Parks and Recreation Department Increases Revenue, Accountability with Retail System

Overview

Country or Region: United States
Industry: Government—Local

Customer Profile

Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation offers a diversified selection of programs at more than 250 parks, recreation facilities, and greenway areas in the greater Miami, Florida, area.

Business Situation

Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation needed a solution that would enable park administration to better track payments and reservations, ease access to programs and facilities for park visitors, and improve data accuracy and reporting.

Solution

Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation deployed Microsoft Dynamics® RMS integrated with Recreation Dynamics to automate scheduling and reservation processes and create reports necessary to receive continual funding for park programs and maintenance.

Benefits

- Manual processes eliminated
- Improved revenue collection
- Better customer service
- Reliable data increases public support

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>
> Allison Diego, Assistant Director for Administration, Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation Department

Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation runs the nation's third-largest park system. Until recently, the department ran its summer camps, recreation programs, and facilities rental programs with a manual system of paper forms. To improve operations, the department installed a point-of-sale and management solution using Microsoft Dynamics® Retail Management System and Recreation Dynamics from US eDirect, a Microsoft Dynamics Partner. The solution centralized information and enhanced cash management operations among all the associated parks and recreation facilities. Today, park administrators have real-time access to accurate information about department operations and finances, and park employees can manage their operations more efficiently and offer better customer service to residents. In addition, the department expects its improved processes to increase revenue collection.

Situation

Three-time winner of the National Gold Medal for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management, the Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation Department in Florida maintains more than 250 parks, recreation facilities, and greenway areas in the Miami area. It offers a diversified selection of programs to approximately 2.4 million residents, including summer camps, after-school programs, sports leagues for youth and adults, arts and crafts, fitness programs, and field trips for seniors.

But, managing this complex system was a severe challenge for parks administrators and managers. The department was responsible for 13 county pools, seven multicourt tennis centers, six full-service marinas, 175 ball fields, and hundreds of picnic areas, campsites, and classroom buildings. Until recently, all reservations—including scheduling, registration, and fee processing—were manual, paper-based operations.

Parks department personnel operated freestanding cash registers to collect fees at the various park facilities. Staff would fill out paper triplicate forms by hand, which personnel collected from each location and manually entered into the county's mainframe financial system for each transaction. "We had several entry points into our old system, and sometimes data was entered three different times at different places," explains Allison Diego, Assistant Director for Administration at Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation. "We couldn't keep up with logging everything into the system, so we could only do spot audits. Depending on who entered what, we could have inconsistent versions of our actual revenue."

There was at least a two-week delay in all accounting, and requests for refunds sometimes took more than 30 days. The lack of accurate up-to-date financial information severely hampered department operations.

"If I got a phone call from county administrators for information on the cost of our programs, we'd call six administrators and they would contact the service managers, who would contact the managers of each park," Diego explains. "They would all crunch numbers and pass the information back up to us. It was inconsistent and not always accurate. We'd always be questioned about our numbers, and it was causing funding issues for us."

Solution

To obtain more accurate financial and operational data, Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation implemented Microsoft Dynamics® Retail Management System, a complete point-of-sale cash management and accounting solution for multifacility organizations. To modernize the system of reserving, renting, and scheduling facilities and programs, the department combined the solution with Recreation Dynamics from Microsoft Dynamics Partner US eDirect.

Deployment

In the first phase of the project, the department deployed Microsoft Dynamics RMS and Recreation Dynamics to 120 locations in 50 parks. The new system uses Microsoft Dynamics RMS Store Operations in the individual park locations and Microsoft Dynamics RMS Headquarters at the Parks and Recreation department central office.

"We wanted to start with our general operation parks, which include community, neighborhood, and district parks that serve most of the people in our residential areas," explains Diego. In less than three months, the system was ready to handle the department's busy schedule of summer programs and activities.

"We have an experienced staff—many that have grown up working in the parks," says Diego. "For some, it was their first experience working with computers, and it was a bit of a challenge, but once they got comfortable, most of the staff were thrilled with the new system." The new system gave parks staff the ability to offer services to residents that weren't possible with the older system.

Scheduling Parks Facilities

Microsoft Dynamics RMS and Recreation Dynamics gives parks staff the ability to check schedules and makes reservations at any park in the system, which vastly improves customer service for Miami-Dade residents. "Before, someone who wanted to book a picnic shelter or sign up for a class had to call the specific facility and, if that park was booked, employees had no way of knowing what might be available in other parks," says Diego. "Now, any employee at any park can look up information about facilities at any park in the system and make a reservation for a customer. Our employees feel like they're better serving the public."

Accurate Financial Reporting

Microsoft Dynamics RMS enabled Miami-Dade officials to link point-of-sale equipment at the parks facilities in various locations. Now, financial and operational data from facilities across the county is automatically integrated into the county's mainframe financial management system, without the need for manual processing.

"Microsoft Dynamics RMS saves at least 30 minutes a day in most park facilities," Diego says. The new system also eliminated the need for a full-time accounting clerk at park headquarters. "We'll save more than $114,000 in just the first phase of the project."

At the central office, Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation administrators can now view, analyze, and share accurate, up-to-date information about the department's operations and finances in real time. Managers can compare results for similar recreation programs across parks in different areas or quickly determine which ball fields are booked for games and which might have time available. "At the management level, we love the new system," says Diego.

The combination of Microsoft Dynamics RMS and Recreation Dynamics enables Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation to keep track of everybody who pays and reserves a facility or attends a program.

"Now, we can go to our elected officials with accurate numbers, and we can show exactly who's being served, where they're being served, and where we need to serve more people," says Diego.

"Serving the public is a high priority for public sector agencies, and financial controls are as important as financial results," explains Tony Alex, President of US eDirect. "People audit these accounts and everyone wants accountability for the taxpayers' dollars."

Benefits

With Microsoft Dynamics RMS, Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation administrators have real-time access to financial and operational information. Parks employees can manage their activities more effectively and serve residents with information and reservation options through the solution. In addition, the department can document its record of serving the public and make a stronger case for the funding that it needs.

Manual Processes Eliminated

With a combined solution of Microsoft Dynamics RMS and Recreation Dynamics, Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation eliminated hours of manual data entry and reduced the possibility of errors or duplicate

entries. The automated system gives parks staff and managers more time to serve the public without needing to fill out, collect, or analyze paper forms.

Says Diego, "With Microsoft Dynamics RMS and Recreation Dynamics, staff can now manage their day-to-day operations better, and they can create attendance reports, which provide us with accurate statistics for each park. It's a huge success."

Improved Revenue Collection

Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation projected that with Microsoft Dynamics RMS and Recreation Dynamics, it would improve facility rental revenue collection by 5 percent. Results suggest the department is well on its way to meeting that goal. In addition, there is greater management control and a reduced risk of fraud.

Better Customer Service

Miami-Dade residents can now call the nearest neighborhood park and receive information over the phone about programs, facilities, or services at parks throughout the entire system. With this information, staff can serve residents more effectively.

"This is a huge improvement in customer service for us, and our residents have confirmed this. With the new system, the staff's job is easier and the residents have information readily available to them," says Diego.

Reliable Data Increases Public Support

With accurate, real-time financial and operational data centralized in the new system, Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation can provide accountability to elected officials and the public it serves. "When we can go to our elected officials with maps showing exactly who we're serving and where our customers come from, it makes a huge difference," Diego says.

Miami-Dade County recently encountered a multimillion-dollar budget shortfall, but the impact on the parks and recreation department was less than expected. "We have great public support, but having the numbers and being able to report them to the community was a huge help in preserving our funding," reports Diego.

Information from the new system also gives Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation the resources that it needs to apply for grant funding for scholarships to reach underserved areas or populations. The additional funds help the department improve customer service to families that might lack the money to enroll their children in park activities.

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