

Winning Strategies

Facility Trends in Today's Clubs

Keeping up with the Jones's



The Country Club of Virginia's Multimillion Dollar Aquatics Center

During the club boom of the 1990's to the mid 2000's, clubs attempted to make a statement with their clubhouses and golf courses. Other amenities also grew in prominence, including aquatic and fitness facilities centered on lifestyle and family activities. In 2008 the industry tucked their tail between their legs and went into survival mode and for good reason. Membership loss, due to economic conditions, put significant stress on financial bottom lines.

Today there is a dwindling population of potential new club members to replace those leaving. The competition is stiff in most markets to just maintain membership levels. Clubs are re-examining their brand within the marketplace.

In the old days when a man wanted to join a club, it was because of the course or because that was where his friends played golf. That pattern changed in the past two decades. Families make club decisions together. What does the club offer for both spouses and the kids as well? What are the activities that the family can do together?

This concept blended well with the fact that many clubs had compaction issues on the course or just did not want any new players that may impact the enjoyment of the existing golfing population. However, they had plenty of room for more social activity. To that end they expanded fitness, junior activities, family programming, and casual dining. Clubs offered new athletic and social membership as a revenue generation tool.

For the past few years, many clubs have postponed major capital investment. Today, more and more clubs are revisiting the master planning process and embracing facility enhancements that continue the earlier trends. Many recent club surveys have targeted pool and fitness needs. It is amazing how many facility enhancement programs target aquatics, fitness, spa, and al fresco dining, as well as specialty spaces like wine rooms, sports bars, and display kitchens.

Traditional country clubs are also expanding programming into more and more formerly non-traditional activities that were developed by city, athletic or resort clubs. The following seem to be commonplace in many progressive clubs:

1. Cultural road trips or in club cultural activities, such as member art displays
2. Family overnight campouts on the golf course
3. Fishing rodeos
4. Symphony/jazz concerts on the lawn
5. Cooking/decorating classes
6. A movement into wellness activities including unique things like acupuncture
7. Addition of health bars
8. Services such as car detailing, laundry services, and barber shops
9. Expansion of old favorites such as wine societies, beer clubs, bridge, and book clubs
10. Junior activities such as olympics, sleepovers, dodgeball tournaments, tumbling for tykes, martial arts camp, splish/splash camp

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Wine Room at Atlanta Athletic Club
we travel around country, see many clubs setting a standard

programming that adds member value and positions the club to compete in a competitive market. Those managers with foresight are keeping up with the trends and setting examples for the industry. Unfortunately there are still a great number of clubs that are not seeing the light so-to-speak.

The key to having a proper facilities focus is to have a comprehensive strategic plan in place. The key to having an effective plan is to have an effective plan management system that insures progress towards goals and objectives. The hardest thing for clubs to accomplish seems to be dedication and focus on the strategic plan. We ask all the time why clubs spend time planning and then seem to abandon the work. They chase rabbit trails and lose focus.

It can be quite simple. A club board needs to manage strategically through the plan. And if that plan is complete, it provides not only strategic but also operating goals and objectives to manage through the general manager. A good strategic plan should have a goal of having a complete facilities master plan that identifies capital needs. However, it is through strategic planning that the facilities direction is set. It determines how capital can be developed and or future debt retired.

For managers who want a more thorough discussion of industry trends, join us for the “Keeping Up With the Jones’s” seminar at the 2013 CMAA conference in San Diego.