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Summer Playgrounds Returning for Fun and New Friendships

by **DAWN WIVELL**

I spent many summers playing at my local park and participating in organized activities like dancing and arts and crafts. It was a great way to meet new friends, learn new things (anyone remember box-hockey?), and just have fun. Kids in the city of Reading are still enjoying summer activities at their local parks thanks to the dedication of the Reading Recreation Commission.

According to Daphne E. Klahr, CPRP, Executive Director for the Reading Recreation Commission, they have 4-500 children in their playground program. She says, "Participating in summer playground programs is an important part of childhood that helps to develop physical strength, coordination and balance. Playgrounds also present many opportunities for children to learn and develop social skills, creativity and imagination, problem-solving skills, a sense of community and connection to others."

The Reading Recreation Commission, formed by ordinance in 2011, is a community partnership between the City of Reading and Reading School District, that provides neighborhood-based recreation and learning opportunities for all ages – with an emphasis on affordable programs for children – at schools, parks, playgrounds, and at its two recreation centers – 3rd and Spruce, Pike.

In addition to the summer playground program, the Reading Recreation Commission also offers after school programs, fitness classes, club activities (including urban cooking and youth leadership development), cultural arts programs, and special



In this case, raising a racquet means we're having a good time.

community events. They also provide home-style meals and snacks to youth participating in their programs and to outside organizations.

As if this wasn't enough, the Reading Recreation Commission also offers both youth and adult instruction sports programs and leagues. Their tennis program serves over 4,000 youth and adults annually combining physical activity, healthy eating, homework assistance, and at-risk youth supervision. Their year-around basketball program serves over 200 youth ages 10-18 years old. The adult volleyball program, with over 200 participants, operates a summer and winter session. Their baseball program enables kids ages 9 to 12 and 13 to 15 to learn the fundamentals of baseball, learn about nutrition and play baseball throughout their summer vacation.

Klahr says that many of the staff have become mentors for kids in the city of Reading, stating, "Each of our staff have children who seek their advice, guidance, or just want someone to talk to on a daily basis." She adds, "We go to school functions (games, concerts etc.) in some cases, to be the cheerleader for our kids who may not have family members to support them. Our leadership programs - including Little Ladies, Young Men's Club, Success for Teens Program for Boys, and Girl's Leadership - put our kids into contact with great leaders in the community along with Recreation Commission staff on a weekly basis. In many cases, we act as 'surrogate parents' to kids in our programs – helping them with personal care issues, and school issues like homework and reports."

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Spring
Home
Improvement
Page!

Literacy Council Provides Citizenship Preparation Classes

by **DAWN WIVELL**

Having been born right here in Berks County, I sometimes forget how fortunate I am to be a citizen of the United States of America. As an American citizen, I have more rights and privileges than many individuals throughout the world could even dream of. I have the right to speak my mind, to follow whatever religion I choose, to purchase a gun, to own property, to travel wherever I want...and the list goes on and on. It's easy to take of these rights for granted, since they're all I've known.

This is not the case for approximately 680,000 citizens that the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) welcomes during naturalization ceremonies across the United States each year. Unlike me, these individuals were required to "demonstrate a commitment to the unifying principles that bind us as Americans." In order to become an American citizen, individuals age 18 and older that meet certain eligibility requirements – such as the



Clockwise from top, Sandra, Flor, Erjon with Pat, our ESL teacher.

ability to read, write, and speak Basic English - can apply for naturalization.

These individuals also need to pass a citizenship test and give an oath that goes something like this: "I swear that I give up completely the government of which I have, up to this time, been a citizen or sub-

ject. I will give my support to the constitution and to the laws of the United States. I will obey them. I will help to keep this country safe from dangers within and dangers from the outside. I will help the United States in time of war. No person made me take this oath. When I say this, I am keeping nothing back, and I will continue to keep my promise to support the United States of America. God knows that all I have said is true."

The Literacy Council of Reading-Berks is helping these individuals with a series of Citizenship Preparation classes. During these four 3-hour classes the following topics are covered: the process, fees, and application for citizenship (including information about the N-400 form, fingerprinting, and photographs for USCIS); basic American history and government using the 100 standard questions and answers used in the USCIS interview; a videotape showing what is expected of the applicant in read-

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