TRANSFORMING YOUR AQUATIC CENTER INTO THE COMMUNITY’S “THIRD PLACE”

Josh Martin
MARTIN AQUATIC DESIGN & ENGINEERING
Third places is a term coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg and refers to places where people spend time between home (‘first’ place) and work (‘second’ place).

They are locations where we exchange ideas, have a good time, and build relationships.
WHERE ARE THIRD PLACES?

• Churches
• Parks
• Recreation centers
• Hairdressers
• Gyms
• Fast-food restaurants
LET’S EXCHANGE IDEAS
ELEMENTS THAT CREATE A THIRD PLACE

• Transportation
• Cost
• Food and Drink
• Scheduling
A THIRD PLACE FOR ALL

• Encouraging diversity

from Oldenburg:

“By diversity I mean a lot things: race, religion, ethnicity, what part of the country you came from, the socio-economic differences, so many things that make people different from one another, and interesting to one another.”
HOW TO BRING IN THE MARGINALIZED

• Accessible
  • Creating a facility where all community members CAN gather

• Appealing
  • Creating a facility where all community members WANT TO gather
ACCESSIBILITY

• Most centers will already be ADA-compliant

• But what does inclusiveness look like in your aquatic space?
Every feature can be accessed or controlled from wheelchair height

- Multiple platforms use ramps not stairs
- Heated water for guests with sensitivity to cold
- Highest quality chemical filtration for guests with compromised immune systems
  - Lower intensity sprays

**CASE STUDY:**
Morgan’s Inspiration Island
UNIQUE FEATURES:

- UV sanitation systems
- Regenerative filters
- Shade structures
- Water heaters
- Custom aquatic wheelchairs developed by Morgan’s Wonderland
APPEALING TO ALL GENERATIONS:

• Having amenities for different age groups doesn’t automatically create a multi-generational attraction

• The design and planning of your features can go a long way to creating a cohesive environment

• Partnerships with wellness providers to offer social and health benefits
TWO APPROACHES:
CASE STUDY: Eagle Lakes Aquatic Center

- Multiple pools with separate zones for activities, yet proximity-driven by age group
- One property site allows all members of the family an area to engage with their peers
UNIQUE FEATURES:

- Lap pool with diving boards and starting blocks
- Leisure/family pool with interactive splash structures
- Dual slide tower
- Toddler wading pool
- Shade structures
CASE STUDY:
Woodforest Amenity Center

- One pool with “zones” of activity
- Allows toddlers, teens, adults, and seniors a unique space, yet still seemingly connected
UNIQUE FEATURES:

- Dual slide tower
- Zero-entry sunshelf for safe, shallow wading with toddler slide
- Water sports and activities (log walk, basketball hoop)
- Adult lounging
TWO FUNCTIONS OF DESIGN

• Programming
• Independence

*These can be opposing ideas, but if the community needs are there, they can both foster Third Places.
PROGRAMMING-INSPIRED DESIGN

• Multi-function spaces that cater to various programming needs

• Allowing the space to be available for groups to start their own impromptu games
UNIQUE RETROFIT ELEMENTS

• Float up wall
• Ninja cross
• Water Slides
• Exercise & Activities
• Child development toys
INDEPENDENCE-INSPIRED DESIGN

• Safe environments promote non-adult-controlled play

• Zero-depth interactive water features and wet play structures
UNIQUE GROUND-UP ELEMENTS

• Adventure Pool at Perfect Day at CocoCay
BEFORE CREATING YOUR COMMUNITY’S THIRD PLACE...
UNDERSTANDING YOUR INVESTMENT

• Make sure your equipment is warrantied – not just on installation

• Use highest quality parts for long-term sustainability
PUT BUDGET TOWARD SERVICES, NOT SERVICING

• Reduce your ongoing maintenance costs

• Automation savings can be applied to other Third Place elements (scholarships, program offerings, etc.)
SUSTAIN YOUR MOMENTUM

• Don’t start out with outdated technology (you’re not going to build a new car and put in a cassette player)

• Keep your facility from appearing aged/tired

• Avoid trendy amenities that could fade from pop culture
PUTTING THE ELEMENTS IN PLACE
OPERATIONAL ELEMENTS

• Programming
  • Classes can motivate people to come to your facility
  • Leave time/space for people to converge independently

• Offerings
  • Food and beverage options allow people to linger

• Costs
  • While you need to make a profit to operate, don’t price certain groups out of the market
DESIGN ELEMENTS

• Aquatic features should be accessible and appealing

• Safe spaces allow free play for kids and opportunities for relaxed socializing for parents

• Retrofits with temporary interactive elements can transform spaces when not in use

• Look at how diverse groups can use a similar or connected space
QUESTIONS?