

October 17, 2011

Dear Portland Parks and Recreation Employees:

Today I have the incredible honor of taking the helm of this Bureau. For over a quarter century, I have interacted with Parks as a customer, observer and contracted consultant. In at time, I have come to greatly appreciate the system and the amazingly dedicated professionals like you who make it successful. So today, I start with the knowledge that we have the best "parkies" in the country. I am honored to be working with you.

I now have the daunting responsibility of leading this Bureau as we strive to make Portland even more livable, even in the midst of difficult financial times. The challenges we face together are very similar to those faced by our neighbors, family and friends. It is not lost on any of us that our parks and recreation programs are even more important during tough times like these.

In spite of these challenges, I remain very optimistic about our future. We enjoy the support of the citizens of Portland, 85% of whom say we are doing a good job. This support is key to our future success, and we need to continue building this goodwill by working and doing our best to engage with the citizens we serve. We have dozens of innovators - people like you who are busy thinking about how we can meet our mission in new and exciting ways:

- Establishing and safeguarding the parks, natural resources, and urban forest that are the soul of the city, ensuring that green spaces are accessible to all;
- Developing and maintaining excellent facilities and places for public recreation, building community through play and relaxation, gathering and solitude; and
- Providing and coordinating recreation services and programs that contribute to the health and well being of residents of all ages and abilities.

This idea of collaboration and partnership is really one of the things that I see changes in the months and years ahead. We are going to reach out and give our community greater access and influence in what we do. This will be done on a project level like the proposed Harper's Playground at Arbor Lodge Park, and future development of Thomas Cully Park, to list two examples. More important than the resources that these collaborations can bring to the table is the goodwill and support that comes from people who are heard and engaged. I ask you to think about this with every one of your interactions with our citizens, sports groups or other advocates - listen, consider and respond in ways that help them feel like they are truly stakeholders in Portland Parks & Recreation.

We have a bright future ahead. Portland Parks offers a wide spectrum of solutions to problems we faced in our society: childhood obesity, nature-deficit disorder, community health and others. This summer, I was able to participate in a number of Summer Free for All activities. I saw firsthand how important we are in helping our citizens move from isolated neighbors to form real community. In addition, as employers of thousands of youth, we are incredibly important to the economic well-being of Portland.

In short, we matter, and your efforts are key to our success, whether you lead volunteers in pulling ivy in Forest Park, drive a mower, supervise recreation programs at University Park Community Center, or help plan the future for Portland Parks & Recreation.

I look forward to meeting you and finding out how I can be most effective for you. Until then, please know that I appreciate all you do to make Portland's park system one of the greatest in the world. I will strive to be the leader you expect and deserve, walking in the footsteps of Santner, Jordan and Mische.

Appreciatively,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Abbate". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style with a horizontal line at the end.

Mike Abbate
Director