September/October 2018

CLUB MANAGEMENT

Official Publication of the Club Management Association of America

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Telling your story

NEXT GENERATION Clubhouses

Family-friendly, casual and stylish: Clubs are revamping their clubhouses to attract new and younger members. We profile four clubs that hit a homerun.

By Robert J. Vasilak

For any business to prosper, it must adapt to the changing tastes and lifestyles of customers. And the club industry is no exception. What worked 20 years ago, might not be relevant today.

That's one reason foresighted clubs are continually revitalizing their facilities to prepare for their next generation. In collaboration with master planners and architects, clubs with an eye on the future are adding family-friendly attractions and giving their facilities stylish makeovers to adapt to contemporary lifestyles.

According to data from the McMahon Group, people typically join clubs when they're between the ages of 36 and 45 and almost all of them – 93 percent – are married with children younger than 18, usually 6- to 12-year-olds.

Because these joiners are the source of so much economic potential, Frank Vain, president of the St. Louis-based consulting firm, views them as "the gateway to the future."

Clubhouse designers agree. Rick Snellinger, president of Chambers, a Baltimore-based clubhouse design firm, said he always respects the desires of a club's newest, youngest members because "they're the best indicators of what the next five years of incoming members will likely want and need."

We profile four clubs that have committed to what's new and have hit a homerun.

These clubs have elevated the quality of their food, and used in-vogue colors, materials and textures to create chic but casual bars and dining areas.

They're opening resort-style pool complexes and state-of-the-art fitness centers. They're welcoming tots, tweens and teens by adding kid-tailored lounges. They're even investing in golf, especially with short, fun-to-play courses and practice areas featuring the latest, high-tech training equipment.

"People want the sense of being at a five-star resort and much of that feeling comes from the design of the space," said Robert J. Altevers of San Diego-based Altevers Associates.

What's more, modern facilities can more easily offer a wealth of activities and programs, including childcare, kids' summer camps and yoga and Pilates for busy moms, which add value for growing families.

Though clubs are spending millions of dollars, these four clubs have found it money well spent. In just three years, for example, a massive makeover has helped Rolling Hills Country Club near Los Angeles increase its initiation fee from $50,000 to $175,000. A family activity center and contemporary dining options have helped Cape Fear Country Club in Wilmington, N.C., lower the age of its average member by eight years.

"These are strategic investments in facilities that bring people together," Vain said. "They allow people to see the energy of a club, which is what prospective young members want."

The Collective
Seattle

Whether you view it as an experiment, a laboratory or a prototype, ClubCorp has unveiled a high-style, high-concept

Offering state-of-the-art amenities and attractions, Rolling Hills has more than just a great view.

worry about a babysitter. Older kids can hang out with their friends, watch movies or play air hockey and foosball.

And here's an unexpected bonus: The Family Activity Center is being used by Cape Fear's entire membership, including the older members who resisted its construction.

"It's been a home run in terms of utilization," Snellinger said.

The center cost $6.5 million, and Geiss believes it was worth every penny.

"We're a club of the future," she said. "We're always evolving into what a great club should be, and the vibrancy at our club nowadays in unparalleled."

Rolling Hills Country Club

Rolling Hills Estates, Calif.

If it seems as though you can see forever from the grounds of Rolling Hills Country Club, well, that's no accident. Rolling Hills occupies 160 acres on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, and its 70,000-square-foot, ranch-style clubhouse was designed to showcase priceless views of the Los Angeles skyline and the San Gabriel Mountains.

The view alone might be enough of a selling point for many prospective members, but Rolling Hills has raised the stakes by offering virtually every amenity and attraction available to state-of-the-art member clubs. Established in 1965, but completely transformed in 2018, the club features fine and casual dining (both indoors and outdoors), meeting and banquet space, a golf course, a grand pool complex, a sports bar, tennis and fitness centers, a spa with massage and steam rooms and a wine cellar.

In other words, the reimagined club now has the lively spirit of an upscale resort that's capable of catering to any whim. For $1,250 in monthly dues, the newest generation of members expects nothing less.

"The club of the future must have something for everyone," said Altevers, whose company designed Rolling Hills' facilities. "To be sustainable, clubs need options for members to do on their own and also as a family."

Surprisingly, Rolling Hills is also counting on golf to lure a young demographic. The club has built a world-class golf course for those who are still committed to playing 18 championship holes, but it also has golf facilities that can be enjoyed by family members who just want to have fun.

Rolling Hills features a lighted driving range that's been outfitted with nine regulation-size greens. It not only can be used for target practice but also can be played as a par-3 course that's ideal for juniors, young couples and anyone who simply wishes to play less-challenging golf for an hour. The club's indoor golf academy offers the latest in high-tech swing analysis, including the same TrackMan launch-monitoring system that's seen in television coverage of professional golf tournaments.

"If you build a state-of-the-art golf course, which we've done, and some of the best practice facilities in the country, you'll attract members," said General Manager Greg Sullivan, CCM.

Another example of the club's family-friendliness is its kids' lounge, a brightly colored, 1,000-square-foot room with its own entrance and, like the other clubhouse interiors at Rolling Hills, its own design character. The

lounge was created especially for children age 3 to 14, and it's full of games and toys to entertain them – televisions, Xbox consoles, a movie screen – as well as areas reserved for arts and crafts.

"There are always kids in there, particularly in the summer," Altevers said.

What's more, the lounge serves as a staging area for the variety of kids' programs.

The redesigned Rolling Hills clubhouse has been open for only a few months, but thus far the makeover has received rave reviews. And what really counts: The club has maxed out its membership and has a waiting list.

Carmel Country Club
Charlotte, N.C.

Carmel Country Club renovated both of its 18-hole golf courses and added a resort-style pool complex featuring water slides.

For more than a decade, one of the most desirable country clubs in the Carolinas has been funding modernizations designed to provide youthful activities.

Carmel Country Club, a full-service, 1,450-member club, aims to attract members who want what General Manager John Schultz, CCM, CCE, calls an experiential lifestyle. Those people are invariably young. Carmel's new members are, on average, 41 years old. And they value energy. So when prospects are on a tour, the club showcases all the activity that takes place on its grounds: kids splashing in water, groups gathering for tennis, golf carts arriving at the clubhouse.

"To drive membership, you need to create experiences that bring people out," he said. "The more we do, the more we attract."

With Schultz's strategy in mind, Carmel strives to ensure that its major amenities are hubs of action for athletic activities and social events. Working off a strategic improvement program created in 2006, the club has renovated both of its 18-hole golf courses, added a golf short-game practice area, unveiled an expanded fitness center, redesigned its tennis center and revamped its restaurants.

The club's primary recreational attraction, however, is its resort-style pool complex, which opened to record attendance in 2008 and remains the members' favorite outdoor hangout. The complex was designed for family enjoyment, with water slides, diving boards, chaise lounges, cabanas, food service, a tiki bar and enough elbow room for barbecues, birthday parties and live music. Most importantly, it serves as a gathering place, where kids and parents find friends and make memories.

The pool complex cost $5 million, an expenditure that at the time was viewed by some as reckless. But the gamble paid off, even before it opened. After the pool complex was announced, Carmel added 131 new members, banked $5 million in initiation fees and grew social memberships from 30 to 130.

"If a club's target is a couple between the ages of 35 and 45, a pool may be the best investment it can make," said Vain of the McMahon Group.

An equally sound investment, Vain said, is dining that's irresistible to 30- and 40-somethings – in particular, dining that's fun. Carmel overhauled its dining areas three years ago, creating a quartet of options that allows members to select an environment that suits their mood: a deliberately noisy, high-spirited bar; a family-friendly grill room; a swankier fine-dining space; and a comfortable outdoor terrace that's often filled to capacity.

Atlanta-based Johnson Studio, a firm that typically works on high-end, destination-worthy restaurants, oversaw the $3.5-million overhaul. Schultz felt that Johnson was uniquely qualified to set a casual but upscale design tone that would invite the next generation to relax, recharge and reconnect.

"We wanted the zing and feel of the restaurants our members enjoy when they go out on the town," he said.

It was another risky choice that paid off. Schultz reports that restaurant activity increased by 50 percent in the year following the unveiling, and the numbers haven't fallen since.

Even better, Carmel's makeovers have helped to lower its average member age to 52 – six years younger than that of the typical U.S. club – and to boost its initiation fee to $75,000.