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Ozaukee Sports Center offers variety of ways to fill lazy summer days

OZAUKEE SPORTS CENTER offers activities for a variety of interests. The 18-hole miniature golf course has been an attraction at the Port Washington facility for three years. At lower left, Paul Taylor and his grandson Zach got instructions on how to play laser tag from Alec Schimmelpfennig and Nichole Marth. At lower right, Nichole Marth worked on her batting stroke in the indoor batting cage.

*Photos by Mark Jaeger*Local youngsters are settling into the routine of the lazy days of summer, leaving more than a few parents with the overwhelming question — What am I supposed to do with them today?

One answer can be found in what seems to be an unlikely location on the fringe of the Port Washington industrial park.

This is the third year Ozaukee Sports Center has been in operation at 955 Maritime Dr., but it increased its appeal greatly earlier this spring with the opening of an 8,800-square-foot building that is proving to be the place to be for active families.

Until this year, the center's offerings were limited to an 18-hole miniature golf course and an outdoor laser tag course.

With the addition of the new metal building, the center now has a 3,600-square-foot turf sport area, an inflatable sports arena for a fun twist on soccer, basketball and volleyball, baseball pitching and batting area, indoor golf driving range with nets, indoor laser tag course, game arcade,
concession stand and party room.

There are also several soccer fields on the site.

As the number of options has grown, so has its popularity.

The center was the dream of three Ozaukee County couples who saw a great need for family recreation in the area.

The facility is owned by Dan and Jennifer Wade and Ron and Becky Marth, all of Grafton, and

Ray and Chris Verespej of Mequon.

“Our primary goal is to entertain families. We all saw the need for something like this in the county,” Becky Marth said. “The center provides a lot of activities for families, and it also gives us a chance to give back to our community.”

To underline that point, the facility has been a popular destination for church and school groups. Promotions with nonprofit organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ozaukee County and Family Sharing are regularly penciled in on the center’s calendar.

The giving goes both ways, as youngsters from Grafton Elementary School lent their artistic talents to decorate the street facades in the laser tag area.

“We are a work in progress. There is a lot more we would like to do. We already have blueprints for something like 98,000 square feet of buildings on our eight-acre property,” Marth said.

Unfortunately, the economy began to tailspin just about the time those plans were finalized.

“We haven’t given up on those plans yet,” Marth said.

The economy, however, has also proven to be one of the center’s biggest allies.

“We have found that the economy is forcing a lot of families to stay close to home, but they still want to have fun activities,” Marth said.

That has resulted in the popularity of family passes, that give unlimited use of the center facilities.

The cost of a seasonal pass for a family of five is $125. Year-round family passes cost $175.

Two-hour passes also give visitors unlimited access, but at a more economical price. Adult passes are $15, while children and seniors can get a pass for $13.

Marth said the center appeals to people of all ages.

“We hit every age group. For the past three years, we have had an older couple stopping in regularly to play mini-golf, and it is not unusual to have grandparents join in a rousing game of laser tag,” she said.

“There are some families that drop their children off for a couple of hours every day. We also host a lot of family birthday parties. The other day we had a 140th birthday party … actually, it was a party for two 70-year-olds.”

The benefits of an indoor recreational facility became clear during the recent cool, wet spring, but Marth said families are just as glad to have a place to let kids burn off excess energy during the winter.

“We would have people come play mini-golf outdoors until the weather got really bad, but we are truly a year-round facility now. Of course, we are heated during the winter, but we are experimenting this summer to see if we need to add air conditioning,” she said.

Prevailing winds off nearby Lake Michigan and good insulation have kept the center comfortably cool so far, according to Marth.

Although the center is off the beaten path, she said the site has proven to be ideal.

“The officials from Port Washington were so welcoming to us. We couldn’t have asked for a better reception. That’s how we knew this was the right place for us,” Marth said.

As for the challenge people have in locating the center.

“We just tell people to turn east off Highway 32 at Maritime Drive and look for the old silo and trees,” Marth said.

The center can be booked for parties and group gatherings by calling 284-1800 or requesting a reservation at ozaukeesportcenter.com.