



This year, the Gunnison County Metropolitan Recreation District, commonly referred to as Met Rec, will celebrate its 42nd birthday. Like many of the area's older organizations, Met Rec must adapt overtime to meet community needs.

As we move forward, it helps to know where we're coming from. This is the first of four articles about Met Rec and how it serves the Gunnison Valley. Met Rec differs from most Colorado recreation districts. In other mountain communities you will find recreation districts financing and operating community recreation facilities. Here, the historic focus has been television.

Met Rec's foundation as a special district was to help finance television infrastructure. Forty years ago, the Gunnison Valley was much more isolated. Many of the streets in the County were still unpaved. There was no internet, and outlying communities had limited or no access to telephone. A community group, Gunnison County Television, Inc. (GCT), decided to address the need for better communication through the creation of a translator system to bring television to communities throughout the region. However, funding was required to maintain the infrastructure. That sparked the formation of a special district.

In Colorado, special districts are entities that can tap into property taxes to provide essential services, as defined by the State. Colorado has over 1,000 special districts that address needs from fire protection to water and sanitation services. At the time of Met Rec's inception, it was supported by a 1 mil levy property tax for the purpose of over-the-air television. Like all special districts, Met Rec was bound by a service area, which to this day encompasses almost all of Gunnison County and a small portion of Saguache County. Special district service areas often cross municipal boundaries, enabling them to respond to shared community challenges and interests.

In 2001, Met Rec's mission was expanded to include park and recreation services. This is where the 'Met' of Met Rec comes in. Any special district that provides at least two different types of services is considered a metropolitan district. One of the main motivations for taking on recreation was that it allowed Met Rec to utilize Conservation Trust Funds. These funds come from the Colorado Lottery proceeds and are mandated for distribution to local governments for acquiring and maintaining parks, open space and recreation facilities, inclusive of television relay services.

Once Met Rec took recreation into its service plan, it meant that no other special district serving recreation could be formed in our area. So, while there was more money for the translator system, it also meant that the recreation community had to look to Met Rec for needs that traditionally are best served by a special district.

Since 2001, Met Rec has worked to uphold its whole mission. The transition from analog to digital television was completed in 2009 and over \$1 million has been awarded in grant

funding to organizations in support of community recreation initiatives. Today, Met Rec's mission continues to be providing high-quality over the air television service and strategic leadership that leverages innovative partnerships to accomplish vital recreation opportunities for our communities. As the Met Rec district manager, I hope you will tune in for monthly articles over the next three months to learn about what your local recreation district is doing.