



Hot Stuff About Swimming Pools 2008

This is the sixth year that *PM* has published its swimming pool section in the December issue, in time to prepare for summer activities. The magazine continues to receive new information on pools that are owned and operated by local governments. In the August and September issues, readers were invited to share pool stories and photos. Here are the contributions the magazine received.

ARLINGTON, TEXAS

Bad Königshofen is the name of Arlington's sister city in Bavaria, Germany. The two cities have shared a special relationship since 1952. Since Bad Königshofen is known for its natural mineral baths ("Bad" is "bath" in German) and health resorts, it was a natural namesake for the municipal water park that is called the Bad Königshofen Family Aquatic Center.

This is especially true given that a dedication to Bad Königshofen was already on the ground at S.J. Stovall Park, the site of the project. Goals for the project were to provide an experience different from the other five city pools and to respect and foster the sister-city relationship.

Arlington's (population 333,000 in 2000) first goal was achieved through a master planning process that absorbed input from city staff and a series of public meetings. The resulting ideas and wishes of the groups led directly to the amenities that were included in the project. Attractions include features for all ages, with some extra emphasis on Arlington's teenage population. A spray-pad overlooks the play pool and doubles as an iconic fountain in the off-season. A diving board and drop slide share the deep-water area next to the lap lanes and sunning "wet deck."



Bad Königshofen is as attractive as it is entertaining in Arlington, Texas. The facility is nestled in a 52-acre park in Southwest Arlington and draws many visitors beyond the geographic region by responding to the entertainment value of both children and adults.

This process defined the “what,” but the second goal was the “how” of the project. It was clear from the beginning that while the sister-city relationship was important, a Bavarian-themed water park was not the intent. No beer steins or mock castles here. The design response instead was to draw from the significant German immigrant heritage of the early European settlement in the Texas hill country. An agrarian-style project emerged using regional materials and avoiding the visual noise of the typically bright colors seen in most water parks.

The project takes advantage of the existing trees for shade and topography for dynamic views. The staff and ticketing building is literally a finished-out grain bin, partly clad in stone so as to imply that it has always been there. The building housing the bathhouse and the concessions resembles a farmhouse, complete with back porch and a “dog-run” design between the components to channel breezes. The water-play features were conceived as a “pipe farm” and are plain stainless steel instead of painted.

A custom wood and rope fence and waterfall separates the bodies of water and the teen area from the children’s area. A custom waterslide tower structure uses a derrick-type

structure instead of standard support poles. Custom shade structures look like they belong as opposed to being purchased from a catalog.

In the words of the city’s assistant park director, the design has been a “home run.” Citywide pool attendance figures approximately doubled in the project’s opening season and without detriment to attendance at existing facilities.

Bad Königshofen’s opening-season attendance outperformed that of the other city aquatic facilities (opened 2006) by 57 percent. Financially, the project far exceeded expectations. In a city that is accustomed to subsidizing its pools, Bad Königshofen was the only pool to operate in the black in 2006 and 2007.

—De’Onna Garner
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NORTH RICHLAND HILLS, TEXAS

NRH2O Family Water Park in North Richland Hills (population 56,000 in 2000) recently completed its 14th season! The park serves as both a community gathering spot and a destination facility for North Texas by offering plenty of water and fun to keep families cool all summer long.

Its theme is that “it is an aquatic park in a park.” With more than 20 waterslides, including the world’s largest uphill watercoaster, a 200,000-gallon wave pool, a children’s area, and more, visitors have been flocking to it to beat the Texas heat.

This project consists of an eight-acre water park built and run by a city of approximately 60,000 in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. As late as 1990, North Richland Hills had no indoor or outdoor swimming facility for its citizens. The city determined that it wanted to develop a park that had water elements within it. City planners, however, did not want to compete with the large commercial water parks but wanted to fill a void for the family water park.

The project planning and design team was led by a Dallas-based architectural company and a national aquatic consultant that worked with the city to organize public and staff input to generate a business plan, which determined expense and operating budgets for the facility. This planning initiative created support from both city leaders and citizens to move forward in a pioneering direction for public pools.

This park-within-a-park development includes a park covering approximately 23 acres that includes an eight-acre water park, a 500-space parking lot with a dedicated area for bus parking, a jogging trail, and a softball-soccer field as part of this full-service park.

The water elements within the park include a lazy river, a tube tower with three tube rides of varying excitement levels, a wave pool, a kiddie pool with several interactive play elements including two small slides, and an activity pool of 25 yards that can be used for fitness training in off hours, as well as a lily pad, log walks, and water volleyball.

Park elements include a sand volleyball area, an outdoor playground, a covered pavilion with picnic tables that can seat 200, and in the center of the park a man-made but natural-looking streambed served by a fountain—the central focus of the park.



The Lazy River in the NRH2O Family Water Park in North Richland Hills, Texas, is part of the water elements of an eight-acre water park that resides within a 23-acre park.

Buildings include a wave-pool building, maintenance and storage building, pavilion, first aid, break area for staff, bathrooms including two private family changing areas, lockers, arcade, gift shop, office, ticket area, and food court.

Unlike many commercial aquatic parks, the planners used areas of green spaces to separate activity zones within the park. This separation allows a high attendance without patrons feeling crowded.

During the past 14 years, NRH2O has added a new four-lane racing slide, which is called the Accelerator, in addition to new shaded seating areas. Prior to the coming of the Accelerator, the park revamped its children's area and opened a catering facility and two new group pavilions in 2006. NRH2O's Frogstein's Splashatory attraction was introduced in 2004. The park offers many other unique activities such as dive-in movies and fireworks displays.

The park has been extremely successful in terms of both finances and attendance. It exceeded the projected first-year revenue estimates by 33 percent, and it has generated revenue above operating expenses each year since. As a gathering place for families throughout the North Texas area, NRH2O continues to be a testament

to the benefits of planning before you build.

—Vicki Loftice

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PLANO, TEXAS

The Tom Muehlenbeck Center provides recreational and aquatic activities to more than 20,000 members and hundreds of daily drop-in users. For a

mere \$65 per year for adults (\$40 for youth), citizens of Plano (population 222,000 in 2000) can slide, dive, and splash into fun at any three of the facility's swimming pools.

The aquatic elements were designed to flow seamlessly not only between the two indoor elements but also between indoor and outdoor elements. Creative use of a drop slide from a leisure slide platform allows the 25-yard lap pool to be used as a leisure amenity. Movement between the indoor pools is facilitated by vertical sliding doors that provide sound isolation or direct connection, depending upon the desired pool use.

A strong visual connection between the inside and outside bodies of water as well as views to the adjacent wetland creek maximize the flowing, free-form nature of the leisure pool space. The site for the facility is in the center of a community park surrounded by three public schools.

The indoor aquatic elements include an eight-lane, 25-yard competition pool equipped with a one-meter diving board and drop slide. Users may travel through the sliding doors into 6,300 square feet of leisure pool space. This adjacent indoor body of water includes a waterslide, current



The need for diverse aquatic programs in Plano, Texas, became one of the desired priorities driving the development of its Tom Muehlenbeck Center. The flowing nature and free form of the leisure pool space experience is maximized by a strong visual connection between the inside and outside bodies of water as well as views to the adjacent wetland creek, the shaping force of the project.

channel, vortex, playdish, underwater seating, and open play area as well as a two-lane lap area ideal for water walking.

When users venture to the outdoor aquatic element, they are immersed in 7,778 square feet of play zones. The outdoor pool features a shallow children's area complete with a waterfall, water playground, and spray-pad that is ideal for toddlers and infants. For the more experienced user, a large, open play area is available complete with basketball hoops and a beautiful fountain.

The most exciting feature of this outdoor area is the three-slide tower. Riders who approach the waterslide launch area can choose one of three winding thrills. The waterslides feed into run-outs as opposed to a catch pool area. This creative element reduces water assists as well as the need for additional lifeguard staff.

Aside from the open-play leisure aspect, the Tom Muehlenbeck Center pools are home to a high school swim team and a growing master's swim team. The facility offers a variety of learn-to-swim programs for all ages and abilities as well as provides workout space for adults. Both shallow- and deep-water aerobics are offered as well as river walking or exercise using the current channel area.

Users may also reserve the aquatic facilities after hours for birthday parties, back-to-school parties, or any type of celebration. Whether for leisure or exercise, users certainly enjoy the high-tech design of the indoor facilities, which include an ultraviolet sanitation system coupled with a salt-chlorine generation system.

Whatever the season or the reason for the visit, users of all ages leave the Tom Muehlenbeck Center with a smile and can't wait for their next visit!

—Don Wendell

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SIERRA VISTA, ARIZONA

Sierra Vista (population 45,000) opened the doors to the Sierra Vista Aquatic Center, known as The Cove, on February 14, 2002. The city's origi-



The Sierra Vista, Arizona, Aquatic Center's ("The Cove") wave machine can be set to create eight different wave patterns. As of October, The Cove's attendance this year numbered more than 200,000 visitors.

nal outdoor pool in Veterans' Memorial Park was built back in the early 1970s and was past its prime. When it came time to look at a new aquatic facility, members of the community, city council, city officials, and high school and swim club members all offered input.

Ideas were put onto paper and the project began. Dwight Thurman, the city's sports and aquatic supervisor, did research, attended industry conferences, and looked at several facilities around the state.

The Cove was definitely designed with the community in mind. It is open to the public seven days a week and offers classes in swimming, water aerobics, lifeguarding, scuba, PADI Seal Team certification, and kayak training. It can be reserved for private parties, and specific times are set aside for lap swim and splash time for children age five and under.

The complex is unique in that it is a multipurpose facility and shares space with offices. It is designed in such a way that there can be multiple activities (diving, lap swimming, and splash time) going on at the same time without interfering with each other. The Cove incorporated a number of high-tech operations into the facility, and officials from across the country come to visit to see how they

can build a similar facility in their communities.

The facility has four specific bodies of water. There is a shallow entry pool that can be combined with the main pool, a therapy pool, a diving well with one- and three-meter diving boards, and two water "trough" 150-foot slides that land in approximately four inches of water, which makes it safe in that no one is submerged when they come out of the tube.

In addition to all the water features, there is a snack bar, an outdoor patio and a sunning deck with lounge chairs, lockers, and changing rooms. One of The Cove's most popular features is the wave machine that can be set to create eight different wave patterns from "tsunami" to "double diamond." Another well-thought-through feature is the retractable roof that is covered with mesh to keep birds out when the roof is open.

In 2004, The Cove was honored with the 2004 Southern Arizona Energy Award. It uses an extraordinary climate control system to maintain temperatures and humidity. The complex is completely electronically monitored, including heating, lighting, air, and water. Sierra Vista approached this challenge by incorporating a weather station into the building and using its many sensors to monitor all

heating and cooling systems and pool filtration pumps as well as the security of the building. The city estimates the weather station-driven climate control system saves approximately 26 percent of the operation's utilities costs, with an estimated payback of four years.

Further energy conservation also is realized with the use of a gray-water system designed to recycle the backwash water from the pool's filtration system. This gray-water system is one of the largest municipal systems in the state. It is estimated that cost savings are about \$1,600 per year, and the estimated 104,000 gallons of recycled water per year are used in a drip irrigation system for one of the city's parks. In 2003, The Cove also received the Arizona Parks and Recreation Facility of the Year award.

Sierra Vista staff members believe all the time, effort, and money spent in designing, developing, and maintaining The Cove was well worth it. More than 250,000 visitors and residents used the complex in 2007.

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TONGANOXIE, KANSAS

In response to the catastrophic failure of the city's 80-plus-year-old swimming pool, voters in Tonganoxie, Kansas (population 4,156), approved a sales tax of .75 percent in April 2007 to finance the design and construction of a new \$2.9 million water park. The "up to 10 years" sales tax proposition was approved by a two-to-one margin.

The design and engineering team worked with city officials and a citizens committee to determine features to incorporate into the new facility as well as to determine local infrastructure upgrades required to accommodate the desired water park facility. The team was selected because of its reputation for expertise, track record, and knowledge of modern aquatics facility standards. The final design allowed Tonganoxie to construct the new water park on the site of the old swimming pool.



Two 25-foot-high water slides become a part of the small-town Tonganoxie, Kansas, skyline. A new water park opened there on July 1, 2008.

After a prolonged, weather-impacted winter construction season, the new water park opened to the public on July 1, 2008, with large numbers of patrons evident every day of the 2008 swim season. Attendance reports showed that during 52 days of operation this year beginning July 1, a total of 16,783 or 324 patrons per day used the new water park until season's end on September 1. In contrast, the city's old pool generally attracted approximately 400 swimmers per week.

Tonganoxie's water park incorporates many modern popular features, including two 25-foot-high waterslides, a toddler pool, a spray ground, six 25-meter lanes, two one-meter diving boards, zero-depth entry, natural and artificial shade structures, overhead lighting, landscaping that includes numerous plantings and lawn areas within the park fencing, a new bathhouse and staff-lifeguard-concessions building, and patron furnishings.

The water park was designed in accordance with aquatics facility standards, including state-of-the-art water filtration and treatment equipment. The facility is handicapped accessible.

The most consistent compliments from the public during the 2008 season were directed toward the features and layout that attract and allow for use by all ages from toddlers to se-

niors. The layout of the park generally separates age groups toward feature and activity areas: youth and teens are attracted to the slides and diving area, toddlers generally play in the toddler pool and spray ground, families and seniors like the zero-depth area, and fitness swimmers use the lap lanes.

Numerous other compliments were received regarding the interior landscaping, plantings, and lawn area that provide a park atmosphere rather than the old-fashioned concrete slab pool.

City officials made a great decision with this project that has served and will continue to serve Tonganoxie's growing population. The facility has also attracted numerous visitors from surrounding communities, and it will serve the community for decades to come.

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