the park buzzed with sprint activity from start to finish.
- The annual Thanksgiving run, Feet to Feast 5K, was our most attended race, with more than 1,100 registrations! Two days later, we hosted the annual Tree Lighting Ceremony in collaboration with the Flagler County Rotary Club's opening night of Fantasy Lights, creating a weekend of community celebration.
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- For the first time since COVID, the City of Palm Coast celebrated the return of the Starlight Parade in Town Center. An estimated 10,000 attendees lined the route to enjoy 60 parade participants, including decorated floats, marching bands, dance groups, and community organizations.



- In partnership with the Palm Coast Historical Society, we hosted the first History in Park event featuring food trucks, games, and free admission to the history museum. 50 visitors attended and supported the Historical Society.
- At City Hall, we celebrated the renaming of the Community Wing to the Jon Netts Community Wing with a ribbon cutting and plaque unveiling, bringing residents together to honor his memory and legacy of service to Palm Coast.



### *Engaging with our Community*

Throughout the year, partnerships and outreach were front and center. We secured sponsorships for the Palm Coast Concert Series, the Southern Recreation Center, clean-up events, and more! The most notable being Palm Coast Ford. We also received in-kind support from Tractor Supply for Arbor Day, from Flagler Broadcasting for Community Center programs, and from the Best Western and Renaissance hotels for the Palm Coast Open. Across the year, we secured additional sponsorships from Geiger Law, Ryan Holmes, and Gilbane.

Our marketing team redesigned the Memorial Day programs, published the Winter/Spring, Summer, and Fall activity guides, and relaunched the Palm Coast Concert Series, which boosted social media engagement. In July, we celebrated Parks and Recreation Month with NRPA's theme, "Build Together, Play Together." A video produced by our marketing team premiered at the City Council proclamation, featuring highlights of our community, staff, and facilities. NRPA also featured a photo from our cover submission on its national page, spotlighting the behind-the-scenes work of Parks Maintenance.

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### *Partnering with our Community*

Parks & Recreation believes in connecting with our local community partners. The list below includes our partner organizations that we work with to make Palm Coast a great place to live.

- UF/IFAS Extension Flagler County continued its partnership with Parks & Recreation by supporting community programs and providing oversight for our community gardens. They are currently designing a pollinator-friendly plantscape just outside the gardens.
- The Palm Coast Historical Society have been a valued part of Parks & Recreation since the City's inception. With their support, we can provide residents enriching historical and educational programs and experiences. In January and March, the Community Center hosted their Historical Society Speaker Series and James F. Holland Memorial Park hosted History in the Park events.
- Flagler County Cultural Council (FC3) plays an active role in promoting arts, cultural, and historic opportunities in our community and partners with the Parks & Recreation department to administer the Cultural Arts Grant.
- Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association continues to help maintain the mountain biking trail at Linear Park and provide community education on mountain biking safety.
- AdventHealth remains a major sponsor and a strong supporter of our initiatives, including but not limited to Egg'Stravaganza, the Challenge Court at the Southern Recreation Center, and our Lunch N' Lecture program.
- S.M.A.R.T. of Flagler County attends many of our events to provide community information about foster and adoptable dogs and other important animal services.
- Special Olympics continues to host recreation activities such as swimming and tennis at the Palm Coast Aquatics Center, Southern Recreation Center, and Sport Fields.
- Flagler County Library Services has partnered with our department for over a year, providing books for our StoryWalk® installation at Linear Park, encouraging families to read together while exploring the outdoors.
- Florida Pickleball League supports our efforts by hosting regional tournaments, promoting the Southern Recreation Center, donating equipment, and volunteering at City-hosted pickleball tournaments.
- Flagler County Tourism Development Council (TDC) partnered with us in our annual Celebrate Trails Day at Waterfront Park and awarded a Special Event Marketing grant for the Palm Coast Open.
- Flagler County Sheriff's Office partners with us to provide free Women's Self-Defense classes.
- The AARP Foundation partners with our department to provide free tax aide for residents. They utilize the Palm Coast Aquatics Center's classroom and Community Center for training and appointments.
- The National Christian College Athletic Association (NCAA) has been a partner for 15-years, providing free youth sport clinics that help local youth athletes build skills, confidence, and a love for the game.
- Palm Coast Ford is a major sponsor and strong supporter of our events, including but not limited to the Starlight Parade, Food Truck Tuesday, and the Concert Series.

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### Testimonials

- *“Very nice layout, Generally, good conditions. Greens fair but a little slow. Fun course. Good value.”*
- [Regarding Feet to Feast 5k,] *“loved the national anthem, and accurate timing. The course distance was spot on. The entire race was well organized and highlighted our beautiful city. Thank you for caring!”- Jessie Bech Magee*
- *“Great job parks and rec on cleaning up our community center playground! Thank you Mr. Aaron and Ms. Carrie for helping today with our favorite swing” – Nancy LaRive*
- *“Dear Mr. Hirst,  
I am writing to express my heartfelt gratitude for the exceptional support provided by Elise Gross, Carter Dippel, and Rain Marti during Saturday's Shirley Chisholm event at the Palm Coast Community Center. Their dedication and professionalism truly stood out. Elise, Carter, and Rain were instrumental in ensuring the event's success, assisting with the setup, and providing seamless technical support for the audio-visual needs. Their efforts made a significant impact, and their positive attitude and willingness to go above and beyond did not go unnoticed. Please extend our thanks to them for their outstanding work. Once again, thank you for the continued excellence of the Parks & Recreation team.  
Ralph and Agnes Lightfoot”*
- *“Course was great! Staff super kind and helpful. We love the course layout. Highly recommend!”*
- *“Golf course is challenging but fair. Enough water and bunkers to get into trouble, but nothing that can't be avoided, for the most part. Greens are in excellent shape.”*
- *“Southern recreation center (Pickleball) is excellently staffed with friendly and knowledgeable people. It is a well-run facility that offers players of every skill level and financial background, the opportunity to enjoy play and mingle together.”*
- *“Very nice community center. We are so blessed to have this place to go to. To play games, socialize, make new friends and bring the old friends along to meet the new friends. I wish I could give you more than 5 stars...”*
- *“James F. Holland Memorial Park is by far the best playground between Volusia County and Flagler County. As a parent from Daytona Beach, I sometimes travel specifically to this park because it's such a fun, beautiful, and great place for kids. My five-year-old absolutely loves it! There's so much to do, from swings and ziplines to a fun hill where kids sit on cardboard boxes and slide down. Be sure to bring or cut a piece of cardboard for your child—they're definitely going to love it! It's a huge park with plenty of space for kids to run around and play. The best part is that there are always other children there, so my child always has the chance to make new friends. With all the different features, there's never a dull moment. Highly recommend it!”*
- [Regarding the Southern Recreation Center] *“Staff is amazing, super sweet. Facility is a hidden gem. More people need to know about this place.”*
- *“Excellent staff and facility at a great price point. Thanks for the great work!”*



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# Play

*games, sports, and together*

**Our department has always encouraged play for our community for all ages from toddlers to seniors. Play, no matter what that looks like to you, is an important part of physical, social, and emotional development. Each quarter we continue to promote and increase play opportunities for all Palm Coast residents.**

### *Providing for our Community*

Offering activities to enhance recreation experiences for Palm Coast residents has been a fundamental piece of our department. We offer programs for all ages and abilities starting from 6 months up to our very engaged senior population. In FY 25, Parks & Recreation provided 320 programs, 18 of which were new, and 86,864 in program attendance. Some of our program highlights include:

#### *Palm Coast Community Center*

- Lunch with Littles launched in June as a new multi-generational program pairing our summer campers with senior friends from the Community Center. Before the program, campers were asked what thought about seniors, and by the end of lunch, conversation, and making friendship bracelets together, many described the experience as fun!



- Our Enrichment Block for Homeschoolers is now offered in two groups: Kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Each four-week session features new activities that keep students engaged and learning.

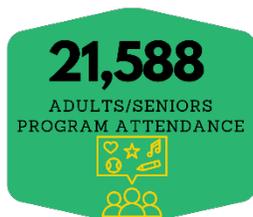
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- Fun in the Sun Summer Camp welcomed 140 campers to the Community Center and filled the facility with summer energy from morning check-in to afternoon pick-up. We also hosted several specialty camps including Teen Adventure Camp, Firefighter Camp, Soccer Camp, and Robotics Camp. Most weekly sessions reached capacity and many had waitlists. When openings became available, Staff worked diligently to fill them and accommodate families.
- Discover Trips returned this year with coach-bus excursions to standout regional destinations. Participants enjoyed a festive December outing to the Jacksonville Symphony's Holiday Pops show, a spring day exploring Silver Springs in March, and a May visit to the Jacksonville Zoo & botanical gardens.
- We hosted two multi-generational events this year. In October, the inaugural Spooky Soirée invited families to dress up in costume, play games, limbo, and dance the night away. Food was sponsored from our local Outback Steakhouse and Five Star Pizza. In February, the second annual Valentine's Sweetheart Dance featured a professional DJ, a catered dinner from Carrabba's and a lively dance-off.





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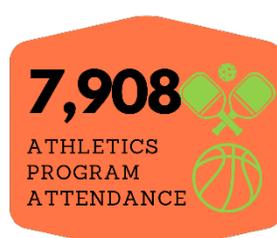
### *Southern Recreation Center/Athletics*

- Youth pickleball continued to grow each quarter. We began with youth beginners pickleball class and expanded to pickleball leagues, youth pickleball summer camps and youth pickleball tournaments. The summer camp reached capacity with a waitlist, so Staff added an additional session to meet demand.



- We continued our successful pickleball tournaments, hosting Pink n' Pickle, Luck of the Pickle, the Mother's Day tournament, and our first youth tournament! Participation remained strong, with many passholders returning year after year.
- At the request of our passholders, the Southern Recreation Center implemented professional pickleball and tennis services, providing high-performance instructional opportunities for players.

- Room rentals grew this year for social gatherings such as birthday parties, baby showers and graduations, as well as for meetings hosted by Rotary, Kiwanis, and local support organizations. Rentals occur nearly every day, with multiple bookings on several dates, and we secured long-term weekly rentals with karate, dance, and church groups.
- Growing our community fitness programs remains a priority. We offer Zumba, Fit 4 Life, Belly Dancing, and Yoga, with classes both at the Southern Recreation Center and the Community Center, making it easy for residents across the city to join in.





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### *Palm Coast Aquatics Center*

- The Aquatics Center hosted three signature events this year: Egg Splash, Pool Safety Day, and World's Largest Swim Lesson. Each combined fun with learning, with trained lifeguards and instructors leading hands-on activities that reinforced water safety and foundational swim skills.
- We also welcomed four different camps to the Aquatics Center to stay active and cool: Fun in the Sun Summer Camp, Imagine Schools, Victory Preschool, and Daytona Hydro.



- The Palm Coast Aquatic Center splashed into action this year! Residents were able to enjoy Water Aerobics, Aqua Zumba, and private swim lessons. Staff also successfully partnered with the Florida Department of Health to implement the Free Swim Lessons Voucher program (Senate Bill 544), expanding access to water safety education for families in our community.
- The Palm Coast Aquatic Center continued its partnership with Buddy Taylor Middle School to support the SeaPerch initiative – an innovative underwater robotics program. Students build battery-powered underwater vehicles and compete each year in a statewide competition, where they navigate obstacle courses underwater. This hands-on STEM partnership has been going strong for over 8 years.





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### *Palm Harbor Golf Club*

- Palm Harbor Golf Club hosted a variety of summer camps. Every Friday in June, the Mini Golfers program for ages 3-5, introducing tots to fundamentals and sending them home with goody bags after the final class. Our LPGA instructor also led a summer camp for ages 6-13, offering more technical instruction and consistently strong attendance.
- Palm Harbor Golf Club welcomed two Florida State Golf Association (FSGA) Junior Tournaments this year – one in January and one in March. Each tournament brought approximately 80 young players and their families to Palm Coast for a full weekend of competition, contributing to the excitement and energy around the course.
- On March 29, Palm Harbor Golf Club hosted the National Christian College Athletic Association (NCCAA) golf clinic, a free event for Palm Coast youth where participants learn core skills from professional coaches and collegiate athletes.



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This infographic depicts the highlights from our program matrix, which is a tool we use to track the success of our program opportunities. Each quarter we record the number of programs and activities offered, attendance, program cost, revenue collected, and a final cost recovery percentage. Our department strives to be 100% cost recovery on programs in support of City Council's goal of fiscal responsibility. We had a very successful FY25 offering 18 new programs/events and exceeding our cost recovery goal which helps to offset our other operating expenses.

### Awards and Achievements:

- Alex Durate was promoted to Groundskeeper I
- Brandon Eatman and Zach Sundberg received Aquatic Facility Operator (AFO) certification
- Dan Whitling passed the Natural Areas exam
- Katelyn Anderson graduated from LITE team
- Laura Curtin received Pickle Registry Level I (Associate Coach) Certification
- Mark Hunt obtained his Right-of-Way Pesticide Applicator License

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- Matthew Scammel received the City of Palm Coast Employee of the Month award for February
  - Scott MacDonald was promoted to Groundskeeper II
  - Scot MacDonald passed the Certified Playground Safety Inspector exam
  - Zach Sundberg received American Red Cross Lifeguard Training Instructor (LGI) certification
  - Southern Recreation Center achieved Gold LEED status (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)
  - Tourism Development Council received Best New Tourism Product Award for the Southern Recreation Center
- Waterfront Park received the 2024 Great Places in Florida's Chapter of the American Planning Association