

First Multi-Use Health Club Was Catalyst for Lincoln Park Redevelopment

CHICAGO – Founded in 1972, the Lakeshore Athletic Club proved to be both the beginning of a new industry and a catalyst for the revitalization of Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood. Initially known as the Lakeshore Racquet Club concentrating on tennis, the facility added racquetball and Nautilus exercise equipment on the way to developing a vision for what would become the multi-use health club.

The club, at 1320 W. Fullerton in Chicago, was founded by brothers Walter and Jordon Kaiser, who recall adding "a few machines in the corner" during the first few years. When the building was demolished by the major 1979 snowstorm that also led to the election of Jane Byrne as Chicago's mayor, the Kaisers built the world's first multi-use health club. They had noticed that the machines in the corner, the then innovative Nautilus equipment, were constantly being used. "Older machines concentrated on muscle building only and were not very sophisticated, says Walter. "They were basically free weights; universal equipment in which weights were pulled from the wall."

The brothers also read the ground-breaking book on aerobics by Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper, who quoted statistics showing that people's lives would be extended by incorporating aerobic exercise into their daily routine. This and the increasing popularity of running added to their store of ideas and became fodder for the new, 180,000-square-foot multi-use health club that re-opened at the Fullerton address in January 1980. For the first time, the full range of exercise and athletic options was under one roof.

At that time, Lincoln Park was a predominantly industrial and commercial area, far from today's high-profile residential community. "Our club was the focal point for development in the neighborhood – a catalyst for the redevelopment of the Lincoln Park area," says Walter. "When a condominium was built across the street, the new residents were offered a free one-year membership as an incentive to buy. When town homes went up and began offering a club membership, they sold out in one day. All new developments in the area had a map with a star noting that they were located near our club. It was a selling point not to be missed. "We changed the neighborhood from primarily industrial to primarily residential."

Today, the Lincoln Park Club includes a 1/4-mile running track, indoor and outside tennis courts, racquetball, squash, a cardiovascular room, a treadmill room, a free weight room, a selectorized weight equipment room, a full court basketball/volleyball gymnasium, a cycle studio, group exercise studios, adult and children's swimming pools, a pro shop, physical therapy, Wave Spa with massage, nail, waxing and facial services, a roof-top sundeck with cafe, a restaurant and lounge area, Kidshore childcare facilities, locker rooms with full amenities and free parking.

In the years that followed, Lakeshore opened additional multi-use clubs in Chicago at Downtown, 441 N. Wabash (opened in 1992); Illinois Center, 211 N. Stetson (1998); and Streeterville, 333 E. Ontario (2001). Lakeshore Management Group also operates The Spa and Fitness Club in Costa Mesa, California (1995), and the Pinnacle Athletic Club in Mishawaka, Indiana (1996). A second corporate arm, Lakeshore Medical Fitness, operates five additional facilities, including health centers associated with hospitals.

The Kaiser brothers are pursuing their vision of creating athletic clubs that put their 20,000-plus members first by delivering quality service and creating exceptional club environments. They tailor each club to meet and exceed member expectations and hire experienced individuals who intend to develop careers in health and fitness, thus maintaining a "People Taking Care of People" focus. Lakeshore is consistently ranked as one of the top 35 Clubs and Chains in North America by Club Industry Magazine.