

Mark McHenry

Mark McHenry came to the City of Kansas City, Missouri in the spring of 1974 as a Municipal Management Trainee.

In 1976, he was hired as the Park District Manager where he supervised approximately 50 employees. He trained, monitored, managed, and evaluated employees in the operations of maintaining park facilities. He kept supervisors and others informed of work progress and potential work issues and communicated and coordinated regularly with the director to maximize the efficiency of internal operations. Mark led by example, influencing, and assisting others to achieve great things.

Mark rose through the ranks quickly because of excellent performance and sound management, principles, and judgement. In 1988, Mark McHenry was appointed as Deputy Director for the department.

As Deputy Director, he was appointed as the Kansas City Zoo Project Manager. Under his leadership, bonds were passed to support and expand the Kansas City Zoo with the addition of Australia in 1993, International Festival in 1994, and Africa in 1995. The opening of Africa drew approximately 40,000 visitors in the first two days alone. The improvements resulted in a record annual attendance of 700,000 guests and approximately 400,000 IMAX visitors. He also led the charge to change the Kansas City Zoo from a city-operated organization to a public-private partnership with the Friends of the Zoo.

Following his time at the Zoo, Mark was appointed Project Manager for the Restoration of the Liberty Memorial National World War One Museum and helped establish another public-private partnership.

Under his leadership, Mark helped acquire funding, design, and development to create beautiful places for people to gather in Kansas City. This includes the Children's Fountain, the Firefighters Fountain and Memorial, and the Women's Leadership Fountain. Other fountains developed and funded at this time were the Helzberg and Steadman Fountains at Starlight Theater, contributing beauty and cool sprays of water on summer evenings at the city's premier outdoor music and theater venue. Mark also helped design and oversaw the construction of the Davis Civic Mall Fountain and Park, across from City Hall.

Mark was appointed Director in 2003, becoming the seventh in the 125-year history of the department. Mark oversaw an annual operating and capital budget of approximately \$67,000,000. The department maintains 222 parks, 12,000+ acres of parkland, 158 miles of trails and bikeways, 29 lakes, hundreds of athletic fields and tennis courts, 115 playgrounds, and five public golf courses. Miles of scenic boulevards and parkways crisscross the city, where 48 fountains and 122 monuments and sculptures surprise and delight. Ten community centers, along with eight museums, provide the setting for socially equitable and community-driven programming.

In 2012, Mark and his team successfully obtained citizen support to pass a 1/2 cent sales tax in perpetuity to support the parks and recreation department.

Mark promoted parks and recreation issues through active participation in national, regional, and state agencies. He mentored municipal interns and young professionals from diverse backgrounds. Mark chaired the MPRA Legislative and Critical Issues Committee for a long time. He has developed excellent relationships with other governmental agencies, often called upon to share his expertise.

Mark put in countless hours meeting with citizens, developers, and councilmembers to put in place standards to preserve and protect the integrity of Kansas City's historic parks and boulevard system. Both the parks board and city council approved the Boulevard and Parkway Standards. Under his leadership, the original park and boulevard system was listed on the National Registry of Historic Places by the National Park System, Department of the Interior.

Mark retired from his directorship in December 2018. Upon his retirement the KC Parks & Recreation Board named an 800-acre park in his honor. He currently works as a consultant, serves on several community non-profit boards, and in 2019, was appointed by the governor to serve on the Missouri Department of Conservation Commission.

Congratulations Mark McHenry, the 2024 Missouri Recreation and Parks Hall of Fame Inductee!