

Fitness by the Numbers

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One size almost never fits all, but when it comes to the construction or renovation of a fitness facility, there are a number of general guidelines available.

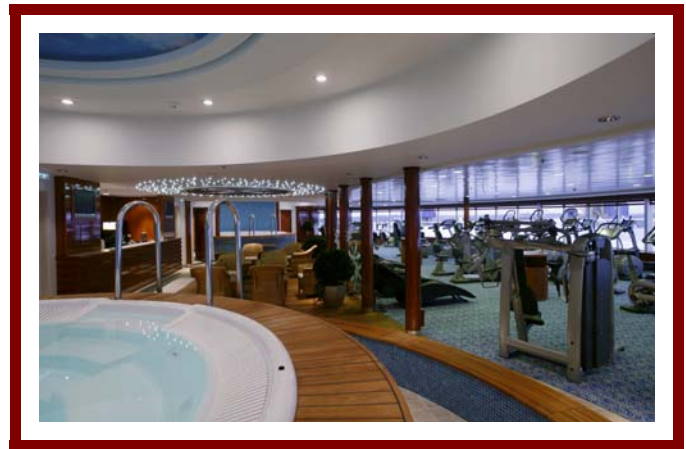
In an education session at the 2005 CMAA world conference, a fitness consultant with WTS International said that an 800-member club should plan about 2,400 sq. ft. of space for a fitness facility. Another rule of thumb is to allow 60 sq. ft. of space per piece of equipment and 50 sq. ft. per participant for group exercise spaces. The recommended minimum for any club would be about 1,200 sq. ft.

Generally, construction cost is estimated to be around \$300 per sq. ft. including furniture, fixtures and equipment. That figure is higher for a freestanding facility and a little less for renovation of space in an existing building.

Our sources suggest buying top-quality "big name" equipment and only hiring certified instructors may save headaches in the long run. It also gives the facility instant credibility and generates word of mouth "buzz" among members and prospects.

In most commercial spas, massage therapy accounts for 50 to 75 percent of the revenue. Clubs might benefit from cornering the local market on massage and leaving more exotic treatments to commercial facilities.

Before tackling issues such as size, cost or programming, experts rec-



ommend a "needs analysis" to determine what kind of facility will succeed at your club. Survey members to get a feel for interest level. If they make use of other local facilities, find out what kinds of equipment and services are offered there. It's important to remember that in a private club setting, the mix of users may be different than that of a commercial facility.

Staffing the Fitness Center

Chris White of WTS International also shared his thoughts on the human side of the equation once the center is up and running. Careful staffing is the key to maximizing usage and White warns clubs to be especially thoughtful about who they hire to serve as director.

Promoting a personal trainer to manage the facility could turn out to be a mistake akin to bumping a server directly into a banquet manager's job, says White. The job calls for an individual with a great deal of creativity and above all, strong management skills.

"The purpose of a fitness center director is to invent things for people

to do and that's where the majority of their energy should go." Fitness contests, social events, and walking clubs are all rank high on White's list of effective ways to both transfer information and acclimate members that are on the fence about using the facility.

In terms of payroll, White believes that spa and fitness staff—including personal trainers—should be employees of the club rather than independent contractors.

"Personal training is a real sleeping giant," he said. "Clubs that think they're saving money in the fitness center because they don't have payroll and benefits are underestimating the revenue potential of personal trainers."

To keep spa and fitness directors focused on their management responsibilities, White recommends a contract restriction limiting the director's involvement in such personal services as fitness training or massage.

To be continued....

"Promoting Your New Fitness Facility" will be added to this article after its initial publication in the September 2005 issue of *PCA Plus*

