

Nuts and Bolts

Fitter Facilities

By Mary Helen Sprecher

Being close to work, to kids' schools and to shopping used to be good enough reasons for people to choose to live somewhere. And generally speaking, if a condominium or community association could offer well-maintained roads, nice living spaces and decent parking, residents would be happy enough to stay.

Today, the market is much more competitive, and every edge your association can gain can make the difference between a resident who stays, and one who starts looking for greener pastures. Amenities are a big attraction, and one of the greatest things you can offer is a fitness facility. They may be large or small, appointed with just the basics or offer multiple opportunities for different types of workouts, but fitness facilities all have the same end result: they give residents one more reason to love where they live.

Keeping your facility up to date and looking good doesn't have to be a huge struggle, but it does have to be a regular item on your to-do list. Think of doing maintenance on your fitness area the way you would think of a regular exercise program: if it's done routinely, everyone stays healthier and happier. Communities should not wait for complaints from residents. Someone—a board member, manager or maintenance supervisor—should walk through the facilities on a daily basis to look for potential problems.

Clean lifting

Weight rooms are one of the most common, and one of the most popular features in a fitness facility. However, because free weights aren't subject to the mechanical breakdowns that occur with electronic cardio equipment, they—and the area around them—are often overlooked.

"Weight rooms are one of the most abused and neglected areas in a fitness facility," says Jim Stalford, of Mondo USA in Tega Cay, S.C. "The activity happens in a confined space with many obstacles. Athletes have direct contact with everything in this space. Keeping the area safe and clean is a must."

Professionals recommend putting up containers of disinfectant wipes, along with signs asking users to wipe down weight benches, mats and other equipment before and after each use. When mirrored walls are clean and free of smudges and when painted walls look bright, fresh and unmarked, an overall tone of cleanliness is created. As a result, users will be more encouraged to clean up after themselves.

While some weight rooms are carpeted, many use nonskid matting or special sport surfaces. Stalford recommends non-porous flooring that contains natural anti-microbial properties. "Cleaning a weight room can be a challenge when equipment is placed closely together," he says. "Having a surface that does not require coatings and that can be dust mopped on a daily basis is vital. This is key to the area looking great, being healthy and eliminating traffic patterns and pivot points at the machines and weight benches."

Communities should also clear the air. Weight rooms—no matter what your high school coach said—should not smell bad, which is why a clean floor, wiped-down equipment and adequate ventilation are essential. HVAC systems should work good enough to prevent humid or stale conditions.

Cardio concerns

If you have electronic equipment, including ellipticals, treadmills and step trainers, take a listen; the machinery should not be making loud noises. If anyone tends to systematically avoid one machine, find out why; maybe it's getting hard to operate or maybe the readout isn't functioning correctly. Often, when an individual can use an identical piece of equipment, you won't hear complaints about the one that isn't up to snuff.

Debris, such as grass, mud and rocks, can destroy cardio machines. The amount of dirt and muck that can be found on the back side of a treadmill would surprise most people, says Sam Fisher of Fisher Tracks in Boone, Iowa. "Catching all of this debris before it lands on the interior floors or embeds itself in the working parts of machines is an inexpensive way to keep the facility looking sharp and staying functional."

A good entrance with appropriate matting will take care of the problem; devices placed near the entrance that brush the sides and the soles of shoes also do wonders.

Safety matters

When users place their gym bags, cell phones, jackets or equipment on the floor next to the weights, the machines or in the walkway, accidents are more likely to happen. Provide hooks, cubbyholes or lockers to increase safety.

The lighting should be bright with no burned-out bulbs, tubes or fixtures. Adequate visibility heightens comfort and safety. If carpeting has lumps, wrinkles or pulls, replace that section. Carpets need to be vacuumed regularly and steam-cleaned a couple times per year.

"Indoor facilities are sometimes battered, and sprucing up is important," says Alex Levitsky of Global Sports & Tennis Group in Fair Haven, N.J. "Cleaning backdrops, replacing light bulbs, adjusting hardware, and replacing worn or broken components are all musts."

Dave Marsden of Boston Tennis Court Construction Company in Hanover, Mass., also recommends doing a walk-through of locker rooms and reception areas. Pay attention to mechanisms like showerheads and faucets. Soap dispensers and paper towels need to be kept full. Communities also should provide a water fountain or cooler with disposable cups.

Final touches

Many fitness facilities also have recreation rooms that can be used for social activities, classes or gatherings, as well as for athletic purposes including yoga and aerobics. These rooms need to be ready for all users. Floors that are scuffed or dinged should be cleaned or repaired. Depending on the severity of the problem, this may be more than an overnight job.

Rooms with synthetic flooring typically require less maintenance. Hardwood floors may need a rescreen and recoat, which would shut the room down for one to two weeks. Once floors are replaced or rehabbed, communities should post signs stating rules regarding proper footwear. Ensuring those rules are enforced will reduce cleaning and repairs.

If your fitness facility is big enough, post directional signs too. Just because your regulars know their way around—where the weight room is, where yoga sessions are held, how to find the lockers—doesn't mean that new residents, or those new to using the fitness facilities, will know.

In addition, Levitsky recommends taking some time to make sure that everyone—regular members and new users alike—knows what you have to offer. Spreading the good word can pay dividends; communities should promote new programs, new equipment or new features to the facility. “Hang banners and posters advertising the new programs, revise your website to celebrate and publicize upcoming events and prepare handouts,” he says. “Offer pre-program events to get members excited, and bring in special staff for new programs.”

Keeping your facility fit requires regular attention. A running to-do list can help you stay organized, save time, save money and will lead to more efficient operations. After all, a clean and functional fitness facility may set your community above the rest in a competitive marketplace.

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