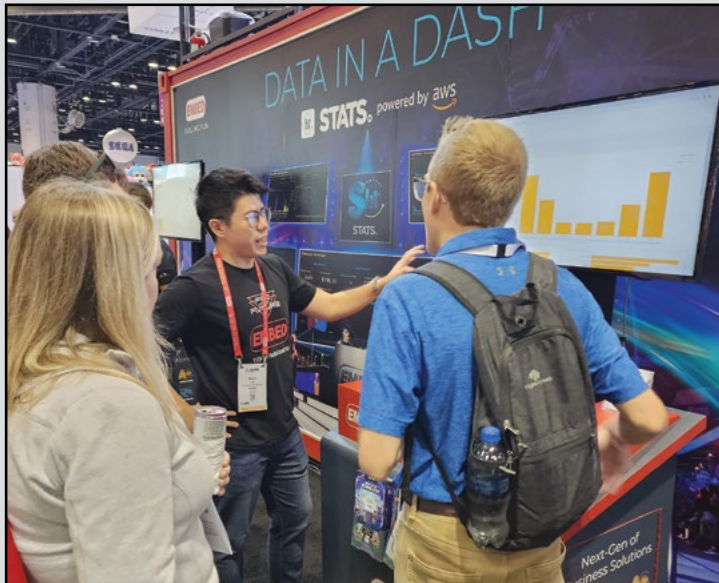




Embed's transformative tech opens gates to FEC of the future



When Embed debuted its latest innovation — STATS — at IAAPA Expo 2022, company representatives were eager to detail the tech's benefits to FEC clients. COURTESY EMBED

AT: Susan Storey
Special to Amusement Today

SINGAPORE — Family entertainment centers (FECs) are the fastest-growing — and arguably the most diverse — segment of the global attractions industry. Innovative technology has helped raise the bar for guests of all ages, making FECs easily accessible destinations that are unique, affordable and repeatable.

And just as video games, bowling alleys, competitive challenge games and even nostalgic classics are evolving, so too are the tools FEC owners and operators rely on to keep everything running smoothly.

The transition to cashless operation for the FEC industry had been steady but slow. However, as COVID-19 quickly moved around the world, the need for touchless solutions moved the timetable forward. It was no longer a nice idea; it was necessary.

Three years later, as the entire industry continues to re-emerge from the impact of the pandemic, both the enthusiasm for the benefits such solutions provide has led to greater demand. In short, the FEC of the future is here and happening now. To keep the industry moving forward, technological software solutions provider **Embed** is among those helping FECs and attractions remain relevant and competitive while becoming more efficient than ever.

Embed's focus on providing integrated cashless business management systems for FECs has evolved to help clients think about their company from a future viewpoint, beyond the current day-to-day operation. This work begins with providing seamless solutions for payment reporting and management.

► See **FUTURE**, page 6

New ownership preparing Family Kingdom for 2023



AT/RON GUSTAFSON

► See full article on pages 10-11

Camp Fimfo opens Cliff Carver by Wiegand, Texas' first alpine coaster

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

NEW BRAUNFELS, Texas — Camp Fimfo in Texas' Hill Country is one of two such named properties in the Lone Star State (the other being in Waco). Situated in a hilly, rugged setting, the 500-acre property near Canyon Lake offers a lot for campers to do. This property just secured some admittedly cool bragging rights.

Cliff Carver is the latest alpine coaster from **Wiegand Sports**. Not only is it the first one in the state of Texas, but it is also the first to go into a North American campground.

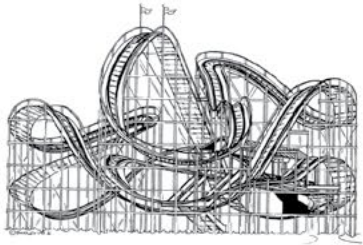
"It's always exciting to



Cliff Carver is the first alpine coaster in Texas. AT/TIM BALDWIN

► See **CLIFF**, page 8

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AMUSEMENT VIEWS

AT NOTEBOOK: John W.C. Robinson, jrobinson@amusementtoday.com

Seizing the opportunity



Robinson

When it comes down to it, life is all about opportunities and what we do with them. Do we talk to this new person and maybe make a new friend? Do we go someplace different for dinner and perhaps discover a new favorite restaurant or dish? Do we take a random idea we have one step further and let it flourish as a new product or industry concept?

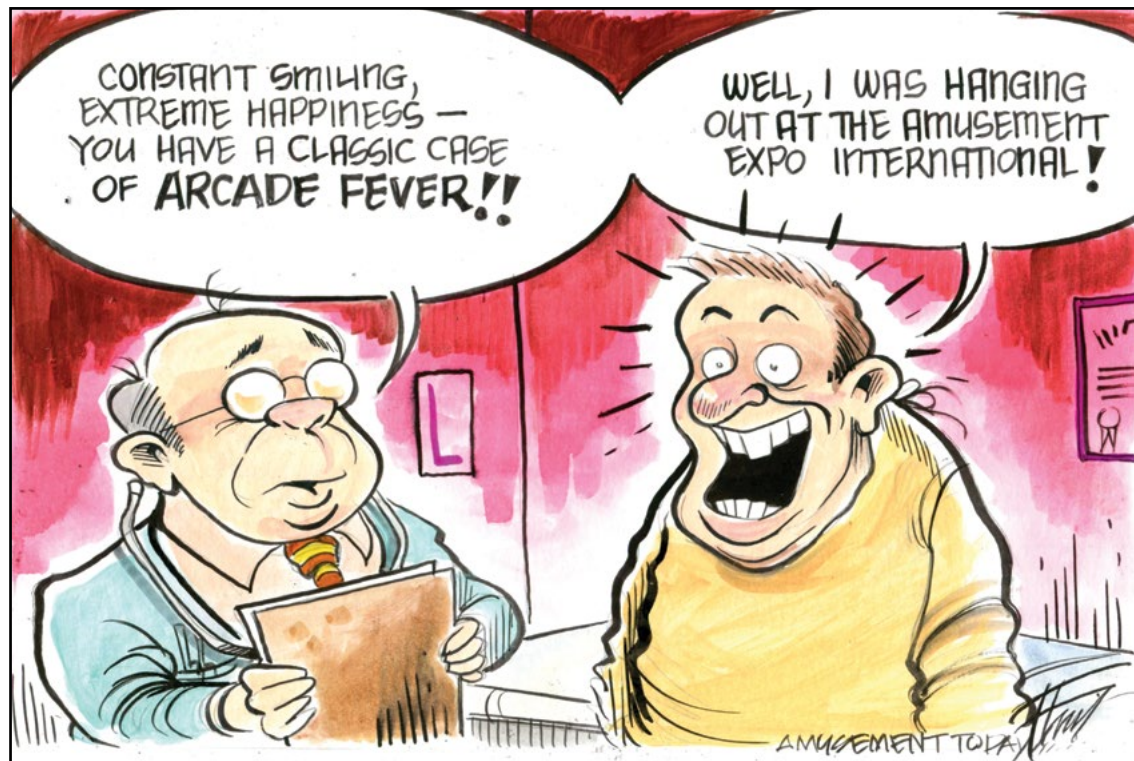
With airline prices on the rise, I looked at my upcoming visit to the Amusement Expo International in Las Vegas, Nevada, as an opportunity to tackle a lifelong dream. Rather than pay for an exorbitant flight to Vegas, I'm seizing the chance to hop on my Harley Davidson Softail and ride across the country. As a result, I'll see parts of this country I've never seen, get a chance to experience more on this trip than ever before and actually gain the opportunity to cover Universal Studios Hollywood's new Super Nintendo World for *Amusement Today* as a result.

I recall a conversation I once had at an expo with an attraction supplier who'd lost out on a bid to a competitor because he had failed to truly seize the opportunity. The request was for water attractions to be accessible to children with autism and various disabilities. And, while his product accomplished the accessibility part, he lost the bid. But the failed opportunity inspired him to take his product offerings to the next level. The result? He launched a full line of attractions that were not only accessible to all children, but also were designed to appeal to their varied sensory perceptions. He created attractions that would let a group of children who often have less opportunities to enjoy the amusement industry now be able to experience more joy than anyone.

What we do with our opportunities is everything. Seizing them gives us a chance to develop unique character and carve out the path to our future. Embracing a moment as an opportunity for change and improvement is the gateway to tomorrow's smiles.

Opinions expressed on this page are those of the columnist(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher.

FLINT'S VIEW: Bubba Flint



INDUSTRY VOICE: Pete Gustafson, American Amusement Machine Association

Driving the industry, forging relationships

The American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA) has been around for 43 years. Originally it was an association comprised exclusively of amusement game manufacturers. Today, the membership is made up of five primary categories: the original amusement game manufacturers along with the industry's leading amusement game distributors, suppliers, professional service providers and family entertainment center owner/operators.

We're far from the biggest trade association in the industry and that's okay — our size allows our members to create and nurture valuable, long-lasting relationships. That's harder to do in associations with larger memberships.

I like to tell people, "We're in the neighborhood." You don't need to save for five years for a family vacation to an amusement park in Florida or California, we're local with free admission offering any number



Gustafson

of unique and exciting attractions appealing to the whole family.

Here, you're provided an opportunity to make a difference in the industry. We seek to engage our members by offering a variety of member events including our Annual Meeting, the Amusement Expo International trade show (Amusement & Music Operators Association (AMOA)), FEC Connect program and fly-ins to D.C. where we meet with federal legislators to advocate on behalf of our members and industry on Capitol Hill. We encourage members to participate in one or more of our active committees, where they're given the opportunity to impact the direction of "their" association and industry.

We want our members to know, this is "your" association — help us help the industry by getting involved. You'll quickly find we're a positive group of disrupters up to something good. Come help us make the world more fun.

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Your Amusement Industry NEWS Leader

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2 MINUTE DRILL



AT: Janice Witherow

Yannick Gemme, Triotech

Yannick Gemme is in the business of creating fun, and he loves every minute of it. As vice president of sales and marketing for **Triotech**, a leader in digital and multi-sensory interactive attractions, Yannick is responsible for driving Triotech's global leadership position. His passion, positive attitude and customer-first approach are well-known to industry insiders, and his sense of adventure always seems to shine through.

Title:
Vice President of Sales and Marketing.

Number of years in the industry: 15.

Best thing about the industry: That's the best part of the job, it never feels like working; we are entertaining people!

Favorite amusement ride: The last one that I experienced is Hagrid's Magical Creatures Motorbike Adventure at Universal Orlando. Loved it!

If I wasn't working in the amusement industry, I would be... Retired!

Biggest challenge facing our industry: I'd say it's the constant innovation to keep people wanting to come back. We always must find a way to push the envelope to deliver the best experience. To create memories with friends and family that will last a lifetime.

The thing I like most about amusement/water park season is ... Creating lasting memories with family and friends.

Favorite kind of cookie:
White Chocolate Macadamia nut cookie.

The first thing I notice when I meet someone is ... The level of passion in their eyes.

The most I have ever paid for a dinner is ... Too much.

Hidden talent: Wake-surf and wakeboard.

I have always wanted to ... While I enjoy driving/flying, being teleported to my destination and cut some of the unnecessary traveling is definitely on top of the list.

Favorite timewaster:
Hiking or touring in a remote location.

Store I find myself in most often: Costco.

The first thing I do when I return from a vacation is ... Unpack and get ready for the upcoming week.



Yannick Gemme's sense of adventure and customer-first approach have shined throughout his career in the industry of fun as part of Triotech. COURTESY TRIOTECH

Pick one: beach vacation or mountain vacation: While I do enjoy the beach occasionally, mountain vacations are definitely the go-to destination.

On a free evening, I would rather be ... Having dinner with friends with a few good bottles of red wine.

My e-mail box is ... Under control.

You are in a bookstore. What section do we find you in? Business, personal growth, and leadership.

When I retire, I would like to live in... An RV touring the Americas or in the countryside in a nice quiet place surrounded by trees and water.

My last road trip was to ... Last summer we drove 550 miles from Montreal to Hersheypark in Pennsylvania with the family. Two years ago, we made the switch to electric vehicles and this trip was a blast from start to finish.

My busiest hour at work always seems to be ... Mornings 8 a.m.

When I look out my front door, I see ... Six feet of snow, I live in Montreal, Canada.

Springtime is approaching. For me, the worst spring chore is ... Simply happy to clean the windows to let the sun right in.

I wish I had one more hour in the day so I could ... Read more!

THE INDUSTRY SEEN

Friendship is no novelty



GIBSONTON, Fla. — Florida Week and the IISF Trade Show is a popular time for industry members to network, shop, showcase their wares and connect with one another. Friends Chris Gray of Skyline Attractions (far left); Susan Storey of Storey To Story; Lauren Muscato of Knoebels Amusement Resort and Leanna Muscato also of Knoebels Amusement Resort took time during the events to pose for a photo with a new fuzzy friend at the Big T Toys & Sports booth. COURTESY SUSAN STOREY

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Renee Welsh of Embed, Li Shuman of AWS and Kash Ahmad of Embed celebrate the unveiling of STATS (above left). The minimal footprint Embed's Kiosk+ was of great benefit to the newly opened Tilt Studio FEC (above middle). Mobile Wallet, which Embed debuted in 2020, allows guests to utilize virtual redemption cards via Google Pay and/or Apple Wallet (above right). COURTESY EMBED

► FUTURE
Continued from page 1

“Cashless payments are the first step for FECs to futureproof their businesses, not just because it’s become trendy but due to strong consumer demand,” said **Renee Welsh**, CEO, Embed. “We listen to our clients and educate them about advances in technology that can and do make a difference in their daily lives. Being cashless improves the customer experience, streamlines operations, lowers maintenance costs and reduces unnecessary downtime.”

Embed’s constant research and development also enable FECs to glimpse into the future, so it can help clients meet guest needs now.

“Consumers are continuing to expect more from all industries, from ease of service to speed and accuracy,” Welsh continued. “We believe maximized technology makes the guest experience smooth and problem-free. Technology should

redefine the customer journey while expanding the clients’ revenue landscape.”

Speed, accuracy, simplicity and even design are important attributes FEC owners consider as they look ahead and plan for future business. For **Kevin Jordan** of **Nickels & Dimes**, it was the overall look of Embed’s product that initially drew him to Embed.

“Late last year, we opened our newest FEC, **Tilt Studio**,” said Jordan. “As a forward-thinking company, we are constantly looking for ways to give our guests an unforgettable experience that also maximizes our profits and minimize costs. Embed’s Kiosk+ has the smallest hardware footprint when compared to others in the industry. As fellow operators know, maximizing space is always a priority for FECs.”

And while the sleek look and feel of the Embed Kiosk+ itself may be first draw, it’s what’s inside, that makes all of the difference.

“We operate a

110,000-square-foot venue,” Jordan continued. “Kiosk+’s smaller footprint helps us plan for expansion and growth because we can allocate more games, attractions, and spaces for relaxing without sacrificing real estate to hardware.”

“Our guests are our top priority,” shared **Noelia Deaton** of **Jester FEC**. “Embed understands that and has helped us to provide systems that allow our guests to book parties, reload gamecards and more, easily and quickly. This means they can focus on fun and making memories together.”

A core value in the attractions industry is that positive guest experiences mean repeat visits, and through Embed’s technology and software, operators can better understand their guests’ behavior. Data about everything from game card use, length of time spent in one visit and more is captured with the simple swipe of a card. A constant cycle of great service and information give operators the ability to learn from the information to continually improve the entire guest experience, thus leading to even greater guest service.

Embed’s latest product has greatly enhanced the ability for FECs to interpret and understand data so operators can make real-time adjustments that are seamless to the guest user. This program is an industry first, exclusive data visualization platform called **STATS**.

Introduced in late 2022, and powered by **Amazon Web Service (AWS)**, **STATS** is the next level of service for both the client and their guests. The platform maps out data for operators so they can better understand

their guests’ behavior as they move through each area of the location. Everything from comparing redemption game engagement with traditional arcade game performance to usage at each point of sale in the facility to how many swipes at each kiosk are captured is made easily accessible for analysis.

Embed’s **STATS** platform creates a full picture that tells the story of each guest’s visit and helps operators make adjustments that fully maximize and highlight the best of their locale. This is future-focus technology operators are benefiting from today as **STATS** anticipates for its users.

Through the preparation of venue data, including gaming patterns and customer preferences, FECs can accurately predict and optimize popular gaming periods, game offerings and promotions, better impact staff scheduling for peak and quiet times and employ inventory efficiencies across multiple locations.

Through this new product and service, Embed’s **STATS** program is using tomorrow’s technology to serve clients today.

Longtime Embed client, **Station 300**, has already seen the capabilities of **STATS**. **Kevin Taylor**, chief financial officer for **Station 300**, shared: “**STATS**, is one of the most effective and versatile management tools we have at our disposal to help manage our business. It is well done, and I love it.”

The latest from the company’s Tech of Transformation roster of products, **STATS** helps Embed better serve its growing global customer base. The technological solutions help FECs lower infrastruc-

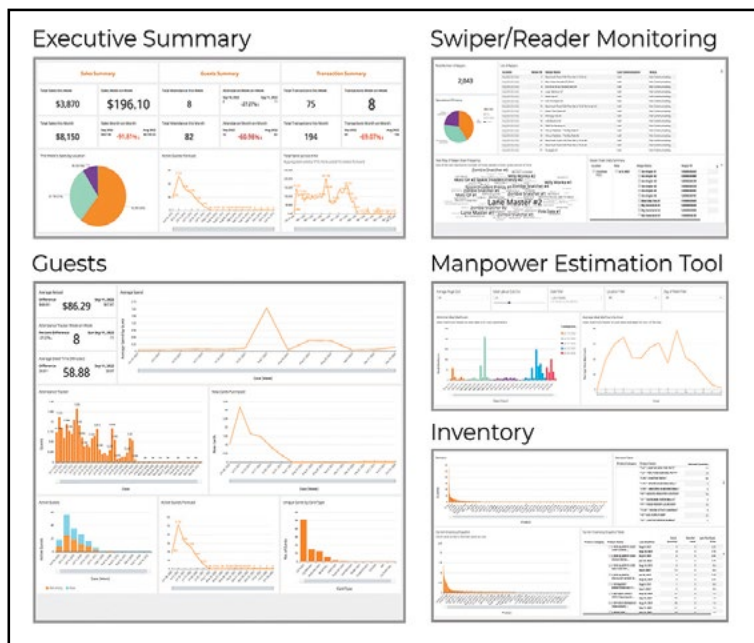
ture costs, provides faster software delivery times and offers subscription tier options that can be tailored to meet varied customer needs and sizes.

With over 1,000 customers and installations in 56 countries, Embed continues to look through its technological crystal ball to make data retrieval and analysis easy for FECs while empowering their businesses with direct sales, services and support. The newly launched **eShop** is an online shopping portal exclusive to Embed customers that provides a convenient way to purchase hardware, parts and accessories with just a few clicks, 24 hours a day. In addition, the **eShop** features **Staff Merchandise**, and a series of customizable wristbands, key fobs and lanyards have been introduced to match an FEC’s theme, color palette and brand.

Embed also remains the exclusive FEC business solutions provider to partner with Google and Apple to gain compliance for the Embed system. The use of virtual game cards powered through Embed’s technology allows guests to save to their **Mobile Wallet**, providing contactless game play that can be reloaded anytime. This breakthrough does not require the user to download an additional app.

“Everything we do ties back to our mission, which is to transform the business of fun,” added Welsh. “With our products and as we layer on all of this new information, it’s opening up a new world for [FECs] to become more profitable, more scalable, more in touch with their customers than they’ve ever been before.”

•embedcard.com



STATS maps out data for FEC operators to better understand their guests and their habits when visiting. COURTESY EMBED



DATA IN A DASH

Who says numbers shouldn't be fun? STATS is the game-changing business intelligence dashboard Embed jointly developed with Amazon; it will make your business insights and reports work hard so you won't have to.



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Find your business strength in numbers. Track game and guest activities and get deep insights on:

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Tactical Planning

With its intuitive analysis, you can use STATS for reports on operational planning and forecasting game revenue and sales based on retro data. Learn more about your business as you grow.

Stacks on Stacks

Increase profitability as STATS gives you a free hand to customize your business dashboard with interactive widgets called STACKS. This way, you get bite-sized, easy-to-interpret data to identify key revenue management areas with tangible ROI.

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► **CLIFF**

Continued from page 1

build an alpine coaster in a new state! A few years ago it would have been hard to imagine we'd be building in less-mountainous states like Texas, but tons of guests love the rider-controlled experience of the alpine coaster, so we do what we can to come up with creative solutions for new locations, said **Jessica Wedel**, Wiegand. "With the development of the Coasterkart, we're hoping to bring the mountain-coaster-like experience to even more non-mountainous parts of the country."

"I was terrified. It was fast. I know the speed says up to 25 mph, which isn't daunting, until you're on it — going through the trees, the terrain, very low to the ground," said **Brian Lane**, general manager, Camp Fimfo. "I love coasters. I grew up in an area where we had plenty to choose from. I can attest the thrill here is comparable."

The track is 1.1 miles and delivers a ride experience



Wiegand built its first alpine coaster in North America in 2005. There are now 39 installations on the continent. The Camp Fimfo installation's three downhill runs cut through the rugged Texas landscape (right). COURTESY CAMP FIMFO; AT/TIM BALDWIN

that lasts between eight and nine minutes. Riders speed through the Texas landscape of mesquite trees, massive live oaks and rocky limestone.

Lane likes the notoriety of being first. "It's 100 percent cool! Who doesn't want to be first and the biggest, especially in Texas?" he said. "Hopefully, if another one is built it won't be bigger or faster."

He shouldn't have too many worries there. Texas is the largest of the contiguous states in the nation (570,641 square miles) and it boasts a variety of landscapes — from

desert to beaches to wooded settings — but mountainous areas aren't really one of them. The Texas Hill Country in the Austin area offers nice elevation differentiation, but most of the state has a reputation for having wide open spaces. That means flat.

Camp Fimfo is one of many properties operated by **Northgate Resorts**. Under its umbrella are 20 **Yogi Bear's Jellystone Parks**. While those properties have a focus on families with younger children, the Camp Fimfo direction is of a more



adventurous nature. Fimfo comes from "Fun is more fun outside." In addition to 259 high-end RV sites, Camp Fimfo offers four different sizes and styles of cabins, ranging from larger cabins that sleep 12 to very small accommodations along the Guadalupe River that sleep two. The facility is under major expansion already with a beautiful new wedding center under construction, as well as 173 new cabins to bring the total to 213.

Tent sites are also available.

Family camps are known for having various amenities and activities for those staying on property. Camp Fimfo, which opened in the summer of 2021, already offered a small waterpark, several play areas, a mining sluice, miniature golf, jumping pillows, craft opportunities, a swimming pool and activities from nature itself. Providing an alpine coaster

► See **CLIFF**, page 8

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▶CLIFF
Continued from page 8

really puts it on the map. "It's definitely unique," Lane told *Amusement Today*. "For the Northgate mantra of 'Fun is more fun outside,' it is completely out in the elements. We can run in the rain, sleet or snow. You just change up the safety rules a little bit for those types of situations. But for the brave at heart who want to come ride in the poor weather, it's going to be phenomenal. Guests are going to love it."

Camp Fimfo offers ride discounts for first responders and military.

"The original idea for the coaster was going to be at one of our Jellystone parks in North Carolina," said **Alex Pugh**, assistant general manager. "When that project was met with complications within the state, we broke ground on this one first."

"One particular request that caught us off guard initially was that they needed to preserve as many Oak trees as possible due to local protections," said



This aerial image shows much of Cliff Carver's track weaving along the hillside. COURTESY BRAD OEHLER/AIRTIME IMAGES

Wedel. "Alpine coasters are unique in that we have to build around the natural landscape, so those kinds of restrictions can present design challenges that may not be initially apparent when we first visit a site. In the end, however, it's worth it to see the ride interacting with natural features!"

"We didn't have any challenges [with terrain].

The one thing is most alpine coasters are on bigger hillsides, which is why ours is a three up-track/three down-track. It made more sense with the size of the hill," noted Pugh. "The terrain was presented to Wiegand, and they are experts. They essentially drew the design that best fit."

"The heat was the biggest issue," noted Wedel.

"We had to modify the working hours so that the crew worked in the mornings and evenings, taking a break during the hottest time of the day. Lots of water [was] consumed on this project! The design is fairly unique as well; Texas is actually quite a bit flatter than our usual locations. We knew from the start this would have to be a multi-lift ride, but using

three lifts instead of two really gave us an edge up in making this ride stand out as something special."

While Cliff Carver is the first installation at a campground, it won't be the last. The North Carolina project has since broken ground and hopes to debut in early summer of 2023. With Wiegand closing in on 300 installations globally since introducing the product at the close of the last century, 39 are in North America, which is impressive considering the first was in 2005.

An attribute that many fans of this type of ride noticed was several sections of slalom-like track that added lateral maneuvers and exhilarating thrills in comparison to just standard straight track.

"From the first time riding one of these to riding this one, I've always been impressed with how smooth it feels and how quiet they are," said Pugh. "That was huge for me. I'm on a campground; I like the outdoors. This fits the camping vibe of how it's built and how it's run."

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PARKS, FAIRS & ATTRACTIONS

► Joyland sale falls through — pages 14-15 / Mission Ferrari opens — page 18 / Outdoor FEC indoors — page 24

Promising future ahead for Family Kingdom under new ownership

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. — Industry veterans **Les (Corky) and Debbie Powers** and **Bill Prescott** have purchased **Family Kingdom Amusement Park**, ensuring the seaside attraction will continue to operate for years to come.

During a recent visit to the property, *Amusement Today* saw firsthand a park in transition as many updates were in the works for 2023 season, which opens April 1.

Most notable was a crew of workers retracking much of the classic Swamp Fox wooden roller coaster.

"We have 24 maintenance people here now," Corky Powers asserted while walking through the 17-acre facility. "We're updating some rides and will be bringing in new ones for this year."

Owners have right stuff

The husband and wife team have been in the amusement industry most of their lives. Powers represents the fourth generation of his family in the business, starting as an independent ride operator in 1968 before forming **Amusements of Rochester** in 1980. Today the company is doing business as **Powers Great American Midways** (PGAM), providing rides and attractions to major fairs and festivals in the East.

Debbie Powers complements the operations with her expertise in food, having started with ice cream concessions more than 40 years ago to building a full lineup of food and beverage operations

which exist with PGAM today.

Prescott has a standing history of successful amusement operations in Myrtle Beach, including **Pavilion Park's** rides at **Broadway at the Beach** and **Sling Shot Park** on Ocean Boulevard. Family Kingdom is a short distance from the Sling Shot operation.

Opening in 1966 as **Grand Strand Amusement Park**, the facility's name was changed to Family Kingdom when it was acquired by the **Ammons** family, known locally for its key developments to bolster family vacations to the area.

Terms of the sale to the Powers and Prescott were not disclosed.

Stormy weather

While the change in ownership was not widely publicized throughout the amusement industry, the sale was reportedly completed prior to Hurricane Ian causing catastrophic damage in Florida and the Carolinas late last September.

Family Kingdom was flooded by the storm surge with television coverage of the inundated property making national news.

"We had nearly \$4 million in damages," Powers said of the disaster. Much of the damage was to motors and other equipment submerged by the salt water.

By mid-winter, the park looked more like a business getting ready to reopen, not one which had suffered massive losses just months before.

Ready for thrills

Of the more than 30 rides

The Swamp Fox wooden roller coaster is getting new track along large sections of its course. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



that will be operational this year at Family Kingdom, the one that draws the most attention is the Swamp Fox wooden roller coaster, which opened in 1966.

The 2,640-foot ride was designed by industry legend the late **John Allen** and constructed by the **Philadelphia Toboggan Company** (PTC).

At a height of 72 feet, it offers a view of the Atlantic Ocean from the lift hill before plunging 62 feet on the first drop and soaring along its out-and-back course at a top speed of 50 mph.

The property's sale is not only good news to patrons, but also ride buffs.

Elizabeth Ringas, president of **American Coaster Enthusiasts** (ACE), offered the following comments after AT notified ACE that the Swamp Fox had a promising future:

"Seaside coasters have become such a rare experience. American Coaster Enthusiasts is grateful for the new ownership's commitment to keep Swamp Fox, an ACE Roller Coaster Landmark, delivering thrills and making memories



Les "Corky" Powers (left) and park manager Donald Sipes tour Family Kingdom Amusement Park. AT/RON GUSTAFSON

for the residents and visitors of Myrtle Beach."

She added: "Arriving each summer for family vacation, I was dazzled by the towering beauty of Swamp Fox. Each year I would dream of the day that I would ride. It truly inspired my passion for travel and to seek out the thrills of wooden roller coasters. As a child, I had no idea how many coasters existed, but today, I continue to work toward a goal that I set as that child driving by Swamp Fox — the goal to experience every wooden roller coaster. I am grateful that I can continue to visit each year and share the thrill of riding with my children."

The ride currently has two PTC four-car trains, the second added when **Lakeside Park** in Salem, Virginia, closed in 1986, idling the **Shooting Star** coaster there.

While the Swamp Fox is currently able to only operate one train, Powers said future plans call for updates to accommodate both trains.

"There's always a long line for the coaster, so we see the need to have both trains eventually operating," he noted. "It will ride smoother with the extensive track work being completed for this season."

► See KINGDOM, page 12

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► KINGDOM Continued from page 10

New rides for 2023

Many staples at the park will be in place for the coming season, including the Hurricane (Bertazzon Himalaya), Twist 'N' Shout (Zamperla mouse coaster), Giant Wheel (Chance Rides), Log Flume (O.D. Hopkins), Galleon pirate ship (Zamperla), and Yo-Yo and Thunderbolt (Chance Rides). There is a wide selection of kiddie and other family rides on the property.

The park also features a circa 1929 PTC carousel with a recently refinished wood deck. A classic Allan Herschell kiddie wet boat ride (circa 1955) is another nostalgic attraction that will stay put.

"I recall riding those boats when I was a child," Powers said of the ride. "We're certainly going to continue to operate it here."

He said around a dozen new rides will be at the park this year, including PGAM's Sky Hawk (ARM), F5 (KGM), Rockin' Tug (Zamperla) and Magic Maze Glass House (Owen Trailers).

He will also field his Air Maxx (SBF), which is one of two worldwide and the only such piece operating in North America. A Zamperla Fiesta Wheel, which will allow parents to accompany children, is also replacing an aging kiddie Ferris wheel in the park.

Prescott will add to the major ride arsenal by bringing in a Miami (SBF).

Some of the large portable rides will leave the park after Labor Day to fulfill PGAM

The Chance Giant Wheel at Family Kingdom will feature a new LED package this coming season to make it dazzle with a spectacular light show.
AT/RON GUSTAFSON

fair contract obligations.

More for the guest experience

The go-kart track adjacent to the log flume is being updated with electric vehicles.

"They will continually charge while in the loading area — doing away with the hassle of gasoline engines," Powers said. The state-of-the-art charging units have already been installed.

Walking through The Great Pistolero Roundup, a Sally interactive dark ride installed in 2000, he was quick to point out that all of the targets and other ride functions are properly working.

Another go-kart track in the center of the park has been shut down and will make way for additional rides.

The property is also transitioning into a digital ticketing system for all-day ride wristbands and rechargeable cards that can be used throughout the park.

"We'll be adding a lot of shaded areas for our guests as well — something that was lacking," the new owner said.

Large umbrellas with seating underneath will dot the midways and a former arcade building will be revamped with indoor seating near the food concessions.

"The building will work great for seating, as it gets a breeze off the ocean and is



across from food and beverage locations," Powers added. "We'll have the large umbrellas throughout the park. And colorful flags decorating buildings and rides."

Bring on the LEDs

The 90-foot Chance Giant Wheel, the second big wheel produced by the Wichita, Kansas, manufacturer, will be sporting a new LED system from Denny's Electronics, Nokomis, Florida.

Powers noted that the wheel's spokes are all galvanized to protect from the salt air and that the new programmable lighting can be themed for holidays and other special occasions, providing a dazzling display. The Swamp Fox coaster will also have new perimeter "chasing" lights installed along its handrails high above the midway.

Family Kingdom will be expanding its parking as a site across Ocean Boulevard was also acquired and is being excavated to accommodate around 150 vehicles.

The future does indeed look promising for this seaside property.

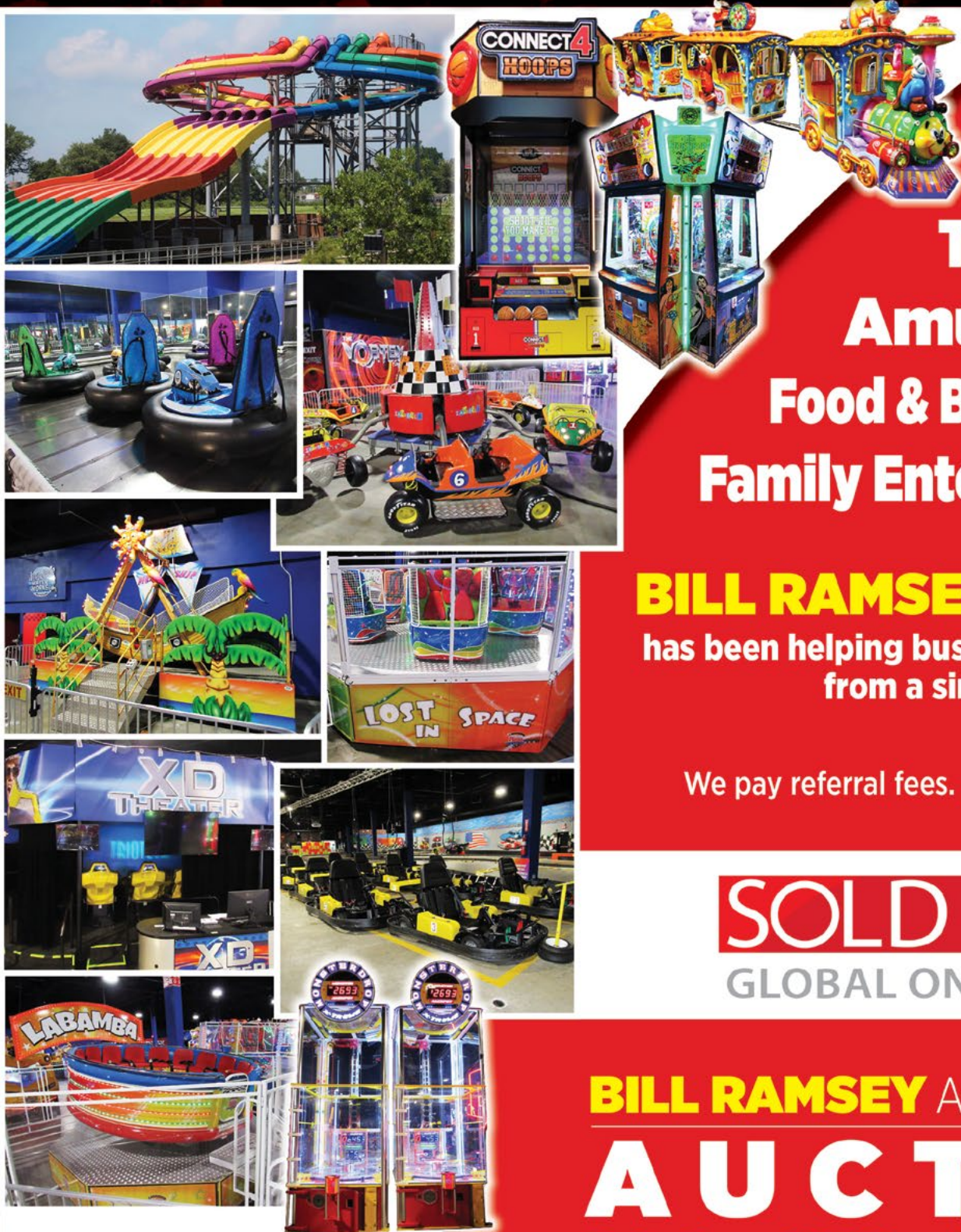
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Joyland Amusement Park closes, new buyer purchase falls through

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

LUBBOCK, Texas — Locals and fans of family-owned traditional parks were saddened that the optimistic purchase of **Joyland Amusement Park** has fallen through. Owners **David and Kristi Dean** announced following the close of the 2022 season that the park was not expected to reopen. The Deans felt the timing in their life was right to retire and to address some health concerns.

A communal sadness from the city brought forth what looked like two couples partnering together to be new owners. **Jim and Kai Evans** and **Darryl and Stephanie Holland**, two local business owners stepped forward. The Deans were willing to serve as consultants for the first year for a smooth transition.

However, in January



The Reverchon portable flume looks to have a new home in an international location (above left). The linear midway (above right) was packed with classic rides and modern thrillers. AT/TIM BALDWIN

of 2023, the deal had fallen through.

"It didn't happen, so we had to move on," said David. "It was a heartbreaker for us."

Joyland has two major obstacles. The first is the park does not own the land. It belongs to the city, and the park leases the property, which is part of Mackenzie Park. The second challenge is the park has been prone to flooding

when heavy rains descend upon Lubbock. Drainage isn't strong in the park area. Operators either have to wait on the city to act or invest their own money to address the situation.

Once the Deans terminate their lease with the city, they will have six months to vacate the property.

"The people of Lubbock have been very supportive," said Kristi. "They are very sad to see the park

close. We will miss seeing the smiles on their faces when they came to visit."

The park had more than 20 rides, including three family roller coasters, the largest of which was a Galaxi, purchased from **White Swan Park** and opened in the early 1990s. The attractions ranged from old classics to new thrillers. Most flat rides were portable in nature, as was the **Reverchon** flume, but a

few of the attractions were park models that were permanently installed, such as the **Hopkins** sky ride that went down the center of the linear midway.

Originally, the rides were going to be sold at auction last fall, prior to the intentions made by the future buyers. Now, interested parties are contacting the park for the specific

► See **JOYLAND**, page 15

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► **JOYLAND**

Continued from page 14

rides they are interested in.

"We'll probably be on property until the end of 2023," David said.

The Deans reported that at least a third of the rides have been spoken for, with deposits put down.

"We're selling the big equipment — the rides — first," said David. "People buying something big can also look at ice machines and things like that. We're not really having people coming in and looking at [the small stuff] for now."

Once the bigger capital is purchased, the Deans stated they would allow people to come in and look. They would liquidate anything that remained.

Two of the oldest rides were the **C.W. Parker Co.** carousel, which dated back to 1902, and a train ride from **Miniature Train Co.** The park installed it in 1979 after purchasing it from **Wonderland Park** in Amarillo. David remembers riding it as a child at the park less than two hours from Lubbock.

Its most recent purchases were a **Wisdom Dragon Wagon** in 2017, a **KMG Freak Out** pendulum ride in 2018 and a **Blizzard** roller coaster from Italian company **Cavazza Diego** in 2019.

"We're donating the entrance sign to the **Roller Coaster Museum and Archives** in Plainview," David told *Amusement Today*. "We're excited about that."

AT asked the couple if they would keep anything for themselves. "We have a wooden carousel horse, and we'll save things that are simple like Joyland flags. We have a Joyland bear and things that have Joyland on it. Pictures. That's about it," said Kristi.

Many of the sold rides are staying within Texas; others are finding homes in different places in the country. The flume will have a new international location yet to be disclosed.

"It's been interesting

meeting many of these people [for the first time] who aren't necessarily park people, but they are expanding into the amusement rides world," said David.

The Deans plan to have a reunion event for previous employees in the spring so that people can share their memories.

When the park ended its 2022 season, it had operated as Joyland for 50 years.



The park's Galaxi was Joyland's biggest coaster (above left). The C.W. Parker Co. carousel had more than 100 years of history (above right). AT/TIM BALDWIN, GARY SLADE

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Skyline Attractions to supply racing coaster attractions for Six Flags

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

AUSTELL, Ga. and SAN ANTONIO — Orlando-based Skyline Attractions showcased models and a piece of track with its Aurora lighting package at IAAPA Expo 2022, confirming that two installations had been contracted for 2023.

Six Flags Fiesta Texas announced its project in December, and Six Flags Over Georgia reported in January that it would be the second.

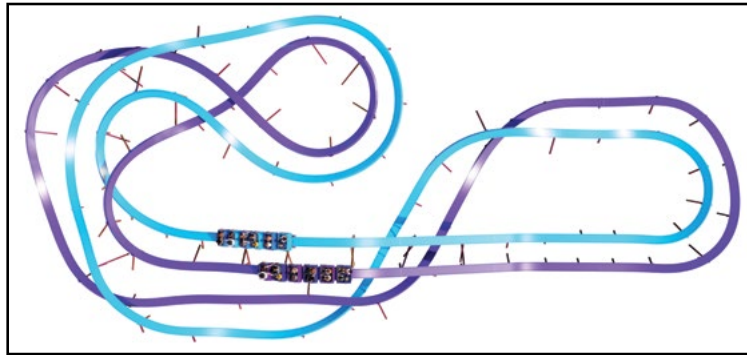
While both installations will be the largest models from Skyline Attractions, it is the racing aspect of these additions that help add marketing clout, as each will be the first racing coaster in each state.

The yet-to-be-named attractions are family rides that seat a parent with child. Six Flags had signed the contracts just prior to the expo.

"They liked that the projects could be built very quickly, and they loved the light package," said Chris Gray, vice president, Skyline Attractions.

The light package stretches the length of the layout directly on the track both on the top and sides.

"The Aurora light package will make these children's coasters the most visually impactful rides in the park,"



Two Six Flags parks are installing Skyline Attraction's first P'sghetti Bowl coasters. The layout will create multiple crossovers and interaction. COURTESY SIX FLAGS, SKYLINE ATTRACTIONS

Gray told *Amusement Today*. "It will be the Pied Piper of coasters. No child will be able to resist its visual sonar!"

"The new coaster light package promises to be EPIC!" said Park President Jeffrey Siebert, Six Flags Fiesta Texas. "I'm most excited about the customization of the programming. We can give the ride a completely different look for Fright Fest and the holidays with a simple program update."

"This latest addition will allow the unique experience of parents riding in tandem with their children and being able to experience the thrill of that first coaster together," said Greg Fuller, general manager of the Six Flags Atlanta Properties. "It honors our commitment to providing guests with experiences for all ages and thrill levels

so that the entire family will enjoy an exhilarating ride experience just before graduating to our more adrenaline-pumping coasters."

Fiesta Texas is revitalizing its kids' area into ThrillSeeker Park. The new racing coasters will be adjacent to the existing rides that are undergoing retheming.

"We've been working hard on developing an innovative plan to enhance our quality and collection of kid-inspired thrill attractions that grownups will love riding with their kids," said Siebert. "Once our new racing coaster opens, Six Flags Fiesta Texas will now reign king as the Kids Coaster Capital of Texas. The current kids' area will take on new life and have a colorful transportation theme focused on airplanes, trains,



hot air balloons, automobiles and bucking broncos placed in a park-like setting."

"The riveted track gives us extremely smooth transitions and track joints," said Gray. "This will be a ride that not only brothers and sisters will enjoy riding with the kids but also moms, dads and grandparents."

Once the 12-passenger trains crest the parallel lift hills, the tracks twist into a tangle of curves that cause riders to interact with each other as they race to the finish.

"The new coaster is the perfect mix of mayhem and adrenaline," noted Fuller. "Being a first of its kind, the twin tracks race over and under each other a dozen times during the ride cycle allowing guests to compete to the finish. The race feature, coupled with the immersive

theme and lighting package, creates a dynamic ride experience setting it apart from our other exciting attractions."

AT asked Gray what was involved in designing such a snarled layout. "It was more of how do we make a racing kids coaster cool, fun, visually stunning and fun to ride," he said. "It's a delicate [engineering] balance between the ride's envelope and how much energy we have to go over and under each other. We have a very clever team of folks who love to figure out those kinds of three-dimensional puzzles that mix man with machine."

To make space for the new attraction, Fiesta Texas is retiring a bumper cars ride that opened with the park in 1992.

"This classic attraction was experiencing declining guest appeal and ridership," said Siebert. "The vehicles were at the end of their service life, and the building needed significant enhancements. It's always sad to see an attraction sunset, but the timing is perfect with the replacement of Texas' only racing coaster."

The Georgia park will be adding the coaster addition on the site formerly occupied by a Larson International Fireball sporting a Joker theme.

"Our P'sghetti Bowl roller coaster continues the development of the multi-year reimagining of the Gotham City park section," said Fuller. "The removal of [the former ride] will provide the ideal location for this new attraction. In 2021, we unveiled a twist on The Riddler Mindbender, and we're continuing to set the standard for new innovative thrills with the neighboring first single-rail family racing coaster in the state."



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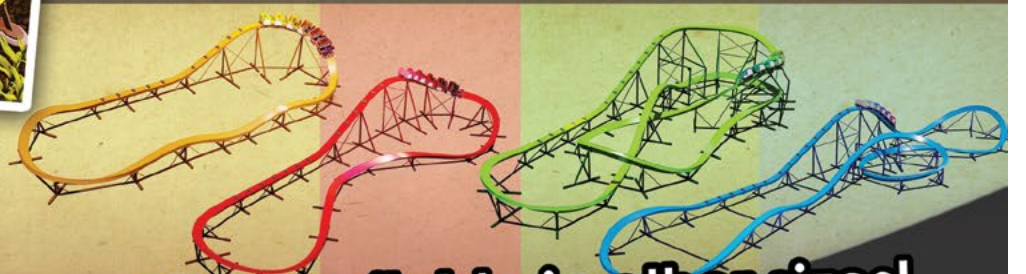
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Long-awaited Mission Ferrari opens as first Special Effects Coaster

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

ABU DHABI — **Ferrari World** guests are enjoying the opening of Mission Ferrari, a long-in-the-works attraction that utilizes cutting-edge technology. Created by **Dynamic Attractions**, it is the first in the company's model line of Special Effects Coaster.

Early ideation for this style of coaster began back in 2012. The original concept was developed over a six-month period by a team of six senior engineers and a creative director. By 2015, the development was awarded Best New Product Attraction Concept at IAAPA Expo 2015.

Once Ferrari World signed on and the attraction was underway, challenges delayed the project, a pandemic being one of them. But getting such a complex attraction open stayed in focus.

"From Dynamic Attractions' side, the commissioning phase involved a combined team size of around 30 people between the site team and the support team in the office. If



Large vehicles seat nine passengers (above left). This construction shot (above left) shows the massive size of the track, as well as one of the coaster's inversions. COURTESY FERRARI WORLD, DYNAMIC ATTRACTIONS



you include the client's team and the various contractor groups, the overall technical team was well over 100 that brought this ride over the finish line," said Dynamic Attractions CEO **Guy Nelson**. "Another big influence factor delaying the opening was the time it took to solve the incredibly complex technical issues that are inherently part of such a sophisticated system that were uncovered through the commissioning

process."

Initial reactions, however, indicate that Ferrari World and Dynamic Attractions have pulled off a world-class attraction with a superb wow factor.

"The biggest key to success, for any significantly new and innovative product concept, must begin with a very close collaboration between the ride designer and the ultimate customer," Nelson told *Amusement Today*. "The attraction operator must commit to what in essence is the funding of an R&D initiative."

So what makes this roller coaster so different? Lots.

The track design looks massive. Large single-car vehicles seat nine passengers in a front row of four and a back row of five. Six cars race along the coaster.

A tilt-and-drop maneuver is the standout element, which takes place inside a projection dome, which culminates into a spectacular reverse drop. There is also what many in the industry are calling a "sideways drop," as well as two inversions.

"Unlike a conventional coaster which has a closed loop track system for cycling of ride vehicles, the SFX elements introduce discrete elements which

create breakpoints in the track system," Nelson said. "This makes cycling of ride vehicles for integration and development testing purposes extremely complex and challenging."

The ride also tells a story. Guests on a spy mission race through indoor scenes that use 3-D imagery to tell the tale. This component merges both dark ride experiences with those of a roller coaster. Physical sets mixed with audio and video make the attraction highly immersive. It has earned high praise as one of the world's most elaborately themed coasters.

"There are very large multi-movement switch elements that move vehicles from one location to another, all while maintaining the highest safety stan-

dards," said Nelson.

The roller coaster features 1,840 feet of track but offers a ride time of more than four minutes. During that time, riders experience many scenes that play out, followed by various launches. Mission Ferrari does not feature a typical lift hill. The top speed is 45 mph. It is the park's sixth roller coaster.

"Thrill seekers want more than just a train on a track," said Nelson. "We've combined spectacular storytelling and eye-popping special effects with the most technically advanced ride. This has the amusement industry's top draws — dark rides and roller coasters — in one unbelievable experience. It is the first of its kind in an entirely new category of rides."



While most of the special effects take place in an event building, spectators capture glimpses of riders racing by. COURTESY FERRARI WORLD



The themed exterior to the attraction indicates an immersive experience within. COURTESY KIRK ERMEN

Legoland Florida's quest to bridge nostalgia, fresh family fun

AT: David Fake
Special to Amusement Today

WINTER HAVEN, Fla. — Legoland Florida's January debut of its new boat ride, Pirate River Quest, was preceded with years of brainstorming, planning, design and construction. What may slip by the park's target demographic, children ages two to 12, is that the ride is a nostalgic throwback to the park's former life as Cypress Gardens, a botanical gardens attraction which opened in 1932.

The park describes Pirate River Quest as "a one-of-a-kind ride in part because of its unique location and natural setting on Lake Eloise. Guests will experience the beauty of the natural foliage and even get a potential glimpse of Florida wildlife while onboard. All boats are free-floating vessels and are driven by trained boat captains, with extensive experience navigating the narrow canals and natural lake. As guests embark on the adventure to find Captain Redbeard and locate the treasure, fun encounters follow as they experience Lego Minifigures, including Legoland Florida exclusive characters Calico Jade and Captain Redbeard, as well as Lego toucans, monkeys, skeletons, spiders and alligators.



Yet, this is not just another superbly executed Legoland attraction – there is a nostalgic history to the attraction.

Rex Jackson, park president and managing director of Legoland Florida and Legoland Resorts North America, understood the attraction's concept had already been successfully brought to fruition decades before on the same waterways of the park's lower section, as well as the adjacent Lake Eloise. In fact, it was the simple, nostalgic attraction that was behind his push to revive the idea. This time, however, with a new theme and the entertaining flair for which Legoland Parks, Merlin Magic Making and their parent company, Merlin Entertainments, are known.

"This has been a passion project of mine for several years to be able to bring boats back into Cypress Gardens," stated Jackson. "We have been operating the Botanical Gardens since Legoland Florida opened in 2011. But we operated it from a



Pirate River Quest is a one-of-a-kind ride in part because of its unique location and natural setting on Lake Eloise. All boats are free-floating vessels and are driven by trained boat captains, with extensive experience navigating the narrow canals and natural lake. AT/DAVID FAKE

pedestrian view only from the pathways. We did not operate it from a canal view, because nobody was going down the canals. So, when we decided to look at reopening the canal ways, it required a lot of landscaping and sea wall work as the guests would now be looking at the gardens, not just from the pedestrian walkways but now from the canal view as well."

Jackson said that the park needed to replace approximately 90% of the wood sea walls on the canals with corrugated steel in preparation for the opening of the ride.

While the ride borrows a concept from the

past, Pirate Quest is truly an original Legoland/Merlin attraction.

As with all Legoland attractions, the boat ride

is fun, quirky and the perfect combination of facets that parents and kids

► See PIRATE, page 20



Sunken Lego ship, foreground, Cypress Gardens botanical gardens' gazebo and Lego Southern Belle, background, is one of the many ways that new meets classic on Pirate River Quest (above). At the climax of the adventure, tentacles of a Lego Kraken surround the free-floating boat (right). AT/DAVID FAKE



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Rex Jackson, park president and managing director of Legoland Florida and Legoland Resorts North America, welcomes guests to Legoland Florida's Pirate River Quest on opening day, January 12, 2023. AT/DAVID FAKE

►PIRATE Continued from page 19

alike will enjoy. Including the educational aspects of the attraction.

Jackson explains that this concept is what Legoland and Merlin Magic Making do best.

"I think the educational aspect is what I would call the 'light touch.' The overall entertainment value of the ride and what we've designed it to be is a multi-generational ride," he said.

"We know that there are going to be grandparents that visit our park today that are certainly going to be coming back now that they hear there are boats back in the Cypress Garden waterways. And they will now have a completely different view than they had before, but now they get to share that with their grandkids. They have known the history, but they're entertained by the Lego theming, the Lego storyline," added Jackson.

"We also know that it will skew a little bit younger in terms of the ride experience. That's where the educational parts are targeted towards, a two- to eight-year-old demographic in this case," clarified Jackson.

Pirate River Quest is not the only attraction at Legoland Florida that pays homage to the legacy of the land on which it sits. There are Cypress

Gardens' iconic Southern Belles made out of Legos, and the resurrected Water Ski Show, with its water skier pyramid on water, which even those who had never visited the park will recollect from photos and postcards.

Then, for Legoland Florida's 10th birthday in 2021, the park added the Legoland Story attraction, which tells the entire history of the park's multiple incarnations.

"The multimedia show begins with the story of Lego. We introduce a lot of our guests to the story of Lego, because many do not know that this is a family-owned company from Denmark. We then tell the story of Cypress Gardens, because you can't tell the story of Legoland Florida without including Dick Pope's Cypress Gardens, 'Florida's first tourist attraction,'" explained Jackson.

Legoland Story also makes mention of Cypress Gardens Adventure Park, which it was known as from 2004-2009 when it was operated by Kent Buescher, founder and then owner of Wild Adventures in Valdosta, Georgia.

At the conclusion of the ride, while aboard Pirate River Quest, guests also are treated to a special view of the historic Florida Pool, initially built as a film set for the 1953 MGM film "Easy to Love" starring Esther Williams.

• legoland.com/florida



SeaWorld Orlando in Florida has revealed its events lineup for 2023. The theme park launched Elmo's Birthday Weekend event, Seven Seas Food Festival and its Mardi Gras celebration throughout the month of February.

Viva La Musica event will take place on May 13. The Summer Spectacular event begins May 27 and the park's Howl-O-Scream event will return for the third season on Sept. 8.

SeaWorld Orlando's Christmas Celebration will run Nov. 10-Dec. 31.

The **New Mexico Museum of Natural History & Science** in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the technology company **Meta** have committed to a five-year partnership.

As part of the agreement, Meta will have naming rights to the museum's Space Sciences wing, which includes a planetarium. In exchange, the company will give the museum a \$300,000 grant for the expansion of its educational programs.

Margaritaville Resort Biloxi in Biloxi, Mississippi, has begun hiring employees to staff its upcoming new **Paradise Pier** amusement park ahead of its opening. Different positions are available in areas including food and beverage, admissions and ride and hotel operations.

Connect&GO, a world leader in integrated operations management solutions, is commemorating 10 years of assisting operators in streamlining operations and increasing revenue through its Radio Frequency Identification technology.

The company helped incorporate the technology in live events over the past decade before it moved toward the attractions industry, which includes theme parks, water parks, family entertainment centers and zoos.

Merlin Entertainments has announced that all its **Legoland** resorts in the U.S. will become certified autism centers starting in March.

The operator is partnering with the **International Board of Credentialing**

and **Continuing Education Standards** to earn the accreditation, which includes staff training and sensory-friendly amenities such as sensory guides installed at attractions and rides.

A new proposed bill to create a government-controlled version of the **Reedy Creek Improvement District**, Florida, aims to create a board of supervisors to govern that district. The district is currently run by the **Walt Disney Company** since that is where the district lines are located.

Florida Governor **Ron DeSantis** has stated his intent to remove this power and place it in the hands of the state.

Notably, the proposal states individuals who have worked for a theme park or entertainment complex in the last three years are not eligible for the board. This means Disney would not be permitted to have an active role in governing the district. The governor would also be responsible for appointing all five board members, with confirmation from the senate.

Wording of the proposal includes that the board "shall have controlling authority over the district, and shall exercise the powers granted to the district under this act and under chapters 189 and 298, Florida Statutes. The board of supervisors shall consist of five members appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate, with one member designated as chair of the board of supervisors and one member designated as vice chair. Each member shall hold office for a term of four years and until a successor is chosen and qualified, except that for the initial appointments made after the effective date of this act, two members shall be appointed to serve a term of two years. Furthermore, each member initially appointed to the board of supervisors must replace the board member who has been serving on the board for the greatest amount of time to date."

Preparations are in full swing for a new attraction coming to the **Gardaland Resort** located in northeastern Italy.

The new attraction is Jumanji - The Labyrinth, a thrilling adventure to be experienced in the heart of Gardaland.

Visitors will challenge themselves as they explore and are completely immersed in the fantastic and untamed Labyrinth of Jumanji, where they will become protagonists of the adventure and create their own personal experience inside.

Gardaland Resort is an amusement park that opened in 1975. It includes **Gardaland Park, Gardaland Sea-Life, Legoland Waterpark, Gardaland Hotel, Adventure Hotel and Magic Hotel.**

CEC Entertainment remodels 200th Chuck E. Cheese, more ahead

AT: Pam Sherborne
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DOUGLASVILLE, Ga. — **Chuck E. Cheese** rolled out a one-of-a-kind purple carpet premier in late January to celebrate the grand reopening of its 200th location remodel at this Atlanta-area fun center.

But 200 is just the beginning of the brand's remodel as **CEC Entertainment LLC**, the parent company, continues its refreshing across 35 U.S. states to meet the shifts in consumer demands. The company plans to remodel another 100 in 2023.

"Within the next three years, we expect all our fun centers across the country to be upgraded with our latest vision of the brand," said **David McKillips**, president and CEO of CEC Entertainment LLC.

"Our remodeled fun



One of the new additions to the remodeled Chuck E. Cheese is an interactive dance floor. COURTESY CEC ENTERTAINMENT

centers offer families more space for play and through our game enhancement program, we are introducing new games year-round."

The company and its franchisees operate nearly 600 Chuck E. Cheese FECs along

with 120 **Peter Piper** venues.

Reimagined remodeled experiences for guests include technology upgrades that focus on convenience, simplicity and entertainment.

There are new games that offer varying skill lev-

els for players of all ages. The venues will average 70 games per location.

Each remodeled Chuck E. Cheese has/or will have an interactive dance floor to serve as center stage for live Chuck E. dance-alongs and concerts. These fun happenings are being scheduled every hour on the half hour.

The company has also added or plans to add a 200-inch LED video wall to more locations.

Some of the new technology being used to enhance the guest experience includes the following:

- Play Pass & Play Bands in place of traditional tokens.

The tap-to-play game card system provides an easier, more convenient way to play.

- E-tickets have replaced

paper tickets as a contactless and more eco-friendly alternative. The automated ticketing system is convenient and easily trackable on the guests' Play Pass or Play Bands.

- Touchless payment options are available, including **Apple** and **Google Pay**.

- Self-service kiosks allow guests to pause their play time, check their ticket allotment or re-up on game play at any time;

- Mobile table ordering creates an easy way for guests to view the menu, order food immediately or later from their table so they have more time for fun.

CEC Entertainment has been creating memories with its Chuck E. Cheese restaurants for 45 years.

- chuckecheese.com

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Attendance at Amusement Expo International is expected to soar

AT: Pam Sherborne
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LAS VEGAS, Nev. — Planners of the **Amusement Expo International (AEI)** were feeling that the moon was their only limit, as registration for this year's event, set for March 27-30, at the **Las Vegas Convention Center**, Las Vegas, Nevada, soared.

As of Feb. 17, **Jean Marie Saidler**, of **JMS Marketing**, the firm doing the marketing for AEI, said the number of exhibiting companies for the trade show was up nine percent over 2022. Preregistration of trade show attendees was up 78% over 2022. And preregistration for the educational program was up 122% over 2022.

The AEI is unique in that it is hosted by two leading professional associations, the **Amusement & Music Operators Association (AMOA)** and the **American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA)**.

AEI continues to grow and expand its influence. The event offers two full days of educational sessions. Then, there are two full days of the trade show. There are no educational sessions scheduled during these days.

AEI brings a huge added value to attendees and exhibitors, with collocating partnerships with the **National Bulk Vendors Association** and the **Laser Tag Convention**, that continues to strengthen opportunities for all in attendance. These events



Amusement Expo International is experiencing a huge growth between the 2022 event (above) and this year's event set for March 27-30 at the Las Vegas Convention Center, Las Vegas, Nevada. Virtual reality is a segment of the industry that is experiencing continual growth. Plenty of virtual reality products will be exhibited at the AEI this year (below).

COURTESY AEI

naturally complement each other and deliver an even stronger platform for attendees and exhibitors.

AEI's focused conference and show floor is designed to meet all the needs of owner/operators within entertainment and amusement venues, along with prospective entrepreneurs in this exciting industry.

On-site registration will be available all day on Monday, March 27. Educational sessions kick off in the early afternoon on that day.

Topics scheduled for Monday include Interior Design, How it Matters in Your Retail, FEC or Location Space; Harnessing Route Software Data to Increase Revenue and Profitability; How Ghost Kitchens Can Add to Your Food and Beverage Revenue Without Having to Add Tables to Your Restaurant and Ticket to Success - Leadership,



Culture and Core Values.

Under the heading of VR Arcade Game Summit that runs throughout both days includes topics such as Growth and Marketing Strategies for VR Arcades; Staying Ahead of the Trend, Riding the Wave of VR and Competitive Socialization - Panel and Virtual Natives, Using VR to Elevate your

Party Packages for Generation Alpha.

The closing day's keynote address is The Future Is Already Here: Are You Ready For It? given by **Bob Cooney**.

There will be a VR VIP Industry Reception Monday evening.

Tuesday's sessions kick-off with the keynote address from **Jarrett Payton** called Lessons Learned from my Father. Payton is the son of the **National Football League's (NFL) Hall of Famer Walter Payton**. He is a former NFL and **Canadian Football League** running back, and is a businessman and celebrity broadcaster.

Session topics on this day include Jukebox and Pinball Promotions, Driving Play in a Digital World;

New Markets for FEC's – Adding Attractions to Existing Anchors; and Best Practices for Securing Your ATM Equipment and Funds Beyond the Transaction.

Topics for the VR Arcade Game Summit include Free Roam for All: How Standards Will Drive Widespread Adoption in 2023 and Beyond; Performance Management; Maximizing VR Attraction Success: Strategies for Independent and Chain Operators; VR and Esports: The Future of Competitive Gaming, Industry Round Tables and From Games to Attractions: The Reality of Making Money with VR.

There will be a surprise keynote guest speaker at the end of the this day.

The trade show will include products in categories such as amusements, music, games and ATMs; billiard and home leisure; virtual reality; family entertainment centers; bulk vending; laser tag and professional service providers.

The trade show will run from 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Wednesday, March 29, and 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Thursday, March 30.

A reception unveiling the winners of the industry rewards will be held Wednesday afternoon.

AEI is managed by **W. T. Glasgow Inc.**

AMOA is a national trade association that promotes and strengthens the currency-operated machine industry. It unites operators and other professionals beyond the scope of amusement machines, providing the tools and support to help businesses grow and thrive.

The AAMA is an international not-for-profit 501(c)6 trade organization representing the manufacturers, distributors, suppliers, professional service providers and location owner/operators for the coin-operated amusement industry.

• amusementexpo.org



An important part of the AEI is its educational sessions. COURTESY AEI

Amusement Expo International 2023

March 28-30, 2023, Las Vegas, Nevada

Exhibitor Listing

3Dar.....	A1555	exA-Arcadia.....	A1156	Prominent Games.....	A1315
AC Radiocom.....	A1119	FEC Insurance Agency.....	A956	PSI.....	A1547
Adrenaline Amusement.....	A709	FECFIN - The FEC Financial Group.....	A1245	Pucker Powder.....	A1202
Alan-1.....	A1440	Fish Game Kings/Prestige Gaming Solutions..	A609	Pyramid Technologies, Inc.....	A1331
Alpha Display Co Ltd.....	A1216	Fun Express.....	A919	Quatronics.....	A1303
American Alpha, Inc.....	A1020	Funovation.....	A1413	QubicaAMF Bowling Products.....	A240
American Amusement Machine Assoc. (AAMA) ..	A1535	GameBox Builders, LLC.....	A1003	Reboot Imagine.....	A1101
American Changer Corp.....	A530	Genmega.....	A1434	Redemption Plus.....	A841
AMI Entertainment.....	A317	Goldfinger.....	A236	RedPlum Skill Games.....	A656
Amusement & Music Operators Assoc. (AMOA) ..	A1511	Guangzhou YingFeng Technology Co., Ltd...	A654	Replay Magazine.....	A617
Amusement Connect.....	A137	Hero Zone VR.....	A1345	Rhode Island Novelty.....	A255
Amusement Products.....	A1431	Hoffman Mint.....	A534	Rilix.....	A1113
Amusement Resource Connection - ARC.....	A1000	Hologate.....	A1217	River City Amusements.....	A1242
Amusement Source International, LLC.....	A1247	IAAPA.....	A1503	Roller.....	A647
Amusement Studios.....	A1308	Ideal One Amusement Software.....	A1441	S & B Candy and Toy / St Louis Game Co....	A1421
Amusement Today.....	A1234	IGPM Distribution.....	A749	S&C Vending.....	A1508
Andamiro Co.,Ltd.....	A817	Incredible Technologies.....	A131	Sacoa Cashless System.....	A309
Animalive Ltd.....	A1514	Incredivend, LLC.....	A441	SafeparkUSA.....	A943
Apex Commercial Capital Corp.....	A143	Innovative Concepts in Entertainment Inc....	A331	Sega Amusements International Ltd.....	A417
Apple Industries.....	A831	Innovative Technology Americas, Inc.....	A1218	Service First Processing.....	A1540
Arachnid 360.....	A217	Inowize.....	A1201	Shaffer Distributing.....	A313
ARC Studios.....	A1255	InterCard.....	A731	SkillGameKiosk.com.....	A1438
Art Attack.....	A439	International Currency Technologies Corp....	A535	Smart Industries Corp.....	A621
AstroSystems Inc.....	A505	iPlayCO.....	A1411	Smart Software.....	A602
ATM Merchant Services.....	A531	Ivey Promotions.....	A909	SpringboardVR.....	A1605
AVS Companies.....	A551	Jenka Lab LLC.....	A1012	Stern Pinball, Inc.....	A409
AXES.ai LLC.....	A1246	Jet Games.....	A646	Strategic Tax Planning.....	A1612
Bandai Namco Amusement America.....	A109	JK Coin Supply LLC.....	A903	Sureshot Redemption.....	A1230
Banilla Games.....	A1231	Kejieda.....	A1615	Sureway Games.....	A316
Barron Games International.....	A1330	KioSoft.....	A1040	Suzohapp.....	A554
BarZcash Inc.....	A847	Klopp: Money Handling Equipment.....	A1222	Sweet Robo.....	A756
Baton Lock & Hardware Co., Inc.....	A1542	Komuse America Inc.....	A1009	Team Play Inc.....	A947
Battle Company.....	A1447	LAI Games.....	A345	The Really Big Crane Company, LLC.....	A703
Bay Tek Entertainment.....	A715	LaserBlast.....	A550	Top Patch.....	A1344
Bazooka Ball/ Axe Throwing.....	A1200	Laserforce.....	A955	TouchTunes.....	A630
Best Coast Pairings LLC.....	A1256	Lasertag.com by Zone.....	A1241	Toy Factory LLC.....	A1236
Betson.....	A231	Lasertron.....	A1109	TrainerTainment.....	A244
Big Daddy Games.....	A811	LaZer Runner Laser Tag Systems.....	A254	Trestle.....	A803
Bissell Commercial.....	A1304	Legacy Arcade.....	A1335	Triotech.....	A147
blacklight attractions.....	A1549	Legacy Coin-Operated Distributors, Inc....	A537	TVM.....	A1556
BMI Leisure.....	A809	Lock America, Inc.....	A322	UNIS Technology (Canada) Ltd.....	A739
BMI Merchandise.....	A431	M3t.....	A435	Univest Capital, Inc.....	A354
Bowling Center Management.....	A1111	Maxsomo.....	A355	Uplay America.....	A1312
Bravery Gaming LLC.....	A1351	MCDS Vending.....	A1209	US Bowling Corporation.....	A954
Brunswick Bowling.....	A619	Meridian Equipment Finance LLC.....	A655	Us Fun Machines Corp.....	A1054
Captain's Auction Warehouse.....	A155	Moss Distributing.....	A209	USA Byte LLC.....	A1401
Cardinal Xpress.....	A509	National Dart Association.....	A1501	Valley Dynamo Made in the USA.....	A503
CenterEdge Software.....	A1208	Nayax Tigapo.....	A1437	Valo Motion.....	A1250
chargeFUZE.....	A1103	Netronic (Lasertag).....	A1546	Venco Business Solutions.....	A716
Chicago Gaming Company.....	A1617	North American Dart Organization (NADO) ..	A1002	Virtuix.....	A1339
Coastal Amusements, Inc.....	A515	nWave Pictures Distribution.....	A848	Vortex Bunkers.....	A1451
Complete Signs.....	A536	Omega Carpet Patterns.....	A755	VR 360 ACTION.....	A756
Crazy Software.....	A1203	Pace O Matic Inc.....	A640	vrCAVE.....	A1301
Creative Works.....	A849	PAI/Brinks.....	A1536	VRsenal.....	A356
Custom America, Inc.....	A1409	Paradise Distribution of Wyoming.....	A242	VSR Industries, INC.....	A1622
Cypress ATM.....	A917	Parafait Card System (Semnox Solutions)..	A1121	WDD - We Do Digital.....	A1551
Delta Strike USA.....	A850	Party Center Software.....	A1417	We Create Entertainment.....	A1309
Digital Cash Processing.....	A1337	Party Direct.....	A1512	Western Equipment Finance.....	A1117
Digital Centre America, Inc.....	A1505	Patriot Gaming.....	A1211	Wiegand Sports GmbH.....	A1105
DSM Sales & Manufacturing, Inc.....	A1204	PayRange.....	A1403	World Plush, Inc.....	A1016
Elaut Group USA.....	A931	PhoenixDarts USA, Inc.....	A700	WTIwireless.....	A1340
Elite Gaming Technology.....	A913	PIA Products.....	A941	Yingfeng Technology Co., Ltd.....	A654
Embed.....	A542	Primero Games.....	A1017		

Bolder innovates FEC concept moving adventure activities indoors

AT: Tim Baldwin
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GRAND PRAIRIE, Texas — Paul Fontanelli knew he wanted to create something different. He began ideas in 2017, eventually stepping away from a career in finance. He drew from his own experiences with his own three children to conceive of a family entertainment experience unlike anything he had seen before.

“The entertainment industry was something I loved being a consumer of, and I started to look at it as a business opportunity,” Fontanelli said.

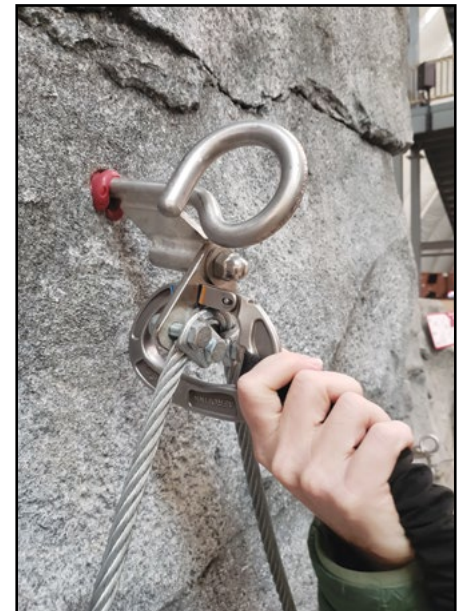
A lifelong local within the Dallas/Ft. Worth area, he quickly realized that trampoline parks were everywhere, and it became imperative to innovate and create something new.

“For a year and a half, it was just ideas and a vision in my mind,” he told *Amusement Today*. “When we started looking at ideas that were different, ceiling height became an obvious differentiator. A lot of entertainment centers can renovate big box stores where you are limited to what was there. Adventures became our theme, and we wanted to do something different.”

A dome became the solution. With a top height of 75 feet, Fontanelli’s imagination began to soar, and he came up with the idea to bring outdoor adventures indoors. The name he selected was **Bolder**. With clear spans and no structur-



The rocky via ferrata centerpiece adds an iconic look to the park’s many adventures (above left). The ingenious sliding hook system (above right) allows for participants to always be locked to the cable and never be detached until the conclusion of the course. AT/TIM BALDWIN



al support needed, he was able to create unique attractions brought indoors. With 350 tons of cooling, the climate-controlled structure is a drawing card itself.

“We’re in the entertainment industry, and a dome is unique,” he said. “Most people haven’t been in a dome like this, so when you walk in, the dome is almost its own attraction. You get that height and space you normally don’t see in a traditional building.”

“When Bolder first opened, the reaction was what we still get every day. You walk in and get that wow factor,” said **Emily Miller**, sales and marketing. “You are completely in awe of these 60-foot rock structures.”

The outdoor feel was important. In addition to the iconic rock structures in the center of the facility,

surrounding attractions and areas are accented with wood and natural-looking materials.

Via Ferrata is the park’s centerpiece. Stemming from Italian, it translates to “iron way” — essentially a protected climbing route of steel cables, rungs and ladders used to cross over or through mountain ranges. The history of via ferrata was established in World War I to get troops around the Swiss Alps.

“The cable is the trail. You just traverse the rock by following the cable around,” said Fontanelli. “It’s very popular in Europe, and it’s starting to make its way to North America. To my knowledge, we’re the first in North America indoors.”

There are two different levels offering a beginner’s trail and one more advanced — and higher

— with different activities along the way. To scale the course takes between 30 to 40 minutes.

The climbing system is ingeniously clever. At no time do participants unclip themselves from the cable. The design of the clasp allows the guest to slide over the attachments to the rocks but still stay secured to the cable.

Bolder offers four different levels of activity packages, all named after trails on ski slopes and using the same color-coded classifications, from green (easiest) to double black diamond (most difficult). Ticketing is provided by **Semnox**.

Offerings are diverse. They include synthetic ice skating (**Extra Ice**), artificial snow tubing (**Neveplast**), ziplines, adventure and ropes courses (**The Trekking Group**), a blast-

er arena (**Media Vision**), circular bumper cars (**Amusement Products**), net (**InCord**) and rock climbing, an exploration play structure (**PlaySmart**) and freefall experiences. Additional activities include a mining sluice (**Sandy Creek Mining**), archery lanes and arcade games (**Alpha Omega**).

The air-supported dome has 66,000 square feet of floor space. Mechanical systems have redundancies of power with natural gas generators on site, powering multiple inflation systems.

“These domes are extremely common up north,” said Fontanelli. “Those places have only a few months a year to do outdoor sports. We obviously are using it for entertainment.”

“It’s not the traditional

► See **BOLDER**, page 26



Bolder has many levels of activities, making for interaction between visitors, such as ziplines and rope courses suspended over the snow tubing (above left). The via ferrata attraction has a lower and more advanced course (above middle). The inflated dome allows for a ceiling height of 75 feet (above right). AT/TIM BALDWIN



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► **BOLDER**

Continued from page 24

trampoline park you see," said Miller. "It's one of a kind. It doesn't exist anywhere else. That excitement made it easier to convey what was inside. It's the outdoors brought indoors. One of our [taglines] is 'Are you bold enough?' Getting that excitement out of being bold enough to try something outside your element."

"We hired a company to fly a drone through the entire park," said Fontanelli. "In three minutes it did what we can't do in words and pictures. When we did that, everyone got it."

In addition to ticket sales, other revenue streams are in place. Mining, food and beverage (which includes beer and wine), a gift shop, birthday parties, archery lane rental and arcade games help raise per caps.

Comfort foods are elevated with special touches.



Bumper cars from Amusement Products provide amusement rides in addition to the participatory offerings (above left). All the rope adventure activities were supplied by The Trekking Group (above right). AT/TIM BALDWIN



Because of the nature of kitchen equipment in conjunction with the pressurized dome, the kitchens are in a separate building with a pass-through window once the food is prepared.

DFX did the audio and visual systems throughout the dome.

Management estimates the average length of stay to start at three to four hours. The bigger packages keep people engaged from six to eight hours.

"It's unlimited," said Miller. "You can go up and climb, come down and get something to eat and then go back up."

"Jerry Merola of Amusement Entertainment Management did our feasibility study, and they helped us identify what attractions, what revenue sources and what location," said Fontanelli. "I come from the finance industry, so I didn't have the amusement experience.

They provided expertise in the industry. That was tremendously beneficial in the early stages."

During the process of obtaining funding, the pandemic hit, making for substantial challenges.

"When the pandemic hit, I couldn't get a pitch meeting to save my life. Jerry's advice to me was to just keep going. I had so much uncertainty, but at that point, it was just architectural," Fontanelli told

AT. "It was all soft costs. Jerry said to keep going so that when we come out of [the pandemic] you need to be further ahead. When we could get investor meetings, we then had more to show."

By the end of 2022, Bolder was ready to open its doors.

Dynamic Design provided architectural services.

Based on the initial success, Fontanelli looks forward to building the next one.

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FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRAL

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Altitude Trampoline Park announced a new signed agreement to propel the concept into Oklahoma City. The agreement marks the brand's first-ever location in Oklahoma.

"Oklahoma is one of the markets that our team has been diligently looking into over the past year, and we're thrilled to introduce our fun and energetic brand to Oklahoma with this new location," said **Robert Morris**, vice president of development for Altitude Trampoline Park. "The franchise owners in Oklahoma City exemplify the kind of skilled operators that we're looking to grow our proven business model with and establish a home for gravity-defying joy, exhilaration, social growth and wellness in communities across the U.S."

The company is targeting markets throughout the country to further increase the brand's national footprint, with specific priority for new locations in Oklahoma, as well as Iowa, Indiana, Michigan and Missouri.

Virtual reality content, management software and attractions developer **VRstudios** has announced that the company has moved to a new product ownership structure and business model.

FOD Capital, LLC, the majority shareholder of VRstudios, Inc. has acquired the company's entire technology and product portfolio, including its robust AMP (Attraction Management Platform) software, ATOM and FLEX multiplayer free-roaming systems and portfolio of game titles built expressly for out-of-home VR attractions.

Under this new structure, the business model will shift from channel and direct sales to an invitation for strategic partners to license or acquire the technology and products to fast-track the addition of branded VR attractions and content to their portfolio or as a baseline to accelerate new product development. The offering leverages more than seven years of development and field-proven reliability of millions of VR games delivered by the AMP across multiple system formats in amusement locations.

Cluggy's, a Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, family entertainment center, is preparing for a series of upgrades under new ownership.

John and Mary McGough, the previous owners, had operated Cluggy's since 1999 and were ready to retire, but were unable to locate a buyer and announced they'd be closing the location. When the news got out, Cluggy's regulars **Melissa and Brian Bentzen** stepped in.

The Bentzens will not only own the business, but Cluggy's games, bowling

and bounce houses. They will be leasing the building as well as the outdoor mini golf and go kart areas.

Within three to nine months, the Bentzens plan to renovate Cluggy's, adding digital screens that show food menus and activity prices, smart TVs in birthday areas, adding staff to improve customer service and updating birthday packages to include more options. They also aim to replace play tunnels with a new indoor playground and update the batting cages.

Area15, the immersive art and entertainment district located minutes from the Las Vegas Strip, announced a monumental expansion spanning 20 acres to its north along nearby I-15. **Universal Parks & Resorts** will anchor the expansion with a new, year-round horror entertainment experience inspired by its popular Halloween Horror Nights. The new development extends beyond Area15's main complex which includes **Meow Wolf's Omega Mart, Illuminarium** and **Lost Spirits Distillery**.

The expansion will include more than 450,000 square feet of customizable retail, office and residential space featuring different types of building structures, with tenant leasing opportunities ranging from 1,000 square feet to 60,000 square feet. More than 85,000 square feet will be dedicated to pop-ups and outdoor experiences, including a salvaged Boeing 747 aircraft to be repurposed as an event space.

"Area15 curates a constellation of world-class experiences and our partnership with an internationally renowned entertainment company such as Universal marks a significant milestone in our evolution," said **Winston Fisher**, chief executive officer, Area15. "Consumers continue to gravitate toward artful new forms of entertainment providing immersive experiences, authentic connections and real emotions. The demand for more Area15 experiences is high, and we are ready to dive into this substantial expansion and find more partnerships that will have a lasting impact on the Area15 District and the city of Las Vegas."

A new family entertainment center opened in the San Antonio, Texas, area. **AR's Entertainment Hub** opened its doors on January 7, 2023, inside the **Wonderland of Americas** in Balcones Heights, Texas.

"AR's Entertainment Hub is thrilled to offer our community a safe and fun environment to make memories with one another," said owner **Archie Wright**.

The FEC offers roller skating, laser tag, mini golf, a playground, bumper cars and an arcade, in addition to a bar and bistro. The event center also has deals for parties and corporate events.



The Twilight Zone by Monster Mini Golf in Las Vegas, Nevada, is one of more than 30 Monster Mini Golf locations that will be upgraded to utilizing Semnox Solutions' technology.

AT/FILE

Monster Mini Golf locations add Semnox Solutions tech

DALLAS, Texas — **Semnox Solutions**, which builds holistic technology solutions for the entertainment and leisure industry, will now be utilized in more than 30 **Monster Mini Golf** locations across the U.S. and in Canada with state-of-the-art technology upgrades.

Monster Mini Golf, an indoor glow-in-the-dark family entertainment center that features an 18-hole mini golf course, laser tag, and an arcade, began migrating its point-of-sale systems and arcade management systems to Semnox's Parafait suite of solutions this year. Being one of the fastest-growing family entertainment franchises in the industry, Monster Mini Golf needed a way to provide central reporting to HQ and cohesion among its franchisees.

"We offer our franchise owners some flexibility within their market, which is different from other Semnox multi-unit partners," said President of Monster Entertainment **Chris King**. "Together we had to create a hybrid scenario to develop all needs effectively. The all-in-one system creates unification of all technologies, and the fair subscription rate doesn't gouge expenses, which is a nice touch in this industry."

Monster Mini Golf offers different promotions, special packages and loyalty programs depending on location. Some locations used token-based arcade games, while others used magnetic swipe cards. Franchisee operators at each location will receive a new POS system, an arcade RFID card reader system upgrade and self-service kiosks provided by Semnox Solutions.

"Our operators were using several POS Systems as well as various third party applications to operate their centers. This was a barrier to effective management and analysis of our business, as we had no unification or top-level transparency," added King. "The Semnox system provided an all-in-one system that brought us all together and incorporated new tools such as online booking/reservations and e-commerce."

The POS system will allow operators to set their own promotions while creating central reporting metrics for the corporate office. RFID card readers and kiosks will help increase revenue and provide an overall better guest experience.

"Of the venues we did move over, there was a 25-30% immediate jump in revenue, including arcade play, as well as the ability to create and sell attraction combinations," stated King.

Monster Mini Golf has grown organically over the past 17 years and as of January 3, 2023, the company's founder sold the franchising company to a group of its top franchisees who have plans to aggressively accelerate growth in the coming years. By the fall of 2024, all 30-plus locations and future locations will be powered by Semnox Solutions.



IAAPA FEC Summit attendees gain knowledge, motivation boost

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Over 160 attendees from around the country attended the **International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) Family Entertainment Center (FEC) Summit 2023** held January 22-24, at the Renaissance Nashville Hotel.

IAAPA's FEC Summit has proven to be a successful networking avenue and learning opportunity for FEC owners and operators and for those thinking about entering this part of the industry. It includes specialized motivational and educational workshops and sessions. And it includes tours of local FECs.

The 2023 theme was "Reimagine. Transform. Lead."

As networking is at the top of importance of the FEC Summit, the event kicked off this year on Sunday evening with a costume contest. Attendees were to dress up as their favorite music artist or wear a shirt featuring a loved band.

On Monday morning, the first of two keynote address took place. **Dan Ralphs**, CEO and founder of **Dream Leadership Consulting**, was first up. Through Ralphs' professional years, he has shown he has a talent for helping individuals

discover their own dreams and learn how to pursue them. He addressed this topic and then led the **Reimagine Workshop** afterwards.



Ralphs

Attendees toured three facilities Monday afternoon and evening. Included in that tour were two Nashville facilities, the **Tee Line** and **Game Terminal**.

Tee Line is an entertainment venue that combines recreation and relaxation, offering curling, bowling and a restaurant.

Game Terminal appeals to Nashville's pinball enthusiasts and all the Pac-Man wizards and Street Fighter experts. This arcade offers more than 250 games from a collection spanning four decades.

That evening, attendees were taken to **The City Forum** in Clarksville, Tennessee, about an hour's drive north of Nashville. This 120,000-square-foot entertainment center is family-owned and operated by the **Knott** family.

It first opened in 2018 and offers ample space for socializing and features high-speed go-karting, 10 lanes of bowling, two stories of laser tag, 18 holes of mini golf and an arcade



Attendees were treated to three venue tours during the summit. One was **Game Terminal** (above), which offered more than 250 games from a collection spanning four decades. Another venue, **Tee Line**, offered curling (below), bowling and a restaurant. COURTESY IAAPA

filled with classic game cabinets, as well as the newest video games.

Tuesday morning kicked off with keynoter **Verne Harnish**, founder, **Entrepreneurs' Organization**,

who addressed the group on "There is No Going Back: Our only choice is moving forward." And he emphasized during his address that it is important to do it faster than change is happening. Keeping up wasn't enough anymore.

After Harnish's keynote



Harnish



on Tuesday morning, attendees were offered educational sessions. The first was the **Operator Panel-Transformation Process** session. It was led by **David Dimberio** from **Combat Ops Entertainment** and **Glenn Gable** from **Roll-House Entertainment**.

The afternoon session was the **Leadership Session: You Cannot Motivate**

Anyone, You Can Only Inspire a Motivated Person. It was presented by **Troy Sacco** from **Five Star Parks and Attractions**.

This session focused on understanding how to use compassionate intelligence with employees.

A farewell reception was held Tuesday afternoon to close the event.

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At **Tee Line**, the group was able to come together for a question-and-answer session with **Tee Line** operators. COURTESY IAAPA

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2023 South Florida Fair proves a Dino-Myte success for all involved

AT: Pam Sherborne

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WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — The theme for the 2023 South Florida Fair, in West Palm Beach — Dino-Myte — was very apropos as the event experienced one of its best years ever, attracting record crowds on multiple days throughout its Jan. 12-29 run.

Of course there was another reason why the Dino-Myte theme was so appropriate. Adding to the fair's success in 2023 included the Imagine Exhibitions, which showcased several animatronic dinosaur displays second. The traveling exhibit, titled Dinosaurs Around the World, featured some of the world's most unique and recently discovered dinosaurs.

Guests were able to get an up-close look at dinosaurs such as a Tyrannosaurus Rex and a Triceratops.

"I think people are feeling more comfortable being in large crowds again, which I hope is a good sign for the fairs that will take place later in the year," said **Vicki Chouris**, president and CEO of the South Florida Fair. "Visitors also loved our dinosaur theme, plus we had near perfect weather this year. Both of those factors also contributed to our overall success."

The South Florida Fair does not release its exact attendance until after auditing has been complete, but many of the fair's longtime food vendors noticed the increase in attendance as well.

According to **Doreen Marcial Poreba** of **PR Czar Inc.**, the fair's public relations company, the **Butcher Boys** has been a food vendor at the South Florida Fair for



The 2023 South Florida experienced a great turnout with multiple record-setting dates. Wade Shows provided the midway. Vicki Chouris, president and CEO of the fair and comedy hypnotist Brad Matchett stand before one of the dinosaurs on display at the event (inset). COURTESY SOUTH FLORIDA FAIR

40 years. The current owners, **Priscilla and William Scannell**, have been a part of the fair for the past 20 years.

"It's probably the best year we've ever had here, especially with the change in (booth) locations," Priscilla Scannell reported to Marcial Poreba, "This year we saw a huge increase. I'm sure every vendor here is having the best year they've ever had."

Randy Reichert, owner of **Hot Wisconsin Cheese**, also reported that the 2023 fair was the best he had experienced in the 15 years his company has been at the fair. Both Scannell and Reichert also gave kudos to the fair staff. The fair staff gave kudos right back to its vendors, attributing the fair's success to its vendors such as the new dinosaur attractions.

Fair guests found themselves being educated about dinosaurs. They were able to discover where the various species of dinosaurs lived, how they arrived and the latest paleontological, cutting-edge research.



Fairgoers also got to see lifelike dinosaurs in action and interacted with them throughout the Jurassic Kingdom Lockdown show.

Additional theme-related exhibits included prehistoric dinosaur adventures, a mobile museum, the **Palm Beach Museum of Natural History**, the **Cox Science Museum and Aquarium**, a Dino Encounters Excavation Zone and **Mr. Adler**, an experienced paleontologist who loves to take his babies for a stroll around the fair.

Another new hit attraction this year was "Extreme Illusions and Escapes," pre-

sented by **American Bath and Shower**. Featuring **Josh and Lea Knotts**, the duo presented a show mixed with stage illusions, skillful escapes, audience participation and music to go along with it.

For the first time, the fair offered two different wine pairing dinners, sponsored by the **Sun Sentinel** and presented by **Cugini Winery**.

A new horse show titled "Hollywood Horses Tricks and Tales" impressed many fair guests. **Austin Anderson** offered this educational show. He taught the audience how the horses are trained and discussed how he approach-

es training, working with a horse's natural ability and how to enhance it. The horses performed some tricks and even took a bow on command.

The annual ice skating show, "Dinotopia On Ice," presented by **Ford**, is always a crowd pleaser and this year was no different.

The award-winning agriculture and livestock program featuring more than 1,000 exhibitors from more than 30 Florida counties also engaged visitors. The always-popular Mooternity barn gave guests a chance to see calves being born.

Wade Shows provided the midway with more than 200 rides, games and attractions. The 2023 South Florida Fair kicked off on Jan. 12 with an evening Ride-A-Thon.

The fair also provided five stages of live music, a drumline competition, two robotic competitions, daily parades. Comedy hypnotist **Brad Matchett** also drew a lot of attention.




Fair success is many times assessed by the fair food, and the 2023 South Florida Fair didn't disappoint in this category either. New items included **Miller Lemonade's** pickle lemonade, **Holy Macaroni's** Thai bowls and its build-your-own macaroni bowls.


Another highlight was **Carnival Eats**, a Canadian TV series that features culinary creations from various fairs and festivals. The show's 10-person crew spent four days filming on the fairgrounds.



They captured foods made by **Fluffy's**, **GuaGo**, **LR Foods**, **Casey's Concessions** and **FunTime Foods** and also interviewed the vendors and fairgoers as they tasted these delectable delights. Two shows are planned with a tentative show date of July.

"The Fair is all about bringing smiles to the faces of everyone from young children on up," Chouris said. "We also are very proud to be an integral part of our community by helping our youth with scholarships and programs to further their education."

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Despite winter storm, 2023 Fort Worth Stock Show fared well

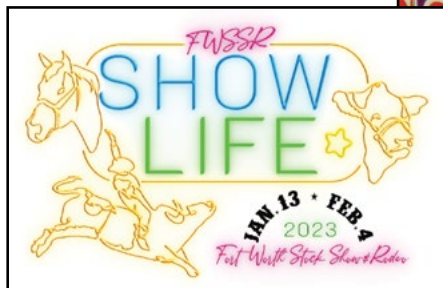
AT: B. Derek Shaw

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FORT WORTH, Texas — There was a total of 1,271,250 estimated grounds attendance, during the 23-day run, a record for the **Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo (FWSSR)**. That number represents an increase of 69,050 from 2022. “Weather worked in our favor for the first two weeks before experiencing some icy precipitation on January 30 and 31 which slowed attendance. The skies cleared on February 2 and crowds were large the last two days of the show (February 3 and 4). The impact from COVID-19 was minimal,” said **Matt Brockman**, communications director. The theme was Show Life.

Locally-based Talley Amusements brought 50 rides with 13 food stands and 30 games. New rides this year included a **Wisdom Tornado**, **Owens Juke Box** funhouse and an **Owens Haunted House**. The three most popular rides were a **Lamberink 33-meter Ferris wheel**, **Pinfari Iron Dragon** coaster and a **Chance Rides Big Kahuna**.

Even with four icy days forcing the ride midway not to open, revenue results were strong. “We set



a record on gross revenues even with the winter storm. [This is] a great indicator as to what to expect for the 2023 season,” said **Mary Talley**, co-owner. Talley Amusements has provided the entire midway at the FWSSR since 2003.

“We have a wonderful relationship with all the stock show staff and local municipalities,” said Talley. “It is an honor to provide our midway to our hometown event.”

FWSSR sees the value of the ride component. “Our carnival/midway compliments our entertainment offerings perfectly with something for everyone from toddlers taking their first-ever ride on the Choo Choo Express or the Tea Cups all the way to teenagers and adults getting their adrenaline charge on exciting thrill rides like the Cliff Hanger, Tilt-A-Whirl or Kamikaze,” said Brockman. “We have a great working relationship with Talley Amusements.”

Brockman noted one of



The three most popular rides were a Lamberink 33-meter Ferris wheel (shown), Pinfari Iron Dragon Coaster and a Chance Rides Big Kahuna. AT/GARY SLADE

the things that sets this stock show apart. “We organized the world’s first indoor rodeo in 1918. Now, 105 years later, our FWSSR ProRodeo Tournament, is among the top five professional rodeos in the nation. With a \$1.2 million payout and the sport’s premier venue, **Dickies Arena**, our rodeo is reaching new and exciting heights. We were honored to receive the 2022 Large Indoor Rodeo of the Year Award as well as the 2022 Polaris Remuda Award for the best lineup of bucking horses, both bestowed

by the **Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association**. Showcasing our traditions and the western lifestyle is important to us while also being innovative in our efforts to appeal to an increasingly diverse local demographic.”

The stock show advertises its product across several media — digital (paid social, display and search), television, radio and print.

FWSSR was asked about COVID-19 mitigation challenges and practices. “We facilitated hand sanitation across the complex. Signage was posted reminding patrons to take precautions (handwashing and social distancing) to protect themselves and others,” said Brockman.

The stock show hosted the kickoff for the year-long bicentennial celebration of the **Texas Rangers** law enforcement agency. This proved to be quite popular. The Rangers had a significant presence on the grounds and Texas Rangers’ exhibits complete with artifacts, photographs and video were well received. This also was the second year of autograph signings from cast members of the television show, *Yellowstone*. An inaugural year 50/50 raffle, dubbed **Pony Up**, was held during

rodeo performances raising \$105,804 for stock show scholarships and educational initiatives.

Grandstand entertainment included **John Michael Montgomery** with **Deana Carter**; **Tesla**; **Brian Regan**; **ONEUS**; **Larry the Cable Guy**; **John Anderson** with **Bryan White**; and **Shane Smith & The Saints**. All told, 43 music acts were held in the Roadhouse and The Corkyard, as well as several street musicians performing in various locations on the complex, all of whom were included in the price of grounds admission.

“We continue to be blown away at how the local community embraces the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo,” said Brockman. “From the guests that come to enjoy the many offerings, to the exhibitors, competitors, volunteers and donors that make the show come together, our success is due to the thousands of amazingly individuals that unselfishly dedicate their time, energies and financial support to making the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo truly legendary.”

The 2024 dates are January 12 through February 3.

•fwssr.com



Hometown carnival ride provider Talley Amusements again brought in 50 rides — including a **Chance Rides Stampede** (above left) — with nearly half appealing to kiddie attendees. AT/GARY SLADE; COURTESY FORT WORTH STOCK SHOW & RODEO



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EVERY RIDE SHOULD BE A STAR



Mathews visits 27 state fairs in a single season

AT: B. Derek Shaw

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MANASSAS, Va. — **Rick Mathews** has been around North America and around the globe frequently — very frequently. His position as vice president of event Management at **Precon Events** keeps him traveling. mathews produces large corporate conferences and events mostly from the audio-visual and technical side for non-profits and other associations. His assignments take him here, there and everywhere, including near fairs.

Mathews, who resides in Manassas, Virginia, (when he is not traveling, which is rare), explains how this feat came together. “As I was traveling around, visiting amusement parks, [I thought] I can get a lot more coasters by visiting some of these state fairs.” He began by mapping it out, looking at fair calendars and planning the logistics. “I love fair food and the atmosphere of fairs — state fairs. I also love county fairs. I’ve visited quite a lot of those over the years, as well, all over the country.”

His season-long trek began at the **Florida State Fair**, Tampa, and ended at the **Washington State Fair** in Puyallup. Other fairs in between included the **Maryland State Fair**, the **Virginia State Fair**, **New York State Fair** and the **Oregon State Fair**, along with 21 more. “And a ton through the mid-west, just to see what they are all about. It was all a good time,” said Mathews.

Mathews favorite fair? He quickly responded, “The **Wisconsin State Fair**, because of all the fried cheese. They also have the biggest traveling **Schwarzkopf** out there, so that was a good one.”

What about the most unique? “Puyallup was definitely very unique because it has a wooden roller coaster. That was nice to get to ride that in its original setting, because most fairs don’t have the permanent rides. [The **State Fair of Texas** removed theirs, so I’d say Puyallup.”

Mathews summed up his two dozen plus three state fair visits, “It was a great year. Eventually I want to visit all the state fairs in the US. We’ll try to keep knocking those fairs out in the coming years.”



A few seasons back, Rick Mathews visited 27 state fairs in the U.S., starting in February and finishing the task in late September. Recently he was visiting Lakes Entrance Family Carnival, run by Chants Amusements. In the background is the 20-meter wheel manufactured by Mondial World of Rides. AT/B. DEREK SHAW



MIDWAYSCENE

AT: B. Derek Shaw

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Fort Worth residents have fond memories of the five-mile miniature railroad that runs through Forest Park and Trinity Park. The train that has been running since 1959 closed down last March due to mechanical issues. However, it should soon be back in operation.

Operator **Forest Park Rides, Inc.** owns the train, the tracks and the bridge crossing the Trinity river and has a contract with the city of Fort Worth to use the park land.

In October, the city gave the operator 60 days to resume operations or face contract cancellation. The company asked for an extension, showing invoices totaling \$250,000 for needed repairs. Upon receiving them, the city gave the company a 90-day extension. The new deadline is the end of this month.

Mary Talley, president of Forest Park Rides, said in a statement that her company has made significant progress and she was confident the miniature railroad would be open this spring.

Centre County Grange and Encampment Fair, Centre Hall, Pennsylvania, is the recipient of a grant through the Graymont Carbon Reduction Fund (GCRF). The grant will be used to convert inefficient lighting to LED lighting on the fairgrounds.

The 149th annual fair takes place August 18 - 26, with two ride midways. One is run by **Bartlebaugh Amusements**, while the other is operated by **Garbrick Amusements**. This is one of the few remaining encampment fairs in the country.

The 2023 **National Association of Amusement Ride Safety Officials** (NAARSO) instructor of the year is **Avery Wheelock**, president of **Worldwide Safety Group Inc.**, Plant City, Florida. Wheelock is certified by both leading certification bodies in the United States. He is a NAARSO ride inspector level III with instructor endorsement as well as a NAARSO certified ride operator level II.

Worldwide Safety Group provides third party inspections for insurance companies, carnivals, FEC’s, amusement parks and other companies in the industry. Risk assessment and loss control surveys, consulting services along with operator training and nondestructive testing are just a few of the areas it covers, positioning themselves as a “one stop shop.”

Harry Reffner of Bedford, Pennsylvania, was named the 2022 fair person of the year at the **Pennsylvania State Association of County Fairs** (PSACF) annual convention held in January in Hershey. It is always held in conjunction with the **Pennsylvania**

State Showmen’s Association (PSSA).

A native of Roaring Spring, Reffner has been involved in the fair industry since the early 1990s, having nearly “done it all” at the **Bedford County Fair** held yearly in late July. (The 2023 edition in July 23 - 29 with **Bartlebaugh Amusements** providing the ride midway.) Reffner has held positions including entry clerk, exhibitor, entry superintendent, concession manager, board member, and then board secretary from 2003-2022.

The **Arkansas State Fair** (ASF) has appointed **Tiffany Wilkerson** as its new general manager. She is not only the first female to serve in that position, she is also the first African American general manager and, at age 39, the youngest in the leadership role.

Wilkerson hopes to build upon the traditions of the ASF while growing the Fairgrounds as a year-round event venue along with an ag-educational program. In her words, “I am thrilled at this opportunity. My entire career as part of the Arkansas Livestock Show Association has been full of exciting challenges. I intend to take my 20 years of experience and build on our recent levels of success. The sky’s the limit for the Arkansas State Fair and our Association,” said Wilkerson in a release.

Bruce Maloch, chairman of the Arkansas Livestock Show Association, says of Wilkerson, “Tiffany’s historical knowledge, experience, and expertise make her the perfect choice to serve as general manager of the Arkansas State Fair. She is familiar with all aspects of the state fairgrounds and will provide the leadership to make the fairgrounds the premier entertainment and livestock exhibition venue in the state.”

The fair takes place October 13-22 with **North American Midway Entertainment** (NAME) covering the ride midway.

Reithoffer Shows has new attractions planned for 2023-2024 seasons. **Rick Reithoffer**, president, announced a new ride and attraction acquisitions to the Reithoffer stable at the IAFE convention in Indianapolis. The pair are a **Bertazzon** Ice Jet and a **Gosetto** New York New York Funhouse.

Ice Jet has a footprint of 63 x 60 feet and stands 22 feet tall, with a 40-rider capacity for an up to 2.5 minute ride cycle. The two-story funhouse has a “Big Apple” motif, with appropriate graphics and light package.

A first quarter delivery is expected. “Once we get the rides, then we have to build special racking for U.S. travel on the trucks. We’ll move as quickly as possible to get these attractions out on the circuit,” said Reithoffer. He said other attractions are “in the pipeline” and will be announced as the season progresses.

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Florida Week 2023 proves successful; perhaps two weeks in 2024

AT: B. Derek Shaw
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RIVERVIEW, Fla. — The 55th annual International Showmen's Foundation (IISF) Super Trade Show and Extravaganza had a strong four days. While some of the ride manufacturers chose to bring less equipment or even a tent with no rides, the vendor count stayed the same, occupying a smaller footprint. The weather was warm and sunny most days, with a gentle breeze that kept things more comfortable. Inside vendors, depending on location within the metal pavilion, teetered from a little uncomfortable to bordering on toasty. However, most all agreed, it was a good show with decent traffic most days despite some inconveniences.

"Fabulous, absolutely fabulous – truly! It's probably one of the best shows we've had in a long time. We're very grateful," said Teresa Rimes, trade show secretary.

Vendors were up over the last two years. There were 12 first-time vendors. Registration numbers were up every single day.

A pair of first-time show attendees from New Oxford, Pennsylvania, Pete and Bonnie Rondeau of Glory Days Amusements, were pleased with the trade show. "It [has] a nice vibe to it. I like the size and feel of this. I've been to IAAPA [Expo], which, of course, is huge. This is a much different feel. I really enjoy that. It's a little more personal. Everybody here feels like family," said Pete.

"It's nice, it's very nice. It's very carnival oriented," said Bonnie.

Brian Woodke with



There was a good assortment of inflatables on display at the trade show. They were located directly in front of the IISA headquarters, beside Riverview Drive in Riverside. The show was held indoors and out. Some of the ride manufacturers brought less equipment, however the vendor count stayed the same, occupying a smaller footprint. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

Amusement Devices & Manufacturing felt the show was "Fabulous. It's been good every year."

Isabella Smith, product manager with Luna-Park Rides was pleased, "The show was really, really good. It was really busy. We had a great location."

"Very good. Very busy," said Kevin Dalton, Dalton Kid Rides Rebuilders. "I'm unable to really take ride orders just because of help issues. I'm backed up. I got as many ride sales as I want for the foreseeable future. I am taking fence orders, parts orders and selling replacement vehicles for existing rides."

Massimo Sartori, chairman, Sartori Rides srl saw a lot of trade show floor traffic: "This year the show was good. Normally it is typically quiet. This year [there were] many clients from the United States and also from



South America, Mexico, Central America, Panama and Columbia. We are very happy for this year."

Marcello Bertazzon, principal, Bertazzon Rides had mixed feelings: "The show is a bit slow, but this is a good occasion to meet people because many showmen show up here. We were not expecting to sell a ride right away. Actually, we did sell a set of bumper cars that was unexpected, so that was

good. It's nice to be here."

Fabio Martini, CEO, Technical Park, said, "It's very important because every year we come to Gibtown. I know all my customers. I meet the new customers and so for Technical Park it is very, very important for marketing in the United States."

The sales Manager of POI-Rides, Peter Stolarczyk, was satisfied. "We had a lot of interest in our ride. Besides the ride outside, we

also had a punching bag game inside," he said.

Al Frieden with Battech Enterprises experienced good traffic. "The trade show was busier early on than what was expected, and that's a good thing. It seems to have died off at the end, but it was a good thing."

Roger Wadkins Jr. with Wadkins Expo Wheel company was pleased: "It was good. [We received] a lot of good compliments. We had a good response — a couple of sales. We'll be back again next year."

Stephen Lisko, owner of Equipment Solutions International, felt satisfied with the show. "It was a pretty good show this year. It's been really good. We sold many swings."

Sebastian Lamberink, director, Lamberink Ferris Wheels felt good about the event. "It was quite interesting. It was better than last year. We had some really good interest, [so] I'm hoping after the show to sell some rides as well," he told *Amusement Today*.

Jim Ziaja, World Ride Service & Supply Inc. felt the show was productive. "We had a good trade show. A lot of people came by — a lot of important people, the working people of the show. We didn't have a lot of what I would call 'fill-in' people just wandering around looking at stuff. So, it was pretty good for us. We talked to a lot of people."

Rides 4 U had a very good show as Len Soled, principal, explained, "We saw good quality people. The volume of people wasn't as grandiose as in the past, but the actual buyers were down here. There's a lot of interest in equipment. Unfortunately the situation with both new and used is quite a lead time. A used [ride] is very difficult to find in good quality condition. Our deliveries right now are anywhere from four months out to nine, ten months out on a couple of bigger pieces we sold here. We are still able to turn stuff for the remainder of this year, which is unusual. SBF/Visa, as big as they are, they are in a great position to still be able to turn out equipment."



Fabio Martini, CEO of Technical Park was on hand (left). Also in the booth after a three-year absence were Carlo Guglielmi and wife Cindy Rothschild, who represent Technical Park along with a few others through ITAL International LLC (above left). The Pickett family made the journey from down under to participate in the festivities that honored their father (and Emily's departed husband, Taz). Two siblings live and work for shows in the United States (above right). AT/B. DEREK SHAW

► See FLORIDA, page 37

► **FLORIDA**

Continued from page 36

Soled has been a vendor at the show for 38 years. "A lot of my competitors out there are not bringing equipment down," said Soled. "I think if you can't touch, feel — that's what helps sell this equipment."

"The show was good. There weren't that many people here, but [the] people here were buyers," said Jim Frederiksen, Frederiksen Industries. "We sold one out of here and a lot of potentials. I'm happy with the show."

Jack Souilljee, with Kolmax Plus, felt it was important to have a presence. "We didn't expect anything because we couldn't take any rides with us. On the last day [vendor deadline] we decided, no matter what, people have to see that we are still alive and kicking," he said. "So, then we wrote in we are coming with a tent."

Lisa Gosetto, CEO of Gosetto said, "The show was a little bit quiet this year." Intermark Ride Group's, Gina Guglielmi, felt the same. "I believe it was very slow this year. We didn't see as many people on the floor as we normally do."

Edward Cromhecke, vice president of Fabbri Group, said, "The show was very successful. We introduced a new ride called INcontrol. It has been received very well. We have shown a model in our booth." (Both park and portable versions are available.) "It is very, very quick to set up and to dismantle. We have a very positive reaction



Attendees from the IAFE stopped by the Amusement Today booth. Above right, they include (l to r): Jo Reynolds (manager, Warren County Fair, Indianola, Iowa and 2023 1st Vice Chair of IAFE), Marla Calico, president and CEO and Jennifer Giesike (Washington Town & Country Fair, Washington, Missouri and 2023 Chair of IAFE). Brian and Chandler Woodke (above right) are second and third generation owners of Amusement Devices & Manufacturing. AT/B. DEREK SHAW



from the U.S. market."

Here's a look back at some of the activities held by other organizations that week.

The Showman's League of America (SLA) held meetings throughout the week, including the Long Range Planning/Capital Preservation Committee, Scholarship Committee, Nominating Committee, Board of Governors annual meeting and a social at the Gibtown Club. The St. Louis Chapter of the SLA had a social mixer for their members as well. In addition, Ben Pickett, Blake Huston, Andy Deggeller, and James Ingram all earned their gold cards by each signing up 25+ members in 2022.

"Audrey Poole and I enjoy working together on the National Independent Concessionaires Association (NICA) Business Expo/Fare Foods [events]. It is a meaningful and successful partnership," said Rey O'Day, NICA executive director. "Our events were well attended, and good conversations occurred in the educational sessions and between the trade show exhib-

itors and their customers. One of the NICA Business EXPO sessions took a look at some of the new products being showcased, including Boxed Water, Glove to Go, Mrs. T's Pierogies, and longtime exhibitor, Smithfield Foods."

Together we are "ALL IN!" was the 2023 theme of the events all held at the Sheraton Tampa Brandon Hotel. The NICA Year in Review Annual Meeting and Gala included the installation of its 2023 Board of Directors led by Vincent Nelson, president; an inspirational greeting "We're On the Rise" from International Association of Fairs and Exhibitions (IAFE) President and CEO Marla Calico; and the honoring of Past President Don Delahoyde, Five Star Catering, as NICA's 2022 Hall of Fame Recipient for his many contributions to NICA and the industry. Also, of note, was the increase in the award level of the annual scholarship fund to \$35,000.

Greg Chiecko, CEO of the Outdoor Amusement Business Association (OABA) recapped its activities: "It's been a phenomenal week. We've had the best attendance we've had in years (pre-pandemic levels). I think we are returning to normal. People missed a few years here. They want to come down and share celebrations like we had this evening, (59th annual banquet, also held at the Sheraton). We had three outstanding award winners, two Hall of Famers and one Pioneer award: Taz Pickett (deceased Australian showman) on the Pioneer award and Andy Schoendienst, Luehrs' Ideal Rides and Mary Chris Smith retired from Allied Specialty

Insurance, both icons in the industry in the Hall of Fame." The presidential gavel was passed from Andy Deggeller to Rick Reithoffer during the evening.

"We had the best TopGolf event we've ever had, once again, a record breaker. That money goes to our H2B visa advocacy in Washington, D.C.," said Chiecko. This was the seventh time it was held with the auction being coordinated by Debbie Powers.

In the past, Florida Week activities have occurred earlier in the month, however, the National Football League (NFL) added a 17th regular season game to the schedule. This has created calendar conflicts. This year Florida Week took place the same week as Valentine's Day, starting the week after the Super Bowl.

When asked if OABA plans to start a week earlier in 2024, Chiecko told AT, "We actually made this decision [and] our board voted on it last year. Our membership really wants to go back

to the week we've had forever. The club [IISA] moved it [later] because the NFL moved another week into the season. Unfortunately, last year, they had already announced their dates, so as a courtesy, we went along with it. We are definitely moving our dates back to the week before. We're working with the club. It's very congenial to try to figure out how to do this the best way."

NICA activities and the Fare Foods show will be aligning with the week before the Super Bowl in 2024.

A question about the move by the other three organizations and how that would affect IISF caused Rimes to respond, "I'm not really sure what the answer to that is, yet. It caught us off guard — a meeting in the middle of our show." Regarding IISF's plans for switching or staying, Rimes said, "That will definitely come very soon."

Rimes was ecstatic about this year. "We're very happy with Gibtown 2023!"



Award winners at the IISA Carnival Museum mid-week champaign reception (l to r): Mary Chris Smith, retired from Allied Specialty Insurance and Andy Schoendienst of Luehrs' Ideal Rides were both Hall of Fame inductees. Emily Pickett (far right) accepted the Industry Pioneer Award, posthumously, for showman, Taz Pickett. COURTESY OABA



Above are (l to r) Robert and Shirley Beltz, owners of Egyptian Exposition and Isabela Smith, product manager, Luna-Park Rides. The Marion, Illinois, carnival purchased one of a half-dozen 15-meter Luna-Park wheels and will take delivery upon conclusion of the 2024 trade show. COURTESY OABA

WATER PARKS & RECREATION

► Royal Caribbean debuts Galveston terminal — page 40 / News Splash — page 40

Malaysia's SplashMania Waterpark opens in planned community

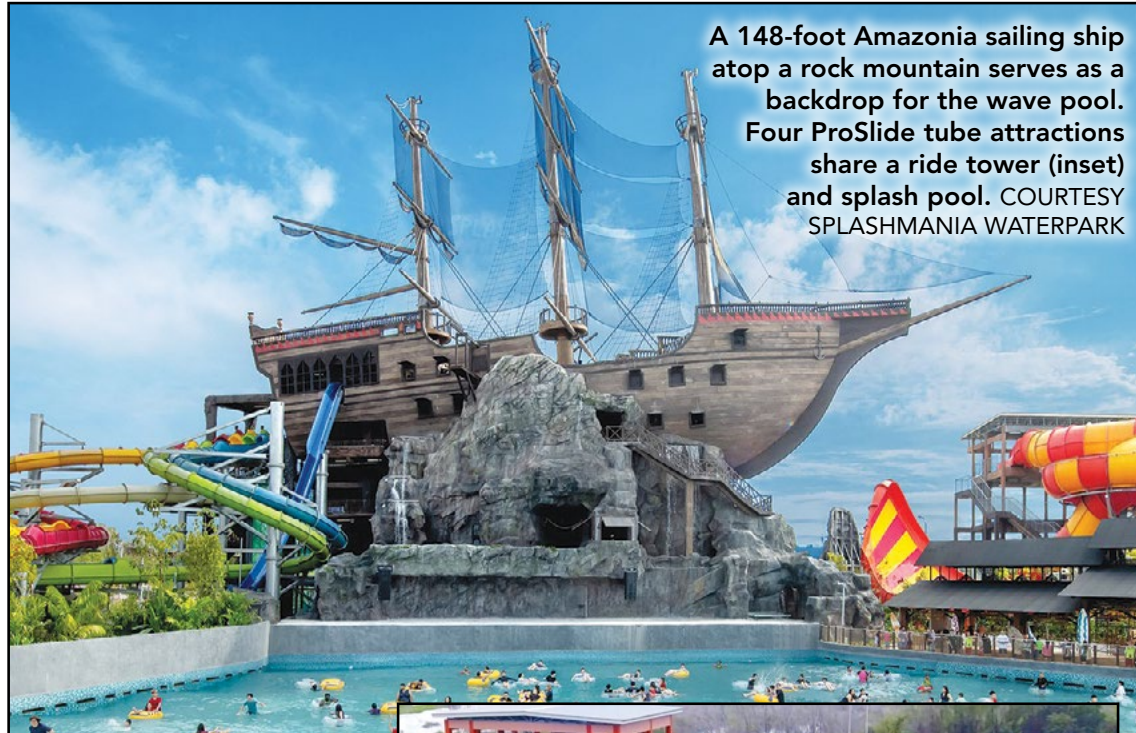
AT: Jeffrey Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

PETALING JAYA, Selangor, Malaysia — **SplashMania Waterpark** at Malaysia's **Gamuda Cove** master-planned city opened to the public on February 6, 2023. The 18-acre water park includes 24 slides, and among the 15 key attractions are some first-of-their-kind waterslide experiences for Malaysia — including a virtual reality waterslide.

The attractions and slides in SplashMania are designed by **Polin Waterparks** of Turkey and **ProSlide Technology** of Canada and feature a balance of adrenaline-pumping slides for thrill seekers along with family-friendly rides for all ages, as well as kid-based attractions. Several children's attractions are pint-sized versions of ProSlide's popular larger slides such as a Kidz Wave, Kidz Twister, Kidz Racer and Kidz Tornado. The very young set can play in a zero-depth splash pad, while older kids will enjoy a massive interactive play structure with medium-sized body slides, including a junior-version bowl ride.

The adult slides are placed around the outside edges of the park and are situated on four ride towers as well as the park's iconic sailing ship.

Among the noteworthy slides is **Shaka Waka**, a 78-meter (255-foot) long multimedia slide with an audio soundtrack and vari-



A 148-foot Amazonia sailing ship atop a rock mountain serves as a backdrop for the wave pool. Four ProSlide tube attractions share a ride tower (inset) and splash pool. COURTESY SPLASHMANIA WATERPARK

ous LED light effects that can be customized by each individual rider prior to entry.

Atlantis VR is an immersive, virtual reality-enhanced waterslide which is said to be the first such implementation in Malaysia. Guests will be presented with virtual reality headgear and then board two-person or four-person family rafts. Upon departure the guests will be virtually transported into a completely different world as they embark on a 250-meter (820-foot) long journey through the **Lost City of Atlantis**. Unfortunately, new technology sometimes presents challenges, and **Atlantis VR** was not ready to be experienced on opening day, but the park is working to have it up and running as soon as possible.



The landmark of SplashMania is a huge rock mountain topped with a 148-foot Amazonia sailing ship. This monolith is an innovative artificial rock structure, fabricated by **Pico Play** of Queensland, Australia, using a highly specialized glass-reinforced concrete technique. Pico Play opened a fabrication facility in the Malaysian state of Johor in 2019, and business has been booming ever since. The rock mountain serves as a backdrop for the park's wave pool and is adorned with waterfalls. The ship can be accessed via a set of stairs and exploring guests will find vantage points from which to take in the surrounding views, as well as a few activities such as a rope monkey bridge between masts. The ship also serves as the ride platform for some of the park's body

waterslides including a vertical speed slide, pair of side-winder loops with **SkyBox** drop capsules and a four-lane **RallyRacer** twisting mat slide.

Adjacent to the ship is a ride tower with two ProSlide attractions: a **FlyingSaucer 45** with three saucer sections and a fusion slide combo with a **BehemothBowl 40** and **TornadoWave 60**. Both slides utilize large, four-person rafts. The attractions share the same splash pool allowing the rafts to be feed into a single conveyor lift to transport the ride vehicles to the top of the tower.

Another tower holds two body slides that twist and turn, then terminate a few feet above the splash pool allowing adrenaline seekers to rocket through the air before landing in a 10-foot-deep splash pool.

On the opposite side of the park, another tower features four more ProSlide attractions

utilizing single or double tubes. These include a two-lane dueling pipeline, **CannonBowl** and a **FlyingSaucer 30**. All four slides glide into the same splash pool.

The center of the park is home to the wave pool, plenty of shaded areas for relaxation, private cabanas and a lazy river that meanders its way through the park. In keeping with the mantra "Where Nature Meets Fun," SplashMania features lush landscaping with native trees and plants.

"The addition of the SplashMania Waterpark will not only benefit residents from Gamuda Cove, but its surrounding communities and Malaysia at large with a projected annual visitorship of 800,000. The water park will allow us to reach out to an untapped eco-tourism opportunity in the Southern Klang Valley region in line with tourism Selangor's plan," said **Chu Wai Lune**, Gamuda Land CEO, adding that Gamuda Cove's strategic location along the North-South Expressway Central Link Expressway at the southern corridor of Klang Valley will make it highly accessible to both local and overseas tourists.

The 1,520-acre Gamuda Cove, envisioned to be a "Nature Sanctuary, Smart City" has been mindfully planned with sustainability at heart comprising more than 200 acres of parks and greenery within residential and commercial developments. At the core of the township is a 60-acre "Heart of Cove" which serves as the commerce, retail and leisure activity center.

The township also brings together natural attractions like the **Paya Indah Discovery Wetlands**, outdoor adventures such as the **Goosebumps Rope Course** and the **Cove Aerobar** in **Discovery Park**. The addition of SplashMania Waterpark will further enhance the vibrancy of Gamuda Cove.



The sailing ship can be explored and doubles as a ride platform for two of the body slides and the mat racers. COURTESY SPLASHMANIA WATERPARK

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Royal Caribbean debuts Galveston cruise terminal

AT: Jeffrey Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

GALVESTON, Texas — Last November, **Royal Caribbean International** (RCI) cruise line debuted its new cruise terminal. The \$125 million terminal was purposely built to allow the cruise line's largest ships to dock at the port in Galveston. To debut the terminal, RCI sent *Allure of The Seas*, one of the five Oasis-class ships (sixth under construction) that comprise the world's largest and longest passenger ships.

The current plan is to have *Allure of the Seas* home port out of Galveston at least through October 2023. Four other RCI ships will also cruise the Western Caribbean out of Galveston, including *Mariner*, *Voyager*, *Adventure* and *Harmony of the Seas*.

In keeping with RCI's other recent building projects, the Galveston project is one of the most technologically advanced terminals in the United States. Not only does it feature state-of-the-art technology, the terminal is stunning from the moment guests first see it. The face of the building is covered with colorful blue panels adorned with the familiar Royal Caribbean crown and anchor logo. Inside, the cavernous lobby is bright and airy and filled with comfortable, contemporary furniture. Local artists and photographers were called upon to decorate the facility.

The terminal also breaks new ground in energy efficiency. According to the press release, it is the world's first LEED-certified zero energy facility, generating 100% of the energy it needs via onsite solar panels. From the beginning, the design strategies used to develop the cruise ship terminal were aligned with parent company Royal Caribbean's environmental goals.

"We are focused on innovating across all aspects of our company, especially in our work to advance sustainability in the communities we visit," said **Jason Liberty**, president and CEO, **Royal Caribbean Group**. "We deeply value both the oceans we sail and the communities we visit and operate in, and the modern design and development features at our terminal in Galveston will work in service of both."

The port of Galveston is one of the oldest in the Gulf, and for many years the port authority tried to lure cruise lines. Those efforts finally paid off in 2000 when **Carnival Cruise Line's** *Celebration* debarked from the port. Other cruise lines, including Royal Caribbean soon followed. Since that time, the port has invested more than \$85 million to build new terminals, and the Galveston Cruise terminal has become one of the top five in terms of number of passengers in North America. Although the cruise port has generated significant revenue for the city and state, the new RCI cruise terminal is still seen as a major boon to the local economy. Cruise lines pay based on passenger volume, and bigger ships mean more passengers. The RCI cruise terminal is expected to welcome as many as 630,000 passengers per year. Aside from the port itself, local services, such as parking, stores, restaurants and hotels also benefit. The new terminal is expected to generate significant local business services revenue.



NEWS SPLASH

AT: Jeffrey L. Seifert
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Atlantis Paradise Island Bahamas resort recently unveiled a new addition just for kids under 54 inches. Poseidon's Playzone, a new water play structure, replaces the former Splashers pool. The 30-foot-tall, 9,000-square-foot structure features 40 interactive water play elements, including water cannons, fountains, buckets, four kid-sized slides, tipping cones, bubbling jets, overhead bridges and a water wheel.

Along with the new water play "fort," Atlantis refreshed the snack bar in that area of the park and added four new family-friendly cabanas. Each cabana can accommodate up to six people.

A \$76 million project in Medford, Oregon, is currently on track for its targeted opening of November 2023, despite some weather delays. The 140,000-square-foot facility called **Rogue X** will be home to a new aquatic facility and event center.

The 35,500-square-foot natatorium will feature two indoor pools. The first, a 13-lane competitive pool, will allow Medford to host major swimming and other aquatic sporting events. The second, a recreational pool, will have two water slides and an indoor splash pad. It will also link up with a second interactive splash pad located outdoors.

The city financed the center with municipal bonds and a \$3.5 million support package from the American Rescue Plan Act. The city also sold naming rights to **Rogue Credit Union**. Originally known as the Rogue Credit Union Community Complex it was shortened to simply **Rogue X**.

Despite having been in operation for only two seasons, **Legoland New York** is already expanding with the addition of a water playground. The massive water play structure is specifically designed with kids in mind and includes a multitude of interactive water toys and waterslides. The structure is topped with a water bucket that will randomly dump 318 gallons of water on park goers.

"We have no doubt our water playground will become the heart of the park this season with its four waterslides and new creative building opportunities for kids," said **Stephanie Johnson**, Legoland Resort New York regional director. "Everything we do is for the love of fun, and we're committed to building unforgettable offerings that will keep families coming back to our resort again and again."

Guests will also have the opportunity to construct Lego boats and race

them in a special raised pool designated to test their boats seaworthiness.

Legoland New York will open at the end of March. The new water playground is scheduled to open on Memorial Day weekend.

Kalahari Resorts and Conventions is actively seeking a location for its fifth African-themed resort. Among the sites under consideration is a potential development location in Palmer, Massachusetts, that was once considered by **Mohegan Sun** — which currently operates a casino in Connecticut — as a location for a second casino.

Mohegan Sun spent seven years lobbying toward getting the 152-acre site approved as a site for a \$1 billion resort casino, but the effort was nixed by voters.

After Mohegan Sun terminated its land lease, another developer, **Skanska USA**, had proposed the Palmer Water Park Resort-Spa and Sports Complex in 2018. However, very little has occurred since the grandiose announcement in September 2018.

Kalahari currently has a purchase-and-sale agreement with owners **North-east Realty Associates**, according to Northeast Realty attorney **Jerry B. Plumb**. Plumb said he could not provide details about the proposal due to a confidentiality agreement.

A spokesperson for Kalahari stated the company is working with various local, county and commonwealth officials to learn more about the possibility of developing a Kalahari resort in Massachusetts. The spokesperson added that information will be shared once notable progress has been made.

The West Norfolk Council in England is still pursuing plans for a £29 (\$34.8) million **Hunstanton Oasis Leisure Center** and swimming pool complex despite losing a government grant. The council had hoped to secure £20 million from the government's Levelling Up fund to go towards the cost of the new facility.

Stuart Dark, leader of the council, said the setback would not dent the authority's ambitions for the project, stating, "The result of the Oasis bid is perhaps not surprising, given that it was the first time this bid had been submitted and bids rarely succeed at the first time of asking."

The proposed new, two-story building is to include a 25-meter, six-lane swimming pool, smaller learner pool and a separate splash pad for toddlers.



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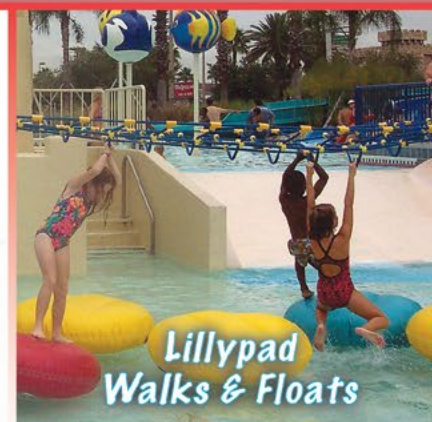
Inflatable Barriers



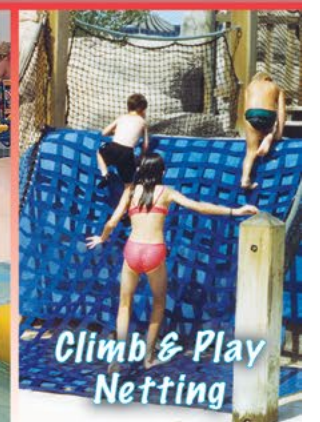
Family Rafts



Sidewinder Tubes & Rafts



Lillypad Walks & Floats



Climb & Play Netting

BUSINESS & NEWSMAKERS

► **Woman of Influence: Alyse Sklover** — page 47 / **New book documents Holiday World history** — page 49

Five Star Parks supercharges FECs to power-up to the next level

AT: David Fake
Special to Amusement Today

BRANSON, Mo. — Family Entertainment Centers (FECs) have been around for decades and exist in a variety of sizes with diverse offerings. Most are local, family-owned entities offering an alternative to full-scale theme parks and intended as partial-day experiences. The business model is tried and true and quickly turns a profit.

There are several nationally operated FECs that have broken out of the family/locally-owned-and-operated mold, but most remain locked in their current state with minimal growth opportunity.

Sometimes, these one-off or smaller chain FECs see their success plateau and/or are bought outright to be absorbed into a larger chain and rebranded into the format and style of the purchasing company.

Unfortunately, when this occurs, the original theme and feel of the FEC, as well as the multi-generational memories that have been made there, simply become part of local history. And while the memories live on, they are relegated to “good ol’ days” or “remember when” conversations.



Five Star Parks and Attractions is a platform created to partner with and invest in leading FECs, instituting positive changes aimed at creating superior entertainment experiences for families. COURTESY FIVE STAR PARKS & ATTRACTIONS

Then in 2021, **Five Star Parks and Attractions**, a then newly formed private equity-backed investment company, came on the FEC scene with a fresh approach to acquisition.

Five Star Parks and Attractions’ business model is to identify FECs that are already successful, well-established entities and provide them with the resources to enable them to move up to the next level, a feat the FEC may not be able to accomplish with its current resources.

John Dunlap, Five Star Parks and Attractions’ CEO, explains their approach in this way: “We are equally committed to [FEC] industry growth and enhancement as

we are to our own success. We are proud to be innovators in our space, but it is the strong brand that has already been established that is sought after by our acquisitions and investments.”

Dunlap says that Five Star Parks and Attractions has three levers in their business model. Those levers are: 1) identify and acquire FECs meeting its criteria of being well-established strong brands, 2) grow and expand those acquisitions, and 3) identify and execute greenfield growth.

Yet, what may be the biggest difference in Five Star Parks and Attractions’ approach is its philosophy that when they identify and acquire FECs burgeoning



with opportunity, they want the acquired FECs to maintain their current names, feel and legacy. Five Star Parks and Attractions also makes every attempt to retain as much of the leadership of its acquired FECs, providing the FEC with the ability to become even more successful under the name and legacy that made the FEC successful in the first place.

What Five Star Parks and Attractions brings to the table for the FECs it purchases is buying power to permit the FEC to leverage new growth and success while offering bigger, more exciting thrills, and ensuring the creation of even grander memories and multigenerational fam-

ily traditions.

Five Star Parks and Attractions’ initial acquisition in 2021 was **The Track Family Fun Parks**, a trio of FECs in Branson, Missouri.

Later that same year, the company acquired five **Dubby’s** attractions in two of the country’s leading vacation destinations, including **Xtreme Racing Center Branson**, **Branson Zipline**, **Extreme Racing Center Pigeon Forge**, **Speed Zone Fun Park** and **LazerPort Fun Center**, both also in Pigeon Forge.

In March 2022 the group acquired **Celebration Station’s** five FECs in the prime suburban locations of Clearwater, Florida; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Greensboro, North Carolina; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and Mesquite, Texas.

In July 2022 Five Star Parks and Attractions purchased a string of indoor theme parks under the name **Malibu Jack’s** in Ashland, Lexington and Louisville, Kentucky.

Most recently, Five Star Parks and Attractions obtained three of the four **Craig’s Cruisers Family Fun Centers** in Grand Rapids, Holland and Muskegon, Michigan in October 2022.



Five Star Parks and Attractions’ business model is to identify FECs that are already successful, well-established entities and provide them with the resources to enable them to move up to the next level, a feat the FEC may not be able to scale to on its own with its current resources. COURTESY FIVE STAR PARKS & ATTRACTIONS

► **See STAR, page 43**



Five Star Parks and Attractions has three levers in its business model: 1) identify and acquire FECs meeting the criteria of being well-established strong brands, 2) grow and expand those acquisitions and 3) identify and execute greenfield growth. COURTESY FIVE STAR PARKS & ATTRACTIONS

► **STAR**
Continued from page 42

The fourth and original Craig's Cruisers location in Silver Lakes, Michigan will continue to be owned, and operated by **Craig Cihak** who, along with his parents, **Ron and Donna Cihak**, established Craig's Cruisers in 1979.

"We're big fans of the Craig's Cruisers parks and have always been impressed by the quality of their entertainment offering, which we consider best in class," said Dunlap. "They have a tremendous leadership team with decades of experience in the family entertainment industry, and their focus on clean, safe fun is in perfect alignment with the mission of our company. We look forward to building upon the 40-year legacy that

Craig's Cruisers has established in west Michigan, and we're excited to evolve the parks in ways that will benefit their guests, employees and communities into the future."

"Five Star brings a whole team of experienced professionals from the industry," said **Jeff Gebhart**, CEO of Craig's Cruisers, in a statement. "They have an appetite for growth, and we're very excited to see what's

next for Craig's Cruisers."

"It's really a staple of the community, and that's our favorite part," Five Star Park's Senior Vice President **Craig Westcott** said. "We're all about the memories, that excite us."

As with the previous Five Star Parks and Attractions Investments, The Craig's Cruisers name is here to stay. "All managers and employees have been retained too," said Westcott.

"We want to keep the essence the same, it has a great history and we're not here to mess with that," Westcott added. "There's always that list of stuff you always wanted to do and we're going to be able to help look at some of those ideas and make those a reality. That could be new attractions inside or outside; we're still putting those plans together."

"In total, Five Star

Parks and Attractions currently operates 19 FECs in nine states, but our pipeline of growth opportunities is quite robust," stated Dunlap. And while he would not comment on what is up next for Five Star Parks and Attractions, he did say, "We are in the final stages of a large investment, that should be ready to be announced in full detail in the very near future."

• fivestarparks.com



Five Star Parks and Attractions brings buying power that has permitted its FECs to leverage new growth and success while offering bigger, more exciting thrills.

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MARKET WATCH

COMPANY	SYMBOL	MARKET	PRICE 2/17/23	HIGH 52-Week	LOW 52-Week
The Blackstone Group	BX	NYSE	93.52	132.93	71.72
Cedar Fair, L.P.	FUN	NYSE	44.95	58.63	37.58
Comcast Corp./NBCUniversal Media	CMCSA	NASDAQ	39.12	48.42	28.39
The Walt Disney Company	DIS	NYSE	105.22	150.79	84.07
EPR Properties	EPR	NYSE	42.31	56.38	34.58
Fuji Kyoko Co., Ltd.	JP:9010	TYO	4150.00	5130.00	3650.00
Haichang Holdings Ltd.	HK:2255	SEHK	1.85	4.29	0.81
Lefoo Development Co.	TW:2705	TSEC	18.75	19.95	15.40
MGM Resorts International	MGM	NYSE	43.56	49.00	45.64
Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ltd.	RCL	NYSE	73.03	87.68	31.09
Sansei Technologies, Inc.	JP:6357	TYO	799.00	926.00	704.00
SeaWorld Entertainment, Inc.	SEAS	NYSE	65.65	76.57	40.01
Six Flags Entertainment Co.	SIX	NYSE	28.39	46.59	16.83
Tivoli A/S	DK:TIV	CSE	764.00	900.00	650.00

STOCK PRICES ABOVE ARE GENERALLY QUOTED IN THE FOREIGN CURRENCY IN WHICH THE COMPANY IS LOCATED

Worldwide Markets: **ASX**, Australian Securities Exchange; **CSE**, Copenhagen Stock Exchange; **LSE**, London Stock Exchange; **NYSE**, New York Stock Exchange; **NASDAQ**, National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations; **SEHK**, Hong Kong Stock Exchange; **SZSE**, Shenzhen Stock Exchange; **TSEC**, Taiwan Stock Exchange, Corp.; **TYO/TSE**, Tokyo Stock Exchange

—SOURCES: Bloomberg.com; Wall Street Journal

BUSINESS WATCH

Walt Disney reports first quarter earnings

BURBANK, Calif. — In early February, **The Walt Disney Company** reported earnings for its first quarter ended December 31, 2022. Revenues for the company's quarter grew 8%, with diluted earnings per share from continuing operations for the quarter increasing to \$0.70 from \$0.63 in the prior-year quarter.

"After a solid first quarter, we are embarking on a significant transformation, one that will maximize the potential of our world-class creative teams and our unparalleled brands and franchises," said **Robert A. Iger**, chief executive officer, The Walt Disney Company. "We believe the work we are doing to reshape our company around creativity, while reducing expenses, will lead to sustained growth and profitability for our streaming business, better position us to weather future disruption and global economic challenges, and deliver value for our shareholders."

Disney Parks, Experiences and Products revenues for the quarter increased 21% to \$8.7 billion and segment operating income increased 25% to \$3.1 billion. Higher operating results for the quarter reflected increases at the company's domestic parks and experiences and, to a lesser extent, its international parks and resorts.

Cedar Fair announces record results

SANDUSKY, Ohio — **Cedar Fair Entertainment Company** announced its 2022 fourth-quarter and full-year results, which ended December 31, 2022.

"I am extremely proud of the Cedar Fair team's execution in 2022, which resulted in record annual performance, strong returns for investors, and millions of delighted guests at our parks," said Cedar Fair President and CEO **Richard A. Zimmerman**. "We achieved the highest levels of revenues, net income and adjusted EBITDA in Cedar Fair's history, and returned approximately \$220 million of capital to unitholders in 2022, through the reinstatement of our quarterly cash distributions and the implementation of a new unit buyback program. At the same time, we strengthened the company's balance sheet by repaying \$264 million of debt during the year and reducing year-end total net leverage to 4.0x adjusted EBITDA, back in line with pre-pandemic levels."

Net revenues for fourth quarter totaled a record \$366 million, an increase of 4%, or \$15 million, compared with Q4-2021. Compared to Q4-2019, net revenues increased by \$109 million, or 42%. For all of 2022, net income was a record \$308 million, an increase of \$356 million compared with a net loss of \$49 million in 2021. Compared to 2019, net income increased by \$135 million, or 78%.

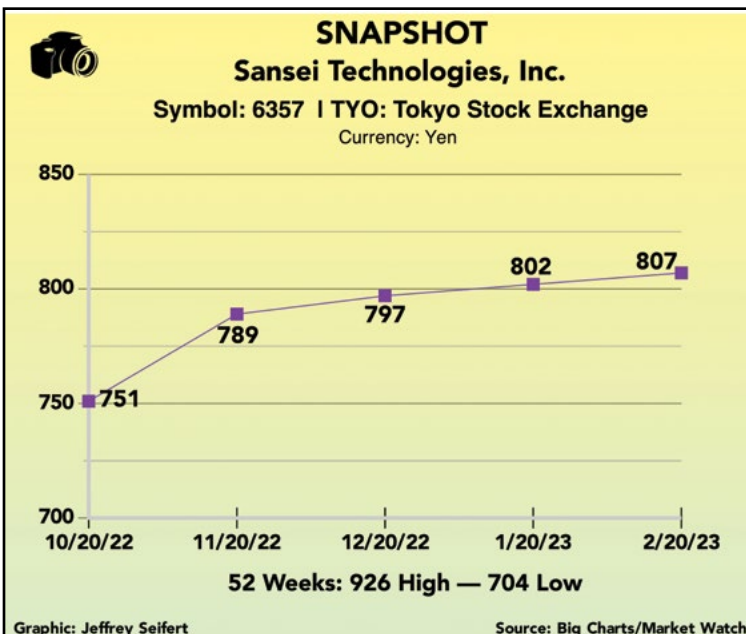
Merlin partners with Ferrari Race

DORSET, U.K. — **Merlin Entertainments** announced a global partnership with iconic car brand **Ferrari** to develop immersive themed brand experiences at two **Legoland** theme parks, with the potential for further expansion in the future. The collaboration builds on Merlin's successful relationship with Ferrari, and includes the recently opened Lego Ferrari Build and Race at **Legoland California**.

"Ferrari aligns perfectly with our ambitions of partnering with the world's most exciting and innovative brands. Our partnership with Ferrari accelerates our IP partnerships at our iconic Legoland Theme Parks," stated **Scott O'Neil**, CEO of Merlin Entertainments.

Launching in Spring 2023 at both **Legoland Billund** and **Legoland Windsor** theme parks, Lego Ferrari Build and Race is a brand-new experience that puts visitors in the driver's seat to build, test and race their very own Lego Ferrari with cutting-edge digital technology, the first of its kind to be experienced at any Legoland theme park in the world.

Busch Gardens Tampa Bay's Serengeti Flyer — an S&S Screamin' Swing — opened to the public on February 27, 2023
COURTESY
BUSCH GARDENS TAMPA BAY



DIESEL PRICES

Region (U.S)	As of 2/13/23	Change from 1 year ago
East Coast	\$4.653	\$0.590
Midwest	\$4.274	\$0.390
Gulf Coast	\$4.150	\$0.365
Mountain	\$4.660	\$0.749
West Coast	\$4.674	\$0.413
California	\$5.445	\$0.451

CURRENCY

On 2/20/23 \$1 USD =

0.9350	EURO
0.8303	GBP (British Pound)
134.15	JPY (Japanese Yen)
0.9239	CHF (Swiss Franc)
1.4536	AUD (Australian Dollar)
1.3471	CAD (Canadian Dollar)

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OBITUARY



Russell Winter

Russell Wintner, Memphis Kiddie Park owner, passes

DELRAY BEACH, Fla. — Cleveland, Ohio's Memphis Kiddie Park lost its owner and manager, Russell Wintner, when he passed on January 23 at his winter home in Delray Beach, Florida. He was 70 years old.

In an interesting footnote, the children's park opened on the day he was born. It was started by his parents, Stuart and Lanny Wintner in 1953. Memphis Kiddie Park is one of the country's oldest-operating children's parks and features a variety of historic and classic rides that have been lovingly preserved.

"I consider Kiddie Park my little brother, and it really is like a sibling to me," Wintner said in 2022 when *Cleveland ABC's News 5* profiled the park on its 70th anniversary. "The Kiddie Park and I were born on the same day."

Wintner was a graduate of Lehigh University and began his career as an industrial engineer with Proctor & Gamble.

Wintner's career took a turn to one in the film industry. He is credited as a pioneer in transitioning movies from celluloid to digital. When he stepped away from that industry, he entered another one in 2012 upon his retirement. He took the reins of the business his father started, managing the kiddie park ever since.

Russell is survived by his wife, Elli, and his sons Scott and Todd, the former of which still has his hand in the family business.

ON THE MOVE

Six Flags Entertainment Corporation announced that it has appointed **Marilyn Spiegel** to its board of directors. Spiegel will stand for election along with the company's six other directors at the company's 2023 annual general meeting.

"We are delighted to welcome Marilyn to Six Flags," said **Ben Baldanza**, non-executive chairman of the board. "Her experience spanning over three decades in the hotel and entertainment industries will provide the company with valuable insight and guidance as we seek to elevate the guest experience and deliver long-term, profitable growth."

Spiegel has more than three decades of experience in the entertainment industry. She has served as the president of seven distinctive Las Vegas casino and entertainment properties where she was responsible for day-to-day operations — **Wynn Las Vegas** and **Encore, Harrah's Las Vegas, Rio All-Suite Hotel, Bally's, Paris Las Vegas** and **Planet Hollywood**. Spiegel was one of the first female leaders to run a major Las Vegas casino and entertainment resort.

"I am very pleased that Marilyn has decided to join our board. Her leadership and operational expertise in hospitality, revenue management and human resources adds important skills to our board as we execute on our strategy," added **Selim Bassoul**, Six Flags president and chief executive officer.

Intercard has hired arcade industry expert **Jeff Tash** as a sales rep. Tash is based in Intercard's St. Louis headquarters and will represent Intercard to arcade owners and route operators west of the Mississippi River.

Tash comes to Intercard with more than 15 years of experience in sales and business development for companies such as **Elaut Group, Moss Distributing, Raw Thrills** and **TouchTunes Music**.

"Jeff's extensive experience in route operations makes him a strong addition to the Intercard team as we are steadily growing our customer base in this important category," said **Bill Allen**, North America sales manager for Intercard.

Gateway Ticketing Systems, Inc. welcomed **Sharon Parker** as its senior manager of marketing. Her expertise in the attractions industry will be a great addition to the company as it continues to grow its branding and marketing footprint.

Before joining Gateway, Parker spent 15-years at **Six Flags Over Texas** and **Hurricane Harbor** serving in various roles, most recently as park president. She also served as the director of marketing and entertainment, as well as manager of communications. While there, Parker managed the development and execution of all aspects of marketing the Six Flags brand for the original theme park location, developed short and long-term marketing plans and oversaw all aspects of external communications.

Prior to Six Flags, Parker was external communications coordinator of **The Fort Worth Independent School District**, where she was the primary spokesperson. In addition, Parker brings 10 years of on-air news anchor, general assignment reporting and editing experience from her tenure at **KWTX-TV**.

Chelsea Nelson has been hired as the new director of park operations at **Raging Rivers Water Park**. Nelson brings years of experience in park maintenance and operations, having spent 15 years in the hospitality, tourism and aquatics industry.



Spiegel



Tash



Parker

Sally Dark Rides announces corporate restructure

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — **Sally Dark Rides** has announced a realignment of its organizational structure. The announcement marks the reformation of Sally's executive leadership team.

Beginning in January 2023, **Rolf Paegert** assumed the role of chief executive officer. Company founder and longtime leader, **John Wood** transitioned to the role as president, and will continue as chairman of the board.

"Rolf is a terrific complement to our organization and the culture we've created," said Wood. "His vast experience as a multi-park operator gives him a unique perspective when discussing the value of adding a Sally attraction to a park. Our team has more than embraced his organizational style and initiatives."

Formerly the company's chief operations officer, Paegert has amassed three decades of executive management experience. Prior to joining Sally Dark Rides, he served as the COO of **Parques Reunidos'** United States division, which involved the strategic planning and operations of 22 parks. He also served as the corporate vice president of theme parks and capital management for **Palace Entertainment**. He's worked in executive leadership and management roles for FEC operations, **Castle Park** and **SeaWorld San Diego**. Paegert earned his B.A. in International Business from San Diego State University and MBA from the University of San Diego.

Nelson graduated from **University of Wisconsin — Stout** with a bachelor's degree in Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management and minored in Business Administration.

"Chelsea is an excellent addition to the Raging Rivers team, and under her leadership, park staff will continue to exhibit their traditional high level of commitment and passion," said Raging Rivers Water Park General Manager **Jeremy Hayes**. "She will be integral to our continued success to provide families with special memories each visit."

Stern Pinball, Inc. (SPI) announced the appointment of **Erica Frohm** as chief technology officer (CTO) as part of the company's organizational commitment to technology innovation.

"Stern is committed to investing in all of our pinball products, especially to the innovation and evolution of our Insider Connected platform. Erica will continue to lead this charge and grow the future of pinball worldwide," said **Seth Davis**, president and CEO of Stern Pinball, Inc.

Frohm and her team at **01 Insights** collaborated closely with SPI's Product Development Studio in the development of Stern Pinball's award-winning Insider Connected platform. Early in her career, she served as director of systems development at **WMS Gaming**. Since founding 01 Insights, Inc. in 2001, Frohm has designed and led several large projects in the gaming industry for clients including WMS, **Aristocrat, IGT, Rocket Gaming Systems** and **Rush Street Gaming**. Frohm holds business, physics and electrical engineering degrees from the **University of Colorado** and **Lake Forest College**.



Paegert



Wood



Nelson



Frohm

Women INFLUENCE

A view from the top...

Alyse Sklover is the senior event manager with **Roller**, a cloud-based platform serving FECs and attractions. With her degree in Event Management and Marketing from the University of Central Florida – Rosen College of Hospitality, she combines her passion for service excellence with a gift for gab.

FECs industry special to Sklover

SAVANNAH, Ga. — Like many in the attractions industry, Alyse Sklover entered it believing it would merely be her first job, not her career. In 2002, she worked part-time for Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, while also attending college. It was there she learned the importance of providing excellent guest service, how to successfully work in a fast-paced, ever-evolving environment, and most importantly, that she was now part of an industry unlike any other. She applied those lessons as she worked through school, honing her focus on event planning and management.

After graduation her career plans went in an entirely new direction, taking her into the music industry. She managed artists and their emerging careers, as they built their fan bases.

Several years later, she again found herself changing direction with an opportunity that combined a childhood passion with her professional goals when she joined the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex.

"I loved my career in artist management and supporting young singers as they worked to become musical stars," Sklover said. "However, I also wanted to focus more on my personal life and be closer to Bryan, who would later become my husband. The opportunity to work for the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex was the perfect way to use my event management skills and reignite my love for the stars and everything in the sky."

For five years, Sklover was found behind the scenes overseeing the vast array of events held at the visitor center. Special events often involved managing logistics centered around launches into space. She coordinated with the visitor center operations team and the many VIPs, astronauts, dignitaries and more, to ensure that each event provided her guests with the same feelings of magic and wonder she felt when she experienced

her first launch.

It was also during that time she received career advice she has always carried with her.

"I worked a few times with Shuttle Astronaut and United States Navy Captain Kay Hire. She told me, 'People are going to ask you about your *plan* many times throughout your career. The answer I encourage you to give is, 'I've got a plan, but it's going to change.'" Ever since I have made sure not to be so caught up in following a 'plan' that I missed a great opportunity."

Sklover's two professional tracts — music management and event planning — merged in 2019 during the 50th Anniversary of the Apollo 11 Moon Landing. She produced a live concert at the Visitor Complex featuring popular '80s band and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee, Duran Duran. The exclusive show took place in the famed Rocket Garden, with a one-of-a-kind backdrop that included the Saturn 1B launch vehicle, rockets, and spacecraft.

"When I look back on the Duran Duran event, I still wonder how we got it all done. We were celebrating history while looking ahead to returning to space. There were astronauts, scientists, NASA executives, politicians and dignitaries, media, those who love anything related to space, and the band's dedicated fan base. They all came together for one incredible evening under the stars."

"It was the perfect example of the most challenging and most rewarding part of working in the attractions industry. Our first goal is to provide great service to our guests. Each day they come to us from different backgrounds, and their definition of entertainment is also different. No other industry can bring such diversity together and unite them for a fun, memorable time."

After four years with the Space Center, Sklover answered a call to serve the attractions industry in a



new way, by joining IAAPA as the global staff liaison for family entertainment center (FEC) members. The position helped shift her focus from a specific location to understanding the full constituency's needs and nuances.

"I got to be deeply involved in the world of the operator and help bring together the suppliers and vendors that support them," she said.

They say timing is everything, and after only six months with IAAPA, the global pandemic all but shut down the industry. Sklover worked with her colleagues to provide services and resources to the association's members, and she found herself returning to her service-focused roots.

"I felt a huge responsibility to the FEC community. I spoke with members daily and listened as they shared concerns about their employees, their families and their futures. The FEC industry is a special one. Many are small companies operating only one or two locations. Often, they are family owned. These businesses are not just jobs, they are entrepreneurial dreams that came true and future family legacies."

"We are going to feel the impact

of COVID-19 for many years to come," she continued. "However, I believe there are positive things that emerged as well. The heart of the FEC community is its entrepreneurial spirit. FEC owners and operators know how to get things done and they work together to do it. I am proud to have played a small part in helping support FECs come together so that they could reopen."

From a guest-focused role to an industry-supporting role, today Sklover serves FECs in a new manner.

"Now that I am working on the supplier side of the industry, I lean on all of my experiences to help Roller work with FEC operators and anticipate their growing needs," she said. "Our focus is on providing efficient, easy-to-use solutions that enhance the guest experience — the first lesson I learned when I began in this industry. You could say my career has now come full circle."

"Being a part of the attractions industry is incredible. Our work, our focus, is to make people happy. I can't imagine doing anything else. Plus, I am really good at mini-golf. Where else is that a valued skill?"

—Susan Storey

Pa. Showmen at Farm Show and Fair Showmen Convention



In early January, a record-breaking amount of funds were raised by the two rides at the Pennsylvania Farm Show, Harrisburg, Pa., operated by the Pennsylvania State Showmen's Association (PSSA). Above is a 1946 Allen Herschell art-deco styled 36-foot carousel, which was provided by SwikaS Amusements. In another building within the complex, a Hampton tractor flat ride was supplied for the event by Penn Valley Shows. Over \$56,000 was raised and was split between the PSSA and Pennsylvania Farm Show Foundation scholarship funds. This was the highest amount ever raised for the annual fundraiser that began in 2005. COURTESY SUE NICHOLS



Christina Benner of Penn Valley Shows and Christine Houghton with Houghton Enterprises brought these hoverboard horses (left) to the wild west themed annual showmen's banquet. COURTESY SUE NICHOLS



Jennifer Bartlebaugh Harris and husband R.J. (above) were selling raffle tickets for the Chinese auction, raising nearly \$5,000. There was also a \$100 raffle with top prize of \$10,000. Only 300 tickets were available for purchase. COURTESY SUE NICHOLS



One big happy family. Breaking bread together were (l to r): Scott Silar; Sue Nichols, 5 Cent Ride; Tony Rossi; Dick Knoebel and Jeannie Reedy, both of Knoebel's Amusement Resort; Bradford Doolittle of Haas & Wilkerson insurance and Laura Woodburn Krolczyk. Silar, Rossi and Krolczyk are all with Hersheypark. COURTESY SUE NICHOLS



Relaxing at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center during the convention held in late January are (l to r): Christine Houghton, Dave Pfeffer, Chloe Santillo and Makayla Houghton. All are Houghton Enterprises staff except Pfeffer, who is principal of Tons of Fun Shows. Attendance was slightly higher than 2022, however still not at the pre-COVID level. COURTESY SUE NICHOLS



At the PSSA western-themed banquet held during the state convention, an oversized check in the amount of \$28,869 was presented to Mike Firestein with the Pennsylvania Farm Show Foundation for use in their scholarship program. This is half of the proceeds generated by the two fundraising rides that operated at the annual Pennsylvania Farm Show in early January. COURTESY MCGOWAN STUDIO



Jeff Good, co-owner of Goodtime Amusements, Hellertown, Pennsylvania, was named the Showman of the Year at the PSSA banquet during the showmen/fair convention. Good is seen with Mary Ott, executive secretary of the PSSA. Goodtime Amusements, a family legacy owned business, founded in 1988, serves the Lehigh Valley and eastern Pennsylvania with rides, games and food. COURTESY MCGOWAN STUDIO

Tons of Fun was giving any of the fair queens who visited their booth either a popcorn or French fry styled purse. Sarah Kadel, Miss Perry County Fair is seen with Ben Pfeffer. There were 58 queens vying for the title won by Chloe Bomgardner, who represented Lebanon Area Fair. COURTESY SUE NICHOLS



New book documents the history of 'America's First Theme Park'

REVIEW: Tim Baldwin
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There's no shortage of books on the amusement industry and the parks that are a major part of it. That's because people love them, whether they are fans of their hometown parks, former employees or enthusiasts of the industry. Books documenting these very special places serve as a telescope to look into the past.

Holiday World & Splashin' Safari: 75 Years of America's First Theme Park has a unique niche. On its cover, there is not one author listed but five. Among them are the names **Jim Futrell**, **Ron Gustafson** and **Dave Hahner**. This trio of historians have an enviable storehouse of knowledge and experience. The writing is not an interwoven work of collaborative thought. Instead, certain chapters are placed within the hands of each of those authors.

Futrell (of IAAPA's Hall of Fame Committee) authors two chapters, recounting **Holiday World's** origins as **Santa Claus Land**, as well as a period of notable growth in the 1970s and 1980s. Hometown pride and the importance of family relationships helped weather the challenges of the ups and downs of getting a business firmly rooted.

Hahner, a roller coaster historian, appropriately takes over when roller coasters put Holiday World on the map. The journey of creating and building three world-class wooden coasters is chronicled, as is the origins of naming each of them and their placement in the forested setting.

Gustafson has been a journalist/photojournalist for nearly 50 years. He shares in his chapter the importance of water, most particularly the addition of the water-park **Splashin' Safari** and its marketable impact.

The chapters from these three men are bookended by two women who bring it all together. **Nell Hedge** is a Santa Claus, Indiana, local who serves as director of the Santa Claus Museum & Village. She guides the first chapter by telling of the town's heart and spirit, prop-

erly positioning the reader in place. Finally, fourth-generation owner **Leah Koch** concludes the book with a chapter full of humor, heart and introspection that can only come from a family member. Her recollection of how the family recovered from the loss of her father, Will Koch, is heartfelt, as is the family's determination to continue

his vision of the park's most expensive roller coaster.

But there's more. An abundance of photographs traces 75 years of history. Lists share chronology of attractions and park accolades. Sidebars relate interesting stories about the park and specific attractions. Coaster and water coaster stats are also provided.

The reader finds out

important details along the way. The success of Holiday World goes beyond the rides. Paved roads, Disneyland, free soft drinks and letters to Santa all made their mark on the park's full story.

There are countless history books written on the amusement industry done in various styles. There is no reason to say one approach is better

than the other. However, with multiple authors on *Holiday World & Splashin' Safari: 75 Years of America's First Theme Park*, it still manages to be a remarkable, cohesive whole. It checks all the boxes and is highly recommended.

The book is hardbound and full of color photos among its 189 pages. It retails for \$25.

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► GCI a family business — page 52 / Industry safety seminars deliver — page 54

StarGuard Elite CAMP sets record numbers for conference at sea

AT: Tim Baldwin

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ORLANDO — Officials at StarGuard Elite (SGE) estimated that 100 attendees would be the maximum number its conference could hold aboard Royal Caribbean's Mariner of the Seas. Final figures came in almost perfectly at that number. Several attendees were returning professionals to the Conference for Aquatics Management Professionals (CAMP), but 54% were first-time registrants.

After checking in, two buses shuttled attendees from Orlando to Cape Canaveral for boarding the cruise ship for the four-day CAMP. Late in the afternoon, everyone gathered for an overview of the conference, introductions and a networking opportunity of trading swag from home facilities.

Sessions started in earnest the next day, Feb. 6.

The first keynote speaker, Paul Snoblen, spoke on Understanding the Reality of Acting to Save a Life. The presentation pinpointed differences between training in perfect and "plastic" conditions to the realities of an actual rescue. It struck home with many attendees. "My training had me prepared for the skill, not the reality," he stressed during his presentation.

Snoblen also spoke on the care for employees following a traumatic incident. As a community resuscitation programs specialist with Peel Regional Paramedic Services in Canada, he isn't a fan of the words "just a."



SGE CAMP attendees gathered for a group photo when docked at Perfect Day at Coco Cay (above). Paul Snoblen was the first keynote speaker with the topic of real life conditions (below). COURTESY STEPHEN MARVA; AT/TIM BALDWIN

"You're not just a life-guard," he encourages. "You bring your own specialty to a team."

Sarah Suter with Suter Law & Advocacy LLC provided two sessions of legal challenges. In the second session, attendees were able to ask questions on the best ways to handle certain situations.

"Everything is constantly evolving with new information. I do as much note-taking as I can to bring back — how we train and stay up to date on current information is of great value," said Adam Norman, Clear Water Pools LLC. "The cruise is geared toward worldwide clients and the vastness of this industry. Because people are from all over, it's not like I'm networking with a competitor. I'm talking to a friend in the industry. We're going to help each other get bigger and better and share ideas."

"Nine countries are represented at this year's CAMP,"

said Nick Hawco, CAMP coordinator and Western United States partner, SGE. "The meat and potatoes part of CAMP are always similar. We addressed feedback from last year to expand the variety of speakers."

"I think the biggest thing that differentiates StarGuard Elite CAMP from other conferences is our focus on professional development and to make our clients better operators and challenge them with new ways of thinking and perspectives," said SGE President Wess Long.

Searching vs. Scanning, Supplemental Training Modules and Aquatic Safety Audits: Statistics, Trends and Takeaways were session topics.

Vincent Ibarra, director of aquatics, Splashway Waterpark and Campgrounds, found the networking beneficial. "It was very informative. Being around like-minded individuals, we all get to talk about



problems and solutions in one place," he said. "We all read manuals and guidelines, but if there are similar questions, the only way to be sure about things is to talk to each other about solutions. It's refreshing to know that we aren't going through these battles alone."

The cruise docked in two locations. Attendees were able to get a brief glimpse of Nassau but spent several hours at Royal Caribbean's private island and water park, Perfect Day at Coco Cay, where "campers" could view the operational overview of all that the island entails.

A returning presenter was SGE's medical director, Dr. Justin Sempsrott. His role as executive director of Lifeguards Without Borders enabled him to make two engaging presentations: The Latest on ILCOR's Drowning Task Force and Advanced Oxygenation, as well as a training workshop on bag-valve-mask ventilator use. The floor was also open to questions for the doctor.

"For me, the CAMP really marks that passage of time within the industry and

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SGE President Wess Long welcomes attendees. AT/TIM BALDWIN

► **ELITE**

Continued from page 50

how far we've come over the past year, two years, three years..." Sempsrott told *Amusement Today*. "Even when I look back on presentations that I did seven or eight years ago compared to what we do now, what was cutting edge or controversial at the time are now industry standards."

He added, "Even over the last 15 years, this has been an exciting time to be a part of pre-hospital emergency medicine, and by extension the pre-hospital healthcare professionals that lifeguards are. We are starting to better understand and apply a lot of the resuscitation science to what we do."

Sempsrott made a point in his presentation: "If you want to know what we learned five years ago, read the textbook. If you want to know what we learned last year, read journals. If you want to know what we're learning for the future, attend conferences."

Amy TC, supervisor, **Island H2O Live**, was a return attendee. "The constant change of information and updates across the board is paramount to what we do for a living. If you can stay on top of the industry — the knowledge and innovation of equipment and gear and legalities — to see it and hear it, CAMP is a continuing education."

"One thing I'm really taking away is the training aspect and what goes into those ideas," added co-supervisor **Damien Del-Rosario**, who was a first-time attendee. "Everything else is big and important, but I'm trying to think about passing on things to others to help them grow as well."

Presenter **Tracy Stayton** spoke on *How Paramilitary Preparation Increases Performance*. Her engaging workshop sparked ideas for

attendees to create not only Jump scenarios for training, but at times, the unexpected situation such as multiple emergencies or a lifeguard "freezing up."

Part of the conference was the opportunity to work with and see new products that are becoming available.

"CAMP introduces them to things that are coming, industry trends and new protocols. It's not focused on just making them better lifeguard instructors; we get a lot of training, but we also concentrate on the operational leadership and professional development," Long told *AT*. "Every year the itinerary is different, but we take them to other operations to where they can look at something as simple as furniture or point-of-sale system, but a lot of times it is aquatic safety focused. They may see a different way to do something. They can benchmark their operations to how they do things versus something else and ask questions."

Prior to the closing of the conference, awards were given to attending facilities.

While the Cruise CAMP is a unique opportunity for professionals, SGE also offers traditional, shorter conferences in both Chicago and Phoenix. At the conclusion of the CAMP 2023, SGE announced next year's cruise will be aboard *Allure of the Seas* — a larger ship with a larger conference space that will allow registration size to double.



Dr. Justin Sempsrott spoke on oxygenation. AT/TIM BALDWIN

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Great Coasters International evolves, becomes a family business

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

SUNBURY, Pa. — In 1994, Clair Hain Jr. and Michael Boodley exhibited at their first IAAPA Expo as **Great Coasters International, Inc.** Both men, previously with the now-closed **Custom Coasters**, were confident they could build the highest-quality wooden coasters.

Hain, president, is still in the business and now wants to make it a family company.

“My daughter came on board [last] June, and she’s hopefully going to be the face of Great Coasters,” he said. “My nephew will be joining us in May; he’s still in college. He’s going to take over the repair business and the refurbishing. My son hopes to come back. He knows the job involves traveling, so he is getting accustomed to that. Hopefully he can come back and take over the part I was in charge of — which was new rides.”

During the November

IAAPA Expo 2022, all the family members were at the GCII booth gaining experience meeting customers and working with them.

Olivia Hain, Clair’s daughter, now serves as marketing director.

“It’s a really fun business. I enjoy going to meetings and seeing different parks. Afterward, you get to ride the coaster — nothing beats that, she said.”

Frustrated with the job market at her home in Ft. Lauderdale, Olivia said, “I think God heard me because a couple of days later my dad called.”

While her father would have permitted her to work remotely, she is pleased to return to Pennsylvania.

“Being at the office every day and learning what he knows ... it’s so cohesive there. It makes so much more sense. Honestly, it’s a really interesting business,” she told *Amusement Today*.

“There’s always something new; I’m always learning



Clair Hain Jr. stands behind his two children, Hayden and Olivia, seated in a GCII Millennium Flyer car.

AT/TIM BALDWIN

new things every day.”

Hayden Hain, sales, said, “We grew up in a smaller town. Everyone’s parents did simple things, and people would ask what my dad did, and I would say, ‘He’s in China right now. Then he’ll be in Australia and Japan’ ... and everyone’s mind is blown.”

The travel did have its drawbacks.

“My kids knew me through the telephone. We would talk every night, but it was very difficult. My wife would send me pictures and videos. I would see videos of him in wrestling tournaments and winning awards,

and I missed it,” Clair said.

Now that the business is ingrained into the family, Clair finds it twice as rewarding to be able to spend quality time with them.

“I’m very tickled. This is what I was hoping for, for my children to be taking over,” he said. “I’ve been working very hard to get us where we are, so I could hand it to them.”

Clair, 56, states his plan is to stay until he is 75. He doesn’t have any desire to stop, but he wants GCII to be a family business forever.

“I’m not going to stop growing; I’m not going to stop innovating,” Clair said. “Wooden coasters are art.”

He noted he had just purchased his first laser cutter prior to the expo.

“The people in the business keep me in it,” said Olivia. “I absolutely love working with my father. We have a better relationship now that we’re working together. It’s not just a contract, it’s an actual connection with people.”

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Reflections on AIMS International

One day when I was working for **Great Wolf Resorts**, I got a call from **Roger Berry**. He shared he was putting together a “blue ribbon panel” to advise **AIMS International** on what operators needed for training. Who knew that one call would lead to more than 11 years bringing safety training to people all over the world!

When I first joined the AIMS board, I did not know that much about what AIMS truly did. This was a passionate group of industry leaders who wanted to make our parks safer through training. This was a 100% volunteer organization with no expense reimbursement, no fancy dinners, no far-flung places. Yet, it blew my mind how much they accomplished.

I remember **Mark Moore** telling me that he told the others he wasn't sure AIMS was “ready for Francean Gonzales.” Was that a good thing or a bad thing? Was I too pushy?

Pushing in a different direction? Ok, yes that's me. Guilty as charged.

One afternoon, about five of us spent a few hours drafting a strategic plan. We wanted to hire a paid executive director to coordinate the work so the board could be more strategic, we needed to focus our energy on being THE education organization focused on safety training. That plan and moment gave us a clear identity and mission. It felt momentous.

We all put our oars in the water and rowed in the same direction. In these last years, AIMS is a solid organization and is poised for growth. It has expanded its offering and has forged important alliances. **Karen Oertley** set the foundation with good business practices and let the board be a board.

Mary Jane Brewer came along as executive director and we made another leap. She moved AIMS into

a digital world bringing in ambassadors to implement digital registration and class tracking. Now there is an interactive app and really good engagement. She wanted to launch a Learning Management System and though the board declined her initial proposal, we worked together and went through many iterations to satisfy that the financial investment would work. Good organizations debate great ideas, make sure they will work and then fully endorse them. In the end, the LMS was one of the best things we could have done, allowing us to go online quickly in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

That LMS program has allowed AIMS to offer many hours online to satisfy training prerequisites. It also has allowed for 40 hours of Spanish language courses to be offered and allowed the partnership of ACOLAP, the Colombian association. This

partnership took several years to come to fruition. Expanding safety training into Latin America has been one of my goals since joining the AIMS board.

There is a lot more to be done, whether it be launching standalone certification products, expanding specialty tracks, and partnering with other organizations around the world. The future is bright for AIMS and especially for those who send their teams to the Safety Seminar or who use the online training tool, or participate in any of the AIMS On the Road programs. I'm happy that **Megan Wallace** will be taking my open spot as I step down and I'm counting on her and the other board members to keep going, keep being pushy, keep growing the reach of AIMS, and keep our industry people well educated so they do the right thing in their businesses in the spirit of safety.

—*Francean Gonzales*

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UNITED STATES — It was a record-breaking year for the **AIMS International Safety Seminar**, which ran Jan. 8-13 in Galveston, Texas.

"We had more attendees, instructors, volunteers and sponsors than we've ever had," said **Mary Jane Brewer**, AIMS executive director. "The weather was great and everyone loved the Wednesday night social event at **Pleasure Pier**, plus the nightly happy hours."

The annual AIMS event drew 687 overall attendees. There were 529 students (at capacity), 150 instructors and eight student ambassadors. There were 348 educational courses, 440 hours of content and 51 sponsors, 47 of them exhibiting at the seminar.

Because of the number of attendee — not that they are complaining — Brewer said they had to reconfigure the classrooms a little differently in order to add capacity.



AIMS International Safety Seminar drew a record attendance of 687. Erik Beard, a managing partner and legal counsel, International Ride Training, presented the keynote address to a standing-room only crowd (above). Below left, incoming AIMS board member Maegan Wallace of Maclan Corp. (left) and outgoing member Franceen Gonzalez, Whitewater, take in the 2023 seminar. Below right (l to r), Bobby Park, Cindee Huddy and Kelly Roberts catch up during the 2023 seminar. Huddy is a managing partner of International Ride Training in Nashville. Both Park and Roberts are with the California/OSHA — Amusement Rides and Tramway Unit. COURTESY HFE; AT/GARY SLADE

"We also had to add a classroom at the **Hilton Hotel**, one that we normally used as our office/staging area during the seminar," she said.

There was standing-room-only at the keynote address delivered by **Erik Beard**, a managing partner, **International Ride Training**, who spoke on the importance of interdependency between owner and operators, manufacturers and suppliers and state and third-party inspectors.



AIMS offered 40 hours of in-person Spanish language courses that were live-streamed.

"We had 10 virtual Latin

American students and we were able to video record the content to deliver on-demand at the brand new ACOLAP AIMS Where You Are pro-

gram in Bogota in February."

The first students from AIMS Academy of Amuse-

▶ See SEMINARS, page 55

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► **SEMINARS**

Continued from page 54

ment Risk Management, Safety and Security class graduated this year. All 23 students became Certified Amusement Safety and Security Associates (CASSA).

This is a two-year program, which focuses on the foundational pillars of Safety, Security, Risk Management and Emergency Management.

The new Adventure Attractions Track was a success as well, with 45 people participating in the program. There also was a new eight-hour Introduction to Crowd Science course taught by Prof. Dr. G. Keith Still, who holds a PhD in Crowd Dynamics and has developed and delivered training materials around the world for over 30 years. Still and the National Center for Spectator Sports Safety and Security (NCS4) partnered in March 2021 to bring this body of work to the United States.

The purpose of the courses is to develop greater awareness of how individuals and crowds react and behave in places of public assembly.

Brewer said she feels AIMS success has come from their efforts to solicit new and updated course proposals from new and returning instructors in an effort to offer the most relevant and up-to-date content possible.

"The AIMS staff and board members work diligently to provide an opportunity for our students to not only experiment in quality classroom education but to have adequate time during social events, such as the daily happy hours, to network and learn from their peers and other industry experts," Brewer said. "We give them time to wind down and make connections that would not be possible in another format. This is intentional and we feel it is what sets our seminar apart from others."

AIMS has continued its success by continuing the educational partnerships with Ellis & Associates (aquatics), International Ride Training (operations) and the Outdoor Amusement Business Association (traveling shows).

The 2024 Safety Seminar



International Ride Training's safety school — known as Ride Camp — included hands-on training at 2023 host park Carowinds (above left). This year's event drew over 150 attendees from 50 locations in the U.S. and Canada. COURTESY IRT

will be held in Orlando at the Doubletree Resort on International Drive near SeaWorld.

NAARSO presented its 36th Annual Safety Seminar, Jan. 29-Feb. 3, 2023, at the Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Approximately 300 people attended the long-standing seminar. Plus there were more who took virtual classes.

The seminar offers course programming and examinations for the following certifications: Limited Specialty;

Inspection Certification Level I (basic), Level II (advanced) and Level III (sr); Operations Certification, Level I, Level II and Level III; Operations Certification, Level I, Level II and Level III and Aquatic Operations, Level I.

The first day of the event, Sunday, Jan. 29, was full of logistical activities such as registration, membership meetings and seminar orientation. The seminar welcome reception was held that evening.

Courses began the next

morning and ran the remainder of the week. Course topics included: math knowledge; OSHA; wire rope inspections; hydraulics; pneumatics; generators; electric; legal aspects; braking systems; amusement ride chains; accelerometer; rigging; ASTM standards; bearings; ARC flash safety and dark ride and walk-through inspections.

Others include best practices for incident response and investigations; corrosion analyzing; inflatables; communi-

cation skills; accessibility; water slide and features; aquatic ASTM; water quality; aquatic inflatables and much more.

Groups took turns Wed., Feb. 1, going through a dozen attractions at Family Kingdom Amusement Park, Myrtle Beach, for the hands-on portion of the event.

International Ride Training (IRT) hosted its annual safety school, known as Ride Camp, at Carowinds in

► See SEMINARS, page 56

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E&A's International Aquatic Safety School experiences record attendance



PHOENIX, Ariz. — Ellis & Associates' (E&A) International Aquatic Safety School (IASS) saw a record number of instructors participate in the pre-IASS Instructor Trainer update and — for the first time in 37 years — attendance soared to more than 275 participants. Programming for IASS includes classroom sessions, land skills, in-water skills, team building, professional development and the opportunity to connect with professionals from around the world. This year's keynote speaker at IASS was outgoing Great Wolf Resorts, Inc. CEO Murray Hennessy. For the second year, IASS faculty selected one participant from each group to receive the Vera Solis Leadership Award. Pictured above, this year's Vera Solis Leadership Award recipients were (l to r): Zhane Dean, Great Wolf Lodge Georgia; Denzel Flowers, Valley Fair Amusement Park; Michael Herdson, Columbia Association; Emma Gerrity, Oceans of Fun; Tanesha Boulden, Prince William County Government; Jordan Brouillard, Plainfield Parks and Recreation and Trinity Finley, Six Flags Hurricane Harbor Arlington (not pictured). E&A will also conduct an IASS East program, taking place in Abu Dhabi beginning February 27, 2023. COURTESY ELLIS & ASSOCIATES

SEMINARS

Continued from page 55

Charlotte, North Carolina, from Feb. 5-9, 2023.

The event drew over 150 attendees from 50 locations from both United States and Canada. Utilizing the theme, Safety is Our Superpower, the seminar demonstrated this throughout the week. The event held more than 120 educational sessions.

"We had 13 groups led by our renowned faculty who make Ride Camp what it is by ensuring prior to and during Ride Camp the student is prepared and well taken care of for their educational experience," said **Cindee Huddy**, IRT managing member.

Ride Camp is led by a professional faculty with decades of real-world experience. These individuals represent various parks located in the United States and Canada. There also are many guest speakers in a four-day, highly immersive, educational, and training experience focused on ride safety and operations best practices.

This year Ride Camp started on Sunday, Feb. 5, for new instructors. Returning



Attendance at the 36th annual NAARSO Annual Safety Seminar was good with multiple classrooms packed of students. AT/RON GUSTAFSON

instructors and Ride Camp attendees got started the next day on Feb. 6.

Ride Camp attendees work intensively in the classroom and hands-on training using the park's rides to learn and brush up on ride safety training techniques.

"We work hard with our esteemed faculty to ensure that every camper learns great training techniques, with a level of industry knowledge and best practices to bring back and implement into their facility, all while having an amazing week in the Carolinas," Huddy said.

The 2023 Ride Camp offered classes in ride operations safety, ADA compli-

ance, normalization of deviance, guest service, training tips and techniques, industry updates, deposition readiness and aquatic operations, among others.

"We want to give our campers the necessary tools to enhance their safety, risk management and compliance programs," said **Erik Beard**, IRT managing member and general counsel.

There were three evening events, including a meet-and-greet night, a superhero trivia night and the annual International Ride Training Ride Camp Awards Show.

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IAAPA volunteers convene at ASTM F24 Committee meeting

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — On February 1-4, 2023, representatives of the IAAPA team and members of the North America and Global Safety Committee participated in ASTM International F24 Committee Meetings held in Jacksonville, Florida.

Formed in 1978, the ASTM F24 Committee establishes standards on amusement ride design and manufacturing, testing, operation, maintenance, inspection and quality assurances. These standards play a preeminent role in all aspects of amusement rides and devices. The committee is comprised of approximately 1,000 consumer advocates, government officials, amusement park operators and suppliers, and amusement ride operators.

Accordingly, these standards serve as the foundation of our advocacy involving ride-safety legislation and regulations. Working in lockstep with the North America Safety and Government Relations Committee, IAAPA's team is currently monitoring proposed ride safety legislation in nine states and proposed ride safety regulations in two states in an effort to promote and maintain ASTM standards. Working with local operators, the group is also laying the foundation needed to influence the introduction of ride safety legislation in Alabama and Montana based on ASTM standards.

While there is no federal legislation currently pending, in the past Congress has introduced legislation to bring fixed-site amusement rides under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). Given the industry's safety record, IAAPA opposes such proposals. Instead, the association supports strong state-level ride safety regulations based on ASTM standards. IAAPA believes that adding another, possibly conflicting, layer of regulations will not improve the industry's safety record.

IAAPA continues to work with the appropriate congressional committees to promote the industry's safety

record, the purpose of ASTM, and the importance of maintaining state-level ride safety regulations.

The promulgation and implementation of world class F24 standards are the direct result of the technical expertise, guidance and work provided by IAAPA and ASTM member volunteers.

•astm.org

Members of IAAPA's North America and Global Safety Committee participated in the ASTM International F24 Committee meetings held in Jacksonville, Florida, on February 1-4, 2023. The team is currently monitoring proposed ride safety legislation in nine states.

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BREAKING NEWS

Silver Dollar City announces 2023 is grand finale season for Fire in the Hole

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

BRANSON, Mo. — After more than half a century, Silver Dollar City's Fire in the Hole attraction will enter its 52nd — and final — season. Built in 1972, the historic coaster/dark ride holds a special footnote in coaster history. Three years before Walt Disney World opened its original Space Mountain, Fire in the Hole showed what a roller coaster ride could do indoors.

Going far beyond the painted murals of early-century scenic railways, Fire in the Hole told a story. The tale spun was modeled after Marmaros, a real-life mining town. As the ride's theme song tells, the mysterious baldknobbers came and burned the town to the ground. As riders work their way up through the building, they travel past animals, forested scenes and country folk. Soon they see the town ablaze, and once reaching the upper story, three large dips — one in front of an "approaching train" place roller coaster drops into the dark ride setting. The final plunge sends riders into a pool of water culminating in a dramatic splash.

"More than 25 million guests have been entertained by the Fire In the Hole adventure since the attraction opened a half-century ago," said Brad Thomas, president of Silver Dollar City Attractions. "While it has just a bit of thrill, it's



Fire in the Hole opened in 1972, and set the stage for what indoor coasters could be by telling a story.
COURTESY SILVER DOLLAR CITY

a family-friendly ride that appeals to everyone. Adults that rode the ride 51 years ago, now have a final year to enjoy the adventure with their grandkids — and even their great grandkids. That's epic! Silver Dollar City's mission is to 'create memories worth repeating,' and Fire in the Hole has certainly fulfilled that mission for over half a century. We are hopeful that families can have fun together while they take their final rides — whether they've ridden it multiple times in the past or perhaps this year might even be their family's first time to ride!"

Fire in the Hole was a big thrill attraction when it opened and put the park "on the map" in terms of exciting rides. It was built in-house and uses an electrically powered incline throughout the building. Numerous vehicles can traverse the attraction at the same time. Trains of two cars seat 12 passengers. Upon entering the ride lay-

out, guests are immersed into a nighttime, forested setting.

"My first visit to The City was when I was in junior high, and of course, Fire in the Hole was a part of that visit," Thomas told *Amusement Today*. "While I loved the adventure of the ride, I also was intrigued by this story, the scenes, the fire effects — and the fact that the ride was indoors!"

One of the benefits of the indoor attraction is that it is not affected by temperature or weather conditions.

According to the park, the farewell season of the ride coincides with the preparation of unprecedented growth slated for the next 10 years at the Branson properties. No announcement has been made as to what the future will hold, but park management teases they are keenly aware of the legacy that Fire in the Hole maintains.

"This ride set the stage for what guests love about the Silver Dollar City brand. It tells a story yet also provides family-friendly fun, with surprising moments of humor and adventure," Thomas said.

Often, loyal fans are caught unaware when a park announces an attraction's closure. Silver Dollar City is allowing guests to enjoy one last ride during the 2023 season and is planning special events to celebrate Fire in the Hole's place in park history.



As riders journey through the indoor attraction, town buildings have been set "on fire."
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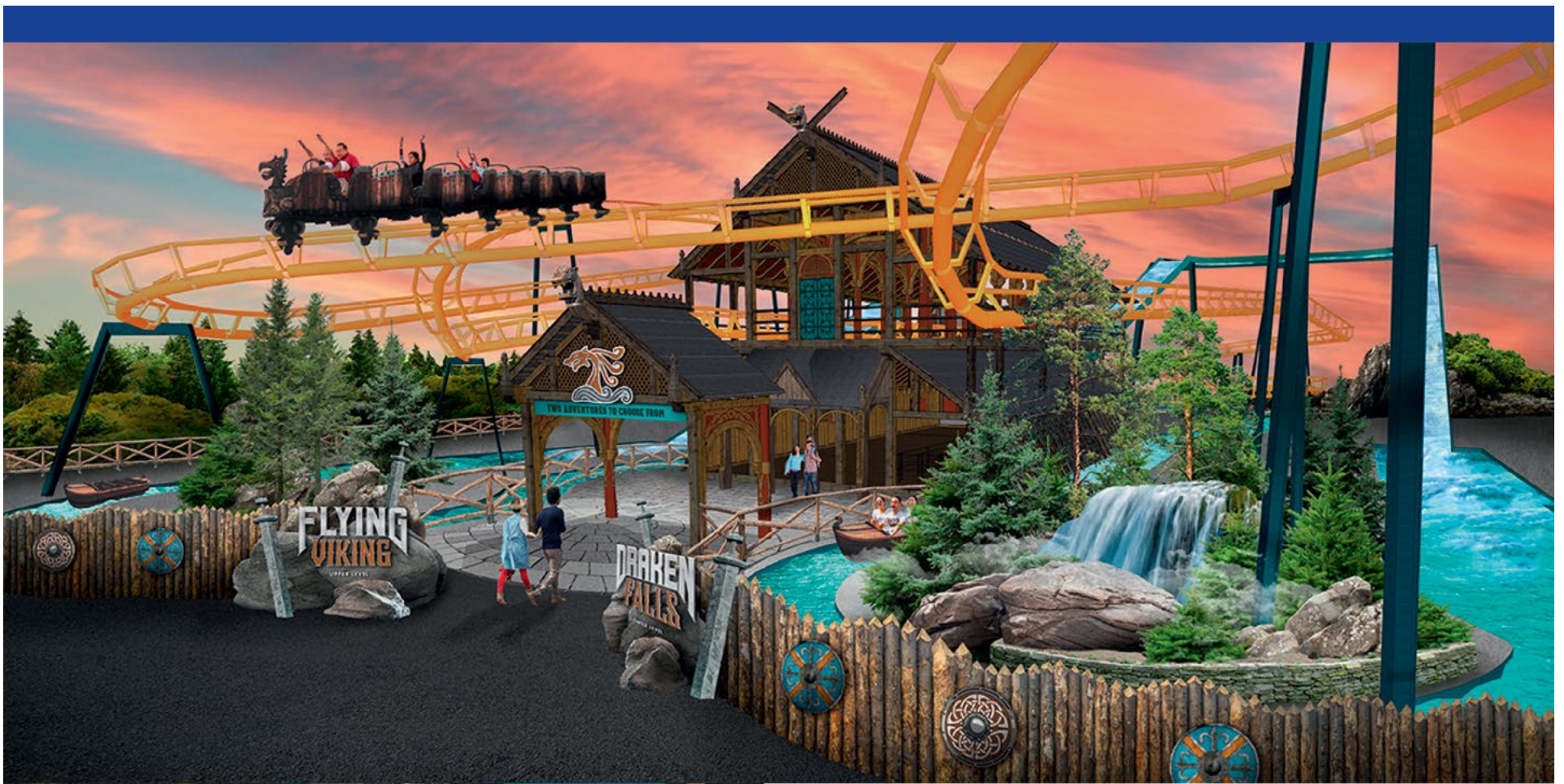
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