Amusement industry helps light the way for hope

As the nation — and the world — battles the COVID-19 pandemic, the amusement and attractions industry is doing its best to keep people’s spirits up, remind them that better days are ahead and to be the light at the end of the tunnel. Demonstrations of hope by the attractions industry are being seen and enjoyed worldwide. Kentucky Kingdom took out billboards throughout Louisville reminding the community that they were in this together with them (above left). Playland’s Castaway Cove showed everyone they can always look forward to the future by keeping its Ferris wheel illuminated (above right). Walt Disney World Resort and Universal Orlando Resort illuminated several of the resorts’ hotel towers with hearts (Universal’s Aventura pictured right). Carnival Cruise ships were seen off the coast of Florida with the message “We will be back” lit up across them (below right). Entertaining guests in their homes, Disneyland’s Dapper Dans (below left) performed live via the internet, taking requests and harmonizing from their living rooms.

COURTESY KENTUCKY KINGDOM, PLAYLAND’S CASTAWAY COVE, WEAR-TV, DISNEY PARKS; AT/ DAVID FAKE

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The queue is forming

I know we’re all looking forward to parks opening their gates again and welcoming guests. We’re eager to show off new attractions, get the carousels turning and hearing the familiar clicking of a coaster’s lift hill. I’m here to remind all of us, that we aren’t the only ones.

As much as we’re a part of the amusement industry, we often lose sight of just how much parks and attractions mean to the world at large. They aren’t just random rides, entertainment and distractions.

Theme and amusement parks are the first job for many teenagers. Roller coasters and Ferris wheels are where kids of all ages learn the payoff for conquering their fears. At some point in everyone’s life, they’ve tried to win a prize at a midway game for a date or a child and, if won, that prize held a special place in someone’s heart.

Even if Tunnel of Love rides have been phased out, taking a date through a dark ride is still part of our pop culture. Reaching for the brass ring remains a symbol of achieving excellence, even with only a precious few brass ring dispensers still in operation on carousels.

Kids cheer when their parents surprise them with a Walt Disney World trip. A season pass to a theme or water park is an easy holiday gift for parents they know children will love. Any teen on a date wanting to buck the dinner-and-a-movie trend immediately suggests mini-golf or laser tag.

Parks and attractions are woven into our world. They’ve been that way since the days Coney Island first welcomed guests in Brooklyn for an evening out.

My parents met in an amusement park. My grandmother’s sister met her husband at one. My uncle welcomed guests in Brooklyn for an evening out.

It’s with all those years around parks behind me that I know we’re all looking forward to parks opening their gates again and welcoming guests. We’re eager to show off new attractions, get the carousels turning and hearing the familiar clicking of a coaster’s lift hill. I’m here to remind all of us, that we aren’t the only ones.

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It’s with all those years around parks behind me that I know the industry will survive this current shutdown and I know the world around it is looking forward to it.
Unprecedented

Hal McEvoy, President and CEO, IAAPA

Unprecedented. That is the word on everyone’s mind. In early January, IAAPA began responding to COVID-19 and its unprecedented effects around the world. First, the coronavirus began affecting the attractions industry in the Asia-Pacific region, and now, its effects can be felt in just about every city and every country. While we are doing our part to “flatten the curve,” we are also remaining positive and looking ahead with hope. This is a time of uncertainty. The global attractions industry, along with so many other industries around the world, has all but stopped. Every day I talk to members who are worried about their businesses, their employees, their families—and each other.

Look behind the global attractions industry’s greatest rides, shows, food and beverage offerings, games, engineering and proactive maintenance, and you’ll find talented individuals. Our industry is rooted in people. And this global crisis is impacting people.

Currently, our members are using innovation and passion to adjust their businesses so that they can continue to support their employees and communities. Manufacturers and suppliers are pivoting to produce personal protective equipment. Technology has allowed us to be there every step of the way. Whether it is through our ramped-up webinar program schedule or information curated on our COVID-19 website page (waterparks.org/COVID-19), we are here to serve and support our industry so that we all can return to serving our guests in the future.

Midways will shine again

Sharon Barlow, Editor, Midway Magazine

For more than a century, the travel amusement industry has logged millions of miles, served countless sticks of cotton candy and candy apples, and given even more rides on merry-go-rounds, Ferris wheels, Tilt-a-Whirls, or Himalayas. Generations of great show owners have welcomed generations of guests to their midways, eliciting smiles bright enough to rival the most brilliant lights. Yet 2020 will now always be remembered as the year the lights went out. The music of the carousel was silenced, and the Ferris wheel ceased to turn. Millions of people watched in disbelief as great events like the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo and the Miami Dade Youth Festival closed their gates to stop the spread of COVID-19.

In the beginning of February, the show owners’ greatest concern was their spot in the lineup for receiving their H-2B labor, and the carnivals like Butler Amusements, North American Midway Entertainment, Ray Cammack Shows and Wade Shows were the objects of envy, not so much because of their size or grandeur, but because of their early start dates insuring they would have their help. Now, Danny Huston, owner of North American Midway Entertainment, talks of the difficult decision he made not just to send his help back but the difficulties in even finding airports where they could fly out. Similarly, Ben Pickett of Ray Cammack Shows tells of sending a large percentage of their help back with a return ticket that he hopes they will be able to use while the ones who chose to stay are readjusting their lives to include social distancing. Bill Johnson of Fantasy Amusements is grateful that he was allotted Group D; “in a crisis like this, it is always pleasing to have the health authorities and easy access to exclusive resources. Technology has allowed us to be nimble, and we have hosted webinars, Facebook Lives, chats on Twitter, conference calls and more — helping us to keep members connected with each other. Together, we host important conversations about our industry. With each interaction, with each program, with each connection, we come together.

For more than 100 years, IAAPA has served every facet of the attractions industry. Now more than ever, we are here to serve our members and work alongside them as they make difficult decisions in an uncertain time. We will continue to be here every step of the way. This global crisis will pass. The attractions industry is resilient, and we will emerge in new ways. Families around the world will look to us to help provide smiles and create new memories. I am certain we will get through this challenge. We will continue to come together, work together and support each other in ways that are, truly, unprecedented.

Sunnier days are ahead

Damien Latham, Board Chair, World Waterpark Association

One could argue that our global community has never faced a bigger challenge than the one we are facing with the COVID-19 pandemic. This virus has touched each part of our lives in every part of the world. Truly, these are dark and difficult times, but we should never lose hope in our ability to bounce back when faced with a challenge. We are temporarily down, but we are definitely not out.

If we can all stay focused on who we are and what we provide to our guests, we will once again find ways to share laughter, build memories, teach children to swim and save lives. As waterpark owners, operators, designers, suppliers and developers, we already have a unique set of skills that will allow us to step forward with recreational activity once we are given the all-clear to open up by our state and local health departments. After all, many of us are seasonal business operators, which means we are used to accomplishing a lot in a short amount of time.

Right now, we need to listen to the advice being provided to our businesses by our local officials, and we should continue to advocate for the needs of our businesses and our industry. Next up, while we wait for when we can safely reopen, there are a number of things we can do now to be ready for that time.

First, we need to ensure that communication is happening with our team members, our key stakeholders and our guests. While we might not have all the answers right now, we can still be a resource to our furloughed employees. We can still communicate meaningful, hopeful messages to our guests through social media.

Second, we need to access our financial health, make some assumptions on what a prolonged shutdown will mean for our businesses and explore what options are available in stimulus packages to potentially shore up our bottom lines. Some questions you might want to answer include: Where is financial spending has happened and where can I reevaluate my marketing efforts to get ready for reopening? How quickly can I complete a line-by-line review of my expenses?

The World Waterpark Association board and staff are working hard to provide a trusted repository of information and resources to our members during this difficult time. Whether it is through our ramped-up webinar program schedule or information curated on our COVID-19 website page (waterparks.org/COVID-19), we are here to serve and support our industry so that we all can return to serving our guests in the future.

Working through unparalleled times

Andrew Mellor, Editor, Interpark

We are in the midst of an unprecedented and, to be blunt, very scary period of our lives as COVID-19 wreaks havoc across the world. It’s difficult to see where it will all end and what shape the attractions industry will be in when it does. I guess we can only hope that the virus passes as quickly as it arrived.

Here in the UK we are now in total lockdown, partly because so many people continued to ignore government advice by going out and continuing to adhere to the social distancing rules. The UK government have announced a £330 billion package aimed at helping the 2 million self-employed and another £14 billion to help avoid further spread of the virus, but also as part of the extreme measures necessary to beat the pandemic. We can only leave our homes for four specified reasons and pretty much every activity we take for granted has been halted. When it will all get back to normal again is totally unknown at the present time.

Theme parks and attractions are also being hit very hard as we all know, and despite plans for many just a few short weeks ago to open at the usual time for the start of the new season, I don’t know of any now that have not delayed their opening. The vast majority here and elsewhere in Europe are staying closed for the foreseeable future.

But also as I write, there are just the smallest signs that some countries are wining the battle. I’ve been reading about a “flattening” of Germany’s coronavirus infection curve as the upward trend in cases the country has been seeing appeared to be leveling off. Further field some parks in Japan are reopening, albeit on a limited basis and in a lot of cases with outdoor attractions only. Hopefully, though, it’s a sign that the worst of the pandemic is over in those countries.

Interestingly, some European park operators are taking action to ensure that guests continue to at least get a taste of what they have to offer during this unusual period and to help keep youngsters entertained. Headquartered in Belgium, and with both indoor and outdoor infrastructure, the amusement park is operating a number of competitions and distributing promotions via Facebook, while from the Dutch park Efteling, there is a performance of the show Fairytale Struggle the Musical on YouTube that lasts for well over an hour. Other parks are doing similar things, and more will no doubt follow suit, so at least in the interim period before they eventually open, venues are able to give guests a teaser of what they can look forward to in (hopefully) a few weeks’ time.

The thing to remember is that we will get through this, and we will see our parks and attractions reopening at some point. And boy will everyone be more than ready to enjoy them once again.
U.S. theme parks find silver linings, continue to engage patrons

AT: Dean Lamanna
dllamanna@amusementtoday.com

NORTH AMERICA — While the COVID-19 pandemic has dealt a severe blow to businesses and national economies worldwide, and recovery will be slow, some bright spots and forward thinking have emerged from the U.S. attractions industry’s theme park sector while operations are temporarily suspended.

That is not to say that companies have not been scrambling as the spread of the novel coronavirus, which was still increasing in the U.S. at the start of April after paralyzing much of Asia and Europe, scuttled new ride debuts and park reopening/seasonal opening dates. “Like everyone in the industry, we are diligently working through a number of issues that are demanding our complete focus,” said Laurie Tardif, corporate spokesperson for Sandusky, Ohio-based Cedar Fair Entertainment Co., in an emailed response to Amusement Today that reflected the collective and unprecedented challenges facing operators.

When The Walt Disney Co. and NBCUniversal announced the closure of their Southern California and Central Florida resort facilities in mid-March — Disney’s shutdown will last until further notice and Universal’s until at least April 19 — other theme park operators quickly followed suit. All have since posted and updated announcements on their websites and social media channels.

Company representatives typically conveyed a gracious, personal tone. “The safety and well-being of our guests and associates are always our top priorities,” said Richard Zimmerman, Cedar Fair president and CEO, expressing hope that the company’s 11 North American parks could open in mid-May or soon after. “Thanks to our guests and associates for their support and cooperation during this ever-evolving situation. Your loyalty to our family of parks is invaluable.”

The safety of our team members and our communities by never compromising the safety of guests or employees, echoed Mike Spanos, president and CEO of Grand Prairie, Texas-based Six Flags Entertainment Corp., indicating that the chain’s U.S. parks would remain shuttered until at least mid-May. “On behalf of everyone at Six Flags, thank you for your trust in us. I look forward to seeing you out in our parks.”

Leaders of several individual parks offered empathetic messaging, as well, including Craig Ross, president and CEO of Dollywood Parks and Resorts — operated by The Dollywood Co., a partnership between Herschend Family Entertainment (HFE) of Branson, Missouri, and entertainer Dolly Parton. “Based on the ever-changing developments, we are looking daily at all of our options to present an exciting and entertaining 2020 season that is a great experience for our guests,” said Ross, who was hoping the Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, facilities could open in May. “But our first priority is the safety of our hosts and guests.”

Added Parton: “We need to focus on good health and praying for those who are affected. We know brighter days are ahead.”

Like most of the other major theme park companies, Dollywood signaled its commitment to guidelines and directives from medical experts, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and local governments during the crisis. In addition to posting CDC guidelines in common areas, the company has already implemented additional sanitation measures — installing 300 more hand-sanitation stations throughout its resort properties, adjusting food and beverage service in accordance with current food safety recommendations, and increasing training and reinforcement in its traditionally rigorous cleaning and disinfection standards.

Disney, which, like Universal, is continuing to pay its hourly park workers through at least mid-April, also highlighted its increased sanitation and hygiene protocols for guests and employees. In addition to training reinforcement, these included the addition of easy-access hand-washing and hand-sanitizing facilities, frequent cleaning and wash-down of outdoor locations, and defined cycles for the frequent cleaning and disinfection of targeted areas.

“We are focused on the health, safety and well-being of our guests and Cast Members,” the company said in a statement appearing on the Walt Disney World Resort website.

Food for thoughtfulness

The attractions industry’s temporary halt created an inadvertent bounty for food banks and charitable organizations, which benefited from donations of surplus food from parks at a time of especially crucial community need. Disney filled trucks with contributions. Walt Disney World Resort (WDW) shared its inventory of fresh salads, greens and cooked hot items with Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida, while Disneyland Resort sent its surplus to Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County in Southern California, according to the company’s blog.

“These donations would not be possible without the dedication of cast members behind the scenes who collect, sort and distribute every item to ensure it’s delivered with the highest level of freshness, keeping food safety top of mind,” said Tajiana Ancora-Brown, WDW’s director of external affairs. “We feel an immense sense of pride and excitement every time we [make] deliveries in the community.”

Donations of food, especially shelf-stable food, will be critical in the days and weeks ahead to serve those in our community impacted by the COVID-19 crisis,” said Harald Herrmann, CEO of Second Harvest’s Orange County chapter.

Both Disneyland Resort and WDW have an ongoing commitment to reducing food waste, and unserved food from select locations has been donated regularly to support those in need. Each year, the resorts donate over 1.2 million meals to their local Second Harvest Food Bank chapters.

Elsewhere in Central Florida, Busch Gardens Tampa Bay delivered approximately 5,500 pounds of food to Feeding Tampa Bay, a food rescue and distribution organization. As with other properties of SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment (SWP), which was continuing to pay full-time employees for the extent of its shutdown, the park is closed indefinitely.

Six Flags Over Georgia in Austell provided 114 boxes of fruit, vegetables and dairy totaling 1,600 pounds to The Center for Children &
Despite park closures, construction reportedly is continuing on Universal Orlando Resort’s fourth theme park, Epic Universe. COURTESY UNIVERSAL ORLANDO RESORT

**PARKS**

**Continued from page 4**

Young Adults, a private, non-profit shelter based in nearby Marietta. Six Flags was committed to serving the community in “this unprecedented situation,” said Dale Kaetzel, park president, noting that the effort helped address the need created by school closures and quarantines. “We are grateful for the partnership with The Center and look forward to providing those living [there] with this nutritious food in a time of uncertainty.”

Also, on March 23, the parking lot at Kennywood in West Mifflin, Pennsylvania, became a staging area for food distributed by the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank to residents in need, including many unemployed as a result of the pandemic. The park, owned and operated by Newport Beach, California-based Palace Entertainment, tentatively plans to start its season May 2.

Online diversions

With patrons in the most populous areas of the U.S. ordered to stay home and/or practice social distancing, theme parks — mindful of brand maintenance — turned to delivering amusement and education via the web and social media.

Palace Entertainment’s Idlewild & SoakZone in Ligonier, Pennsylvania, stepped forward after reading a Facebook post from a frustrated mother who was trying to juggle working from home and assisting her children with online school work. The park added a Kids’ Page to its website with printable, amusement-themed activity sheets such as coloring pages and word searches.

“We wanted to offer families a bit of a break from the craziness that is our new ‘normal,’” explained Jeff Croushore, the park’s director of marketing, to AT. “Now, especially, we all need to take a break from our work and enjoy some smiles together.”

Idlewild is eyeing May 16 as a possible launch date for its 143rd season. SWP’s Sesame Place parks in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, and (debuting in 2021) San Diego provided coloring pages via their websites featuring the beloved Sesame Street characters. The company’s Busch Gardens and SeaWorld properties offered free online educational resources dedicated to wild animals and nature, as did Orlando’s Gatorland through its Facebook and YouTube channels.

Additionally, the SeaWorld parks and HFE’s Wild Adventures Theme Park in Valdosta, Georgia, posted assurances that their animal collections would continue receiving round-the-clock attention — with SeaWorld noting that the CDC has found “no evidence that coronavirus is transmissible from humans back to animals.” The Valdosta facility, meanwhile, was eyeing a May reopening.

Disney was keeping park fans actively apprised of developments at Disney’s Animal Kingdom, posting news and photos of the Central Florida park’s latest animal newborns. They included a female zebra foal and a female porcupine, was shared by Disney Parks Blog (above). Idlewild & SoakZone in Ligonier, Pa., offered printable coloring pages (right) and other activity sheets online. COURTESY DISNEY PARKS BLOG, IDLEWILD & SOAKZONE

**Nintendo World attractions at Universal Studios Hollywood and Universal Studios Japan in Osaka.**

“Our construction projects around the globe... all remain active and on track under protocols established by government officials and with their support,” wrote Tom Williams, chairman and CEO of Universal Parks & Resorts.

Although business in any area of the industry may be far from proceeding as usual, there is a vital undercurrent of confidence that it will recover and emerge stronger from this extended pause. There is also the expectation that when the gates are flung wide once again, the reaction of patrons will be nothing short of joyous. In the meantime, through their customary innovation, theme parks are doing their part to unite and heal.

“More than ever, our world needs to hear ‘I love you,’” said Idlewild’s Jeff Croushore. “We can all do small things to help our neighbors and spread kindness. It is what we are called to do.”

— Additional reporting by Tim Baldwin

Theme parks are keeping patrons and fans engaged remotely via various digital platforms. News of wild animal births at Disney’s Animal Kingdom, including a female zebra foal and a female porcupine, was shared by Disney Parks Blog (above). Idlewild & SoakZone in Ligonier, Pa., offered printable coloring pages (right) and other activity sheets online. COURTESY DISNEY PARKS BLOG, IDLEWILD & SOAKZONE

“Although Walt Disney World Resort is temporarily closed, Disney’s Animal Care Team is continuing to provide top-notch care to the thousands of animals who roam our savanna and seas,” wrote Dr. Mark Penning, the Disney parks’ vice president of animals, science and environment, on the company’s blog. “We are diligently following state and federal guidelines to ensure the health and safety of our dedicated team.”

For those seeking home-delivered park entertainment on the human end of the spectrum, Disney did not disappoint — presenting a first-of-its-kind online performance by the Dapper Dans, the iconic barbershop quartet from Disneyland’s Main Street U.S.A. The musicians jumped online from their homes to sing one of their all-time favorite tunes, “When You Wish Upon A Star,” and invited song requests from viewers for future video appearances.

Creative engagement was on tap, too, thanks to Disney’s “Imagining in a Box,” a 32-part online program. The Legoland Resort properties in Central Florida and Southern California, closed until at least mid-April, challenged their million-plus social media followers more interactively with Lego-brick projects.

**Building on dreams**

While construction on highly anticipated new attractions reportedly has been halted during the shutdown at Disney and SeaWorld parks in Central Florida and Southern California, Universal is said to be forging ahead with on several major projects in the U.S. and overseas.

As reported by the Orlando Business Journal, a March 24 internal memo indicated that work was continuing on the company’s forthcoming Epic Universe theme parks at Universal Orlando Resort and the 2021-debuting Universal Beijing Resort in China, as well as the Super

**AMUSEMENT TODAY 5 COVID-19 Special Edition 2020**
Manufacturers and suppliers forge through the outbreak crisis

“We are all in this together, and I think showing our humanity will allow us to get through this the best we can.”

— Adam Sandy, Ride Entertainment

**INTERNATIONAL** — As the COVID-19 global pandemic makes its harsh impact on businesses around the world, manufacturers and suppliers are finding their paths through ongoing events.

“When we are cleared to work again, we have a train to ship out to Six Flags Over Georgia immediately,” Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters, Inc., President Tom Rebbie told *Amusement Today.* “We have others ready to assemble and get out to parks too.”

Situations vary from state to state and country to country. Pennsylvania requirements first indicated that PTCo had to shut down, then it was allowed to resume work, but mere days later was told to shut down completely.

“When we get back, our employees are not going to fall into a hole. They’re going to be taken care of,” said Rebbie.

“Currently, Larson International is able to maintain normal operation through this slowdown,” said Hunter Novotny, mechanical engineer. “We are doing our best to keep everyone healthy with cleaning stations for tools, hands and other items throughout the shop. We are following all county, state, and federal mandates and have constructed a lengthy ‘what if’ road map for the foreseeable future. Our goal is to try and weather the storm with the rest of the country whether that is from our shop or from home.”

Novotny reports that if any park or carnival is doing ride preparation for the season, Larson’s ride and parts department is stocked and ready for incoming orders of rides or parts for its portfolio of products. “We are sanitizing incoming and outgoing boxes for precaution and will do our best to maintain our availability through these times,” he said.

“Our employees have been briefed on our processes of going forward as long as the virus is a concern,” Novotny told *AT.* “We are asking anyone who does not feel 100% to stay home without question and are using the CDC guidelines to request employees to self-monitor symptoms for several days or contacting a medical professional before consideration of return. We have policies in place for deep cleaning our facility in the case of an exposure to the virus and a continuation on our high level of service to our valued clients,” said Sara Seay, director of sales and marketing. “Premier has gone beyond the state requirements and imposed a number of detailed directives to ensure worker safety. Safety is the key consideration followed by the desire of the team members to continue to produce for our clients. Premier is always focused on innovation, so we are using new technologies to allow in-office staff to work seamlessly with remote workers. The same technologies are being used with our clients to provide a level of confidence that once the crisis subsides their projects will still be moving ahead.”

“Things are getting better in Asia,” said Jim Seay, president, Premier Rides. “We have associates at ground zero in Wuhan, and they are back at work and feeling positive about the future. Parks are reopening in Japan and China including the front areas of the Disney parks. There is a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel!”

In reference to whether parts were available, they confirmed that Premier Rides just made multiple shipments to parts orders for properties that are restocking. “Our other large partners — Gerstlauer, Funtime, Lagotronics Projects, etc. — are shipping parts as needed. With parks in South Korea and other countries starting to reopen we are seeing orders for Skycoaster parts come in,” said Sandy.

“Honestly we are taking this one day at a time. While we want our new projects, revenue shares and operations to be open, we realize that it will be a process to get past the worst of things and to get the parks up and running,” he added. “That being said, we are using this time to prepare. Our teams in all our divisions will be able to hit the ground running once parks in North America start to reopen. Our operations in New York are set for the season and inspections are completed, we just need to open the doors. In addition, we can certainly help parks around the country. If any properties need help to make up time on installation or maintenance projects, we can come in like a SWAT team and help them attack large projects such as the tunnel!”

Rides 4 U and SBF/VISA Group have shipped a first-of-its-kind, 70-foot-tall Air Balloon Observation Tower with a unique sports theme to Adventureland Long Island of New York. COURTESY RIDES 4 U

Ride Entertainment isn’t seeing any difficulties in fulfilling parts requests. It is currently fulfilling Skycoaster

> See SUPPLIERS, page 7
As chain replacement, vehicle repair or other large off-season work that was delayed. We are all in this together, and I think showing our humanity will allow us to get through this the best we can.”

Len Soled of Rides 4 U is staying positive. “We’ve been fortunate during these circumstances,” Soled said. “We’ve continued to be here for our people, and we’ve been fortunate that product has arrived from Europe. We’ve been able to see production out of the factories.”

A new KMG Freak Out ride from The Netherlands is going to Paul Maurer Shows. “It’s encouraging to see product coming out,” said Soled. “To know once you get the green light, you are ready to go — existing equipment and new equipment.”

Soled feels the amusement industry recovers quickly in such times. “We look back through the history books. Our industry is never impacted from the economical side. It has always been affected by weather. I think that will be the case. People still need to bring entertainment to their life to bring balance. We found that even during the Depression people were spending money on amusement park rides. That was what they could look forward to,” he said. “Everyone is going to want to get out of the house. Amusement parks and carnivals are going to be upbeat.”

Rides 4 U has also delivered a new observation tower ride to Adventureland in Long Island.

“People are excited to get this new equipment and get their existing equipment up and operating. People are still having their maintenance teams go through the attractions to get things ready. We’ve been busy shipping out spare parts,” said Soled. “I’ve always maintained a high level of inventory. In the recent weeks we’ve put even extra parts on the shelves.”

Vekoma Rides continues to work on existing and new projects and has maintained business meetings via video conference with clients on a daily basis. “Even during this difficult time, our clients are looking ahead and working on new projects and ideas with us for the next seasons. We realize that the parks suffer a considerable loss of income, however we are positive that the industry will come out of this crisis stronger than ever,” said Ricardo Etges, global business development manager.

“Our production facilities in the Netherlands are still open and our Chinese facility is starting up again after two months’ closure,” Etges shared with AT. “It is understandable that there may be delays as our sub-vendors are also in the same situation, but for spare parts we maintain a decent stock to be able to assist our existing customers. Vekoma Rides Parts & Services is fully staffed, we are still able to support parks with phone calls, conference calls, photos and screen sharing while they remain 24-hours available for emergencies through our 24/7 emergency number for VRPS. Our goal still is to meet urgent delivery times. However, this depends on multiple external parties and government restrictions in this crisis time. Some borders are closed, and travel restricted. So, there is a possibility that goods are delayed, and site visits cannot be made due to this.”

In a prepared statement released late March, Sunkid confirmed that parts availability would be ongoing. “One thing is certain: We will make it through this difficult time together and cooperate on new projects once more. That is why this is the right moment to focus on the future and to work on planning and developing new ideas and projects more intensely than ever,” the statement read. Sunkid reported the planning department continues to be available through the crisis.

In times of crisis, inspirational stories abound. National news will find specific examples of people stepping up, sometimes at personal expense to work toward the greater good. The amusement industry is no stranger to these encouraging efforts.

Daniels Wood Land is a theming company that builds whatever a client wants. Innovative tree houses and cabins, shooting galleries, themed sets and playgrounds — all projects that push the company into thinking creatively and producing signature pieces for each customer.

Based in California, the company was swept up with an abundance of other businesses deemed “nonessential.” Enter Ron Daniels, president of Daniels Wood Land. “As the crisis began to escalate, we saw things being shut down. All the shelter-in-place orders started coming down the line,” Daniels said. “Talking with my upper management, one of them suggested we call our city leaders to see if there was something we could do to help. We didn’t want to go home and [worry about] the problem; we wanted to help solve it.”

One of the manager’s next-door neighbors was a fire marshal. When asked what the city needed, the suggestion of protective gowns seemed a doable option. Personal protection equipment for first responders was in short supply. Knowing if medical teams became exposed, they’d be “down for the count. It was going to reduce the capacity to care for the sick. That’s scary! We all have a stake in this game here,” said Daniels. “All of us could end up knowing someone who could pass away from this virus.”

Daniels felt the fight should be personal. Recalling Henry Ford switched to making tanks during World War I, that was what connected the dots. Knowing the creation of themed environments was not possible in the weeks ahead, Daniels could get his workers creating what was really needed.

“We didn’t have the materials on hand, but we were able to get a sample of what needs to be made,” he told AT. “The company was able to get the needed supplies. ‘Daniels Wood Land has made a career out of making things we’ve never done before. Every project is something we’ve never done before. Figuring out how to set up this production line was something we have never done before.’”

With the task at hand, workers cleared out the new 37,000-square-foot facility and pushed projects out of the way. Within a matter of two days, the company was receiving orders. Finding success in obtaining more raw materials, the company was making them as fast as it could and still is. At full capacity, the company estimates it can produce 120,000 gowns a day. Protective gowns are the main item in production, but the company has samples of face masks and face shields they are exploring.

This forward-thinking innovation has two-fold benefits: keeping employees working and filling a dire need during an extraordinary crisis. Although these times seem devastating, the industry is getting through it and learning how to become stronger in the process.

Stepping up to meet the needs of the pandemic, Daniels Wood Land switched gears from creating themed structures to producing vital protective gowns for first responders. COURTESY RON DANIELS/DANIELS WOOD LAND
There is no part of the independent industry has gone dark. It's brought about by the coronavirus and we are working with our clients to ensure they have the right insurance coverages and solutions to alleviate the financial burden brought about by the coronavirus and the shutdowns.

For the first time ever, the entire industry has gone dark. There is no part of the industry that has not been affected. However, there are large and small operators in the amusement industry. Some operators have deeper coffers to dig into in times like these, while others rely on each season’s finances to stay operational.

Unfortunately, every one of our clients are shut down due to the COVID-19 health emergency. We and our insurance partners are working on solutions to reflect the lack of business operations and exposure by our clients. We realize we are all in this together, and one solution will not fit all. Renewal dates, locations and season are all issues to be looked at, as well as what coverages are still needed, and which can be suspended or postponed,” said Rick D’Aprile, Vice-President of Amusement Entertainment Risk Insurance Associates (AERIA), a company that provides insurance coverage to both mobile and fixed site amusement facilities. “All are impacted. The needs is that many events are canceling and not rescheduling. Also [of concern], with so many people out of work, will there be money to spend on entertainment? We hope this will all be over soon but until then, we hope every one stays safe and healthy.”

Drew Tweskbury, Director of Sales and Marketing for McGowan Allied Specialty Insurance, added, “We have seen a virus universally affecting their vast array of clients in the mobile amusement, carnival concessionaire, fixed amusement park and water park spaces. “We see a lot of facilities and shows that are, sadly, having to shut their doors and will not open during this period of challenge. All our insurance carrier partners are actively and aggressively working on a class-wide solution to providing solutions to ease the economic burden on our clients. It’s not a one-size-fits-all type of situation, but our partners are being very, very creative about being proactive in partnership with us and our insureds through this awful, awful pandemic. We certainly understand that these are tough times for everybody, but first and foremost for us is our care for the safety and welfare of our clients and our employees. That absolutely comes first,” Tweskbury said.

“I am finding that my underwriters are very agreeable to working with my clients, but the clients and brokers need to be proactive, get in front of the ball, and let the underwriters know what’s happening with their business,” said Dave Harman of AJG Risk Management Services. “It’s going to be really tough for everybody in our industry until this thing gets through. But I think if the clients, the parks, the carnivals, the concessionaires, the underwriters will work with them to solve whatever problems that can be solved. I’ve reached out to each of my clients, asked them where they stand, what their thinking is, and I’m going to do whatever it takes to help my clients survive. I haven’t seen any insurance company say they’re not going to do the same. We can’t just sit and watch the world go down, having more hand sanitizers and handwashing stations—much more than there were in the past. Although, a lot of our businesses have done a really good job of that. I just don’t think it was advertised, because its importance wasn’t at the forefront. Until now, it wasn’t necessary to advertise it. It’s been a taken a back seat. But I think it will become more prevalent, probably everywhere. There will be less people crowding together. I think they’ll just be more open areas on the fairgrounds and at events. I know that OABA is putting together a list of best practices, but the requirements really are being driven by the CDC.”

This sentiment is shared by Ryan Wilkerson, President of his own CEO of HAAS & Wilkerson Insurance: “When this is finally over, we need to give [consumers] confidence to come back and join us again. More visibly cleaning things by disinfecting and cleaning and putting our best foot forward will show our consumers that we’re taking their safety seriously not just from a ride safety standpoint, but from a health safety standpoint, as well.”

Firestone Financial, a subsidiary of Berkshire Bank, a Massachusetts-based nationwide business lender serving the amusement and entertainment industry, has taken a proactive approach to the current situation by offering a three-month deferral on existing loans for all who contact them requesting assistance due to the effects of COVID-19 on their businesses. “We understand the impact this may have on our customers’ businesses,” said Michael Smith, Executive Vice President, Chief Operating Officer of Firestone Financial. “Helping our customers preserve their businesses during this rapidly evolving and unprecedented situation is our top priority. Their focus right now should be on celebrating after having been confined to their homes for weeks or months. At the same time, there is a common belief that people are still going to be a little nervous about having to go out and find their families, and they may be more cautious with how and where they spend their money. “I think they may want to take like a staycation. Maybe, for example, a couple-hour drive and spending a whole day with the family at a regional park, fair, or carnival,” said Gockelman.

The constant that appeared across the finance and insurance companies with whom AT spoke is that the amusement and entertainment industry hopes that with warmer weather coming, it will make the virus dissipate; that by late April or early May this will be behind us, people will be able to congregate again, and the state and local governments will do away with the bans on congregate. There is also a shared hope among this segment of the amusement industry that the 显示器 audience has taken a proactive approach to the current situation by offering a three-month deferral on existing loans for all who contact them requesting assistance due to the effects of COVID-19 on their businesses.

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Industry associations, organizations communicate, meet with technology

The show on the road. With lightning speed, that all changed.

Just weeks ago, owners and operators of amusement and theme parks, carnivals and fairs were in control. Openings were set. New and exciting rides and attractions already had been advertised. Carnival staff were kicking tires.

Everyone was ready to get the show on the road. With lightning speed, that all changed.

“The hardest part of coping with this crisis is not knowing when it will end,” Chiecko said. “It has been a huge and collaborative effort regionally. They are including our own, and will look to our industry for fun and togetherness once this crisis has ended.”

“Being all in this together” is a common phrase heard throughout the industry.

Kim Samarelli, executive director of the New Jersey Attractions Association (NJAA), made every comment during a phone call meeting of the New Jersey Attractions Association (NJAA) to make sure we have a voice in D.C.

The International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) global offices are helping to relate information to its world-wide audience. And through the association’s COVID-19 Resource page, IAAPA is sharing advocacy efforts regionally.

IAAPA is hosting webinars and already has offered e-learning courses related to COVID-19 through its online learning management system. Topics included preparedness, crisis management, pandemic planning and working from home.

The association is producing an ongoing Q&A series with members from around the world on how they are managing the global COVID-19 situation. These topics include creating COVID-19 resources for staff, delaying opening day, clear communication and preparedness and how to engage guests when gates are closed.

“Now is the time to stay connected and to channel our powerful collective creativity to find and share innovative ideas and strategies to see each other through,” said Hal McEvoy, IAAPA president and CEO. “We are all in this together. Let’s be sure we are there for the families, friends and colleagues who support us, including our own, and will look to our industry for fun and togetherness once this crisis has ended.”

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WE’RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER!
Family-owned parks display hope, work to protect parks and guests

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

NORTH AMERICA — It’s a waiting game for many family-owned amusement parks across the nation as the coronavirus continues to have dramatic impact throughout the industry and the daily lives of Americans.

Amusement Today reached out to a number of park owners and executives for their comments related to the crisis and how they are dealing with it at their properties.

Was an exception to the rule
Fun Spot America, which has operations in Orlando and Kissimmee, Florida, as well as Atlanta, remained operational while most attractions — especially in the Orlando area — were closed due to the pandemic.

However, the parks did announce Sunday, March 22, on their website the following: “In cooperation with state and federal guidelines, we continue to focus on the safety, health and wellbeing of our guests, employees, and community. We are temporarily closing until further notice all Fun Spot America Theme Park locations effective March 23.”

According to John Arie, Jr., CEO Fun Spot America, the properties had been operating pretty much “as normal” until the closing announcement was made.

He said the two Florida properties had been running daily and Atlanta only on weekends in an effort to cover bills and pay employees.

Arie noted that crowds had been “good,” yet down quite a bit due to the closure of major theme parks in the Orlando area during the traditional bustling spring break. There had been a “frenzied change” in operational procedures at the Fun Spot properties since the outbreak hit home.

Arie said hand sanitizer dispensers were located throughout the parks and personnel frequently wiped down handrails, doorknobs — just about anything a person touches.

Open and shut
For Joyland Amusement Park in Lubbock, Texas, the scenario was quite different.

“We began our 2020 season on March 7 with a good start,” owner David Dean told AT. Weather forced the park to stay closed the following day, but Joyland was able to continue operations the following Saturday, March 14.

“We were blessed with a great day,” Dean said of the March 14 response. “We took lots of extra steps to keep guests safe.”

Staff was trained to properly clean using disinfectants and hand sanitizer was placed throughout the park for guests. According to Dean, as the virus started to spread nationally, Lubbock city government issued more restrictive measures.

“We were planning on reopening on Wednesday, March 17, but after several conversations with the city manager, we decided to close,” he said of the outcome.

The part-time staff of 80 was laid off and full time employees were cut to 20-30 hours per week.

“We’ve had to cut spending on most everything,” Dean continued. “We’re hoping Texas declares Lubbock County a disaster area, allowing us to qualify for SBA (Small Business Administration) disaster relief.”

Without a disaster declaration, Dean said the rest of the park staff will be laid off.

Yet, Joyland is using its social media in attempts to keep a positive spin on things, including the sale of the park’s “enjoyment cards.”

Once open again, the business owner said he is considering adding more morning openings through the summer schedule to accommodate guests.

New level
Ken Taylor, vice president of Jenkinson’s Boardwalk & Aquarium, Point Pleasant Beach, New Jersey, said the arcade and game operations at the seaside resort were closed down before it was mandated by the state.

“We voluntarily closed down because we thought it was the right thing to do to try to flatten the curve. The ride park was scheduled to open April 4 and unfortunately we have had to lay off employees in retail, food services, games and arcades,” he said of the situation.

Taylor believes the virus will change all of our lives individually and the way we operate our businesses.

“Purell stations are going to be fixtures at every ticket booth, arcade counter, POS station, kiosk — everywhere,” the park executive emphasized. “We’ve always prided ourselves in keeping our property clean, but we are going to take this to a new level. We also have to add precautions with our employees and their dealings with the public.”

He predicts gloved ride operators, arcade attendants and cashiers will become the norm and that it will be a while before people will want to venture out into crowded areas.

Jenkinson’s marketing department continues to post updates as they become available, especially for its educational aquarium.

“We are trying to send positive thoughts out there to our customers,” Taylor added. “I really think that after this is all over, people will have a new appreciation for simple everyday things that we have - sadly, things we have taken for granted.”

Where we stand now is proceeding forward with caution, but optimism, that the 2020 season will occur," stressed Christopher Maier, owner of Land of Make Believe, Hope, New Jersey.

Also closed by the New Jersey mandate, Maier continued, saying: “My pilot training emphasized always to plan for the worst-case scenario. We have financially operated our amusement park with that priority.”

Out west
The crisis is much more stringent in California, where residents have been ordered to stay home until at least April 19.

“Our immediate concern has been to protect our employees and their families,” said Marq Lipton, vice president of marketing and sales at Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, Santa Cruz, California. “Initially we gave our year-round employees 40 hours of paid time off to accommodate those in high risk groups, those who didn’t feel comfortable coming in, and those that needed to attend to their families. We called-off part-time seasonal employees.”

“Then we were able to give some of our year-round employees the opportunity to work from home,” Lipton stated. “A very small number of critical operational staff, including a Coronavirus Task Force, reported to the park. We made the decision to pay our year-round employees for the week our state’s ‘shelter in place’ order started, regardless of whether they were able to work from home or not.”

The Boardwalk was having a record start to the year and gearing up for spring break when the crisis hit the West Coast. Hiring is also at a standstill at the property.

Like other parks, Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk will follow recommendations and direction from state and local health officials once the order is lifted.

Lipton said, “We expect to continue increased cleaning and sanitation efforts.”

As for reaching out to customers, “We are focusing on social media efforts with virtual rides, light and reassuring content as well as some fun history. We want to stay connected with our guests, and bring the Boardwalk to them while keeping everyone safe during this difficult time.”

April is lost
Some other parks with scheduled April debuts have had to delay their openings as well.

“We were in the midst of hiring when the situation escalated into a shutdown,” said Justin Hays, general manager of Cliff’s Amusement Park in
The state of affairs was mirrored at Connecticut’s Quassy Amusement & Waterpark, where personal interviews for seasonal positions have shifted to online components.

“He are currently in our off season, and the only impact internally has been on our sales team,” Quassy President Eric Anderson asserted. “We had to reduce their hours due to schools and businesses being closed.”

Both Cliff’s and Quassy were gearing up for late April openings, but the parks will remain idle.

“We have accepted the fact that April probably is lost,” Hays noted. “We are pivoting to May as our opening.”

Amusement parks and other attractions in Connecticut — under a state mandate handed down the week of March 17 — were ordered closed until April 30.

“We are monitoring what our state and local agencies are recommending at this point,” Anderson said of the directive. “It’s wait-and-see for us. Hopefully we’ll be able to open sometime in May.”

He added that Quassy will be stepping up disinfectant and public space cleaning procedures once operational.

Both parks said they will keep guests informed via social media regarding park operations, including opening dates.

The state order also put an end to the annual job fairs held in the resort’s co-owner Brian Knoebel office, so summer job applications are now being accepted online.

The state order also put an end to the annual job fairs held in the resort’s co-owner Brian Knoebel office, so summer job applications are now being accepted online. As for full-time personnel, Nelson noted, “We have 24 full-time employees and most of them have been with us a long time. We don’t want to lose them — it will cost us — but that’s the way it goes.”

The park has an annual “preview” weekend in late April for season pass holders, with selected rides and attractions in operation.

“It’s up to the county to decide what we can do,” Nelson said of the uncertainty at this point. “We’re booking picnics like before and have a few new dates for the ballroom, but don’t know — for certain — when we can open.”

He further explained that Erie County generates 7% of its gross income from the amusement industry, which includes bowling alleys, amusement parks and other attractions.

“We have to pay some attention to us,” Nelson said in reference to the negative business impacts and how they will trickle down.

Like other parks, Waldameer is taking steps to install hand sanitizers at picnic shelters, kiosks and concession stands. More soap dispensers will also be available in washrooms.

Another Pennsylvania park delays opening

Knoebels Amusement Park in Elysburg, Pennsylvania, slated to start its season April 25, has pushed back its scheduled opening to May 9, according to the resort’s co-owner Brian Knoebel.

“We remain hopeful we’ll be able to open at that time,” Knoebel told AT. He noted that Knoebels Lumber was operating with regular hours to serve the community while the family’s Nickle Plate Bar & Grill was offering take-out orders only.

The resorts’ Three Ponds Golf Course is closed until further notice.

“We’ve been providing regular updates via our Team Knoebels Facebook group, and relying on our managers to ensure those who don’t have Facebook are receiving our company communications,” he said of communicating with employees. “We’re currently exploring options for virtual rehire meetings. Since we’ve canceled our job fairs and in-person interviews, we’ve launched virtual interviews.”

Interested applicants can apply online at www.knoebels.com/job and will receive a call to schedule a virtual interview, interview via FaceTime, Skype or Google Duo.

Knoebel went on to say, “We’re analyzing our existing thorough cleaning routines and enhancing where necessary. This includes our currently open facilities, where we are regularly sanitizing all high-touch points, and providing hand sanitizer for guests wishing to use it during their visits.”

“We’re making an effort to ensure our social media posts provide a mixture of information and purely bright spots in our fans’ newsfeeds, such as Knoebels coloring sheets and user-generated content,” he concluded.

Next chapter

Paul Borchardt, president of Wonderland Amusement Park, Amarillo, Texas, said the scheduled April 4 opening of the property is questionable.

“We’re in the maintenance mode — getting ready for our annual inspections,” he told AT. “If we don’t make that date (April 4), it will — hopefully — be the Saturday before Easter.”

He noted that with schools closed - many until the end of April - student outings are in jeopardy and it is also affecting hiring.

“Everybody is scared,” he said of the situation. “We’re interviewing (for jobs) but can’t get into the schools and people are hunkered down and can’t leave their homes to come here.”

What’s really taking its toll now is the fact that there is no money coming in, he added.

“It costs a lot of money just to open and people don’t realize that,” Borchardt continued. “We’re doing everything we possibly can to stay in touch with customers. It’s like the old saying: ‘stay tuned for the next chapter.’”

As for losing operational days to the crisis, he pointed out, “There’s never a make-up in this business.”

In his closing comment, David Dean stated the following; “We encourage everyone to pray for our country and world and try to remain positive.”

Wonderland Amusement Park acknowledged that school closures will effect group outings and the park’s hiring process.

AT/GARY SLADE
Workers pack-up the remains of the closed Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. COURTESY THE HOUSTON CHRONICLE

The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo was cancelled after nine days into its 20-day run. RCS Carnival Group, one of the main food vendors for the rodeo (out of 36), found a silver lining from the crisis by donating uneaten food to the Houston Food Bank. This included bread, produce, dairy and some meats.

On what was to be opening day of the Miami-Dade (Fla.) Youth Fair it was ordered to close, due to the outbreak. A week later, a tented area on the fairgrounds was repurposed as a temporary 250-bed hospital with a mobile X-ray machine.

The Tommy Thompson Youth Center at the Wisconsin State Fair Park has become a donation facility for personal protection equipment for health care providers who are treating patients. This includes N95 masks, dust masks, or paper surgical masks, safety glasses, protective gowns or suits, hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes and sprays, and disposable medical gloves.

Every fair, along with state governments, is working on different timelines as to when things might get back to some sense of normalcy. For some it may be sooner than later. The Minnesota State Fair, St. Paul, is supposed to take place August 27 through September 7, however, the Minnesota Department of Health feels that could be when the outbreak is in full swing in their state.

A spokesman for the department of health stated, “Minnesota needs the fair, now more than ever.” Executive Vice President Jerry Hammer responded, via email, “He’s right, and we’ll deliver.”

“We’re going full speed ahead with preparations for this year’s fair and working hard to make our very special brand of late-summer magic.” Governor Tim Walz and state Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm said they’ll look at data over the next several weeks and months and see how the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve before making a decision on this year’s fair.

The Ohio State Fair staff is feeling the pinch too, even though that fair isn’t until the summer. “Fairs, specifically, have a lot of moving pieces. There are hundreds of vendors, thousands of competitors, dozens of entertainers, countless volunteers and staff that all play different roles and all need to work in tandem to put on our fairs,” said Alicia Shoults, marketing & PR director and assistant general manager. “Whether a youth exhibitor is deciding to buy an animal to exhibit, a carnival provider is building their route across the country, or our leadership team is setting fair dates in conjunction with Ohio’s other county and independent fairs, there are decisions that can’t be made in a vacuum.”

When asked about keeping to the traditional late July timeframe, Shoults said, “It is our hope that the Ohio State Fair will be able to proceed as planned. Right now, we’ve been providing each fair department with the resources they need to reach out to their stakeholders and keep them updated about where we stand.” She feels upbeat about the collaboration of fairs nationwide during this outbreak. “The fair industry has always been one where people come together, share ideas and work as a team. Coming together during the time of this crisis is just another example of that. I feel fortunate to be a part of the International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE), which facilitates those relationships and camaraderie through networking, COVID-19 roundtables, message boards and more. We’re also seeing that our industry is #FairStrong, with many fair facilities being used for emergency food and medical supply storage, as temporary hospitals, and more. We really all are in this together.”

The portable industry is experiencing the pain as well. Chris Lopez, vice president of RCS Inc. explains some of the issues above and beyond what a brick-and-mortar business has incurred: “Transportation costs, refunds for those who purchased pre-sale tickets for events, obligations to employees and families that depend on RCS and those events, maintenance schedules for that equipment, annual NDT, insurance inspections, etc., all must happen and,
of course, those financial obligations all must be met.”

Lopez is upbeat and sees the light at the end of the tunnel, stating, “As a family-owned-and-operated company, we have come together with not only our fair partners but also the communities we serve. Donations to food banks plus receiving the countless e-mails, social media messages and comments are all very uplifting. It really shows the support and ensures that when we do open up at the fairs/festivals it will be huge and better than ever.”

“We are predominantly seeing the same challenges as any other business at this time,” said Lynda Franc, corporate marketing director, North American Midway Entertainment (NAME). “The one difference that we have noticed is how the industry of fairs and events are all turning to each other to motivate one another, stay strong and just support each other in any way we can. Where other industries may be isolated from city to city, our relationships across North America are collectively coming together as much as we can — whether it be information sharing or words of encouragement, we’re all in this together and together we’ll continue to forge on!”

The northwest has been hit hard as it was the first area that endured many coronavirus cases resulting in heavy shutdown and people hunkering down. “This is serious business,” said Ron Burback, Sr., co-owner of Fantastick Traveling Shows, Portland, Oregon. One worker in the concessions department came down with the virus. Burback did lay off his crew so they can apply for unemployment. “All of our fairs are down until June now. What happens after that date, we’ll have to play by ear,” said Burback.

When asked about his company, Burback said, “We are all right until June. We are hoping for the best and planning for the worst.” He indicated that the show may not open this season. When asked about personnel, he said, “Our employees are just wonderful — very positive. No one has said anything negative. They are very understanding.”

The carnival owner offered a solution that centers on the government allowing companies to do self-testing of employees and attendees once the worst has passed. “They [organization] would keep a log at work or at a fair or festival — testing at an event.” He feels this could open restaurants as well. “We do it with [testing for] drugs. I think we could get a lot of businesses back open,” said Burback.

Jay Strates, director of finance and administration, Strates Shows, sees something that nonentertainment business may not encounter. “I think because we are in the large-scale event business we were the first to be shut down, and we may be the last to be able to open again.” Looking down the road, Strates said, “My favorite thing about this industry is the resilience of our people, both the owners and the employees. We will get through this and come out on the other side stronger than we were.”

John Hanschen, president of Thomas Carnival, talked about what they are doing with their operation: “Communication via e-mail and telephone continues. All events planned for April have cancelled until 2021. Events during May and beyond are still a go for now. Some employees chose to go home to be with their families, others are hunkered down at our winter facilities. No workers are currently on the road.” Looking ahead he is optimistic. “Our product is popular. We will come back with a bang when the restrictions are lifted.”

On March 15, the Collier County Fair, Naples, Florida, shut down after only four days of operation. It was supposed to continue through the end of the month. Reithoffer Shows, the carnival on its midway, had this post on the last day of operation: “For the first time in our 124-year history, the phrase ‘The Show Must Go On’ just doesn’t fit. Our industry has faced so many hardships recently with labor shortages, catastrophic weather events, impossible governmental regulations, increasing fuel expenses and now a pandemic. Not all of us will weather this storm. But the ones that do survive will be the ones who remember our ‘old school’ ways of supporting each other with kindness, understanding, hard work and perseverance.”

Some fairs have become proactive offering an assortment of things to turn this outbreak into a more positive experience. The State Fair of Texas is offering a downloadable coloring book with eight different coloring sheets with themes from the fair, staying true to its brand. The North Carolina State Fair, which doesn’t run until the fall is releasing at least one category from its competitions or a fun activity per week to get a jumpstart. Titled Fair Fun at Home, one activity available on the site was a thumbprint Ferris wheel craft (all items can be seen from roads while in your car) and Color the Fair, a downloadable coloring sheet.

One of the positive outcomes that many carnival operators and fairgrounds agree on is there is now plenty of time to catch up on things, including maintenance, painting and ride refreshes. One midway provider is continuing digital transformation efforts to streamline administration and compliance. To raise at least a small portion of the lost revenue, some carnivals have been setting up their food trailers near their headquarters or location where the canceled event was supposed to occur. Ride sales are still continuing in anticipation of the season starting back up at some point in the future. “Europe is alive and breathing with production,” said Len Soled, President of New Jersey-based Rides 4 U. Soled said many assume that all of Europe is closed, which is not the case. “They are still manufacturing and shipping, still moving. No lag time. We are getting production. Thank God manufacturing is going on during these hard times. We are getting ready for opening day, wherever that is.”

The company represents S&S Worldwide, SBF/Visa Group and KMG and has sold numerous rides, including a unique sports-themed 70-foot observation tower for Adventureland, Farmingdale, New York. Called Air Balloon Observation Tower, the SBF/Visa Group product is the first of its kind anywhere in the world with eight specially molded gondolas themed as a tennis ball, baseball, soccer ball and golf ball. “We are really excited — it is one of the tallest rides in the park. The light show is one you won’t want to miss,” said Jeanine Gentile, marketing manager. Gentile said the tower fits in with their plan to keep the park family oriented.

Rides 4 U has also sold a trailer mounted KMG Freak Out to Paul Maurer Shows. After clearing customs, the ride traveled cross-country in late March to Huntington Beach, California. Maurer’s plan is to set the ride up, operate and test it, so that it’s ready to capture the attention of guests along the midway once he can resume shows. COURTESY RIDES 4 U

The Ohio State Fair remains hopeful it will be able to welcome visitors late in summer. However, it’s organizers and operators are already feeling the pinch that the current COVID-19 shutdown is having on exhibitors, vendors and entertainers.

AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON
One of the uniquely defining characteristics of the modern family entertainment centers is that they are adaptable. The roofs protect most of them from seasonal or poor weather. Pricing options are readily available for guests of any budget to find a fit.

That’s exactly how many FECs attempted to treat the onset of COVID-19 in the U.S., by adapting.

As soon as states started setting limits on the number of people allowed to gather together, Urban Air Adventure Park facilities adjusted their capacity. They altered the play passes so that all guests were on a limited timeline, and only 100 or fewer guests were allowed in the play area at a time.

However, adaptability such as this was not going to be enough as states began to increase restrictions and limit what businesses could be open. On their own or by government request, FECs had to close their doors to guests.

“We proactively elected to close all five of our venues nearly a week before the mandated shutdown,” said Jonah Sandler, founder of the Scene75 chain of FECs. “We felt that doing so was required for us to fully adhere to one of Scene75’s core values of putting people first.”

With closings came the questions of what to do about staff. Unlike amusement and theme parks which were just beginning their hiring processes in March, the nation’s FECs were open and operating. They were fully staffed.

“Closing a week early, while economically painful to miss an additional weekend of activity, was in the best interest of our family of team members and guests,” added Sandler. “Upon announcing our closure, we agreed to pay all staff members in full for the following two weeks despite asking them to stay home. Wage and benefit payments were extended from days to weeks, and possibly months, many facilities have done their best to continue helping ensure their staff would receive an income.

“In the wake of closing our parks in order to protect our communities, we convened with leaders of brands who are currently seeing a surge in demand to help park employees find work,” said Michael Browning, CEO of Urban Air Adventure Parks, which has more than 200 facilities open or under construction in the U.S. “We connected our nationwide staff of more than 12,000 people with Amazon and RTC Recruitment for part-time employment. Qualified staff will be able to find employment with Amazon in as little as seven days with the option to return to Urban Air once our parks reopen.”

Management not only ensured employees had a chance to receive income, but the company’s top executives made a point to do their part to keep things as profitable longterm as possible, even during a shutdown.

“Our executive staff is not taking salary until we get back on track. Urban Air is a family owned-and-operated business. We made this decision as a team.”

Financial concerns are industry-wide during the shutdown. So much so that several FEC suppliers are doing their part to ensure their customers can reopen and remain profitable when restrictions are eased.

Creative Works, a supplier of laser tag and VR arenas among other attractions, is deferring payments for support and warranty plans on all attractions to help operators during the Coronavirus crisis.

“We truly love this industry and we appreciate everything that our clients do to create memories for their communities,” said Armando Lanuti, president of Creative Works. “These are difficult times, but hopefully this payment deferral can help ease the burden for operators as they make their way through this crisis.”

“Laserforce staff has been deployed, where possible, to work from home to continue providing the level of service required to support our operators,” said Jason Wallace of Laserforce, an industry laser tag provider. “Even though things are not normal, Laserforce is doing its part to continue operating for the benefit of its clients.”

“It’s a love for the industry and that feeling of community that is keeping FEC operators and their suppliers going during this sudden shutdown.”

“As people, we may be isolated now. But no one is alone,” said Sandler. “I encourage all in our industry to form new connections and friendships during this period of uncertainty; the more we are able to connect and share, the more we will see that we are closely tied. Let's be hopeful together.”

Projecting that hope to their guests — many of whom are under Stay-at-Home orders from local government — is something that the FEC operators have taken it upon themselves to do. The facilities have found ways to interact and entertain their guests, as they wait to welcome them back.

“We’ve been engaging with our Facebook audience via a game of virtual Bingo,” added Sandler. “We’re in the midst of planning live videos from management and myself as CEO to inform our guests of the challenges to reopen, while sharing our hope for the future.”

Social media has been key for facilities to stay in touch with their guests. “We want parents to know Urban Air understands the pressures of pandemic parenting. It led to the launch of Urban Air at Home,” said Browning. “It’s a program on our website and social channels to inspire and keep things fun! Each week we release coloring pages, photo hunts, games, ways to stay active at home and soon we will host FB Live Shots with special guests. It's important for our guests to stay connected to the brand they love and miss.”

The end desire of these online interactions is, of course, to have guests eager to return once businesses like FECs are allowed to reopen. After weeks of being told to avoid crowds and gatherings, it’s reasonable to assume guests may be apprehensive to return to entertainment attractions.

Embend has launched an ongoing education series of blogs and videos as well as web video series with key partners sharing their views. “We believe they will be highly beneficial, as will the toolkits we’ll give to Embend customers for free, that will include not only creative that they can use (across their social media channels, mailing lists, customer base), but a demand generation promotional idea they can implement to attract their customers back,” said Sara Paz, Embend’s chief marketing officer.

Embend recently debuted Mobile Wallet product, which uses Apple Pay and Google Wallet as an FEC cashless payment system, seems almost tailor-made for a world concerned with minimizing touching new surfaces. “We are working on the next wave of technology innovation with our partners Apple and Google so that contactless payments become truly contactless (mobile everything) across our entire solutions,” added Paz.

Urban Air Adventure Parks plans to educate guests when the time comes to reopen. “Without the foot traffic right now, we have been using this time wisely to go over everything with a fine-tooth comb. And make upgrades etc.,” said Browning. “We will also explain cleaning procedures online. It’s an extensive cleaning processes that involve vacuuming, and fogging with antimicrobial and antibacterial products. It leaves a protective coating on all surfaces.”

Virtual reality supplier Hologate has made certain its locations know that the company has seven full pallets of disinfectant wipes in its warehouse and they are ready to be shipped when needed. The company is also working on implementing an Ultraviolet C medical grade cleaning solution. The technology is lab tested to kill 99.99% of bacteria, virus and fungi.

While in the midst of implementing the best cleaning practices possible, Scene 75 is planning to “...identify what operating measures we would need to implement if asked to limit capacity in our buildings upon reopening,” stated Sandler. “We will also likely launch a donation program through which $1 from every play at a particular attraction will be donated to a local charity that changes monthly.”

Even with the current uneasiness as the industry is shuttered, FEC operators are looking towards the future with hope and positivity.

“We believe those first guests in the door [after the facilities reopen] will become our biggest brand ambassadors,” said Browning. “They will see our parks are a healthy environment and don’t want to return to us overnight. We believe they will be stronger than ever.”

I am confident that in time we will return. I will better appreciate the days where we operated well but perhaps did not set records; I will better appreciate the ability to give my team members hugs, fist bumps, and high-fives; I will better appreciate the freedom to spend time with those I love outside of home confinement; and I will better appreciate what we represent as an industry — fun industry that was down but not out.

“The world needs our industry and will need it like never before when life returns to normalcy. While crowds may not return to us overnight, I am confident that in time we will be stronger than ever.”

“Let’s be hopeful together.”

Sandler pithily offered: “When we reach the other side of this, I know that my outlook will be different. I will be better appreciate the days where we operated well but perhaps did not set records; I will better appreciate the ability to give my team members hugs, fist bumps, and high-fives; I will better appreciate the freedom to spend time with those I love outside of home confinement; and I will better appreciate what we represent as an industry — fun industry that was down but not out.

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“The world needs our industry and will need it like never before when life returns to normalcy. While crowds may not return to us overnight, I am confident that in time we will be stronger than ever.”
“It is quite surreal to see our park empty of happy guests and team members in the spring, and we cannot wait to reopen our gates and do what we do best — create fun. I am so proud of how our team has responded by taking care of each other and planning for the future during these very challenging times. We are also supporting our community through the donation of perishable items to our local food bank, planning blood drives and whatever else we can do to assist in the health and welfare of this amazing city. A situation like this makes us take pause and reflect on what is truly important, and no doubt together we will emerge stronger when we reach the other side of this event.”

—Jeffrey Siebert, Park President
Six Flags Fiesta Texas

“106 years of age, the San Antonio Zoo has survived the pandemic of 1918, the Great Depression, two world wars, economic crises and much more. Our team is bound and dedicated by and for our mission. While we realize it’s tough now, we know we will come out of this smarter and stronger. We have been interacting with us on social media which has kept us both connected and focused on reopening with a new-found mutual appreciation.”

—Tim Morrow, President and CEO
San Antonio Zoo

“The feeling on the street is people are trying to be upbeat. People are talking, We got to get open, but when we do get open, business will be pretty brisk.”

—Len Soled, President
Rides 4 U

“The hardest part for me is trying to figure out if there is anything I can do to help. I have made it a point to ask my neighbors if they need anything while I am at the grocery store. I might have got more than I bargained for, because for the first time ever I to had asked, ‘Where is the feminine products aisle?’ Back to the real part of the story: all my neighbors are doing the same for me. It makes me smile every time I get a text from a neighbor asking if we need anything from the store. The group chat has turned into a great way to laugh as everyone is trying to come up with the most ridiculous to the list. We should all try to have a good laugh everyday. It’s the best medicine.”

—Chris M. Gray, Vice President
Skyline Attractions

“As I work at home, educate at home, and try to keep life ‘normal,’ my industry family is making all the difference. I feel more connected than ever with colleagues and friends around the world. My son is, too, as he engages online with his favorite parks, zoos and aquariums and every encounter with ‘When can we go there?’ We are planning one heck of a summer road trip.”

—Susie Storey, Communications Director
IAAPA

“In some ways, we are approaching this similar to bad weather. We can’t control the weather, and we all know it can have very negative effects on our extremely seasonal business, but we have to keep moving forward and giving — and planning to give — our guests the best product possible for the days when it eventually clears up. We may have to deal with a few weeks of ‘rain,’ but someday soon, the sun will shine again.”

—Michael Schwitek, General Manager
Alabama Adventure

“Although the filtration and chlorination of water at a properly run water park will kill the Covid 19 virus, it can survive on surfaces outside of the water. Water parks also bring people in close proximity to each other which greatly increases the risk of person-to-person transmission. For that reason, water parks, aquatic centers and splash pads all over the world have closed or delayed reopening for the season. However, even with the unfortunate closures, there is some good news to be shared.

Great Wolf Lodge closed all its resorts on March 15 and plans to keep it resorts closed until May 19. Guests with reservations during the closure will receive a full refund or can reschedule for a future date. Those who do reschedule for another 2020 date by April 1 will receive a $50 resort credit for each night booked.

In a statement on its website Great Wolf Resorts posted, “These are challenging and unprecedented times, and we are very appreciative of the support from those within the community who have spent quality family time at our resorts over the years. We are looking forward to reopening soon and providing so many families with the fun-filled getaway they missed this spring.”

Great Wolf Resorts is encouraging families to take steps to maintain their emotional well-being, as well as their physical wellness. Great Wolf posted some ideas on greatwolf.com based on family-favorite activities at its resorts.

WhiteWater West has reported that several of its projects in China have restarted construction after being on hold for a couple of months. Workers at the Shanghai office have been reporting back to work, taking extra precautions to avoid transmission such as sanitizing frequently and checking the temperatures of visitors before they enter.

Aquatic Development Group remains open for business and is continuing to work on contracted projects wherever the company can. ADG is shipping equipment and parts as needed. A spokesperson added that the people within its employ are great problem solvers and they continue to look for creative ways in order to support clients while at the same time enabling the employees to care for themselves and the needs of their families.

ADG is also sharing a Wave Sound Meditation video with clients and members of the industry. Julie St. Louis, ADG marketing & communications specialist shared with AT, “During this stressful time, we wanted to focus on staying connected to our clients. At the same time, we recognize that it can’t (and shouldn’t) be business as usual. We thought about what was unique to our company that we could offer. The sound of waves crashing on a beach is peaceful and relaxing, and a calm escape from the everyday stresses — something that everyone can use right now. One of ADG’s key products is our WaveTek wave generation systems so it was a natural tie-in for us.

“We have also created a Mountainsides Sounds of Nature video similar to our wave one. Another natural tie-in, this is reflective of our ADG Mountainsides division and has been sent to all of our contacts who we work with in that industry,” added St. Louis. “We hope that these sounds bring positivity and peace to all who listen. This is a tough time for everyone and is especially taxing on our industry, we hope that this simple video can bring a smile or a moment of calmness to all who watch and hopefully provide some positivity for the future.”

—Amusement Today echoes these sentiments.
HELP STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS

Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Stay home when you’re sick, except to get medical care.

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least twenty seconds.

This poster is available for download at AmusementToday.com!

The entire Amusement Today staff donated their time and talents for the production of this special digital edition in support of our amusement industry family during this difficult time.