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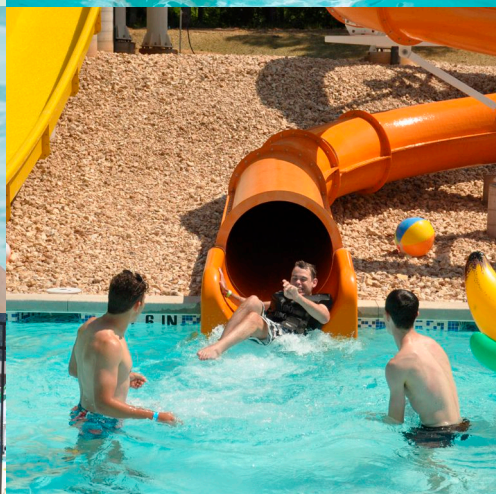
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For Special Needs Campers

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Camp Barnabas Aquatic Complex Is A Dream Come True

**Industry Rallies
To Create Unique
Aquatic Experience For
Special Needs Campers**



By Robert J. Morgan

The grand opening for the new aquatic complex at Camp Barnabas was June 26, 2023, and was, with all sincerity, the highlight in my 20+ year career as a pool constructor, one which will likely never be replaced. With kind and inspirational words from the CEO of camp, John Tillack and Camp Director Mike Mrosko, along with others who were instrumental in the process, accolades were given, a ribbon cut, and then campers flocked to the new pool at Camp Barnabas with a zeal and excitement that can only be attributed to the

innocent enchantment of children. Their new aquatic experience is finally within grasp. Returning campers relieved after a year of camp that did not feature a pool. The actualization for everyone of an aquatic facility built intentionally for people with special needs is finally achieved. That sounds like the end of a sweet story, but it's not the ending. It is the beginning of the second chapter, with the

prelude yet to be written.

My father, Rob Morgan, was contacted by the CEO of Camp Barnabas at the end of summer 2021 with a plea that we help remedy the disaster of a swimming pool that had, for the past 20 years served camp. The existing pool was built in a terrible location, leaked like a sieve and had equipment deficiencies to put it mildly.

Our family company is a commercial pool builder in Texas and the surrounding regions, the sorts of remediations Camp Barnabas' pool would require are ones we are familiar with in our scope of work. Southern Missouri is outside of the geographical area where our company would typically commit to a project, but they are a Christian organization, and we are a Christian company pleased to help and work with other Christian organizations. They had an appropriate budget in mind for this type of work and a reasonable expectation as to what could be done, so after just a brief internal discussion it was determined that we should, at a minimum, see if we could help.

We arrived at camp in the picturesque hill country of Purdy,



Camp Barnabas



The pool's concept design focused on bringing the entire camp together simultaneously while allowing participation to the fullest extent of the individual's willingness rather than the extent of their physical ability.

Missouri on a Friday in early August with camp in full session and were quickly inundated by the scope of what camp provides for kids and families. They are a Christian camp that caters specifically to special needs individuals, and the folks that run the camp do not have a “no” in their hearts. Regardless of disability, level of terminal illness, age, or level of behavioral needs, any individual is welcome at camp. Not only are they welcomed with love, but with the necessary accommodations planned for and available to handle a myriad of disabilities. Equally, and possibly with even more life changing results, they have individuals in the junior high and high school age groups without disabilities come and serve one-on-one with the campers for a week.

The existing pool was in terrible shape; it was beyond repair, and it became clear

they needed a new one. We had already become invested in what we had seen and explained to them that we would be happy to help them put together a

plan to rebuild. Following that discussion was an incredibly enthusiastic lunch with the campers, which included cheering and camp chants, individuals getting up in front of the crowd and speaking in front of a crowd for possibly the first time in their lives to declare their best friendship with someone, or that they love camp, or to mumble something incomprehensible and proudly walk away with newfound courage to cheering from a crowd there to support them unequivocally.

Through this time, my heart broke for these campers; not because of their disabilities, because they were truly joyful, and at that moment did not appear to need pity for their

Regardless of disability, level of terminal illness, age, or level of behavioral needs, **any individual is welcome at Camp.**

CAMP BARNABAS

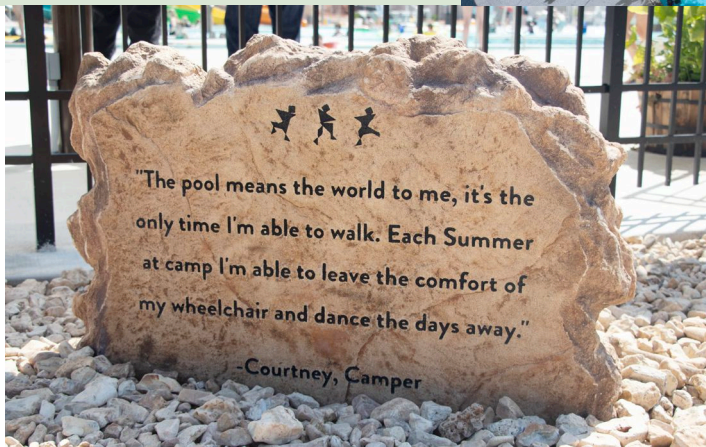
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The pool's design provides two different environments – a peaceful, not overly stimulating area and an area full of water explosions, splashing, sprays and excitement.

condition. My heart broke with the thought of someone else attempting to salvage that disaster of a pool with the idea that the campers do not know better, so they do not need better. My heart broke at the idea that the budget dedicated to the new pool would build them only part of what they deserved. Quite honestly, my heart broke because I not only had a baseline human obligation to care for those "overlooked and forgotten" as the Bible describes in Matthew 25:40, but I believe I had a much more abundant spiritual responsibility to them.

There is a crazy thing about a 6.5-hour drive home after an experience like Camp Barnabas, and that is the opportunity to dream of the "what ifs." We determined on that drive home that it was time to use our "once-in-a-business-generation" charitable outreach card with the businesses that we utilize consistently and consider friends in the industry. We wanted them to partner with us to create and build a dream design to change Camp Barnabas for the better.

The first question was design; we are not designers nor engineers and given that Councilman- Hunsaker is also physically in Missouri, our first solicitation resulted in a quick "yes" when Darren Bevard confirmed they were on board. Secondly, fun activities needed to be added to the pool and someone with the ability to create unique features and some whiteboard material so that we could quickly start to promote this idea. SplashTacular's Alex Weidman and Kodi Theilgaard did not hesitate to jump aboard and immediately started creating some digital representations of sketch ideas.

This brought the conceptual design to life and gave us the ability to showcase to potential partners as well as give to the camp so they could have the opportunity to start raising additional funds.

Amazingly, the responses were anything but "not interested" from the requests extended, as you can see from the extensive list of contributors. Soon after those initial conversations, in early February of 2022, Rob was able to present the plan to the United Aqua Group Foundation and its members, from which another \$250,000 was raised to give these special needs campers a deserving pool. We got to be the initiators of an industry coming together to create something amazing for some of the most humble and non-assuming patrons. Companies and trades from all over the pool industry and beyond united to create something totally selfless and incredible.

The design of this pool required thinking beyond the normal aesthetics and functionality of a typical pool and we needed to consider, above all else, the user interface and inclusivity possibilities. The most important concept I recognized from my interactions at the original pool was the reality that two different environments for campers needed to be built into one facility. The camp needed a Zen-style environment that was peaceful and not overly stimulating for those with sensory sensitivities. They also needed an area full of water explosions and splashing, sprays and excitement.

This concept was achieved by implementing a zero entry on both sides of the facility and two different splash pads of a variety of water sprays, features, and interactive toys. A 300 foot long lazy river answered a dream desire the directors of camp laid out for us; to have an entire cabin of campers floating around

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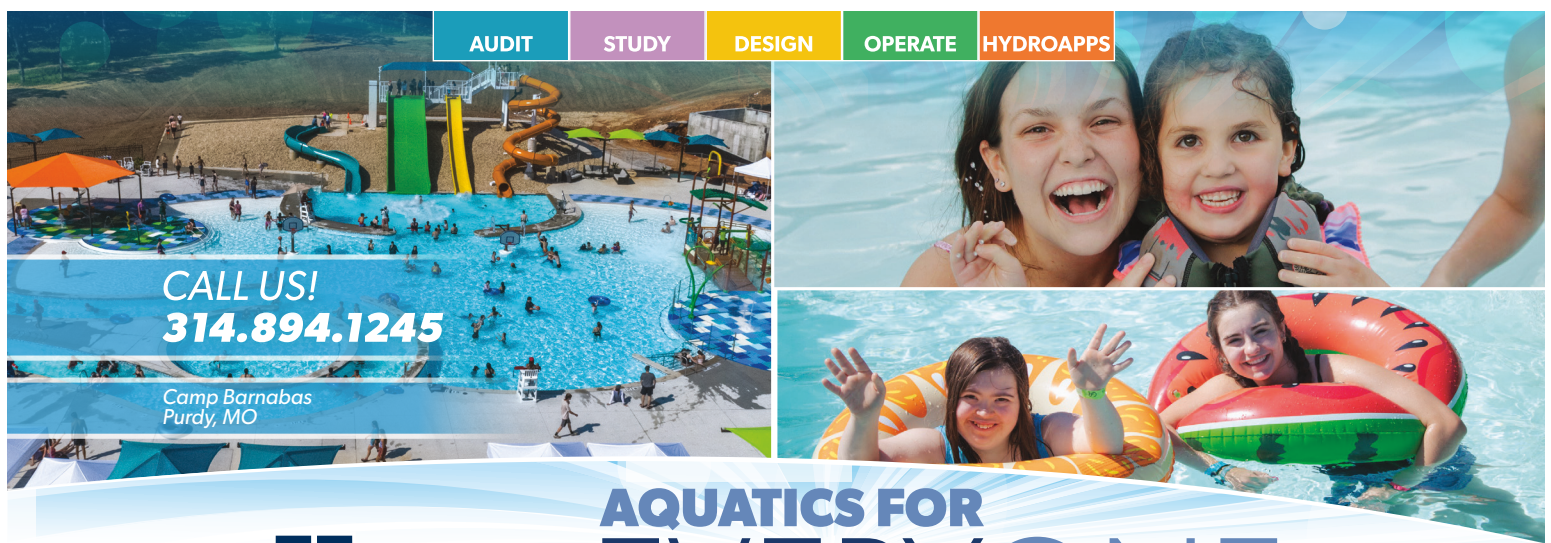
Suppliers

- Development/Design: **Councilman-Hunsaker**
- Consultants: **Councilman-Hunsaker**
- Construction: **Sunbelt Pools**
- Theming: **SplashTacular**
- Waterslides: **SplashTacular**
- Children's interactive play structure: **SplashTacular**
- Children's equipment: **SplashTacular**
- Pool or deck coatings: **Ultra Poly One Coat, Life Floor**
- Filtration equipment: **Neptune Benson Defender**
- Pumps: **ASC Pumps (Aurora) with H2Flow Variable Frequency Drive**
- Chemical: **ChlorKing NexGen and Engineered Treatment System Ultra Violet**
- Chemical controllers: **BecSys 7 with Alkalinity Monitoring**
- Shade system: **USA Shade by All Inclusive Rec**
- ADA Lifts and Rails: **Spectrum Aquatics**
- Main Drains and Grating: **Daldorado**

CAMP BARNABAS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 38

in tubes without a concern in the world. A water basketball area featuring a full court along with multiple goals of different heights was a late addition to the design after recognition of the campers' love of shooting baskets. A slide complex consisting of four slides with multiple levels of excitement brings participation options to multiple levels of willingness and ability. There is a wheelchair lift for the slide tower that allows users who would typically be unable to participate on slides the ability to independently travel to the top of the slide tower. A specifically designed, unique aquatic play structure by SplashTacular features ADA ramps and features designed so there is no option unavailable to those needing wheelchairs or special assistance to experience full access to the aquatic features. The conceptual design is focused on bringing all the camp together simultaneously and inclusively and allowing participation to the fullest extent of the individual's willingness rather than the extent of their physical ability.

The participation of our industry was amazing and surpassed all expectations, but the project did not happen without some major setbacks. To start, we quickly realized the quality swim season of Southern Missouri and the building season of swimming pools are synonymous with each other. By the time a quality design was approved and engineering confirmed, the temperatures were below what we could comfortably work in and were literally too cold to glue pipe, of which, there is a lot to do early in a project. Impossibly wintry weather was followed by a February to June of unprecedented rain; we were quickly aware that a summer of 2022 opening date was not going to be a reality. With what I can only imagine was frustration from management and staff (I have to imagine because we never saw



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anything other than gratitude and grace from them) camp was held in 2022 without a pool.

As an outsider witnessing camp's day-to-day activities during this year without a pool, the reality of what our industry was creating, what we were able to participate in, was not just a feature for the campers to enjoy, we were recreating the highlight of camp. The old pool was dilapidated, unsanitary, and basically featureless due to its mechanical insufficiencies and deficiencies, but it was a beloved activity for campers and staff that brought camp together. We were getting to create a new center point of camp that will be so far and above what the previous pool was in intent, activity, sanitation and filtration, it would literally change the campers overall experience at Camp Barnabas. Yet that literal cement pond being replaced was beloved and missed without an appropriate aquatic feature to replace or replicate what it brought. Seeing those campers miss the pool was a clearer reminder than the best sales technique could ever demonstrate; that our industry is in business for far more than the sake of building. What we routinely create are community gathering locations, anticipated activities in a lineup of fun, training grounds and irreplaceable experiences to many.

Outside of camp, the typical kid that attends Camp Barnabas is consistently reminded of the activities or experiences that they are excluded from because of their mental or physical disability. Camp Barnabas exists with a mission to only exclude "you can't"



The new pool is the center point of camp and the highlight of the camper's experience.

from their operation. The swimming pool facility is designed and built with that same mindset at its core. I am so proud of our industry and partners that said "we can" when the opportunity presented itself. It is truly one of the greatest honors of my life to have gotten to be instrumental in this process.

For additional information on Camp Barnabas, please go to www.campbarnabas.org.

ROBERT J. MORGAN IS THE SENIOR CONSTRUCTION SUPERVISOR AT SUNBELT POOLS IN DALLAS, TEXAS AND HAS PROUDLY WORKED IN THE BUSINESS SINCE HE WAS A TEENAGER. WHEN NOT WORKING ON POOLS, HE IS EITHER ENJOYING THE SNOW, BEACH, OR A SAILBOAT WITH HIS FAMILY.



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