

Rec supervisor Marra leaving Scarsdale

By CATHERINE FERRIS

It is very likely that years from now, students at one of Scarsdale's five elementary schools will stare with satisfaction at their newly won Scarsdale Players Cup and have no idea who they really have to thank for it, so perhaps the cup, and the tournament of events created with the cup as its goal, should be dedicated to its founder.

Because the village won't have the benefit of him for much longer.

Jason Marra, long dedicated to the village Parks and Recreation Department and its most recent supervisor, is leaving Scarsdale in February to continue his career in Great Neck, Long Island. When he goes, Marra, with his restructuring and revitalization of several sports programs, will leave a tangible legacy in the village.

"I've always been involved in parks and recreation ... It was something I just grew up with," Marra, a Harrison native, said. "My first job was at a day camp when I was 14, so I kind of knew what I wanted to do throughout my career."

Marra said he enjoyed his time with the programs and the children during his years working his way up the recreation ladder in the different recreation centers. He said he saw how important the different programs and services were for children and their families.

"I saw the benefit improving people's quality of life. It meant a lot to me. It was something rewarding I felt good about," he said.

Boasting his experience in the field with classroom study, Marra majored in recreation leisure studies for his undergraduate degree at Southern Connecticut State University and received his master's degree at Lehman College in recreation education.

After graduating, Marra worked as a recreation supervisor at a private, non-profit day camp called Purchase Community House in Purchase and as a rec supervisor in Cortlandt Manor, which was his first time working for a municipal government.

A preview of things to come.

In 2008, Marra found his way to Scarsdale as an assistant superintendent. He worked for three and a half years under then superintendent Suzanne Busby before moving up to superintendent.

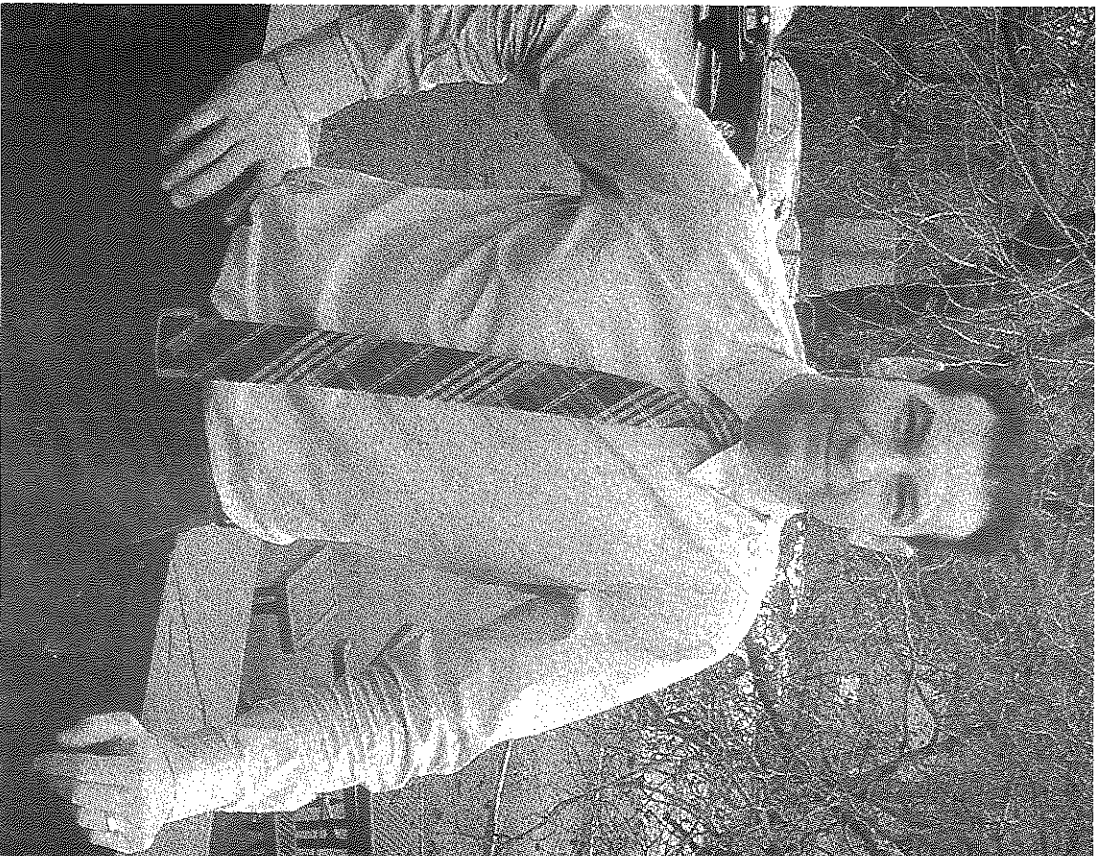
Marra said Scarsdale has a great reputation as a town supportive of the parks and recreation department, and he saw it as a community where he would be able to grow his career, which is exactly what happened.

"You always have your difficult points, but it's always been rewarding and satisfying," he said, adding his experience in Scarsdale made the decision to accept a position elsewhere difficult. Looking back over his time in the village, Marra said one of the most rewarding parts of Scarsdale was working with the community.

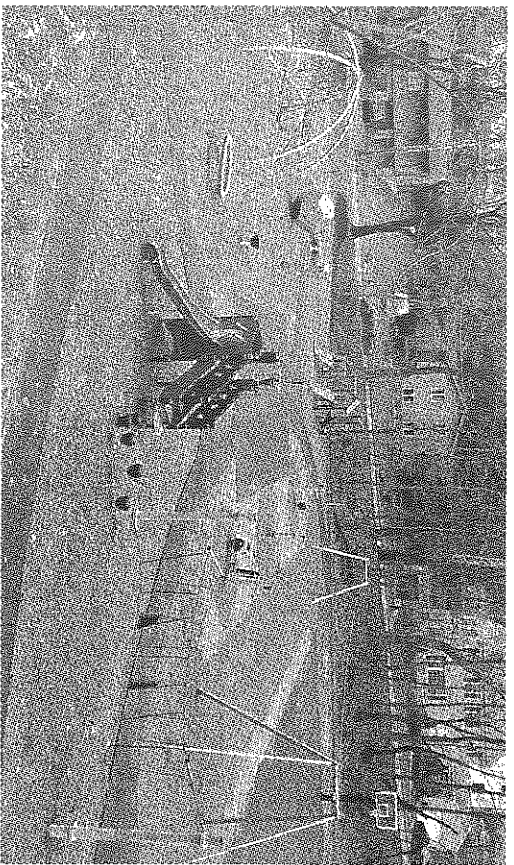
"People move here for the schools, and that's a great thing, but hopefully they [also] come here for the parks. The programs here are good. That's what we strive for," he said.

One of Marra's final projects, the renovation of Hyatt Park, is in the final stages.

Initially, the project began as simply redoing the park's basketball court, which Marra said was in disrepair, but the village ended up combining that with the park's renovation. The park rejuvenation was designed



Jason Marra, above, will move on to Great Neck, Long Island after working for the village of Scarsdale since 2008. The Hyatt Park renovation was one of Marra's projects, as was creating the Scarsdale Players Cup.



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around health and fitness and has walking paths, adult fitness equipment and a new basketball court.

"The good thing about that is there was a lot of community involvement," Marra said. "As people saw the work happening, they wanted to keep making it better."

Help came from all sides; the engineering department came up with the design of the park. Scarsdale workers took down the old park equipment

as a mentor, gave him a solid place to get to work.

"Our programs and parks were always good. I felt you have to constantly just look for improvements," he said. "From a budgetary standpoint, we're up to 71 percent subsidized with revenues we've taken in from our programs. Prior to that, they were 64 percent. It's the highest it's ever been, and I'm really proud of it."

This increase in revenue is not because of an increase of fees, according to Marra. It's because the programs themselves have improved.

And because Marra has spent his time growing the programs and making them better for the village, his departure will be bittersweet.

"I would've loved to have been here to grow the department and do larger things," he said.

Although this door is closing for Marra in Scarsdale, he is looking forward to the future in Great Neck. He said it was a unique opportunity because it is a park district, meaning the tax revenue goes directly to the parks.

"There's not many opportunities I would have even considered to leave Scarsdale for because I was very happy," he said.

In addition to the more direct line of funding, Marra said the Great Neck rec budget is about triple what he is currently working with, and comes with 50 full-time staff members.

Despite Marra's excitement to get to work on Long Island, he said he wanted to make sure Scarsdale will be left in

a place that is solid and secure, which is why his last day is Feb. 3, after he presents the department's budget for the 2016-17 fiscal year.

The village has yet to find a replacement for Marra — Busby will return as an interim superintendent — which Marra believes will make the transition process as smooth as it can be. He said he will leave happy with what he has managed to put into place, but it is bittersweet because of other projects he was hoping to tackle.

"I wanted to get our department accredited nationally," he said. "There's only one in New York State that has an accreditation through the National Parks and Recreation Association. I had that lined up, so in the next year or two, we had planned to do that," he said.

Marra said he also hoped to implement a community master plan to assess the needs of the village, hire a consulting company and lay out a 10-year plan to accomplish whatever was determined was needed.

All that, and the Players Cup Challenge.

"It's tough to leave when you're happy," he said.