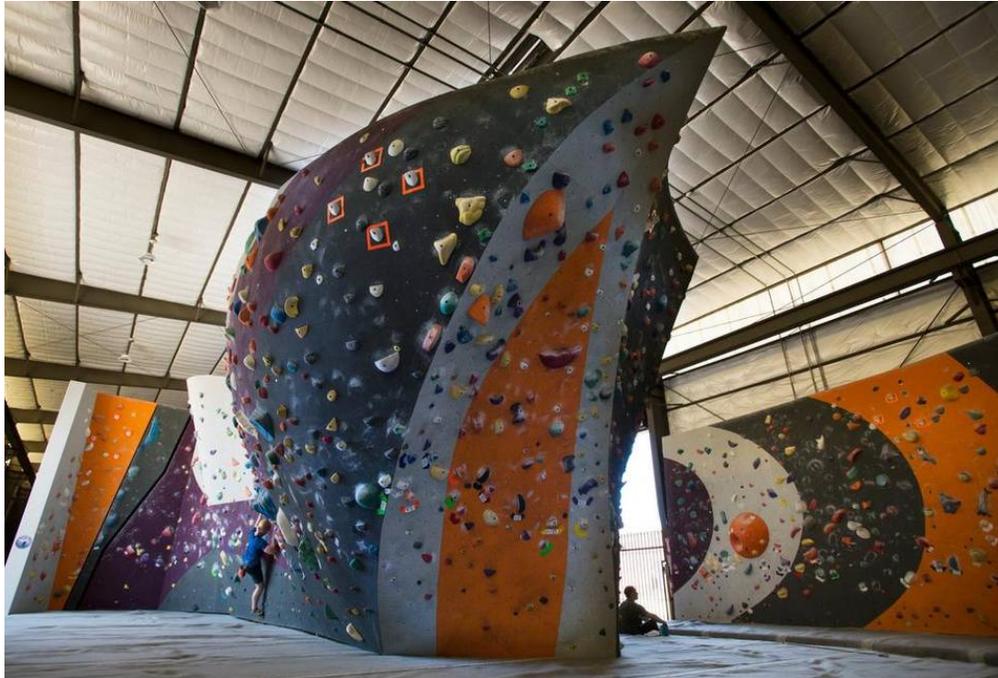




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Membership climbs the walls at Pipeworks gym in River District



Patrick Sparks, 25, left, works out on the bouldering wall at Pipeworks Climbing and Fitness on Wednesday.

BY BOB SHALLIT
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A North Sacramento company has more of its customers climbing the walls. And that's a good thing.

[Sacramento Pipeworks](#), a rock-climbing center that opened in 2001, recently completed an expansion that nearly doubled its space and is bringing more fitness buffs into the century-old warehouse space at 116 N. 16th St.

Membership is almost 2,200, up from about 1,400 last fall, said Pipeworks manager Vaughn Medford.

The big draws: new "bouldering" and CrossFit spaces that attract a mostly younger crowd to the city's River District neighborhood.

“When people saw these new facilities, they really responded,” said Medford, a self-described former “climbing bum” who has been running the local center almost since it opened.

The new space – totaling about 15,000 square feet – was formerly used by Gerlinger Steel, a metal fabrication company. Gerlinger relocated to Woodland in 2013 and the gym expansion started late last year.

The bouldering space suits the growing number of people who like scampering up 17-foot structures without any harnesses or ropes. Thick foam padding covers the floor to break any falls.

“Bring a chalk bag and a pair of shoes and that’s literally all you need” for bouldering, Medford said. “That simplicity appeals to the younger kids.”

The CrossFit space also appeals to a mostly younger crowd that’s drawn to the high-intensity interval training style that has participants lifting heavy weights and doing other exercises during a grueling one-hour workout.

“It’s almost cultlike,” Medford said of CrossFit’s appeal, with some people taking six or more classes a week. The rigor of the classes seems to foster camaraderie. “Everyone suffers so they tend to be supportive of each other,” he said.

The Pipeworks site is one of 11 in California operated by San Francisco-based Touchstone Climbing. Most are located in industrial settings with towering ceilings. Medford said the Sacramento site differs in one respect: It’s dog-friendly. He started bringing his own dog, a Papillon named Jackie, and decided to let others do the same “to be fair.” He worries sometimes that overexcited pooches might cause a problem in the busy gym. “But so far,” he said, “it’s worked.”