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The Official Magazine of the World Waterpark Association

## The Big Pool Gets A Big Makeover

Gardens Rapids At The Big Pool, Garden City, Kansas, U.S.A.



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# THE BIG POOL GETS A BIG MAKEOVER

THE CITY OF GARDEN CITY, KANSAS, SAYS GOODBYE TO ITS LEAKING, 100-YEAR-OLD POOL AND HELLO TO THE COLORFUL AND EXCITING NEW GARDEN RAPIDS AT THE BIG POOL.

For us to give you the complete picture of Garden Rapids at the Big Pool, we will have to go back, way back to 1922, and discuss The Big Pool.

## HISTORY OF THE BIG POOL

Initially, Garden City Mayor H.O. Trinkle, a water enthusiast, wanted to create a novelty pool as a tourist attraction. The Big Pool was hand dug and concrete poured by the people of Garden City in 1921. It measured a whopping 220 feet by 330 feet. It opened for its inaugural season in 1922. The pool quickly gained fame as the "World's Largest Free Outdoor Concrete Municipal Swimming Pool" and would hold on to that title until 2003, when the first user fees were instituted.

In the pool's nearly 100 years, there had been many memories made that created a history to be remembered! During the 1950s, the Sea Sprites, a choreographed swimming group from



Opened in 1922, The Big Pool was available free of charge until 2003.

Lansing, Michigan, would travel to Garden City to perform in the pool. The 1960s would have visitors from every state recording its largest attendance record for the season. The 1970s was the beginning of the bathtub races, which was a fundraiser for Muscular Dystrophy. During the 1980s, a local resident taught wind sailing classes in The Big Pool. Then, from 1987 to 1994, the beloved elephants Moki and Chana from the City's Lee Richardson Zoo



During the 1980s, wind sailing classes were taught at The Big Pool by a local resident.

GARDEN RAPIDS AT THE BIG POOL IS A UNIQUE COMBINATION OF NEW AND MODERN AMENITIES WITH MEMORIES OF THE PAST SPRINKLED THROUGHOUT THE FACILITY.

BY JAMIE STEWART





The park's iconic elephant slide was refurbished and positioned at the new front gate to welcome guests.



A "lazy" river is one of the facility's new amenities.

had the opportunity to swim in The Big Pool after it closed for the season. Crowds reportedly came from as far as California and numbered in the thousands daily for the week that the elephants swam.

### THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF THE BIG POOL

However, by the late 1990s, the pool was badly in need of a facelift. After gathering input from a community pool committee, the City Commission prepared a master plan. Because of the \$8 million price tag, the project was broken down into smaller pieces. As the first eager swimmers hit the water of the Big Pool in 2006, they inaugurated the most significant improvements to the Garden City landmark in its 84-year legacy. It had undergone its third and most visible facelift during the late winter and early spring of 2006. Five slides were incorporated with a plunge pool and a bulkhead that divides the pool into north and south halves.



Over the years, management of the pool moved back and forth between the City and the Recreation Commission, and in 2017, the City took back management of the pool.

By the end of the 2018 swimming season, facility operation costs were \$3,337 per day. This amount did not include an additional \$300,000 per year in capital costs. The Big Pool was losing 200,000 gallons of water a day at the cost of \$136,546 per year. Because of that water loss, the pool had to be refilled every evening, which meant it was always cold. To add to the discouraging numbers, attendance was dwindling, reduced to a staggering 330 swimmers per day. Much like governing bodies before them, in October of 2018, the current governing body was shocked to hear the extreme amount of water being lost, the high cost to operate and the low number of people attending the facility.

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

The governing body directed staff to develop a process to engage the community and try and assess where they should go for the future of public water recreation in Garden City. Should staff continue with the costly fixes, or does the community want something different?

For eight weeks, staff presented information to schools in Garden City and the surrounding areas, community members and civic groups. Staff was able to communicate with more than 6,000 residents and survey more than 4,500. A few of the biggest complaints about the current facility were the lack of shade and seating, the cold water and there were very few amenities for all ages. After the survey results had been collected and subsequently presented to the governing body, a Request for Proposal process to construct a new facility was approved and opened on April 2, 2019.

With the long history of The Big Pool, the governing body and staff knew it was imperative to engage and include the community throughout this process. The community had opportunities to provide their input on the presentations given by the companies from the RFP process via a survey, they would be asked to help choose the design concept they thought would best suit the community of Garden City, they would vote on the name, theme and color scheme

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30



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## GARDEN RAPIDS AT THE BIG POOL

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[HTTPS://WWW.GARDEN-CITY.ORG/GOVERNMENT/DEPARTMENTS/GARDEN-RAPIDS-AT-THE-BIG-POOL#AD-IMAGE-0](https://www.garden-city.org/government/departments/garden-rapids-at-the-big-pool#AD-IMAGE-0)

FACEBOOK @GARDENRAPIDS; INSTAGRAM @GARDENRAPIDSGC

OWNERS: CITY OF GARDEN CITY, KANSAS

ADMISSION PRICES: DAILY PASS - \$3.00; 20 PUNCH PASS - \$48; ANNUAL PASS - \$77; ANNUAL COUPLE PASS - \$120; ANNUAL FAMILY PASS - \$174

DATES OPEN: MAY 29, 2021 - AUGUST 15, 2021

CAPACITY: 1,800 PATRONS

CLIENTELE (PERCENT LOCAL VS. TOURIST): THIS WILL BE OUR FIRST YEAR WITH THE NEW AQUATICS FACILITY



GARDEN RAPIDS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

and they would be asked to provide their feedback on what buy-up options they wanted to see as amenities in the new facility. The community was involved in every step of this process.

The selected design team was critical to the community engagement and design process for the city of Garden City. The city selected the team of Confluence, Water Technology, Inc. and Barker Rinker Seacat to guide them through the expedited design schedule.

Through local participation to garner feedback and input, the design team worked collaboratively with city administration to provide aquatic design solutions that would serve the needs of today's diverse user groups, while planning for the future of aquatic recreation. Additionally, the governing body prioritized aquatic attractions and amenities that would meet the expectations and directives of the community, while providing iconic, one-of-a-kind attractions that would create a regional draw for the revitalized aquatics facility.

### COVID-19 IMPACT AND CONSTRUCTION

On May 19, 2020, the governing body was faced with the hard decision not to open The Big Pool for its final season in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff recognized the closure had a finality to The Big Pool and its history that many community members were incredibly saddened by. To alleviate some of those feelings, staff organized a "Farewell Celebration." The event allowed community members to come to The Big Pool one last time, walk around, take pictures and even leave the event with a small concrete brick from the pool deck and a replica windshield sticker recreated from the 1930s as a souvenir.

While it was unfortunate not to have a final season at The Big Pool, it did allow construction to start sooner than anticipated. A groundbreaking ceremony was held on July 21, 2020, and demolition began that following day. With only 312 days until opening day, a lot needed to be decided and completed.

While demolition continued, staff began working with Confluence to narrow down colors, themes and names. A committee comprised of staff, community members and students were asked to help provide a handful of names and a corresponding theme for the new aquatics facility. Once they were narrowed down to four, the staff once again took the choices to the community. With the community's input, the governing body chose Garden Rapids at the Big Pool as the new facility name paying homage to the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32



The renovation work on The Big Pool started earlier than expected in 2020 due to the pandemic.



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## SUPPLIERS

**DEVELOPMENT/DESIGN:**  
WATER TECHNOLOGY, INC. (WTI)

**CONSTRUCTION:**  
MCCOWNGORDON (GENERAL CONTRACTOR); CEM AQUATICS (POOL CONTRACTOR); BARKER RINKER SEACAT ARCHITECTURE (BATHHOUSE RENOVATION)

**THEMING:** CONFLUENCE

**WATERSLIDES:**  
SPLASHTACULAR

**CHILDREN'S INTERACTIVE PLAY STRUCTURE:**  
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**CHILDREN'S EQUIPMENT:**  
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**LOCKERS:**  
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**PUMPS:**  
CEM MAINTENANCE, INC.

**SHADE SYSTEM:**  
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GARDEN RAPIDS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30

original Big Pool. The color scheme was selected with bright, bold colors with a theme of playful animals giving a nod to the City's Lee Richardson Zoo, located across the street.

Once the name, theme and color scheme were selected, things really started to take off. The new logo was the next item created and completed. With the color scheme, the shade sails and slides were ordered and paint for the building was selected.

Bi-weekly meetings were held with City staff, the design team, the construction team, the architects and the other various contractors to check in on the progress, what needed to be completed next and ensure things stayed on track as the timeline was tight.

## INTRODUCING GARDEN RAPIDS AT THE BIG POOL

Garden Rapids at the Big Pool is a unique combination of new and modern amenities with memories of the past sprinkled throughout the facility. The location of the new facility sits on the same footprint as the original Big Pool. As

The "SlipStream" stand-up slide is the first installation in the United States.

you walk up to the facility, you are greeted by the iconic elephant slide that was refurbished from The Big Pool and now sits out front. The building is playful and inviting, with the logo expanding across all sides of the building, emphasizing the bold colors. The breezeway sets the tone for the adventure you are about to have as you enter. The bathhouse, kept from The Big Pool, was updated with lockers, new shower stalls, a men's, women's and family section. There is ample shade throughout the facility, along with plenty of seating to accommodate all visitors. The new facility offers various new amenities such as a "lazy" river, a zero-depth entry kids' play area with structure, three diving boards, a ten-lane competition pool and a splash pad still under construction. Two unique additions to Garden Rapids are the "SlipStream" stand-up slide and the two "Fly Tyme" slides. The "SlipStream" slide at Garden Rapids is the first installation in the United States and was generously donated by Splashtacular. The "Fly Tyme" slides at Garden Rapids are the first municipal installation of a launch slide in the United States as well. These iconic new amenities already have patrons lining up to enjoy the thrills that can only be found at Garden Rapids at The Big Pool.

The new facility has lights around and in the pool, allowing staff to offer new events. The first Friday of each month is an Adult Swim Night under the lights. The second Friday of each month is a Kid's Night Out for ages 8-14. This event allows the children to have a fun and safe activity to do on a Friday night while also giving parents or caregivers a few hours to themselves. The third Friday is set for Dive-In Movie Night; a feature film will be shown while guests float in the pool.

Garden Rapids at the Big Pool officially opened with a Grand Opening event on May 29, 2021. Since opening, attendance has averaged around 900 patrons during the week and 1,200 on the weekends. The excitement surrounding Garden Rapids has stretched across multiple states and continues to grow.

For more information on the process taken to complete the project, visit: <https://www.garden-city.org/government/departments/big-pool/pool-redesign-proposals>.

JAMIE STEWART IS THE COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER FOR THE CITY OF GARDEN CITY, KANSAS.

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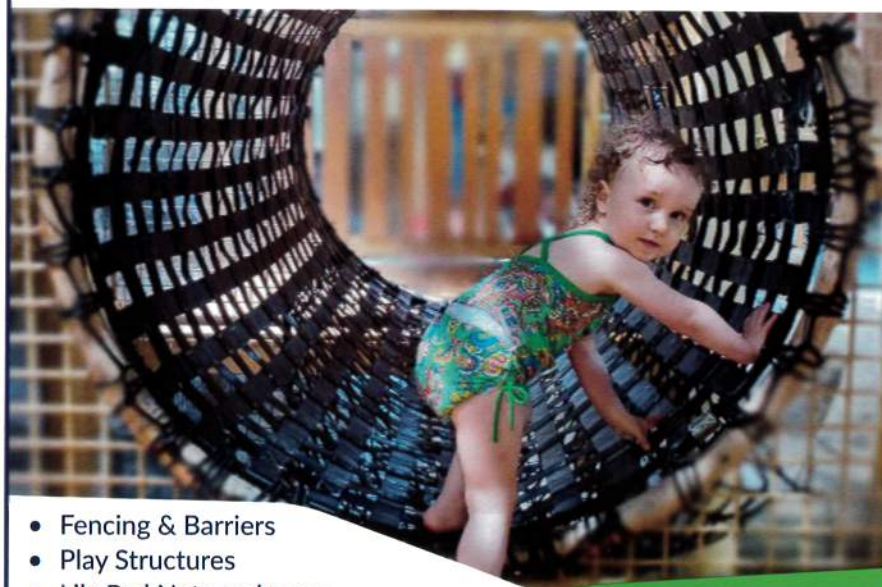
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