A MESSAGE FROM

THE SUPERINTENDENT

Our Culture at BREC

By Dr. Brooks Williams, BREC Superintendent
November 2026

Over the past few months, you've seen leadership changes, responsibilities shift, and positions eliminated at BREC. Our employees have been asked to adjust while continuing to serve this parish, sometimes learning a different role or saying goodbye to colleagues they've worked beside for years. For the people who use our parks and help pay for them, these changes need to produce better service and confidence that we are using their resources well. I will keep asking more of BREC, because the people we serve should never have to lower their expectations to accommodate what we have grown comfortable providing.

This period of position eliminations and departures will end and the people affected deserve care and dignity through it. We have made these changes deliberately to create a lean, high-functioning agency and direct as many dollars as possible back into our park system. That requires clear responsibility for the work and investment in the expertise to do it well. We are building on the good work people have contributed to BREC and our responsibility now is to support our people and uphold our standards in the way we work together every day. The purpose is a lasting culture our employees can be proud to belong to and a level of service this parish can depend on.

The way we work within BREC affects people who may never attend a staff meeting or read one of our policies. They experience our culture through how we treat them and how well we deliver the services they depend on. Our employees experience it through the support they receive and whether their work makes a difference. The culture we build must serve both the people doing the work and the people depending on it.

Public service is a calling to use the authority and resources entrusted to us for the benefit of the people we serve. It asks more of us than completing an assignment or applying a rule, because the purpose of that authority is to help this parish function well and make life here better. The people who fund BREC are entitled to responsible decisions about their money, including the people who may rarely use a park themselves. Following the law, protecting public resources and treating people fairly are obligations we accept when we take on this work.

When you come to a BREC park, you should be able to trust us with the ordinary things you shouldn't have to think about. When someone plans an afternoon around a program we offer or returns each morning for a walk, our preparation helps them make the most of that time. Those everyday opportunities to be active and spend time together are part of what makes this parish a good place to live. We are also responsible for places where people with very different lives can enjoy something in common. The care we give those shared places says something about the regard we have for one another as a parish. People should get our best simply because they came to a BREC park.

Across East Baton Rouge, including in parts of BREC, we have become too accustomed to things being done poorly. Over time, "that's just how things are" becomes a reason to stop expecting better and even people who care deeply begin to wonder whether their effort will make a difference. We lose the opportunity to improve when a resident stops raising a concern or an employee decides there is no point in offering an idea. We reinforce that apathy every time we excuse work we know should be better. What we walk past, we teach others to accept.

There is a bigotry in low expectations, in deciding that our employees can't do better or that some of the people we serve should be happy with less. Public service calls for capable professionals, and a public paycheck should never be treated as a reason to expect less expertise or a lower standard of work. Our people are capable of excellent work and every person who comes into our parks is worth the effort it takes to do it well.

The unspoken bargain of "we don't pay much, so we don't expect much" is over. We will pay people well for the knowledge, skill and judgment they bring to the job…with the highest expectations for the work they deliver. If a job requires professional judgment, we need to hire someone who has it and pay enough to recruit and keep that person. Where one or two capable professionals can produce better results than three or four lower-paid positions, that is where we will invest. Those professionals deserve the authority and support to do their jobs well, and the public deserves results that justify the investment.

That is why some positions are changing and others are being eliminated. We need clear responsibility for the work and fewer steps between a decision and a finished job. Strong financial management and effective planning help protect the funding available for our parks and the people doing that work need the expertise and authority to do it well. Every dollar we can responsibly take out of unnecessary overhead is a dollar we can put to work in our park system. That is how this transition gives way to a stable agency our employees and the public can depend on.

The entire parish deserves an agency that earns its confidence through the quality of its work. We help this parish succeed when qualified, competent caring people who are focused on our mission and driven to excellence make their careers at BREC. They use their experience to make better decisions about our parks and programs, protect public resources and help the people around them get better at the work. Those are the people we need to recruit, develop and keep, with honest feedback and opportunities to take on greater responsibility.

Investing in people also means giving them a fair chance to succeed, which is why **SAVE** has to become part of how BREC works every day. Its four commitments, Standards, Accountability, Visibility, and Execution, connect what we expect with how we help people deliver it. Employees need to understand the results they are responsible for and have the tools, training and authority to achieve it. An employee should know what the standard is before being held accountable for meeting it.

Visibility means knowing the condition of our parks and the quality of the service we provide. The people leading the work need to inspect the results and talk with employees about what is helping or preventing them from doing the job well. Leaders are responsible for recognizing excellent work and resolving problems their teams cannot resolve on their own. Following through means checking that the work did what it was supposed to do, because the result is what the public will experience. Residents should be able to hold us to those same standards when they see work that falls short and their concerns should help us decide where attention is needed.

When expectations are clear and employees have the support they need to succeed, there is also an expectation that they follow through and deliver. When that doesn't happen repeatedly, those leading the work have a responsibility to address it. Poor work is never without a cost, because someone else ultimately pays for it - whether it's the coworker left to finish what wasn't done or the resident waiting for service. The time and money spent correcting avoidable mistakes are resources we could otherwise invest in another park or another program. We owe the people who consistently do excellent work a workplace where their efforts are recognized and where they can count on others to do their part.

We have to be willing to help people learn when a decision turns out to be wrong. We will all make mistakes…and when we do, I expect us to explain what happened to the people affected, make the correction and use what we learn to improve the next decision. An honest mistake needs a different response than a refusal to take responsibility and our employees should have the confidence to bring forward a concern or a better idea without wondering whether speaking up will be held against them.

For that standard to endure, it has to become part of how our people work together every day. A new employee should learn from colleagues that excellent work is expected and find people who will help them succeed long before they hear from the superintendent. As people who share that commitment teach it to those who join them, employees gain a place to do work they can be proud of and residents gain confidence that their parks and programs will receive the same care long after these changes are behind us. Excellence must become what we expect of ourselves and what this parish can expect of us.

Making **EBR** *better.*