

# The Business of Wellness

Fitness and health take center stage at private clubs.

By Karen Moraghan



Reynolds Lake Oconee





**F**or years, private clubs have offered fitness and athletic activities for their members, with many investing in new equipment, on-property spas and other lifestyle amenities. More progressive clubs have taken their programming to even higher levels by embracing and creating dedicated wellness programming.

Globally, health and wellness is a \$4.2 trillion industry, according to the Global Wellness Institute. Under this umbrella fall nutrition, weight loss, mind-body, fitness, anti-aging, personal care and beauty. As shown by the array of options, when it comes to taking care of themselves, consumers no longer want a standard strategy: They want what works and they want it specifically tailored to their needs and lifestyle.

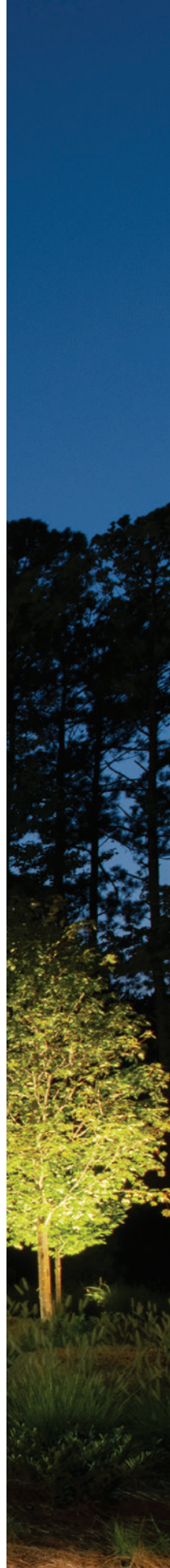
What does “wellness” mean? Defining it is not as easy as it may seem.

Tammy Mugavero, director of fitness and wellness for 23 years at Bonita Bay Resort in Naples, Fla., says, “Wellness is difficult to define because it means something different to everyone—the condition of being healthy, the absence of distress or illness, the condition of good physical, mental or emotional health, the active pursuit of health, physical and mental well-being, or the state of being healthy in body and mind.”

Neil Doldo, director of fitness at Atlanta Athletic Club, concurs. “I view wellness as any activity that someone performs to better themselves—mental, physical, social, or holistic. It’s all about making people feel better—about themselves, their life, their being.”

“Wellness is a never-ending process and evolution to improve our quality of life,” says Arnaldo Cocuzza, CCM, director of athletics and Sonoran Clubhouse at Desert Mountain in Scottsdale, Ariz. He believes wellness starts with sleep and encompasses nutrition, aerobic activity (tennis, pickleball, fitness classes), anaerobic activity (weightlifting, hiking), meditation (spa activities) and special additions (red light therapy, cold cryotherapy).

As you can see, the definitions vary but overlap. And they all agree on a few basics: integrate, differentiate, innovate.





## Approaches to Wellness

Desert Mountain takes a holistic approach to wellness, encouraging its members to switch from one or two practices like weightlifting and running on treadmills to a wide range of activities.

“A good analogy between fitness and wellness is to explain the difference between service and hospitality,” Cocuzza explains. “Service is what you do for someone. Hospitality is how you make someone feel. At Desert Mountain, we focus on how we make someone feel.”

What drives the wellness program at Bonita Bay Club? “The active and healthy lifestyle of our members and their desire to stay that way,” says Mugavero. “They want to age well and be able to enjoy all of the amenities of the club and our active lifestyle. And each year, we try to bring in something new to keep things fresh.”

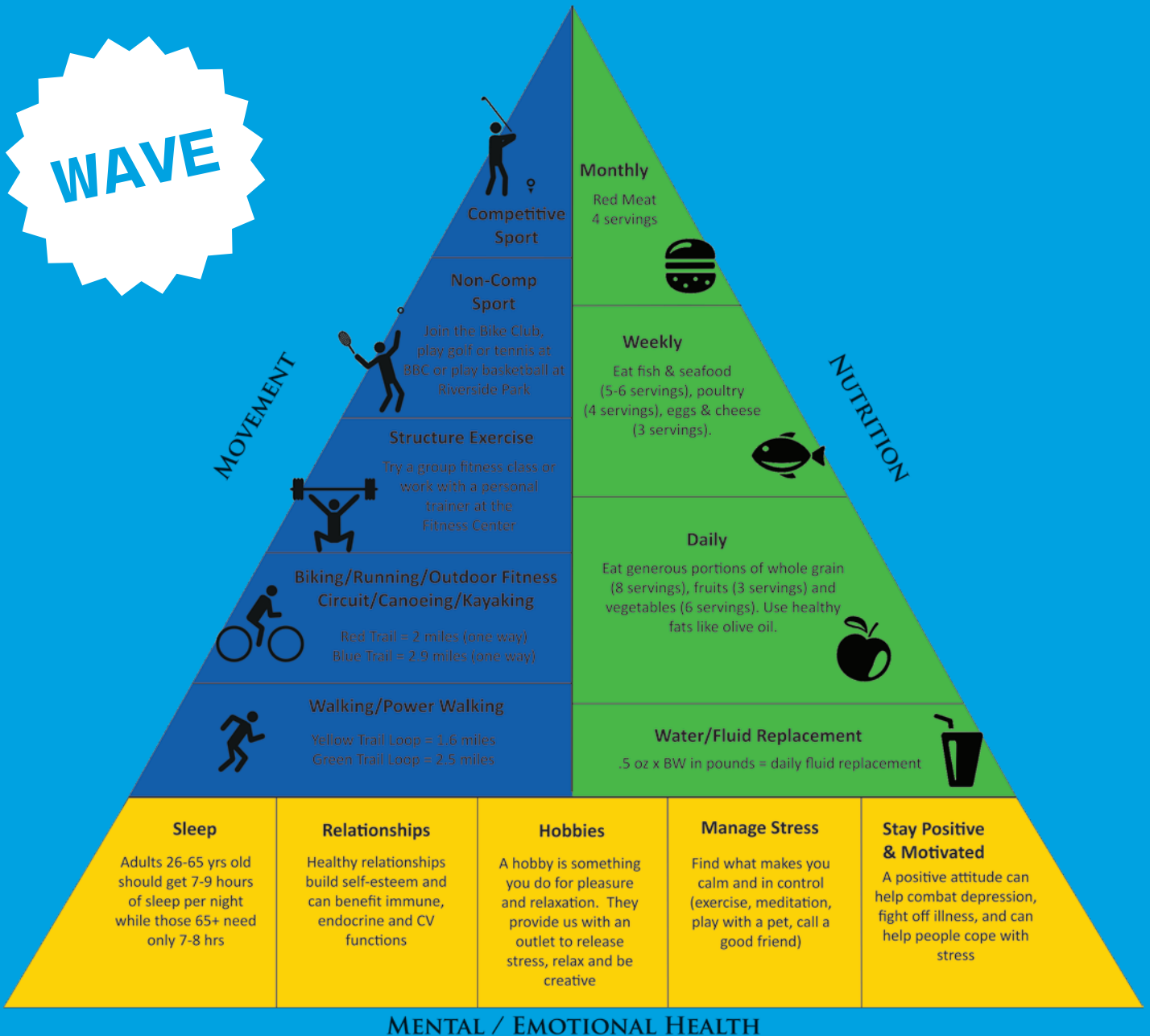
In 2022, Bonita Bay added BioCircuit, a short, guided circuit workout personally tailored to each member that offers a total body workout in less than 20 minutes. “I think a lot of people are looking for quick hits—get in, get out—and this is a great option for those members,” says Mugavero. “It’s not for everybody, but it is another tool in the toolbox and one that is pretty unique to us. In fact, there are only three clubs in the country that offer the BioCircuit to their members.”

At Desert Mountain, the state-of-the-art fitness equipment has QR codes that allow members to easily set-up workout schedules and routines. Many members also track their wellness results on personal apps such as Garmin and Apple.

Smart clubs take members all the way through the fitness process, and that includes recovery. “We have been stretching



Desert Mountain Club



**Wellness And Vitality Enrichment (WAVE)** is a club-wide wellness initiative for members and employees of Bonita Bay Club.

The WAVE icon is a color-coded triangle, with each side representing a different modality: movement (blue), mental/emotional (yellow) and nutritional health (green). Posters featuring the wellness triangle are posted throughout the club, and wallet cards are available explaining what WAVE is about.

Class schedules use corresponding color codes to let users know which discipline is being served. Menus use the WAVE logo to designate healthy food items.

WAVE works away from club facilities as well. Cards available in the fitness center outline everything from dynamic warm-ups for golf, tennis, and pickleball to diabetic, low-salt and portion-control diets. The nutrition cards also feature recommendations from the WAVE Café that fit into the specific plans.

And, as noted, WAVE isn't only for members. A fitness center is available to all Bonita Bay Club employees, where they can take exercise and fitness classes during the summer months and participate in contests and challenges (walking, Biggest Loser, weight loss) throughout the year.



and foam-rolling for years, but we have taken recovery to the next level,” Bonita Bay’s Mugavero explains. “We offer a dedicated space for our members with advanced recovery modalities including massage chairs, Normatec Compression Therapy, laser therapy, cupping and in-house physical therapy services. Advanced recovery is hot in the industry, so we are staying ahead of the curve.”

Both Mugavero and Cocuzzo include sleep among the most important, and often overlooked, components of a well-rounded wellness program.

“Being well rested is the start to a healthy day,” says Cocuzzo. “The proper building blocks of sleep (deep sleep, REM sleep, light sleep) are the cornerstones of a wellness program.”

### Varying the Options

Every month, Atlanta Athletic Club offers one or two specialty classes based on member input, such as Sonic Yoga (combining sounds and music with the practice of yoga) or meditation.

“We are all aware that meditation has a positive effect on our mental health,” says Doldo. “Now, a growing body of scientific evidence suggests that it may also assist individuals in coping with physical ailments and pain.” He also notes that assisted stretching sessions have grown in popularity over the past couple of years, as has integrating stretching into golf and tennis workouts.

Bonita Bay also offers wellness programs tied to members’ favorite sports. “We are a golf club, so training programs that improve golf and sport performance are important to our membership,” explains Mugavero. “We have the largest number of TPI-certified golf fitness professionals of any club in the country, 20. And not to leave out our tennis players and pickleballers, we have four RacquetFit certified professionals on our fitness staff.”

Desert Mountain takes a gradual approach to expanding new services. Cocuzzo provides an example. “We are growing our spa from traditional services (massages, facials) to



Atlanta Athletic Club



Bonita Bay Club

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impactful offerings (meditation, red light therapy) that improve the quality of our members' lives. In addition, we will be renovating our fitness floor to offer state-of-the-art machines that allow for more robust and more efficient workouts, thereby giving members more time to enjoy other club activities like dining, golf, swimming and hiking."

Another special need targeted at Bonita Bay is Parkinson's Disease. Five staff members are certified coaches for Rock Steady Boxing, leading Parkinson's patients through activities designed to maintain motor movement, agility and flexibility. This

program also helps develop a sense of community among those with this neurological disease.

### Eating Well

Where there are wellness programs there's always a matching concern for healthy food. At Bonita Bay Club, Richard Brumm, CEC, CCA, director of culinary operations and executive chef, and his team have wholeheartedly embraced the nutritional component of the club's wellness initiative, called WAVE (see pg. 71 sidebar).

All of the club's dining venues offer gluten-free and vegan menus. One of the restaurants is even called the WAVE Café.

"It was a natural progression to incorporate the WAVE logo onto menus to identify those types of healthy or health-related items," Brumm says. "We change menus seasonally and each time we prepare a new menu we'll prepare vegan, gluten-free and allergy-free offerings."

Bonita Bay also adheres to a "from-scratch philosophy," with everything made according to recipes created by Brumm and his team. That means no pre-packaged or processed foods are used.

All these clubs offer smoothie bars with expansive menus: Atlanta Athletic Club prepared 10,000 smoothies in two months from a menu offering 12 different options.





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Arrowhead Country Club

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The clubs have integrated wellness into their retail operations, as well. Bonita Bay Club goes so far as to offer KT tape, Cryoderm/Biofreeze, and Hyperice (vibrating foam rollers, massage balls, percussion therapy guns, Core Meditation Trainer) products, and

they’ve all expanded the options for athleisure apparel, including nationally known brands, in their pro shops.

### **It Starts with the Staff**

Training and education are key to the success of any program, but recruiting quality staff is especially important in wellness, where members expect to work with experts in their fields. Most clubs prefer hiring trainers who are degreed professionals and/or with many years of experience. Bonita Bay currently has 16 certified personal trainers on staff, including a licensed athletic trainer, two licensed physical therapists, and a licensed physical therapy assistant.

The club also dedicates resources to staff education and encourages employees to pursue opportunities that would benefit membership and themselves personally.



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## Training and education are key to the success of any program, but recruiting quality staff is especially important in wellness, where members expect to work with experts in their fields.

“You don’t really have to prompt quality people to try to get better at their craft, they come to you with ideas that enhance the club’s mission and our wellness programming,” says Mugavero. “We even pay for training opportunities for our front desk staff who show an interest in fitness.”

### Measuring Success

How does a club know its wellness programs are appealing to members? The numbers don’t lie.

Atlanta Athletic Club had 103,000 visits to its fitness center in its peak year (2018), and is well on track to beat that in 2023. At Bonita Bay, use is up more than 16% over last year, and when Mugavero hears, “The fitness center was why we joined the club,” she knows that she is delivering what members want.

At Desert Mountain, all Cocuzzo needs to do is check the parking lot. “When the lot is full in the morning and throughout the afternoon, it’s an indicator that members are enjoying our amenities. On a regular basis, we measure the data of members using the facilities, coverage needed for the service, and the adjustments needed for potential capacity challenges. We offer 280 fitness classes each month and average 40-plus members per class.

“But our most satisfying measure of success is that our members choose our athletic and wellness club for the quality of the offerings instead of just the convenience of being inside the club property.” **CD**

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**Karen Moraghan** is president of Hunter Public Relations. She can be reached at [kmoraghan@hunter-pr.com](mailto:kmoraghan@hunter-pr.com).