

Texans Keep Healthy in City Parks



City parks are the front line in the battle of the bulge, and they help keep Texans feeling their best at home and while away. Texas cities face extreme weather, modern lifestyles, and funding challenges in maintaining fitness. Arlington, San Antonio, Dallas-Fort Worth, El Paso, and Houston made *Men's Fitness* magazine's list of the nation's fattest cities. The magazine ranks the nation's 50 largest cities by considering various factors—such as air and water quality, availability of parks and recreation facilities, sports participation, and television viewing trends—when ranking city health and fitness.

Texas cities provide programs that improve the quality of life for individual participants and the overall community. All Texans, including youth and seniors, benefit from the opportunity to increase their health and reduce stress. Communities are strengthened by opportunities to build partnerships, enhance diversity, and learn tolerance through teamwork.

A 2006 study by The Perryman Group found that the physical health of individuals and environmental contributions are often the first benefits people associate with local parks. People with the best access to both built and natural facilities are 43 percent more likely to exercise 30 minutes most days of the week, clearly illustrating the importance of local parks in the fitness movement.

When cities provide safe alternatives, parks can curb juvenile delinquency and make communities safer. City parks also encourage youth to step away from their televisions and computer games for real social interaction while playing basketball, softball, soccer, gymnastics, or simply enjoying sunshine and wildflowers.

City parks provide outdoor recreation resources such as pools, softball fields, and Frisbee golf courses. Cities also provide indoor recreation activities for sports, arts, and nature programs. While most cities have hiking trails, some cities are investing in new interests such as dog parks and skate parks. Many cities even provide classes to encourage hobbies and various self-help classes such as income tax and language skills. ★

The Texas Economy Keeps Healthy in Local Parks

- Parks contribute to residential and commercial real estate values. An analysis of approximately 30 studies found a positive impact of 20 percent on property values abutting or fronting a passive park area.
- Local parks across the state lead to the creation of 45,623 jobs through their maintenance and operations activity, capital investment, and direct tourism.
- By adding the effects of operations and maintenance, capital spending, and tourism, a total gross impact can be derived. Across the state, the total impact of local parks leads to an addition to business activity including \$6.439 billion in spending.
- The incremental net fiscal revenue to the state government from local parks activity is approximately \$171.6 million per year.

Information from Sunshine, Soccer, and Success: An Assessment of the Impact of Municipal Parks and Recreation Facilities and Programs on Business Activity in Texas by The Perryman Group for the Texas Parks and Recreation Foundation in December 2006.