

BREC Superintendent Carolyn McKnight Retiring After Decorated Career

EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH – After nearly seven years at the helm of BREC, 30 years in the parks and recreation profession, and prior military service in the United States Air Force, Superintendent Carolyn McKnight announced she is retiring at the end of the year, marking the end of a decorated career.

In 2016, McKnight won the highest individual award conferred by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) when she was named the National Distinguished Professional. While serving as BREC Superintendent, she was named one of the Influential Women in Business by the Baton Rouge Business Report and received numerous honors from organizations such as the East Baton Rouge Metro Council, School Board and City Constable's office. She serves as a board member for NRPA, is a Fellow with the American Academy of Park and Recreation Administrators as well as a Certified Park and Recreation Professional and served as a lead reviewer for the NRPA Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) accreditation review team, along with many other board memberships and affiliations. In 2010, McKnight was inducted into the Texas Women's Hall of Fame by Governor Rick Perry.

Superintendent McKnight began her career in parks and recreation in Dallas, Texas in 1988. She also served in the military, retiring from the Air Force as a Colonel in 2006. She held several leadership roles at the Dallas Parks and Recreation System before coming to Baton Rouge in January 2012.

“It has been an honor to serve with Carolyn McKnight in my capacity as Chairman of the BREC Commission,” said Lloyd Benson II. “She is a visionary leader who has worked tirelessly to continue the progress made by the Imagine Your Parks strategic plan passed by voters in 2004 and to take the BREC system to the next level. Even more importantly, under her leadership, BREC served a critical role in helping to serve the community after civil unrest following the police shooting of Alton Sterling and the Historic Flood of 2016 that took place just one month later,” said Benson.

During her tenure with BREC, the agency has been named a finalist for the highest award in the profession, the NRPA Gold Medal Award, three years in a row. BREC has won the coveted Gold Medal twice and has been named a finalist in the largest category of the competition a total of 15 times. With McKnight's guidance, BREC also achieved an unprecedented fifth agency accreditation in 2014. That same year, BREC completed the Imagine Your Parks 2 strategic plan and won the support of voters for its ten-year property tax renewal. Despite a growing anti-tax sentiment in East Baton Rouge Parish, BREC won approval from voters for the other half of its funding two years later in 2016.

Under her leadership, the long-awaited Knock Knock Children's Museum became a reality, recreation centers in every part of the parish have been modernized and air-conditioned, Howell golf course has been transformed through a beautiful 72-acre addition to the community park and major renovations have been completed at every community park within the BREC system – including the expansion of Liberty Lagoon Water Park and the Botanical Gardens, the addition of playgrounds and splash pads at North Sherwood Forest, Jackson, Zachary and Highland Road, expanded recreation centers at Anna T. Jordan and Highland Road, outdoor fitness equipment at Greenwood and Perkins Road, expanded recreation centers at Anna T. Jordan and Forest, as well as the creation of Sandy Creek Community Park. She has also overseen the addition of the Main Library, plaza and café' building at Independence Community Park, the addition of a new visitor's center at Magnolia Mound, the opening and enhancement of Central Sports Park and the new education center at Bluebonnet Swamp, among

numerous construction projects approved by voters. Since Superintendent McKnight joined BREC, the agency has doubled the miles of trails it offers pedestrians, joggers and bicyclists and among additional trails projects currently in the planning phase, BREC received the largest grant in its history at more than \$3-million to build a trail that will eventually connect LSU and Southern Universities. During McKnight's tenure, BREC also opened its first of several planned boat launches at Highland Road Community Park that will create a connected blueway system for paddlers.

"I want to express my deepest appreciation for the many partners and volunteers who have worked with me and our BREC staff to help keep our parks clean and beautiful, take our programs and events to a higher level, and to build upon and enhance the many construction projects we have been able to complete each year. We simply could not do all that we do without you," said Superintendent McKnight. "You have deepened our reach into the community and I will be forever grateful for the partnerships and friendships that have helped make BREC into one of the leading park and recreation systems in the nation these past seven years," said McKnight.

BREC's commitment to community partnerships during McKnight's tenure was on full display following the devastating of the August 2016 flooding. That work continues to this day, with BREC currently working with the City-Parish on several projects focused on helping the community become more resilient for future natural disasters. Together, the agencies are applying for federal funding from FEMA to create large, modern recreation centers that will serve as safe rooms for emergency responders in three strategic locations in East Baton Rouge as well as the development of a plan to lessen the possibility of flooding through a joint effort to improve waterways across the parish as well as much of the 6,000+ acres of park land owned by BREC.

"I am proud of the work we have done as an agency to make East Baton Rouge Parish a better place to live, work and play," said Superintendent McKnight. "There is still a lot of work to do as we embark on large-scale projects to modernize the Zoo, renovate Greenwood Community Park, dredge and improve the Lakes area, work with our partners to create connectivity trails across the Parish, renovate all of the dog parks in the system while also creating new ones and so much more. I am comfortable that I am leaving this agency in capable hands with a Commission committed to doing the right things for this community and a staff that has the passion and drive to make the community's wishes a reality. While I won't be here to see these projects to fruition, I do plan to come back and celebrate with the community as many of them are completed," said McKnight.

McKnight is the mother of two sons and four grandchildren, and she just learned a fifth is on the way. She and her husband John will move back to her home in Dallas to be near family although they also have plans to travel. She will remain with BREC until her contract expires toward the end of the year while the BREC Commission conducts a national search to find her replacement.