STHM alums receive Pennsylvania Park and Recreation Society awards

Three graduates of the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management have been recognized for their programming achievements in the park and recreation industry.

Each year, the Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society (PRPS) bestows Excellence in Programming Awards upon deserving professionals for outstanding achievement in park and recreation programming. In 2014, Daniel Russell, BS '97, Sudha Suryadevara, BS '05, and Kathleen Muller, BS '78, were named recipients of the award for their programming contributions geared toward serving children.

Those who receive the PRPS Excellence in Programming Award earned statewide recognition at a March 2014 conference in Champion, Pa.

Russell and Suryadevara, both of who represent the Upper Merion Township Department of Parks and Recreation, received the award for their SNAP soccer program. SNAP, an acronym for Special Needs Adaptive Program, offers children with special needs the opportunity to learn basic soccer skills while also getting the chance to exercise and socialize.

“We feel, as a recreation department, that it's important to provide services for people of all ages and abilities,” said Russell, the Director of Upper Merion Parks and Recreation. “It's very near and dear to our hearts because it reaches the special needs population in our community.”

“The program is designed to be rewarding, challenging and fun,” said Suryadevara, Upper Merion's Recreation Superintendent who initially interned for Russell and the department during her STHM career.

The SNAP soccer program met several criteria for the Excellence in Programming Award, due to its partnership with the Upper Merion School District. The district provides student volunteers to assist with teaching SNAP soccer skills. Upon completion of the program, volunteers receive a special certificate to recognize their dedication and hours of community service.

“It's a really great opportunity that provides volunteer buddies the chance to understand and relate to participants with special needs,” Suryadevara said. “It brings two groups of people that might not otherwise interact, together.”

As the Director of Strategic Initiatives for Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, Muller said creating a program to benefit the future success of the children in Philadelphia was something she and Deputy Mayor for Environmental and Community Resources Michael DiBerardinis had deemed a necessity. Their program, Mantua in Action Youth Development, provides increased opportunities for middle-school youth to stay active, lead healthy lifestyles and evolve as community leaders.

“We offer traditional activities such as basketball, tennis, and art classes,” Muller said. “We also offer a variety of non-traditional activities like wrestling, squash and bicycle workshops, which are conducted by Neighborhood Bike Works in Philadelphia, to teach the kids how to properly take care of their bikes.”

The Mantua in Action Youth Development Program, which receives volunteers from its partnership with Drexel University, provides safe spaces within which to conduct featured activities through the year. The program, Muller said, is reflective of the hard work of those from the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Department who care deeply about the future of urban youth.

“The children are connecting with caring adults while learning new skills,” said Muller. “They are our citizens. They are the future leaders of Philadelphia.”

–Angelise Stuhl

STHM alums Kathleen Muller, of the Philadelphia Department of Parks and Recreation, and Daniel Russell and Sudha Suryadevara, of the Upper Merion Township Department of Parks and Recreation, were recently honored for stellar programming.