

Clubs, Resorts Invest in Expanded Pool Complexes

By Pamela Brill | January 28, 2020



Timuquana Country Club

Club and resort properties are increasing the value and appeal of their pool facilities with family-focused water features, dining options and made-in-the-shade seating.



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CLUB AND RESORT CHEF

A refreshing dip on a hot day, capped off by an icy-cold beverage served poolside. Watching the kids frolic and play in the water, while turning the pages of the latest beach read.

No longer a fantasy, these scenarios represent real-life member and guest experiences, as more club and resort properties expand the space devoted to their pool complexes and make the investments needed to turn them into full-fledged outdoor oases. From pools that boast zero-entry access for young families, to those that offer dining with expanded food-and-beverage options, more and more facilities are finding ways to keep members satisfied, both in and out of the water.

All Hands on Deck

At Timuquana Country Club in Jacksonville, Fla., an outdated pool was long overdue for a facelift. Originally built in 1965, the facility featured an L-shaped pool with a diving board, a baby pool, and a snack bar with limited food-and-beverage options.

General Manager Greg Sheara describes the refreshed complex as “a more contemporary and functional one that allows members to take full advantage of the club’s frontage along the St. Johns River.” Unveiled to members last May, the \$3.5 million project is complete with new amenities designed to please swimmers and landlubbers alike.



“Many new and prospective members have noted the new pool amenities and increased access to family-friendly activities as helping to contribute to their decision to join the club.” — Greg Sheara, General Manager at Timuquana Country Club in Jacksonville, Fla.

While the pool’s footprint remains intact at 5,437 sq. ft., the design team opted to utilize the surrounding space. Expanding west into the club’s parking lot enabled an expanded deck and the ability to comply with code requirements for an updated zero-entry pool.

“We had little deck space with capacity for only 30 lounge chairs, few shaded areas to get out of the hot Florida summer days, and a snack bar that lacked the equipment to create a full-service menu,” says Sheara, adding that members typically ordered food to-go from the casual dining facility in the clubhouse, or dined poolside.

By increasing decking capacity by a whopping 200 percent, the new design has doubled its seating capacity and accommodates large cantilever umbrellas and a shaded pavilion, along with a 60-seat, full-serve bar and kitchen (dubbed The Grove). The zero-entry pool—boasting interactive fountains—offers a safe, entertaining alternative for young families, while six heated lap lanes provide dedicated space for serious swimmers.

During the course of construction, the club was faced with a tight timeline that required use of the grounds in April for the USGA’s U.S. Women’s Amateur Four-Ball Tournament. Although the project experienced delays as the result of a busy building season, the majority of the work was completed ahead of the tournament, with finishing touches to The Grove done post-event.

Since the Memorial Day weekend opening, Timuquana’s membership has been restored to pre-2008 levels. Sheara is also enthused by The Grove’s contribution to increased revenues, citing a seasonal income of \$250,000 and gross profit of \$13,000. “Many new and prospective members have noted the new pool amenities and increased access to family-friendly activities as helping to contribute to their decision to join the club,” he says.



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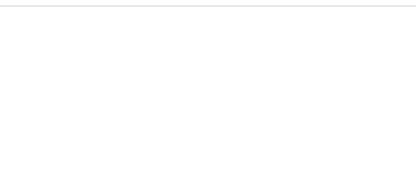


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Full Makeover

Much like Timuquana's, the original pool (circa 1957) at the Philadelphia Country Club (PCC) in Gladwyne, Pa., had been relatively untouched over the years and warranted a full-scale renovation. "We felt that private club amenities are now compared to resort-style pools in terms of member expectations," says General Manager Janine Budzius, CCM, CCE, of the decision to upgrade the club's pool complex.



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—Janine Budzius, General Manager at Philadelphia Country Club in Gladwyne, Pa.

After compiling feedback from its Board of Governors, staff and pool renovation committee, the club underwent a \$3 million construction project that incorporated family and competitive swim features, extensive food-and-beverage options and outdoor seating. The result was an expanded layout that added 1,850 sq. ft. to its now-10,130-sq.-ft. pool and an extra 4,500 sq. ft. of decking.

To achieve these results, designers completely restructured the facility's primary spaces to maximize ease of use. "We felt that the best pool design and safety practices [were to] locate the wading pool and shallow end of the main pool adjacent to the entrance, locker rooms and food service, which was the opposite of our existing facility," explains Budzius.

Diving was relocated to a newly constructed diving well, so as not to interfere with lap swimming or food-and-beverage service. Although the club's Citrus Tree casual-dining venue was not part of the redesign, a new 12-seat, full-service bar and adult lounge area were added.

To further enhance the pool's family-friendliness, the redesigned configuration includes a zero-entry design, play spray features and an underwater seating area. Designers chose to relocate the toddler pool zone to the shallow end, just off the club's Summer House complex that houses the Citrus Tree, men's and ladies' locker rooms, lounge and retail shop. Refurbished cabanas offer a dedicated place for sunbathers to take a break in the shade, while keeping a close eye on little ones in the pool.

With its first full season under its belt, the club has reaped the benefits of record-high guest fees and food-and-beverage revenues. "The ability to heat the pool extended the season into September weekends and gave us a competitive advantage over local clubs," notes Budzius.

She is also pleased with member feedback solicited at the end of season, with compliments that range from tennis players who enjoyed a post-game, poolside cocktail, to parents of a 6-month-old whose baby enjoyed the water all summer long. "Our new resort-style pool is now an additional amenity on our campus for multi-generations of families to enjoy together," Budzius says.

Five-Star Amenity

The pool at the University Club of MSU (Michigan State University) in Lansing, Mich., has seen its fair share of usage since members took their first swim back in 1970. Nearly 50 years later following the pool's installation, the well-honed facility that had only been intermittently patched and repaired was more than ready for a massive overhaul. "By 2014, we knew the pool had to be our top priority for capital improvements," says CEO & General Manager Karen L. Grannemann, CCM.



After initially deciding to maintain the existing pool shell and then realizing the potential cost restrictions, management ultimately decided to start fresh and create an entirely new facility. Using input from a member- and staff-based Backyard Master Plan Task Force and with a \$2.4 million budget in hand, construction kicked off in September 2017 and wrapped just in time for the pool's opening the following July.



"We frequently see members coming to the pool in street clothes to sit under the shade structure and read a book, which has significantly increased pool check-ins, food-and-beverage sales and member engagement." —Karen L. Grannemann, CEO & General Manager at University Club of MSU in Lansing, Mich.

Retaining its original location just off the clubhouse, the newly designed pool increased its footprint by 10 percent (from 4,782 to 5,256 sq. ft.) to accommodate a large zero-depth entry. Pool decking grew by 21 percent—from 20,109 to 24,339 sq. ft.—and included an upper deck "for those wanting to be a little removed from the poolside activities," explains Grannemann.

To better appeal to younger (and older) members, the pool features zero-depth entry with three water features and five waterspouts. This area is particularly popular with young families and senior members who have difficulty using stairs. "It is so gratifying to watch people sit in several inches of water with a baby, while an older member enters the pool using their walker," says Grannemann.

An underwater bench, adjacent to the lap lanes, offers a prime respite for those keeping a watchful eye on young swimmers. "This has completely eliminated our previous challenge of parents taking chairs into the kiddie pool, so they could sit in the water," Grannemann adds.

Adults can also enjoy some undisturbed time in the former kiddie pool area, which has been transformed into a generously sized hot tub. A fire pit with comfortable seating and a large shade structure complete the scene for this private getaway.

"We frequently see members coming to the pool in street clothes to sit under the shade structure and read a book, which has significantly increased pool check-ins, food and beverage sales and member engagement," notes Grannemann. (Plans for enhanced outdoor dining, a poolside snack bar, tiki bar, pickleball courts, a playground and youth building are part of a future development phase.)

While construction plans originally were moving along swimmingly, the team ran into some unforeseen delays, courtesy of Mother Nature. Heavy rains and local flooding were responsible for the area's wettest February on record and persisted into late spring. "By mid-April, we all reluctantly acknowledged that we could not meet our opening date of early June, even if the rains stopped and we had perfect weather," says Grannemann. "So our team went to work, making sure our members had access to the swimming facilities they were expecting and paying for." The club contacted nine area pools and paid guest fees for members to use the facility of their choosing.

Despite a few grumblings, most of the club's members were unfazed by the inconvenience. And Grannemann believes this minor hiccup actually served to improve the club's reputation in the long run. "The unintended consequences of this adversity were that it strengthened our brand in the local community, impressed many people with our dedication to member service regardless of the obstacles, and made our

members even more grateful for the facilities we provided them,” she notes. Extending the pool’s season an extra three weeks also assuaged any discomfort.

With any setbacks now firmly in its rearview mirror, the University Club of MSU has welcomed a number of young families to its facility. Pool check-ins have nearly quadrupled, snack bar sales have doubled and poolside cocktail service has tripled. “Comments like ‘You hit a home run’ and ‘I feel like I’m at a five-star resort’ are commonplace,” says Grannemann of the overwhelmingly positive feedback.

“Meeting” the Demand

For clubs that host regular swim-team meets, a facility that offers plenty of space and top-notch amenities can provide a competitive edge over neighboring venues, and maximize the revenue opportunities those events can generate.



When redesigning its pool facility, Philadelphia Country Club added a 25-year short course for its swim team and added a state-of-the-art AV system that also adds a new source of enjoyment for regular pool users.

At the Philadelphia Country Club in Gladwyne, Pa., accommodating the junior swim program and competitive swim team were top of mind when it came to re-designing the club’s pool facility. In addition to adding a 25-yard short course for the swim team, the club maintained its traditional Olympic-sized pool for 50-meter long-course swimming. As an enhancement to swim-meet acoustics, a state-of-the-art AV system was also included, “to make announcing and listening to music more enjoyable in the new facility,” says General Manager Janine Budzius.

To support the robust water polo team at Timuquana Country Club in Jacksonville, Fla., increased storage facilities were an essential component of the revamped pool complex.

Housing water-polo nets, inflatable movie-night screens and other equipment, this addition has enabled the club to better serve its recently expanded recreational and aquatic programming.

Other large-scale events at Timuquana include adult master’s swimming, polar bear-plunge events and youth swimming developmental teaching programs. “These programs, coupled with design enhancements, have been successful in creating new experiences for our members,” says General Manager Greg Sheara.

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