



numerous conservancies and park friends groups in helping keep his parks open and running. "I desperately need conservancies to help me keep up some of our signature parks," Turner says. These groups range in size from the larger Herman Park Conservancy down to groups representing two-block-wide parks. "So, even though I may not have park funds—park capital bond monies—I still have development going on because our park board can raise money privately.

"There are all kinds of ways to make it work," Turner says. "Right now we are looking at an all-fee structure. I cannot set a fee structure unless my [city] council approves it. In the past, they've never wanted to charge for things. Compared with other cities, it will be minuscule."

Los Angeles

Parks and recreation in Los Angeles, a city of 3.8 million, is an equally complex undertaking. It's a "semi-proprietary" department that gets a direct appropriation of property taxes, close to \$140 million in the past budget year. Going into the 2011-12 budget cycle, that figure will drop to \$128 million, according to Jon Kirk Mukri, general manager of the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks. His department also derives another \$30 million to \$40 million in its own revenues, from a variety of venues, such as the Greek Theatre. "That's not bad," Mukri says of the roughly \$177 million for his budget.

Unfortunately, for the past three budget cycles, the city has been charging Mukri's department for "common support and services," such as utilities

Name Your Price

Naming rights extend way beyond the entrance sign

Mention park naming rights, and most people think of multi-millionaire philanthropists, not average citizens. Creative park (and park foundation) directors, though, are redefining the traditional notion of naming rights—and they are negotiating, packaging, marketing, and cross-promoting those rights in ways that can appeal to every level of giving.

In Fairfax County, Virginia, parks director Mike McCarty entered the realm of park naming rights when a wealthy county resident, Geraldine Sherwood, donated \$5 million for a new community center that she wished to be named for her late husband Stacy. McCarty, in accepting the gift, asked that Fairfax County be given the rights to name spaces in and around the community center. Reserving additional naming rights, he argued, would help provide for the ongoing capital purchases and replacement costs the community center would require.

Mrs. Sherwood agreed to those terms, and the Stacy C. Sherwood Community Center project launched the agency's first comprehensive naming rights

campaign. The county stipulated that rooms and spaces inside the center—as well as playgrounds, trail sections, ball fields, trees, and other exterior elements—may be named after an individual, organization, or corporation for a one-time donation. Donation amounts are based on a per square foot price for designated periods of time, with the maximum duration being 20 years. And, if multiple donors select the same space, the naming rights are awarded to the donor agreeing to the longest duration.

Fairfax has cross-promoted its naming rights program with a local arts foundation, Spotlight on the Arts—an arrangement that has not only led them to more donors but has also given them a ready-made foundation vehicle for accepting various types of donations.

So far, McCarty says, the community center naming rights campaign has brought in about \$500,000. And its importance lies not just in the funds raised for this particular project, but also in the lessons the county has learned about a donation opportunity open to virtually every member of the community.

Naming rights are nothing new to NRPA President Dianne Hoover, director of Recreation and Parks in Bakersfield, California. She recently wrapped up her latest substantial naming rights project with the opening of Aera Park, a 11-field baseball complex named for an energy company. Previously she had coordinated the sale of naming rights for the city's amphitheater for \$500,000 for five years to Bright House Networks, a cable company (see *Parks & Recreation*, August 2006). Aera Park is a public/private/nonprofit partnership between Bakersfield Recreation and Parks, Aera Energy, and Bakersfield South West Baseball (BSWB), a local PONY baseball league. The BSWB league previously played on the campus of Cal State University but needed to find a new facility due to expansions at the university. Fortunately, the president of Aera Energy was a big baseball fan and was already seeking naming rights opportunities with Bakersfield Recreation and Parks.

"It's really all about partnerships," Hoover says. "I've heard people say, 'I really don't want to give up that authority.' We don't

and employee benefits. Currently, those charges total \$38 million. "So, from \$177 million we are now being charged about \$38 million, thus our real budget has seen a decrease of \$38 million over the last couple of years.

"In fairness, we knew this was coming," he continues. "Every department knew that we're addressing a \$1 billion shortfall, either in revenue or in anticipating expenses—primarily in employee-covered expenses. Over the past two years we've been able to wipe out about \$600 million and we have about \$400 million left from this year and next. That will get us in equilibrium between expenses and revenue.

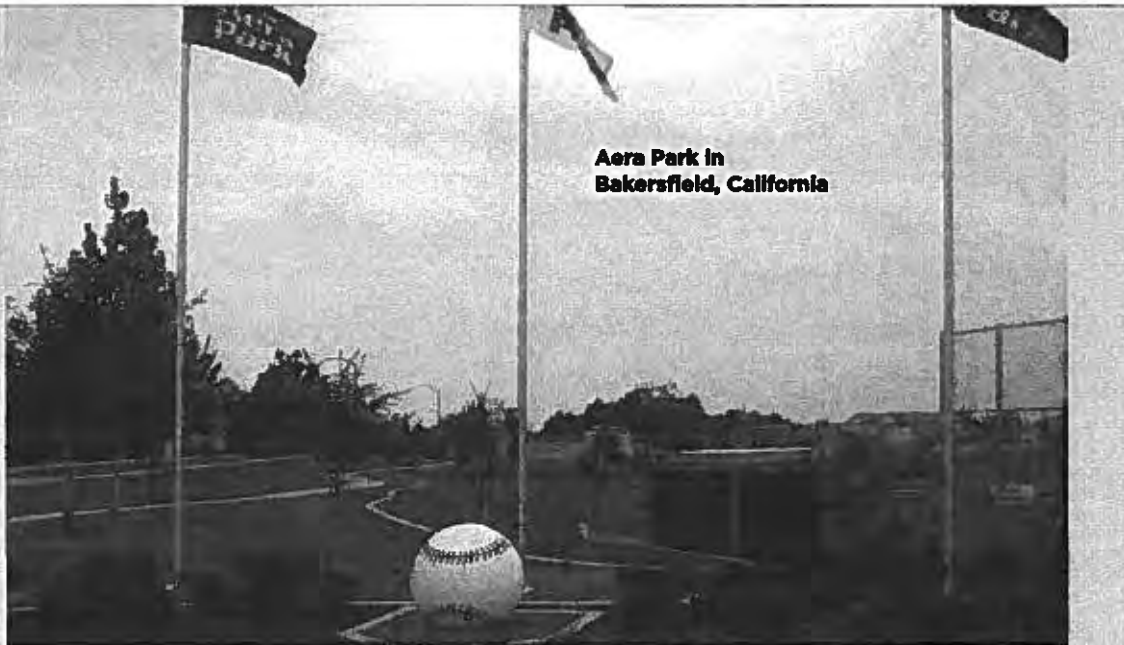
"What that means for me is, I'm going to have fewer employees," Mukri says. "Eighty-six percent of my budget goes directly to employee salaries. So we

will see a decline from about 2,000 employees three years ago to roughly 1,500 full-time employees today. Three years ago we had roughly 8,000 park employees. We're hovering at about 4,500. So we've taken tremendous cuts with the number of people."

Cuts in his budget will extend to service delivery, mostly in the form of reduced hours in some facilities and in the consolidation of recreation centers in certain areas. "We may not have baseball at three centers—it may be at one—same thing with softball and basketball. We've also gotten out of the licensed childcare business."

It's the staff reductions that hurt most.

"Our recreation people are the best city employees ever," Mukri says. "They're there seven days a week, 365 days a year and their only job is to make people's



**Aera Park in
Bakersfield, California**

really have a choice now. To us, it's not giving up anything because everybody wins and everybody is successful...When budgets are cut, that's not going to be cut and the youth will still get to play."

The city donated the land (a water recharge area that is flooded in the off-season), Aera Energy contributed \$250,000 for 15-year naming rights, and BSWB coordinated the construction and will maintain the facility for at least 15 years. Hoover says term limits to naming rights are

critical, and in this case the limit happened to dovetail nicely with the maintenance agreement.

Once those three different agreements were in place, other companies came forward to donate such items as fencing and the concession stand construction. The park even got a reduced rate for the sod and a local Target store donated some extra concrete balls from its store entrance, which were repainted as giant baseballs at the park entrance. Thanks to the added donations, and because BSWB was able to build

the park less expensively than if it were a city project, more than 50 percent of the construction cost of park was covered. The park now also includes a playground and an adult outdoor fitness center located near each other.

"Entering into this, and before I started thinking about all this, I wasn't so sure either," Hoover admits. "But I see how this is a win-win for the city and especially for the children....it's really popular in pro sports, so why not?"

—Elizabeth Beard and
Maureen Hannan