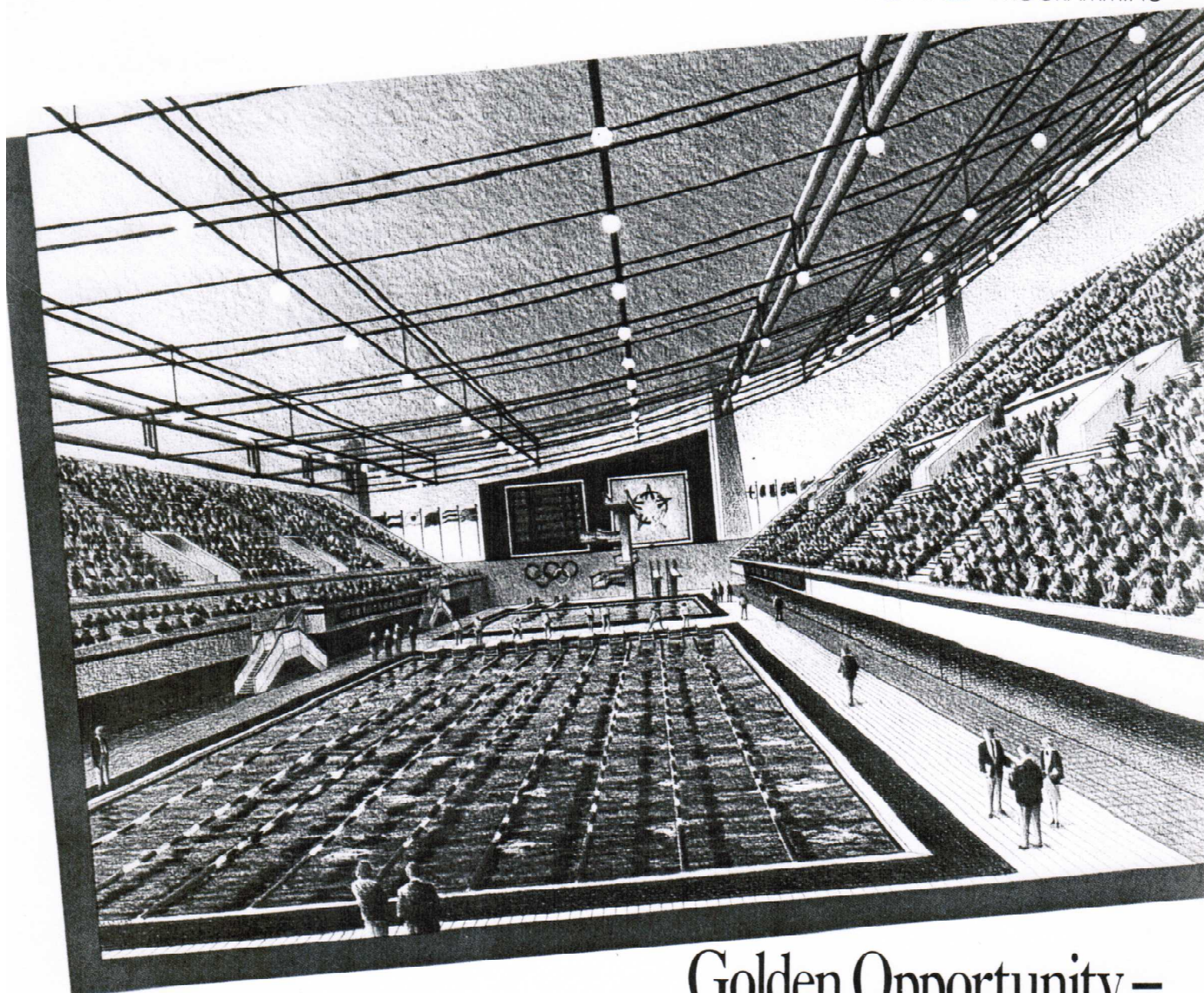


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Choose a Pool Service Firm Carefully

Care should be taken when hiring a service firm to operate and maintain your semi-public commercial pool. Before finalizing a contract, make sure you have acceptable answers to the following questions:

- How long has the company been involved in the pool/spa industry?
- What percentage of the pools they service are commercial? Residential?
- Is year-round service available?
- Are the service technicians familiar with federal, state and local codes, regulations and guidelines as they pertain to operation of the specific pool?
- Are the technicians Certified Pool/Spa Operators, or do they have equivalent education, certification or training?
- What are the total number of pools serviced on a route? This will indicate the amount of time a technician will be likely to spend at the facility per service call.
- Who will be responsible for chemical purchases?
- What recourse is available if the technician is not adequately doing the job he or she has been contracted to do?
- Does the firm employ technicians capable of completing minor, major and seasonal maintenance and repairs?
- Will a licensed contractor supervise equipment replacement or major repairs done on the pool?

Look for service companies who hold membership in a professional trade association such as the National Spa and Pool Institute (NSPI) or Independent Pool and Spa Service Association (IPSSA). Although membership in a trade association does not guarantee quality workmanship or reputable service, it does indicate that the company subscribes to the trade association's business policies and practices.

Avoid hiring "gas shooters" for chemical service. "Shooters" administer pressurized gas chlorine directly to the pool water. This is both unsafe and illegal in com-

mercial pools and destructive to the pool shell and recirculation system and components.

When comparing costs of contracting with various service firms, you must first indicate exactly what services will be required. Being "on service" with different companies may or may not consist of: water-quality analysis; chemical adjustment; vacuuming; surface skimming; emptying and cleaning skimmer baskets, hair and lint traps, and drains; tile scrubbing; the inspection, maintenance and repair of equipment; and seasonal opening or winterizing. Many services are not performed regularly, or at all, unless specifically requested by the customer. You must be explicit as to the precise services required when contracting with the service company so both facility manager and service company understand the expectations.

Determine who will be responsible for water chemistry. Chemical testing must be completed daily by the service technician or on-site staff before opening the facility to the public and then several times throughout the day. The frequency of testing will depend on the bather load and may be specified by state code. Free available chlorine or other sanitizer levels, oxidation reduction potential (ORP), pH and acid or base demand, water level and clarity, air and water temperatures, humidity, the presence of noticeable odors, flow rate, and pressure differential should be recorded as required. The type and quantity of any chemicals added to the pool should also be logged.

In addition, total and combined chlorine, cyanuric acid, total alkalinity, calcium hardness, dissolved metals (particularly iron and copper), total dissolved solids and nitrates should be monitored by the service technician on a twice weekly basis for swimming pools and daily for spas. The Langelier Saturation Index should be calculated and chemical adjustments made to balance the water if needed. Dissipated chemicals in

the air above the pool should be monitored. Water samples should be taken and bacteriological water quality analysis performed by an independent lab as required by health codes.

Develop daily pool inspection logs, water analysis record forms and maintenance checklists. Require that record forms be completed by the service technician and submitted to management on a regular basis. Inspect the facility to make sure maintenance is being satisfactorily completed. Retain the records for a period of at least three years, and longer if an injury occurred that might result in potential litigation requiring proof of adequate maintenance procedures.

Remember that pool service companies contracted to maintain and operate the pool will not provide lifeguards or supervisory staff unless they also are contracted to provide pool management services. If on-site management substitutes as supervisory staff in lieu of trained and certified lifeguards, the staff should be capable of performing the lifeguard duties, including preventing accidents and injury to patrons, recognizing an emergency situation, responding to and managing emergency situations, extricating an injured patron from the pool or accident site and providing necessary First Aid.

And finally, determine whether it is cost effective to hire a pool service company or whether the facility's money would be better spent training in-house staff to operate and maintain the pool. The average charge for commercial pool service varies depending on the number of service calls per week and the area or region of the country in which the pool is located. Typically, service is least expensive in the Southwest and Southern California and gets more expensive heading east. Service costs are highest in the North, Southeast and Florida.

— Dr. Alison Osinski