



By ANNE MOORE

## EDITOR'S CHOICE

### PER-HOUR CLUBS TAKE THEIR SHOT

For more years than he cares to recall, Steve Maxsud has been driving from Chicago to Barrington every Monday night to play floor hockey -- at 10:30 p.m.

"It made for a 2 a.m. day. That's tough," says Mr. Maxsud, 31, operations manager for Max's Screen Machine Inc. in Chicago, a maker of printed promotional items.

A shortage of gymnasium space in city high schools and within the Chicago Park District left Mr. Maxsud -- who's been playing floor hockey since grade school -- with no option but the suburbs. But with the recent opening of a city field house, Mr. Maxsud and his pals can strap on their shin guards in the evening. "We go right from work and play."

Windy City Fieldhouse, where Mr. Maxsud plays, is the brainchild of two former Big Six consultants similarly frustrated by the dearth of nearby fee-for-use indoor athletic facilities. Hefty member fees and no guarantees on court times at health clubs led Windy City partners Murrel Karsh and Robert P. Beaubien on a seven-year quest to build a field house like the ones found on college campuses, where many sports can be played under one roof.

"We had no place to play basketball," recalls Mr. Karsh, 29, who, with Mr. Beaubien, tried to organize an intramural league only to find court time limited to 5 a.m. Sundays. "We said to each other, 'We need to build a collegiate field house in downtown Chicago.' We both laughed, but separately thought about it, and realized that it wasn't the craziest idea."

With a \$3-million investment, the duo and a third partner, David Rosengard, transformed a former Budweiser distribution building on the North Side into a 55,000-square-foot sports facility with courts that can be used for basketball, volleyball, in-line hockey, soccer, baseball, football, rugby, lacrosse and other sports. Court fees range from \$75 to \$85 an hour. For athletes who aren't in a group, \$10 buys a full-day pass for running, in-line skating, aerobics or a pick-up game.

Single-sport gymnasiums such as Hoops the Gym charge similar fees (\$80 to \$100 per hour). So popular was the first Hoops -- which opened on the Near West Side in 1992 and offers basketball only -- that owner Gary Cowen two years ago opened a second site three times the size. North Beach Inc. rents indoor beach volleyball courts (\$20 to \$50 per hour) in the Lincoln Park neighborhood, and has trucked in tons of sand for courts in Downers Grove and Hoffman Estates.

For corporate groups looking for organized weekly social activities outside of bars, the fee-for-use facilities are just the ticket: Players don't have to join a singles club, they say, and the corporation typically picks up the tab for court time.

Mike Batz, a software consultant with Chicago-based Andersen Consulting, reserves a Windy City court for two hours every Wednesday evening, where about 20 colleagues show up for basketball and volleyball. Next, they'll try wiffle ball.

"We're not locked into a sport," says Mr. Batz, 26. "It's a way to get together, meet new people and exercise."