

Fitness Through the Ages

I October 31, 2008



For clubs with diverse demographics, age-specific fitness programming can mean the difference between an empty fitness center and healthy, active members across the board.

At Knollwood Country Club, where adults in their 30s and 40s make up the bulk of the club's membership, the staff assumed the fitness center was being used most often by that age group, too.

A closer look, however, revealed that wasn't the case.

"We started to pay closer attention to which demographic groups were using the fitness center and we realized that the ages are quite literally across the board," says Rhonda Bremer, Athletic Director at the Granger, Ind.-based club.

Members in their early 30s and 40s favored group exercise classes. Preteen members swam laps. And members in their early 80s worked out in the gym.

After making this discovery, Knollwood reworked its fitness programming to try to do a better job of offering all members an exercise option, no matter their age.

"We really don't leave anyone, or anything, out now," Bremer says.

Early Sports Start

For Arizona's Tucson Country Club, age-specific fitness programs give the club a family-friendly edge that has enticed parents with young children to become members.

"We're trying to open up our membership options by gearing our programs a little bit more toward young families," says Donald E. Beaver, Jr., CCM, the club's General Manager/COO. "One-third of our members are seasonal residents who live elsewhere in the country for six months of the year. The remaining two-thirds of our members are Tucson folks."

To pursue these membership goals, Tucson CC began to offer an athletic-based summer camp for 4- to 7-year-olds. Last summer's installment included a 30-minute Taekwondo class, taught by a local instructor.

"Because they're younger, it has to be much more supervised and structured," Beaver says. "It's interesting for us to watch [the instructor] instill discipline—to always have your arms by your side, to bow to the leader. The mothers loved it because the kids were responding so well, and listening so well, at that young age."

A few years ago, Knollwood also began focusing on kids' fitness programming. This led to it recently hiring a youth-based instructor who has helped introduce classes like YogaFit, where young members make animal poses as an instructor reads a story.

To assist older kids, Knollwood is starting to focus on sport-specific training. "Some of our [area] schools have cut back on extracurricular activities—art, music and physical education classes," Bremer says. "And [our] high schools are very competitive. We had several kids coming to us saying, 'We want to work out after school, and we need this.'"

The club is about to launch a program to help its swim team members target their upper body and core strength, using boot camp-type activities like crunches and wall squats.

"They will specifically work on areas that swimmers need to focus on," Bremer says. "Kids get into sports so young, they sometimes don't know how to take care of their body. We wanted to address that, so there wouldn't be so many rotator cuff injuries and other similar problems later in life."

Refining the Fitness Formula

When working with kids, it's important to tailor fitness programming to very specific ability levels, or risk losing everyone's interest—especially older kids—fast.

With that in mind, Tucson CC created an additional camp for slightly older members this year.

"We had done 4- to 7-year-old camps before," says Beaver. "We heard from parents asking us to design something for older kids—so we came up with a 7- to 12-year-old group."

The 7-to-12-year-old camp works with professional instructors and is divided into two groups, for ages 7 through 9 and ages 10 through 12.

The two groups rotate between the club's tennis courts and driving range to learn golf and tennis skills. To keep the group manageable, Tucson limits enrollment to 20.

"We want to make sure they're getting quality instruction," Beaver says. "Yes, we could have signed up 40 kids, but then we're basically a babysitting service."

The formula clearly works: The camps sold out in June and July. "Parents were just delighted with it," Beaver reports.

Proper Balance

Because Boca Woods Country Club's membership consists of residents of a 645-home community in Boca Raton, Fla., its membership skews older than some clubs.

Although the mean age is around 70, members range "anywhere from 55 to 95," says Fitness Director Shannon Watt.

As a result, for the past several years Boca Woods has offered its members therapy-based equipment—including NuStep machines that Watt says are often used in rehab for cardiac patients, and those who have had hip and knee surgery or replacements.

The club also hosts water fitness classes. "It's a lot easier on [older members'] joints when they exercise in the water," Watts says. "The deep-water class is especially good for members with arthritis, because it has absolutely no impact on the joints."

Boca Woods also created a balance class, to help members avoid falls by strengthening their lower body and posture. The class—a member's idea—primarily uses pre-existing club equipment, such as balance pads, but also focuses on challenging participants' neuromuscular skills and peripheral vision.

"A lot of times, balance has to do with failing vision and inner-ear problems, and we try to incorporate that," Watt says.

The Right Time and Plan

Having older or younger clientele can help a club determine what classes to offer—and when to offer them.

In summer, because school is out, Knollwood switches its younger member classes from evening to morning. And at Boca Woods, where many members are retired, classes are consistently held in the morning, because "it's not the usual gym where people get off work and then come," Watt says.

In some cases, personal medical history is also factored into fitness programs. Boca Woods will review a member's health history to create a customized exercise program.

After a cardiac incident, or knee or hip surgery, Boca Woods will talk with the member's doctor and physical therapist.

"They help us, as personal trainers, continue what they were doing," Watt says. "We try to have a good relationship with [members'] doctors and physical therapists, so we can help to continue their recovery."

From the Walker to Weight Room

Age-based fitness programming can not only help to attract members to a club's fitness facilities—it can also help to enrich their lives outside the club.

"We understand that you have to start early to develop [healthy] routines," Bremer says. "There is so much buzz out there about child obesity and how overweight much of America is—the younger we can start [teaching fitness and nutrition], the better off our kids will be."

Likewise, equipment and classes for older members can help seniors recover from injury and illness.

"Sometimes, the older members are literally using walkers and wheelchairs when they come in," Watt says. "Our approach gives them the opportunity to be in a group setting, but still have an instructor and work on specific goals."

However, as beneficial as age-specific fitness programs can be, it's important to also remember that member needs can change—and when they do, exercise options need to change with them.

Just ask Boca Woods, which for years has focused its programming on its booming senior membership. Some of the club's members are passing away, and younger, new members are buying their homes

—which means the club must redirect its programming to accommodate both groups.

"Our club is in transition," says Watt. "We're at the stage where we're trying to suit the needs of the aging population and at the same time attract younger baby boomers who are going to be purchasing homes and staying here for the next 20 to 30 years."

The result? New fitness programming that includes Pilates and meditation classes.

"This upcoming season, we're gearing toward the younger population," Watt says.

You must be logged in to post a comment.

C+RB NEWSLETTER SIGN UP



CLUB AND RESORT CHEF



CLUB + RESORT TALKS



July 21, 2025

Inside Top Club Upgrades: Mirasol's Elite Racquets Program + Kalamazoo CC's Golf Course Renovation

See More >

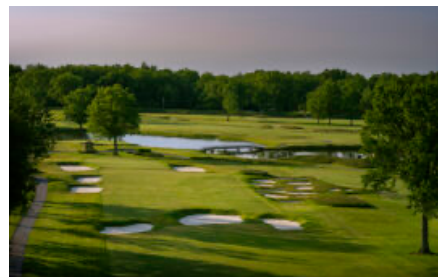
CLUB + RESORT BUSINESS DIGITAL EDITIONS



Tucson CC offers an athletic-based summer camp for 4- to 7-year-olds that has helped to draw in more family memberships.



Matthew Jordan on Building Stronger Golf Operations at The Olympic Club



Lakewood CC Unveils \$6M Golf Course Restoration



Agronomy 2035: How Technology and Turf Will Shape the Next Decade



Wellness Real Estate Market Reached \$584B in 2024 — Forecast to Double to \$1.1T by 2029

Connect with Club + Resort Business on Social Media

