

► Iowa State Fair's Sky Glider celebrates half-century over its midway — page 26

Amusement TODAY

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Bobcat coaster roars, delights guests at Six Flags Great Escape

AT: Don Helbig
Special to Amusement Today

QUEENSBURY, N.Y. — Replacing the park's former Alpine Bobsled, Bobcat — a new wooden roller coaster — opened June 1, 2024, at **Six Flags Great Escape** in Queensbury, New York, and brings a thrilling new dimension to the park's attractions lineup. Bobcat marks a significant addition, being the first new coaster at Six Flags Great Escape since 2003 and the first new wooden coaster in New York State since 1999.

Manufactured by **The Gravity Group**, renowned for its innovative wooden coasters, Bobcat embodies the company's expertise, joining the ranks of other notable rides such as Mine Blower at **Fun Spot America** and Oscar's Wacky Taxi at **Sesame Place Philadelphia**. This

new addition comes as part of the park's 70th anniversary celebration, complementing the fabled Comet roller coaster and providing a quintessential wooden coaster experience that introduces families and thrill-seekers to quick turns, spunky drops, and heart-pumping excitement aboard a custom, state-of-the-art, Timberliner train.

"This was our first project with Six Flags, and we were thrilled to be working at Great Escape," said **Korey T. Kiepert**, engineer and principal at **The Gravity Group**. "Great Escape already had a true classic with the Comet. We knew that our wooden coaster had to be perfect to complement this double out-and-back. So, we created a ride filled with twists, turns and mul-

► See **BOBCAT**, page 6



Bobcat is the latest popular family wooden coaster designed by **The Gravity Group**.
COURTESY
DON HELBIG



Penguin Trek is a 65-foot-tall, 3,020-foot-long roller coaster which reaches speeds of up to 43 mph. COURTESY SEAWORLD ORLANDO

Wildlife, education, thrills combine for SeaWorld's new Penguin Trek

AT: David Fake
dfake@amusementtoday.com

ORLANDO — On July 7, **SeaWorld Orlando** opened **Penguin Trek** to the public following a short ceremony which included comments by **Rob McNicholas**, director of operations for SeaWorld Orlando, and **Jon Peterson**, park president of SeaWorld Orlando. Accompanying McNicholas and Peterson were Justin, an explorer character, and Puck, a penguin costumed character, who took the honor of ribbon-cutters.

Following the ribbon-cutting ceremony, a gathering of children from Orlando-area Scouts of America packs received the honor of being the first to officially experience **Penguin Trek**.

The 65-foot-tall, 3,020-foot-long roller coaster that reaches speeds of up to 43 mph, was designed and installed through a collaboration of **United Parks and Resorts** (formerly **SeaWorld Entertainment**) and oft-lauded, Swiss engineering company, **Bolliger & Mabillard Consulting Engineers, Inc.** (B&M).

The attraction is a first-of-its-kind steel, sit-down, dual LSM-launched, family roller coaster on which guests ride one of two trains comprised of nine cars with passengers seated two-abreast, which is a departure from the larger, traditionally four-abreast seating configuration used by B&M on their designs.

The coaster, which welcomes everyone from young adventurers of at least 42 inches tall to thrill-seekers of up to 77 inches, features an

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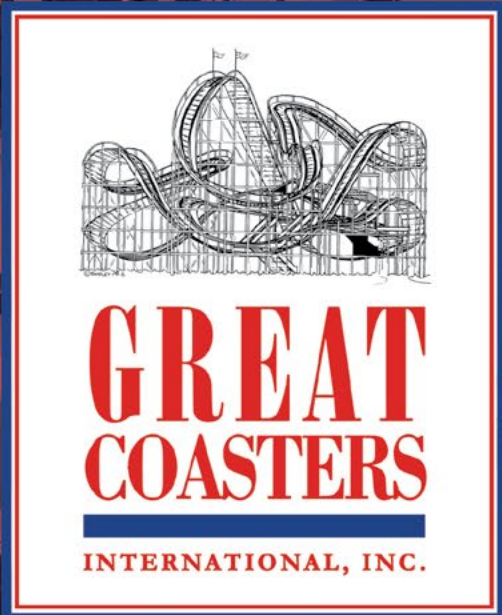


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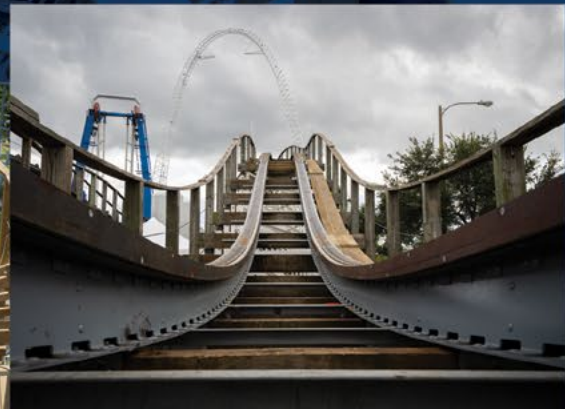
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Santa Cruz Boardwalk Freestyle



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

FLINT'S VIEW: Bubba Flint

Relationships are everything



Robinson

We're in an industry with billion-dollar parks, multi-million-dollar rides, groundbreaking engineering and ideas limited only by imagination. Yet it's all worthless and an exercise in futility without constantly building, maintaining and strengthening relationships.

We're in the business of people.

Manufacturers to suppliers, suppliers to operators, operators to guests ... the common denominator to all of that is the relationships between people and how well they communicate and interact with one another.

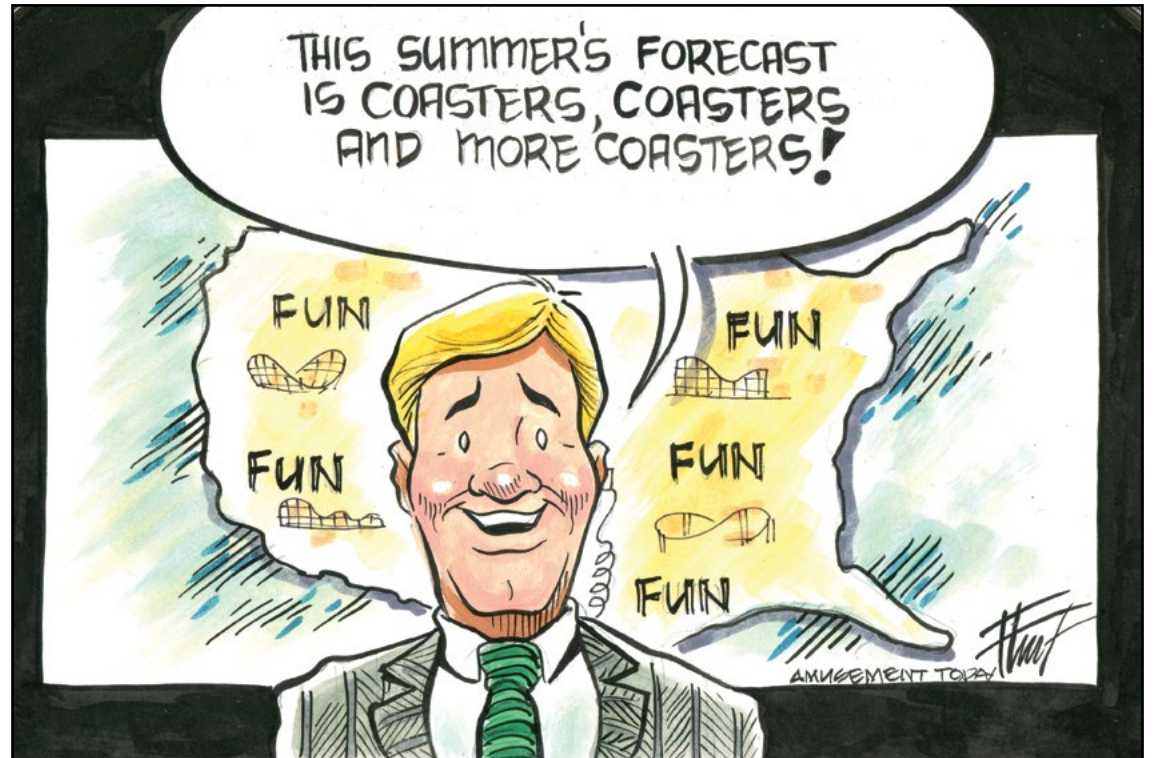
Many factors contribute to operators choosing a manufacturer or supplier for a project, too many to count. However, in the end, it's often the trust and faith in a working relationship between that final person to make the decision and the company or individual whom they know — from experience or reputation. Mishaps and less-than-stellar experiences happen every day at our attractions, but it's the relationship the guest has with the facility that determines whether it's a hiccup, an anomaly ... or a reason to never visit again.

A handshake deal is still a very real thing.

Physical hands aren't always grasping one another in acknowledgment, but the agreement between two parties trusting one another — a true social contract — is very real and overly abundant. It sometimes escapes our attention, but when we strike a deal or continue a working endeavor, we're taking steps in an ongoing relationship, one we started built on trust and hope to continue as such.

As over-the-top and creative as our industry gets, behind all the colors and flashing lights, it's people that make it go forward, people that we count on every day and people that we're putting our trust in. It's people we have a relationship with, and people — customers, coworkers, associates, vendors, etc. — whose trust we worked so hard to gain and create a relationship we must continue to work to retain and remain.

The people at the heart of this business are everything. Without them, not one ride gets made nor smile expressed. Every signed contract, every sales spiel promise, every click of the turnstile ... that's a handshake showing someone is putting their trust in you. Don't let them down, you're in this relationship too.



INDUSTRY VOICE: Kimberle Samarelli, New Jersey Amusement Association

Only as good — as strong — as our membership

Amusement rides and games have been inherent to the seashore communities along the 127 miles of oceanfront in New Jersey since it was discovered as an ideal summer vacation destination. In the mid-fifties, many lawsuits were filed when local law enforcement officials closed down amusement games in Wildwood, Point Pleasant and Asbury Park.

The organization of a state amusement operators' association for New Jersey resort business proprietors followed the governor's persistence in forcing them out of their legitimate, long-standing livelihoods. An organization committee was formed in August 1956, with Mayor Stanley J. Tunney of Seaside Heights as a temporary Chairman.

A legislative committee, headed by Gilbert Ramagosa, met with Senator Sandman to have legislation enacted to legalize games. Introduced January 28, 1957, whenever the Legislature had the bill on its agenda, arcade owners from throughout the state swarmed to Trenton by private cars and charter busses, packing the gal-



Samarelli

lery to show their support. The legislation passed and was approved by public referendum in November 1959.

At that time, the New Jersey Amusement Owners Board of Trade (NJAOPA), with an office in Asbury Park, was formed.

On March 18, 1976, the NJAOPA was incorporated as the New Jersey Amusement Association (NJAA). The New Jersey Amusement Association Scholarship Fund, Inc., a separate nonprofit corporation, was formed in 1988.

Today, our economy in New Jersey is strong and healthy; we fight the yearly battles that every other industry does — labor shortages, wage increases, various legislative bills — but overall, we move forward every day. Our industry survives collectively because we have each other to lean on throughout the strong state trade association. We know when there is an issue or crisis, the NJAA steps in. We have a motto: we are only as good as our membership allows us to be. Our members are always innovative, safe and create smiles for all their guests each season.

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Address: P.O. Box 5427, Arlington, Texas 76005-5427, USA

Deliveries: 2004 E. Randol Mill Road #502, Arlington, Texas 76011, USA

Phone: (817) 460-7220

AmusementToday.com, GoldenTicketAwards.com

Founder & Publisher

Gary Slade • (817) 460-7220
gslade@amusementtoday.com

Accounting & Classified

Sammy Piccola • (817) 460-7220
spiccola@amusementtoday.com

Advertising

John Robinson • (513) 256-1441
jrobinson@amusementtoday.com
Gary Slade • (817) 460-7220
gslade@amusementtoday.com

Editor & Production Manager

John Robinson • (513) 256-1441
jrobinson@amusementtoday.com

Editorial

Tim Baldwin • (972) 697-9745
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

Jeffrey Seifert • (817) 460-7220
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

B. Derek Shaw • (717) 843-3050
bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

Pam Sherborne • (615) 308-3310
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

Monthly Contributors: David Fake, Bubba Flint, Ron Gustafson, Susan Storey, Janice Witherow

Association Memberships: ACE, AIMS International, ASTM, IAAPA, IISF, IRT/iROC, NAARSO, NEAAPA, NJAA, OABA, PAPA, PACE, SLA, TTA, WWA

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2 MINUTE DRILL



AT: Janice Withrow

Richard Pretlow, Morgan's Wonderland/Morgan's Inspiration Island

Vision, drive and compassion. Those are words used to describe **Richard Pretlow**, president of **Morgan's Wonderland** and **Morgan's Inspiration Island** in San Antonio, Texas. With 15 years of experience in the amusement industry at such parks as **SeaWorld San Antonio**, **Six Flags Great Escape** and **Sesame Place**, Richard brings an array of talent to his relatively new leadership role (January 2023) at this extraordinary park aiding children and adults with special needs.

Title: Park President.

Number of years in the industry: 15.

Best thing about the industry:

Our industry is all about fun and making memories. To be able to do that every day and have such an impact is amazing.

Favorite amusement ride: The Loch Ness Monster at Busch Gardens Williamsburg. It was my very first roller coaster as a child.

If I wasn't working in the amusement industry, I would be ... I would have loved to have been a commercial airline pilot. I love the experience of flying.

Biggest challenge facing our industry: There are many challenges in our industry as we continue to find ways to be innovative and creative around guest needs and expectations. But the one challenge that all operators face is around staffing and employee engagement. Our business relies heavily on high school and college students. Much like our guests, their needs and expectations are evolving, and we have to evolve at a similar pace.

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

No two days are ever alike. It's hard to be bored when you're operating a park!

Favorite Mexican food...

Hands down Birria tacos.

On a free evening, I would rather be ...

At the bowling alley or Top Golf.

My neighbors probably think I am ...

Never home!

Krispy Kreme or Dunkin' Donuts?

Krispy Kreme always!

It's August! To beat the summer heat, I ...

Texas heat is tough to beat but San Antonio has some great museums and cultural centers on the River Walk that I enjoy visiting.



Richard Pretlow brings his experienced and unique array of talents to the amazing Morgan's Wonderland.

COURTESY MORGAN'S WONDERLAND

The last time I screamed really loud was ... I'm not much of a screamer, but the last time I can remember is riding the Iron Rattler at Six Flags Fiesta Texas.

My favorite footwear is ... Cole Haan ZeroGrand Hybrid Sneakers. Extremely comfortable for walking around the park, but look good with slacks.

My kitchen could be described as ... Always clean.

My commute to work is ... Used to be about an hour, but is now just 18 minutes.

When it comes to television, I would even watch re-runs of ... *The Office* for sure. It's still funny and very relatable.

You have a home-improvement project ... do you fix it yourself or hire someone to do it for you?

I love problem solving and doing things with my hands, but I also know my limits, so I'm likely hiring someone.

The coolest thing about life in Texas is ...

... There's so much to do and see all times of year in Texas. Great food and a rich and dynamic cultural history make it a great place to live.

My dream vacation is to ...

I love cruises, the destination doesn't matter. It's all about the journey.

The book I am reading right now is ...

The Ride of a Lifetime: Lessons Learned from 15 Years as CEO of the Walt Disney Company by Rober Iger.

THE INDUSTRY SEEN

Catching up is an "Adventure"



MUSKEGON, Mich. — *Amusement Today* Founder & Publisher Gary Slade (left) took time during his recent Michigan vacation to stop in and visit Michigan's Adventure. There, he found friends Camille Jourden-Mark, vice president and general manager (center) and her husband, J. Steve Mark, vice president of maintenance & construction (right). The park is enjoying its new Camp Snoopy featuring five family rides and other attractions. Guests to the park are also seeing new paint on multiple rides including the Corkscrew and Mad Mouse coasters. New track on the Wolverine Wildcat for 2024 was provided by The Gravity Group. COURTESY CHARLIE BREEN

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►BOBCAT

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multiple cross-overs.”

Six Flags Great Escape had a tall order in replacing the beloved Alpine Bobsled, aiming to capture the hearts of park guests once again. Bobcat delivers, featuring speeds up to nearly 40 mph, a height of 55.4 feet, and a length of 1,412 feet. The ride operates with two trains, each accommodating 12 passengers. The height requirement stands at 42 inches with a person of responsibility, and 48 inches to ride alone, making it accessible to a wide range of guests.

The coaster’s natural design beautifully complements the park’s surroundings in the Adirondacks, and its revolutionary coaster trains ensure a smooth rider experience. Bobcat’s layout, with its quick turns and drops, stays low to the ground, maintaining speed while offering ample airtime, a hallmark of Gravity Group rides.

The design process for Bobcat was a collaborative effort between Six Flags corporate, the park and The Gravity Group. Six Flags Great Escape, with its family-centric clientele, sought a ride that balanced excitement and accessibility. The Gravity Group delivered by iterating through five or six designs to perfectly fit the available space and meet the park’s needs. One key advantage was reusing the loading station from the Alpine Bobsled, a cost-effective move that allowed for the addition of homey touches around the station to create a lodge environment. This included an exterior Bobcat on the prowl ID sign at the entrance, enhancing the thematic experience.



Bobcat takes rides more than 55 feet into the air before racing down its wooden track. COURTESY SIX FLAGS GREAT ESCAPE

“The Bobcat site was complicated,” said Kiepert. “Anytime you reuse an existing structure, like we did with the station, it adds a level of complexity to the design. But when you look at the ride, the station and the storage area, you’d think it was designed just for Bobcat.”

A notable feature of Bobcat is its airtime. As riders ascend the lift and descend the first drop, they encounter a second hill of airtime that soars over the brake run and beneath a head chopper, delivering a dramatic visual and physical thrill. The ride’s design keeps passengers guessing, with twists, turns, and a double-up that maintains the excitement from start to finish. The final curve features a double down, followed by a graceful airtime hill leading into the brake run, encapsulating the ride’s dynamic, bounding sensation.

Bobcat’s name perfectly encapsulates the ride’s character — small, spunky, and full of surprises. The ride’s low-to-the-ground maneuvers maintain speed

and deliver consistent airtime, embodying the nimble nature of its namesake. The visual and physical aspects of the ride seamlessly tie into the Bobcat’s theme, creating an immersive and cohesive experience.

The ride’s development also had practical considerations. The Gravity Group and the park knew they wanted two trains to maximize capacity, necessitating a storage area. The existing station from Alpine Bobsled provided a convenient and budget-friendly solution, with the ride’s entrance reoriented to suit Bobcat’s layout.

“The Gravity Group has been such a pleasure to work with,” said Taylor Myers, communications manager at Six Flags Great Escape. “Partnering with them to bring a first-of-its-kind wooden roller coaster to Six Flags Great Escape has been a thrilling experience.”

Since its opening, Bobcat has quickly become a favorite among guests. Its accessible height requirement of 42 inches was a crucial design element, ensuring it catered to

Six Flags Great Escape’s typical family-oriented clientele. The ride offers nine distinct airtime moments, with each hill providing a unique sensation. The beautiful visual before the first drop adds to the anticipation, and the acceleration felt in the last curve leaves riders exhilarated.

“It’s a special roller coaster that has generated considerable excitement,” said Myers. “The feedback has been even better than we could have hoped. From kids experiencing their first big coaster to seasoned enthusiasts who travel the world, everyone has fallen in love with Bobcat.”

Beyond the technical and thematic achievements, Bobcat’s impact extends to the broader community. The ride has not only delighted park guests but has also contributed to a boost in local tourism. Lake George, a popular vacation destination known for its picturesque landscapes and outdoor activities, has experienced a surge in visitors eager to ride Bobcat. This influx of tourists has positively affected local businesses, from hotels

and restaurants to shops and entertainment venues, as families extend their visits to enjoy both the park and the surrounding attractions.

Local officials and business owners have praised Bobcat for its role in revitalizing the area’s tourism sector. The increased foot traffic has led to higher occupancy rates at hotels, more diners at restaurants, and a general uptick in economic activity. This boost is particularly welcome, as it helps to sustain the local economy during the peak tourist season and beyond.

Moreover, the success of Bobcat underscores the importance of continuous innovation and investment in amusement parks. For Six Flags Great Escape, the introduction of a new and exciting ride like Bobcat demonstrates a commitment to enhancing the guest experience and staying competitive in the amusement and theme park industry. It reflects a broader trend of parks recognizing the need to refresh their offerings regularly to attract new visitors and retain loyal fans.

Bobcat has proven to be the perfect addition to Six Flags Great Escape’s attractions lineup. With its thrilling yet approachable design, immersive theming and positive impact on local tourism, Bobcat is poised to become a beloved fixture at the park for years to come. Its combination of cutting-edge design, family-friendly appeal and significant contribution to the local economy makes it a success story in the amusement and theme park industry. As Bobcat continues to draw crowds and create lasting memories, it solidifies its place as a cornerstone of Six Flags Great Escape’s enduring legacy.

•sixflags.com/greatescape



Bobcat utilizes Gravity Group’s popular Timberliner trains (above left). The family wooden coaster welcomes guests 48 inches and taller, but guests 42 inches tall may ride with an adult. The ride features more than 1,400 feet of track. COURTESY SIX FLAGS GREAT ESCAPE, DON HELBIG

**THANK YOU TO SIX FLAGS GREAT ESCAPE FOR PARTNERING WITH US
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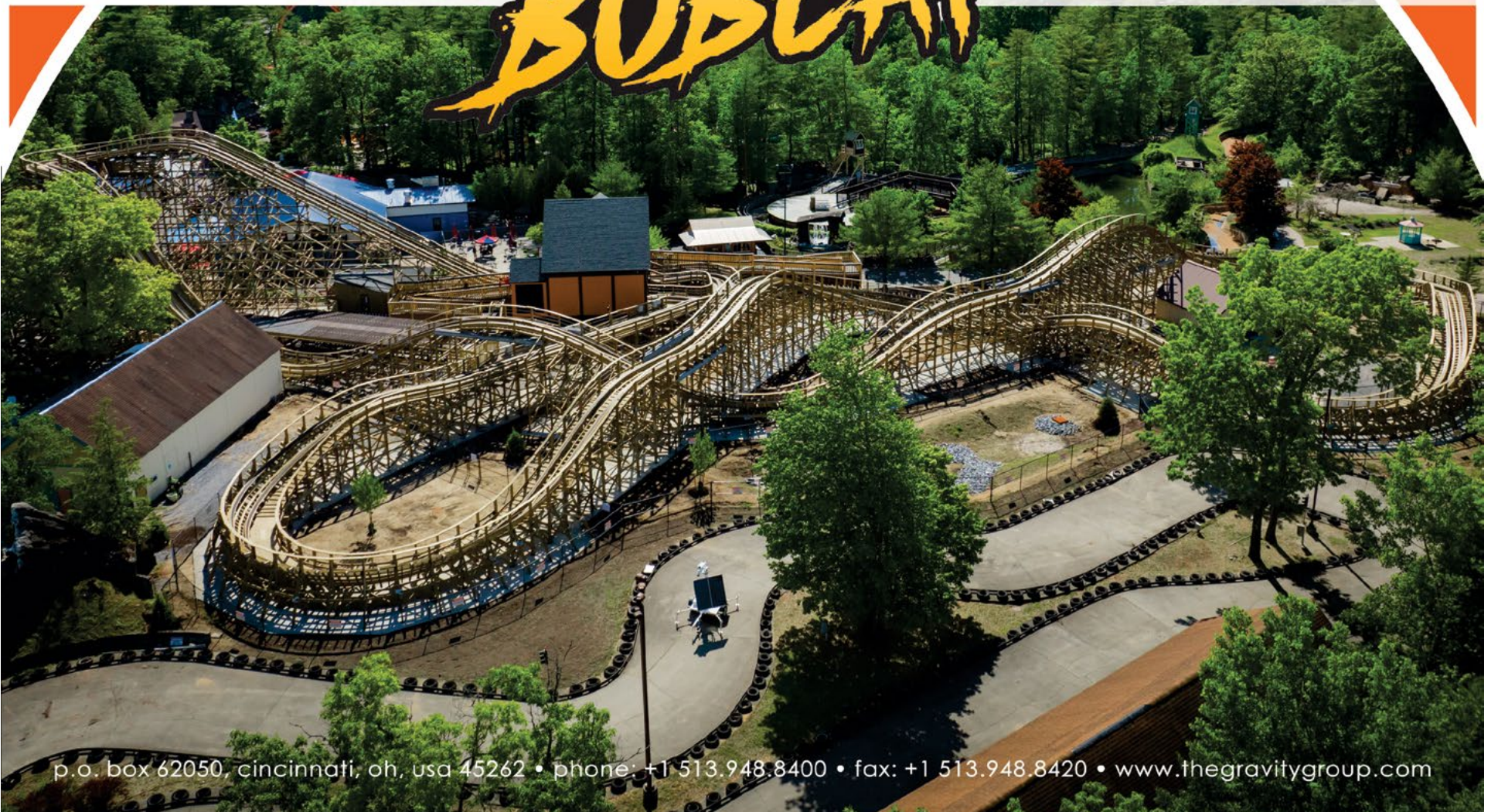


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The attraction's penguin encounter allows guests to come face-to-beak with six of the 18 different species of penguins that exist in the world (above left). Rob McNicholas, director of operations for SeaWorld Orlando, and Jon Peterson, park president of SeaWorld Orlando, along with Justin, an explorer character, and Puck, a penguin costumed character, took the honor of ribbon-cutters for the official opening of Penguin Trek on July 7 (above middle). A train filled with Orlando-area Scouts of America pack-members (above right) received the honor of being first to officially experience Penguin Trek. AT/DAVID FAKE

► PENGUIN Continued from page 1

indoor queue, themed to an Antarctic base camp for penguin observation and studies. It is at the base camp that guests board a snowmobile-styled train for their "trek" into the desert of the Antarctic in search of a penguin colony.

Upon departure from the base station, guests are treated to an indoor dark ride experience through a snow-covered landscape. This portion of the ride features practical set pieces and large-format projections where guests aboard their "snowmobile" then dip into a twisting cavern of special effects before launching out of the show building to experience the more thrilling, yet family-friendly, outdoor roller coaster segment of the ride.

After traversing drops, twists and turns as well as a second booster launch, guests return to the show building where they disem-

bark for the second segment of the attraction, the penguin encounter. It is here where guests can get face-to-beak with six of the 18 different species of penguins that exist in the world — Chinstrap, Rockhopper, King, Adelie, Gentoo and Magallenic.

"Penguin Trek was born out of what rides the park needs. When you step back you see that we have Mako with height and speed," said **Conner Carr**, United Parks and Resorts' corporate director of rides and engineering.

"There is Pipeline, a very unique surfing experience. We have Manta, a great flying coaster experience. Kraken is our classic sit-down thrill coaster. Journey to Atlantis is a water coaster. The shuttle coaster experience can be found on Ice Breaker. And finally, we have Super Grover's Box Car Derby in Sesame Street. And even though it is a family coaster that all can ride, it really is geared toward smaller kids and isn't necessarily exciting for adults. So,



you see, none of those are, as I keep saying, 'a coaster for all,' or 'an adventure for all' — a kind of attraction for everyone to ride and experience together. That was the kind of coaster we needed," Carr told *Amusement Today* at the attraction's media preview on July 1.

"So, then the question was, 'How can we put this type of coaster in the park so that it is somewhere that really is a good fit and makes sense?' Then the ideas started flowing. Then we looked at Antarctica a couple of years ago and realized, 'that's the place for it,'" added Carr.

The Antarctic-themed area of SeaWorld Orlando is the home of the park's penguinarium and was once the home to the ill-fated attraction Antarctica: Empire

of the Penguin, a motion-based, trackless dark ride at SeaWorld Orlando on which guests followed a young penguin, Puck, as he first ventures out into the sea. When boarding the ride, riders could choose between a mild or wild ride motion experience. The ride's final scene was a reveal of the actual penguinarium seen from the ride vehicles through large glass windows. Guests would then disembark the ride vehicles and enter inside the penguinarium, which is cooled to a chilly 32°F, replicating the penguin's natural environment.

Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin opened on May 24, 2013. The ride operated sporadically due to technical issues with the ride system until March 16, 2020. It was then that the ride, along with the entire park, suspended operations indefinitely due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The ride's sporadic and lengthy downtime accom-

panied by costly maintenance costs contributed to SeaWorld Orlando's choice not to reopen the ride portion of Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin when the remainder of the park and the attraction's penguinarium reopened to the public on June 11, 2020.

The ride's show building sat unused, and after the ride's closure, guests would enter the penguin experience portion of the attraction via a bypass of the ride in the attraction's queue, which is still utilized for guests who choose not to experience the roller coaster portion of the new Penguin Trek attraction.

"Much of the original show building has been completely reused," said Carr. "There's actually very little adjustment other than a couple of holes in the wall for trains to exit and reenter the building. In fact, the station platform is what was the finale room for Empire and the station exit ramp passes directly by the finale reveal windows of the former attraction."

United Parks and Resorts has come a long way with its storytelling and theming, ensuring that they remain a contender with the likes of **Disney** and **Universal** in the competitive Orlando market.

Penguin Trek is just the latest example of how SeaWorld Orlando is masterfully combining wildlife, education and innovative attraction design to create a remarkable and memorable experience that families of all ages will want to experience together.



Penguin Trek is a heavily themed, dual LSM-launched, family roller coaster that welcomes everyone from young adventurers of 42 inches tall to thrill-seekers of up to 77 inches. The coaster's trains have been styled to resemble snowmobiles, fitting the arctic theme of the ride and the surrounding Antarctica area of the park (above right). COURTESY SEAWORLD ORLANDO

PARKS, FAIRS & ATTRACTIONS

► Six Flags Over Texas revitalizes classic attractions — page 14 / Strates Shows brings back rail travel — page 24

Thorpe Park, Mack Rides break U.K. records with debut of Hyperia

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

CHERTSEY, England — It's often said records are made to be broken. It sometimes takes time to do so. Even though the U.S. theme park landscape broke the 300-foot barrier almost more than a quarter century ago (as well as 400 feet), England has a new record holder for the U.K. Thorpe Park has opened Hyperia, the U.K.'s tallest roller coaster. That alone is enough marketing clout to make millions take notice.

Supplied by Mack Rides, the coaster has several moments to make guests go "wow" — whether they are riding or not.

"Hyperia proudly holds the title of Mack Rides' tallest and fastest coaster to date. It's a significant milestone for the company and a testament to our commitment to pushing the boundaries of coaster design and engineering," said Maximilian Roeser, marketing, Mack Rides. "As it has already received so much



Hyperia breaks records as the tallest and fastest roller coaster in the U.K. COURTESY THORPE PARK

hype from the revelation of the layout to the first test runs, we can't express how proud we are to open this new ride. But our most important goal was the maximum airtime possible on such a ride. In total, we have 14.8 seconds of airtime on the coaster. That's 40% of the time that you'll have between the top of the lift and the brake run."

Standing at 236 feet tall, it surpasses the park's sec-

ond tallest coaster, Stealth, to redefine the skyline. But this project is more than just about records. It features dramatic new elements for the Mack Rides portfolio.

"Hyperia indeed introduces some innovative features not seen before in Mack Rides' repertoire. For instance, the ride incorporates a unique combination of inversions and airtime hills, providing riders with a thrilling and dynamic

experience unlike any other Mack coaster," Roeser noted. "One of the standout features of Hyperia is the inclusion of an outside banked turn, a first for Mack Rides. This element adds a thrilling twist to the coaster experience, providing riders with a unique sensation of lateral forces as they soar through the curve."

Hyperia has been in development for some time.

"From the initial planning stages to the ride's opening, the development of Hyperia took us some time," Roeser told *Amusement Today*. "We had our first layout presentation in October 2020 and then a development process over several ideas of the layout design [followed] to opening the ride now in 2024."

Thorpe Park is known throughout England as a theme park for thrill seekers. After opening in 1979, the park began finding acclaim as it added noteworthy coasters. Its first was an indoor,

backward-facing coaster. Since then, it has delivered the world's first 10-inversion coaster, a 205-foot tall launched coaster, the U.K.'s only wing coaster and more.

The track length is 3,266 feet long. Two trains hold 20 passengers each.

The station is decorated with gold, LED lighting and touches of fog. The motif of the ride and logo are wings of gold, and a tagline challenges riders to "find your fearless." The bottom part of the support structure is painted in gold, while the towering elements are in white.

The wild layout at times defies description. An outward-banked curve leads to the coaster's lift. After a traditional chain lift hill (complete with music), the trains immediately dive into a twisted first drop that curves under itself. It speeds into an Immelmann inversion, one of three. Aside from inversions, the outward-banked airtime hill may be the ride's most gasp-inducing moment. But a barrel roll down drop and a stalled dive loop are equally dramatic.

"Thorpe Park's reputation for extreme thrills certainly made a big impact on our layout design and the overall feeling of our ride," Roeser said. "We emphasized the importance of delivering a ride that not only meets but exceeds guest expectations for intensity and excitement. Collaborating with a park known for its dedication to thrill-seeking audiences likely spurred Mack Rides to push the limits of what's possible in coaster design."



The outward-banked airtime hill (above left) is the only one of this type in the world. The restraints on the Mack Rides vehicles make for a very comfortable ride. COURTESY THORPE PARK



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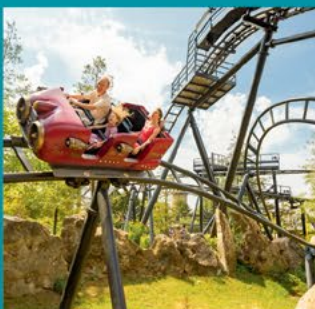
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Six Flags Great America opens Zamperla's Discovery Giga 40

AT: Pam Sherborne
 psherborne@amusementtoday.com

GURNEE, Ill. — Six Flags Great America, Gurnee, Illinois, opened a new thrill ride for the 2024 season, and that ride started the season with a bang.

Sky Stryker, a Zamperla Discovery Giga 40, opened June 7 to a much anticipated crowd of guests.

"We are thrilled to introduce Sky Stryker to our world-class lineup of attractions here at Six Flags Great America," said Six Flags Great America Park President John Krajnak.

The ride features a ring of outward-facing seats. In all, 40 passengers rotate around a central column. During the ride, guests are swung beyond 90 degrees.

Each passenger enjoys an individual seat, secured by an over-the-shoulder restraint.

As riders are launched skyward, they will feel a surge of excitement from soaring high into the sky. The pendulum's back-and-forth



The new Sky Stryker features a ring of 40 seats facing outward and swings riders at 75 mph up to heights of 172 feet. COURTESY SIX FLAGS/ZAMPERLA

motion creates a sense of vertigo, while reaching incredible heights inducing an exciting free-fall sensation.

The rapid swinging of the pendulum heightens the experience and the simultaneous spinning provides an adrenaline rush.

At the pendulum's highest points, which reaches 172 feet, riders experience a

stomach-drop sensation and a feeling of suspension in the air, combining to deliver a thrill and a breathless ride with every rapid change in motion and height.

The ride's top speed is 75 mph.

The dynamic return drop generates a variety of sensations on riders depending on their specific position in the

counterclockwise rotation, creating a different ride experience each time.

Krajnak said the park's ongoing relationship with the Italian manufacturer Zamperla has been instrumental in bringing innovative and exhilarating attractions to guests.

"The addition of Sky Stryker not only exemplifies the quality and excitement

that Zamperla attractions are known for, but also reinforces our commitment to delivering unforgettable experiences to our guests," he said.

Debuting in 2018 at Six Flags Magic Mountain, Valenica, California, the Zamperla Giga Discovery has thrilled many guests. Zamperla touts that the ride is the perfect focal point. It's massive, impossible to miss and designed to grab attention day and night.

The Discovery Giga 40 Sky Stryker is part of Zamperla's family of Discovery rides. Those include: Discovery Giant 40; Discovery Revolution 16; Discovery Revolution 30; Discovery 16 and Discovery 30.

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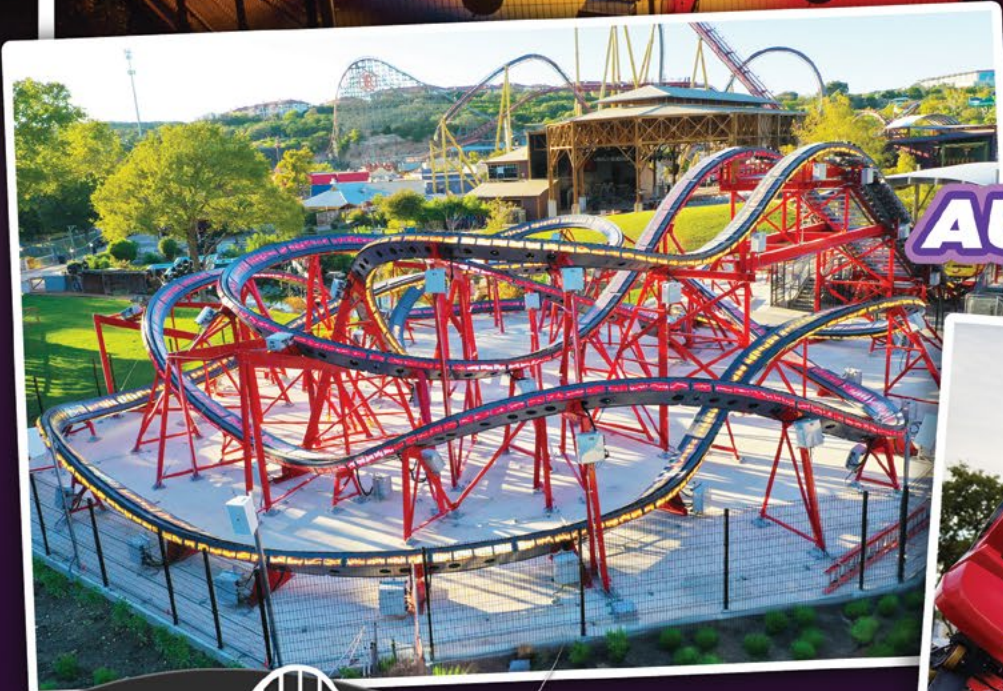
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Dinosaurs headline Six Flags Over Texas' new, returning attractions

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

ARLINGTON, Texas — The saying “What’s old is new again” applies to the summer season at **Six Flags Over Texas**. A trio of new additions are geared toward families. While it is new and fresh, there is a familiarity to it as well.

In 1962, the park’s second year of operation saw an expansion into undeveloped land anchored by an **Arrow** automobile ride called **Chaparral Cars**. They were named after one of three models produced by a Texas company, the **Cleburne Motor Car Manufacturing Company**, in 1911 and 1912. Seating four per vehicle, “Chaps” (as called by employees) had a higher capacity than the other automobile ride in the park. The ride is one of the longest-running attractions in the park’s history.

However, in 2024, it gets a new look — or a prehistoric look, depending upon how you look at it. Now called **Dino Off Road Adventure**,

the guide-rail vehicles travel past an assortment of larger-than-life animated dinosaurs.

“Most of my memories here at Six Flags are from when I was a kid coming with my parents, my grandparents, aunts and uncles — all those family memories,” said **Melanie Stolze**, marketing and communication supervisor. “I’m really excited to see generations of families together here to make fun memories and pass on stories for years and years.”

While a handful of the Arrow vehicles remain, a new fleet, supplied by **Gould Manufacturing**, makes for a blend of vehicles and styles.

We have 17 new vehicles from Gould,” said **Charles Laureano**, senior director. “Gould is building them off prints of the originals. They aren’t one-for-one replicas, but there are quite a few similarities between the original cars and the new fleet.”

Fifteen animated dinosaurs engage passengers on the car ride.



New autos from **Gould Manufacturing** (right), new landscaping and 15 dinosaurs provide a makeover to a 1960s attraction. The vehicles cause the dinosaurs to move as riders pass by.
AT/TIM BALDWIN

“The track is pretty big,” Laureano told *Amusement Today*. “We had to create foundations for each one of the dinosaurs to anchor them into the ground. That was

▶ See TEXAS, page 16



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► TEXAS

Continued from page 14

step one. Then we ran electrical from the station area all the way to the turnaround. Like a regular ride, there is an e-stop switch if we need to turn off all the dinosaurs. There are infrared sensors so that when a vehicle goes by, it activates the program."

"I have a favorite," smiles Stolze. "Cornelius the Carnosaur is my favorite because I like the look of him. He's scary and has little arms. I love everything about him."

As the ride opened to the public, Stolze said, "I've seen people commenting on how excited they are to show their kids the ride. When they are walking by, the kids see the dinosaurs and are enthralled and want to get closer."

Repeat riders may begin to notice more detail as they ride.

"We have five units out there that have specialized breathing mechanisms," said Laureano. "It gives the dinosaurs a little bit more realism. The bellies inflate and deflate."

Ocean Art provided the dinosaur assets for Six Flags.

"We have four of the largest units that they manufacture," said Laureano. "The Dilophosaurus is one of the most articulated units. There are a dozen different movements that work in concert."

Dino Off Road Adventure opened to the public in mid-June. One of the other notable differences to the attraction is that the cars are now traveling in the reverse direction, as well as some new hardscape elements.

Two other rides were added in early July, both from Zamperla. The pair are placed in Bugs Bunny Boomtown.

Daffy Duck Bucket Blasters was placed in storage when a large attraction

dictated its removal. AT asked if relocating a stored ride is easier than having to install something from scratch.

"In some ways, it can be more challenging," noted Laureano. "If they are stored outside, you have to inspect the condition of the vehicles. Plus, we want to update and upgrade control systems. It was a pretty big deep dive. We brought them into the shop and evaluated what we could upgrade."

The whirling water ride allows guests to aim water blasters at other riders.

Sylvester and Tweety Pounce and Bounce is a relocated ride from sister park Six Flags America, but new for the Arlington park. This ride stands 41 feet tall and offers a series of tummy-tickling drops and bounces. Riders sit in a circle around a central tower.

"Zamperla is easy to work with," shared Laureano. "The nice thing is it was a conscious decision to add rides that families could ride together. Daffy Duck's Bucket Blasters is bigger than the mini tea cup ride we had there. Moms, dads, grandparents and children can ride these two rides together."

"We have also brought back the train robbery and gunslinger fight," Stolze noted. "I have some vague memories of experiencing it as a kid, and it is cool that we brought it back. It's exciting."

"The cool thing is it is a continuous story," inserted Laureano. "There is the gunslinger show in the Texas area, and then a small scene in the Texas Depot where the marshal boards the train with a bag of loot. And the story continues down at the ghost town section. It's more about Texas coming alive with these cowboys and cowgirls."

The robbery takes place twice a day on Saturdays and Sundays.

Park Post-its



AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

The iconic thumbs-up from theme park workers to let other employees know it's okay to start a ride has become familiar to guests. A new technology using an AI-type process may make that gesture even more important.

A Universal Destinations & Experiences-related patent dubbed "System and Method for Controlling Operation of a Ride System Based on Gestures" appears to use a camera system that can read the gestures of ride operators to begin, stop or hold a ride taking away the need for operators at a control console.

Dallas's newest family fun attraction opened July 3, 2024. **Sea Dragon Safari**, a fleet of six dragon-shaped pedal boats, set sail on the **Fair Park Lagoon**. The classic pedal boats, which come in two-person and four-person sizes, are available for rent daily at the Fair Park Lagoon. The boats have been painted in bold and whimsical colors with designs by local artists.

Sea Dragon Safari is located near the **Children's Aquarium at Fair Park** and is being operated by the aquarium.

The four-person dragon-shaped boats are 10 feet long and five feet wide. The two-person boats are eight feet long and five feet wide. The boats rent for \$30 for a 20-minute ride.

Parc Astérix, an amusement park located near Paris, marks its 35th anniversary with new attractions this year.

The park offers more than 50 attractions and shows, blending entertainment and adventure in the thematic setting of the famous Astérix the Gaul comic strip.

Visitors can enjoy a variety of family-friendly experiences, including major roller coasters like Oziris and the record-breaking Toutatis, as well as water rides.

New attractions introduced for the anniversary include the musical *C'est du Délire!*, the star flyer *La Tour de Numérobis* and *Le Défilé Gaulois'* parade. The existing shoot the chute was rethemed to *La Revanche des Pirates — Le Grand Splatch*.

Despite the scorching heat, countries in the Middle East are continuing to build theme parks. Qatar is the latest, greenlighting a \$5.5 billion project 40

minutes north of the capital Doha.

It's called **Simaisma** and it's being built by a state-owned company, **Qatari Diar**, appointed by the government.

With a theme park at its core, the project will span eight million square meters (1,976 acres) along seven kilometers of beachfront land. The development is also set to include an 18-hole golf course surrounded by 300 villas, hotels, a marina and beach club, as well as homes and shops.

Gulliver's World has an action-packed summer of fun planned as it celebrates its 35th anniversary, including special appearances, a revamped ride and expanded accommodation.

The Warrington, U.K. theme park, which opened in 1989, has announced that *The Wiggler* has returned to the park with a brand-new look.

The *Wiggler*, a Pinfari Big Apple kiddie coaster, which is beloved by families, has been transformed and will re-join the 50 other rides and attractions at the park.

It's not just the return of *The Wiggler* that guests should be excited about though, as on August 31 the park will host a Summer Sparks Spectacular with Gully and Gilly mouse. There will be extended hours that day so families can better enjoy the fireworks show.

Dennis and Gnasher, as well as other characters from the Beano comic, will also be making an appearance at the park until September.

Gulliver's Hotel & Lodgings, in Old Hall, has expanded its accommodation too, with seven new holiday lodges now open for visitors.

There will be screams and cheers and laughs aplenty at **Valleyfair** theme park, Shakopee, Minnesota, over four days in January 2025, but they will have nothing to do with roller coasters and carnival games.

In July, officials from the **Minnesota Wild**, **Bally Sports North** and the local organizing committee for Hockey Day Minnesota (HDM) crowded a stage inside the park to announce the eight games involving 16 teams participating in the 19th annual HDM over the course of four days next winter.

"There's nothing more important for us than events like this if we're going to live up to the State of Hockey ideal, which is all true," Wild CEO **Matt Majka** said, during the announcement. "It's good for us, and it drives home the point that we're dedicated to the continuing health and growth of hockey in Minnesota."

The Wild will host Calgary at **Xcel Energy Center** in St. Paul, Minnesota, as the final matchup of HDM on the evening of Saturday, Jan. 25.

Before that, 16 teams will play on an outdoor rink, which will be set up in the Valleyfair parking lot.

Family-oriented Dreamworks Land opens at Universal Orlando

ORLANDO — Summer just got more exciting with the official debut of several all-new, must-see experiences at **Universal Orlando Resort**. Guests of all ages can now enjoy DreamWorks Land — the expansive, vibrant themed environment inspired by beloved characters from **DreamWorks Animation’s Shrek, Trolls** and *Kung Fu Panda*.

Guests can now step into the vivid worlds of some of their favorite animated films in DreamWorks Land, the colorful new area which features attractions, character meet and greets, interactive play areas and a live show inspired by DreamWorks Animation’s most beloved characters.

Guests can explore Shrek’s Swamp; feast on themed items like Shrekzels (pretzels shaped like the famous ogre) and Poppy-

licious Pink and BroZone Berry ice cream treats; scream with laughter on the Trolls Trollercoaster, learn kung fu moves with Po in the Panda Village; meet and take photos with characters like Shrek, Donkey, Poppy, Branch, Puss in Boots, Gabby from Gabby’s Dollhouse and more.

DreamWorks Land also features live entertainment with DreamWorks Imagination Celebration — a multisensory live show that combines hit pop songs, high-energy dancing and advanced technology to bring beloved DreamWorks stories to life like never before.

More personal experiences occur at DreamWorks Character Zone, where guests can meet, greet and interact with their favorite DreamWorks characters such as Gabby from Gabby’s Dollhouse.

•universalorlando.com



Universal Orlando's DreamWorks Land allows guests to explore imaginative areas such as Shrek's Swamp (above), the DreamWorks Character Zone (below left) and even enjoy live entertainment with DreamWorks Imagination Celebration (below right). COURTESY UNIVERSAL ORLANDO RESORT



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Landry's Kemah Boardwalk maintains, upgrades popular Boardwalk Bullet

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

KEMAH, Texas — Owned by Landry's, an amusement area in south Texas just outside Houston has received some improvements and upgrades.

Kemah Boardwalk has one of the wildest wooden roller coasters in the Lone Star State. The facility keeps a continual eye on its signature attraction, a wooden coaster.

"The Boardwalk Bullet is a high-thrill, record-breaking wooden roller coaster featuring 42 cross-overs," said **Jacob Bigger**, general manager. "Guests experience extreme heights, including a 92-foot drop with quick turns and sudden drops. The Boardwalk Bullet reaches speeds of 51 mph or more with 3.5 G-force. It is one of our premier attractions here at the Kemah Boardwalk that attracts over 300,000 riders annually."

The raucous coaster is no stranger to **Texas Skilled Carpentry**.

"We have been working with Kemah Boardwalk for several years; I'd say 13," said **Luis Acevedo**, owner, Texas Skilled Carpentry. "We've had a good relationship with everyone at Kemah."

"Every year, the Bullet undergoes multiple accelerometer readings to help determine potential areas of the track that may need to be inspected further," noted Bigger. "We review and com-



The team from Texas Skilled Carpentry — who has worked with the park for more than a decade — works on trouble spots to keep Boardwalk Bullet in top condition. COURTESY TEXAS SKILLED CARPENTRY

pare these readings to see how the track is reacting and holding up to scheduled maintenance. We work closely with **The Gravity Group** and other third-party coaster groups to develop and execute our annual plans. This process has led to us putting the coaster on a multiyear, multiphased plan that has included re-establishing its centerline; utilizing new materials like "Ipe," a Brazilian hardwood; and upgrading its control system to make it an enjoyable and safe ride for our guests for years to come."

"This year we worked on several areas," said Luis Acevedo's son, **Johny**, supervisor. "We installed all-new magnetic brakes

in the brake run. The year before, we changed the whole track on the lift hill to The Gravity Group's vertical track to eliminate any sag that's created when bents are too far apart."

With Kemah Boardwalk being positioned right on the Gulf, *Amusement Today* asked if the location created any harsh effects. "We believe it does affect [the structure] with humidity and salt from the ocean. That's why we provide a maintenance approach year-round," said Luis.

Boardwalk Bullet opened in 2007. It was designed by The Gravity Group and constructed by **Martin & Vleminckx**. It stands 96 feet tall and has a track length of 3,236 feet, all twisted on less than one acre. Two trains supplied by **Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters, Inc.** race over its rails. Perched near the water's edge, the ride offers sweeping views of an inlet of the Gulf of Mexico.

Kemah Boardwalk is home to numerous rides, multiple waterfront Landry's restaurants and retail outlets.



This aerial view shows work being done on the first turn off the lift. .COURTESY TEXAS SKILLED CARPENTRY

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The unique attractions at Activate Games locations encourage guests to stay active by physically making them part of the game itself. COURTESY ACTIVATE GAMES



Activate Games announces expansion with 30 new locations in U.K., Ireland

WINNIPEG, Canada — Activate Games Inc., a pioneering force behind the active gaming experience, announced its expansive venture into the United Kingdom and Ireland markets with the opening of 30 new stores in partnership with We Do Play.

Following the success of Activate's innovative gaming concept across North America and the MENA region, the company is poised to energize the entertainment landscape in the U.K. and Ireland. With a commitment to promoting physical activity while offering unparalleled gaming experiences, Activate is set to captivate audiences across these regions with the FECs' unique experiences and offerings.

"This expansion marks a significant milestone in Activate's journey," said Adam Schmidt, founder and CEO of Activate Games Inc. "The U.K. and Ireland have long been on

ACTIVATE

our radar as markets ripe for Activate's unique blend of interactive gaming and physical activity. We are excited to bring our adrenaline-pumping adventures to communities across these regions and provide an unforgettable entertainment experience for players of all ages."

Each Activate location offers an immersive gaming environment where players can #EnterTheGame and compete in a variety of interactive challenges. Activate promises an experience like no other, where players can unleash their competitive spirit while staying active.

"We are committed to diversifying leisure offerings and providing our guests with innovative entertainment experiences," said Richard Beese, co-owner of We Do Play. "With the launch of 30 new stores in the U.K. and

Ireland, we are thrilled to introduce Activate to a new audience and create lasting memories for families, friends, and gaming enthusiasts alike."

The expansion into the U.K. and Ireland marks a significant milestone in Activate's global growth strategy. Activate is poised to unveil more than 20 new stores across the United States and Canada in 2024, including an expansion into the MENA region this fall.

Furthermore, Activate has strategic plans for international growth, with aspirations to establish 70 stores in 10 countries over the next decade.

With locations worldwide and a dedicated community of fans, Activate continues to push the boundaries of traditional entertainment and redefine the gaming experience for the modern era.

•playactivate.com

Urban Air Adventure Park to launch new slide attractions

DALLAS, Texas — Urban Air Adventure Park is unveiling a new attraction across the country this year — Urban Air Adventure Slides.

The new Adventure Slides are set to debut in August 2024 starting at Urban Air Adventure Park locations in Southlake, Texas, and north Fort Worth, Texas. Following the initial launch, Adventure Slides will be rolled out to over 30 locations this fall and nationwide across Urban Air's more than 200 existing parks in 2025 and beyond. All new parks under development will feature these state-of-the-art slides as a staple attraction. The innovative and patent-pending designs include the Surf, Scoop, Racer, Launch and Tube Slides.

"With this rollout, we're enhancing our next-level entertainment to create unforgettable moments for our guests," said Jeff Palla, brand president of Urban Air. "The new slides are designed to integrate seamlessly within the architectural footprint of our parks, ensuring a blend of excitement and aesthetics for our families and franchisees."

Monster Mini Golf opens North Carolina location



MONROE, N.C. — Monster Mini Golf, the franchised, multi-tier, indoor family entertainment center that brings black lights and international theme-park quality animated figures to miniature golf and other activities, will open its latest location on August 3, 2024, in Monroe, North Carolina. The franchise is owned by Christopher King, CEO of Monster Entertainment, the franchisor for Monster Mini Golf locations across the nation. The 11,500-square-foot family entertainment center will feature Monster's signature 18-hole miniature golf course, featuring eerie black lighting and animated figures, a four-lane bowling alley, Laser Maze, an arcade with a prize center, live entertainment from a D.J., alcohol-free snack bar and haunted house-themed party rooms that can host private events for families and companies. COURTESY MONSTER MINI GOLF



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Care Bears enter Location Based Entertainment market

LOS ANGELES — Care Bears, one of **Cloudco Entertainment's** most beloved properties, has retained **Bay Laurel Advisors** to help strategize Care Bears expansion into the world of Location Based Entertainment (LBE) and secure licensing opportunities for high-quality guest experiences within theme parks, family entertainment centers, themed-dining, themed-retail, hospitality and other location-based entertainment venues.



The Care Bears, with over 40 years of heartwarming adventures, were recently honored as "The #3 Hottest Brand" in the global character licensing business by *License Global Magazine*. These remarkable milestones, coupled with the thriving success of its YouTube Channel, which has amassed over 185 million views, and a TikTok presence boasting over 400 thousand followers and 9.3 million likes, underscore the enduring appeal of the Care Bears brand.

Bay Laurel Advisors is led by its founder and president, **George Wade**, an executive with decades of LBE collaborating with major entertainment brands to create appealing entertainment-based experiences. Joining Wade on the Care Bears account is **Joe Lawson**, who worked with Wade during his days leading entertainment content for **Rovio Entertainment**.

Properly trained FEC staff makes all the difference

DALLAS, Texas — A family entertainment center that's successful at training staff regularly can positively affect its bottom line. Proper staffing management, increased employee retention, reduced reliance on contractors and support teams as well as improved uniformity and consistency in the organization are all benefits for FECs that maintain training with their staff.

"Guest satisfaction is only as good as the training staff receive on a regular basis," stated **Joshua Chappell**, field force manager and GoTrain engineer for **Embed**. "Businesses that put a premium in employee development like training see 11% greater profitability."

"A well-trained staff provide superior customer service that increases satisfaction and loyalty among FEC guests," Chappell added. "Our research shows that 42% of consumers would pay more for a friendly and welcoming experience."

Aside from the basics of installation and troubleshooting, FECs need cross-functional staff that are not only operators of games and attractions but are the ambassadors of the systems that run the business.

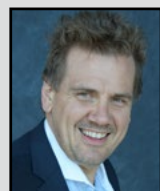
"This is what we had in mind when we came up with the Embed GoTrain," offered Chappell. "This program is tailor-fit for FEC staff, with the program involving hands-on training, role-playing and on-the-job training."

Chappell's experience has shown that staff training pays off in transformational revenue growth. He commented, "Our customer **Stars & Strikes** went from zero to 411 Mobile Wallet registrations over three months post-training, racking up an average reload value of \$42."

• embedgotrain.com



Chappell



FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRAL

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

Betson Enterprises announced the installation of 60 cutting-edge games at two new **Rush Funplex** locations in Pleasant View, Utah, and Shawnee, Kansas. These installations mark Betson's continued partnership with The Rush Funplex, following successful collaborations at four other locations across Utah and Missouri.

"We have been using Betson for over 10 years at our facilities," stated Owner **Kenny Gertge**. "They have been great to work with from starting new locations to upgrading arcade machines."

The Pleasant View location celebrated its grand opening in November 2023, followed by the Shawnee location in March 2024. Under the guidance of Betson Northwest Regional Sales Director **Steve Lamoreaux**, each game room was designed to offer a unique array of entertainment options. The Pleasant View location features attractions such as **Fast & Furious Arcade Motion (Raw Thrills)**, **Dinosaur Era (Coastal Amusements)**, 6-player Prize Cube (**Coast to Coast Entertainment**) and **Photo Studio Deluxe (Apple Industries)**. Meanwhile, the Shawnee location boasts **Dodgeball Ultimate Arena (Ice Games)**, **Combo Boxer (Kalkomat)**, **Big Shot (Jet Games)**, **Showtime 4-player (Coastal Amusements)** and **Fantastic Prize (UNIS)**.

Altitude Trampoline Park announced remarkable growth since the start of the year. With a focus on providing family-friendly entertainment, Altitude has proven itself as an attractive investment opportunity for franchisees, with six signed development agreements that will bring 13 new locations to target markets nationwide.

Since the start of 2024, Altitude has opened four locations in Spring Hill, Florida; Austell, Georgia; North Versailles, Pennsylvania; and Webster, Texas, and currently has eight units leased and under construction. Altitude is continuing this momentum, with its franchise agreements to bring locations to North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee, among other states.

"Our growth in 2024 has been phenomenal. Dedicated to providing family-friendly fun, we are committed to expanding nationwide to make our parks accessible to everyone," said **Mike Rotondo**, CEO of Altitude Trampoline Park. "It's amazing to see several of our existing franchisees expanding their footprint while also welcoming new franchisees into our system. As our growth continues, exciting plans are in store that will continue to make Altitude a worthwhile investment for franchisees and a top destination for all families."

Also in 2024, Altitude expanded its leadership team, welcoming new hires, including

Chris Kuehn as chief operating officer, **Mike Stout** as vice president of franchise development and **Mike D'Arezzo**, director of franchise development.

Altitude is continuing its growth with eight units currently under construction.

Slick City, inventors of the world's first indoor slide park designed for all ages, has announced that the lease has been signed for the company's first franchise location in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The brand's first Minnesota location will be in the Arbor Lakes district and is slated to open in Spring of 2025. Franchise owners, **Mike and Annie Kelly** are thrilled to be bringing Slick City to their community and state that it's a perfect fit for those looking for an action park experience everyone will love.

"As parents of three young children, we couldn't imagine a better place for Slick City's Minnesota debut than the Arbor Lakes district in Maple Grove," said the Kellys. "Living nearby, we love frequenting the local restaurants, shops, and ice arenas, making us deeply connected to and passionate about this vibrant community."

Intercard has installed its cashless technology at multiple family play venues recently.

Among the installations are the 280-acre **Playland** amusement park in Rye, New York, and the 8,000-square-foot indoor **Jungle Jam** in Albuquerque, New Mexico. While the two centers differ dramatically in size and scope, both operators found Intercard's versatile cashless system ideal for their arcades.

A National Historic Landmark, Playland is revered for its art deco architecture and vintage rides like the Gondola Wheel and Grand Carousel. Jungle Jam features trampolines, obstacles, mazes, slides, crawl tunnels, bridges, climbing partitions and the only ball blaster arena in Albuquerque. They recently chose Intercard cashless technology for their 30-game redemption arcade. The new system replaces an older one that had been embedded by another manufacturer.

Intercard's **Mack Inabinette** did both installations in June 2024.

The company has also installed its latest cashless technology at **Galaxy Bowling and Entertainment Center** in Richmond, Kentucky. The 32-lane center recently refreshed its 50-game arcade with 30 new games and replaced an older cashless system with Intercard's latest PlusXL software, which allows easy customization of the touch screen on the arcade's iTeller kiosk.

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Strates Shows is bringing back limited rail travel for 2024 season

AT: B. Derek Shaw

bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

TAFT, Fla. — The last remaining show train in the world will be back in business, at least in part, during the 2024 season. James E. Strates Shows has put together a fair train that will ride the rails along the Eastern Seaboard from Orlando to Hamburg, New York, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of its partnership with the Erie County Agricultural Society, host of the Erie County Fair, Hamburg.

It's been four years since the show has traveled by rail, the last being the fall of 2019. Part of the curtailment was the pandemic-related shutdown of the fair industry. Crews have been busy all winter and spring preparing rail cars that were dormant. They were mechanically overhauled and restored, including the application of a retro-inspired paint scheme and lettering.

"Erie County is our only 2024 run. The number of cars has yet to be determined (as of press time.) Our cars are traveling in general freight and not as an independent



unit train as in the past," said Marty Biniasz, Strates spokesperson.

It is hoped that other spots the operation plays will be able to operate via rail in upcoming seasons.

The reactivation of the Strates Shows rail program coincides with a centennial celebration to commemorate their partnership with the fair. The exclusive partnership is a historical milestone in the modern amusement industry and is considered the longest continuous run of any carnival midway in the United States. The 2024 fair runs August 7 through August 18, with more than 100 rides, games and vendors on the Hamburg midway.

"We have worked extremely hard with all of



Retired show painter Jack McKissock, who has been painting unique murals and ride panels for Strates Shows for nearly 40 years, lettered each car. COURTESY JAMES E. STRATES SHOWS

our railroad partners to make this summer's run possible," said Director of Operations Jimmy Strates. "Our carnival train is a beloved aspect of Americana that deserves to be celebrated. We are immensely proud of our railroad heritage as part of our overall outdoor amusement business operations."

The flat cars making the journey are painted orange to reflect color schemes used during the 1960s and '70s. Retired show painter Jack McKissock, who has been painting unique murals and ride panels for

Strates Shows for nearly 40 years, hand lettered each car and added his own artistic touches. One of Strates' oldest rail cars, a circus-style Warren Car Company flat car used as the "ramp car," has been freshly outfitted in blue paint with bright yellow ramps.

Strates Shows has worked closely with its mainline railroad partner, CSX Transportation to enable the historic show train movement to occur. The "Fair Train" will move in general freight during its trip up the Eastern Seaboard from Strates Shows winter

quarters in central Florida to western New York State.

Strates Shows, founded in 1923, began using railroads to transport its midway attractions up and down the Eastern Seaboard in 1934. It was common for dedicated Strates trains to be more than 50 cars in length, carrying everything from rides, tents and games, to attractions, generators and employees. In December 1953, James Strates purchased a tract of land south of downtown Orlando for its "winter quarters" base of operation and constructed a mile-long spur to accommodate the "Fair Train." The train was the primary method of transporting the carnival through the end of the 2019 season.

"We have found ways to modify our business model to including over-the-road trucks, just like we were back in the early 1930s," said Biniasz. "But the train is invaluable to Strates Shows heritage and brand. It means so much to our fair partners and to the generations of fairgoers who have waited by the train tracks to see the carnival come to town."

Since 1982, and the end of rail operations by Royal American Shows, Strates Shows has been the last remaining railroad traveling carnival. In 2017, Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus announced its closure, ending that cir-

► See STRATES, page 25

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Strates Shows flat cars that will make the journey to the Erie County Fair, Hamburg, are being painted orange to reflect color schemes used during the 1960s and 1970s.

Also shown is a circus-style Warren Car Company flat car used as the "ramp car," outfitted in blue paint with bright yellow ramps.

COURTESY
JAMES E. STRATES SHOWS



►STRATES

Continued from page 24

cus train tradition, making Strates Shows officially the last show train on American rails. Railroad and carnival historians are hard pressed to find another "show train" operating anywhere in the world.

"Moving forward, Strates has elected to trim the fleet and plans to retain 25 cars while the remainder are in the process of being sold," said Biniasz. At one point, there were over 60 cars in the rail fleet.

To commemorate the "Fair Train," Strates Shows has partnered with Atlas Model Railroad Co., Inc. to release models depicting trains from two different eras. The models will be announced for pre-order reservations in Atlas' O-scale catalogs, beginning with the first of the announcements this summer.

Strates Shows is a family-owned and operated outdoor amusement and carnival business with headquarters in Orlando, Florida. The company was founded in 1923 by Greek immigrant James E. Strates as Southern Tier Shows in Elmira, New York. The business is led by third generation Strates members, including Jimmy, Jay, John, and Susan. Nick Strates, who officially joined the show full-time during the 2015 season, is the fourth generation of the family to continue the tradition. Overseeing it all, as he has for the past 66 years, is E. James Strates, who continues to be actively involved in daily operations from their offices in Orlando.

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Iowa State Fair's Sky Glider celebrates half-century over its midway

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

DE MOINES, Iowa — Tracy Shedd has good reason to celebrate this summer at the Iowa State Fair.

The 2024 edition of the exposition, Aug. 8–18, marks the 50th year of operation of a Sky Glider scenic chairlift ride, which has been a significant part of Shedd's life as well as a staple at the fair since 1975.

"The state fair was literally in my backyard when I was a kid, and I came to know every drop of it," he recalled. "In '75, Jerry Pendleton was installing the ride, and I was the kid in their way doing anything I could to help them."

Shedd's persistence paid off as Pendleton (1938-2017), an iconic industry figure and founder and president of New Hampshire's SkyTrans Mfg., hired him to help run the new ride. When not working for Pendleton in those early days, Shedd did other jobs for the fair, including operating its historic Ye Old Mill ride and off-season maintenance.

Sticking with an occupation he fell in love with, Shedd, now 63, is the general manager for SkyFair Inc., a management company that owns and operates eight similar chairlift rides, including those at the state fairs of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois.

"Jerry was like a second father to me," Shedd said of the relationship he had with Pendleton. "Anything to do with the rides from operating to maintenance — Jerry got me involved with all of them."

With the exception of



At right is Tracy Shedd at the original Sky Glider ride prior to the 2024 edition of the Iowa State Fair. The event's midway is pictured above. COURTESY IOWA STATE FAIR

one ride, all of the attractions under SkyFair's umbrella are from the design of industry legend O.D. Hopkins (1926-2010). Hopkins produced a variety of amusement rides for more than four decades and Pendleton served as president of the company before the two businessmen launched the SkyFair division.

Pendleton eventually purchased the assets of the chairlift business from Hopkins and created SkyTrans Mfg., which continues today under the direction of his sons in Contoocook, N.H. SkyFair is a subsidiary of SkyTrans.

Not just the fair

The original Sky Glider is one of two aerial tramways at the Iowa State Fair, with the second — using the same title — being added in 2003.

According to Shedd, the original ride has had only one modification through the years.

"We created more capacity by adding a tower and

relocating two 40-foot towers," he said of the updates. The ride, 1,241 feet in length, now has 90 seats compared to its original 67. The capacity of each seat is two adults or two adults and a small child.

"The original ride starts in the heart of the fairgrounds and goes up a slight hill — supposedly one of the highest points in Iowa," Shedd noted. "The ride turns around by the campground, so most people take the roundtrip. Coming down the hill you can see the city and the state capitol building."

The newer Sky Glider starts near Gate 10 where the Dart Transit Hub (bus drop-off) is located and runs 1,250 feet to Rock Island Avenue in the fairgrounds. It also has 90 seats and 40-foot towers but only a small rise due to topography.

Tickets are \$6 one way and \$9 roundtrip for each ride.

"It takes between 18 to 22 minutes for the roundtrip on the rides," Shedd said. "And give a few people rides — the original averaging 125,000 persons and newer ride around 100,000 during the fair. Sky rides at fairs generally take in eight to 12 percent of the gates, but we do a little better than that here. We're on the upper side of the averages."

The Sky Gliders at the Iowa State Fair also see some action outside of the annual exposition.

"We run them at the Goodguys car show over July 4th and a few other smaller events," he emphasized.



"We've even run them for weddings and cattle shows — anything people want to pay us for. We enjoy people having the experience during these off-season events and the opportunity to see the fairgrounds from the air."

Taking care of business

As for maintaining the chairlifts, Shedd said, "We take very good care of these rides. We pull all of the seats and hangers off, and I stay on top of everything. I've never had to replace the wire ropes (cable) because we keep the ride properly maintained."

He noted that the large ropes actually consist of a nylon core encased in steel wire. Proper lubrication keeps the core from shrinking and maintains the integrity of the rope.

Both rides are examined annually by "specialized inspectors" with an understanding of chairlifts and — most notably — wire rope.

Gold seat auctioned

In commemoration of the original Sky Glider's 50th season, Shedd has painted three of the rides' seats gold. One seat will be on each of the two rides during the fair.

The third seat was auctioned off at the July 13

Corndog Kickoff Benefit Auction for the Iowa State Fair Blue Ribbon Foundation. Proceeds from the auction go toward renovation and preservation of the fairgrounds. Seats previously auctioned off have sold from \$7,000 to \$22,000 each.

"They make great backyard swings," Shedd asserted.

Shedd is engaged to Holly Coston, who has served as seminar manager for AIMS International for more than 20 years and is currently the office administrator for the National Association of Amusement Ride Safety Officials.

"She's a partner now in all of this at SkyFair," he said. "Holly has actually operated a couple of rides for us when some of our fairs overlapped."

We both have a great love for the Iowa State Fair and the business," he said of the bond.

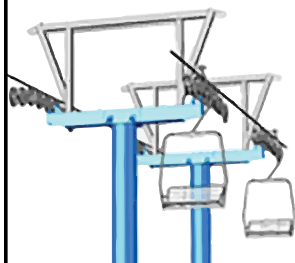
In summing up his life on the fairgrounds, Shedd noted: "It's great seeing satisfied customers, as well as all of the people we have worked with here at the fair and across the industry. The fair considers me a partner, as well as an employee. It's a great relationship."

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MIDWAY

Iowa State Fair's midway features themed areas, rare Old Mill

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

DE MOINES, Iowa — The Iowa State Fair, founded in 1854, has been held at its current location, a massive campus that encompasses 450 acres, since 1886.

“Prior to moving here, the fair was held at various locations all over the state,” noted **Mindy Williamson**, marketing director for the fair. “In recent years, attendance during our 11-day run averages around 1.1 million.”

Since 2017 the exposition has featured an independent midway, which is divided into three distinctly themed areas.

Thrill Ville is exactly what it says and for 2024 will feature spectaculars such as Crazy Dance and Eclipse (**Fabbri**), Flipper (**Huss**), High Flyer and Rockstar (**ARM**) and a classic Sky Wheel (**Allan Herschell**).

Thrilltown is for the younger generation with a variety of kiddie and family rides, while Thrill Zone has a handful of extreme pay-as-you-go attractions.

According to Williamson, the fair brings in around 40 rides each year to supplement the midway areas. In addition, the fair has two permanent Sky Glider chairlifts, a giant slide and a historic Ye Old Mill ride.

Presale all-day ride wristbands are available for \$40 each online and are valid Monday–Thursday. The all-day ride passes — not available for purchase at the fair — include the Thrill Ville and Thrilltown attractions. Patrons can purchase ride credits on a card or wristband to be used on individual rides.

“The Sky Gliders are a great way to see our iconic fair,” Williamson said of the aerial attractions. “Our Old Mill is one of just a handful left operating in the nation. Our ride turned 100 in 2021. We also have a giant slide that is 50 feet high and 170 feet long. The fair is proud to still have these permanent rides.”

The 1,500-foot-long mill ride was in need of repairs by the early 1990s. As repairs were in the making, a windstorm leveled the building in 1996, but a gift from **Boatman's Bank** allowed the structure to be rebuilt in time for the fair that same summer.



Spinning coaster (above left) is a popular ride in Thrilltown at the Iowa State Fair. The wheel lights up the evening along the independent midway at the fair (above right). COURTESY IOWA STATE FAIR



The Chance Rides Yo-Yo swings on the midway at the Iowa State Fair. COURTESY IOWA STATE FAIR



Ye Old Mill ride at the Iowa State Fair is one of just a handful of such rides remaining in the country. COURTESY IOWA STATE FAIR

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MIDWAYS SCENE

AT: B. Derek Shaw

bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

After a five-year hiatus, the **Alaska Railroad** is returning to provide transportation the final weekend of this year's **Alaska State Fair**. A special platform has been built especially for fair guests on a spur track in Palmer, where the fair is held.

"The Alaska Railroad is happy to once again partner with the Alaska State Fair," says **Dale Wade**, vice president of marketing and customer service for the state-owned **Alaska Railroad Corporation**. "We're always looking for opportunities to serve the community, and giving fairgoers a relaxing, enjoyable way to get to the fair is one way we can do that," he told *Alaska Business*.

On August 30, August 31, and September 1, the railroad will run two 90-minute round trips per day between the Anchorage depot and the South Palmer train depot next to the Green Gate at the fair.

"Since fairgoers don't have to think about driving and parking, they can just focus on having a good time with family and friends," says **Jeff Curtis**, CEO of the Alaska State Fair. "A visit to the Alaska State Fair is fun and memorable, and riding the train adds to that experience."

The 2024 fair takes place August 16 through September 2. **Golden Wheel Amusements** is providing the ride lineup.

Vicki Chouris, president and CEO of the **South Florida Fair & Palm Beach County Expositions Inc.** retired June 30 at the close of the fair's fiscal year. Chouris had served in one capacity or another with the fair for 43 years.

Chouris said what she'll miss the most are the people — her staff and the volunteers who make it all happen. "I'll also miss seeing the smiles of the fairgoers, knowing that they are bringing joy to thousands of people, thanks to the time, effort and talents of our staff and volunteers," Chouris told the **Town-Crier** paper.

Matt Wallsmith, chief financial officer took over her position July 1. During his 26 years with the organization, he was responsible for handling accounting and overseeing gates, midway, concessions, information technology and maintenance operations. He was instrumental in creating Fright Nights, the fair's largest event outside of the annual fair in January.

Wallsmith earned a master's degree in accounting from the **University of Florida** and began his career in public accounting at **Ernst & Young LLP**. He is a licensed CPA in Florida. Wallsmith's goals are to focus on improving parking and enhancing the overall experience and value for fairgoers.

"I'm excited to lead the South Florida Fair into its next chapter, emphasizing innovation, sustainability and excellence,"

Wallsmith said. "I'm looking forward to working closely with the board, leadership team and all employees to drive the organization's mission and deliver exceptional experiences to fairgoers."

The fair comes around again January 16 through February 2, 2025, with **Wade Shows** handling the midway.

Five weeks before the **Ventura County Fair**, Ventura, California, started and after only one year on the job, CEO **Jen McGuire** resigned, citing health reasons. The news came out of a closed-session fair board meeting in late June.

"Jen has been an integral point person for this Fairgrounds," Board President **Dan Long** told the *Ojai Valley News*. "Her leadership inspired all of our employees to work so hard to improve the grounds that we all care about."

The private session was also attended by attorneys and officials from the state, as well as officials from the **California Department of Food and Agriculture**.

Current Board President Long and Deputy Manager **Heidi Ortiz** will work together in a joint role as interim co-CEOs through the end of this year's fair, then the board will likely conduct a search for a new CEO afterward.

McGuire was hired as CEO a year ago and also served as CEO of the **Eastern Sierra Tri-County Fairgrounds** in Bishop, California.

The Ventura County Fair takes place July 31 to August 11. It is an independent midway with nine different carnivals supplying the rides, games and food.

Earlier this year, **Majestic Midways**, York, Pennsylvania, purchased the name and assets of **Russ Amusements**, Dillsburg, Pennsylvania. Owner **Jim Boyer** was looking to retire. Sixteen of the 19 rides were purchased by Majestic. "We have been friends and neighbors for years," said **Terry Johnston** with Majestic. "They were not a competitor for us, as we operated in different markets."

Boyers' sons, **Christian** and **Steve**, retained the games and food trailers and travel the route. Russ Amusements will continue the name under Majestic ownership, playing approximately 20 spots including Shrewsbury, Delta, Marysville, and Hanover in Pennsylvania, and Manchester, Taneytown and Thurmont in Maryland, among others.

The acquisition operates more like a partnership said Johnston. In the off-season the sons will work at Majestic winter quarters in Dover, Pennsylvania. "They are an asset to our company. They are talented. We get along real well," said Johnston.

Majestic plays primarily southeastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware, with over 50 rides in their operation.



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► NewsSplash — page 34

Silverwood's Boulder Beach debuts Emerald Forest expansion

AT: Jeffrey Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

ATHOL, Idaho — In June, **Boulder Beach**, the water park at **Silverwood Theme Park**, opened a 3.86-acre, \$15 million expansion — Emerald Forest. The expansion increases the area of the water park by nearly 30 percent. Idaho is known as the “gem state,” so each of the themed areas is named after a different gem — Sapphire Springs, Garnet Bay and Opal Ridge. The newest, Emerald Forest, is touted as a place where guests can immerse themselves in “the wonders of nature, embrace the thrill of the hunt, and the joy of discovery. The crowning jewel of the new area is Eagle Hunt, a **ProSlide** Dueling RocketBlast — the first of its kind on the West Coast. It also takes the reins as the longest dueling water coaster in North America.

“We hope that this expansion will enhance the overall guest experience, offering more thrills, relaxation options, and fun for visitors of all ages,” said **Stephanie Sampson**, Silverwood’s PR manager.

As with similar ProSlide RocketBlast installations,

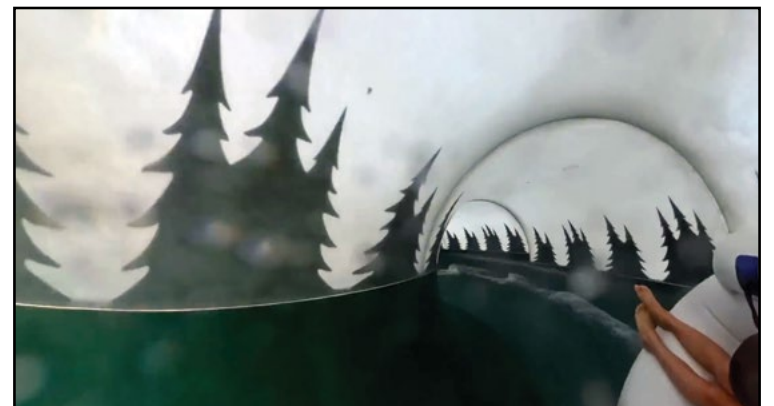


Shortly after dispatch (above left) the pair of rafts take off in different directions before meeting up at the first uphill blast (above right). The new ProSlide shadow effect simulates guests flying through an evergreen forest (below).
COURTESY SILVERWOOD THEME PARK

Eagle Hunt features both racing and dueling aspects pitting riders side-by-side against each other, then having them separate and rejoin in a head-to-head dueling zone. The massive slide includes three of ProSlide’s signature saucer sections, four uphill blasts using proprietary water jet technology, and three downhill rally points, including a double-down finale that leads into the final runout.

The ride also features the first use of ProSlide’s shadow effect which combines opaque fiberglass with sheer fiberglass, creating a silhouette of the opaque

shape along the bottom half of the flume. In keeping with the theme, Eagle Hunt, ProSlide uses evergreen tree shapes. The sheer fiberglass on the top half of the flume is highly translucent, allowing a lot of light to penetrate, which enhances the “shadow” experience. The intention is to make the guests feel as though they are traveling through a forest with trees on either side and the sun shining above. To further enhance the experience, guests are asked to pick an animal for the hunt and race down the slide like an eagle in pursuit of its prey. If the



riders get to the bottom in the specified time, they will have “caught” their prey. If they don’t make it in time, it will have gotten away. Some animals are harder to catch than others and require a faster hunt. Choices range from a turtle that can be captured in 50 seconds to a fox that must be caught in 39 seconds. A screen at the end of the slide will show the riders’ exact times and whether or not they were successful.

After thrill seekers make their way to the top of the tower, they board two-person rafts. The pair of rafts is dispatched via a conveyor system to make sure that both rafts are launched at the same time. Once they make contact with the slide, the hunt is on. A short rally point allows competitors to see each other before they quickly diverge into tunneled tubes leading in the opposite direction. Paths converge as riders encounter

the first side-by-side uphill blast. Paths split again as the rafts enter the first of three saucer elements. After feeling the force of the positive Gs as they round the saucer, riders then encounter the longest uphill blast leading to another saucer section which sets them up for the duel. As riders race downhill in an open chute, they will see their competition on the other side heading toward them and then whiz by in the opposite direction. Another blast sends the rafts into the shadow effect section where riders will get the illusion that they are flying through a conifer forest. Another uphill blast launches the rafts into the third and final saucer, which brings the two paths back together again for the final rally point into the runout. Here challengers can see how well they did against their competition, as



This latest Dueling RocketBlast attraction includes three of ProSlide’s signature saucer sections per side and four uphill blasts using proprietary water jet technology.
COURTESY SILVERWOOD THEME PARK

► See **BOULDER**, page 34

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The final pair of saucer sections brings the two competing rafts back together for one final rally to the finish line.
COURTESY SILVERWOOD THEME PARK

►BOULDER

Continued from page 31

well as whether or not the hunt was successful.

Salmon Run was designed to engage little adventurers. It consists of eight unique kiddie slides ranging from 36 to 82 feet long. The area was inspired by the various species of fish that live in the streams and lakes of the surrounding area. In addition to the slides, Salmon Run includes a splash pad that consists of various water features like fountains, sprayers and small buckets that dump water intermittently. It, too, has forest elements to tie everything together and create a North Idaho, Pacific Northwest feel. It was designed for children to run around and play in while offering a safe and interactive way to cool off during hot weather without the hazards of deep water.

"ProSlide is extremely proud and honored to partner with the amazing Silverwood team on their largest water park expansion to date," said **Phil Hayles**, vice president, business development and strategic accounts. "The highly innovative nature of the massive Eagle Hunt Dueling Water Coaster and the substantial Salmon Run KIDZ zone required extensive and seamless collaboration and planning between the Silverwood and ProSlide teams.

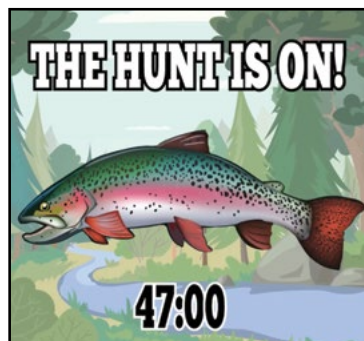
This significant expansion for Silverwood's Boulder Beach provides the latest and greatest innova-

Screens at the start and finish let riders know which prey was selected and if the hunt was successful.
COURTESY SILVERWOOD
THEME PARK

tions across a wide demographic appeal that will delight their guests — from the smallest toddler and young families to the thrill seekers in all of us!"

The Emerald Forest expansion was added to help increase the overall capacity of the water park. In addition to the new slides, the park also added a new food venue with a new kitchen; new cabanas, pavilions and villas; and plenty of new seating. Rapids Grill is a huge venue capable of handling 1,200 guests per hour with grab-and-go food items. The cleverly named Northern Flights offers a wide range of beverages including flights of beer and a variety of frozen slushies. The cabana expansion adds 24 cabanas, along with seven private villas that can hold up to 20 guests. The new pavilions are perfect for large groups such as corporate outings, and when booked together can hold up to 200 guests.

"I think that the best part of all of this is that we really have included everyone in this thought process. When planning this expansion, we listened to the feedback of our guests and by adding the food pavilion, a kid slide area, more cabanas, and another slide, we are getting everyone's needs taken care of," said **Jordan Carter**, the director of marketing and entertainment.



NEWSPLASH

AT: Jeffrey L. Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

Ground was broken in June on a new recreational and aquatic facility for Agassiz, British Columbia, Canada. The **Lets'emot Regional Aquatic Centre** is replacing the **Ferny Coombe** outdoor pool which had served the community for nearly 50 years but was well past its expected lifespan. The new 27,000-square-foot facility will feature an indoor eight-lane lap pool, lazy river, leisure pool, whirlpool, steam room, sauna, spectator viewing area and a community room.

The CA\$23,476,000 (US\$ 17,219,350) center is designed to be LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified and will make use of renewable resources to provide a framework for a cost-saving, green building.

"This project has been many years in the making, driven by the vision and dedication of our previous mayors and council, such as **Lorne Fisher** and **John Van Laerhoven**," said Mayor **Sylvia Pranger**. "We extend our heartfelt thanks to the province and the government of Canada for recognizing the value this facility will bring to the physical and mental health of residents in the region."

The newly renovated **Kaukauna Aquatic Center** in Kaukauna, Wisconsin, opened in early July. Last summer the city began a \$6 million renovation to the existing municipal pool to add a splash pad, chaise lounges, mini-golf course, climbing wall, yard game area and shaded family seating zones.

The splash pad opened to the public on July 1, with most of the rest of the facility opening a few days later. One of the slides was still awaiting commissioning and was expected to open later in the month.

Zoombezi Bay water park at the **Columbus Zoo and Aquarium** in Ohio, has announced that it is closing one of its original waterslides. **Dolphin Dash**, a six-lane **ProSlide** mat racer that opened with the park in 2008, will give its final ride on Monday, September 2, when the park closes for the season.

Although specific details were not given, a **Facebook** post announcing the closure, hinted that a new attraction in 2025 will become a guest favorite and "will put Zoombezi Bay on the map."

Zoombezi Bay is located on a portion of the site of the former **Wyandot Lake Amusement Park**. For years it was owned by the City of Columbus but leased to **Funtime Inc.**, the owners of **Geauga Lake**, also in Ohio, and New York's **Darien Lake**.

Funtime was acquired by **Premier Parks**, which eventually became **Six Flags**. When Six Flags began to divest itself of properties, Wyandot was sold to the Columbus Zoo. Portions of the park's dry rides area were annexed by the zoo, and the existing waterslides were either sold or removed. A 22.7-acre parcel was set aside for the development of a new park and following a \$20 million investment, Zoombezi Bay opened to the public on May 26, 2008.

Although the park is separately gated, a day pass or season pass to the water park grants guests access to the zoo.

Plans have been revealed to upgrade the **Family Aquatic Center** located in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. The existing facility is starting to show its age and is not currently up to ADA standards. It also lacks gender-neutral bathrooms and does not meet the state requirements for toilet and shower counts.

A capital improvement plan has been proposed recommending several renovations. Among them are a bathhouse remodel and reconfiguration, upgrades to the concession stands and splitting the pool into two distinct areas. Replacing some of the existing slides and adding an aqua zipline, basketball hoops and an obstacle course. The improvement plan includes upgrades to mechanical systems.

The **Scheels Aim High Big Sky Aquatic and Recreation Center** opened in July in Great Falls, Montana. The new facility includes an eight-lane lap pool, recreation pool with zero-depth entry and waterslide along with a lazy river,

Other amenities include a sauna; changing rooms; cardio and weight machines; an elevated walking track; full court gymnasium with basketball, volleyball and pickleball; fitness rooms; party and programming spaces; and a lounge with a fireplace.

The facility will be owned and managed by the city, but will also help the military with their water training needs for both **Malmstrom Air Force Base** and the **Montana Air National Guard**. To help defer the costs, the city received a \$10 million grant from the **U.S. Department of Defense**.

The original building estimate was \$20 million with the city committing the remaining \$10 million. Cost overruns pushed the final figure to \$21,049,453. The additional money was covered by donations, park maintenance district assessments and a tourism grant



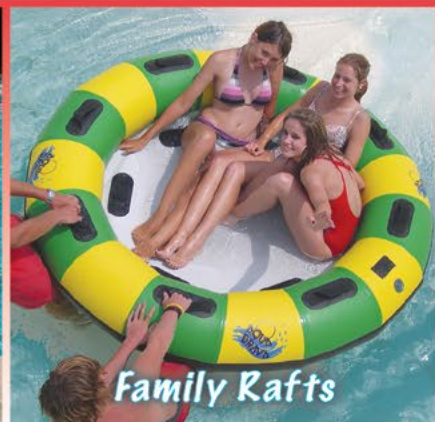
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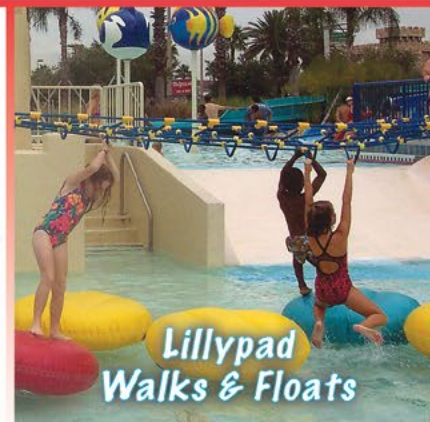
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Family Rafts



Sidewinder Tubes & Rafts



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BUSINESS & NEWSMAKERS

▶ East Coast parks shine in 2024 — page 42 / Focus on the Horizon: Premier Rides' Haley Knoebel — page 45

Disney, Florida Governor reach agreement, growth promised

AT: Susan Storey
Special to Amusement Today

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — Walt Disney famously said, “Disneyland will never be completed.” As the success of the California park grew, so did nearby, competing businesses. The sprawl, and soon, lack of space to expand, inspired Disney to look for land and a location where his theme park dreams would never run out of space. Since opening the Magic Kingdom in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, in 1971, The Disney Company has not slowed down.

While Disney died before the grand opening of Walt Disney World, his forward-thinking provided a place that today is home to four theme parks, two water parks and more than 36,000 hotel rooms. Last September, the company announced the next chapter of growth would begin in its Disney Parks, Experiences and Products division with the commitment of more than \$60 billion of investment over the next 10 years. The massive pledge is roughly twice what it has spent over the previous 10 years. While this news excited fans, it also came in the middle of a struggle the Florida-based parks were working through with the state’s governor.

Then in early June, a 15-year settlement between Disney and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis was approved. The biggest news from the deal commits \$17 billion to be invested into Walt Disney World Resort



Florida's Walt Disney World Resort is currently home to four unique theme parks, including EPCOT (above). The park's Flower and Garden Festival celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2024. AT/SUSAN STOREY

over the next two decades. An \$8 billion investment will be made during the first 10 years, and then the remaining commitment over 20. Also stemming from this plan for growth is the creation of an estimated 13,000 jobs.

This decision ceased the ongoing dispute between Disney and the governor. The two entities had been locked in a legal battle, which began two years ago. A public feud kicked off in 2022 when Disney openly communicated its opposition of DeSantis’ controversial “Don’t Say Gay” bill, which limited Florida schools from teaching lessons about sexual orientation and gender identity to students. In retaliation, DeSantis became publicly critical of Disney and prompted him to go after the Reedy Creek Improvement District, which had oversight of Walt Disney World resort’s public services for the past 57 years.

Since 1967, through the creation and oversight of Reedy Creek, Disney had the

power to control the municipal services around its theme parks, resorts and Florida property. Among the benefits of the district to Disney was the ability to more easily finance infrastructure additions and improvements. While unusual, the arrangement remained in place largely due to the draw Disney brings to Florida tourism, and the revenue that comes from tourist dollars. In addition, Reedy Creek ensured local taxpayers were not impacted with the company’s debts, and that public services for the 25,000 acres on Walt Disney World property were taken care of.

In 2022, as part of his ire with Disney, DeSantis took Reedy Creek out of Disney’s control. DeSantis christened the district with a new name: the Central Florida Tourism Oversight District (CFTOD). The move also included replacing the district’s sitting board members. DeSantis appointed new members of

his own choosing. A constant barrage of issues and lawsuits between Disney and DeSantis continued with no real end in sight.

Throughout 2023, the two sparred and court filings continued. Disney canceled a previously announced plan to create a billion-dollar Florida campus, bringing with it 2,000 new jobs. It was a decision DeSantis considered retaliatory.

The June approval meant the (pixie) dust had at last settled. In return for Disney’s promised monetary investment, the CFTOD committed to building the new road and infrastructure projects that will be needed to support Disney’s growth and improvement goals. The agreement also includes \$10 million, to be funded by Disney, for attainable housing projects in Central Florida and the creation of a local business hiring program, ensuring more than half the value of future con-

struction work at the Walt Disney World Resort will go to Florida-based businesses.

In a statement about the settlement agreement, Walt Disney World Resort President Jeff Vahle said: “This new development agreement paves the way for us to invest billions of dollars in Walt Disney World Resort, supporting the growth of this global destination, fueling the Florida economy, and allowing us to deliver even more memorable and extraordinary experiences for our guests.”

Gov. DeSantis’s office agreed. On June 13, Bryan Griffin, communications director for the governor’s office told the Associated Press: “This agreement is a big win for central Florida and will lead to numerous jobs and improved guest experiences.”

While there is a great deal of excitement and interest surrounding how and when Disney will move forward in the wake of the announcement, the company has not responded to questions or speculation about what it will do next. The agreement covers 17,300 acres and allows for the addition of one “major theme park” in Florida, furthering speculation Disney will soon announce plans for a long-awaited fifth gate. Additional information includes the ability for Disney to add up to five minor parks, such as more water parks. New hotel rooms, restaurant/retail space and nearly 1.3 million square feet of office space are also noted in the final agreement.

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Snackville at Pacific Park providing guests with new, exciting foods

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

SANTA MONICA, Calif. — A new food area, Snackville, at the **Santa Monica Pier at Pacific Park**, Santa Monica, California, has taken off. The all-new fun, food area with reimagined culinary concepts by Michelin-Star Chef **James Kent**, features five new dining options that officially opened on Friday, June 7. Kent is an executive chef at **Saga Hospitality Group**.

Adding Snackville to the park that offers 12 amusement rides, 14 midway games and retail beach shops, is creating an all-encompassing guest experience.

"We are excited about the opening of Snackville and its new culinary concepts on the Santa Monica Pier," said **Nathan Smithson**, senior director of business affairs at Pacific Park on the Santa Monica Pier. "Our five fun food offerings are sure to elevate the Santa Monica Pier experience for all our guests visiting from near

and far."

Snackville is the first of many new capital investments to be introduced at Pacific Park. The area is located adjacent to the entrance.

Here is closer look at the new offerings:

- **Smashie's** burgers, serving smash burgers, loaded hot dogs and a selection of freshly fried fries. Smashie's anchors the new Snackville. Its hot fresh burgers are charbroiled on the griddle, topped with slices of American cheese, grilled onions and all-new Smashie Sauce.

- **Mr. Nice Fry**, serving fresh fry varieties including Skinny Dippers, Swirly Fries and Tater Wheels. Mr. Nice Fry's selection of fried potatoes is served with a variety of dipping sauces and premium seasonings.

- **Eegee's**, an Arizona beverage staple since 1971, is making its Hollywood debut over the cool blue waters of the Pacific Ocean. Located inside Mr. Nice Fry, park of-



Snackville opened this summer at Pacific Park on the Santa Monica Pier. COURTESY PACIFIC PARK

ficials said the eegees beverage is the perfect blend of real fruit and frozen goodness.

- **Churrita Churro**, a classic fried dough treat gets an upgrade at Churrita. Cinnamon sprinkled, dulce de leche filled, or chocolate dipped, the churro can be served with or without creamy soft-serve ice cream.

- **Scoops Creamery** is located just inside Snackville's main entrance. It serves frozen treats including hand-

scooped ice cream, milkshakes and sundaes.

- **Cosmic Funnel Cake** is a Pacific Park's signature treat of guests who visit the Santa Monica Pier. The name comes from the technique of pouring batter through a funnel into hot oil. The funnel gives the cake its signature texture. Funnel cakes are typically served with a dusting of powdered sugar. At Snackville, they are served at Cosmic Funnel Cakes and

Scoops Creamery and can be topped with strawberries, whipped cream, or even a scoop of Lappert's premium ice cream.

Kent, the park's chef, is excited about the addition of Snackville.

"Pacific Park on the Santa Monica Pier has been an opportunity to apply our restaurant experience to some of my most beloved amusement park foods," he said. "We'll serve exactly what I want when I'm on the water with my family, namely the definitive smash burger and extra crispy fries."

With Snackville, Pacific Park's offerings continue to grow outside of the rides and attractions. However those rides and attractions are still the draw. Pacific Park's signature rides are the solar-powered Ferris wheel, the Pacific Wheel; and the West Coaster, a steel roller coaster that races 55 feet above the Santa Monica Bay.

• paccpark.com

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COUNT ME IN!

Alterface debuts Cadbury Chocolate Quest dark ride in the U.K.

WAVRE, Belgium — The new Cadbury Chocolate Quest ride at Cadbury World near Birmingham, U.K., takes budding chocolate makers on a fun, interactive journey to source the ingredients to make a Cadbury Dairy Milk bar.

“Part of ambitious plans for Cadbury World, the new ride is an opportunity for guests to enjoy a whole new chocolatey experience, with even more fun along the way,” said **Tim Waters**, regional director, **Merlin Entertainments**. “We’re excited for our guests to discover what’s in store at our attraction this year.”

Working from Merlin Entertainments’ initial design, **Alterface** helped refine the project, assumed project management responsibilities, coordinated and subcontracted suppliers for media, lighting, audio and the ride system, ensured the ride adhered to gameplay and interactivity standards, and powered the ride and

its effects through its Salto show control technology.

Benjamin Walravens, Alterface show producer, emphasized the importance of the joint approach: “We worked directly with **Theodore Papadopoulos** from **Merlin Magic Making**, who came to us with the concept design. Theo was in direct contact with **Mondelez International**, who owns the Cadbury brand, and made sure that what we proposed was approved by all stakeholders. Merlin Entertainments and Mondelez were great partners, making sure that the final design met their expectations, whilst giving us room for creativity.”

Scent, wind, heat and other special effects in the ride are in play through six interactive scenes. Nine trackless and specially designed **ETF Multi Mover** cars provide a throughput of 600 guests per hour.

Guided and encour-



aged by the beloved Cadbury character **Freddo** and his team of Cadbury Buttons monkeys, riders use “Cadbury Collectors” to gather cocoa pods and milk and eventually combine them to create a delicious Cadbury treat.

“As it happens, **Freddo** was a perfect match for the storytelling part of the ride, and his team of Buttons monkey friends were just what we needed to bring some fun and mischief to the scene,”

said **Walravens**. “The animators from **1050 Studio** created the monkeys to be the cutest and funniest characters I’ve worked with so far.”

Beyond the entertainment and educational aspects, the ride also makes a statement about inclusivity.

“Inclusivity is integral to the Cadbury identity, and we worked very closely with Merlin Entertainments on this,” said **Louis Vanhomwegen**, Alterface project manager.

“There are special armrests on some seats to allow easier access, one of the cars is a new design compatible with wheelchairs, and subtitles are on all of the screens so that those with hearing difficulties can fully participate in the adventure.” The wheelchair car is something truly unique, specially designed and integrated in the ride.”

Assigned by Merlin Entertainments to liaise with Alterface on the project, **Malique Williams** of **WT Partnership** emphasized the challenges of creating a compelling adventure in a relatively small space while the overall park remained in operation.

“Alterface brought the ride to life with its lighting, music and screen design,” **Williams** said. “Guests have an interactive experience well suited to the story we are trying to portray: how to make your perfect Cadbury Dairy Milk chocolate bar!”

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RICK BASTRUP
Foreword by Gary Slade, *Amusement Today*

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My Personal Story of Creating Memorable Theme Park Rides and Attractions

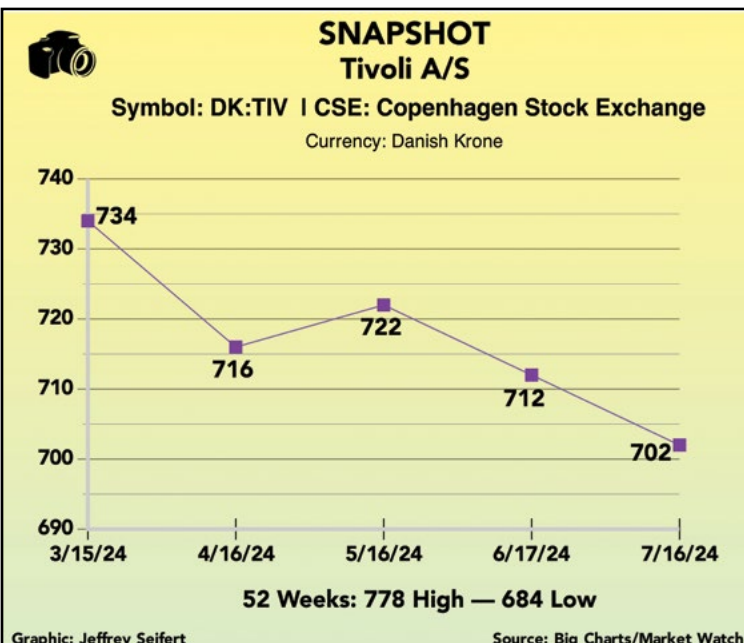
MARKET WATCH

COMPANY	SYMBOL	MARKET	PRICE 7/18/24	HIGH 52-Week	LOW 52-Week
PARKS AND ATTRACTIONS					
The Blackstone Group	BX	NYSE	136.41	142.04	88.59
Bowlero Corp.	BOWL	NYSE	13.17	15.47	8.85
Comcast Corp./NBCUniversal Media	CMCSA	NASDAQ	40.14	47.45	36.43
Dave & Busters Entertainment, LLC	PLAY	NASDAQ	39.34	69.82	33.07
EPR Properties	EPR	NYSE	43.9	49.10	39.65
Falcon's Beyond	FBYD	NASDAQ	11.19	44.00	7.02
Fuji Kyoko Co., Ltd.	JP:9010	TYO	3155.00	5820.00	2732.00
Haichang Holdings Ltd.	HK:2255	SEHK	0.76	1.24	0.65
Leofoo Development Co.	TW:2705	TSEC	19.89	22.45	16.15
MGM Resorts International	MGM	NYSE	45.30	51.35	34.12
Parks America, Inc.	PRKA	OTC	0.42	0.61	0.23
Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ltd.	RCL	NYSE	164.19	172.63	78.35
Six Flags Entertainment Corp.	FUN	NYSE	50.74	58.70	34.04
Tivoli A/S	DK:TIV	CSE	702.00	778.00	684.00
United Parks & Resorts Inc.	PRKS	NYSE	59.01	60.36	40.87
The Walt Disney Company	DIS	NYSE	96.79	123.74	78.73
Warner Bros Discovery Inc.	WBD	NASDAQ	8.52	14.76	6.94
SUPPLIERS/OTHERS					
Brogent Technologies, Inc.	TW:5263	TSEC	193.50	204.00	108.00
Sansei Technologies, Inc.	TYO:6357	TYO	1744.00	1852.00	1026.00
Topgolf Callaway Brands	MODG	NYSE	15.54	20.14	9.84

Details and information available at amusementtoday.com/stocks

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

—SOURCES: Bigcharts.com



DIESEL PRICES

Region (U.S)	As of 7/15/24	Change from 1 year ago
East Coast	\$3.908	\$0.029
Midwest	\$3.745	\$0.019
Gulf Coast	\$3.551	\$0.045
Mountain	\$3.750	(\$0.177)
West Coast	\$4.030	(\$0.101)
California	\$4.932	\$0.084

CURRENCY

On 7/19/24 \$1 USD =

0.9156	EURO
0.7703	GBP (British Pound)
156.63	JPY (Japanese Yen)
0.8850	CHF (Swiss Franc)
1.4865	AUD (Australian Dollar)
1.3687	CAD (Canadian Dollar)

BUSINESS WATCH

Cedar Fair, Six Flags merger completed

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — **Six Flags Entertainment Corporation** announced the successful completion of the merger of equals between **Cedar Fair, L.P.** and former Six Flags Entertainment Corporation, effective July 1, 2024. The combined company is operating under the name Six Flags Entertainment Corporation.

Cedar Fair's units and shares of the former Six Flags' common stock ceased trading at the close of the New York Stock Exchange on July 1, 2024. The former Six Flags (SIX) stock ended at \$32.00 and Cedar Fair (FUN) stock ended its final day of trading at \$52.11. The shares of merged Six Flags Entertainment Corporation's common stock start trading under the ticker symbol "FUN" on July 2, 2024, and closed that day up \$2.78 at \$54.89.

Under the terms of the merger agreement, Cedar Fair unitholders received one share of common stock in Six Flags Entertainment Corporation for each unit owned, and former Six Flags shareholders received 0.5800 shares of common stock in Six Flags Entertainment Corporation for each share owned.

"[This day] marks a significant milestone for our company, shareholders, guests and associates, unlocking higher value and greater opportunities to deliver engaging entertainment experiences," said **Richard Zimmerman**, president and chief executive officer of Six Flags Entertainment Corporation. "Our merger establishes a new Six Flags Entertainment Corporation with a highly diversified footprint and robust operating model, enhancing park offerings and performance through the complementary portfolio of attractive assets and intellectual property from each of Cedar Fair and the former Six Flags. The combination also enhances the financial profile of the company with strong cash flow generation to accelerate investments in our parks to delight our guests, driving increased levels of demand and in-park value and spending."

Each park in the combined company's portfolio will retain their legacy branding with no changes to park names currently being planned or contemplated.

There will be some behind-the-scenes changes. The corporate headquarters for the newly combined company that will be known as Six Flags Entertainment Corporation has been moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, where **Carowinds** is located.

Six Flags will close its headquarters in Arlington, Texas, but the new company plans to keep some of its finance and administrative functions in Sandusky, Ohio, where Cedar Fair had its headquarters.

"We believe that by combining the best ideas and most successful entertainment practices of both Six Flags and Cedar Fair, the new Six Flags can deliver a superior level of joy and excitement that has yet to be experienced by regional park guests," added **Selim Bassoul**, executive chairman of the board of directors of Six Flags Entertainment Corporation. "We are excited to unite the Cedar Fair and Six Flags teams to capitalize on the tremendous growth opportunities and operational efficiencies of our more extensive entertainment portfolio."

For the remainder of this season, season passes will only be honored at the parks they were purchased from. So Cedar Fair season passes will only be good at Cedar Fair parks and the same goes for Six Flags season passes. The same goes for season drink, food and front-of-the-line season passes.

East Coast parks light up season with rides, events, promotions

AT: Pam Sherborne

psherborne@amusementtoday.com

UNITED STATES — All up and down the east coast of the United States, amusement parks opened, bringing fun and thrills to guests.

Some opened with brand new rides or anticipation that new attractions will open later in the summer.

With enhanced promotions and added special events, these parks have something for everyone.

Here is a sampling of some of those parks and the new offerings.



Family Kingdom Amusement Park, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

The veteran amusement park along the Grand Strand in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, opened the 2024 season with new rides this season creating options for guests of over 35 rides and attractions.

The new rides include:

- A Vertigo, manufactured by ARM;
- Crazy Cabs, manufactured by SBF/Visa Group;
- Samba Balloons, by Zamperla;
- A Techno Jump by Sartori Rides; and
- Lunartic, an SBF Air Maxx.

The family-owned-and-operated park also installed a new Kiddie Teacups ride.

During a press conference announcing the new rides back in the spring,

Family Kingdom Amusement Park started the 2024 season with a bang, debuting six new rides, including the Samba Balloon by Zamperla (above right), and Crazy Cabs by SBF/Visa Group (above inset). Palace Playland opened its 2024 season on May 25 with the addition of the Kraken, a Technical Park Street Fighter Revolution (below).

COURTESY ZAMPERLA, FAMILY KINGDOM, PALACE PLAYLAND

Bill Prescott, park owner and president, expressed the park's excitement.

"We're thrilled to kick off the season with our biggest opening weekend yet," Prescott said. "With the addition of six new rides and the timeless excitement of the Swamp Fox, we're ready to create unforgettable memories for families and friends this summer."

Swamp Fox, the park's iconic wooden roller coaster, first opened in 1966. It has a track length of 2,400 feet and was manufactured by Philadelphia Toboggan Company. The maximum height is 72 feet, with the first drop being 62 feet.

Family Kingdom is also offering an exclusive

locals and military special throughout 2024. Those with proof of local residency or a military ID can get a 50% discount/\$25 off on all-day wristbands, which grants unlimited access to all 35 rides and attractions.

Funplex, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

Just north of Family Kingdom is The Funplex, also located along the Grand Strand, just across from the Atlantic Ocean.

This park didn't add new rides this year but has a new option on ticketing. In addition to the park's popular Single-Day Unlimited Ride Wristband and Season Pass Option,



for visitors in 2024 have the opportunity to elevate their experience with the all-new Two-Day Unlimited Ride Wristband.

This new addition allows guests to extend their

adventure over two consecutive days, ensuring ample time to explore all the thrills and attractions the park has to offer.

Palace Playland, Old Orchard Beach, Maine

Palace Playland opened its 2024 season on May 25 with an exciting new ride that has received great response from park guests.

The Kraken, a Technical Park Street Fighter Revolution, opened with the park this season.

When the ride cycle of the Kraken starts, the 16-seat gondola begins to rotate and the pendulum arm begins to swing. The imposing structure can reach just under 70 feet



Jenkinson's Boardwalk added a new ride for 2024 called the Doggie Dash by SBF/Visa Group. The ride has six dalmatian cars that spin and go up and down. COURTESY JENKINSON'S BOARDWALK

► See EAST, page 43



Inspired by the high-energy thrill of motorsport racing, Electric Eden Raceway (above) is Luna Park at Coney Island's first sustainably-powered go-kart attraction. Manufactured by Zamperla, it features state-of-the-art technology and innovative design. Soon, the New Jersey's Steel Pier will welcome a spinning Wild Mouse (right) from Premier Rides that is replacing the park's Crazy Mouse. COURTESY LUNA PARK, STEEL PIER

► EAST Continued from page 42

tall, and the gondola can achieve a 360-degree inversion.

This is the third straight year that Palace Playland has installed a new ride. In 2023, it opened the season with a new Hyperjump, manufactured by **Preston and Barbieri**. In 2022, the new ride was a Cliffhanger, manufactured by **Battech Enterprises**.

Steel Pier, Atlantic City, New Jersey

Officials at Steel Pier, Atlantic City's oldest amusement park, expect to offer park guests a new ride before the end of the 2024 season.

The park's Crazy Mouse is being replaced with a spinning Wild Mouse. An opening date

hasn't been set but is expected this summer.

Premier Rides is the manufacturer of this new ride as well as another coaster expected to debut on the pier in 2025, a Skyrocket II.

With supply chain delays over the last few years due to the COVID pandemic, the two rides were actually scheduled to open in 2023 and 2024. Premier announced the new ride installations at the **IAA-PA Expo 2022** at the company's booth. During that announcement, **Jim Seay**, Premier president, called the new spinning coaster, "an intelligent spinning coaster."

Being on the coast, rides are subject to changes because of the climate. Seay said this spinning coaster self adjusts to climate changes. It looks at the temperatures, rain,

winds, etc., giving guests the optimal ride.

Seay also explained some of the features of the future Skyrocket II. He said it will be very different because the digital signage and lighting package on the ride.

That ride is expected to open sometime in 2025.

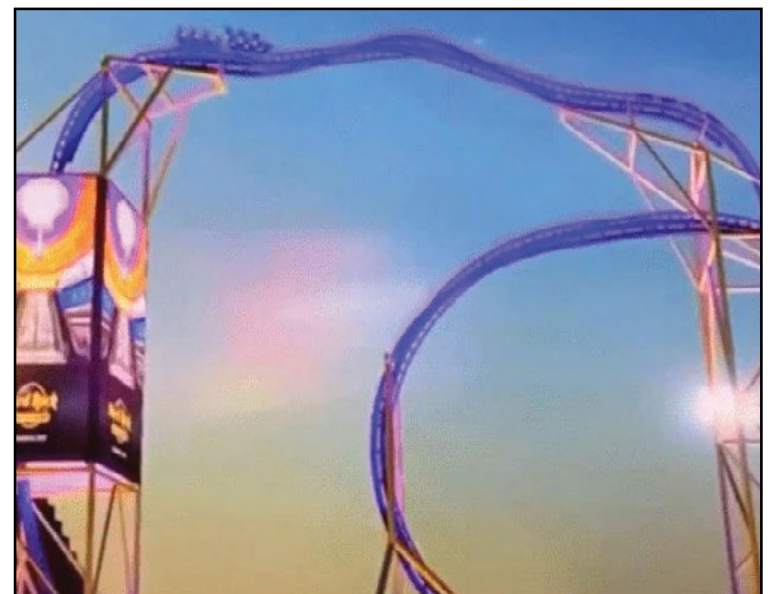
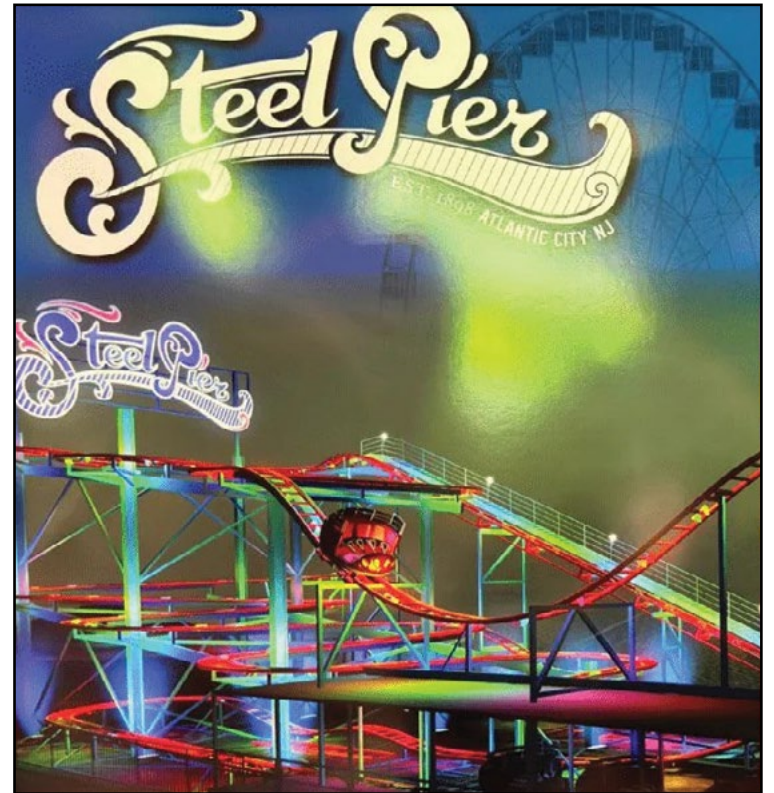
Steel Pier is located on the world-famous boardwalk in North Beach Atlantic City, just steps from casino resorts and New Jersey's beautiful miles of beach.

It offers over 22 rides and attractions, as well as games and food.

The history of the Steel Pier began in 1898.

Jenkinson's Boardwalk, Point Pleasure Beach, New Jersey

Jenkinson's Boardwalk added a new ride for 2024 called the Doggie Dash by SBF/Visa Group.



Coming in 2025, the Steel Pier will welcome Skyrocket II, also from Premier Rides. COURTESY STEEL PIER

The ride has six dalmatian cars that spin and go up and down.

In addition, a new summer event was added as well, a dance party on the beach on July 28 that turned out to be very successful.

Luna Park at Coney Island, Brooklyn, New York

Ahead of the Memorial Day weekend, **Luna Park** introduced what it says is the area's first electric amusement park on Coney Island.

"Electric Eden Raceway" is part of the park's sustainability effort and recent expansion to attract visitors that help vitalize the local community, according to **Alessandro**

Zamperla, president and CEO of **Central Amusement International Inc.**

"Part of our core values is sustainability," Zamperla said during the announcement. "From the design stages, we want to bring something that really reduces emissions, decreases our carbon footprint, and also allows us really to up-cycle all the materials.

The project cost about \$1.2 million to complete.

There are 24 karts in total, 16 of which are single riders and eight allow for a passenger. Typical go-karts are gas-powered and produce emissions just like regular cars. The switch to electric go-karts eliminates exhaust fumes, making it safer for riders and better for the environment.



The Funplex at Myrtle Beach didn't add a new ride this year but did add an all-new Two-Day Unlimited Ride Wristband. AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON

OBITUARIES

Lake Winnepesaukah's Talley Green passes at 60

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. — Adrienne Talley Rhodes Green—whose family founded Lake Winnepesaukah Amusement Park of Chattanooga, Tennessee, and continue to operate it today—passed away peacefully at her home on Thursday, June 27, 2024. Her contributions to the amusement park industry and her local community were immeasurable, leaving behind a legacy that will be remembered for generations.

Born on February 14, 1964 to Buddy and Adrienne Rhodes, her birth date destined her to a life of heart-themed gifts on nearly every holiday, something she was far too gracious to ever complain about.

Green graduated from The Bright School (Class of 1976), Girls Preparatory School (Class of 1982) and Hollins University (Class of 1986). She went on to earn a Master's in Education degree from the Bank Street College of Education in New York City.

After pursuing a career in education at the Hunter Museum of Art and the Creative Discovery Museum, Green joined Lake Winnepesaukah, her family's business, as manager of public relations and advertising, a role she would go on to serve in for 25 years.

Green was known to all with whom she interacted for her subtle wit, ready smile and gentle disposition, save for on her annual, beloved dove



Talley Rhodes Green

hunts with her late father, where she was a mean shot.

Green's sister, Tennyson Dickson of Lake Winnepesaukah, released the following statement to *Local 3 TV* following Green's death: "Our family has a long relationship with the community we love, providing a family-friendly experience at Lake Winnepesaukah. Talley and I grew up in the business, and we loved seeing the smiling faces of those who enjoyed a day at Lake Winnie. Talley will always be part of us, and my hope is that everyone will remember and appreciate her commitment to a place where you are able to get happy."

Renowned for her dedication to maintaining and improving Lake Winnepesaukah Amusement Park, affectionately known as "Lake Winnie," she helped ensure the park's enduring appeal. Located in Rossville, Georgia, Lake Winnie has been a cherished destination for families and thrill-seekers since its opening in 1925. With

Green as part of the leadership team, the park flourished, expanding its attractions and remaining a beloved spot for locals and tourists alike.

Green's commitment to Lake Winnie went beyond just business; she was deeply invested in the happiness and safety of her guests. Her hands-on approach and personal touch were evident in the park's operations. Often seen interacting with visitors, she ensured their experience was enjoyable and memorable. Her warmth and kindness made her a beloved figure among employees and guests.

A lover of country music, Green helped continue Lake Winnepesaukah's rich tradition of summer concerts, booking many of the most famous acts to ever play Jukebox Junction, including Rascal Flatts, Blake Shelton and Josh Turner.

She survived by her husband, Jeff Green; stepdaughter, Courtney Green; mother and namesake, Adrienne Rhodes; sister, Tennyson Dickinson (Tommy); nieces, Taylor Cordeiro (Andrew) and Carter Dickinson; nephew Myers Dickinson; sister-in-law, Janet Green (David); and brother-in-law Jason (Ashley); as well as numerous cousins. She was preceded in death by her father, L.C. (Buddy) Rhodes, Jr.; maternal grandmother, Evelyn D. White; and paternal grandparents, Clyde and Ruth Rhodes.

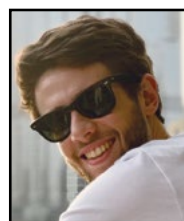
Sartori Rides family mourns the sudden passing of Edoardo Rossini, the son of Manuela Sartori

MONTAGNANA, Italy — On June 24, 2024, Edoardo Rossini passed away unexpectedly at the age of 28. This was announced by his mother Manuela Sartori and his father Franco Rossini.

After completing his studies in business administration and marketing and a degree in communication sciences, Edoardo joined his family's company Sartori Rides, an international amusement park ride supplier, three years ago.

There, he was responsible for the communication and marketing department as chief marketing officer.

Rossini was a pillar of local basketball in Montagnana, Italy, an athlete who had dedicated his life to sport and to his city. Residents and friends knew Rossini as a talented basketball player, but also as a



Rossini

person of great heart and dedication. While working for Sartori Rides, he managed to successfully balance his professional career with his passion for basketball.

His sudden death left a void not only in his family, but also among his friends and teammates.

At his services, a close friend of Rossini's honored him with words of affection: "Your soul was a glue, a magnetic field. You kissed, hugged and had the courage to say 'I love you.'"

ON THE MOVE

Palace Entertainment announced the appointment of **Ricky Spicuzza** to general manager of **Kennywood Park** and **Sandcastle Water Park**. As a native of Pittsburgh, he brings more than 20 years of dedicated amusement and water park experience to the role. Spicuzza's first order of business has been extending park operating hours, offering 20 days of 10 p.m. closes in July.

"After more than 22 seasons with Palace Entertainment, we are thrilled to name Ricky Spicuzza as general manager of Kennywood Park and Sandcastle Water Park," said Vice President of Operations, **Mark Pauls**. "I believe Ricky is the perfect person to lead each of these beloved Pittsburgh institutions as we continue to invest in these properties with new capital projects, robust event lineups and more."



Spicuzza

Spicuzza began his career at Kennywood in 2002 as a food and beverage team member in the park's iconic Pagoda. Over the past 22 seasons with Palace Entertainment, he has worked in several leadership positions at each of the company's Pittsburgh-based parks. In 2010, Spicuzza joined the team at **Idlewild & SoakZone** where he served as the aquatics manager for three years before being promoted to director of operations in 2013. In 2016, Spicuzza was named assistant general manager of Idlewild and in 2021, he was named the assistant general manager of Sandcastle Water Park. Most recently, Spicuzza served as the assistant general manager at Kennywood Park.

Ruud Koppens, the founder of **ETF Ride Systems**, has announced his retirement effective July 1, 2024. Ruud, who established ETF Ride Systems as a division of the **ETF Group** 26 years ago, has been a member of the ETF Group for nearly 51 years.



Koppens

True to his innovative spirit, Ruud leaves the company and the market with a new product. Over the past few months, he led the development of a new high-end vehicle for the trackless range. The new vehicle, named "Dynamic Mover," boasts higher speed, greater acceleration and deceleration, omnidirectional driving capabilities, increased passenger cabin rotations, and the ability to navigate inclines. Notably, it no longer relies on the renowned ETF floor wire. The "Dynamic Mover" will be introduced and demonstrated live to the public at IAAPA Expo Europe in Amsterdam, followed by IAAPA Expo 2024 in Orlando, Florida.

Retiring at the age of 67, Ruud Koppens made the decision to step down while in good health, hoping to spend more time with family. Over the years, ETF Ride Systems has thrived under his leadership, becoming a prominent name in the industry.

Palace Entertainment has announced the appointment of **John Reilly** as chief executive officer. Reilly will retain his role as chief operating officer and member of the executive committee of the **Parques Reunidos Group**, the parent company of Palace Entertainment, continuing to oversee operations throughout Europe.



Reilly

"With over three decades of experience in the theme park industry and an in-depth knowledge of our U.S. and Australia-based parks, John will be pivotal in enhancing the memorable experiences we offer to our guests," said **Pascal Ferracci**, CEO of Parques Reunidos. "Since joining us in 2019 as COO for the U.S. business, John has successfully led our U.S. and Australia properties, establishing a core leadership team at our new park support center. His contributions have been instrumental in the growth and success of our operations in these regions. We are thrilled to see him take on this new challenge."

Focus on the HORIZON

Continued learning is propelling Knoebel forward in the industry

ST. PETERSBERG, Fla. — Like most young professionals in the attractions industry, Haley Knoebel is proud to be a part of it and passionate about paving her way. Unlike most, she became part of it before she was in kindergarten. “You could say I started working as a toddler,” Knoebel laughed. “There are photos of me handing out ice cream cups in the catering department. As I got older, I helped with everything — painting signage, adding sugar to funnel cakes, whatever I could do.”

Knoebel’s early entry in the industry comes from her family. She is part of the fifth generation of the family behind Knoebels Amusement Resort in Elysburg, Pennsylvania. “I have always enjoyed being at the park,” she explained. “I love meeting and talking with people. Everyone would tell me how special our park was, and I agreed. I was as happy as they were to be there.”

During her senior year in high school, Knoebel had a co-op position that allowed her to leave school early each day to work at the park during the off season. “I was a front desk attendant in the human resources department,” she said. “I learned about recruiting and onboarding.” Knoebel went on to earn a Bachelor’s of Science in Business Administration from Lebanon Valley College. Throughout college, she continued to learn and work at Knoebels. “I became a games supervisor in 2018 and kept that position until I graduated. I also had two internships at the park, one of which earned my IAAPA Brass Ring Award.”

“While I have grown up in the industry, actually working in the park itself is where I really began to understand providing fun for others was a career. However, my experience as an IAAPA Ambassador was groundbreaking for me. I had no idea that my corner of the industry

at Knoebels was one part of a larger community of amazing people and experiences.”

“That week I learned where roller coasters and water slides come from,” Knoebel continued. “It was an entire world I knew very little about. I met people who built and sold rides, souvenirs, and everything in between. I also listened and learned. I saw this industry is one that invites you to combine your skillset with your passion and interest. There is so much opportunity and I knew I wanted to find my place with in it.”

Upon graduation, she returned to Knoebels and worked in event planning and marketing for the park. She also remained connected with people she met at the IAAPA Expo, and even had the opportunity to travel to Georgia to support the grand opening of Fun Spot Atlanta’s Arie Force One roller coaster. All her experience came together when she earned the role as marketing coordinator at Premier Rides, an award-winning globally recognized designer and manufacturer of custom-designed roller coasters and attractions. “Today when I tell people I am part of a team that sells roller coasters, they reply, ‘Wow! That’s a job?’ I love explaining what we do!”

“Accepting the role was a big step for me,” Knoebel continued. “I moved to a new state and set out to learn all I could about Premier Rides, the brand, what sets us apart and how I could support the team in the best way possible.”

To her surprise, Knoebel found her previous park experience had many parallels with her new role at Premier Rides. “Our goal is to help our clients solve a need,” she explained. “At the park we would discuss how our guests have many options when it comes to how and where to spend their time together. Now my frame of mind has shifted to understanding our clients have many choices when it

Haley Knoebel Premier Rides St. Petersburg, Florida



comes to investing their capital.”

“I’m constantly in awe of how special this industry is,” Knoebel added. “We overlap with Hollywood and the music industry, hotels and resorts, and even cruise lines. It’s a broad industry that is also a small world. Everyone is willing to share ideas, advice and insights. Even if we provide different experiences, we often face similar challenges, and our united passion for what we do connects us as peers, colleagues and friends.”

“People are the backbone of this industry,” she furthered. “This is an industry of givers — people who love to provide fun and community for guests all around the world. That applies to each other, too. You’d be pressed to find someone who isn’t going to do their best to help you in a pinch!”

As Knoebel looks ahead and continues to build her career, she also reflects on the steps she has already taken. Her best advice for anyone interested in joining the attractions industry begins with people. “Find someone who will support you,” she said. “There are so many amazing individuals in

this industry who just want to see you win. Find them. They will open doors for you that you didn’t know existed. You never know when the casual conversation could lead to that person becoming your next boss a few months later.”

For Knoebel, being in the attractions industry also means she can continue to embrace her first love: learning. “I loved school. I really did. Learning from others in the industry keeps me motivated,” she explained. “There are no silly questions and people at all levels are willing to share their knowledge and experiences. Learning something new refreshes and motivates me. I am energized when new amazing, even crazy, ideas others have dreamt up come to life. That inspires me — who knows what I may come up with!”

“I have a new skill, too,” Knoebel smiled. “I can look at any roller coaster track and tell you which manufacturer built it. It may sound like a small thing, but it also reminds me how unique and wide the industry is and why I love being a part of it.”

—Susan Storey

Sandcastle adds colors, sights and sounds for the 2024 season

AT: Pam Sherborne

psherborne@amusementtoday.com

WEST HOMESTEAD, Pa. — In the midst of a multi-year refurbishment plan, officials at **Sandcastle Water Park**, located along the banks of the Monongahela River, decided 2024 would be the year of color and sounds and more.

"We touch almost everything in the park with bright new colors, including our slides and buildings," said **Rick Spicuzza**, general manager.

With the park adding a new **Whitewater West Industries** drop capsule, **Bomb's Away** in 2023, no additional major attractions were added for 2024.

Instead, the water park now has a new sparkle. **Safe Slide Restoration** was contracted to give a blast of color to most of the slides, and a local business, **Almega Company**, painted the steel.

The park enhanced its **ProSlide** bowl slide called the **Dragon's Den**.

"There has always been a dragon in the center of the bowl, but we added some special effects making it a little scarier," Spicuzza said.

There are now dragon sound effects, along with new misters with the help of supplier **L3DFX**.

In addition, the **Dragon's Den** attraction has a new dragon at the front of



Sandcastle Water Park has a refreshed sparkle to it as **Safe Slide Restoration** was contracted to give a blast of color to most of the slides, and a local business, **Almega Company**, repainted the steel. COURTESY SANDCASTLE WATER PARK

the queue. The park maintenance manager was responsible for that transformation. Spicuzza said the existing dragon was stripped down and completely redone with added special effects.

Then there is the **Sandcastle Bar and Grill**.

"We have all new beers and adult beverages," Spicuzza said. "We have had local breweries make new beers for us. We have a new sign for the **Potato Patch** food location. It has been repainted and special effects added. Smoke is now coming out of the sign."

The **Potato Patch** is a

popular eating location at Sandcastle, as well as at **Kennywood Park**, Sandcastle's sister park located in West Mifflin, Pennsylvania, just miles from Sandcastle. The **Potato Patch** serves fresh cut fries. The most popular option is topped with cheese and bacon.

"It was created by a former owner of Kennywood back in the 1970s," Spicuzza said, who added there have been a lot of new food items introduced this year. "At the **Bridge Bar** we have a new hot honey chicken wrap. It was actually created by one of our supervisors at the park. He would go in and make it for him-

self, then for some of the staff and everyone loved it."

They decided to introduce it to their guests this year, and it has been a hit.

Other new food items include walking tacos, cheese steak sandwiches and cheesecake on a stick dipped in chocolate.

The park brought back its **Jammin' July** concert series. Every Saturday and Sunday in July, live music was presented during the day at the park's **Mushroom Pool**.

"It is very popular," Spicuzza said.

The gardens and plants showcased at the park are done by **JML Landscaping**. Spicuzza said that company also maintains them.

Spicuzza said the unique location of Sandcastle Water Park has led to unique locations of attractions in the park. Because the park is located along the Monongahela River, Sandcastle is a boardwalk-type park. Its lazy river runs along the river and guests may participate in either single or double tubes.

"We have a very long lazy river," Spicuzza said. "We have to have 14 lifeguards on that attraction alone."

Fortunately, he said Sandcastle has not had any challenges with lifeguard

staffing. The park employs about 150 lifeguards.

"And we use **Ellis and Associates** training programs. We have been using them since 1989."

Spicuzza said he is a lifeguard and has maintained his license through **Ellis and Associates** for 13 years.

"We have had a great program through **Ellis and Associates** and a great lifeguard team," he said.

Spicuzza said, along with the river, there are other things that make the park unique in its location.

"The park was built on a steel mill and brick yard," Spicuzza said. "A train bridge runs over the top of our entrance and trains pass over. It is really special."

Park officials have been able to hold down admission prices to the park. A one-day park pass is \$34.99 with season passes costing \$59.99. Pass holders also get a 20% discount on food.

And there are numerous promotions and discounts. For example, for the days before July 4, the park offered a "double your discount," giving those buying season passes during that time a 40% discount on the ticket price. That included a 40% off of food as well.

•sandcastlewaterpark.com



Sandcastle Water Park has maintained its lifeguard license through **Ellis and Associates** for more than 13 years. COURTESY SANDCASTLE WATER PARK

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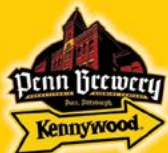
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REGIONAL COUNCIL OF CARPENTERS



Details and registration available at

www.GoldenTicketAwards.com



The 2024 Golden Ticket Awards event is hosted by Kennywood, one of the most cherished traditional parks in the U.S. COURTESY KENNYWOOD

Deadlines approaching to attend 2024's GTA event hosted by Kennywood

Book discounted hotel by August 19; event registration ends August 26

Ticket Award room block is held through *August 19, 2024*, so please make reservations quickly.

WEST MIFFLIN, Pa. — The Networking Event of the Year is shaping up to be a beneficial weekend for amusement industry professionals. The Golden Ticket Awards are set for September 6 and 7, 2024, and registration is open. Event details, registration and the schedule can be found at GoldenTicketAwards.com. Sign-up today, the registration deadline is *August 26, 2024*.

Those wanting to golf for a cause can enter the third annual golf tournament that benefits the **National Roller Coaster Museum and Archives**. Space is limited and filling up quickly, so attendees are encouraged to register ASAP and enjoy the scramble format. Fun and laughter are sure to ensue.

During the event, attendees will enjoy meals, behind-the-scenes tours and visits to both **Sandcastle Water Park** and **Kennywood**. Most people know that Kennywood is one of the most cherished traditional parks in the U.S., dating back to 1899. The park boasts a solid lineup of rides and attractions, including rare rides such as the Kangaroo, Auto Race, Whip and Noah's Ark and modern thrillers such as Sky Rocket and Spinvasion. The park's three wooden roller coasters are dedicated ACE Roller Coaster Landmarks by **American Coaster Enthusiasts**.

Of course, the key feature to the weekend is the annual awards ceremony. The Golden Tickets brings industry professionals from around the globe. In addition to recognizing the Best of the Best in numerous categories, as well as industry Legends, **RWS Global** will be providing entertainment during the ceremony and throughout the evening.

Adding to the fun, **Penn Brewery** is crafting a special brew, a Golden Ticket Awards golden beer just for the event.

The host hotel is **Westin Pittsburgh**. Located 10 miles from Kennywood, the hotel is near North Shore, Pittsburgh. The Golden

As always, *Amusement Today* is proud to keep the Golden Ticket Awards a free event for industry professionals, thanks to the generosity of the host park and gracious sponsors.

More details can be found at the website GoldenTicketAwards.com. As the locals would say, "See yin'z in the 'burgh!"
•goldenticketawards.com



Discounted rooms at Westin Pittsburgh available!



Visit GoldenTicketAwards.com to reserve your room by **August 19!**



SEE YINZ
SEPTEMBER 6 & 7

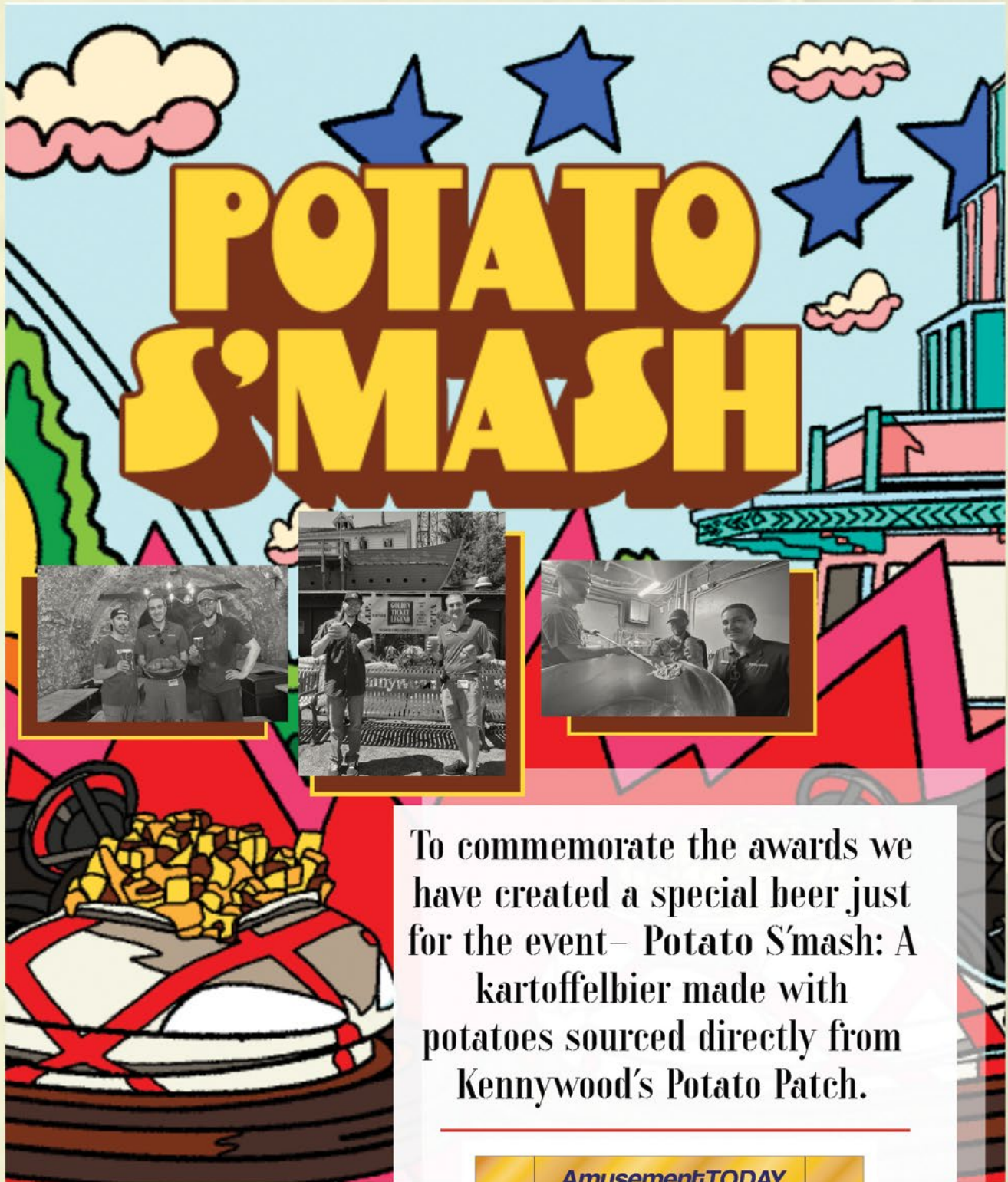
AT THE 2024 GOLDEN TICKET AWARDS



Penn Brewery is honored to be part of the 2024 Golden Ticket Awards.

Golden Ticket

Welcome all Golden Ticket attendees to Penn Brewery!



To commemorate the awards we have created a special beer just for the event – Potato S’mash: A kartoffelbier made with potatoes sourced directly from Kennywood’s Potato Patch.



Penn Brewery, 800 Vinial Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15212,
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SAFETY, MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

▶ Loch Ness Monster resurfaces — page 53 / Funtown's Excalibur refurbished — page 55

Inspections at CocoCay hold intriguing challenges for Safe Slide

AT: Tim Baldwin

tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

THE BAHAMAS — Inspections of waterslides and accompanying towers are a common requirement for operators. It is one of the services provided by **Safe Slide Restoration**. And while such procedures appear very standard, occasionally, unusual circumstances make for interesting projects.

Perfect Day at CocoCay is a private island owned by **Royal Caribbean** cruise line. The lush setting allows the ship's passengers to lounge on the beach, take in the gentle surf or, if desired, purchase a ticket to the colorful water park on the island that boasts thrilling rides and slides.

"We've had a relationship with Royal Caribbean as a brand for over a decade, specifically, the relationship at CocoCay for the last several years for their safety inspections," said **Tony Perry**, vice president of customer relations, Safe Slide. "It's quite the unique facility because it is on an island. Just to get to 'work,' we charter a plane from Miami to Great Harbor Bay Island, and from there, we take a boat taxi to CocoCay just to get set up. What we do provide for the overall inspection is ultrasonic testing for their steel, all the visual inspections for the steel and fiberglass and drone inspections for the entire facility."

Getting there isn't the only challenge. Commonly, water parks have a simple summer "season," but owing to its tropical setting, Perfect Day at Coco Cay is in almost



Perfect Day at CocoCay is a private island owned by Royal Caribbean. For tall structures, repelling from ropes is necessary for complete inspections (above left). A children's activity ship received ultrasonic testing from Safe Slide (below left). When necessary, drones (below right) can help Safe Slide gain visual access to challenging areas. AT/TIM BALDWIN; COURTESY SAFE SLIDE RESTORATION



year-round operation with the cruise line marketing it as one of the docking ports. "Off days" are few and far between.

"It's difficult to explain the uniqueness of travel to and from work by boat each day," smiled Perry. "It's really quite enjoyable. In that spirit of the relationship, they are enjoyable people to work with. **Josh Seymour** and the team they have there

on the island are really dedicated to safety."

The inspections are done annually. Perry said there is a limited amount of trailers for vendors on CocoCay that allow for part of his team to sometimes stay on the island overnight. Hundreds of employees stay on the island, which Perry feels is an impressive setup.

If the Safe Slide team

members can stay at night, some of the inspections can be done in the dark with staff repelling off towers.

"We have headlamps and spotlights," Perry told *Amusement Today*. "[In the daytime hours], we have a large drone that can get to places easily and quickly. All of this comes to the betterment of the facility. It is interesting to see some of

the things we find from the ropes or drone access."

Because various ships come and go, sometimes the inspection team has to wait until the last passengers are back on board. However, this past spring, Safe Slide was able to accomplish inspections when the entire island was closed for maintenance.

▶ See SLIDE, page 52

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► SLIDE Continued from page 51

“That was ideal. It was the most efficient for us and our team,” Perry said. “I think it was convenient for them too.”

CocoCay isn’t the only property where these unusual inspections take place.

“Night inspections can happen in those types of facilities that operate 365 days a year,” Perry said. “Great Wolf Lodge is another brand very much dedicated to safety. Some night inspections happen at that facility as well.”

The structures on CocoCay can be large. Its iconic Daredevil’s Peak tower stands a record-breaking 135 feet. The attractions are from WhiteWater West.

But not everything is necessarily tall. Safe Slide inspects everything from ground level to the sky.

“It’s nice having one brand of slide on the island,” Perry said. “WhiteWater has done a great job in the splash area using Life Floor. It’s a feature that not only adds safety but adds beautiful scenery that the children and guests can play on.”

Near the front of the island is a ship play structure. Safe Slide even gets inside that ship to do ultrasonic testing.

“Beach sand creates a challenge,” Perry noted, pinpointing another of CocoCay’s specific attributes. “It can be a challenge for their pumps and obviously the abrasiveness on fiberglass. All of our customers that deal with saltwater are battling corrosion. Being on an island, we need to be on top of rust mitigation.”

Perry is quick to compliment the island’s hospitality.

“It’s so good. Even the cafeteria food is so amazing,” he told AT. “You can gain weight; they treat us with such great hospitality. The desserts, water is delivered to us — even in the middle of work, it feels like you are being pampered. We’ve even considered staying a day longer.”

In addition to inspections, Safe Slide Restoration restores and maintains fiberglass, protecting investments. They have more than 30 years of experience.

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Busch Gardens's Loch Ness Monster resurfaces after restoration

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — After a six-month rest, the Loch Ness Monster: The Legend Lives On roared back to life on May 10 at Busch Gardens Williamsburg, Virginia. The refurbished coaster, which first opened June 2, 1978, has satisfied both coaster enthusiasts and guests alike.

Premier Rides did the refurbishment on the coaster, and Jim Seay, Premier president, said Premier was honored to do just that.

"The Busch Gardens Williamsburg Loch Ness Monster project was a very special opportunity for Premier Rides," Seay said. "There are few other rides in the world that have such a historic pedigree and such a global fan base. The American Coaster Enthusiasts has recognized Loch Ness Monster as an ACE Roller Coaster Landmark, a designation reserved for rides of historical significance.

"With that as a backdrop, Premier was extremely honored to have been chosen [by United Parks & Resorts] to be part of their team that would execute a dramatic restoration of the famed coaster," he said. "Premier's contribution focused on the



ride structure itself and included the replacement of almost 1,000 feet of track."

The layout of the coaster is the same, but the experience has been updated with sounds and special effects, in addition to the new track.

The adventure begins with an enhanced queue experience featuring new storytelling elements to peruse.

Busch Gardens enhanced the storyline where riders go on a journey through Scottish terrain. As riders begin to climb the first hill, a new specially-created Loch Ness Monster soundtrack awaits. During the first drop, riders can see a shadowy animal lurking beneath the water. Riders head straight for the first drop and the first of two interlocking loops before plunging into a tunnel where they come face to face with "Nessie" herself.

It is in this tunnel, which covers the double helix, where some of the biggest thematic changes have taken place. In "Nessie's" lair, there is all-new lighting and sound effects, along with LED screens that show the monster in action.

The new installation of track has smoothed out some of the rough spots, particularly entering and exiting the interlocking loops. Audio has also been added to the turn prior to the first lift where an exploration shack and a recently damaged expedition vehicle has been recovered. There is a soundtrack now on speakers mounted along the lengths of the hills.



The restoration of Busch Gardens Williamsburg's Loch Ness coaster included replacing almost 1,000 feet of track by Premier Rides to make for a smoother ride. Redubbed The Loch Ness Monster: The Legend Lives, the ride reopened (below) on May 10, 2024, after restorations during the off season. COURTESY BUSCH GARDENS WILLIAMSBURG



"The challenge of the project was the critical importance to maintain the ride's iconic dynamic experience, while at the same time using current advanced engineering and fabrication technologies to produce new structure that will perform for decades to come allowing new generations to experience Loch Ness Monster," Seay said.

The refurbished coaster reopened to the public with much fanfare during a special ribbon-cutting ceremony with bagpipers playing.

"It's definitely something missing when this ride isn't open. It's just such an important part of the park," said Kevin Lembke, Busch Gardens Williamsburg park presi-

dent. "Not only the ride itself, but visually and the energy it brings, the views, the yellow track, it's just all iconic, and it's great to have the whole Scotland area alive again."

Lembke said that for a lot of people, the Loch Ness ride is the nostalgia of being their first real coaster or the first coaster that they went upside down on.

"Those people are coming back and are now bringing their kids to ride it," Lembke said. "When it's been around for that long, we've created so many memories for people, there's an emotional attachment and a lot of passion around it, and we're glad to bring it back."

The background of the ride's story goes back to the

year of 564 when the mythical Loch Ness Monster is believed to have been first spotted in the Highlands of Scotland. Centuries later in 1978, the Loch Ness Monster came alive in Busch Gardens Williamsburg.

Now in 2024, the Loch Ness Monster has resurfaced as a fully restored experience loaded with all-new thrilling elements, dramatic storytelling and innovative effects.

Busch Gardens Williamsburg is a European-themed adventure park, boasting more than 100 acres of family fun. It is home to world-class roller coasters, award-winning entertainment and more than 50 rides and attractions.

• buschgardens.com
• premier-rides.com

FAST FACTS

First and only-remaining interlocking loop steel coaster

•

Manufacturer:

Arrow Development

•

Restoration company:

Premier Rides

•

Originally opened:

June 1978

•

Track length:

3,240 feet

•

Highest point:

130 feet

•

Rider capacity: 28



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Gravity Group, Texas Skilled Carpentry refurbish Funtown's Excalibur

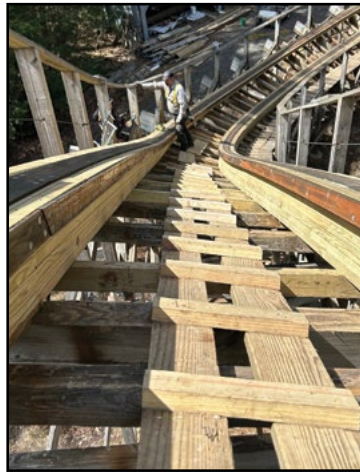
AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

SACO, Maine — In the 1990s, wood coasters were seeing a resurgence, thanks in part to the emergence of Custom Coasters Inc. Among its many projects was Excalibur at Funtown Splashtown U.S.A.'s Excalibur in 1998.

As with all wood coasters, routine annual maintenance is required. Funtown took a dedicated approach to getting its signature attraction back to top form.

"We had worked with The Gravity Group in the past in 2019. They came in, scanned the whole track area, gave us some reprofiling options, and it turned out really well; we were happy with that project," said Cory Cormier, maintenance manager. "When it came time to do a bigger area, we felt very comfortable about sticking with Gravity Group."

Excalibur is the only



Funtown management report the off-season track work has increased the speed of Excalibur. Major curves received needed attention (above middle). In addition, Excalibur's first drop (above right, below) received precut track from The Gravity Group. COURTESY FUNTOWN SPLASHTOWN U.S.A., THE GRAVITY GROUP

wooden coaster in the state of Maine.

"One of the areas we wanted to address was the first drop, and we became very interested in their vertically stacked track," Cormier told *Amusement Today*. "Talking to the various parks that had it, it was all good reviews, very smooth. It was holding up very well. We thought it was the right option for a fairly steep first drop, so having something that is going

to give you the strength of close to a steel rail but staying with actual wood — keeping with the wood tradition on this coaster is something we wanted to shoot for."

"The engineered precut track allows us to profile the ride exactly the way it needs to be," said Brian Kosmac, engineer, The Gravity Group. "It is cut specifically for the track, and it is 30 times stronger. We

► See FUNTOWN, page 56



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► FUNTOWN

Continued from page 55

are able to take away the use of skilled labor and put it in the hands of the engineer."

The height of Excalibur is 100 feet, and the first drop is 82 feet.

"The first drop was tired, and it had a lot of oscillations. When you rode it, it was getting bumpy," observed Kosmac. "I've been working with Cory since 2019. They were thinking about working with the first drop, but then COVID hit. We surveyed the ride last year, and the first drop is perfect for the vertical stack. We took the angle from 52 degrees to 55, which doesn't sound like much, but it makes a difference; you get a nice little pop of air."

"The first drop is fabulous right now," Cormier smiled, who was pleased with the accelerometer testing. "It looks beautiful."

Another section of the ride used the precut curved track.

"We had to do some major ledger adjustments because the dynamics of that



Excalibur's rehab work has it running in top form. The vertically stacked track is seen with a label from The Gravity Group (above right). COURTESY FUNTOWN SPLASHTOWN U.S.A.

curve were changed in the reprofiling, fairly dramatically," Cormier told *Amusement Today*. "The ledgers are about 12 inches lower than they were originally. It's a much smoother ride in that area. It actually carries more speed through the second half of the ride because of the re-engineering of the first drop and the smoothing out and reprofiling of that other turn. It's a big improvement all around."

"You take that curve at a little different incline now," Kosmac said. "In curve seven, we used our horizontal precut

track, reprofiled and rebanked some of it to eliminate the side-to-side issues. We lowered one of the hills just a little bit. It's running just great."

While The Gravity Group did the engineering, Funtown contracted with **Texas Skilled Carpentry** for the bulk of the work. AT asked that group if being based in Texas but working in a Maine off-season was a temperature shock.

"Being a Texas-based company doesn't really affect us working out of town. I mean we have been working out of

town for many years!" said **Luis Acevedo**, owner. "The weather was pretty intense this year, with winter being so long up north. We did have a couple of big snowstorms that even took the power out for a whole day — all over Saco, Maine. But nothing we are not used to. When you work on roller coasters, that's part of the package: snow, rain, heat!"

Funtown has been using the Texas team for 16 years, according to Cormier. While Funtown has its own crew, there isn't enough manpower to address large, substan-

tial jobs. "They do a great job, excellent work," he noted.

The Gravity Group supplied the precut track, and Texas Skilled Carpentry was able to install those particular pieces. Working to The Gravity Group's specs, the teams involved were very pleased with all the work completed for the 2024 season.

"From where it was five years ago to where it is today — it's night and day," said Kosmac.

"I've been married to that ride for 25 years. It's like a second wife," Cormier joked.



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2024 World's Largest Swimming Lesson draw thousands to water

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. — The 15th annual **World's Largest Swimming Lesson** (WLSL) was held June 22. Even though total numbers of participants were not yet available, Beth Root, owner of the communications company **Buzzonic** and wife of the **World Waterpark Association** (WWA) President **Rick Root**, said from what they are able to compile now, it looks like it was a great success.

"We anticipate being higher or on par with the number of participants in 2023," Root said.

The WLSL is promoted by the WWA as well as many other organizations. It is a 30-minute free lesson where lifeguards teach life saving skills.

The first WLSL was held in 2010 with 3,892 participants in six countries.

Since its inception, more than 383,000 children and adults in 53 countries on six continents have participated in the WLSL lessons generat-

ing more than 2.7 billion life saving, learn-to-swim media impressions.

Root said this year there were 16 countries participating.

"The number of water parks we are compiling is very encouraging," Root said. "Those water park numbers could be higher than in 2019, which was our best year. To date we have heard from 81 water parks hosting 7,981 participants, including 16 new waterpark locations."

And, to date, locations representing 16 countries have submitted including, Bahamas, Benin, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Ecuador, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Mexico, Qatar, Trinidad and Tobago, UK, United States and Uruguay.

Highlights from this year's WLSL include **Disney's Typhoon Lagoon**, Orlando, Florida. That event drew 1,020 participants.

Dollywood's Splash Country, Pigeon Forge, Ten-



COURTESY WWA

nessee, drew 742 participants and **Water World Ocean Park** in Hong Kong reported 400 participants.

Wild Rivers water park in Irvine, California, hosted over 200 children. And **Wet 'N' Wild Waterworld**, Anthony, Texas, had over 200 swim participants this year, plus over 50 lifeguards helping teach the lesson and promote that swimming lessons save lives.

Cranberry Waterpark, Cranberry Township, Pennsylvania, has hosted the WLSL for the past 15 years. In just 30 minutes, 50 people, at Cranberry, learned bare-bones swimming basics to keep their heads above water and, may-

be, get to the side of the pool.

The Miami-Dade County Parks, Recreation, and Open Spaces Department, Miami, Florida, participated the WLSL, but no numbers were available. The same with both the Big Kahuna's water parks in, Destin, Florida and West Berlin, New Jersey.

Sulphur Parks and Recreation, Sulphur, Louisiana, participated as did the Miami-Dade County Parks, Recreation, and Open Spaces Department.

Big Kahuna's water parks in, Destin, Florida and West Berlin, New Jersey both hosted a WLSL this year.

Sulphur Parks and Rec-

reation, Sulphur, Louisiana participated as did **Wild-Water**, Cullman, Alabama. **Splash Kingdom Wild West**, Hudson Oaks, Texas, also participated.

Schlitterbahn New Braunfels, Texas, also hosted a large group this year.

Research from the **American Academy of Pediatrics** shows risk of drowning can be reduced by 88% if children participate in formal swimming lessons between the ages of 1-4. Yet, a survey conducted by the **American Red Cross** in 2020 found that more than half of Americans (56%) either can't swim or don't have the necessary basic swimming skills.

Other data show that drowning remains in the top five causes of unintended injury related death from birth to 54 years old.

It is estimated that for every fatal drowning victim, another five to 10 victims receive hospital related care for non-fatal drowning injuries.

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Europa-Park rebuilds bigger, better revamped Austria after fire

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

RUST, Germany — Thick black smoke is something no operator ever wants to see at their park. On June 19 of last year, a fire broke out at **Europa-Park**. While firefighters managed to get it under control and no visitors were injured, the mishap did take out two rides for the remainder of the season. Almost immediately, the affected area was walled off out of sight of the guests.

While contained, it necessitated the closure of **Alpenexpress**, a powered coaster ride, as well as the park's log flume. Those two attractions intertwined within a dark diamond mine, which was the structure that caught on fire.

"I like to have the families in the park," said cofounder **Roland Mack**. "If I look back to when we started, the first roller coaster was the **Alpenexpress**, which is a family coaster. With six million people we have to balance [attractions] very carefully not to lose the family."

Replacing the two rides was no small feat. **Mack Rides** was challenged to get the replacement attractions in for the current season.

"Despite the demanding timeline and a busy schedule with numerous rides in the engineering process, our entire team rose to the occasion," said **Maximilian Roeser**, marketing, Mack Rides. "From engineers to workshops, shipping departments, final assembly, and painting, everyone contributed to the successful and timely completion



While some of the flume trough and logs were undamaged, much of the flume (above left) had to be rebuilt for the 2024 season. Spiraling through newly constructed "Alps" mountains, the **Alpenexpress** (above right) is a recreation of the park's first "coaster" ride. AT/TIM BALDWIN



of the rides. We are extremely proud and thankful for their outstanding efforts, which ensured that the cherished attractions in the Austrian area could be brought back to life for guests to enjoy."

While portions of the flume remained, the entire **Alpenexpress** and much of the flume had to be rebuilt in a beautiful Alps-themed area.

"The Austrian area at Europa-Park was one of the first with big attractions and was beloved by many guests that visited the park since the beginning. These rides have offered memorable experiences with their close proximity and interactivity, creating a sense of nostalgia for many visitors," Roeser said. "The overall experience with both rides interacting with each other and being built so close were wonderful experiences. Given the deep connection many guests have with these

attractions, the park made the decision to preserve their essence while updating them. The ride layouts for both the **Tiroler Wildwasserbahn** and the **Alpenexpress** have undergone only minor changes, ones that most visitors likely won't even notice. However, the theming of the rides has been significantly revamped, and there have been substantial upgrades to the technical aspects to enhance safety and enjoyment."

The powered coaster was the most demanding of the two.

"We had to build the coaster completely new from the foundations. In contrast, the work on the **Tiroler Wildwasserbahn** log flume involved only minor changes, with the boats remaining intact and only the channel and lift being replaced," said Roeser.

"The **Alpenexpress** has undergone a complete rene-

wal, now reflecting the modern standards of the rides we currently sell," Roeser told *Amusement Today*. "One of the significant improvements is the replacement of the old lap bar, which covered two seats, with individual lap bars for each rider. This upgrade greatly enhances safety and comfort. Technically, the new **Alpenexpress** is a modernized version of its 1980s predecessor, incorporating advanced engineering and technology."

He added, "We have retained the beloved theme of the mine train in the Alps while also integrating our **VRCoaster** equipment directly into the vehicles. The newly installed tracks provide a much smoother ride, with enhanced transitions between turns, significantly improving the overall ride experience. The **Tiroler Wildwasserbahn** log flume, while not as extensively rebuilt, did see updates to the channel and lift systems, ensuring a more reliable and enjoyable experience for guests.

Overall, these enhancements have revitalized both attractions, preserving their nostalgic charm while incorporating modern advancements to enhance safety, comfort and enjoyment."

The rebuilt rides from Mack Rides now have a third attraction in the newly themed Alps area. With crawl/rope structures supplied by **Kristallturm** and various slides from **Wiegand**, the new area is com-

pletely transformed for the family audience.

"I would like to get rid of the headache of rides being installed in buildings," Mack noted. "When you have these terrible events, you are happy to not have all the fire restrictions necessary. But secondly, the Alps is something that fits into Austria. It's an exciting decision. Being in the middle of the park, if you wish to build a building with the fire restrictions nowadays and the materials you have to use — my first thinking [last August] was that I'd like to have the rides back for the 2024 season. In the middle of the park, the construction was easier to realize in a shorter time [without the mine]. The solution came out perfect."

While familiar, the new area is a completely transformed spectator vista.

"The people in the hotel area can really see parts of the ride, and that's an attractive thing," smiled Mack.

Ironically, folks who miss the old ride can experience it with the VR opportunity.

While the walk-through mine is gone, a gem-speckled gift shop still offers the legacy feel to what was once there.

The entire project could have easily been the capital for a new season, but with Croatia and the new mega-coaster **Voltron** [see AT JUNE cover story] having opened on the other side of the park, Europa-Park has doubled down on wowing guests for 2024.



New play structures from **Kristallturm** and **Wiegand** offer a third attraction intertwined into the reimagined land (above left). A throwback to what was lost, a newly built gift shop still conveys the magic of the diamond mine legacy (above right). AT/TIM BALDWIN



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Mid-season maintenance, operations review: ensuring excellence

As we pass the halfway point of the operating season, it's time to sit down with your teams and reflect on maintenance and operations programs, checklists and procedures including a thorough review of training and auditing processes that complement and support these programs.

The mid-season can often lead to a sense of routine, leading to complacency among operations and maintenance teams. Repeatedly completing checklists day after day can lead to a box-ticking mentality which must be addressed to ensure vigilance and attention to detail.

Maintaining relevance and vigilance

Now is the time to identify which aspects of your programs are working well or which need improvement or fine tuning. To maintain high standards, it's crucial to ensure your procedures remain relevant and effective. To accomplish this, collaborate with teams and individual team members on the ground. Their insights and applied experience can help refine processes and ensure they remain valid. This collaboration also provides the team members an all-important sense and degree of ownership in the programs.

Utilizing downtime reports

At this stage in the season, potential issues and signs of wear may start to emerge through your downtime reporting and data capture processes. These reports are invaluable for planning the off-season, allowing for targeted strip, inspect, repair, and replacement programs. Frequent and repeated occurrences on downtime reports can highlight areas that require attention and can support maintenance budgets and guide maintenance priorities.

Safety protocols and procedural reviews

When reviewing procedures, include relevant safety protocols, especially related to daily ride checks and routine ppm schedules. For example, if a process involves working at height, Work at Height (WAH) safety protocols should be attached to that checklist.

A review of your ride area access and management programs will confirm they are effective and current. The lock-out/tag-out process is particularly crucial and must be meticulously followed to ensure safety.

Having direct access to useful and relevant information while conducting your checks and ppm's at the rides and attractions is one of the many bonuses of deploying a digital system for your checklist and ppm program by replacing paper checklists.

Mid-season reviews provide a strategic opportunity to uphold and enhance the standards of your operations and maintenance programs. By preventing complacency, collaborating with your teams, utilizing downtime reports, and applying safety protocols, you ensure your park operates efficiently and safely throughout the season.

Enhancing safety with digital systems

AIMS International partner, **Mobaro**, offers a platform ideal for streamlining safety management by digitalizing checklists and maintenance programs to prevent complacency. It aids performance tracking, off-season planning, and enhances team collaboration. The system supports efficient access management and lock-out/tag-out processes. Leveraging this technology helps maintain high safety standards and a secure environment for visitors and staff.

—David Bromilow,
AIMS International past president

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Route 7 Karting adds TrainerTainment sales coaching



NORTH RICHLAND HILLS, Texas — Route 7 Karting and Entertainment has teamed up with TrainerTainment to turbocharge its sales team. The Route 7 team raved about the two-day onsite kickoff, calling it “amazing.” TrainerTainment’s Denise Killian brought the PCQPC (Prospect, Connect, Qualify, Propose, Close) sales process to life with a mix of fun, sincerity and practical wisdom. Killian commented, “It was awesome bringing the team together to collaborate creatively and operationally, with ideas to implement in their operation and increase sales.” COURTESY ROUTE 7 KARTING

Legoland Japan Resort becomes the country's first Certified Autism Center

NAGOYA, Japan — The International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES) announced that Legoland Japan Resort has become the first Certified Autism Center (CAC) in the country, pioneering the accessibility and inclusion movement in the Japanese theme parks

and resorts industry.

This achievement underscores the resort’s commitment to creating a supportive environment for autistic and sensory-sensitive guests and their families. The CAC designation is awarded by IBCCES to inclusive organizations whose guest-facing workforce has completed specialized autism and sen-

sory awareness training and certification and has committed to fostering an inclusive and accessible experience for all guests regardless of abilities.

The resort’s divisional director, **Yoshi Honda**, shared: “During the IBCCES certification process, I realized there was so much I did not know about the autism spectrum. I am glad that all of the Legoland Japan employees also had the opportunity to learn about it as well.”

Located in Nagoya, Legoland Japan Resort features a variety of 24 thrilling rides, Lego models to play and build with, as well as interactive, adventurous attractions.

“We are proud to collaborate with Legoland Japan Resort to not only raise awareness but also to provide accessible and inclusive options in the country,” added **Myron Pincomb**, IBCCES board chairman. “The team’s dedication to the training is truly commendable, and we hope this initiative inspires other theme parks and resorts to prioritize accessibility and inclusivity in their agenda.”

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For additional information or to schedule an audit, members should contact jeff.smith.oaba@gmail.com.



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