

MULTIFAMILY PROPERTIES

Quarterly

MULTIFAMILY: FITNESS

Look before leaping: Pros, cons of fitness trends

We all know that capitalizing on trends is a necessity when it comes to keeping property amenities fresh and community members happy. The latest equipment, coolest machines, and best training tools can help lift the community brand and experience for those residents with fitness and wellness priorities. However, some popular trends in the fitness arena have their downsides too, which don't often get solid consideration in the debate.

With the costs of new construction, renovations and refurbishment at historically high levels, here are the pros and cons around five of the top fitness trends in multifamily today.

■ **Outdoor fitness.** Communities with unused or underused open spaces where landscaping or even parking lots once resided have found opportunity (and many satisfied compliments) in creating outdoor fitness spaces for all types of fitness activities.

Outdoor fitness “gyms” can be created pretty much anywhere there is a bit of unused or underused space. As property managers continuously innovate and rethink how they might use every available property square inch, some are getting quite creative with outdoor fitness configurations and integrating fitness equipment with community outdoor common areas, trails and other features.

However, several cautions also need to be considered. Galvanized all-weather materials aren't cheap, and the last thing you want is for equipment to start to fall into disrepair from being outside if you've selected the wrong items. Safety and monitoring of outdoor fitness spaces can also be a challenge, along with adequate surfacing underneath outdoor fitness areas. Experts can help sort all of this out, as doing it right takes detailed experience.

■ **Integrating technology and fitness.** Who doesn't love a large interactive screen and some gamified fitness applications to make the whole experience both entertaining and good for your fitness awareness



LaRae Marsik
Vice president
of marketing,
Advanced Exercise

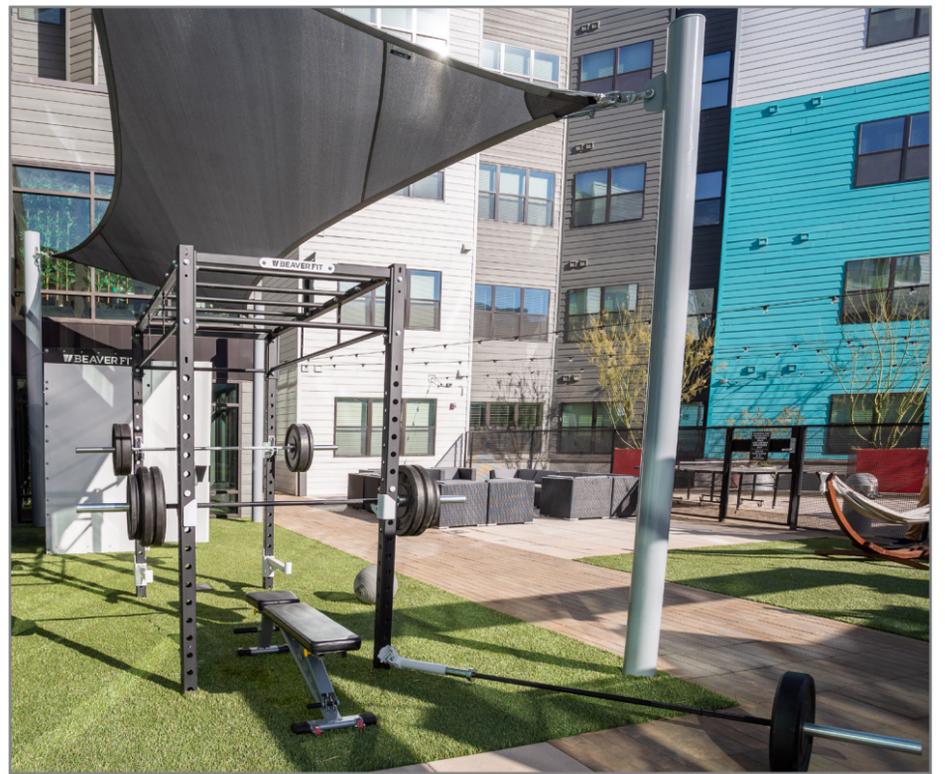
and training?

New body scanning machines can do much more than track heart rates and body mass index, and virtual coaching and competitive rankings are all the rage. In many cases, fitness technology has married esports and gaming with traditional cardio and strength workouts, and people can't get enough.

Hurdles still exist though, as high-speed networks (and network reliability) can sometimes be an issue, as can installing technologically advanced equipment with older infrastructure to support it. Everyone is so accustomed to having their screens work seamlessly that expectations are high, and it's noticeable when everything doesn't work perfectly.

■ **Recovery zones.** A huge trend in fitness right now has to do with recovery options and products, as a sought-after reward post-workout, a way to help prevent chronic muscle soreness and pain, and a necessary effort to give the body time to restore and repair. From compression sleeves and massage tools to zero gravity chairs, saunas and other options, fitness centers everywhere are making room for muscle and joint recovery fitness for everyone to enjoy.

Some trends in recovery might seem cool at first but may be impractical for multifamily settings. Take the cold plunge trend, where submerging in sub-50-degree water to activate the body's “fight or flight” response is being hailed as an instant cure for muscle soreness, inflammation and mental fatigue among a slew of other positive benefits. The practicality of keeping a cryo-plunge option on site is daunting. Keeping the unit clean for full-community use is just one challenge, along with safety and monitoring issues, etc. While there's lots to like (and people will be sharing their experiences on Instagram constantly), all the details need to



Create outdoor fitness spaces for all types of fitness activities.

be considered, and an expert consulted, before installation.

■ **Community fitness engagement.** Building community connections through fitness and wellness options has proven to be a strong strategy over the past two years, and it's getting stronger. Lifestyle directors are procuring an array of programming options to entice residents to take classes on every aspect of health: from functional fitness workouts, to nutrition workshops and a virtually unlimited menu of other options. Whether driven by individual motivation or group dynamics, creative fitness and wellness engagement strategies can lead to impressive returns that last far longer than any single effort or event.

Since this trend relies on having trained staff to execute detailed programs to engage residents, costs are involved that might not be realistic for every property. Part-time program experts can be brought in to augment the employee team, as multifamily properties that try to have internal staff handle multiple roles often spread staff too thin and risk both a less-than-ideal experi-

ence for residents and unhappy or exiting staff members.

■ **From the floor on up.** As the largest and most pervasive fixture and design feature of any property, flooring choices have exploded with new textures, styles and features that include acoustic and ergonomic properties, cleanliness, performance and aesthetics never before available. In fitness spaces, energy absorption and sound dampening surfaces are important, alongside hygienic, easy-to-clean properties. Outdoor surface options and locker rooms need to consider slip-resistance too.

Flooring used to be a throwaway detail, but those days are gone. It's the single element that everyone sees, and it's becoming a curated asset that can impress or disappoint in an instant.

Challenges in chasing trends primarily include cost, longevity, and practicality, but those who are willing to invest can find significant returns in capturing interest in and creating vibrancy behind their particular community's identity. Just look before you leap. ▲

lmarsik@advancedexercise.com