



BY BRANDON LAUE

FROM LOGISTICAL NIGHTMARE TO MIRACLE

ENTICING RENTERS TO YOUR FACILITY

You may think the process of building a large facility would be the main challenge when wanting to host a large-scale sporting event, so did I. In the years after the opening of my facility, I quickly found that this challenge is only temporary. The real challenge is appealing to your renter in a way that fosters year round interest.

As a municipal employee for the past ten years, I have seen our Oro Valley Parks and Recreation Department progress toward larger and larger events as a reflection of our residents' needs and interests. Our small Arizona community of 42,000 people is wanting larger events, and our municipal government has dedicated its resources toward building facilities that can host these events, specifically facilities for large scale sporting events. The facility has been built. Now what? If you build it, they will come, right? Unfortunately not, hosting a successful large-scale event has less to do with the facility than you might think.

Through my experiences running a newly renovated facility, I have uncovered some great tips on how to make your facility appeal to the outside user. Throughout this article I will explain the three logistical challenges that renters face when planning an event at another facility. I will focus on the steps needed to access the needs of these renters and how to tailor rental packages to entice the specific user you are interested in hosting. Once the user needs are figured out, I will go over the importance of building the necessary relationships with the community in which you are hosting the event. I will also cover utilizing event sponsorships to sweeten your facilities packages and cover the safety side of hosting these large-scale events. Lastly, I will conclude by putting the logistical solutions together to leave your renter with a lasting impression.



I was thrown into the world of hosting events just last year when I took over managing our municipal aquatic center in Oro Valley, Arizona. Prior to managing the aquatic center, I spent eight years aiding in the creation of the Parks and Recreation Department's events, but I was never in the position of recruiting sporting events for a specific facility. The aquatic center I manage was renovated in March of 2013 and was designed to host large scale swimming competitions. The goal of this facility was to give our community and the surrounding area a high caliber swimming pool to compete in and to attract some sports tourism to the area. After the pool was renovated, we received a lot of buzz from the community and the local teams, but not a lot of interest from outside renters. It was clear at this point that outside swim teams and competitions needed more than just a swimming pool to entice them to our area.

The first step in preparing a packaged facility for outside renters was to determine their needs. Luckily for us, the swimming community was rather large throughout Arizona, and we were not the first facility geared toward competition. Many calls were made to other facilities in the area, and they were asked what was expected of them from swim teams and other renters alike. In addition, we spoke to swim teams themselves and asked what their challenges were when traveling to compete at other locations. Our facility was fortunate enough that we already had two established swim teams that called our pool their home facility, and we relied heavily on them for the inside scoop. The biggest takeaway from our research was that finding a nice pool was the least of the renter's worries. If a swim team or any other outside renter was interested in bringing an event to your facility, there

were a lot of logistics on their end that still needed to be determined.

We discovered that the three biggest logistical challenges for these outside rental groups were lodging, food for the volunteers, coaches and officials, and parking/safety logistics. We knew if we could assist with these logistical issues, then we would essentially be a one stop-shop for these renters. So how can you assist with these needs at your facility? Where would you start?

You can start where we did--with our own team or employees. At your facility, you may want to turn to your volunteers or members of your event committee. Whether you manage a facility for your local government or you are a stand-alone facility looking for renters, you will have people on your team with specific expertise. For us, we talked with everyone from our municipal inspectors to our marketing/communications team. We also tapped into the resources of our economic development team, which had expertise on local restaurants, hotels and businesses. If you do not have these resources readily available, you can contact your local municipality or Chamber of Commerce. They can both be a great resource, and chances are you will need to get them involved anyway if you plan on hosting a large event. Along with your local municipality or chamber, it is important to have a good relationship with the first responders in your area. Your community's police, fire and EMTs need to know that you are just as concerned with safety as they are. Another great start would be to contact your local Visitor's Bureau if you have one. Our town did not, so we contacted the Visitor's Bureau for the larger city that borders us. This agency had such a plethora of knowledge and expertise that we quickly partnered with them to help bring these events to our area.

All of this relationship building doesn't happen overnight but it is important and beneficial to meet with these types of individuals on a regular bases.

Lodging Logistics

With great relationships in place, you can start to tackle your potential renter's logistical problems—the first of which is lodging. Your first step is to meet with the hotels in your area, with the goal of getting them excited about your potential events and the intent to help direct the event goes into their hotels. To do this, it is important to do your research and know the average impact of your potential renters. Our research indicated that on average, the swim meets in our area lasted three days and attract about 300 athletes. It is also important to communicate with a diverse set of hotels in your area as user needs differ. Take into consideration different income levels for participants and the hotel's proximity to the event and restaurants in the area. Our economic development team took on the task of meeting with local hotels and educating them on the potential draw for these large events. Our newly partnered visitors' bureau met with these selected hotels and took on the task of negotiating room blocks. By having these meetings, we were able to view the properties and understand their attributes including total room numbers, rooms with kitchenettes, pools, exercise rooms, etc. This specific information will come in handy later when processing inquiries from potential renters. In the end your renters will love you for eliminating their need to do any research in regard to lodging.

Food and Beverage Logistics

Now who is hungry on tips on how to feed your renters while building good relationships with the restaurants in your community? As with the lodging issue, it is important to understand what is needed by the group that you are trying to attract before you meet with the restaurants in your area. For my facility, we were trying to attract individuals to have large-scale swim meets. The biggest food needs for any swim team running a swim meet are finding food to feed the large number of volunteers, coaches and officials. Historically, this coordination and financial responsibility was left with the renter. We also found that these volunteers, coaches and officials were walking advertisements for all of the hungry athletes and their parents. Our economic development team with the help of our local Chamber of Commerce decided to reach out to the restaurants in our area and ask for food donations with the understanding that we would

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display their banners at our events. In addition to banners, our facility would package the event program with menus and coupons for these restaurants. By doing this, we were able to accomplish three things at once. First, we were able to tell our potential renters that we can assist with feeding their volunteers, coaches and officials. Second, we supplied the athletes and parents, who are most often not familiar with the area, with information on the restaurants near to the facility and their hotel room. Third, through directly exposing the food to these athletes and parents we were able to funnel that traffic right back to our partner restaurants, helping to boost their patronage and revenue. When trying to assist with food at your facility, it is important to think of longevity. Think of ways to make things easier on your potential renter while also supporting the restaurants in your area. This mutually beneficial relationship helps sweeten your renters' packaged deal and is also viewed as a positive thing for the community instead of a burden.

Parking and Safety Logistics

The last of our logistical challenges are parking and safety concerns. These issues are going to be a big question for your potential renters. These groups need to know that your facility is safe and able to handle a large number of participants and spectators.

For our large swimming events, we can offer our renters one point of entry to ensure unwanted guests and for quality control. We overstaff the facility with lifesaving personnel and make sure to inform our local fire department of the upcoming event. We can even tell our renters the average response time for paramedics to respond to an emergency at our facility. We work with our local police department to make sure that traffic flow is safe and parking is adequate. Often times we utilize uniformed officers at our events.

In assessing your own parking and safety needs, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does your facility have one point of entry or is it an open space event? With sporting events it is important to know how many athletes you can house safely for all aspects of the event. This includes practice space and non-competing areas for the athletes.
- Is your facility ready to house the anticipated number of spectators or are extra amenities needed like additional restrooms?
- Outside of your staff or event committee, is there a need for additional personnel for security reasons? These additional personnel can be more of your staff, a private security company, additional lifesaving personnel, or your local police department.
- Lastly, what is your traffic and parking plan for the teams and attendees? Whether you are operating on behalf of a municipality or as a private event producer, it is important to consider the overall impact of your event on the community. A well thought out traffic control plan will help prevent any potential backlash from these members of your community.

Putting It All Together

If you manage a facility that is geared toward sports and competition and would like to boost your appeal from outside users, then you should look into ways to entice your potential renter. Do your research and determine the possible issues for these outside groups. Take the high road and make some of their burdens your own. Be creative. Don't assume that all renters are alike and be ready with diverse answers to their questions. Overall help your renter.

So you have researched and understood the needs of your potential renter. You have then identified their issues when traveling to a new facility and found creative, reciprocal ways to help with those needs. You can now put this all together to offer your renter personalized packages to entice them to your facility. If your renter can have an easier planning process and a successful event, then everyone succeeds. You will find that one success story turns into another, and soon you will have a sought-after facility for large scale sporting events.

Brandon Laue is the Aquatics Manager for the Oro Valley Aquatic Center in Oro Valley, Arizona with 10 years of experience in community events. Brandon grew up in the area that he works and even attended the same high school as his father. After high school, Brandon went on to study at the University of Arizona graduating in 2012 with a degree in Interdisciplinary Studies. Taking with him his education and knowledge of the community, Brandon began managing the Oro Valley Aquatic Center in June of 2015. Since that time, Brandon has obtained the accreditation of Certified Parks and Recreation Professional through the National Parks and Recreation Association. Brandon continues to manage the Aquatic Center bringing in year-round competition both on the state and national level. Brandon can be reached at: blau@orovalleyaz.gov.