

Excitement builds as Chuck Fruit Aquatic Center enters Year Two

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
August 9 2015 11:20 AM



The Chuck Fruit Aquatic Center enjoyed a successful first year by any measure – it provided an onsite swim facility for Edwardsville High School students, served as a training facility for competitive athletes at all levels, hosted competitive swimming events that served a wide spectrum of swimming abilities, and worked in partnership with various outreach programs by providing a swim facility for their participants.

Superintendent Lynda Andre couldn't be more pleased with the Aquatic Center's success. "We had great expectations for this facility, and it is gratifying to see that it has exceeded them. It's certainly a valuable addition to our school district, providing increased opportunities for our students. And it can't help but be a boost to the local economy, when 500-800 swimmers come to town to compete in weekend swim meet multiple weekends during the year," Andre said.

In its opening year, the Aquatic Center served approximately 600 Edwardsville High School students who received swimming instruction as part of the freshman physical education curriculum. Each freshman participated in a 3-week swimming unit. In addition, elementary, middle school and high school students enrolled in the Functional Life Skills program also participated in a swimming unit. Fifteen students also received Red Cross Lifeguard Certification in training held after school.

According to Edwardsville High School Principal Dennis Cramsey, the next steps in curriculum development will include the development and implementation of an advanced aquatics course, as well as units in American Red Cross Lifeguard Training and water aerobics to be taken in PE classes during the school day.

Cramsey, PE Department Chair Lori Blade, Associate Principal Joe McNamara, Swim Instructor and Assistant Swim Team Coach Samantha Shaw, and Aquatics Center Director Bob Rettle are meeting to develop courses that will meet the needs of EHS students and to schedule the courses in a way that maximizes the use of the pool during the school day. New courses/units will be announced in the fall and will be implemented in the second semester.

The Aquatic Center also serves as a training facility for competitive athletes at all levels. The Edwardsville High School Boys and Girls Swim Teams completed successful seasons in their first year of interscholastic competition.

Other District 7 athletic programs have utilized the pool as a training facility, including Special Olympics participants. The EHS Girls Track and Field Team utilized the pool as an alternative training facility, and the EHS 2015 Boys State Champion Track and Field Team utilized the pool as a rehabilitative option for injured athletes.

Girls Track and Field Coach MiKala Thompkins is a strong believer in the benefits of the pool for her track and field athletes. "Besides using the pool for team building activities, we used it for Active Recovery the day after intense workouts on the track. I don't think it's a coincidence that we had the least number of injuries since I became head coach," Thompkins said.

In addition to the District's use of the pool, Aquatic Center Director Bob Rettle said the facility also hosted competitive swimming events that served a wide spectrum of swimming abilities, including 15 IHSA events with 50 – 200 athletes, 6 USA Swimming events with 400 – 600 athletes, 1 USA Swimming Multicultural Clinic with 75 athletes, 1 USA Master's Swimming event with 100 athletes, 1 Special Olympics event with 150 athletes, 4 YMCA events with 300 – 800 athletes.

The District collaborated with USA Swimming to host six local and regional USA swimming-sanctioned events, including the Ozark "A" Championship and the Martin Luther King Celebration Invitational. More than 1,500 athletes participated in these events.

The District contracted with the Edwardsville YMCA to provide training time for the YMCA competitive swim team. In addition, the Chuck Fruit Aquatic Center has served as the site for four major YMCA swimming competitions. More than 30 YMCAs from throughout the region have participated in these events.

District 7 established partnerships with a variety of local outreach programs.

In October 2014, the Chuck Fruit Aquatic Center hosted a USA Swimming Multi Cultural Day featuring former national team member, Byron Davis, accompanied by USA Swimming Diversity Specialist, Manny Banks. The Aquatic Center also hosted the Area 12 Special Olympics Swimming Competition on March 16, 2015.

District 7 conducted an Outreach Program to provide otherwise unexposed youth to basic swimming lessons and water safety best practices. In addition, 150 students enrolled in Summer Zone, District 7's fee-based summer childcare program, utilized the facility two days per week during the Summer 2015 session. A minimum of five (5) Red Cross-certified lifeguards were on duty at all times during swimming activities.

The program featured:

Recreational swimming and organized swimming activities with Summer Zone counselors and EHS Swim Team members

Teaching platforms to reduce the water depth from the 7-foot depth to a 3½-foot depth

District 7-provided flotation devices, required for all participants, to ensure student safety in and around the water

Rettle said that this year's calendar is a repeat of last year. In addition, the CFAC will host the 2016 Midwest Regional Coaches Summit, one of four such meetings in the

country, bringing 200-300 coaches to the CFAC. The 2016 Boys IHSA Sectional Championships is also scheduled.

Other programs may include USA Swimming Zones Select Camp, USA Swimming Make a Splash program, university conference championships, continued diversity and inclusion projects, additional collegiate training, USA Swimming national level training camps, the 2016 Central Zone Paralympic Championships, and the 2016 Central Zone Diversity Summit.

According to Dave Courtney, Assistant Superintendent for Business, operations of the Chuck Fruit Aquatic Center were self-sufficient during the first year of service (2014-2015 school year). “In addition to revenue received, projected first year operating expenditures of the Aquatic Center were lower than budgeted,” Courtney said.

Rettle said that the District is applying to host two additional events for Central Zone USA Swimming: a multi-cultural swim meet in 2017 and a Diversity Camp in 2018. Rettle and EHS Head Swim Coach Christian Rhoten will make a formal presentation and bid for these events at the US Aquatics Sports Convention in September.

Great Lakes Valley Conference (GLVC) representatives will make a site visit to the CFAC on August 11 to determine if it is a suitable site for their Division II conference championships. Area schools in the GLVC include University of Illinois – Springfield, Maryville University, McKendree University, and University of Missouri – St. Louis.