

No Standing News

Since we have no standing, we stand with those left standing.

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COUNTRY CLUB WEST?

By Lois Ann Marler

Somewhere in the world the day is dawning on a lavish beach paradise dappled with palatial villas with every amenity imaginable to mankind, and a price tag to match. Unfortunately, someone in city hall is suffering from delusions of grandeur, and has proposed Donald Trump rates to our soon-to-be-unveiled renovated wading pool. In a document that reads like an interdepartmental practical joke, the city has outlined its proposed fees for the outdoor pool and it's no laughing matter.

Parks and Recreation Director Ken Kwantes sent a packet of information dated January 20, 2000, to the Rolla City Council, the Mayor, City Administrator, and "REC Members," which outlines the fee structure and hours for the new outdoor aquatic center (aka "The Birdbath"). The rates you are about to read are for using the outdoor pool for three months only. **These rates have nothing to do with the indoor recreation center** - that will be another bunch of fees.

The admittance fee structure focuses on a daily entry fee and a "Multiple Entry Discount" or "value card" system as opposed to a traditional season pass. A value card offers only 20 visits and will NOT be replaced if lost or stolen. A value card for a youth (ages 3 to 17) or senior citizen (ages 55 and up) is \$55. An adult card is \$70. If you want to swim more than 20 times you will have to buy a second value card. Regular daily admission prices: \$3.50 for youth and senior citizens, and \$4.50 for adults.

We have listed below the 1999 rates, the new "Grand Opening Pass" rates, and the "regular" rates for comparison.

Youth Season Pass. 1999 rate: \$35..... **Year 2000: \$145.** Year 2001: **\$165.**

(Senior Pass is the same as Youth)

Adult Season Pass. 1999 rate: \$35..... **Year 2000: \$195.** Year 2001: **\$225.**

Family* Pass. 1999 rate: \$60-\$90..... **Year 2000: \$350.** Year 2001: **\$390**

*Family is defined as up to four persons residing at one address. Each additional family member on the pass is an extra \$25.

Why the huge increase? It's a mystery. When I contacted Kwantes about a current pro forma for the outdoor pool, he told me that there isn't one and won't be one. No current revenue projections or expenditures were considered in formulating these fees. City Administrator John Butz informed me that the "Parks Department" formulated the fee structure based on a 1997 Councilman/Hunsaker study and

"more recent market data." Some of this "data" that was included in the fee packet compared other towns' outdoor aquatic center fees. The highest family season pass listed was \$160 (Maryland Heights and St. Charles). But the Maryland Heights outdoor aquatic center is a **four-acre** facility with 5 waterslides! (As a side note, Maryland Heights boasts **NO** city property tax and a **6.475%** total sales tax rate, more affordable than Rolla's sales tax rate of **7.725%**) Of the seventeen Missouri aquatic centers listed, the average rate for a family pass was only \$117.

What is the priority here? Is the outdoor pool Rolla's latest cash cow? Traditionally Rolla families and individuals have enjoyed purchasing a season pass, which allows unlimited admittance for the summer and is usually a bargain compared to the daily pass. In Rolla, bargains have become a thing of the past. City Administrator John Butz has already anticipated council argument about the outrageously high season pass by claiming that a season pass is "more difficult to define and administer." I can hardly wait to hear the spin on this!

REC, or "**R**ecreation is for **E**veryone (if you can afford it') **C**ommittee also received this packet of information. This special interest group, which was spearheaded by Dr. Bill Moorkamp, should not be confused with the ad hoc committee formed by the city, which was very similar in membership and was also dominated by Dr. Moorkamp. No REC names were mentioned on the memo, but Butz informed me that some of the members are: Maggie Thomas, Walter Bowe, Carol Snow, Bonnie Brainard, and John Guerrin. This packet was disseminated to REC so that they could gather feedback from the community regarding the proposed fees and report their findings at the February 7, 2000, City Council meeting.

This backdoor tactic to get "feedback" from the community is typical of how the city has handled this project from the beginning. Instead of holding a true public hearing to let the citizens speak for themselves, they delegate a small, select special interest group to "speak" for us. The city has not, to date, held a bona fide public hearing for the rec center and outdoor pool project. The only meetings they have held have been either "open houses" where people just milled around or meetings in which only written questions were permitted. Pathetic.

As plans for the pool and indoor rec center has unfolded, NSN has heard talk of this being "Country Club West." First there was talk about "underprivileged dollars" and a "foundation" being set up for those who couldn't afford to use the outdoor pool and rec center. Now this ridiculous fee structure has emerged. It appears that those Country Club West rumors had validity.

With rates like the ones being proposed the city is running the risk of a boycott, either intentionally or out of economic necessity. Not only are these rates an unnecessary assault on Rolla's working class, it is an assault on everyone! It amounts to highway robbery! Remember that the cost of renovation is already paid for by the half-cent recreation sales tax that we all pay every time we make a purchase within the city limits. The admittance fees only need to be high enough to cover salaries and maintenance for three summer months, not the renovation itself.

With the disclosure of the outdoor pool fee structure, we cringe when imagining what the proposed rates for the INDOOR center will be. It will be open year-round and have an operating overhead of about \$830,000 per year. The last estimate for a family pass for the indoor center was \$375. With a family pass for three months at the Birdbath set at \$390, it is doubtful that the \$375 for the indoor center will cover it. With rates like these, this project is taking on the distinct flavor of a private club, just as we had suspected.

Well, Rolla, your 2-million dollar paradise is nearly completed. Tell the kids to leave their CD's at home because the \$1,400 CD player had to be scrapped from the budget. Forget sand volleyball, too. They couldn't afford that, either. Just bring your checkbooks and don't worry about getting your hair wet: the deepest water is only 3'8".

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