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The advertisement features a large, vibrant photograph of a water park. In the foreground, a large green slide structure is the focal point, with children playing around it. In the background, a yellow bucket-shaped water feature is dumping water. Two circular callouts on the right side of the image highlight specific features: "Waterslides" showing a child on a slide, and "Splashpad®" showing a close-up of a child's face splashing. The text "VORTEX Water moves us vortex-intl.com" is overlaid on the left side of the image. At the bottom, a dark blue banner contains the text "30 YEARS OF INSPIRING AQUATIC PLAY" and "REIMAGINE YOUR AQUATIC SPACE!".

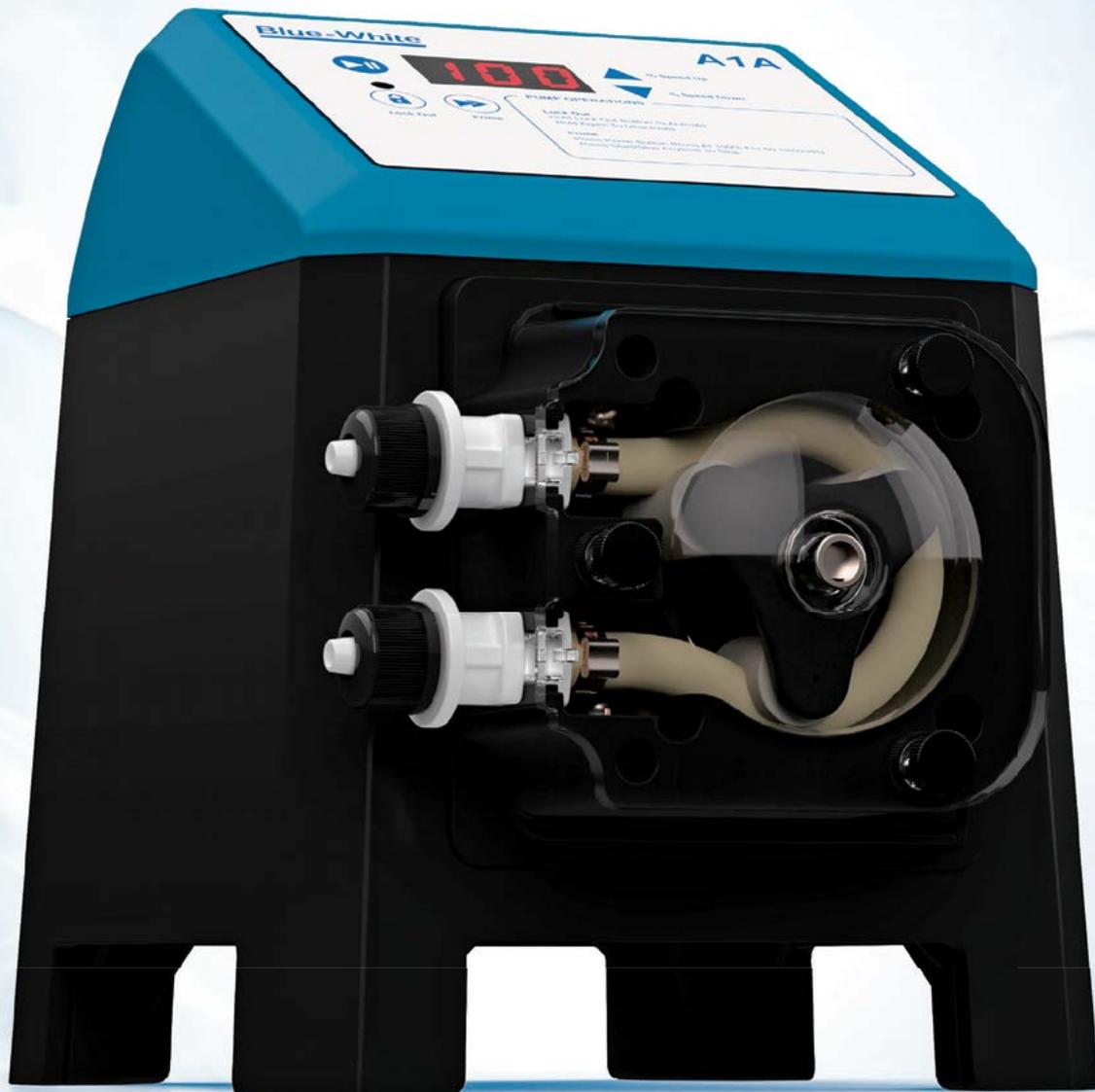
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A New Era, Defined by People



The aquatics industry has never lacked passion. What it has sometimes lacked — and what this moment clearly demands — is alignment: between innovation and regulation, access and safety, data and day-to-day practice, and perhaps most importantly, between protecting the public and protecting the professionals who do that work every day.

That alignment is the common thread running through this year's Power Issue.

The seven leaders featured here come from different corners of the industry — research, regulation, advocacy, education, law, and frontline operations — but they're all responding to the same reality: Aquatics is changing, and the systems that support it have to change too.

In Tyler Anderson's work helping lifeguards recover after traumatic incidents, we see a long-overdue recognition that safety doesn't end when a rescue does. Lifeguards have long been treated like first responders in practice, but rarely supported like them. Anderson's efforts reflect a growing awareness of the human cost of vigilance — and the need for structures that help professionals recover, stay engaged, and keep doing their jobs well.

That focus on systems and support also shows up in Kirsten Barnes' work to bridge the gap between research and on-deck decisions. Data matters, but only if people can actually use it. By translating academic research into practical insight, Barnes is helping facilities make stronger cases for staffing, training, and funding — and reinforcing aquatics as a public good grounded in evidence, not anecdotes.

Access and inclusion are another clear theme. Angela Beale-Tawfeeq and Kate Connell come at it from different directions, but with shared urgency. Beale-Tawfeeq reminds us that water safety can't be separated from history, culture, and trust — and that access to aquatics can truly change lives. Connell's work reinforces that inclusion isn't aspirational; it's operational. Policies, language, and staff training shape who feels welcome and who doesn't.

Legal advocacy remains another driver of change. Michael Haggard's career shows how tragedy can lead to reform when litigation turns into legislation — and why consistent safety standards still matter, especially as new risks emerge.

At the same time, innovation continues to move faster than the rulebooks. Sarah Cheshire's work on cold plunges and manmade lagoons offers a model for what smart oversight looks like when trends evolve quickly: focus on how people use the water, identify real risks, and build flexible frameworks that protect public health without shutting progress down.

And Bob Pratt brings it all back to the basics. His push to make water safety as universal as fire safety reminds us that education, repetition, and cultural muscle memory save lives. "Flip, float, and follow" is more than a slogan — it's prevention that starts long before anyone reaches the water.

Together, these leaders point to a new era for aquatics — one that's practical, people-centered, and ready to evolve.

That same mindset guides *Aquatics International* as it enters a new chapter under Kenilworth Media and returns to print. The goal is simple: reflect where the industry truly is, and help move it forward.

Progress doesn't happen overnight. It's built by people willing to move the needle. I invite you to join me in recognizing the Magnificent Seven in this issue, along with our Best of Aquatics winners, at a special awards event during AOAP's annual expo and conference at 8:30 a.m. on Feb. 18 at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colo. Hope to see you there!

Joanne McClain
jmclain@kenilworth.com

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LIFEGUARD TRAUMA RECOVERY GROUP FORMS PARTNERSHIP WITH AOAP

Through the agreement, the International Lifeguard Critical Incident Response Alliance plans to see its training and assistance gain a faster foothold.



PHOTO CREDIT: ADOBE STOCK

By Rebecca Robledo

The Association of Aquatic Professionals (AOAP) and the International Lifeguard Critical Incident Response Alliance (ILCIRA) have formed a strategic alliance to address an issue that often eludes aquatics managers: How to help staff process the psychological impact of rescues and other traumatic or critical events.

The partnership will focus on ILCIRA's core mission of strengthening the aquatics industry's ability to provide critical incident support and foster mental health for lifeguards and other aquatic professionals.

"By doing so, the organizations acknowledge that lifeguards and aquatic professionals are first responders who carry the emotional weight of their work long after an incident ends and deserve resources to manage that burden," ILCIRA and AOAP said.

AOAP will bring its capacity to provide education, professional development and operational support with ILCIRA's expertise, the organizations said. They plan to expand availability of training and resources, and development of best practices to help deal with severe or traumatic incidents and promote mental wellness of lifeguards and other responders.

"For too long, the aquatic industry has focused almost exclusively on the physical skills of rescue, while neglecting the internal aftermath those rescues

leave behind," said ILCIRA President Tyler Anderson. "By adopting response frameworks consistent with internationally recognized emergency service standards, we are ensuring that lifeguards are no longer expected to 'just get over' a traumatic event. Our alliance with AOAP is a pivotal step in treating aquatic professionals with the same respect and psychological safeguards as any other first responder."

This training comprises not only showing how to respond and provide support after an incident, but also to better prepare staff in advance to recover from trauma. This helps build resilience. "That is the proactive portion of the ... continuum of care," Anderson said.

He hopes the new alliance addresses one of the reasons the aquatics field has come later to adopting critical incident stress management [CISM] — a lack of resources. Where cities can fund such care for their fire and police departments, a stand-alone aquatics center can't do the same thing, especially considering that such incidents occur much less frequently than for their fire and police counterparts.

In addition to easing access to training for aquatics professionals across the spectrum, Anderson also hopes to form a team through AOAP that will provide assistance to the industry in general when needed. He expects this to take a few years to build.

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The Supervisor Checklist

The best supervisors take an active approach — walking, interacting, guiding, and supporting the team. Here's how.



PHOTOS COURTESY PETE DEQUINCY

By Pete DeQuincy

A promotion from lifeguard to lead, pool manager, or deck supervisor can be exciting. Transitioning from employee to boss could include a new uniform, a desk with a computer, and a set of keys that open everything.

But with big change comes big challenges.

What are your responsibilities? What should you prioritize? How do you ensure that the lifeguard operation is effective? How do you make sure your lifeguards are seeing and doing what they're supposed to?

New supervisors should frame their mission: "Every day, we strive to have all patrons and employees go home alive

and uninjured: We constantly look for weakness and vulnerabilities within the operation. We constantly assess the effectiveness of our lifeguard's surveillance. We constantly check our staff's readiness."

Lastly, we adapt to ensure the mission stays true. The industry doesn't need any more supervisors who want to sit in their offices and watch videos from their phones or computers while their lifeguards provide surveillance. It's not good enough to be a supervisor. The best leaders are *active* supervisors — those who walk, interact, guide, and support the operation during open hours.

Here's what it looks like to work in service of this mission.

Pre-operations:

Looking for weaknesses and vulnerabilities

Before opening, the supervisor should verify that equipment and facility checks have been performed. Do a physical walk-through to ensure everything is in working order. All broken equipment should be replaced, red-tagged, or cordoned off from the public. All necessary signage must be in its place and in view. Within the staging/break area, a diagram of zone coverage for all bodies of water should be posted and up to date. The day's lifeguard rotation should be posted. The rotation board should have the names of all the lifeguards in their starting positions, and include positions in breaks and alternate stations. The length of time in each position should also be listed. Do a pre-opening briefing to review zones, visiting groups, weather, and past hot-spot areas that might need additional support or modifications to the operation.

During operations:

Looking for weakness and vulnerability in the rotation

Once operation begins and before the rotation, the supervisor should verify that each lifeguard has taken the

proper position at each station, understands their surveillance zone, and is searching the water for potential victims (surface, mid-depth, and bottom) effectively. If there is an immediate need to adjust the station or correct/remediate the lifeguard, the supervisor should do so.

Once the rotation begins, the supervisor should observe it in its entirety, from the first lifeguard initiating the rotation to the last lifeguard leaving it. Look at the overall rotation and verify that it is effective, meaning that surveillance of the water is uninterrupted during each lifeguard transition, whenever a lifeguard takes over a station, and when a lifeguard leaves a station. Also make sure that each lifeguard transition is smooth and efficient. It is imperative that the incoming lifeguard initiate the transition, not the outgoing. The supervisor should be able to observe a clear hand-off of the station between the two lifeguards without any compromise or interruption in surveillance. The supervisor should document each transition.

If you notice a behavior or action by one or both lifeguards that needs adjustment, correction, or remediation, do so immediately.

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The best supervisors show up at the pool and on the deck to assess their lifeguards. Seen right, the Supervisor Rotation Check-Off.

The question might arise as to whether the supervisor should observe every rotation, and the answer is, “Yes.” This is a safety measure that a supervisor should do every day of operation. See the Supervisor Rotation Check-off, upper right.

During operations:

Assessing the effectiveness of the surveillance

As the supervisor, you should test the effectiveness of your lifeguard’s surveillance. How does one do this? When checking surveillance, you want to verify your lifeguards see everything you see, and that they have the ability to prioritize and differentiate between low-risk and high-risk activities occurring in the water.

To check on what your lifeguards are seeing, I would incorporate the Vigilant Voice. Developed by Terri Smith, of Water Design, Inc., Vigilant Voice is an activity where the lifeguard providing surveillance verbalizes everything they see as they scan their zone. The supervisor listens and takes notes of what the lifeguard verbalizes. Once the lifeguard has finished, the supervisor verbalizes what they see within the same zone. The supervisor points out any differences. The lifeguard repeats the activity with the goal of seeing the same things that the supervisor saw. *NOTE:* During this activity, you must provide a back-up lifeguard

In general, a rotation between an incoming and outgoing lifeguard should take roughly 80-90 seconds. An increase or decrease in time could be affected by number of patrons within the zone along with the number and complexity of activities within the zone.

(Circle One) Ground/ Elevated/ Roving/ Floating Station Zone # or Zone Name _____

Incoming lifeguard name _____

Outgoing lifeguard name _____

Check boxes as you observe the rotation	Yes	No
Incoming lifeguard performs preliminary scan of zone as they approach		
• Outgoing lifeguard maintains continued surveillance of zone		
Incoming lifeguard takes position next to station and secures zone		
Outgoing lifeguard moves off station and positions themselves on opposite side of station		
• Incoming lifeguard maintains continued surveillance of zone		
Outgoing lifeguard secures station zone		
Incoming lifeguard moves into position on the station		
• Outgoing lifeguard maintains continued surveillance of zone		
Outgoing lifeguard provided verbal report of zone conditions		
Incoming lifeguard confirms zone conditions and secures the zone		
Outgoing lifeguard leaves area to next assignment		
• Incoming lifeguard maintains continue surveillance of zone		

If **NO** is checked, relief lifeguard is brought in to provide zone surveillance while remediation is being done for the incoming or outgoing lifeguard.

(REPEAT THIS FORM FOR ADDITIONAL STATIONS UNTIL ALL STATIONS ARE ASSESSED)

Time rotation ended _____

Management Signature: _____ Date: _____

to perform uninterrupted surveillance of the zone while you do the assessment.

Once the supervisor feels confident that the lifeguard is seeing everything within their zone, they should begin to develop the lifeguard’s depth of surveillance knowledge. This is about a person’s ability to see the larger picture, as well as to identify, predict, and prevent aquatic incidents. As the supervisor, your role is to assess and develop their knowledge base.

This means your lifeguards understand the strengths and weaknesses of each zone; the areas, amenities, or waterfeatures that see the most traffic and the most rescues; and visibility issues such as where glare causes blind spots, and how visibility changes depending on the activity and number of patrons in the water. The lifeguard should reach a point where they can differentiate between normal patron behavior and high-risk activities, as well as identify and avert potential crises. *NOTE:* Here again, you must provide a back-up lifeguard to provide uninterrupted coverage during this exercise.

As a best practice, this should be done every day throughout the hours of operation, with the goal of assessing every lifeguard multiple times during the season. The assessment should be documented and saved.

Checking the staff's readiness

Checking your lifeguard's ability to demonstrate lifesaving skills is imperative. This can be done throughout operation hours. This activity should focus on a handful of skills, both land- and water-based. The readiness check should take no more than three to five minutes, with the lifeguard being able to demonstrate the skill in 60 to 90 seconds.

See how your lifeguards can perform the following land skills:

- Stopping uncontrolled bleeding, up to the use of a tourniquet
- Rescue breathing for an infant, child, or adult
- Solo CPR for an infant, child, or adult
- Addressing conscious choking of an infant, child, or adult
- Assisting with unconscious choking for an infant, child, or adult
- Application of an AED

Assess lifeguards' ability to perform these water skills:

- Active rescue on the surface, solo and team

- Passive rescue on the surface, victim face-down, solo and team
- Passive rescue submerged, mid-depth, solo and team
- Passive rescue submerged, deep water, solo and team
- Rapid extrication of passive victim, solo and team
- In-water ventilations

As a best practice, readiness skill checks should be done every day throughout the hours of operation, with the goal of checking every lifeguard multiple times throughout the season. The readiness skill checks should be documented and saved to identify gaps in training (missing in-service days or vacations), which effect a lifeguard's proficiency.

NOTE: You must provide an additional lifeguard for the team readiness skill checks. Also, any water skill should be done in a lifeguarded area.

Becoming a good supervisor requires consistency, patience, and a desire to excel to a higher standard. Lifeguards are first responders, requiring leaders who emulate what is needed to serve patrons and the community.

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2026 POWER ISSUE: EMERGING INTO A NEW ERA



With a new owner and print edition, *AQI* is embracing its next chapter. In the same vein, we celebrate here individuals who are carrying the aquatics field forward, whether by raising consciousness of new issues and tackling them head-on, or finding new ways to carry out classic missions.

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SAVING THE SAVIORS



Tyler Anderson is using his background at just the right time, forwarding industry efforts to help lifeguards recover from traumatic incidents.

By Rebecca Robledo

Everywhere Tyler Anderson has gone, those surrounding him have recognized his unique skill and found ways to leverage it.

In his career, he has worked in critical incident stress management for several airlines, employing the same methods as police and fire departments to help staff manage the aftermath of plane crashes and other traumatic events.

He still works for an airline in this capacity, traveling once or twice a month to help on-site.

But president of the International Lifeguard Critical Incidence Response Alliance [ILCIRA], headquartered in Cumberland, R.I., also has 25 years of aquatics experience. His career has included leadership positions at Six Flags Theme Parks, the American Red Cross, YMCA of the USA, Goldfish Swim Schools, and a number of pool-management companies. He is an American Red Cross Lifeguard Instructor Trainer and an Ellis & Associates Lifeguard Instructor.

Bringing the two together, he's formed an organization that begins to answer a question over which the lifeguarding segment has long struggled.

PREPAREDNESS GAP

During his time in aquatics, among the backdrop conversation acknowledging that lifeguards serve as first responders but go unrecognized as such, Anderson noticed more immediately urgent conversations.

"I constantly saw on [social media] where aquatics directors were saying, 'We've had an incident. What are we supposed to do with our staff?'" he remembers. "There wasn't a good answer."

He spoke with aquatics leaders who shared his concern. “It became apparent this was indeed a problem, and that it’s going to take many years to come up with good solutions because it is so new to the industry.”

In his pursuit of answers for the aquatics industry, Anderson formed ILCIRA to train aquatics professionals in critical incident stress management, or CISM [pronounced “sism”]. This approach pairs those who’ve experienced a trauma with peers who understand.

After going through a traumatic experience on the job, professionals tend to feel more comfortable with peers, not only because they share experiences and can speak each others’ language, Anderson says, but also because they feel safer: Somebody who’s gone through the experience probably won’t judge any responses that an outsider might consider a mistake.

“Our goal is not to identify if they made a procedural error but to help them transition past [any errors],” Anderson says.

This doesn’t remove mental health professionals from the equation. Those experiencing more difficulty recovering may need to undergo specific therapies such as Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR). In such cases, he says, “we are there to say, ‘Let us help you find the best professionals to help,’” Anderson says.

Right now, ILCIRA has about 25-30 aquatics professionals trained to CISM, but it expects to grow exponentially by collaborating with larger organizations that can offer its training to members, or bigger companies that can bring the instruction in-house.

PROGRESS SO FAR

ILSIRA [pronounced like ill-SEAR-uh] recently embarked on a study with the Center for the Advancement of Military and Emergency Services Research at Kennesaw State University in Georgia to determine how

lifeguard experiences overlap those of EMTs, and what kinds of critical or traumatic incidents they experience the most.

At the time of this writing, 1,000 individuals had participated in the International Aquatic Personnel Critical Incident Prevalence and Impact Study. Any conclusions would be premature, since the study will be continued into summer, and it had been recently released on a more global scale, with Southern Hemisphere countries just beginning their swim season and beginning to respond.

However, certain patterns have begun to show themselves.

“Now that some of the preliminary data has come back, we see that many lifeguards experience this,” Anderson says. “There is plenty of data that lifeguards are experiencing these events – and they do several times, especially those with longer careers. I think it just helps us prove what we suspected in the aquatics industry – that lifeguards were experiencing the same thing as other first responders but haven’t had the resources.”

Tyler Anderson with attendees of his training.



BY THE NUMBERS



AOAP Assistant Director
Kirsten Barnes has set an immediate priority: Helping bridge the gap between academic studies and on-deck decisions.

By Nate Traylor

Like so many aquatic professionals, Kirsten Barnes grew up inside the ecosystem of summers, swim lessons, and staff training.

She entered the community at 14, working at a pool concession stand and, since then, has built a career that spans nearly every layer of the industry. She has served as a parks and recreation supervisor, director of management services for a lifeguarding firm, and in executive roles with two companies that developed software specifically for aquatics.

Today, Barnes is positioned to play a significant role in shaping the field as it progresses into the future. She serves as assistant director of the Association of Aquatics Professionals (AOAP), with a path to heading the organization in the future. And one of her first major projects addresses a subject that many in the industry are banking on to best position it for future success – research.

FROM THE LAB TO THE DECK

Barnes is helping undertake an ambitious project: turning scattered studies into a shared resource so operators can build stronger programs, training, and water-safety cases.

Facility leaders and managers make dozens of decisions a day about staffing, surveillance, swim lessons, chemicals, and incident response, yet the research that could strengthen those decisions often lives in academic journals, conference proceedings, and PDFs written for other researchers, Barnes says.

Important findings exist, but they're hard to locate, harder to interpret, and hardest to apply when you're trying to keep the deck covered and the schedule filled.

Barnes wants to change that. AOAP's new research initiative, she says, is designed to function as a central clearinghouse — organizing credible studies, highlighting what's most relevant, and helping members understand how to use data to support real-world decisions.

In her mind, research is not just information. It's leverage. It becomes advocacy when it helps leaders translate lived operational realities into policy, funding, and community buy-in. For example, a well-timed study can strengthen a budget request, support a grant application, or help a manager justify more training hours, staffing levels, and swim instruction. AOAP's initiative also is meant to reveal patterns across facilities, so operators can benchmark decisions instead of reinventing them.

Barnes is especially focused on translating what research means for the people doing the work.

"It's written from an academic perspective," she notes. This information is valuable, but not always digestible. Part of AOAP's role, as she sees it, is helping members discern what's foundational versus what's anecdotal, and then turning that knowledge into action.

FROM DATA TO ACTION

That translation matters most in the moments the public never sees — after a close call, a rescue, or other critical incident.

Barnes points to emerging research efforts, including work by the International Lifeguard Critical Incident Response Alliance (ILCIRA) that examines how lifeguards process and recover from critical events. Understanding those impacts and building better support structures in response can reduce burnout, improve retention, and ultimately strengthen safety outcomes.

In Barnes' view, that's exactly what the next era of aquatics should look like: not just reacting to incidents but using evidence to

build systems that protect both patrons and the professionals tasked with protecting them.

All that ladders up to Barnes' core belief about the role lifeguarding plays in every community. Barnes argues that it's one of the most meaningful leadership on-ramps a young person can find. For many, it's a first job that demands real responsibility, decision-making, and service—skills that translate far beyond the pool deck.

"We know this generation wants to be change makers," she says. "There is no job a 16-year-old can get that offers that more than lifeguarding."

In Barnes' view, aquatics professionals — and especially lifeguards — help form the fabric of a safe community. "They're somewhere between manager and coach and first-aid provider," she says. "And they're always doing it in wet socks or flip-flops and a face full of sunscreen."

The more the industry can back that work with data and resources, the more it can be recognized for what it truly is: a public good.

Kirsten Barnes at the Association of Aquatic Professionals Conference and Exposition.



ADVOCATE FOR ACCESS



Through education, research, and community partnerships, **Angela Beale-Tawfeeq** works to expand aquatics access in Black and underserved communities.

By Rena Goldman

Angela Beale-Tawfeeq knows the life-changing effects of access to aquatic facilities and the ability to swim on both individuals and communities. Her early experiences in the pool opened doors for her and shaped her professional goals.

Beale-Tawfeeq has spent decades working at the intersection of water safety, public health, and youth development. Her career spans competitive swimming, lifeguarding, K-12 education, higher education, and national leadership roles with organizations such as the American Red Cross and Diversity in Aquatics. She has also worked on the National Water Safety Action Plan and played a role in the New Jersey State Swim Safe Alliance, which created the first strategic water safety action plan for the state and the third in the United States.

PUBLIC POOLS OPEN DOORS

Like many in the industry, Beale-Tawfeeq started her aquatics journey at a young age. She grew up in North Philadelphia in the 1980s with access to public pool programming through Philadelphia Parks and Recreation. One of her favorite lines is “in North Philadelphia, born and raised, in the swimming pool is where I spent most of my days.”

It was there that Beale-Tawfeeq was introduced to competitive swimming by coach Jim Ellis, whose work later inspired the film *Pride*. At the time, Ellis, one of the most influential coaches in USA Swimming, was using aquatics as a means to help African American youth and any youth in the community who needed it.

For Beale-Tawfeeq, swimming opened doors to

lifeguarding, scholarships, and higher education. She earned a swimming scholarship to Florida A&M University before transferring to Howard University, where she competed and served as team captain. Along the way, aquatics supported her academically and professionally through lifeguarding jobs with the Red Cross.

As Beale-Tawfeeq pursued more education and career opportunities, she created ways to give back to the community. She wrote a dissertation on health and physical education at Florida State University. The dissertation was one of the first to examine the impact of aquatics on K-12 education.

Beale-Tawfeeq holds several degrees: a PhD in Physical Education; a Master of Public Health in Community Health; a Masters in Therapeutic Recreation; and a Bachelors in English and Secondary Education. She currently serves as an associate professor at Rowan University in Glassboro, N.J.

For some communities, she says, access to swim lessons means more than learning skills in the water — it also can lead to life-changing experiences.

APPROACHING WATER SAFETY WITH CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Since 2013, Beale-Tawfeeq has served on the American Red Cross Scientific Advisory Council, Aquatic Sub Council. She also serves as a board member and director of education and research for Diversity in Aquatics (DIA), a non-profit dedicated to promoting and supporting water safety and aquatic activities for vulnerable populations.

“In terms of the African American community, the Black and Brown community, sometimes you have to approach water safety or access differently,” she says.

Beale-Tawfeeq’s approach to water safety and entry into aquatic activities among African American, Black and Brown, Alaskan Native, and Indigenous people involves recognizing the

role of historical barriers, social determinants of health, and generational trauma.

“You have to meet people where they are,” she says. “You can’t come in telling them what they need.”

That could mean considering childcare needs, transportation challenges, and family responsibilities. The Red Cross could provide information and access, but Beale-Tawfeeq explains that communities might not be ready to receive it because of perceptions, lack of access due to finances, or family trauma and fears.

Her ties to the Red Cross and DIA allow her to bring resources from both organizations together. Examples include joining communities for learn-to-swim programs at historically Black universities or HBCUs, which can serve as a community resource.

Through her teaching, research, and work with organizations, she continues to build connections between aquatics professionals, educators, and communities — always with the goal of making water safer and more accessible for everyone.

Swimming helped open the door for Angela Beale-Tawfeeq to lifeguarding, scholarships, and higher education that included several degrees. She works to help underserved communities reap the same benefits.



DEFENSE FOR SAFETY



Longtime trial attorney **Michael Haggard** uses the law to drive reforms in policy surrounding pool safety.

By Rena Goldman

For more than two decades, attorney Michael A. Haggard has stood at the intersection of law, public health, and water safety. His involvement in aquatics and drowning prevention takes him beyond the courtroom as he fights for new legislation, speaks at conferences, and works with advocacy organizations.

The managing partner for The Haggard Law Firm, based in Coral Gables, Fla., has represented more than 100 families in drowning, near-drowning, and entrapment cases, with 80 of them being wrongful death suits. He has worked with a variety of water-safety-advocacy groups, including the National Drowning Prevention Alliance, on whose board he served for many years; Families United to Prevent Drowning; and the Association of Aquatic Professionals.

He has received honors for his drowning prevention efforts, including the Jon E. Krupnick Award from the Florida Justice Association, and the Harry Philo Award from the American Association for Justice.

FROM ATTORNEY TO ADVOCATE

A trial lawyer by training, Haggard's introduction to aquatics came in the early 2000s through near-drowning cases involving apartment complexes with broken or noncompliant pool gates.

In 2003, he tried two separate cases that showed him litigation alone is not enough to safeguard swimmers.

In *Hinton v. 2331 Adams Street Corp.*, a toddler nearly drowned and suffered brain damage after he accessed a pool through a broken gate. Haggard won the family a \$100 million verdict that garnered headlines and shed light on the issue. But, hoping to prevent such tragedies from happening to other families, he came to believe that legislation was needed. He thought, "we need a

code [so] every apartment complex has the same gate requirements and health inspectors check it.” Haggard advocated for changing the Florida building code to ensure that officials monitor gates.

The other case, *Peterson v. Sta-Rite Industries*, involved a 14-year-old suction entrapment victim. In his apartment-complex pool, he chased after a penny that had fallen in the water and put his hand in the drain. Multiple people tried to help, but nobody could pull him out until they broke into the equipment room and turned off the pump. The boy suffered a massive brain injury. The lawsuit led to a \$104 million verdict against a pump manufacturer, along with media coverage that shed more light on entrapment hazards, a relatively obscure issue at the time.

Haggard wanted to see changes in how pumps were made. He attended meetings of the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission and was hired by families for more entrapment cases. But he didn't feel his efforts making a difference until he was contacted about the Virginia Graeme Baker case. This involved the fatal spa entrapment of the seven-year-old granddaughter of former Secretary of State James Baker. Haggard joined other lawyers, politicians, families, and advocacy groups to form a coalition that pushed for passage of the VGB Act.

MORE TO CHANGE

While Haggard is proud of the success he and the coalitions have enjoyed so far, he still sees gaps in legislation.

“We just need our government at every level to act,” he says.

For him, two issues take priority – one resulting from a societal shift, the other having gone without notice for too long. In both instances, Haggard believes unified standards that require bodies of water to have a fenced enclosure need to be created and enforced.

The first comes from short-term rentals, such as Airbnbs. Though generating income, pools on these properties usually are not subject to the same health and safety codes as hotel or apartment pools. This means a rental on Airbnb or another app usually isn't legally obligated to have a secure pool.

Haggard has seen many cases where “a kid is in a new house, gets out, goes through a sliding glass door, into an unsecured pool, and dies.” He believes short-term rentals should be held to the same standards as hotels when it comes to securing pools.

Haggard also worries about unfenced retention ponds at apartment buildings. These pose particular danger for children on the autism spectrum who are prone to wandering. Natural bodies of water are not required to be fenced, but Haggard believes this shouldn't be the case with water near apartments.

As drowning continues to rank among the leading causes of death for young children, Haggard remains focused on prevention.

“When you can address a societal problem, and you can make a difference, that's a real opportunity and obviously very empowering,” he says.

Attorney Michael Haggard has spent the last two decades raising awareness about safety issues that tend to stay under the radar. Before, it was entrapment and self-closing, self-latching gates at apartment pools; now it's pools at temporary rental homes and community retaining ponds.



BUILDING MUSCLE MEMORY



Bob Pratt and his push to make drowning prevention as universal as fire safety.

By Nate Traylor

Fire safety has “stop, drop, and roll.” Bob Pratt wants “flip, float, and follow” to become the water-safety counterpart.

He knows firsthand the power of such a mantra once it gains traction. In his former career as a firefighter and paramedic, he saw how Fire Prevention Week helped turn basic messages into cultural muscle memory. Kids learned what to do, practiced it, and carried it home. “Stop, drop and roll” became shorthand that saved lives.

But that was just the tip of the iceberg. Now the co-founder and executive director of the Great Lakes Surf Rescue Project (GLSRP), works to develop and promote water-safety education that will help cement such sayings and lessons in children’s minds.

EDUCATIONAL IMPERATIVE

At the center of GLSRP’s vision sits a long-term goal that, in Pratt’s view, is long overdue: a true water-safety curriculum in schools — something that reaches every child the way fire safety once did.

Drowning remains a leading cause of death among young children, and the problem is complex enough that it can’t be solved by any single intervention.

“It’s a huge problem,” Pratt says. “It’s a complex problem with a complex solution. One way to address it is through public education.”

GLSRP traces its origin to 2010, after co-creator Dave Benjamin experienced a nonfatal surfing incident that sharpened his focus on open-water hazards. Like many grassroots water-safety groups, GLSRP began with public

education sessions open to anyone who wanted to attend. However, the organization found its message of water safety left more impact in classrooms. Since then, it has delivered roughly 1,200 to 1,300 school presentations across the Great Lakes region.

The organization tailors its school talks by age, all with a consistent aim: building instincts early and realism later.

For elementary students, the tone stays playful: Pratt uses sea otters floating “holding hands” to reinforce that young kids must stay within arm’s reach of an adult. With older students, the message turns more direct: drowning risk rises when people overestimate their abilities or ignore surrounding conditions. Rather than preach “don’t,” Pratt frames safety as a continuum: Know your limits, read the environment, and make choices that reduce exposure.

Then there’s the line Pratt wants everyone to remember: “Flip, float, and follow.” Flip to breathe; float to calm down; and follow the current instead of fighting it.

He points to at least one example where the lesson had the intended effect. A student on spring break in Florida got swept into a rip current with her mother. Fortunately, they knew to stay afloat until they were rescued.

AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

GLSRP also fills another gap that Pratt considers foundational and which has gained more attention of late: tracking fatalities. He says there was no single agency consistently tracking Great Lakes drownings. Even when data existed, he says, definitions could be inconsistent. For instance, cases that result in death later may not always be captured and tracked the same way as those causing an immediate fatality. GLSRP compiles its own numbers using news reports and other public information. It now lists 1,417 Great Lakes drownings since 2010.

That data fuels GLSRP’s broader push for policy and school-based education across the Great Lakes states. The group has worked with partners to support water-safety legislation in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and beyond, covering issues ranging from shoreline rescue equipment to education requirements.

The group has long provided a living example of the approach now called for by the U.S. National Water Safety Action Plan. In developing the 10-year roadmap to coordinate drowning-prevention strategies nationally, that nation plan’s originators came to the conclusion that no one-size-fits-all solution exists, but that such plans will prove most successful when states adapt them to address local risks and realities.

For Pratt, it all ties back to the same premise: Drowning prevention should be normalized and as relentlessly taught as fire safety.

“We’re making a lot of effort highlighting what a problem it is and hopefully starting to address it more,” he says.

Simple awareness of water safety isn’t enough for Bob Pratt. Through the Great Lakes Surf Rescue Project (GLSRP), he works to make safe swimming practices second nature in the Great Lakes area.



AMBASSADOR FOR INCLUSION



Kate Connell has helped reshape how the industry approaches access, inclusion, and staff training.

By Rena Goldman

Kate Connell has dedicated the past few years to speaking about and creating educational content aimed at helping the aquatics industry improve equity, inclusion, access, and staff training. Between webinars, national trade shows, and other opportunities, she has spoken at more than 100 sessions on different topics as they relate to equity and aquatics.

Connell continues to have important conversations about how to make people of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities feel comfortable when they visit a municipal pool, guarded beach, or aquatics facility. Her work has also shaped efforts at the association level.

DRIVING CHANGE

Before working in aquatics, Connell was a yoga teacher with her own studio, where accessibility and inclusion were already central to her practice and values. Coming from that space helped her recognize sensitivity training gaps in aquatics. Practitioners like her who worked in the field didn't have the training or expertise to handle different situations with the proper sensitivity.

During the early days of the pandemic, when her work at a municipal aquatics department paused, Connell used her extra time as an opportunity to make educational materials. She created social media

content, guest articles, webinars – and later live training sessions – through different organizations.

Her content focused on inclusion in general and touched on a variety of topics. “During the first year, my signature training centered on the Three Ps: personnel, policies, and programs,” Connell says. This work became the foundation of Equitable Aquatics, an education and training initiative she launched in 2020 to help aquatics professionals and organizations build more inclusive environments using policies, programming, and staff training.

As time went on, she added other topics that professionals identified as urgent, including de-escalation, empathy, inclusive leadership, difficult conversations, inclusive first aid, inclusive language, and more.

In addition, Connell has played a key role in shaping equity efforts at the association level. She is a founding member and current chair of the AOAP Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Subcommittee. Through her work with AOAP, she has been able to help bring more attention to DEI in the industry.

“We launched a dedicated Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice track for the 2026 International Aquatics & Water Safety Conference and Exposition,” she says. “We also strengthened the Aquatic Professional Designation (AqP) by requiring all candidates to complete training in DEIJ topics.”

In promoting and teaching about inclusion, Connell encourages all facility managers to review their rules and policies. These can largely determine how welcoming it is to all groups. Examine every rule and policy, she encourages, and really ask why it is necessary. If a policy can’t be explained, she recommends going back to the drawing board to figure out what the goal is in making the rule. While perhaps unintended, unnecessary rules and policies can exclude certain groups.

LOOKING AHEAD

While Connell is proud of her work, she acknowledges that more is to be done. There is still discomfort for some around the term diversity, equity, and inclusion, or DEI.

“I’m a white person, so I generally have more capacity to be able to try to work with people who have that sentiment,” she says.

In presentations, she aims to meet people where they are and use language that helps them understand why these concepts and practices are important.

In the future, she hopes to see more inclusion and integration of all types of learners into different swim lessons rather than creating separate lessons. She also wants to give aquatics facilities tools to assess their level of inclusion.

In one of her latest efforts, Connell played a pivotal role in developing AOAP’s dedicated Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice track, to be debuted at the 2026 International Aquatics & Water Safety Conference and Exposition.



WELLNESS WATCHDOG



How **Sarah Cheshire** is setting safety guardrails for cold plunges and manmade lagoons.

By Nate Traylor

Sarah Cheshire translates public health into practical rules for the water, where trends move fast and risks move faster.

As an environmental health scientist at the Utah Department of Health and Human Services, and formerly a local health inspector, she has specialized in pools and spas during a time when they're evolving into wellness experiences with new systems, new users, and new risks.

Take cold plunges and manmade swimming lagoons, for example. Both promise wellness and novelty while living in regulatory gray zones where old rulebooks don't quite fit. Cheshire's goal is to protect public health while allowing these new experiences to serve the bathing public.

"We're trying to figure out what's the line, where's the limit — what's safe — but still allow people to enjoy them," she says.

NOVEL BUT SAFE

Cold plunges are surging in popularity, whether they be single-person tubs or larger vessels to accommodate larger bather loads, such as those for athletic teams.

Utah has become an early test case in how to regulate these water bodies. A proposed rule has been published and remains a work in progress, but it signals what other jurisdictions may consider: signage acknowledging health risks; age and depth limits similar to spa-style guardrails; frequent testing; secondary sanitation; and an emphasis on showers and hygiene.

Cold water also changes the treatment conversation. Many plunges involve "contrast" use — hot to cold —

bringing a high organic load. Disinfectants may not react as quickly in cold water, Cheshire notes, which is driving interest in supplemental treatment such as ozone and UV to add an additional layer of protection.

Then there's the physiological reality. Cold shock can trigger a fight-or-flight response. "Heart attacks can be triggered," Cheshire says, and people with arrhythmias or other underlying factors may face higher risk.

She is working to learn more about the impacts and how to respond.

Cheshire's work extends beyond Utah through the Model Aquatic Health Code (MAHC), where she has served in leadership and now participates in a committee focused on cold plunge pools.

As the category grows, Cheshire is also watching what cold water does to systems and equipment. NSF/ANSI 50 has long guided pool and spa equipment standards, but cold-water operation raises questions about saturation index, corrosion, and durability — issues the MAHC community has flagged for further examination.

REGULATING LAGOONS

Manmade swimming lagoons, with their crystal-clear water and ample room for recreation, are another amenity defying classification.

"They're not lakes, but not pools," Cheshire says, which is why enforcing standard pool codes can feel like fitting "a round peg in a square hole."

Their sheer scale changes everything: turnover and treatment aren't managed the same way as in a traditional commercial pool, and the water often supports multiple uses beyond swimming. In 2024, Utah passed a rule specifically regulating manmade lagoons using a performance-based approach — set public-health outcomes, then allow different technologies and designs to meet

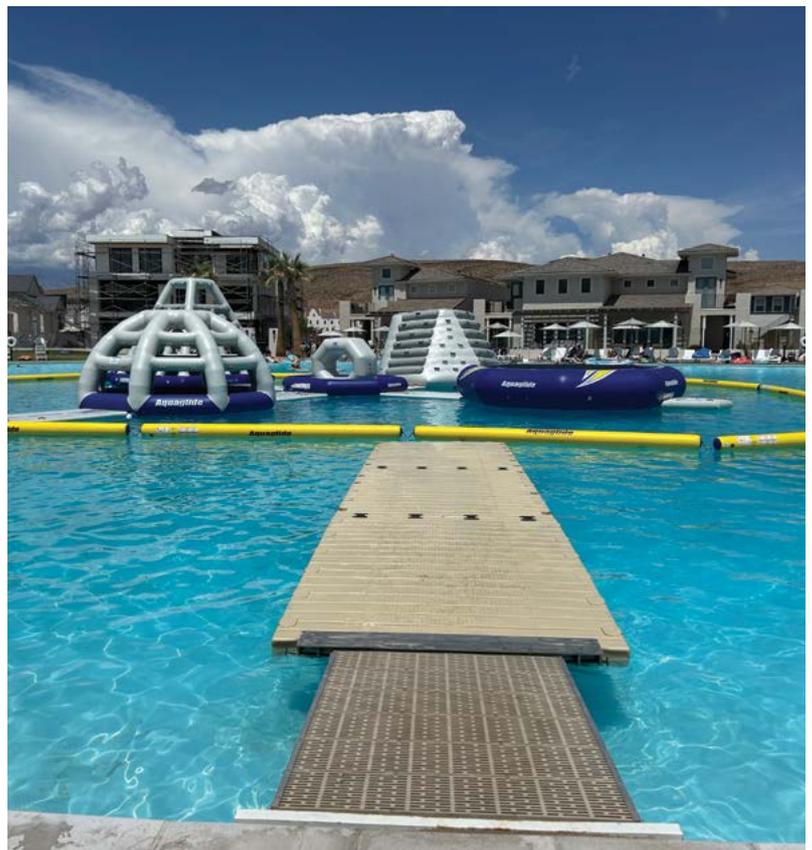
them. Some systems rely on sand filtration; others push and circulate water so the designated bathing zone turns over more quickly. The rule also emphasizes clear zoning and bathing areas, plus patron hygiene — especially showers — to manage bather load and reduce contamination.

Cheshire's influence also runs through industry standards. With the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance (PHTA), she serves on the committee for Standard 11 on water quality, helping reorganize it for easier usability.

Across cold plunges and lagoons, her throughline is practical: Ask who's using the water, how often, and under what conditions, then write rules and standards that keep pace.

"It's an evolving regulation — we put something in place, now we have to evolve."

As a public health official, Sarah Cheshire is helping develop codes, rules, and standards for water elements that have traditionally gone unregulated.



AOAP Exhibitors

A



B



C



D



A) American Red Cross

Product: Longfellow's WHALE Tales Water Safety

Features: new version has been specifically developed for Latino communities; no-cost program helps children learn vital water safety behaviors without having to be in or near the water

Contact: cruzrojaamericana.org

B) Chemtrol

Product: PC1500

Features: ORP, pH, temperature, automatic data logging, remote access (wired or wireless)

Contact: sbcontrol.com

C) ChlorKing

Product: NEXGEN Onsite Chlorine Generator

Features: helps protect facilities against the ever changing costs chemicals, replacement parts, and labor for repairs; helps prevent recreational water illnesses and improve swimmer comfort; produces 10-120lbs of bleach per 24 hours and uses pool water; one unit can sanitize up to six bodies of water

Contact: chlorking.com

D) Counsilman-Hunsaker

Product: Design Services

Features: delivers innovative aquatic design and engineering solutions; each project begins with stakeholder engagement and a comprehensive needs assessment, guiding the development of customized schematic design and construction documents tailored to each facility

Contact: counsilmanhunsaker.com

E



E) Hayward Commercial Aquatics

Product: CAT Controllers

Features: water chemistry controllers with TDS, temperature and salt monitoring; equipped with sensing and control capabilities tailored specifically for salt chlorine applications; pH, ORP, conductivity/NaCl, backup sanitization and internet-based monitoring

Contact: hayward.com/commercial

F



F) Landmark Aquatic

Product: AquatiCare

Features: newly enhanced preventative-maintenance program; customized service plans align with each facility's unique needs, covering equipment inspections, routine maintenance, and precise chemical care

Contact: landmarkaquatic.com



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G) Natare Pools

Product: Natatec PVC Pool Lining

Features: durable, slip-resistant, dual-layered reinforced PVC pool lining system designed for commercial pools and spas; reduces construction and renovation costs, quickly installs, limits maintenance; custom-fitted and bonded on-site

Contact: natare.com

H) PoolCorp

Product: Splash Squad

Features: colorful, modular floating play structures for kids ages 4-12; turns any pool or shallow water into a safe, exciting adventure zone; easy to install

Contact: lincolnaquatics.com

I) Recreonics

Product: Wibit FitnessTrack Inflatable Modular Combination

Features: fun and athletic pool obstacle combination with five modular inflatable units designed for all age groups; allows for free play as well as competitions; perfect for standard pool sizes; easy installation, handling and storage

Contact: recreonics.com/product/wibit-fitness-track-combination-play-product/

J) RenoSys

Product: Commercial PVC Pool Membrane Systems

Features: eliminates surface leaks and restores watertight integrity in high-use aquatic facilities; custom-fabricated systems install over existing substrates to reduce downtime; engineered for competition pools, municipal centers, and institutional facilities requiring extended service life

Contact: renosys.com

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K



K) Vortex Aquatic Structures

Product: Splashclub

Features: designed for shared fun, Splashclub combines immersive aquatic play, engaging themes, and multi-age attractions; ideal for resorts, amusement parks, and attractions; offers flexible, cost-effective solutions that elevate guest experiences

Contact: vortex-intl.com

L



L) Wapotech

Product: Aqus ClearAmine Air Monitor

Features: measures 12 air parameters providing a calculated surrogate value that accurately duplicates airborne trichloramine residuals in the natatorium; continually measures, data logs, displays, and helps manage air quality with multiple connectivity options

Contact: wapotech.com

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A) Recreonics

Product: Wibit WiggleBoard
Modular Play Inflatable

Features: WiggleBoard wobbles side to side, demanding guests keep their balance to avoid splashing into the pool; for all fitness levels; puts balancing skills to the test

Contact: recreonics.com/product/wibit-wiggleboard-modular-play-product/

B) Vortex Aquatic Structures

Product: Elevations

Features: multilevel play structure is designed for all ages; interactive games and dynamic water effects that encourage movement, exploration, and social connection; with customizable themes, safe access points, and bold colors; creates inclusive environments

Contact: vortex-intl.com

C) Waterworx USA

Product: Aqua Tabletop

Features: this modular water play table allows for a customizable and scalable setup; an unlimited number of tables can be combined to create a comprehensive and engaging water play area; spinners rotate in different directions to manipulate the flow of water

Contact: aquaworxusa.com

D) WhiteWater

Product: AquaAdventure

Features: unique aquatic play experience allows kids and teens to climb, scramble, and swing from platform to platform over a pool; AquaAdventure is a highly configurable structure that offers elements such as Cannonball Run, AquaClimb Traverse, Zip 'N Swing, and more

Contact: whitewaterwest.com

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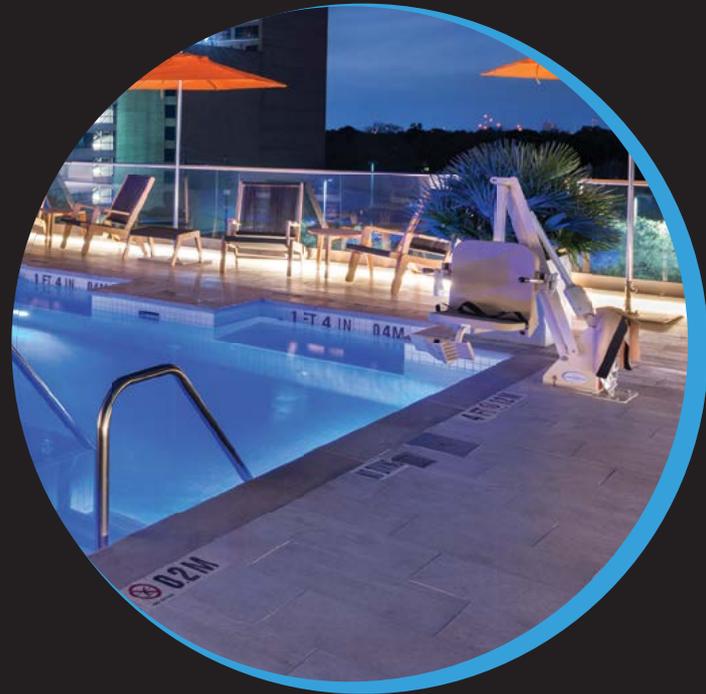
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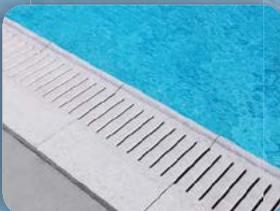
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