



PRIVATE UNIVERSITY PRODUCTS AND NEWS

SUMMER SPECIAL EDITION 2026
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NATARE POOLS
A GLOBAL LEADER IN
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**HOW THOUGHTFUL
AQUATIC
ACCESSIBILITY
SHAPES THE CAMPUS
EXPERIENCE**

**BUILDING THE NEXT
GENERATION OF
CAMPUS AQUATICS**

**DESIGNING THE
MODERN NATATORIUM
BALANCING
PERFORMANCE,
EXPERIENCE, AND
LONG-TERM VALUE IN
COLLEGIATE AQUATIC
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Editor's Letter

SUMMER SPECIAL EDITION 2026

There is something about water that brings people together. Whether it's the excitement of a championship swim meet, the determination of students training before sunrise, or families filling the stands to cheer on their favorite athlete, aquatic facilities have a unique way of becoming the heartbeat of a campus. That's exactly why so many of you asked us to dedicate an entire issue of *Private University Products and News* to this important topic—and we're excited to finally deliver.

An aquatic center is far more than a swimming pool. It's a classroom, a competition venue, a wellness center, a recruitment tool, and often one of the most recognizable facilities on campus. From varsity athletics and student recreation to physical therapy, learn-to-swim programs, community outreach, and summer camps, these facilities work year-round serving countless purposes. That's a lot to ask from one building, and it takes an incredible amount of planning, maintenance, and innovation to keep everything operating safely and efficiently.

Let's be honest—owning an aquatic facility isn't always smooth sailing. Water has a funny way of finding every tiny crack, humidity seems determined to challenge every surface it touches, and if you've ever managed pool chemicals, filtration systems, or HVAC equipment, you've probably learned that "routine maintenance" can become "surprise project" in the blink of an eye. It's almost as if the pool waits until Friday afternoon to decide it wants your attention!

Fortunately, our industry continues to introduce remarkable advancements that make these facilities safer, more energy efficient, and easier to maintain. Throughout this special edition, you'll discover the latest products, technologies, and expert advice covering everything from construction and renovation to water treatment, ventilation, deck surfaces, accessibility, spectator seating, lighting, and long-term facility management. Our goal is simple: provide practical ideas that help you create exceptional aquatic environments for your students, athletes, and communities.

One of the things I appreciate most about serving the private higher education community is witnessing the commitment campuses make toward creating experiences that extend well beyond the classroom. Aquatic facilities represent health, wellness, teamwork, personal growth, and opportunities for lifelong learning. They help recruit students, support championship programs, and provide spaces where memories are created every single day.

Thank you for continuing to make *Private University Products and News* your trusted resource for ideas, products, and solutions that strengthen your campuses. Your suggestions continue to shape the magazine, and this Special Aquatics Edition exists because you asked for it. We appreciate your partnership, your feedback, and your continued readership. As always, we invite you to reach out with your ideas for future issues and let us know what challenges you're facing on your campus. Together, we'll continue bringing you the information and innovations that help your facilities—and your students—make a lasting splash.

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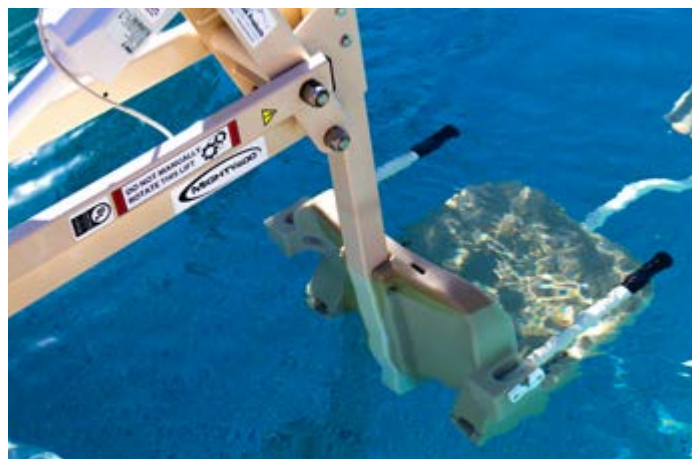
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GETTING TO KNOW NATARE POOLS, A GLOBAL LEADER IN AQUATICS FACILITIES

Discover how Natre Pools turns ambitious aquatic concepts into high-performing facilities. Explore innovative campus projects, custom engineering solutions, and advanced systems designed to improve flexibility, efficiency, safety, and long-term value—from rooftop lazy rivers to championship pools and complex facility renovations.



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HOW THOUGHTFUL AQUATIC ACCESSIBILITY SHAPES THE CAMPUS EXPERIENCE

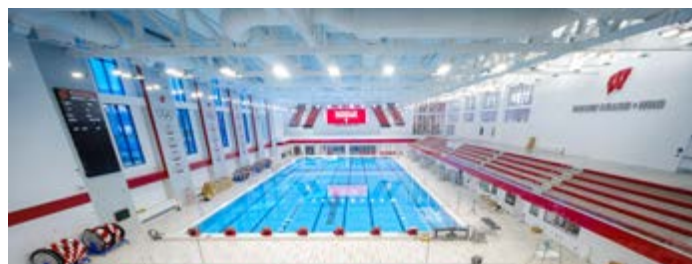
Aquatic accessibility is about more than meeting ADA requirements—it shapes whether students feel welcomed, supported, and able to participate. Discover how thoughtful design, durable equipment, and facility-specific solutions can transform campus pools into truly inclusive spaces for wellness, recovery, recreation, and connection.



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BUILDING THE NEXT GENERATION OF CAMPUS AQUATICS

Today's private universities are investing in aquatic facilities that support competition, wellness and long-term sustainability. Find out what one company has learned over five decades in the business with a team comprised of former competitive swimmers, coaches, lifeguards, and aquatic facility managers.



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DESIGNING THE MODERN NATATORIUM

As natatoriums evolve, colleges and universities are rethinking how these facilities support athletes, spectators, and campus life. Steve Crocker, director of Sport Swimming at Water Technology, Inc. (WTI), explores how natatorium design is evolving—and what institutions should consider when planning their next aquatic facility.



Getting to Know Natare Pools

a Global Leader in Aquatics Facilities

BY DAVID VINSON, PhD

“Natare” is the Latin verb meaning “to swim”. It is an apt name for Natare Pools, which ranks as one of the world's most respected stainless steel pool manufacturers and suppliers of custom equipment for commercial swimming pools, water parks, and aquatic centers.

continued...



Whether it's an innovative, multi-purpose aquatic facility, elevated specialty pool, exotic resort pool or unique water feature, Natre provides cutting-edge construction and design systems for projects that would otherwise be considered too expensive or cumbersome to tackle. Such is its reputation that Natre has been featured by the likes of the Wall Street Journal, National Geographic, the Discovery Channel, in addition to multiple aquatics industry trade journals and publications.

We were delighted to sit down with Joshua Albertson, Sales Manager at Natre, to learn more about what makes the company stand out in a market flooded with talented competitors. "Customers are drawn to us for two reasons. First, our experience. We've been in the business of commercial

aquatic systems for over 50 years. There isn't a scenario we haven't successfully navigated or a solution we've not created. We've seen it all and overcome it. And second, we're a totally custom shop. What I mean is we're not afraid to take on a project or a problem outside of our comfort zone. Our industry knowledge gives us the tools to lead."

Albertson's comments are supported by Natre's versatile portfolio. At the Marriott Marquis Houston, for instance, Natre constructed a spa as well as an infinity-edge rooftop swimming pool. But what's most eye-catching is the massive Texas-shaped lazy river. Swimmers who approach the western tip of the Texas map (where El Paso is located) will float by a clear, acrylic wall overlooking the roof's edge before water jets

shoot them southeast along the path of the Rio Grande. The lazy river is emblematic of Natre's talents for bringing to life the most creative of designs. Moreover, and as a testament of their global reach and reputation, Natre was commissioned in Christchurch, New Zealand, to construct a recreation center previously destroyed by the region's 2011 earthquake. The challenge was to find a pool construction solution that could withstand future seismic activity while maintaining structural integrity and performance. In collaboration with Apollo Projects, Natre implemented a steel pool construction system which provides flexibility, durability, and adaptability in unstable ground systems. The technology of the pool's stainless-steel walls allows the pool to be leveled in the event of future earthquakes.

Bringing Aquatics Projects to Life on College Campuses

Natare's expansive reach extends to higher education, providing campuses with stunning aquatic facilities ranging from high-performance natatoriums for swim teams to versatile pools for physical education and wellness programs. Additionally, Natare has improved campuses with stainless steel pools, therapy spas, filtration systems, PVC pool linings, movable bulkheads, and perimeter gutters, all of which are designed to meet the unique needs of schools, colleges, and universities.

I asked Albertson about Natare's reputation within the ecosystem of higher education, how it was built and why it's as strong as ever. While he emphasized the long-term value, safety, and efficiency of its systems, I was most compelled by the glimpse he offered into how Natare's company culture serves as a driving force of excellence with each project: "We like to describe ourselves as a big-small company. Every customer, client and project is so important to us because we depend on the next one." Natare's culture, to put it simply, is one which refuses complacency on principle. There is an ethics of humility and self-determination: "We must make sure to execute at the highest level to ensure we're asked to participate in the next great project. Customer service is our driving force."

Natare's aquatics systems are found on college campuses all over the world. On its surface, the collaborative process appears relatively straightforward: "Generally, it starts with architecture firms, aquatic consultants, and/or college leadership providing an understanding of the vision of the project. In some cases, we help directly. In others, we join a construction team where each member knows their role." But it is one thing to make plans and something else entirely to bring them to life. Albertson explains, "As cliché as it sounds, communication is so important. The more both sides can communicate clearly, the better off each will be. Project goals, scope, dates—they're all vital. The same goes for the scheduling of

fabrication, installation, and repair. There's no margin for error, and the chances of a successful project go way up if [we] all understand each other."

Natare's Extensive Experience on College Campuses

Albertson is alert to Natare's role in both anticipating and shaping the needs and wants of students, faculty, and staff on college campuses. He rightly notes how much the industry has changed: "In the past, college and university pools were boring rectangular shapes simply used by swim teams for practice and competition. But over the past decade or so, we've seen more elaborate designs used for more recreational fun. They're now a great means of attracting prospective students. Think of a more waterpark feel with bells and whistles versus a traditional shape satisfying only a single purpose."

One such example of Natare's expertise in modernizing facilities is at Princeton University's DeNunzio Pool. The stakes were high, not least of all because DeNunzio Pool was designed with technology that made it among the fastest pools in the nation. Since its initial construction in 1990, it has been home to the Princeton Swimming & Diving teams and has hosted multiple Ivy League Championships and EISL Championships, the 2009 NCAA Water Polo Championships, the 2014 Special Olympics USA Games. It has even served as a training home for Olympic gold medalists. Natare was tasked with updating the original bulkheads (also manufactured by Natare), and now the customizable fixed, horizontal, and vertical moving bulkhead systems have refashioned DeNunzio Pool into a hub for cutting-edge aquatics experiences.

Natare took on a far more complicated endeavor at the University of Florida's O'Connell Center, whose facilities were held back by old, obsolete bulkheads. What resulted was a vibrant transformation that defied the odds. Natare typically builds, transports, and installs movable bulkheads in one piece. But gaining access to the O'Connell Center was severely limited.

continued...

Natare's expansive reach extends to higher education, providing campuses with stunning aquatic facilities ranging from high-performance natatoriums for swim teams to versatile pools for physical education and wellness programs.



The roof at the facility is air-supported and a revolving door was the only means of access. The challenge was to install the moving bulkheads without compromising the air pressure that supported the roof of the massive complex. The project timetable presented yet another obstacle, as the University needed the facility to operate as seamlessly as possible for daily operations. Accessibility was addressed by removing the existing doors and constructing a temporary airlock through which the new bulkheads and appropriate equipment could move. The new bulkheads were then lifted with a crane and placed into position to be inserted into the building through the airlock. Fork trucks, floating dollies, and rigging equipment were used to move the bulkheads from the staging area through the airlock and onto the natatorium deck where they were re-assembled, cleaned and adjusted, then placed into the pool. Finally, the two 65-foot moving bulkheads were furnished with certified slip-resistant grating, starting platforms and anchors, guard rails and targets, and bulkhead anchorage systems. Not only did Natare find creative solutions at every step, but the O'Connell Center project was completed ahead of schedule.

Natare's Most Recent Project Achievements

Located in the suburbs of Los Angeles, Mt. San Antonio College Aquatic Center is an essential hub for the junior college and the surrounding community. As the area continued to grow, the need for a larger aquatics facility became apparent. The biggest priority was that it had to be flexible enough to accommodate additional programming and host national and international competitions for the college's award-winning swimming, diving, and water polo teams. Designed to replace the original aquatic facility, the new Aquatic Center now comprises a 59m competitor pool (all deep) and 30m teaching/diving pool (shallow to deep), both of which feature Natare hybrid moving bulkheads. It also holds seating for 2,500 spectators. Since the facility opened in 2022, it has received honors for its superior and innovative design.

In 2014, the City of Globe Community Swimming Pool (located in Globe, Arizona) was forced to shut down due to continuous water loss and mechanical components that

were no longer functional. It sat empty for nearly 10 years. Natare was chosen to provide components that would not only extend the life of the pool by years but would also save time and money on annual maintenance, thereby creating funds for additional aquatics programs. Natare incorporated three of its top products—utilizing the “Natare Trifecta”—and in this case, also adding a pool bulkhead. The Trifecta included the implementation of a stainless-steel perimeter pool gutter system, a vacuum sand filtration system, and a PVC membrane. The Stainless-Steel Perimeter Pool Gutter System replaced the original concrete gutters and failed piping. Natare's Vacuum Sand Filtration System eliminated the need for constant maintenance while creating crystal clear water, and the PVC membrane reinforced the pool basin with an extremely strong inner core of custom cut polyester mesh fabric. No longer would maintenance have to worry about re-plastering or fixing chipped paint again. The same membrane was installed in the City's new splash pad, which provided kids with a much softer and slip-resistant surface to play on. With the expertise and reliable leadership of Natare, the City of Globe Community Swimming Pool has now doubled in size and is equipped with new amenities.

With each passing year, Natare continues to build on its vast expertise while exceeding expectations in aquatics facilities around the world.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Natare is a global leader in stainless steel pools and aquatic systems, providing innovative, custom-engineered solutions for commercial pools, resorts, and water parks worldwide—combining decades of expertise, precision design, and unmatched construction quality.



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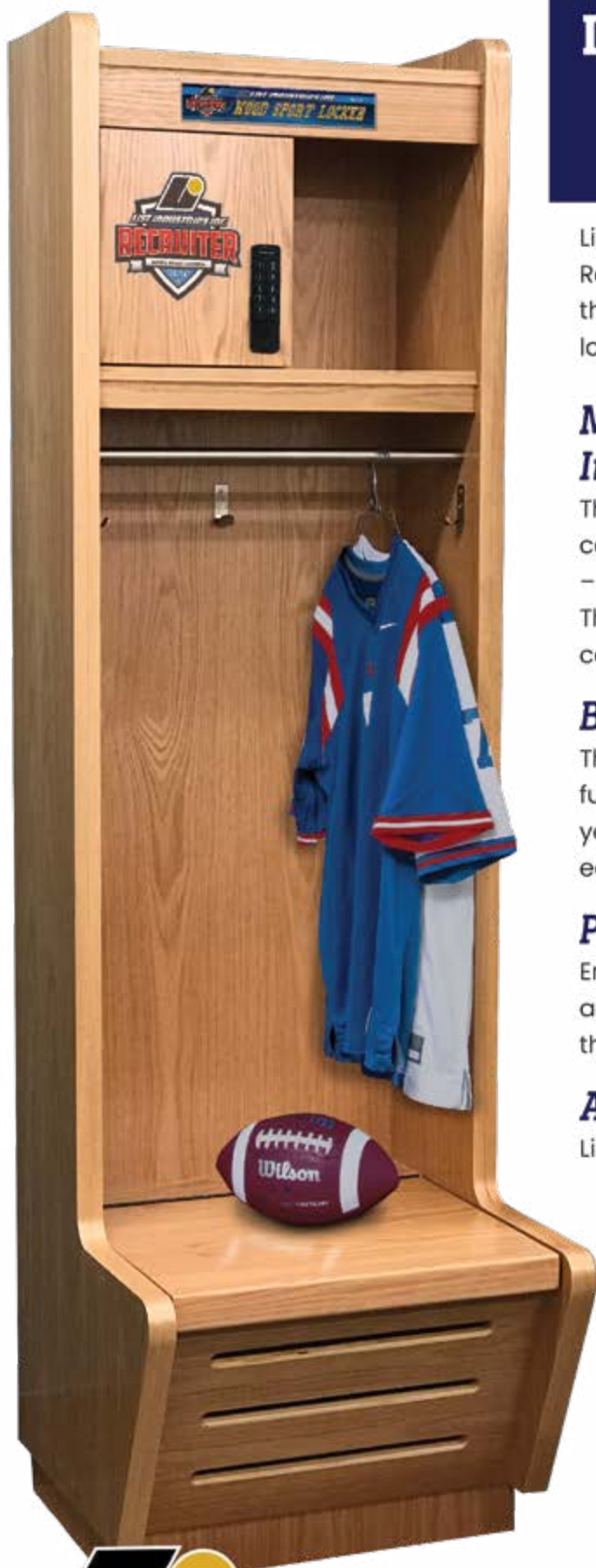
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How Thoughtful Aquatic Accessibility Shapes the Campus Experience

BY AQUA CREEK

Imagine walking into a classroom with no desks.

A football field with no bleachers.

A residence hall with no doors.

You would immediately notice something was wrong because the space clearly wasn't designed for everyone meant to use it.

continued...





Now, think about how many aquatic facilities quietly send that same message every day. Not intentionally, of course—most colleges and universities care deeply about inclusion, wellness, and creating welcoming environments for students. But when facilities are functionally disconnected from the people they are intended to serve, it shows. And the ripple effect can be far greater than many people realize: a pool lift tucked away in storage, a therapy spa with no realistic transfer solution, a ramp entry with no aquatic wheelchair—equipment that technically checks an ADA box, but feels disconnected from how the facility actually functions.

Modern campus aquatic centers are no longer just a place for lap swimming. These spaces have evolved into hubs for recreation, rehabilitation, stress relief, athletic recovery, wellness programming, adaptive athletics, and community connection. From

competition pools and hydrotherapy spas to cold plunges and elevated swim spas used in athletic performance programs, aquatic environments now serve a wider range of users and abilities than ever before. That means accessibility can no longer be treated as an afterthought hidden somewhere in the project specifications. It needs to be part of the experience from the very beginning.

Different Pools Require Different Solutions

One of the biggest mistakes facilities make when selecting ADA accessibility solutions is assuming that every aquatic environment has the same operational needs. In reality, modern university recreation and athletic facilities often contain multiple bodies of water serving completely different purposes. A competition pool has very different accessibility needs than a hydrotherapy spa. A cold plunge designed for athletic recovery creates different challenges than a recreation

pool used for student wellness programming. Elevated swim spas and above-ground therapy pools require entirely different access solutions than traditional in-ground aquatic environments.

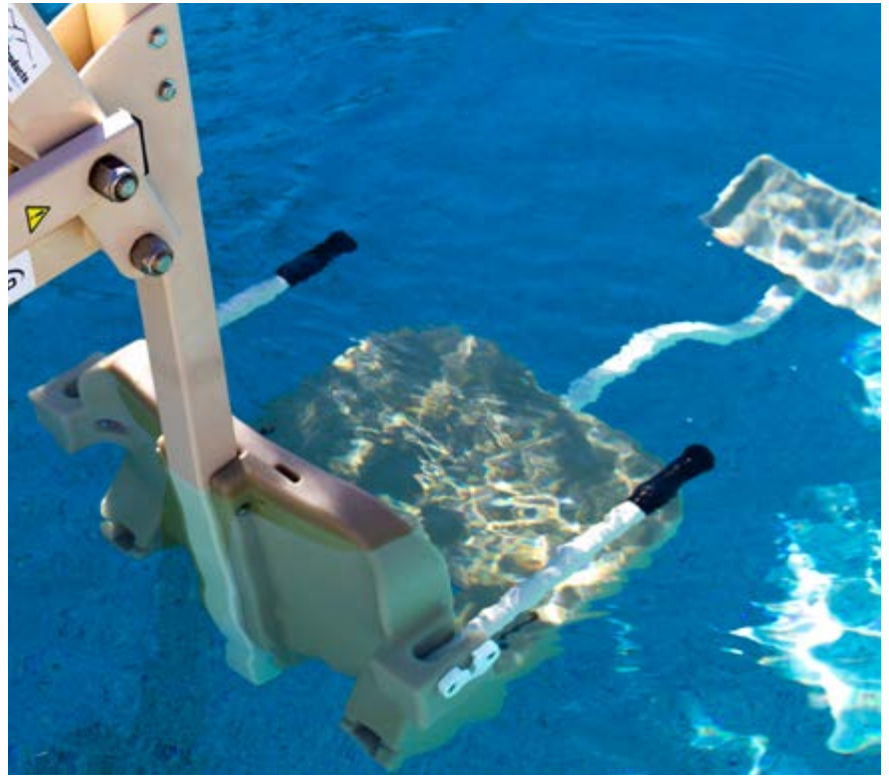
This is where thoughtful planning becomes critical because accessibility should never be approached with a one-size-fits-all mindset. For some facilities, a fixed ADA pool lift may be the best long-term solution. In others, a semi-submerged therapy spa with a transfer wall may create a more intuitive and independent experience for users.

The best access solutions are designed and installed intuitively for each unique application, and reflect how the facility is actually being used every day.

The Problem with “Good Enough”

ADA compliance plays an essential role in aquatic accessibility. But truly inclusive facilities understand that compliance alone does not automatically create equal and equitable access – and this distinction matters more than many people realize.

continued...



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Even equipment that technically meets compliance requirements can still create barriers if it is difficult to use in real-world situations. For example, ADA standards recognize ramp entries as primary means of pool access. They can provide excellent accessibility for many users, but present a major issue for wheelchair users if the facility has not provided aquatic wheelchairs specifically designed for aquatic environments. A user's everyday mobility chair is often an expensive piece of equipment that is not intended for prolonged water exposure or submersion. Overlooking this detail can unintentionally create another obstacle instead of removing one.

A common misconception often seen in the field is that the use of a single portable lift across multiple pools satisfies ADA requirements. In reality, each pool and spa must have a compliant accessible means of entry available whenever the facility is open for use. It's also important to understand that while some portable lifts may meet ADA requirements, not all do. ADA compliant pool lifts (portable or not) must be fixed and securely anchored to the pool deck while in use. Facilities should verify that any portable lift

system they purchase is specifically designed to meet those requirements.

Handrails deserve the same level of intentionality. Effective rail systems should provide continuous ergonomic guided movement from point A to point B, helping users maintain stability and confidence throughout the entire entry and exit experience rather than only supporting isolated transition points.

True accessibility is not simply about getting people in the water. It is about allowing people to move through the environment with confidence, dignity, and independence.

Durability Starts at the Source

Once you have determined which accessibility solutions best fit your aquatic environment, the next question becomes just as vital: will it last, and what happens if it doesn't?

Commercial aquatic environments are demanding. Constant exposure to moisture, pool chemicals, UV exposure, and heavy daily usage can quickly expose weaknesses in equipment quality. Long-term durability and product longevity begin long before installation day—they are baked into the very essence of the product down to the brand that stands behind it.

Material quality matters. Facilities evaluating stainless steel access equipment should look beyond appearances alone and consider the quality of the raw materials being used. Manufacturers that prioritize high-quality U.S.-sourced stainless steel provide greater long-term durability and consistency, particularly in harsh commercial aquatic environments where lower-quality materials are likely to deteriorate prematurely.

Safety and quality certifications can also provide valuable insight into how manufacturers approach reliability and performance. Certifications such as UL and ISO 9001:2015 help demonstrate that equipment and manufacturing processes have undergone structured evaluation for safety, consistency, and quality management practices.

Just as importantly, universities should evaluate the long-term support structure behind the product itself. Accessibility equipment is not a short-term purchase. Facilities should consider technical support responsiveness, training resources, and ongoing maintenance guidance when evaluating manufacturers. A warranty only matters if the company behind it is prepared to support the product long after the ribbon-cutting ceremony is over.

Accessibility Shouldn't Feel Institutional

One of the most overlooked conversations surrounding aquatic accessibility is aesthetics.

Universities spend enormous amounts of time and resources selecting branded scoreboards, custom deck furniture, signage, starting blocks, bleachers, and other architectural finishes because they understand that visual identity shapes how students experience a space. So why should accessibility equipment feel disconnected from the rest of the facility?

Custom colors, coordinated finishes, and intentional design choices help accessibility equipment feel integrated rather than institutional. And while that may sound like a small detail, it sends a powerful message to students and visitors alike: accessibility was considered from the beginning, not bolted on as an afterthought to satisfy a requirement.

Operational readiness matters just as much as appearance. Equipment should remain visible, functional, and ready for use without creating unnecessary operational headaches. Features such as solar charging systems can help reduce battery maintenance demands while improving long-term equipment readiness, helping ensure lifts remain operational throughout regular facility use.

People Participate When They Feel Welcome

The conversation surrounding aquatic accessibility often becomes heavily focused on regulations, compliance requirements, and risk management. While those conversations are important, they shouldn't overshadow the bigger picture.

Accessible aquatic facilities create opportunities for participation.

They support injured athletes throughout rehabilitation and recovery.

They expand opportunities for adaptive sports programs.

They encourage students to engage in wellness activities that improve both physical and mental health.

And they create spaces where students, faculty, staff, and visitors can experience the same sense of belonging and community that universities work so hard to foster throughout the rest of campus life. Students notice when environments are intentionally welcoming.

They also notice when they aren't.

The strongest campus environments are not built around minimum requirements. They are built around people. Because at the end of the day, aquatic accessibility is not simply about helping someone into the water. It's

about making sure every person has the opportunity to fully participate in everything waiting on the other side of it.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Since 2002, Aqua Creek has designed and manufactured American-made aquatic access solutions that promote freedom, confidence, and inclusion. This family-owned Montana company combines quality craftsmanship, white-glove service, and integrity to help people of all abilities enjoy the water with dignity.

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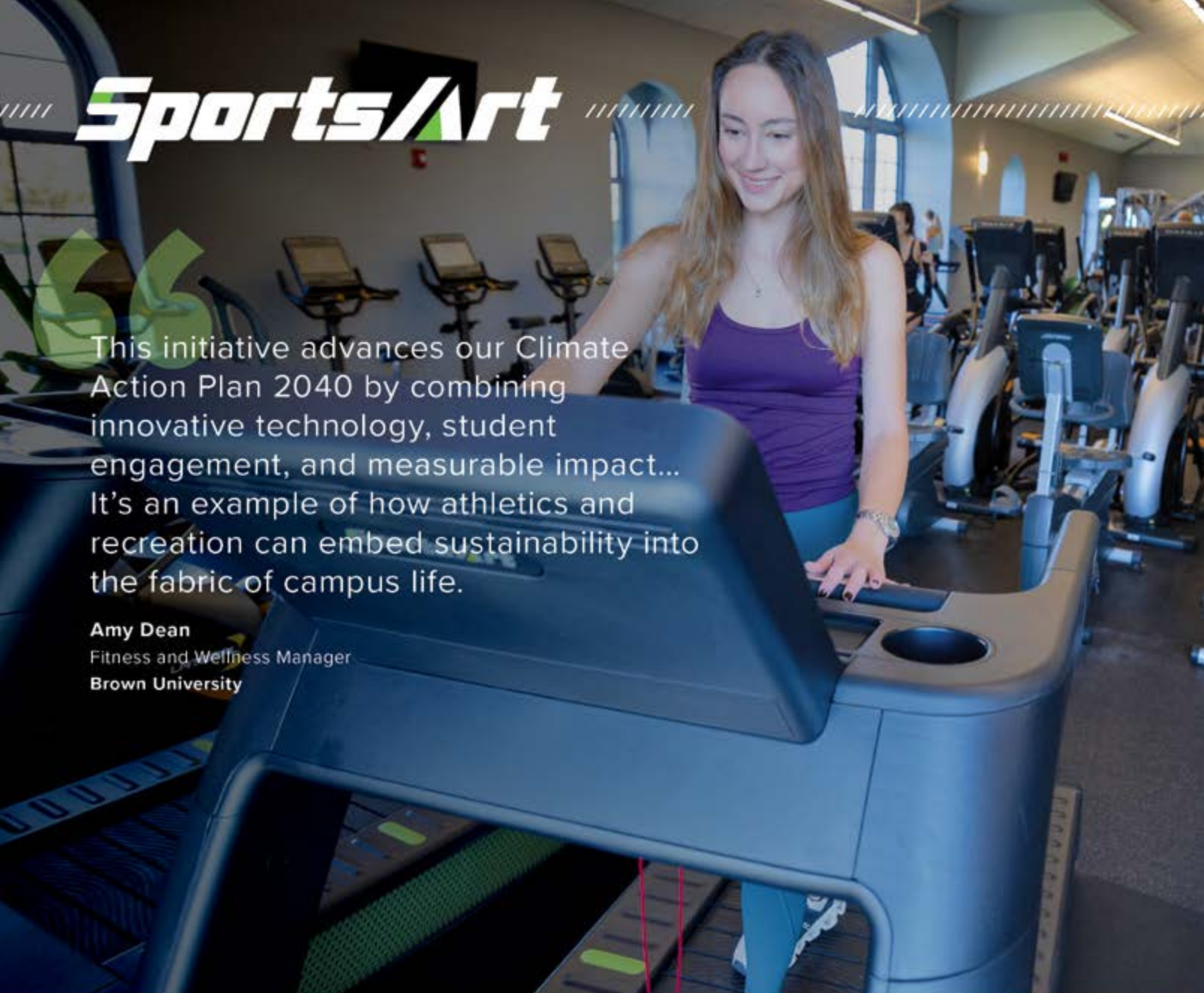
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Building the Next Generation of Campus Aquatics

Why Today's Private Universities Are Investing in Facilities That Support Competition, Wellness and Long-Term Sustainability

BY COUNSILMAN-HUNSAKER

Across higher education, aquatic facilities are evolving far beyond their traditional role as competition venues. Today, private colleges and universities are designing natatoriums and aquatic centers that serve multiple purposes—supporting NCAA athletics, campus recreation, student wellness, physical therapy, community engagement and institutional recruitment.

continued...



As institutions continue to invest in campus infrastructure, aquatic facilities have become essential to delivering a broader, more versatile student experience while supporting long term operational and sustainability goals.

For more than 55 years, Counsilman-Hunsaker has specialized exclusively in aquatic facility planning, engineering and operations, helping colleges and universities develop facilities that balance athletic performance with efficient day-to-day management. Unlike multidisciplinary engineering firms that include aquatics as one-service line, the company's sole focus has always been aquatic environments, giving its team a unique understanding of how pools are designed, maintained and operated throughout their

lifecycle.

Designing for Multiple Campus Missions

Modern aquatic facilities must accommodate a wide range of users. Student-athletes require championship-caliber competition venues, while campus recreation departments need flexible programming space for lap swimming, fitness classes, aquatic instruction and community outreach.

Successful facilities also must satisfy administrators focused on operating budgets, sustainability objectives and long-term maintenance costs.

According to Counsilman-Hunsaker, the most successful university aquatic projects

begin with understanding how each institution intends to use the facility rather than simply designing around aesthetics. That approach has resulted in more than 500 university aquatic projects ranging from competition natatoriums and recreation pools to hydrotherapy suites, rehabilitation centers and wellness facilities.

Operational Experience Drives Better Design

One characteristic that separates specialized aquatic consultants from traditional design firms is operational experience.

Many members of Counsilman-Hunsaker's staff have served as swimmers, coaches, lifeguards or aquatic facility managers. That firsthand knowledge influences everything from lifeguard sightlines and swimmer circulation patterns to equipment access and mechanical system layouts.

The firm's services extend beyond facility design to include:

- Feasibility studies and master planning
- Facility condition assessments
- Mechanical and structural evaluations
- Code compliance reviews
- Risk management consulting
- Operations planning
- Staff training
- Long-term facility audits

This comprehensive approach allows institutions to evaluate existing facilities, plan future expansions and improve operational efficiency throughout the life of the aquatic center.

Sustainability Continues to Shape Aquatic Construction

With sustainability initiatives becoming a priority on many private campuses, aquatic facilities are increasingly incorporating technologies designed to reduce energy and water consumption.

Counsilman-Hunsaker integrates features such as variable-frequency pump drives, UV secondary disinfection systems,

heat pump technology, advanced filtration equipment and water-conservation strategies into many university projects. These systems help institutions reduce operating costs while supporting broader campus sustainability initiatives and certification programs such as LEED and SITES.

The company has participated in more than 70 LEED-certified aquatic projects and has contributed to the development of national aquatic design standards through organizations including the Council for the Model Aquatic Health Code (CMAHC) and the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance (PHTA).

University Projects Showcase Diverse Applications

Recent university projects illustrate the wide variety of aquatic environments now being developed.

New York University's John A. Paulson Center integrates a six-lane competition pool within a 23-story mixed-use facility designed to support the university's climate action initiatives. Southern Methodist University expanded its nationally recognized aquatics program with a new outdoor Olympic-size competition pool, while the University of Memphis developed the Mike Rose Aquatics Center featuring Myrtha pre-engineered pool construction, movable bulkheads and UV water treatment systems.

Private institutions have also invested heavily in aquatic infrastructure.

Washington and Lee University replaced its aging natatorium with a modern competition facility designed for future expansion, while St. Mark's School of Texas incorporated a championship-level competition pool into its \$58 million athletic center to support competitive swimming, water polo and physical education programming.

Aquatics Beyond Competition

Aquatic environments are also playing an expanding role in sports medicine and athlete recovery.

Facilities such as Syracuse University's Lally Athletic Center and the University
continued...

With sustainability initiatives becoming a priority on many private campuses, aquatic facilities are increasingly incorporating technologies designed to reduce energy and water consumption.



of Alabama's Mal M. Moore Athletic Facility demonstrate how hydrotherapy pools, underwater treadmills, hot and cold plunge systems and rehabilitation spaces are becoming essential components of collegiate athletic performance programs.

These specialized environments provide year-round resources for injury prevention, rehabilitation and recovery while enhancing overall student-athlete wellness.

Planning for the Next Generation

As private colleges continue modernizing their campuses, aquatic facilities will remain an important investment in recruitment, wellness and community engagement.

Whether constructing a new competition venue, renovating an aging natatorium or developing a campus recreation center, institutions increasingly seek facilities that combine operational efficiency, sustainability and long-term flexibility.

For firms specializing exclusively in aquatic environments, success is measured not simply by opening day but by how effectively the facility serves students, athletes and campus communities for decades to come. That long-term perspective continues to shape the next generation of university aquatic facilities across the country.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Counsilman-Hunsaker is a nationally recognized aquatic planning and design firm with more than 50 years of experience serving colleges and universities. Its multidisciplinary team delivers innovative, sustainable aquatic facilities that support student wellness, recreation, athletics, recruitment, and community engagement while aligning with each institution's goals, budget, and long-term operational needs.

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Designing the Modern Natatorium

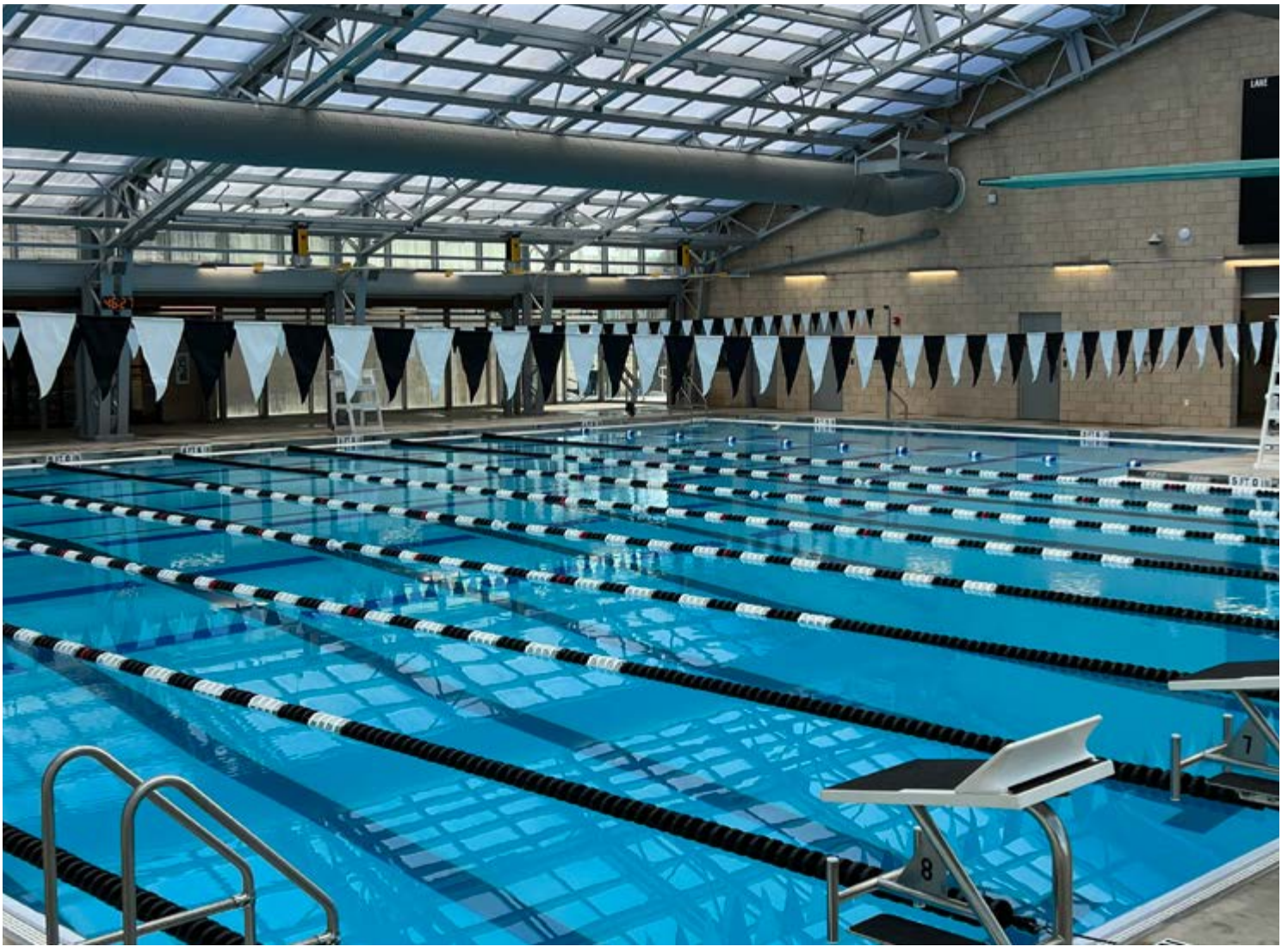
Balancing performance, experience, and long-term value in collegiate aquatic facilities

BY WATER TECHNOLOGY, INC

As natatoriums evolve, colleges and universities are rethinking how these facilities support athletes, spectators, and campus life. Today's designs must deliver far more than water; they must deliver flexibility, efficiency, and lasting value.

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By leveraging advances in aquatic planning, design, and engineering, modern natatoriums have transformed from simple indoor pools into high-performance environments. For higher education institutions, these facilities now serve as recruitment tools, competitive venues, recreation hubs, and community assets while operating under increasing pressure to maximize efficiency and long-term return on investment.

Drawing from insights shared by Steve Crocker, director of Sport Swimming at Water Technology, Inc. (WTI), the following explores how natatorium design is evolving—and what institutions should consider when planning their next aquatic facility.

From Functional to High-Performance

Natatorium design has come a long way

from its early, utilitarian roots. Historically, aquatic facilities prioritized participation, with minimal deck space and limited accommodations for spectators.

Today, collegiate natatoriums are highly specialized environments that balance athlete performance, spectator engagement, and operational demands. This shift reflects broader changes in swimming from a participation-based activity to a performance-driven, spectator-supported sport.

Designing for Faster, More Competitive Pools

Modern competition has directly influenced how pools are designed. Since the 1980s, more of a race occurs underwater, particularly during starts and turns. As a result, deeper pools are now standard for competitive facilities.

Additional performance-driven features—such as deeper gutters and advanced lane line systems—help reduce turbulence and create a faster, more consistent swimming environment.

For universities, these decisions are not merely technical. They play a meaningful role in athlete development, program success, and recruiting.

Elevating the Athlete and Spectator Experience

As swimming has grown in visibility, expectations for the overall experience have increased.

- Large video boards and integrated AV systems
- Enhanced lighting for competition and broadcast environments
- Flexible seating and improved sightlines

At the same time, facilities are becoming more inclusive. Features such as universal locker rooms and flexible changing spaces reflect a broader commitment to accessibility and user experience.

For campuses, this evolution helps natatoriums

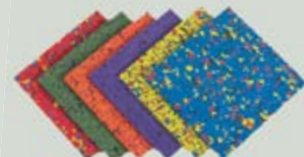
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Why Air Quality Matters More Than Ever

One of the most critical—but often overlooked—components of natatorium design is air quality.

Modern air-handling systems are designed to control humidity, remove chloramines, and maintain healthy conditions at the water surface.

These systems play a vital role in swimmer health and comfort, as well as long-term facility performance. For institutions planning new builds or renovations, air quality should be considered a core design priority.

Technology and Flexibility Are Reshaping Design

As institutions rethink how their aquatic spaces need to perform, design priorities are expanding beyond air quality and mechanical systems. The next wave of innovation is centered on flexibility—how materials, layouts, and technologies can help a single natatorium do more.

- Advances in materials and systems are enabling more flexible aquatic environments.
- Panelized pool systems enable temporary or adaptable installations
- LED lighting improves visibility and reduces energy use
- Systems and layouts support multiple aquatic disciplines

This shift toward flexibility allows natatoriums to accommodate a wider range of programs, from competitive swimming and diving to water polo and recreation, within a single facility.

Designing for Daily Use

A common pitfall in natatorium planning is designing primarily for occasional high-profile events.

While hosting competitions is important, most facilities spend the majority of their time supporting daily use. As a result, leading institutions are prioritizing:

- flexible programming space
- efficient circulation and operations
- configurations that support both training and recreation

Designing with everyday use in mind leads to more sustainable and effective facilities over time.

Planning for Renovation and Operational Continuity

For institutions renovating existing natatoriums, downtime is often unavoidable.

Successful projects account for this early and may include strategies such as:

- identifying temporary off-site facilities
- phasing construction where possible
- utilizing temporary pools to maintain programming

Proactive planning helps minimize disruption and keeps athletic and recreation programs running.

A Look Ahead: Adaptability and Hybrid Spaces

The future of natatorium design is centered on adaptability.

Emerging concepts include adjustable pool floors that accommodate multiple activities, reconfigurable layouts for different competition formats, and indoor-outdoor hybrid facilities with operable roofs or walls.

These approaches give institutions greater flexibility, extend facility lifespan, and can help reduce operational costs through more efficient energy use.

Collaboration Drives Better Outcomes

Ultimately, successful natatorium design starts with a clear understanding of program goals.

Early collaboration between stakeholders—athletics, campus planning, and design professionals—ensures that facilities align with both current needs and long-term vision.

Touring peer facilities and learning from past projects can also help institutions make more informed decisions and avoid common challenges.

The Bottom Line

Modern natatoriums represent a significant investment for colleges and universities. But when thoughtfully planned, they can deliver meaningful value across athletics, student life, and community engagement.

As expectations continue to evolve, the most effective facilities will be those that prioritize flexibility, support diverse users, and adapt to the changing demands of aquatic sports and campus life.

Author note: This article was developed for PUPN as an educational thought leadership piece from Water Technology, Inc. based on an interview with Steve Crocke, WTI Director of Sport Swimming.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Water Technology, Inc. (WTI) is a global leader in aquatic planning, design, and engineering. For more than 40 years, WTI has combined innovation, technical expertise, sustainability, and creative design to deliver world-class aquatic environments that engage people, elevate experiences, and bring water to life.



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