Rec leader calls time out to play

There's an adage that says "do what you love and the rest will follow." Erika Berry is doing just that in her position as recreation superintendent for the City of Chandler. She learned to love community classes at an early age, as she was raised in Hawaii and went to her local rec center so often she ended up building her own fleet of miniature boats.

PLAYING FOR KEEPS: Erika Berry, City of Chandler recreation superintendent, made a career out of getting the community to come out and play. *Submitted photo*

"As a kid I went every day after school and did ceramics, volleyball, ukulele and boat making," Berry says. "We would learn woodwork and how to glue, cut, sand and paint. Then we would have a boat regatta."

When she discovered she could make a career out of play, she changed her major to recreation management at ASU and knew she found her calling.

Berry started working at the City of Chandler 12 years ago with a part-time job as a recreation leader II. Her job was to implement the successful youth mentoring program known today as "Leaders in Training."

Berry was recently promoted to her new position as superintendent, which includes oversight of the Tumbleweed Recreation Center (TRC), the Tennis Center and the Snedigar Recreation Center. It also includes managing special events, such as Mayor Jay Tibshraeny's Health Connect Expo, which she says can be a game-changer for someone.

"With recreation we can impact someone for life," explains Berry. "A person might come in to the TRC and find out they can get a pass and use the center for a week. Two months later they are still there and they find out what they can really achieve."

Much of Berry's work involves things most people would only notice if it weren't happening, like ensuring equipment is up-to-date, safety hazards are immediately addressed and customer comments receive quick responses.

"Customers are surprised when staff will call back and let them know what we are doing to address their concern," she says. "We can't always purchase a specialty item, but we let them know what our plans are and they seem to appreciate it."

Her job is also to figure out how to manage changing trends and see how Chandler can meet requests as much as possible.

"People love Zumba, and if we get 10 comment cards, we'll look at possibly adding a class or rearrange the schedule to offer it at the best time," says Berry.

Keeping up with the times is a constant part of her job, and her next challenge is to review adult sports as the City is always looking to offer different sports for adults in the community.

"We just keep adding things as we go," concludes Berry. "Our goal is always to get people to come enjoy our programs and come out and play!"