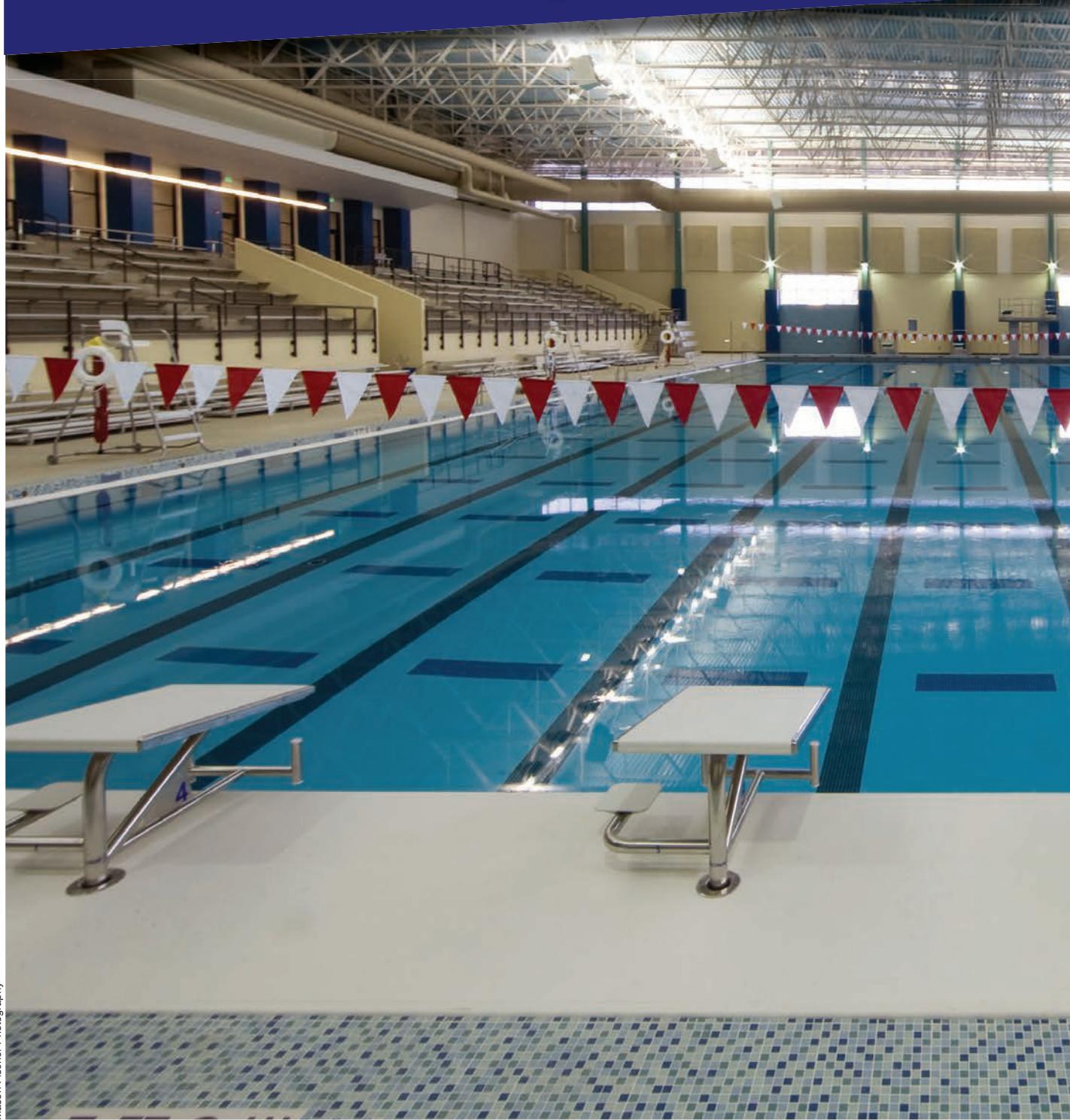




everything H2O

The Modern Competition Pool



Mason Fischer Photography



Revenue-generating programming for all hours of the day

BY TRAVIS STENSBY

If you've seen one competition pool, have you seen them all? While many pools today seem identical, the face of competition pools in the United States is changing.

A competitive swimmer born in the 1970s or 1980s probably swam most of his or her biggest meets on a major university campus—especially if one lived in the Midwest. Major meets were held at the University of Minnesota, the University of Texas, and even the University of Nebraska. Today, swimmers can compete at Southern Methodist University, at the Birmingham CrossPlex in Alabama, at St. Peters Rex Plex in Missouri, or at the Tupelo Aquatic Center in Mississippi. More and more pools are owned and operated by school districts, municipalities, private swim clubs, and individuals. The face of the modern swimming pool has changed.

Why are so many city governments and private organizations spending dollars on competition swimming pools? It's well known that water in any form is a great selling point for a community, but the biggest difference in today's market is the realization that a natatorium can be sustainable.

The key driver in this change has been sustainability. With creative programming, these facilities can help offset operating expenses and be a value-added asset to a community.

The Birmingham CrossPlex in Alabama is well known for hosting competitive swimming events.

The Modern Competition Pool

How is this possible? With revenue generated strategically, the average competition natatorium that is normally busy during post-school hours can be filled with activity throughout the day. Also, with strategic partnerships, natatoriums can target the right types of events and capitalize on all forms of revenue. Here are some ideas that help make this possible:

- Swim lessons
- Water-fitness programming
- Physical therapy
- Partnerships
- Meet revenue
- Economic impact
- For-profit swim teams
- Element of a complete recreational center
- Recreational water

Swim Lessons

The key to any facility's sustainability is a good lesson program. These programs create recurring memberships and provide a larger per-hour revenue generator than swim teams. Lessons also help fill the facility during the day-time hours as lessons can be offered to part-time, school-age kids and school programs. Some overlap might occur during the popular after-school hours, but a properly planned and designed facility can accommodate both swim teams and lesson programs at the same time, with relatively low impact on operating expenses.

Water-Fitness Programming

One of the significant off-peak-hour events to help generate revenue is water fitness. With the overall fitness market continuing to grow, water fitness has been an expanding trend. The term water fitness might mean different things to different people. Typically, water fitness includes water-aerobics classes, but may also include programming such as Water Zumba, a modern version of





Shannon Sheridan

water aerobics, with pop music and choreographed movements. Other areas include water-running training for marathon teams, water-fitness boot camp classes, and cross-training space for basketball, football, and soccer conditioning. Marketing this time and space can pay dividends in the end-of-year balance sheet.

Physical Therapy

Yet another way to fill the daytime hours of an aquatic center is joining with a physical-therapy professional to offer water physical therapy. Some facilities offer areas of water solely for physical therapy. Many physical-therapy activities can take place in an aquatic environment designed for swim lessons and also in a competitive swim

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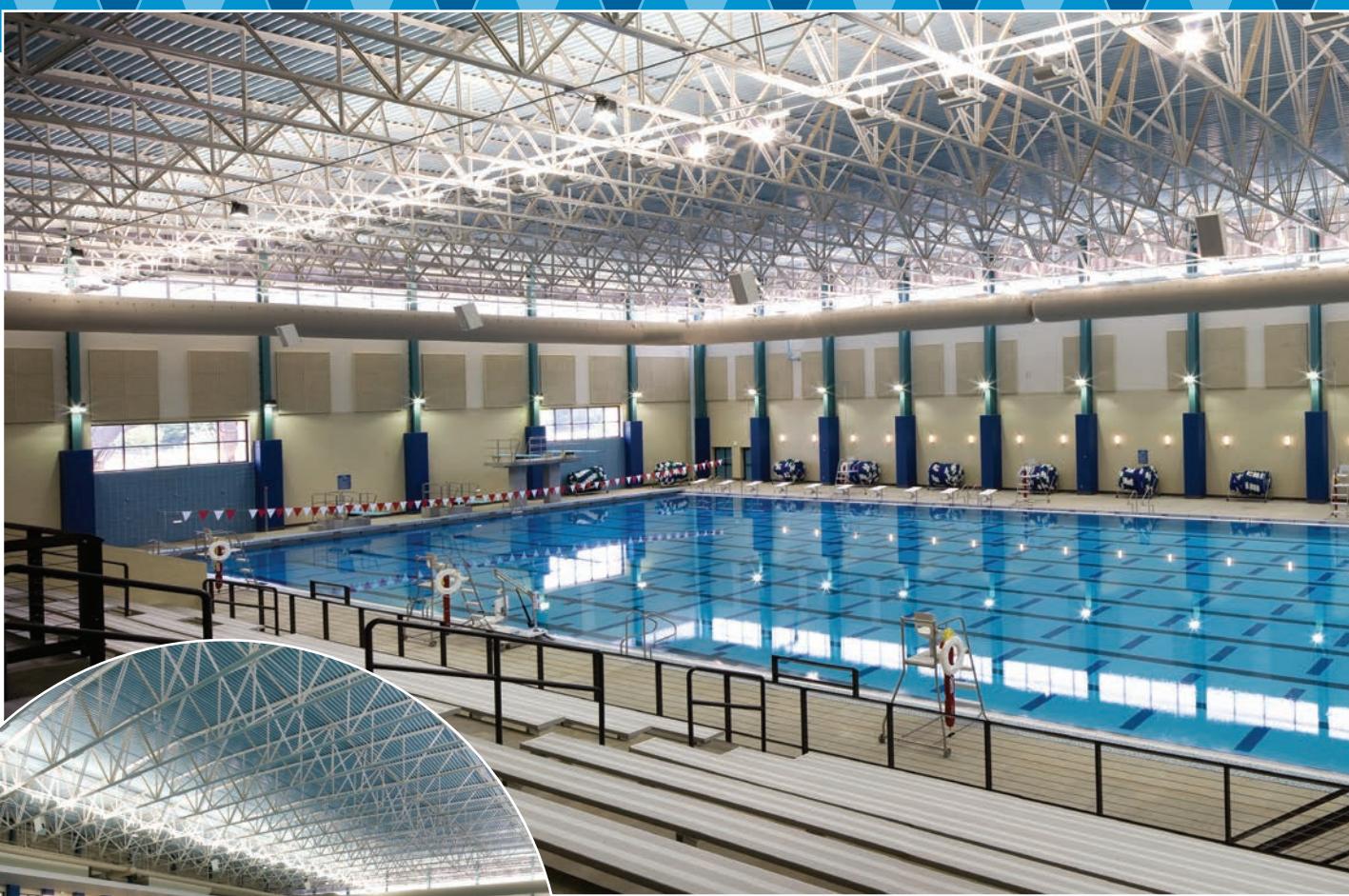
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The Modern Competition Pool

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cities, school districts, hospitals, and swim teams are all joining forces to create aquatic centers that meet the needs of the community. Modern competition facilities might include special dedicated water for community hospitals.

Pools that were historically used for warm-up/cool-down are now designed as multi-use spaces that can offer YMCA/Red Cross lesson programming and water-fitness programming during the day. Every partnership is unique, as some partners might bring upfront capital to the project, while others supply operating expertise or guaranteed revenue.

environment. Water treadmills and water bikes can be added to a “lesson pool” as part of a physical-therapy design for rehabilitating many different types of injuries.

Partnerships

The modern competition pool, as part of a complete aquatic facility, brings together many organizations. YMCAs,

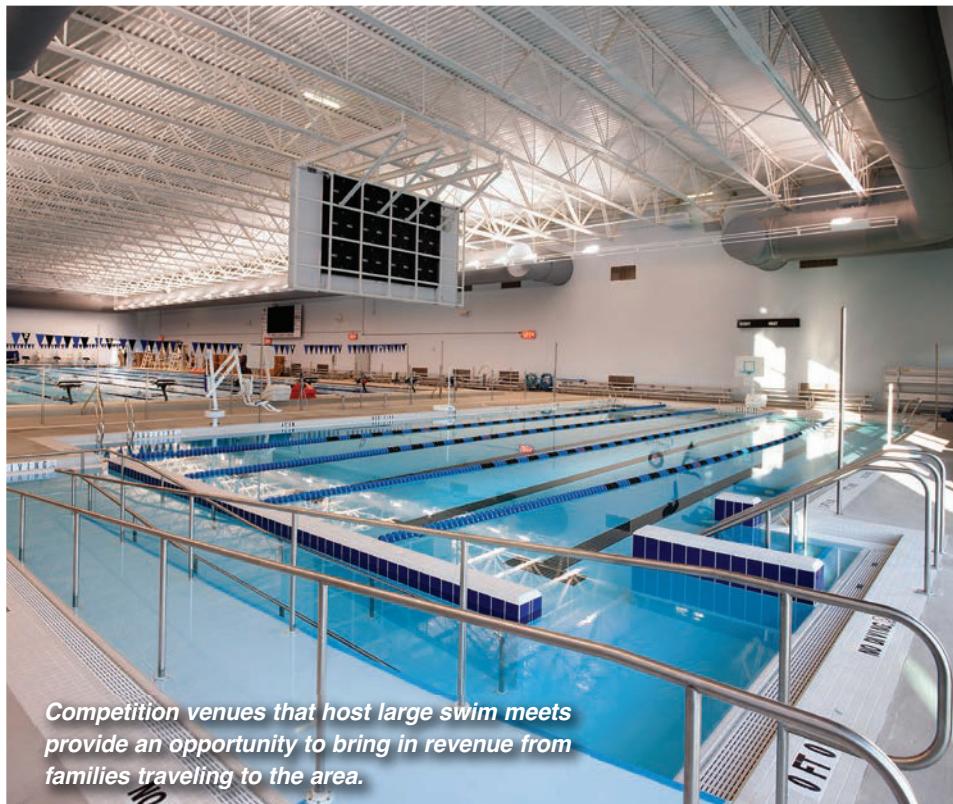
Meet Revenue

Renting out a competition facility for swim meets is a straightforward

revenue source. However, some of the biggest revenue-generating meets do not have to be the most high-profile meets. Hosting a local summer-league championship can be a big revenue generator, especially if the facility is able to retain revenue from concessions, T-shirt and equipment sales, parking, and entrance fees.

Economic Impact

This is an important buzzword in today's business environment. Providing a competition pool for events and programming is more than offering a service to the community. Competition venues provide an opportunity to host large swim meets or water-polo matches that bring in teams from across the nation. These traveling teams will purchase hotel rooms, food and beverage, and entertainment while they are in town, bringing more



Competition venues that host large swim meets provide an opportunity to bring in revenue from families traveling to the area.

revenue into the city and the aquatic program. Partnering with local businesses can help pay for the costs of hosting such a large event.

For-Profit Swim Teams

The changing face of the modern swim team is changing the face of the modern competition pool. National youth athletics have changed greatly since the 1960s. That world was filled with volunteer coaches and refs, and a swimmer was lucky to get a matching team uniform. Today, the swimming community is filled with professional coaches and head-to-toe uniforms from major athletic-apparel brands. These businesses contribute large rental fees to facilities, or may even allow a team to purchase its own facility.

Recreational Centers

While recreational centers are not a completely new element of

competition pools, they have always been a key financial component of making competitive water self-sustaining. The revenue generated on the “dry side” and the shared expenses of management help create a sustainable bottom line.

Recreational Water

Along with recreation centers, recreation water has also been a key in offsetting operational expenses of competition water. Activities like “Swim-in Movies,” climbing walls, and inflatable water features can change competition water into temporary recreational water to help create other revenue streams.

The Next Wave

The face of competition pools has changed greatly in the last 30 years, especially in the last 10 to 15 years. Obviously, the face of the competition

pool will evolve further. For-profit swim centers and the idea of elite training centers are developing in today’s competitive swimming market. **PRB**

Travis Stensby, Project Manager for Counsilman-Hunsaker, is responsible for the design and engineering of commercial aquatic venues. His expertise and understanding of the aquatic industry provide practical, cost-effective, and efficient designs in dealing with the requirements of aquatic programs. Stensby is a graduate of Missouri University of Science and Technology with a degree in Mechanical Engineering and a Master's Degree in Business Administration. Travis is a former collegiate athlete as well as a former swim coach.

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