



VIRGINIA G. PIPER SPORTS AND FITNESS CENTER FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Year of Completion: **2011**
 Year of Opening: **2012**
 Total Cost: **\$12.5 Million**
 Total Area: **\$45,000 sq. ft.**

Sport Architecture
 (USA)

FEBRUARY 2012 WAS A MONTH OF CELEBRATION FOR THE DISABILITY EMPOWERMENT CENTER IN PHOENIX, ARIZONA. IT WAS THE OFFICIAL GRAND OPENING OF THE **VIRGINIA G. PIPER SPORTS AND FITNESS CENTER**.

The first of its kind in the Western United States, **this 45,000-square-foot center offers a variety of options to encourage healthy, active living for people with disabilities of all kinds.** From a weight room to rock climbing to team sports, this interactive facility gives a feeling of inclusion from the moment people enter. **The addition of colorful, safety centered Mondo flooring brings the 'wow factor' to the building, encouraging return visits.**

CUSTOM DESIGN HITS THE MARK

The designers at award-winning Baldinger Architectural Studio were able to bring the vision for this new sports center to life. The end result was **nothing short of spectacular.** **"The entire focus of this project was to create a building that was completely dedicated to people with disabilities," says Ilan Baldinger, principal.**

"Often when sports complexes are built, having facilities or equipment for the disabled is somewhat of an afterthought. However, at the Virginia G. Piper Sports and Fitness Center, it is the primary goal." Accessibility for all meant incorporating both hospital-size elevators and ramps, allowing wheelchair users to travel between the upper and lower floors. An accessible aquatic center with locker rooms and shower facilities was uniquely crafted to answer the needs of this diverse group. **All regulations laid out in the American Disabilities Act (ADA) were followed to ensure users of the Virginia G. Piper center were able to enjoy the facilities to the fullest extent.** The design team, in some cases, adapted more stringent design guidelines based on actual observation and experience gained from the first phase of the Disability Empowerment Center completed in 2009. **"We wanted everything in the center to be as accessible as possible," says Baldinger.**

SAFETY MEETS AESTHETICS

The Arizona desert landscape was the influence for the color palette, with beige and terra-cotta being the principal colors. While the interior



design tones created a relaxing atmosphere for users of the center, **Mondo rubber flooring played a large part in the safety considerations.** "Before deciding on the flooring, we toured several other fitness facilities and realized that Mondo was what we needed," says Baldinger. "We liked the look of it and Mondo's reputation for durability is well known in the sporting industry. The low maintenance factor means the cleaning staff only needs to use one product for all the rooms or areas. This results in a cost saving for the center."

Several styles of Mondo flooring were used throughout the building, including Natura in the foyer and common areas, Bollo on the ramps and stairs, Sport Impact in the weight room, and **Mondotrack for the 1/10 mile track,** which is suspended above the basketball court. The Natura was also incorporated into the trainers' area, using it on the front of the registration desk to give a millwork look. Another reason why Mondo was selected for the Virginia G. Piper Sports and Fitness Center was its virtual odor-free feature. **"The facility has members that are sensitive to smells and to be truly accessible, we need to make sure the products we used were free of scent,"** says Baldinger.

STANDING UP TO THE TEST

"The exercise equipment area has a light, birch-colored Sportflex floor with a gray border that is wide enough for two wheelchairs to pass," says Baldinger. **This duo tone design ensures that the heavy machines are only placed on the lighter flooring that can endure the weight.** To ensure traction for the wheelchair ramps and general safety for people using the stairs, Mondo Bollo was installed. **"Bollo is a great product because it has a tactile feeling so people in wheelchairs know when they are on the ramp,"** says Greg Wedge, project manager for **Baldinger Architectural Studio.**

"The Mondo flooring holds up very well to traffic, which includes everything from crutches to wheelchairs. Other materials that were used previously, such as carpet, showed the wear and tear, and collected a lot of dirt." He says easy cleanup is very important when the weather changes. "When people come into the facility and their wheelchair has gone through dirt or wet areas, muddy tire tracks are left on the floor. Simple soap and water can be used for a quick clean." **With a large variety of wheelchair styles that use the facility, it is essential the flooring can handle the ongoing pressure.** "There are several types of wheelchairs, each with varying weights," says Wedge. "The rugby wheelchair is lighter with slanted wheels. The power wheelchairs are significantly heavier and we've been assured Mondo can take the directional change and other non-linear moves."

HEALING POWERS OF CAMARADERIE

The Virginia G. Piper Sports and Fitness Center is not only a facility for members to develop and maintain a healthy lifestyle, is also a gathering place for like-minded people. **"One of the things that we find very helpful to people who are new to their injuries is peer support,"** says Amber **Blanchard,** manager.

"Just like people, all injuries are different. You can't just give the same exercise prescription for the same injury," says Blanchard, whose background includes a degree in therapeutic recreation from the University of Arkansas.

"A lot of times people come in feeling like their life is over and they'll never be able to do anything again. When they left rehab, they were often sure their life would be limited. Then they come in here and see people with the same type of injuries having a great time playing wheelchair basketball and rugby, and rock climbing. They will learn how to adapt the equipment to work with their injuries."





