

Pools set to make a splash

Live Oak - 1990
By ANNA MARIA BASQUEZ
Sentinel staff writer

LIVE OAK — A quarter century after Live Oak residents first dreamed of a community pool, the \$6.5 million Simpkins Family Swim Center is about to open.

“The good thing about staying with a thought is eventually it comes about and makes people feel good,” Santa Cruz County Supervisor Jan Beautz said.

Although there are still bugs to work out, the builder estimates residents will be splashing in the pool by early next month.

More than a pool site, supporters see the center as a community hub — not just for Live Oak, but the entire county.

The 11,000-square-foot swim center has four pools, including a 1,000-square-foot warm-water pool for water aerobics, swim lessons and handicap access; a 50-meter Olympic size pool and a wading pool for infants.

The facility, which also sports a 120-foot-long spiraling water slide, is painted in warm grays, and light blues and greens.

The center has survived a series of controversies, including questions over project bidding, as well as the size of the pool and even the kind of facility the community wanted.

And that was after the debate about whether to build a pool at all.

“Some people in the county were talking about it becoming low-income housing, which is really popular out in Live Oak,” said Beautz. “You had a lot of housing but no parks facilities.”

It’s only in the past 10 years, with parks additions and a new library, that it has



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The four pools at the county-operated Simpkins Family Swim Center in Live Oak, proposed about a quarter-century ago, are expected to be loaded with swimmers by early next month.

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started to change, she said.

The project also survived a threat of lost state funding, Beautz said.

“I credit our local representatives, who have worked hard to keep that money coming,” Beautz said.

The pools are almost filled and all looks ready, but there are still electrical bugs to work out, the contractor says.

“Everybody would’ve loved to have had it open sooner,” said Bill Simpkins, whose wife Brigid has headed fund-raising efforts for the opening. “I guess these things

take longer. I’m just excited about it and looking forward, not back.”

Tom Burns, executive director of the county redevelopment agency, said the Rhodes & Kesling construction company will set the opening date.

“If the contractor does what they need to do, it should be open,” he said. “Nothing has gotten done as soon as it seems it should have been ... , so we just keep working with them.”

While the pools will attract the most visitors, the center has other facilities, too.

There will be office space and a community recreation room for center programs and community and private function rentals, said Barry Samuel, director of Santa Cruz County Department of Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services.

“We don’t have a public facility of this magnitude, and aquatics is a very big part of living in Santa Cruz County,” Samuel said. “From swim teams to water polo teams — a lot of the folks who live here are involved in water-related sports.”

The center was paid for by a state grant (\$150,000) and about \$500,000 in donations from businesses and individuals. The largest individual contribution came from Alan and Phyllis Simpkins, amounting to about \$200,000. The balance was paid for by the county redevelopment agency.

The only other pool owned by the county is located at Highland Park in Ben Lomond, Burns said.