

Soaring To New Heights

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Years ago, swimmers of all ages flocked to public pools to take a refreshing break from the summer heat. Frolicking in the water and swimming a few laps satisfied a craving for fun, provided a total-body workout, and offered a temporary escape from an otherwise stressful day.



Pool climbing walls are challenging and fun.

Today's fitness enthusiasts are as eager to find new and creative ways to enjoy their water experience as technology buffs are to stay current with the most modern gadgets.

Ever-evolving innovations in aquatic recreation are elevating the fun factor and the fitness challenge to new heights with pool climbing walls. Traditional climbing walls have been a popular feature at recreational facilities for years, but industry experts say adding them to pools has been gaining interest in recent years.

The Woodlands Township Parks and Recreation Department in Texas installed the feature in early June at its Sawmill Park and Pool facility. The wall—which cost approximately \$35,000—is 10 feet wide and 11½ feet tall.

Chris Nunes, director of parks and recreation for the township, expects the wall to enhance the overall value the pool provides to the public.

“The 2011 Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment reviewed all of the community's parks and pools,” he says.

“It determined that pools and other facilities should have an improved entertainment value to drive more users to the facilities. Therefore, we thought including climbing walls was something new which would enhance the play value of the pool and add something unique to the pool system.”



Clear panels provide lifeguards with a good view of the whole pool.

Nunes, who has climbed the wall with his kids, says it provides an upper-body workout, challenges coordination and offers an alternative to the traditional diving board.

Tom Griffiths, president and founder of the Aquatic Safety Research Group, LLC in State College, Pa., believes that climbing walls and diving boards can co-exist in the same pool as long as there is ample space between them.

“The biggest safety issue is just making sure that those who use the wall do not try to dive or perform other acrobatics and that only one person at a time uses the wall,” says Griffiths, whose group provides water-safety and risk-management programs.

“The walls must be supervised by a lifeguard.”

He adds that the feature is attractive to all age groups, but for different reasons; for instance, adults are attracted to them as a way to enhance their physical fitness and children are drawn to them because they are challenging and fun.

Tracy Corens, director of marketing for Everlast Climbing in Mendota Heights, Minn., says interest in the climbing walls has been “off the charts” with inquiries coming from recreational facilities, schools and individuals.

The price for a poolside climbing wall ranges from \$6,000 to \$35,000, depending on the size and style.



This girl is all smiles as she tackles the pool climbing wall.

“They have gotten the best response of any new product launch. People love them,” Corens says. “The climbing and jumping off are ways to experience positive risk-taking, which is seen as important to child development.”

The walls are available with both color panels and clear panels to accommodate any safety concerns and to complement the design of any facility.

“The clear panels facilitate visibility through to the pool and to areas on the pool deck, which enhances safety,” says Mertyce Mrvos, curriculum and marketing specialist at Everlast Climbing.

“The clear panels also coordinate with any indoor or outdoor décor. Plus, it’s fun for climbers who can see through the wall while climbing and for bystanders to watch climbers from either side.”

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