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Some area pools open for summer season

For the first time, two city pools will have early opening

By Joe Burris

1:29 PM EDT, May 22, 2009

Just when you thought it was about time to get back into the water -- it is.

Baltimore's summer swim season begins early this weekend with openings at two of its largest and most popular public pools. Druid Hill Pool and Patterson Park Pool will open for weekends only beginning Saturday as part of the city department of Recreation and Parks' abbreviated, early opening -- a first for the city's swim season. The pools will open on Saturdays from noon to 7 p.m., and on Sundays from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is \$1.50 for each.

The two sites are among several local swim facilities slated to be open for the unofficial start of summer.

In Baltimore County, the pool at the new Randallstown Community Center opened on Wednesday. The county will open another pool in July at the new Dundalk community center, which is still under construction.

In Howard County, the Roger Carter Recreation Center pool -- the lone pool run by the county's department of parks and recreation -- opens on Saturday and will continue to operate a weekend-only schedule until school ends in June.

Others include the Meadowbrook Aquatic Center in Mount Washington, and all 23 pools run by Howard County's Columbia Association. In Baltimore, other city pools will open in late June as usual, culminating with the commemoration of the swim season, the Big Splash, on June 27 at Druid Hill Pool. The Patterson Park and Druid Hill pools will begin opening daily then, offering a full schedule that includes swimming lessons. Before that, only open swimming is offered.

"Druid Hill and Patterson Park are two of our larger pools, and we thought we would offer relief from the heat leading up to our summer schedule," said Gwendolyn Burrell, public information officer for Baltimore recreation and parks. "This is the earliest we've ever opened."

Burrell added that the pools are opening early to offset pool closings and shortened pool schedules due to proposed city budget cuts. She said that three city pools have been closed: Ambrose Kennedy, City Springs and the Cherry Hill Aquatics Center (an indoor pool that will remain available for private rentals). She added that while daily pool hours have not been

shortened, the weekly schedule for some pools has been abbreviated from eight weeks to six.

Last year, Meadowbrook was purchased by Olympic gold medalist Michael Phelps, who honed his skills at the facility, and Bob Bowman, Phelps' coach. The two have plans to transform Meadowbrook into a world-class training facility.

Saturday's opening of swim season comes amid several renovations at Meadowbrook, which opened in 1930. General manager John Cadigan said that the center has installed a new fence around the children's pool, a sandbox area for kids ages 9 months to 5 years and a new drain for the outdoor pool. They've also given the building's outside a new coat of paint.

"Down by our children's pool had been just grass and sand with beaches one side and a playground," said Cadigan. "It was difficult for parents who wanted to be in the sand and playground but stay by the children's pool. We built a sand box with playthings for kids to ride on and crawl through."

Cadigan added that this Memorial Day Weekend launch of swim season is unusually long, giving swimmers more opportunities to enjoy the pools.

"This year, Memorial Day is as early as it can be, and Labor Day (Sept. 7) is as late as it can be," said Cadigan. "Everybody gets an extra week to swim." Burrell said that it's important for swimmers to observe health and safety guidelines during the season. Preparations for safe swimming should start before a family even arrives at the pool, she said.

"The first thing we want to encourage people to do, even before they get into the water, is to protect their skin," she said. "You should apply sun block in advance of coming outdoors. Once outside, stay safe to prevent overexposure to the sun."

Burrell added that even while lifeguards are on duty, swimmers should still exercise caution when in and around the water.

"The big thing with kids that we emphasize is no running, because kids slip a lot," she said. "Swimmers should be aware of their swimming ability, and there should be no excessive horseplay, no diving in shallow areas, no jumping off the deep end, no dunking people under the water or throwing people into the pool."

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