

GoRamsey.org – The Web Portal to Active Living *by Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt*

Looking for a good sledding hill this winter? How about a skating rink? Cross Country Ski or snow shoe trail? All of these can be found at GoRamsey.org. The Go Ramsey Mapping Portal is an easy way to find opportunities to find the parks and recreation opportunities near you and get active. It brings the myriad sources of information available on the internet to one easy map based search tool for you to find the right recreational opportunity for you.

GoRamsey.org is a great example of the collaboration that is possible with geographic information systems (GIS). The basic idea is that a lot of organizations and governmental units have geographic data, and if we can share that effectively we can provide better service at less cost than trying to do it all on our own. Emergency services have been reaping the benefits of data rich mapping tools for a long time. Private entrepreneurs like Google have been constantly adding more meaningful data, like restaurant reviews and transit routes to their maps.

Go Ramsey builds on GIS to help people take advantage of the information about parks, trails, and recreation centers that are on our websites. Examples include availability and reservation information, and adding maps of the best walking, biking, driving routes or transit directions. You can also search for facilities based on location. I just found the sledding hills and cross-country ski trails within two miles of my house. I can then click on the icons on the map to find a description of the trails and information on renting skis and a link that will take me to a bird's eye view of the trail.

The goals of the site are to increase awareness of public parks and recreational facilities, promote access and make it convenient for people to find places to be physically active, and encourage walking and biking. We take the healthy communities approach a step further, not only is there information on Go Ramsey about the resources each community has dedicated for recreation, it also provides a link to food and exercise resources sponsored by the Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health Department. Some Health Partners doctors have even started to use Go Ramsey to prescribe physical activity in lieu of, or in addition to, prescription medications.

There were many partners involved in making Go Ramsey work. Staff from multiple Ramsey County departments, including Public Health, Parks and Recreation and Public Works, and staff from 14 cities in Ramsey County and Active Living Ramsey Communities worked countless hours creating a seamless user experience. The State of Minnesota contributed money through the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) with a goal of creating a healthier community by making it easier to access the right activity for anyone.

The best way to fight the winter blues is to go out and stay active. Take some time to explore GoRamsey.org this month. You will find a near limitless supply of information about the opportunities to be active in our community.