

INTERNATIONAL aquatics

hanley wood

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SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT: THE SEVENTH ANNUAL BEST OF AQUATICS AWARDS

Shades of Summer

by Rin-rin Yu As outdoor aquatics facilities try to attract a wider range of patrons and find new revenue sources, they're turning to a cool proposition: shade structures.

Though most facilities do not charge individuals for the shady spots, many have found a lucrative side business in renting out partitioned shade areas where large groups can gather. The concept has become the coolest hot spot at any facility that offers them, say aquatics professionals.

"They're a crucial element to the design and overall quality of the park or facility," said Scott Stefanc, project designer at Water Technology Inc. in Beaver Dam, Wis. "We've noticed an increased demand for amenities such as cabanas and other covered shaded areas that can be rented out to derive additional income."

For \$25, half of the covered pavilion can be rented for an hour at one of the outdoor venues in Lewisville, Texas. Most patrons spend the money to bring together families and friends under one roof without inter-

ference. "Once people figured out they could [rent the space], it became extremely popular," said Hilary Pike, aquatics supervisor. "By the end of the summer, we were selling out every day."

NRH₂O in North Richland Hills, Texas, also was selling out its shaded group areas daily. Several different-sized pavilions, starting at \$40 a day, can be rented out to families and corporate groups, with options ranging from picnics to catering. The facility's gathering spaces are so popular, especially with the area's 200-plus corporate groups, that it is building more for next season, said Tracey Dickson, group sales representative.

James Hughes agreed, pointing out that people who frequent watering holes typically seek out a cool space to gather. "When your days get up to 103 and 110 degrees, shade is very important, no matter how much water you have," said the director of Parks, Recreation and Special Events in Bedford, Texas. His facility also rents out shaded areas for

large private gatherings. Cooler temperatures aside, he said the spots are favorites for parties.

These days, facilities can select from a rainbow of hues and shapes to color their venues. Stretching across a network of poles, the structures add a whimsical feature to swimming pools as well as a protective layer that keeps patrons lounging at the pool all day rather than leaving after just a couple of hours.

As leisure pools move toward attracting the entire family, youthful sun worshippers comprise a smaller slice of the attendance pie than in the past. "We have more families coming, and moms and dads don't want to be in the

sun the whole day," Pike said.

No wonder shady spots were almost required during the design of Pike's facilities. "It really was what the public had asked for," she said, noting that the umbrellas and other shade areas are expected to be occupied first. The popularity of the rented pavilion, however, was a genuine surprise.

Not so for Stefanc, who sees this pattern again and again at venues his company designs. "These group areas have really grown because they meet the needs of anywhere from 50 to 500 people," he said.

Now that's cool.



COOL IDEAS Shade areas such as this make popular gathering spots for groups and families on hot summer days. Many facilities rent out the spaces for extra revenues.



PHOTOS COURTESY USA SHADE & FABRIC STRUCTURES INC.