

Using glass and lighting, the community center at Trietsch Memorial UMC in Flower Mound, Texas, invites the community in.



Photography by Nathan Shands

HOW TO MAKE your recreation spaces as engaging as possible

By Mark R Ashcraft with Bruce Woody, AIA

If you look up the definition of “recreation,” you will see something along the lines of *activities done to relax, have fun or simply done for enjoyment when one is not working*. It is the re-energizing of our strength and spirit.

Today more than ever, we need this renewal to balance the overwhelming loads we carry and create a true fullness in the joy of life.

To this purpose, let’s discuss three concepts that are successful in designing engaging spaces for recreation.



Photography by Peter Calvin

The use of color and shapes in the ceiling design at North Dallas Community Bible Fellowship in Plano, Texas, create visual interest and speak fun.

#1: Know your purpose

When the average person thinks of a recreation space, they most likely picture a gym. While this is true, these spaces are much more — they are *connecting spaces*. They engage people and create opportunities for interaction. They need to be intentional in their design for the activity you want to encourage.

North Dallas Community Bible Fellowship in Plano, Texas, has a strong Awana ministry. A main driver in the design of the children's and youth assembly rooms was the accommodation of Awana courts with the required overruns for their Wednesday night service. Incorporating Awana in the design allowed an effective overlap in use of the space, reaffirming this space was designed for it, but without sacrificing the sense of worship.

Moreover, bright colors and dynamic ceiling treatments create an environment that says, "We have fun here." Kids and their families who come to the Wednesday evening service have the invitation to delve deeper.

#2: Make it community-focused

A good first step in engaging the community is to be *focused* on that community. People are more willing to engage when they feel welcomed.

Leaders at Trietsch Memorial UMC in Flower Mound, Texas, saw the opportunity to become better integrated into their local community by developing a partnership with the city to build a community center on their campus. Open to the public during the week and used by their youth ministry as its venue on the weekends, the facility serves as hub of activity.

With a full gym, café, classrooms, soccer fields and more, there is always an event to draw people in — it's the church in the marketplace. Incorporating hospitality amenities helps create more conversational, casual environments. At Trietsch Memorial, the many seating areas become connecting spaces for parents watching soccer games, as well as for teens gathering after Friday night football.

Providence Baptist Church in Raleigh, NC, has an outreach ministry for local at-risk teens which integrates basketball and bible study. As part of the church's master plan for its campus, the current worship center renovations include plans to accommodate a full competition gym with cross courts to better serve this ministry.

Serve your local community by designing space that engages their interests and increases the chance they will walk through the door.

#3: Build in flexibility

Allowing for flexibility in how spaces will be used creates more opportunities to tailor ministries for outreach and specific events.

First Baptist Church in Forney, Texas, incorporated this flexibility in the design for its current campus expansion. Leaders needed a new worship

venue to accommodate growth; at the same time, they wanted to better serve the community.

The new, 2,200-seat venue with retractable bleachers can be converted into two full-size basketball courts with minimal effort. A walking track, full weight room, rooms for aerobics and other classes — as well as a café — add to their outreach to the community, as well as to the church body.

A flowing glass wall allows natural light to stream in the commons space and into the fitness areas, giving a sense of vitality and energy that refreshes.

The recreation aspect is just as much a driver as the worship; one cannot exist without the other.

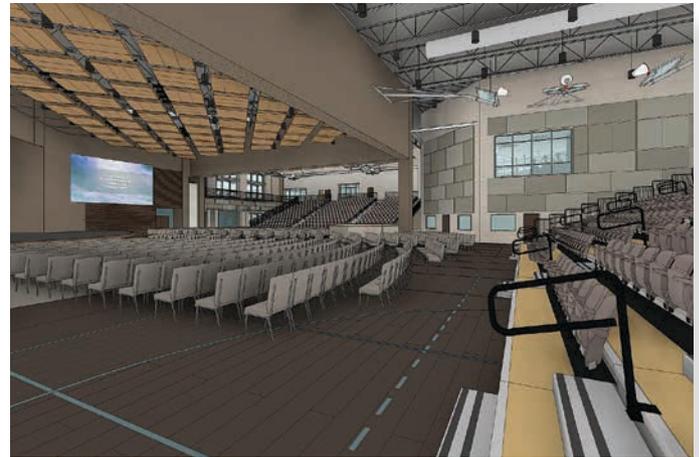
Parting thoughts

Knowing the purpose of what you want to accomplish is key. A well-planned design that creates a welcoming, community-focused environment prepares us for connection. This connection helps us to relax, recharge, and maybe even have a little fun.

As Catherine Fenwick, author of *Healing with Humor*, notes: "Your body cannot heal without play. Your mind cannot heal without laughter. Your soul cannot heal without joy." **CE**

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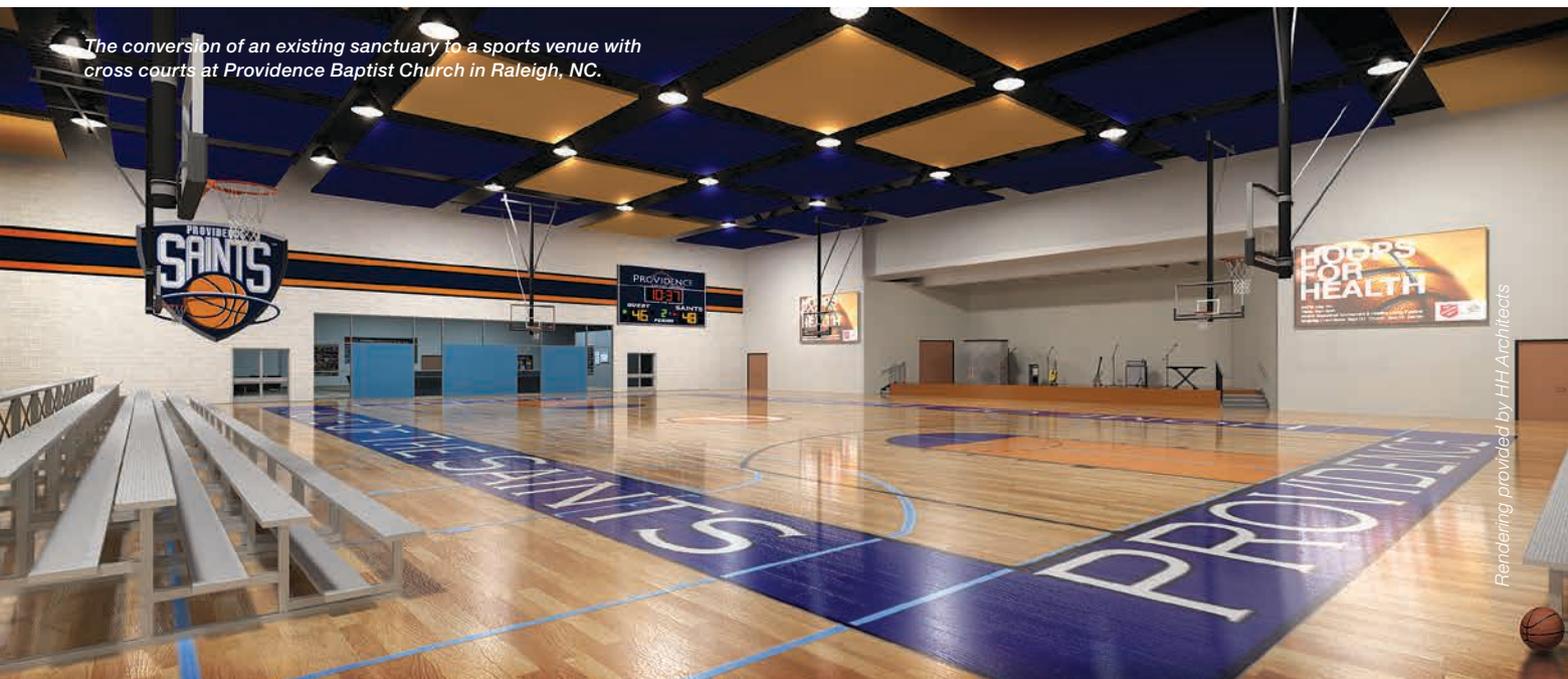
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Rendering provided by HH Architects

A 2,200-seat venue in worship converted to dual basketball courts for weekday use at First Baptist Church in Forney, Texas.

The conversion of an existing sanctuary to a sports venue with cross courts at Providence Baptist Church in Raleigh, NC.



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