

At long last, it's pool season

Indoor aquatic center opens after years of planning

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By JEFF NEWMAN
Staff writer

Doug Meadows remembers when he first began as a county employee in 1985, when Calvert was home to 35,000 people, and talk of building an indoor swimming pool already had begun.

Fifteen years and nearly 55,000 residents later, those talks have become a reality. The \$20 million Edward T. Hall Aquatic Center in Prince Frederick will officially open its doors on June 8, just in time for the summer season. Opening day admission will be free from 3 to 10 p.m.

Plans for an indoor, county-owned pool began in earnest in 1992, when a committee was formed to explore the project's plausibility, Meadows said. But the cost was deemed too high and it would eventually take three committees before the pool was approved.

But the third time was the charm and after years of anticipation, construction of the 41,000-square-foot structure began in September 2008.

"You just can't describe it. We've been looking forward to it for so long, we're all just really, really excited," Meadows said. "We think the public is just going to be amazed when they see it. We hope they are, anyway."

Named after Edward T. Hall, a Calvert County resident who served in the Maryland Senate from 1958 until his death in 1978, the aquatic center includes a large 50-meter-lap competition pool with a diving area, a leisure pool designed for children, a therapy pool and nine-person hot tub for people 18 and older.

The competition pool has a movable bulkhead, allowing for multiple configurations. On either side of the pool's eight lap lanes are shallow and deep general swimming sections.

Now, instead of traveling out-of-county to practice or compete, all four Calvert County high school swim teams will make use of the new facility. Competitions will be enhanced by three rows of raised bleachers for spectators and a large LED scoreboard capable of tracking two events simultaneously, Facility Manager Timothy DeLucia said.

One-meter and one-half-meter diving boards already are installed along the diving area and a 3-meter board will be added in the winter, DeLucia said. "Bubblers" under each board were installed to give divers a visual of when they will hit the water and also break up the water surface prior to impact, Aquatics Supervisor Kenny Gray said.

The leisure pool includes a plastic, floating anaconda, four small water slides and above-head buckets that tip over as they fill with water. The pool is meant for pre-school-aged children, so lifeguards will kick out older kids first if it becomes too full, DeLucia said.



For special occasions that might be too large for the leisure pool to handle, the aquatic center will break out an inflatable obstacle course in the competition pool.

"It's designed for children, but it's actually harder for the adults to do," DeLucia said.

"For those who are still a kid at heart," Gray said.

Children must be 13 or older to be in the center alone. Those younger than 13 must be accompanied by someone at least 16 years of age and "responsible," DeLucia said.

A fitness room adjacent to the lobby is free with admission and includes three treadmills, two ellipticals, one stationary bike and a few strength-training machines.

The center also includes two conference rooms — one on the ground-level that will be used by county departments or community organizations and another downstairs for birthday parties or public safety courses. The pool will host lifeguard and CPR training courses.

Swimming lessons also will be offered beginning June 21 every weekday, in the morning and evening, and on Saturdays.

"It's not our ideal, but parents really need that on the weekends," DeLucia said of the Saturday lessons.

The pool has been unofficially open to county staff since it received its use and occupancy permit in March. Gray admitted he would miss the exclusive access "a little bit," but he'll still be able to sneak in a swim during working hours when the pool is less crowded.

The county already owns two outdoor pools — one at Kings Landing Park in Huntingtown and another at Cove Point Park in Lusby.

The center has been training lifeguards since March and will employ a total of 40, but only a fraction will actually be on duty at any given time. Many of the lifeguards are also students and will only be able to work a couple of four- or eight-hour shifts each week, Gray said.