

Shout Out: Craig Culp, executive director of NSSRA



Craig Culp (right) with former NSSRA Foundation President Terry Porter at the NSSRA Foundation's 2017 SWING Golf Outing. Culp has been executive director of NSSRA for 10 years. (Provided photo / NSSRA)

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Craig Culp, 48, the executive director of the Northern Suburban Special Recreation Association, celebrated 10 years of service with the organization in December. Before coming to NSSRA, Culp worked at the Maine-Niles Association of Special Recreation and the Northeast DuPage Special Recreation Association. He graduated in 1993 from [Illinois State University](#) with a bachelor's degree in recreation administration. He has been married to his wife, Nicole, for almost 25 years and they have a 12-year-old son. Culp grew up and lives in Arlington Heights.

Q : How have you enjoyed the last 10 years working at NSSRA?

A: It's been fantastic. The fastest 10 years of my life. That's probably the biggest downer, it just goes so darn fast. But that means that I, and we, are engaged, having fun and working as hard as we can to make sure that the residents that we serve are having a blast. Because that's our mission, to make sure that our residents in our 13 communities that have a disability have a place to play and be connected to our community. It's really easy to get motivated to work for individuals with disabilities because ... when a person with a disability, especially a kid, has an opportunity where they feel like a superstar, when they feel special, when they feel important, there's no better feeling in the world.

Q: Looking back on your time at NSSRA, what memory comes to mind?

A: For 40 years, we've been sending a group of individuals with disabilities to Camp Wigwam in Maine. We go there for eight to 10 days to this camp, and we're campers there. I've gone twice since I've been here. The two times I've gone to spend a couple of days with the campers have been some of my favorite days here. The other thing I really enjoy is, we have an annual banquet where we recognize our participants and we celebrate their achievements and the people that they are. It's our annual Shinning Stars banquet. It's an awards banquets for our participants, our teams, our volunteers and our supporters.

Q: What inspired you to start a career in recreation administration?

A: I was connected to athletics all throughout my life. It's just been a progression. I started in my first position at Northeast DuPage Special Recreation Association and my job as a recreation specialist was to create an adapted sports program for the agency. I just parlayed all of that into taking an opportunity and making the most of it with the focus of giving our participants with disabilities the setting to be amazing. There are not as many opportunities for individuals with physical disabilities or any type of disability to be a superstar athlete as there are their typically developing peers.

Q: Who is someone you admire?

A: We lost a good friend this year. His name is Mitch Slotnick, and he is a father of one of our participants. He and his family started our foundation. The foundation pays for our scholarships, our big special events and our vehicles. Mitch started that, and he died this year. He would always encourage us to just do the best we can for the residents that we serve. He's someone I really look up to and really miss. Also, my son. He's amazing. He's why I live. He's smart, he's fun and he's funny. He's a blessing.

Q: Do you have any words of wisdom for the community?

A: Live every minute like it's your last one. It's what our participants show us and it's the best way to live life. It's important for me, and I think it's important for all of us, to put others first. I don't do my work for me. I do my work for who we serve and I love it.

Shout Out is a weekly feature in which we get to know and introduce our readers to their fellow community members and local visitors throughout suburban Chicago.

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