



A PLACE TO BELONG

Parks Foundation of Oak Park

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Community Recreation Center Capital Campaign exceeds 75% of goal, announcement during “A Place to Belong” kickoff event

Community challenged to help finish campaign that includes new \$500,000 donor match

Announcing a significant milestone in its campaign to help build a new Community Recreation Center (CRC), the Parks Foundation of Oak Park kicked off a public campaign on Saturday, Sept. 18, during “A Place to Belong” celebration. The outdoor public event took place at the planned site of the new Center, 229 Madison St.

The campaign has already raised more than 75 percent of its \$22 million goal, said Edward Kerros, Parks Foundation board member and development chairman. He also announced a challenge grant from an anonymous donor for up to \$500,000 to help push towards the \$22 million project goal.

“A generous anonymous donor has stepped forward to provide a challenge grant in matching all gifts toward the community campaign up to \$500,000, so your gift to the campaign will be doubled,” Kerros told the 150 celebration attendees, including donors, elected officials, Parks Foundation and Park Board members, neighbors, and the public.

Prior to launching the public campaign, the Parks Foundation worked to raise funds through private donors and grants. Oak Park residents, Ken and Patty Hunt, donated \$1 million to the CRC. At the ceremony, Ken Hunt said he and Patty are excited that the CRC will include an e-sports room. “It is clear mental health is dependent on connection and access,” said Ken Hunt, who said they like the e-sports room for youth who may not be interested in sport activities. “The e-sport room will provide a special, new outlet for social connection and interaction.”

The celebration event also featured speeches from elected officials voicing their support for the CRC and its value to the community. State Rep. Camille Lilly, who grew up in Oak Park, was an early supporter of the project. She said: “A Place to Belong is awesome! The title itself says

inclusion. The CRC will be a great space and place in our community. It will make a difference in our community.”

Mary Jo and Stephen Schuler joined the campaign in its earliest phase and donated the land for the CRC’s construction on Madison Avenue. Both Oak Park natives, they grew up using park district programs and facilities as an important part of their lives. Today their volunteerism and philanthropy focuses on closing opportunity gaps for children.

“We said yes to the Parks Foundation because we want every family, child and senior citizen to have access to a lifestyle of fitness, recreation and fun regardless of family economics,” said Mary Jo Schuler, who is also co-chair of the campaign. “For us personally, the park district taught us valuable lessons about teamwork, leadership and being engaged with people demographically different than us. We want every child in Oak Park to have the opportunity to build a bright future for themselves.”

She said the CRC will be located within one mile of both middle schools, the high school, and the Township’s Senior Center for easy access to all.

To donate to the capital campaign, supporters can visit the Parks Foundation website and click the “donate” button: parksfoundationop.org.

Also, a tribute paver program is available, with customizable pavers for donations of \$250, \$500, \$1,000 or \$2,000. Pavers will be displayed at the entrance to the CRC and can feature names of businesses, organizations, families, or in memory of a loved one.

To purchase a tribute paver, visit [PDOP.org/tributepaverbrick](https://pdop.org/tributepaverbrick). Select the paver size you want and type your personalized name or message. Proofread the text and submit payment.

As an extra incentive, all donations of \$25 or more will receive a yard sign to proudly display their support for Center.

With the campaign’s continued success, the CRC could open as early as spring 2023.

The Parks Foundation promotes giving opportunities around Oak Park parks and to support extraordinary projects within the Park District of Oak Park. Its mission is to collaborate with Oak Park residents, community groups and partner organizations to support exceptional and extraordinary projects that enhance our parks and community life. Founded in 2012, the Foundation is chartered with the State of Illinois as a 501(c)3 charitable organization. While a separate and independent entity, the Foundation coordinates closely with the Park District of Oak Park to help address community health, recreation and wellness needs for all. For more information, visit the Parks Foundation website at: <https://parksfoundationop.org>

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