

RECREATION MANAGEMENT

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Trends in Multipurpose Facilities

By Deborah L. Vence

Multipurpose recreation facilities offer a little something for everyone. Exercise classes for fitness buffs, water therapy for seniors, sports such as basketball and soccer for youth, and even a library for reading enthusiasts.

Over time, multipurpose facilities have grown in popularity, with design elements continuing to expand. You can often find exercise components, health screening, nutrition programs and social spaces in one facility.

Many interesting trends are emerging in multipurpose facility design today.

"With wellness, we're seeing more communities and colleges create recreation buildings that address wellness on all fronts: physical, mental, emotional, preventive health, etc.," said Colleen McKenna, principal, leader of CannonDesign Sports Practice.

"Where recreation buildings of the past may have been predominantly about spaces for weights, cardio and a gymnasium area, today's recreation centers can include areas for counseling, health screening, demonstration kitchens, nutrition education and much, much more," she said. "This is exciting for architects and designers, but also important as it translates to healthier individuals, families and communities. I anticipate even further integration of health, recreation and wellness in the years ahead."

In addition, more cities and colleges are teaming up to create recreation spaces. "We've had two projects recently open that were partnerships between a city and a nearby university," McKenna said. "They share the investment, and then share the space for programming and resources. This shift toward public plus private funding helps ease the financial burden for both parties and ensures these important spaces are built to advance health and wellness."

When asked if multipurpose design is changing, McKenna said, "definitely."

"Just as multipurpose design is evolving, so, too, is the world of architecture and design," she said. "Our team is currently creating a multipurpose facility for the University of Southern Indiana that blends recreation and athletics components, and we've used virtual reality throughout the design process. That's something we could never have done five or 10 years ago."

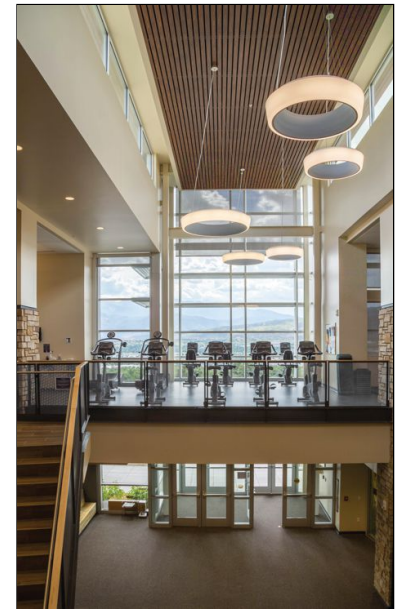


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Design Trends

"So, given these shifts in how we design, and the spaces we're designing, the look and feel inherently evolves, too," she said. "We're pushing new boundaries with how we shape buildings. We understand the health and sustainability value of different materials, and that impacts what we use in the interior environments. We leverage environmental graphics and wayfinding much more than in the past—it all adds up," she said.

"Furthermore, the integration of new wellness components means it's not uncommon to walk by a kitchen space or a nap room on one's way to the treadmill in some of today's recreation centers. That's a new and exciting reality," she added.

Troy Sherrard, FAIA, NCARB, LEED AP BD+C, partner, practice leader, sports and recreation architecture, Moody Nolan, said that "recreation facilities will become more integrated, more diverse and more complex in the future. Future-ready facilities are now based on a hybrid functionality design mindset with the focus on 'holistic wellness.'"

"'Opportunity and wellness' centers, as we refer to such facilities, are more impactful and alive when integrated with say, healthy dining, nutrition, academic, workspace, wellness, healthcare, social spaces, gaming commons, community meeting, events, etc., program spaces," he said.

Stephen Springs, AIA, senior principal at Brinkley Sargent Wiginton Architects, an architectural firm based in Dallas, said "co-location has been growing in popularity for some time, but co-usage is a much more innovative idea. It takes progressive departments to be so willing to work together to share spaces, but it makes sense when it comes to saving dollars (both capital and operational)."

He said it's "also great for the community in that it allows 'one-stop shopping.'"

"All members of the family can be served at the same location. They can also be exposed to programs that they wouldn't otherwise know existed," Springs said. "For example, a grandparent at the facility for water therapy might see a program that they would like to bring their grandkid to. Likewise, a teenager doing their homework at the library may discover a recreation program to sign up for. There are many examples of such synergies."

While the concept of having co-location isn't necessarily a new idea, what's different is having those "different entities cooperating together program-wise," Springs explained.

He noted a new project that his company recently broke ground on in Arlington, Texas, which combines a branch library, recreation center and a senior center.

The new East Arlington Recreation Center and Library at Bob Cooke Park is a collaborative project between the Parks and Recreation and Libraries departments. The co-facility will replace the existing Hugh Smith Recreation Center and the East Branch Library. The 47,249-square-foot facility is set to open in the fall of 2020, according to information from the Arlington, Texas, government website.



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"With respect to recreation centers, the latest trends are that more often, every program space is being required to be multipurpose in nature. With facilities under pressure to bolster cost recovery, the more hours out of a day spaces are being used, the ability to reach that goal increases," noted David Sprague, senior design principal, Ohlson Lavoie Collaborative, Denver.

He said that it's "No big surprise, but gyms during 'dark hours' are being used for pickleball, badminton and group exercise classes. Group exercise rooms are no longer specialized. They can accommodate many different class sizes and types in one area. Even traditional meeting/community rooms are being programmed as classrooms of all types and party facilities."

"Similarly, the same holds true of aquatic facilities," Sprague said. "Competitive pools, which are historically very low on the cost-recovery totem pole, are now being viewed as multi-use in nature. Slides, climbing walls, raised areas in the center for aqua-aerobics, and floatables are a few elements that are finding their way into competitive venues to get more activity into the environment. Designers are creating individual bodies of water within leisure pools that can be used for learn-to-swim, sport pools, recreational swim and exercise/therapy."

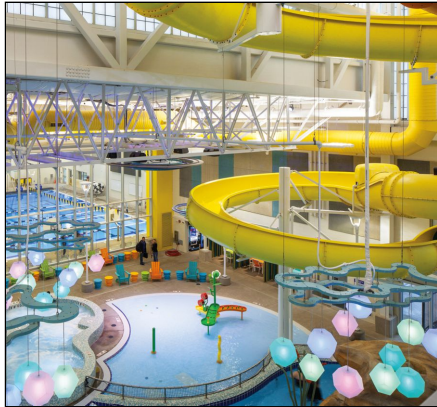


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Kevin Armstrong, AIA, LEED AP, Barker Rinker Seacat Architecture, Denver, said that "The trend for multipurpose spaces has been growing for a while, bringing functional fitness into the traditional recreation environment. It started in the open fitness areas of recreation facilities and is making its way more and more into the group exercises spaces."

For example, Armstrong's company is completing a new community recreation center in Southlake, Texas, that will have a modular functional training rig within a small fitness studio, allowing the room to be more flexible, providing both traditional group fitness classes and functional fitness offerings.

"We are studying more and more concepts that bring in interactive and immersive fitness," Armstrong continued.

Also, "We are seeing the multipurpose nature of our centers move beyond physical health and exercise toward total wellness. Discussions regarding wellness and mindfulness are ever-increasing in the programming requests from recreation departments, community groups and city leaders. We have seen a desire to bring awareness to healthy eating and nutrition through teaching kitchens and community gardens," he said.

"Additionally, mental health and counseling spaces are more and more integrated into our projects," he added. "We are finding that the recreation center is more and more recognized as one of the cornerstones of the communities we work providing a broader and broader reach of services."

Common Elements

Strategy is a key ingredient to successful multipurpose facility design.

"There are so many different types of multipurpose facilities that can focus on different levels of community— athletics, recreation, wellness. Organizations need to understand their needs and goals before they start selecting specific types of spaces," McKenna said.

"With a sound strategy in place, communities and institutions can then really create beautiful, cost-effective buildings that drive value for their users and translate to health and wellness outcomes," she said.

Sherrard noted that "The spaces in-between the typical 'active' recreation program elements are just as important to focus on. Every square foot of a building comes with a cost and should be designed to create engagement or provide a desired experience. We see these spaces evolving into hybrid social spaces to foster community, social connectedness, to be mindful, play table tennis, to do your homework, have a smoothie, catch up on the news, etc."

Another common element seen more and more in multipurpose design is "aquatics," Springs said.

"We are seeing increasing demand for aquatic recreation for all types, lap swim (fitness), recreational water (kid parties and learn-to-swim) and therapeutic programming (driven by the older crowd)," he said.

Why is there more demand for this?

"We're seeing seniors ... baby boomers, who are requesting that," he said, adding that it can be a challenge for departments because the water tends to be warmer and certain depths are needed to do water aerobics, for example.

"A rapidly growing space type is 'maker-spaces,'" Springs said. "Creativity is demanding more of spaces than traditional arts & crafts rooms and pottery. These spaces can include wood-shop tools, metal-shop, 3-D printing, embroidery, music-making and so on. Technology continues to change the way we do everything, including being creative."

Meanwhile, Sprague said "Pickleball taking over in the 'dark hours' of traditional gym time is a recurrent theme.

"In fieldhouses," he said, "new flooring systems are being used where users can use both skates and inline skates on synthetic hockey rinks, as well as play a variety of sports, such as tennis and soccer, on the infield of an indoor competitive track."

As far as what the most important elements are, much of a space's ability to accommodate multiple uses is dependent upon choosing flooring material that offers the best chance of success with many different kinds of activities.

"In a competitive indoor sport scenario, the ability to play off wall surfaces, and have a play area that meets allowances in size requirements, is also of key importance," Sprague said. "Divider nets that can subdivide a space into smaller compartments [are] also important, as well as providing a safe environment for non-compatible uses."

Armstrong said that "Common within all our multipurpose areas is the need to be flexible with quick conversion from one use to another. Maximizing program opportunities is conducted through a variety of facets":

- Making sure the layout is appropriate to the potential uses.
- Providing effective storage that is right-sized with a throughput that allows for the easy flow of users taking out and putting back equipment.
- Using the right types of materials and equipment to correlate to the intended uses of the space.

Multipurpose Design

McKenna said it's not uncommon for the team at CannonDesign to be working on a dozen multipurpose facilities at any one time, noting three that, she said, really stand out.

For example, Virginia Tech is renovating and expanding its War Memorial Hall to set an exciting new standard for recreation and wellness integration on college campuses.

"The project unites their School of Education, Department of Human Nutrition, Foods and Exercise, Hokie Wellness, collegiate recreation and human performance under a singular roof to best help students lead healthy lives," she said.

The Brantford YMCA/Wilfrid Laurier University Recreation Complex is an example of a successful partnership between a local university and community. The new center revitalizes Brantford, Ontario's downtown and offers an aquatics center, dedicated spaces for children, a gymnasium with retractable stadium seating, health intake consultation rooms for specialized community-based healthcare programs and much more.



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In addition, at the University of Maryland, "Cole Fieldhouse is becoming an unrivaled multidisciplinary hub for sport, health, science, wellness and entrepreneurial education," McKenna said. "The project converts the historic Cole Field House basketball arena in the heart of campus into an indoor football practice facility, along with a Center for Sports Medicine and Human Performance, and Orthopedic Treatment Center and a new Academy for Innovation and Entrepreneurship."

Armstrong noted some other examples. "Functional fitness integrated within group exercises spaces," he said, "are found in our work at the Center of Recreation Excellence in Hobbs, N.M., and at the Eaton Area Community Center in Eaton, Colo. Both facilities include trusses in their ceilings for the integration of [suspension training] as well as well-organized storage for quick adaption for changeover between fitness classes."

On the subject of healthy eating and nutrition, Armstrong's firm designed a teaching kitchen at Moorhead Recreation Center in Aurora, Colo., that has glazed overhead doors that open on to an adjacent multipurpose meeting room.

"This allows for a variety of scale of classes, from a small, intimate experience to a larger gathering," he said.

"In terms of mental health and broader wellness, the UCCS Gallogly Recreation and Wellness Center is an integrated center that offers both student recreation and health services on the UCCS campus in Colorado Springs, Colo.," he said. "Providing these facilities together in a single facility is an ever-increasing topic within collegiate recreation, as it is seen as a means of improving the student experience and breaking down barriers for improving health and well-being."

"Special care was taken in the design to provide an experience for the students that does not stigmatize those that come to the facility for health care and counseling," he added.

In addition, Sprague noted Campbell County Recreation Center in Gillette, Wyo., which has an indoor competitive track that can host NCAA track meets, as well as tennis on the infield separated by divider curtains.

"The basketball courts directly adjacent can serve as queueing areas for athletes, so the fieldhouse is kept orderly during competitions," he said. "'The Neighborhood' in Rochester, Minn., is a smorgasbord of multi-use opportunities. Filled with batting cages, a multi-use sportwall 'gym,' which can accommodate a dozen different activities, to aeroball and mini-golf, this themed 'exertainment zone' is the epitome of what the heart and soul of multipurpose design is all about."



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