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Digital Edition

The Smoky Mountains welcomes Golden Ticket Awards

Dollywood showers amusement industry with southern hospitality

PIGEON FORGE, Tenn. — Although smaller ripples from the global pandemic still exist, the return to normalcy has been a blessing, one of which is the ability to gather together and share.

Amusement Today was pleased to welcome everyone back in 2022 with the return of the Golden Ticket Awards event. This year is the 25th anniversary of the global acknowledgments, and the excitement is bigger than ever.

The host park, **Dollywood**, welcomed industry colleagues from park operators to vendors to suppliers and various service providers.

"We are very proud to host our colleagues in the amusement industry at Dollywood Parks and Resorts. True hospitality is what we strive for every day, and it will be special hosting the Best of the Best," **Eugene Naughton**, Dollywood Parks and Resorts president, told *Amusement Today*.

For a quarter century, *Amusement Today* has assembled some of the most knowledgeable and passionate travelers to share their expertise. The panel of voters is never the same from year to year, so each rollout of awards always comes with some new winners and some interesting surprises. The first set of awards in 1998 consisted of a dozen categories printed in a small, eight-page insert in the August issue of *AT*. Over the years, the categories have evolved, the size of the panelist group



Dollywood's new Big Bear Mountain (above) was on tap for Golden Ticket Awards attendees. Dollywood's DreamMore Resort (right) was ideal for networking. AT/TIM BALDWIN

has grown, suppliers and journalists have become involved in industry-only categories, and the awards themselves have transformed into The Networking Event of the Year.

As the host hotel, Dollywood's **DreamMore Resort** provided ample locations and opportunities to sit back, relax and share "industry talk."

"There is a value that you can't put a price on when it comes to meeting in person," said *AT* Publisher **Gary Slade**. "We never stop learning from each other and encouraging each other."

"It's so easy to get caught up in weather woes and routine snafus. It is good for the soul to gather and celebrate the endless positives the amusement industry provides to guests every year," said **Tim Baldwin**, Golden Ticket

Awards Communications Coordinator. "Seeing these friends — and making new ones — within this atmosphere is energizing. We don't just need that as professionals, we need it as human beings. It is invigorating."

Dollywood opened its gates in 1986 after **Dolly Parton** — against the wishes of her advisors — decided she wanted a theme park in her Smoky Mountains. Taking a property dating back to 1961 (Rebel Railroad) that grew under many names, including **Silver Dollar City**, and partnering with **Jack and Pete Herschend**, she infused her spirit and love for the Smokies — and people in general — bringing life to the park it had never seen before. Decades later, it welcomes millions of people each year, has added a water park, is putting the



final touches on a second resort hotel and has long-range plans to continue its exponential growth.

New for 2023 was the largest investment by the park into a single attraction. The expansion of Wildwood Grove saw the addition of Big Bear Mountain, an enormous family roller coaster supplied by **Vekoma**. The triple-launch roller coaster is the longest in the park's arsenal of 10. Attendees of the Golden Ticket Awards got to enjoy it firsthand.

Winners were announced in 23 categories inside Dollywood's Showstreet Palace Theater on September 9. In addi-

tion to those awards, two Publisher's Picks acknowledged success in industry practices, and Golden Ticket Awards Legends cast a spotlight on parks and people that serve as inspiration to the entire amusement industry.

Attendees were able to observe and enjoy the numerous attractions, food, entertainment and ambiance of Dollywood during the event. Full coverage of the Golden Ticket Awards will appear in the November 1 issue of *Amusement Today*.

All stories this issue
by Tim Baldwin
unless otherwise noted



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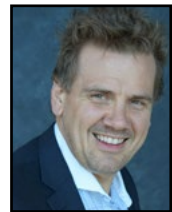
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GOLDEN TICKET AWARDS

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

Making the stars brighter



Robinson

There is nothing quite like how the stars shine in the night sky of Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains. The natural beauty of the area has helped lure tourists and sightseers to the area for generations.

And, it's no secret that Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge have drawn more tourists than most over the years. With the main roads lined with one-of-a-kind attractions, shops, restaurants, minigolf and amusement rides, people flock to the area seeking an escape and unique finds.

When I was a kid, visiting the World of Illusions (now closed) was a priority. Those little unique attractions were what the area was known for and considered must-dos. Even with a couple small amusement parks and water parks along the main corridor, it was the unique attractions that lured guests through their turnstiles.

That is, until one of those small amusement parks found itself under new ownership and with a new partner. Silver Dollar City became Dollywood. And while the park started as a curiosity of a theme park in the Smoky Mountains ... it has evolved each and every year so that now it is one of the primary reasons to visit the Smokies. In fact, it is a safe wager that Dollywood and Pigeon Forge/Gatlinburg, Tennessee, have become synonymous to the American — and international — public.

Dolly Parton and Herschend Family Enterprises have helped make the lure of Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains brighter than ever. It's no longer just a getaway for a weekend or a side trip en route to somewhere else. It is a true vacation destination known for southern hospitality, a beautiful natural setting and one-of-a-kind cooking.

There's nothing quite like the stars shining over Tennessee. However, they seem to shine a little brighter — and have so many more people noticing them — thanks to the efforts of Herschend Family Entertainment, Dolly Parton ... and the evolution of Dollywood.

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

FLINT'S VIEW: Bubba Flint



AMUSEMENT VOICE: Tim Baldwin, Golden Ticket Awards Communications Coordinator

The importance of family

On occasion, I'm asked if I notice industry "trends." The amusement industry is always growing, always changing, always innovating. But some things remain constant. One of those things that have always been at the forefront is the importance of family. Parents bringing kids to an amusement park has been the lifeblood of the industry. Yes, thrill-seekers can sometimes drive revenue, but families are undeniably woven into the fabric of what parks do day in and day out.

A clear trend is the emergence of suppliers making efforts for families to ride together. Children's rides aren't the same as family rides. Family rides are made for everyone. They aren't pulse-pounding, but they offer enough thrills for everyone to enjoy. Not only are manufacturers creating new and fun family coasters, but parks are buying them. With each year, a noticeable crop of diverse family attractions is populating the attractions industry landscape, and more have already been announced for 2024.



Baldwin

To recognize this, the Amusement Today team has introduced a new category, Best Family Coaster. Specific qualifications had to be met to fulfill the requirements of the category, which are explained elsewhere in this issue. In so doing, AT can shine a spotlight on that segment of the industry that doesn't necessarily tower over the park's skyline. Kids are always wanting to take that next step up. These rides fulfill a very valuable need.

In the past, the Best New Roller Coaster Award has leaned toward the bigger thrills, so this category joins Best New Family Attraction to recognize what is also important.

Filling that gap between kiddie and extreme is a solid move by park operators. In creating those lifelong memories, it helps build a future audience. For any child to ride with their parents on his or her first roller coaster is an unforgettable experience for both of them.

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GOLDEN TICKET AWARDS™

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After quarter century, Golden Tickets have lasting impact for winners

For 25 years, the **Golden Ticket Awards (GTA)** have celebrated the attractions industry. Held each fall at a park in the United States, the awards are as much a celebration of the people of the industry as they are the places millions of guests visit each year.

When asked what makes the GTAs so special, words such as unique, an honor, a goal, a tribute and fun are echoed among past winners.

Dollywood Parks and Resorts, 2023's GTA host and previous award-winning park, points to the annual event as a shared honor. "Our operating teams work hard to exceed the expectations of our guests every single day. The Golden Ticket Awards confirm our hosts' hard work and are a tangible way of showing them the importance of every single interaction with our guests," shared **Wes Ramey**, public relations director, Dollywood Parks and Resorts. "Our teams take pride in their awards; many of them have trophy cases in their offices where they proudly display their winning Golden Tickets."

A beloved park, and frequent GTA recipient, Dollywood has celebrated



Dick Knoebel — flanked by AT Publisher Gary Slade and his sons Brian and Rick Knoebel — was surprised in 2022 as a recipient of the GTA Legend Award (above). Ed Hodgdon's work with NEAAPA during the global pandemic saw him recognized in 2020 with a Golden Ticket Leadership Award (inset).

AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON; COURTESY NEAAPA



multiple wins across several award categories, including Best Guest Experience, Best Kids Area and Best Christmas Event, an honor earned consecutively for more than 10 years. And while the filled trophy cases are beautiful to look at, Ramey further explained, "As Dollywood has continued to grow in stature, the

Golden Ticket Award wins have served as a barometer of sorts, helping us gauge how we are regarded within the industry. These wins illustrate that many of the decisions we recently made — such as the additions of Wildwood Grove and Big Bear Mountain — were undoubtedly the right decisions for our park. The

Last year, Knoebels brought home a truly special award honoring **Dick Knoebel**, the park's patriarch, as a 2022 Golden Ticket Award Legend. The Legend Award is a standout honor for both the person, and the facility, attraction or company they represent. Its presentation is often the most emotional and moving part of the ceremony.

With his two sons by his side, Knoebel, a third-generation family member and park co-owner, accepted the award in front of all attendees. Looking back at the moment, he shared, "It was a total surprise. I feel very honored and humbled. I know I received this with the help of my staff and everyone involved. They are a part of this award just as much as I am, and I would not have earned it without them."

The 2023 Golden Ticket Awards again brings Knoebel and his team together with industry representatives to celebrate the next incoming 2023 class of awards and the year's new Legend winners.

Reflecting on his father's honor, Brian Knoebel shared how a Golden Ticket Award is more than another award to display and brag about. "The awards truly are a great celebration of our industry and everyone who works in it. Each year, **Gary (Slade)**, **Tim (Baldwin)** and the full *Amusement Today* team put together a weekend that is relaxed and supportive. It has flourished over the years and become both a homecoming and a tradition for us. The Golden Ticket Awards allows us to celebrate the success of our team as well as the other parks that work just as hard

awards also reinforce that the overall park and guest experience are on par with key experiences that traditionally have been considered the absolute best attractions in the world."

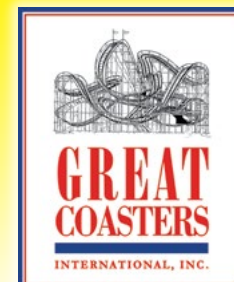
Family-owned and operated **Knoebels Amusement Resort** also looks at a GTA win as one that celebrates its entire staff. "It is absolutely an annual goal for our team to try to achieve this honor," said **Brian Knoebel**, fourth-generation Knoebel family member and co-owner. "Each year during the awards program, they anxiously wait to hear from those of us in attendance if we have earned a Golden Ticket. A Golden Ticket Award is an incredible way for us to show our team that their efforts each year truly make a difference."



After the 2017 Golden Ticket Awards ceremony, winners took a group shot before taking their accomplishments back to their host parks. COURTESY DAN FEICHT

► See **IMPACT**, page 7

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GOLDEN TICKET AWARDS

As part of the GTA events, John Arie Jr. and the Fun Spot America team enjoy experiencing other places, other operations and new attractions — such as Cedar Point's Valravn — to help grow as industry professionals and have a little fun (above left). Dollywood's Pete Owens poses with an award at the 2018 Golden Tickets in Branson, Missouri (above middle). The GTAs have marked themselves as a celebration and a place for fun, as Hunter Novotny of Larson International discovered during the 2019 event, falling prey to the antics of Silverwood's Marshal Jack (above right). COURTESY CEDAR POINT, SILVER DOLLAR CITY; AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON

►IMPACT

Continued from page 6

as we do for our guests.”

While rides, attractions, food and industry innovation are key categories the GTAs are most known for, personal work, support and passion for the industry are also highlighted. In 2020, **Ed Hodgdon**, secretary for the **New England Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (NEAAPA)** was honored during the first-ever virtual GTA event. Hodgdon was highlighted for his work guiding NEAAPA to take proactive measures and action while supporting association members during and through the pandemic.

Reflecting on his win he shared, “I was shocked and moved when I learned that I won a Golden Ticket. I was just doing my job, the best way I knew how during an unprecedented moment for the industry. My role was to be a resource for the members of NEAAPA. I wanted to pitch in and help, and not sit on the sidelines or wait to be told what to do. I felt it was my duty and responsibility to get information out and to provide a forum for people to come together and communicate with each

other. To be recognized with a Golden Ticket meant — means! — so much to me.” Like many others, Hodgdon has the GTA weekend marked on his calendar. He joked that the song “See you in September” is as much a medley as a promise to connect with friends, old and new.

For **Fun Spot America Theme Parks**, based in Orlando, Florida, attending the GTAs is also a fall weekend must. Like the Golden Tickets, 2023 is the company's 25th anniversary. Over the years, earning a Golden Ticket has become a recognition that went from once seeming out of reach, to a goal, to reality. Fun Spot earned its first-ever Golden Ticket for Breakout Family Entertainment Center 2020/2021 for its newest property in Fayetteville, Georgia, **Fun Spot America Atlanta**. Two years later the recognition award means just as much today as it did then.

“What does winning a Golden Ticket mean to Fun Spot America? It is HUGE!” shared **John Arie Jr.**, president and CEO, Fun Spot America Theme Parks. “Our team has worked so hard for the past 25 years to impress the world, and I'm proud of everyone's efforts. We

earned this award for our first park outside of Florida. When we purchased the location, it meant our growing management team split a lot of time between the two states, ensuring each location provided safe, clean fun for everyone. When it was announced Fun Spot America Atlanta won a GTA, I felt like we had arrived.

“Earlier this year we opened our largest coaster ever, ArieForce One, at the Atlanta park,” he continued. “It has been nominated for a 2023 award, and we are thrilled. You could say the GTAs helped us elevate our recognition within the industry and given us a springboard to communicate our brand to more people than ever.”

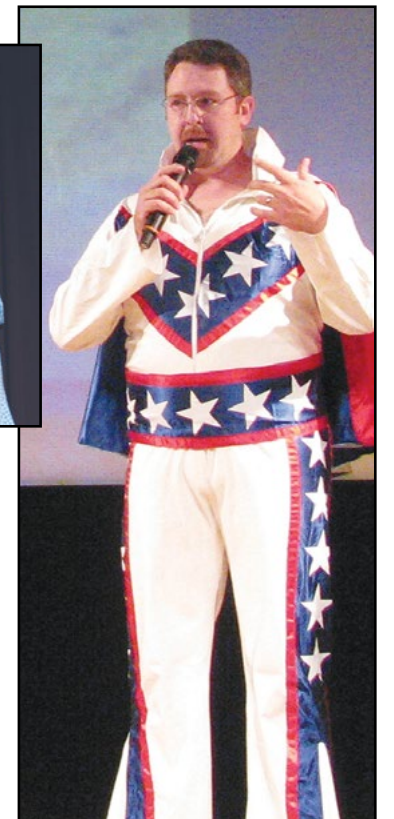
Unlike other award shows held in ballrooms or meeting spaces, with attendees dressed to the nines, attendees walk the parks they love to award and talk about. Moving each year, the event is held at a park or facility allowing for casual networking, connecting and, yes, fun. The GTAs provide host parks with the opportunity to highlight new rides and attractions, favorite foods and most importantly, their teams. Over the years, additional events have unofficially become part of the

“Golden Ticket Weekend” including the golf tournament to benefit the **National Roller Coaster Museum**. Special tours and experiences at the host park, as well as opportunities to experience smaller local attractions, broaden the weekend and build up to the ceremony itself.

Amidst the sights and sounds of the host facility, GTA attendees and nominees mingle and mix, sharing not only what is new with their companies but also the latest with their families.

“Twenty-five years of anything is a milestone, and what Gary has done with the GTAs is incredible,” Dick Knoebel shared. “The impact the awards have made by highlighting the many ways parks, manufacturers, suppliers and industry personnel work to keep our industry moving forward is unmatched. Together with my team, I will attend the GTAs each year and celebrate my park, my colleagues and my friends.”

—Susan Storey



The GTA ceremonies have provided countless one-of-a-kind memories and moments, including Pat Koch's showstopping Carol Burnett homage (shown above with AT Publisher Gary Slade) and Jeff Pike of Skyline Attractions presenting dressed in an Evel Knievel jumpsuit (right). COURTESY S. MADONNA HORCHER; AT/FILE



GOLDEN TICKET AWARDS

Dollywood takes Best Park; Schlitterbahn doesn't let record slip

One of the hardest Golden Tickets to obtain, the category of **Best Park** has only been won by three parks. **Cedar Point** carried the category for 16 years. In a long process of working its way up the ladder year after year, **Europa-Park** accomplished what was thought impossible and dethroned the Sandusky giant in 2014. This year, a new park has followed that same playbook — **Dollywood**.

In 2018, the park came in fourth. In 2019, it was rated third place. Since then, it has landed in the No. 2 spot. This year, Dollywood has worked its way to the top taking Best Park for the first time.

"Wow! It is an incredible honor to be named as Best Park by the Golden Ticket voters, but, really, we are the best among the best," said **Eugene Naughton**, park president. "I know **Dolly** and our whole team are proud and will cherish this award. It will, however, make us strive



For the first time ever, Dollywood takes the Best Park category. It is only the third park to do so. AT/TIM BALDWIN

to get even better for our guests and our hosts."

Dollywood was a finalist in nine categories and took five Golden Tickets among them.

Europa-Park finished strongly at No. 2. Being a finalist in eight categories

speaks toward the park's quality and popularity. With a brand-new land under construction for 2024, including a major roller coaster, can the park pull off an upset next year? Voters will decide.

Universal Islands of

Adventure inches up a spot to No. 3. With the popularity of its recent **VelociCoaster** bringing in throngs of people, the highly themed park has lots of fans. The **Wizarding World of Harry Potter** also continues to

retain robust popularity.

Phantasialand (No. 4) in Germany keeps its hold as a finalist in this category. This park added a steam-punk-themed masterpiece, **Rookburgh**, in 2021 that quickly put the park on enthusiasts' bucket lists. Elaborate theming, original stories and inviting resort hotels make the park world class.

The finalists welcome a new contender. **Kings Island** enters the group at No. 5. Fans old enough will remember being introduced to the park via **The Brady Bunch** and **Partridge Family** television shows. Now 50 years later, the park boasts 14 roller coasters, with a 15th on the way. The well-maintained grounds make for the quintessential hometown theme park, and its locals are very loyal.

For **Best Water Park**, **Schlitterbahn** makes it 25 years in a row. Since the

▶ See BEST, page 10

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► **BEST**

Continued from page 8

Golden Tickets were created in 1998, this is the one category that has been undefeated.

"Twenty-five years! WOW! This is an incredible accolade for Schlitterbahn New Braunfels. We never take such an amazing recognition as this Golden Ticket for granted," said **Darren Hill**, vice president and general manager. "This award motivates our team to work harder each day to provide a unique, one-of-a-kind, charming experience for all our guests. We greatly appreciate our fans and *Amusement Today* for recognizing Schlitterbahn as the World's Best Water Park once again."

Schlitterbahn has already announced a new expansion for 2024 offering more activities for families.

Splashin' Safari, the self-proclaimed "Water Coaster Capitol of the World" keeps its high standing in the second-place spot. As **Holiday World's** water park, the

massive facility is included with admission to the theme park. The park has a legion of fans, both locally and from around the country.

Moving up a notch is **Volcano Bay** (No. 3) at **Universal Orlando Resort**. Volcano Bay is the youngest finalist on the list, having opened in 2017. The park's iconic volcano as a photogenic backdrop is just one aspect of the elaborate theming waiting for guests.

Hyland Hills Water World (No. 4) in the Denver suburbs occupies 70 acres, making it one of the nation's largest water parks. Famous for its collection of "dark ride" water attractions and water coasters, the park offers numerous signature rides.

Completing the list of finalists is newcomer **Aquatica Orlando**. As **SeaWorld's** water park, the year-round destination has seen tremendous growth since it opened in 2008. One of the distinctions of Aquatica is the opportunity to interact with animals and marine life.

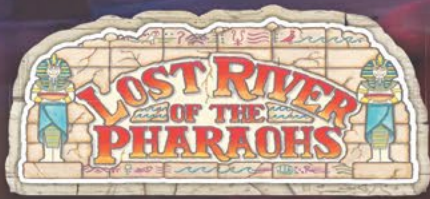


Schlitterbahn (above) wins the Golden Ticket Award for Best Water Park for the 25th time. It is the only winner from 1998 that has been undefeated. Splashin' Safari (right), "The Water Coaster Capitol of the World," hangs on to No. 2.
AT/TIM BALDWIN

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In 2006, *Amusement Today* was looking to expand the popular Golden Ticket Awards in an effort to shine further light on facets of the amusement industry. The Best of the Best had room to grow, as there was continual innovation and progress in attractions-based entertainment. One area that *AT* had not focused on was marine life parks. Those facilities concentrated heavily on shows, but rides eventually found their way into entertainment offerings.

Best Marine Life Park became a part of the Golden Tickets.

SeaWorld Orlando took the category that year — and every year after that.

The park opened in 1973. It was the third in the chain of SeaWorld parks, but Central Florida was a home run. Orlando hadn't yet evolved into the vacation destination of the world, but having a second park in the area was a next step.

Once acquired by **Anheuser-Busch** in 1989, the synergy with Busch Gardens parks helped fuel



Interaction with and preservation of the world living in the sea has always been the core mission of SeaWorld (above left). Paired with rides (above right) to align with this mission, SeaWorld Orlando was the perennial winner of Best Marine Life/Wildlife Park. COURTESY SEAWORLD; AT/TIM BALDWIN

growth. Today, the owner and operator is **SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment**. The direction of the park seems even more focused.

Its mission is stated on the website: "SeaWorld Entertainment's Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives identify ways the company is building a purpose-driven company to create experiences that matter and inspire

people to protect animals and the wild wonders of the world. The programs showcase the actions SeaWorld is taking to ensure the health and well-being of the animals in its care, rescue and protect animals in the wild, minimize the environmental impact of its operations and create a strong culture where employees are engaged and connected to the company's mission."



Early in 2023, the chain of parks celebrated 40,000 animal rescues. Other applaudable initiatives include plastic reduction, renewable energy, reducing waste and emissions and responsible food sourcing.

"At SeaWorld Orlando, our ambassadors wholeheartedly embrace our conservation mission through immersive training programs that emphasize the vital role we play in safeguarding our animals and their habitats," explains SeaWorld Orlando Park President **Jon Peterson**. "We instill the significance of conservation through interactive workshops, expert-led seminars and hands-on experiences, fostering a deep connection between our team and the animals we care for. Through these efforts, we ensure that every staff member is a passionate advocate for conservation, driving positive change

both within our park and beyond."

With SeaWorld Orlando the predominant winner, *AT* looked to expand the Golden Ticket category in 2019, making it **Best Marine Life/Wildlife Park**. This would expand the number of parks from the limited candidates strictly dedicated to marine life. New finalists found their way onto the charts, but voters were adamant — SeaWorld Orlando needed to stay on top. That remained unchanged.

In years past, big new rides help thrill guests, but there is always a connection to the water, environment and animals that brings a bigger picture to light.

Before retiring the category, *Amusement Today* recognizes SeaWorld Orlando as a team and the animals **Golden Ticket Awards Legend** for its continued conservation efforts, variety of entertainment and the connection it brings to people and their environment.



SeaWorld Orlando took the Golden Ticket 17 times. AT/TIM BALDWIN



THIS ISSUE SHALL GOLDEN TICKETS REVEAL;
Nominees and winners, with passion, zeal.
Riding coasters made of both wood and steel;
This great industry with such broad appeal.
Important today as we all look to heal,
For these past few years have been an ordeal.
Commitment so strong, it's almost unreal;

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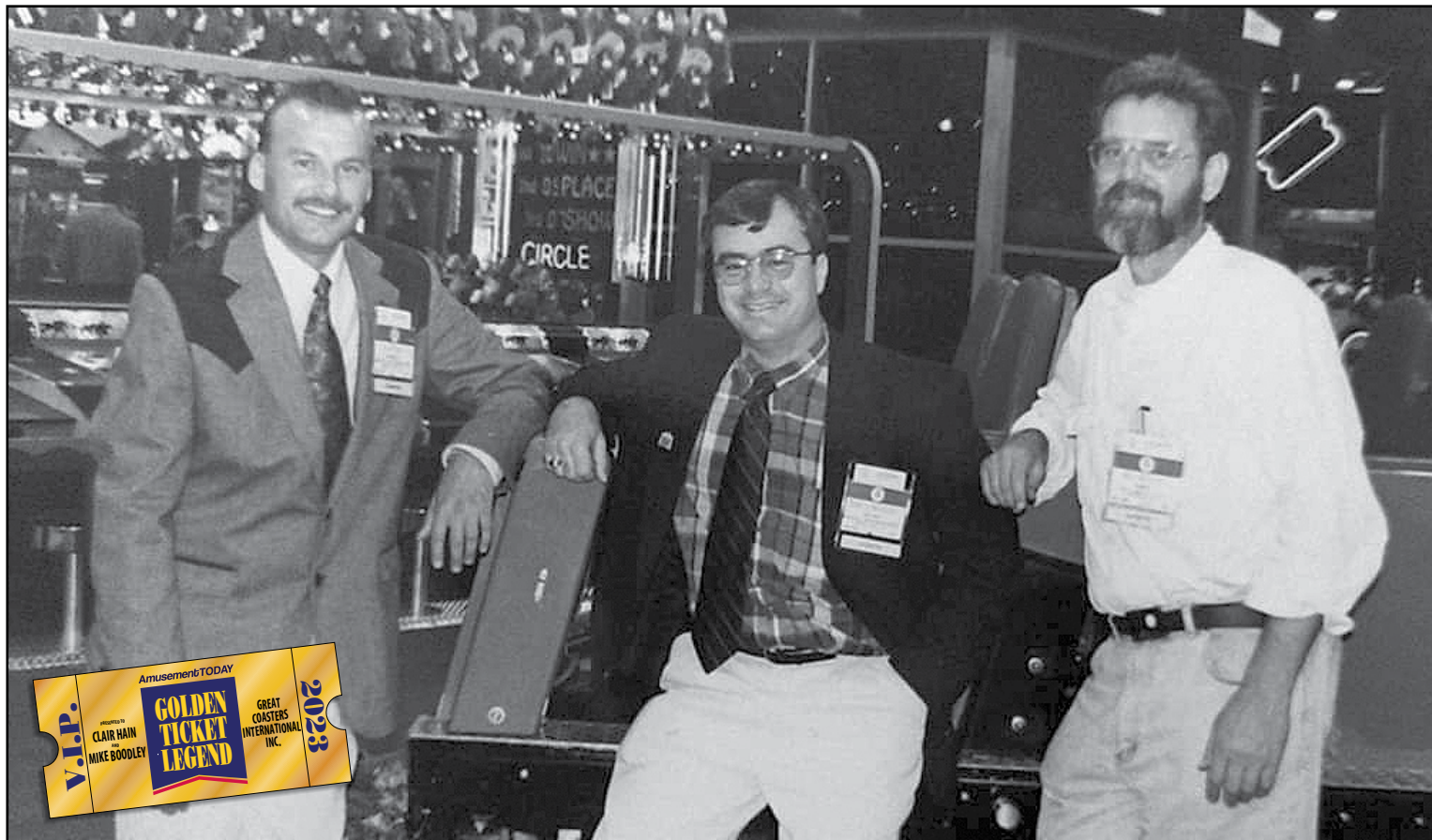
CONGRATS TO ALL, FROM
DENO'S WONDER WHEEL!

GTA Legends Hain, Boodley team to advance roller coaster design

As steel coasters overtook the number of wooden coasters in the 1970s and '80s, the wooden coaster could have potentially slipped into amusement industry history. **Charlie Dinn** and **Curtis Summers** began to revive the genre by the late 1980s. Dinn's daughter, **Denise Dinn Larrick**, followed in her father's footsteps at his retirement and established **Custom Coasters Inc.** Wooden coasters were making a comeback.

Part of the Custom Coasters team were **Clair Hain** and **Mike Boodley**. Hain was working in construction, while Boodley crafted the company's designs. Boodley was a freelance designer who had worked alongside **John Allen** of the **Philadelphia Toboggan Company** and **Dana Morgan** of **D.H. Morgan Manufacturing**.

Circumstances resulted in the pair separating from the company and starting a new venture. It was a challenge to start a new business in a highly competitive and limited field. **Great Coasters International, Inc.** (GCII) was established in 1994, exhibiting at the IAAPA Expo that year. **Hersheypark** took a chance on the startup company, and the partnership resulted in **Wildcat**, GCII's first installation in 1996. Lauded



Clair Hain (left), Mike Boodley (center) and Bill Kelly (right) represented GCII at the IAAPA Expo in 1994. COURTESY NRCMA ARCHIVES

by enthusiasts for its artistic fluidity and graceful curves, the thrilling woodie was the first of 34 wooden coasters built to date by GCII. The availability of new wooden coaster projects was alive and well.

Boodley and Hain worked together crafting several iconic attractions such as **Lightning Racer** at **Hersheypark**, **Gwazi** at **Busch Gardens Tampa Bay** and **Thunderhead** at **Dollywood**.

Along the way, innovations continued. An enthusiast by nature,

Boodley studied **Prior & Church's** work from the early 20th century and designed more-articulated vehicles. After introducing the **Millenium Flyer** trains, GCII was able to imagine designs with more compound curves, which made dramatically exciting elements possible. In time, layouts also took on a signature moment with several projects that included the "fly-through" moment in the station, which enhanced the exhilaration of awaiting riders.

Although Boodley

retired in the 21st century, he still assisted **Knoebels Amusement Resort** in problem-solving the issues associated with trying to recreate the **Flying Turns** concept.

Hain improved the track construction technique. Working with both wood and steel, he met the needs of the customer in terms of available space and financial budget. He also brought the strength of **Ipe wood** into GCII's designs. Eventually, **Titan Track** was developed and offered as a solution for

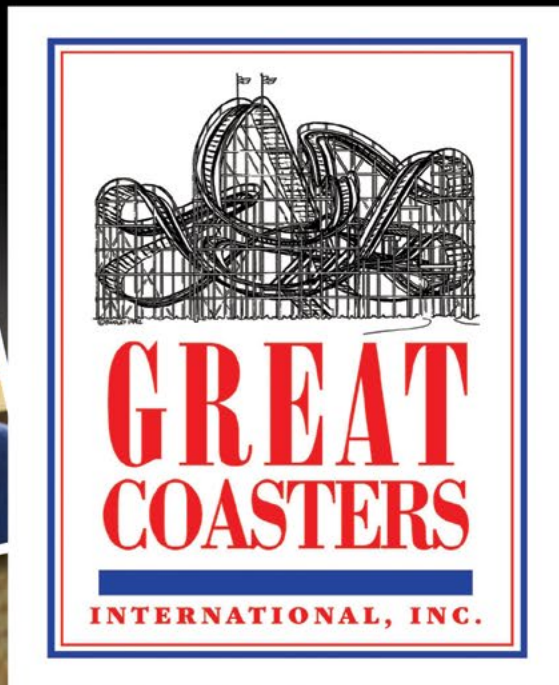
high-stress areas on wooden coasters, whether they were GCII's designs or not.

Infinity Flyer trains debuted this year. They are capable of even tighter turns and inversions if the customer requests such elements in a coaster.

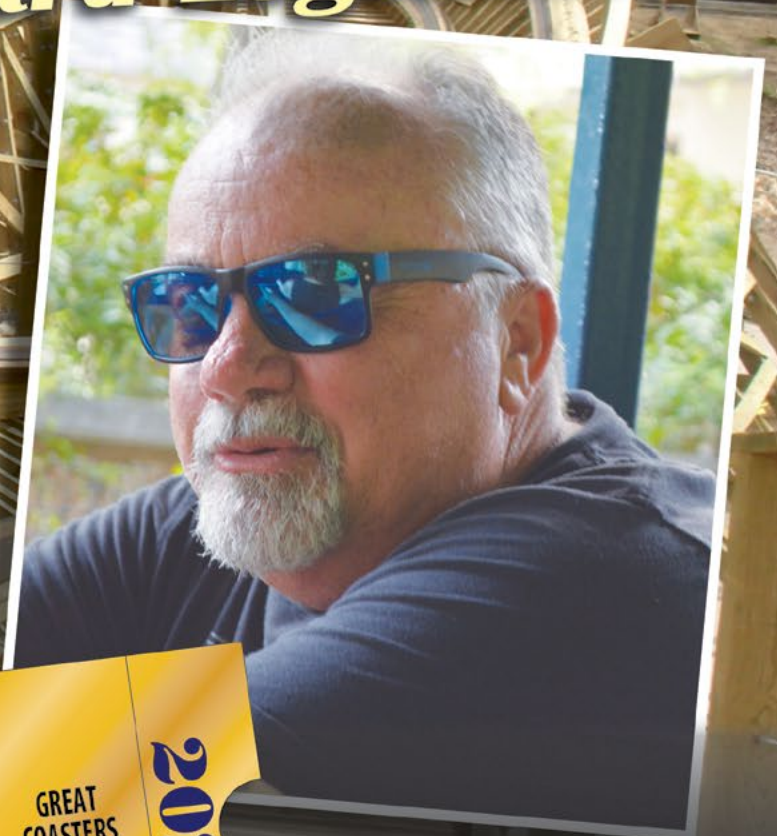
In acknowledgment of the work and advancement of wooden coasters brought to the industry by these two individuals, *Amusement Today* is excited to recognize Clair Hain and Mike Boodley as **Golden Ticket Award Legends**.



Dolly Parton poses with the GCII team in front of **Thunderhead** (above left). GCII's (l to r) Boodley, Chris Gray, Jeff Pike and Hain showcase the company's popular **Millenium Flyer** train with the front car from **Celebration City's Ozark Wildcat** during an IAAPA Expo (above right). AT/FILE



Great Coasters International, Inc. congratulates our two "Great" founders on being recognized as Golden Ticket Award Legends!



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Jack and Pete Herschend, Dolly Parton are honored as Legends

Bringing families closer together — that's what it has always been about.

When **Jack and Pete Herschend** opened their first attraction, Marvel Cave in Branson, Missouri, in 1950, it would have been impossible to even dream of the entity **Herschend Family Entertainment** and its parent company, **Herschend Enterprises**, have grown to become today. When **Silver Dollar City** expanded on the cave operation, the brothers were on their way to creating a legacy.

In time, Silver Dollar City became a world-renowned theme park. Today, it receives awards from numerous organizations and publications. As the park grew, one thing stayed consistent: The Herschends' commitment to creating welcoming places where families create memories worth repeating.

The company's 70 years of success is a credit to the deep-rooted culture of "Love in Action," built on the Herschend family values of kindness and caring. It is the belief of the company that love can be found at every Herschend property, every day, from the way guests are treated to how the company cares for its employees. It's a big departure from many corporations that put profit over people.

"Jack and Peter's fingerprints on our corporate culture began decades ago and still impact us today," said **Brad Thomas**, park president, Silver Dollar City. "The consultative decision making includes a variety of voices — even when the opinions may conflict. This has always been evident in their

conversations with front-line employees, and the board of directors always has diverse members with diverse backgrounds. They *hungered* for input."

In time, the Herschend brothers expanded again — to another state. Acquiring a property in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, Jack and Pete took possession of a destination with a great train but one that needed direction. More importantly, the Herschend touch gave it heart. The craftsmen and artists that the Branson location was famous for soon joined the mountain folks of Tennessee. The location had operated under many names, but a second Silver Dollar City made its own name in the Volunteer State.

But a bigger name entered the picture.

In 1982, **Barbara Walters** interviewed **Dolly Parton**, who expressed a desire to build a theme park in her hometown. The Herschend brothers recognized an opportunity and approached the country singer about a mutually beneficial partnership.

In 1986, the park reopened as **Dollywood**. In that first year alone, it had doubled the attendance of what the former Silver Dollar City had received the year before.

The partnership was more than just good business, it was the perfect pairing. Parton's name recognition was an incredible draw for building the success of the park. Over the decades, attendance has passed the three-million mark thanks to her influence. However, it was Parton's heart and soul that aligned with that



Jack and Peter Herschend (top left, seen with Mary Herschend) began the company with strong family values and respect and commitment to employees.

Once partnered with Dolly Parton (right) in the 1980s, the heart and soul of Herschend Family Entertainment aligned with that of the famous singer.

COURTESY SILVER DOLLAR CITY/DOLLYWOOD

of the Herschends. The importance of faith and family remained at the core of her decisions, as well as the brothers.

"Her values — including her love for others and her giving spirit — permeate the park and are truly what inspire our award-winning guest and host experience," said **Pete Owens**, vice president of marketing and public relations. "As hosts, we work each day to make her proud through the care we provide our guests. Her philanthropy efforts, especially through The Dollywood Foundation and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, should be a shining example to everyone on how we can each make a positive difference in the world around us."

When fires affected



families in the Smoky Mountain region, Parton was quick to react.

Outside of **Walt Disney**, rare is the park that bears the namesake of an individual person. But Parton's story resonates with guests, as does the honest southern hospitality instilled in the park. It is a reflection of her. Her principles are felt as guests walk through the park, and it earns respect. Each visitor is greeted with warmth and sincerity. The importance of kindness is at the heart of everything.

If only the world could take notice.

"Dollywood simply wouldn't be the same without Dolly; her busi-

ness acumen and wealth of ideas are unparalleled," said **Eugene Naughton**, park president. "However, I truly believe it is the inspiration she provides as our Dreamer-in-Chief that really does make Dollywood so different."

Working as a team and empowering each other is a driving factor for the Herschend properties. Because of their exemplary leadership, *Amusement Today* is proud to acknowledge the contributions to the amusement industry by Jack Herschend, Pete Herschend and Dolly Parton by recognizing them as **Golden Ticket Award Legends**.



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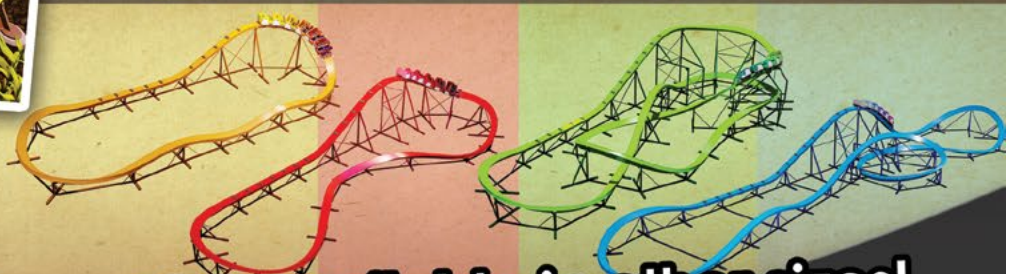
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In the past years, Fun Land of Fredericksburg has added fun new things both indoors and out. For 2023, the FEC installed two new rides. COURTESY FUN LAND OF FREDERICKSBURG

New additions lead to Breakout FEC going to Fun Land of Fredericksburg

In 2023, families found completely new offerings when it comes to family entertainment centers, as well as facilities that have shown notable growth.

Taking the Golden Ticket for **Breakout FEC** is **Fun Land of Fredericksburg**.

"Fun Land of Fredericksburg is an exciting brand filled with exciting attractions for guests of all ages, from three to 93," said **Wes Marks**, COO, **Five Star Parks & Attractions**. "Our dedication to safe, clean, fun has proven to be beneficial. We've already made some incredible upgrades to our Fun Land brands. In Fredericksburg, we have already completed a full redesign of our arcade and game floor. Our Fredericksburg location has been an excellent fit into the Five Star Parks portfolio, and we have exciting plans to grow and improve the park!"

The FEC offers rides and attractions outside, along with many activities and arcade games

inside. In the past few years, Fun Land has seen substantial growth. This year, the park opened two new rides.

By providing a diverse range of entertainment options, we give guests an opportunity to enjoy our offerings regardless of weather conditions, making us a top-of-mind destination all year," said Marks. "The indoor attractions provide an escape from unpredictable weather and offer a unique and immersive environment, while the outdoor rides capitalize on our natural surroundings and provide a refreshing outdoor experience. This balanced approach not only caters to different preferences but also enhances the park's overall appeal, ensuring that guests can fully experience our wonderful attractions through each season!"

Meow Wolf — The Real Unreal (No. 2) recently opened in Grapevine Texas, the fourth family entertainment art experience from the eclectic art colony and local Texan art-

ists. Inside, families enter other worlds through portals in a house, including sliding into washers and dryers, getting lost in other dimensions, activating sensory experiences and being immersed in imagination and color.

New FEC **Scene75 Chicagoland** (No. 3) is a recently opened facility delighting families in its 135,000-square-foot facility. Inside, 14 attractions and more than 150 arcade games provide endless entertainment.

Bolder (No. 4), a first-of-its-kind FEC, houses attractions from rope climbs to ice-skating to archery to simulated snow tubing within a pressurized dome. One of its most notable features is the via ferrata cliff climbing experience. Built in Grand Prairie, Texas, the innovative attraction houses 18 activities.

The fifth finalist is **Malibu Jacks Lafayette**. The Indiana installation is the fifth in the chain. It contains rides, Malibu Golf, laser tag, go-karts, bowling and more.

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Aeronautica Landing addition earns Turnstile Award for Carowinds

Having originally opened in 1973, **Carowinds** is celebrating its 50th anniversary this season. With each expansion and acquisition in recent years, the park has worked diligently to bring new life to areas around the property.

Blue Ridge Junction rethemed an area of the park with the southern culture of the Carolina mountains. Prior to that, County Fair gave a cohesive feel to a grouping of flat rides added to the park. In 2023, Carowinds added its most immersive themed area yet, Aeronautica Landing. A rethemed **Chance** Trabant and new bumper cars from **Majestic** complemented four new rides from **Zamperla**. The games and new dining/cocktail establishment further communicated the theme: the region's history with the birth of flight.

In addition to all the attractions, the use of artwork and a creative atmosphere gave Aeronautica Landing a sense of place. A 50th anniversary alone would have been enough to



Art, immersive theming and props make Aeronautica Landing a huge, new reason to keep visitors coming back to Carowinds. Six attractions anchor the new area.

AT/TIM BALDWIN

market, but management knew a bigger reason to come was the way to go.

With six rides in the area, there is something for everyone. All the attractions help keep the overarching theme, but small children can find something to ride, as can thrill seekers. The new area connects with a giant **Bolliger & Mabillard** inverted coast-



er that now has more exposure, increasing the ridership of one of the park's major assets.

"With the debut of Aeronautica Landing at Carowinds, we've seen a significant enhancement in the guest experience," said **Brian Oerding**, vice president and assistant

general manager. "This new aviation-themed area has not only boosted guest satisfaction scores but also introduced an immersive environment featuring five new rides,

a re-themed existing ride, engaging games, and two exciting new culinary offerings. It provides a diverse range of rides, blending state-of-the-art attractions with classic favorites, all contributing to the enrichment of Carowinds' legacy of themed family entertainment in honor of our 50th anniversary."

Cedar Fair gave considerable consideration to the color palette, landscaping, props and naming of the area attractions. The efforts clearly went beyond the simple installation of a ride package as all the décor in the area help tell a story. At the center is an artistic sculpture honoring those in the field of aviation.

Giving new and fresh offerings in a thoughtfully planned atmosphere bringing guests back again and again prompts *Amusement Today* to spotlight Carowinds on its 50th anniversary with the **Publisher's Pick Turnstile Award**.



Rides in the area range from family rides to bigger thrillers to make sure there is something for everyone in a family to enjoy. AT/TIM BALDWIN

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Makeover earns Kennywood Publisher's Pick Renaissance Award

When **Kennywood** opened before the turn of the 20th century, the park offered a clean and colorful place for families to have fun. The park in the Pittsburgh suburbs has enjoyed a 125th Celebration this season. Just in time, Kennywood has transformed itself into a new look and a new life.

Enhancements to the park have been ongoing in recent years. Fresh paint is everywhere. Nods to the park's past are found on murals and new signage. Four of the park's major roller coasters, including all three wooden coasters, have been painted in the last two years.

"We had the huge privilege of being involved with the refurbishment of four major coasters," said **Chris Baynum, Baynum Solutions**. "I just loved that they kept the colors of the wooden coasters that amusement park enthusiasts find memorable. They brought life back into them. With Phantom's Revenge, I think it was marketing genius that they brought in the guests to vote on the colors to use — and the guests hands down chose the right color with that purple. I don't know if



Kennywood could have done a better job than the way they did it."

Although new modern rides are still arriving at the park, a love for its classic rides, such as the only remaining **Traver Tumble Bug**, continues to give Kennywood its historic charm and multigenerational loyalty. New control systems from **Irvine Ondrey Engineering** have brought nonoperational rides back to life, and magnetic braking has modernized the efficiency of some of the coasters.

For returning guests and long-time fans, a new visual experience welcomes them. Bright enhancements make Kennywood fresh,



New paint, new signage and restored park elements bring colorful, new life back to Kennywood. AT/GARY SLADE

bringing back a visible and vibrant feel for its guests. Buildings have been transformed with new facades and interiors. Photo ops have been restored for countless selfies.

The park's beloved Pagoda offers a new look with whimsical signage. One side in fiery colors offers "Fire-Breathing Sausage," while the other side offers "Blizzard-Blast Creamery" in shades of blue for the ice cream offerings.

Although the new **Zamperla** Spinvation provides new thrills (complete with an Area 412 Gift Shop), established rides see a new look as well, giving them a colorful makeover that is both retro and current.

Behind the scenes, Kennywood has improved its safety for guests with a new high-tech security system at the front gate and



perimeter fencing.

"At the end of the 2021 season, we embarked on a journey to refresh Kennywood while remaining true to the park's iconic Pittsburgh roots in celebration of our 125th anniversary," said **Mark Pauls**, general manager. "Throughout these two years, the park has been enhanced, from the moment guests arrive at Kennywood, through the midway and onto several rides and attractions. Throughout the

transformation process, we have stayed true to Kennywood, beginning with the main entry. Our goal was to create a strong sense of arrival by adding murals throughout the tunnel onto the midway showcasing iconic points of Kennywood history and beloved attractions."

For bringing renewed energy to the park experience, *Amusement Today* honors Kennywood with the **Publisher's Pick Renaissance Award**.



New control systems and magnetic braking have modernized the efficiency of some of the coasters such as the classic **Thunderbolt**. AT/GARY SLADE



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Amusement Today's newest category, Best Family Coaster was won by Dollywood's new Big Bear Mountain. COURTESY DOLLYWOOD

It is all in the "Family" — Family Park, Family Attraction and Family Coaster

Recognizing the surging importance of family rides (see page 4), Amusement Today introduces a new category. **Best Family Coaster** shines a spotlight on roller coasters that deliver thrills to a wide demographic, not just the hardcore thrill seeker.

For this category, AT set guidelines:

- The height requirement had to be less than 48 inches.
- The speed had to be less than 50 mph.
- The coaster could not be in the dark.
- The ride could not go upside down.

Easily taking this category was **Big Bear Mountain**, the new-for-2023 coaster at **Dollywood**. Built by **Vekoma**, the family addition features multiple launches and is the park's longest roller coaster.

"Big Bear Mountain is a thrilling ride, but with its 39-inch height requirement, it directly appeals to families with younger kids," said **Wes Ramey**, public relations, Dollywood. "The reviews so far tell us that we've got a hit on our hands. I have two young kids myself who have ridden it over and over, and they have deemed it their favorite ride in the park. With Big Bear Mountain's immersive theming, it really is easy for kids — and even adults — to imagine they're going out on the search for Big Bear."

This was the second time Dollywood turned to Vekoma for a family coaster. Both are in the Wildwood Grove section.

"It was important to reach this wide demographic because at our heart, we look for attractions and experiences that allow the family unit to enjoy time together," said Ramey. "For many kids, this may be their first 'real' roller coaster; think of the memories Big Bear Mountain will provide them when they think back to that first roller coaster experience. We're proud that for many kids, Dollywood is where that memory will take place. Vekoma did an amazing job offering a ride everyone will enjoy for their own special reasons."

Slinky Dog Dash at **Disney's Hollywood Studios** took the No. 2 spot. Heavily themed to the *Toy Story* franchise, this coaster was built by **Mack Rides**. It, too, features a launch.

Fun Spot America Orlando takes the No. 3 spot with **Freedom Flyer**, a family suspended coaster from Vekoma. At multiple times, the ride flies riders over onlookers on the midway. The final helix offers mild but thrilling positive-G forces.

Coming very close to Freedom Flyer is **Wooden Warrior** (No. 4) at **Quassy Amusement Park**. The woodie from **The Gravity Group** helped put the small amusement park in Connecticut on the map for coaster lovers. It opened in 2011 and is one of the park's signature attractions.

Finishing up the category is **Big Thunder Mountain** (No. 5) at **Disneyland Paris**. The French variation is often considered to be the best

of this style of ride at all the Disney parks. It was manufactured by Vekoma, and in contrast to the other versions, most of it takes place on an island.

For a fourth year, **Dutch Wonderland** takes the Golden Ticket for **Best Family Park**.

"We are delighted to have welcomed families through our gates for 60 years, and to be a beloved part of so many childhood memories," said **Courtney Burkarth**, marketing director. "Dutch Wonderland opened in the heart of Pennsylvania in 1963 and now offers more than 30 rides, attractions and shows, as well as overnight accommodations on resort at the Old Mill Stream Campground and the world's first Cartoon Network Hotel. We look forward to continuing to bring magical fun to families for generations to come as the reigning Kingdom for Kids."

Santa's Village in Jefferson, New Hampshire, maintains its No. 2 spot. Themed to all things Christmas and winter and snow, the family park offers numerous rides and a water playground. It's hard not to catch the Christmas spirit during a visit, even in the heart of summer.

Jumping up two spots is another New Hampshire park, **Story Land** (No. 3). Cinderella, Daniel Tiger and more make their home in the park, and fanciful rides and play areas make for a

► See FAMILY, page 34

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FAMILY

Continued from page 32

perfect day for families to get out together. The family coasters and unique carousel are highlights.

Paultons Park (No. 4) in England delivers fun rides for all members of the family and adds landscaped beauty. Themed lands, including Peppa Pig World, offer small and moderate thrills, but all rides cater to family fun. The most recent land to be added was Tornado Springs.

Closing out this category is another 2022 finalist, **Legoland Florida**. Located in Winter Haven, this massive property offers a theme park, water park and second gate, **Peppa Pig Theme Park**. Kids (or adults) who love Legos will be amazed at all the sculptures and creativity that is prevalent throughout the park.



Mario Kart: Bowser's Challenge (above left) takes dark rides to a wacky and whimsical level. **Dutch Wonderland** (above right) takes Best Family Park for a fourth time. COURTESY UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOLLYWOOD, DUTCH WONDERLAND



Mario Kart: Bowser's Challenge takes the Golden Ticket for **Best New Family Attraction**. As part of the Super Nintendo World addition to **Universal Studios Hollywood**, the cutting-edge technology behind this virtual reality dark ride steers guests through underwater courses and adventures in the clouds.

Also in California is **Mickey & Minnie's Runaway**

Railway (No. 2) at the original **Disneyland**. This immersive dark ride uses the latest in visual technology to take families on a fun — and funny — larger-than-life adventure.

Draken Falls (No. 3), a flume from **Zamperla**, is a new anchor attraction at **Adventureland** in Iowa. The new ride brings a log ride back to the park's lineup after the retirement of

Adventureland's original flume several years back. It has been greeted with enthusiastic favor and has appropriately made a big splash.

Another flume, **Yuta Falls** (No. 4) at **Lost Island Theme Park**, provides splashing refreshment. Built by **Interlink**, the flume seats six riders. What makes this ride particularly special is the iconic waterwheel in the sky

that offers a thematic wow.

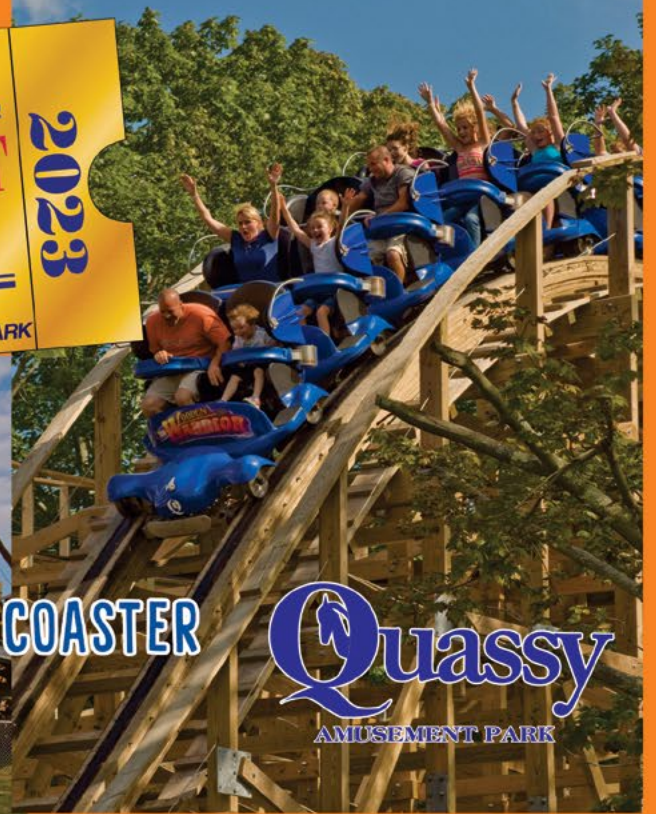
Treasure Hunt: The Ride (No. 5) is a stand-alone operation in Monterey, California. Built by **Sally Dark Rides** and **Daniels Wood Land**, the immersive experience welcomes visitors to discover new caverns and use "treasure collectors" to interact with the scenes. The attraction operates at the famous Cannery Row.

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Quassy Amusement Park's Eric Anderson takes Leadership Award

Each spring and early summer, *Amusement Today* opens up the Golden Ticket Awards for industry nominations. In those categories, the amusement industry itself not only submits them but votes for them. One of the categories is the Leadership Award, which focuses on the efforts and dedication of an individual, company or park. The results of this award are not tabulated from AT's enthusiast panel, but by attractions professionals, who evaluated the attributes of each nominee.

Of the selections provided, **Eric Anderson** of **Quassy Amusement Park** was the winning nominee.

Part of the nomination read: "Eric's vision and implementation of it helped save one of the nation's oldest family-owned parks. In 2002, the park embraced a plan to turn the century-old property around with the debut of water park elements. Since then, Quassy has had a rebirth with the addition of more than a dozen new rides, water park attractions, as well as a cashless system to streamline operations."

"I recall the time years



Eric Anderson has overseen the growth and survival of Quassy Amusement Park, making it the success it is today. AT/TIM BALDWIN

ago when one of his sons returned from a visit to a theme park and said, 'Dad, you've got to do something to turn Quassy around,'" said **Ron Gustafson**, public relations (retired), Quassy Amusement Park. "The advent of water park development was the first step 20 years ago, and its success led to the installation of the Wooden Warrior roller coaster. Eric's vision really helped make Quassy the jewel it is today. He saved the park."

Last year, the park

became the smallest family-owned facility to open a water coaster in its Splash Away Bay Waterpark. The television commercial introducing the new ride was honored with an IAAPA Brass Ring Award. Under his leadership, the park has recorded banner seasons and remains non-gated as it has since it opened in 1908.

Three other individuals made a close race for second. Emerging ahead in the group is **Dennis Clevenger** of **Silver Dollar City**. He serves as the vice

president of maintenance and construction.

For more than 40 seasons, Clevenger's leadership has helped build the Silver Dollar City brand and impacted the entire industry.



Clevenger

Clevenger has led construction efforts for the park's largest investments, which include two family areas, three world-footprint record-breakers and a recent \$14 million parking renovation and enlargement. The new-for-2024 addition, the largest investment by the park to date, will also be under his purview.

"From ride installations to park improvements and industry-firsts, Dennis has worked tirelessly to transform the park's guest experiences," said **Brad Thomas**, park president. "Dennis' true passion for the Ozarks is evident as he protects the trees and landscape of the park while honoring the area's history."

David Bromilow of **Mobaro** has had many roles. Bromilow exemplifies leadership because of his exceptional achievements and contributions to the industry. With 46 years dedicated to engineering, operations and

safety, he has been a pioneer in ride safety inspections, serving globally since 1985. In prominent roles of IAAPA and AIMS, he has worked tirelessly to improve safety standards and has mentored young professionals. His expertise, extensive experience and commitment make him a true leader.



Bromilow

The nomination noted many of Bromilow's roles and achievements: Chairman IAAPA Global Safety Committee, President of AIMS, ASTM F24 committee member and the Lifetime Achievement/Service Award, IAAPA 2020.

Bromilow's work as a mentor for young industry professionals and his work with parks globally on maintenance and safety programs — which drove industry standards — were also noted.

Mike Koontz, vice president and general manager of **Kings Island**, began his career in finance at the park in the late 1990s. With a career that spanned different parks and various roles, he has been at the helm of Kings Island since 2017.

In that time, the park implemented many changes under his leadership to improve the guest experience. 2018 saw the initiation of a culinary program, which enhanced the park's food locations. In 2019, he rallied behind guests' requests for the return of a beloved attraction. He was integral in the decisions on



Koontz

how to best celebrate the park's 50th anniversary in 2022, with investments in restoration, refurbishment and entertainment.

Also, Koontz hosts an annual Seasonal Leadership Summit.

Leadership Award: Honorable Mentions

Evan Barnett, president of the **Pyek Group**, exemplifies unparalleled leadership in transforming **Typhoon Texas** and **Cowabunga Vegas** water parks into industry powerhouses. With his visionary strategies and unwavering commitment to excellence, Barnett has taken these water park destinations to new heights, setting new benchmarks and revolutionizing the water park industry.

Under Barnett's leadership, Typhoon Texas and Cowabunga Vegas water parks have experienced remarkable growth and success. Through his innovative approach, he has created immersive experiences that combine thrilling rides, top-notch amenities, and exceptional customer service. Barnett's keen understanding of market trends and consumer demands has enabled him to continuously enhance the parks' offerings, attracting a wide range of visitors and ensuring their satisfaction.

Barnett's commitment to sustainability sets him apart as an exceptional leader. He has implemented eco-friendly initiatives that minimize the parks' environmental impact, such as water conservation efforts and the use of renewable energy sources.

Steve Thomas of **Traders Village** has taken his small facility and significantly increased revenues and attendance over the past two years. In addition, he's overseen a significant reduction in attrition for employees, all while managing a complicated ride relocation — in addition to operating in a crowded market for tourist and travel dollars.

Steve has built a strong rapport with his staff members, helping to retain dependable employees while many parks are suffering with staffing.

His long career in the industry has helped him develop a passion for it, as well as a desire to bring efficiency to the place of business.



Thank you, Amusement Today, for recognizing Eric Anderson,
President of Quassy Amusement & Waterpark,
with the 2023 Leadership Award.

WOODEN WARRIOR - RECOGNIZED AS ONE OF THE BEST FAMILY COASTERS

Splashin' Safari beats itself, Valhalla returns, new finalists all-around

It's not often that a park creates an upset for itself, but **Splashin' Safari** pulled it off. After **Wildebeest** took hold of the Golden Ticket for **Best Water Park Ride**, it rode with it for 12 years straight. While that popular ride slips to second place, its larger counterpart adjacent to it creates some sibling rivalry within the 2023 panel. **Mammoth**, a six-passenger water coaster, charges its way to the prize. Both attractions are from **ProSlide Technology**.

"We call ourselves the Water Coaster Capital of the World, but this seals the deal!" said **Leah Koch-Blumhardt**, director of communications. "It's amazing to think we've dethroned ourselves for Best Water Park Ride, but it's not surprising. Our guests love Mammoth because they get to watch reactions from friends and family as they ride together."

Krakatau Aqua Coaster at **Universal's Volcano Bay** (No. 3), also from ProSlide, sends riders zipping and plunging through the caverns and tunnels of the park's iconic centerpiece. It seats up to four passengers.

New to the list is **Lost River of the Pharaohs** at **(Hyland Hills) Water World** (No. 4). This heavily themed multi-passenger attraction sends tubers into a mysterious temple, complete with statues, animated props, projections, treasure and lasers. The attraction combines a waterslide-type beginning with a slow river journey through the perils of the temple.

Completing the list of finalists is **Cheetah Chase** at Splashin' Safari. The park



Mammoth at **Holiday World & Splashin' Safari** (above) is the latest victor for **Best Water Park Ride**. **Valhalla** (below) returns after a temporary absence to be reimagined — and reclaims the Golden Ticket. COURTESY HOLIDAY WORLD, BLACKPOOL PLEASURE BEACH

touts it as the first launched water coaster, with riders speeding along side by side. With three of the top five finalists, **Holiday World's** water park dominates the charts in 2023.

Valhalla is back! After a two-year thematic overhaul, the splashing fun on **Blackpool Pleasure Beach's** indoor adventure reclaims **Best Water Ride**. Built by **Intamin**, the heavily themed flume ride had its Viking storyline and sets upgraded. Fans have been excited to see it reopen.

Amanda Thompson OBE, CEO Blackpool Pleasure Beach, said, "We are once again absolutely delighted to receive the Golden Ticket Award for Valhalla. To be voted Best Water Ride for a seventh time is amazing. The new ride is absolutely sensational and will definitely leave riders wanting more. Those who remember the original



ride may recognize some of its best-loved features, but this reimagining of Valhalla offers a totally new immersive experience that will leave riders eager to return!"

Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls at **Universal Islands of Adventure** (No. 2), a previous Golden Ticket winner, nudges up a spot. Built by **Mack Rides** and themed with cartoonish

sets, this flume ride completely soaks riders.

Last year's winner, **Chiapas** at **Phantasialand**, is a multi-layered Intamin flume that carries riders through various scenes, changes direction from forward to backward, and has a dramatic finale with a plunge through a village plaza. The top three finalists are the only rides to ever

win Best Water Ride.

Timber Mountain Log Flume at **Knott's Berry Farm**, one of the most famous log rides in the world, keeps its place at No. 4. Built by **Arrow** in 1969, it too is heavily themed, a trend in this category.

A fresh face in this category is the long-awaited

► See RIDES, page 40

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►RIDES

Continued from page 38

Aquaman Power Wave at **Six Flags Over Texas** (No. 5). Supplied by **Mack Rides**, the ride launches passengers up two vertical towers using linear synchronous motors before boats create an incredible splashdown.

Dollywood hangs onto the Golden Ticket for **Best Kids Area**. With the expansion of **Wildwood Grove**, it's not a surprise.

"We are thrilled with the success of Wildwood Grove and the recognition as the Best Kids Area," **Pete Owens**, vice president of marketing and public relations, said. "The area is so highly themed, and it tells such a wonderful **Dolly Parton** and Smoky Mountain story that appeals to the whole family. The addition of Big Bear Mountain to that area just made it even better this year."

Kings Island, a long-time winner of this category, holds onto its second-place ranking. With a recent announce-



Children's and family rides, plus wet and dry play, make Dollywood's Wildwood Grove a repeat winner (above left). Disney's Hollywood Studios' mind-blowing Rise of the Resistance (above right) hangs on to Best Dark Ride.

ment of an expansion to its **Planet Snoopy** area for 2024, the competition is on.

From there, this category has completely changed from last year's finalists. More and more parks are finding the value of a solid children's and family-ride lineup.

Canada's Wonderland (No. 3), a sister park to Kings Island, has an enormous children's area, and it is graced with lush landscaping throughout. Not only is it fun, but it's also beautiful. With its addition this year, the area now boasts four roller coasters

just for kids.

Universal Islands of Adventure returns to the charts at No. 4. The park's **Seuss Landing** is filled with smiles and whimsy. It is many a family that goes home with shirts that say Thing 1 and Thing 2 (and 3 and 4).

Wrapping up the finalists is **Carowinds** (No. 5), another newcomer to the charts. The heavily landscaped area provides lots of fun and lots of shade.

Best Dark Ride goes to **Rise of the Resistance** at **Disney's Hollywood Studios** for a third year. This



mind-blowing adventure incorporates a pre-show, a walk-through experience and an indescribable escape through elaborate sets, special effects and a slew of **Star Wars** characters.

Knoebels Amusement Resort's well-maintained classic dark ride, **Haunted Mansion**, celebrates its 50th anniversary this season. It creeps up a spot to No. 2.

Volkanu: Quest for the Golden Idol at **Lost Island Theme Park** (No. 3) lands on the charts for the first time. The **Sally Dark Rides** new-for-2022 installation took the

Golden Ticket for Best New Family Attraction last year.

Another new entry on the charts is **Guardians of the Galaxy: Mission Breakout** at **Disney California Adventure** (No. 4). The thrill ride incorporates major drops within the comic-themed storyline.

Harry Potter and the Escape from Gringotts at **Universal Studios Florida** retains its spot on the charts at No. 5. A combination of roller coaster moments paired with the dark ride storyline make this attraction a real one of a kind.



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Fun Spot, Waldameer take New Installation, New Water Park Ride

Fun Spot America likes to use the word *huge*. It is heavily heard in the chain of parks' marketing campaigns. Its Atlanta location has made the community notice with just such an investment. **AireForce One** wins the Golden Ticket for **Best New Attraction Installation**.

"This is HUGE for Fun Spot America! I have always looked up to all of the Golden Ticket winners and have always wanted to be in their shoes," CEO **John Arie Jr.** told *Amusement Today*. "I always think to myself when doing an expansion or upgrade, 'Will this be enough to win a Golden Ticket?' This was an incredible mountain to climb having to deal with our local government. There is anything that was going to hold Fun Spot America



Fun Spot America Atlanta's AireForce One takes Best New Attraction Installation after making such an impact on the park. AT/DAVID FAKE

► See **NEW**, page 46

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Rocket Blast thrills Waldameer's Water World guests with new coaster/waterslide thrills. COURTESY WALDAMEER

► **NEW**

Continued from page 44

or **Rocky Mountain Construction** back from building this amazing coaster for our guests! This is not just motivation for me or the team, this allows us to brag to the world that we won such a prestigious award. We still tell everyone that we won the Golden Ticket for Breakout FEC, and we are proud of it!"

Certainly, the biggest investment in the chain's history will make a difference for Fun Spot. What was more of a solid family entertainment center in the past is now positioned as a true amusement park with an incredibly marketable attraction to bring people from across the nation — and it has! Many new attractions have exorbitant budgets or spec-

► See **NEW**, page 48

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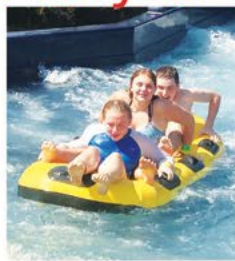
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►NEW Continued from page 46

tacular theming, making them ideal candidates for this category. ArieForce One has something even different: impact. It makes people notice the park and has accomplished what the Arie family was hoping for.

Mario Kart: Bowser's Challenge (No. 2) was a key part of **Universal Studios Hollywood's** new section, Super Nintendo World. With the success of the recent film, *The Super Mario Bros. Movie*, the new attraction should reach bigger audiences for Universal. Along the journey, riders interact via virtual reality with various realms.

Toutatis, the heavily themed, multi-launched coaster from **Intamin**, brought rave reviews to **Parc Astérix**. The storyline, immersive atmosphere and new land made for one of the most impressive additions in all of Europe. It was a spectacular attraction and a significant investment. It features a station that would make any park jealous.

Leviathan (No. 4) was the anchor for **Sea World's** New Atlantis Precinct. Built by **Martin & Vlemminckx** and designed by **The Gravity Group**, the wooden coaster brought major attention to the Australian marine park. Standing at

105 feet tall and racing through many crossovers at 50 mph, the trains feature a back seat where riders are facing backward.

Dollywood and its quest to find Big Bear completes the list of finalists. **Big Bear Mountain** was built by **Vekoma** and is the park's biggest investment in a single attraction to date. This attraction took the Golden Ticket for Best Family Coaster.

Best New Water Park Ride goes to **Waldameer & Water World**. Built by **ProSlide**, **Rocket Blast** takes riders on a water coaster 831 feet long. It is the first attraction of its kind in the region and features three uphill blast sections and three flying saucer turns. Four riders sit toboggan style.

"Our new Proslide Rocket Blast is a fantastic addition to our water park. Guests line up to ride when we open for the day and the queue line is busy the entire day," said **Steve Gorman**, president. "It is our longest and most exciting waterslide and thrill seekers ride again and again. They love the blast sections, the tight turns and the 800-plus feet of pure wet fun. The ride intertwines with five adjacent water attractions and two buildings, which makes it even more intense."

Riptide Race (No. 2)

opened at **Water Country USA** in Virginia. Standing 54 feet, the racing waterslide from ProSlide sends pairs of riders through 520 feet of slide with rally points in which lower walls let competitors see how they are doing in the race.

Vikingsløp at **Rulantica** takes third place. Built at the **Europa-Park** resort, the eight-lane racer from ProSlide is completely enclosed to allow for year-round operation. The heavily themed launch bay and staircase just add additional detail to the high-capacity attraction.

Turtle Coaster (No. 4) at **Aqualand/Land of Legends** in Turkey is ProSlide's longest RocketBlast water coaster to date. At more than 1,420 feet, it offers a ride length of close to two minutes. The attraction features an impressive eight uphill sections and four saucers. Also of note are the rainbow colors spread throughout the ride.

Lightspeed Shuttle (No. 5) debuted at **Studio City Water Park** in Macau. Supplied by **WhiteWater West**, the Master Blaster creates a continuous loop along the edge of the indoor water park. Nearing 1,000 feet long, Lightspeed Shuttle features large windows in the walls of the slide to allow views into the water park.

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Busch Gardens, Knoebels and Dollywood offerings earn gold

Busch Gardens Williamsburg has been a recurring champion in the **Most Beautiful Park** category (as well as its predecessor, Best Landscaping). After letting it slip to **Dollywood** in 2021, the Virginia theme park snagged it back last year. Its grip on the Golden Ticket is tentative, but a hair above the Pigeon Forge playground gives it the win. Busch Gardens Williamsburg claims Most Beautiful once again.

"Everyone at Busch Gardens Williamsburg takes a tremendous amount of pride in the beauty and landscape of our park," said **Kevin Lembke**, park president. "Our landscape team works tirelessly to ensure we maintain the legacy of quality for which our park is known, and we are grateful for the industry



Busch Gardens Williamsburg is dedicated to creating a beautiful park within its natural setting. COURTESY BUSCH GARDENS

▶ See **EXPERIENCES**, page 51

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► EXPERIENCES

Continued from page 50

recognition. The natural topography and meticulous landscaping in our park are our hallmarks, and we all take great pride in providing our guests a chance to experience that beauty every season."

Right at its heels is Dollywood (No. 2). Having claimed the Golden Ticket once, the park trailed by the thinnest of margins in 2023. It was the closest race in this year's Golden Ticket Awards. In recent years, the Flower and Food Festival has only further enhanced the park's natural beauty and colorful landscaping.

Europa-Park (No. 3) moves up a notch. The park's various lands are all adorned with detailed architecture and lush flower beds. Fountains, sculptures and gardens also accent the park for those who enjoy taking leisurely strolls throughout Germany's most popular theme park.

New to this list is **Tokyo DisneySea** (No. 4). With a seething volcano in the heart of the park, the Japanese destination wows audiences with elaborate and immersive architecture, fantastical theming and beautiful details everywhere. The park's many lagoons and waterways that create the "sea" theme only enhance the beauty.

Staying on the list is **Efteling** (No. 5) in The Netherlands. This long-running finalist has numerous green spaces, landscaped beds, lakes and architecture filled with imagination.

The judging criteria for **Best Guest Experience** focuses on cleanliness, friendly employees and efficient ride operations. Hanging onto the Golden Ticket is Dollywood.

"All of the hosts at Dollywood are very proud of winning Best Guest Experience," said **Pete Owens**, vice president of marketing. "This award goes to the heart of what

we do every day. Our goal is to create an environment that allows our guests to have their best day of the year, and this shows we are on the right track."

This category is a clear victory for the Tennessee theme park.

Other finalists still provide a fantastic experience.

Knoebels Amusement Resort maintains its No. 2 spot. The hometown feel could be described as old-fashioned, but courtesy and good times within a wooded setting are a very satisfying experience.

At No. 3, **Holiday World** has established

► See EXPERIENCES, page 52



Dollywood's atmosphere and treatment of guests gives the park a win for Best Guest Experience. COURTESY DOLLYWOOD

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EXPERIENCES

Continued from page 51

core values of friendliness and cleanliness for decades. Long-time fans still recognize the work and effort that go into making it all noticeable, and they embrace it.

Moving up one space over the 2022 listings is Europa-Park (No. 4). With some of the finest ride operations in the world — and operators would be wise to simply go observe — attractions run like a charm. The park is immaculate, and the hospitality starts with the **Mack Family** ownership and trickles down to the seasonal employees.

New on the list this year is **Silver Dollar City** (No. 5). The Branson destination makes visitors feel like family from the moment they set foot in the gate — or board one of the trams from the free parking lot. It would seem inconceivable to find a friendlier staff as it is apparent that people

who work there feel like it is “their” city and are happy to show it off.

The finalists for **Best Food** remain unchanged from last year. Our ever-changing panel of voters still appreciates these five parks above the rest.

Knoebels Amusement Resort may keep its eyes on the second-place competition, but its many visitors unquestionably love eating there. With comfort food at family prices and special days such as all-you-can-eat spaghetti nights, the park offers full-service dining, walk-away favorites and fun sweets. Somewhat rare is the ability to come into the park early in the morning and enjoy a wide range of breakfast options. Want creamed chipped beef? It’s on the menu. As Knoebels provides numerous cabin rentals, this amenity is a big plus, particularly since the park is ungated.

“Food is an immense part of the fun here at Knoebels. Making our

guests happy includes making their tummies happy with unique, affordable and tasty fare,” said owner **Dick Knoebel**. “It means a lot to know we’ve succeeded at making Golden Ticket voters happy.”

At No. 2, Dollywood finds itself in every category on this page. With big farm skilletts and home cooking found at places like Aunt Granny’s and Granny Ogle’s, **Dolly Parton** herself has said, “If you leave hungry, that’s your fault.” And who can resist cinnamon bread?

Right on its heels, sister park Silver Dollar City (No. 3) is one taste-tempting offering after another. People love the buffet restaurants, the enormous Rivertown Smokehouse, the wonderful bakeries and (like Dollywood) those awesome farmhouse skilletts.

EPCOT (No. 4) and Europa-Park (No. 5) hold onto their spots. Both offer an international flair to their cuisines with so many countries represented.



Tasty comfort foods, fair pricing and wide variety is a winning formula for Knoebels.
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Wildcat's Revenge takes Best New Coaster; ArieForce One close

The 2023 season is a good one for **Rocky Mountain Construction**. Its two new-for-2023 coasters take the top two spots for **Best New Roller Coaster**.

Dispatching with the Golden Ticket is **Wildcat's Revenge** at **Hersheypark**. Taking the bones of the park's former Wildcat coaster, this new reimagining is taller, faster and longer than its predecessor. Wildcat's Revenge is the park's most extreme roller coaster and brings riders back into the station screaming — screaming for more.

"We've heard from our guests that the ride is truly wild! The one-of-a-kind elements have already made it a fan favorite as it joins one of the largest and most iconic coaster collections in the Northeast," said **Vikki Hultquist**, vice president, Hersheypark & Entertainment Operations. "We are thrilled to accept



Wildcat's Revenge at Hersheypark delivers a smooth but relentless ride that redefines "out of control." AT/TIM BALDWIN

this incredible honor from respected industry leaders and coaster fans who have raved about their experience riding the first hybrid coaster at Hersheypark. Wildcat's Revenge combines the best of wood and steel for a signature RMC experience you can only find in The Sweetest Place On Earth. It's even more meaningful given the unique nod to the original Wildcat, the first coaster purchased

by our founder, **Milton S. Hershey**, 100 years ago."

Right behind it is **ArieForce One** at **Fun Spot America Atlanta**. A giant among the park's other attractions, ArieForce One is named after the chain's founder, **John Arie**. With four inversions and its dramatic placement alongside Hwy 85, this crowd-pleaser is going to continue to draw fans to the town of Fayetteville, a suburb of

Atlanta. At a height of 155 feet and a speed of 64 mph, it is a force to be reckoned with.

Dollywood's Big Bear Mountain (No. 3) was the park's largest investment in a single attraction. Geared toward the family and not the thrill seeker, the steel coaster manufactured by **Vekoma** features three launches and just enough exhilaration that no matter the age of the rider, there's fun and excite-

ment to be had.

Toutatis (No. 4) at **Parc Astérix** is a thematic masterpiece. As with many attractions at the French park, the storyline is immersed in whimsy, and the detailed props and environment, as well as the visually stunning station, made this ride from **Intamin** a real wow. It features a height of 167 feet, three inversions and multiple launches.

Worlds of Fun paid homage to a part of its park history during its 50th anniversary. **Zambezi Zinger** (No. 5), supplied by **Great Coasters International, Inc.**, features the spiral lift of the park's original ride known by the same name. The use of the manufacturer's Titan Track mixed with wood, as well as the debut of the company's Infinity Flyer trains, make this ride notable and fun for the family audience for which it was intended.

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Puy du Fou takes Best New Show with innovative production

Singers, horses, drones, dancers, fireworks, mimes, costuming — the nominees for **Best New Show** were more diverse than ever. *Amusement Today* received more nominees than any other year for this category, as well as having its largest panel of judges.

It was also the biggest win for the Golden Ticket. The finalists had some very close races coming down to the last ballot, but the first place slot was not in question. In the biggest victory ever, **Puy du Fou** in France takes its first-ever gold. The show **"Le Mime et l'Etoile"** features so many over-the-top innovations, it was a favorite of both audiences and the judges.

"The show is a real challenge. In its perpetual quest for innovation, Puy du Fou has accepted to leave the beaten track here and take a huge artistic risk, venturing into a new scenographic language that has had to be tamed," said **Manon Rigaudeau**, international project coordinator, Puy du Fou. "For half an hour, the spectator physically enters a period film, with no screens or tricks, in true black and white. We had to turn the constraints of black and white into a strength. The lighting and costumes were tailor-made for the show."

Within the course of the show, audiences fantastically are drawn into stage sets and costumes that transform into black and white, while the leads still remain vividly in color. Massive sets and showpieces move and engage each scene.

"Visitors' reactions speak for themselves: 'It's literally grandiose, mind-blowing.' Or, 'We loved it! We felt like we were watching a movie. We remained like children,'" said Rigaudeau.

"Le Mime et l'Etoile" is performed up to seven



"Le Mime et l'Etoile" (above) won Best New Show in a landslide. The innovative production puts on an elaborate performance for guests at Puy du Fou. Cedar Point's "Summerbration" (below) was the top-rated new show in the U.S. COURTESY PUY DU FOU, CEDAR POINT

times a day and requires 16 actors (for 120 characters), as well as four technicians, three backstage assistants and a costume designer.

Cedar Point also had a giant cast of live musicians and singers and dancers in its **"Summerbration"** show. Coming in at No. 2, the outdoor show had a giant stage, pyrotechnics and 25 performers.

"El Misterio de Sorbaces" (No. 3) is an outdoor show that involves conquistadors, horses, fire and some of the most impressive moving-and-transforming sets. **Puy du Fou España** uses 30 performers in each show.

Cedar Point has a second finalist with **"Wake The Dead,"** a 2022 Halloween show. Interacting with audiences in an intimate venue, it came in fourth.

A final ballot cast created a tie for fifth. **"Hot Time in Rivertown"** at **Silver Dollar City** and **"Retrospect"** at **Carowinds** received accolades for its vocals and musicians (Branson) and singers and dancers (Charlotte).

The five finalists for



Best Halloween Event remained unchanged from last year, even if the positions were different.

Only three parks have ever taken this category. **Universal Studios Florida** at Universal Orlando Resort clutches the Golden Ticket in its talons once again, and the park has a loyal audience for its Halloween Horror Nights, with many traveling across the country.

"Halloween Horror Nights is more than just entertainment; it's a full-on

rush into our most chilling fears that leads to unimaginable thrills. You're not just watching the stories that kept you up at night — you're living them," said **Jim Timon**, senior vice president of entertainment for Universal Orlando Resort. "Our team works year-round to bring the most iconic horror experiences to life! We can't wait for our guests to discover what we have lurking in the fog this year!"

On the other coast, **Knott's Berry Farm's**

renowned Halloween Haunt at Knott's Scary Farm (No. 2) also boasts a legion of fans who make it an annual must-do experience.

Nearby, **Universal Studios Hollywood** (No. 3) offers chills and thrills. The park moves up a spot this year.

Six Flags Fiesta Texas punctuates its Fright Fest (No. 4) with a wide range of musical performances, haunted houses, fogged-

► See SHOW, page 58



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Dollywood's Smoky Mountain Christmas (above left) remains undefeated. Halloween Horror Nights (above right) continues its reign of terror as Best Halloween Event of 2022. COURTESY DOLLYWOOD, UNIVERSAL STUDIOS

► **SHOW**

Continued from page 56

filled zones and a spooky version of its fireworks and multi-media show.

Europa-Park with its Traumatica event closes out the finalists at No. 5.

Best Christmas Event sees new faces, but not at the top.

"Fifteen consecutive

Golden Ticket Awards solidify the fact that Christmas is as much a part of the **Dollywood** experience as the Smoky Mountains themselves," said **Wes Ramey**, public relations. "Our teams start hanging the six million lights during the summer, and the care, attention and hard work they put into the festival certainly are on display

every night when the sun goes down. There is no doubt the Smoky Mountain Christmas festival fills you with indescribable excitement for the season and really does put you in the Christmas spirit. We added 1 million lights last year, and we have another special surprise for this season's festival that we'll announce soon, but let's

just say Santa's sleigh won't be the only thing flying over Dollywood this holiday!"

Right at its heels is sister park **Silver Dollar City** (No. 2). The Branson theme park wows guests with mesmerizing Christmas light displays, shows and a parade.

New since the 2022 charts is **Magic Kingdom** (No. 3) in Florida. **Walt Disney World** has always

impressed fans with its seemingly overnight transformation from Halloween to Christmas in its festive décor.

Kings Dominion (No. 4) appears on the chart for the first time with its elaborate Winterfest event.

Closing out the category is a tie between two newcomers, **Busch Gardens Williamsburg** and Europa-Park.

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Rocky Mountain Construction's 208 ReTraK takes Best Innovation

Nominated by and voted on by industry professionals, the Golden Ticket for **Best New Innovation** goes to **Rocky Mountain Construction (RMC)** for its 208 ReTraK.

With a history of successfully upgrading traditional wood track for decades, RMC has used steel track portions to reduce maintenance and improve the ride experience. The company's new 208 ReTraK is the latest evolution of track replacement. According to RMC, the product lasts five times longer than traditional wood coaster track and eliminates the need for continuous inspection, repair and replacement.

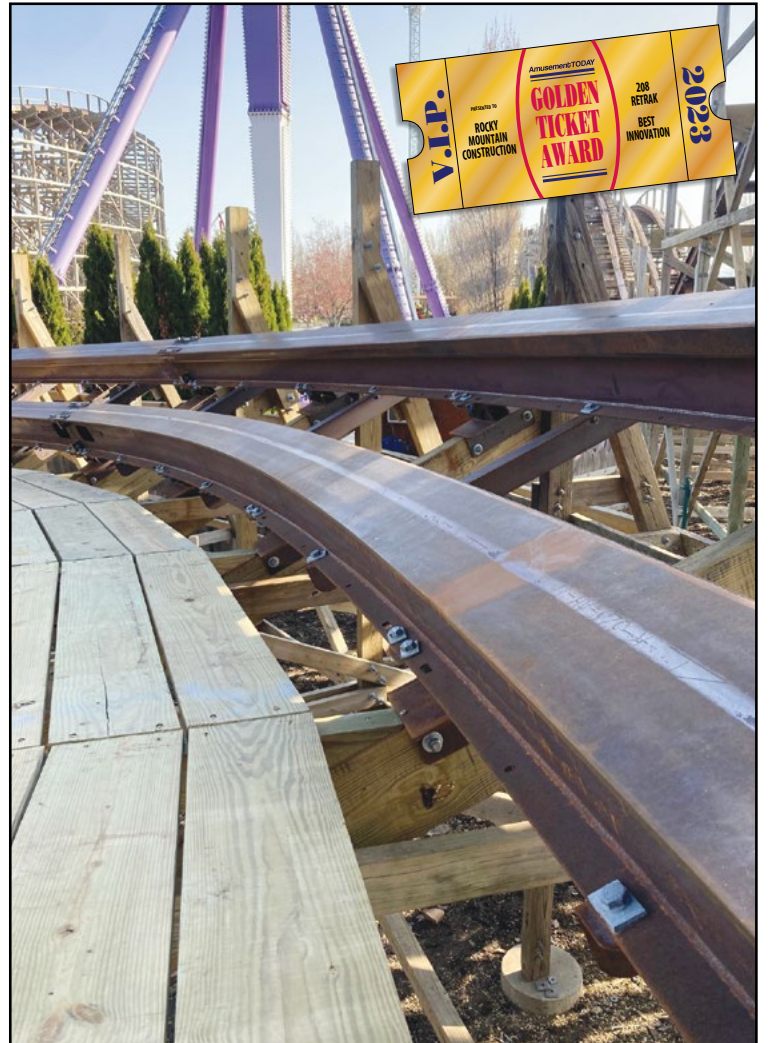
"RMC has worked with **Silverwood** and **Fun Spot** to upgrade existing wooden track with our patented 208 ReTraK,"



Eatrenalin (above) wowed tourists and locals with an off-the-charts, mind-boggling experience at Europa-Park that features a multicourse meal in a vehicle designed by Mack Rides. The 208 ReTraK steel rail (right) serves as a solution to problem spots on wooden coasters.

AT/TIM BALDWIN; COURTESY ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONSTRUCTION

said RMC President **Darren Torr**. "208 ReTraK is based on our proven I-Box track construction and is designed to extend the life of existing wooden coasters while providing a superior guest experience. The track provides a much



► See INNOVATION, page 62



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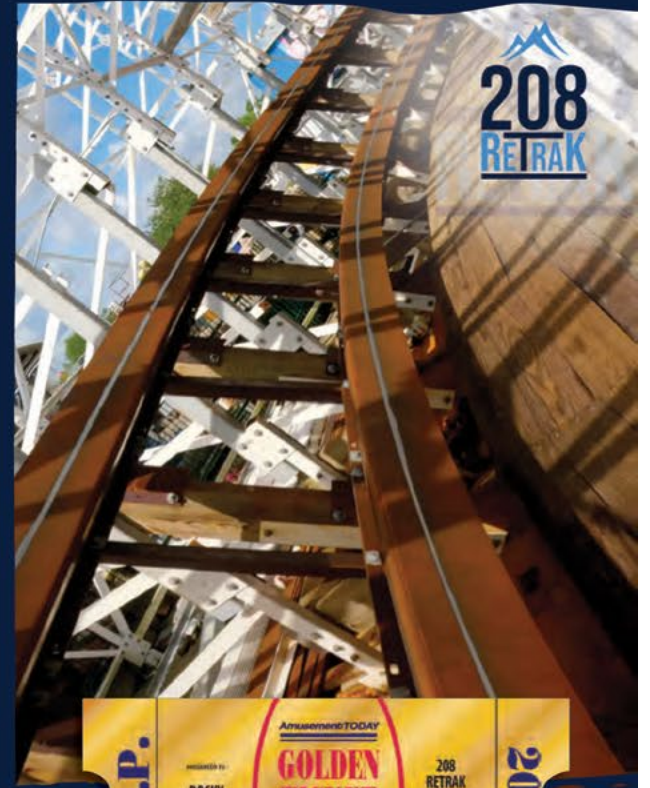
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 2013 Outlaw Run - Golden Ticket Award - Best New Ride, 1st Place | 2013 - Iron Rattler - Golden Ticket Award - Best New Ride, 2nd Place
 2015 Outlaw Run - Guinness Book of World Records - Steepest Wooden Coaster | 2016 Goliath - Guinness Book of World Records - Tallest, Steepest, Fastest Wooden Coaster
 2016 Lightning Rod - Golden Ticket Award - Best New Ride, 1st Place | 2016 Storm Chaser - Golden Ticket Award - Best New Ride, 2nd Place
 2017 Raptor Track - Popular Science - Best of What's New Grand Prize, Engineering | 2018 Steel Vengeance - Golden Ticket Award - Best New Ride, 1st Place
 2022 Iron Gwazi - Golden Ticket Award - Best New Ride, 1st Place



New standup vehicles from B&M resurrected this style of roller coaster. AT/DAVID FAKE

► INNOVATION

Continued from page 60


smoother ride, strengthens the structure, and reduces wear and tear on the trains. From an operations perspective, the total cost of ownership for 208 ReTraK is dramatically less than traditional wood track. 208 Retrak is only slightly more upfront to install than wood track but reduces track inspections and off-season track rebuilds.”

RMC states that the new system is precision-manufactured — utilizing RMC’s laser measurement system, CNC plasma cutting abilities, and patented semi-automated welding technology — and installs seamlessly into existing structures. Parks are able to use their existing trains and the innovation helps improve wheel longevity.

Two other innovations scored highly with our industry panel.

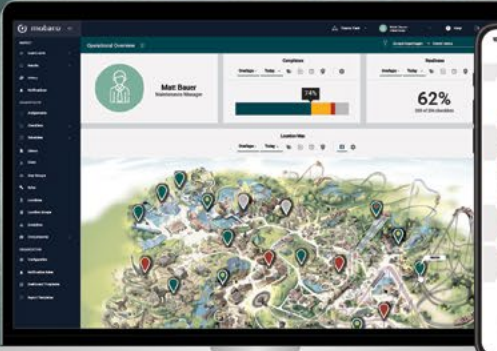

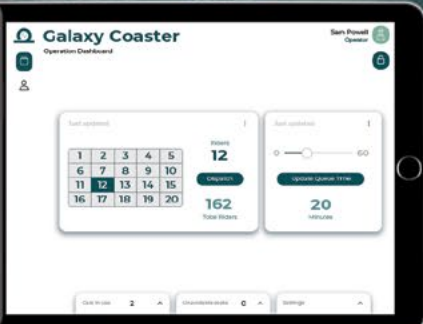
Eatrenalin, an out-of-the-box concept took dining to new dimensions. Built at the **Europa-Park** resort, the upscale dinner experience has 16 guests at each seating boarding “floating chairs” built by **Mack Rides** to transport them through nine rooms for an indescribable meal and sensory experience. For 90 minutes, guests are wowed with images, tastes, sensory experiences and gradual ride movement. Nothing else like it exists on Earth.


The newly designed vehicles for a standup coaster from **Bolliger & Mabillard** provide a smoother, more rider-friendly experience in comparison to the previous mechanical technology of the late 20th century. New innovations brought forth renewed life for a past genre and was seen on Pipeline: The Surf Coaster at **SeaWorld Orlando**.



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Best Innovation of 2023: Honorable Mentions

The **StaCool Vest Core Body Cooling System** is designed to help workers beat the summer heat, allowing work zone employees to stay safe, cool and productive despite elevated ambient temperatures.

The vests are fully adjustable and models are available in safety yellow, orange as well as green to wear over normal clothing, providing all-day comfort with unrivaled mobility. Under-vests are also available, to be worn under other clothing, so there is a StaCool Vest to suit any style, preference and application.

Six Flags Fiesta Texas introduced **eSix Gaming**, the first-of-its-kind and most extensive esports gaming center at any amusement park in the country. This state-of-the-art esports competitive gaming campus is complete with the newest high-tech equipment and the industry's biggest titles, providing an unmatched gaming experi-

ence in the midst of a theme park.

Micro Markets/Just Walk Out stores entered the theme park world. **The Coca-Cola Company** and **Six Flags** teamed up to bring the first-ever frictionless micro-market experiences to theme park visitors. Since June 1, guests at **Six Flags Great Adventure** were able to purchase park essentials using **Amazon's Just Walk Out** technology, without waiting in line at the register to pay.

A seamless experience, the concept store, **Quick Six**, offers the first and only automated checkout-free shopping experience within a theme park. The store uses frictionless commerce technology to deliver a satisfying shopping experience for park guests, allowing them to save time and leave the store without having to wait in line to pay. Visitors can peruse the store, place items in their virtual cart and then

simply leave when they're done, with their selections automatically charged to the payment method used to enter the store.

Belt Assisted Transport or "BAT" is the first and only one of its kind operating in a cave. Developed by **SunKid/Star Lifts**, the BAT is a belt-driven ride out of a cave 700 feet uphill.

Usually exit tunnels are hard uphill hikes for guests, and when **Natural Bridge Caverns** extended its cave, management knew a conveyor belt out would be a fun and memorable way to exit.

Perfect Pour is a self-serve draft beer or batched cocktail dispensing system with souvenir drinkware and RFID technology.

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AIMS International honors 2023 Safety Award recipients

The **AIMS International Safety Award** is presented annually to the individual or organization that demonstrates leadership, innovation and foresight in improving safety in the amusement industry. The association recognizes improvements to safety in many forms including the design and implementation of new products and technology, the development of safety education programs and training, and through exemplary leadership in influencing others. This year, AIMS has chosen two worthy recipients.

Individual Honoree **Jeff Abendshien** is vice president of **Recreation Engineering, Inc.**, a company started with his business partner **Brian King** to provide specialized engineering, testing and inspection services to the

amusement industry.

Throughout his 40-plus year career, Abendshien has volunteered countless hours advocating safety in the global amusement industry, serving on the board of directors of several industry organizations. He is an active voting member of the ASTM F24 Committee and chairman of the ASTM F24.10 *Test Methods and Component Parts* subcommittee with responsibility for writing and maintaining internationally recognized amusement ride standards. Abendshien is also an active member of the **American Society for Non-Destructive Testing**, responsible for maintaining the qualification and certification of inspection and testing personnel. Jeff has also authored several textbooks on mechanical design and history and

instructs at numerous amusement industry safety seminars including AIMS, **AREA**, **NAARSO**, **IAAPA** and the **ICC** Educode symposiums.

"In addition to his work maintaining and improving amusement industry safety, Jeff generously contributes his time to support organizations, including AIMS, ASTM, and NAARSO," said AIMS board member **Timo Klaus**. "Jeff has been a go-to instructor for multiple classes and is always ready to promote safety in our industry."

AIMS International is also awarding an Organization Safety Award to the **ASTM F24 Committee** and all of its volunteers. The ASTM F24 Committee on Amusement Rides and Devices is celebrating 45 years of dedication and leadership in the development of International Amusement

Industry Safety Standards. This award recognizes the global impact of ASTM International made possible by the thousands of members that make up the F24 committee.

Since 1978, F24 has developed world-class safety standards. Many of which have been adopted outside of the United States and are currently being harmonized with the European Norm EN13814 to provide consistent and state-of-the-art global industry safety standards.

F24 boasts the second most well-attended technical meetings among ASTM's 148 committees. Over 1,200 F24 volunteers meet twice annually and attend more than 100 meetings per year, rigorously maintaining and updating industry safety standards.

—Amy Lowenstein

Space for this AIMS page is provided courtesy of *Amusement Today* as a corporate partner of AIMS Intl. Content is provided by AT & AIMS.



CONGRATULATIONS

Safety Award Honoree: **Jeff Abendshien**

Organization Safety Award Honoree: **ASTM F24 Committee**

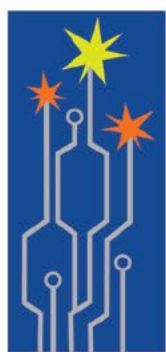
Recipients of the 2023 AIMS International Safety Award for leadership, innovation, and foresight in improving safety in the amusement industry.





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Best Wooden Coaster: Phoenix reigns; Thunderhead makes climb

Best Wooden Coaster is a category that has had a rotation of more winners than any other category. When **Phoenix** at **Knoebels Amusement Resort** took the gold in 2018, it was the seventh wooden coaster to do so. This year, with its fifth-consecutive win, it ties a record with the No. 2 woodie, **The Voyage** at **Holiday World**, for the longest stretch of wins for this category. It bears the question, can it set a new record next year now that it is positioned to do so?

Phoenix is aptly named since owner **Dick Knoebel** silenced numerous naysayers who claimed relocating a 1940s wooden coaster designed by **Philadelphia Toboggan Company's Herb Schmeck** was impractical. Having proved them wrong, Knoebel and his team are dedicated to keeping the Golden Ticket Winner in top form. Enthusiasts worldwide praise the maintenance staff that keep all of this ride's classic features intact. It isn't the biggest or tallest, but it is a legendary favorite.

"Five consecutive years in the top spot – WOW! We are both humbled and thankful our guests appreciate the timeless thrills Phoenix provides as much as we do," Knoebel said.

For those who like a ride a little more pulse-pounding, **The Voyage** delivers the goods. It's difficult to find a wooden coaster experience so exhilarating and breathtaking — and long! — like **The Voyage** provides. This year, **Holiday**



Phoenix (No. 1). AT/JEFFREY SEIFERT

World, like **Knoebels**, continued to invest in keeping their globally recognized attractions in top shape. More than 1,600 feet of new track was installed to make it deserving of its legion of fans.

"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. "Over the last few years, we've invested heavily into all our wooden coasters, and the work has held up wonderfully. I daresay **The Voyage** might be running better than it ever has."

It was built by **The**

Gravity Group and the company has been involved in its continued refurbishment.

At No. 3 is a former Golden Ticket winner. **El Toro** at **Six Flags Great Adventure** is famous for its outrageous airtime and big drops. Supplied by **Intamin**, it is the only ride of its type in the U.S. as it is built from prefabricated sections of track.

In some big news, **Thunderhead** at **Dollywood** has made a significant climb. Ranking at the No. 10 spot in 2022, it shoots up to No. 4 this year, also receiving some TLC by **Great Coasters International, Inc** (GCII). As a star attrac-



The Voyage (No. 2). COURTESY DAN FEICHT



El Toro (No. 3). AT/TIM BALDWIN

tion at this year's record-setting **Coaster Con**, **Thunderhead** appropriately took fans by storm.

Boulder Dash at **Lake Compounce** completes the top five. Many coasters take advantage of their setting, but rare is the coaster that has the unique terrain this thriller does. Darting among trees, rocks and ravines along the side of a mountain makes this a truly one-of-a-kind attraction. It was among the class of 2000 woodies from **Custom Coasters Inc.**

2023 is the first year for the top five to also be held by current or former Golden Ticket winners. **Phoenix**, **The Voyage**, **El Toro**, **Thunderhead** and

Boulder Dash have all taken the prize in this category.

Kings Island boasts two coasters in the top ten. At No. 6 is **The Beast**, the world's longest wooden roller coaster. Having remarkably held that record since its debut in 1979, the 7,361-foot woodie in the back woods of the park has embraced more than four decades of worldwide fame. Just mere minutes from it is **Mystic Timbers** (No. 7), built by GCII in 2017. It was praised as that year's Best New Ride.

At No. 8 is **Ravine Flyer 2** at **Waldameer**, another creation that makes use of its environment. As its

► See **WOODEN**, page 68

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▶WOODEN

Continued from page 66

name implies, the coaster plunges down a sloped ravine at the back of the park — only to jump over a road! Designed by The Gravity Group, the ride has been lauded for its signature elements and unique layout. It is one of five wooden coasters in the top ten to operate with **Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters, Inc.** rolling stock.

GhostRider at **Knott's Berry Farm** continues its run of popularity since its refurbishment from CGII several years back and places at No. 9. **Outlaw Run** at **Silver Dollar City** remains in — and completes — the top ten. This daring coaster was a creation of **Rocky Mountain Construction**.

Making a substantial leap was **Balder** at **Liseberg**, jumping up to the No. 11 spot. The largest climb was from



Boulder Dash (No. 5). COURTESY LAKE COMPOUNCE

Rutschebanan at **Tivoli Gardens** in Denmark. The 1914 scenic railway is a historic masterpiece and received the distinction of an ACE Roller Coaster Landmark this year. It leaped 20 spots from No. 40 to No. 20.

Those two coasters are among 10 international rankings, including **Wildfire** at **Kolmården**, Sweden (No. 13); **Wodan**

at **Europa-Park**, Germany (No. 14); **Troy** at **Toverland**, The Netherlands (No. 19); **Colossos** at **Heide Park**, Germany (No. 27); **Playland Wooden Coaster** at **PNE Playland**, Canada (No. 31); **Cú Chulainn** at **Emerald Park**, Ireland (No. 36); **T Express** at **Everland**, South Korea (No. 38); and **Wicker Man** at **Alton Towers**, England (No. 47).



Thunderhead (No. 4). AT/TIM BALDWIN

★ Thank You ★

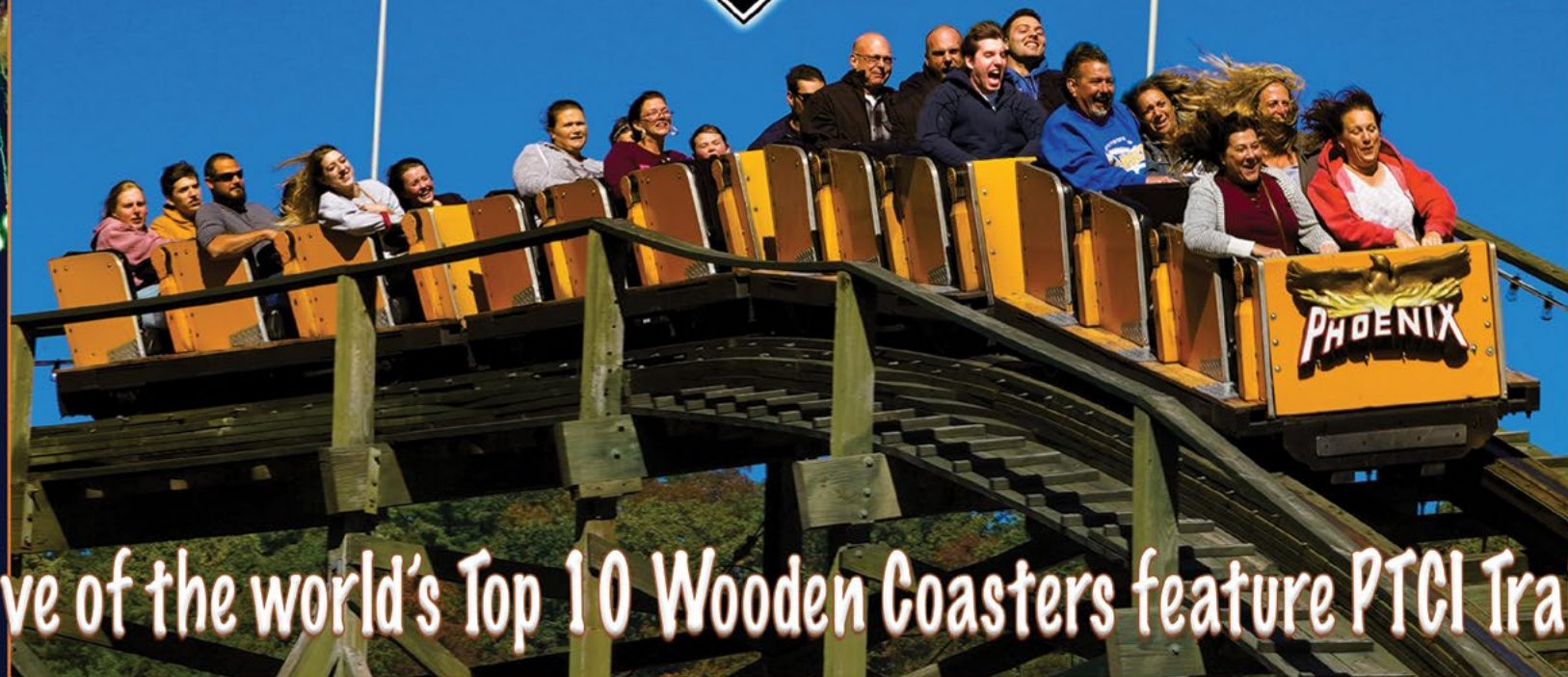
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#5 BOULDER DASH
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#6 BEAST
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THE LIST

2023 TOP 25 WOODEN ROLLER COASTERS



RANK	NAME	PARK	LOCATION	SUPPLIER	YEAR
1	Phoenix	Knoebels	Elysburg, Pennsylvania	Dinn-PTC/Schmeck	1985
2	Voyage	Holiday World	Santa Claus, Indiana	The Gravity Group	2006
3	El Toro	Six Flags Great Adventure	Jackson, New Jersey	Intamin	2006
4	Thunderhead	Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tennessee	Great Coasters Int.	2004
5	Boulder Dash	Lake Compounce	Bristol, Connecticut	Custom Consters Int.	2000
6	Beast	Kings Island	Mason, Ohio	KECO	1979
7	Mystic Timbers	Kings Island	Mason, Ohio	Great Coasters Int.	2017
8	Ravine Flyer 2	Waldameer	Erie, Pennsylvania	The Gravity Group	2008
9	GhostRider	Knott's Berry Farm	Buena Park, California	Custom Coasters/GCII	1998
10	Outlaw Run	Silver Dollar City	Branson, Missouri	Rocky Mountain Const.	2013
11	Balder	Liseberg	Gothenburg, Sweden	Intamin	2003
12	Gold Striker	California's Great America	Santa Clara, California	Great Coasters Int.	2013
13	Wildfire	Kolmården	Norrköping, Sweden	Rocky Mountain Const.	2016
14	Wodan	Europa-Park	Rust, Germany	Great Coasters Int.	2012
15	Jack Rabbit	Kennywood	West Mifflin, Pennsylvania	Miller	1920
16	Cyclone	Luna Park	Brooklyn, New York	Baker/Keenan	1927
17	Shivering Timbers	Michigan's Adventure	Muskegon, Michigan	Custom Coasters Int.	1998
18	Thunderbolt	Kennywood	West Mifflin, Pennsylvania	Vettel/Miller	1968
19	Troy	Toverland	Sevenum, The Netherlands	Great Coasters Int.	2007
20	Rutschebanan	Tivoli Gardens	Copenhagen, Denmark	L.A. Thompson	1914
21	Legend	Holiday World	Santa Claus, Indiana	Custom Coasters Int.	2000
22	Lightning Racer	Hersheypark	Hershey, Pennsylvania	Great Coasters Int.	2000
23	Flying Turns	Knoebels	Elysburg, Pennsylvania	Fetterman	2014
24	Prowler	Worlds of Fun	Kansas City, Missouri	Great Coasters Int.	2009
25	Comet	Six Flags Great Escape	Queensbury, New York	PTC/Schmeck	1994

View the Top 50 wooden roller coasters at www.GoldenTicketAwards.com



STEEL COASTERS

Fury 325 keeps gold; new steel coasters race onto the charts

On the list for **Best Steel Coaster**, the deck has been shuffled slightly. **Fury 325** has a clear grip on the gold. Since 2016, the gigantic coaster supplied by **Bolliger & Mabillard** tops the charts.

"For the seventh time, **Fury 325** at **Carowinds** has been crowned the 'Best Steel Coaster' in *Amusement Today's* Golden Ticket Awards. This remarkable achievement is a testament to the unwavering passion and dedication of our associates in delivering a world-class experience to our guests," said **Courtney Weber**, communications director. "At **Carowinds**, we take immense pride in this recognition, and it serves as a testament to the incredible support from the amusement industry."

The remaining top five have all shifted a bit. Nudging its way back up to No. 2, **Millennium Force** at **Cedar Point** displaces another steel coaster at the park, **Steel Vengeance** down to No. 4. Moving up two notches is **Jurassic World VelociCoaster** at **Universal Islands of Adventure**. Built by **Intamin**, the crowd-pleaser has continued to gain momentum in its three years on the charts. **Iron Gwazi** (No. 5) was built by **Rocky Mountain Construction**, just



Fury 325 (No. 1). AT/GARY SLADE

like its cousin at No. 4. **Iron Gwazi** thrills guests at **Busch Gardens Tampa Bay** and won the Golden Ticket in 2022 for Best New Coaster.

Intamin lays claim to the remainder of the top ten, giving the manufacturer an impressive seven of the ten upper-elite steel machines.

Expedition GeForce at **Holiday Park** in Germany has long rated as the highest-ranking coaster outside of the U.S. Built in 2001, it entered the top 10 the following year, and has placed as high as No. 3. This year it checks in at No. 6. Likewise, **Superman: The Ride** (known

by different names over the years), has never slipped from the top ten and even claimed the Golden Ticket for several years. Flying riders around **Six Flags New England**, the Man of Steel comes in at No. 7 in 2023.

Taron (No. 8) is a new addition to the top ten. Wowing fans at **Phantasialand** in Germany, it could potentially create pressure for its German predecessor two hours away. The heavily themed, dual-launch coaster has a loyal following.

Completing the top ten is **Intimidator 305** (No. 9) at **Kings Dominion** and **Maverick** at **Cedar Point** (No. 10). With **Maverick's** placement, it maintains **Cedar Point's** tradition of having three steel coasters in the top 10, the only park ever to do so.

"**Cedar Point** is extremely proud of its diverse, world-class coaster experiences," said **Tony Clark**, communications director. "The placement of three park favorites in the top 10, with the most recent debuting in 2018, is humbling for our team and demonstrates that these



Millennium Force (No. 2). AT/TIM BALDWIN



Steel Vengeance (No. 4). COURTESY CEDAR POINT

coaster legends continue to deliver amazing experiences for our guests and fans."

Six new coasters in the list of the top 50 appear on the charts for the first time.

Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind, a 2022 installation at **EPCOT**, soars in at No. 23. **ArieForce One** at **Fun Spot America Atlanta** also appears in the upper 25 in the No. 25 spot. Elsewhere, these new coasters are finding the spotlight: **Fønix** at **Farup Sommerland** in Denmark (No. 33), **Big Bear Mountain** at **Dollywood** (No. 37), **Wildcat's Revenge** at **Hersheypark** (No. 40) and 2020's **F.L.Y.** (No. 46) at **Phantasialand** in Germany.

Of those new coasters on the list, four were manufactured by **Vekoma** and two were new-for-2023 projects from **Rocky Mountain Construction**.

New steel coasters seem

to find favor with fans. Of the top 50, only six were built before 2000. The longest-running coaster on the charts is **Riddler Mindbender** at **Six Flags Over Georgia**. Manufactured by **Schwarzkopf**, it opened in 1978.

The charts do show a notable trend, however. Inversions have become smoother and more comfortable. In years past, the top ten had very few coasters with inversions. This year (and last year), three of the top five do.

Making the biggest jumps were **Intimidator** at **Carowinds**, rising 12 spaces to No. 15, **Helix** at **Liseberg** in Sweden, jumping up 12 spaces to No. 18, and **X2** at **Six Flags Magic Mountain**, a climb of 12 spaces to No. 21.

Notable coasters being built for the 2024 season have already been announced, bringing new competition to the arena.



Jurassic World VelociCoaster (No. 3). AT/TIM BALDWIN

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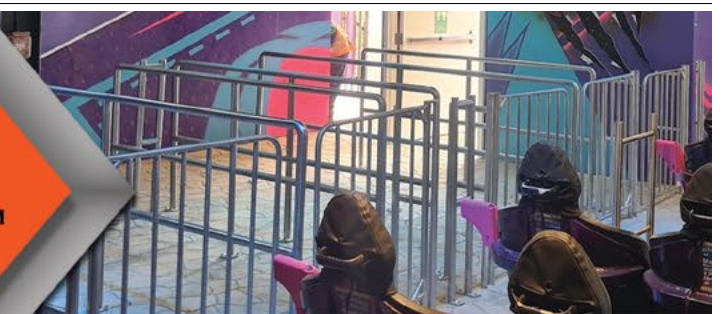
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THE LIST

2023 TOP 25 STEEL ROLLER COASTERS



RANK	NAME	PARK	LOCATION	SUPPLIER	YEAR
1	Fury 325	Carowinds	Charlotte, North Carolina	B&M	2015
2	Millennium Force	Cedar Point	Sandusky, Ohio	Intamin	2000
3	Jurassic World VelociCoaster	Universal Islands of Adventure	Orlando, Florida	Intamin	2021
4	Steel Vengeance	Cedar Point	Sandusky, Ohio	Rocky Mountain Const.	2018
5	Iron Gwazi	Busch Gardens Tampa Bay	Tampa, Florida	Rocky Mountain Const.	2022
6	Expedition GeForce	Holiday Park	Hassloch, Germany	Intamin	2001
7	Superman The Ride	Six Flags New England	Agawam, Massachusetts	Intamin	2000
8	Taron	Phantasialand	Brühl, Germany	Intamin	2016
tie-9	Intimidator 305	Kings Dominion	Doswell, Virginia	Intamin	2010
tie-9	Maverick	Cedar Point	Sandusky, Ohio	Intamin	2007
11	Apollo's Chariot	Busch Gardens Williamsburg	Williamsburg, Virginia	B&M	1999
12	Phantom's Revenge	Kennywood	West Mifflin, Pennsylvania	Morgan/Arrow	2001
13	Leviathan	Canada's Wonderland	Vaughan, Ontario, Canada	B&M	2012
14	Lightning Rod	Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tennessee	Rocky Mountain Const.	2016
tie-15	Intimidator	Carowinds	Charlotte, North Carolina	B&M	2010
tie-15	Iron Rattler	Six Flags Fiesta Texas	San Antonio, Texas	Rocky Mountain Const.	2013
17	Mako	SeaWorld Orlando	Orlando, Florida	B&M	2016
18	Helix	Liseberg	Gothenburg, Sweden	Mack	2014
19	Hagrid's Magical Creatures Motorbike Adventure	Universal Islands of Adventure	Orlando, Florida	Intamin	2019
20	Nitro	Six Flags Great Escape	Jackson, New Jersey	B&M	2001
21	X2	Six Flags Magic Mountain	Valencia, California	Arrow	2001
22	Time Traveler	Silver Dollar City	Branson, Missouri	Mack	2018
23	Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind	EPCOT	Lake Buena Vista, Florida	Vekoma	2022
24	Candymonium	Hersheypark	Hershey, Pennsylvania	B&M	2020
25	ArieForce One	Fun Spot America Atlanta	Fayetteville, Georgia	Rocky Mountain Const.	2023

View the Top 50 steel roller coasters at www.GoldenTicketAwards.com



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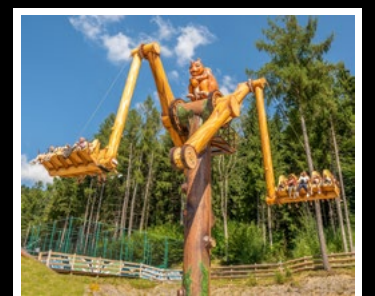
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2023 GOLDEN TICKET AWARD WINNERS

BEST PARK

1) Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.
2) Europa-Park	Rust, Germany
3) Universal Islands Of Adventure	Orlando, Fla.
4) Phantasialand	Brühl, Germany
5) Kings Island	Mason, Ohio

BEST WATER PARK OF 2023

1) Schlitterbahn	New Braunfels, Texas
2) Splashin' Safari	Santa Claus, Ind.
3) Volcano Bay	Orlando, Fla.
4) Hyland Hills Water World	Federal Heights, Colo.
5) Aquatica	Orlando, Fla.

BEST FAMILY PARK OF 2023

1) Dutch Wonderland	Lancaster, Pa.
2) Santa's Village	Jefferson, N.H.
3) Story Land	Glen, N.H.
4) Paultons Park	Hampshire, England
5) Legoland Florida	Winter Haven, Fla.

BEST FAMILY COASTER OF 2023

1) Big Bear Mountain	Dollywood
2) Slinky Dog Dash	Disney's Hollywood Studios
3) Freedom Flyer	Fun Spot America Orlando
4) Wooden Warrior	Quassy Amusement Park
5) Big Thunder Mountain	Disneyland Paris

BREAKOUT FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTER OF 2023

1) Fun Land of Fredericksburg	Fredericksburg, Va.
2) Meow Wolf: The Real Unreal	Grapevine, Texas
3) Scene75 Chicagoland	Romeoville, Ill.
4) Bolder	Grand Prairie, Texas
5) Malibu Jacks Lafayette	Lafayette, Ind.

MOST BEAUTIFUL PARK OF 2023

1) Busch Gardens Williamsburg	Williamsburg, Va.
2) Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.
3) Europa-Park	Rust, Germany
4) Tokyo DisneySea	Urayasu, Japan
5) Efteling	Kaatsheuvel, The Netherlands

BEST WATER RIDE OF 2023

1) Valhalla	Blackpool Pleasure Beach
2) Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls	Universal Islands of Adventure
3) Chiapas	Phantasialand
4) Timber Mountain Log Ride	Knott's Berry Farm
5) Aquaman: Power Wave	Six Flags Over Texas

BEST KIDS AREA OF 2023

1) Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.
2) Kings Island	Mason, Ohio
3) Canada's Wonderland	Vaughan, Ontario, Canada
4) Universal Islands of Adventure	Orlando, Fla.
5) Carowinds	Charlotte, N.C.

BEST HALLOWEEN EVENT OF 2022

1) Universal Studios Orlando	Orlando, Fla.
2) Knott's Berry Farm	Buena Park, Calif.
3) Universal Studios Hollywood	Universal City, Calif.
4) Six Flags Fiesta Texas	San Antonio, Texas
5) Europa-Park	Rust, Germany

BEST NEW SHOW OF 2023

1) "Le Mime et l'Etoile"	Puy du Fou France
2) "Summerbration"	Cedar Point
3) "El Misterio de Sorbaces"	Puy du Fou España

BEST NEW ROLLERCOASTER OF 2023

1) Wildcat's Revenge	Hersheypark
2) ArieForce One	Fun Spot America Atlanta
3) Big Bear Mountain	Dollywood
4) Toutatis	Parc Astérix
5) Zambezi Zinger	World's of Fun

BEST NEW FAMILY ATTRACTION OF 2023

1) Mario Kart: Bowser's Challenge	Universal Studios Hollywood
2) Mickey & Minnie's Runaway Railway	Disneyland
3) Draken Falls	Adventureland
4) Yuta Falls	Lost Island Theme Park
5) Treasure Hunt: The Ride	Monterey, California

BEST NEW WATER PARK RIDE OF 2023

1) Rocket Blast	Waldameer & Water World
2) Riptide Racer	Water Country USA
3) Vikingløp	Rulantica
4) Turtle Coaster	Aqualand/Land of Legends
5) Lightspeed Shuttle	Studio City Water Park

BEST NEW ATTRACTION INSTALLATION OF 2023

1) ArieForce One	Fun Spot America Atlanta
2) Mario Kart: Bowser's Challenge	Universal Studios Hollywood
3) Toutatis	Parc Astérix
4) Leviathan	Sea World Australia
5) Big Bear Mountain	Dollywood

BEST GUEST EXPERIENCE OF 2023

1) Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.
2) Knoebels Amusement Resort	Elysburg, Pa.
3) Holiday World & Splashin' Safari	Santa Claus, Ind.
4) Europa-Park	Rust, Germany
5) Silver Dollar City	Branson, Mo.

BEST DARK RIDE OF 2023

1) Star Wars: Rise Of The Resistance	Disney's Hollywood Studios
2) Haunted Mansion	Knoebels Amusement Resort
3) Volkanu: Quest for the Golden	Lost Island Theme Park
4) Guardians of the Galaxy: Mission Breakout	Disney California Adventure
5) Harry Potter and the Escape from Gringotts	Universal Studios Florida

BEST WATER PARK RIDE OF 2023

1) Mammoth	Splashin' Safari
2) Wildebeest	Splashin' Safari
3) Krakatau Aqua Coaster	Volcano Bay
4) Lost River of the Pharaohs	Hyland Hills Water World
5) Cheetah Chase	Splashin' Safari

BEST FOOD OF 2023

1) Knoebels Amusement Resort	Elysburg, Pa.
2) Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.
3) Silver Dollar City	Branson, Mo.
4) EPCOT	Lake Buena Vista, Fla.
5) Europa-Park	Rust, Germany

BEST CHRISTMAS EVENT OF 2022

1) Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.
2) Silver Dollar City	Branson, Mo.
3) Magic Kingdom	Buena Vista, Fla.
4) Kings Dominion	Doswell, Va.
5-tie) Busch Gardens Williamsburg	Williamsburg, Va.
5-tie) Europa-Park	Rust, Germany



Thank you for recognizing these parks among the **BEST OF THE BEST** in the **GOLDEN TICKET AWARDS!**

**Publisher's Pick –
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Best Park
#5 Kings Island®

Best Wood Coaster
#6 The Beast® – Kings Island®
#7 Mystic Timbers®
Kings Island®
#9 GhostRider
Knott's Berry Farm®

Best Water Park
#1 Schlitterbahn®
Best Kids Area
#2 Kings Island®
#3 Canada's Wonderland®
#5 Carowinds®

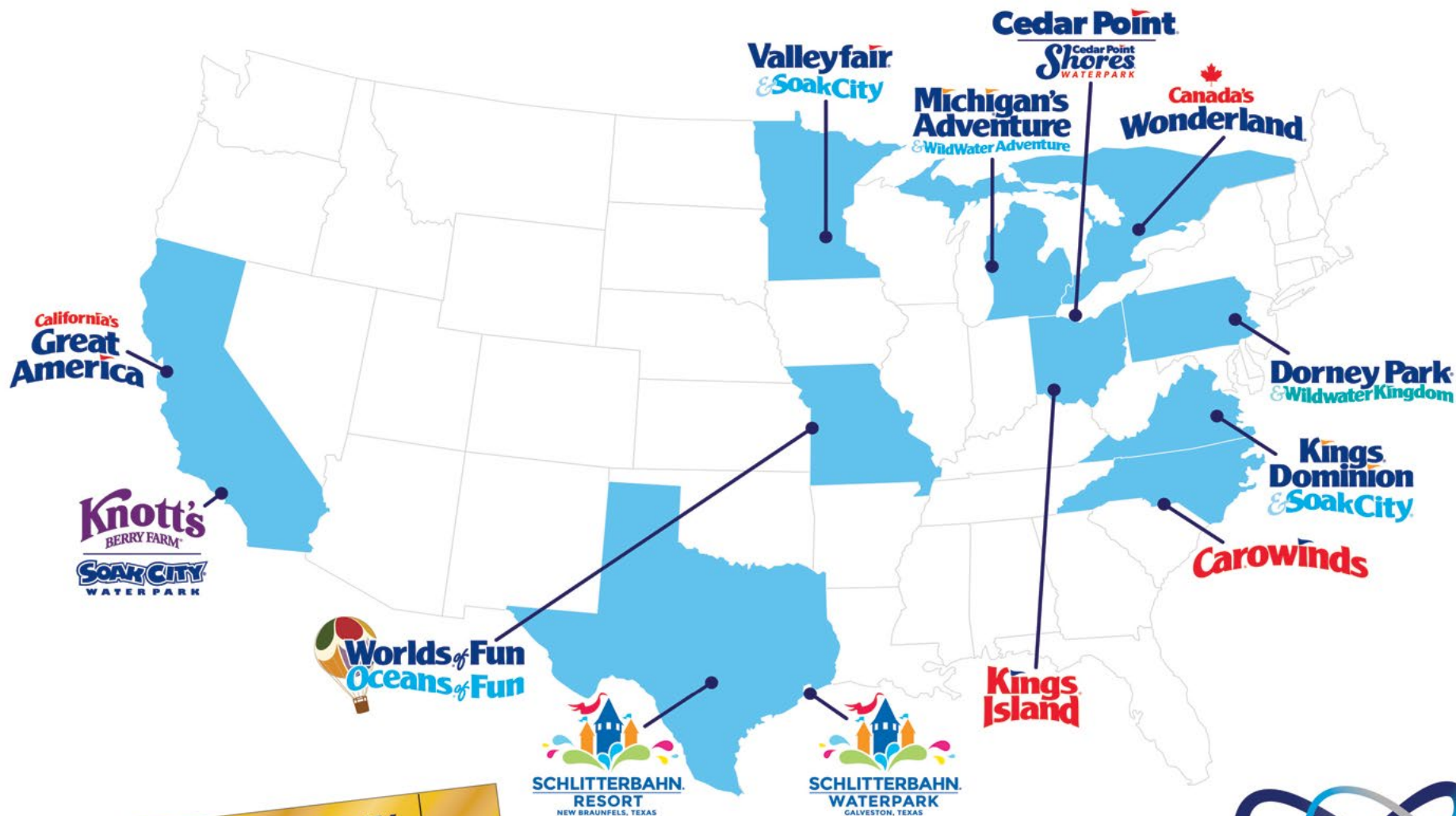
Best Halloween Event
#2 Knott's Berry Farm

Best New Coaster
#5 Zambezi Zinger
Worlds of Fun®

Best Steel Coaster
#1 Fury 325® – Carowinds®
#2 Millennium Force®
Cedar Point®
#3 Steel Vengeance®
Cedar Point®
#9 Intimidator® 305
Kings Dominion®
#10 Maverick® – Cedar Point®

Leadership
#4 Mike Koontz – Kings Island®

Best Christmas Event
#4 Kings Dominion
Best Water Ride In A Park
#4 Timber Mountain Log Ride
Knott's Berry Farm®
Best Show
#2 Summerbration
Cedar Point®
#4 Wake the Dead
Cedar Point®
#5 (tie) Retrospect – Carowinds®



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