

offerings provided in urban communities and those offered in rural facilities. In other words, suburban communities seem to contain a little bit of everything. The amenities were either more typically included in suburban and urban areas or in suburban and rural areas.

That said, respondents in suburban communities were more likely to report including things like outdoor sport courts, park structures, outdoor and indoor aquatic facilities, waterparks and splash play areas, golf courses and ice rinks than respondents from other kinds of communities.

Park spaces seemed to be among the top planned facilities for suburban communities (as well as rural communities), with park structures, and trails and open spaces being the top two amenities these respondents were planning to add over the next several years. They also were more likely than other types of communities to be planning to add skateparks.

The top 10 amenities suburban facilities are planning to add over the next few years include:

- Park structures
- Trails and open spaces
- Bleachers and seating
- Playgrounds
- Natural turf sports fields
- Waterpark and splash play areas
- Synthetic turf sports fields
- Outdoor sport courts
- Concession areas
- Skateparks

Respondents from rural communities were more likely than those in urban and suburban areas to report that their facilities included concession areas, trails and open spaces, and waterfronts or marinas. Outdoor and traditional options are more common in these communities, with outdoor sport courts, playgrounds, sports fields, trails and open spaces and park structures among the top amenities included in these facilities.

Rural facilities were far less likely to include synthetic sports fields. On average, more than 12 percent of all respondents rely on synthetic turf. That number jumps to more than 17 percent for urban facilities, but falls to just over 6 percent of rural facilities. This could be a reflection of the lower number of people using the sports fields in rural communities. Because of this, rural facilities likely have more time than facilities in urban and suburban areas to allow their fields to rest between programmed activities.

Likewise, they were far less likely to include waterparks or splash play areas. Nearly 22 percent of suburban communities provided such features, while just over 9 percent of rural communities had them.

Rural communities were also less likely to include golf courses, skateparks, climbing walls, indoor aquatic facilities, fitness centers, community or multipurpose centers, and many of the amenities associated with indoor facilities like indoor sport courts and locker rooms.

Respondents from rural communities, which seem to rely mainly on traditional park offerings with plenty of outdoor opportunities, were most likely to be planning to add more of the same.

However, fitness centers, climbing walls and other indoor options also appeared on this group of respondents' list of top 10 planned amenities for the next several years:

- Park structures
- Trails and open spaces
- Fitness centers
- Waterpark and splash play areas
- Bleachers and seating
- Playgrounds
- Climbing walls
- Natural turf sports fields
- Indoor sport courts
- Locker rooms

When it comes to programming their facilities, the respondents in suburban communities were the most likely to offer programming of all kinds. There was no type of programming that could be found in more urban or rural facilities than in the suburban facilities.

The top 10 program offerings in suburban facilities do differ slightly from the general survey population, mainly because they simply are much more likely than others to offer most types of programming. For example, they were nearly 13 percent more likely to offer mind/body balance programs like yoga and tai chi than the general survey population. They were also 12.4 percent more likely to provide sport training options, such as golf instruction or tennis lessons. They are more than 10 percent more likely to offer fitness programs, and day camps and summer camps. They also include programs for active older adults among their top 10 program options, with more than 55 percent of suburban facilities offering such programming.

Suburban facilities were also the most likely to be planning new programs for the next few years. Their top five planned program additions were led by environmental education, followed by fitness programs, teen programs, mind/body balance and nutrition and diet counseling.

Among urban respondents, the top 10 current program offerings also differed from the general survey population in a couple of ways. They were nearly 11 percent more likely than the general survey population to provide mind/body balance programs. They also were nearly 10 percent more likely than respondents across the board to provide fitness programs, and were 5 percent more likely to include swimming programs, day camps and summer camps, sports tournaments or races, adult sports teams, and individual sports activities, such as running clubs and swim clubs.

Urban facilities were less likely than their suburban and rural counterparts to be planning additions to their programs. That said, their top five planned program additions for the next few years include fitness programs, mind/body balance

programs, nutrition and diet counseling, teen programming, and educational programs.

The top 10 programs offered in rural communities also differ from the general survey results, mainly in the fact that these facilities tended to be less likely to offer programs of any kind. The exception to this rule was arts and crafts programs, which can be found in the facilities of more than two out of five of the rural respondents.

Rural communities were about average in terms of the programs they said they were planning to add in the next three years. They were more likely than the general survey population to be planning programs for environmental education, fitness, education, mind/body balance and teen programming.

Building Active, Involved Communities

A Look at Trends in Parks & Community Recreation Centers

Parks and recreation departments help build our communities and connect us with opportunities for recreation, leisure activities, fitness, education and much more. Parks and community centers improve the quality of life for the citizens they serve. They help build local economies, providing jobs, as well as incentives to lure businesses that provide even more jobs. In urban areas, parks are often the only places people can congregate in the outdoors. In suburban communities, park districts often provide opportunities to get entire families involved in fitness. And in rural areas, park picnic areas and playgrounds provide a place to gather with fellow community members.

Parks and recreation departments were more likely than the average survey respondent to report increases in the number of people using their facilities in 2006, and were more likely to project increases for 2007 and 2008. They also were less likely to see decreases. Nearly 69 percent of parks and recreation department respondents said the number of people using their facilities increased from 2005 to 2006, compared to just over 63 percent of all respondents. By 2008, nearly three-quarters of parks and recreation respondents projected increases for their facilities, and less than 2 percent expected to see a

decrease in the number of users. (See Figure 35 on page 40.)

Despite this fact, many are concerned about improving participation in parks and recreation facilities, whether it's through creating new and innovative programming options or by improving marketing techniques. Marketing and increasing participation was one of the top five current issues of concern for parks and recreation respondents, and was expected to be a concern still in three years.

Parks and recreation departments surveyed reported 15.1 percent higher operating budgets for fiscal 2006 than the average respondent. This category's average spending on operations for 2006 was \$1.36 million. This could reflect

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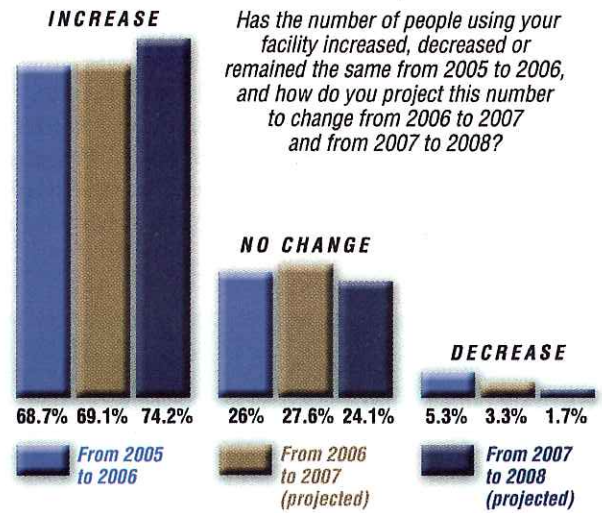
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FIGURE 35:
**Usage Statistics, Current and Projected,
Parks & Recreation Departments**



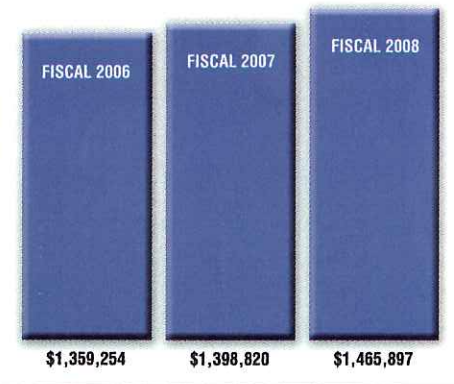
the fact that many parks and recreation departments—particularly those in urban and suburban areas—tend to operate multiple facilities, from traditional parks with playgrounds and picnic areas to community recreation centers with fitness spaces and gymnasiums. That said, their operating expenditures are projected to increase at a slower-than-average rate between now and 2008—just 7.8 percent, compared to 8.2 percent for the general survey population. By 2008, operating expenditures among parks and recreation departments were projected at \$1.47 million, just 14.7 percent higher than average. (See Figure 36.)

Respondents from parks and recreation departments expect minimal changes in the number of paid employees staffing their facilities between now and 2008, with just minor increases in full-time and part-time staff, and a slight decrease in the number of seasonal workers. However, a substantial increase—58.6 percent—was projected for the number of volunteers working for parks and recreation facilities, from an average of 92.5 volunteers currently employed to nearly 147 projected for 2008.

More than 50 percent of parks and recreation respondents said staffing was one of their top current concerns, and more than 40 percent felt it would still be a concern in three years. Some of these respondents may be seeking to deal with staffing issues by turning to volunteers to staff parts of their facilities—a tactic that presents unique challenges of its own.

Several respondents cited an increase in the number of facilities they run and the number of programs they provide, without coinci-

FIGURE 36:
**Yearly Operating Expenditures,
Parks and Recreation Departments**



dent increases in staffing levels. The only way to deal with this problem may be by relying on volunteers.

Respondents from parks and recreation departments were slightly more likely than the average respondent to require certifications of their staff members. The most common certifications among parks and recreation departments were life-guard certifications, aquatics management and pool management certifications, and playground safety certifications—all three of which were required by more than half of all parks and recreation respondents. Nearly 30 percent also require coaching certifications or personal training certifications.

Bigger and Better – Planning New Facilities

Parks and recreation departments were slightly more likely than the average respondents to be planning changes to their existing facilities—from building entirely new facilities to adding on or renovating their existing facilities. Nearly four out of five parks and recreation respondents had plans of some kind. They also were much more likely than the average respondent to be planning to build new, with 41.5 percent of parks and recreation departments planning new facilities in the next few years, compared to less than 35 percent of the general survey population. In addition, 37.6 percent plan to add onto their existing facilities, and 57.8 percent are planning renovations.

These new facilities, additions and renovations will cost substantially less than those for other sectors covered in the survey. Parks and recreation departments that have plans for facility construction project that they will spend \$2.74 million, on average, more than 38 percent less than the average for all types of facilities.

For those planning to construct new facilities or renovate their existing buildings, Daniel Atilano, principal and team leader of Burnidge Cassell Associates' Recreation and Municipal Studio, suggests that the first step is to get the right people involved. Based in Elgin, Ill., Atilano has presented at conferences for the National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA), as well as the Illinois Park and Recreation Association.

"The key recommendation is to create a winning team," he said. "Make sure you surround yourself with a group of people who share enthusiasm for what you're doing."

Susan Wallover, principal of Recreation Planning Associates, a Lancaster, Pennsylvania-based firm that focuses predominantly on feasibility studies for community centers, recreation centers and swimming pools across the board, said it's also important to thoroughly canvass the community to determine what will work best.

"You need to ask the community what they want," she explained. "Don't presume to know based on your family or your needs what they want. And you have to ask according to age group, as well as ethnici-

ty. If you're coming from a different background, your needs may be different."

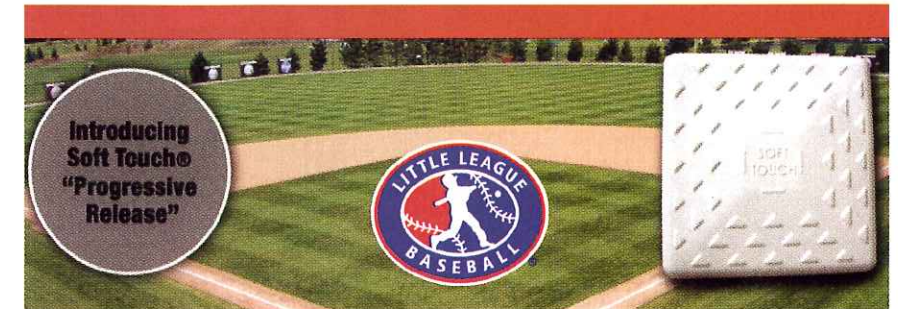
To get started on the process, Wallover recommends a citizen assessment survey to find out what people want and what they will support. "However, do not ask them if they will pay for it, or how they will pay for it," she added. "If I asked you, 'Do you want to buy this house?' but you didn't know what's in the house, would you want to buy it? They have to know what the facility's going to provide for them. Find out what the community wants as a whole, then assign the price tag. You can always back down. The survey should go first, a feasibility study, and don't forget the importance of building partnerships."

Todd Seidler, the coordinator of the graduate program in Sport Administration at the University of New Mexico and a facility planning consultant, advised getting the right input. "Oftentimes when facilities are planned, the owners will hire an architect and let them plan it without having any input from the professional staff who are going to use the facility, and that's how we end up having what we call building bloopers," said Seidler, who has served on the executive board and as chair of the Sport Management Council and the Council on Facilities and Equipment within the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD). "It's real common to walk in and find major mistakes made during the planning of a facility," he added. "Often it's because the professional staff wasn't allowed any input. All too often, it may be the architect's first pool or recreation center that they've planned, and we don't want them to be learning on our facility. If the staff can get involved in the planning, they need to do it. Don't just depend on the architect to get it right without that input."

Ultimately, Atilano said that the key for any facility manager to think about when considering new buildings, or just fixing up or programming their existing spaces, is to consider what their facility can do differently. "It's really about thinking about what programs you're putting in," he explained. "What has a proven track record? You have to look closely on a case-by-case basis. If you're doing something that's losing money, maybe it's time to rethink it. If you keep doing the same thing, you're probably going to get the same results."

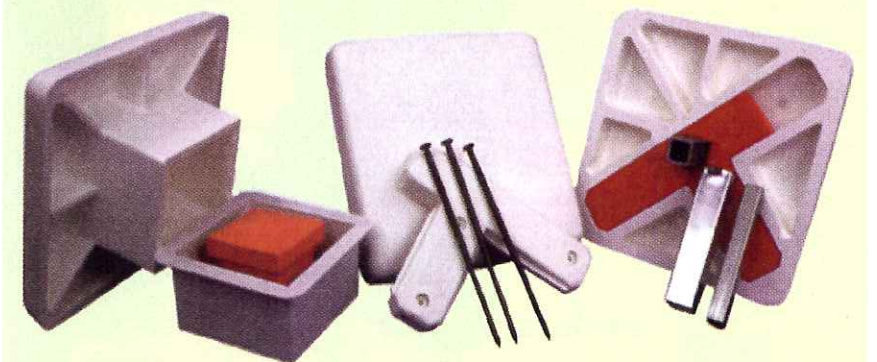
Wallover said an important part of this process is to consider the programs that your patrons might find elsewhere. "They need to step back and find out what's going on in their entire community—who's doing what," she said. "If they can work with the economic development group and find out what else is going on, hopefully you end up not competing, but joining forces to do more."

"People want to do what their neighbor did that worked, but we like to make people look internally and ask them, 'What's different about your community and what do you need to address that's more pertinent to where you're at, as opposed to what your neighbor is doing?'" Atilano added.



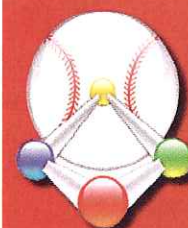
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Trends in Park Facility Design

The main trends architects and consultants agreed were taking a firm hold in park facility design included an increased focus on family participation, as well as a greater emphasis on sustainable, "green" design practices.

Teresa (Teri) Hendy, board member for the International Playground Equipment Manufacturers Association's (IPEMA) Voice of Play Initiative, and president and owner of Site Masters Inc., a design and safety consulting company based in Cincinnati, Ohio, said that developing places where the entire family can take part in recreation has been an essential goal of the recreation industry. "That's something that we as an industry have been trying to promote over the years—developing community spaces that bring all kinds of people together," she said. "We have to look at how we're developing communities."

Much of the added pressure to get entire families involved is coming from the baby boomer generation, as well as their children, said Craig Bouck, president and CEO of Barker Rinker Seacat, a Denver-based architectural firm that has designed more than 100 community centers nationwide, including facilities in more than 20 national parks. "There's a lot of great stuff going on," he said. "The baby boomer generation is between 60 and 70 million strong. They are moving into retirement, and they are very active, so the services they're going to need will be focused on things like indoor walking, fitness and aquatics. But what people forget is that

the baby boomers' kids are graduating from college and beginning to have families of their own. So now the demands are going to be for services and facilities for families too—older people, as well as families."

These changes, Bouck explained, will add to a growing need for innovation in terms of making spaces available for multiple uses, as well as creative programming to get more people involved.

"You have the two biggest demographics looking for recreation and activity together," Bouck said. "This makes the whole idea of multi-use and multifunction spaces more imperative. You're going to see more innovation in terms of getting more people involved in activities at the same time—more programming opportunities as well as free-play opportunities in those spaces—trying to be everything to everybody."

"I think we're seeing more trends for families," Wallover said. "I think in the future that's going to be even more so. In Pennsylvania with the turnpike you can now go into a women's restroom, and they'll have one stall that has the toilet for an adult, one for the toddler, as well as the fold-down changing table. They're making things more convenient, and the more convenient they make it, the more people will expect that. Comfort is everything."

Patrons' expectations for facilities that provide a comfortable setting for families will play out in many ways in terms of facility design. Bouck said that locker rooms, in particular, will be heavily influenced by these changing demographics and expectations.

"I wouldn't be surprised in a noncompetitive setting if traditional locker rooms diminished to the bare minimum," he said. "We're already doing centers where we have no traditional locker rooms. The only demand for traditional locker rooms is where you have teams moving in and out. Otherwise, everyone wants the cabana-style wet and dry lockers—the changing rooms, family style, whatever you call it. But it's not just families. It's seniors, people with alternative lifestyles, and so on."

As environmental headlines abound and energy costs increase, the trend toward greener designs is also starting to gain a stronger footing, particularly among parks and recreation clients, Atilano said.

"The big trend I'm seeing that's starting to pick up momentum is green design," he explained. "Certainly in the parks and recreation industry, you're going to have a client that's receptive to the idea and understands the value of protecting our environment."

Atilano believes that parks and recreation will become a leader in buildings certified by the U.S. Green Building Council with the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System. He explained that because we spend so much of our time indoors, it's important to ensure that the indoor environment is as healthy as possible—particularly in these facilities where we go to improve our health. With a LEED-certified building, he said, "you have a building where you're not going to have adverse health effects, you're being good to the environment, and you're saving energy costs."

Atilano sent out a survey in 2003 asking people if they were familiar with the benefits of green design. Sixty-eight percent answered yes. But when he asked if they were familiar with the U.S. Green Building Council, only 23 percent said yes. "I bet if I asked that again today, it would be about 50 percent who would say yes," he said. "I think there's a consciousness, particularly as energy costs go up. You do pay more up front for LEED buildings, but you can end up saving 25 percent minimum on energy costs. You have to look at lifecycle costs."

When Atilano asked his survey respondents whether they would be willing to pay 5 to 10 percent more for an energy-efficient green building, just 45 percent said yes. "They liked the idea, but didn't want to pay for it," he explained. "Now, as energy costs are skyrocketing, people will be more willing to do it. It's also related to global warming and recognizing its effects."

Bouck agreed that sustainability is becoming a more prevalent concern when designing community recreation centers. "Just the fact that the recreation centers, because of the kinds of spaces and hours of operation they have, they're just energy hogs," he said. "It's about really buckling down and figuring out what kind of investment we can put toward energy conservation. There's a lot of passion out there for solving that. You're going to see a lot more projects doing the best they can to try to preserve resources."

This conservation approach will not be limited to park buildings, either. According to Jim Figurski, a principal with GreenWorks PC, a Portland, Oregon-based landscape design firm with a focus on sustainable landscapes, green approaches will be incorporated more and more into landscape design in traditional parks as well. "For example, in many of our parks, both neighborhood and even urban," he said, "we're incorporating stormwater features into them. All of that water that falls on the park stays in the park."

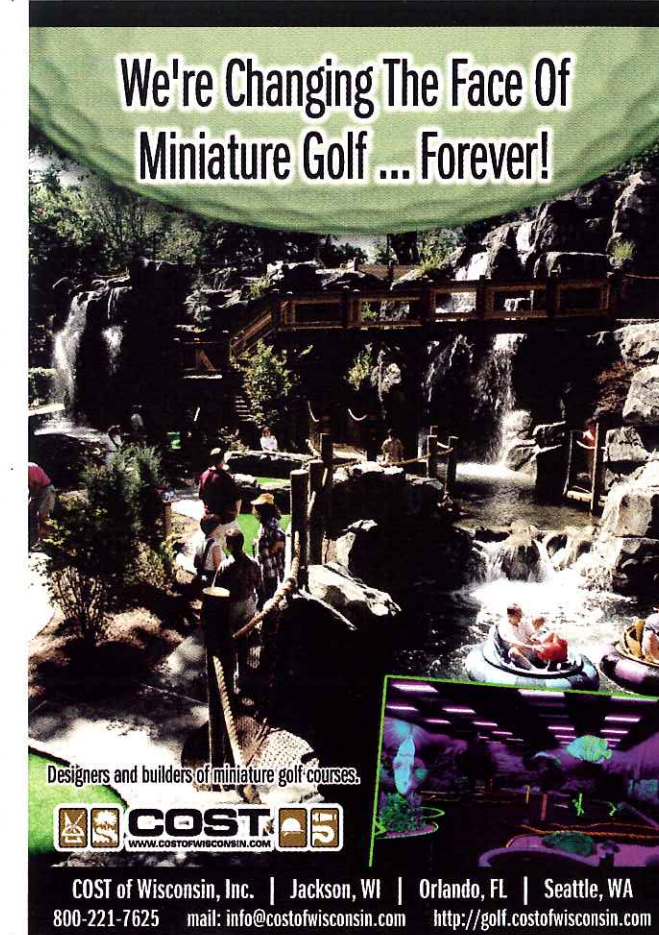
Parks and Playgrounds

Traditional parks and playgrounds are the facilities we often think of when we consider parks and recreation departments, and this was reflected in the top amenities the Industry Survey respondents said were included in their facilities. Nearly 90 percent said their facilities included playgrounds. More than three-quarters also included park structures, such as shelters, restroom buildings and concession buildings, as well as trails and open spaces such as gardens and natural areas. Outdoor sport courts, bleachers and other seating, natural turf sports fields and concession areas were also included in the facilities of a majority of parks and recreation respondents. Community and multipurpose centers and outdoor aquatic facilities also were included by more than half.

Not much will change over the next several years, with more of the same—traditional park amenities—listed among the top plans of parks and recreation respondents. The top three amenities they are planning to add within the next three years include more park structures, trails and open spaces, and playgrounds.

The addition of open spaces and parklands is particularly important in urban facilities. A recent study from the

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University of Manchester determined that increasing the amount of green space in urban areas by just 10 percent could reduce surface temperatures by as much as 4 degrees Celsius—equivalent to the average predicted temperature increase caused by global warming by the 2080s.

In February 2007 testimony before the Interior and Environmental Subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives, Richard Louv, author of "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder" and chairman of the Children & Nature Network, reported that only 6 percent of kids between 9 and 13 years old play outside on their own during a typical week. "Studies by the National Sporting Goods Association and American Sports Data, a research firm, show a dramatic decline in the past decade in such outdoor activities as swimming and fishing," he added. "Even bike riding is down 31 percent since 1995."

Creating parks and green spaces that are accessible to children, teens and families of all backgrounds and income levels is a key to improving public health, and defeating the ever-more-alarming epidemic of obesity in this country.

"As far as I'm aware of, most cities are woefully short of parkland, and there are increasing pressures on what little available space there is," Figurski said. "Park departments are also suffering a lack of funding in many cases, so you have increased pressure on existing spaces, and you have less and less availability of funding and materials to take advantage of when creating those parks."

More people will be looking to get in touch with nature by heading out the door and walking a short distance, Figurski added, and that means a lot of demand for the parks that are available.

"Parks are going to have to withstand a lot of use," he said. "People aren't going to want to get in their car and ride for an hour or two hours into the countryside to connect with nature. They want to just cross the street and connect with something green and flowing and fresh."

Parks, trails and greenways—usually protected areas along rivers and waterways, or sometimes abandoned railroad tracks—are an essential component of the mission most parks and recreation departments serve. To help people realize the full benefits of these amenities, Active Living by Design, a program of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that establishes and evaluates innovative approaches to increase physical activity through community design, public policy and communication strategies, recommends activities communities can pursue, including physical projects. These might include projects to link different parks, trails and greenways up with local destinations to encourage people to walk instead of getting in their car. The organization also encourages communities to design parks, trails and greenways with multiple users in mind, and solicit community feedback to determine citizens' interests and needs. In addition, communities should ensure that their parks, trails and greenways are well-maintained and improved when necessary. Otherwise, safety will suffer, and people will stop taking part.

Dr. John Sutterby, an assistant professor at the University of Texas, Brownsville, who focuses on early childhood development and play theory and development, said that he's seen more parks adapting to include more interaction between children and adults, in addition to the traditional playgrounds and picnicking amenities we've all come to expect.

"We've been seeing more long, linear park designs that are more for adult-child interaction, where they can take long walks or long bike rides," said Sutterby, who is an advisory board member for IPEMA's Voice of Play Initiative. "We've also seen a lot of housing hooking up with parks. We just had a long one put in as part of an abandoned railroad track."

For the playgrounds that are planned, there is a trend away from the more traditional equipment, according to IPEMA advisory board member Dr. Frances Wallach, president of Total Recreation Management Services Inc. and an expert in park and playground safety, planning, design and evaluation. "There's more creativity in terms of playground design, and really a trend toward having equipment out there that will be both challenging and creative for the children," she said.

Hendy agreed. "I think that a lot of people are beginning to want something a little different," she said. "They're looking at more unique, creative products—kind of going outside the box a little bit. Some traditional play equipment is still important, but they're looking at providing other opportunities for play as well. We're seeing that with the boulders and the climbing walls and bringing more natural elements in."

This coincides with an increase in "play value," which IPEMA advisory board member Monty Christiansen said he's seen as a growing trend. A co-founder, with Wallach, of the National Playground Safety Institute (NSPI), Christiansen is also the executive director of the International Playground Safety Institute (ISPI).

"I've seen an increase in what we would call 'play value'—these things that spontaneously encourage children to challenge themselves and reach out beyond the traditional rides and climbing equipment," he explained.

Play spaces for adults are gaining in importance as well, according to several of the IPEMA Voice of Play Advisory Board members. "Something I've seen more abroad than here is the development of adult playgrounds," Christiansen said. "I saw a lot of these in Hong Kong. They provide opportunities for adult-scaled equipment used primarily for fitness and development. They're used a lot in Hong Kong by the senior citizens. It's a bit different from the fitness trails we've seen over the years here in the United States."

Hendy said that these kinds of equipment are starting to appear stateside as well. "We're starting to see that equipment out in California in areas where the climate is such that people can be outside year-round," she said.

Yet another way to ensure there are opportunities for all to get involved in our local park facilities.

Community Fitness

Community centers and fitness centers, as well as indoor sports courts, were also top choices for additions to parks and recreation facilities, and represent just one more way these

organizations can get their communities together to get active.

Research from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control determined that creating places where people can get active can lead to a 25 percent increase in the number of people who exercise at least three times a week. By adding a community center with a fitness area, as well as multipurpose rooms to serve various programming needs—from mind/body classes like yoga to educational programs—park districts can help provide their communities with a low-cost fitness option.

But with increasing budget pressures, it can be difficult to figure out ways to get all of the requested activities into one center.

"With a limited amount of revenue coming in the door, we have to think harder and smarter about everything we program," Atilano said. "Multipurpose is the key. You need to be flexible to deal with new trends. Who would have thought that Pilates and Spinning would be the current hot trends? The main thing is to have a building that's flexible enough to respond to those changes."

Another key to flexibility is to figure out ways to incorporate multiple demographics—which might have had their own centers before—into a single facility.

"The whole focus on the senior center and the resources put toward senior centers are going to be blended into these lifestyle centers, or whatever they're going to end up calling them," Bouck said. "It's becoming harder to justify dedicating so many resources to one group. And people don't want

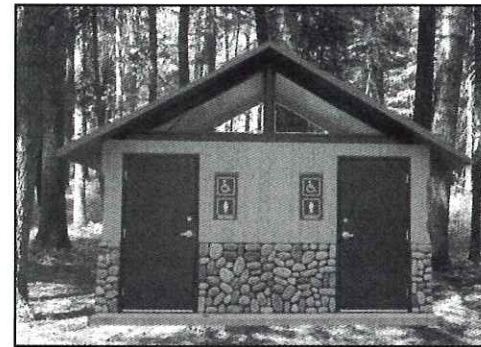
to be sequestered anyway."

Another way to improve the efficiency of the community center is to use the space wisely. According to Atilano, that means planning to use some space for programs that have revenue-generating potential.

"We're seeing more of a focus on space allocations," Atilano said. "When we're developing a program, we can take the same square footage that we'd use for a gymnasium and put it into fitness, which has a greater potential for revenue. If you want some big-volume spaces, that's great, but let's also look at what's going to help you stay out of the red, so you can offset other programs where there's a 50-50 chance you're going to make money."

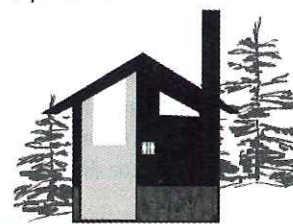
Creative Programming

The programs most commonly offered by parks and recreation departments surveyed included holiday events and other special events, programming for youth sports teams, arts and crafts, day camps and summer camps and educational programs. More than half of the respondents in this field also provided programming for adult sports teams, active older adults, swimming, sport training such as golf or tennis instruction, sports tournaments and races, teens, fitness programs and mind/body balance programs such as yoga and tai chi. This frequency of fitness programs in parks and recreation facilities occurs despite the fact that less than 30 percent of them currently include a fitness center. Many more, though, have



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community or multipurpose centers, which make an ideal venue for aerobics classes and other options to help improve community fitness.

These numbers are likely to see changes over the next several years, as parks and recreation departments plan to add new options. Creating new and innovative programming options was listed as one of the top five issues parks and recreation facility managers will be concerned about in the next three years. One New York-based respondent said, "Our participation rates have dropped considerably over the years because of the drastic change in society. So we have to find new, safe ways to get and keep people involved."

The most common choices for new programs at parks and recreation facilities included environmental education programs, fitness programs and programs aimed at teenagers. More than 10 percent of parks and recreation department respondents said they are planning to add such programming over the next three years.

Parks and recreation departments also were more likely than the general group of survey respondents to be planning to add performing arts programs, such as dance, music or theater, adult sports teams, sports tournaments and races, personal training, youth sports teams, sport training and swimming programs. They were less likely to be planning to add daycare preschool programs, therapeutic programs or nutrition and diet counseling.

The top 10 programs parks and recreation departments are planning to add within the next three years include:

1. Environmental education
2. Fitness programs
3. Teen programming
4. Mind/body balance programs
5. Performing arts
6. Educational programs
7. Active older adults
8. Holiday and other special events
9. Day camps and summer camps
10. Trips

Environmental education programs, such as trail guides, nature guides, bird watching, classes on environmental impact and sustainability and more, are likely becoming more popular among parks and recreation departments as awareness of global climate challenges grows and the impact of rising energy costs is felt across the board.

One California-based respondent cited youth involvement in natural areas as an issue of top concern in his facility. "Increase in youth involvement in electronics and indoor activities is taking the place of wilderness experience and activities. This looks like a long-term trend with millions of young people not experiencing nature."

Author Richard Louv, in his testimony before the House of Representatives, said that impressive efforts are starting to emerge across the country that aim to address this problem, and some of these programs feature elements of

environmental education.

"Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge in Washington State successfully brings hundreds of schoolchildren to the Refuge and combines school lessons with tree plantings for habitat restoration," Louv said.

He also described a campaign launched by John Flicker, president of the National Audubon Society, who is encouraging politicians and communities to create a family-focused nature center in every congressional district. "Of course, such programs must teach children how to step lightly on natural habitats, especially ones with endangered species," Louv said. "But these experiences are essential for the survival of conservation. The truth is that the human child in nature may also be an endangered species—the most important indicator of future sustainability."

Louv went on to encourage the government to increase the number of naturalists and interpreters working at parks and in other public nature settings.

The U.S. Forest Service recently put \$1.5 million into projects to help close the growing chasm between kids and the natural environment. Many studies have revealed a widening gap between kids and nature, and this gap inevitably leads to corresponding drops in physical and outdoor recreation.

"We can help address troubling declines we see in the mental and physical health of our children," said Gail Kimbell, chief of the forest service, in a recent press release. "At the same time, we can inspire future conservation leaders, who can perpetuate the critical role forests play in the quality of life for Americans."

The money granted by the forest services is focused on projects designed to reach underserved and urban youth, recreation and conservation education, solid, broad-based partnerships and innovative techniques, with most of the projects taking place within national forests.

Environmental education can provide a way to get children outdoors and encourage activity, but the second most common program offering parks and recreation departments are planning to add in the next several years—fitness programs such as aerobics classes, cardio sessions, strength training and more—tackles the growing problem of obesity head-on. Fitness programs were a common program addition planned at park and recreation facilities, and the need couldn't be clearer.

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) completed a survey that found that the majority (89 percent) of city managers believe that it is the responsibility of parks and recreation departments to lead the way in creating communities that promote active lifestyles. That same study also showed that nearly half of city managers felt that the most important action to take in order to build these communities is to build an interconnected system of parks and trails.

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) calls further attention to the need to create more opportunities for physical activity in communities that are traditionally underserved, including low-income areas, higher-poverty areas, and communities with a higher proportion of racial and ethnic minorities. Research has shown that these citizens are at a higher risk of

being sedentary and overweight. "As many as two-thirds of the residents of America's largest cities do not have access to a nearby park, playground or open space," the TPL reports in its report, "The Benefits of Parks: Why America Needs More City Parks and Open Space."

One California-based respondent cited community fitness as an issue of top concern in his area. "We are in a low-income community, and we are a generally out-of-shape community. There are too many fast-food and bad food vendors and not enough opportunities for community fitness."

According to the Task Force on Community Preventive Services, a 15-member, nonfederal, independent panel of experts working in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control, one of six recommended interventions to help get more people active is the "creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach activities."

Parks and recreation departments are well-positioned to provide for such programs. Many park facilities already include fitness centers and multipurpose rooms that can be adapted for this use. For departments that do not have gyms, weight rooms or fitness spaces, there's still plenty to do. In addition to forming partnerships with other organizations in the community, you can get people more active simply by getting them outside.

In his testimony before Congress, Louv touted several city, state and regional campaigns, including programs in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Chicago, the San Francisco Bay Area, St. Louis, Florida, Colorado, Kentucky and Texas, as well as Canada. "A host of related initiatives—among them the simple-living, walkable-cities, nature-education and land-trust movements—have begun to find common cause, and collective strength, through this issue," he said.

A simple walking program can get local citizens engaged in one of the most popular—and easiest—forms of exercise around. One example is set forth by the NRPA, which recently partnered with the AARP to introduce a 10-week pilot walking program in cities across the nation.

"Walking can take place in any of the numerous venues provided by public park and recreation agencies," noted John Thorner, NRPA's executive director, in a press release announcing the program. "We are proud to be working with AARP on this 10-week walking

program to promote health and livability throughout the lifespan of all Americans."

Ten locations are hosting the pilot program, which aims to help participants find safe places to walk, in addition to providing tools and support to help them keep going.

For parks departments that want to reach their residents through traditional fitness options in fitness centers and community centers, there are several things to keep in mind. Atilano suggested that multipurpose is the way to go.

"The world of fitness is expanding to be much more than a room with weight and cardio machines," he said. "It's about multipurpose rooms. It's the Pilates, the tai chi and karate—

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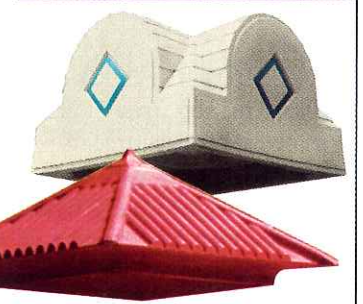
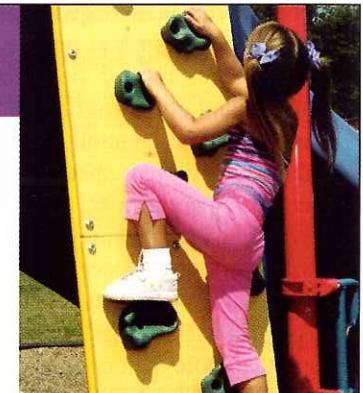
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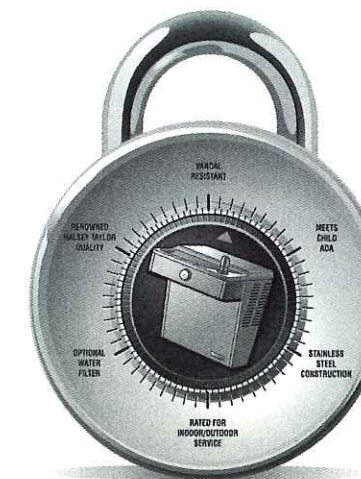
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whatever the park district is doing that is part of fitness. People may not want to build a fitness center or programs for fitness, but we have a problem with obesity and poor health within the demographics of the population. We've got to be out there saying this is the right thing to do."

Another important consideration when adding fitness programs is ensuring you have the right staff, properly trained.

"I think one of the real important things that has to be done when you expand programs like fitness is to make sure that you hire qualified staff to run the programs—people who have the right training, certifications and backgrounds," explained Seidler, who is well-versed in risk management. "All too often, we see them hire somebody with an English degree. It used to be that you wanted to hire somebody who looked good in spandex, and that's got to change. We need to hire people who have degrees in exercise science or related fields, and certifications with the well-respected organizations in the field."

The third most common program option park facilities are planning to add were specialized programs directed at teen audiences. According to the TPL's Center for Parks and Health, teens who said they did not have access to a safe park, playground or open space were significantly more likely not to engage in any physical activity compared to teens who had access to such settings. And the Active Living Network reports that more than one-third of teens in grades 9 to 12 do not exercise at least 20 minutes a day, three times a week. Reaching these teens with fitness options in particular, is one way to help address problems of childhood obesity.

Atilano said that when he works on fitness areas, he tells clients that it's not just about cardio equipment.

"The things we're suggesting are youth areas and spaces for youth fitness," he said. "In most fitness centers, the youth can't go on the fitness floor. As you try to have a community center that's family-focused, if your son or daughter can go with you, work out and understand the value of that, it's going to become a driver for getting more people into the facility."

Other teen programs provide an opportunity to socialize—through hip-hop dance classes or special gatherings—or show off their skills through contests like a battle of the bands or talent show. The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Department of Parks and Recreation, Prince George's County held its 5th Annual Xtreme Teen Rising Star Vocal Showcase recently at the University of Maryland. From an initial 225 candidates, the competition was whittled down to 15 pre-teen finalists and nine teen finalists, who prepared for two months for the final showdown.

Top Issues in Parks and Recreation

By far the top issue of concern to respondents from parks and recreation departments—both now and in three years—was the budget. Nearly three-quarters of respondents in this category said budgetary concerns were a major issue now, and more than 60 percent said they expected them to be a concern three years from now.

The NRPA reported last May that parks and recreation

departments face a \$38 billion funding deficit for basic needs over the next four years. With other city services like fire and police considered more important, parks and recreation departments often must scramble for shrinking dollar amounts.

In a press release from the NRPA discussing its Urban Park and Recreation Summit, Long Beach (California) Mayor Beverly O'Neill said, "Let's face it, nobody is going to give [parks and recreation] any resources until you demonstrate that your services are just as important as the health and safety of our communities—as important as police officers, fire fighters, streets and sidewalks."

The NRPA's National Legislative and Policy Platform for 2007 included several recommendations associated with improving funding for parks. (See www.nrpa.org for more information on these recommendations.) These include support for funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) state assistance program, the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Act and the River Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program, among others.

Atilano also referred to funding challenges as a barrier that prevents many parks departments from providing communities with the facilities they need. And he advised that there are ways the design team can help improve the efficiency of the building, as well as its staffing.

"There's limited funding. There are not opportunities for them to get money, so reducing energy costs and smart space allocation are important," he said. "The old proven option for funding is state grants, especially here in Illinois," he added.

Wallover suggested that it's important to get innovative about finding new approaches to funding, particularly by forming creative partnerships with other organizations in the community.

"It seems like we're just starting to touch on more in-depth partnerships—looking outside the box," she said.

Parks and recreation departments surveyed were highly likely to form partnerships with other organizations. More than 96 percent formed partnerships, and the most common partners were local schools, local government and nonprofit organizations.

Atilano cited one creative partnership between a park district and a health provider. "We just had a park district sign a 10-year agreement with a private health provider that is giving them rent to associate with that space," he said. "They're going out onto the fitness floor, and 50 percent of those people will become members. That's a best-case scenario."

Wallover said that she expects partnerships to change over the next several years to become more inclusive. "Everybody's looking to maximize the use of their dollar," she said. "Of course, the budgets will be affected by families when you get more of them involved."

She added, "Taxes have been the way of doing things in the past. People are starting to say no because so much has been levied against them, and I don't think we've yet hit our peak in creativity in terms of getting things accomplished. That's where a lot of these partnerships will help develop projects that might otherwise have been taxed."

The second most common issue of concern among parks

and recreation departments is equipment and facility maintenance, which more than half of respondents said was an issue for them. Nearly half said they expected it would still be a concern three years from now.

Looking at the budgeting and maintenance needs over the entire lifecycle of a facility, whether that's a building, a park shelter or a playground, rather than just the initial cost of buying and installing equipment, is essential up front.

"Particularly urban parks are going to have to be durable," Figurski explained. "They're going to have to be very maintainable, because the moment they aren't, they tend to decline."

"Playgrounds have a functional lifecycle, just as a mower or tractor," Christiansen explained. "And they need to budget a life period of about 15 years, and eventually change out some of their equipment each year and not do a massive change all at once."

Hendy agreed, adding that people need to be realistic about their capital investments. "If they're looking at a capital investment of \$200,000 and they're thinking they're going to get it installed and then never have to touch it again, that's not realistic," she explained of playgrounds. "You tell them it's got a lifecycle of 12 to 15 years and that they will have to attend to the surfacing both in a routine format and also replace it about halfway through the life of that structure." "Once they understand that lifecycle, they also need to anticipate more than routine maintenance."

Here again, partnerships can be a way to ensure maintenance is taken care of—and paid for.

"Here in New York, we've gone heavily into community involvement," Wallach explained. "We have organizations and local community groups who support a specific playground or park and are the basis of that budget."

"I think you see that in a lot of communities," agreed Jean Schappet, an advisory board member for IPEMA's Voice of Play Initiative whose 25-year career in the playground industry includes consulting, designing play environments, teaching and writing. "You have friends of the park, or whatever they choose to call it."

Hendy explained that this kind of community group gives the facility a voice. "If people value that public amenity, they're going to give it a voice and honor it with their resources," she said.

The third most common issue of concern, both now and in three years, was staffing issues, with more than 50 percent of respondents listing staffing as a top concern now, and more than 40 percent listing it as a top concern three years from now.

One Illinois-based respondent said, "Locally, I anticipate staffing being a concern. Many of our most experienced supervisory employees may retire or find new employment in three to five years. Replacement workers may lack the training, management skill, education and experience to effectively provide the vision and leadership needed to move our organization forward. I believe this will be a challenge for many organizations as the baby boom generation moves on."

A Texas-based respondent said she has seen "a pattern of increased work, without an increase in workers." She added,

"We have added new facilities and acquired new park land, but no new staff members."

Staffing issues are closely connected to budget challenges, as Atilano explained.

"Nobody's got enough money coming in," he said. "If you look at a 40-year lifecycle, building costs and construction costs are just 2 percent of the total outlay. Maintenance and operations are 6 percent. Ninety-two percent is people—salaries benefits. We're trying to minimize staff, which ties into the building layout."

Bouck agreed that designing facilities well can help deal with staffing issues.

"How can we make the center run with as few staff as possible, while still providing the same level of service?" he asked. "This calls for good planning. So for example, the front desk could have a view to the whole facility to provide security and control, as well as customer service. There's going to be a lot more scrutiny to be sure things can truly be operated as effectively as possible."

Marketing and increasing participation were top issues of concern for 43.6 percent of respondents now, and more than 34 percent felt it would still be a concern in three years.

Increasing participation can be a challenge, but playing to your strengths is one way to improve the numbers.

"Don't try to compete head to head with other facilities," Atilano said. "If it's private industry, they're not after the community, they're not after families. Families are your strength—use that."

Campus Recreation

A Look at Trends in Recreation at Colleges and Universities

Millions of parents pack their young-adult children up every year to send them off to colleges or universities across the country to further their education, but further educating their young minds goes far beyond the classroom to include their entire campus life experience. Recreation and sports activities are just one part of that experience, and while critics may complain that some of the newer, impressive recreation facilities being built on campuses across the country are contributing to a rise in the cost of a higher education, smart administrators understand the real value of providing these kinds of facilities. Recreation and sports facilities on campus aid recruitment, contribute to alumni involvement down the road, provide good employment options for students and, most importantly, take higher education, well, higher.

"Those who are in campus administration who are enlightened understand that it's not just about putting student in an academic setting in the classroom for a few hours. It's about their entire higher education experience—how they'll develop, whether they'll become good citizens, good alums, whether they'll be educated and have a successful history at that institution," said Kent Blumenthal, executive director of the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association

(NIRSA). "How can you isolate or excerpt a student from the rest of their environment?"

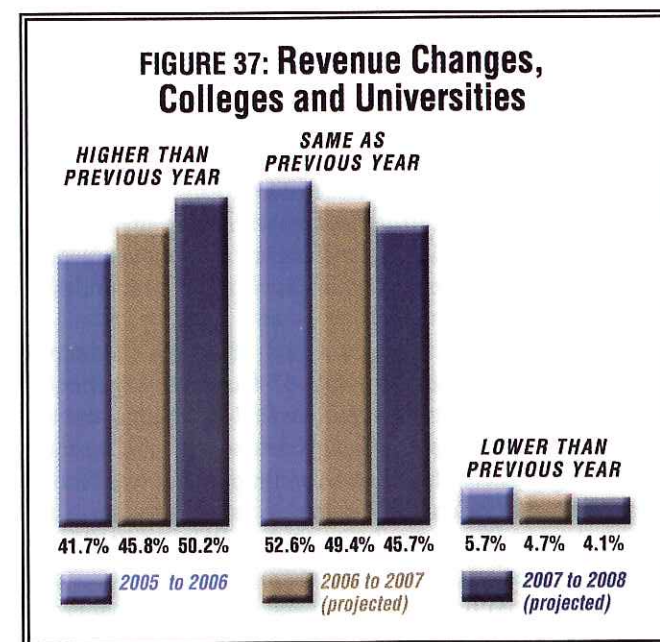
Blumenthal compared the major university to a caregiver that essentially helps provide guidance to students, many of whom are away from home for the first time.

"Universities have an obligation to provide safe and healthy environments," he said. "So at some level, the expenditures on these campuses for health and fitness centers are as much for the parents as they are for the students. It gives them peace of mind, as well as providing fitness and wellness to the students. Healthier students also translate into more educated students, students with a greater capacity to learn, greater stamina, greater self-image and so on. That's what it's about."

As the facilities grow and improve, more people—students and faculty alike—are using them. Colleges and universities differed very little from the general survey population in terms of increases in the number of people using their facilities. From 2005 to 2006, more than 63 percent said that number of people using their facilities had increased, and another third saw no change. Less than 3 percent said there was a decrease in usage that year. From 2006 to 2007, nearly two-thirds project an increase, and from 2007 to 2008, nearly seven in 10 respondents project an increase in the number of people visiting their facilities.

Despite the increasing usage of their facilities, substantially fewer colleges and universities are experiencing increases in revenues, when compared with the rest of the survey respondents. From 2005 to 2006, just 41.7 percent of college and university respondents reported an increase in revenues, compared with 54.3 percent of all survey respondents. By 2007 to 2008, just over 50 percent of colleges and universities are projecting increases in their revenues. (See Figure 37.)

Of course, the funding wheels often spin slowly on campuses, with many committees and people to approve budgets and student fee increases. However, the slower increases in revenues among these facilities surely contributes to the large



number of respondents (73.5 percent) who named budgets as a primary concern.

One Texas-based respondent said an increase in the student fee for recreational sports was an imperative. "If we do not receive it in the next three years, we will be forced to cut programming."

Another respondent summed up the way budget issues have a ripple effect across the board: "Budgetary concerns are always an issue for public institutions of higher learning. This impacts staffing, equipment purchases, maintenance, programming and marketing!"

Colleges and universities also reported significantly lower-than-average operating expenditures for their facilities. For fiscal 2006, the average operating expenditure for these facilities was \$967,396—18.1 percent lower than the average for all types of facilities. That said, operating expenditures for college and university recreation facilities are projected to increase at a slightly faster rate than those of other survey respondents. By 2008, college and university respondents projected an average operating expenditure of \$1,058,723, a 9.4 percent increase over the average for fiscal 2006. This compares to the average 8.2 percent increase expected for facilities of all types.

Campus Work

Among survey respondents, the third most common issue of concern, both now and within the next three years, was staffing issues. More than 50 percent of respondents from colleges and universities said staffing was a major concern for their facility.

Blumenthal said he believes that the expectations of college and university administrators are going to increase. "I think their expectations of performance of their employees, of delivery of services, of expectations to perpetually meet student needs will accelerate," he said. "Having said that, I think that's going to translate into the pressure being on these professionals to stay on top of cutting-edge knowledge, information and technology—to really focus on skills and aptitudes that people have, which will then translate into taking training or expectations for certifications to a higher level."

As the schools compete for the best students, faculty and staff, Blumenthal explained, they'll need to stay on the cutting edge in many areas.

"Our job as professionals who offer training and certification and the like is to make sure that the staffs and professionals who operate and manage these multimillion-dollar facilities have the right knowledge and tools so their student bodies, their faculty and their staff are well-served."

Colleges and universities employ substantially fewer full-time, seasonal and volunteer staff workers than the average survey respondent. In fact, between now and 2008, colleges and universities are actually projecting a 3.5 percent decrease in the average number of full-time staff employed at their facilities. A 9.4 percent decrease in seasonal staff is also projected. These facilities seem to be planning to replace the lost staffers with part-time help, as a 4.9 percent increase in part-

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