

RECREATION MANAGEMENT

THE MAGAZINE WITH IDEAS & SOLUTIONS FOR RECREATION, SPORTS & FITNESS FACILITIES MANAGERS

A Spacious Solution

The Ohio State University Recreation and Physical Activity Center
Columbus, Ohio



SUBMITTED BY:

MOODY-NOLAN INC. IN COLUMBUS, OHIO

Size: 600,000 square feet

Project Cost: \$153 million

Quick Tour:

- ◆ Five-level recreation center featuring two natatoriums
- ◆ More than 25,000 square feet of fitness space
- ◆ New aquatic facility with recreation lap pool, class instructional pool, leisure pool, whirlpool spa, two saunas
- ◆ Four gyms with 12 courts for basketball, volleyball or badminton
- ◆ Four squash courts with movable side walls and glass back walls
- ◆ 10 racquetball courts with glass back walls
- ◆ Four-lane jogging/walking track
- ◆ Five aerobic/multipurpose rooms

Completed in September 2005, the vast Ohio State University Recreation and Physical Activity Center

(RPAC) was a long time coming. According to Diane Jensen, the associate director of the facility, planning began back in the mid-'90s.

"We were trying to provide our students with better facilities and really meet with a lot of what the competitive schools were doing or have already done. They had all built or were building new facilities," Jensen explained.



Extensive student involvement and a common student thread that ran through the planning process eventually contributed to the success of the project. "Students have been a part of this all along," Jensen said. "We had the same student rep from 1999, and she's still here. She went from being a master's student to getting a law degree to finishing her Ph.D. To have that same, consistent voice all the way through has been helpful."

The ultimate goal of the new facility was to create a life-changing impact on the campus culture—encouraging students and others on campus to become more involved in wellness activities.

The end result—a 600,000-square-foot mega-plex of recreational activities and wellness options—is a true innovation that meets the complex needs of multiple users, from recreational sports to physical activity and educational services.

"Obviously the size and complexity of the project make it quite unique," said Julie Cook, project architect with Moody-Nolan, the Columbus-based architectural firm that designed the project in collaboration with renowned architect Antoine Predock. "One of the ways that we accomplished having a central entry point was having part of it underground, and having pedestrian plazas above the building. The crossroads is where they enter. There are four buildings above, and they're all connected below. When you're in the facility, it's not that intimidating, and it's easy to orient yourself because of that."

Being such a large facility, it was important to provide a design that didn't overwhelm users with the spaces. Daylight and dramatic views across wide open spaces are key elements in the design's success,

but Jensen said it was also good to break up some of the spaces. "We have fitness spaces in five locations in the building," she said. "That helped make it a little more intimate."

The flexibility of the building is reflected in its ability to host many different types of events, from sport club tournaments and intramural contests to camp programs, fitness classes and major competitions. "We've been able to host a number of different special events for the campus, from the president's brunch before a home football game to the Plowboy Prom (the 4-H prom)," Jensen said. "Last week we had the National Table Tennis Tournament. We're hosting Big 10 meets, diving meets. In a year or two, we'll be hosting

NCAA meets in the aquatic center."

Other components of the facility allow for flexible use as well, with a special nod to families taking part in activities at the RPAC. A shallow warm-water pool and baby-sitting, along with private changing rooms for families or for people with disabilities who might have an opposite-sex assistant make the center more accommodating to families, Jensen said.

Visually, Cook said the openness and overlooks provided in the facility make it particularly unique.

Jensen agreed, adding, "What's unique about the facility is just the visibility from outside into the space, and once you get inside, the visibility within. My perception is of ease in moving around because there's so much glass."

Very high ceilings combine with the large areas of glass to provide a feeling of being outdoors. Balcony overlooks provide views of activity taking place throughout the facility.

This visibility contributes to the design concept, which is based on making wayfinding easy. Outdoor corridors criss-cross the plan on plaza decks and allow entry at the center.

"It's set up as kind of a wheel, with the entrance at the hub, and people can filter out to different areas from that hub," Jensen said.

A main stair leads down to the hub of the "pinwheel" plan, with gyms, aquatic facilities, locker rooms, multipurpose rooms, a game room and fitness spaces all visible from a single point. Up those stairs is an upper-level gym, more activity spaces, racquetball courts and a track that winds throughout the fitness spaces.

Because the site was tight, design had to go vertical. This required a completely new and innovative approach to building the gymnasium spaces. Ultimately, the design team broke new ground by placing one four-court gym above another four-court gym.

Other creative spaces throughout the facility contribute to a feeling of campus community. Whether students are hanging out in the amphitheater space with its fireplace and casual seating, picking up a healthy meal at one of multiple snack bars, or socializing on the rooftop terrace with its views of the adjacent Ohio Stadium, the spaces within this vast facility provide a surprising intimacy and connection to the campus.

RPAC achieved quick success and is now the first place prospective students and prospective faculty or staff visit.

"We've been having about 7,000 people a day so far this quarter," Jensen said. "We're right in the 70 to 80 percent range of students using the facility and have sold somewhere around 4,000 memberships to faculty and staff."

All of this, of course, helps RPAC achieve its original mission, driving home a culture of wellness to The OSU community.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

WWW.OHIOSTATERECSPORTS.ORG

WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

This mega-plex is outstanding, well-thought-out and well-executed. The exterior approach and what you see in the facility before you enter is a 'wow'!

DANIEL ATILANO

An amazing solution to a very complex program creatively addressing code issues that hamper less determined designers.

HERVEY LAVOIE

Clean, consistent, industrial aesthetic with lots of natural daylighting create a very strong, state-of-the-art expression and great student life

amenity. The best thing about this is its consistent quality and clever layout.

RICHARD FAWELL

ASSOCIATED FIRM S

DESIGN ARCHITECT:

Antoine Predock Architect PC

STRUCTURAL/MEP

CONSULTANT:

Korda/Nemeth Engineering Inc.

AQUATIC CONSULTANT:

Counsilman/Hunsaker & Associates
Inc.

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