



Athletic + Recreation Programming

BY NICOLE VAN WINKLE

# Keep Your Pool Afloat

## Maximize attendance during off-peak hours with alternative programs

**T**he face of community pools has changed significantly over the past 30 years. In the 1980s, pools were rectangular bodies of water with a deep end, a shallow end, and a diving board. Now, leisure pools can vary in size and depth, and typically include amenities such as waterslides,

spray features, tipping buckets, and continuous rivers. A facility may be packed during the summer and between 4:00 and 8:00 p.m. during the week, but what about the rest of the time? The pool is sitting there, becoming quite expensive, and revenues remain stagnant. Where are all of the potential

users hiding? While the amenities in the typical leisure pool have changed, public perception has not quite caught up. In addition to maximizing pool use by finding non-peak users, identifying alternative funding resources and programs can provide additional revenue and more flexibility in offerings.



Photo: Susan Fleck



Photo: Counsilman Hunsaker





Photo: Charles Davis Smith

### Non-Aquatic Sports Teams

A huge benefit to aquatic sports is that it is more difficult for participants to overheat in the water, and the sweat factor is significantly reduced. When temperatures soar, providing a space for non-aquatic sports teams—football, baseball, and soccer—to



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Photo: Susan Fleck

exercise and train in pools provides an additional revenue source. The space is typically timed prior to the release from school, when staff is already in the facility preparing for swim lessons or swim-team practice. Merely adding one lifeguard to the schedule for a few hours that day increases revenue greatly, while minimally increasing expenditures. Many teams enjoy swimming laps or walking against the current in a continuous river for strength training.

### Homeschool Groups

Many homeschool families join agencies where they check in, are provided curriculum, and are accountable for their work. Oftentimes, there is a physical-education component

required, for which the agency or state reimburses the family. Since these schedules are typically more flexible, private or group lessons can be put together during off-peak hours. Partnering with an agency will provide a free marketing outlet and direct business to the facility without spending marketing dollars. Once word of mouth travels, you will have a booming mid-day swim-lesson program.

### Senior Population

As predicted, the baby boomer generation has been retiring with increased disposable income and a willingness to participate in leisure ventures. Besides the typical aqua-aerobics and water-walking, a growing trend is aquatic therapy to reduce muscle contractures and the effects of aging. The goal of Watsu, a version of Shiatsu massage in the water, is that participants enter a deep meditative state as the practitioner moves them

through the water in accordance with their breathing patterns. The water's resistance helps to stretch the muscles. Watsu practitioner-certification clinics are held around the country, or your facility can partner with a local physical therapist who is comfortable with performing therapy in the water. In order to reach this demographic, the typical marketing media may not be effective. Work with a local assisted-living home to arrange specific times that residents can be transported to the facility to ensure a steady turnout and revenue justification for providing the program.

### Public-Safety Personnel

Offering local fire and police members the ability to exercise at the facility for a discounted rate increases revenue and ensures they know the facility's exact location, layout, and employees, as well as adding a layer of safety to your team if the service





members are present during an incident or emergency. Public-safety personnel need to train for unique situations in as realistic a scenario as possible. A continuous river or competition pool can serve as the perfect site for swift-water rescue or capsized rescue-boat training.

### Alternative Funding

Once the off-peak hours' attendance has been maximized, consider increasing revenue potential by using sponsors and partners to cut costs. Review the list of vendors that are consistently used. Would they benefit from marketing exposure within the park? A sign vendor may create products for you in exchange for printing the company name and contact information on the bottom of the sign or brochure. If the landscape service also provides residential services, perhaps the company would provide a discount for its service in exchange for placing a banner in the facility. Identifying a win-win for both parties helps to cut costs and become your vendors' favorite customer!

Besides typical programming and users, special events offer an opportunity to do something different at a higher price point in your leisure pool. Finding partners to offset costs and those who may have the same target market or programming goals makes the costs easier to bear. Realtors are great partners for programming events, while hospitals are usually willing to assist or provide materials for wellness and health events. During the holidays, partner with a local organization that supports needy families and put on a cold-water obstacle course at the leisure pool. Participant entry fees can be waved with a donation of a toy or meal, and winner prizes can be donated through a sponsor.

While the maximum revenue-generation time will always be the summer season and typical after-school hours of programming, that does not mean all other business hours are a lost cause. Think creatively about the

potential users in the area, as well as potential sponsors and partners, to make your facility an integral part of the community. **PRB**

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