

JCC fitness center renovations prioritize wellness and community

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By **EMMA RIVA**

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JCC staff celebrate renovations to its fitness center with a ribbon cutting event on Oct. 10. (Photo courtesy of the JCC of Greater Pittsburgh)

The [Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh](#) prides itself on not just being a gym but a true community space — and renovations to its fitness center in Squirrel Hill double down on that mission.

When the JCC team first planned to renovate its outdated racquetball courts, however, it was the height of the pandemic. So, the staff put on construction gear and did it all themselves.

The newest iteration, this time done by professional contractors, allowed JCC President and CEO Jason Kunzman, Fitness Director Laurie Wood and Fitness Division Director Elie Golin to spend more time designing the space around members' needs.

"We had the opportunity to invest more intentionally and do the work more professionally," Kunzman said. "This work represents a deepening of our commitment to functional fitness. It prepares you to better participate in the daily activities of life, like lifting, pulling and bending."

Additions to the recovery room and a focus on restorative movement after exercise also serve to make those movements more sustainable. Kunzman had just taken a HIIT (high-intensity interval training) class at 7 a.m. the day he spoke to the Chronicle, and noted, "I'm sore, so I guess it worked!"

But for those times JCC members are feeling sore, the space now has massage guns, compression pants, foam rollers and dedicated classes in the recovery room for individuals to learn more about cooling down from working out.

Wood kept her eye on trends in the fitness industry for the renovation, including a suggestion box for members. The top suggestion might be a sign of the times — punching bags.

“We also saw the need to have dedicated space for dynamic movement like sled pushes and speed training,” Wood said. She saw HIIT and functional fitness as two of the most significant trends in the fitness world in 2025 and wanted the gym to reflect that.

Wood and her team have redesigned HIIT classes, as well, to make the most of the JCC’s new equipment. Much of how she approached laying out the new space was to make sure individuals could work out alone, groups could work out in classes, and trainers could see clients all without disrupting each other.



A view of the renovated fitness center (Photo courtesy of the JCC of Greater Pittsburgh)

The JCC is an inclusive place to exercise, not just because of the many demographics of people who use it, but also because the space now has maximum usage and inclusivity built into it, according to JCC leadership. Where many gyms can feel daunting, the JCC is designed to be comfortable for members, regardless of age or fitness level.

“We also doubled up on our most popular training tools, because we saw people waiting,” Wood said. Machines like the chest-press or hip adductor are used so many times throughout the day that members often have to wait to use them, so adding more allows for more people to work out simultaneously.

At many gyms, waiting for the squat rack can feel like waiting in line at the DMV. “We have five squat racks, more than double what I’ve seen anywhere else,” Golin said. So, there’s no need to stand around waiting when what you came to do is squat.

Membership at the JCC comes with a complementary personal training session, and the new space now has private space allocated for those sessions.

“We use a non-invasive 3D scanner called Styku, but for something so personal and intimate, it’s better to have a private space,” Golin explained. “Trainers can also use the recovery room, and training machines are meant for all ability levels. We really try to be a community-driven approach to all of this.”

The next phase of the renovation will be redesigning the Platinum member rooms, which include the sauna and whirlpool spa.

“We could call this Phase 1, ‘Fitness Redefined,’ and the next phase is ‘Wellness Redefined,’” Golin said. The renovations for the Platinum member rooms will include all new tiling, single-person locker rooms in the male changing area, and updates to the sauna and steam room machinery.

“We really want to take a comprehensive approach to both fitness and wellness. But what’s going to set us apart and make us feel comfortable for people is that we’re attacking all elements of fitness: physical health, mental health and social interaction, all combined into one.”

Wood agreed that what makes the JCC special is the effort that staff put into relationships with members.

“In group classes, if there’s a student we don’t see for a few days, we’ll text them to see where they are,” she said. This is particularly relevant for older adults who might be facing health challenges or lacking social engagement. It also allows for intergenerational interactions, something rare in many spaces in contemporary life. At a visit to the JCC gym, you’re just as likely to see a local bubbie as you are an Allderdice or Central Catholic student-athlete lifting.

Above all, the team designed the space to be welcoming.

“I just want people to want to be there every day and want to work out with us,” Golin said. **PJC**

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