

Athletic Business

THE LEADING RESOURCE FOR ATHLETIC, FITNESS & RECREATION BUSINESS

AUGUST 2008

PLUS

COLLEGE SPORTS | 88
ADMINISTRATORS PREPARE
FOR A SEXUAL EVOLUTION

RECREATION | 96
RECREATION CENTERS
TARGET VIOLENT CRIME

HEALTH CLUBS | 100
URBANITES PAUSE FOR THE
QUICKEST OF WORKOUTS

Armed Force

MILITARY ATHLETES
AIM FOR GLORY
THIS MONTH IN BEIJING

Gun Play

CAST AS SAFE HAVENS, SOME RECREATION CENTERS ARE FORCED TO TAKE AIM AT VIOLENT CRIME. BY NICHOLAS BROWN

Last October, amid a spate of shootings in and around some of Philadelphia's public recreation centers — the most recent one involving an 18-month-old who was critically wounded by an errant bullet — former city recreation commissioner Victor Richard III offered this statement to the *Philadelphia Daily News*: “The rec centers are not unsafe; it’s disheartening that inner-city children are caught up in this nonsense.”

The statement is perplexing, if not outright contradictory. It also illustrates a mindset shared by the many recreation providers who not only see their facilities as refuges from gun-related violence, but who also are faced with the painful evidence from around the country that belies that notion.

As of this writing, the family of a 19-year-old Long Island, N.Y., man who was shot to death this Memorial Day during an informal party at a recreation center was pleading for witnesses to come forth. Meanwhile, in Yuba City, Calif., a 22-year-old man was headed to trial for allegedly opening fire with an Uzi semiautomatic weapon at a youth-and-community center, wounding three people attending a March concert. Philadelphia has been hit especially hard by crime spreading from the streets into its parks and



PHOTO BY JOSEPH KACZMAREK

recreation centers. According to a June report in the *Daily News*, 16 people were shot, five fatally, within or on the grounds of city recreation property since January 2007.

To be sure, such anecdotal evidence doesn’t necessarily represent a national trend. But as Asheville (N.C.) Parks and Recreation Department director Roderick Simmons points out, it is the very suddenness and unpredictability of these incidents that should resonate with all recreation providers. Simmons knows firsthand the damage that can be caused by unforeseen violent crime.

Last July, a 14-year-old covering

his face entered one of Asheville’s neighborhood recreation centers and opened fire in a crowded gymnasium. Another man returned fire, according to *Associated Press* reports, and three bystanders were shot.

Simmons firmly believes the shootings had nothing to do with the open basketball program that was taking place at the time. “We’ve got parts of this town that are a lot worse that haven’t had any shootings in their facilities,” he says. “I don’t think it was the neighborhood; it just happened to be this one guy knowing where the other guy was going to be. It could have happened at the gas station or outside the courthouse. It just goes to show you that it can happen anywhere.”

While there may be no way to completely prevent violent crime at rec centers, there are some easy-to-implement strategies for combating it, suggests Harry Erickson, of Long Beach, Calif.-based CPTED Security Consultants, a firm specializing in "crime prevention through environmental design," a multidisciplinary approach to deterring criminal activity.

"At a public space such as a recreation center, we always recommend that people entering the building have to check in, so there is a record," says Erickson. "If your facility is already built and you don't have the funds to move your check-in desk, it's important to have a live body there, a person with a position of authority who people coming into the facility have to pass by."

Simmons says many of Asheville's neighborhood recreation centers are small, converted schools that

are capable of serving only the surrounding residents, who, prior to last year's shooting, could come and go freely. After a thorough review of the department's security procedures, involving extensive input from local police and fire officials, Asheville's rec centers now not only enforce a check-in/sign-out system, but also benefit from increased staff and police presence.

In order to quell anxiety in the surrounding neighborhood, Simmons' department also worked closely with police to inform residents and facility users of security and policy changes, as well as to provide them some specifics about the incident itself. "We basically shared as much information with the public as we could to let them know what was going on," says Simmons. "But situations like this are tough. It's not like you can just go into martial law and start shaking

everyone down; then people are not going to want to use your facility."

That way of thinking appears to also exist in Philadelphia, despite that "the brazen daylight shootings, stabbings and murders on the rec-center grounds seem to have handcuffed the department as it struggles to maintain its programs," wrote *Daily News* reporter Damon C. Williams last October, adding, "Philadelphia's gun violence permeates the safest of safe havens."

The city has since launched an interdepartmental and multifaceted initiative that goes well beyond just bolstering security. "There is a lack of consistent programs," Sue Slawson, who was promoted in June from the police ranks to head the rec department, told the *Daily News*. "A big crime-fighting tool is programs."

Slawson's department did not respond to *AB's* interview requests, but according to reports, it has

For wet floors.

Dri-Dek®



Bare feet and wet floors don't mix. That's why there's Dri-Dek. In showers, locker rooms, or toweling areas, Dri-Dek drains water as it lifts you above wet floors. Better yet, it helps halt the spread of infectious germs. All day. Every day.

Instant Brochure and Free Samples!
at www.dri-dek.com or
call 800-348-2398.


Made in the USA.

Kendall Products Naples, Florida
email: info@dri-dek.com

1/9 area sample

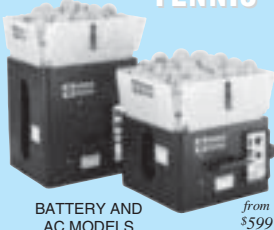
Looking for the competitive edge?

BASEBALL & SOFTBALL




from \$2,795

TENNIS

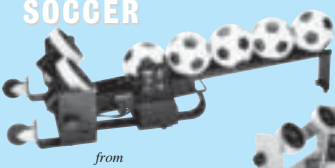


BATTERY AND AC MODELS
from \$599




SPORTS TUTOR
The Sports Machine Company

SOCCER



from \$1,149

VOLLEYBALL



from \$999

www.sportsmachines.com
1-800-448-8867 for FREE brochure
Sports Tutor Inc., 3300 Winona Ave., Burbank, CA 91504

seen an increase in funding and sponsorships that have helped make possible the revitalization of more than 40 baseball fields in several Philly neighborhoods, and some 900 young people were expected to be given city jobs for the summer. "You want to keep [youth] busy in order to keep violence down," the department's deputy commissioner, Leo Dingham, told the *Daily News*.

Erickson, who regularly works with municipalities to create cost-effective crime-prevention measures at their facilities, agrees that the mere presence of more "legitimate" users and facility staff members will make those who might perpetrate a crime take pause. "You want more sets of eyes," he says. "If legitimate users feel safe because of openness, visibility and lighting, then chances are that the illegitimate users will feel at risk."

{ We always recommend that people entering the building have to check in, so there is a record. }

Erickson also fully subscribes to the "broken windows" theory — which asserts that seemingly minor problems, such as the presence of graffiti, will ultimately lead to more serious problems — as it applies to rec centers. "If the municipality doesn't pay enough attention to that graffiti, then law-abiding citizens are going to feel afraid, like they're in a bad area," he says. "If people are allowed to sit on a park bench and drink beer — something that is probably illegal in most jurisdictions — it may seem minor. People might say, 'We need to focus on the bigger things. We just had a homicide.' But the problem is if you don't focus on

those little things, they're going to lead to larger things."

Erickson acknowledges that there is no firm guarantee against gun-related violence in rec centers or any public building, for that matter, even with a comprehensive security plan that may include locks, security patrols, education, ordinances, alarm systems, surveillance cameras and a range of other target-hardening devices, as well as CPTED strategies. But he urges recreation providers to consider measures to make their facilities seem off-limits in potential criminals' minds. "Most crimes are crimes of opportunity," he says. "Whether they consciously make the decision or not,

Towels for Every Budget!



Keep your locker rooms stocked with **TOWELS, TOWELS & MORE TOWELS!**

Call for **FREE SAMPLES & PRICING**

Let A-1 Textiles Cut Your Costs!

- * 6 Quality Levels of Towels
- * Upgrade to Golden Mills Towels
- * Pool Towels-Solid or Stripes
- * Robes, Wraps & Bags

SAVE ON FREIGHT - 5 SHIP POINTS
Same day or next day shipment!

A-1 TEXTILES (800) 351-1919 ext 6
& Hospitality Products www.a1athletictowels.com

**PLEASE
LET US KNOW
IF YOU HAVE
MOVED
OR ARE PLANNING
TO MOVE...**

If you're moving or your label shows an incorrect address, send your present label, along with your correct address, to:

ATHLETIC BUSINESS MAGAZINE

**Attn: Circulation Dept.
4130 Lien Road
Madison, WI 53704**

there's a decision-making process going on when a suspect chooses a location to commit a crime, and the environment plays into that."

While Asheville's parks and recreation department has been careful to review and update all of its policies and procedures for emergency situations, and enhanced security has been

If legitimate users feel safe because of openness, visibility and lighting, then chances are that **the illegitimate users will feel at risk.**

implemented, Simmons says that to suggest that any rec center is perfectly safeguarded against a violent crime such as a shooting would be naïve. "Always keep in the back of your mind that we are providing public facilities, and these things could always happen," he says. "Just have a plan in place for when they do."

But even the most pragmatic thinker has a difficult time coping with an apparently random and violent shooting. "You're trying to provide programs to the community, and then something tragic like that happens," he says. "It's surreal." ☐

Nicholas Brown can be reached at nick@athleticbusiness.com

Building Clients, not Just Projects

Hastings & Chivetta has been a recognized leader in the field of athletics and recreation design for over 45 years. Since our founding in 1960, we have worked with over 150 college, university, and municipal clients across the United States.

We are proud of the fact that so many clients engage our services for multiple projects.

Let us know what we can do for you.

Hastings⁺Chivetta

ARCHITECTS • PLANNERS • INTERIOR DESIGNERS



LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY



GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY



UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-COLUMBIA

700 Corporate Park Dr. Suite 400 • St. Louis, Missouri 63105

888-659-2724 toll-free • 314-863-5717 phone • 314-863-2823 fax

www.hastingschivetta.com

My passion is >>

Stretching my mind and my body to the limits.



Legend Fitness Pin-Select Machines



With an easy weight selection system, our machines ease your mind and work your body.

LEGEND
FITNESS
Over 150 pieces of equipment



1-866-7-LEGEND
GSA #GS-03F-00827

>> how do you train your passion?
www.LegendFitness.com