

Live Oak swim center opens after only 20 years

Community dream becomes reality

By ANNA MARIA BASQUEZ
Sentinel staff writer

LIVE OAK — After more than 20 years, what county authorities nicknamed the "pool of dreams" became reality Monday.

The 11,000-square-foot Simpkins Family Swim Center opened its doors to more than 400 children, lap swimmers and competitive team members.

"I remember talking about it back in the '70s," said Cabrillo Threshers coach Jim Triplett, whose swim team numbers 100. "It seems like I've been going to meetings for years. The project sort of died for a while and was brought back to life."

The swim center's September opening was delayed when officials noticed black residue on the metal anchors where lane ropes attach to the walls of two swimming pools. After weeks of testing, officials determined that the corrosion did not threaten public safety, so the pool could open.

"We got through the first phase," said Tom Burns, director of the County Redevelopment Agency, which helped finance the \$6.5 million facility.

"More testing could take weeks or months. Once we finish testing, we might need to litigate in terms of responsibility if it turns out to be a major cost item.

"I'm assuming the contractor does not want to fix it and we may have to take some action if it turns out it's their fault.

"If it requires actual closure of the pool, we'll do that at a reasonable time, but we're not sure at this point."

Earlier delays at the pool came from financial uncertainty, bidding difficulties and disagreements over pool size.

But, forgetting bureaucracy on a sunny autumn day, children savored the moment Monday, taking first tries at the 120-foot spiraling water slide and splashing into each of the four pools.

Barry Samuel, director of the Santa Cruz County Department of Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services, pointed to a woman holding a baby in the wading pool.

"It's being used just the way we pictured

'I'm not used to art and pools mixed together.'

— Allie Layhee, swim coach

it being used," he said. "I think it's going to fulfill everything people wanted it to."

Clark Beattie, recreation superintendent, said the weather held up well for the opening considering the rainy weekend.

"We were sweating it," he said. "When we saw it was supposed to be decent weather, we were pretty excited. We couldn't have been luckier."

Beattie said recreation officials are hoping the center will host some water polo and swim team championships. Santa Cruz County Aquatics Team also tried the pool.

The opening also meant 32 new lifeguard positions. Most of the aquatic staff was taken from workers for summer programs at places including Soquel High School, said lifeguard Abel Gutierrez, 24.

Gutierrez said the children weren't any more rowdy than most groups he's watched, despite the excitement of the opening.

Domonick Gross, 13, was having a good time but said, "I think more than one person should be allowed on the slide."

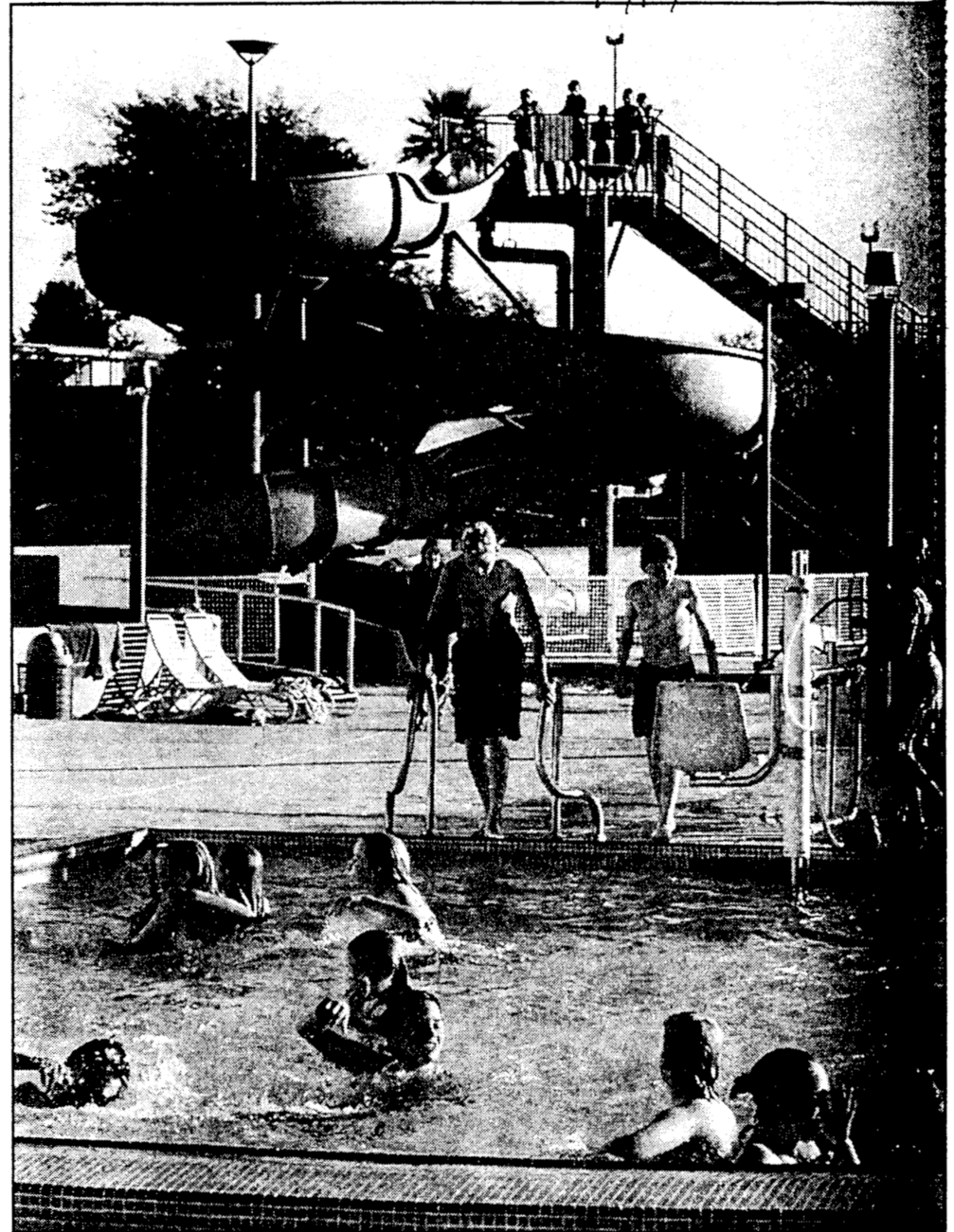
Abby Van Bremen, 10, said the water didn't sting her eyes like other pools do.

"It's rather high-tech for Santa Cruz," said Allie Layhee, assistant coach for the Threshers. "I'm not used to art and pools mixed together," she said, pointing to the art along the fence.

Triplett said, "It's like a mini-Disneyland, with the slides and all the decorations."

Michael Bailey, whose son is a member of the Threshers, said he had never seen anything like it.

"I used to swim for Aptos (High School) and we didn't even have a pool there back then," he said. "This is definitely a good pool. You only find ones like this at colleges. I'm jealous."



Some 400 people showed up for the opening of the swim center.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel