

Hot Stuff About Swimming Pools 2006

It's that time of year to begin preparing for summer activities, and, as in the previous four years, the December issue of *Public Management* offers this section on swimming pools owned and operated by local governments. In the July issue, managers were invited to share pool stories and photos. Here are the contributions the magazine received.

NEW BRAUNFELS, TEXAS

Nestled in the heart of New Braunfels, Texas (population 46,000), is a unique and natural beauty called Landa Park. Named for Harry Landa, who settled in New Braunfels in 1890, the 48-acre park is home to the headwaters of the Comal Springs, the largest natural springs in Texas and the entire southwest. A constant water temperature of 72 degrees attracts many to the clear, refreshing, gentle-flowing waters.

These springs are the waters that feed one of Landa Park's most exceptional and popular attractions, the spring-fed pool. The pool was built in the late 1800s and had originally operated as a company facility for Camp Placid. The pool, holding 1.5 million gallons of Comal Springs water, opened to the public for the first time in 1938.

In July 2005, *Texas Parks and Wildlife* magazine named the facility one of the top 10 swimming holes in Texas. Amenities at this attraction are several play features, including a rope swing, zip line, giant Wet Willie slide, docks, playscape, and a concreted play area with two slides and a mushroom waterfall. Not only does the spring-fed pool still have a natural bottom, it is also home to ducks, many kinds of fish and minnows, crawfish, and the fountain darter, a small fish that is an endangered species.

Although everything in Landa Park has its own unique and interesting story to tell,

nothing is more rewarding to hear than residents' fond memories of the pool from years ago, how much it has changed, and how much the facility means to them.

The history of this landmark is astonishing. The facility has been a magnet for corporate events, family memory making, and organized activities. One of my favorite stories is of a ladies' synchronized swim team that 60 years ago used to don their "swimming costumes" and perform patriotic routines at Fourth of July celebrations."

Stacey Laird, director of parks and recreation, noted, "Virtually every day guests in our Landa Park offices share stories of visiting the spring-fed pool as children and remembering their parents reminiscing about their own childhood visits to the crystalline waters. These same people are now bringing their grandchildren to New Braunfels for this unique experience."

Additions such as an olympic-size pool built in 1968 and, more recently, a zero-depth pool have formed the Landa Park Aquatic Complex. The complex is a public facility with a summer operating season, and it is home to the Landa Park Dolphins, a summer swim team organized more than 40 years ago.

With reasonable admission fees and such programs as swim lessons and junior lifeguard camp, this facility offers plenty to keep the kids learning, all while having fun. The Landa Park spring-fed pool is sure to be treasured and enjoyed by generations to come.

—Ashlea Boyle, aquatic coordinator,
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PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

The Peirce Island Outdoor Pool in Portsmouth, New Hampshire (population 21,000), is a Great Depression-era municipal facility that has served several generations during its 69-year history. The pool's unique location, storied past, and status as a beloved recreational asset make it distinctive.

The pool sits on a 27-acre mu-



The Landa Park's pool in New Braunfels, Texas, is spring fed and maintains a constant temperature of 72 degrees.

nicipally-owned island adjacent to Portsmouth's downtown. Purchased in 1923 for \$11,000, Peirce Island is a popular recreation asset that also offers a boat launch, a network of walking trails, shore access for fishing, a playground, a sand volleyball court, and picnic areas.

Built in 1937 by the federal Works Progress Administration, the pool is 100 feet wide. It slopes from 14 inches to maximum depth of 6 feet over its 300-foot length. Its location on the shore of the tidal Piscataqua River provides a unique view of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, as well as cargo ships, tugboats, and other watercraft traveling to and from the Atlantic Ocean.

When the city purchased Peirce Island in 1923, "a swimming pool or beach and a general playground for the people" were immediately envisioned. In 1944, a complete redesign of the pool was carried out, and by 1946, Mary Dondero, Portsmouth's mayor at the time, described it as the "finest swimming pool in New England" and one of her administration's highlights.

To fill the pool, the city opened sluice gates from the river to fill one-fourth of the pool, and then pumped in fresh water to complete the operation. This process was designed to preserve fresh water supplies and maintain water pressure. Silt and salt had a costly impact on the filtration

system, however, and the city abandoned this custom in the 1960s.

In the 1970s, pollution problems and a need for costly repairs forced the closure of the pool for several years. A fund for renovating the pool was established, and the pool reopened in 1979. It has operated continuously ever since.

Recent improvements to address environmental concerns have been made in and around the outdoor pool, including installation of a new skimmer system with piping to discharge pool water directly into the sanitary sewer system, stabilization of the adjacent shoreline, and installation of a state-of-the-art stormwater detention and treatment system in the parking area. These upgrades also included an extensive coastal cleanup by volunteers.

During the past decade, the pool has benefited from community investment of all types. The city council, recreation board, the Peirce Island Committee, several community organizations, and state and federal agencies have worked diligently to fund and carry out a variety of recreational improvements on Peirce Island. These have included council-approved, taxpayer-funded investments through the city's capital improvement program and grants from several state, federal, and local charitable organizations.

Today, the pool continues to be a



The Peirce Island Outdoor Pool in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, is located on a 27-acre municipally-owned island.

vibrant community gathering spot. The recreation department, under the direction of City Manager John P. Bohenko, is responsible for the pool's day-to-day management and programming. For nine weeks each summer, it is open every day and two evenings a week. Some 700 children enjoy the free swimming lessons offered to residents. Open swim times account for 24,000 visits, and an annual water carnival attracts 500 Portsmouth children. Weekly "Family Fun Nights" were added in 2006.

—David Moore, community development program manager, Portsmouth, New Hampshire (dmoore@ch.cityofportsmouth.com)

NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

Centennial Beach is the perfect melding of Naperville, Illinois's (population 138,000) rich history and traditions with today's need for staying cool despite the heat that a midwest summer can bring. The six-acre facility, which just celebrated a remarkable 75 years in the community, offers a sandy beach, long stretches of grassy picnic areas with large shade trees, and a large body of water—6.2 million gallons to be exact. The water starts at zero-depth and gradually makes its way up to 15 feet deep at the far end where a NCAA and USS-approved diving complex is situated.

Long-time residents call it their home away from home during the summer and these "Beach Bums" as they refer to themselves, can be found playing cards and catching up on the latest news around town. On any given day, kids take swim lessons or play a traditional game of pier tag, competitive swimmers practice for the Mudrats swim team, adults relax during adult float times, and swimmers of all skill levels test their mettle in the "deep water test."

Over the course of a season, weather permitting, Centennial Beach charms more than 155,000 visitors from Memorial Day through Labor Day. It closes its season each year with Doggie Dip—an event for people and their four-legged best friends to enjoy a day of swimming and fun. The 2006 event set record attendance of 1,065 dogs and their owners.

Visitors and new Naperville residents are always surprised and amazed by Centennial Beach and its uniqueness. The facility is also known for its exceptional life-guarding staff, which has won numerous industry awards for safety. In 2002, Centennial Beach was awarded the prestigious title of "Best Inland Beach" by *Chicago* magazine.

Naperville was a century old in 1931 when the former quarry property was purchased as a part of the city's

centennial celebration for \$16,500. Thirty-nine local citizens personally and willingly underwrote the cost of the land although, at the time, the Great Depression was having an impact not only in Naperville but around the world. Each member of the group contributed \$500 to purchase the 45-acre site in downtown Naperville near the West Branch of the DuPage River. The property was to commemorate a century of progress and was dedicated as a permanent memorial on June 6, 1931. Actual development of Centennial Beach as a swimming facility began in 1932.

In 1935, the limestone bathhouse was completed and the first Beach water show—also known as an "Aquathon"—was hosted to honor the completion of the structure. Recreations of this original Aquathon, including water skiing, diving, comedy ballet, and synchronized swimming were held in the 1940s and 1950s. The most recent Aquathon was hosted by the Naperville Park District in 2006 as a part of the Beach's 75th birthday celebration.

In later years, the large, double quarry was divided. One part of the quarry remained Centennial Beach while the other part became the paddleboat quarry. During the warmer weather months, visitors can rent a paddleboat for a trip around this portion of the historic quarry. It also is a popular place for catch-and-release fishing for small fish.

Renovations and improvements over the years have maintained the beloved community swimming facility. Each improvement, however, has been carefully planned and executed in order to maintain the historic nature and significance of Centennial Beach—an aspect that is of great importance to the community. In 2004, the Beach hosted a grand reopening of the facility after a nine-month renovation project, including the installation of new concrete decks, a new water circulation system, facility lighting, and new staircases leading to the bathhouse.

In 2007, Centennial Beach will welcome a new feature—a shallow

end slide. The funds used to purchase the slide were raised through the Bottom-feeder Ball event that was hosted by the park district in April 2006 as a part of the year-long birthday celebration. This black-tie event was held in the empty bottom of the quarry before it was filled for the swimming season. The slide that was selected has a rock face and a rustic look and will meld nicely with the historic facility while entertaining a whole new generation of Centennial Beach guests.

—Sameera Luthman, marketing and communications manager, Naperville Illinois (sluthman@napervilleparks.org)

SEWARD, NEBRASKA

The new Dowding Municipal Pool in Seward, Nebraska (population 6,800), opened on July 3, 2004, to rave reviews. Funds for the \$3.2 million pool project came from a \$2.9 million bond issue, a \$200,000 state grant, and more than \$100,000 in private donations.

This new aquatic facility, which has a 21,837 square-foot water surface area and holds 650,000 gallons of water, includes features for all ages and types of usage and has a capacity of 1,200 patrons. Pool features include a water slide, two diving towers, spring boards, lap swimming lanes, numerous water play features, a full concession stand, and an ADA-compliant bathhouse.

In addition to general public use, the new pool is used for birthday



A renovated pool that has been in operation for a remarkable number of years is Centennial Beach in Naperville, Illinois.

parties, evening functions, receptions, private pool parties, community events, and Red Cross swimming lessons.

Seward's former Dowding pool had served the community well for more than 80 years! Unfortunately, it had reached the point where it was no longer in compliance with current code and health regulations. The city made a concerted effort to provide the necessary pool maintenance and repairs; however, these efforts were becoming more costly and ineffective each year as the former pool was losing more than five million gallons of water a year through leakage.

The old pool, built in 1919, had been a source of pride and enjoyment for the residents of Seward and the surrounding area for many years. Featuring a unique round vessel design, the old pool had been a Seward landmark and one of the town's most popular attractions.

A Seward amusement association, consisting of local businessmen, decided to build a pool to provide children an alternative to swimming in the Blue River, where several of the town's youth had drowned. When the pool was built, a dance hall was constructed next to it. The dance hall was a popular gathering place and was the sight of many dances and social events for the Seward area.

Rehabilitating the original pool, as well as looking at the possibility of a new pool, was on the city's agenda for several years. Members of the citizen pool committee, in conjunction with the city council, city administration, and city staff, worked with engineers to address the future needs of the community. They wanted to enhance the quality of life for Seward's residents and also abide by federal ADA laws and state health regulations.

A local architectural and engineering firm was responsible for developing the new pool plan. It conducted several public forums and student surveys to gather input and gauge community interest.

The new pool is picking up where the old pool left off. Thousands of people have enjoyed the pool's improvements during the past two summers. A family pool pass that costs \$125 provides cool, low-cost fun for only slightly more than \$1.50 a day for the entire family. Once again, the Seward Dowding Municipal Pool is a shining star for the community.

—Daniel Berlowitz, ICMA-CM, city administrator, Seward, Nebraska (daniel.berlowitz@cityofsewardne.com)



The round configuration of Seward, Nebraska's Dowding Municipal Pool has always been a unique feature.