Description of your Agency and its programs.
On March 13, 2020, the Farmers Branch Aquatics Center temporarily closed due to COVID-19. In hopes to reopen, the safety of our staff and guests was of the utmost importance. Keeping the facility sanitized and ensuring safety protocols were being followed was vital to a successful summer.

Our opening plan was developed based on the President’s “Opening up American Guidelines,” The Governor’s Report to Open Texas, CDC guidelines, and other guidelines from Dallas County and the City of Farmers Branch. Staff was also able to watch and actively participate in Parks and Recreation webinars/zoom meetings.

With the uncertainty of our outdoor water park (The Frog Pond) reopening for the 2020 summer season, the full time staff kept in contact with Lifeguard applicants and those who expressed an interest in working as a Lifeguard. Staff started recruiting for the 2020 summer season in September of 2019. Previous employees received a Christmas card in the mail. The Staff visited extracurricular activities offered by the school district, which included Track practice, Band practice, and Theatre rehearsal. Everyone who takes our Lifeguard Training course is a future employee, which our instructors encourage him or her to apply for us. Not only are they teaching them how to become a Lifeguard, they teach professional skills such as showing them how to fill out a job application online. During the stay-at-home time-period, staff provided updates of their job application status and encouraged them to follow our social media to stay connected with our facility.

The Year Round Staff went from working a consistent schedule to having a closed facility in the months of March, April, May and parts of June. During the first two weeks, staff had the opportunity to deep clean the facility and prepare the Frog Pond for opening day. When it became clear that the Margaret Young Natatorium reopening date back further due to the pandemic, the staff wanted to help their community. The year round staff helped at our Active Adult Center (Branch Connection) with their drive through meal events. Staff also helped at our local food pantry service. They helped the citizens of Farmers Branch and surrounding cities receive nutritious food for their families! The Farmers Branch Parks and Recreation Department encouraged citizens to participate in our parks, but to be smart about it. The staff eagerly volunteered to be park monitors. Lifeguards train to be proactive, prevent accidents from happening and respond quickly to an emergency. These skills shifted from the Aquatics Center to outdoor park environment. Staff made sure park users were following social distance rules and answering any citizens’ questions.

Why does your Agency deserve recognition?
The Farmers Branch Aquatics Center training program consist of two main parts: excellence in skills, and developing into a close-knit team, not just co-workers. Our in-services consist of a team building exercise whether it be competitions for refining skills, a fun relay race through the facility to build endurance, or staff getting to know each other and how to work as a team. With social distancing guidelines strongly encouraged, the staff thought, how could we safely train staff and rescue someone?
Staff reached out to the Fire Department on how to perform CPR, Ventilations and First Aid during a pandemic. With guidance from the Fire Department, staff was able to keep each other and many others safe, while also being able to provide proper care. With new training procedures put in place, our philosophy of training never stops remained the same. Training never stops, we take every opportunity to educate and improve our skills. This may include times during inclement weather and/or facility closures where we take the opportunity to work on dry land skills and conduct scenarios. In-service and training focused skills, team building, but slightly modified to keep everyone 6 feet apart from each other.

With many families spending more time at home because of the coronavirus pandemic, staff was concerned there will be an increase in child drownings. Everyone should learn to swim and that is the reason why we decided to offer swim lessons. We wanted to provide year round swim lessons to those families in our communities. Student to instructor ratios reduced to a safe number and only offered our most popular classes. Seating arrangements placed in certain areas around the pool deck. Only one parent or guardian watched the child during swim lessons. The water toys and chairs disinfected on a regular schedule throughout the whole summer. Instructors kept themselves a rescue tube length apart from the kids. The lifeguards on duty wore their mask and had social distancing signs around them. By the end of each session, we saw our attendance numbers begin to increase each time. By offering swimming lessons, no child had their opportunity to learn how to swim denied.

Faced with the biggest challenge, management wanted the opportunity to open the Margaret Young Natatorium and Frog Pond for the summer season. When we saw our aquatics colleagues in the Dallas Fort Worth area find out that their facility was not going to open their doors for the summer, our heart was broken. Running a water park in a pandemic was nothing the staff could have imagined doing. Without the diligence and dedication of each Lifeguard and Instructors, this summer would not have been possible. We have been impressed with how the staff have conducted themselves during this trying time.

Our recruiting theme this year was Friends, "I'll be there for you." The staff recreated a Friends opening video, which played at our high school recruiting trips. The song says, "When it hasn't been your day, your week, your month or even your year. I'll be there for you." 2020 does not feel like our year. This year's summer quote was, "We are in this together just six feet apart." The staff came together as one team to achieve the goal of keeping everyone safe and the facility clean.

**Virtual Program/Special Event**

On March 13, 2020, the Farmers Branch Aquatics Center closed down temporarily. Programming, rentals, and special event cancelations began immediately. Several months spent planning programs and events that now cancelled and the Aquatics Center, what once filled with guests was now completely empty. The staff felt lost and confused about the journey ahead, but the team quickly realized that the members of the Farmers Branch community were feeling the same way. Without a
facility to visit, programs to participate in or events to attend, the members of the community had nowhere to go. The team utilized social media as the new place to host the Farmers Branch community. Facebook and Instagram utilized to create video/picture posts with creative messaging and programs.

Uneasiness thoughts such as, will this be longer than two weeks? Can events and programs that occur after the two-week period occur or promoted? Can we continue to prepare for the summer season? Can there be planning for upcoming programs and events? What does this mean for the future? How does this affect jobs? Many questions lingered in the minds of the staff. Seeing programs and special events that been planned for months being cancelled within minutes was disheartening. The Aquatics Center was empty and staff began to miss their usual guests. All around, the staff felt lost and confused.

The purpose of Parks and Recreation is to serve the members of the community. Becoming creative during COVID-19 to keep the community engaged was the priority. The Aquatics Center was able to cross promote the Recreation Center fitness programs on Facebook and Instagram. A total of 17 fitness videos were created by various fitness instructors and uploaded to the Facebook page, @FarmersBranchCRC. These fitness classes varied, but the theme was to show people the ease of working out at home with an instructor lead video. A virtual story-time video series called, "Ribbit Reading", was offered on Facebook and Instagram. This is a virtual version of a program the facility offers during the summer season only. The facility has expanded the program to a year-round virtual program.

Other virtual programs offered by the Aquatics Center was a virtual triathlon and an Easter Egg Home Hunt. The staff had planned and prepared for the Easter Egg Splash, but due to COVID-19 the event was canceled. The staff brought the Easter event to the community in a different way. Staff filled plastic eggs with candy and gave them to the community members who donated canned items. The food pantry received these canned items. A thousand eggs delivered and over a two hundred canned items were collected. The event was very successful. Families were able to celebrate Easter safely and assist their fellow community members out in the process.

Not only did COVID-19 affect members of the community, but it also influenced high school seniors. Many events that tend to create lifelong memories such as prom, senior night, senior walk, and many others no longer scheduled. The staff wanted to highlight all of their fellow high school senior staff. We wanted to give them a digital congratulation on our social media page. The seniors would get the recognition they deserved while also allowing the community to get to know the lifeguards a little more.

Everyone was devastated at the closure. Our members missed us just as we missed them. With an empty building, staff wanted to reach out to those who are not on social media. Staff sat down and hand wrote ‘We Miss You’ letters to those members who are not on social media. This allowed staff to check in with some of the aging
members. Some members would call just to say they received our letter and that it had brightened up their day. The community of Farmers Branch brought closure together. Other content developed to help create humor or positivity throughout the facility’s closure.

COVID-19 happened right in the middle of March, which is the time Aquatics department hires and ramps up their Lifeguard Training courses. The Farmers Branch Aquatics Center is always recruiting good staff members and working towards that cohesive team. We start recruiting for the fall before summer is over and recruit for next summer as soon as summer ends. The three ways we recruit for the best return are solidifying our returners for the next summer, utilizing our staff members to recruit their friends, and social media. For our social media push, the staff sees it as an incentive to do well. Being on our social media allows the staff be invested in the program.

Our department made it a priority to increase the promotion of our brand on social media. This allowed us to reach a larger audience and show what it was like to work in a fun, family-oriented environment. The philosophy also allowed us to reach people who did not have a swim background and would have never thought of becoming a lifeguard. We continued to use the traditional methods of recruitment, but found that social media reached a larger set of eyes. This philosophy allowed us to recruit employees that will potentially work with us for multiple seasons. We wanted to take the time to invest in each person who had the desire to become a lifeguard. This philosophy is what made us have a successful summer season. The facility had more than enough staff without offering Lifeguard Training Courses in March, April, May or June.

In Farmers Branch, we pride ourselves on growing our own by investing the time and education and reaping the benefits of their dedication. We do our trainings in-house and if the applicant has trouble with the prerequisites, we are willing to work with them. If they put in the effort, we will too. This shows their willingness and dedication to the position. Any employer would want their employee to have these qualities. Thus, allowing us to have a consistent lifeguard program without affecting our facility operation. Lifeguard Training courses started as early as October and continue year-round. Those participants in the fall and winter were the first to apply for the summer positions.

The social media push allowed us to highlight our new lifeguard incentive program. The Instagram posts showed the life of lifeguarding and highlights of our facility. Our outdoor water park is named the Frog Pond, so the social media push really introduced the Frog Family. It allowed us to create a brand that was specific to our facility and staff, such as #fbh2o and #frogsquad. Our Instagram and Facebook followers have increased over the past two years. The social media presence has allowed our community to view our facility more. The members recognize the staff and talk to them because they see them on our social media platform. The staff see it as a privilege and reward to be on the social media platform. They not only tell their
family, but also their friends, who in turn want to work at the Frog Pond. It has increased our attendance in our programs, special events, overall daily usage, as well as memberships. We have not had to close any attraction since we began the program. Employee engagement has definitely increased.

The staff came up with the term “Frog Squad” as our version of family (based off our Frog Logo, and name of our Frog Pond Waterpark). We are not just co- workers or team members, we are a Frog Squad. We are family- oriented and relate all of our trainings back to our City’s Core values R.E.A.C.T., which stands for Respect, Excellence, Accountability, Care, and Trust. This has created a culture that breeds excellence, communication, and a fun environment for patrons and staff alike!

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Please share any additional information that will help in the evaluation of your program. *

A few comments we received from some of our members:

“The staff is very friendly. When they can remember who you are that is so special. We enjoy and are very thankful that the place is very clean. Also, at this time they follow the mask rule and the social distant. Thank you for being here for us.”

“Everything! - Staff are friendly and helpful, COVID guidelines being followed, the whole facility is very clean and I feel comfortable and safe visiting during this challenging time. Thank you for all you're doing to make the pool available and safe for us to visit. It's a true blessing during these days of turmoil - a wonderful place for a physical and mental break to refresh and keep healthy. Thank you again!!”

“Clean, friendly and consistently run facilities. Have done a wonderful job adhering to social distancing rules. I have been impressed with how the staff have conducted themselves during this trying time.”

“The staff is attentive, professional, and welcoming. Paul and Ashley set a consistent of friendly service and top- notch safety that is practiced by all staff members.”

“The Margaret Young Natatorium is a wonderful place to exercise! The staff are polite and efficient, and the facility is sparkling clean. Since the recent reopening, the staff have been diligent in gently enforcing the mask- wearing and social- distancing rules and keeping everything sanitized. Since I've become a regular visitor, the desk staff have learned my name; they always make me feel like a welcome guest. Two years ago, I began taking water aerobics classes that helped me take control of my weight
and blood pressure. In these difficult, coronavirus ridden days, the opportunity to exercise safely outside my home has saved both my physical and mental health. I can't express my gratitude enough!”

“The staff members are very friendly and knowledgeable. The facility is TOP NOTCH. Plenty of showers and lockers. The facility is always very clean too!”

Many families would often approach management and say “thank you for keeping us safe.” Those six words meant the world to the staff. All the hard work and preparation was paying off. You can't put a price on a mother or father knowing their children are being cared for.

With a stressful summer and many unknowns. The biggest joy the management had this summer was seeing staff come together as one team (family) and taking pride in having the safest and cleanest facility!