



Big Changes On Small Budgets

How to have an aesthetic impact on aquatic facilities while “thinking small”

BY JUDITH LEBLEIN JOSEPHS

Home-improvement and DIY projects are all the rage on television. Websites like Etsy are filled with great ideas, from weddings to home décor. But perhaps you didn't embrace that same "lots for less" attitude when it came to your family aquatic facility.

Is your aquatic center starting to show its age while the capital budget is hitting an all-time low? Can the center use a facelift, but you just can't afford a new attraction? Are the decision-makers OK with being "good enough"? Would you like to infuse some energy without a financial hemorrhage? Some subtle changes will go a long way with guests, and help to keep a facility viable, exciting, and attractive.

The first step in an affordable makeover is to "think small." Staff members' usual reaction to improving an aquatic facility is to "think big." Adding an attraction, expanding a concession, or creating a new themed area may be among the suggestions at the annual staff meeting. Then the financial reality sets in! But, most customer-service complaints arise from some of the smaller issues, like cleanliness and ease of use. So, start thinking small to get big changes from some minimal budgets. Even the smallest of improvements can improve the perceptions of members and guests.

1 HAVE THEM AT HELLO.

First impressions are everything. Take a good look at your entrance and take it up a notch. A new entrance sign, planter boxes, and banners are affordable solutions that make a big statement. Is there a boring cinder-block wall? A larger-than-life mural or a simple layered plywood sign painted with high-gloss paint makes a real statement. Do guests feel a real sense of arrival? Impress them at the entrance, and you have already made a new friend.

Ready-made banners are a quick and inexpensive way to add color, and can also be used to redirect a visitor's eye away from big vistas of blacktop in parking lots. That sea of asphalt will feel a little cooler with fabric blowing in the wind. Keep the costs down by making your own flagpoles out of concrete forms, metal poles, and some hardware. Fabric is an inexpensive way to add color and the illusion of soft breezes on a hot and humid day. This works outdoors as well as in a bathhouse.

Affordable planters with a different color scheme each year can make a big difference. Work with the local garden club, or better yet form a partnership with a local grower in

exchange for a sponsorship. The cost-saving secret here is to make the grower maintain the plants. Create flowerbeds throughout the facility using several local farm stands and nursery houses as corporate sponsors. There is nothing like some healthy competition to make each flowerbed a little nicer. Can't find an interested nursery? Why not sell sponsorships for each bed? It can give smaller firms a chance at advertising at the facility.

2 ARRIVE LIKE A GUEST.

Take a pre-season walk around the perimeter of the facility. Sit and take in the view of the outside of the aquatic center. Are there damaged trees with "widow makers"? Are there unsightly sheds, trash piles, and abandoned vehicles in neighbors' yards that you need to screen? These unsightly situations may not be of your doing, but they still have an impact on a facility. Ask a trusted friend or colleague to visit the facility and intentionally find flaws. Sometimes we are so close to the properties that we miss some obvious shortcomings.

A fresh coat of paint on garbage receptacles, fence mate-



TURN EYESORES—SUCH AS UNSIGHTLY WALLS AND BLAND LANDSCAPES—INTO ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS TO IMPROVE A FACILITY.



PUNCH UP TYPICAL TRASH CANS WITH A MAKEOVER BY ADDING CHARACTERS OR COLORS.

rials, pumps, and other amenities just outside a facility can make a difference. The most creative applications I have seen were wonderful garbage dumpsters painted by local artists along the beaches of the Florida Keys. In East Brunswick, N.J., a Boy Scout troop painted the railroad trestle right outside their facility with a beautiful mural. The view is now lovely for those lounging by the pool, looking away from the facility.

3 USE THE ENTRY FOYER TO EDUCATE, ENTERTAIN, AND WELCOME.

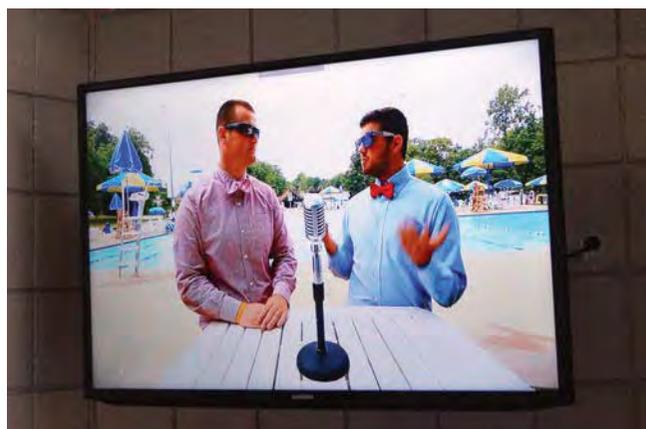
Most of our facilities have fairly boring entry areas that lead to restrooms. These also tend to be areas of assembly during rain delays and events. Why not use these areas to educate and entertain guests? Host local art exhibits, display historical photos of the facility or park system, or advertise programs and activities on a TV monitor. The technology that allows for digital display has become very affordable. Create shows and public-service announcements on water safety, parental responsibility, and the proper use of lifejackets, or use free video materials from a myriad of aquatic-safety organizations. Create a “closed circuit” aqua-tainment station. There’s even an opportunity to sell ads!

Entry foyers with high ceilings are a great opportunity to hang banners, mobiles, and kids’ art. In Summit, N.J., a banner proudly proclaims “Home of the Summit Sharks!” across an unsightly rollup door cover. The annual Shark Art Contest results in a sea full of cardboard sharks decorated by children after the artwork is displayed on a hillside in the facility. The

NJ Visual Arts Center located in Summit judges the contest and displays the work in the museum. The other sharks are hung from the ceiling on filament and swim above the guests as they enter the vestibule.

Identify leadership staff members with photos and bios on bulletin boards. This is a great place to post the “Lifeguard of the Week” photo and bio, too.

Welcome guests upon arrival and thank them as they leave. There are plenty of affordable temporary signs available on the market today. Let guests know the air and water temperature, as well as the sun index. If questionable weather is

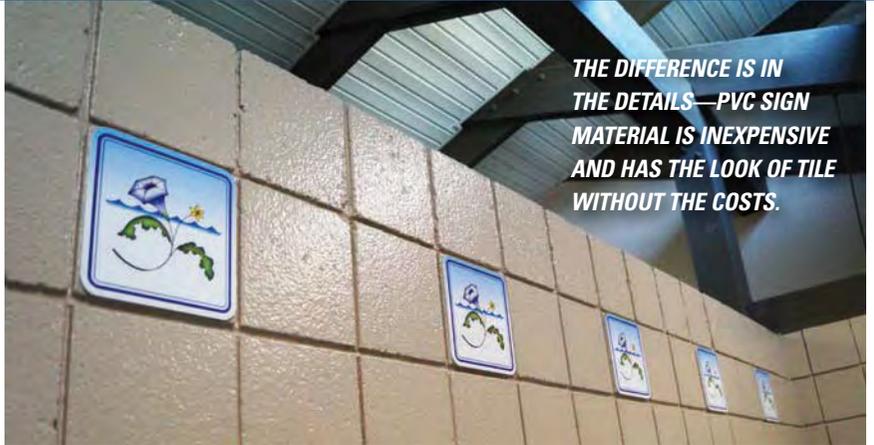


USE A TV IN THE LOBBY TO ADVERTISE PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES AS WELL AS AIR PUBLIC-SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS ON WATER SAFETY.

on the way, let them know that as well. They can decide if they want to buy that full-day ticket.

4 GIVE NEW LIFE TO THE BATHHOUSE.

Everything looks good with a new coat of paint. Paint the interiors and exteriors of a facility as if you were painting your home. Learn the psychology of color and use it to your advantage. Selecting a new color palette for a facility can create a totally new atmosphere. Do you have a children's area that needs some punch? A fresh color palette that entices children can add new excitement. Yellows and reds can make guests feel hungry, while blues will turn off that appetite. A bathhouse can look fabulous with a wall full of fun murals. Use local high school and college artists to have the job done inexpensively. There are products on the market that make murals easy and affordable. Borders and peel-and-stick characters are readily available in local home-improvement and craft stores. Use a PowerPoint projector and project clip art onto walls. It's readily available on every computer today. Can't afford to paint the entire bathhouse? Why not just do a mural



at a kid's height? It will add a new perspective and cover up most of the mess.

The bathhouse usually has boring block walls that we can't afford to retile or redecorate. Why not produce your own tiles with PVC sign material? It's inexpensive and can mimic your signage or logo. It has the look of tile without the costs. Add a wave that runs throughout the bathhouse.

Don't forget to move the air with oscillating fans and infuse the room with automatic room freshener. This will keep the bathhouse smelling good and will be well received by female visitors and the mommy market.



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5 GET CREATIVE WITH FLOWERBEDS.

As flowerbeds outside of a facility add affordable color, you can add great style inside an aquatic center with creative uses of flowerbeds. Use local artifacts, stones, farm tools, wood carvings, wind chimes, and garden art in the beds to create a sense of whimsy. At the Summit Family Aquatic Center, Coroplast shark heads and fins are placed in a sea of seasonal flowers, giving the impression of a school of sharks. Teach local history lessons by placing signs with facts in each planting bed. Commission a local artist to create your mascot in one of the flowerbeds. Add a new one each year and dedicate it to one of the safety partners in the community. Why not mix good-will gestures with art?



6 FROM FILTER PLANT TO STORYBOOK COTTAGE, CREATE A BACKSTORY FOR THE FACILITY.

Turn unsightly filter buildings into cute cottages. Just add shutters, a window, and a window box, and you now have a story line. Add the mascot peeking out of the window, and you have a storybook cottage. Plant some pretty flowers or silk plants in the window box and you have a winner instead of an eyesore. Are there large pipes and pumps outside? At Tropicanoe Cover in Lafayette, Ind., they are painted fabulous colors and surrounded with plantings. Steampunk is all the rage now!

7 ADD SOME SHADE AND "ROCK ON!"

The consistent lament of management and guests alike is not enough shade. When it comes to customer satisfaction, shade ranks high. Focus your attention and any available funds here. Work with a manufacturer to select the right colors for the facility's palette, but focus on colors that best handle the UV rays. Look at fabric sails and linear shade, and create new shaded areas, like a stroller parking area along a bathhouse wall. Use awnings to add color and shade throughout the aquatic center.

My favorite new addition to the Summit Family Aquatic Center is the "Quiet Zone." It's a hexagon shade structure on the top of the Family



Leisure Pool area. Complete with rocking chairs, this area is specifically designed for rocking or nursing a baby, reading a book, taking a break, sharing a secret, or enjoying the view—as stated on the signage. It’s a great place for a child with unique needs to settle down after the noise and excitement of the facility. Add rocking chairs around the facility, and I guarantee that guests will be much more relaxed!

parents arrive. Turn kitchen vents into daises and have a Library Corner like the one at Crystal Springs Waterpark in East Brunswick, N.J.

Pool decks and dressing areas can get quite messy. Create cubbies out of PVC pipes to store kids’ shoes and be sure to hang up those free lifejackets. A simple rack will help to dry them out, give them a longer life, and make them more attractive to use!

Even the smallest of budgets can add improvements with the biggest impact. Makeover magic isn’t only for reality television. It can come to your facility soon. It only takes some imagination and a little effort while “thinking small.” **PRB**

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8 STAND UP FOR SIGNAGE.

One of the most neglected areas in family aquatic centers is signage. The right approach to a sign plan creates a themed, customer-friendly environment without breaking the bank. If you can’t afford an entirely new sign plan, have a master plan and attack one area of the park at a time. Colors have a way of dating a facility, just as they can date the look of a home. Certain colors that were prominent in the 1970s and 1980s now give a dated appearance to a facility. Be sure to add a border, as it improves focus and retention. Signs in at least two colors are known to attract more attention.

9 CONSIDER IMPROVEMENTS THAT ARE “JUST FOR THE FUN OF IT.”

Post a “Lost Parent” sign, where a kid can be held until the

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