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## INTRODUCTION

Recreation is an important part of a well-balanced lifestyle. People who are engaged in active healthy lifestyles live longer,<sup>1</sup> are less in danger from heart disease and stroke,<sup>2</sup> are at a significantly reduced risk of cancer,<sup>3</sup> and have improved chances of combating a wide range of chronic conditions such as diabetes, arthritis, asthma, and depression.<sup>4</sup> Northern Chester County’s heritage and culture offer another dimension to recreation: the opportunity to use and engage in heritage related sites and programs that evoke the globally significant history that occurred here. The area is an attractive place for heritage tourism where people can learn American history within the context of having an enjoyable and memorable experience.

Recreation participation increases one’s sense of well-being, deters addictions, and assists in the social learning of tolerance and respect for others. Recreation plays an important role in promoting a strong sense of community by providing settings for people to socialize and share common interests, and being a major driver of community interaction and pride. Recreation facilities make an important contribution to the physical infrastructure of communities. They provide a social focus for the community and affect a resident’s perception of his or her neighborhood. It is widely accepted that parks and recreation influence how a community looks, feels, and functions.

In 2009, the U.S. Center for Disease Control enlisted local communities in the fight against diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension by urging them to offer plentiful and convenient places and

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<sup>1</sup> Gibbons, L.W., and Macera, C.A., 1995. Changes in physical fitness and all-cause mortality: a prospective study of healthy and unhealthy men. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 273:1093-1098

<sup>2</sup> Blair, S.N., Kohl, H.W., and Gordon, N.F., 1992. *How much physical activity is good for health?* *Annual Reviews of Public Health*. 13:99-126

<sup>3</sup> Slattery, M.L., Potter, J., Caan, B., et al., 1996. *How much physical activity do we need to maintain health, prevent disease? Different diseases – different mechanisms*. *Research Quarterly Exercise and Sport*. 67(2):209-212

<sup>4</sup> Glasgow, R.E., Ruggerio, L., Eakin, E.G., et al., 1996. United States Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control and Prevention. *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, Georgia.

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programs that will help citizens to increase physical activity. This initiative will help to reduce national health care costs, one of our country's most pressing challenges. Today public recreation is considered essential to public health. Walking for 30 minutes daily benefits your heart, weight, and mental health, and has recently been found to stave off Alzheimer's disease. Cancer does not kill most Americans – the lack of physical exercise and a poor diet do.<sup>5</sup> Public recreation has a prominent role in creating healthy people, healthy families, and healthy communities in the Northern Chester County region (the Region).

## RECREATION TRENDS

While recreation trends are typically portrayed as activity based, there is a changing attitude toward recreation and life goals in America. This is an important trend to consider in community recreation planning: how to help our citizens achieve or do what is important to them through recreation.

A national survey<sup>6</sup> found that about 85 percent of the respondents listed maintaining their health as an important goal. Three-quarters considered themselves healthy now; an almost equal number (69 percent) admitted to being at least somewhat out of shape. After health, connecting with family, friends, and community is next in importance. An important trend is volunteerism, which is on the upswing. People want to make a meaningful contribution to improving the world and want to put their expertise to work, well beyond the usual stereotype of menial volunteer work.

Public recreation trends are those changes that go beyond fads and that have affected society so much that they are now a part of our culture. Trends include the following:

- Programs and activities that directly affect the health of the residents of the community, and the minimum support required to maintain those services, is becoming a principle mission of a public park and recreation agency. The focus of public parks and recreation is becoming directed toward essential and fundamental life and health services, not only community vitality and enrichment.
- Nearly half of all Americans say they spend time together outdoors at least once a month. Recreation is important to families with young children.
- Today, 66 percent of all Americans recreate outdoors monthly. In 1994 only 50 percent did.
- In 1972, one out of 27 girls participated in high school sports. In 1978, the ratio was one out of four. Today, more than half of all high school girls participate in sports. For years, researchers have found that there is a link between participation in high school sports and success later in life.<sup>7</sup>
- While baseball, football, and basketball were once the major sports, field hockey, lacrosse, and rugby are now mainstreaming. Even cricket (the most-watched sport in the world) is now popping up in the Delaware Valley.

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<sup>5</sup> Oz, M. *6-Month Plan for Getting Healthy*. AARP Magazine. Volume 53: 3A May/June 2010. p56.

<sup>6</sup> Harris, M. *Forever Young*. Money Magazine. September 13, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Lahart, J., 2010. *Economists Link Athletics to Success in School, Job Markets*. Wall Street Journal.

<http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2010/02/08/economists-link-athletics-to-success-in-school-job-markets/>

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- Sports are played throughout four seasons, including soccer and basketball year-round. Softball and baseball players and teams train in the off-seasons.
- Today's empty nesters with extensive free time, unprecedented good health, and retirement plans, are indulging in active lifestyles that are well beyond rocking chairs, front porches, and bingo. There is a mismatch between what retirees are looking for and what society provides. Many are looking for a second career that often involves using their expertise to make the world a better place, for example, through conservation.
- The first of the Baby Boomers will turn 65 in 2011. They represent the major planning challenge for parks and recreation. They will be more active, well-educated, and healthier than previous generations and will most likely be more involved in recreational pursuits. The sheer number of baby boomers will require more facilities and services than did previous generations of people over the age of 60.
- Generation X'ers (born 1964-1980) have launched the development of new activities such as in-line skating and skateboarding.
- Gen M (born 1985 and forward) is the Millennium generation. They have lived their full lives with benefit of the Internet. People in this age group are exposed to 8.5 hours of electronic media daily. This includes 2.5 hours in which they are "multi-tasking" with two or more media sources.
- People born between 1980 and 2000 make job choices based upon convenient access to facilities and services where they can engage in active recreation. The majority of those in this age group engage in vigorous physical activity on a regular basis. Having such opportunities nearby is a key to keeping and attracting both young people in the community and employers looking to locate or expand a business.
- In today's busy society of overscheduled youth, recreation programming is moving away from scheduled programs to self-directed opportunities and programs with fewer meeting times such as single night educational/recreational programs.
- Heritage Tourism is an important and growing segment of the tourism industry.

### RECREATION TRENDS IN NORTHERN CHESTER COUNTY

Recreation opportunities in Northern Chester County and the surrounding region abound. From the expected community sports programs to the unexpected beagling and bassetting (the hunting of hare and rabbits on foot with beagle or basset hounds), people who live in or visit the Region can find a host of fun things to do in the great outdoors. These activities include opportunities that one can enjoy at his/her own discretion, to a full calendar of special events in every season of the year. Many of these activities are unique to Northern Chester County such as the newly-forming Cheese Trail. Here visitors can enjoy world-class scenery as they traverse the countryside to taste locally-made, internationally-acclaimed cheeses. They can try out the wine trail as well! Whether one wants to enjoy a brisk 30-minute walk or a 100-mile bicycle ride, there is plenty to do here.

- **Regional recreation.** Residents undertake their recreation throughout the Region rather than only within their own municipality. With nine municipalities, three school districts, two multi-municipal parks and recreation commissions, and many private nonprofit providers of recreation opportunities, recreation is complex in Northern Chester County.

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- **Sports participation** is increasing. Leagues are expanding. Organized sports leagues are playing through multiple seasons with many going year-round. Players are playing at older and younger ages. National sports sanctioning organizations are changing the regulations regarding field sizes, resulting in different-sized fields. Sports organizations operate independently. Spin-off leagues are emerging in the area such as Wildcat Football, resulting from parents wanting their children to play by age group not by weight. This is a very important trend to address.
- **Recreation special events** are important in Northern Chester County and are often used to showcase other important aspects of the area such as heritage, locally-grown food, and land conservation.
- **Recreation special events through diverse providers.** Community and conservation organizations plan and carry out recreation events related to the beauty and history of Northern Chester County, as exemplified by the Iron Tour, Homegrown Harvest, Green Valleys Association EnviroFest, the Dance at Welkinweir, and the Dry Stone Workshop at Hopewell.
- **Recreation and heritage.** The relationship of recreation to the history and heritage of the area is notable in Northern Chester County. Many different organizations are involved in various aspects of recreation heritage, culture, conservation, and wellness. They operate through an informal network partnering when opportunities arise but not in an organized fashion. Recreation opportunities range from national caliber at the Schuylkill River Heritage Area and Hopewell National Historic Site, to scout troops in the local neighborhoods.
- **Astronomy** via Delaware Valley Amateur Astronomers, universities, and Astronomers without Borders is popular in this Region that treasures its dark night skies. Three out of five respondents in the survey reported enjoying the dark starry skies as one of the recreation activities they enjoy, while another 25 percent report being interested in that activity – for a total of 85 percent of the respondents. Keeping the skies dark is important to the quality of life here.
- **Trail use is high.** Trail use is popular and in some areas becoming threatened. Horse trails thread the area in large part due to the generosity of private landowners who allow the informal use of their property for horseback riders. This is a privilege not a right; access to these trails could be changed at any time, particularly if there is a change in property ownership.
- **Fun in the creeks.** Access to local creeks is important to the residents with 63 percent of the survey respondents indicating that they use local creeks for recreation.
- **Year-round recreation.** Interest in recreation indoors year-round is becoming more important in the area.
- **Wellness and physical activity.** Reflective of Chester County’s ranking as the healthiest county in Pennsylvania, the Pottstown Heath and Wellness Foundation is dedicated to increasing the level of physical activity throughout its service area, which includes Northern Chester County.
- **School Districts and recreation.** Schools provide important recreation opportunities (programs and facilities) for children and youth in all three school districts. They serve as community hubs of activity year round. The Owen J. Roberts School District provides adults with lifelong learning program hosted in the Adult Evening School. Adult life-long learning emerged at the top activity in which survey

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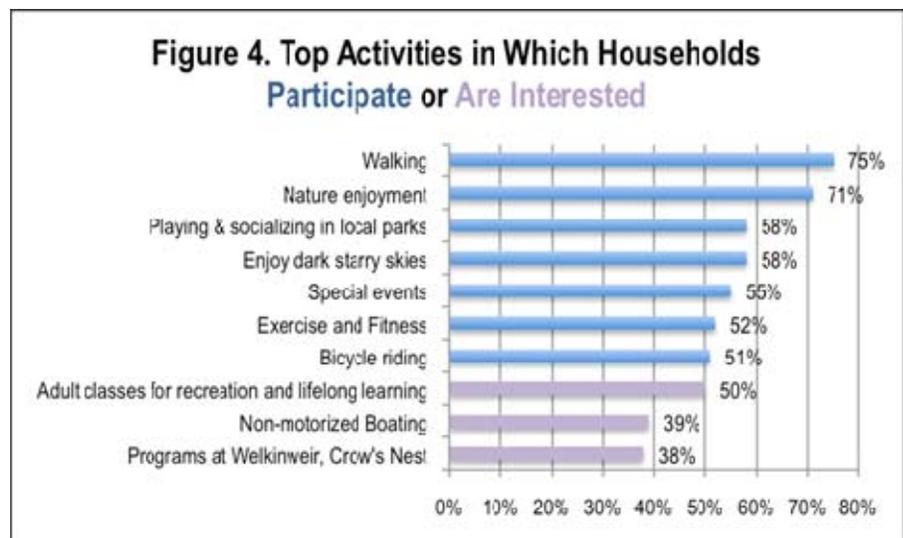
respondents are interested. Half of the survey respondents indicated that they are interested in adult lifelong learning while another 20 percent said they are already participating.

- **Active and passive recreation.** There is some tension between active and passive recreational interests. Concern is strong regarding the conservation of the rural character of the area while providing active recreation facilities to meet the needs of a constituency engaged in active healthy lifestyles. Finding a way to meld the two interests will be a key to success.
- **Nature-based recreation.** Interest in nature and passive recreation is on the upswing. Fishing, hiking, and wildlife watching are reportedly gaining in interest. There is a keen need to connect children to the outdoors – a particular challenge in this area where children’s time is heavily scheduled.
- **Tourism.** While tourism is growing as a leading industry in Pennsylvania, tourism in Northern Chester County is not clearly defined. There is not consensus on a clear direction or theme for tourism in this Region even among organizations with tourism as their mission, such as the Brandywine Valley Visitors Bureau and the Valley Forge Conference and Visitors Bureau. Certainly the residents do not want buses traveling the narrow country roads, but there is a sense that attracting visitors as smaller groups of families and friends to experience the wealth of history, scenic beauty, and outdoor recreation opportunities would offer benefits.

### RECREATION PARTICIPATION IN NORTHERN CHESTER COUNTY

Information on participation in recreational pursuits was derived from several sources including the public opinion survey, interviews with key stakeholders and focus groups, information provided by organizations, and observations through field visitation. Survey Figure 4 shows the top activities in which survey respondents for this plan participate or are interested in participating. Survey responses reflect the opinions of the general public, not special interest groups, and as such are comprehensive in nature and very important to the planning process.

Most of their participation and interest lies in activities they can undertake on their own such as walking, enjoying nature, using local parks, cycling and enjoying the dark starry skies. Two exceptions to activities people can do on their own are special events and adult classes for lifelong learning. The many special events held in Northern Chester County are successful both a response and a generator of participation in special events and popular. People want to socialize with family and friends and to create memories and recreational special events are the way to achieve that.



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### BLOCKS TO PARTICIPATION

According to results from the public opinion survey, public meetings, focus groups, and interviews, the chief block to recreation participation is that people are unaware of the opportunity. About one out of two survey respondents indicated that not knowing about the opportunity was the chief reason they did not participate. Typically, survey respondents indicate that they are too busy to participate. Lack of awareness as the top reason is a survey finding unique to Northern Chester County.

### REGIONAL RECREATIONAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OPPORTUNITIES

The citizens of Northern Chester County live close to outstanding recreational opportunities in the great outdoors as well as within an hour of world-class cultural, educational, entertainment, and sporting events in the city of Philadelphia. The significant history of the area, its scenic beauty, and its conserved resources play an important role in recreation.

#### THE GREAT OUTDOORS

National, state, and county parks in the Northern Chester County area offer recreational opportunities in the great outdoors. County parks are places that people typically spend half of a day to a day enjoying. State parks offer full-day, overnight, weekend, or vacation-length opportunities. State and county park facilities are fully described in Appendix 2. The Schuylkill River, French Creek, and Pickering Creek all offer important water-based recreation opportunities close to home.

Written comments in the survey indicated that people tend to travel to the various large nature and historic parks throughout the Region, including French Creek State Park, Marsh Creek State Park, Valley Forge National Park, Hopewell Furnace, and Warwick County Park. The Schuylkill River National Heritage Area celebrates the rich culture and history of the Schuylkill River watershed as one of America's most significant cultural and industrial regions. As a National Heritage Area, it is working to revitalize and restore the Region through natural and cultural resource preservation, education, recreation, community revitalization, and heritage tourism.

Schuylkill Highlands is a Conservation Landscape Initiative (CLI) region of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. It includes Northern Chester County as home to critical unprotected lands such as source waters, head waters, riparian buffers, watershed lands, natural areas, contiguous forested lands, and the key habitats, farmland, and greenway connectors found in the Hopewell Big Woods. The Schuylkill Highlands initiative is striving to protect what is special in this Region by saving high-quality lands and connecting people and communities through a network of trails and gateway communities.

#### Close-to-Home Activities Available at National, State, and County Parks & Heritage Areas

Hiking. Bicycling. Mountain Biking. Trail Riding. Horseback Riding. Picnicking in shelters and groves. Swimming. Boating. Windsurfing. Fishing. Hunting. Trapping. Wildlife Watching. Cross-Country Skiing. Sledding. Tobogganing. Ice skating. Iceboating. Ice fishing. Nature Center visitation. Organized group camping in cabins, tents, and yurts. Birding. Destination Playgrounds. Disc Golf. Astronomy. Orienteering. Historic programs and events. Tours. Nature study and environmental education.

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### MUNICIPAL RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Playing and socializing in local parks is important to residents. About 80 percent of the survey respondents socialize and play in parks close to home or are interested in doing that. With respect to organized, scheduled activities, the municipalities in Northern Chester County range in the level of services they provide. Some offer organized programs and others do not provide any recreational services. Several key factors come into play here. Size of population, availability of park and recreation facilities, capacity of the local government operations, the rural nature of the area, budget, and availability of volunteers are all contributing factors in the provision of recreation services.

**Table A6.1: Municipal Parks and Recreation Programs, Activities, and Events in Northern Chester County**

Municipality	Program/Event	Date Offered 2010	Sponsor
East Coventry	Community Day	June 5	Park, Recreation & Conservation Committee
	Easter Egg Hunt	March 27	Parker Ford Women's Club
East Nantmeal			Historical Society and Green Valleys Association are program sources.
East Pikeland	Outdoor Movie Nights	June 5	Parks & Recreation Board and Exelon Power as sponsors
	Kimberton Run	September 18	Kimberton Lions
	Easter Egg Hunt	September 25	Kimberton Lions
	Easter Egg Hunt	March 27	Parks & Recreation Board
	Yard Sale/Craft Fair/ Bake Sale	May 1	East Pikeland Township
		October 24	
	Historic Walking Tour	July 8	Kimberton Friends
	Summer Sports Program	August 2 - 6	Offered by U.S. Sports Institute
	Summer Playground Program	June 22 - July 31	Phoenixville Area Recreation Department
	Summer Tennis Camp	June 21 - July 24	Phoenixville Area Recreation Department
	Kimberton Fair	July 26 -31	Kimberton Fair organization
	Annual Butterfly Garden Planting	Spring	Park & Recreation Committee and North Coventry Elementary School
	Environmental Monitoring	Spring	Frog Watch and Nest Box - EAC
	Annual Clean & Green Day	April 18	EAC
Coventry Woods Festival	May 31	Park & Recreation Committee and EAC	
East Vincent	Community Day	May 7	Park on the Ridge
	Trout Rodeo	May 7	Park on the Ridge
	History Under the Stars	June 11 & Aug 13	Park on the Ridge
	Independence Day Ceremony	July 4	Revolutionary War Soldiers' Cemetery
North Coventry	Summer Camp	Six Weeks	Kenilworth
	Tennis Lessons	Summer	Kenilworth
	Fall Bonfire	October	Coventry Woods
	Coventry Woods Festival	May 22	Coventry Woods
South Coventry	Sundae Serenade	June	Community day with ice cream, book, and plant swap. Board of Supervisors and Open Space, Recreation and Environmental Oversight Board.
West Pikeland	Chamber Music Series	March 7	Arts & Culture Committee
		April 11	

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Municipality	Program/Event	Date Offered	2010 Sponsor
	Spring Egg Hunt	March 21	Parks & Recreation Board
	Milling Demonstrations	Monthly Apr - Nov	Anselma Mill
	Pickering Grove Tree Planting	April 17-18	Parks & Recreation Board
	Yellow Springs Art Show	April 24 - May 9	Historic Yellow Springs - 27 <sup>th</sup> year
	Chester County Craft Guild Show	May 1-2	WPT Cultural Center
	Herb & Ceramics Sale	May 13	Historic Yellow Springs
	Summer Fest	June 6	Historic Yellow Springs
	Swing Into Summer	June 19	Anselma Mill
	West Pikeland Fall Festival	October 17	Parks & Recreation Board
	Midsummer Night's Dream	July	Commonwealth Classic Theater
	Trail Guide	Used year-round	West Pikeland Township
West Vincent	West Vincent Community Day	Spring	Park and Recreation Commission
	Trout Rodeo	Spring	West Vincent Township Police Department
	Outdoor Movie Night	August 21	Park and Recreation Commission
	Turkey Trot	November	Park and Recreation Commission
	Park and Pavilion Rental	Year-round	West Vincent Township

Overall, no municipality has sufficient population size, staff, or budget to offer a full program of recreational services. While some have been providing some level of recreation services for many years, others have not. There is no right or wrong approach; what works for the community is the important factor. What is appropriate for one municipality is not necessarily a good fit for another.

In addition, the residents tend to look at all of Northern Chester County as a region with recreation opportunities, rather than only their municipality. Most organized recreation opportunities in communities are provided by volunteers including Parks and Recreation Boards, Historic Committees, Environmental Advisory Council (EAC), and Boards of Supervisors. *Table A6.1* presents recreation opportunities in each municipality. The table presents broad information about anything that the municipality directly provides or facilitates.

### THE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The school districts serve as community hubs for recreation. They make their facilities available for public recreational use and are vital for community sports. An important factor for recreation, particularly youth sports, is that children and youth like to play sports with their friends—usually schoolmates. Communities, as well as families and adult individuals, are in most cases oriented toward the school district rather than the municipality, especially in rural communities.

Owen J. Roberts provides two important recreation programs: the Aquatics Program and Adult Evening School. The Aquatics Program includes swimming instructions, parent and tot classes, lap swimming, conditioning classes, water polo, competitive swimming and diving, recreational swim, a summer program, adult conditions, and a master swim program. The Adult Evening School offers a wide variety of classes, instructions, and recreational opportunities for people 18 years of age and older. According to the citizen survey findings for this plan, 50 percent of the respondents indicated that they are interested in lifelong

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learning classes for adults. Another 20 percent already participate in such programs. This was the program of the most interest to survey respondents.

### *FIT FOR LIFE IN THE OWEN J. ROBERTS SCHOOL DISTRICT*

The Owen J. Roberts School District is committed to fostering active, healthy lifestyles among its students. With funding provided by the Pottstown Health and Wellness Foundation, the School District has put into place the *Fit for Life* program headed by the Wellness and Communications Coordinator. The program operates with the Owen J. Roberts Wellness Council, a working group composed of individuals with an interest in wellness from representative segments of the community and schools. Members include administrators, teachers, nurses, food service staff, and experts in dietetics, nutrition, physical activity, and health.

Each individual school within the district has representation on the Council and is also encouraged to have a dedicated Coordinated Health Team in their respective building. Many experts in the areas of health, mental health, physical education, and nutrition comprise the School Coordinated Health Teams, making the Wellness infrastructure in the Owen J. Roberts District very diverse and strong. The goal is to create wellness outcomes that benefit people through healthier lives.

Through partnerships and programs the Wellness Council strives to create new knowledge, increase skills, foster a positive change in attitude or values, and drive behavioral changes that improve lifestyle habits. They focus on programs and services that build long-term solutions – lifelong healthy people. Goals are directed toward demonstrated need in the youth health risk areas identified by the Centers for Disease Control: tobacco use, poor nutrition, lack of exercise, drug and alcohol use, injury to self and others, and other risky behaviors. Most of the School District's programming addresses nutrition and physical activity because of the magnitude to which these areas can improve the public's health and prevent and control chronic diseases.

## COMMUNITY SPORTS

Community sports programs are important in Northern Chester County. Leagues are expanding. Participation is increasing. Sports have moved beyond one traditional season into multi-season and even year-round play. About 4,051 participants played in the leagues in 2009 or were on league waiting lists. This does not account for volunteers, coaches, field and concession managers, and spectators. It also represents a snapshot in time – it is important to remember that many people play sports at a certain point in their life and then age out of it. When combined, a significant portion of the population is playing or has played in community sports. The following sports organizations serve Northern Chester County.

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**Coventry Girls Basketball** serves 120 girls in the second through ninth grades in the Owen J. Roberts (OJR) School District. The organization uses gyms in East Coventry Elementary School, North Coventry Elementary School, and OJR Middle School. This is not enough gym time and has resulted in splitting two days among three groups in the middle school. They need at least one more gym or more days in the existing gyms.

**Coventry Little League** (CLL) offers little league baseball, t-ball, and softball for boys and girls ages 5-18. League participation has been growing since 2002 with the fall session experiencing the most growth. CLL plays at the Wampler Complex and practices on OJR High School and Middle School fields, Kenilworth fields, and Anderson fields. As the league grows, they anticipate needing three additional fields by 2013.

**Coventry Soccer Association** is a soccer league for participants ages 4-18. Participation has been increasing and a cap in certain age groups may become necessary. In 2002, there were fewer than 500 players; however, it is anticipated that there will be over 1,000 by 2013. The league plays spring through fall. Game fields used include East Coventry Elementary School (side and front fields) and North Coventry River Bend Park (all three fields: Anderson, Batdorf, and Deegan). Practice fields include East Coventry Elementary School (Front-U8, Side-travel, Back-U10/travel), North Coventry Elementary School (front), Kenilworth Park (t-ball field, soccer field), North Coventry River Bend Park (all three when available), Parker Ford Brethren Church, and East Vincent Township Park.

For winter use, they rent the Sportsplex in Pottstown and the Body Zone in Wyomissing. The organization reported difficulties in using assigned fields, with other teams forcing them off fields they had permits for. Anticipated field needs include: one full-sized game field for travel, one full-sized for intramurals, two small-sided fields for travel, one small-sided for intramurals, and one additional full-sized field for the U6 and U8 intramurals. Additionally, more space is needed for practice. At least an additional two full-sized field areas and two small-sided field areas are needed. They have investigated purchasing land and found it to be unaffordable.

**Coventry Youth Lacrosse** serves 160 boys ages 7-15 and 95 girls ages 8-12, with a total of 16 teams. Participation is expected to stabilize at about this number. Fields used include:

- East Vincent Elementary School – Fields behind the school accommodate three separate practice locations.
- North Coventry Elementary School – Front field (near Kemp Rd) accommodates two squads; the narrow space between the parking lot and the front field accommodates one squad.
- OJR High School – North turf field after the high school squad has completed their practice accommodates two squads when available.
- East Vincent Township Park – Two areas are used including the “lower field” and the field adjacent to the tennis courts.
- West Vincent Township Park – Multi-use field (soccer field) is used.
- Connie Batdorf Park (South Coventry Township) – Football field is used for games only.

The organization anticipates needing one to two fields in the future due to decreasing access to school fields, loss of field use due to school priorities, and competition with other sports leagues for fields.

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**Downingtown Areas Recreation Consortium (DARC)** is a multi-municipal parks and recreation organization that includes West Pikeland. DARC is the only organization offering adult leagues for softball, basketball, volleyball, and street hockey. It also offers youth sports clinics and camps. DARC's programs fill up and have waiting lists. The leagues operate year-round depending upon the sport. Facilities used include Hickory Park, Shamona Creek Park, and Kerr Park. For gyms, they use all school district facilities for basketball and sports clinics. They have enough facility time for games but none for practices. Kerr Park has lost one field due to drainage issues. If adult leagues grow, then more fields will be needed.

**Glenmoore Eagle Youth Association (GEYA)** offers baseball and soccer for youth ages 5-18. The league has been growing. Both sports play in the spring and fall. Facilities used for baseball include: 60-foot - Hickory Park (2 fields), Springton Manor Elementary (2 fields), West Vincent, and Brandywine Wallace; 90-foot - Hickory Park (older divisions also travel to other leagues within Chester County to play away games). Facilities used for soccer include: Shamona Creek Elementary (two 25x50 fields), Windsor Baptist Church (two 15x30 fields), West Vincent Park (one regulation field), Springton Manor Elementary (one 40x70 field), Pickering Valley Elementary (three 15x30 fields), Montgomery School (one regulation field), and Ludwig's Corner Horse Show Grounds (one 60x100 field, one 40x70, two 25x50, three 15x30). The organization reports having difficulty getting fields for practice. Drainage problems exist at Hickory Park and West Vincent. While not looking for more fields now, they would consider exploring the addition of fields.

**Kimberton Youth Athletic League (KYAL)** offers baseball and softball for youth ages 5-16. The league is growing especially in the younger ages. Play is underway April through July. All fields are on Kimberton Fire Company property or East Pikeland Park property (four fields at #6 Firehouse Lane in Kimberton) and school district fields are used for practice. KYAL is raising money for new lights. They need two more practice areas and upgrades to the current fields.

**Lionville Youth Association (LYA)** is a regional umbrella sports organization celebrating its fortieth season. LYA serves the youth primarily in Uwchlan Township, West Pikeland Township, and Northern East Caln Township, which are all in the Downingtown Area School District. LYA does not view Northern Chester County as part of its territory. They play in ten Uwchlan Township parks and West Pikeland Township's park. A new Challenger League is being added in 2011 for youth ages 5-18 with mental and physical disabilities. About 4,000 participants are involved in the following sports:

- Spring: Little League Baseball, Little League Softball, American Legion Baseball, and Girls and Boys Lacrosse
- Fall: Intramural Soccer, Girls Field Hockey, Fall Baseball, and Fall Softball
- Winter: Girls and Boys Basketball
- Other: Club Baseball - Lionville Hillcats; Travel Softball - Lionville Lightning; and Travel Soccer - Lionville Soccer Club

LYA offers summer sports camps for youth in the first through eighth grades for baseball, co-ed lacrosse, girls lacrosse, boys lacrosse, golf, flag football, basketball, field hockey, cheerleading, and an all-sports camp. Most camps are held at Lionville Park while basketball is at the Lionville Elementary School and golf is at Rossi's Golf and Sports Center. LYA reports a need for more practice soccer fields.

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**Norchester Red Knights** offers football and cheerleading in the fall. Facilities used include North Coventry Elementary and Connie Batdorf Park. North Coventry Elementary has been the practice location over the past couple of years but it is not large enough for all of the teams to be on one field. The youngest team (ages 5-6) practices on the side, just off the parking lot, away from the organization. Cheerleaders typically practice on the playground. That leaves approximately a 20x20 yard area for the other teams to practice, which is restrictive given the contact nature of football.

For the safety of the kids, coaches typically practice well within that boundary to avoid overlapping. They have discussed and investigated purchasing land over the past couple of years. Unfortunately, to purchase about 8-10 acres of land puts the organization in competition with developers that have greater resources. They would like more practice space and parking at Connie Batdorf Park.

**Norchester Youth Athletic Association (NYAA)** is a baseball league serving boys ages 13-19 in the spring. Participation has been increasing with a leveling-off expected in the near future. The teams use two fields at the OJR High School and Middle School. They also use a field at Kenilworth Park but it is in disrepair. Fields are overused and in poor condition. They would like to have a stadium but one more field would help.

**Penn Premiere Lacrosse** is a lacrosse league for youth in grades 1-12. The league anticipates growing from 100 participants to 175 in the next three years. They use facilities at 88 Wells Road, East Vincent Elementary School, North Coventry Elementary School, East Vincent Township Park, and the OJR High School lacrosse fields. They work with OJR School District for fields and negotiated an agreement to rent the WC Eagles turf field. The league anticipates needing additional fields to accommodate their growth.

**Phoenixville Babe Ruth League** is a baseball league for boys ages 13-18. All games are played at DeSanno Field which is a 90-foot lighted baseball field located at Mason and Wheatland Streets in the borough of Phoenixville. This field is owned in fee by the Phoenixville Babe Ruth League, a not-for-profit corporation. American Legion home games are played at "Doc Kennedy Field" – a 90-foot baseball field located on the grounds of the Phoenixville Area High School. This field is the high school baseball field. DeSanno field is at risk of loss due to a proposed land development that would take the field to build a road there. This is a premiere baseball field that is used by numerous school athletic teams as their home field and for tournaments as well. While the organization would be compensated, there is no other land in the borough that could replace this field.

**Spring-Ford Youth Athletic League (SFYAL)** offers baseball, softball, football, cheerleading, boys and girls basketball, and wrestling. Football has a waiting list. Playing seasons include spring and fall for baseball, fall for football, and winter for basketball and wrestling. The league uses the following facilities: two 50/70 fields at Spring City (SC) complex, two 46/60 fields at SC complex, three 46/60 fields at Manderach Park, Victory Park, one T-ball field at SC complex, and all Spring-Ford Area School District elementary fields for practices. They could use more field space and lighting. They could use four more baseball/softball fields. The Spring City complex has design and overuse issues that need to be addressed.

**Vincent United Futbol Club** is a premier travel soccer organization with a purpose of providing an opportunity for girls to participate in a complete soccer program by encouraging teamwork and good

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# Recreation and Cultural Heritage Programs

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sportsmanship, and by teaching the necessary skills to play competitively. Their program offers girls opportunities to compete regionally and nationally giving them the exposure to further their development as student athletes at the collegiate level and beyond. It is a year-round soccer training program that develops players to their greatest potential by focusing on top-quality instruction and exposure to the highest levels of competition. The organization uses fields in East Vincent Township, West Vincent Township, and the Owen J. Roberts School District Stadium. Eleven teams are organized according to age groups of U10 through U23. Four of the teams are U10 to U12.

**Wildcats Football** is a relatively new organization going into its third season providing football and cheerleading for boys and girls ages 5-12. About 89 boys play football on six teams. Twenty-two cheerleaders are organized into two teams. Participation increased by 50 percent in the second year with growth projected to be 250 by 2013. The Wildcats rent their practice facility from the 422 Sportsplex and play games on the North Turf of the Owen J. Roberts High School. These facilities are expected to be adequate through growth to 250 players as long as the fees at the 422 Sportsplex remain stable and the school district permits their use of the turf field.

*Table A6.2* presents the sports participation according to league, sport, and place of residence of the participants. *Table A6.3* also presents the total participation for the Northern Chester area and for the leagues. Total sports participation in the Northern Chester County was 4,051 in 2010. Overall, the leagues and DARC served 16,143 participants in 2010. Without DARC, the leagues served 10,619 participants in 2010.

### PARTICIPATION BY SPORT

As shown in *Table A6.3*, several leagues offer the same sport, such as GEYA and the Coventry Soccer Association both providing soccer. However, they have different primary service areas. For example, GEYA soccer serves mainly East Nantmeal, West Pikeland, and West Vincent townships, as well as Upper Uwchlan and Wallace. Coventry Soccer Association serves primarily East Coventry, East Vincent, North Coventry, South Coventry, and Warwick townships. It also serves West Vincent township, but to a lesser extent than GEYA. East Nantmeal and West Vincent have players in both leagues. *Table A6.3* presents the total participation by sport in Northern Chester.

### LEAGUE FINDINGS

While all leagues appreciate the commitment of school district, municipal, and community organizations that provide facilities and support for sports, the reality is that:

- There are not enough fields.
- Practice time is extremely limited to non-existent at times due to lack of facilities.
- Not all fields are permanently protected as recreation facilities. Fields such as those at Ludwig's Corner or Brethren Church are not guaranteed for use in perpetuity. Only fields that are in parks are protected. Even school district fields are not a given should the district need land for expansion of educational facilities.
- Participation varies by municipality as does the provision of sports fields.
- Fields are overused.
- There are no sports turf management programs in place and no fields get rest.

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**Table A6.2: Sports League Participation by Municipality and League Total**

League	East Coventry	East Nantmeal	East Pikeland	East Vincent	North Coventry	South Coventry	Warwick	West Pikeland	West Vincent	Total NCC	Total League
Coventry Little League	98	11	0	125	175	79	49	0	5	542	550
Coventry Soccer Assn	132	6	0	196	165	94	35	0	56	684	1,400
Coventry Youth Lacrosse	27	10	0	66	38	30	11	0	73	255	255
Coventry Girls Basketball	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	120	120
DARC Leagues & Camps	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	468	0	468	5,524
GEYA Soccer	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	24	180	216	1,200
GEYA Baseball	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	16	127	151	850
KYAL Baseball	0	0	443	37	0	0	0	0	0	480	480
KYAL Softball	0	0	196	11	0	0	0	0	0	207	225
LYA All sports	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	400	0	400	4,000
Norchester Red Knights Football	20	3	1	23	40	12	5	0	1	105	133
Norchester Red Knights Cheerleading	20	6	3	18	27	6	17	0	4	101	113
NYAA Baseball	16	5	13	15	18	7	7	7	12	100	100
Penn Premiere Lacrosse	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	100
Phoenixville Babe Ruth	0	0	36	0	0	0	0	0	0	36	122
SFYAL Baseball	0	0	0	40	0	0	0	0	0	40	400
SFYAL Softball	0	0	0	40	0	0	0	0	0	40	400
Vincent United Futbol Club (Soccer)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wildcats Football	25	0	0	38	32	10	0	0	1	106	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>692</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>915</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>4,050</b>	<b>16,211</b>

n/a - not available or not available by municipality

**Table A6.3: Participation by Sport**

Sport	Total Participants
Basketball	120
Baseball	1,349
Football/Cheerleading	312
Lacrosse (Penn Premiere unreported by municipality)	255
Soccer (Vincent United unreported)	900
Softball	247
Multiple sports by DARC and LYA	868
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,051</b>

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# Recreation and Cultural Heritage Programs

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- Fields are generally maintained as well as possible given the resources of the communities. There is no gradation of fields from practice areas through recreational play to tournament quality.
- Field scheduling is a challenge with field use conflicts regarding permits.
- Field lighting in the area is limited, which is consistent with environmental concerns.
- Lack of indoor facilities requires groups to travel outside the area to rent facilities.
- Land values are high and beyond the financial capacity of community sports to purchase sites for fields.
- The leagues operate independently.
- Children and youth appear to have field priority. Over time, adult leagues are likely to emerge such as those that are in place in other areas of southeastern Pennsylvania including: adult soccer, field hockey for ages over 50, and “Grumpy Old Men” softball leagues. They will need places to play.

In interviews and two sports focus groups for this plan, league representatives expressed the desire to work in common and support efforts to obtain land and develop and/or improve facilities.

## PROVIDERS OF RECREATION AND HERITAGE-RELATED OPPORTUNITIES

Northern Chester County is fortunate to be the home of important organizations that have a mission related to recreation, history, and the local heritage. These include the Mill at Anselma, Anselma Farmers’ and Artisans’ Market, Binky Lee Preserve, Chester Springs Creamery and Milky Way Farm, Crow’s Nest Preserve, Historic Yellow Springs, Ludwig’s Corner Horseshow and County Fair, Maysie’s Farm Conservation Center, Welkinweir, French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust, and the Natural Lands Trust. All of these organizations add to the quality of life here by directly connecting people who live and work here to the local heritage through recreation and tourism opportunities.

Although there are YMCA’s in Pottstown, Phoenixville, Lionville and in nearby counties, there is no YMCA or other type of community center in Northern Chester County. Interviews found that the Freedom Valley YMCA’s feasibility study for establishing a YM/YWCA in Northern Chester County research found an insufficient base to support a YM/YWCA. The Ludwig’s Corner master site plan reserves a footprint for a future YM/YWCA should conditions change and Freedom Valley or other organization determine it feasible to construct and operate a facility here. In the meantime, exploring ways of working with the Freedom Valley YMCA in the provision of services would help to provide more public recreation services. For example as shown in Table 5, the Pottstown YMCA is working with the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation and North Coventry Township in offering a 10-week summer camp in Coventry Woods that would also serve youth from Pottstown. This partnership features management and services from the YMCA, funding from the Foundation and facilities from North Coventry Township.

## HISTORY AND RECREATION

Northern Chester County is an important region in the history of the United States of America. It is the home of the Iron and Steel Industry. Important historic events occurred here during the Revolutionary War. Northern Chester County is one of the few places where people can experience the landscape of an historic event in the same way it appeared during the actual event, largely due to the land preservation efforts of the municipalities of the Northern Chester County area. Opportunities to interpret this history and convey it

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# Recreation and Cultural Heritage Programs

through recreational experiences should be fostered. Efforts are underway to create a heritage tourism program through the Chester County Parks Department.

**Table A6.4: Private Providers of Recreation and Cultural Heritage Programs**

Site/Organization	Activities and Programs
Binky Lee Preserve <a href="http://www.natlands.org/preserves-to-visit/...preserves/binky-lee-preserve/">www.natlands.org/preserves-to-visit/...preserves/binky-lee-preserve/</a>	Hiking, walking, nature enjoyment, wildlife watching
Crow's Nest Preserve <a href="http://www.natlands.org/preserves-to-visit/list-of-preserves/crows-nest-preserve/">www.natlands.org/preserves-to-visit/list-of-preserves/crows-nest-preserve/</a>	Visitor Center, hiking, wildlife watching, educational programs, youth environmental programs and camps, volunteer days
Welkinweir <a href="http://www.greenvalleys.org/welkinweir.html">www.greenvalleys.org/welkinweir.html</a>	Enjoyment of nature and unique trees, flowers, and shrubs. Home of Green Valleys educational programs. Hosts schools and other organized groups, educating them about wildlife, water, and land protection. Nine-week Summer Nature Day Camp for children ages 4 through 14.
Green Valleys Association <a href="http://www.greenvalleys.org">www.greenvalleys.org</a>	Wide range of programs and services related primarily to the preservation of watersheds and the environment. Programs for children and adults through schools, scout programs, summer camps, on-site programs, and more.
Mill at Anselma <a href="http://www.anselmamill.org">www.anselmamill.org</a>	Tours, workshops, special events, festivals, and school programs related to the mill, food, and heritage.
Anselma Mill and Artisans' Market <a href="http://www.anselmamill.org/market.htm">www.anselmamill.org/market.htm</a>	Weekly children's activities on the green, with a focus on sustainable agriculture education and the active promotion of school gardens, farm-to-school, and whole food nutrition.
Historic Yellow Springs <a href="http://www.yellowsprings.org">www.yellowsprings.org</a>	Tours, exhibits, workshops, classes, and performances related to the studio and performing arts.
French & Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust <a href="http://www.frenchandpickering.org">www.frenchandpickering.org</a>	Iron Tour, Homegrown Harvest, special events, annual auction
Milky Way Farm <a href="http://www.milkywayfarm.com">www.milkywayfarm.com</a>	Services and products with "down on the farm" flair including birthday parties, private tours, school group field trips, and pick-your-own pumpkins.
Chester Springs Creamery <a href="http://www.milkywayfarm.com/homepage-creamery.htm">www.milkywayfarm.com/homepage-creamery.htm</a>	Ice cream making and facility rental for parties and meetings.
Maysie's Farm Conservation Center <a href="http://www.maysiesfarm.org">www.maysiesfarm.org</a>	Nonprofit educational organization dedicated to increasing public understanding of the importance of conservation and ecological thinking. Offers a community learning series, school and youth programs, events, educational programs, camps, cooking classes, and more.
Ludwig's Corner Horse Show and Country Fair <a href="http://www.ludwigshorseshow.org">www.ludwigshorseshow.org</a>	Dedicated to preserving the tradition of horses in Chester County. Offers horse-related programs and special events.
Pottstown YMCA <a href="http://www.ymca.net/y-profile/?assn=5895">www.ymca.net/y-profile/?assn=5895</a>	Working with the Pottstown Health and Wellness Foundation and North Coventry Township in creating a 10-week summer camp at Coventry Woods; this camp would also serve participants from Pottstown.

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# Recreation and Cultural Heritage Programs

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Northern Chester County is home to more than a dozen historic villages. Tours, programs, and events in these communities would be a way to inform local residents of their heritage through recreational experiences.

The historic Parker Ford Tavern is being restored as the keystone of a multi-municipal park along the Schuylkill River. East Vincent Township has a vision for the Parker Ford Tavern – to see the buildings and grounds restored as closely as possible to their original eighteenth-century appearance. The tavern could serve as a museum open to the public and dedicated to the history of Parker Ford. The themes for this site would include historic modes of transportation, the growth of commerce and industry in Chester County, and the Revolutionary War. As part of the Schuylkill River Valley Heritage Corridor, the Tavern site will attract tourists, school children, scouts, and area citizens to visit and step back in time. The township believes that with all the growth happening today, saving this historic treasure for future generations to enjoy is a commitment for all ages. It is envisioned that a Friends of the Parker Ford Tavern organization will help to support the facility and programs.

In the public opinion survey, one out of every two respondents indicated that they were interested in lifelong learning classes and programs. Further research and interviews revealed that citizens have a keen interest in learning about the history of the area. Suggestions generated included having local and regional history classes incorporated in the Owen J. Roberts Adult Evening School.

The area has fine examples of events and activities organized around the historic aspects of the Region. These include re-enactments such as the 225<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Crossing of the Schuylkill River by General George Washington's troops.

### CULTURE AND RECREATION

While the Brandywine area of Southern Chester County is renowned for art – most prominently expressed through the Wyeth family – Northern Chester County is also home to an important arts community. Historic Yellow Springs is a nonprofit enterprise that preserves and promotes the history and arts of Yellow Springs village. The Chester Springs Studio is a vibrant arts center at Historic Yellow Springs. Founded in 1978 as an offshoot of Historic Yellow Springs, the Studio grew in reputation as a nationally-known home for the visual arts, particularly in the areas of painting and ceramics. Historic Yellow Springs offers an innovative mix of arts, history, and interdisciplinary program experiences. Today, the Chester Springs Studio continues to be an artistic epicenter in Northern Chester County. The Studio's dedicated faculty members bring experience and excitement to intimate classroom settings. Visiting artists conduct workshops to expand students' horizons in ceramics, sculpture, painting, photography, dance, and other pursuits. Exhibitions provide a way for established and emerging artists to showcase their works while educating the public about visual art.

Historic Yellow Springs features the Yellow Springs Cultural Center. In the 1920s the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts created studio space in the 1845 barn for its Country School. The Yellow Springs Institute, a nonprofit performing arts organization, was formed in 1976 and purchased the barn and five acres from Historic Yellow Springs. The loft was converted to a black box theatre in 1982 and a conference center was added in 1989. Historic Yellow Springs was able to repurchase the property in 1997 and created the Yellow Springs Cultural Center, a performing arts center.

## TOURISM

Cultural heritage tourism includes traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historical, and natural resources. Northern Chester County has its own unique identity rooted in its Revolutionary War history, the Iron and Steel Heritage, and its significant natural resources and scenery that organizations and individuals have been working strategically and successfully to protect. This is not an area that favors a large volume of group tours and buses. The lovely countryside with its narrow winding roads, small historic villages, and scenery is more conducive to heritage tourism supported by small groups of family and friends enjoying the area together.

Northern Chester County is not a focus of the area's visitor and convention bureaus. The Brandywine Conference and Visitor's Bureau concentrates on the southern part of the county featuring the Brandywine area. The Valley Forge Convention and Visitors Bureau is centered on the Valley Forge/King of Prussia area. The Schuylkill Highlands CLI is working toward addressing recreational tourism in the area that includes Northern Chester County. Consideration could be given to determining if this is the logical home for tourism for Northern Chester County. Because cultural heritage tourism could be important for the area, Northern Chester County should continue to work with the Schuylkill Highlands CLI in developing an approach that works for those who live here, as there appears to be a duality of desire to both showcase the Region as well as keep it a secret!

## RECREATION PROGRAM AND OPPORTUNITY ANALYSIS

Recreation opportunities are a patchwork of self-directed opportunities in the great outdoors, heritage-related programs, the arts unique to this area, community sports, special events, school district programs, multi-municipal park and recreation organizations, and close-to-home recreation provided by volunteers under the auspices of local municipalities.

The main character of recreation in the area is enjoyment of the great outdoors, special events (many tied to heritage, history, and conservation), and sports. There appears to be a strong desire to establish active healthy lifestyles as a way of life here. This would be in keeping with Chester County's rating as the healthiest county in Pennsylvania. Another underlying theme is the desire to meld heritage and history with recreation rather than as discrete elements separate from each other.

The programs, such as the Iron Tour and community festivals, offered are of top quality and are generally increasing in participation. The provision of recreation services, programs, information, schedules, and locations is fragmented. Each provider operates independently as best they can in planning and implementing recreation opportunities. There is no centralized place for people to go for information about programs, events, facilities, or services.

The residents participate in recreation throughout the Region and do not restrict themselves to their own municipality. The municipalities are too small to provide their own recreation services, as is common in larger communities in southeastern Pennsylvania. West Pikeland and East Pikeland have joined together with Phoenixville and Downingtown in providing multi-municipal recreation in their areas in conjunction with other municipal partners.

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Sports represent a major challenge. With 16 organizations providing football, baseball, softball, soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, basketball, and swimming, all operating regionally, increasing in numbers, and struggling to get enough game and practice facilities, there is a lot of problem solving and work to do here. Fortunately, people in the leagues and the municipalities as well as some private organizations are willing to work together in this effort.

The activities in which most people are interested are opportunities outdoors such as walking, bicycling, enjoying nature, and so on. The organized activity of the most interest is lifelong learning for adults – and Owen J. Roberts offers the Adult Evening School for that. One of the disconnects relates to children being engaged and active in the outdoors. With youth largely consumed with video- and computer-based recreation, engaging them in active healthy lifestyles is a major goal of the communities of Northern Chester County. A work session with 90 fifth graders found that their top interests were being outside, but not in more ballfields and game courts as expected. They expressed the desire to play in the woods, in the creeks, and on play equipment suitable for their ages.

Probably the single most important thing that Northern Chester County could do to foster participation in recreation and active healthy lifestyles for people of all ages is to develop the “go-to” place for information. Survey respondents indicated that their most preferred source of this information would be one Web site for Northern Chester County. This support for a regional source of information is a significant finding of regional thinking, especially in Pennsylvania. The “go-to” place would be easily accessed, in real time, easy to navigate, and provide a range of information on the activities, events, facilities, and opportunities in the Region. Promoting this resource to create wide public understanding of its availability would be key.

Long-term and out-of-the-box, there may be another way to engage people through a leisure counseling approach that would be based upon a strategic development process tailored for Northern Chester County. The idea would be to develop a system similar to finding a hotel on a travel Web site that engages the participant in a series of directed questions until he/she makes a choice about what they would like to do. This would be a rather significant undertaking requiring expertise and resources for development, but perhaps it would be worthy of university involvement and grant funding from a foundation. The key may be to tying this into wellness and active healthy living.

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