



Big Bear Mountain is the largest single attraction investment in the history of Dollywood. COURTESY DOLLYWOOD

Big Bear Mountain roars to life, delights guests at Dollywood

Vekoma supplies park's largest-ever ride investment

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

PIGEON FORGE, Tenn. — On May 12, **Dollywood** opened Big Bear Mountain, the largest single attraction investment in the park's history. With the opening of this latest roller coaster, the park's lineup has now reached double digits. Big Bear Mountain fits into the park perfectly, spinning tales of the Smoky Mountains. The park's namesake and "dreamer in chief," **Dolly Parton**, held a fondness for the embodiment of the ride into her childhood digs.

"We said we're going to expand Wildwood Grove, and we really meant it," Parton said. "I'm so glad we're able to incorporate so much of the Smokies into this ride. I'm proud of where I'm from, and these Smoky Mountains truly

are so much a part of me and who I am to this day."

"Dollywood Parks and Resorts was poised to re-establish its growth trajectory after COVID and our investment was made to pay off in terms of brand development and business growth," said Park President **Eugene Naughton**. "This attraction was developed with a focus on building on our reputation of being a complete family vacation getaway for multi-generational families. Going big would help deliver a new family experience that not only will drive destination markets but also would be very attractive to our season pass holders. This attraction will deliver positive results in brand awareness for years to come."

With an investment of \$25 million, it's not just the price tag that makes it a huge addition, it is the ride's size as well. Big Bear Mountain is the longest ride

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Intamin delivers iconic Toutatis to Parc Astérix

AT: Tim Baldwin
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PLAILLY, France — Opened on April 8, Toutatis now brings the coaster arsenal at **Parc Astérix** to a total of eight, many of which are quite notable. This new coaster supplied by **Intamin** stands as the tallest roller coaster on property, and that's just the beginning of its numerous notable attributes.

The theme park opened in 1989 dedicated to telling the story of the comic strip characters in "Astérix." The park has various themed lands that have developed as the park has grown during its success. The newest area (at a size of three hectares) is Festival of Toutatis, which is a part of the Gaul zone. It features a woodland environment.

As the story goes, the character Abraracourcix, accompanied by the villagers, must go to the Tumulus de Toutatis, a megalithic

site dedicated to the tribe's patron god, to preside over a great festival organized in honor of Toutatis.

In the new area, there are stands, souvenir stalls and food outlets. A new restaurant called Au Dolmen Gormand helps cater to the increased influx of guests into the heavily themed land.

A **Zamperla** NebulaZ called **Chez Gyrofolix** adds a flat ride to the new land, and the **Sangler d'Or** playground offers something for the youngest guests.

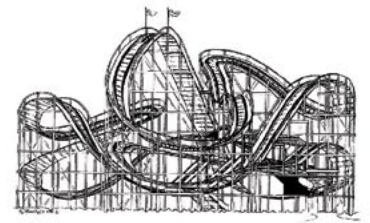
The land was five years in development, and construction took place over two years. The total investment in Festival of Toutatis was €36 million (\$39 million).

A Parc Astérix spokesperson remarked, "The different teams involved in the project were all in agreement that they wanted to create the big-

► See TOUTATIS, page 8



Toutatis features an abundance of dramatic maneuvers. COURTESY INTAMIN



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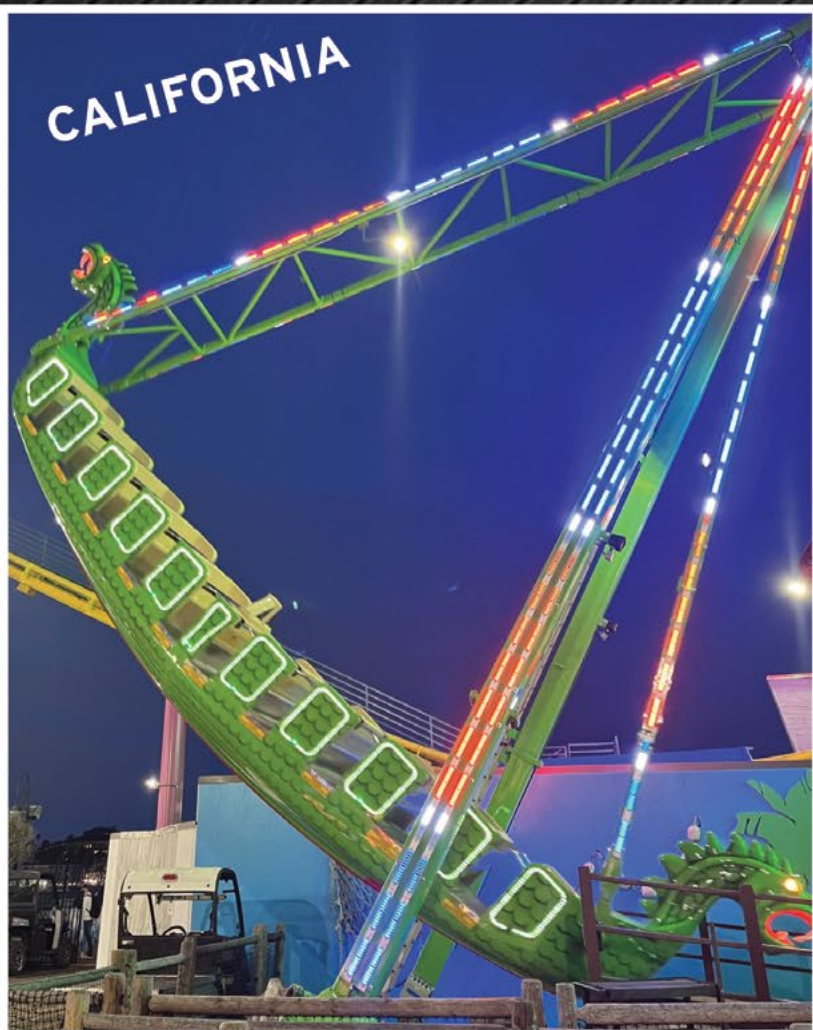
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AMUSEMENT VIEWS

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

Feeling impact of "Wishes"



Robinson

In early April, I was lucky enough to attend the WWE's Wrestlemania while I was in the Los Angeles area. While the event itself was awe-inspiring, how it opened hit an emotional nerve I was not expecting.

The first match of the event was John Cena vs. Austin Theory. Theory, the "bad guy" in the match came to the ring first.

But, for Cena's entrance, the entryway was suddenly filled with more than a dozen children.

The announcement came that all of the children on the stage were Make-A-Wish guests whose "wish" was to attend Wrestlemania. They were soon joined on the platform by John Cena — one of the most popular wrestlers of all time — and their faces lit up in a way that every one of the more than 80,000 in attendance at Sofi Stadium could feel. Cena holds the world record for granting 650 Make-a-Wish Foundation wishes (no one else in the history of the organization has exceeded 200 wishes).

As I looked on, with tears in my eyes, as the kids jumped for joy and high-fived their hero on stage alongside them, it hit me. The day before, I was visiting Universal Studios Hollywood and I'd seen some of these very kids there as well! In fact, a few of them were in line beside me and riding Jurassic World — The Ride with me.

With trips to Disney World, the impact of Give Kids The World Village and the "dream come true" nature of many theme parks, the amusement industry has become synonymous with the Make-A-Wish Foundation. However, as a lifelong member of the industry, this was my first time where I had been privileged enough to not only see the impact of wishes being granted, but feel it. It was a sensation so strong that every occupant of a sold-out football stadium was glowing with the happiness of those children at the mere site of their joy.

The efforts of the people who grant these wishes — who provide that incredible moment or memory for these children — cannot be recognized enough. In our parks, and in these children's hearts, these are the people making real magic happen.

FLINT'S VIEW: Bubba Flint



INDUSTRY VOICE: Kristopher Rowberry, National Roller Coaster Museum & Archives

The key to the future is the past

Call Doc, it's time to jump in the DeLorean and go back to the future.

In this era of clickbait videos, cancel culture and so-called social media "influencers," how can your facility stand out...and in a positive light? One word: nostalgia.

For years now, savvy parks have taken defunct rides or retro logos to better connect generations of families on their next visit. No longer just an appeal to hardcore fans, it turns out to be good business.

Busch Gardens could not keep The Big Bad Wolf or Drachen Fire t-shirts in stock, two rides that were removed years ago. Worlds of Fun brought back a new version of Zambezi Zinger, but with nods to the original Schwarzkopf design.

As the human behind the National Roller Coaster Museum & Archives social media, I can attest to the power of nostalgia each time we post something. For fans to see their favorite ride preserved is more than



Rowberry

just reassuring, it leads to positive interactions online, something rarely seen these days.

Producing the *Legacy of Schwarzkopf* documentary for American Coaster Enthusiasts, there's a pattern in our interviews: the power of rides. Not the physical forces, but their ability to evoke

positive memories from those who rode them.

With Millennials aging, we're bringing our own children to the parks where we grew up. We want them to have the same experiences we did, something social media can never replicate.

Our industry is well positioned to capitalize on and embrace this nostalgia to stand out in the crowded media market we live in today. No so-called "influencer" with millions of followers can ever replace the singular impact of your first Schwarzkopf coaster.

Your facility already has one of the best marketing tools it could have. Now, it's time to unlock its full potential across our entire industry.

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



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2 MINUTE DRILL



AT: Janice Witherow

Matt Hughey, Circuit of the Americas

Matt Hughey started his amusement career at **Six Flag Over Texas** as a team member in the games department in 1990 and later was the park's operations manager. He has also been the proud owner of **Hughey Entertainment**, which operated kiddie rides in malls across north Texas. Currently serving as director of park operations at **Circuit of the Americas** in Austin, Texas, Matt is enjoying his role at this world-class motorsports and entertainment destination where he brings his passion, industry knowledge, focus on employees and lively personality to the job. Fun fact about Matt: he performed magic professionally from 1985-1991!



Enjoying a more-than-30-year career in the amusement industry, Matt Hughey is currently director of park operations at Circuit of the Americas. COURTESY CIRCUIT OF THE AMERICAS

Title: Director of Park Operations.

Number of years in the industry: 25.

Best thing about the industry:

The consistent creativity. I'm always amazed at what our industry creates.

Favorite amusement park ride:

Texas Wildcat at COTA, Hagrids Magical Creatures Motorbike Adventure at Universal Studios Florida, Devil's Den at Conneaut Lake Park and Rise of the Resistance at Disney's Galaxy's Edge.

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

The owner of my own business.

Biggest challenge facing our industry:

Maintaining and hiring team members. Team members are so important to our industry. We must take care of those who are taking care of our guests!

The thing I like most about amusement park season is ...

The energy guests bring.

It's summer! For me, that means ...

Travel and amusement park visiting.

Favorite junk food:

Kettle-cooked potato chips.

I typically celebrate my birthday by ...

Going out to eat. Steak tartar is usually on the menu.

The best place I have ever watched a sunset is ...

Venice, Italy.

The last time I cooked a meal, I whipped up ...

Homemade pasta and sauce. Yes, I make my own pasta dough and sauce!

Favorite summertime drink:

Mango lemonade.

You're at the beach: Do you stay on the sand or hit the waves?

I love the water, so the lion share of time is spent in the waves.

I would describe my backyard at home as ...

My oasis, I spend a lot of time in our hot tub.

The one thing I never leave home without is ...

My cell phone.

When drinking water, do you like yours with or without ice?

Ice!

On a rainy day, I like to ...

Sit in the hot tub.

If you could be in a band, what instrument would you play?

Drums.

My all-time best "bloop" moment would have to be ...

When I was performing a water suspension magic trick and the water did not stay suspended.

When I think of doing laundry, I ...

I immediately think of something else!

The last concert I went to was ...

Ghost.

When I say pizza, you say ...

New York style, pepperoni, mushroom, sausage and fresh basil.

I am so tired of hearing about ...

People complaining about those who love the 80s decade because it was the best decade!

The celebrity I would most like to sit by on a plane is ...

Terrance Hill, a famous Italian actor known for playing in spaghetti westerns.

THE INDUSTRY SEEN

Parenting the fun way



SANDUSKY, Ohio — While attending and speaking at Cedar Point's Engineering Day as part of the Zamperla team, Adam Sandy used his free time after the event to take in the park with his daughters Anya (pictured above with Adam) and Kira. The family even got to enjoy Zamperla's own Skater attraction (Pipe Scream) and the park's new Wild Mouse spinning coaster (also manufactured by Zamperla) which anchors the new Boardwalk section of the park. COURTESY ADAM SANDY

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► BEAR

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in the park. With a track length of just under 4,000 feet (and no lift hill), it is a minute and forty seconds of pure action — and fun.

However, with big bragging rights over its coaster siblings, it would be easy to assume that the new kid on the block would be some towering, gigantic scream machine. Dollywood already has some world-class offerings in that category. Instead, this massive new ride aims at a different demographic than thrill seekers — the family.

"This is a thrilling ride, but with a 39-inch height requirement, this ride will

directly appeal to families with younger kids," said **Wes Ramey**, public relations. "I have two young kids myself, and I know they are going to love this experience, especially with the ride's immersive theming. We know families are going to love the ride because — for many of them — it may be the first 'real' roller coaster they are able to enjoy together as a family unit."

Dollywood's most recent coaster prior to this year's debut was *Dragonflier*, which opened with Wildwood Grove in 2019. It was supplied by **Vekoma**, and the park returned to the Dutch manufacturer for this latest addition. **Benjamin Bloemendaal**



The first half of the ride hugs to the ground. COURTESY DOLLYWOOD

was the designer.

"We are proud to be doing business with Vekoma as a leader in the industry for safe and reli-

able attractions," Naughton told *Amusement Today*. "They came through a very aggressive bidding process in early 2020 and outscored the other vendors who participated in the bid process on all key ride design criteria, including all the attributes included in the RFP package. The entire Vekoma team made sure to deliver on all of the attraction marketing hooks."

"Our partnership with Dollywood over the past few years has been outstanding," said **Ricardo Tonding Etges**, VP, sales and marketing (Americas), Vekoma. "Dragonflier was a great initial step, when we were able to demonstrate our capabilities, both when it comes to the quality of the product, as well as our customer-centric approach, working hand in hand with their team throughout the entire process. Coming back now with Big Bear Mountain is extremely rewarding. The project is much larger in scale and scope and was custom designed, especially for that section of the park."

Part of the fun is how the theming fits into the surroundings.

"The whole thing started prior to 2019, around 2017, when we started envisioning Wildwood Grove. [The area] was a story that used a character that was a surrogate for Dolly and how she grew up," said **Pete Owens**, vice president of marketing, Dollywood. "She found this hidden hollow, and

we created the characters of Flit and Flutter, but we also created a character called Ned Oakley, a ranger of Wildwood Grove. Even though we also introduced Benjamin Bear, there were also some loose ends of the storyline we wanted to tie together as we expanded Wildwood Grove."

Those loose ends were found in local folklore. A tall tale within the Smokies involves Big Bear and a quest to find him.

"We tied Big Bear and Ned and fancified the story," Owens said. "Of course, as a family park, we aren't hunting Big Bear. We just want to find him!"

The ride features three launches. The first bolts riders right out of the station. In many ways, the ride could be seen as having two halves. Major launches set each act in place. The first half keeps close to the ground and dives below a waterfall. Following the third launch, the second half soars over the plaza, queue and queue building and offers airtime.

"At Dollywood, we are very mindful of the beauty of the Great Smoky Mountains and how that unique element of our environment gives us the opportunity to provide guests with an experience they are not going to find anywhere else," said Ramey. "We're blessed by our location, so building attractions to take advantage

GCI refurbishes Dollywood's Thunderhead

In addition to the major addition to Wildwood Grove, Dollywood has also completed a multi-year project on its wooden coaster, Thunderhead. It was built by **Great Coasters International, Inc.** The park has turned to GCI to refurbish the ride to maintain its elite status.

"GCI has redesigned Thunderhead to include track-to-ledger connections, added ipe [wood] to the top two layers of the track, doing a final circuit re-tracking. The new design and added ipe will allow riders to have a smooth ride," said **Olivia Hain**, director of public relations, GCI.

"In my opinion, Thunderhead is still one of the best traditional wood coasters anywhere," said **Pete Owens**, VP, marketing, Dollywood. "It was incumbent upon us to be good stewards of the ride that Mike Boodley designed, and Clair Hain and his team built. It is such a great ride!"

Thunderhead opened in 2004 and immediately leapt into the Top Ten on *Amusement Today's* Golden Ticket Awards list. In 2005 and 2006, it snagged the Golden Ticket for Best Wooden Roller Coaster. Since it opened, it has never dropped out of the Top Ten.

"Over the last several years, we have been working to retrack with ipe, and the outcome is spectacular. It reminds me of the first couple of years it opened. It's still a very traditional wood coaster ride, and now it's much smoother. I still feel it is one of the best wooden coasters anywhere in the world," said Owens.



Substantial work on the award-winning Thunderhead has it running like new. COURTESY JOEL STYER

CONGRATULATIONS TO DOLLYWOOD WITH THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF 'BIG BEAR MOUNTAIN'!



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► BEAR

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of the beauty of the Smokies makes perfect sense.”

“There are plenty of surprises, starting with the size of the coaster,” said Etges. “It is not every day that we see a massive coaster for such a wide audience. The launches are forceful, the layout is full of airtime, ground hugging in different sections and cool curves and twists. The speed is high and consistent. It is actually almost like two family coasters in one, given how long the ride is and how the first section (after launch two) and the second section are different.”

“The launches on Big Bear Mountain really took me by surprise, as I really wasn’t expecting them to be quite as powerful,” added Ramey. “In addition to that, I think most guests are going to be surprised by the length of the ride experience. When you feel like the ride should be about to



After the final launch, Big Bear Mountain soars above the plaza at speeds that near 50 mph. COURTESY DOLLYWOOD

end, it just keeps going!”

While riding, the storyline continues as the two 20-passenger trains also feature onboard sound.

“The audio was such a good tool for us to help with the storytelling process,” Owens told *AT*. “One of the things that is impressive to the riders is the amount of story there is to discover in and around the ride plaza and through the queue. The

onboard audio allows us to have a soundtrack throughout the entire ride. There’s a musical soundtrack, but there are also radio calls from Ned alerting you to what’s going on. It’s a well-executed soundtrack and extremely clear audio. We wanted to really engage the kids riding with their moms and grandparents.”

“It is the cherry on the cake,” added Etges.

“Onboard audio recently became a must-have for new coasters and our team has been able to develop reliable and solid onboard audio systems for different vehicles from our portfolio.” Big Bear Mountain encompasses the entire Wildwood Grove as a dramatic backdrop.

“It allows us to have people who aren’t riding it interact with the ride in

Wildwood Grove, no matter where they are,” said Owens.

One of the biggest selling points for the park is the low height requirement of 39 inches.

“This was a requirement from Dollywood, given how family-oriented the park is and how scarce rides with such a low height restriction are,” said Etges. “Vekoma had the perfect solution for it — a vehicle which can safely carry 39-inch-tall riders while offering an exciting ride experience for an older audience too. It is the best of both worlds.”

“I think Big Bear Mountain is a nice combination for the families that visit Wildwood Grove and the enthusiasts who are looking for a more thrilling experience. I really think Vekoma did an amazing job offering a ride that everyone can enjoy for their own reasons!” said Ramey.

“We set out in this process to reinvent the family thrill coaster,” said Owens.

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The theming for Festival of Toutatis (above left) and the coaster's station (above right) is exceptionally impressive. A Zamperla NebulaZ called Chez Girofolix is part of the new area (above middle). The park boasts a record number of negative-G moments on Toutatis (below). COURTESY PARC ASTÉRIX

► TOUTATIS

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gest thrills ever experienced in France. With its 51-meter (167-foot) height and 110km/h (66 mph) speed, Toutatis is breaking quite a few records — fastest in France, the European record for accelerations and the world record of air-times. Parc Astérix is rightly earning its place in the pool of the greatest European theme parks.”

“The coaster project started early 2018 with the layout design finished in summer 2018. In between, the location of the coaster changed to its final spot,” said **Daniel Shoppen**, VP design and development, Intamin. “The COVID crisis delayed the project by about one year.”

Space constraints by an existing **Mack** bobsled coaster necessitated creative interaction. The big triple launch had to find a way through the labyrinth of columns, back-of-house roads and overall viewing constraints.

“During the detail design phase, the Park Astérix/CDA design team developed the idea to install the first launch and triple launch/high-speed switch in trenches, which is supporting the ride experience,” Shoppen told *Amusement Today*. “Speeding by nearby flying walls, as well as the overall design of the themed Toutatis area — Toutatis is a fun machine. The coaster train can be seen at the big launch pit, but it is not restricting the view to the station. The development of the layout was a great collaboration of the creatives of Parc Astérix and Intamin.”

Ride capacity is reported to be 1,260 riders per hour. Three trains are artistically adorned and seat 20 passengers per train.

The ride layout is a checklist of dramatically cool elements. The three inversions are a slow hanging stall, a zero-G stall and a barrel roll. A small drop from the station puts riders onto a first launch. Soon, trains go backward and forward via a switch track for a triple LSM launch eventually cresting a top hat maneuver. The plunge from the tallest point of the ride takes place slowly, as magnetic brakes hang riders as they stare into the 101-degree, beyond-vertical plunge.

“The brake design was intended from the beginning to feature a top speed of 66.5 mph without conflicting the maximum height restriction,” said Shoppen. “The first-row experiences hangtime, while the last row is catapulted over the parabolic drop.”

The ride features an abundance of negative-G moments, overbanked curves and wild direction changes. While the track length is 3,527 feet, because of the back-and-forth triple launch, there is 4,537 feet of experienced track.

“It is quite hard to choose

a favorite moment as everything is put together to create a real firework of excitement,” said the park spokesperson. “The legend is it is the Ritual of Courage, as the druids of Carnutes Forest, assisted by [the character] Panoramix, have transposed the teachings of the god Toutatis into a ritual designed to test one’s bravery.”

To say the area is heavily themed is an understatement. The décor throughout the festival village, the landscaping and the themed elements such as architecture, the coaster’s station, the ride entrance and a gigantic statue (both imposing and eccentric) create a visually immersive and stunning environment. Monolithic rocks are engraved and inscribed with artistic detail and whimsy.

“The elements of the program and the scenery all relate to this festive Gaulish ambiance,” said the park spokesperson. “The work efforts have been huge from the scenography to the actual construction of the attraction while keeping biodiversity and sustainability front of mind throughout. Everything was thought through to the smallest detail.”

The rockwork inside the station features a sculpted



visage of Toutatis, and upon dispatch of the coaster train, submerged lighting emerges from the crevices of carved rock. It is these specific creative details that elevate Festival of Toutatis to a world-class and destination-worthy attraction for thrill-seekers.

“The teams wanted to create a zone which would suit the entire family, the biggest in the park’s history,” the park spokesperson said. “Festival of Toutatis is a small park within the park. Thanks to the playground Sanglier d’Or and Chez Girofolix, the two restaurants, the shop and of course the roller coaster Toutatis, there is something for everyone within the new zone.”

Crowds rushed to

be among the first to ride Toutatis on opening weekend and rave reviews indicate the park’s substantial investment is paying off.

“The teams were so eager to see how the public would welcome our new attraction when the park reopened!” Parc Astérix’s spokesperson shared. “Visitors come out of the attraction with a big smile on their faces, we hear them say how incredible Toutatis is, that the ride is brilliant and mind-blowing and that the sensations are amazing. Our visitors love the attraction and are asking for more. We feel the launch has gone well and Toutatis is on track to become one of the signature attractions at Parc Astérix.”

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Playland Amusement Park set to reopen under new management

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

FRESNO, Calif. — **Davey Helm** already had a lot on his business plate.

As the operator of his family's carnival, **Helm and Sons Amusement Company**, he travels seasonally up and down primarily the west coast playing a variety of fairs, festivals and special events.

During the carnival's off-season, he spends time at the company's headquarters in Colton, California, which is less than 10 miles from his home in Riverside, California.

Now, he has added a new venture, the operation of **Playland Amusement Park** located in Roeding Park in Fresno, California. What he and family members have already done to Playland park and the future plans he has for the family-friendly venue ... well, it is a whole lot.

Rides have been refurbished. More have been brought in. Concessions have gone up. Games are in place and props adorn the grounds.

"But I am ready for it," Helm said. "I am all in."

Playland will open to



Playland's splash pad (above left) has been repaired and is in working order, just waiting on the return of visitors on June 16. The park will have updated concession booths (above right) with plans to offer more than 40 menu items. There also will be a souvenir booth and various other vendor booths. COURTESY PLAYLAND



the public June 16, a couple of weeks after a VIP opening for potential sponsors and donors on June 1.

"We are giving members of the community an opportunity to sponsor parts of the park or make donations," Helm said. "We have created over 50 sponsorship and donation opportunities such as naming the horses on the Grand Carousel."

Helm said he has thought about operating an amusement park. He is looking at this opportunity not only as a way to reopen the much-

loved park but also as a way to learn more about operating an amusement park. One of these days, he said, he wants to own and operate an amusement resort. But that is down the line. Right now, his focus is Playland and, of course, Helm and Sons.

And he still has so much planned in addition to what already has been accomplished.

The way this venture started was somewhat happen-chance. The **Fresno Rotary Club** is the owner of Playland, as well as **Storyland**, also located in Roeding Park, which is state-owned land.

Playland, which originally opened in 1955, had not reopened since the COVID pandemic shut it down in 2020. It also closed for the 2015 season due to low attendance.

Representatives from the Fresno Rotary Club got in touch with Helm through Facebook. They had a proposal for him. Would he like to operate Playland under their supervision?

He decided he really

wasn't interested in taking on the park operations unless he was running it. The Rotary Club, while still owning it, would need to relinquish operational control.

"If I was going to run it, I wanted it to be my vision, my dream," Helm said.

After a little back and forth, the Fresno Rotary Club agreed. A proposal was presented in early 2021 and an agreement was reached.

"It took about a year to get all the paperwork done, but that was done last September," Helm said.

So, he began. One of the first things he did was convince his sister-in-law, **Candace Cuisinier**, to relocate and become the general manager.

"I have moved several family members from around the country to Fresno," Helm said.

Helm's crew got to work assessing the existing 12 rides. They took them apart, made repairs, updated them, inspected them and put them back together. Of the 12, they

did end up having to decommission four of them

The existing rides that remain and will open this season include a Grand Carousel, an **Allan Herschell** helicopter ride, a **Jolly Caterpillar**, a **Zamperla** teacup ride, miniature cars, a family coaster by **Molina and Sons** and **Chance Rides C.P.** Huntington trains. They worked on the two-mile track that takes visitors from Playland to Storyland and back again.

Helm didn't disclose all the rides he is bringing in except for his **Chance Rides** 85-foot gondola Ferris wheel. The company also plans to bring in a 110-foot by 45-foot slide.

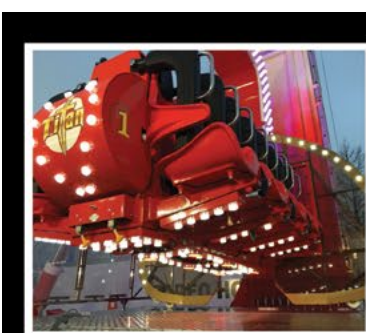
He plans to bring in a total of 12 rides from his arsenal at Helm and Sons. Since the park is open year-round, he plans to switch them periodically to keep things new and exciting.

Then, the crew set about building and assembling the other grounds attractions.

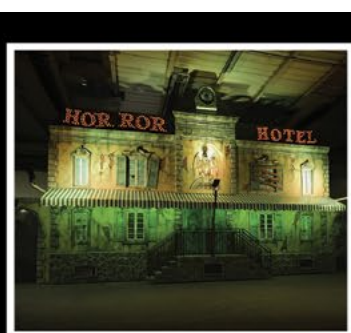
► See **PLAYLAND**, page 12



The Raging River ride is an existing ride that will stay at Playland once it reopens. COURTESY HELM AND SONS



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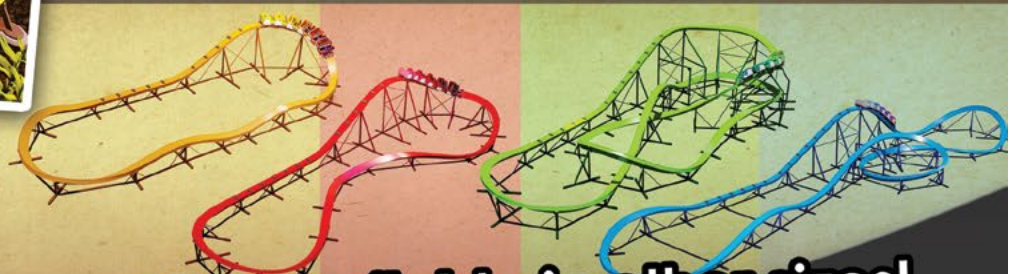
Details

- Base frame option available for indoor or outdoor use
- Inclusive train design fits both children and adults
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- Theming opportunities for both the track and trains!

Ride Stats

Height	24.5' [7.5 m]
Length	566' [172.7 m] 592' [180.4 m]
Footprint	162' x 83' [49.5 m x 25.3 m]
Capacity	1,200 pph
Power	100 kW
Height Req.	36" [91 cm]

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This C.P. Huntington train runs on a two-mile track between Playland and Storyland Park, Playland's sister park. Helm and Sons Amusements has done some refurbishments to the ride and track. COURTESY HELM AND SONS

►PLAYLAND Continued from page 10

An 18-hole miniature golf course that he describes as more of an upscale course has been installed.

"Kids will enjoy it, but I think the adults are going to enjoy it, too," he said.

The park's splash pad has been updated.

"During COVID, my wife and I bought into a prop company in California. We have a plethora of props we are putting in the park for photo ops including a 65-foot-tall replica of the Eiffel Tower. We are calling that the Eye Full Tower."

He has brought in eight games, as well as food concessions. Helm's wife, Colleen, is in charge of all the food operations at the park.

"She is actually in charge of all the food operations including the carnival," he said.

She is planning a large menu.

"We will have over 40 menu food items," Helm said. "There will be a souvenir booth, which will sell all types of park souvenirs as well as such items as lip balm, towels and diapers."

"We will have other vendors, too, such as face painting and build-a-bear-type opportunity."

Helm also has created some special entertainment, one being a game show that he has scripted.

"It will have a carnival and park atmosphere," he said.

And, of course, there will be seasonal events.

"We have real snow

planned and we will be bringing in real pumpkins," Helm said.

He has created a new logo for the park, which he said is a hybrid between the park and the logo used by Helm and Sons.

Playland will be open Wednesdays through Sundays. The closed days, however, will be open for private parties and company special event opportunities.

The park will be pay-one-price admission with prices of \$25 for adults and \$20 for seven years and under. The train will be extra.

For on-site purchases, **Magic Money** will be available. Helm said guests will be able to reload money not only at the park but at home, if they choose, on the app.

"We want to make that part easy for them," he said.

So, yes, Helm and his wife will be busy this season.

At Helm and Sons, there is a ride arsenal of approximately 65 rides.

The carnival primarily travels on the west coast.

A sampling of the carnival's dates are the **San Gennaro Feast**, Henderson, Nevada, May 10-14; **San Bernardino County Fair**, Victorville, California, May 27-June 4; **Santa Barbara County Fair**, Santa Maria, California, July 12-16; **California Mid-State Fair**, Paso Robles, July 19-30; the **Oregon State Fair**, Salem, August 25-September 4; the **Antelope Valley Fair**, Lancaster, California, Sept. 22-Oct. 1 and many others.

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Hershey's Great Candy Expedition opens at Chocolate World

AT: B. Derek Shaw
bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

HERSHEY, Pa. — It has all the makings of a big-time Broadway production — a fully immersive, interactive cinematic experience. The new Hershey's Great Candy Expedition combines the sights, sounds, lights and smells of chocolate on a virtual train excursion all within a 126-seat theater inside Hershey's Chocolate World. The 4,500-square-foot attraction opened May 19 to the delight of legions of fans at the Sweetest Place on Earth, during the 50th anniversary year of Chocolate World.

The 30-minute adventure ushers guests through three different main areas, beginning at Hershey's Chocolate World Train Station, inspired by trains that Milton S. Hershey himself traveled on to explore and find ingredients for his candy-making business. The train station



is designed to bring guests back to the golden age of travel, outfitted with an art deco-inspired departure board, clocks and vignettes as well as retro-style posters depicting each Hersheyland area along the journey.

While waiting to board, visitors can enjoy ingredient tastings such as Reese's peanut butter cups straight from the factory. Each receives an Adventurer's guide filled with information on each Hersheyland they will discover as well as games and puzzles for families to continue their exploration at home.

When it's time to head to the official Sweets Expedition Company Platform 73, visitors



Ginny, the Engineer, is at one of the three crossroads, asking the audience to decide which path they want to take. In this case, the decision is between Twizzlers Forest or Reese's Ridge. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

are immersed in time-period-specific sights, locomotive sounds and realistic experiential lighting as they step onto the Hersheyland Express.

Once inside the theater, guests are surrounded by projection-mapped screens that take them to whimsical and colorful sweet stops using special effects. Scents

change throughout the various candy worlds, including berry, coconut, roasted peanut and Hershey's chocolate. To get from one candy-filled world to the next, guests will be able to collectively control each of the train's destinations by voting using light-up buttons on their armrests. The journeys tell each

brand's story, offering entertaining education. Audience participation is encouraged via the characters on the screen. This is accomplished through tapping the same buttons, as well as gently vibrating seats or gusts of fan-generated wind to simulate the train being launched off the tracks into the air.

After the journey ends, visitors take home a bag filled with treats from each Hersheyland sweet stop they visited.

Cutting-edge technology indulges all five senses. This includes 270-degree, 4K projection mapping and special effects including scents paired with different worlds, visual lighting and theatrical snow to create a sense of cascading confetti. Guests control each of the train's three destinations by voting using light-up buttons on their armrests with the majority determining which track to take throughout the 15-minute excursion. The updated theater also has seating with rumble vibrations and wind timed to special moments during the excursion.

The project concept came to life at the end of 2020. "We knew we needed to be future forward. We needed to come back in a big way, once we reopened our doors. For the 50th anniversary, we needed something big and spectacular. The code name for the project originally was Hershey's Extravaganza," said Danny Byerley, creative director for The Hershey Experience.

Multiple blue-sky concepts were developed and tested with guests and cost-functional teams. "[They were] really refined down to the best of the best of the different components that guests want to see in an attraction — interactivity, repeatability, edutainment that peaked behind the curtain and people want to go to these vibrant, candy worlds," said Byerley.

Almost nine months were spent on the concept development phase, which included the film and scripts. All told it was a two-and-a-half-year project with no delays

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IRM tapped by Joyland Park to find homes for rides and equipment

LUBBOCK, Texas — Joyland Park of Lubbock, Texas, closed for the season in September 2022 with intentions to reopen with a new owner. During the holiday season, the deal was not fulfilled, and Joyland owners, with retirement underway, were faced with a turnkey park filled with supplies and equipment.

International Rides Management (IRM) was selected to liquidate the park and find homes for the rides so Joyland would live on and provide fun to families elsewhere. **Samuel Shurgott**, president of IRM, commented: "The first decision we made as a company was to call this a 'retirement' vs. a liquidation. Liquidation indicates an end-of-the-line fire sale, which was not the goal. Springtime is harder to sell rides, but not impossible. We had to find parks and convince them they needed more equipment."

Shurgott tasked the team, who met regularly in early January to form a plan. They found parks and facilities/attractions using several methods. IRM identified the often-overlooked value of midway games and other items including park benches, picnic tables and food equipment. Once IRM had a buyer onsite, the team showed them other items that they could use with buyers taking advantage of many of these items.

"Working with **David** and **Kristi Dean** has been both a joy and very smooth. I have been to Joyland many times and had more than 300 photos. My team was able to reload our website with file photos," said Shurgott.

In early January, IRM sent out their first emails late at night and by early next morning **Playland** in Ocean City, N.J. and **Indiana Beach Holdings** had claimed equipment and events moved forward each day. IRM was onsite in February hosting many premier clients including Indiana Beach Holdings, **Fun Spot** theme parks, several other family-owned park owners and IRM's European Partner **Martin Meijer**. Fast forward to May, and Joyland will live on as many rides already have been removed and loads of equipment have arrived at new homes.

Shurgott added: "Family-owned parks like Joyland are what makes the best in summertime fun and while I am sad this park is closing, we are honored to sell and place rides in many smaller parks and help them grow for future generations of visitors."

Amusement Today will publish an exclusive list later this summer of what parks and facilities received Joyland rides and equipment.

►HERSHEY

Continued from page 14

in the process. "Everything really has slid together really nicely," said Byerley. "We tried our best to put the money in the show so that every dollar went right to something guests could see, touch, smell or hear." Nearly 100 people were involved in the process. The total project cost was not disclosed.

Throughout the attraction, there are many "Easter Eggs" paying tribute to people and dates throughout the years at Chocolate World. In the train station on a bulletin board attached to the door to the fictional train engineer, Ginny, is where there are quite a few of them. Byerley hinted, "Maybe [you'll] see the names of some of our famous cows from the tour ride. You'll notice on our train, we've hidden some numbers on there. Some of the numbers might have to do with the opening dates of our attractions here that previously had this footprint.

For example, 2003 is when we opened the Really Big 3D Show. 2013 is when we opened the previous show, the Chocolate 4-D Mystery, and 2023 is the year we opened this. So, we put those numbers in and sprinkled them about. A keen eye and pure enthusiasts might be able to uncover even more."

He added, "I hope people come to this experience and leave feeling joy in their heart, feeling like that they have experienced something they've not been able to do anywhere else and that we have given the experience to our guests in a way that they can connect with their family, they'll want to come back multiple times and really help hit them emotionally. We've really tried to make something special after all that we've gone through collectively, in the last few years. We need to feel some joy and we need to share that goodness."

Chocolate World is owned and operated by **The Hershey Company** and located adjacent to **Hersheypark**.

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2 rows, building included)
- 1954 G-16 Railroad....\$109,000 p/m
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- 1972 SDC Galaxi Coaster....\$99,000 p/m
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Europa-Park and Mack Rides announce huge expansion for 2024

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

RUST, Germany — Although Europa-Park is just two months into its 2023 season, it has been very vocal — and visible — about what is coming to the theme park in 2024.

Next season will see the addition of a new themed land, Croatia. The park did create a makeover for a former children's area into Ireland in 2016, but this will be the first time the park has expanded its boundaries into a new themed land in a long time.

The anchor for the new Croatia area will be a gigantic coaster. Clearly, there is no hiding it, as structurally, the ride is complete. But there is much to accomplish as the current season takes place.

To help set the stage, guests are already being immersed in the story behind it. Nikola Tesla, with roots in Croatia, has been chosen as a principal figure to the new land. His experiments with electricity will be the catalyst for the roller coaster's storyline.

"Storytelling is becoming more and more important. We are able to do storytelling now because we do have our own company, we do have the VR people and designers that we can produce our own [content] and books on our own if we want," said Europa-Park founder **Roland Mack**. "In Croatia, I think it is a perfect situation with the combination of culture,

Theming on the new land will be immersive. Construction of the coaster structure (inset) has been ongoing over the last few months. COURTESY EUROPA-PARK; AT/TIM BADLWIN



buildings and high tech. With Nikola Tesla [as the focus], there is inspiration."

When *Amusement Today* asked Mack if the coaster themed to electricity came first or the plans for park expansion, he said, "The idea to build Croatia came early. It is a country that Europeans like to go to for vacations. It makes them feel good. It was the same when we built themed hotels. We had theming from places that people like to go in the summertime. The new coaster had to have a theme, so everything came together."

The new coaster, which has not officially been named yet, will be the next big thing for the park's lineup of coasters. While Euro-Sat was retracked and rethemed for the 2018 season, not since the coaster-like Arthur in 2014 and Wodan wooden coast-



er in 2012 has there been a sizable addition for coaster fans. This one is certain to be iconic with its look and thematic experience.

"You need content to enhance a roller coaster," said **Michael Mack**, managing partner. "I think putting in digital entertainment might help the journey before you go to the theme park. We have some things we've never done at Europa-Park on the coaster, so we have some mechanical novelties.

But the sound and the ambiance set the feeling. We're going to have some beautiful lighting effects. I think you have to create atmosphere."

Park management has stated that it won't be Europa-Park's tallest or longest roller coaster, but they are aiming to make it the best.

"We have some new features in the ride, but, unfortunately, we can't share all the secrets yet," said **Maximilian Roeser**, marketing, **Mack Rides**. "But what you can see in the POV is the rotating switch in the middle of the track where we turn the train around and do a back-and-forward launch sequence. The other features will be in the station building and will be revealed later."

The new coaster will be unique to Europa-Park. Mack Rides has opened two other Big Dipper coasters already (with others in production), but this version is larger. The Big Dipper model seats eight riders in a single car of two rows.

"For Croatia, we are building a Stryker coaster. It will still have four seats across but with a train configuration and 16 people in total," said Roeser. "We also have a very powerful launch mechanism with four stators that will launch the roller coaster significantly stronger than our existing coasters to date. Also, we will feature a more-than-90-degree banked launch upward right from the start. This will be an outstanding feature."

With seven inversions, wildly banked turns, launches and the turntable element (plus yet-to-be-revealed moments), the ride will also operate with seven trains.

"The dispatch of the trains is crucial for the ride," said Roeser. "We will achieve a very high throughput of 1,600 guests per hour — and this with a 16-seater train. That's phenomenal and will really be appreciated by all guests. Europa-Park is known for its perfect operations, and we will set a new standard with this ride in particular."

To help build anticipation, the park's domed theater is already playing *Nikola Tesla's Beautiful Croatia*. Later this season, the park's 4D Theater will feature a film centered on Tesla's experiments which lead into the coaster's storyline. Europa-Park successfully did this by bringing stories of Rulantica into the theme park a season before the water park opened in 2019.

Although Croatia is the big news, amusingly, Europa-Park debuted a new land this year, Lichtenstein. Because it is such a small country, the park relocated a balloon ride and themed it to Lichtenstein, which pretty much made up the new small "land."

"The press took it so heavily," smiled Roland. "It is a very small country, but because Europa-Park [featured] Lichtenstein, we never expected it to be a frontline story in the newspaper."



Europa-Park isn't keeping the new-for-2024 land a secret. Signage in front of the construction area is building excitement. AT/TIM BADLWIN



Kituwah LLC, a tribally-owned-and-operated economic development organization, broke ground in April on a new entertainment district within its 200-acre property off Interstate 40 in Sevier County, Tennessee.

Dubbed **Smoky Gap**, the 20-acre district will be home to "major international attractions, restaurants, retail stores and much more," according to a press release.

It will be built to resemble an early 1900s Main Street with Americana-themed storefronts and a large clock tower. A future attraction will anchor Smoky Gap with a world-class "experiential facility."

The attraction is to be managed and designed by French theme park company **Puy Du Fou**.

Kituwah LLC is wholly owned by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The LLC stated that the project is in its final design phase.

Sevier County in Tennessee is also home to **Dollywood** in Pigeon Forge, as well as many other attractions and resorts.

One month after regaining its zoological accreditation, the **Columbus Zoo and Aquarium** in Powell, Ohio, announced it was getting a new attraction.

The new attraction, which opened at the end of May, is the Adventure Sky Wheel, a 110-foot-tall **Lamberink B.V.** wheel. It was brought to the zoo and installed by the Ohio-based **Kissel Entertainment Company** ahead of Memorial Day weekend.

The wheel includes 24 gondolas, which can seat six people each. It also features LED lights in multiple colors for when the wheel operates in the evenings.

A spokesperson for the zoo said the wheel will be at that location for the remainder of 2023.

The U.S. Marshals Museum, Fort Smith, Arkansas, will open to the public on July 1 after more than 16 years of fundraising, design, construction and installation.

The U.S. Marshals Service selected Fort Smith as the permanent home for its national museum in 2007, according to a museum news release. Volunteers, staff, community leaders and elected representatives from throughout the state and country have worked with the Marshals

Service since then to complete the project.

"To say we're excited would be a vast understatement," **Doug Babb**, chairman of the museum's board, said in a news release. "It's truly gratifying to see the work of so many different people who have dedicated their time and resources to this effort come to fruition. This will be a jewel for Fort Smith, the state of Arkansas and the country."

Construction of the main museum building, which consists of about 53,000 square feet along the Arkansas River, was completed in January 2020.

The museum will feature five galleries that will educate guests about the role the marshals have played in upholding the rule of law.

Nearly 150 members of **Darkride and Funhouse Enthusiasts** (DAFE) gathered at **Knoebels Amusement Resort**, Elysburg, Pennsylvania, last month to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Haunted Mansion.

People from as far away as Texas traveled to the amusement park to ride the attraction that has maintained its charm since opening in 1973.

Some of the Knoebel family members met with the DAFE guests and gave them some historical background of the ride. **Rick Knoebel** told them that in 1972, the park was hit by a terrible flood. They wanted to come back strong the next year, so they built the Haunted Mansion.

Connect&GO, a leader in integrated attractions management solutions and RFID technology, announced a new partnership to provide the company's Kconnect all-in-one management platform to **Canyon Sainte-Anne**, an outdoor nature park in Quebec, Canada.

Known for its beautiful scenery and lush nature setting, the Canyon aspires to provide an inspiring and meaningful ecotourism experience that ensures sustainability for future generations. Activities include hiking trails, suspension bridges and the unique **AirCANYON** zipline, which takes guests on a thrilling journey through the forest with breathtaking views of the canyon and waterfall from the comfort of a motorized chair built for two.

Discovering the rhyme and reason behind tourist behavior is a science for which the **Griffith Institute for Tourism** (GIFT) in Southport, Queensland, Australia, has launched a cutting-edge laboratory.

The Biosensor Lab offers the ability to combine psycho-physiological biometrics with traditional self-report measures to gain deeper insights into tourism phenomena. State-of-the-art tools in the GIFT Biosensor Lab include virtual reality eye-tracking, screen-based eye tracking, mobile eye-tracking glasses, facial expression analysis and electrodermal hardware to analyze physiological and emotional reactions of participants, in real-time.

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Interactive gaming relaunched to play on The Wheel at Icon Park

AT: David Fake
Special to Amusement Today

Orlando, Fla. — In late April, **Icon Park** launched its latest entertainment offering, **The Great Florida Road Trip**. This unique interactive game is offered as a buy-up option to guests riding the park's signature attraction, **The Wheel at Icon Park**, a 400-foot-tall observation wheel, designed and manufactured by **Intamin Amusement Rides**.

The game, themed around a nostalgic road trip through Florida, is billed as the first interactive game to take place while riding an observation wheel, adding an innovative secondary experience on top of the incredible views."

On this road trip, reminiscent of those of the 50s and 60s, the game pays homage to the state's original tourism attractions that existed long before the arrival of famous theme parks. It harkens back to Florida of old, then renowned as a unique vacation spot for its natural sights, inventive roadside attractions, unique architecture and sports. Retro attractions featured include the Everglades, **Silver Springs'** glass-bottom boats, Miami's art deco style, Daytona's car



The Wheel at Icon Park opened in 2015 and reaches skyward to a height of 400 feet (above left). The addition of interactive **Great Florida Road Trip** game weaves together new technology with nostalgia. COURTESY ICON PARK; AT/DAVID FAKE

racing, and Florida's "original attraction," **Cypress Gardens**.

The game is played using special retro-themed cameras that resemble vintage long-lens cameras from the 50s. Outfitted with infrared technology that reaches up to 1,000 feet, the cameras interact with 45 game markers on the rooftops below. These markers symbolize a nostalgic road trip through the Sunshine State, including Florida oranges and giant vintage postcards promoting famous travel destinations of the era.

While listening to a 1940s-era radio voice describing fun facts about the sights, players aim their cameras at the sensors on each marker and "snap" photos to electronically register points. Every cabin has a winner, as the high scorer gets a prize, a \$5 card for

use in Icon Park's arcade.

"This new experience is inspired by the original features that put Florida on the map," said **Chris Jaskiewicz**, Icon Park's president and CEO. "Weaving together new technology with nostalgia, this experience was designed for people of all ages to enjoy. Parents and grandparents will love the vintage appeal, and kids can put their gaming skills to the test."

The road to launching **The Great Florida Road Trip**, however, was not without a pothole or two. Jaskiewicz explained one of the challenges in this way: "We wanted to use a device for this experience that involved innovative technology. We realized that we couldn't use the technology on just any device. It was a challenge creating a device

through which this technology could be used in a way that was fitting and suitable for the attraction and also helped tell the story of the experience.

"Doing this involved a lot of brainstorming, a lot of creative R and D, discussing various options, analyzing data and determining what data to read.

"There were many people in the room who have a great passion for the history and heritage of Florida and our industry, such as myself. It's these things that have always made Florida a wonderful destination — its natural beauty, its architecture and its innovation."

The deeper challenge to which Jaskiewicz alludes was the reception of the original, extremely short-lived incarnation of the experience.

The **Great Florida Road Trip** was briefly preceded by **Bullseye Blast**, a similar, infrared technology-centered add-on game. The original offering of the technology, which launched on the **Wheel at Icon Park** in the summer of last year, used realistic toy guns instead of cameras as the device housing the technology, similar in design to the shooting galleries of yore.

Immediately after it opened, the concept was met with criticism. The game did not sit well with those who felt the new game was "insensitive" given the rash of mass shootings and gun violence in the U.S. Adding to the concern was the visual created by players aiming outward like snipers through the gun sights of realistic-looking toy firearms from inside the **Wheel's** gondolas.

Icon Park reacted quickly to the backlash, saying they would immediately pause offering the game to guests while they sought an alternative design.

"Some non-guests and community members expressed that they considered the toy shooting device used to be insensitive," Icon Park said in a statement. "The attractions industry has many similar games which use similar shooting devices, so that is what we were limited to when exploring the game. However, we believe that a device can and should be designed which does not offend anyone in the community.

"Just like all electronic games are improved over time, we will pursue a new design that will deliver the same level of customized fun for guests, in a way that the entire community can embrace," said the Icon Park statement.

The **Great Florida Road Trip** was what resulted from that pause and subsequent brainstorming. And a superb result it is.

Everything about the relaunched experience is exceptionally executed. From its theme to the nostalgia it resurrects to the use of cameras as the new infrared housing, it all has been reimagined with brilliant creative excellence.





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Five Star Parks acquires Scene75, Fun Land entertainment centers

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Five Star Parks & Attractions, announced two major acquisitions in May. The company has added the Scene75 Entertainment Centers chain and the two Fun Land locations in Northern Virginia to its portfolio.

The Scene75 acquisition marked the first strategic acquisition since Five Star Parks was acquired by Court Square Capital Partners in March 2023.

"We are pleased to bring together Five Star's unique platform for value creation with the recognized innovation and award-winning excellence of Scene75," said Joseph



Five Star Parks & Attractions increased the company's FEC holdings with the recent acquisitions of the Scene75 Entertainment Centers chain (above left) and both Fun Land locations in Northern Virginia.

AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON; COURTESY FUN LAND OF FREDERICKSBURG

Silvestri, co-founder and managing partner at Court Square.

Scene75 has been recognized with numerous industry awards as well as receiving the



2021 Golden Ticket's Publisher's Pick Turnstile Award from *Amusement Today*. The company's five locations — Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, and Dayton, Ohio, as well as the Chicagoland-area of Illinois — feature a variety of exciting attractions, including electric go-karts, blacklight mini golf, two-story laser tag, arcade, bar, 4D simulators, mini-bowling and private event space.

"It is an exciting opportunity for Scene75 to join forces with Five Star Parks & Attractions," said **Jonah Sandler**, CFA, founder of Scene75. "We are proud of the experiences we have created for our guests over the years and believe Scene75 has a bright future of innovation and growth as part of Five Star Parks."

"We are thrilled to welcome Scene75 to the growing Five Star Parks family," said **John Dunlap**, CEO of Five Star Parks & Attractions. "We've been so impressed with Scene75's huge high-quality entertainment centers, and we are excited to continue to innovate and build the brand with their talented team."

The further strategic move of acquiring the Fun Land FECs in Northern Virginia marks an exciting milestone in Five Star Parks' expansion into the vibrant Virginia market. The addition of the Fun Land locations expands the company's portfolio to

27 locations in 13 states.

"The acquisition of Fun Land furthers Five Star Parks' impressive growth in the attractions industry," said Silvestri. "This is a great fit for us and marks new territory as we expand into Virginia."

Fun Land has been a staple of Fredericksburg for more than two decades, delighting generations of families. In 2020, a new location opened in Fairfax County and has quickly emerged as a local favorite. Both locations feature Tailgater's Sports Grill restaurant offering great food, drinks, and fun to foodies of all ages.

"We are so excited to welcome Fun Land into the Five Star Parks family," added Dunlap. "Fun Land is known for delivering exceptional experiences and we are thrilled to build upon that foundation."

The Five Star Parks & Attractions portfolio already included the **Track Family Fun Parks**, **Adventure Ziplines** and **Xtreme Racing** in Branson, Missouri; **LazerPort Fun Center**, **SpeedZone** and **Xtreme Racing** in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee; **Celebration Station** with locations in Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, Oklahoma and Texas; **Craig's Cruisers** with three locations in Michigan; as well as **Malibu Jack's** indoor theme parks with locations in Indiana and Kentucky.

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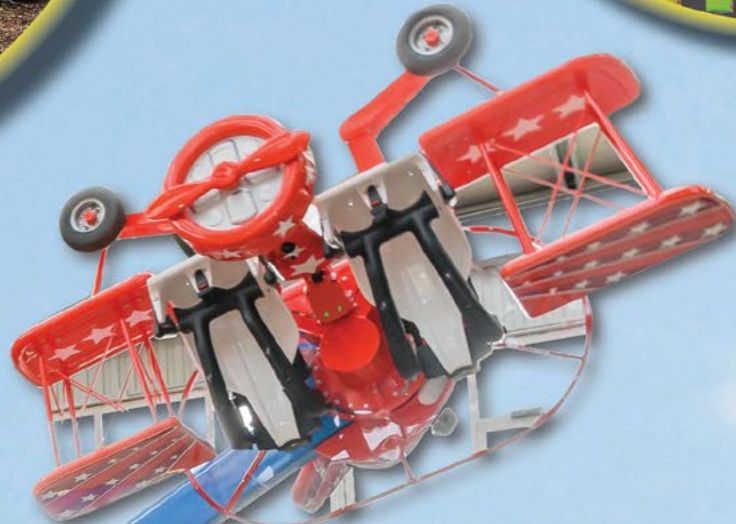
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New rides are running at Fun Land in Fredricksburg

FREDRICKSBURG, Va. — Fun Land in Fredricksburg, Va., has two new rides from Italian supplier SBF/Visa Group up and running this spring. Brokered through Rides 4 U of Somerville, N.J., the FEC has a 12-seat Midi 360 themed as The Flip Side and 40-foot, 12-seat Drop'N Twist titled Patriot Plunge operating in the outdoor section of the year-round facility. The acquisitions bring to three the number of SBF/Visa rides at the facility with a popular spinning coaster, Twist-N-Shout, thrilling guests indoors. The FEC also has go-karts, mini bowling and laser tag among its other attractions as well as Tailgaters Sports Grill.

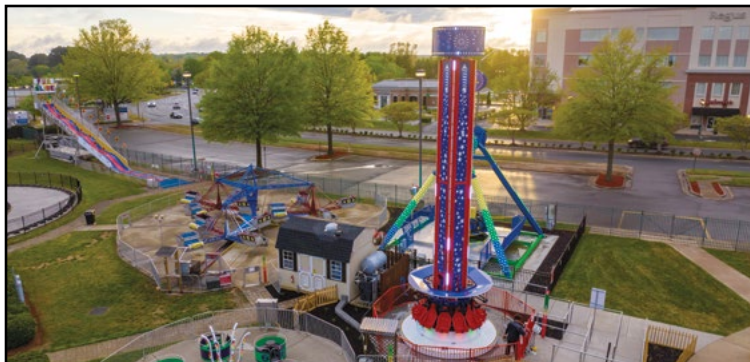
—Ron Gustafson



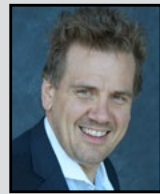
Patriot Plunge is the most popular of the two new rides featured at Fun Land, according to General Manager Clint Novak. "That's based on ridership as the tower loads much quicker (versus the 360 pendulum ride)," Novak said. "Last week, both were in our top five attractions and they really look cool at night!" COURTESY FUN LAND OF FREDRICKSBURG



Of the 17 rides and attractions — indoors and outside — at Fun Land, The Flip Side 360-degree pendulum ride is among the most thrilling. COURTESY FUN LAND OF FREDRICKSBURG



Fun Land's Patriot Plunge tower ride was showcased at IAAPA Expo 2022 in Orlando, Fla. "After we bought it, we worked with SBF/Visa to bring it to IAAPA," according to Novak, who has been Fun Land's GM for more than six years. COURTESY FUN LAND OF FREDRICKSBURG



FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRAL

AT: John W.C. Robinson
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Build-A-Bear Workshop and **Kalahari Resorts & Conventions** announced a new partnership that brings Build-A-Bear to all four Kalahari Resort locations including Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin, Sandusky, Ohio, Pocono Manor, Pennsylvania and Round Rock, Texas.

"We love to bring the Build-A-Bear experience to places as fun and thrilling as Kalahari, and to provide guests the chance to create a furry friend as a keepsake of their visit to the resort," said **Chris Hurt**, chief operating officer of Build-A-Bear. "Making memories is why our brand aligns so well with Kalahari and it is an exciting example of how we're bringing our iconic Build-A-Bear experience to more places than ever before."

Build-A-Bear has strategically shifted its location strategy beyond traditional malls to include non-traditional, tourist and destination locations that now account for approximately 35% of all sites through a combination of corporately and partner-operated experience locations, in settings such as family-centric tourist areas, amusement parks and resorts—all places that families go to create memories. The new Workshops in Kalahari Resorts will offer the signature Build-A-Bear Make-Your-Own experience, with an assortment of furry friends that appeal to kids and adults alike. The store will also offer an exclusive Kalahari t-shirt, along with a selection of clothing and accessories.

The Flying Squirrel, an indoor trampoline, sports and entertainment complex, will open a new location in Chatham-Kent of Ontario, Canada.

The 42,000-square-foot building will feature an indoor trampoline facility, rock wall, zip lines, an arcade and a restaurant. The company will also partner with the **Children's Treatment Centre of Chatham-Kent** to provide a first-of-its-kind sensory room.

"With Chatham-Kent's growth on such a steep incline, there has been a distinct need for more family-orientated activities in our community," said Chatham-Kent Mayor **Darrin Canniff**. "This investment by Flying Squirrel and **Tatro Group** is truly an exciting development for the future of CK. This will be an inclusive place where kids, families and caregivers from all over Ontario and beyond can make lasting memories in Chatham-Kent."

"I am excited to see the joy this facility will bring to the children, teenagers, young adults & caregivers of our community," said owner **Don Terault**. He added that the facility will provide state-of-the-art technology and games.

Five Iron Golf swings into Cincinnati with the opening of the company's eighteenth location nationwide, and the first in Ohio. The newest Five Iron Golf is located in The Foundry, **Cincinnati Center City Development Corp.** (3CDC)'s \$51 million mixed-use development which was previously home to **Macy's** department store.

Encompassing approximately 13,000 square feet of street-level space in the heart of Cincinnati's Central Business District, Five Iron Golf Cincinnati is expanding the brand's Midwest footprint. The brand currently includes three locations in Chicago, one in Pittsburgh, and one suburban Michigan location. Five Iron is also developing locations in Detroit, Cleveland, and Indianapolis, with plans for more locations by 2024.

"We are excited to officially open our doors in downtown Cincinnati, and to be a part of such a rich and dynamic community," said **Randy Earley**, general manager of Five Iron Golf.

Ohio's 6th Circuit Court of Appeals has upheld the district court's decision to dismiss a lawsuit filed by Middletown, Ohio's **Land of Illusion** owner **Brett Oakley**, so the facility's \$190 million expansion issue appears to be over.

Butler County commissioners heard the Madison Twp. zoning case in late 2020 and denied rezoning 206 acres across eight parcels off Thomas Road to a Business Planned Unit Development from the current agriculture, residential and general business classifications.

Oakley wanted to make Land of Illusion a year-round facility with additional family activities, camping sites and a hotel. He said the multi-phased project would be a \$190 million investment in the county's economy.

Bounce Empire opened a 50,000-square-foot indoor theme park at in Lafayette, Colorado. With more than 50 attractions for guests of all ages, it will set a new record for the world's largest indoor inflatable amusement park.

"Bounce Empire has thrown down the gauntlet. We will have over 55 jaw-dropping attractions that haven't been seen by most of the public before," said Bounce Empire Owner **James Hay-Arthur**.

Bounce Empire's signature attraction is a 30-foot inflatable slide dubbed Kraken that propels visitors at lightning-fast speeds. Similar inflatable structures include Triple Raptor, Twister Slide, High Voltage Grinder & Warped Wall

Pima County Fair's final three days contend with hot weather

AT: B. Derek Shaw
bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

TUCSON, Ariz. — The temperatures during the final days of the 11-day **Pima County Fair** rose to near 100 degrees, affecting attendance but not impacting ride revenue too much. “The weather was great. Usually, springtime in Tucson can be very windy which didn’t happen this year,” said **Chris Lopez**, vice president, **Ray Cammack Shows (RCS Inc.)**.

“Our [final] numbers are not yet in, however, I believe we are down from [the] 2022 anomaly of coming back from the pandemic,” said **Launa Rabago**, entertainment and marketing manager. “I believe it will be our second or third best fair attendance-wise and our second-best year, revenue-wise.”

The theme of the 110th edition was “We don’t judge fun!”

For 42 years, RCS has been the sole midway provider. This year it brought 57 rides (including a trio of new rides to that spot), 36 games and 17 food stands on the carnival midway. Nearly half of the rides were kiddie ones. New rides at the fair were **Sea Ray (Mulligan)**, **Joker 360 (Technical Park)** and **Slingshot (Funtime)**.

The top three rides included **Wild River (Reverchon Industries)**, **Big Wheel (Lamberink)** and **Titan Booster (Fabbri Group)**. Ride midway revenue barely missed the record set in 2022, however, it was a significant increase from 2019.

Asked about staffing issues, Lopez said,



The Fredricksen slide (above) is one of the rides RCS brought in. The provider brought in 57 rides (including a trio of new rides to that spot), 36 games and 17 food stands on the carnival midway of the 640-acre fairgrounds, located on the southeastern edge of Tucson (right). COURTESY PIMA COUNTY FAIR, PIMA COUNTY SHERIFF’S DEPARTMENT AIR UNIT

“Employment challenges are annual. We are fortunate to have our H2B workforce. Recently we were in Washington, D.C. lobbying with the OABA and many others in industry to keep and improve the program. Without the program, we could not do what we do!”

Lopez was quick to give praise to the Pima County staff. “We consider the staff and board family members as we do at all our fairs. We have been fortunate to see and be a part of the fair’s growth and expansion from new buildings to RV parks, roads and gates. **Jon Baker** and his staff have done many great things over the years and [has] taken the fair and venue to a year-round destination for events and fair to the top 50 in [the] United States.”

“Excellent as always,” is how Rabago described the

fair’s long-term experience with the Laveen, Arizona carnival. “We value our relationship with RCS and couldn’t ask for a better partner.”

When Rabago was asked what sets the fair apart from others, he said, “We are early in the fair season mostly due to the heat and routing with the **Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo**. (RCS also provides rides for that event.) We are often the first to reach out to nontraditional performers and are willing to take risks to continue to grow our fair attendance. We are trying different strategies to reach younger demographics to prevent our fair from aging out.”

Special fair promotions included a presale before the start with 10 rides or games for \$20. There were food drives, both Sundays, where attendees could gain fair



admission with three cans of food until noon, which benefited the **Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona**. Also, there was \$6 admission every day with active or retired military ID and for fair attendees 55+ and \$6 admission on Monday for everyone. Fair food and vendor happy hour took place Monday through Wednesday with \$3 menu items and draught beer until 5 p.m. Pay One Price (POP) was offered Wednesdays and Thursdays during the fair. Finally, vendor **Craig Sawyer** gave away 1,100 orders of French fries from **Piggly’s Barbecue** before 5 p.m. Monday to Friday with a fair app download.

New food items included fruit roll-up **Dole** whip sushi, Tucson two-step ice cream cone, **Captain Crunch** chicken sandwich, hot **Cheeto** chicken on a stick and cotton candy ice cream tacos.

A \$375,000 total advertising budget was spent on traditional radio, TV and outdoor with less on print. Streaming and OTT (over the top) digital marketing as well as online were also part of the expenditure. OTT is a term used to refer to content providers that distribute streaming media as a standalone

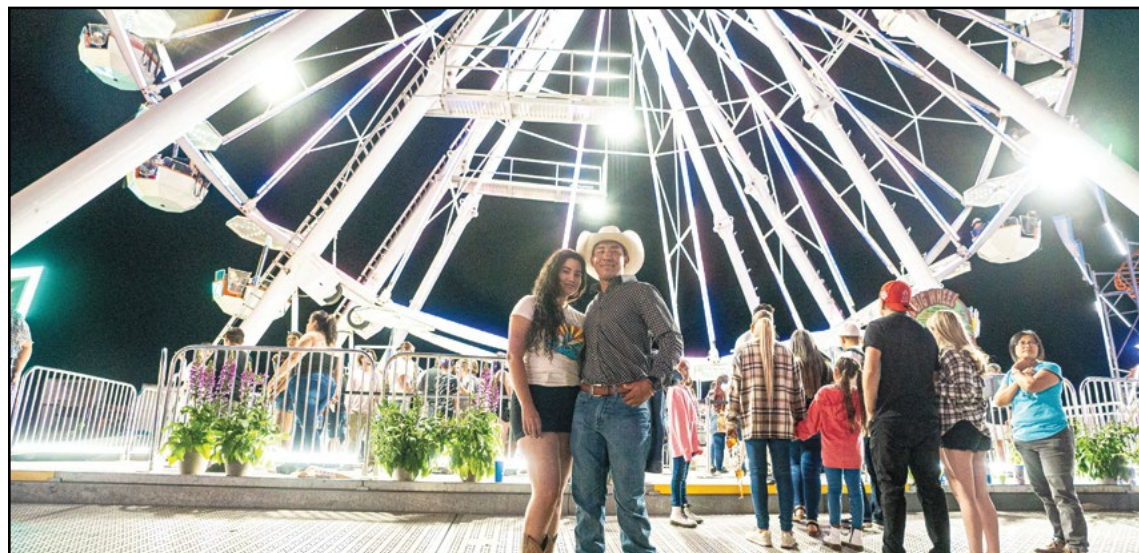
product directly to viewers over the Internet. This year, the Pima County Fair went away from an official fair print program to lessen the environmental impact and encouraged attendees to rely upon their mobile app.

Parking went to \$7 this year, while the fair implemented **Etix** ticketing service provider for the first time. To attract staff, wages were raised.

Entertainment included **Lil Jon**; **Scotty McCreery**, **Ginuwine**, **Ying Yang Twins** and **Paul Wall**; **Jeremy Camp**; **Dirty Heads**; **Jordan Davis**; and **Laberinto**. All attracted huge crowds.

“We have a solid understanding of our community and core carnival attendees (i.e., those who strategize, buy early and know when the POP days are a year before we even announce). This summer we will continue to strategize on courting new demographics while holding onto a few traditional strategies. There are challenges in talent buying given pricing and social media influence. Pima County Fair has a great team and is always up for the challenge! See you next April 18 – 28, 2024,” said Rabago.

•pimacountyfair.com



A young couple enjoys each other’s company in front of the Lamberink wheel. COURTESY PIMA COUNTY FAIR

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MIDWAYSCENE

AT: B. Derek Shaw
bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

The first **Washington County Agricultural Fair** in Pennsylvania was held in 1798 when **John Adams** was the nation's second president and the United States only had 16 states. It was originally known as the **Morganza Fair**.

"Over the past 225 years, the fair, has really shined a light on the importance of agriculture in our county, on the farming families that work every day to sustain that, and, of course, bringing together those who aren't in farming with seeing their food source and where it comes from," said **Jeff Kotula**, to the *Observer-Reporter*. Kotula is president of the **Washington County Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Promotion Agency**, and a member of the fair's 225th anniversary committee. "We're not only celebrating that rich history of agriculture, but also where we're going, what the future of agriculture is in Washington County, and the improvements we're making here at the fairgrounds."

Capital improvements are planned, including renovating the draft horse barn, paving a portion of the fairgrounds, installing additional rail fence, and erecting a historic barn that had been donated by **CNX** and will be used for 4-H meetings, private parties and other events.

Agriculture is the largest industry in Washington County, ranked fourth overall, out of Pennsylvania's 67 counties, with 1,760 farms, trailing only Lancaster, York and Berks counties.

The **Pennsylvania Trolley Museum** will continue its 112-year-old tradition of providing transportation to the August 12-19 fair, shuttling many of the 65,000 guests to and from the grounds. Daily fair admission is \$10 including carnival rides with free parking. **C & L Shows** is providing the midway.

In late April, **Matt Carter** was named general manager of the **Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo**, replacing long-time General Manager **Brad Barnes** as the leader of day-to-day operations for the 127-year-old organization.

"It's humbling to be appointed to a role held by just a few individuals in the Stock Show's storied history," said Carter. "I have big boots to fill and I'm honored to step into this role following the exemplary leadership of Brad Barnes."

Carter joined the stock show's full-time staff as senior executive vice president in 2021. He previously served as a volunteer, beginning as a livestock show superintendent in 2009 and was later elected to the organization's board of directors and executive committee.

Barnes will continue serving in gover-

nance and operational roles as stock show president. He is stepping away from the GM role to facilitate a long-term succession plan for the show's executive management team.

"We have an outstanding and cohesive officer corps in place that will make crucial decisions for our future," said Barnes. "There's a great mix of institutional knowledge and tried-and-true experience coupled with innovation and foresight that will ensure the Stock Show is in good hands for decades to come."

The show set an attendance record earlier this year with more than 1.2 million people entering the grounds and over 200,000 rodeo tickets sold.

The 2024 Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo is scheduled for January 12 through February 3, 2024. **Talley Amusements** has had the midway contract since 2003

The **Showmen's League of America** (SLA) mobile club had its season opener in Laredo, Texas, February 9-20 with the **Thomas Carnival**. There was a good turnout of showmen and women including numerous past SLA presidents.

The traveling unit then appeared at the **Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo**, February 28 - March 19 with **Ray Cammack Shows** hosting.

In April, the mobile club appeared in three spots: **Frazier Shows** April 2-9, **Phoenix Premium Outlets** carnival, Chandler, Arizona; **Butler Amusements, Maricopa County Fair**, Phoenix, Arizona April 12-16; and concessionaire **Nate Janousek**, April 20-30 at the **Pima County Fair**, Tucson, Arizona.

If a carnival or concession is interested in hosting the SLA Mobile Club, it should e-mail office@showmensleague.org

The **International Association of Fairs and Expositions** (IAFE) is looking for donations to help the new education foundation tribute garden. It is a great way to say thank you; commemorate a special occasion (like a graduation or the promotion of a co-worker); or remember a special friend, family member, or pet. Donations also help the foundation fulfill its mission to support, through fundraising, educational charitable, research or literacy activities in the advancement and improvement of agriculture fairs, expositions and shows.

For every donation made, now through October 15, a flower will appear in the virtual tribute garden on the IAFE Foundation website, along with an acknowledgment of who (or what) the gift is honoring. Donors will receive a commemorative gift of wild-flower seeds that can be given to those honored or kept as a reminder of the gift.

On the Midway: Penn Valley Shows



Middleburg, Pa's, Penn Valley Shows, LLC. brought 14 rides total to Parking Lot "C" of Clipper Magazine Stadium, Lancaster, Pennsylvania in mid-April for five days. The still date operated Wednesday through Saturday 5-10 p.m. and Sunday, 2-8 p.m. The show plays 26 spots this season. AT/B. DEREK SHAW



Some of the midway includes a 1967 Hrubetz Round Up, Dartron Hurricane, Fredricksen Fun Slide and an ARM Rock Star. The Rock Star was booked in from Majestic Midways, Dover, Pennsylvania. They also brought three other rides. The Round Up was originally at Rocky Glen Park near Scranton, Pennsylvania. AT/B. DEREK SHAW



Principals for the operation standing in front of their new unit are from l: Brett Klee, Alycia, Chase, Christina and Kerry Benner. Penn Valley has been in operation since 2010, although the family business goes back much further. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

Penn Valley took delivery of its new Hitchhiker popper at that spot. It is the first one from the manufacturer with LED message signage all the way around. In addition to rides, it offered food and games as well. AT/B. DEREK SHAW



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WATER PARKS & RECREATION

▶ Great Wolf Lodge continues commitment to inclusion — page 30 / News Splash — page 32

Fiesta Texas expands water park, rebranded as Hurricane Harbor

AT: Jeffrey Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

SAN ANTONIO, Texas — When **Fiesta Texas** opened its gates in 1992, the original property owners had the foresight to include a water park. Like the rest of the theme park, the Ol' Waterin' Hole, featured extensive Texas theming. Small at the time, the water park was first expanded in 1996 when **Six Flags** took over management of the park. Since then, new attractions have been added every few years.

The water park has also seen its share of name changes. Ol' Waterin' Hole became Armadillo Beach in 1999, then White Water Bay in 2005. This year brings about another change as the water park is rebranded **Hurricane Harbor San Antonio**. The Hurricane Harbor moniker was originally used by Six Flags at its **Magic Mountain** property in 1995 and has slowly spread throughout the entire chain.

"Six Flags Fiesta Texas is taking our water park to the



The Kidz attractions emulate popular adult ProSlide attractions. COURTESY SIX FLAGS FIESTA TEXAS

next level with the introduction of Hurricane Harbor San Antonio," said Park President **Jeffrey Siebert**. "The elevated experience includes eight new

palapas-style double decker cabanas, more than 250 new luxury lounge chairs, picnic tables and umbrellas and a selection of six new family attractions making this San Antonio's premier water park destination."

A reimagined entry, enriched landscaping and immersive décor throughout the park will enhance the guest experience. Siebert told *Amusement Today*, "To change and retheme to Hurricane Harbor gave us a wonderful opportunity to refresh and retheme the entire water park." White Water Bay had kind of an old, rustic Texas look to it, but the new look will have more of a tropical, Caribbean resort look, which based on feedback, is what guests pre-

fer. Palm trees have been added along with brighter colors to offer more of a tropical resort ambiance rather than the previous thematic experience offered by White Water Bay. In anticipation of the change to Hurricane Harbor, some of the existing slides had been renamed over the last few years. Even though the park is losing its rustic look, it will still be uniquely Texas, particularly with its enormous Texas-shaped wave pool.

Attractions added for this year include **ProSlide Technology's** collection of Kidz slides — pint-sized versions that emulate some of the larger ProSlide attractions. The new slides are located in the upper section of the water park near other family attractions

such as the Texas Treehouse and an activity lagoon. These slides are specifically designed for children, but adults can ride along with them. The six new family and kids' attractions, which will come later this summer, include Ripcurl, a smaller version of ProSlide's TornadoWave attraction, and Vortex, a mini Tornado that resembles the park's full-size Tornado. These two attractions utilize tubes; the remaining are body slides — some racing, some twisting. That same upper section is also the location for the new two-story palapas, giving families with small children an opportunity to reserve a private space in a part of the park where the family is likely to spend most of their time.

Starting this year, guests visiting the water park are being asked to pay an additional fee. Diamond and platinum Six Flags passholders along with legacy membership holders will still have free access. Gold passholders or those who bought a single-day ticket will need to purchase an upgrade of \$7 during the week or \$10 on weekends to enjoy the water park. The new entrance will have a new set of turnstiles where guests can scan their pre-purchased tickets.

When asked if Six Flags would consider creating a separate entrance to Hurricane Harbor from the parking lot, Siebert responded, "A variety of concepts have been developed. We're just seeing how this first phase of the new entrance experience goes before we move forward with any additional plans."

The rethemed entrance displays the water park's new brand and helps establish the tropical ambiance.

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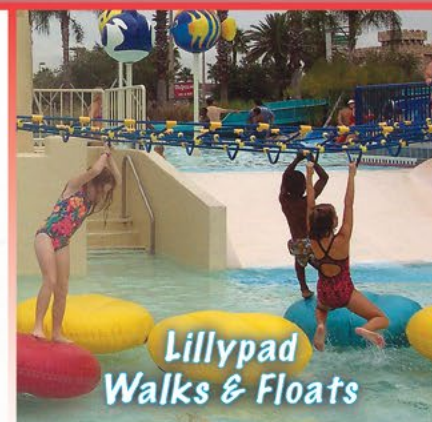
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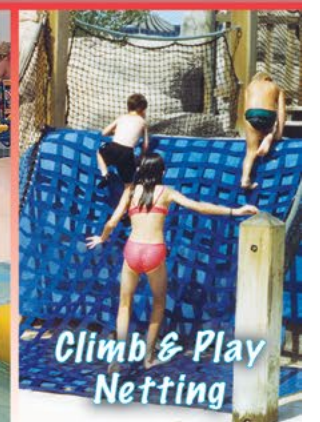
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Great Wolf Lodge continues commitment to inclusion/accessibility

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

MADISON, Wisc. — **Great Wolf Lodge** continues to grow and, with that growth, Great Wolf Lodge officials continue to commit to inclusion and accessibility for all its guests.

In that regard, the company, headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin, recently partnered with the **International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES)**, a global leader in autism and neurodiversity certification, to enhance inclusion and accessibility at its 19 resorts across the U.S.

Beginning last month, guests with an autistic family member could download a comprehensive guide that lists all of the slides, pools, rides, attractions, shows and activities found at Great Wolf Lodge locations. This way guests may prepare and be made aware of what



The company's Maryland resort will be the largest Great Wolf Lodge has ever built. COURTESY GREAT WOLF LODGE

to expect based on their own personal sensitivities or those of their children.

IBCCES has more than 20 years of experience developing cognitive disorder training programs for healthcare, education, and corporate professionals worldwide including the travel and hospitality industry.

A team of IBCCES ex-

perts traveled to multiple Great Wolf Lodge locations to independently evaluate and assign sensory ratings to Great Wolf attractions. The resulting sensory guide provides a comprehensive overview of each attraction or entertainment experience and provides a rating for all senses, sight, smell, sound, touch and taste.

"Part of helping families strengthen their pack is recognizing that every guest and family who visits a Great Wolf Lodge is unique, and we want to be prepared to deliver a joy-filled experience to everyone who stays with us," said **John Murphy**, Great Wolf Lodge chief executive officer.

In addition to the sensory

guide, Great Wolf Lodge will receive regular training materials for every aspect of its business, including content created specifically for water attractions to better assist those working in the resort's expansive indoor water park.

IBCCES will present Great Wolf Lodge with its evidence-based training, which includes perspectives of autistic individuals.

This is all part of Great Wolf Lodge's desire to create a resort experience that is even more accommodating for sensory-sensitive guests and overall inclusiveness for all guests.

Myron Pincomb, IBCCES board chairman, said he has seen that this is a huge need globally.

"And we're proud to provide comprehensive support and certification to work with our industry partners who are leading the way for accessibility," Pincomb said.

• greatwolf.com



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Big Water Bay includes a large stage at the back of the wave pool along with a 48-foot LCD screen. COURTESY TROPIC FALLS

Tropic Falls opens new wave pool: Big Water Bay

AT: Jeffrey Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

FOLEY, Ala. — Last summer, **The Park at OWA**, an amusement park and shopping district in southern Alabama, was remade into **Tropic Falls**. The transformation included a new indoor water park, the makeover of the front gate and expansion of the tropical theming into the theme park.

The two latest additions to the park are located outside the indoor park and accessible through a retractable glass wall. Big Water Bay is a 30,000 square-foot wave pool along with Coastal Curl, a surfing simulator that is strategically placed at the edge of the wave pool dividing it in two. At the front of the pool is a large stage with a 48-foot-wide LED screen that can be used for live performances or to showcase water-themed movies. Breakers Beach Bar & Grill restaurant overlooks the surf simulator and offers tropical-inspired open-air dining and drinks. The pool is surrounded by a beach area with ample seating, additional outdoor cabanas, restrooms and a locker area.

Unlike similar glass-enclosed indoor water parks, Tropic Falls features a massive retractable wall that opens directly to the adjacent outdoor wave pool and its accompanying amenities. The wall measures 128 feet wide by 26 feet tall and slides open to fully allow guests to flow from indoors to out in a seamless experience. The glass structure along with its retractable roof and sliding glass wall, was manufactured by **Open Aire** of Oakville, Ontario. The impressive structure is the largest of its kind on the Gulf Coast.

“Tropic Falls is currently the only indoor waterpark in the United States with both a retractable roof and sidewall adjoining an outdoor water park,” said **Kristin Hellmich**, director of external communications, **Poarch Band of Creek Indians**, “making OWA a standout destination for family fun and entertainment.”

“The Tropic Falls expansion has been more than three years in the making and is evidence of our continued commitment to seeing our vision through at OWA,” said Cody Williamson, president/CEO of Creek Indian Enterprises Development Authority (CIEDA). “Leading the development arm of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, we focus on continually investing in projects, like OWA, which allow us to remain a strong economic partner for the State of Alabama.”

The Poarch Band of Creek Indians are descendants of a segment of the original **Creek Nation**, which once covered almost all of Alabama and Georgia. The Tribe currently owns three hotel and casino resorts in Alabama, one in Pennsylvania, and two in the Caribbean. Its success in the hospitality industry has allowed it to become a benevolent leader in the world of philanthropy, contributing to many charitable organizations in the community. The tribe helps to fund the arts as well as activities such as youth sports, senior care and emergency support services.



NEWS SPLASH

AT: Jeffrey L. Seifert
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Wild Wadi Waterpark in Dubai, UAE, closed in January for annual maintenance, but as of April still had not reopened. According to park officials, bad weather conditions in January and February caused delays with the annual maintenance program. However, the park was expected to reopen by mid-May.

Dubai was one of the first emirates to open its borders to foreign tourists. Wild Wadi, which opened in 1998, was the first water park in the UAE and helped promote Dubai as a tourist destination. Currently Dubai is the fourth most visited city in the world based on the number of international visitors.

Aquatica Orlando is replacing its previous kids area, Kata’s Kookaburra Cove with Turi’s Kid Cove. The new play area will include watering palm trees, tipping buckets, spraying jets, water bobbles and a new waterslide. The new slide, Tamariki Twirl is a kids-sized version of the popular KareKare Curl slide for adults.

Yogi Bear’s Jellystone Park Camp-Resort at Pine Lakes in Pittsfield, Illinois, is adding a Water Wars splash pad that will include two waterslides. The splash pad will be available to guests with a day pass that allows daytime visitors to enjoy the camp’s amenities, such as the pool, lake and playgrounds, without requiring an overnight stay.

Those who do wish to stay overnight can take advantage of one of the 30 new cabins or 39 new RV pull-through sites being added to the resort. The new cabins include electricity, AC/heating, kitchens and full baths. The new RC pull-through sites will be able to accommodate larger campers than the existing sites.

The city council in district five in Corpus Christi, Texas, has approved plans for the **Bill Witt Aquatic Center**. Construction started in April with an anticipated completion date of May 2024.

The facility, coming in at just over \$10 million, will be the first public pool on the south side of the city that will feature aquatic recreation.

“It’s important to have these kinds of facilities to teach our kids how to swim,” said Councilman Hernandez.

The new center will include a 10-lane, heated, short-course competition pool, a 7,500-square-foot recreation pool with waterslides and play features, shade structures, lounge chairs, bath house, administration buildings and facility lighting for evening activities.

Funding for the facility is coming from the city’s Bond 2022 program, a \$125 million bond that was approved by voters in November 2022. The bond was passed to cover street improvements, public safety projects, library improvement and park improvements.

Ground breaking took place in April on improvements to the **Riverside Family Aquatic Center** in Moline, Illinois. Although nothing was wrong with the existing pool that was built in 2003, it no longer met the needs of the community.

“We’re keeping the existing shell of the swimming pool, and that’s going to be our main body of water. We’re just adding to what’s currently there and upgrading it,” said **Eric Griffith**, the director of parks and recreation.

The new aquatic center will include waterslides, a lazy river, splash pad, upgraded concessions, shelters, more shady areas, and night lights.

Griffith added that local residents were invited to provide feedback, and the number one requested feature was a lazy river.

The renovated aquatic center is expected to open on Memorial Day weekend in 2024.

The Los Angeles County Board has agreed to allocate \$10 million to fund the renovation of the **Smith Park Pool** in Pico Rivera. The current Olympic-size pool was constructed in 1981 and is located near two high schools, an elementary school and a senior center. It was used as a training and practice facility for the Los Angeles 1984 Summer Olympic Games and served more than 10,000 patrons annually until it closed in 2020 as a result of the pandemic.

The renovation will include the replacement of the entire pool casing, the replacement of the deck, pool furnishings and equipment, heaters/boilers, a new chemical room, storage area, pool building, lighting and security enclosure fencing.

The renovation will reconfigure the existing pool into two, 25-meter pools — one for recreation and the other for competition. The recreation pool will be extended with a zero-depth entry point and include a shallow area for children with mushroom spray fountains and other water-play structures.

Additional enhancement to the facility will include upgraded showers in the bathhouse, additional rest rooms, stadium seating for competition and family-friendly seating areas for casual use. The facility is expected to reopen in 2025.

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BUSINESS & NEWSMAKERS

► Ellis & Associates celebrates 40 years — page 36 / Focus on the Horizon: Jess Thuer — page 40

Embed's Mobile Wallet proves successful, STATS showing value

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

DALLAS, Texas — Embed has been showcasing its new data visualization dashboard STATS — designed to change the way FEC operators analyze reports — at multiple recent industry expos.

Consistently the demo-in-demand, STATS continues its successful streak of breaking barriers in what Software as a Service (SaaS) products can do for a family entertainment center. Developed in collaboration with Amazon Web Services (AWS), STATS' powerful data and report visualization is designed to help FECs worldwide transform guest experiences, improve operational efficiency and boost revenue using data.

"We just love the curiosity and feedback we are getting from customers and prospects about the virtue of SaaS products like STATS," said **Renee Welsh**, CEO at Embed. "We are just as excited to move FECs forward to digitalization and automation with STATS, helping operators eliminate manual and counterproductive data work and start making informed business decisions on staffing levels, scheduling, revenue forecasting, and even inventory through real-time reports."

Aside from STATS, metric results from Embed customers using the Mobile Wallet also highlighted the importance of SaaS in boosting FEC revenue. Launched in 2019, this virtual game card is still the only non-banking, non-finance, or loyalty brand certified by Apple and Google. The Mobile Wal-



let sits in a consumer's Apple Wallet or Google Pay — with no additional app download required.

Embed's Mobile Wallet allows FEC guests to store their game cards directly in their Apple Wallet or Google Pay and reload with ease (above left). The straight-forward dashboard of STATS (above right) simplifies compiling data and allowing FEC operators to better understand their guests' habits and spending at their facility. COURTESY EMBED

FEC operators, large and small, are showing the same average metric results with Mobile Wallet use: reload value 5x that of cash, at \$50.57 average Mobile Wallet reload value — a tremendous jump from \$31.95 reload value when guests use a credit card to top up their game card.

"The fact that there's no risk of losing the game card frees a consumer to go big when reloading their game card because it sits in their mobile wallet along with their credit cards, protected by secure mobile encryption technology," detailed **Sara Paz**, Embed's CMO. There's also no barrier to entry because there's no app to download. Consumers will not download an app that doesn't offer wide value, which is just more work for operators to maintain versus

the straight-forward solution of adding a game card to the mobile wallet, done simply by scanning a QR code."

Before the consumer even steps foot in the FEC, 60% of Mobile Wallet reloads happen offsite. Once at the venue, guests don't have to leave the game to reload; they can do it from their phones. This is the most revolutionary revenue/profit and operational efficiency that results from new technology in the industry.

"An FEC operator with 21 locations have seen their transactions value jump by nearly 3,000% since adding Mobile Wallet," commented Paz. And the increase in transactional value was just as present in smaller FEC operators. "The numbers have shown that Mobile Wallet opened the door for a more than 400% increase in transactional value for an FEC operator with only six locations."

The numbers do not lie and Embed's Mobile Wallet has proved a valuable asset to

location customers since STATS is designed for operators of all business sizes."

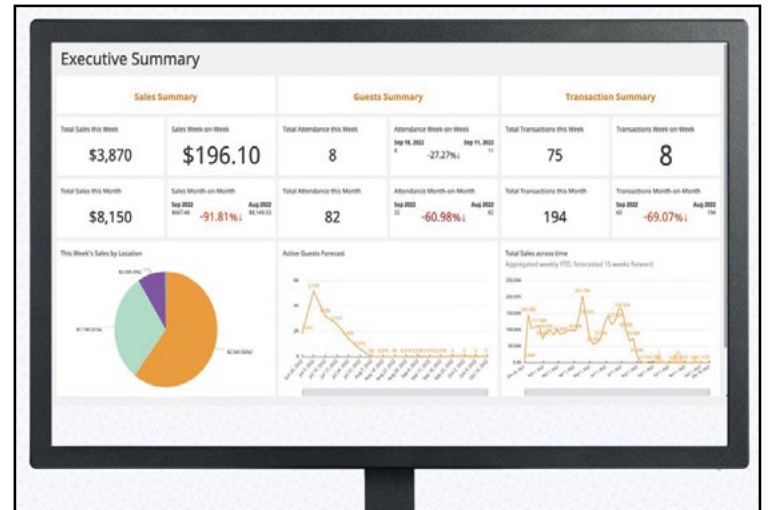
STATS' in-depth, dynamic visualized data reporting is built with AWS's global cloud infrastructure for accessibility, security, and low latency.

Just as Mobile Wallet has simplified locating and reloading game cards for customers, the analytical tools of Embed's STATS dashboard promises to simplify understanding the patterns of guests for FEC operators.

the FEC industry. The buzz around the company's new STATS dashboard indicates it will also prove an invaluable tool for the FEC of the future.

"STATS is on a roll — such a fantastic uptake of this breakthrough innovation at [industry expos]," commented Embed Chief Management Consultant **Kash Ahmad**. "We have loyal customers who are thrilled to apply this cloud-based solution in their venue that has AWS in the backend — we had sign-ups from both single and multi-

location customers since STATS is designed for operators of all business sizes."



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Embed's Kash Ahmad (second from left) discusses STATS during 2023's Amusement Expo International. COURTESY EMBED



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Ellis & Associates leads the aquatics safety industry for 40 years

AT: David Fake
Special to Amusement Today

MAITLAND, Fla. — 2023 marks the 40-year anniversary of **Ellis and Associates'** trailblazing existence and passionate service to the aquatics safety industry.

The company, more commonly known within the industry as simply "E&A," was the brainchild of **Jeff Ellis**, founder of Ellis and Associates. When established in 1983, E&A revolutionized the industry by becoming the world's first risk management firm dedicated to aquatic safety.



Ellis

In the four decades since, E&A has accomplished a remarkable number of "first and only" achievements in the aquatics industry. Today, Ellis Aquatics Innovations (the company) says it "proudly serves more aquatics industry professionals in more countries while delivering more training by instructors speaking more languages than any other aquatics safety and risk management firm in the world."

That extraordinary statement is not a general everyday claim such as "world's best" or "world's greatest" that are used ubiquitously and without evidence. E&A's statistics easily support their claim as they currently partner with more than 800 clients in over 40 countries around the world.

All claims aside, one only needs to speak with **Jeff Ellis** to fully understand his passion and dedication that has cascaded through all levels of the company, that has earned E&A the title of the "go-to, trusted leader" in the aquatics industry.

AT was able to do just that and witnessed this commitment first-hand by taking the opportunity to speak with Ellis to get a retrospective of the first 40 years and preview what is on the horizon for E&A.

"As water parks began operating in the 1980s, their technological advancements transitioned static water swim-



ming pools into fluid water attractions that included waves, currents, hydraulics, etc. It quickly became apparent that traditional rescue practices were inadequate to protect swimmers in this new environment. Multiple drowning accidents occurred at these water parks soon after opening, which created a need to rethink aquatic safety and develop new rescue techniques and operational practices to enhance the safety of swimmers and lifeguards," said Ellis, explaining the catalyst for the creation of E&A.

A great portion of the company's success can be attributed to Ellis' foresight to keep E&A firmly planted within the aquatics industry and recognizing its ever-evolving nature. With that knowledge, E&A's approach to aquatics safety training and certification is continually revisited, reevaluated, realigned to ensure that the company is providing the most up-to-date and relevant training to meet industry needs.

Ellis explained the company's perspective on change in this way: "We believe that the quest for optimum aquatic safety must continue to evolve to address the technological advancements of the industry. If you are not moving forward seeking better solutions, the industry will quickly leave you behind. Relying upon existing knowledge and practices is not an option if we are to continue to provide quality swimmer protection that leads to reducing the opportunity for a drowning event. E&A is the consulting branch of our company; it will continue to provide aquatic safety solutions for its clients based upon the innovations created and developed by **JEM [Jeff Ellis Management]**, our test and research laboratory, and implemented by **EAI [Ellis Aquatics Innovations]**, our technology branch. E&A continues to



Leading in aquatic safety since 1983, Ellis and Associates serves more aquatics industry professionals in more countries while delivering more training by instructors speaking more languages than any other aquatics safety and risk management firm in the world. COURTESY E&A ASSOCIATES

deliver the highest quality of aquatic safety protection available in the industry."

And while it would be conceivable that after 40 years of leading the industry in "firsts," Ellis would be most proud of those accomplishments, what he sees as E&A's greatest achievement is the impact the company has had in making the industry safer by elevating the industry's standards.

"While we are fortunate to have developed and contributed many industry practices and technologies along our journey, I believe developing/implementing the VAT [Vigilance Awareness Training] program in 2004 and more recently launching the EAVS [Ellis Aquatic Vigilance System] have made a profound impact upon the global recreational aquatic industry. E&A works every single day to improve aquatic safety resources. Our accountability-based program has been imitated by other organizations; something we are proud of. Dedication to safety is a passion we all share with one common mission, zero drownings," stated Ellis.

Another aspect that sets E&A apart from any other company is that the word "associate" in Ellis and Associates does not refer to full-time team members or the employees of the company. Here it represents the family aquatics professionals around the world that have invested in themselves and their roles by furthering their education, their credentials and, ultimately, their ability to teach aquatics safety and their ability to teach others

how to teach. Those associates are an equal part of the E&A success story.

"The 'associate' model was based upon the concept of utilizing professionals who demonstrated a passion for excellence in aquatic safety. As such, each original associate held regular jobs and chose to participate as an associate because they believed in our mission and objectives. Each possessed extensive knowledge, training and experience in aquatic safety but since an "associate" was a part-time position, they chose to participate because of their passion for aquatics. As such, they contributed talents and services driven by their passion to make a difference," Ellis said.

Senior Vice President and COO, **Richard A. Carroll** explains E&A's associate criteria in this way: "To become an associate with Ellis & Associates, an instructor must demonstrate the highest standards in operational excellence. Their performance as an instructor



Carroll

trainer conveys the highly regarded E&A culture of excellence and accountability to other instructors, making the industry as a whole even stronger. E&A Associates are central to aquatic safety around the world. Their shared experience, knowledge and expertise demonstrate the type of teamwork that is as important to E&A now as it was 40 years ago."

Possibly the greatest testament of a company's success is how it is viewed by its

clients, their loyalty and what they have to say about the service they have experienced.

Glenn Davidson, an advisor at **Miral**, the developer and operator of **Yas Waterworld** in Abu Dhabi, has been an E&A client for 39 years. Davidson spoke about his relationship with E&A: "I was introduced to Ellis and Associates in 1984. It was obvious on the first day of training that this program was a game changer for lifeguarding. The E&A Lifeguard program was and is targeted on creating skilled lifeguards that are prepared to handle the tedium and moments of complete fear and excitement that is lifeguarding. I have now managed or been associated with seven different water parks, each of which used or uses the E&A program.

"Over the last 40 years, E&A has continued to adopt new tools, technology, and methods to improve the skills and preparedness of those that work in and around water. I think establishing the annual International Aquatic Safety School provided a good forum to train the trainers, introduce new skills, and create a water safety community of like-minded individuals," said Davidson.

Davidson summed up the company's lasting impact in "E&A has, since its inception, made water a safer place to be."

There is a saying that goes, "What you do is your history, but what you set in motion is your legacy." So, if E&A's history full of aquatic safety "first and onlys," then "making water a safer place to be," is its legacy. Ellis and Associates should proudly wear it as a badge of honor.



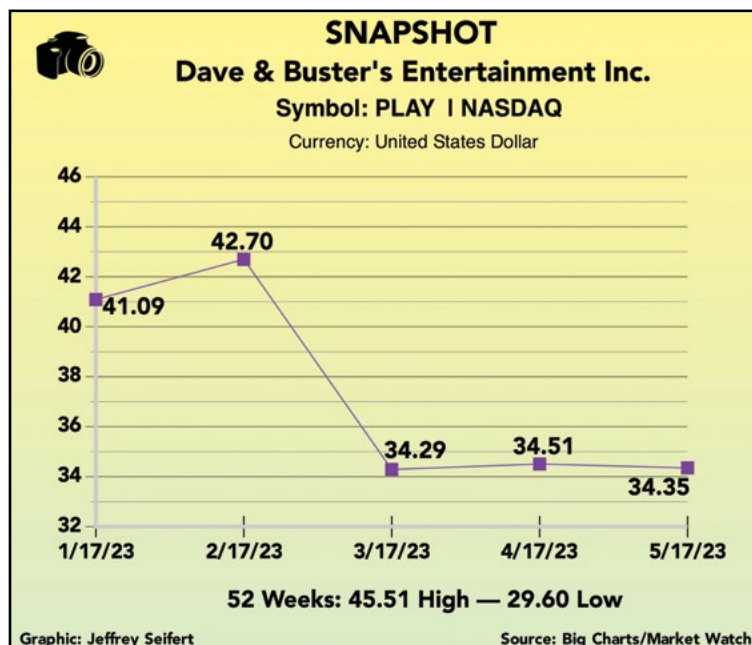
MARKET WATCH

COMPANY	SYMBOL	MARKET	PRICE 5/22/23	HIGH 52-Week	LOW 52-Week
PARKS AND ATTRACTIONS					
The Blackstone Group	BX	NYSE	85.01	123.18	71.72
Bowlero Corp.	BOWL	NYSE	11.80	17.45	8.71
Cedar Fair, L.P.	FUN	NYSE	41.76	49.40	37.58
Comcast Corp./ NBCUniversal Media	CMCSA	NASDAQ	41.24	44.66	28.39
Dave & Busters Entertainment, LLC	PLAY	NASDAQ	33.57	45.51	29.59
EPR Properties	EPR	NYSE	42.25	55.90	33.92
Fuji Kyoko Co., Ltd.	JP:9010	TYO	5490.00	5670.00	3815.00
Haichang Holdings Ltd.	HK:2255	SEHK	1.51	4.28	0.81
Lefoo Development Co.	TW:2705	TSEC	18.70	20.20	15.40
MGM Resorts International	MGM	NYSE	42.33	46.36	26.41
Parks America, Inc.	PRKA	OTC	0.32	0.55	0.26
Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ltd.	RCL	NYSE	80.33	81.16	31.09
SeaWorld Entertainment, Inc.	SEAS	NYSE	56.84	68.19	40.01
Six Flags Entertainment Co.	SIX	NYSE	26.25	31.29	16.83
<i>*Warner Bros Discovery Inc.</i>	<i>WBD</i>	<i>NASDAQ</i>	<i>12.16</i>	<i>18.76</i>	<i>8.82</i>
Tivoli A/S	DK:TIV	CSE	796.00	878.00	650.00
The Walt Disney Company	DIS	NYSE	91.82	126.48	84.07
SUPPLIERS/OTHERS					
Brogent Technologies, Inc.	TW:5263	TSEC	116.50	148.50	99.6
Sansei Technologies, Inc.	TYO:6357	TYO	1182.00	1234.00	738.00
Topgolf Callaway Brands	MODG	NYSE	16.45	25.96	16.13

Details and information available at amusementtoday.com/stocks

Worldwide Markets — CSE/DK: Copenhagen Stock Exchange; HK: The Stock Exchange of Hong Kong; JP: The Tokyo Stock Exchange; NASDAQ: National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations; NYSE: New York Stock Exchange; OCT: Over-the-counter stocks; TAIEIX: The Taiwan Capitalization Weighted Stock Index; TYO: The Tokyo Stock Exchange; TW: The Taiwan Stock Exchange.

—SOURCES: Bigcharts.com



DIESEL PRICES

Region (U.S)	As of 5/15/23	Change from 1 year ago
East Coast	\$3.932	(\$2.012)
Midwest	\$3.823	(\$1.523)
Gulf Coast	\$3.593	(\$1.702)
Mountain	\$4.089	(\$1.379)
West Coast	\$4.382	(\$1.237)
California	\$4.825	(\$1.287)

CURRENCY

On 5/22/23 \$1 USD =

0.9252	EURO
0.8033	GBP (British Pound)
137.91	JPY (Japanese Yen)
0.8989	CHF (Swiss Franc)
1.5022	AUD (Australian Dollar)
1.3495	CAD (Canadian Dollar)

BUSINESS WATCH

Cedar Fair reports first quarter 2023 results

SANDUSKY, Ohio — **Cedar Fair Entertainment Company** announced its 2023 first quarter financial result. In addition, the Company announced the declaration of a cash distribution of \$0.30 per limited partner (LP) unit payable on June 21, 2023, to unitholders of record as of June 7, 2023, and the Board's authorization to repurchase additional units up to \$250 million.

"During the first quarter, rainy and cool weather impacted our California parks, resulting in a slower start to the season," said Cedar Fair President and CEO **Richard A. Zimmerman**. "Despite this, Cedar Fair is poised to capture the full potential of our upcoming busiest and most profitable days of the year, as the remaining three quarters typically account for 95% of full-year attendance and net revenues. Underscoring our positive outlook are robust booking trends in our group channel and at our resort properties, along with a compelling lineup of new attractions at our largest parks."

For the quarter, net revenues totaled \$85 million on attendance of 1.1 million guests, compared with net revenues of \$99 million on attendance of 1.5 million guests for the quarter ended March 27, 2022. The decrease in net revenues was attributable to a decline in attendance of approximately 440,000 visits at the company's California parks, resulting from the weather challenges during the quarter, and additional prior-period visitation attributable to the extension of 2020 and 2021 season passes at **Knott's Berry Farm** through May 2022. While operating days in the first quarter were up, the incremental attendance related to the expanded operating calendars was not enough to offset the attendance shortfalls caused by approximately 30% of the company's operating days being significantly impacted by weather during the period, particularly at Knott's Berry Farm.

SeaWorld shares first quarter financials

ORLANDO — **SeaWorld Entertainment, Inc.** today reported its financial results for the first quarter of 2023. Attendance was 3.4 million guests, a decrease of approximately 25,000 guests from the first quarter of 2022. Total revenue was a record \$293.3 million, an increase of \$22.7 million or 8.4% from the first quarter of 2022. Net loss was \$16.5 million, the second smallest net loss in the first quarter and an increase of \$7.5 million from the first quarter of 2022.

"We are pleased to report another quarter of record financial results despite adverse weather across a number of our markets, particularly in our California market and a shift in the timing of the opening of our new rides," said **Marc Swanson**, chief executive officer of SeaWorld Entertainment, Inc. "We continued to drive growth in total per capita spending in the quarter demonstrating the effectiveness of our revenue strategies, our pricing power and the strength of consumer spending in our parks."

Gold Medal launches cashless popcorn vending

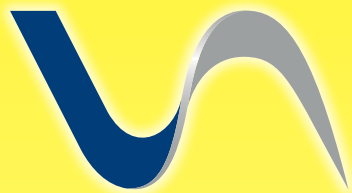
CINCINNATI, Ohio — The next evolution in popcorn dispensing technology is here with the launch of the Ready Series cashless models from **Gold Medal**. A complete fresh popcorn vending system, it includes a cashless payment system and a push-button dispenser, allowing for simple pay and serve with these convenient self-serve machines.

The cashless models in the Ready Series are equipped with a programmable payment system. It includes settings for customizing pricing, dispense time and other options. Customers can pay with a card and then serve up fresh popcorn with just the push of a button. This not only reduces labor for operators, but it also offers customers convenience.

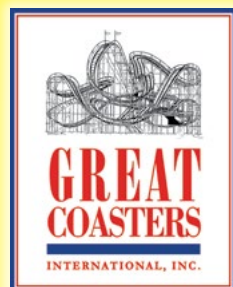
"The benefits of the Ready Series cashless models are practical across venues," stated **Adam Browning**, president of Gold Medal. "It reduces lines, saves on labor, increases customer satisfaction and gives guests an experience they can't find at competitors."



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**September 8 & 9, 2023
Pigeon Forge, Tennessee
GoldenTicketAwards.com**

Dollywood to host Networking Event of the Year Amusement Today opens nominations for industry Golden Ticket categories

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

ARLINGTON, Texas — The return of The Networking Event of the Year brings about the opportunity for experienced professionals to spotlight the best of the industry. The Golden Ticket Awards will take place on September 8 and 9 at Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. With the host hotel being the famous DreamMore Resort, industry professionals should prepare for a weekend of fantastic opportunities for social interaction, the sharing of best practices and the networking of creative ideas both the attendees and parks can offer. As a winner of numerous Golden Ticket Awards, Dollywood will delight and inspire those within the amusement industry.

This will be the third time for Dollywood to play host for the Golden Ticket Awards, and management is already at work preparing to welcome park operators, manufacturers, marketers and more from the amusement industry.

“Dollywood is excited to host the industry for the Golden Ticket Awards. It really is one of the most special events of the year, and we are proud to have everyone as our guests here in the Great Smoky Mountains,” said **Pete Owens**, executive vice president, marketing, **The Dollywood Company**. “And while we are thrilled to showcase our properties, we take the most pride in the hardworking Dollywood hosts who make everything come together in spectacular fashion. The Golden Tickets are just one part of what is a truly big year for us. With the addition of Big Bear Mountain, the opening of HeartSong Lodge & Resort this fall, a record-breaking Coaster Con, and, of course, the Golden Tickets, this is a year to remember at Dollywood. We look forward to seeing everyone in September!”

Registration for the event — still complimentary — will open in June. However, *Amusement Today* is already seeking nominations for the 2023 Industry Categories.

The Golden Ticket Awards have core categories offered annually, but certain categories are voted on specifically by industry professionals. Best New Innovation, Best Installation and the Leadership Award are the result of feedback from those who work in and report on the amusement industry. Nominations are being accepted for these categories, as well as nominations for Best New Show of 2023, which is reviewed by an elite panel of show fans.

For these categories, please follow these steps to nominate worthy candidates:

Leadership Award

In 300 words or less, summarize a person, park or company that has brought exemplary leadership practices to the industry describing the skills of an individual or improvements or growth brought on by his or her leadership. For a park, what practices or changes have been implemented to improve the guest experience? For a company, what initiatives



Guests attending the 2023 Golden Ticket Awards will stay at Dollywood's famous DreamMore Resort. COURTESY DOLLYWOOD

have been taken to offer a superior product or advancements in safety? In all of these instances, does the nominee help improve and guide the industry via leadership?

Nominations can be submitted at goldenticketawards.com/leadership.

Best New Innovation of 2023

Is there a new procedure or product that has improved safety? Has a new addition improved throughput or traffic flow? Has a food product taken the park by storm thanks to an innovative introduction? Has a new invention made a park better for the guests? What changes are taking place or being implemented that are moving the industry forward? In 300 words or less, nominate what deserves recognition.

Nominations can be submitted at: goldenticketawards.com/innovation.

Best New Attractions Installation of 2023

Great new attractions are happening this year. Which particular attractions are clearly noteworthy because of the quality of ride, the efficiency of capacity and the operational procedures? Has theming elevated an attraction to world class? In 300 words or less, summarize what new installation of the past year surpasses others.

Nominations can be submitted at goldenticketawards.com/installation.

Best New Show of 2023

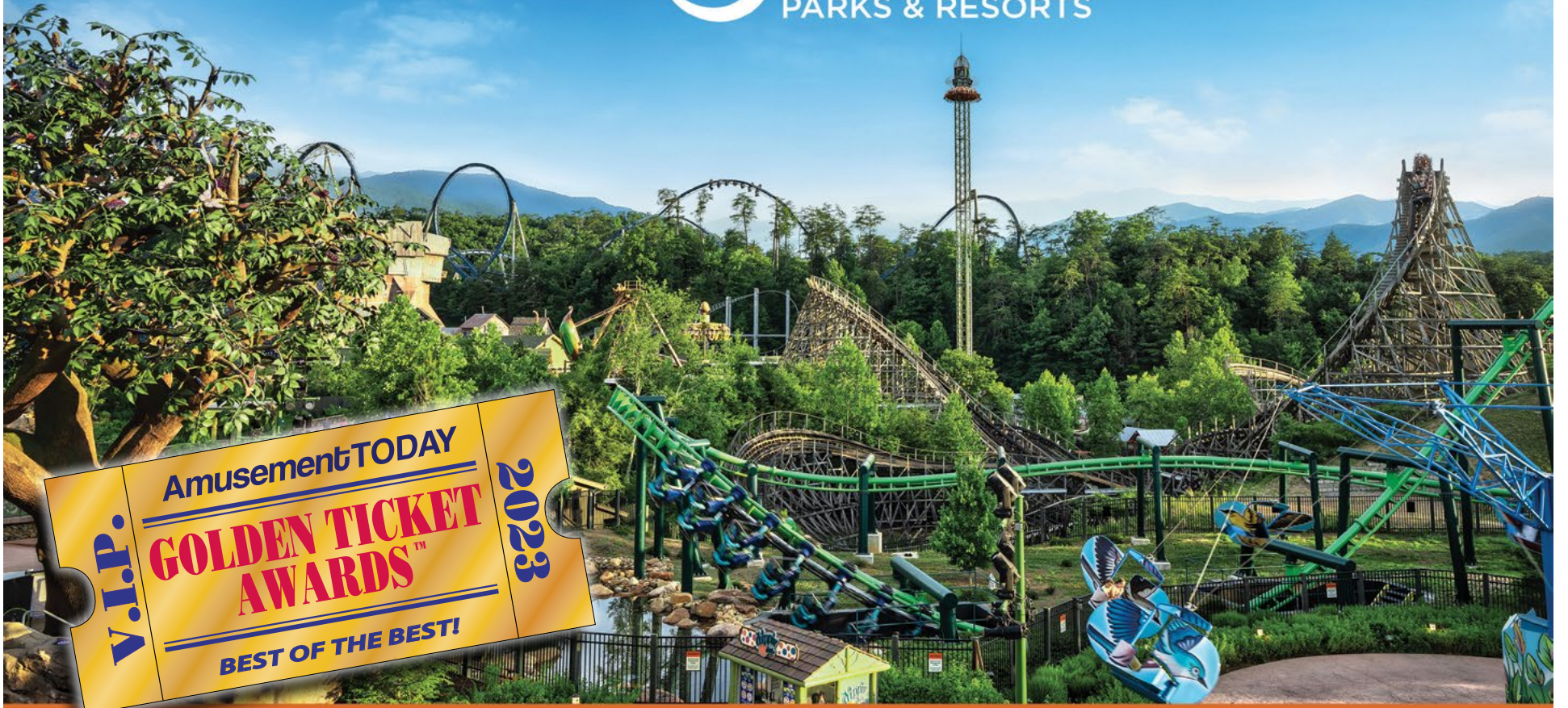
Nominations for this category are different. In an email communication to Golden Ticket Awards Communications Coordinator Tim Baldwin, state an interest in nominating a show by June 27. A recorded version of the show in its entirety must be uploaded to *Amusement Today* no later than July 3, 2023. Any show produced after last year's Golden Ticket Awards is eligible. To be nominated, it must be a brand-new show.

Nominations and video uploads can be emailed to tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com.

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Focus *on the* HORIZON

Engineering creative, logical for Thuer

BOLINGBROOK, Ill. — When asked how she found her role as a mechanical design engineer at L3DFX in Bolingbrook, Illinois, Jess Thuer admits ice cream was involved.

Like many recent college graduates, Thuer found her first job-seeking plans stalled because of the pandemic. “My professional internship ended early, but I kept networking and doing all I could to earn a job,” she recalled. “Slowly, people stopped responding, and LinkedIn showed the industry was slowing. It was scary.”

Thuer kept looking and applying. “I wanted to get into the entertainment industry, but I also needed a job,” she continued. “I was connected with an opportunity with a tool company, and even with several interviews, I think they could tell my heart wasn’t in it. I did not get the job.”

That rejection inspired her to refocus and pursue the right role. “One night I got a pint of ice cream and searched for industry design jobs on Indeed and LinkedIn. I went down a rabbit hole about ‘themed entertainment’ and applied for at least 50 positions. I was determined.”

The first of two companies to respond was L3DFX. “It got me so excited,” she remembered. “I had to nail that interview. I did everything I could to research L3DFX, what they do, and how my experiences and interests would be an asset for them.”

She did nail the interview and has not looked back since.

Originally from Indiana, Thuer refers to herself as “weird and different. I embrace being weird and different. From an early age I’ve always known that I wanted to work in entertainment, but from a more technical than creative standpoint. I just didn’t know how to get there. I truly enjoy visiting theme parks and taking in film and television as an artform, but I didn’t grow up singing, dancing or playing an instrument. What I did was solve puzzles, build with LEGO,

and tinker in my grandfather’s barn,” Thuer remembered, “From a young age I recognized I wanted to pursue a career where I could utilize my strengths and tap into my passion for entertainment.”

“It may sound cheesy, but I love what I do,” she continued. “Some people work to live for the weekends. I get excited about the next project and the next challenge.”

Thuer began her career journey in Florida. In the spring of 2020, she accepted a co-op internship with the Walt Disney Company as a professional mechanical engineering intern working in manufacturing project management. It put her on the path that helped solidify her job goals and identify the type of leader she wanted to become.

Thuer said her manager, Sarah Chapman, played a significant role in who she is today. “Sarah would take me with her everywhere. I saw how meetings were conducted. I learned how to work with people and understand how different departments come together to solve problems.” Understanding Thuer’s degree would include a minor in robotics, Chapman also made sure she had the opportunity to work with another manager who was overseeing the production of new audio-animatronics for several overseas Disney parks.

Referring to Chapman as her, “mentor for life” Thuer said one of their first conversations taught her the most. “Sarah told me, ‘I’m not going to let you fail, but I will let you make mistakes.’ That trust helped me learn how to use sound reasoning and confidently make decisions. Today, I use the same approach. I won’t let anyone fail; we all learn from our mistakes.”

Today, Thuer continues to push herself to learn new things. The wide array of projects at L3DFX — big and small — allow her to stretch in ways she once only imagined.

When describing her typical day, she shares it starts by coming

Jess Thuer, EIT
L3DFX
Bolingbrook, Illinois



in early. “Every day is different. It’s both super fun and chaotic. I like to be the first one in for a few brief moments of calm and alone time.”

That quiet time is short-lived once her colleagues arrive. Then it’s time to dive into the many projects in the L3DFX space. “I walk the shop floor every day,” she continued. “That means visiting each department — carpentry, paint, welding — so I can see what’s going on.” From there she jokes she enters “chaos control” so she can focus on designing and problem solving. “I am involved in every aspect of a project once it is fully awarded to L3DFX from concept art to construction, to shipping and onsite logistics, to final installation.”

While still new in her career, Thuer has two significant highlights. The first was working with the intellectual property Nintendo for her first on-site installation. And the second hangs in the air.

Reach, a large-scale sculpture designed for the Multi-Modal Facility at O’Hare International Airport consists of two arms,

which are approximately 27 and 31 feet long and weigh over 1000 pounds each.

“Working on the Reach project has been logistically and literally my largest to date,” Thuer said. “I had nightmares about it, worrying I might miss something, and I would check and recheck every step and plan. When I was onsite, and all of the planning and work came together, well, it was amazing! I am so grateful for the trust and guidance our L3DFX president, Paul Ciesion gave me to bring that project to life.”

“If someone had asked me in school what my dream job was, I would have described what I found at L3DFX,” she finished. “I wanted to be a part of a collaborative conversation, solution, and all-encompassing design team. I am excited to keep moving forward and hopeful tap back into my project management roots and lead a design team one day.”

It’s pretty amazing what drive, focus and a pint of ice cream can lead to.

—Susan Storey

ON THE MOVE

PB Amusement, LLC announced the addition of **Jay Willis** as director of sales. Willis has 15 years of business-to-business sales experience in the attractions ticketing industry, but has actually spent most of his life in and around the amusement business because his family owned a bowling alley.

"I grew up at the bowling alley," said Willis. "When I was young, I would do small tasks like cleaning tables, working the front desk and snack bar. I eventually became manager of the bowling alley, earned certifications through PBAA, and even became a USBC Certified Youth Bowling Coach."



Willis

Willis is well known in the amusement and attractions industry. He has managed accounts for some of the biggest and most prestigious properties in North America. His primary focus will be working with family entertainment centers, ski resorts, waterparks and sports team/facilities selling **ADG** mountain coasters and slides, motion simulators and film licensing from **DOF Robotics**, food services from **Perky's Pizza** and **Spirello** as well as sustainable rain ponchos from **Green Gear Supply Company**.

Eric Summers has been promoted to the position of chief financial officer at the **Santa Cruz Seaside Company**, owner and operator of the historic **Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk**. Prior to his promotion, Summers served as the company's director of finance and investments since he started with the company in 2018. As CFO, Summers will direct the company's financial strategy with an emphasis on financial analysis and reporting, real estate investment and management, shareholder relations and budgeting.



Summers

"Eric has been an integral part of our company's success during his time at the Boardwalk," said Santa Cruz Seaside Company Chief Executive Officer **Karl Rice**. "Eric is a respected leader within our company, the community, and the attractions industry. His experience and talent will help ensure our company's success well into the future."

Summers is a native of Atascadero, California, and received a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from **Cal Poly San Luis Obispo**. After moving to Santa Cruz in 2005, Summers worked in a variety of leadership positions at **Comerica Bank** and formerly served as president of the **Santa Cruz County Chamber of Commerce** and a member of **IAAPA's** Audit Committee.

Lake Compounce announced the appointment of **Doug Hemphill** as general manager effective immediately. Hemphill is a seasoned industry professional that brings more than 40 years of amusement industry experience to the park.

"I am thrilled to join the team at America's first amusement park," said Hemphill. "The

park has so much to be proud of as it ramps up for its 177th season. I am looking forward to leading the park through a fantastic next chapter, beginning this season, as we reintroduce live concerts on a new state-of-the-art floating stage and continue to elevate our guest experience, retail and food and beverage operations."



Hemphill

Hemphill most recently served as corporate vice president of food and beverage with **SeaWorld Parks and Entertainment** and as corporate senior director of food and beverage operations with **Six Flags**.

"We are pleased to welcome Doug to our growing **Palace Entertainment** team," said Group Manager of Theme Parks **Mark Pauls**. "We know that through Doug's leadership and invaluable experience, he will be undeniably successful in leading Lake Compounce to success and growth for many years to come."

Amusement Entertainment Management (AEM) has announced the promotion of **Jackie Zilligen** to director of client services. In her new role, Zilligen will lead the firm's project development initiatives, working directly with project principals, vendors, financiers and city planners.



Zilligen

Earlier in her career, Zilligen led a marketing and sales analytics division of Fortune 100 pharmaceutical giant **Merck & Co.**, where she was responsible for the analysis of marketing and sales trends for senior leadership in addition to problem solving, training and distribution of the U.S. sales team's field data.

Since 2017, Zilligen has served as executive director of AEM's education subsidiary, **Foundations Entertainment University**, where she has been largely responsible for the program's curriculum and expanded presence within the amusement sector.

Palace Entertainment announced the appointment of **Bonnie Sherman Weber** to chief operating officer. Weber is an industry veteran and brings more than 30 years of attractions industry knowledge to the organization. As COO, Weber succeeds **John Reilly**, who has been elevated to managing director.



Weber

"Not only does [Bonnie's] leadership style make her an outstanding cultural fit for our organization, but her keen commercial insights, in-park expertise and extensive operations experience also make her the right leader to take our parks through their next phase of growth," said Palace Entertainment Managing Director, John Reilly.

Weber most recently served as senior vice president of park operations with **Six Flags**. Under her leadership, Weber successfully led the company through the COVID-19 pandemic while delivering quality guest experiences.

OBITUARIES

Dallas Zoo President, CEO passes away at the age 64

DALLAS, Texas — The president and CEO of the Dallas Zoo, Gregg Hudson, died after a brief battle with cancer.

"Words are simply not enough to express the magnitude of this unexpected loss. Gregg was a husband, father, brother, son, and a leader in the zoo and aquarium industry — a north star for so many," the zoo said in a statement.

Hudson has been the zoo's president and CEO since 2006, leading it through several milestones such as a partnership with the City of Dallas in 2009 and the 1 million visitor mark in 2015.

"His passion, tireless work ethic, and love for our Zoo has cemented Gregg's legacy here forever. We are simply heartbroken to lose such a visionary leader for the Dallas Zoo.

Our team is positioned, and proud to build on the foundation of success he built here at the Zoo," the zoo continued in its statement.

Prior to the Dallas Zoo, Hudson also worked at the Fort Worth Zoo and the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden.

"For all of his professional accomplishments, Gregg was a genuine, caring, wonderful person who built relationships easily, and held those relationships close to his heart. He was a friend and a mentor to so many, not only here in Dallas, but across the country and around the world. To say he will be greatly missed is an understatement," the zoo said.



Hudson

George Moffett, founder of Variety Attractions, passes

ZANESVILLE, OHIO — George Larry Moffett, 86, passed away on May 14, 2023. Born in 1936, in Zanesville, Ohio, Moffett was a fan of entertainment, and his life story is a testament to that.

Moffett attended The Ohio State University his freshman year, majoring in business. While there he played trumpet with a dance band and also got the idea to secure dates for the other dance bands. During his sophomore year, he transferred to Muskingum College and started booking local bands on the side at local fraternity parties and social clubs.

When he graduated, he realized the need for a booking agency, which led to the founding of Variety Attractions in 1961.

Little did he know at the time that Variety Attractions would eventually become a brand that is one of the most respected, trusted and honored companies in the

entertainment world. To date, Variety Attractions has booked over \$1.2 billion in contracts since its inception and now operates in 24 states.

As Variety Attractions grew, Moffett was honored on numerous occasions from the Country Music Association naming him the SRO promoter/talent buyer of the year four times. He was the Academy of Country Music Awards Talent Buyer of the year three times. Moffett was inducted into the Ohio Fair Managers Hall of Fame. He served three terms as a director on the Country Music Association Board of Directors. He served on the board of directors of International Entertainment Buyers Association and was inducted into their Hall of Fame in 2018.



Moffett

SAFETY, MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

► Gravity Group revitalizes Grizzly — page 44 / IAFE produces safety and security boot camp — page 48

Drownings: discussing the differences between training vs. real life

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

BRAMPTON, Ontario, Canada — Paul Snobelen, a community resuscitation programs specialist with Peel Regional Paramedic Services is responsible for the local development and implementation of pre-hospital programs supporting the chain of survival. He has developed a region-wide, community-accessible Public Access Defibrillation Program with more than 2,000 AEDs registered. Snobelen's work can be found in a number of publications, and he is an industry leader in understanding the cognitive effects of lay-responder response. He has been involved in research with the American Red Cross, American Heart Association and most recently speaking with clients from StarGuard Elite as part of its CAMP presentations.

What makes Snobelen's presentation unique is that he articulates the realities of acting to save a life and pinpoints common cognitive reactions to these events. This allows attendees to both prepare staff and also understand the recovery process from the responder's perspective. This is advantageous for management to help facilitate learning environments but also provide support and recovery after. The presentations he delivers also resonated with those who acted to save a life, because they feel heard and validated.

In his presentation,



Real life situations may vary from training done on manikins. It is important that training explains that clean, calm and plastic environments are not what should be expected in real life. COURTESY STAR GUARD ELITE

Snobelen emphasizes that training usually takes place on manikins that typically don't have eyes. "When you do CPR in real-life, you're not prepared for the perception of the victim staring into your soul while doing compressions," he tells *Amusement Today*. "That visual becomes imprinted into the rescuer's mind and stored and can become a cognitive barrier to recovery."

Most training occurs in safe environments and controlled spaces, with generic, perfectly molded plastic manikins. In real life, bodies are usually wet and may have tanning oils or sunscreen that make them slippery. In a study that is currently being prepared for publication, he said that his research found that almost 70% of the 300 people he talked with were prepared for the skills of acting to save a life but not the reality of actually doing it. In fact, the 10 most common questions

Snobelen gets during his follow-up conversations are:

- Why was there blood coming from the mouth?
- Why was their stomach moving so much during compressions?
- Why were their eyes open?
- Why did they make sounds? (gasp, gurgling)
- Why were they drooling/frothy?
- Why did they soil themselves?
- Why were they twitching/making a fist?
- Why did their skin change color?
- Am I supposed to break ribs to do proper CPR?
- Were they actually dead?

In his presentations, Snobelen talks about the vicarious impacts of critical events and that facilities should consider doing scenarios involving other departments. When a critical incident occurs, it's not just the lifeguards involved in the actual skills. Who is calling



911? Are they prepared for the questions that will be asked? The average caller will be on the phone for at least three to four minutes, unable to assist in other areas.

Many water parks, aquatic centers and properties hire lifeguards and newly certified EMTs to provide the first aid care at their facilities. "Those individuals have been trained and tested and trained again," Snobelen noted, "yet, they may not have ever seen a real drowning, cardiac arrest or been involved in directly acting to save a life. One key recommendation is to discuss with your team during training what they can *really* expect when acting to save a life. Especially if you can't simulate it."

He recalled an incident where a person felt responsible for a death because they performed CPR. "An individual did CPR, felt a pop in the chest, and when emergency services arrived, the person who did CPR

observed blood coming from the mouth. This is common in many cases. That individual spent the day thinking that pop was them breaking a rib, which punctured the lung, causing the bleeding and resulting in the victim ultimately dying. That person had no intention of telling their employer and bottled that up. When we can articulate the reality of saving a life, processing the event becomes much easier for the responder."

Too often, once the reports are filed, a facility may feel the responsibility is complete, but the reality is the staff member or lifeguard has gone through a traumatic event.

Snobelen has created a Resource Guide (available at tinyurl.com/2s3wupb8). That guide explains the Four 4's in relation to recovery post-event. Some notable takeaways from his presentation

► See TRAINING, page 43

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TRAIN REHABILITATION
PICTURED: SCREAM, SIX FLAGS MAGIC MOUNTAIN

► TRAINING

Continued from page 42

are that in the first 24 hours, the mind is not fully done processing the event and that events like these are stored in one's mind differently.

First four hours: Immediately following the event, excessively high levels of hormones, adrenaline and sugar that entered the bloodstream during the event begin to wear off. The mind is not processing the event, the body is physically processing the event. After four days, the mind starts to process the event and begins to seek answers. Snobelen stated that 24 to 48 hours following the event is the best time to have a technical debriefing. After four weeks, the acute stress of the event begins to fade. After the fourth month, certain triggers (often the senses) remind the individual of the event. Facilities should be receptive to their staff to see if professional support is needed.

"When a critical incident happens, our mind takes snapshots, often in connec-

tion with one of our five senses," Snobelen explained. "You might remember a certain smell, sound, visual, texture or taste. The ability to put the chain of events together chronologically can take some time. The first four hours are particularly the hardest, which is also that critical time when everyone wants reports and statements."

One recommendation he gives is to provide notes immediately but take a couple of hours to finalize a report for submission. Although a staff member may seem all right and able to articulate immediately after, places often find out later they are just "functioning on autopilot." The good news, according to Snobelen, is that when technical clarity has been provided for the rescuers after an incident, by the four-week mark, the event is a memory and not a roadblock. He and other researchers are looking at the long-term effects of acting to save a life both with and without support post-event.

Six Flags Magic Mountain to run on solar

VALENCIA, Calif. — Officials at **Six Flags Entertainment Corp.** announced in April the installation of a new 12.37-megawatt solar carpet to be built over the main guest parking lot at **Six Magic Mountain**.

Six Flags partnered with **Solar Optimum** and **DSD Renewables** on the project, which is set to begin development this summer. Six Flags officials said when completed, this project will rank as California's largest single-site commercial renewable energy project. It will be able to offset 100% of the park's energy usage with solar power.

The 12.37-megawatt solar project will produce approximately two MW of power, with approximately eight kilowatt hours (kWh) of capacity that can be deployed daily and 20.8 million kWh of energy annually, which is equivalent to the electricity consumption of 2,874 homes and 1.79 million smartphones charged.

Key facts about the Six Flags Magic Mountain solar installation include:

- Producing 12.37-megawatt solar carpet built over the main guest parking lot and providing shade for the cars parked there.;
- Battery storage system producing 1.958 megawatts of power with 7,886.3 kilowatt hours of capacity that can be deployed daily;
- It will offset greenhouse gas emissions each year comparable to 34,194 barrels of oil consumed, 5,110 tons of waste recycled, and

17,612 acres of U.S. forests;

•It will offset carbon dioxide equivalents each year comparable to taking 3,182 cars off the road, 37.8 million miles driven by an average gasoline-powered automobile, and 1.6 million gallons of gasoline consumed.

Looking at the future, the solar carpet is expected to produce 517.89 million kilowatt hours of energy in a 25-year period. That is expected to offset greenhouse gas energy consumption equivalent to 911 million miles driven by gasoline-powered automobiles and the carbon sequestration equivalent to 434.3 thousand acres of trees planted.

Jason Freeman, Six Flags vice president of operations, public safety, engineering and maintenance, said during the announcement that Six Flags has placed a priority on efforts to improve and protect the environment.

"By partnering with experts like Solar Optimum and DSD Renewables, we can continue to improve our environmental programs with additional waste, water and energy reduction targets and initiatives," Freeman said.

Six Flags already has solar programs in two of its properties, **Six Flags Discovery Kingdom** in Northern California and **Six Flags Great Adventure** in New Jersey. These solar developments have the capabilities of more than 30 megawatts combined with fully operational solar power systems installed.

—Pam Sherborne

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Kings Dominion's wooden coaster Grizzly comes back with a roar

More than 1,000 feet of track replaced by Gravity Group's stronger precut track

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

DOSWELL, Va. — Let no one say that **Kings Dominion** has lost its roar. Grizzly is back.

The rehabbed wooden roller coaster opened on May 13. **Kyle Kruthoffer**, the digital communications manager, marketing, at Kings Dominion, said prior to the opening that he felt riders were going to be really surprised at how the refurbishments have changed the ride.

"I have been really excited, and I think everyone will be, too," Kruthoffer said.

The Gravity Group out of Cincinnati, Ohio, was contracted to do the updates to Grizzly, which was built in 1982. The coaster was originally designed by **Curtis D. Summers** and constructed in-house by Kings Dominion staff.

Grizzly closed down on Labor Day, 2022, and the refurbishment began. **Michael Graham**, engineer and principal, The Gravity Group, said they retracked a total of 1,040 feet of Grizzly using the company's newly engineered precut track. The new precut track is touted as being 20 times stronger than the traditional wooden coaster track.

The Gravity Group is able to precision cut the track at their own facility in the exact shape needed for the ride. Then the pieces are assembled on-site. It is entirely made of wood, preserving the integrity of a wooden roller coaster.

Graham said the new stronger track provides a smoother ride and will be more maintenance friendly. Additionally, this engineered precut track is economical and easy to install in prefabricated pieces with predictable results.

Aside from the retracking of portions of the coaster's track, the company also made some structural changes.

"We changed the shape of the fan turn to make that turn smoother coming into it and out of it," Graham said.

The Gravity Group also redid a section of the first drop, making it a little longer and steeper. This was done by lowering the track since there was enough space between the track and the ground. By doing so, a 55-degree drop was created from the original 45-degree drop.

In addition, changes to the size and shape of some of the hills were done to increase the thrill, airtime and pacing.

"We also did some structural improvements to the lift hill," Graham said.

In changing the first drop, 12 additional feet



The newly refurbished Grizzly wooden roller coaster has come back with a roar at Kings Dominion, Doswell, Virginia. Aside from the retracking, structural changes also were made, including the lowering of the first drop creating a steeper descent and changes to the fan turn to create a smoother transition. COURTESY KINGS DOMINION

were added so Grizzly now runs on 3,162 feet of track.

Graham said the engineering portion of the Grizzly project took about two months. Once that is completed, they take the recommendations to the park and then proceed with the changes.

This is not the first project using the engineered precut tracking that The Gravity Group has done for **Cedar Fair Entertainment**, owner of Kings Dominion. The company also installed 600 feet on The Racer at **Kings Island**, Mason, Ohio, in 2021.

Kings Dominion park officials had hoped the coaster would be up and operating by Memorial Day



weekend when the park begins its full-time operations. It opened early and Kruthoffer said it opened with much anticipation.

In celebration of the re-opening, a local brewery, **Center of the Universe**

Brewing Co. in Ashland, Virginia, has launched a new beer called Grizzly Hazy Double IPA beer which is now available inside the park at select locations.

•kingsdominion.com
•thegravitygroup.com



The coaster, which originally opened in 1982, reopened on May 13, 2023. It was designed by Curtis D. Summers and built in-house by Kings Dominion staff. The Grizzly has had over 1,000 feet of track replaced by The Gravity Group, which was contracted to do the refurbishment. COURTESY KINGS DOMINION



NEWS & NOTES

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AIMS International welcomes new Executive Director Amy Lowenstein

So many of us started off in this industry as young teenagers looking for a fun summer job. Making sure the kids are tall enough to ride the roller coaster, collecting tickets, serving hotdogs and cotton candy; did any of us know it could grow into a lifelong career?

My journey began as a ride operator at **Six Flags Over Texas** at the age of 16. I absolutely loved that job and quickly understood the trust placed in me to safely inspect and run enormous roller coasters. This was a tremendous responsibility.

As we grow, in order to handle this responsibility and take on more, we look to our mentors. I have been incredibly fortunate to have several mentors who guided me and impacted my career, shaping who I am and where I am today. I was introduced to my very first mentor as a teenager the first time I worked for **Jay Thomas**, previously with **Six Flags** and now CEO of **Urban Air Adventure Parks**. He was my first supervisor and a great leader. Jay was also an inspiration. He sparked a fire in me. I took action and attended **Texas A&M University**, graduating with a degree in Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences. Further in my career, I was introduced to another key mentor, the late **Tom Edgar** of **Six Flags Magic Mountain**. I am confident Tom slept with **ASTM** standards and safety regulations under his pillow and read OSHA regulations for fun! I knew from my operations days how critical safety

was to the industry, but learning risk management, security, first aid and litigation sectors from him further fueled the fire to learn more and train others.

Tom took the time to introduce me to other experienced experts, including the one and only **Pat Hoffman**. When Pat visited the parks, I was stuck to his side. Pat showed how he expresses his care for the industry through patiently taking the time to help others grow and sharing his expertise. There are countless others I still depend on to this day. I can pick up the phone and ask for their input, for suggestions or simply use them as a sounding board.

Please take a moment to recognize your own mentors and thank them! Call them, write an email, text, write a letter or send a note by carrier pigeon. If you are still new to your career these individuals will have a greater impact than you realize.

In my early years as a Safety Manager, I was introduced to **AIMS International**. Talk about an eye opener! There were so many knowledgeable people to network with, learn from and so much I did not know. I continued to learn by attending year after year. AIMS has been an invaluable resource throughout my career and critical to so many in the industry.

I wanted to give back to others as my mentors had given to me. As my knowledge grew,



Lowenstein

I became an instructor at the AIMS seminars and at **IAAPA** Expos. It is quite a thrill to see an attendee's eyes sparkle, as they learn, as they thrive, as they connect with new friends and colleagues and as their excitement for their job grows.

AIMS has grown exponentially over the years and is experiencing record growth and development while increasing its global presence. It's so exciting to be part of an organization that provides critical education and has such an expansive reach. **M.J. Brewer**, our previous executive director, the board of directors, and a vast list of volunteers, has set the organization up with notable achievements and positioned the organization for continued success and expansion. I am thrilled to lead AIMS into its next chapter as it provides cutting-edge resources and networking opportunities that are so vital to the success and growth of our industry.

Meeting mentors, networking with colleagues across the globe and increasing our knowledge is what keeps so many of us in this industry. While we may change organizations or change our positions, this amazing industry allows each of us to build a powerful network that supports us in our work.

As I look to the future, AIMS will continue to expand course offerings with additional programming for our most experienced participants. Educational resources and certifications will be expanded to meet the grow-

ing needs of emerging industry segments and we will continue to grow our international footprint, ensuring safety education is available and relevant globally. We will maintain our commitment to developing and mentoring young professionals, inspiring, and grooming the next generation of industry safety professionals. Finally, we will continue to deliver fresh and relevant educational content online through AIMSConnectEd and in-person at our annual safety seminar, solidifying our position as the world leader in amusement safety education.

I love this industry and what we offer families as they enter amusement facilities around the world. Regardless of our role as a manufacturer, supplier or operator, we all have an impact on every single person who walks through our doors. The amusement industry exists to provide guests with an escape from their day-to-day. At our core, we are tasked with ensuring that their visit is safe. This is, in many ways, a sacred duty that we all share, and I am honored to be entrusted as the new executive director of AIMS International.

See you in Orlando at the next AIMS International Safety Seminar in January 2024. Come and learn from industry experts, build your network and, if you are unable to attend, check out our website at aimsintl.org for eLearning opportunities.

—Amy Lowenstein
Executive Director
AIMS International

amy.lowenstein@aimsintl.org

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Amuse, Gravity Group keep multiple woodies in top shape for 2023

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

COEUR D'ALENE, Idaho and CINCINNATI, Ohio — Within the past decade, the amusement industry has seen numerous advancements in keeping wooden roller coasters in top form. The genre had always been comprised of attractions that regularly need maintenance and refurbishment, but that is a result of their enduring popularity. In recent years, several companies have provided solutions to problematic areas on wooden track. Some companies offer steel track solutions and others still provide wood-track options to preserve the authenticity of the ride.

Amuse has been busy during the off-season. Among its many projects are several wood coaster refurbishments.

One of the biggest was Twister at **Knoebels Amusement Resort**. The wooden coaster features a spiraling helix, and the work done gave the ride a notable upgrade.

"Twister was over 1,000 feet of track," said **Brandon Paul**, president, Amuse.

"Amuse Rides worked with us from November through the end of January. Our team continued the next phase of the project through the end of February and added the finishing touches in March," said **Brian Knoebel**, co-owner, Knoebels. "We are dedicated to maintaining our wooden roller coasters to ensure they continue providing a great ride experience for generations to come."

The ride's spiraling helix was the bulk of the project.



Knoebels' Twister roller coaster saw an entire retrack of its helix, courtesy of Amuse (above left). Amuse worked on California's Great America's Gold Striker to keep it in top form (above right). COURTESY AMUSE

"Roughly 900 linear feet of track in Twister's helix was replaced — a project that spanned an area of 70 bents," said Knoebel. "It has made the element much smoother without sacrificing the thrill of it."

Down the road in Pennsylvania, Rollo Coaster at **Idlewild** received structural upgrades, according to Paul.

"We had no unusual challenges this year as [the] weather was pretty decent and working in the rain or snow has never been a problem for our team," said Paul.

Another project was at **California's Great America**. Gold Striker, a wooden twister from **Great Coasters International, Inc.** received between 350 and 400 linear feet of track work.

"We received reports from both Great America

and Knoebels, saying that after their accelerometer tests, there are substantial desired results," Paul told *Amusement Today*. "Each park we worked at was a return customer, and they plan on Amuse doing work the next season."

Amuse did other projects, including a relocation of a Ferris wheel and some emergency repairs.

Also busy with coaster enhancements is **The Gravity Group**.

"We're working on ten rides for this spring," said **Michael Graham**, principal, The Gravity Group. "It's retrack jobs from small stuff to very major rides. We have some that are announced but some that are not."

Among their biggest projects was The Voyage at **Holiday World**. According



to the park, more than 1,600 feet of new track was installed, equating to about 25 percent of the ride.

"We're famous for our wooden roller coasters, and it's important to us to protect that reputation," said **Matt Blumhardt**, chief operating officer, Holiday World & Splashin' Safari. "While The Voyage was our biggest project, we've invested a record amount of capital into all our wooden roller coasters this year. The Gravity Group has been a great partner, providing engineering services, guidance and their new precut track. We're thankful that they're just a short drive away!"

The project encompassed 522 feet of The Gravity Group vertical precut track from the first drop through the bottom of the second hill, 310 feet of horizontal precut

track on the last turn, 119 feet of horizontal precut track through the "peekaboo" section (between the first and second tunnels) and around 800 feet of brake run, transfer table and other areas.

"I rode it last week, and it's really good," Graham told AT.

In addition, The Raven received 300 feet of new track.

"I can't brag enough about our maintenance program. Our wooden coasters put us on the map, but our coaster maintenance team of nine full-time technicians keeps us at the top," said **Leah Koch-Blumhardt**, director of communications, Holiday World. "Over the last few years, we've invested heavily into all our wooden coasters, and the work has held up wonderfully. The Voyage is going into its 18th operating season, and I dare say it might be running better than it ever has."

"What we have done is a little bit different than what has been happening in the world of retracking. Instead of helping the parks retrack it themselves, we have given them tools and pieces to put together," said Graham. "It's a different situation than it has been. Basically, you can take a section of track, we'll do some fancy computer stuff, and we will cut the boards that fit there and ship them to the site. Either our team or the park's team will install them. They fit together like puzzle pieces either horizontally or vertically, depending upon whether it is straight or if it is twisting."

The Gravity Group's process involves vertically stacked wood when the situation is applicable. According to the company, this increases the strength of the wood 20-fold. [The] horizontal stack in the curvy sections still are eight times stronger with the use of what the company terms as "Gravity Goop."

Other projects included some **Cedar Fair** parks. Graham was pleased to see TGG finish the return run





The final turn on The Voyage was just one section being upgraded by The Gravity Group (above left). Rollo Coaster at Idlewild received structural work from Amuse to help preserve the historic ride (above right). COURTESY GRAVITY GROUP, AMUSE

► **WOODEN**

Continued from page 46

on one of the sides of Kings Island's Racer.

"That was an interesting project in that we had a crew on site doing half that section, and the park's crew installed the other half," he said. "It's like puzzle pieces, so we can train people how to put it together and create this excellently shaped, long-life track."

Two other major projects he could discuss were The Grizzly at Kings Dominion (see page 44) and Megafobia at Oakwood Leisure Park in Wales.

"On both, there is actually a lot of reprofiling of the track," said Graham. "It significantly changes the ride for the better. On Megafobia, we made the drop a touch steeper and there were a few hills on the ride that didn't really deliver since they weren't designed with today's tools. There was a hill after the first drop that didn't really deliver, and we made it into a double down that works really well. We made another hill a double up, so we've added some airtime."

Among the 10 projects, Graham said they totaled more than 6,500 feet of track.

"It's a monster amount of production we've had in our shop," said Graham. "We have found parks are looking for a wood solution to preserve their rides. They're looking for something different than what gives them five years before the section needs to be redone. What we've put together is something the parks are really excited about."

Both Amuse and The Gravity Group have already lined up projects for the following year.

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IAFE helps members prepare for season focusing on safety, security

AT: Pam Sherborne
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SPRINGFIELD, Mo. — In an effort to assist fairs and festivals with keeping guests safe in an increasingly volatile and violent environment, the **International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE)** has produced a six-series boot camp.

The series launched in February and was created by the IAFE Safety and Security Committee. Relatively new, it was created in the spring of 2021 and is now one of the largest IAFE committees.

Marla Calico, IAFE president and CEO, said that in early 2021, IAFE board and staff were approached by various mem-



The six-series boot camp began last February and will culminate with an optional field trip to the South Carolina State Fair, Columbia, October 11-22, to explore their safety and security protocol and systems. COURTESY SOUTH CAROLINA STATE FAIR

bers to form two new committees, the Safety and Security Committee and the Ticketing Committee.

The idea was to add these two committees as Ad Hoc committees just to see what kind of interest they

would have. Both gained a lot of steam early on and the Ad Hoc was dropped and these committees be-

came regular educational program committees under the guidance of **Lori Hart**, IAFE's director of education and member services.

"Safety and security (issues) of fair patrons are of the highest priority for our member fairs," Hart said. "Each event works with their local community and stakeholders to identify potential risks and how to reduce said risks and be prepared to respond to incidents."

Among the topics being included in the Boot Camp series are communications, utilizing effective training programs, crowd management best practic-

► See IAFE, page 49

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► **IAFE**

Continued from page 48

es, crowd psychology and de-escalation.

As the series has progressed, Hart said members are adopting various safety preventative policies.

"Many member fairs are adopting a youth admission policy, which can include an age restriction without a parent or adult, and events are engaging in crowd control and active assailant training," Hart said. "With staffing, law enforcement and volunteer workforce shortages, the committee continues to evaluate and discuss what future security forces will look like."

Hart said de-escalation and training younger generations about de-escalation is another part of the safety and security policies she sees being addressed.

"The de-escalation courses are human behavior based," Hart said. "De-escalation training resonates with all ages and is based on age and relatable by all."

Hart also is seeing more fairs go to a clear bag policy and many are already utilizing metal detectors at the admission gates.

The Boot Camp will run through September and will culminate with an optional field trip to the **South Carolina State Fair**, Columbia, October 11-22, to explore their safety and security protocol and systems.

Calico said the proof of the need and the participation of the Safety and Security Committee became evident around July 2021.

"I received a call from the manager of a fair that had had a shooting on preview night," Calico said. "Before the day was out, there was a commitment from committee members to assist in helping him find metal detectors and formulate policies for the remainder of the fair that year."

This type of IAFE committee is open to any member, fair or associate, but only someone from a member fair can serve as chair of the committee.

•fairsandfestivals.com

Florida Governor signs bill limiting skate rink liability

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Florida Governor **Ron DeSantis** has signed into law a bill that could help reduce premiums for the dwindling number of roller-skating rinks in the state.

Senate Bill 1458, sponsored by state Senator **Clay Yarborough** of Jacksonville and others, absolves skate rinks of liability for the "inherent risks" of skating but requires the rinks to maintain safe operations and premises. The bill is of significance for an industry that is facing a difficult time in trying to survive.

Under the new law, in order to be eligible for protection, skating rink operators must maintain their floors, lights, walls and rental equipment in proper condition.

A similar bill has been passed in 11 other states.

This legislation is crucial, as noted by **Brian Cherry**, a partner of **United Skates of America, Inc.**, who has been involved in the industry for 35 years. In the past, there were over 200 skating rinks in Florida alone.

"We're down to 41," Cherry said.

The bill contends that owners "face great difficulty in obtaining liability insurance coverage at an affordable cost and that the lack of affordable insurance coverage affects not only owners of roller-skating rinks, but also persons who may suffer personal injuries or property damages as a result of accidents that occur on the premises of a roller-skating rink."

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BREAKING NEWS



The unusual configuration of Pipeline Paradise featured a Retro FlowRider next to a standard. COURTESY KINGS ISLAND

Water attraction closes at Kings Island's Soak City

AT: Jeffrey Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

MASON, Ohio — Guests were disappointed to learn that Pipeline Paradise, a popular surfing simulator attraction at Kings Island's Soak City Water Park did not reopen for the 2023 season. The park's general manager, Michael Koontz confirmed that the ride was scheduled to be dismantled due to rising maintenance costs and reliability issues.

Although attractions are expected to be retired as they reach the end of the service life, a FlowRider is very different from the typical water slide. Surfing simulators have become extremely popular over the last decade and have attracted groups and clubs who are used to spending their summer honing their skills at various FlowRiders across the country. There are now national competitions and FlowRider tours across the country. A number of guests had pre-purchased their 2023 season pass specifically to ride Soak City's FlowRider this coming season, and many own their own boards. Rumors had circulated for a few years, but, Kings Island made no announcement prior to the season that the FlowRider attraction, which opened in 1998, was going to be decommissioned.

In a letter to its fans, Koontz wrote: "After 24 years, the final decision has been made to decommission and remove Pipeline Paradise effective this year because it has reached the end of its service life. As one of the longest-operating FlowRiders in the world, it has provided many guests and avid fans with enjoyment and the opportunity to learn how to 'surf' and meet new friends with a similar passion."

On top of all this, one of the chutes on Pipeline Paradise, which could accommodate three surfers simultaneously, was a Retro FlowRider, a less common configuration that included a backwater curl. There are only a few of these types of rides left.

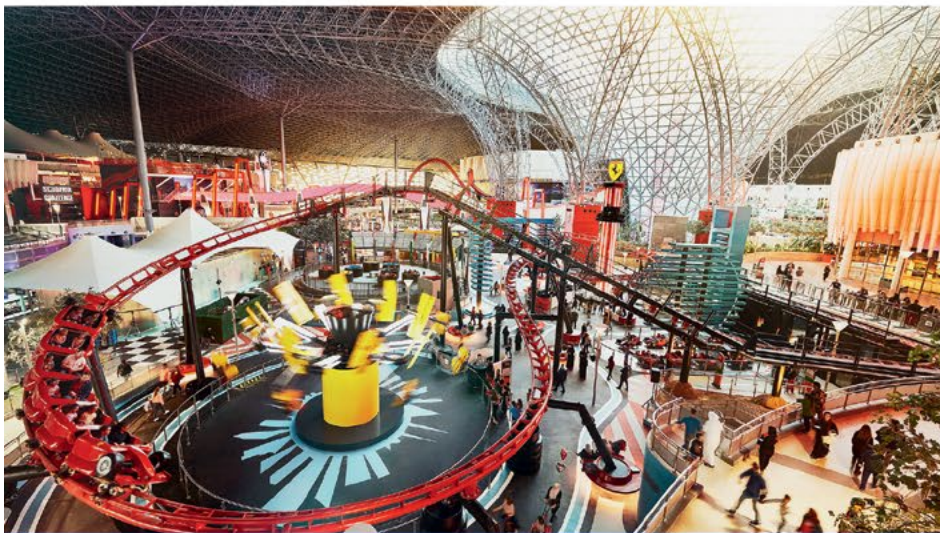
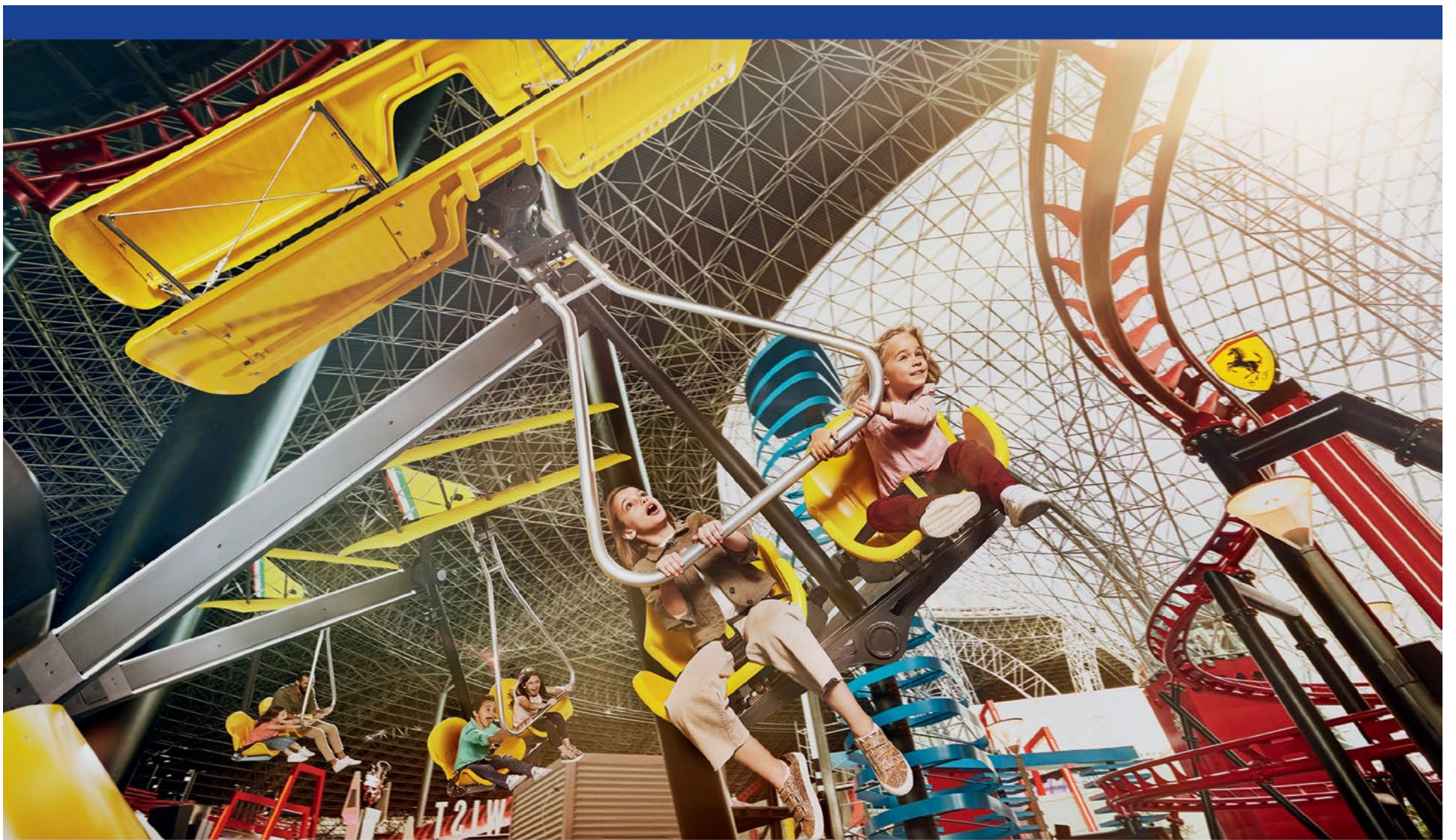
Several clubs, and even the Flowboarders Worldwide social media group, have started petitions to try to persuade Kings Island's management to change their minds. Soak City made no indication that there might be a replacement. Although surf simulators have been appearing everywhere — including stand-alone facilities — according to Flowboarders Worldwide, the next closest FlowRider to Kings Island is a two-hour drive away. Kings Island / Soak City is located a little more than 20 miles from the heart of the Cincinnati Tri-State metropolitan area with a population of nearly 2.3 million.

The first FlowRider opened in 1991 when Tom Lochtefeld developed a water park attraction to simulate the riding of waves in the ocean. Dubbed a FlowRider, the first one opened in Texas, with the help of Jeff Henry of Schlitterbahn, at the family's water park resort on the banks of the Comal River in New Braunfels. Although it has been reconfigured over the years, it is still in operation.

Now, more than 30 years later, FlowRiders can be found at more than 200 water parks, resorts and cruise ships all around the world. Flowboarding, the act of riding boards on FlowRiders has become a popular sport. Professional Flowboarders began touring worldwide in 2006 to promote the sport.

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