

Pool visits help offset dip in gym use

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Every time a new gym opens up in town, the Whitchurch-Stouffville Leisure Centre's fitness centre numbers drop a bit.

But "we usually get lots coming back," according to Nicole Ongman, manager of recreation for the town.

Between 2006 and 2012 fitness centre/program visits dropped 2.65 per cent — from 72,410 to 70,943, according to information presented to council Tuesday.

When the leisure centre opened more than a decade ago, there were no other gyms in town, now there are five.

The rumoured arrival of GoodLife Fitness is just that — a rumour.

"We're always looking for new locations to better serve the health and fitness goals of our members. At this time we do not have any information on a club in (the) Whitchurch-Stouffville area, but always welcome suggestions on new locations across Canada," Adam Roberts, public relations specialist for GoodLife Fitness told The Sun-Tribune via e-mail.

As more gyms come to town, hoping to turn jelly bellies into six-packs, the leisure centre's programming has evolved to also include preventative maintenance and rehabilitation, Ms Ongman told The Sun-Tribune.

"We do catch a segment of the population that isn't being catered to in other clubs," she said.

You also can't beat the set up for a family — one child goes to the library, another to the pool and mom to the gym.

Another segment the town may be able to capture are the walkers.

Currently, a number of local walkers spend their time getting fit window shopping at Markville and Upper Canada malls. But with the official opening of SoccerCity slated for next month, there is the potential for residents to walk around its pitch, although Mayor Wayne

Emmerson noted during Tuesday afternoon's council meeting the scenery is a little lack-lustre compared to a mall.

"I think there's eight months of the year they can use the brand new outdoor running track," Mr. Emmerson said, referring to the newly refurbished McConnell Track on Ninth Line, beside the Stouffville Arena.

Another option may be the potentially expanded leisure centre.

Among the possible amenities put forward in the leisure facilities strategy, prepared by the ReThink Group earlier this year, is a gym with a walking track above it.

What is also proposed in the strategy is a 2,200-square-foot expansion of the strength and conditioning gym, which would essentially double its current size.

"You can't make huge plans without knowing what it will be, where it will be," Ms Ongman said, noting the potential expansion is still in the preliminary stages.

What is on the rise at the leisure centre is aquatics.

"The pool is always the first thing people ask about when they come into town," Ms Ongman told councillors.

The number of classes offered jumped from 827 in 2006 to 1,202 in 2012, according to Ms Ongman.

The number of pool visits went from 45,677 (2006) to 58,056 (2012).

Ms Ongman noted part of the increase is due to the growing population.

While council may not believe online/phone voting is worth the investment, roughly 70 per cent of people now register for their town-run leisure programs online, Ms Ongman said.

When it was initially offered in the 2006/2007 time frame, more than 50 per cent of registrations occurred online, she added.

In the spring of 2012, the town decided to cut down the number of leisure guides it printed from 15,000 to 3,000 and post it online.

"Do all these people want them and look at

them? ... This way the people who want it, get it," Ms Ongman told The Sun-Tribune.

Hard copies of the leisure guide can be found at the town hall, leisure centre and library.

Town's first ribfest a hit

Stouffville's first-ever Ribfest drew about 10,000 visitors, but it didn't impact those who descended upon the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum that same weekend for its 40th annual Antique and Classic show.

The museum's fundraiser drew 1,650 people to the one-day event this past August, which was 25-per-cent more than in 2012, according to Joan Crosbie, manger of culture for the town.

The event also realized a 30-per-cent increase in revenue from last year.

The three-day Ribfest drew about 10,000 people to Memorial Park, but it did nothing for downtown merchants, according to Councillor Phil Bannon.

"It's great that we're having these events, but it's not bringing people into the retail outlets," Mr. Bannon told The Sun-Tribune of what downtown merchants have told him.

Mr. Bannon told The Sun-Tribune he doesn't want the municipality to just host events, but he wants them to also be of benefit to the downtown merchants.

He also noted, however, "we can't do it all for them. They have to be equal partners".

The plan for next year's Ribfest is to have the municipality run it, according to Ms Crosbie, who noted this will enable them to work with the downtown merchants so they, too, can benefit from the vast number of rib eaters in town.

Nineteen on the Park's summer patio series proved successful, especially the second show, which grew by 50 per cent over the first one, according to Ms Crosbie.

The plan is to provide five outdoor evening shows in Civic Square next summer, she said.

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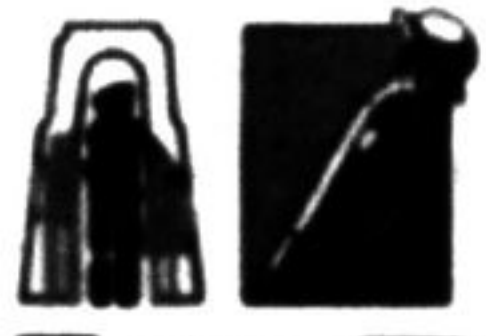


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