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MEETINGS & EVENTS

FACILITY FOCUS

Windy City Fieldhouse

Creative team-building activities generate repeat business for multi-sport and entertainment complex.

By Suzanne Carmel

When Pfizer's upper management saw a need to build camaraderie among its 80-person sales force, they booked a meeting at the Windy City Fieldhouse in

Chicago. "We come together for a meeting every month or two," says Brian Ban, the facility's director of marketing and operations.

The Fieldhouse staff divided the Pfizer group into eight teams of 10.

last year, gets high marks. "We're constantly pushing the envelope with regard to events and the flexibility of our space."

The Fieldhouse is the only facility of its kind that manages/facilitates events and owns a venue of this size in Illinois, notes Dyana Flanigan, a Fieldhouse publicist. "It was described by the Chicago Mayor's Office of Special Events as 'one of the best raw spaces in Chicago.'"

The management staff, with more than 50 years of collective experience, helps to accommodate events such as the Harris Bank 5,000-person summer picnic. Facility partners handle audio/visual, catering, props and transportation, although meeting planners are free to work with whomever they wish.

Ban says a typical all-day team-building event starts with breakfast, followed by a meeting and lunch. During the time when the company participates in break-outs, the Fieldhouse staff talks about something such as hidden values



The Windy City Fieldhouse's 55,000-square-foot playground transforms into a sports paradise for special events or corporate functions.

Chicago. Not only does the multi-sport and entertainment complex match meeting planners' needs when it comes to the typical requirements (food, space, amenities, etc.), but it also offers excellent team-building programs.

Because Pfizer's sales reps operate pretty much alone, day in and day out, the company's goal was to instill more team-style philosophies.

"That's challenging when you only

They competed together in a variety of stations with either mentally or physically challenging activities.

Ban points to two main reasons why his facility, which booked some 50,000 people in its team-building programs



Windy City Fieldhouse facilities also can accommodate clients when there's a need for smaller meetings.

ZOOM IN

Location: 2367 W. Logan Blvd., Chicago.

Contacts: Corporate sales director, (773) 486-7421, www.windycityfieldhouse.com.

Getting There: The four-year old company is 20 minutes from O'Hare Airport and 10 minutes north of the Loop, located off Kennedy Expressway, near the intersection of Logan and Western. Plenty of local parking. Transportation coordination available.

The Basics: 55,000 square feet that also functions as a sports complex for basketball, volleyball and more when not dedicated to team-building functions. 10 break-out rooms. Facilities accommodate 20 to 4,000 attendees. The staff also can plan and man events outdoors, such as corporate picnics in area parks or scavenger hunts on the Magnificent Mile.

Clients: Big and small companies, including American Airlines, Westin Hotel, Aramark Corp., Chicago Travel Consultants, Chicago White Sox, Accenture, Arthur Andersen, Heller Financial, Ernst & Young, Hewlett-Packard, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Leo Burnett Co., Motorola and Reebok.



A Human Inflatable Velcro Obstacle Course is one of the many team-building activities that encourage employees to work together to solve problems.

within the company—or whatever the company has worked out with the meeting planner in advance.

During breaks, the Fieldhouse staff also may participate in some challenges to loosen up attendees. In the afternoon, the company breaks into different teams, maybe with colored T-shirts or funny hats, and they spend two or three hours doing fun team-building activities. At the end of the day, they'll have a debriefing session and put it back together for everyone. This is when attendees get value as they start to think about why activities were or weren't successful.

Padding to Puzzles

"We have a couple of different team-building packages," says Ban. "Some of

them are mentally engaging team-building challenges and some are more physical, fun-type challenges."

Activities might include Puzzling Planks, where a large wood puzzle is broken up and each team member is given a piece. The team must work together to put the puzzle back together. A Human Inflatable Velcro Obstacle Course, canoe races (on wheels with toilet plungers as oars), a Minefield Maze, Basketball Shoot-Out,

Split-Second Charades, Pipeline Pass and many other activities make up the options for team-building.

During warm-weather months, many functions by the Windy City Fieldhouse are held in Chicago parks or in other city locations. Examples include corporate picnics, scavenger hunts, block par-



Team-building programs and a series of challenging activities are a Windy City Fieldhouse specialty.

ties, cook-offs, murder mysteries and building events (such as boat regattas, soap box derbies and model building).

"We've done everything from a Mission Impossible scavenger hunt along the Magnificent Mile to gingerbread house team-building events that are focused around a holiday party," recalls Ban. "The only limitation we have is the creativity of our staff." ■

Suzanne Carmel is a Chicago freelancer.

Up Front Making the shift from gourmet to games.

The ultimate challenge for many facilities is being able to transform an atmosphere from something like black-tie to khakis and back to black-tie. The Windy City Fieldhouse does just that.

"One of our biggest challenges that we faced was turning things around on a very tight time frame," recalls Brian Ban, the facility's director of marketing and operations.

"We held a 1,000-person black-tie, formal charity dinner on a Saturday night with Wolfgang Puck catering it—very high-end. Then we had to turn it around for CDW's 2,500-person interactive reception the next day with high-end video games, rock climbing walls and inflatables."

Not surprising, the staff worked around the clock to make both functions go off without a hitch.

"You're dealing with different vendors and different catering companies—that makes it very complex. But it's about having partners upon whom you can rely."

—Suzanne Carmel