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RPTM 101

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Career Report

### **Introduction**

Introduction to Recreation Services explores many careers, with one relevant to me for a career as Director of Parks and Recreation. Courtney Meehan, Director of Parks and Recreation for the Borough of Lansdale, located in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, was the candidate I interviewed over Zoom on Monday, March 25th, 2024. I chose to interview Courtney based on a few critical reasons. The main reason is that she graduated from Penn State in 2007 with a degree in RPTM. As I consider a degree in RPTM, I was intrigued by how she transitioned from a student into her career as a Director of Parks and Recreation.

I inquired about Courtney's career transition from her undergraduate degree to the Director position for the Borough of Lansdale that she has held since June 2022. As the Director of the Parks and Recreation Department, Courtney articulated that she "is responsible for maintaining all the borough's parks and open spaces." In addition, she stated, "that her department oversees land maintenance and managing the borough's two public swimming pools, tennis courts, basketball courts, and ball fields, as well as overseeing the many cultural and entertainment events sponsored by the borough each year."

To reach the position as the Director of Parks and Recreation, Courtney stated that she "worked previously as the Parks and Recreation Program Coordinator for Whitpain Township in

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, from August 2011 to June 2022.” In that position, Courtney disclosed that she “assisted with developing and managing the department's budget in that role, maintained records related to recreational programming and events, and assisted with staffing, scheduling, interviewing, hiring, training, and providing performance feedback for all seasonal and part-time staff.” I observed that Courtney's coordinator role enabled her to gain experience and leadership skills to move to the director level in her career growth. Another critical point that Courtney provided is for me to look at “obtaining the Park and Recreation Professional Certification (CPRP)” that she achieved in March 2014. She emphasized that “the CPRP certification is the national standard for parks and recreation professionals who have met the education, experience, and continued commitment to be at the forefront of their profession.”

### **Mission/Purpose of the Agency/Department**

The other reason to interview Courtney was to gain insight into her work environment and understand the dynamics of her role. I asked Courtney, as the Director, how she envisioned the Department of Parks and Recreation mission statement, “that the mission is to provide and maintain a well-balanced system of active and passive park sites and recreational facilities that provide research, development, and implementation of year-round programs for the community of Lansdale.” She also expressed her leadership “is to foster recreation, leisure, cultural and arts programming, and activities for all population segments by protecting open space and preserving the natural sustainability of Lansdale Borough resources.” (Lansdale.org, 2024). I resonate with the borough's mission statement, especially as my definition of sustainability centers on a balance between the needs and wants of humanity and nature. As the Director of Parks and Recreation, I understand this role's importance and leadership to the community so that all can

enjoy the various facilities and open spaces while preserving those resources for future generations.

### **Clientele Served**

Further research from the Lansdale Borough website shows that the Parks and Recreation Department oversees 21 parks and six playgrounds with a total of 152 acres offering opportunities for youth and adults in providing cultural and recreational opportunities reinforcing the sense of place and community for 16,000 plus residents (Lansdale.org, 2024). However, due to the scarcity of remaining vacant land, the Parks and Recreation Committee understands that not all natural resources deserving of protection can be preserved in perpetuity. Thus, their preservation priorities have been with the goals for recreational space, which differ significantly from those of a less developed municipality (Lansdale.org, 2024).

### **Services and Programs Provided**

The Parks and Recreation provides various events and facilities to the community via an online program registration process that emphasizes programming offered for residents of the Borough of Lansdale. Access to the two community pool memberships can be purchased for up to five per individual membership and up to 10 per family membership, with a fee of \$7.00 per pass. Guardianship papers for children under 18 are required upon request. There is also a daily pool gate admission via credit card for \$20.00 for six and older and \$16.00 for 2 to 5-year-olds. There is a Swim and Dive Team program for a fee of \$75.00, and the person must be a seasonal pool member. Swim Lessons are also offered based on fees of \$65.00 for pool members, \$70.00 for a resident, and \$85.00 for a non-resident (Lansdale.org, 2024).

Courtney stated that a “few of her favorite programs are the White's Road Park Concert Series, which the Well Crafted Beer Company supports, and various food trucks and bands that range from Philly Funk Authority, De Tierra Caliente, Montgomery County Concert Band, and the Mike Guldin and Rollin' & Tumblin' band.” She also voiced her enthusiasm for “the kids and parents who can write their letters and lists for Santa and having sent with Elf Express to deliver them to Santa at the North Pole.” Another successful event she enjoys “is the Lansdale Festival of the Arts program, showcasing fine artists and crafters, jazz, door prizes, and plenty of tasty food.”

### **Staffing**

Courtney disclosed that the Department of Parks and Recreation has eight full-time staff members and over 100 seasonal staff and volunteers.

### **Funding Source(s)**

The Parks and Recreation Department receives funding from various sources. She mentioned that “fees come from pool members and services, cultural events, state grants, and local taxes from the general operating and capital projects funds.” Lansdale and its partners are engaged in an active recreation fundraising campaign to enhance the existing park system to fill the community's needs through donations of over \$250,000 from residents and businesses, such as Lansdale Electric Company, in addition to private donations from the Pharo Family Fund of The Lehigh Valley Community Foundation (Lansdale.org, 2024).

## **Professional Issues and Excitements**

Courtney revealed a few challenges as the director, “such as navigating unhoused people in parks, residents' complaints about aging facilities and infrastructure, and residents' inquiries about upgrading the playgrounds.” She shared that a positive aspect of her position is “planning, leading, and participating in special and cultural events that unite the community. She enjoys building new and deepening existing relationships with the community, business, and civic leaders.”

## **Conclusion**

My experience interviewing Courtney Meehan was great, she was deeply knowledgeable and passionate about the field of Parks and Recreation. Reflecting on this interview, I learned how to transition from an undergraduate in RPTM and what career path to take to become a director of parks and recreation. I also learned about the skills and qualities necessary for success in Parks and Recreation.

Moreover, I enjoyed Courtney’s advice to attend the National Recreation and Parks Conference, which provides exposure to the industry's dynamics and opportunities and provide contacts for networking as I continue my learning journey at Penn State. In addition to her advice on the importance of transferable skills from other positions and courses she took outside of RPTM. As a result, this has made me realize the importance of developing transferable skills, such as teamwork, communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving. As if I were ever to pursue a career as a Director of Parks and Recreation, I know teamwork is essential because you need to engage with a diverse group of people, make meaningful connections, and manage

protected areas for future generations. In this regard, as I look toward my future, I will remember the advice that Courtney offered me and how she has fulfilled her dream by attending Penn State.

### **References**

Lansdale.org. (2024, March 25). <https://www.lansdale.org>

