

IGNITING "COMMUNITY" IN CORNING

Creating recreation opportunities for Corning local children and youth to enjoy has been in the hearts of Corning's leaders for many years. The long-awaited recreation revitalization came in 2018 when the Paskenta Band of Nomlaki Indians contributed Promise Neighborhood funds to the City of Corning. The goal of the recreation program has been to enhance learning and promote healthy lifestyles through quality educational and recreational programming, enriching the lives of children and young adults living in Corning.

Six months from the start of the first activity, the City of Corning recreation program had **launched 41 programs, taught nearly all 2nd graders from the local school district swimming lessons,** and enrolled more than 500 children and youth in a range of

recreation programs. In 2019, many more records have been broken with hundreds of students participating in the growing variety of classes, including robotics, taekwondo, photography, ballet, creative writing, dancing, painting, and many other enriching classes.

Not only are the programs fun for the participants, the physical activity contributes to their mental health and quality of life and social bonds are developed around shared interest. Further, the programming has strengthened partnerships. Kristina Miller, Corning City Manager remarks, *"From the start, this program has brought community leaders together."* Partnerships have been numerous, *"from principals and superintendents to churches, service clubs, and the Senior Center, individuals, and groups are working collectively to drive the program's success."*

Without the contributions of time and space by local organizations the number of offerings would remain limited, but, instead, the numbers are impressive even without a dedicated recreation center. A listing of a few of the collaborators shows the community is driving the success. The Fire Department has offered its kitchen for children to hold culinary classes; the Senior Center has hosted kiddie crafts, increasing opportunity for intergenerational socialization; the City Council Chambers

conference room has become the site where Tae Kwon Do classes have been offered; and, the newly renovated Rodgers Theater is the venue where dancing classes are being held almost daily. The shared appreciation for the Corning's greatest asset, the children, has ignited community cohesiveness.

Corning locals, young and retired, and college students are sharing their talent with the children in Corning. One recent high school graduate with a talent for dance has committed her time to teach children to express themselves through movement; a retired Chamber of Commerce manager, with a degree in music, has taught voice lessons to youth; a City Council member teaches children to create art and craft projects; and a Corning Union Elementary School District (CUESD) teacher develops student interest in Science, Technology, Engineering

and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines through fun, hands-on learning experiences – robotics, building robots, videogame programming.

The City of Corning has set a gold standard for partnering to achieve the outcome of increasing recreation offerings to the community's youth. Additionally, they have implemented an exemplary recreation program that provides structured, supervised

activities to youth, which may

well serve as a crime prevention tool for the community. Miller's rationale is, *"... monies can be spent up front in a more proactive approach or on the back end after trouble has already occurred. Prevention is a much better tool."* The recreation program is supplying the support, opportunities, and programs to increase skills and pro-social attitudes.

The City of Corning is seeking to sustain the recreation program beyond the funding life by pursuing different forms of funding. Miller shared: *"We are dovetailing off of its success to remediate an area of blight in the community and revitalize our downtown core."* Prop 68 revitalization grant, a grant that is aimed at improving and enhancing local and regional parks, is one funding source the City is pursuing. If all goes as planned, by March 2022, there will be a recreation center, amphitheater, splash pad, and safe family spaces in Corning.

