

**ORANGE COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

ACTION AGENDA ITEM ABSTRACT

Meeting Date: February 3, 2009

**Action Agenda
Item No.** 7-a

SUBJECT: Summer Camp ("Sun Fun Camp") Report

DEPARTMENT: Parks and Recreation

PUBLIC HEARING: (Y/N) No

ATTACHMENT(S):

A: Summer Camp Staff Report
B: RPAC Summer Camp Survey Report

INFORMATION CONTACT:

Lori Taft, 245-2660

PURPOSE: To provide a report and survey that were prepared in response to a request from the County Commissioners to provide follow-up information regarding the cancellation of the Sun Fun Camp program in 2008.

BACKGROUND: The Sun Fun Camp was one of the original programs offered by the new Recreation and Parks Department when it was formed in 1975. It operated successfully each year until 2008. The program consisted of seven individual weeks of general camp programming, including active and passive activities, instruction, free time, enrichment activities and field trips. On average, 80 to 100 children ages 5-12 were registered each week. The Camp fee in 2007 was \$80 per child/per week.

During budget deliberations in 2007 and 2008, it was determined a summer camp program was duplicated in the community many times over. Many agencies, both public and private, operate summer camps for children. The program was eliminated from the budget at that time in order to reprioritize services and conserve resources.

Members of the public, camp participants and the Recreation and Parks Advisory Council commented on this decision with various communications to members of the Board. The Board asked for follow-up information to be provided for its consideration.

FINANCIAL IMPACT: None

RECOMMENDATION(S): The Manager recommends the Board accept the report.



MEMORANDUM

**To: Board of County Commissioners
Laura Blackmon, County Manager
Willie Best, Assistant County Manager**

From: Lori Taft, Parks and Recreation Management Director

RE: Impacts related to the Elimination of the "Sun Fun" Summer Camp Program

Date: November 6, 2008

In May of 2008, the Board discussed the elimination of this camp program in light of the response from the community and from the Recreation and Parks Advisory Council (RPAC). Individuals and leaders in the Community, as well as RPAC had expressed to members of the board, their concern about the potential impact the elimination of this low-cost program might have on children and families. The Board appropriated one-time funding from a childcare subsidy source in the amount of \$10,000, to be used to assist summer day camp participants whose families fall at or below the 200% federal poverty level. The Board asked that that staff bring back a report on the impact of the loss of the Parks and Recreation Department's program.

Following the summer 2008 season, members of RPAC began to develop a survey that would be administered by members of the council to parents of 2007 Sun Fun participants. The telephone survey was administered in early October and the results compiled for this report. Parks and Recreation staff generated a list of 149 children who participated in at least one session of the 2007 Sun Fun camp. A total of 68 parents or 46% completed the survey. (RPAC survey report - Attachment B) Some of the important statistics revealed by the study include the following:

- 31% of respondents did not send their child to camp in the summer of 2008 (21 respondents.)
- 82% (17) of those who did not send their child to camp reported that cost was the principal factor and 18% (4) reported that they were unable to find an affordable replacement camp.
- 22% of 68 respondents reported that they received financial assistance for camp attendance.

The report details the survey results and concludes with the statement:

"The Sun Fun summer camp provided a valuable and much appreciated service to a significant number of Orange County residents. As of 2008, many of those residents have been unable to locate an affordable alternative for their children. Families have been inconvenienced in a variety of ways, and some families have even had to leave their children in unsafe situations as a result of the cancellation of the camp. While the greatest amount of hardship was experienced by families that did not locate a replacement camp, most of the families that did find an alternative for 2008 were also negatively affected in some way by the cancellation of the camp. The majority of parents fervently stated that they would welcome the return of the Sun Fun summer camp."

Staff with the Orange County Department of Social Services (DSS) distributed all of the special funding by July. They reported serving 23 children in the designated summer camp programs in addition to their normal state subsidy funding. Many inquiries were made as the summer progressed and after the funding was exhausted. (DSS letter - Attachment B) It is also important to note that front desk staff in both Parks and Recreation and Cooperative Extension reported receiving many calls from individuals voicing concern about their inability to get through or connect with the appropriate office in Social Services.

Orange County Cooperative Extension staff reported as follows:

"Orange County 4-H 2008 Summer Sizzle Day Camp program for rising 6th, 7th, and 8th graders is a program with a cost of \$100.00 per week. Our program serviced ten campers from the funds designated by Orange County Commissioners due to the absence of the 2008 Recreation and Parks summer program. The total amount of expenditures used from the \$10,000 designated funds was \$1,000.00. We had over a dozen inquiries for additional camperships but unfortunately the funds were exhausted within the first two weeks of the summer program initiation.... Our agency was unable to service the elementary age population as our summer day camp program is geared to the middle school population."

Orange County Schools reported serving eight children in addition to the children that transition from OCS Afterschool Program into their Summer Camp. These eight children were referred and subsidized by DSS.

Sportplex staff reported no change in their camp activity or enrollment from the previous year.

In a letter to the BOCC last May, the Recreation and Parks Advisory Council (RPAC) stated that:

"The benefits of participating in Recreation and Parks programs are endless; in addition, we believe that children learn through play. These benefits can be categorized into the following domains: physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and expressive. In addition, there are benefits for recreation and leisure development, benefits to professional staff, and benefits to caregivers/parents/family. Some of the benefits children receive from direct participation in Summer Day Camp Programs include; reduction in cardiovascular/respiratory risk and childhood obesity, improvement in general physical motor functions, increases in self-esteem and self-concept, opportunities to develop positive social skills and lifelong friendships. In addition, there are benefits to the caregiver/family and the community; allowing caregivers to work, knowing that their children are in a safe and meaningful place; and providing a program to keep youth positively involved in the community. "

Further, RPAC stated that the Orange County Parks and Recreation "Sun Fun" Day Camp Program was an affordable and accessible option to all residents of Orange County. The Orange County Recreation and Parks Advisory Council is asking the Board of Commissioners to reinstate funding for the Recreation and Parks Department Summer Day Camp Programs in fy2009-10, with the understanding that equivalent revenues would be generated from fees charged.

Orange County Parks and Recreation received many phone calls from individuals who voiced their concern about what the loss of the program would mean to their family. Staff directed inquiries to the Social Services program as well as to each of the alternative camp programs. Parks and Recreation remaining Athletic summer camp programs were all filled by May. Each of these camps is sport specific, focusing on Basketball, Football, Soccer or Baseball. Most of the camps had some children enrolled who had little or no interest in the sport. Some of these kids did not participate in the activity all day, but preferred to sit against the wall and watch. They had been placed in the camp for purposes of low cost day care. Unfortunately, some children who were interested in learning how to play that sport were unable to participate due to over enrollment.

Parks and Recreation does not advocate for the reinstatement of "Sun Fun" Camp. Staff recognizes the impact the loss of the camp had on the community, and feels the need to continue to serve those who have felt the loss most deeply. Parks and Recreation has tentatively planned some alternatives to the "Sun Fun" program for the Summer 2009 season. The fees would be set up to recover all of the direct costs involved in the operation of the program, while still remaining affordable to many of the former "Sun Fun" participants. Alternatives would consist of additional Athletics camps, as well as a series of "Enrichment Camps." Tentative Enrichment Camp topics are within the creative arts and environmental science realm, and could include: Nature Camps, Music, Theatre, Creative Writing and Pottery. The camp fees would be set to recover all direct costs and most would be proposed for funding in FY09-10. All of these new programs are tentative and would be fully developed or shelved, pending budget discussions held by the Board of Commissioners

Orange County Parks and Recreation "Sun Fun" Summer Camp Results of Parent Survey October, 2008

Purpose

In response to grievances expressed by community members regarding the cancellation of the Sun Fun summer camp, volunteers from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Council (PARC) undertook a brief survey of parents whose children participated in the 2007 Sun Fun summer camp. The purpose of the survey was to determine whether the participating families were able to locate affordable alternative camps for 2008 that met their needs and to document any hardships experienced as a result of the cancellation of the camp.

Methods

Sample:

Parks and Recreation Department staff generated a list of the 149 children who participated in at least one session of the 2007 Sun Fun camp. Brief (3-5 minute) telephone interviews were attempted with parents of all 149 children in September and October of 2008. A total of 68 parents completed the survey (46%). Of the 81 non-respondents, 2 parents refused to participate in the survey; 12 were ineligible for the survey because the family had either moved out of state, the child (or foster child) was no longer living with the parent, or the child had aged out of the camp, and thus the survey questions were irrelevant; 34 had changed or disconnected their home phone numbers; and 33 were not able to be reached after several call attempts. Parents who had more than one child attend the camp were interviewed separately regarding each child.

Survey Questions:

We asked parents whether their child attended a summer camp in 2008. If the child attended at least one week of a camp, we collected data on the number of weeks attended, the cost per week for each camp, and financial assistance received. If the child did not attend a camp, we asked the reason for non-attendance. We read all parents a list of possible problems that families may have experienced due to the cancellation of the summer camp and asked them to respond by stating whether that problem was a concern for their family. We also asked all parents whether or not they would have enrolled their child in the Sun Fun camp if it had been offered in 2008. Two open ended questions were also posed to parents to elicit information about the value they place on the Sun Fun camp and concerns relating to the cancellation of the camp. A copy of the survey is appended to this report (Appendix A).

Results

Camp Attendance for 2008:

Sixty-nine percent of respondents found at least one replacement camp for their child. For children who did attend a camp in 2008, the average number of weeks attended was 6 weeks. Thirty-one percent of respondents did not send their child to a camp in the summer of 2008. Of those who provided a reason for non-attendance, 82% reported that cost was the principal factor and 18% reported that they were unable to find an affordable replacement camp in time due to the late notice given regarding the cancellation of the Sun Fun camp.

Cost:

Seventy-seven percent of respondents who found replacement camps for 2008 provided data regarding the cost of those camps. The average cost per week for all camps was \$99. The range was \$0 to \$235 per week. A few children attended camps or a school-based summer enrichment program for free. The least expensive camp options for families were the Orange County Parks and Recreation sports camps and a few private church camps.

Of those respondents who found replacement camps, 22% stated that they received financial assistance for camp attendance. Some of the assistance received was private. For instance, one family reported that they received a discount at a camp because the parent works at the museum that sponsored the camp.

Parent Concerns:

All parents, regardless of whether or not they found a replacement camp for their child, were asked about their concerns regarding the cancellation of the Sun Fun camp for 2008. The results are reported in Table 1. Because it was expected that families would experience different types of problems depending on whether they found a new camp for 2008 or whether they had to make alternative arrangements for home care, the results are reported separately for families that did enroll their child in a camp in 2008 and those that did not.

The most common concern parents expressed was increased out of pocket expense (71%), followed by concerns about the child being bored (52%). Although parents who did not send their child to a camp in 2008 were less likely than other parents to report increased out of pocket expenses, almost half of these families nevertheless did experience an increase in expenses due to the cancellation of the camp. Parents who were unable to locate or pay for alternative camps experienced the highest levels of hardship overall, particularly with regard to the child being bored (81%), lack of exercise for the child (67%), difficulties for others (usually a relative) having to care for the child (62%) and concerns about leaving the child home alone (43%).

Table 1. Problems/hardships experienced by families as a result of the cancellation of the Sun Fun summer camp.

Problem/concern	Percent of parents stating that this was a problem		
	<i>Families that DID send their child to a camp in 2008</i>	<i>Families that DID NOT send their child to a camp in 2008</i>	<i>All respondents</i>
Increased out of pocket expenses	81%	48%	71%
The child was bored	38%	81%	52%
Difficulties for others who had to care for the child	34%	62%	43%
The child did not receive much exercise	28%	67%	40%
Transportation difficulties / location	40%	33%	38%
Problems with missing work or being late	38%	33%	37%
Inconvenient hours for replacement camps / alternative care situations	34%	24%	31%
Concerns about leaving the child home alone	21%	43%	28%

Responses to open-ended questions revealed additional concerns expressed by parents over the cancellation of the Sun Fun camp. Nine parents mentioned concerns about their child missing out on interaction with other children, 4 parents mentioned concerns about lack of structure or stability for their child, 4 parents mentioned not being satisfied with other camps that were found, 4 parents stated that summer camps contribute to children’s health and development, 3 parents specifically mentioned safety concerns due to their child’s lack of supervision over the summer, and 2 parents mentioned that the cancellation caused increased hardship for single parents. Other comments were that summer camps help keep children out of trouble, that not all children are interested in a sports camp (the main low cost alternative currently provided by the county), and that camps help keep children stimulated over the summer so that they have an easier time adjusting to school in the fall. One parent, who lamented the loss of the Sun Fun camp, added that a camp for teens whose parents work is also needed in the county.

Evaluation of the Sun Fun Camp:

When asked if their child would have attended the Sun Fun camp if it had been offered in 2008, 84% responded that they would have attended. The main reason parents gave for their desire to enroll their child in Sun Fun camp is that it is a good camp that provides fun and varied activities and that their child liked the camp (33 responses). Parents also commented that Sun Fun was affordable (18 responses) and convenient (13 responses). Other reasons for wanting to continue with Sun Fun were that their children missed the staff and/or the friends they made at Sun Fun, that Sun Fun had a diverse camper population, and that the staff at Sun Fun could be trusted. Several parents also mentioned that their children had attended Sun Fun for many years, or that it was a tradition in their family. One parent said that he had attended the camp as a child and that it was one of the best experiences of his childhood.

Three percent of parents said that they “possibly” would have enrolled their child in 2008 and 13% would not have enrolled their child. Those few parents who would not have enrolled their child either wanted to try something new, were not satisfied with the Sun Fun camp, had moved such that the location was no longer convenient, or had simply found the alternatives to be satisfactory. One parent had a special needs child who was better served by a special needs camp.

Limitations

A main limitation of this survey is the fact that 23% of the parents had disconnected or wrong numbers and were unable to be reached. This could indicate that the survey under-represents families that are more likely to move. If the phone numbers have been disconnected due to the inability to pay phone bills, there is a potential that the survey under-represents low income families. The survey also under-represents foster children who attended Sun Fun, as we did not interview foster parents if the child was no longer living in the home.

Conclusions

The Sun Fun summer camp provided a valuable and much appreciated service to a significant number of Orange County residents. As of 2008, many of those residents have been unable to locate an affordable alternative for their children. Families have been inconvenienced in a variety of ways, and some families have even had to leave their children in unsafe situations as a result of the cancellation of the camp. While the greatest amount of hardship was experienced by families that did not locate a replacement camp, most of the families that did find an alternative for 2008 were also negatively affected in some way by the cancellation of the camp. The majority of parents fervently stated that they would welcome the return of the Sun Fun summer camp.

Appendix A. Sun Fun Camp Survey

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SUN FUN CAMP SURVEY - FALL 2008

Child Name: _____

Parent Name: _____

Home Phone Number: _____

Other Phone Number: _____

CONTACTS

	Interviewer Initials	Month /Day	Day & Time of Call	Results/Notes: Note if the interview was completed, if a specific call-back time was requested, new number obtained, reason for refusal, etc.
1		___/___	M T W Th F S Sn _____	
2		___/___	M T W Th F S Sn _____	
3		___/___	M T W Th F S Sn _____	
4		___/___	M T W Th F S Sn _____	
5		___/___	M T W Th F S Sn _____	

INTRODUCTION SCRIPT

CALLING FROM: Hello, my name is _____ and I am calling on behalf of the Orange County Parks and Recreation Department. May I please speak with [PARENT NAME]?

PURPOSE: The reason for my call is that we are doing a confidential survey of all families that participated in the *Sun Fun* summer camp in 2007. As you probably know, the *Sun Fun* summer camp was cancelled for the summer of 2008. The purpose of this survey is to find out what problems or hardships the cancellation may have created for families. We'd like to ask you just a few questions to find out how the cancellation of the *Sun Fun* summer camp affected your family. The survey will take no more than 3-5 minutes. The answers you give will be mixed in with answers from over 150 other people, and no names will be reported along with the answers. It helps us a lot to know what parents think.

CONSENT: Do you have time now to complete this quick survey over the telephone?

- YES: Great, thanks! GO TO THE NEXT PAGE.
[IF APPLICABLE: I will ask the questions separately for each of your children who attended the *Sun Fun* camp.]
- NO: Is there a better time I can call when you will have time to talk?
 - YES: [RECORD TIME] Okay. I will try to call you then. Thanks.
 - NO: Is it OK if I just try back another time?
[IF NO, RECORD AS A REFUSAL ABOVE]

