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## Rising to New Heights

Mayfield Heights Aquatic  
& Community Center  
brings refreshing upgrade  
to neighborhood







## Rising to New Heights

### Mayfield Heights Aquatic & Community Center brings refreshing upgrade to neighborhood

By Dan Holland | Photos by Christian Phillips

**W**ith an outdated community center built in 1977 and a municipal pool built in 1958, the city of Mayfield Heights in 2014 began conceiving of a reimagined, all-encompassing facility at the site of three baseball fields located at 6080 Marsol Rd. The end result was the opening of a new outdoor aquatics center in July 2023, followed by a new adjacent community center in September 2023 on the 10-acre site along I-271.

The \$34.6 million project also includes a brand-new playground, concessions and recreation department offices. An official ribbon-cutting ceremony was held in June 2024 once all components and finishes were in place.

A second phase of the project is slated to include redevelopment and modernization of athletic fields located directly across the street.

#### Beginnings

A number of community engagement meetings were held, along with community surveys sent out, to determine what residents would most like to see in the new facility.

“Back in 2014, residents came up with ideas on how we could best use the lim-

ited amount of park space we have,” says Mayor Anthony DiCicco. “So, we came up with some ideas of how to best use the space and where to best relocate facilities and amenities.”

Funding for the project came by way of a voter-approved tax increase in 2020.

“We went to our residents and came up with a plan to increase our withholding taxes by a half a percent – from 1% to 1.5% – we were the lowest in Cuyahoga County,” explains DiCicco. “That would generate a sizable amount to cover the cost of the facility and the whole park redo.”

Once funding was in place, the city began to interview and assemble a construction and design team. AMHigley, of Cleveland, was chosen as construc-

tion manager at risk for the project. LevelHEADS, Inc., of Valley View, served as architect of record and lead designer with assistance from Legat Architects and Water Technology, Inc. (WTI). GPD Group, the city’s engineering firm, acted as owner’s representative during early stages, according to DiCicco.

“We brought [Legat] on board as associate architect to strengthen levelHEADS’ offering to Mayfield Heights from aquatic deck, sport court and interior design, which were key to the project’s success,” explains levelHEADS President Christopher Trotta, AIA. “In addition, Legat provided programming/planning and construction documentation support. WTI, a world-class aquatic planning, design and engineering firm, partnered



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**RIPPLE EFFECT** A metal trellis connects the community center facility to a detached freestanding pool building, providing an inviting entry to the aquatics area. Here and elsewhere, curving lines and flowing shapes intentionally nod to the nature of water.

with levelHEADS to lead aquatics, slide/diving and apparatus [toy] design, including associated engineering.”

Site work began in April 2022, with concrete structure work beginning in late August of that year.

### Early design input

A common theme echoed by residents was to make the facility a signature project for the city.

“The residents wanted a facility that was on par with our neighboring cities,” says Recreation Director Sean Ward. “There are some shining stars in nearby

communities such as Mayfield Village and Beachwood, who have beautiful pool facilities. We wanted something different as well, rather than taking a cookie-cutter approach.”

“Something we heard as the architecture team was for this to be an award-winning facility, to be very special,” says Trotta. “From a design standpoint, Sean [Ward] and the mayor were big advocates of building something nice and pleasing to the community, not just another cookie-cutter building. We wanted to make sure that the design was something truly unique.”

“The city wanted its own facility for basketball and other sports, as they had been sharing other facilities in Mayfield Heights,” adds Trotta. “They also have summer camps they host here, which can now all be held in this facility. They wanted to pull it all together into one site.”

A 34-foot-high water slide tower, which contains a spiral slide, drop slide and a four-lane Traxx slide, was designed to be the focal point of the project as well as to be reminiscent of a 12-lane community “giant slide” that previously stood near the interchange of Mayfield Road and I-271.

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**GOING WITH THE FLOW** Continuing a nature-inspired design, the community center building reflects the shape of the pool with curving walls of glass, wood-look panels, masonry and metal paneling.

“When you walk through the facility, your eye is drawn toward the slide,” says Ted Haug, principal at Legat. “You’re very aware of it when you’re walking through the community center. Even when the pool is shut down, you have all of that glass looking out at the slide. It’s great advertising for the entire facility, and creates an event space with all the shade structures. It has really become a destination space. The city really made a great effort to concentrate as many amenities on the site as possible, so that the site would be active at all times of day and all times of the year, unlike most aquatics centers.”

### Design challenges

Moving the public pool from across the street nearer to I-271 was an early concern solved through planning and design. “When we did the master plan, they had the pool moved from the other part of the park to this side of the street, and we got some pushback on being so close to the freeway,” says Ward. “There were concerns about the noise while people are at the pool and debris that might come off there. So, we situated the building so as to block the view and the noise from the freeway.”

Finding the best pairing of the two facilities into one site required careful planning, according to Trotta.

“One of the design challenges was, how to have a community center, gymnasium, fitness center – all of these elements –

and organize the building,” he says. “We wanted to have everything organized so as to look at the pools – looking at the best amenity versus the parking lot or Marsol Road. So, we decided to have the main concourses wrap around the pool.”

“Some of the other things we looked at were whether we would have a splash pad or not,” he adds. “Evaluating the size of the gymnasium and community rooms – just right-sizing everything – that was a major component. Then, the constant balance between parking and the requirements of the building itself; there was a lot of back-and-forth to get the project at the right cost.”

Inclusion of natural elements was also key in the design.

“We had to take into consideration sun angles from a standpoint of both the patrons and staff,” explains Matthew Freeby, project director for WTI. “Looking at it in terms of site design, we also considered prevailing wind directions. In this instance, it worked well, because the building took care of that for us. We also considered sightlines for the lifeguarding staff and safety.”

### Prioritizing

A high priority was placed on completing and opening the aquatics area by July 2023, with the community center to follow closely behind.

“Opening the pool in summer 2023 was always the goal,” explains Brent Wehage, senior project manager for AMHigley.



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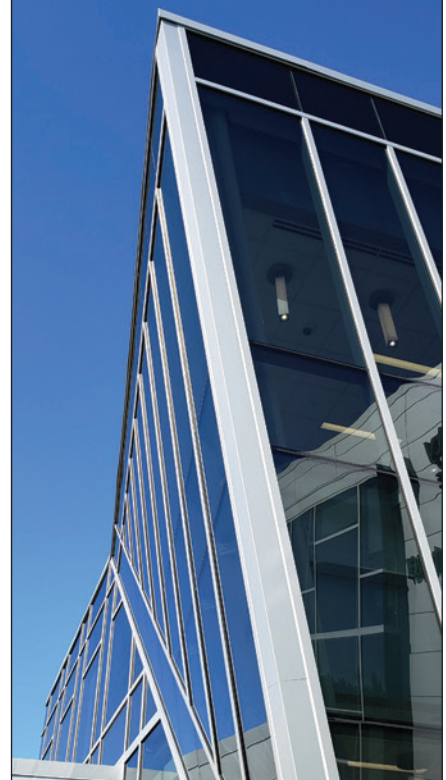
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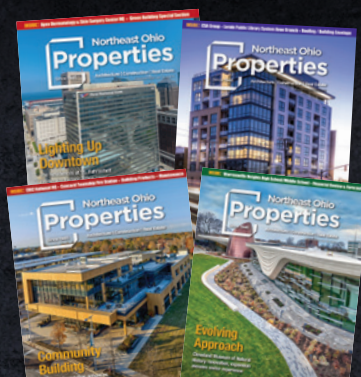


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**TOP ATTRACTION** A 34-foot-high water slide tower, which contains a spiral slide, drop slide and a four-lane Traxx slide, was designed to be the focal point of the project.



Proud to have provided glass & glazing systems at  
**Mayfield Heights Aquatic & Community Center**



“Despite some of the challenges during preconstruction, we worked as a team to identify how to maintain that schedule. It’s something in construction that’s become more normalized with early bid packages and savings in a project, and we did that. We ended up with five different bid packages on this project.”

“The first bid package was the pool and slide in December 2021; we did that as almost a design-bid because we

*“[Recreation Director Sean Ward] and the mayor were big advocates of building something nice and pleasing to the community, not just another cookie-cutter building. We wanted to make sure that the design was something truly unique.”*

**Christopher Trotta**  
levelHEADS

released it essentially as design development drawings, and then worked with the contractor to maintain the schedule and budget,” adds Freeby. “Because that was during COVID, we wanted to make sure that the budget was in line and that we could get a contractor that could meet the schedule.”

Early construction work included demo and abatement of the old community center on the site and relocating the service and maintenance depart-

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**WATER WORKS** In addition to the water slide tower, the 75,000-square-foot aquatics area includes a zero-entry pool, two separate lap pools, handicap pool lift, current channel, vortex, family slide and a deep-pool area with one-meter and three-meter diving boards. Numerous shade structures, including cabanas, are interspersed throughout the pool deck.

ment building to the southwest corner of the property.

### Aquatics area

In addition to the water slide tower, the 75,000-square-foot aquatics area includes two separate lap pools, a zero-entry pool with interactive pool toys, handicap pool lift, current channel, vortex, family slide and a deep-pool area with one-meter and three-meter diving boards. Numerous shade structures, including cabanas, are interspersed throughout the pool deck.

"We wanted to have a variety of options for all ages," says Trotta. "So, as you enter the pool area, the zero-depth pool is near the entrance, and then there's the current channel. As you get further in, it gets more challenging. That was done both for aesthetics and safety reasons."

The pools can be heated to different temperatures to accommodate a particular age group or activity.

A separate pool building containing lockers, changing rooms, showers, restrooms, a concession stand, lifeguard room and staff office sits near the entrance.

The outdoor area also includes a 26-foot by 50-foot picnic pavilion and an ADA-accessible playground.

### Community center

A detached, drive-through metal panel canopy leads into the

33,500-square-foot community center with a centralized vestibule that opens into the main corridor. To the right is a reception desk, restrooms, recreation department offices, a conference room and multipurpose room.

Left of the main vestibule, the main corridor features 12-foot-high floor-to-ceiling windows looking out onto the pool deck. Accessed via the corridor is

a gymnasium with two full-size courts, restrooms, a large banquet room that can be divided into three sections by moveable wall partitions, and a senior cardio room. A kitchen, building mechanical and electrical rooms and the pool mechanical/pump room all sit at the west end of the building.

The 9,200-square-foot gymnasium features rubberized flooring striped for



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**LOOKING BACK** Inside the community center, a main corridor features floor-to-ceiling windows that look out onto the pool deck. An honor wall recognizes individuals who were instrumental in developing recreation programs and park facilities in Mayfield Heights.

basketball, volleyball and pickleball, and includes sound dampening panels and multi-level windows – with frosted east-facing windows – to allow in natural light.

The main corridor incorporates an honor wall that highlights a number of city officials and volunteers who were instrumental in developing the recreation programs and park facilities in the city, in particular those elements that formerly occupied the site.

Wood-look metal panels cover interior corridor walls outside the banquet room, while an exposed corridor ceiling above reveals ductwork and piping.

At the far west end of the property is a freestanding 34-foot by 60-foot metal storage maintenance building.

A new, lighted and landscaped asphalt parking lot is accessed from Marsol Road.

## Design aesthetics

Incorporating a resort-type theme throughout the entire project was at the forefront of the design process.

“The building is designed to reflect the nature of water,” explains Chris Trotta, Jr., building envelope designer for levelHEADS. “We have a curving trellis connecting the pool building

to the main building that represents ripples of water coming across a beach. In addition, the metal panels wrap slowly around the building and flow like water movement.

“On the curve of the building, the city wanted to have some wood form to relate back to nature,” he adds. “There

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**Chris Trotta, Jr.**  
levelHEADS

are also some forms on the pool deck that look like waves cutting into the building to personify the ocean – the water at the beach. The building reflects that environment.”

“We spent a lot of time with the daylighting,” adds Haug. “In every room

or space, there is some kind of natural light coming in. It was very important to have that connectivity to the outdoors and nature.”

## Challenges

As with most projects begun during the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of challenges presented themselves early on.

“When we were brought on, we jumped right into the first round of estimating and doing consolidation,” says Wehage. “That was in 2021, coming out of COVID during the back half of 2021 and early 2022, when escalation pricing in construction was off the charts. We were dealing with material escalations, with roofing and steel being two of the big ones. Christopher [Trotta, Sr.] and his team did a great job of putting together an early bid package for those scopes, and we got that pricing locked in, so that we knew what we had to deal with on the final design piece to be able to bring it in under budget.”

“The preconstruction was a heavy lift, but as a team, between the design team, AMHigley and the city, we made some very good decisions on how to miti-





**OUTDOOR ACCESS** The pool deck, which includes a fire pit and other gathering areas, is designed to be utilized for community activities beyond the summer season.

gate that as much as possible,” he adds. “There were some tough decisions made during that preconstruction phase that ended up working out very well.”

A medium-pressure gas line was required to be run from Mayfield Road to meet the increased needs of the facility.

### Building systems

The building structure consists of load-bearing masonry walls and steel frame, with exteriors being a combination of masonry, utility brick, metal panels and storefront window systems. Interior walls consist of metal studs with dry wall and sheer walls.

Interior finishes and materials were chosen for durability and cleanability.

“We wanted something that was going to be durable,” says Haug. “This is a 50- to 100-year facility – a legacy building – so we wanted to create something that is very easy to maintain in terms of floors and other surfaces. That was really the idea: to create a warm and inviting feeling while having a very durable, low-maintenance facility.”

Flooring consists of carpet tile, ceramic tile, rubberized flooring and static flooring. A white TPO roofing membrane system tops the community center.

The building’s HVAC needs are served by hot water boilers that feed VAVs, along

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**SERVING NEEDS** The community center (top) is equipped with a variety of community resources, including a flexible banquet hall (middle) and a 9,200-square-foot gymnasium (bottom).

with rooftop units. Roof screening was employed to conceal RTUs from view.

### A plan for all seasons

The pool deck area will be utilized for a number of community activities beyond the summer season.

“One thing about this facility that impresses me is that it’s multifunctional and separated. There’s something for everyone at every time of the year,” says Haug. “A lot of these pools, after summer, they just shut down and they’re not used at all, but with this facility, they were very mindful of trying to pack as many different functions into the site as

*“With this facility, they were very mindful of trying to pack as many different functions into the site as possible. It’s always active, and it’s where people want to be. It really gives the community a big bang for their buck.”*

**Ted Haug**  
Legat Architects

possible. It’s always active, and it’s where people want to be. It really gives the community a big bang for their buck.”

### New hub + gateway

The new facility serves as a new hub and gateway to the city.

“It’s a central hub for the town. You have a playground and a day care area for the summer activities,” says Haug. “I don’t know how many different layouts we did for the gymnasium for all the different events you can use it for – from pickleball to basketball to volleyball. And the flexibility of the community rooms allows you to host multiple functions.”

“With the Community Partnership on Aging, it’s a great space for programming for their seniors just to get them up and moving and create a space that they want to come to,” adds DiCicco. “It is one central hub for the





city. They're not coming here just for the pool or just for the community center – they're coming here for a variety of services and activities."

**Winning team**

In the end, all parties worked together to bring a first-rate facility to the city and its residents.

"It's been great working with the team," says Christopher Trotta, Sr. "We all worked together to solve problems and kept moving forward collectively as a team. The mayor was a true leader in this project along with Sean Ward in helping us navigate all obstacles."

"I really enjoyed the team I worked with, and to see the impact and the benefit that it has for the community. That makes it all worthwhile," says Wehage. "Just to see the kids coming in and being excited about the pool; there's nothing better than seeing residents enjoying the finished project."

"It's an inspirational building with the natural light, and everything is beautiful, and our residents say the same thing," says Ward. "People comment that this is their 'happy place,' making them



**EXTRA AMENITIES** In addition to the expansive aquatics area and community center building, the project also includes a 26-foot by 50-foot picnic pavilion, an ADA-accessible playground and a freestanding 34-foot by 60-foot metal storage maintenance building,

feel like they're on vacation. And it's the same on the inside. With the layout of the community rooms, they're really stunning as well as functional."

"It was a pleasure to work with this team, and the proof is in the pudding,"

says DiCicco. "It's a phenomenal building and everything we could have hoped for. And that was all based on the team's ability to work together with a lot of moving parts going on throughout the whole process." **P**



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