

## **PlaySafe and Live Well!**

Welcome to PlaySafe, LLC's informational column. Every month we will work hard to provide you with up-to-date information on topics related to parks, recreation, health, wellness, and physical education. Our hope is that by providing you with detailed information, you will go forward and positively change the world. If you have questions or comments, or if you would like to share your thoughts, please contact us through this web site. Thanks. Now PlaySafe and live well!

## **Telling the World about Your Facility Using Social Media!**

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We Americans love our “likes,” whether it’s for a funny comment, change in relationship status or the photo of the dinner you prepared for a loved one. We also love to “check in” at our favorite restaurants, attractions, sporting events, and concerts. Maybe it’s because we like to let our friends and family know what we are doing and all the fun they are missing out on. Maybe it’s to invite them to join us. Whatever the reason, we love to “check in” when we are out. This article will discuss how you can use social media to provide information for your residents, guests, and their friends. There are millions of photos, comments and details of our lives shared between social networks each day, and that’s just between Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

One of the first and easiest steps to start your social media campaign is to create landmarks where people will be enticed to “check in.” Some areas of interest that you can include are: monuments, trails, signs, playgrounds, splashpads, dog parks, ball fields and park shelters.

An example of a city using Social Media is Figarden Loop Park, in Fresno California. They designed an attractive Monument Sign that was sure to grab the attention of people driving into the park. Rather than putting up a basic park entry sign, they wanted to provide an exciting entrance that would welcome you to a unique experience. If you were to add a “check in” point there’s a good chance that someone can and will “check in” and use the monument sign in the photo.

Wherever you develop a “check in” point, it is important to design an attractive photographic backdrop. You always want to present a good first impression. Often, people look for interesting backgrounds when taking the ever-popular “selfie”; so provide them with a memorable location. Disney and other amusement parks have been doing this since the day they opened. One site created by Cre8Play in Candy Cane Park in Saskatchewan is a great example. The Queenie playground composite was designed to recreate a compliant playground that looks like a Canada Goose. Rather than just providing a play structure, the owners included a place, with the organization’s name, where people can take photographs. This has greatly increased their exposure!

Who doesn't want photos of the children in their lives to share with friends and family? And why shouldn't you provide the great locations for them to take the photos? Weddings, graduations, and events like family reunions can be activities that increase the number of "check ins" at your site and create lasting memories.

Not all "check ins" will occur at large proceedings. The City of Springtown, Texas has provided a "check in" point at their new splashpad. Their residents can now let all their friends and family know where they are playing and having a great time while using the city's park system. On the splashpad equipment, the city chose to put their name on the large dumping bucket, providing a great backdrop for residents' photos and getting their name out. Nothing demonstrates fun like 30-plus gallons of water hitting the splashguard and sending water, and children, in all directions.

Another popular recreation area that has grown in popularity in the past few years is the dog park. Today's dog parks are a far cry from just an area for dogs to run free. If you are developing a dog park, it may be advantageous to add personalized signage, benches, or other items to give your residents a place to "check in". The Newtown Park in John's Creek Georgia not only created a fun place for dogs to play, but also included a sign, which provided the perfect way for the city to promote their dog park, and increase their social footprint.

Gazebos and barbeque areas are additional avenues to provide interesting places to incorporate social media opportunities. These areas can be free or may be rented. Sometimes, if there is more than one shelter at a park, there can be confusion and conflict with who is renting which shelter. By creating themed, named, or labeled shelter areas, you can help identify specific shelters and reduce disagreements. If a family shares an invitation (through snail mail or electronically) to your park, listing the shelter name for their birthday party, that's free advertising for your agency. At an athletic park or specialty recreation facility, shelter designs such as baseballs, soccer balls, and footballs are available and provide multiple places for your residents to engage and post pictures and details to their favorite social media application or website.

Another tool increasing in popularity and accessibility are beacons. Beacons are devices that use GPS technology to communicate information to users through mobile devices such as smartphones. Beacons can allow your agency to notify park visitors once they have reached a certain destination. This can be information regarding historical facts about a monument, specifics about the location and boundaries of a park, hours of operation, closures, emergency notices and special events...the sky is the limit. Beacons can also be used to automatically post to the users' social networks. With this technology, "check in" can happen seamlessly and with minimal effort from the visitor.

Social media is a fantastic tool to help promote your parks, and best of all it's free! Increasing your "hits" will take planning and effort, but will enable your residents to share photos of their loved ones at your facilities with their friends and family. Creating "check in" points within your park system can and should increase your resident's enjoyment, amplify use, and enhance your image. We have some of the most spectacular locations in our communities, now let's get people talking about them. One quick reminder: if you are using a photo of someone in your Social Media, ensure you have written permission.