

Transcript

On West Gray, Episode 21, Norman's Summer 2024 Parks & Rec Preview w/Mitchell Richardson

Runtime: 18 minutes 51 Seconds

Tiffany Vrska 0:17

What's up everybody? Welcome to on with gray, the monthly podcast about all things local government in the city of Norman. I'm your host Tiffany Vrska, Chief Communications Officer for the city of Norman, and we appreciate you tuning in. Today in the studio with us. We have Mr. Mitchell Richardson, interim recreation manager for the Norman Parks and Rec Department. The summer months are fast approaching. And one of the things Norman's amazing Parks and Rec Department is known for is all the fun and incredible events and programming that they put on for kids and adults throughout the community. Michel, welcome to the show.

Mitchell Richardson 0:50

Thank you. Thank you for having me on. This is fantastic. I love your guys's studio setup in here. And I was like, I know you and Bryce do such a good job here with the communications department. It's nice to be involved with it. And thanks for having me on.

Tiffany Vrska 1:05

Yeah, he's the brains of this operation. Let's be honest way to go. So let's start with you. Michel, tell us a little bit about your history with the Parks and Recreation Department. Yeah.

Mitchell Richardson 1:16

So I mean, it's a little bit of a tenured history here. I've got quite a bit. I was my first job. That was really the cool part of this. You never left because you love it. That's 100%, right. Best thing ever is Parks and Recreation. And so yeah, I started at 16 working over at the 12th Avenue rec center, just being a, what they call recreation specialist. And basically, at that point, you just come in and you're doing summer camp with the kids or some after school care. And you're just there to you know, make sure kids are safe and have a good time. And eventually, we worked my way all the way up here until right now I'm the Interim recreation manager. And it's been a, I guess, at this point, 12 year process. And it's really been a great time here.

Tiffany Vrska 2:05

Oh my gosh, yes. 12 years is something that be proud of. So you got to come with the adult cool kids then to the municipal complex.

Mitchell Richardson 2:13

Yes. It was like that was the that was the stepping off point. We got invited to the big kids table at Thanksgiving. Yeah.

Tiffany Vrska 2:21

Well, um, well, then let's dive into some of those events in the programs that we kind of alluded to earlier on in that introduction. So tell us what community members can be looking forward to this summer.

Mitchell Richardson 2:34

Yeah. So we have what three or two two hours to break down all the events and everything we do here is

Tiffany Vrska 2:41

you you take our time in the world.

Mitchell Richardson 2:45

Yeah, we can get a quick synopsis here of we do a ton of things throughout the summer here. You know, it really starts off the Westwood family aquatic center opening up, that's our municipal pool. It's a fantastic facility that was built with the Norman Ford project. Believe it opened back up in 2018.

Tiffany Vrska 3:02

And it's off Northwest 24th and Robinson, right? Correct. Correct. Yeah,

Mitchell Richardson 3:07

the whole Westwood complex there. We've got the Westwood pool Westwood golf course and the tennis center there while the pool opens up here on May 25. And it is from 12 to eight. And then we actually if you buy a season pass and we have a season pass holder preview, May 24. So that's another little extra incentive there to go ahead and get get those season passes in.

Tiffany Vrska 3:35

You guys always have the coolest swag. I think that most of us on the management team snagged one of those. The big like,

Mitchell Richardson 3:44

tie dye cup tumbler cup. Yeah, those are super cool.

Tiffany Vrska 3:48

I love it. So I'm like, What are you guys gonna have this? Like, I

Mitchell Richardson 3:51

gotta get with Josh Homans, the guy that runs it out there. And he does a fantastic job of procuring all the cool swag and he pulls stuff that I haven't even thought of. He does. He does a great job with that. We'll have to see see what he's got coming this year. Okay. Yeah. With the pool, though. I mean, we still have. I think right now, there's private swim lessons available through our group ones, I believe we've got a waitlist going, they're already full. That's there's been a great pull from the community there to really get engaged with swim lessons, because it's a really important thing, especially here in Oklahoma, we have so many bodies of water that people go into that it's really, really important for people to learn how to swim and have safe swims. And that's why we also have our teen aquatic safety program. That's something where we kind of have if you are in between the age of like 13-15 type there and you want to come to the pool by yourself. This is the program you got to go to to make sure that you're going to be a safe person at the pool there. So it's a good good way to get people engaged in get youth youth engaged with the pool. Same thing with our junior elite lifeguard camp and that's a really cool program to where we've got kids, I think from the ages of like 10 all the way to 15 You know, being Junior lifeguards, and they get to learn how lifeguards work. They'll have a tube and be next to lifeguards as they're on duty and understanding how it works. And it's a great way for us to get retention of those lifeguards as we go up because that's one of the hardest parts about municipal pools is getting those lifeguards and getting good quality lifeguards, yes,

Tiffany Vrska 5:37

there's a there's a ton and then you're trying to work probably with vacation schedules and everything else during the height of the summer. So I totally get that. One

Mitchell Richardson 5:46

of the one of the things we've also got coming up is our summer camp program. And so we have three recreation centers that we'll be doing summer camps. We've got the 12th Avenue Recreation Center, Whittier and Irving that starts on May 28. And it is a really a great program. We take ages from five to 12, five to 11. And they go on field trips, weekly field trips to different places like the Westwood family Aquatic Center, and the Oklahoma City zoo and Jasmine RAM Children's Museum. I mean, they go all over the place and all the arts and crafts and activities. And that's where I started doing those summer camp programs. And now it is 10 folds better than what we were doing when I was there. And I was like they they just do so much. There's so much more creative than I I'm super impressed with them.

Tiffany Vrska 6:41

Five to 11 any of those three locations. Yes,

Mitchell Richardson 6:45

they are 12th Avenue rec center is full. But we do have some availabilities at both Irving and Whittier. Those rec centers really are the kind of glue and hold the idea of all of our childcare. So that was really do a fantastic job there. The young family Athletic Center, our new shiny facility, they have some new summer programs coming out to we'll have a pickleball League for the first time coming up. Yeah, sounds like Pickleball has been the sport that's been taken over.

Tiffany Vrska 7:20

Okay, what's the age limit for that one?

Mitchell Richardson 7:22

I don't I think it's just an adult League. So I mean, you can if you want to you want to set up a team. You want to go to Mr.

Tiffany Vrska 7:28

Mr. Verse go will be very excited. Okay.

Mitchell Richardson 7:33

Let's do it. And Bryce, you want to join us here? I

Tiffany Vrska 7:35

see him nodding. Yes. He's not.

Mitchell Richardson 7:40

He's coming with us. He's coming with us. But yeah, the pickleball League. We've got the another youth basketball league, which our last youth basketball league we just finished up not too long ago, was very successful. And we had around I think, 1400 kids through go through there.

Tiffany Vrska 7:56

And that parking lot is packed. Time I passed.

Mitchell Richardson 8:00

Yeah, I was like it is it's fantastic. See how many people roll through there. And we kind of check some numbers and everything. And I think we in the month of March here we had around like 70 or 75,000 people.

Tiffany Vrska 8:11

Oh, my goodness. So basketball, volleyball, you named, you know, pickleball. And there's also kind of that medical element in there as well in partnership with Norman regional. And then you also just opened the pools on there recently, right? The indoor pool?

Mitchell Richardson 8:28

Yes, yeah, the indoor pool just opened up. And right now through April 12. We've got free community hours to come in and check out the pool after that. It'll be included in the memberships and you can do your daily daily fee as well. But yeah, it's got eight competition lane pool, and a four lane recreation pool. In the competition side has got this giant video board and race tracker for all those competition meets in the stadium seating. It really it really sets itself apart.

Tiffany Vrska 9:00

Oh my gosh, that is so exciting. And folks can go on to why fac.com Correct. Yeah, why fac.com To learn more. Yeah,

Mitchell Richardson 9:09

thanks for the plug, appreciate that you're one of our other so when we get into like our special events, this is something that I kind of hold near and dear. It's something that as I've was born here in Norman, and I've grown up in Norman, I have got pictures and memories of going to all the special events. And it's really fun for to have that ability to kind of put those on now and to give that back to the public and hopefully inspire the next person that's going to come through our recreation department and come and put on all the great events as well. We've got our Norman fourth fest coming up. That's our biggest outdoor event. We usually have somewhere in the 12 to 13,000 in the park and then 30,000 around the surrounding area because this year we've got the biggest public fund I work show going on in the state. Of course we do. Yeah, of course we do. We love our person we do.

Tiffany Vrska 10:06

All right. Well, that is exciting. And that is actually that takes place on the Fourth of July and raves Park, right? Correct.

Mitchell Richardson 10:13

Yeah, Reeves Park in July 4. Fireworks that are at 945. We've also got live shows from hook, which does some kind of 70s 80s classic rock. And also with a band called Lip Service, which does metal and 80s hair band. We're really kind of throwing it back and giving, giving some fun 80s vibes with our bands this year. All right. forthright, we also I mean, it is a packed day for Parks and Recreation. So we've got a red white and blue swim at the Westwood family aquatics winter, Westwood family Aquatic Center. And we also have our firecracker, firecracker 5k. So that is that legacy park that was put on last year by the Oklahoma race company and they've done a fantastic job. We've partnered with them, we're going to be putting that on together. And it is just 5k right down that interstate drive off of legacy Park. Basically, you'll go down, come back, and it was a huge hit last year. So we're gonna keep that rolling.

Tiffany Vrska 11:19

Wonderful. Okay,

Mitchell Richardson 11:21

yeah, I was like, we're just gonna, let's see, we've got Juneteenth coming up. So Juneteenth is going to the festival itself is going to happen on June 19. There'll be live performances, education and understanding and basically some teaching moments throughout that. That one also has fireworks. All right, we just keep them rolling with the fireworks. We've also got Movies in the Park. So that is a program that we've been putting on for almost a decade at this point. For the summer month, we've got a Barbie will happen on May 24. And we'll have Barbie box that you saw at all the movie theaters that people were coming in and taking pictures with. We're gonna have some trivia stuff, some costume contests, it'll be full paint out. All right. Fun time for everybody. We also have a Westwood golf course, is putting on the Westwood Invitational that'll be July 5 through seventh. That is just you know, your golf

tournament. That's one of the biggest golf tournaments that they have. Also Junior academies, we have tons of stuff going on for kids, tons of stuff. So we've got the Junior Golf Academy, we also have different academies going on at the tennis center. And we also have free clinics at the golf course that kids can come in and just, you know, figure out how to putt how to do the driving range, things like that. Okay, can

Tiffany Vrska 12:50

adults join in on those as well?

Mitchell Richardson 12:53

There are some, there's I think that let me see

Tiffany Vrska 12:55

if there is more. I'm just I'm asking for a friend. Oh, yeah.

Mitchell Richardson 12:58

For for friends. I was like, I need to definitely brush up on my golf skills, too. I went out there not too long ago. And let's just it was it was embarrassing. No one needs to see. Michelle golf. Let's

Tiffany Vrska 13:12

say you help put on the programming. It doesn't mean that you were the best at the actual Oh,

Mitchell Richardson 13:17

yeah. And really what that I mean, that's completely Rick Parrish out of the golf course he handles all that he has the golf pro, PGA all that stuff. He understands all that I don't go near golf.

Tiffany Vrska 13:28

Well, the good news is I think there's lots of opportunities through Norman Parks and Recreation to get good at anything you want to get good at. So pickleball golf, swimming. And I think that you guys have a full lineup this coming season for everybody. So way to go. And you know, you did name so many different events and programming. You know, that's, that's coming up in the immediate future. But I mean, per year, because I know you guys do things during the winter as well. Do you have any idea how many events you all kind of helped coordinate or organized? Yeah,

Mitchell Richardson 14:01

if we like if we added up everything throughout the department, and I mean, we're probably put on somewhere in the north of 50 events throughout the year range somewhere in the 50 to 55. I mean, that's just with like events. And we've got tons of different programs going on. I mean, we are the city of festivals, right yeah. So it's good idea for us to have a ton of different opportunities for people to come and check out different aspects with city

Tiffany Vrska 14:30

of festivals in the department of fun is usually how we refer to parks and rec around here. So So you know, you all may put on like the 50. But then also, can you talk a little bit about how all year round again, Parks and Recreation really provides vital support for partner agencies and different types of initiatives. And that maybe isn't a city of Norman thing proper, but you know, it's important that we we support and help out Um, different organizations around the community to make those events successful.

Mitchell Richardson 15:04

Yeah. And so that's the gist that all the third party people coming in, we try to provide as much support as we can. On the recreation side, we're willing to meet with people and talk through events and helping coordinate and getting all that stuff sorted out. I mean, really all the hard work and heavy lifting comes for through our park maintenance division way Thompson Mike Carter. Yeah. They really do every like. So when you're talking about those large events like medieval fair, the Norman Music Festival Jazz in June helping, you know, coordinate that stuff and get work with those organizers. And, you know, setting up all the electrical stuff, getting getting all the little logistical details stuff. That's where they really come through and shine and along with making sure that grass is mowed, right? Yeah, gotta get that grass mowed, because people will let you know.

Tiffany Vrska 15:55

Well, that's awesome. You guys do an amazing job day in and day out. So in your own words, Mitchell, what do you think is the most essential mission of Parks and Recreation here at the city of Norman?

Mitchell Richardson 16:06

Oh, that is a good one. That is a really good one. I mean, really, for Parks and Recreation. Our goal is, you know, as much as we're a providing services, we're really a people business. Like we really we're doing everything for people that is 100%. All the stuff we do is just for the community. So our mission is to provide the best recreational park opportunities because it spans so it's such a wide shot, idea of what recreation is. And so our real goal is just to provide that for our community. And that means something

different for everybody. We are doing as much as we can with our department, as we physically can. We are doing a ton of events, ton of programming, or we have a vast amount of parks. And so providing that quality of life for our residents is really our just number one goal.

Tiffany Vrska 17:05

Well, I think that you're doing a fantastic job. So we appreciate you and your team. And I think we had Jason on the show around this time last year. And he's amazing and so thankful for him as well. So is there anything else that you would like listeners to know about your department? What you guys do any final thoughts?

Mitchell Richardson 17:25

As much as our department gets out there? And does you know all the marketing and everything I cannot come in both you Bryce and the communications team for everything that you guys do. It is something that is super special that not a lot of cities get. Yes, the attention that you guys give. Maybe it's just because we're the needy child of the city,

Tiffany Vrska 17:48

between you guys and utilities, I think.

Mitchell Richardson 17:52

But I really do appreciate everything you guys do for us. Thank

Tiffany Vrska 17:55

you. We appreciate you. Questions or commentary about On West Gray can be sent into public affairs at Norman Okay, Doug give ShotSpotter producer and editor Mr. Bryce Holland of the city of Norman communications office visit [Norman ok.gov/news](http://Norman.ok.gov/news). To enroll for E notifications on traffic advisories, upcoming events, election notices and more. Follow us on social Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube city of Norman. Okay. Until next time, stay engaged. Stay informed and always remember to cast your ballot. I'm Tiffany Vrska. Thank you for joining us on West gray

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