

# Keeping Our Youth Fit

## An overview of Fox Valley Park District Healthy Youth Recreation Programming



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# Fox Valley Park District

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Since its inception in 1947, recreation and education opportunities at the Fox Valley Park District have expanded immensely. Initially created to protect pristine land areas for the public to freely utilize and enjoy, today the Park District offers hundreds of programs and events that provide recreational experiences for a dynamic, ever-changing community of 200,000-plus residents.

Recreation programs and leisure opportunities greatly enhance the quality of life in the communities (Aurora, North Aurora and Montgomery) served by the Park District. In creating environments that engage people in positive activities, the Park District provides benefits for individuals, families, businesses, schools, neighborhoods and households of all ages, income levels and cultures.

Effective recreation programs promote the constructive use of leisure time and foster a lifelong commitment to healthy lifestyles. Recreation pursuits range from organized sports and scheduled events to more individualized, casual activities such as fishing, hiking and family picnics.

These positive impacts are reflected by the betterment of our communities. The District's recreation programs play an integral role in a variety of ways. Among them:

- Providing a sense of place and belonging for each individual involved.
- Promoting health and wellness while helping to deter obesity.
- Offering safe places to play, grow, learn and interact.
- Facilitating stronger neighborhood and community connections.
- Enhancing cultural unity while honoring diversity.
- Helping protect our natural environment and increasing awareness of its importance.
- Supporting economic development and local reinvestment.

Enriching children's lives is at the forefront of the Fox Valley Park District's mission. Children who are involved in interactive activities and recreational pursuits enjoy a higher quality of life that carries into adulthood. Engaging children in these activities reaps important physical and social benefits.

For example, teaching children the importance of daily exercise – and making it something they learn to enjoy rather than dread – helps young people develop healthy lifestyles. Assigning responsibility to children and expecting them to carry it out builds self-esteem and self-worth.

The Park District offers an array of such programs designed to build confidence and character in our children. What works to the District's advantage is that while these programs are educational and developmental in nature, children view them as great fun, creating a win-win situation for all parties involved—from children to parents to District staff. It all adds up to stronger, better communities that revolve around the common good.

To illustrate the depth and reach of the Park District's healthy kids programming, descriptions have been broken down into programs and events held at the three community centers and community outreach programming.

## VAUGHAN ATHLETIC CENTER

Nationally acclaimed, state-of-the-industry athletic complex and fitness facility, the Vaughan Athletic Center opened in 2005 and stands as a shimmering symbol of health and vitality on Aurora's west side. The 225,000-square-foot facility features three pools and an indoor water park, a Field House and track, Tennis Center, Fitness Center and group exercise classes and multi-purpose rooms.

Many of the Vaughan Athletic Center's events and programs are aimed at building healthy lifestyles:

- **Kids Fitness Fun Fair:** This annual event is offered at no cost to give families and children an opportunity to experience the fun involved with staying fit and understand the importance of good health. Learning how to achieve and maintain proper habits is a lesson that lasts a lifetime. While promoting health and wellness, this event also serves as a crusade against childhood obesity, warning parents and children alike of the perils associated with developing bad habits and becoming overweight. The message is both inspirational and educational, while extolling the virtues of healthy living, it also helps create awareness at a young age that lifestyle decisions carry long-term importance. The Kids Fitness Fun Fair communicates this in ways that children find fun and interesting. The event includes entertainment, fitness demos, contests and an inflatable obstacle course. Local vendors representing the health and wellness industry add to the ambiance, providing interaction, instruction and free giveaways that delight young attendees. A live DJ leads the crowd in group dances and keeps guests energized and moving.
- **Indoor Playhouse:** This indoor play area allows children ages 3 to 11 the opportunity to crawl, run and jump as they travel through 4,000 square feet and two stories of mazes, punching bags and spiral slides.
- **Friday Night Fun:** The focus of this program is for children ages 6 to 11 to go swimming, make a craft and play sports and games in the Field House for three hours.
- **School Holiday Programs:** One-day programs on Columbus Day, Veterans Day and Martin Luther King Day offer children ages 5 to 11 years an opportunity to be active on a day off from school. They participate in a variety of sports, games, crafts and swimming. They receive two healthy snacks during the day and stay busy from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

- **Open Gym:** Children can have fun in the Field House in an unstructured setting.
- **Mini-Gym:** In this preschool-age program, children develop gross motor skills, hand-eye coordination, balance and body control.
- **Batting Cages/ Baseball:** Indoor batting cages offer local teams the chance to get together and build a bond with one another before their season starts.
- **Pitch with the Pros:** These private pitching lessons are for kids of all ages and are taught by Bill Copp. The sessions teach proper fundamentals and techniques of pitching.
- **Birthday Parties:** Parties provided for children of all ages and abilities offer themes including Sports, Dance Dance Revolution, Indoor Playhouse and Splash Away pool party.
- **Games Galore:** This program offers preschool-age children a chance to jump, run, crawl and hop using a variety of equipment in the gym. Children develop their coordination, self-confidence and listening skills while receiving lots of positive feedback.
- **Kid Rock I, II, III:** These classes combine the use of music and movement to encourage children to be independent and to develop motor skills and their imaginations.
- **Saturday Sports and Swim:** Children spend the afternoon swimming and playing a variety of sports in the Field House while making new friends and enjoying physical activity.
- **Swim Programs:** Swim programs and lessons are offered for children ages 12 months and up year round.
- **Family & Sunday Swim and Gym:** This is an open swim time for families to swim together as well as spend some time in the gym for basketball, soccer or other games.
- **Basketball Leagues:** A variety of leagues are offered: basketball co-ed youth, grades 4-5 intermediate, 6th grade boys, high school girls summer. These leagues introduce and build on the child's basketball fundamentals in a positive atmosphere. Basic instruction in dribbling, shooting and defense are taught as well as teamwork and sportsmanship.
- **March Madness Extravaganza:** This event consists of a round-robin basketball tournament as well as fun games and contests for all ages. When kids are not participating in a game or contest, they are able to watch the NCAA televised match-ups on the large projection screen.
- **Rising Stars Basketball:** For the past 15 years, Rising Stars has been introducing players to the essentials of basketball, teamwork and sportsmanship in an action-packed environment that develops each player inside and out. All classes are taught by professional coaches who at a minimum have played collegiate basketball. These classes are for kids in grades 1 to 6.
- **Soccer:** The district offers a wide range of soccer from kindergarten to high school in the chance to participate in Saturday morning leagues in the spring and fall at the Stuart Sports Complex where children learn not only about soccer but teamwork, sportsmanship and friendships. They can compete in one of the competitive leagues in the summer. In the winter, they have the chance to compete in the 3v3 leagues at the Vaughan Athletic Center. Staff also works with all of the affiliate groups to develop the kids' fitness, talent and sportsmanship. Many affordable soccer camps are offered to youth in the area.
- **Dr. Cosma Soccer Clinics:** This program offers clinics for children ages 4 to 10 that keeps everyone learning and moving. As well as basic skills, this class focuses on positioning and teamwork skills in game situations and is great for coordination and self-esteem building.
- **Club Volleyball:** The Vaughan Athletic Center is the host site for the Cyclones Volleyball Club that caters to middle school and high school students. This program offers personal attention to individual needs and offers enough practice time to develop core skills. This is a competitive program that focuses on hard work, having fun and improvement of skills.
- **Volleyball Programs:** A variety of volleyball programs are offered, including Volleyball Skills & Drills and VolleyStarz. Children learn the basic skills of the sport as well as teamwork and sportsmanship.
- **Middle School Volleyball League:** This league offers the opportunity to sharpen skills and techniques while learning to become a better team player. It allows everyone the opportunity to participate on a team. Each team has a one-hour practice and a one-hour game each week.
- **Tennis Programs:** A variety of tennis programs are offered, from youth beginner to elite advanced. Players learn the basics of the game and the value and rewards of hard work and discipline.
- **Vaughan Performance Team:** This is an academy-level, invitation-only team of elite youth tennis players training and competing in an atmosphere of excellence. The team was created to help its players enhance their abilities through personalized coaching sessions, goal-setting, confidence building, speed and agility training.
- **All Star Sports Classes:** These programs—Lil Sluggers, Lil Pint Hoops, Tiny Kickers, Multi Sport, Parent-Tot Sports, Soccer II, Baseball I and II, Arena Flag Football, Dodge Ball—are designed to cover the basic skills of a particular sport in a fun and safe environment. Each class emphasizes good sportsmanship and covers the rules of the sport. Actual games are played at each level with the advanced levels focusing on strategies and teamwork.
- **Kids Karate Club/ Lil Dragons:** This program offers three levels of Kids Karate as well as classes for preschool-agers. This is a progressive 10-week program that focuses on family involvement and stresses respect while teaching both martial arts and safety to children. They can start as preschoolers and move into the beginner level as a white belt and continue through yellow, orange, green and blue belt classes.

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- **Tumbling, Cheer and Gymnastics:** The focus of these classes is for children to experience new skills, new friends and fun while increasing self-worth, self-confidence and a joy for gymnastics. Students work on a variety of equipment and learn age-appropriate skills.
- **Kids First Classes:** These programs in flag football, dodge ball and badminton are designed for youth ages 6 to 14 years old. Children participate in drills and games that increase skill level and enhance the proper techniques for that particular sport. Hand-eye coordination, strength, and flexibility are also emphasized as well as safety and sportsmanship.
- **Vacation Activity Camp (Spring, Summer, Winter):** These camps offer a wide variety of activities for children ages 5 to 11, including swimming sports, games, crafts and movies. It includes field trips and a chance for children to make friends and have fun while participating in new experiences.
- **Destination Camp – Sports of All Sorts:** This one-week camp is packed with a variety of sports and promotes healthy and physically active lifestyles for children. This camp helps children find a sport they enjoy participating in and they learn that physical activity equals fun. Participants attend daily fitness classes and learn about conditioning and proper nutrition.
- **All Star Sports Camps:** These camps—All Sports Camp, Baseball Camp, Basketball Camp, Flag Football Camp, Soccer Camp, Girls Softball Camp, Volleyball Camp—are available for youth in grades 1 to 8 and are designed to cover all aspects of a particular sport. Boys and girls build confidence and self-esteem as they are challenged with new skills.
- **Kids First Camps:** These camps—Badminton Camp, Baseball Camp, Cheerleading Camp, Flag Football Camp—provide sports instruction for children ages 6 to 14. Each camp challenges players from beginning to advanced levels through competitive drills and action packed games in a fun and safe environment.
- **Volleyball Camps:** These five-day camps—EVP Tour Spring Break Volleyball Camp, Indoor Youth Volleyball Summer Camp, Spiking 101 Camp and Winter Break Volleyball Camps—concentrate on passing, setting, overhand serving and spiking. These camps are taught by the instructors from Volleyball Professionals of Chicago and are for kids from grades K to 8.
- **Basketball Camps:** These camps—Co-Ed Spring Break Basketball Camp, Youth Basketball Summer Camp and Basketball Holiday Co-Ed Camp—are instructional camps designed to introduce younger players to the game of basketball and to challenge older players to develop and refine their skills. The camps are directed by Michelle Roof, head women’s basketball coach at Aurora University. These camps are for kids ages 7 to 11.
- **Big League Dreams Baseball Camp:** The purpose of this camp is to teach the proper fundamentals of pitching, catching, hitting, fielding, and base running/sliding. Big League Dreams is dedicated to teaching the fundamentals through elite professional instruction as well as promoting sportsmanship and ensuring a safe and fun environment.
- **KidFit:** KidFit is a youth fitness class designed for kids ages 7 to 13. Fun cardio activities get kids moving while building self-esteem and helping them to adopt a healthy lifestyle. The program fosters a desire to play and be active while kids learn about building healthy lifestyles. It helps build self-esteem, athletic coordination and agility while they develop a positive experience related to physical activity.
- **“Working it out Together” Adult & Child Fitness Time:** The “Working it out Together” program is designed for those adults looking for fun and healthy ways to do things together. During designated times, children accompanied by an adult utilize the treadmills, bicycles, stability balls and several other sport-performance pieces of equipment.
- **Teen Spin:** This cardio workout for ages 12 and up offers them a chance to listen to favorite tunes while riding stationary bikes, followed with a cool down and stretch.
- **Yoga 101:** These classes are designed to teach kids ages 11 to 18 the fundamentals behind Yoga and set a healthier quality of life for years to come.
- **Family Kick It!:** This cardio kickboxing program for the whole family combines a cardio kickboxing workout with useable self-defense techniques.
- **What’s for Dinner? Nutrition Family Workshop:** One of four nutrition workshops, the focus is on showing kids and their parents how to shop for healthy food and develop appropriate eating habits. The workshop is led by a nutrition consultant.
- **Run, Jump, Climb:** This fitness program challenges kids to run jump and climb their way through a fitness challenge open to children 5 to 11. Use of the indoor track, jump ropes and an obstacle course is provided.
- **Member Appreciation Weekend:** This three-day special event is open to all members, each of whom is personally invited to attend at no cost. It includes activities and promotions that recognize and celebrate the members at the Vaughan Athletic Center. The agenda includes healthy food samples, a health fair, group exercise demonstrations and trainer challenges.

## EOLA COMMUNITY CENTER

The Eola Community Center serves the community needs for tens of thousands of residents living in the southeast section of Aurora, which encompasses portions of Kane, DuPage and Will counties. The center features preschool rooms, the E-Fit interactive fitness room, babysitting room, full-size gymnasium, fitness center, running/walking track, multi-purpose rooms, dance studios and space for gymnastics and martial arts. Many of Eola Community Center's events and programs are aimed at building healthy lifestyles:

- **All Star Sports Classes:** These programs— Parent-Tot Super Sports, Soccer, Basketball, T-ball, Floor Hockey and Baseball—are designed to cover the basic skills of a particular sport in a fun and safe environment. Each class emphasizes good sportsmanship and covers the rules of the sport. Actual games are played at each level with the advanced levels focusing on strategies and teamwork.
- **Little Learners:** This program offered to children ages 8 months to 4 years has a main focus on songs, games, large motor activities and finger plays. This class also encourages the participants to experience a range of fine motor skills.
- **Kid Rock:** These classes combine music, rhymes and instruments to explore gross motor skills and imaginative play for children ages 20 months to 5 years.
- **Tot Rock:** These programs for children ages 12 months to 20 months provide structured and unstructured time to encourage socialization among the participants.
- **Creative Play Preschool:** The preschool program incorporates 25 minutes of large-motor time per class. Children use the gym to play with scooters, basketballs and hoops, large blocks, tricycles, parachutes and tunnels. If the weather is warm, staff takes the children outside to play on the playground with slides, climbers and swings. Parents are asked to provide healthy snacks.
- **Healthy Children Made Easy:** Topics in this program vary each week and include ear infections, allergies, vaccinations, ADD/ADHD, asthma, nutrition and more.
- **Kids Karate Club/ Lil Dragons:** This program offers three levels of Kids Karate as well as classes for preschool-age children. This is a progressive 10-week program that focuses on family involvement and stresses respect while teaching both martial arts and safety to children. They can start as preschoolers and move into the beginner level as a white belt and continue through yellow, orange, green and blue belt classes.
- **Fit 4 Kids:** This fitness class designed for kids ages 7 to 13 offers fun cardio activities to get the kids moving while building self-esteem and helping them adopt a healthy lifestyle. Classes meet two times a week after school.
- **Yoga 4 Kids:** These classes are designed to teach children the fundamentals behind yoga and set a healthier quality of life for years to come. This class meets twice a week for children ages 11 to 15.
- **Happier Kids, Better World:** In this one-day course, children ages 4 to 8 learn valuable tools for coping with stress, building their self-esteem and learning how to let their unique gifts shine. Two popular children's books from inspirational author Wayne Dyer are used in this workshop.
- **Super Sweet Step:** This step class for children ages 7 to 13 gives youth the opportunity to use the steps that are normally incorporated into "adult" fitness classes.
- **Batting Cages/ Baseball:** Indoor batting cages offer local teams the chance to get together and build a bond with one another before their season starts.
- **Birthday Parties:** Gymnastics and other sport-themed birthday parties are another opportunity for kids to have fun and get exercise.
- **Year-round Programming:** Programs focusing on gymnastics, karate, cheerleading, tumbling and dance are offered each season to build coordination, strength, flexibility and endurance, making them a great foundation for all sports. Every class and team is focused on encouraging self-confidence, improving skills and coordination, and building the life-long love of fitness and healthy choices.
- **E-Fit Room:** The E-Fit interactive fitness room uses state-of-the-art fitness technology to create a fun cardio, skill, speed/agility and core strength workout experience. Included in the room for children 5 and up is a 52-inch LCD TV with Guitar Hero and World Tour Complete Band Guitars, drums and microphone; Nintendo Wii with tennis, bowling, golf, baseball, boxing, table tennis, laser hockey, billiards, fishing and more; XerDance Dance Pads, a dance/cardio workout that includes 150 song selections in traditional DDR format, Sportwall Training System with relay races, games, sport-specific training, conditioning and endurance; indoor climbing wall with traverse climbing; and a preschool electronic playground with Chase the Lights, Find Skippy the Dog and Carry a Tune games.
- **E-Fit Conditioning & Endurance:** This program for children ages 7 to 12 enhances an individual's power, speed, accuracy, agility and cardiovascular strength. Interactive challenges, circuits and relay race activities are set up on the electronic Sportwall with specific exercises to address the areas being worked on each day. Medicine and Bosu balls, beanbags, noodles, weights and a variety of other tools make each station more difficult.
- **E-Fit: XerDance & Abs:** Participants ages 6 to 12 get a full body workout by doing intervals between stations using the XerDance Dance Pads and the Performance PT Sportwall. XerDance offers 150 songs. Participants rotate between the dance pads and the Sportwall, performing various activities using Bosu and medicine balls to improve full body strength, core control, flexibility, balance and coordination while working arms and abs.

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- **E-Fit: Sports Skills & Drills:** This class for children ages 5 to 12 is designed to work on a variety of skills using all three panels of the electronic Sportwall that work together, demanding a significant increase in lateral movement and sport-specific drills. Sports covered will include baseball (throwing and fielding), tennis (footwork and serving speed), soccer (kicking drills and shooting), basketball (shuffling, passing), and coordination.
- **E-Fit: Sports Training:** This one-day clinic focuses on fitness and conditioning for sports. Participants use the E-Fit Sports Wall to do a variety of drills and workouts to help improve physical fitness and conditioning for youth ages 9 to 14.
- **E-Fit: Sports Games:** The E-Fit Sports Wall offers many fun and exciting games that are fun to play and great for fitness as well, including Knock the Lights Out, Ball, Tic Tac Toe and Play that Tune. This is available to youth ages 7 to 11.
- **E-Fit Birthday Parties:** Birthday party packages offer the use of the E-Fit Room for parents looking for an alternative to traditional birthday parties at home or at a banquet facility.
- **Open Gym:** Children can have fun in the gymnasium in an unstructured setting.

## PRISCO COMMUNITY CENTER

Centrally located in the heart of Aurora at Lake Street and Illinois Avenue, the Prisco Community Center is a hub of activity for park district events and activities. In 2005, Prisco received a 9,000-square-foot addition that featured dividable community rooms with stage, a new dance studio and new classrooms.

Many of Prisco Community Center's events and programs are aimed at building healthy lifestyles:

- **Middle School Basketball League:** Boys in grades 7 to 8 can play in an eight-week league every Saturday with an additional two hours of practice during the week. The boys learn the skills needed to perform the fundamentals of the game.
- **3v3 Soccer:** This eight-week program every Sunday for youth ages 4 to 10 helps to develop foot skills with constant touches on the ball. The game consists of two 20-minute halves.
- **Soccer Training:** This program for youth ages 3 to 5 offers a chance to engage in physical activity while developing basic motor skills and soccer skills.
- **Sports Saturday:** This free eight-week program allows participants to choose from five different sites where they can learn a new sport (floor hockey, soccer, basketball, dodge ball, kickball, T-ball, and bowling) and do fun crafts. This program is held on Saturdays for grades 1 to 5. This program used the *Power Play Curriculum* in 2007, when health, fitness and nutrition were incorporated for 20 minutes into the programming during each class session with pre- and post-tests submitted to Illinois Association of Park Districts.
- **Volleyball Clinic:** This clinic for ages 7 to 18 teaches bumping, setting, passing, spiking, verbiage and game play.
- **Batting Cages/ Baseball:** Indoor batting cages offer local teams the chance to get together and build a bond with one another before their season starts.
- **Youth Fencing:** Fencing is offered year round for ages 8 to 18 from beginners to intermediate participants. Each class has conditioning, drilling and bouts. Time is set aside each class for individual instruction.
- **Parent-Tot-Sports Craze:** Parents engage with their children during six-week sessions of fun active games. Scooter races, T-ball, tennis, basketball, soccer and parachutes are used to help engage all the children's motor skills.
- **Smocks and Jocks:** Kids ages 3 to 5 play different sporting games/obstacle courses and then create "masterpieces."
- **Play and Picnic:** Families bring a picnic and join in fun outdoor activities for the entire family. Games include: potato sack race, scooter race, kite flying, face painting, chalk art and bike parade.
- **Year-round Programming:** Programs focusing on sports, tumbling and dance are offered each season to build coordination, strength, flexibility and endurance, making them a great foundation for all sports. Every class and team is focused on encouraging self-confidence, improving skills and coordination, and building the life-long love of fitness and healthy choices.
- **Open Gym:** Children can have fun in the gymnasium in an unstructured setting.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In its continuing efforts to offer venues and opportunities for all residents to get involved, the Park District strives to transcend the wide generational, cultural and income gaps that exist among its diverse communities. The District's outreach programs are designed to engender community togetherness by appealing to the basic fundamentals of happiness all of us share, regardless of background.

These are among the most popular and well-attended in the District's vast portfolio of programs. To accommodate community needs, these programs are readily available without restrictions.

Most of the community outreach programs are aimed at building healthy lifestyles:

- **Boxing Training:** This free program is offered year-round Monday through Thursday evenings from 5 to 8 p.m. Participants drop in to learn basic fundamentals, jumping rope, use exercise machines, heavy bags, speed bags and pair up in the ring.
- **Summer Playgrounds Program:** This program for children in grades 1 to 5 offers fun activities such as sports, arts and crafts, reading time, field trips and special events. Children have the opportunity to go on field trips one to two times per week including park district water parks, Blackberry Farm, movies, arcades and others. This is a seven-week program scheduled at four locations. The cost of the program is free except for the optional field trips.
- **Neighborhood Art:** This program is offered at no cost and serves children in grades 1 to 5, exposing them to a variety of art forms while promoting awareness, physical activity and socialization among peers. Dance, sports and games are part of the regular activities as well. Participants meet once per week for six weeks, with each meeting averaging two hours. The program is held concurrently at seven park sites across Aurora.
- **Art in Motion:** Staff provides an hour of art for children in grades 1 to 5 and then they do an hour of movement and dance activities during the school year at four to six elementary schools each year.
- **After-school Middle School Programs:** Staff offers sports activities once a week at various middle schools and a healthy cooking class where a handout on nutrition or health facts is passed out to the students along with making a healthy snack. This program uses *The Power of Choice Curriculum – Helping Youth Make Healthy Eating and Fitness Decisions* following the American Cancer Society's guidelines.
- **Elementary After-School Programs:** Offered once a week, sports activities occur throughout the school year at seven schools. Tennis and tumbling programs are offered at approximately 10 elementary schools throughout the school year. Staff offers a walk/run program for elementary students in partner with the American Cancer Society. The curriculum used is *Healthy Kid Network*.
- **Phillips Park Summer Tennis Program:** This camp for children ages 7 to 18 focuses on these lifetime skill group goals: enhancing social skills, fostering personal skills and developing fitness awareness.

## CONCLUSION

By offering such a large array of healthy kid programs, the Fox Valley Park District provides access to the benefits of recreation as an invaluable community service. The Park District – and each person who is involved in elevating his or her own quality of life – helps to build a stronger, happier and healthier community. It is a lofty goal, yet one the Park District must continually aspire to on its continuing mission toward making the communities it serves the best they can be.



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