

MICHEAL GILES JR. RECREATION SERVICES DIRECTOR

BY: NASH VANBIBBER



Michael Giles Jr. was hired in June of 2010 and walked right into a construction project. State Gym was undergoing a renovation and new addition. At that time, his office was in a trailer and the rest of the Rec Services team was spread out in various locations across campus.

“IT WAS WAS A CHANGE OF PACE TO START IN A NEW DEPARTMENT THAT WAS UNDER RENOVATION.”

His first task as Director: reorganizing and expanding the department.

One of the first new positions added to the mix was an Intramural Coordinator. Nathan Pick was brought on to create the lineup of intramural sports and to orchestrate when each even takes place, among other things.

Intramurals is ever-evolving to stay relevant and exciting. Jason Vlastaras (Associate Director for Student Success) and Pick put their heads together to research and devise a plan for bringing the gaming world to campus. Two years later, Rec Services has a fantastic esports space in Beyer Hall for students to participate and connect in a very different way.

“The beauty of intramurals has been the foundation of this department since the very beginning. The staff has adjusted to its students, to its cultures, to new sports, and even the times.” Giles said.

“I PUT OUR INTRAMURALS AGAINST ANY IN THE COUNTRY”

FUTURE PLANS

Giles predicts that in ten years Rec Services will not look like it does today.

“The program is to help students succeed and provide health and wellness. This is constantly changing, and the staff has had to evolve with these changes since the very beginning.” He says “it is a constant growth and opportunity for the University to meet the demand of the students.”

Although Giles is the voice and face of the department, he is very much a behind-the-scenes type of boss. He provides staff with the resources they need to be successful. He meets with leadership and administration to celebrate and fight for Rec Services.



Micheal Giles Jr. discussing the building of the SE Complex on September 2019.

He sees the value in his position – to champion Rec Services. He also thinks about what the road to 2030 may look like. The strategic vision starts today. Giles can’t walk into the office in 2029 and expect the groundwork to be done. He needs to be a visionary and strategic thinker to plan three or four steps ahead.

As the Recreation Services Director, Giles does not get involved in the day-to-day Intramurals operations. He tries to give that team the autonomy and latitude to run their program area in the best way possible. He wants to see intramurals continue to evolve and to plan for the students who haven’t set foot on campus yet.

Giles asks his staff to assess what they’re offering today and how that will be beneficial to students now as well as in the future.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTRAMURALS

One of the many challenges the Intramurals team has to face is to decide what sports to offer due to COVID-19 restrictions. According to Giles, “Intramurals has done an excellent job with this.”

He explained, “If someone likes Activity A, and that is their only way connecting with Rec Services, and they are one of a few who are doing this activity and it is dropped, we need to make it a priority that one person finds a new activity and a new outlet for them to try.”

“I ENJOY ENCOURAGING MY STAFF TO BE CREATIVE, INNOVATIVE, AND MEET EVER EVOLVING CHANGES AT REC SERVICES.”

Participating in Intramurals provides a sense belonging. It gives people a chance to be active, create friends for a lifetime, and to stay engaged. According to Giles, “It is a place for residence hall floors to build a community and connectedness through sports. It is for someone who comes in and looking for a new place to be involved in, it is just a sense of belonging.” Giles would like to see a big reunion for the



Intramural soccer game in Fall 2018.

commemoration of 100 years of Intramurals at Iowa State. He would like to see anyone who has won an IM Championship t-shirt during their time as a Cyclone. It could be as simple as creating an online scrapbook or sharing a few memories.

If you have an Intramural memory you would like to share, please email: recservices@iastate.edu

COVID-19

Future plans for Intramurals and Rec Services looked a lot different 10 months ago. With a global pandemic altering any concept of normalcy, stability, and predictability, plans quickly changed. Buildings shut down, services and program offerings were moved to a virtual environment wherever possible, and a plethora of new safety protocols were put in place.

Rec Services does not look like what it did before March 2020. Some Intramurals continue to be offered, but large group sports were put on hold. Giles recognizes that things will continue change due to the ongoing pandemic, and Rec Services will continue to adapt and adjust to provide the quality services it's known for.

FAVORITE MEMORIES

Giles often reminisces on the grand opening of the newly renovated State Gym in 2010. He also reflects on the five years of planning and development leading up to the overhaul of Southeast Field Complex. The complex will provide a prime space for students to engage in sand volleyball, baseball, softball, flag football, and many other activities.

“THERE’S ONLY TWO THINGS YOU EARN ON THIS CAMPUS. ONE, YOUR DIPLOMA. TWO, AN INTRAMURAL T-SHIRT. WE DON’T GIVE THOSE AWAY, YOU HAVE TO EARN IT.”

Beyond major department projects, Giles enjoys bringing his staff together. One summer, he brought the team together to kayak the Des Moines River. He and his family also welcomed the staff into his home for holiday dinners; he enjoys being able to sit down and enjoy each other’s company.

Spending 40-plus hours a week with someone can lead to special bonds, none of which are stronger between Giles and his staff. He says sometimes he and his co-workers do not see eye-to-eye, but they always come back together because they’re a family.

Giles wants people to have fun – “fun” is written into the department’s mission statement. He hopes everyone working at Rec Services loves coming to work and loves the work they do.