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The Best of Times

Year after year, it's amazing to see all of the remarkable ways in which aquatics facilities serve their communities. Nowhere is that more apparent than when it comes time to judge our annual Best of Aquatics program. This year, we received a record number of submissions.

So what does it take to be the best? I asked that question a few years ago and, as it turns out, this year's winners reinforced the same themes. Here are a few examples.

Dedication. All of our entrants showed great commitment to bettering the field of aquatics. But the best facilities constantly push for improvement. Randolph YMCA is one such facility. Its commitment to providing members with comprehensive aquatic rehabilitation options is second to none. They now provide more than 30 classes per week for just about every ailment that can be alleviated with aquatic therapy, such as Parkinson's Disease, multiple sclerosis, cancer, arthritis, autism, cerebral palsy, stroke recovery, and more.

Creativity. Thinking outside the box can produce amazing results. Take, for example, Fairmont Aquatic Center in Salt Lake City, where Josh Reusser, aquatics program manager, retooled their swim lessons

to increase active instructional time in the water. The result? Kids who were able to gain swimming skills at an exponentially faster rate than those who learned via traditional swim lessons.

Teamwork. The most successful organizations know that the secret to overcoming challenges involves coming together as a team. When faced with a potentially catastrophic budget issue, the team at Fairfax County Park Authority in Fairfax, Va. banded together to launch its own license-free, learn-to-swim program. Since the launch in 2012, it has provided approximately 150,000 with life-saving swim instruction.

Of course, these are but a few examples of the excellence shown by our 2018 award winners. Read on to discover what makes each of them the best in their categories. I hope you'll find solid ideas to implement at your own facility. And if you've adopted practices or programs from previous Best of Aquatics honorees, drop me a line. I'd love to hear about it!

Joanne McClain
Editor-in-Chief

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NEWS ROOM

NSPF's Lachocki to Leave Next Year

After an historic 15-year tenure, the CEO is taking a sabbatical.



NSPF CEO Tom Lachocki

by Rebecca Robledo Tom Lachocki, CEO of the National Swimming Pool Foundation, will leave the organization sometime next year.

“Tom has done an incredible job of providing a vision for the Foundation and taking it from a one-product [organization] to a multi-faceted, multi-million-dollar business ...” said NSPF’s newly elected chairman, Rob Butcher. “He’s brought real credibility and good will to NSPF, and he will be leaving the organization in such a better place than when he came in.”

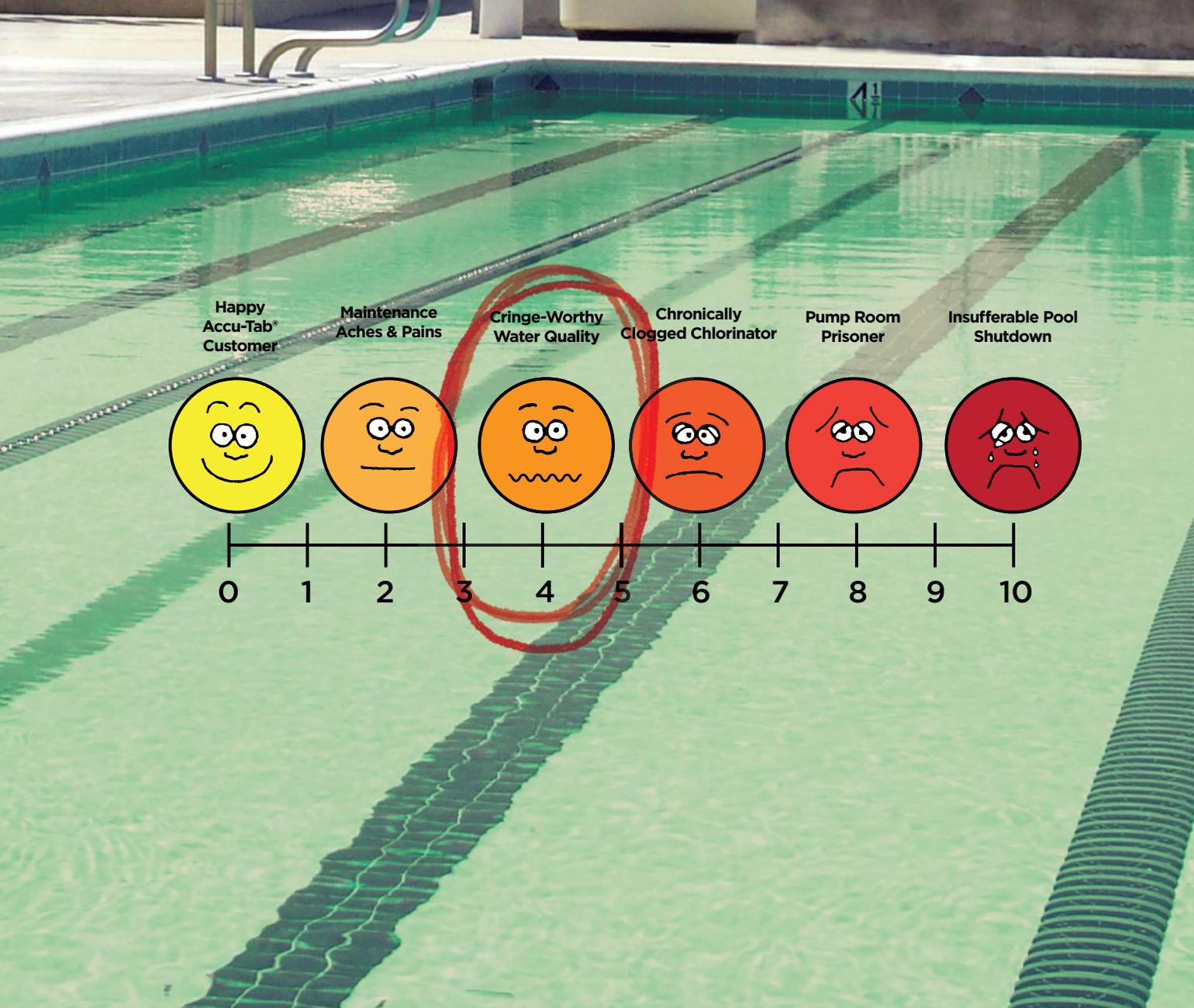
Approaching his 15th anniversary, Lachocki, leader of one of the most ambitious organizations serving the pool, spa and aquatics

industries, said he will take a sabbatical. The time will include bucket-list trips, such as the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage in France and Spain, to gain some quiet and distance before he decides on his next career move.

“When you run a dynamic organization like NSPF, you can’t just walk away for a while,” Lachocki said. “I’m at a point in my life where I need to invest in my body, mind and soul, and the only way to make it work for our Foundation and for me is to help my team and board with a productive transition in leadership.”

Lachocki’s departure date will depend on

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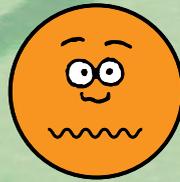
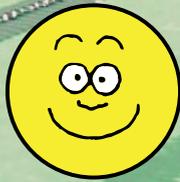
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continued from page 5

NSPF's Lachocki to Leave Next Year

his replacement. The NSPF Board has formed a search committee and begun developing a formal job description and qualifications list. "I don't think it necessarily has to be an inside or an outsider," Butcher said. "It's more about does this person have the right qualities and attributes?"

When the new CEO begins, Lachocki will stay on full-time to help with the transition as needed.

Historic turn

NSPF has evolved significantly since Lachocki took the helm in December, 2003. At the time, the organization was mostly known for one product – the Certified Pool Operator training. Under Lachocki's leadership, the group has made significant moves to expand its scope, and brought awareness of water safety and the joy of pools and spas into the culture and conversation. It also has grown about five-fold, Lachocki said.

"I'm really proud of the organization and all we've achieved," Lachocki said. "We've taken a leadership role in education, made some great strides in promotion and creating growth, taken large steps in being engaged on policy and [best] practices, and organized internally to make the organization strong for the future."

In 2004, NSPF rolled out the World Aquatic Health Conference, an event for which its board credits Lachocki. Like NSPF itself, the event started with somewhat niche appeal, attended by upper-echelon experts in safety and water quality. Since then, the WAHC has grown to include programs about design, construction and service, in both the residential and commercial realms.

NSPF became an early proponent of the Model Aquatic Health Code, the comprehensive model language meant for states, cities and other

jurisdictions to adopt for commercial venues. While the code is administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, NSPF has helped through promotion it and providing input and sponsoring the Council for the Model Aquatic Health Code.

In 2012, the organization began its Step Into Swim campaign, with the goal of creating 1 million swimmers in 10 years. As part of the program, NSPF provides yearly grants to organizations and swim schools. NSPF says Step Into Swim has affected more than 36,000 families so far.

Cross-over moves

After decades operating primarily in the commercial aquatics realm, Lachocki's NSPF crossed over to the residential side. In 2015, it merged with the design and construction education organization Genesis, adding its schools and seminars to NSPF's educational portfolio.

This move also positioned the organization to compete directly with the Association of Pool and Spa Professionals as another national trade group serving all sectors of the industry.

But in spring, 2016, the two organizations announced they would explore the possibility of merging. The following January, the groups decided against joining together.

Late in 2017, NSPF made its official entree into political advocacy and the membership-association world. It absorbed the California Pool & Spa Association, one of the most robust regional industry lobbyists. With the acquisition, NSPF formed its own membership association called The Pool, Spa & Aquatics Alliance.

This year, NSPF and Genesis provided training to more than 40,000 pool, spa and aquatics professionals, the organization said.



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Water Safety USA Embarks on National Plan to Address Drowning Prevention

by **Rebecca Robledo** To bring the United States in line with a recommendation from the World Health Organization, Water Safety USA has embarked on the development of a national water safety plan.

In 2014, the WHO released a report about the prevalence and preventability of drowning worldwide. The organization sought to illustrate that these incidents could be significantly curbed in the hopes of motivating countries to tackle the issue. Nations such as Australia and Canada have developed such plans.

Water Safety USA is a roundtable of various organizations around the country that address drowning prevention in various settings.

“The idea [for the national plan] is fairly similar to the main concept behind Water Safety USA, which is to get everybody on the same page working collaboratively on the issue of water safety and drowning

prevention,” said N. Chris Brewster, moderator for Water Safety USA.

As in other countries, Water Safety USA will assemble representatives and experts from governmental and nongovernmental organizations to identify the key targets on which the nation should focus its drowning-prevention efforts. These priorities could include certain populations or demographic groups, or different settings and circumstances under which drowning occurs, such as certain water sports or destinations.

For instance, the Canadian plan lists targets such as children aged 1 to 4, indigenous peoples, water transport-related drowning, rural areas and cold-water immersion, among others. In Australia, rock fishing is named among the settings where drowning is more prevalent.

“I think historically, in various countries, drowning prevention organizations and water-safety organizations worked in silos, focusing on their areas of interest and expertise,” Brewster said. “This approach doesn’t take away from the specific expertise of various organizations that may have particular foci, but rather harnesses the groups to address the key issues.”

These plans also include information and statistics on drowning in the countries.

In the U.S., the process has just begun, with Water Safety USA establishing a committee to write up the national plan.

“The concept here is to view drowning prevention and water safety holistically in all environments and all circumstances where it may happen,” Brewster said.





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WAHC Sees Largest Attendance

The World Aquatic Health Conference was broadcast in six locations, attracting nearly 600 attendees.



From left: Scott Bowron, sales representative, NCAquatics; Joseph Stefanyak, senior director, Jeff Ellis & Associates; Dr. James Amburgey, associate professor of civil and environmental engineering, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Dr. Darla Goeres, associate research professor, Center for Biofilm Engineering, Montana State University; Dr. Michael Beach, associate director for Healthy Water, CDC's National Center for Emerging Zoonotic Infectious Diseases.

by **Nate Traylor** The World Aquatic Health Conference saw its largest attendance ever.

Approximately 400 people attended the 15th annual WAHC in Charleston, S.C. last month, and about 200 more tuned in from six satellite locations.

WAHCity events made their debut this year, giving professionals an opportunity to network and watch the symposium together at Great Wolf Lodges in Los Angeles, Boston, Minneapolis, Niagara Falls, Ontario, Colorado Springs, Colo. and Dallas.

For the National Swimming Pool Foundation, which organizes the event, it was a priority to make WAHC's diverse line-up of educational seminars more accessible.

"The idea was to bring the science to these major metros that people could get to more easily," said Tom Lachoki, CEO of NSPF, based in Colorado Springs, Colo. "We're excited to prove out the ability to transmit to multiple locations ... This opens up a whole spectrum of opportunities."

Each WAHCity location had a designated master of ceremonies to facilitate discussions between broadcasts. Attendees also were given behind-the-scenes tours of local aquatics facilities and opportunities to learn about unique learn-to-swim initiatives in each host city.

The 16th annual WAHC will be held in Williamsburg, Va., Oct. 16–18, 2019. Early registration begins in April 2019.



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Best of Aquatics

Each November, *Aquatics International* shines a light on the facilities that are doing something big, bold and innovative to make pools safer and get more people in the water. And each year, the aquatics community does not disappoint. In the following pages, you'll be inspired by these professionals, their teams and their creative approaches to common problems, from hiring challenges to public awareness. Enjoy!

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FAIRMONT AQUATIC CENTER

PROGRAMMING *Salt Lake City*

During a typical 30-minute swim lesson, how many minutes of actual instruction does each student receive? By Josh Reusser's estimation, approximately 3 to 5 minutes.

Consider how the average swim class is structured. Typically, you'll find four to six children and one instructor. Hopefully, each

student receives 5 minutes of individual instruction. But when you factor in the time it takes to corral them and tend to the occasional crier or panic-stricken student, it's often less.

Students sit on the coping for most of the lesson. Reusser thought there had to be a better way.

"I started looking at ways I could almost reinvent swimming lessons and get kids actually moving in water," says the aquatics program manager at Fairmont Aquatic Center in Salt Lake City, part of Salt Lake County Parks and Recreation.

His solution: Get parents involved. Or, more accurately, keep them involved. Moms and dads must participate in baby and toddler lessons, but when their children turn 3 or advance to a certain stage, parents can sit out the lessons.

But progress slows to a crawl when parents sit on the sidelines, Reusser says. Besides, moms and dads are almost always involved in any major life skill, from learning to read to riding a bike. Why should swimming be any different?

This summer, Reusser launched parent/child lessons, giving caretakers the option to join their kids in the pool. The result: Significantly more swim time for students

HIGHLIGHTS

- This summer, Fairmont Aquatic Center launched a new swim program that encourages more parental involvement. As a result, kids are learning to swim faster.
- Parent/child lessons not only teach students how to swim, they teach moms and dads how to instruct.

Instead of sitting poolside, caretakers are actively involved in fostering water competency.

- The program allows 15 to 20 minutes after the sessions so caretakers can train their kids while the lesson is still fresh in their minds.

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because parents are following the instructor's directions, working their children directly. Students are no longer on standby.

Reusser also bakes in about 15 minutes between sessions so parents can continue practicing with their children immediately after the lesson.

"It reinforces what was taught, instead of three minutes of instruction and 'Here's what you need to work on for next time,'" Reusser says.

Seeing results

Not surprisingly, students participating in parent/child lessons learn faster than those in the conventional class.

Reusser has seen students with little to no water skills advance to swim teams over the course of a summer. This approach, he says, makes swim lessons more affordable. Parents won't have to pay lessons year after year.

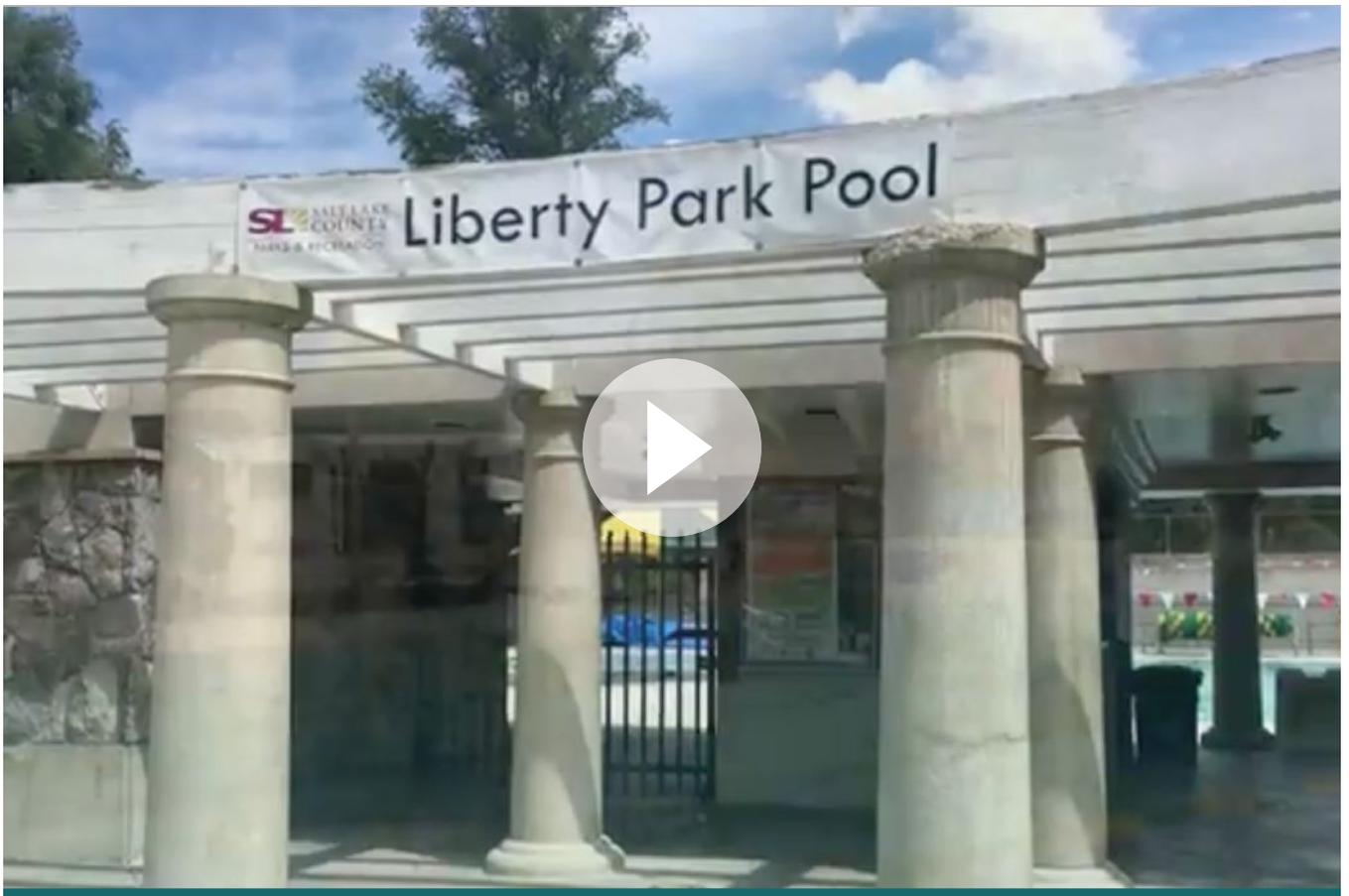
Now, Reusser says it's just a

matter of getting this message out to underserved communities: Become a good swimmer in less time and with less money.

Traditional lessons are still available. But a funny thing happened when Reusser introduced the parent/child program: Parents see other moms and dads in the pool and want to join in.

"It was actually hard with the traditional lessons to keep parents out sometimes," Reusser says.

—Nate Traylor



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Best of
Aquatics



GWINNETT COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION

TRAINING *Lawrenceville, Ga.*

To maintain consistent quality among lifeguards in Georgia's largest county isn't easy.

After all, Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation oversees 10 aquatic facilities, 18 bodies of water, eight waterparks and one interactive fountain. Doing this involves 350 part-time staff, — all managed and trained by only 18

full-timers.

But the Parks and Rec team seems to have found a training formula that helps insure the desired level of instruction, while allowing each facility enough autonomy to address their individual needs and cultures. And managers and trainers have done this in ways that make it fun for trainees.

Some structure

To achieve the needed level of consistency, the county has established fairly intensive requirements of its facilities, along with documentation.

Lifeguards have access to a selection of 30 to 35 annual lifeguard training courses, three to four lifeguard instructor courses, and three to four water-safety instructor courses, taught at four sites in Gwinnett County.

Each facility must conduct at least one in-service training per month during spring and winter, and two every month in summer. Additionally, they undergo skill audits, skill quizzes, rescue drills, and emergency action plan drills on a weekly basis.

Management backs this up with extensive documentation that gives guidance on the training programs falling outside the scope of the American Red Cross materials. A 173-page staff manual covers all policies and procedures, while a 205-page training

HIGHLIGHTS

- With a staff of more than 300, Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation must make a conscious effort to outline consistent training from facility to facility.
- To ensure that all employees reach the desired level of skill, the department makes specific requirements of each facility in its jurisdiction.
- But to allow for the unique needs and cultures from property to property, individual facility staffs can employ their own creative ways of teaching the skills and information.

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manual details 46 skill audits, 23 aquatic quizzes, and contains other training documents.

But each facility gets to choose how they present the materials. This has led to creative exercises for building skills and teamwork. For instance, some facilities implement “the juggernaut,” a cardio-type challenge involving such tasks as running $\frac{3}{4}$ mile, then going up some stairs, then performing CPR.

“It’s definitely difficult — sometimes they have to increase their stamina,” says Aquatics Coordi-

nator Christine Greenfield. “But the staff feel really good about themselves when they’re successfully able to complete it.”

Some have created “escape rooms” on their facilities to help with team-building as trainees work together to find their way out. They have also employed gory Halloween, zombie and alien themes in creating obstacle courses, during which lifeguards must use their newfound knowledge to address one crisis after another while moving through the facility.

“Those are quite comical, and the staff really enjoys them,” Greenfield says. “You can see their wheels turning as they try to figure out how to make it work with the training they’ve had.”

The programs clearly have paid off: In six of the last seven years, Gwinnett County has placed first in the Georgia Recreation and Parks Association Lifeguard Games. “It’s really exciting to watch them apply their training,” Greenfield says.

—Rebecca Robledo



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CITY OF CHANDLER

COMMUNITY OUTREACH *Chandler, Ariz.*

The City of Chandler, Ariz. saw a startling rise in water-related incidents in 2011, with 18 reported accidents, up from only one the year prior.

So far this year: One.

The drastic reduction can be credited in large part to a state-wide water-safety campaign that takes place each year in August. The City of Chandler's participation, however, may be a little more colorful than most.

During Drowning Impact Awareness Month, purple is everywhere. It's the color of the banners hanging from street lamps and the ribbons city officials wear throughout the month. These ribbons also are distributed to the public, including magnetic versions that cling to emergency

vehicles. These visual reminders to be water-safe are unavoidable.

"Our goal is to turn the City of Chandler purple in every way, shape and form," says Traci Tenkely, aquatic coordinator.

The proudest display of purple is on the lifeguards. As part of the campaign, guards sport purple tee shirts both on and off duty. This apparel is intended to start conversation. When the public asks about the tees, lifeguards are instructed to provide a water-safety tip.

"A purple lifeguard shirt is rare and sparks attention, which gives staff the opportunity to talk about their summer job and the impact they have on keeping the community safe," Tenkely says.

The shirts are also something

HIGHLIGHTS

* During Drowning Impact Awareness Month, the City of Chandler paints the town purple. Street lamps are festooned with purple banners, lifeguards sport purple tees and city officials wear purple ribbons to remind the public to be water-safe.

* At a water-safety event, people can learn about the importance of life jackets and watch emergency-responders conduct a rescue drill. The program also provides free swimming lessons.

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of a status symbol, she says. Staff looks forward to receiving their royal purple tees at the end of the season.

A community effort

The campaign focuses on how a drowning affects the whole community.

While the victim's family experiences the trauma firsthand, the ripple effects of such a tragedy spread far and wide, affecting first responders and hospital staff, as well. So it's fitting that the program involves multiple agencies, including fire, aquatics, medical

and health departments, along with Phoenix Children's Hospital.

"The intent really is to talk about the community-wide impact that a drowning has," Tenkely explains.

As part of the campaign, the city hosts a water safety event, in partnership with Salt River Project, the regional utility provider. There, the public can learn about life jackets and watch emergency-rescue scenarios performed by lifeguards and medical professionals. This year's event attracted more than 250 participants.

Chandler Firefighter Charities, Salt River Project and the

Drowning Prevention Coalition of Arizona provided a total of \$750 towards free swim lessons. For 20 who received the waivers during the event, staffers were able to expedite the time it takes to get them into their first lesson. For the general public, there's typically a waiting list, but Tenkely wanted to strike while the iron was hot, so to speak. They were in the water within a week or two of the event, learning how to swim.

"We kind of strong-armed people to get them registered," Tenkely says with a laugh.

—Nate Traylor



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WILLOUGHBY PARKS AND RECREATION

ACCESSIBILITY *Willoughby, Ohio*

For as long as Jim Clark can remember, Willoughby Parks and Recreation has strived to offer a well-rounded slate of programs to engage people of all needs.

But last year, a customer suggested one way the facility could even better serve those with special needs.

“They said, ‘Could you please

schedule a recreation swim for families who have members with special needs?’” recalls Clark, program coordinator.

The city already offered adaptive programming, but this particular customer wanted an open-swim night when they could just relax with their families in an environment that feels safe.

Tailored event

Last summer, Willoughby offered its first Special Needs Swimming nights, one a month. Not only did these events see encouraging attendance — 25 to 46 families, depending on weather — but continual feedback from special-needs participants and their relatives has helped shape the event to accommodate these customers as much as possible.

For starters, one customer named the evening. But as each Special Needs Swimming session took place, participants would provide more input.

For instance, after the first event, one relative advised Clark and his team that the whistles used by lifeguards were too jarring for participants who had sensory issues. So, to mark the beginning and end of the session and safety breaks, or to otherwise alert attendees, the staff moved to using the public address system.

“We were a little more laid-back,”

HIGHLIGHTS

- At the request of a visitor to the facility, Willoughby Parks and Recreation created a special, unstructured open-swim night where people with special needs can just be in the pool with the families.
- Thanks to a particularly interactive group, Willoughby has received plenty of input on how to make their

event as comfortable as possible to people with varying conditions. The refinements continued throughout the summer.

- After a successful summer, 2018, Special Needs Swimming will take place again next year.




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Clark says. “We still made people do things that were safe, but we weren’t tooting in our whistles. We were definitely interactive and calmly approaching things.”

The staff also learned that some participants need more preparation for the experience, while others need to be eased into transitions. For instance, it helped to instruct the families ahead of time about safety breaks and how they work.

An attendee helped with this communication by offering to make story boards that would illustrate certain procedures and rules. She took pictures and assembled the boards to help par-

ticipants understand the locker room, showers, life jackets, waterfeatures and pool entries. This prepared them in advance, making the experience feel more comfortable and safe. The story boards were laminated so they could be posted on each Special Needs Swimming event.

Additionally, to minimize the kinds of transitions that can feel disruptive to some in this group, the staff only calls one safety break per night, rather than the normal one per hour.

With the success of the 2018 Special Needs Swimming sessions, Willoughby Parks and Rec plans to have at least one a month in 2019.

These evenings have not only benefitted those with special needs and their families. Through the new program and the families’ eagerness to make suggestions, the staff have learned lessons that they can apply to virtually all classes and settings. “By having the Special Needs Night, we’re getting an education on how to be more inclusive the rest of the time,” Clark says.

“That’s what I’m proudest of: We learned to listen and respond. And even once we respond, we need to keep listening [so we can] improve and make those relationships even better.”

—Rebecca Robledo



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FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY AQUATICS SECTION

PROGRAMMING *Fairfax, Va.*

In 2011, Fairfax County Park Authority Aquatics (FCPA) found itself in a predicament when the Red Cross announced a dramatic increase in its learn-to-swim program's pricing structure. At the time, FCPA was providing approximately 35,000 individuals with swim instruction each year, and aquatics programs represented 40% of class program revenue for the agency.

"With the size of our program, we estimated the impact [would be] over \$200,000," says John Berlin, FCPA program branch manager. "It would cripple our program."

Unable to absorb the added cost, FCPA had to come up with a solution that would meet its residents' needs and fall within budget. The group reached out to other jurisdictions in Northern Virginia

that might be facing the same challenge, in the hopes of pooling together their learn-to-swim knowledge. FCPA worked to assemble a team throughout Northern Virginia of people with more than 100 years of aquatics knowledge, including representatives from Reston Association, Town of Herndon, Town of Leesburg, and the Reston Community Center.

The result of this collaboration was Virginia Swims, a learn-to-swim program that has provided instruction to approximately 150,000 people of all ages in Fairfax County since its implementation in 2012.

"The objective of [creating] Virginia Swims was to develop a quality-focused, sustainable learn-to-swim program, free of

HIGHLIGHTS

- A new learn-to-swim program was created through a partnership of aquatics professionals throughout Northern Virginia.
- Virginia Swims uses data from frequent customer-satisfaction surveys and aquatics outcomes from instructor evaluation sheets to create and implement ongoing program improvements.



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licensing fees and available to any local jurisdiction,” Berlin says.

Worthy collaboration

Using data has been important from the start for this team of collaborators.

Berlin remembers thinking, “If we’re going to launch a learn-to-swim program, that’s an awesome responsibility. It needs to be comprehensive and proven and effective.”

Before building the Virginia Swims curriculum, the team looked at customer survey data to test existing satisfaction with the current offering.

While it’s always important to understand the needs of the local citizenry, here it held particular urgency: For this program to work, the agency would depend on community members who wanted to pay for it and recommend it to others. Unlike most parks and recreation programs, which are heavily subsidized by tax dollars, the operations and salaries of FCPA come entirely out of the money it takes in through revenue.

“We have to operate like a business, but provide the service that a government agency would,” Berlin says.

Customers with students en-

rolled in Virginia Swims are surveyed regularly on 25 to 35 different aspects of its performance to ensure the program consistently meets their standards. This feedback is then analyzed and given to instructors so they can improve classes.

The program’s most recent initiative is the learn-to-swim outcomes pilot evaluation, which began about two years ago. Data is gathered from instructor evaluation sheets across recreation center locations in order to determine which aspects of the curriculum are effective and what needs improvement.

—Rena Goldman



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FARMERS BRANCH AQUATICS CENTER

LIFEGUARD MANAGEMENT *Farmers Branch, Texas*

When you log into Instagram and look up #fbh2o, you'll see a powerful recruitment tool.

For the past two seasons, Farmers Branch Aquatics Center has effectively used social media to showcase the organization's culture, training and camaraderie as a way to keep applications coming in.

The facility has more than 1,000 followers. While many are frequent guests, Aquatics Supervisor Paul Macias sees them as potential applicants.

Farmers Branch Aquatics Center recently closed out the season with more than 40 lifeguards overseeing its indoor and outdoor pools. Many are high-school students who became interested in working as lifeguards and instruc-

tors after seeing the facility's fun content online. Its Instagram account features profiles on staff members, shout-outs to winners of local lifeguarding competitions, videos of in-service trainings and contests. Posts invite followers to guess the number of loungers in the lagoon or the total number of stairs in the facility for chances to win water bottles, backpacks and other prizes. Photos are jazzed up with filters, flashy fonts and graphics.

The decision to promote Farmers Branch Aquatics Center as an employer came after a severe staffing shortage in 2016, during which managers were forced to close certain attractions. Macias didn't want a repeat of that in 2017.

"We thought the best way to

HIGHLIGHTS

- Farmers Branch Aquatics Center is actively recruiting young people where they live: On social media.
- The facility, which typically hires approximately 40 guards each season, has found Instagram to be particularly useful.
- Through fun photos and videos, Farmers Branch showcases employment opportunities using flashy fonts and graphics, encouraging applicants to become a part of its "Frog Squad."

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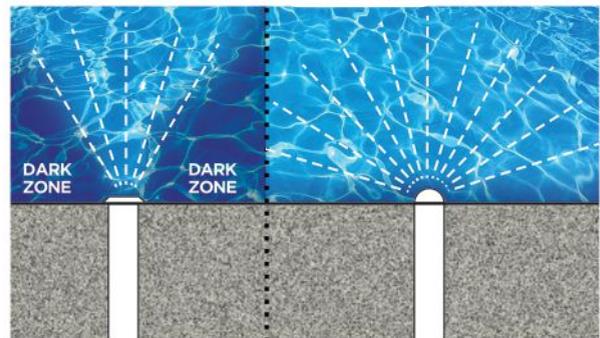
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reach potential employees was through social media,” he says.

At first, he experimented with paid advertisements on Facebook, but that missed the target.

“In working with teenagers, we learned Facebook is for their parents,” Macias says.

He made the switch to Instagram, promoting staff members as the Frog Squad and using the hashtag #fbh2o. When recruiting at high school job fairs, Macias would encourage students to fol-

low them on Instagram, gradually building a loyal following.

Making the grade

While that piqued their interest, Macias and team encountered a dilemma: Many potential applicants weren’t exactly strong swimmers and didn’t know if they’d pass the Red Cross prerequisites to become certified guards.

“A lot of them knew how to swim. They were just a little in-

timidated,” Macias says.

So, he created a workaround: Those who didn’t make the cut were invited to use the pool for free training.

Lifeguards, during their breaks, provide tips and advice. Macias estimates about 40% initially failed, but aced it later.

“We had a lot of kids coming after school to practice,” he says. “That shows dedication right off the bat and a willingness to learn.”

—Nate Traylor





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WESTWOOD FAMILY AQUATICS CENTER

OVERALL MARKETING *Norman, Okla.*

The City of Norman Parks & Recreation department had a lot riding on the newly remodeled Westwood Family Aquatics Center when it opened its doors for the 2018 swim season.

Originally built in 1967, the facility featured an old, square pool with a diving well and two slides. During renovation, the old-school vessel was replaced with a veritable aquatics network consisting of a competition pool, lap pool, lazy river, two tube water slides, rock wall, volleyball nets and more.

But the Oklahoma facility had already run a year behind schedule, and officials didn't want to disappoint taxpayers who were eagerly waiting to find out if this would become their new summer hangout.

To ensure it spread the news of

the community improvement project, the City of Norman began marketing efforts two years out. Future patrons even had the opportunity to vote on the project. Engagement with the community continued through various channels, including events such as a ground-breaking ceremony, art opening, and ribbon-cutting ceremony.

But it was going to take a lot more to hold the public's attention. It would require brand awareness, strategic marketing, and future planning to capture the hearts of the community members.

Baptism by fire

Enter Josh Holman.

The recreation supervisor, aquatics/special event, signed on to the effort when he was hired, a mere

HIGHLIGHTS

- The city parks and rec department needed to bring in the crowds and leverage anticipation for a substantially renovated aquatics center.
- With a savvy social-media overhaul, a new staffer helped the facility attract 10,000 Facebook followers and 1,800 opening-day visitors. The first summer saw nearly as many visitors as constituted the community's population! This marketing boost involved developing a consistent schedule and message.



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three weeks before the grand opening scheduled for Memorial Day.

His first task in promoting the revitalized center was to take over its newly created Facebook page and establish a posting cadence (or frequency), guidelines and brand voice. As part of the effort, his team standardized the flier setup on Facebook and focused on effective use of the logo. By the end of the first season, the facility had more than 10,000 followers.

“The city had been posting on Facebook, but the formatting was always very sporadic and different, and it used to get lost in the noise,”

Holman says. “It was critical for the facility to establish its own presence and brand recognition.”

On opening day, the guest count exceeded 1,800.

Outreach continued with a new event nearly every Friday, ranging from outdoor movies to special appearances by guests including an NBA basketball player. To fund these events, Holman signed on local businesses as sponsors for the facility’s various features, such as the lazy river and the slides.

Ultimately, Westwood Family Aquatics Center nearly tripled attendance and had more than

114,000 visitors in a community of only 120,000. A remarkable achievement, considering the total marketing budget was only \$15,000.

The team has already begun planning for next season, with a master event calendar in place to be inserted in water bills and distributed at various city events.

Also new to the facility: Instagram and Twitter will be added to its social media strategy.

“We plan to have a bigger presence and wider swath and maybe even attract a younger group,” Holman says.



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TRAINING *Rochester, Minn.*

Working in a town of medical experts and staff from the Mayo Clinic, you might expect to have a population of naturally gifted teens to hire as lifeguards. After all, these are the children of doctors and researchers at a world-renowned institution.

You'd be right. But this situation also presents certain challenges to those hiring the teens as lifeguards.

For one thing, they generally leave town after a summer or two so they can attend universities around the world. This means that 15- and 16-year-olds will constitute a higher-than-normal proportion of the staff. The average age is 16½ years old.

And there are aspects of the local career-driven culture that serve an individual well in other jobs, but

can pose an obstacle to working in a team environment and succeeding in emergency situations. For instance, they may fear making mistakes and be even more self-conscious and worried about looking foolish than the average teenager. This doesn't help during rescues, when you must be as present as possible.

For these reasons, the Rochester Athletic Club has developed an impressive training program to not only integrate such intelligent and ambitious individuals into its culture, but also to help rear them into solid adults and leaders.

Team building

It begins with a trust exercise, to help newbies shed concerns about how they look to others. Trainees pair off, with one blindfolded. Then they play Follow the Leader, with the blindfolded person trailing after the other, guided by voice or touch.

"We walk them down the stairs, around the fitness floor — all in front of our membership," says Whitney

HIGHLIGHTS

- Set in the same town as the Mayo Clinic, the Rochester Athletic Club has the luxury of hiring from a population of extraordinary teenagers. But certain traits, such as when conscientiousness turns into self-consciousness, can serve as an obstacle in some situations.
- Through trust exercises and other aspects of the training regimen, trainers are preparing the lifeguards not only to keep swimmers safe, but also to become admirable adults and leaders.



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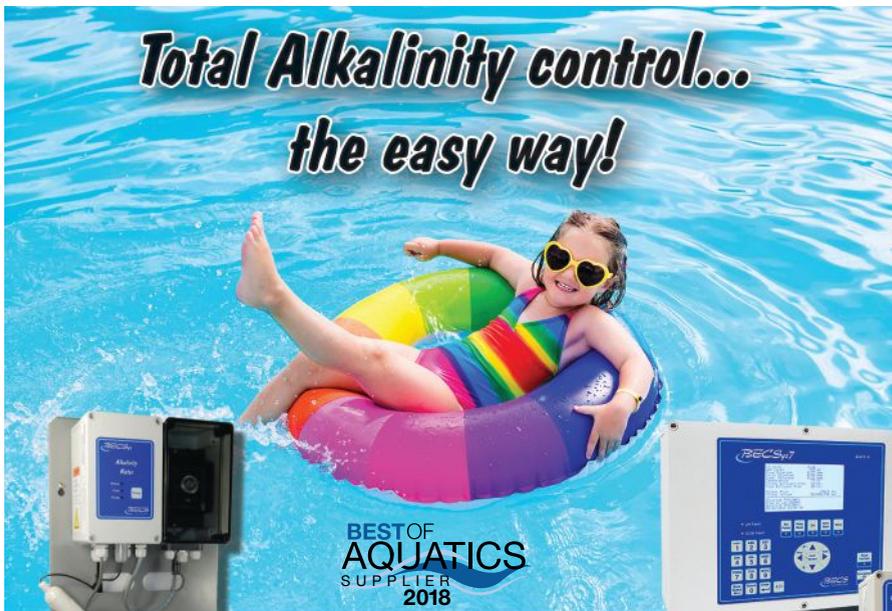
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Benedetti, youth programming and aquatics director of the facility. “[It is] a way to desensitize them to looking silly in front of people, so that if they have to jump in and make a rescue, they know everybody’s watching but it’s okay.”

To help young guards wield the authority their job requires, the staff perform many role-playing exercises that involve awkward or uncomfortable conversations, such as correcting an adult. It works: In a recent situation, a teen guard told doctors that they were performing CPR incorrectly and got them to step aside so he could take over.

“He felt comfortable standing up to them at 16 and say-

ing, ‘You’re doing it wrong. This is what you need to do or let me do it,’” Benedetti says.

This confidence comes largely because of the messages they receive from their trainers and leaders. “We tell [our lifeguards], ‘You may not know how to do cardiothoracic surgery, but you’re not in the operating room — you’re on a pool deck, and they don’t know how to do this,’” Benedetti says.

Training is intense from the start. Before the season, lifeguards undergo a two-hour water training session to review rescues and site-specific water scenarios, plus a 1½-hour skills drill session to practice CPR, first aid and

biohazard clean-up. Then they undergo four more hours covering business issues — manager expectations, policies, and report writing practice. The lifeguards participate in several team-building activities. During summer, the staff gets together for in-service every other week, while head guards perform daily in-service training during a 7-minute break.

“Our philosophy behind this is to create a safe aquatic environment for our members and guests, keep customer service at the forefront, and develop our young staff into community leaders and successful adults,” the facility staff stated.

—Rebecca Robledo



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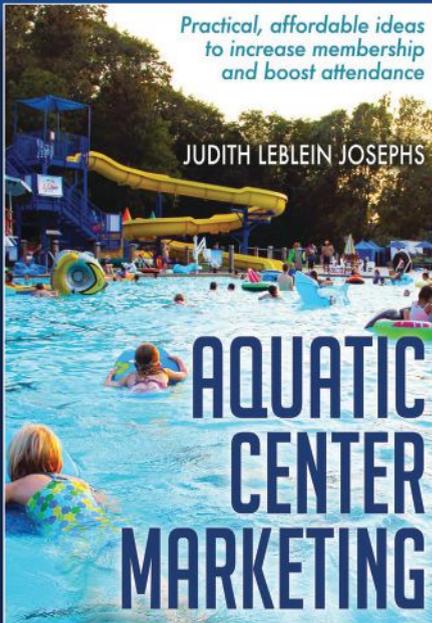
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CITY OF PEORIA AQUATICS

COMMUNITY OUTREACH *Peoria, Ariz.*

Megan Johnson and Christian Peck are no strangers to obtaining grants for community swim lessons.

As recreation coordinators for the City of Peoria Aquatics division in Arizona, they are consistently involved in outreach efforts and always seek ways to deliver swim safety education to the underserved members of their community.

“Our goal is to get swim lessons to as many kids as possible, and it shouldn’t depend on their zip code, whether they can afford it, or whether they have transportation to the pool,” says Johnson. “Arizona statistically has a high drowning rate, and when we hear of them, it affects us. We take it personally.”

In the summer of 2018, they received a grant from the Michael Phelps Foundation, and it was a game changer. The grant allowed the city to offer more than 140 free swim lessons to the local Boys and Girls Club as well as children in low-income communities. Out of the 40 Boys and Girls Club members who were part of the program, 31 had never taken a swim lesson. Thanks to transportation from the Girls and Boys Club, access to the pool was made much easier, making this particular grant so important, Johnson explains.

“To see the joy on all the kids’ faces and to be able to bring Michael Phelps and swim lessons to the community was a really cool concept,” Peck says.

Making a difference

Through this grant, they implemented the Michael Phelps Foundation’s “IM Program,” which teaches kids to be safe around water and promotes healthy lifestyles.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Located in one a city with one of the highest child-drowning rates in the country, the City of Peoria (Ariz.) wanted to teach swimming and water safety to as many children as possible — especially those with limited access to this instruction.
- Through a grant from the Michael Phelps Foundation, the team was able to provide 140 lessons to Boys and Girls Club members and children in lower-income areas. They packaged this important messaging and learning with a fun event.



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At the end of the summer, participants, along with the local Special Olympics swim team athletes, attended a free event at one of the city's pools to promote water safety. Local and national media were present to help spread water safety messages.

The event began with media interviews and a press conference featuring Michael Phelps and other guests of honor. A mini swim lesson took place, and Phelps led a Special Olympics swim team clinic with fellow Olympian Allison Schmitt.

More than 200 people attended the community event, which included 12 stations of in-water

and land activities provided by various organizations, including the National Drowning Prevention Alliance (NDPA), Drowning Prevention Coalition of Arizona (DPCA), Michael Phelps Foundation, Pool Safely, Josh the Otter Foundation, CPR Party, ZAC Foundation, City of Peoria Fire-Medical Department, and Peoria Firefighter Charities.

"As far as events go, it was one of the biggest we've ever done," Johnson says. "This helps motivate us to continue reaching out to agencies and applying for grants and trying to work with other agencies and passing along that information to the unreachable."

Johnson and Peck first became familiar with the grant in April after their supervisor returned to the office from the NDPA conference. The application involved a fairly simple process. Two months after submitting some paperwork, they won the funds.

"When we hear people getting grants or hosting an event, we either reach out to the facility or find out how they did it and ask if we can we do it ourselves," Johnson says.

"Everybody wants to be able to provide reasonable and free lessons. Reaching out is the big thing. You just have to do it."



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RANDOLPH YMCA

TARGETED PROGRAMMING *Randolph, N.J.*

In 2002, when Kathy Fisher interviewed for the position of aquatics director at the Randolph YMCA, she had longevity and health on the mind.

Fisher had recently recovered from a back injury using aquatic therapy and was keenly aware of the impact such programming could have on the New Jersey-based facility. When the CEO expressed interest in building a second pool, Fisher offered a solution that would serve the community, extend beyond trend, and create a cycle of wellness. Needless to say, she landed the role.

“While most facilities at that time were installing splash pads, I was thinking about long-term sustainability and preparing for the future,” she explains. “Those kinds of fea-

tures are great, but we tried to think in advance and stay ahead of the curve and what was coming down the pike in aquatic rehab.”

Strategic growth

After joining the team, Fisher began an intense effort to expand aquatic fitness programming, improve the facility’s overall features, and create access for the growing rehab population. She and her team have raised the bar on targeted programming, thanks to a number of strategies — partnerships with local medical facilities and organizations, a focused facility design, a staff of employees chosen for their passion and personality, and ongoing education through presentations and handouts.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This team stood on the vanguard of the wellness and aquatic therapy movement, ushering in such specialized programming 16 years ago to help ensure the facility's continued relevance as the local community ages.
- The team employed several strategies to boost their therapeutic offerings, including alliances with local medical groups, a focused facility design, a passionate staff, and ongoing education.



*Congratulations Randolph
YMCA on winning best
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Initially aimed at joint replacement patients, the plan quickly evolved, especially after the construction of a 3½-to-5-foot-deep warm water pool was completed in 2009. A 2013 grant was used to upgrade the ADA front entrance to include a better ramp and automatic doors for all the new patrons.

Today the Randolph Y offers targeted programming in more than 30 classes each week for the treatment of such varied chronic illness as Parkinson's Disease, multiple sclerosis, cancer, arthritis, autism, cerebral palsy and stroke recovery, among others.

"Now there isn't anything we turn away," Fisher says. "There's always a jam up of wheelchairs

on the pool deck."

Today, some of the most popular programs include the grant-funded Water Wellness cancer recovery program designed for women who have undergone surgery or treatment 6- to 24 months before. The MS Fit program, which takes place in the main pool, is also in high demand, as is the selection of Arthritis Foundation-approved aquatics classes.

In 2016, Fisher helped introduce an aquatic boxing program specifically for those fighting Parkinson's. Called "UH2O Fight Back," it has grown from 2 to more than 80 participants.

Fischer and her team have hatched more plans for progress.

Soon, the facility will include an on-site hospital physical therapy satellite location, operating an exclusive space within the building. The facility also is wrapping up its first-ever capital campaign to raise funds for a fifth locker room, with plans to begin construction in 2019. An ADA-accessible locker room will provide direct access to the warm water and main pool. Features will include private wet- and dry-area changing rooms, complete with ADA-compliant showers, toilets and changing tables.

"This addition would remove any remaining obstacles that exist for the members of our community who have trouble with access," Fisher says.



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LIFESAVERS

Changing of the Guards

Here's how to make a rescue go as smoothly as possible when multiple guards and steps are required.



by **Pete DeQuincy** Knowing what role to play and when to hand off elements of a rescue to another lifeguard is critical.

This is the first in a five-part series examining how guards can provide uninterrupted care to the victim when multiple steps and guards are involved.

I'm kicking off this series with one of the most challenging rescue scenarios of all. In this case,

the victim is a choking infant.

Watch how the lifeguard transitions from compressions to ventilations with smooth fluidity throughout the drill and how he provides care without a table, which would be the case in the field. Again, the key here is uninterrupted care.

As this series progresses, we'll examine ways to effectively transition between guards.

For more training videos, [click here](#).

PRODUCT FOCUS

IAAPA Exhibitors Focus



A) Aquatic Development Group, Booth 2646

Product: Surf Machine
Features: FlowRider is the most popular surf attraction in the world, say company officials; it's a skill-based ride that attracts multiple age groups; offered in a variety of configurations to fit specific property and guest needs

Contact:
518.783.0038;
aquaticgroup.com

B) Arihant Water Park Equipments, Booth 2656

Product: Water Slides
Features: Arihant is an international maker of water slides with offices in Orlando, Fla., Mumbai, India, and Europe

Contact:
+91.9168649951;
arihantwaterslides.com

C) Creative Polymers, Booth E7408

Product: Slide Coating
Features: Slide Armor is a new urethane gel coat system specifically engineered for the waterpark industry; it can be rolled on DIY or applied by a qualified contractor

Contact:
314.524.0191;
waterparktech.com

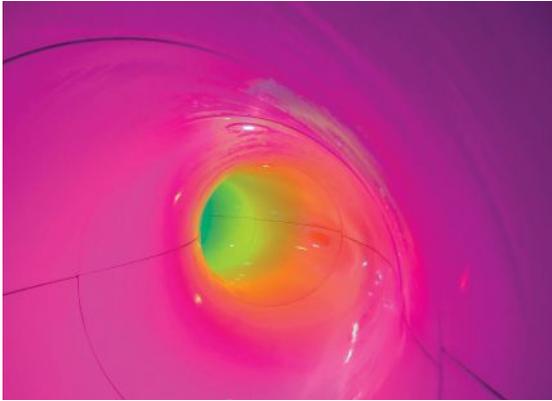
D) Empex Watertoys, Booth 3406

Product: Interactive Play Structure

Features: Empex' vibrant new design, AquaDolce, is themed around candies, cupcakes, ice cream, popsicles and gumballs

Contact:
905.640.3994;
watertoys.com

E



F



G



H



E) iSlide, Booth 3046

Product: Water Slide Upgrades

Features: Enhance existing water slides into a new attraction; change the lighting, sound and/or projections into a constantly changing water slide experience

Contact:
+0031.653335969;
islide.com

F) Neptune-Benson/ Evoqua, Booth 2874

Product: Filters

Features: Defender is an advanced water filtration system; significantly reduces water and waste by eliminating the need to backwash water like traditional sand filters; takes up less space during construction, and saves water, energy and chemicals, per maker

Contact:
800.832.8002;
neptunebenson.com

G) ProSlide Technology, Booth 2254

Product: Water Slide

Features: the TornadoWAVE ride has two curved walls that sends four- to six-person rafts into an almost vertical position, giving riders a zero gravity experience

Contact:
613.526.5522;
proslide.com

H) Shade Creations by Waterloo, Booth 2600

Product: Shade Structures

Features: providing a generous 16-foot shade diameter, the Artis-Tree keeps the harmony in any landscape; panels are available in many colors and fabrics; sponsor logos may be added, creating revenue for parks and businesses

Contact:
800.537.1193;
waterlootent.com

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I) Splashtacular, Booth 4254
Product: Waterpark Attractions
Features: company produces water slides and waterpark attractions, from indoor waterparks to innovative rides; maker of attractions such as 360 Rush and DownUnder; winners of the World Waterpark Association's Leading Edge Award
Contact: 844.836.0925; splashtacular.com

J) StarGuard ELITE, Booth 1836
Product: Risk Prevention System
Features: company works collaboratively to develop and implement client-based aquatic risk prevention solutions that foster operational integrity; creates sustainable safety cultures that save lives, per company
Contact: 573.207.5087; starguardelite.com

K) Vortex Aquatic Structures, Booth 1373
Product: Water Slide
Features: the new PrecisionRide series water slides are precision-engineered for performance and manufactured with state-of-the-art technology
Contact: 877.586.7839; vortex-intl.com

L) Water Safety Products, Booth 2640
Product: Shoe Storage
Features: the new 24 Pair Shoe Drop is designed for guests to leave and retrieve their shoes at the base of a water attraction
Contact: 321.777.7051; watersafety.com

M



N



O



P



**M) Water Odyssey
Booth 654**

Product: Interactive Play Structure

Features: Massive Splash is a modular splash play feature designed for maximum inclusivity of all patrons; constant motion of water buckets includes four spray effects that reduce user wait times; modular design allows for many configurations

Contact:
512.392.1155;
waterodyssey.com

**N) Waterplay
Solutions, Booth 2764**

Product: Interactive Play Structure

Features: Shoreline encourages kids to spin, spray, cover and collaborate in their favorite seaside adventures

Contact:
250.712.3393;
waterplay.com

**O) WhiteWater West,
Booth 2239**

Product: Water Slide

Features: introducing the world's first all-in-one waterpark structure, FusionFortress 17 combines the interactivity of AquaPlay with some of WhiteWater's most legendary slides; over 180 interactive play features and 10 water slides

Contact:
604.273.1068;
whitewaterwest.com

P) Zebec, Booth 3252

Product: Pad Walks

Features: Lily Pad floats are made for heavy commercial use; with high-density foam, the pads are encased in water-tight, reinforced outer membrane covers; full kits come with overhead nets, pool side padding and floats

Contact:
513.829.5533;
zebec.com

PRODUCT FOCUS

The Equipment Room



A) ControlOMatic
Product: Controller
Features: PoolWarden Title 22 is a single or dual pool chemical controller designed to meet California Title 22 regulations; measures free chlorine not affected by cyanuric acid, pH or saltwater chlorine generators
Contact:
530.205.4520;
poolwardentraining.com

B) Hayward Commercial
Product: Controller
Features: the CAT 6000 is a controller with an intuitive touchscreen menu and solid-state free chlorine sensors; the touchscreen allows for configuration of displays and provides measurement and alarm explanations
Contact:
800.657.2287;
haywardcommercialpool.com

C) Lincoln Aquatics
Product: Strainer
Features: the Fluidtrol Fiberglass Strainer is constructed of fiberglass reinforced plastic and PVC; clear acrylic cover with easy open handles and stainless-steel basket; rated for 50 PSI; available in straight in-line, offset and angled offset styles and various sizes
Contact:
800.223.5450;
lincolnaquatics.com

D) Neptune-Benson/ Evoqua
Product: Filters
Features: Defender is an advanced water filtration system; reduces water and waste by eliminating the need to backwash water like traditional sand filters; takes up less space during construction, and saves water, energy and chemicals, per maker
Contact:
800.832.8002;
neptunebenson.com

E



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E) Pentair

Product: Filters
Features: Stark Series Filter Systems now are designed to be easier to install and maintain with a versatile, modular design; standard and custom styles allow for influent and effluent placement to meet any design requirements, including side-by-side, end-to-end or stacked
Contact:
 800.831.7133;
pentaircommercial.com

F) Raypak

Product: Heaters
Features: firm's professional line of factory packaged indirect pool heating systems are factory assembled and plumbed on a prefabricated skid using XTherm boilers driving a shell and tube heat exchanger; Cupro-Nickel exchanger standard
Contact:
 805.278.5300;
raypak.com

G) Recreonics

Product: Filters
Features: Stark Horizontal Fiberglass Sand Filters are seamless and coated in over 80 miles of resin-impregnated fiberglass filament; lightweight tanks are durable and corrosion proof, per maker; meets any design requirement; NSF listed and available in 36-, 42-, 48- and 60-inch diameters
Contact:
 800.428.3254;
recreonics.com

H) Speck Pumps

Product: Pumps
Features: the BADU SuperPro is a drop-in replacement design for the Hayward Super Pump and Pentair SuperFlo pumps; the BADU SuperPro is available with the following motors: single speed or two-speed motors (0.75 to 3.5 HP) and variable speed motors (1.1 THP, 1.65 THP & 2.7 THP)
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usa.speck-pumps.com

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LESSONS LEARNED

Never Allow Balls in Your Pool

Folks will grumble at the rule, but don't give in — unless you have a big budget for repairs.



by Kate Schmidt All pools have rules. Most rules are hated by the general public because they think of them as restricting their ability to enjoy the pool.

It's particularly difficult to tell kids that they cannot play with balls when they are using our pool facility.

A few years ago, we had a relatively new manager who wanted us to revisit the “no balls” rule. He had encountered some parents who were very unhappy with the restriction and couldn't understand why we would not allow some kinds of balls in selected areas. He suggested we consider modifying this rule to make our patrons happy.

That same summer, he learned firsthand the importance of this particular rule.

On one of the hottest days of the summer, our pool manager called in a panic. Something was wrong with our filtration system and he feared that we needed to close the pool right away! The department's deputy director, Peter Travers, went over to investigate.

The motor was running, but no water was flowing through the system. Pete's first thought was that there was a blockage in one of the pipes. He then started to systematically isolate and pressure-test the different pipes leading into the filter system. The tests revealed no blockage, which meant it had to be something with the motor itself.

After that, he removed the motor from the housing, only to discover a lacrosse ball lodged in the motor. Despite our “no balls” rule, this really hard ball managed to find its way into the pool, wind its way past the hair catch and into the pool motor impeller. Though the motor sounded as if it

was operating, it was not functional.

We are big on “be prepared.” We had an extra motor on site, called a pump installer, along with our electrician — so we were able to keep the pool operational. In the end, pool filter operation was interrupted by just four hours.

THE LESSONS

1 Don't panic. The sky is NOT falling! When you experience a problem, don't assume the worst. Start with a systematic approach, identifying the easiest possible problems, working your way up to the hardest problems to remedy.

2 Be prepared. If possible, individually isolate areas to identify where the problem is. Always have spare parts on hand. Be nice to pump installers, electricians and plumbers so they'll come when needed because all emergencies seem to happen after business hours.

3 Always stand fast on this rule. Don't EVER allow balls in your pool.





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