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Outdoor flicks program nabs state award

Big Foot Recreation programmer honored for 'Movie Under the Stars'

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As a result of hard work and community support, Big Foot Recreation District Program Coordinator Dean Connley was recently bestowed with the Silver Star award for program excellence from the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association for his "Movie Under the Stars" program.

Connley, 24, who resides in Lake Geneva, received the award at the WPRA annual conference in La Crosse on Nov. 3.

"Movie Under the Stars" debuted this past summer, attracting more than 1,100 viewers throughout the season, who came out to see a variety of blockbusters.

The largest turnout was for the showing of "Jaws" at Village of Fontana Beach, where 323 people got together on the shores of Geneva Lake with their blankets and popcorn to see the classic flick.

With such a successful turnout and the opportunity to promote the district's ongoing activities prior to the showing, "Movie Under the Stars" was recognized under the Creative Service Delivery in Marketing category.

For three weekends each month, families were invited to view movies in the summer air either at Village of Fontana Beach and or at Goodland Memorial Park in Sharon.

Since viewers would often arrive up to an hour before the scheduled showing, Connley said he recognized the potential to promote the recreation district's other programs.

Together with other recreation staffers, Connley got to work creating a slide show, advertising Big Foot Recreation District programs, office information and forthcoming programs.



Dean Connley

"I thought, as long as we have people sitting there for an hour, let's show them all our upcoming events," said Connley, adding that the program became a marketing tool for the recreation district.

The "Movie Under the Stars" program grew from a similar Big Foot Recreation District program that offers movies in the high school auditorium during the winter and summer months.

Since attendance showed a significant decrease during the summer months, Connley decided to take the program outdoors and so was born "Movie Under the Stars."

The program was meant to be something the whole community could enjoy, and every household could afford, Connley said, adding that tickets only cost \$1 per person.

The formula for cheap, family enjoyment seemed to work – the attendance at "Movie Under the Stars" was the largest since the Big Foot Recreation District started showing movies in the community, according to Big Foot Recreation District Chuck Thiesenhusen, who said plans for next summer's list of showings will soon get under way.

"Jaws" is a film he said the district would continue to offer each summer since it was so popular during the pilot program.

"We'll continue to show blockbusters, try to offer some new releases/classic movies, the ones that will bring people out," he said.

As a program coordinator for the district, Connley said he enjoys working with the community it serves, which includes Sharon, Fontana, Walworth, Linn and Delavan Township.

"I just really like being able to know the community, and work with all different age groups. It's just a good way to get out there and interact with people, and have a hand in the community," he said.

Thiesenhusen said he is grateful for Connley's contributions to the district, and is proud of his recent accomplishment.

"Dean, in addition to the rest of the staff and instructors, have done an incredible job helping make Big Foot Recreation District what it is today, and I am pleased Dean is receiving this recognition for his efforts," said Thiesenhusen.

Connley has brought a lot of "fresh programming ideas to the district, and has a good understanding of what it takes to get the word out," he added.

Connley, whose hometown is Wilmet, Ill., spent his summers in Lake Geneva working odd jobs, but said he has always enjoyed park and recreation activities the most.

In college he studied construction management, but switched majors while working for the Winnetka park district.

In 2009, he received his undergraduate degree in recreation management at the University of Illinois. In 2010, Connley received his master's degree in the same study at Aurora University George Williams College in Williams Bay.

He started as an intern with the district last year before getting hired on as program coordinator.

For more information about Big Foot Recreation District upcoming events, classes and programs visit www.bigfoot-recreation.org.