

Poseidon Profile: Metropolitan Birmingham YMCA

Background

Established in 1884, just 13 years after the city of Birmingham was founded, Metropolitan Birmingham YMCA fulfills its mission of creating Strong Kids, Strong Families, and Strong Communities every day. Birmingham YMCA boasts 13 area branches and a wide range of programs that serve the needs of their local community.

In 2009, Birmingham YMCA made the decision to install Poseidon drowning detection systems in its pools. Poseidon is a state-of-the-art computer-aided imaging technology that provides an added layer of security and complements the lifeguards' skills, vigilance, and training to both detect and prevent life threatening emergencies in the pool. Jim Lombard, President and CEO of Metropolitan Birmingham YMCA was interviewed recently about Poseidon and its importance to his organization's mission.

+ **Among the 13 YMCA facilities in the Birmingham area, how many pools are there?**

JL: We currently have 19 swimming pools.

+ **How many of those are protected by a Poseidon system?**

JL: Right now there are 2 Poseidon systems installed with a plan to add one more this year and one or two each year going forward until all of our pools are protected.

+ **What was the primary driver behind your decision to install Poseidon?**

JL: There really were two important drivers. First, the lifeguard's job is literally impossible. Complete drowning prevention by lifeguards alone is just not possible with everything they have to deal with - glare on the surface, multiple people in the pool, environmental distractions, etc. I have stood at the edge of the pool and watched the test dummy disappear under the surface with the glare and chop on the top of the water. In reality, we are at risk of an event that we are ill-prepared to prevent, even with the best of intentions.

Secondly, and more importantly, we have to make sure no one dies in our pool. I actually dread summer coming, knowing how many people will be in the pools. My stomach is always in knots during the summer. Poseidon helps me sleep at night.

+ **How has the installation of Poseidon helped you address those challenges?**

JL: There isn't something else out there that does what Poseidon does, and it's something we can't do ourselves. A lifeguard and Poseidon together equal drowning prevention.

+ How do you justify the cost of the system?

Or, if you could pinpoint an ROI, what would it be?

JL: If you say we need to have a monetary “return on investment,” you are looking at it wrong. At what point is being safe just the right thing to do, regardless of cost? You can’t monetize the value of a human life. The ROI is lives saved. So it’s not really “How much does it cost;” it’s “Does it work?” If I don’t do everything I possibly can to save the life of a child, I’m in the wrong business.

+ How did you approach your board of directors about making the investment in Poseidon?

JL: When I showed them the Poseidon video and reminded them how many people swim in our pools, we knew we had to do it. Basically, I just showed them the same thing that moved me when I saw it. The board’s first question was “How fast can we do it?”

Eventually something will happen. And it will happen when there are 50 people in the pool and a glare on the water. Cost was not an issue. It was never a matter of “if;” it was just a matter of “how fast?”

+ Do your members know there is a Poseidon system installed in the pool and what it does?

JL: Yes. We promote the fact that we’ve got Poseidon to our members and also to the community. With each new Poseidon, there is a big media and PR push. The evening news will come and do a piece; we promote it our grand openings, etc. We sell it.

+ Do you think that having Poseidon helps you attract new members or retain existing ones?

JL: Perhaps not Poseidon alone, but it is a great feature and it speaks to our overall commitment. It says that we care enough to make the investment.

We were one of the very first organizations in town to have AEDs in all our facilities. We also moved away from all of our 12-passenger vans in favor of new safer buses as soon as we saw the statistics on vehicle roll-over rates. Those things, along with Poseidon, tell a story about what sort of organization we are.

+ What would you say to another organization like yours that is considering a Poseidon system?

JL: You know what the risks are. And if you know about it, and you have a way to prevent it, why wouldn’t you? This is a no-brainer.