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*Working out at the Frisco Athletic Center
photo by Chris Fritchie*



Fun for the Entire Family at the Frisco Athletic Center

By Debbie Vallejo

AFTER MUCH ANTICIPATION the Frisco Athletic Center opened its doors last fall and has enjoyed a steady increase in membership ever since. We looked at the dream of what the Frisco Athletic Center (FAC) was to become in a previous issue of *FRISCO STYLE* and it now seems appropriate, after several months of operation, to look at the reality. Has the center lived up to expectations, surpassed them or fallen short?

Steve Walsh is the Facilities Management Superintendent for the FAC. "Perhaps the biggest impact is the community now has a comprehensive facility which can cater to the recreational and fitness needs of the entire family," says Mr. Walsh. "Thousands of families have determined the offerings available at the FAC are worthy of their investment."

The Founding Member Campaign began last year before the Athletic Center opened and ended in October 2007. More than 4,500 members took

advantage of an extra couple of months of free membership by joining, up front, for an entire year and becoming founding members. As of May 31st, the FAC has just fewer than 15,000 total memberships.

THE POCKET BOOK

The bank account is where most residents are currently feeling the pinch, so how does the FAC live up to expectations of low monetary impact on the pocketbook? It definitely excels with more bang for your buck than the majority of local workout facilities. With no haggling and a take-it-or-leave-it monthly membership fee of \$35 per adult or \$60 per family, childcare included, the city came through with the pricing. The monthly cost is even lower when members pay in advance for an annual membership. As far as getting your money's worth, the FAC continues to exceed expectations.

KIDS FUN CLUB

Childcare has no extra fees, but the experience can sometimes lean more toward frustrating than hassle free. While the Kids Fun Club area is fabulous and staff members are more than welcoming and caring of all the children, the actual management of the facility has its share of challenges. Reservations are permitted up to two days in advance and, as it is very rare to have a day when the childcare area is not full, dropping in without a reservation will most likely not allow for a workout unless you count running laps in the gym while your child trails behind you. When dropping off a child parents must physically sign in each child and then wait while stickers are carefully filled out and put onto each child's back, often resulting in a pretty decent bottleneck of parents and antsy kiddos. A more streamlined approach may be to strategically place card scanners to interact with a software program that allows staff to track ages, reservations and time limits with little difficulty.

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The Frisco Athletic Center increased the operating hours of the Fun Club by expanding the hours from 8 a.m. – 12 p.m. and 4-8 p.m. daily to Monday through Thursday 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. and Friday 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. The expanded hours are a result of citizens expressing their desire



*Outdoor pool at the Frisco Athletic Center
photo by Chris Fritchie*

to increase the amount of time the Fun Club is open for kids. "This will allow more children to attend the Fun Club," explains Mr. Walsh. It also "allows more families to experience the rest of the FAC during these expanded hours." While the extra time definitely helps out, the reservation policy and "sticker-style" sign-in keeps the Fun Club from exceeding expectations.

THE WATER

Hours of operation for the indoor swimming facility require some planning by members due to each of the four indoor aquatic areas being open at different times on different days of the week. The child's playground is fun, albeit a little small. The water is also pretty chilly so be ready with a towel when your child's lips turn blue after about forty-five minutes in the water. The lazy river provides a great workout, but is also small and only open for free swim during select hours of the day. All that being said, the water is clean and well treated, and the life guards friendly and helpful.

The month of May saw the grand opening of the outdoor water facilities and, if opening day is any indication, the outdoor area looks to be a huge success. The waterslides are fabulous for children 48 inches or taller, the lazy river outside is actually a great size and the playground area provides several play options. The one drawback is the hours of operation. Instead of opening midmorning, free swim in the outdoor pools is not permitted until noon. This places moms with young children in the interesting predicament of choosing between an afternoon nap or time at the pool in the heat of the day and height of the sun. A very difficult choice; fussy toddler or bored and possibly burned school age child, hmmm...? The pool facilities themselves are great, but the wacky hours and smaller indoor lazy river and play area mean the aquatics meet expectations, but fall short of exceeding them.

CAFÉ FRISCO

Café Frisco also opened the end of

May and is one of the more exciting additions to the amenities at the FAC. “The response in the short time that Café Frisco has been open has been very positive,” explains Mr. Walsh. It will be interesting to see how the Café holds up through the crush of people that often make it to the FAC on weekends or through the long summer days when families are spending the day at the facility. There are certainly plenty of parents excited about enjoying a brief coffee break or beverage before picking up kids after a workout.

FITNESS CLASSES

The Athletic Center is continually adding and rearranging their fitness classes to accommodate the increasing need for variety and more time options. Current fitness classes have some interesting labels like Mat Pilates, PI-YO, NIA Workout, Core Ball, Rev-UP Kick and Fluid Fusion, just to name a few. Fit Cycle, a class where every participant is on his or her own bike and increases or decreases speed and resistance based on instructions from the fitness instructor, is very popular, especially during the early morning classes. It’s also common to see little floor space available in the Innovative Ball or Yoga classes during particular times of the day, as they are quite full. Even if a member chooses not to take advantage of classes offered at the facility, there is plenty of cardio equipment, weights and other gear to help stay in shape. For the variety of fitness classes and the fabulous instructors the FAC certainly exceeds expectations.

OVERALL REACTION

A few things in the original plans for the Center changed during construction. A rock climbing wall was in the mix the first go round, but didn’t make the cut for the final plans. “As with all construction projects, there comes a point in which decisions have to be made on the features that will be included and excluded,”



explains Mr. Walsh. “Items such as a rock climbing wall and a competitive swim environment were eliminated from the design of this facility.” Even with the cuts, members have more than enough activities to keep everyone in the family busy.

The overall perception from residents is more than positive. “Our members have shared many wonderful comments about the facility and our staff,” says Mr. Walsh. Even when feedback has not been positive, arrangements are made to research how things need to change to better care for members’ needs. “Our members have suggested improvements to the facility which we take very seriously and attempt to address in a quick, proactive manner,” says Mr. Walsh. Expanding the Fun Club hours is an example of how the FAC has worked

to meet the needs of its members.

Keeping citizens happy and competing with other local venues means the city needs to continue to be proactive and cut through red tape when addressing the concerns and feedback from its customers. This can be hard when dealing with any government entity but Frisco has managed to make things relatively painless for its FAC members. With the ease of online class registration, the variety of activities available to members and the cleanliness of the venue, a good deal is definitely a reality for Athletic Center members. The end result is a fabulous workout facility that really provides great equipment and instruction at a reasonable cost.

Debbie Vallejo is a freelance writer living in Frisco.