

# Chicago Tribune



## Cover Story

### Getting in sync



Photo for the Tribune by Peter Thompson

Equity Residential Properties' Julie Palomar and her colleagues try out a different kind of board game at Windy City Fieldhouse.

### Many businesses take unusual steps in a bid to foster better teamwork

By Jeffrey Steele  
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

**O**n many a Chicago day, you'll find scores of businesspeople competing in blindfolded Velcro obstacle courses and scavenger hunts. Others can be spotted battling against one another to decide who can most quickly assemble a wooden, three-dimensional puzzle. Still others will be found riding around in bumper cars, trying to toss a

ball through a hole in a colored backboard.

What is this? A new concept in the research and development of toys? No, just some of the latest methods of "corporate team-building," in which employees from both large and small businesses break down barriers and learn to work together more effectively.

At Chicago's Windy City Field-

### Teamwork

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house, employees from Motorola, G.D. Searle & Co., Leo Burnett and many other large and small firms regularly convene for the Sports Battle.

Divided into teams of six to 20 people each, they compete for 2 1/2 to 3 hours to outdo each other in street canoe and outlandish relay races, or to score the fastest time while traversing a blindfolded Velcro obstacle course. For their teams to win, individual team members must communicate with one another and put aside individual glory for the good of the team.

"What we teach is that, just as in the business world, it's far less efficient if you work by yourself than if you work as a team," said Murrel Karsh, president of Windy City Fieldhouse, a 2 1/2-year-old, 55,000-square-foot sports-and-entertainment complex on the Northwest Side, which also hosts parties and volleyball and basketball leagues. "For your team to be successful, there has to be a lot of communication and teamwork."

Teams rotate through the various competitions at Windy City Fieldhouse, spending about a half-hour at each one. They're having fun, Karsh said, but at the same time learning the importance of working as a team to effectively reach a goal. "What this is about is breaking down barriers and realizing the efficiencies that result from working together."

For those companies that had already been through the Sports Battle and wanted to return for a different, more intellectual team-building experience, Windy City Fieldhouse created Team Challenge. Instead of competing in physical contests, businesspeople vie against one another in mental exercises, such as assembling and unassembling large three-dimensional puzzles.

"In some ways, because it's intellectual team building, it drives home the points about teamwork even more effectively," Karsh said. "On a very minute level, it demonstrates the power of communication and teamwork on efficiency."

After teams have finished their competition, Windy City Fieldhouse is careful not to simply send participants home. Instead, the teams all get together on the mezzanine level of the fieldhouse for a cocktail reception and appetizer buffet.

"People can sit and chat and talk about non-business matters, or maybe about business," Karsh said. "They're going to break down these barriers further, and enable more efficient teamwork."

The cost of a half-day event, including lunch, the Sports Battle or Team Challenge, and a reception, is \$35 to \$100 per person, Karsh said.