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DELIVERING PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH DURING A PANDEMIC

The Village of Westmont, FMC Natatorium at Ty Warner Park, and Westmont Park District Proving Strength in Collaboration, Community and Premier Programs

OAK BROOK, IL – When Illinois faced its shutdown back in March 2020, the Village of Westmont and its recreation leaders took on the ultimate question — how to deliver the outlets so desperately needed for physical and mental health at a time when “getting it right” the first time was critical on many levels. With high standards, tremendous collaboration within their respective leadership communities, and unwavering commitments to safety, FMC Natatorium at Ty Warner Park (FMC) and the Westmont Park District are model examples of reimaged operations in a new day of aligning recreation opportunities and safety.

On September 16, 2020, the brand new, Olympic-caliber FMC swimming and diving facility opened its doors for its first splash. FMC is widely considered in line with the top 10 indoor facilities in the country due to the vision and meticulous eye of its founder, MaryAnn Kaufman, for whom this was a passion project from the start. In addition to the 50-meter competition pool, which has two moveable bulkheads to allow for different configurations, there is a 25-yard training pool with separate entrances, bathrooms and on-deck showers. With these two pools, and their multiple entrances and exits, separate locker rooms, on deck bathrooms and showers, FMC is serving in ways never originally imagined — providing comfort, normalcy and safety during unprecedented times.

The proactive and early planning by the FMC team is proving invaluable in keeping the FMC swim club, 12 additional outside swim clubs, High Performance National Team, and Master’s Swimming streamlined on the calendar and safe within the facility. The initial intent of the 18- to 19-foot deck space around the competition pool was for large events — now proving extremely helpful during this time of social distancing. “We were already collaborating and preparing for what it would look like before the start of the shut down,” said Director of Facility, Programs & Events and FMC Aquatic Head Coach Dave Krotiak. “We knew the importance of getting kids back in the pool. In order to make sure we’re managing our facility correctly and providing the utmost safety, we are opening in layers. The cooperation among organizations in doing so has been remarkable.”

Come early October, FMC will be able to safely accommodate three swim clubs at a time. Plans for accepting public inquiries and expanding community programming will follow shortly thereafter. In facility standards alone, the air quality is second to none thanks to a \$3.5 million ventilation system, with five separate units controlling different parts of the building. Installation of the Defender Filtration System – considered the best in the world – additionally ensures the best water quality. New safety measures in place include 15-minute buffers between practices, active management of arrivals and departures and no parents within the building; clearing areas for testing; 15-foot spacing of pool lines and eight-foot spacing on the deck with masks; no locker room usage; facility cleanings throughout the day; and most importantly active communication to coaches, organizations and the public.

FMC is in good company, as its supporting partner the Westmont Park District also began to navigate the need for its essential services early in the pandemic. “It became evident people needed our parks more than ever,” said Westmont Park District Executive Director Bob Fleck. “For that reason, we never stopped maintaining or taking new steps to make our parks safe. Runners, bikers, family walks...we’ve seen a rediscovery of our parks and people in turn have found the intrinsic connection between physical and mental health.”

The Park District moved quickly to reopen restrooms, ensuring all were retrofitted for safety: touchless everything and even door foot pulls. Safety protocols were put in place at Twin Lakes Golf Club allowing the success of this year’s Senior Golf League — especially important to the park district as it addresses ways to serve those most at-risk for COVID-19. The park district staff and families who participated in summer day camp said the new operations quickly became a normal, efficient routine. It has been deemed successful, with not one known COVID-19 case to date. The Fitness Club has also found ways to not only be safe but provide a space in which people feel comfortable.

“We’ve proved we can operate and keep our participants safe by being sensible and following best practices. As fall and winter approach, we are prepared to adapt and respond, focused on our mission to enrich through recreation,” said Fleck. “I hope people can use this time to not only develop healthy habits, but continue enjoying and appreciating the simple pleasures of being in a park, taking a walk or going for a bike ride, long after COVID-19 has passed.”

“FMC and the Westmont Park District are just two reasons why DuPage is one of the healthiest destinations in Illinois,” said Beth Marchetti, executive director of the DuPage Convention & Visitors Bureau, who has worked in partnership with the Village of Westmont for over 33 years. “They represent the gold standard, not just in Illinois but throughout the United States. As we weather this pandemic, DuPage County’s 500 miles of trails, outdoor amenities and attractions, and recreation partners continue to play an important role for residents and those in need of a safe getaway.”

With the successful opening of FMC, Westmont Mayor Ron Gunter took a moment to highlight the strength of the Westmont community. “Everyone in the Village worked to welcome the natatorium and to have this come to fruition, especially the Park District and Ty Warner Park. I am proud to be Mayor of this wonderful community, to work with these exceptional recreation leaders and to celebrate positive moments like these that will carry us into the future.”

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