

Clubs Focus on Dedicated Youth Spaces

By Pamela Brill | November 19, 2019



The Country Club at DC Ranch

Kids' spaces are becoming permanent fixtures as more clubs cater to growing family memberships—and done right, they can make the younger set want to go eagerly to the club, without any kicking or screaming involved.

Dinner at the club no longer requires lining up a babysitter and leaving the kids at home. As more facilities ramp up their family-focused amenities, parents are taking advantage of on-premise kids' centers that range from informal play spaces and child-tending rooms, to areas reserved exclusively for young members and outfitted with a variety of attractions that make them a destination all their own.

Families First

At Providence Country Club in Charlotte, N.C., where family memberships are rapidly expanding, a dedicated facility to accommodate children became a necessity. "Providence has always been a very family-centric club with several regular kids' activities and programming," says General Manager Howard S. Murphy, Jr., CCM. "However, it did not have a designated permanent space."

After the property became part of McConnell Golf in February 2016, management planned to expand and remodel the lower clubhouse level. And in the spring of 2017, the aptly named "Providence Playhouse" opened its doors.

Adjacent to the club's group exercise studio, the Providence kids' zone is easily accessible for parents who are looking to drop off their child for some playtime fun while they partake of the club's fitness amenities. An internal, moveable wall creates distinct spaces that can be customized as needed. "Large group events or physically energetic games that need movement can be done in the extra studio space," explains Fitness and Activities Director Kym Reed.

Outfitted with kid-friendly furnishings, the Playhouse contains a colorful menagerie of craft tables, chairs and bean bags, chosen for ease of clean-up. Structured activities are divided by age and typically supervised in



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groups of seven or eight children per staff member. (While there is no minimum age requirement, children must be bathroom-independent in order to use the playhouse.) Free-play options include Legos, building blocks and balls that can be easily disinfected.

In addition to these offerings, kids at Providence CC can partake of structured activities, ranging from summer camps and school-break programs during the day to nighttime events such as Slime Night, Water Wars and Cooking Club. Many of the Playhouse's themed activities are coordinated in conjunction with adult programming, to maximize overall family usage. "More families are able to experience the full benefit of our facilities—from fitness classes to adult events—while our children's activities take place simultaneously," says Reed.

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Recent paired events have included a simultaneous kids/adults' night out and father/child campouts with Mommy Mixers. For the holidays, the club will hold a seasonal children's craft class with an adult wine and wreath-making event. "This allows for great partnership within all areas of the country club," Reed adds.

To maintain a secure environment during an active social calendar, a 24-hour camera surveillance system in the Playhouse and the club's fitness facilities keeps a close eye on the latest goings on. Members are required to sign their children in and out of the Playhouse via a single entry, and must stay on the property so they can be accessed by phone at any time.

With this arrangement in place for the past two years, the Providence Playhouse has proved to be a win-win for parents and children alike. "The members are excited to have a safe place for their children to be entertained, educated and supervised while they are enjoying the club's other amenities," says Murphy. "And the children look forward to seeing the staff and enjoying a space of their own."

This symbiotic relationship, he adds, has also translated into greater enrollment for Providence's summer-camp programming, and larger participation for other special events at the club.

The Kids Are Alright

Members of The Country Club at DC Ranch in Scottsdale, Ariz., need not rely on the swimming pool alone to keep their kids cool in the desert sun. On the heels of a 2015 clubhouse renovation, DC Ranch's Board conducted a series of town-hall meetings to decide what improvement projects would be best.

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The result was two kids' club facilities, which were unveiled this past May to wide acclaim. "Indoor space was key for our hot Arizona summer," says Director of Membership and Marketing Melanie Halpert. "Now we have double the amount of camps and activities for the kids."

Complementing the club's family-friendly amenities that include a resort-style pool, a casual family-dining facility and two large event lawns, the kids' clubs are in close proximity and designed for different age groups. The Corral is aimed at ages 10 and under and is fully staffed, while the Hideout is tailored to teens and tweens as a space where, as Halpert describes, "older kids can hang out with their friends in a cool and laid-back atmosphere."



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The Corral features modular furniture and spill-resistant carpeting and is stocked with board games, a costume area and open space for play. The Hideout (see photo above) exudes a more relaxed style, with a large sofa that can be moved around, an oversized television set for video game-playing, plug-in areas for charging electronic devices, and arcade games offering golf, air hockey and shuffleboard.

Because the kids' spaces are near DC Ranch's pool facility, ensuring a secure environment was paramount to the design. In addition to gates around the pool with access-code entry, the event lawns are gated and separated from the pool area—a safety measure the club did not have previously. "Kids can now exit the kids' rooms and play on the lawns without the threat of an ungated pool," notes Halpert. Both the Corral and Hideout are also outfitted with security cameras.

The decision to offer kids' areas that keep young members close by, while still giving them their own space, has proved to be a valuable addition. In a recent member survey, DC Ranch earned a 95 percent satisfaction rate regarding its new facilities. Halpert believes this is a testament to the club's continued emphasis on family, and is something that distinguishes DC Ranch from other area facilities.

"Today, we have generations of families who live in the Scottsdale area, and grandparents and parents all want to be together in one place," she explains. "While they are dining, working out or playing golf, their kids are well taken care of."

A Place to Call Their Own

At Racine (Wis.) Country Club, the club's youngest members have always had good participation in kids' programming, but until recently did not have a separate play space of their own. But after deciding to repurpose a room previously used as a fitness area, management debuted the newly renovated KidZone in February 2017.

Located in the clubhouse's lower level just off the grill room, the KidZone is primarily used as a play area designed for ages 12 and under. (While there is no set age requirement for the area, children under age 4 must be accompanied by a parent.) Painted walls in a rainbow of colors are complemented by carpet squares of varying colors and styles. "That really sets the space off," notes General Manager John Schneider, PGA.

Overhead, light covers featuring designs that shine through when illuminated add to the playful atmosphere. Beanbag chairs are interspersed with varying sizes of tables and other chairs, where kids can immerse themselves in a game of dominoes or checkers, build with blocks, or color. A giant chalk board, beanbag toss and Twister game board are available for kids' unplugged play, or they can use the club's Wii or Xbox machines.

The relaxed vibe of this open-play space gives kids free rein and is not constricted by any set hours of operation. "If a child wants to use the play area, it is open," adds Schneider. Staff members periodically check on the room and are able to contact parents should any problems arise. So far, no safety or behavioral issues have come up, but safety cameras have been installed as an extra precaution.

Since the KidZone has been added at Racine CC, both parents and children have come to benefit from its usefulness. "After two years, usage has exceeded our expectations," says Schneider. "The parents really like it



because the kids have a place to go when they come for dinner. We have seen family usage of our dining increase because the kids have a place to have fun.”

Fully Furnished *and* Functional

Creating a space reserved for kids isn't merely about putting some games in a room or hosting an occasional movie night. Tailoring these facilities to a club's youngest members in an effective and permanent fashion means designing them in a way that appeals to their sense of fun, while also making them manageable for your staff. Managers from clubs that have successfully developed kids' areas shared these easy-as-child's-play tips for how to do it right:

• **Ensure a kid-safe and kid-friendly design.** “Convertible spaces allow for special activities, from magic shows to playing games,” says Howard S. Murphy, Jr., CCM, General Manager of Providence Country Club in Charlotte, N.C.

“Storage for all supplies is imperative, and the use of simple products without multiple parts is important.” Selecting furnishings that can be easily cleaned and with removable covers minimizes upkeep. And for simple, yet personal decorative elements, consider featuring “local artists” by using kids’ artwork. “It is amazing how well a piece of children’s art can be displayed if nicely framed on the wall,” says Melanie Halpert, Director of Membership and Marketing of The Country Club at DC Ranch in Scottsdale, Ariz.

While those for whom the space is intended should have plenty of input for how kids' areas are designed and what they offer, having qualified staff on hand will ensure full comfort levels for parents and management, too.

• **Appeal to a variety of interests and skill sets.** Stock up on supplies and products that are boredom-busters and imagination boosters. “Board games, books and Legos foster member and staff interaction,” says Kym Reed, Providence CC’s Fitness and Activities Director. “Game stations that allow for ‘brain breaks’ and online streaming of movies, for nights when tired kids need to unwind and relax in a fluffy bean bag chair, can also be an advantage.”

• **Select qualified staff.** Hiring staff that has prior experience in child care is a plus. “Members want to know their children are in good hands, so invest in people,” says Halpert. And as members’ use of your kids’ space increases, consider employing a point person to manage personnel. “Hiring a professional director was imperative to ensuring proper safety and liability concerns,” says Murphy. “This key role also helps us to continue to develop more programming.”

• **Focus on customer satisfaction.** When determining how best to create buzz for your new space, it pays to go right to the source. “Ask the kids what they want; they will tell you,” says John Schneider, PGA, General Manager of Racine (Wis.) Country Club. And retaining the interest of both the kids, and their parents, will ensure steady traffic and repeat visitors over the long haul. “It is key to have frequent communications with the members regarding their experiences, and then to use that feedback to manage expectations,” says Murphy.

Summing It Up

- > Creating a separate space for kids’ activities in close proximity to adult dining and fitness areas helps to provide a complete family environment.
- > Furnishings that are well-designed, durable and easy to clean make for effortless maintenance.
- > Hiring and training qualified and dedicated staff promotes security and safety for parents’ peace of mind.

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