

**PRESS RELEASE**  
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**ALASKA RECREATION AND PARK ASSOCIATION ANNUAL AWARDS PROGRAM**

The Alaska Recreation and Park Association (ARPA), an affiliate of the National Recreation and Park Association, honored the recipients of their Annual Awards program. The celebration was held at the culmination of the ARPA Annual Conference held virtually on October 8th & 9th, with President Donnie Hayes presiding. More than 60 parks and recreation staff, directors, and members of ARPA from around the state attended the annual conference. MyRec.com Recreation Software, Denali Education Center, City of Valdez Swimming Pool, Kate Thomas (Wrangell, AK), Joel Todd (Soldotna, AK) and Lauren Anderson (Juneau, AK) were the 2020 recipients, awarded for their accomplishments in 2019.

The **OUTSTANDING BUSINESS PARTNER AWARD** recognizes one business partner that has supported ARPA and its mission. This support can be shown in any manner. **MyRec.Com Recreation Software** was chosen as this year's recipient. MyRec.Com Recreation Software helps departments operate more efficiently with tools like online registration, leading to savings in service delivery, operations, and business planning. In 2019, MyRec.Com Recreation Software set up a website for ARPA free of charge. Their outstanding customer service and dedication to helping ARPA become a more visible and quality organization led them to receiving this award. MyRec.Com Recreation Software has provided ARPA with tools such as, memberships, online conference registration, email blasts, and overall a more streamlined and easy-to-access site.

**Denali Education Center** was presented with the **OUTSTANDING ORGANIZATION AWARD**. This award recognizes the agencies, departments, and organizations that make great contributions to their community and to the improvement of recreation in Alaska. Clubs, federal and state agencies, municipal departments, and not-for-profit organizations are eligible. The Denali Education Center, a non-profit educational partner of Denali National Park and Preserve, promotes an understanding and appreciation of Denali through informative and inspiring programs. The Denali Education Center offers residential educational programs and conducts two annual programs in partnership with Challenge Alaska, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for people with disabilities and the whole community through sports, recreation and education. The Denali Education Center 's was chosen for this award due to their work to provide opportunities for backcountry exploration for Alaskans with physical and intellectual disabilities, youth at risk, challenged youth, and older adults.

The **FACILITY EXCELLENCE AWARD** recognizes significant new projects, major renovations, or long-term performance as a flagship of recreation. Any facility from any area of recreation, from trails to aquatic centers, is eligible. The **City of Valdez Swimming Pool** was chosen as this year's recipient. The City of Valdez Swimming Pool underwent major renovations in 2019, with a \$4.1 million project funded in-house by the City of Valdez, AK. The initial audit assisted in identifying items that needed upgrading from the last pool upgrade. Some of the key renovations were a water slide, rock wall, diving board ADA compliance upgrades, brand new locker rooms and countless other pool upgrades. City of Valdez staff worked with the Recreation Commission, City of Valdez Administration and City Council to provide the entire community a facility that is state of the art and a source of community pride. The pool renovations have provided Recreation staff the opportunity to have expanded programming and offerings for the public.

New professionals are not necessarily the superintendents or leaders that have been visible in the field, but are the up and coming leaders. They possess all the qualities and talents that will eventually place them in top leadership, but at this time in their careers, they are climbing. **Joel Todd** was the recipient of the **NEW PROFESSIONAL AWARD**. Joel is the Assistant Parks & Recreation Director for the City of Soldotna, AK. Andrew Carmichael, City of Soldotna Parks and Recreation Director, says "Joel has spread his zest for recreation across the community and has spearheaded many new programs while bolstering existing programs. His heart and soul are recreation. His most current landmark is the development and bringing online the department's payment and reservation system. He has brought Soldotna Parks and Recreation a phenomenal vision with impetus for the new synthetic basketball court at the award winning Soldotna Creek Park." Joel brings enthusiasm, talent and a can-do attitude wherever he goes.

The presentation of ARPA's most prestigious award, the **PROFESSIONAL AWARD**, went to **Kate Thomas**, Director of Parks and Recreation for the City of Wrangell, AK. The Professional Award is the highest recognition that ARPA can bestow upon a deserving candidate. Kate Thomas started her parks and recreation career in 2007, with a degree in Adventure Tourism and Business Operations from the College of the Rockies in British Columbia. Kate has worked as a backcountry canoe, kayak and hiking guide for high end clients and behavioral health programs serving at-risk youth. Kate's experiences in the wilderness have transformed her into a tenacious creative mentor and leader with an ability to build healthy relationships and understand progress barriers to better implement sustainable solutions. She currently resides in Wrangell and has served as the Parks and Recreation Director for the Borough since 2015. Kate is passionate about making small Alaska communities a better place to live, love and work, and focuses on finding ways to incorporate the best into services for all demographics in Wrangell. Kate also serves on the ARPA Board of Directors as the organization's Secretary. Her contributions to ARPA never go unnoticed. Kate's work in the organization has allowed ARPA to succeed and build to what it is today.

The coveted **BOB ROBERTSON SERVICE AWARD** was presented to **Lauren Anderson**, Treadwell Arena Manager for the City and Borough of Juneau, AK. This award is for service to the Alaska Recreation and Park Association by members of the association. These are the people that volunteer to be on committees, work to improve parks and recreation within the state, help with conferences and workshops, and generally are the backbone of the Association. Although a CBJ Parks and Recreation employee since 2006, Lauren didn't attend her first ARPA conference until Juneau was the host City in 2013. In 2018, Lauren had the opportunity to attend the annual conference in Fairbanks loved it & wanted to get more involved. In 2019, Lauren became an ARPA Board Member as the Membership Committee Chair and has successfully worked to bring new members into ARPA. In 2020, Lauren was a part of the conference planning committee and continues to host weekly zoom roundtables for Alaska Ice Rink managers. Her dedication to ARPA and hard work to grow the organization and improve recreation in Alaska recognizes her for the Bob Robertson Service Award.

The **PAST PRESIDENT AWARD** award was presented to **Donnie Hayes, Pioneer Park Manager** with the Fairbanks North Star Borough. Donnie has served as ARPA President since 2018 and made a positive impact in the organization, by planning 3 successful education conferences, revamping the membership structure, rebranding the organization and more. Mike Illg, Recreation Manager with the City of Homer, was introduced as the new President during the awards ceremony. Mike will serve a two-year term.

The Alaska Recreation and Park Association seeks nominations for the prestigious awards through their membership. Members are primarily professionals in the field of parks and recreation representing cities, boroughs, state and federal land and resource management, and nonprofits. ARAP works to provide a forum for interchange of ideas and information among parks and recreation professionals and supporters; promote the personal, environmental, social and economic benefits of parks and recreation; coordinate, organize and promote quality educational opportunities; and prepare and provide educational information relating to parks and recreation.

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