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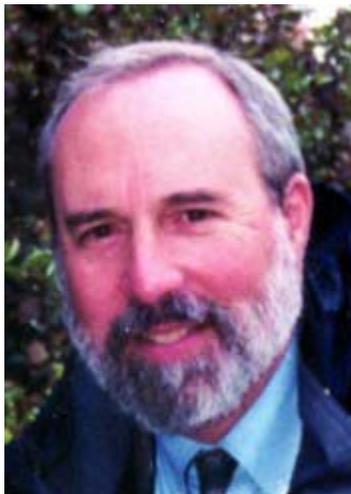
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No pool for you

Low attendance, high operating cost force closure of local swimming spot

By Bridget Jones, Special to the Telegraph



Kids looking for heat relief this summer will have one less option. A local pool will be closing for the summer, and maybe for good.

Oak Knoll Park's swimming pool, which opened in 1995, will be closed for business this summer after low attendance rates and a high overhead costs for operation, maintenance and staffing caused the El Dorado Hills Community Services District to re-evaluate the usefulness of a second area pool, said Wayne Lowry, CSD general manager.

In a recent special meeting, the governing board of CSD made a unanimous vote to shut down the pool.

Lowry said the district has been considering closing the pool down for about five years, but started planning the closure more seriously a few years ago.

"We've been talking about not having the pool open for the past three years," Lowry said. "After the number of years that pool was there, and it had such poor attendance, I don't know how I could come up with a justification of keeping that pool open."

Wayne Lowry

The cost to operate the pool each year was \$27,000, and attendance had dropped to about 300 people a year in comparison to the 400 people that attended the pool about three years ago. This meant the district was paying about \$90 per attendee in recent years and only bringing in \$600 in revenue.

Lowry said the district tried to boost the pool's attendance several times including adjusting the pool's hours of operation three years ago and, after surveying neighbors to determine more acceptable times, adjusting them again last year.

The outreach didn't seem to make a difference, Lowry said.

"We did a lot more publicity, put signs out and did mailings and attendance still didn't improve," he said.

Tony Rogozinski, board president for the district, said the board might be hard pressed to find reasons to re-open the pool in the future.

"We've got some tough economic times and there's only so much money to support recreation in the district," Rogozinski said. "I certainly wouldn't want to mislead anybody ... and unless the board comes back with something that would help us alter (the decision to close the pool permanently), that's most likely the direction the board would go."

Still, Rogozinski said he is committed to helping the community understand the reasons for the closure and is completely open to discussion with residents.

"If it requires an additional town hall meeting with folks to discuss the rhyme or reason for it, then by all means," he said.

Lowry said the pool's location will offer a different type of recreational service to the community in the future. The district hasn't decided what that service will be, but it could include installing a volleyball or basketball court or creating a new picnic area.

"Any time you take away a recreational service is sad," Lowry said. "I think in this case our ability to put some other facility in the pool's place will actually be a benefit."

In the past, the pool was open from the beginning of June to the middle of August. Days of operation included Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 1 to 4 p.m.

Megan Wood, an El Dorado Hills resident and mother of two, said while her family is sad to see the pool go, its hours and lack of services made it difficult to enjoy.

"We're sad because it's so close to our house, it's very convenient," Wood said. "But because they don't provide swimming lessons there ... it's inconvenient anyway. They have this nice pool. You just can't go there (because of the hours). If they had

run it better, I think they would have benefited more.”

While local residents can still use the pool at El Dorado Hills Community Park, it is a few miles away from Wood’s house, which makes it less desirable for her family.

“It’s inconvenient,” she said. “It’s not in a convenient location for this neighborhood. Basically we’d have to build our own (pool) if we want convenience anymore.”

Rogozinski said it’s important for residents to remember they still have an option in the community pool, although it may be farther away from some homes.

“It’s a balance,” he said. “It’s a trade off of deciding where we can meet the majority of needs of the district. At least a consideration is the community has an option. I think at the end of the day we’re not taking away from the community’s recreational swim. We look forward to having additional members participate at the community pool.”

Bridget Jones can be reached at bridgetj@gold

countrymedia.com.