

Take another look: Aquatic facilities are community centers...

by Susan Wallover

Your aquatic facility is a community center, right? It's not? It could be.

Many municipalities have community or recreation centers where buildings of a variety of sizes and shapes provide for social, cultural, or recreational activities. Auditoriums provide a venue for theater, opera, symphonies, community bands, lectures and more. Social halls and recreation centers house opportunities for sports, educational classes, fitness, dance, and meeting rooms used for service organizations, social groups and parties. The uses and opportunities can be endless.

Budgets are created. Professionals (some certified) are hired. Fees are charged. Marketing programs are developed. Businesses and volunteer groups offer support. Municipal officials understand the needs for a successful community facility.

Then there's the aquatic facility.... For some municipalities they are still an afterthought, while in other communities they continue to evolve. Some communities continue to offer swimming facility as a basic service. They often include swim lessons and maybe an aquatic exercise class taught by lifeguards with no certification to teach either swimming or an exercise class. Fees are minimal and are not typically based on administrative or operational expenses.

In municipalities where the aquatic facility is evolving, an atmosphere can be created that is more conducive for the swimming pool facility to serve as an aquatic community center. Swimming facilities are becoming more entertainment oriented as they continue to add exciting water features. Water slides and interactive spray equipment are commonly requested amusements. Water features draw parents into the pool to play with their children rather than just watching their children play. Creating opportunities for parents and children to play together strengthen the family. As members gather in and out of the pool they often socialize with their neighbors and friends, thus, strengthening the community.

Educational classes historically consisted of swimming lessons, lifeguard certification, and water safety instruction. Creative aquatic programmers now provide opportunities to learn snorkeling, scuba diving, underwater photography, water aerobics, and more. Special events are being planned not only for members but as a means to bring non-members to the pool to market the facility. Holiday celebrations, teen parties, adult parties, coffee hour for senior citizens, speakers, outdoor movies, rentals for birthday parties bring more people to the facility by creating more interest. The desire to be involved and have fun is a major draw for the aquatic center.

Programming opportunities are increased at facilities that operate pools with slightly higher water temperatures (84° to 88°). Pre-school children learning to adapt to the water and learning basic skills tolerate the warmer water for longer periods of times. As we age, the temperature of water affects our bodies. Older adults who would like to swim laps or enjoy a plunge are much more comfortable.

Warmer water temperatures of 86° - 94° create an environment that is used for aquatic therapy and rehabilitation. Among the many disciplines that use aquatic therapy and rehabilitation are Athletic Trainers, Massage Therapists, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Kinesiotherapy, Recreation Therapy, and Adapted Aquatics. Therapy pools operated by the medical field are available but in limited numbers. However, as the use of aquatic therapy grows, the availability of warm water decreases because the number of warm water pools is very limited. These pools are utilized to the maximum and therefore are not available for post care or the person



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who would like to continue rehabilitation on their own. Aquatic therapy and rehabilitation is used by all ages for a variety of reasons such as: balance, stabilization, gait training, lumbar strengthening, alignments and sport injuries just to name a few.

So what are the benefits of being an aquatic community center offering such a wide variety of opportunities?

- Providing social, cultural, recreational and therapeutic opportunities.
- Creating and supporting a family environment.
- Benefiting more community members by providing a wide variety of activities for all age groups.
- Increases the number of memberships.
- Increases use of the facility.
- Promoting community wellness.
- Increases the snack bar sales.
- Increases community support for the facility.
- It increases revenues...

Municipally owned aquatic facilities are more often than not paid for with tax dollars. The aquatic facility may be located outdoors in a community park, or located within a recreation center, or it may be an indoor aquatic center. Increased use can result in increased revenues. The increase in revenues can help to reduce or eliminate the financial burden to the community while enriching the community.

For additional information on aquatic therapy, rehabilitation and aquatic exercise contact the following organizations.
Aquatic Therapy and Rehab Institute, Inc. www.atri.org
Aquatic Exercise Association www.aeawave.org

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