

► Las Vegas' Circus Circus hotel is home to largest permanent circus — pages 42-43

# Amusement TODAY

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NEWS Leader

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Digital Edition

## IAFE expects one of its largest turnouts ever for 2024 Trade Show



AT: Pam Sherborne  
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

PHOENIX, Ariz. — Attendees to the upcoming **International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE)** Convention and Trade Show, set for Dec. 1-4, at the **Phoenix Convention Center**, Phoenix, Arizona, may, quite literally, find themselves dancing in the street on the evening of the first day of the largest gathering of the fair industry anywhere in the world.

“In Phoenix, we are going to take advantage of that beautiful weather and we are closing down a block of Third Street in front of the Convention Center to throw a party,” said **Marla Calico**, IAFE CEO and president.

“A giant wheel from **Ray Cammack Shows** will be the centerpiece. We'll have a DJ and a dance floor and all types of fair food to enjoy.”

Calico reported in mid-November that plans for the 2024 event had been going great.

“It has been fantastic,” she said. “We had to add more booth space to the street on the evening of the trade show floor plan in August. We were sold out by October 1. We have a waiting list. We will have 217 exhibitors in the show.”

Pre-registration for the convention was open until November 2. And while the IAFE staff were still processing forms in mid-November, Calico felt certain that the 2024 conven-

tion would see an increase over 2023 and probably over 2022, which had been one of the best years in the past decade.

There are traditionally additional walk-ups as well.

“As always, we do not release numbers, just as we encourage our fairs to do,” Calico said. “We focus on the metrics that matter and that is not sheer attendance.”

Calico said the IAFE doesn't even collect attendance from the fairs anymore.

But fairs from which she and the IAFE staff have heard have reported a great 2024. With very few exceptions, if the weather was

► See IAFE, page 6

The **International Association of Fairs and Expositions Convention and Trade Show** is set for Dec. 1-4, at the **Phoenix Convention Center**, Phoenix, Arizona. Every year comes with a different theme. The 2023 theme was “Fairs Rise.” The theme this year is **Building on Strong Foundations**, which should provide a fantastic backdrop. COURTESY IAFE

## Christmas at the Caverns delivers a unique holiday celebration

AT: Tim Baldwin  
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

SAN ANTONIO, Texas — Christmas is big business, and many facets of the amusement industry find success in meeting the demand of families wanting to experience something festive for the holidays. **Natural Bridge Caverns** has its own take on the holiday, and it has been taking the merriment to new places — underground!

“I came to Christmas at the Caverns well before I joined the Natural Bridge Caverns team, and I was immediately in love with this event,” said **Winter Prosapio**, communications. “I am a huge Christmas nerd anyway, but there was something about this event that felt uniquely Texas. I felt honestly welcome, and I was hooked. I brought my family back several times. Now I'm part of the team and love the direction it's taking. As it grows, our entire team wants to achieve the feeling that you are stepping into a Texas Hill Country winter wonderland — with all the warmth and sincer-

► See CAVERNS, page 8



Numerous holiday activities can be found in the village for visitors to do both before and after experiencing the underground fun. COURTESY NATURAL BRIDGE CAVERNS



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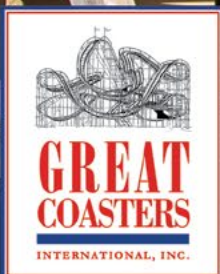
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AT NOTEBOOK: B. Derek Shaw, [bdshaw@amusementtoday.com](mailto:bdshaw@amusementtoday.com)

## Leave no stone unturned



Shaw

When I worked for the American Lung Association, an employee who was leaving, gave each staff member a paper weight with one or two words on it describing that person to her. Mine was persistent.

The phrase "leave no stone unturned" is commonly used to express a thorough search or investigation,

exploring every possibility.

Recently I learned a six-story tall Ferris wheel was going to be placed on a bridge that was closed during a 10-day festival. This was the beginning of what would become an exhaustive search to let industry readers know the details about this unique location-straddling-a-river attraction. Social media had already promoted advance ticket sales to the general public.

One would think it should be easy to reach any of the three organizations who sponsored the event for more information. That is where the communication lapse began.

After repeated phone calls, Facebook messages and e-mails were not returned, I reached out to one of that state's Quality Assurance ride inspectors. They had nothing on file for the attraction. I approached carnival providers who knew nothing. Reaching out to amusement enthusiasts yielded zero. Why is it so difficult to find out who is bringing in the attraction?

I even contacted that city's permit department. They gave me a different number than what I had for the permit holder, producing voice mail with four choices, which did not connect with anyone — a dead end.

Finally, I reached out to the Chamber of Commerce. The person I talked to there knew people from two of the sponsors and offered to reach out, asking his contact to contact me. It was only after that nudge one finally responded, after nearly 10 days of waiting and wondering.

I got the information I was looking for, however only after a significant amount of persistence and time — not a recipe for efficiency.

I make it a point to return all calls and other communication (except spam), within 24 to 48 hours. It's just good sense, business-wise and personally. It is my hope in this day and age, more organizations respond quickly and efficiently — you never know what it can lead to.

FLINT'S VIEW: Bubba Flint



INDUSTRY VOICE: Marla Calico, International Association of Fairs and Expositions

## Some final thoughts from "The Fair Chick"

The state of the agricultural fair industry globally seems as strong as ever based on reports from the field in 2024. Were there challenges? Of course! The industry's number one nemesis — weather — wreaks havoc on best-laid plans. This year saw both extreme heat and extreme rain. Inflation played a role, to be sure, in the increases in per-cap spending, but it certainly could not account for the overall reports of visitor spending. Fairs are facing increasing costs for safety and security, as well as insurance. With some states not only increasing minimum wages but mandatory sick leave for even temporary labor, this will be a challenge for the future. The United States section of the industry did a really great job of coming together to advocate on Congress for HR 1787, the "Carnivals Are Real Entertainment" Act, to provide an alternative solution to the pressing need for guaranteed access to temporary foreign labor. But there remains a lot of work to be done.

But it is not "gloom and doom." Fairs are resilient — and the pandemic certainly proved



Calico

that to be true. Fairs are seeing increasing interest in sponsorships and partnering opportunities; year-round facility usage, whether it be rentals or new events produced by the fair itself, is on the rise. Fairs around the world are proving their relevance to their communities with food drives for the hungry, scholarships awarded to youth, junior market animal auction proceeds that sometime defy the imagination and, as we saw in the past month, making donations to help those so horribly impacted by Hurricane Helene. In my opinion, that is the true metric that matters in this industry: how each fair impacts and reflects its own community, whether that be a county, a region, a state or a province. Weather and economic conditions have always impacted the sector, yet fairs survive. Moreover, they thrive.

I've had the great honor of being in this industry for over 47 years. Being "The Fair Chick" has been so rewarding and my life will be forever blessed by the friendships made with folk from all across the world. Farewell!

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# 2 MINUTE DRILL



AT: Janice Witherow

## Tim Baldwin, Amusement Today

**NOTE:** After 19 years and a total of 243 2-Minute Drills for AT, I have decided it is time for me to pass the torch to one of my closest friends in the industry and AT colleague, Tim Baldwin. Change is good for the soul, and Tim will do a fantastic job continuing this column, bringing his own energy and flair. Thank you, Gary, for allowing me to stay connected to an industry I love for so long ... it's been a great ride!

I first met **Tim Baldwin** in 1991 when he visited **Cedar Point** where I was right out of college working in the public relations department. We became fast friends and have shared many of life's ups and downs together. A self-professed amusement park and roller coaster fan, Tim is an excellent writer, highly organized, passionate about life and just plain fun! He is a retired art teacher (beloved by his students) and a former restaurant server (known for his attentive service). Tim's knowledge of the industry and knack for networking will serve him well. Good luck, my friend!

**Title:** Editorial and Golden Ticket Awards Communications Coordinator.

**Number of years in the industry:** I have been a fan my entire life. Upon retirement of my education career, I could devote more toward industry journalism thanks to my friendship with AT Publisher Gary Slade. I've been writing for AT since the late 1990s.

**Best thing about the industry:** Getting outdoors and having fun. The imagination, courage and connections with others are things you internalize for life.

**Favorite amusement ride:** Easy, roller coasters. I've been on more than 1,300.

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

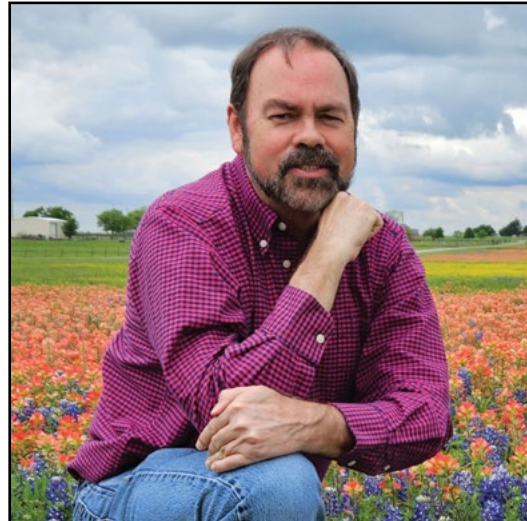
**Biggest challenge facing our industry:** From what I can see, it's staffing and Wall Street.

**The thing I like most about amusement/water park season is ...** It's always new.

**All-time favorite sitcom:** *Seinfeld*, although *Friends* is close.

**Cooler thing about living in Texas:** NOT summer. I love the mild winters. Spring is glorious, particularly with bluebonnets.

**The last concert I saw was ...** Kiss, believe it or not.



**Amusement Today's Tim Baldwin will be taking over the 2-Minute Drill column beginning with the January 2025 issue of the publication.** AT/TIM BALDWIN

**If I had an extra day in the week, I would spend it ...** Writing. It's addictive (when it's not for work).

**It's December! My favorite Christmas song is ...** "Oh Holy Night" is my favorite traditional carol, but "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" by Casting Crowns always gives me goosebumps.

**Favorite "chain" restaurant:** Whataburger for fast food, Texas Roadhouse for table service.

**People say I do this a lot:** Probably talk with my hands; I'm energetic. And I'm a hugger.

**When I am in a hurry, I fix this for dinner:** Parmesan Tilapia (if Sam's Club has it).

**The last thing I lost was ...** The flash drive with my Christmas playlist!

**If money were no object, I would buy a second home here ...** The Cedar Point Chaussee for a summer home. However, a high-rise condo in Manhattan would be pretty cool.

**Best place I have ever watched a sunset:** The Oasis in Austin.

**The household chore I enjoy doing the most is ...** Washing the dishes.

**If I could get the answer to any question, I would ask ...** How can we put an end to political commercials?

**My life motto is ...** Tell people how much they mean to you. Or maybe "Where can we go next?"

## THE INDUSTRY SEEN

### Gentlemen, start your scooters!



**BLOOMSBURG, Pa.** — Joe Filoromo, supervisor for the Amusement Ride Safety Division of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and Dick Knoebel, principal, Knoebels Amusement Resort of Elysburg, Pennsylvania, take a few minutes to talk during the hands-on portion of the PACE ride safety seminar in late October. Fun-loving onlookers commented that the pair needed to race. Complete coverage of the PACE seminar can be found in this issue on pages 48-50. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

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## IAFE

Continued from page 1

cooperative, the fairs and all their partners were very successful

Per cap spending seemed to be up, though not known is how much of that might have been tied to response to inflation in what concessionaires and carnivals were charging guests.

Many fairs reported great success in the ways they were able to give back to their communities this year. There were record-breaking food drives to feed the hungry in their communities and hundreds of thousands of dollars were raised to support the victims of Hurricane Helene. The junior market animal sales where the animals were given to local food banks by the buyer aided in raising money for young exhibitors who were ill or injured.

A challenging note, however, is that "there seems to be no letup in the number of reports of outbursts of violence or malfeasance from young people trying to get social media attention. This is a challenging situation for all fairs and is driving up the costs associated with additional security and law enforcement response.

"The changing landscape of gun laws across the country is creating very challenging and dangerous situations for fairs when certain state legislators have made it impossible, or nearly so, for fairs to prohibit



The educational sessions planned during the IAFE touch on an array of topics (above left). There will be a total of 56 workshop sessions during this year's event. Marla Calico is the IAFE's CEO and president. She is retiring at the end of this year. Above right, she is seen welcoming just one of the many guests to the convention, former North Dakota State Fair Manager, Renae Korslien (left). Calico expects this year's event to be one of the best. COURTESY IAFE

guns from being brought inside the gates," she said.

However, an increasing number of fairs are finding the new weapons detection systems very beneficial to use.

The demand from guests to have options to pay by card continues to increase in 2024. A con that comes with that, said Calico, is that not every fair has the infrastructure of fiber optics and cannot get reliable cell coverage to ensure seamless transactions.

All of these issues will be addressed in some fashion during the convention. Calico said that in a very broad sense, everything is always new at each annual event since the association has been rotating the location of the convention every year.

The educational content of the IAFE convention is driven by committees bringing forth ideas that are then voted upon

by IAFE's membership through an online system. In 2024, there were 31,407 online votes cast to determine the final selection. This is a 15% increase over 2023 and a 28 ½% increase in responses over 2022.

The keynote address this year will be given by **Manley Feinberg II**, the founder of **VerticalLessons, Inc.** Manley is recognized as an award-winning international keynote speaker, business leader and author whose work has been featured on **NBC, CBS, ABC** and **Fox**, and in *The New York Daily News*, *Entrepreneur*, *American Express Open Forum* and *World News*.

Convention registration begins on Saturday, Nov. 30. Sunday, Dec. 1, begins a full schedule of activities and educational sessions. The day will end with the street party.

Each morning will start with Connections and Coffee, small group sessions with a variety of topics to choose from for networking.

On Monday morning, after the Connections and Coffee sessions, zone meetings have been scheduled.

Educational sessions will run throughout the day with the Trade Show open 12-5 p.m.

Monday will conclude with several networking events including the CFE/CVFM/IFM Info Session, the Fair Swag Swap, Pin Trading and Games, and the IAFE



Board of Directors Reunion.

Tuesday morning begins with the Connections and Coffee, going into the educational sessions.

Trade show hours for Tuesday, Dec. 3 are 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., and again 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.

Networking opportunities for this evening include Young Professionals (YP) Connect and Cocktails, a CFE and CVFM Reception, and YP Steering Committee Social Night.

Wednesday, Dec. 4, starts again with the Connections and Coffee, goes into educational sessions, and then ends with the event's closing ceremony that afternoon.

Scheduled on Thursday, Dec. 5, are three educational experiences. They include tours of **WestWorld** of Scottsdale, Arizona; **Sysco Arizona**, Tolleson, Arizona, and the **Footprint Center/Chase Field**, Phoenix.

A workshop, CPP E. coli, will be held that morning as well.

All four of these activities require extra fees.

Calico said there will be at least two topics reflective of each of the association's 14 different educational committees presented during the educational sessions. There are 56 total workshop sessions scheduled this year.

Some of the educational topics this year include: Facility Marketing and Sales; Sponsorship and Marketing; What Color Are

You – Blue, Green, Gold or Orange?; How Do You Test an Elephant – A Hands-on Workshop on Sample Collection for Performance-Enhancing Practices in Livestock Competitions; Google Basics; Google Advance; Elevate Your Fair's Safety and Security with Proven Best Practices; A Look into the Future of Telling the Story of Food, Fiber, and Fuel; No Sellers at Gates? Letting Kiosks and QR Codes Do the Work for You; Information Technology Controlling the Exercise of Free Speech on Your Fairgrounds and Other Legal Tidbits for Fairs; Creative Layout Solutions – Rethinking, Rebranding and Rebuilding Vendor Area and Marketing Masterclass: Build a Winning Digital Marketing Plan Today.

Others are Crafting Captivating Sponsorship Packages: A Masterclass in Pricing and Value Proposition; Creating a Positive Workplace Culture; Practical (AI) Magic: Transforming Fair Management with Artificial Intelligence; Maximizing the Impact of On-Grounds Entertainment; WOW! Saffire Can Do That?; Strategies to Competitively Price Your Facility: The Price is Right; Attitudinal Profiles of a Fair/Rodeo Guest; Strengthening the Touchpoints of Your Fair and Best Practices; Success Stories for Community Engagement and more.

[fairsandexpos.com](http://fairsandexpos.com)



The IAFE Convention and Trade has no lack of networking opportunities. Revisiting with fair friends is certainly a highlight of the convention. COURTESY IAFE



# International Association of Fairs and Expositions 2024 convention

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Mobile Arts	600		
Momentum Refresh	1004		
Mystic Marlow The Mystifier	601		
National Event Services	714, 716		
National Recreation Systems, a Playcore Company	500		
Nature Hill NV	121, 123		
Ocean Sales	902, 904		



## ▶CAVERNS

Continued from page 1

ity remaining firmly at the heart of it all.”

Starting in 2013, the Christmas event sprinkled its own Christmas magic on the traditional year-round cavern tours by making stops along the way. Music can be anything from banjo players, carolers, soloists, bell choirs or even Folkloric dancers.

“We do have some performers who return year after year, but we have a new mix every night. It’s a great way to vary the experience,” Prosapio told *Amusement Today*. “Plus, we include some high school choral groups — they usually are only available for one or two nights of the run of the caroling part of our event.”

The acoustics in the cavern are spectacular for live performances, and the ancient formations of stalactites, stalagmites, flowstone and drapery that fill the cave serve as incredible natural backdrops.

In the decade since it began, the event has really expanded.

“It has grown in two ways — we’ve added new features and upped our delivery,” said Prosapio. “It also evolved based on guest feedback. For example, we’ve selected a higher caliber of performers for the caroling in the cavern. We added story time with Mrs. Claus and gave photos with Santa stronger visual appeal. We’ve kept things like s’mores around the fire to keep in touch with our ranching heritage and found more ways to



Numerous activities above ground make the event very diverse (above left). Singing carols below ground is what makes Christmas at the Caverns a unique event (above right). A western feel offers a true Texas flair to the holiday event (right). AT/TIM BALDWIN; COURTESY NATURAL BRIDGE CAVERNS

increase our gift to the local food bank. 2023 the first time we added a week after Christmas, and we were pleased with the results.”

Because of a new open space in an expanded cave, Natural Bridge Caverns now has a new twist on the holidays — underground concerts.

“Our Live Underground Concerts have been so popular, when we were looking for a way to celebrate our 10th anniversary last year, it seemed like the perfect way to extend the festivities,” said **Brad Wuest**, president of Natural Bridge Caverns.

In 2023, concerts took place between Christmas and New Year’s Eve. For 2024, Grammy-nominated musical artist **Jeremy McComb** will perform below ground on December 20.

Because of the natural space, tickets are limited to 200 partygoers. The event space is 150 feet below ground in the newer

Hidden Wonders cave. This recently developed cave has bar capabilities, restroom facilities and a conveyor system that lets people ride out of the cave.

“We have found the great formula for sell-out concerts revolves around both a great performer who has a loyal following but maybe hasn’t been heard from in a while or doesn’t typically play such an intimate venue,” Prosapio said.

Not everything is underground, however. The fun attractions at the surface are also available, and Natural Bridge Caverns adds a synthetic ice-skating rink and a marvelous walkthrough called Trail of Lights. This latter feature can be set up in the months ahead without affecting routine operations during the fall.

“Exactly!” Prosapio told AT. “We wrap hundreds of trees as well as set up our Trail of Lights starting as early as October. While most of the work isn’t visible to



our guests, when they do see it, it is almost its own marketing of our Christmas event.”

Natural Bridge Caverns is open daily year-round, but Christmas at the Caverns offers so many seasonal offerings that it really boosts the shoulder season.

“The wonderful thing about Christmas at the Caverns is it transforms us in our guests’ minds from a place they visit once to a place they can come back

to multiple times,” said Prosapio. “We love becoming part of Christmas traditions for families, and we know the competition for guests this time of year is significant. We’re happy that we’ve developed an experience that is valued — it’s one of the highest-rated events we do — and that shows another way families and friends can spend time together enjoying the beauty and the wonder.”



Entertainment along the cavern tour can include singers, musicians or dancers (above left). Musician Austin Gilliam (above middle) is always a guest favorite when performing underground in the caverns. The San Antonio culture is found in many displays (above right). AT/TIM BALDWIN; COURTESY NATURAL BRIDGE CAVERNS





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# Amusement TODAY

## ANNUAL HOLIDAY COOKING GUIDE

### John Chidester

**Fun Spot America**

This is my wife Becky's favorite holiday recipe ... okay, beverage. Serve with your favorite charcuterie board while enjoying a classic Christmas movie.



#### Holiday Grinch Punch

**Ingredients:**

- Half gallon of lime sherbet
- 2 quarts of ginger ale
- (optional) Add your favorite spirit to the punch (if it has been a stressful week)

Makes 31 cups.

### Ron Sutula

**Island H2O Live**

My mom's recipe for Turtle Bars is a family favorite. I always loved it when she made these. Be careful, like Lay's potato chips, "I bet you cant eat just one!"



#### Turtle Bars

**Ingredients:**

- 1 (14 oz.) bag caramels
- 2/3 cup evaporated milk (divided)
- 1 box German chocolate cake mix
- 1 cup chopped pecans
- 3/4 cup melted butter
- 1 (12 oz.) bag chocolate chips

**Prepare:**

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
- Melt caramels with 1/3 cup evaporated milk, set aside.
- Mix cake mix and remaining 1/3 cup of evaporated milk, pecans and melted butter together.
- Pat half of the dough into a greased 9 x 13 pan and bake at 350 degrees for 9 minutes.
- Remove from oven and immediately sprinkle with chocolate chips.
- Pour caramel mix over chocolate chips.
- Crumble the remaining dough over the top and bake for 25 more minutes.
- Let cool and cut into desired sized bars.

### Fotina (Fofo) Lakaris Backhaus

**Mount Olympus Water & Theme Park**

This is a family recipe. It is one of our favorite meals!

#### Lahanodolmades (Greek Cabbage Rolls)

**Ingredients:**

- 1 large green cabbage
- 1 cup rice
- 3/4 lb. ground beef
- 1.5 lbs. ground pork
- Parsley, dill, mint (optional)
- 1 large onion, minced (or use a food processor)
- Salt, pepper
- 1 lemon (divided)
- 1 tsp. tomato paste (for filling)
- 1.5 - 2 Tbsp. tomato paste (for sauce) or can of tomato sauce
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1-2 fresh Roma tomatoes
- 1 Tbsp. cornstarch

**Instructions:**

- Prepare the Cabbage: Boil cabbage leaves layer by layer, then drain on paper towels. Cut large leaves in half, removing the hard stem.
- Make the Filling: Mix rice, beef, pork, herbs, onion, salt, pepper, 1 tsp tomato paste, olive oil and a little lemon juice.
- Assemble the Rolls: Roll filling in cabbage leaves and layer in a pot with olive oil, salt, and pepper between each layer.
- Cook: Cover rolls with water and place a plate on top. Boil, then simmer for 1.5 hours. Remove the plate halfway through.
- Tomato Sauce: Blend tomatoes with water and 1.5 - 2 Tbsp tomato paste (or use tomato sauce). Add to the pot halfway through cooking.
- Finish: Mix lemon juice and cornstarch; add to the pot to thicken sauce. Cook for 5 more minutes.
- Serve: Enjoy hot with Greek Yogurt or Sour Cream.





# PARKS, FAIRS & ATTRACTIONS

► Kentucky Kingdom opens Christmas event — page 14 / State Fair of Texas delivers 24 days of fun — page 26

## Looking to the future — Texas Winter Park makes plans for 2025

AT: Tim Baldwin  
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

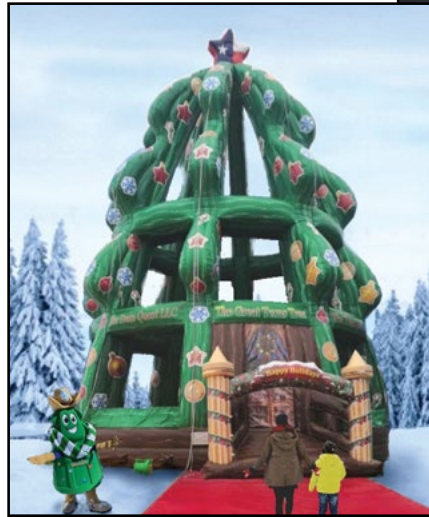
AUSTIN, Texas — **The Train Quest LLC** was established in 2009 and became a hit as an event rental company. Among the company's offerings are video games, children's rides, concessions and a wide range of inflatables. But founder/CEO **Phillis Rand** has big ideas.

"There are Christmas events that bring in 300,000 in a month," Rand said. "I want **Texas Winter Park** to be the 'official' one. These winter wonderlands are big business. But everything looks the same. A lot of them are just Christmas lights; there is not enough activity."

Rand freely admits she likes to be the one in charge. "After doing events for other people, I decided I wanted to do it myself. I'm fighting for this."

Planned for next December (2025), she has found the location that she feels will bring success. An opportunity at a former pumpkin patch in the country was available this year, but she felt it was too remote for the vision she had. She has locked down a location in the town of Manor, just outside of Austin, on a main highway that leads to Houston.

Her goal for 2025 is to set up an event that she hopes develops into annual family traditions for the region. She experimented with the concept in 2021 in



Round Rock, Texas, with a weekend event but has since concentrated on rentals for other holiday events.

"We're super close," Rand said. "It's an amazing location. We wanted to be on a major highway."

At the center will be the world's largest Christmas tree bounce house that she owns.

"When the pandemic happened, I knew I needed a centerpiece to this kids' wonderland idea," Rand told *Amusement Today*. "There was a this and a that — large inflatable snowmen and all that — but that wasn't going to get everyone to come. We needed a centerpiece. So, I thought about the bounce house but make it taller. I thought what would make it peak, so we did a tree. I asked, and the guy who made it said he could go 50 feet. Big Tex [at the **State Fair of Texas**] is 55 feet, so it was decided to add a star on top over five feet tall.



The centerpiece to Texas Winter Park is the world's largest Christmas tree bounce house (above and inset). The Train Quest LLC owns an assortment of children's carnival rides (below left). Bumper cars merge rides with inflatable attractions (below right). COURTESY THE TRAIN QUEST LLC



And I was ... 'Let's do that.' It's a big Texas star."

Florida-based **Leisure Activities USA** manufactured the tree for Rand and agreed to never duplicate it.

"I wanted ours to be historic," she said. "I feel it is like seeing the Statue of Liberty or Mt. Everest for the first time; it is towering over everything around you."

Inside, the open area is 17 feet wide. The bouncing surface is about 4.5 feet tall. Rand said she has had

about 30 people at a time inside, but more could fit. She likes to keep it safe. Because of its height, a conscious effort made it aerodynamic for wind.

The record-setting inflatable isn't the only unique thing in The Train Quest's portfolio. A unique derby racer that blows up to 41 feet in height, has two lanes in which derby cars actually roll down 175 feet with kids inside.

Rand doesn't open this

special piece frequently as she says it can take up to two days to set it up because of various pieces. Rand said it was manufactured by **Jungle Jump**, and only one was ever made in 2013. She purchased it from the original owner, who declared he would never sell it, but when the time came, he said he would sell it only to her.

"There will probably

► See TEXAS, page 12



Junior Coaster 33m x 20m



30m Circuit Wheel



Monster Cars



Roller Ball





► **TEXAS**

Continued from page 11

never be another one,” Rand said. “The back end is about 40 feet wide, but it narrows to about 20. There are planks of wood to create the track on both lanes. It rolls all the way down the hill, and these bumpers slow it down.”

Cables are attached to pull the derby cars by hand back to the starting position at the top. Kids get to run all the way to the top where the cars are locked in place until released.

“We like that ‘only one’ kind of thing,” Rand told AT. “And we like it to be big and over the top.”

Another unique inflatable structure she owns originated in Romania when bounce houses were becoming a marketable thing in leisure entertainment. It is a massive inflatable church. Once another company bought the rights, a distributor in America purchased one.

“No one bought it,” said Rand. “They didn’t



CEO Phillis Rand poses with mascot Grady (above left). Rand’s rare inflatable church will be able to host choirs or a nativity scene at the Texas Winter Park (above middle). A wide range of winter-themed inflatables will offer a lot of activities (above right). COURTESY THE TRAIN QUEST LLC

understand it. He sat on it for almost four years. He said, ‘Phillis, I thought this would be a big hit.’ I’m willing to sell it to you.’ And I thought, ‘Wow!’ It’s 41 feet tall, and you can fit about 200 people (standing) in it.”

She said it is suitable for weddings, but when Texas Winter Park debuts next year, she feels school choirs will make for a great fit. She is also contemplating a nativity scene inside.

“You could stay warm

inside and just visit,” she said.

Rand doesn’t really push that unit for rentals as much as another new piece called Snow Storm.

“I’m really excited about Snow Storm,” she said. “It’s an inflatable parachute ride, and it is definitely made for adults. We’ve done testing, and it holds up to 250 pounds per adult.”

The ride raises passengers 35 feet into the air, which offers great views. For the 2025 Christmas attrac-

tion, it should be a great vista of the whole park. It seats six people at a time.

“Everyone wants to get on it. It’s big, and it has a movie screen on it. You can do advertisements on it,” she said. “It’s really cool. It’s beautiful.”

When Texas Winter Park opens next year, she wants to have about 25 attractions between inflatables, kids rides and light displays. The property in Manor has about 200 acres, which

allows for growth year over year. Right now, the target is from toddlers to kids aged 10 to 12. But she hopes to grow the range with time.

The dates she wants to run the event are from Black Friday to Christmas Eve.

“We can grow it with concerts and food and make it a festival. The drive-throughs and walk-throughs with lights have already been done,” she said, looking ahead. “My goal, my hope is to make this a tradition.”

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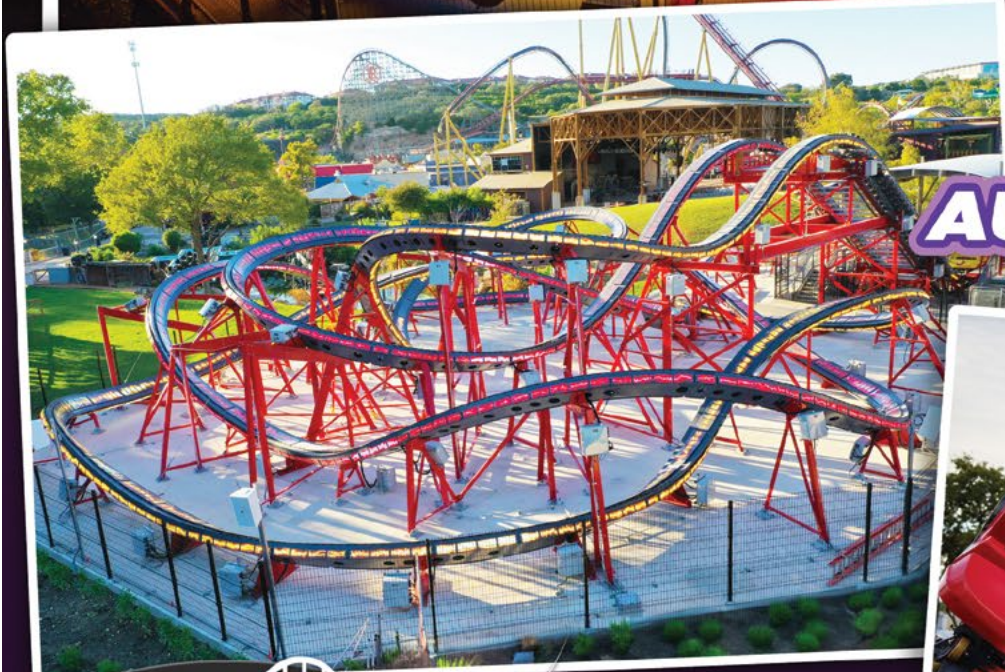
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# Louisville's Kentucky Kingdom opens for first Christmas celebration

AT: Pam Sherborne

psherborne@amusementtoday.com

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — A frozen winter wonderland filled with an array of holiday lights, sounds and food has made its premiere at Louisville's **Kentucky Kingdom**. The debut of the theme and water park's Christmas at Kentucky Kingdom opened November 29 and park officials feel this is the beginning of a very good thing. It will run through January 4, 2025.

"We are looking forward to all of our attractions during Christmas at Kentucky Kingdom, but we are especially excited for Blizzard Bluff, the newest and largest snow tubing hill in the state of Kentucky," said **Carly Uglow**, director of sales and marketing.

Christmas at Kentucky Kingdom will feature 25 rides, including Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer 5D Movie, Tin Lizzie's Starlight Speedway, Kentucky Flyer and of course, Blizzard Bluff.

Designed for the whole



The above rendering shows some of the fun activities and attractions that are meeting guests this year at the first Christmas at Kentucky Kingdom in Louisville, Kentucky. COURTESY KENTUCKY KINGDOM

family, the \$8 million investment is extending Kentucky Kingdom's season by an additional 24 days, bringing guests the longest, brightest, and jolliest season yet.

As guests first enter, they are immersed in a joyful winter wonderland adorned with more than one million glowing Christmas lights, illuminating the paths to adventures in every direction.

As guests explore the park in all its festive glory, they will find four immersive Christmas zones with their own specific attractions. The zones are Classic Christmas, Holly Jolly Junction, Santa's Village and Snow Zone.

In Classic Christmas, guests may view the large pixel Christmas tree, a lighted nativity scene and take a ride on the transformed Tin Lizzie.

Throughout the holidays, it is Tin Lizzie's Starlight Speedway where each car is decorated for the holidays.

There is also King Louie's Candyland with larger-than-life candy canes, a candy throne and a gingerbread bench. Ten rides are available in this section.

Moving on, guests can explore the Holly Jolly Junction where guests are being reintro-

duced to the tale of Rudolph. Not only are guests experiencing the tale, but Rudolph and Bumble the Abominable Snow Monster will be on hand for meet-and-greets and photos.

Also in the section, guests may decorate sugar cookies and go through the Christmas tree maze.

Santa's Village is where guests run into Santa Claus for visits and photos. But there is more. It is in this zone that guests are finding a 60-foot-long lighted portal to envelope them along with a light show of synchronized patterns and vibrant colors. They may experience the countdown to Christmas.

Snow Zone features the four-story, 175-foot-long snow tubing hill, Blizzard Bluff, along with an area of up to three feet of snow for play. There will be large fire pits and a glowing orb field.

All over the park, in every zone, there are areas set up specifically for great guest photos.

• [kentuckykingdom.com](http://kentuckykingdom.com)

## Busch Gardens Tampa Bay enhances Christmas Town event

TAMPA, Fla. — **Busch Gardens Tampa Bay** has once again transformed into a winter wonderland with the return of its annual Christmas Town event, running daily from November 15 through January 5. This year's festivities offer an array of new attractions and returning favorites, all included with standard park admission, offering guests a comprehensive holiday experience without additional cost.

A new highlight for 2024 is added illumination to the park's Skyride attraction, the gondolas of which are adorned with festive lights and offer guests unique nighttime views of the park's holiday décor.

Also making its Christmas Town debut is Phoenix Rising. This new-for-2024 **Bolliger & Mabillard** family roller coaster adds an exhilarating experience to be enjoyed along with the holiday lineup.

"Christmas Town brings the magic of the holiday season to life right here in Tampa Bay," said **Kristine Morgan**, vice president of entertainment at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay. "Christmas Town allows families to create lasting memories together within an immersive realm of beautiful lights, festive entertainment and the spirit of Christmas."

In addition to the holiday lights throughout the park, guests can experience a variety of entertainment offerings during the event, including:

• "Christmas on Ice" — This popular show returns to the Moroccan Palace Theater, featuring talented skaters performing routines set to beloved

Christmas classics and contemporary favorites.

• "Mrs. Claus' Storytime" — Ideal for families, this enchanting session allows children to enjoy holiday tales told by Mrs. Claus herself.

• "Busch Gardens Holiday Magic" — Held in the Stanleyville Theater, this captivating performance combines illusions, choreography and festive music for a memorable holiday experience.

• "Three Kings Journey" — An inspiring musical recounting the journey of the Three Wise Men to Bethlehem.

• Holly Jolly Express — Guests can embark on a festive train ride around the park, singing along to their favorite holiday tunes.

• "Elmo's Christmas Wish" — Join Sesame Street characters as they help Elmo find his Christmas wish, engaging audiences in song and dance.

• "Holiday in the Sky" — A nighttime spectacular where the sky comes alive with a festive fireworks display synchronized to classic holiday music.

Unique culinary options and sweet treats abound at this year's Christmas Town. Guests can indulge in seasonal offerings, including holiday-flavored hot chocolates and freshly baked cookies exclusive to Christmas Town.

New this year are holiday-inspired menu items, a gingerbread cookie decorating station and a selection of Christmas Town craft cocktails available throughout the park. Unique holiday shopping and special photo opportunities provide additional ways to create lasting memories.



Busch Gardens Christmas Town features nearly 70 miles of dazzling lights.

COURTESY  
BUSCH GARDENS  
TAMPA BAY

Character Experiences at the event include Santa's North Pole Experience, where guests can meet Santa, explore his workshop, and share holiday wishes in an immersive encounter; and Rudolph's Winter Wonderland which features festive decorations and interactive displays and provides guests the opportunity to capture photos with beloved characters from the classic holiday tale.

Busch Gardens Tampa Bay's Christmas Town continues to blend traditional holiday elements with innovative attractions, providing a festive atmosphere that appeals to guests of all ages. The integration of new offerings alongside cherished favorites underscores the park's commitment to delivering a memorable family-friendly holiday experience.

—David Fake

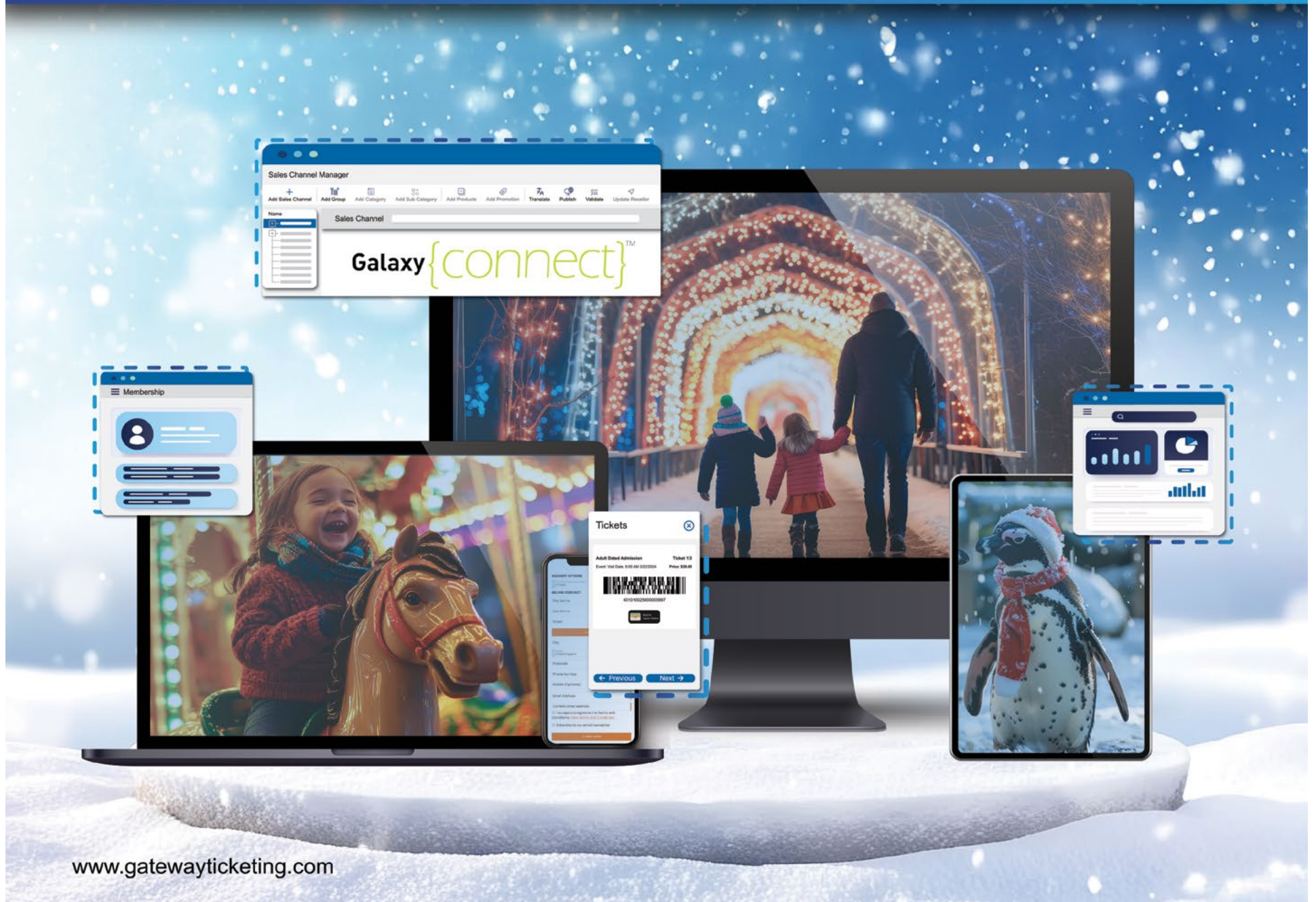




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## Holiday events stuffed with colorful lights, surprises, more



SeaWorld Orlando, Florida, started its Christmas celebrations on November 15 and they will last through January 5, 2025. The park has expanded its festivities and has added all new holiday food, drinks and more. With over three million twinkling lights illuminating the grounds, SeaWorld is a dazzling spectacle of holiday cheer. COURTESY SEAWORLD ORLANDO



The holiday season at Knott's Merry Farm, Buena Park, California, kicked off on November 22 and has met its promise to be merry and bright. The park is debuting the new 'Tis the Season Tree Lighting Ceremony, which is kicking off the evenings of holiday celebration with dancers, singers and, of course, Snoopy. It runs through January 5, 2025. COURTESY KNOTT'S BERRY FARM



The merriment of the season has returned to Dollywood, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, as Dollywood's Smoky Mountain Christmas began on November 1. From award-winning stage productions to delicious culinary masterpieces and six million twinkling lights, there is something festive in store for every family member. The celebration will run through January 5, 2025. COURTESY DOLLYWOOD



Kennywood of West Mifflin, Pennsylvania, introduces the largest expansion ever to its Holiday Lights event. The celebration, which began November 15, features more lights, Pennsylvania's tallest Christmas tree, more rides as well as tasty holiday treats. All new this year are meet-and-greets with iconic characters from the classic TV special, *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*. The event runs through January 1, 2025. COURTESY KENNYWOOD



Jingle all the way back to the magic of Christmases past at Silver Dollar City's An Old Time Christmas. The park — located in Missouri's Ozark Mountains — started its holiday event November 2, and it runs through January 4, 2025. The holiday journey begins with Joy on Town Square, an eight-story-high Christmas tree light and music show, and continues throughout the park. COURTESY SILVER DOLLAR CITY

WinterFest at Carowinds, Charlotte, North Carolina, began November 17 and will run through January 1. Guests are savoring the season with festive ambience, and fun holiday activities. The park is full of holiday light displays replete with millions of shimmering lights, ice skating, family activities, live entertainment, holiday-inspired comfort food and beverages, and select attractions. COURTESY CAROWINDS



The holiday season in Hersheypark, Hershey, Pennsylvania, kicked off on November 15, with the opening of Hersheypark Christmas Candylane holiday attraction and Hershey Sweet Lights drive-through attraction. Both festivities are donning new decorations and theming. The event will run through January 1, 2025. COURTESY HERSHEY PARK



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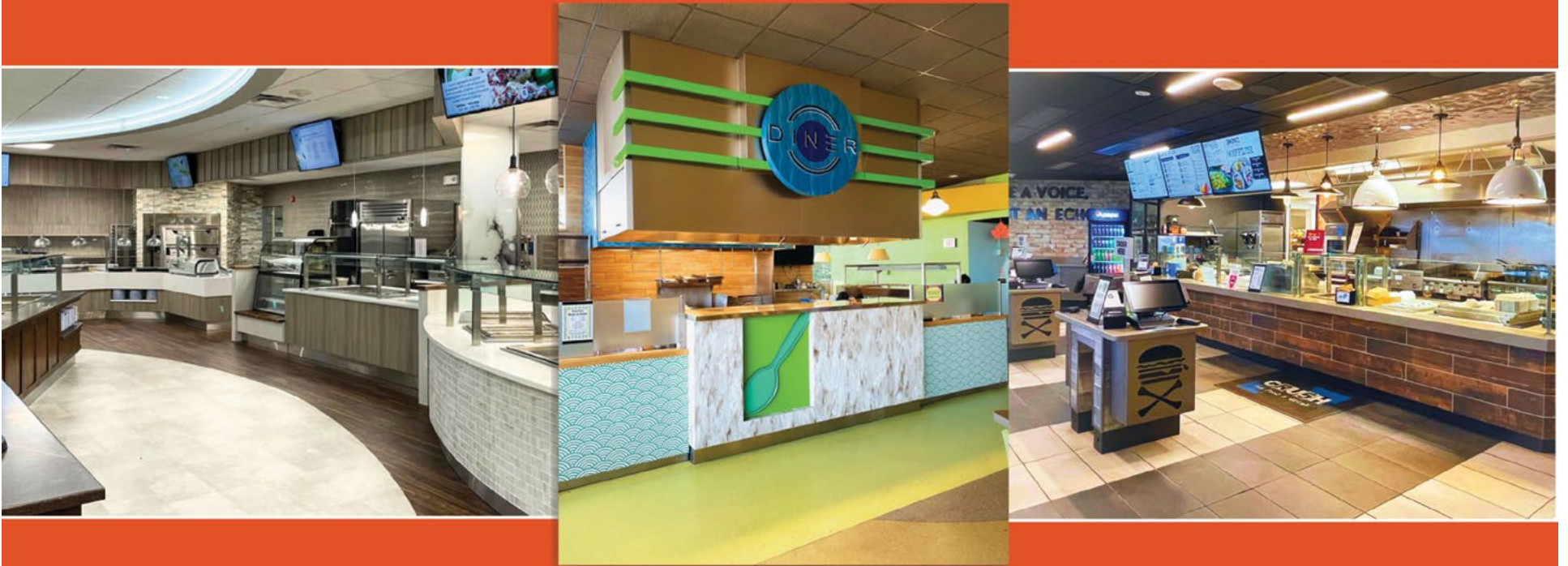
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## Park Post-its



AT: Pam Sherborne  
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

The Funplex in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, is closing permanently, according to an announcement shared on the amusement park's website. The park, which is located a block from the ocean, opened in May 2021.

"We are incredibly proud of the community we have built together and the countless smiles we have shared," the statement on the website read. "It is with a heavy heart that we are leaving Myrtle Beach. The Funplex will continue to operate its two parks in Mount Laurel and East Hanover, New Jersey. We hope if you are in the area, you will still enjoy our parks up there. Thank you once again for being a part of our Funplex family. We cherish the memories we have created together."

Lahn Hospitality and Amusement Group, a family-owned company, owned The Funplex in Myrtle Beach. The group also owns the New Jersey facilities. Those facilities offer more than 100,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor activities.

Guests will have to wait another year before they can visit Barbie's Beach House or ride a Hot Wheels roller coaster at the highly anticipated **Mattel Adventure Park** in Glendale, Arizona, according to a news story posted by the *Phoenix Business Journal* story.

The news story said that **Epic Resort Destinations**, the operator of the Mattel theme park, announced in a statement that the opening had been extended to the end of 2025. It went on to state that the delay is due to the expanded vision of the property that is impacting hospitality, dining and other entertainment offerings.

The theme park is a key anchor tenant of the overall **VAI Resort**.

**Wild Adventures Theme Park** in Valdosta, Georgia, has announced three performances of its 2025 Wild Adventures Live! Concert Series lineup, teasing a schedule packed with award-winning artists.

Platinum-selling acts **Big and Rich**, **The Marshall Tucker Band** and **Chris Tomlin** will take the stage during the season. The concert series for 2025 begins in April.

**Disneyland**, Anaheim, California, has announced it will close five attractions for seasonal refurbishments during the busy

winter holiday season.

Those rides are Fantasmic, Big Thunder Mountain, Little Mermaid — Ariel's Undersea Adventure, Sailing Ship Columbia and Dumbo the Flying Elephant. These rides temporarily closed in November as part of the standard refurbishment schedule at Disneyland and **Disney California Adventure**.

According to an online news source, *Mercury News*, the five new attraction closures join Splash Mountain, Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln, It's a Small World and Pixie Hollow which were already shuttered for refurbishment.

New Orleans' former **Six Flags** theme park, which shuttered in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, is finally coming down, according to a news story that ran in *Times-Picayune/New Orleans Advocate*.

The park opened in 2000 just off Interstate 10 as **Jazzland Theme Park**, but it went bankrupt in two seasons. Six Flags took over the lease, but then Hurricane Katrina struck, flooding the park and much of the city. The theme park never reopened. During Six Flags' bankruptcy proceedings in 2009, the property went to the Industrial Development Board of the City of New Orleans, which negotiated an agreement with the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority that gave NORA title transfer ownership of the site.

In 2023, plans were approved by the city for **Bayou Phoenix** to begin redeveloping the land.

People wanting to visit the much-anticipated jellyfish exhibit at **SeaWorld San Diego**, California, will have to wait a little longer. *Jewels of the Sea: A Jellyfish Experience* is now expected to open next spring, the theme park announced mid-November. It was originally scheduled to debut sometime in 2024.

The upcoming exhibit is promised to feature a variety of jellyfish species in three different galleries as a part of SeaWorld's mission to educate guests about the ocean. It will also come with a 10-foot-tall acrylic archway installation with jellyfish, plus one of the nation's tallest jelly cylinders at 18 feet tall.

**OWA Parks and Resort** in Foley, Alabama, is now offering a special locals' pass to invite residents to explore its attractions at a discounted ticket price.

The new Gulf Coast Neighbor Pass is open to residents of Baldwin, Mobile and Escambia counties in Alabama and Escambia and Santa Rosa counties in Florida.

The pass gives a \$40 savings off the regular price of the Ultimate Pass.

OWA is a 520-acre destination that features **Tropic Falls** with 23 theme-park rides, water parks with a variety of water attractions and pedestrian-only streets filled with dining, shopping and entertainment choices and more.



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The mysterious ETNL radio station drives the music and sounds of the all-new Meow Wolf: Radio Tave installation in Houston, Texas. COURTESY MEOW WOLF

## Meow Wolf's Radio Tave exhibition opens in Texas

HOUSTON, Texas — October 31, 2024, marked the unveiling of **Radio Tave**, Meow Wolf's next permanent immersive art experience, now open to the public in Houston's historic Fifth Ward. Radio Tave transports visitors into a surreal universe where an ordinary radio station is catapulted into extraordinary dimensions. More than 100 artists — half from Texas — have come together to create this exhibition, merging Houston's vibrant creative energy with Meow Wolf's groundbreaking storytelling for an unparalleled audiovisual journey.

Visitors can explore an expansive maze of interconnected rooms, gradually uncovering hidden stories and insights about art, life and even their own sense of discovery. Along the way, they'll encounter a cowboy dive bar caught between liminal realms, ruins percolating with living musical instruments, and *Obsidiodyssey*, a labyrinthine multi-room installation by Santa Fe artist Janell Langford that explores the emotional spectrum of the creative process.

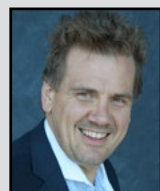
"We're beyond excited for everyone to experience Radio Tave," said **Jose Tolosa**, CEO of Meow Wolf. "The artistic talent of this city is unparalleled, and we've worked hand in hand with Houston's best to create something that will leave people transformed."

The exhibition showcases the fierce talents of artists who have infused Radio Tave with Houston's electric energy, from local legends like the artist liaison with Houston history, **GONZO247**, to renowned artists like **Havel Ruck Projects**, **Kill Joy** and **El Franco Lee II**.

Radio Tave is the most sound-driven Meow Wolf location to date, and the mysterious ETNL radio station is just the start, with local musical collaborators like Fat Tony, who laid down tracks for the experience and starred in the psychedelic commercial, to **Pro Ghost** and **ODAE** creating tracks for the exhibitions — not to mention 30 songs by Houston locals in the jukebox and 50 songs by locals in the front of house playlist.

"It's an invitation to explore the limitless boundaries of your imagination," described **Gil Perez**, general manager for Meow Wolf Houston. "From the moment you walk through the doors, you'll experience something that's both otherworldly and Houstonian — vast, intricate, and full of surprises."

• [meowwolf.com/visit/houston](http://meowwolf.com/visit/houston)



## FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRAL

AT: John W.C. Robinson  
[jrobinson@amusementtoday.com](mailto:jrobinson@amusementtoday.com)

In 2022, **InterCard** and **FEC Financial Group** (FECFIN) partnered to provide InterCard customers with savings on credit card processing services. Now the partnership has expanded to offer equipment financing in the United States.

"For several years FECFIN has helped our customers save big on credit card processing fees," said **Scott Sherrod**, CEO of InterCard. "We are excited to announce that FECFIN now offers equipment financing that will make it easy for customers to acquire InterCard's industry-leading cashless technology."

**Adventure Golf & Sports** (AGS) has announced it will be the exclusive selling agent and installer for RemarkaBall in the United States and Canada. RemarkaBall is a turnkey, tech-infused, pre-designed series of indoor miniature golf course holes and skill games handcrafted by **Jora Vision** in the Netherlands.

RemarkaBall's interactive gameplay shifts mini-golf from a relatively passive classic family game to a competitive social game with universal appeal where, unlike traditional mini-golf, the highest score wins. The game can combine time battles, physical challenges, point multipliers, questionnaires and timed shots — creating an unpredictable entertaining experience that will increase visits and repeat visits to a variety of indoor venues. Depending on the number and type of holes selected, RemarkaBall mini-golf generally requires a minimum of 2,200 square feet of space to present an extraordinary attraction.

"We're excited to be working with Jora Vision and introducing RemarkaBall to local markets," said **Scott Lundmark**, president of AGS. "RemarkaBall mini-golf holes are easily installed and combine well with bar and restaurant operations as well as other venues since they provide entertainment that increases guest time on site. RemarkaBall's integrated technology helps speed up the game and leaves guests ample time to sip on their favorite beverage, enjoy some savory bites or socialize with friends."

**Stern Pinball, Inc.**, announced a full line of **Metallica** Remastered pinball machine accessories compatible with the recently announced Remastered Limited Edition and Premium Edition pinball machines.

The "...And Justice for All" Metallica Topper accessory will accentuate the gaming experience. Featuring RGB lighting, players can watch each letter in "Metallica" light up as it keeps progress of the Lady Justice mode progression, as well as special lamp flashers highlighting their Grave Marker, Electric Chair, Coffin, and Snake multiball status as

they build progress to the Blackened Wizard mode from each main multiball. Through the power of Insider Connected, players will be able to unlock the "And Justice for All" song straight from the start of gameplay in addition to rocking out to a special new "And Justice for All" Multiball.

Players can seek and destroy right from the plunge, jumping into the action with the Illuminated Metallica Logo Shooter Knob. Featuring RGB lighting, this accessory will kickstart a gamer's pinball quest.

Players can ride the lightning and protect their game with the official Metallica Sword Side Armor. This exciting side armor adds further dimension to the Metallica Remastered gaming experience.

"We can't wait for players to give their game fuel with these officially licensed pinball accessories," said **Seth Davis**, president and CEO of Stern Pinball, Inc.

**Merlin Entertainments** announced "Adventures Made Real" — a new, global strategic partnership with **Mojang Studios**, the creator of *Minecraft*, the best-selling video game of all time. The collaboration will bring Minecraft adventures to life in the real world through immersive and interactive entertainment attractions in fixed locations around the globe. It will create new and exciting ways to immerse customers in the physical Minecraft world, including digitally enabled real-life experiences, as well as the creation of touchpoints that will allow guests to unlock exclusive in-game content to continue their gaming journey.

"This is a significant milestone for Merlin, which reinforces our commitment to reaching new audiences through bold and captivating concepts, and directly supports our ambitions for growth," said **Scott O'Neil**, chief executive officer of Merlin Entertainments.

Merlin will be investing in excess of \$110 million in the first two attractions, which will be launching in the U.S. and the U.K. between 2026 and 2027.

Episode Five of ABC-TV's hit series *The Golden Bachelorette* featured an extended bowling date at **Lucky Strike L.A. Live** in Los Angeles. In the episode **Joan Vassos**, the Golden Bachelorette, has a heart-to-heart talk with one of her suitors. To the right of her is an **InterCard** iTeller. It can't offer Vassos everlasting love but InterCard's cashless technology can make it easy for her and her suitors to play arcade games between takes.

The telegenic InterCard iTeller has previously appeared in an episode of *Law and Order: SVU* and a music video by **Imagine Dragons**.



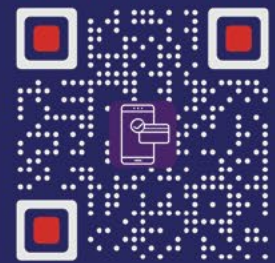
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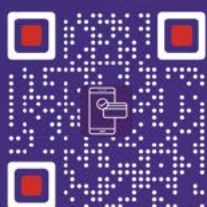
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# Rain-free weather at State Fair of Texas delivers 24 days of fun

AT: B. Derek Shaw

bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

DALLAS, Texas — “Overall, the 2024 State Fair of Texas brought forth fantastic weather. During our 24-day run, we did not have a single day of rain for the first time in several years. However, the lack of rainfall brought a handful of days with summer-like temperatures,” said Karissa Condoianis, SVP of public relations. “This was not necessarily out of the ordinary for our early fall event, as the Texas weather tends to stay on the warmer side until we approach the first of November.”

Attendance for the 2024 State Fair of Texas was 2,385,855 over 24 consecutive days. That is an increase of more than 2% over 2023’s more than 2.3 million fairgoers. The theme for 2024 was “24 Days of Fun.”

The State Fair of Texas operates with an independent midway, which had a total of 73 rides; 31 were kiddie rides. There were 25 carnival providers bringing anywhere from one to seven rides. Operators included Alamo Amusements, Inc, Amusement Management International, Bishop Amusement Rides, B-Thrilled Attractions, Caprice Enterprise, D&K Amusements, Fair of Fun, Fair Ride Entertainment, Great American Entertainment, Iconic Midway Rides,



The independent Midway had 73 rides with 31 just for the younger set. 25 different operators brought in anywhere from one to seven rides. The Texas Star Wheel can be seen in the distance from atop the Giant Slide. COURTESY STATE FAIR OF TEXAS/KEVIN BROWN

Joy Ride, Lauther Amusements, Lone Star Entertainment, M&C Attractions, McBubbles LLC, Mr. Ed’s Magical Midways, Pinnacle Fair Equipment Inc., Prime Pacific Entertainment, Sky Spectacle, Inc, State Fair Spectaculars, Talley Amusements, Texas Skyway, Inc., Triple T Amusement, Wanderlust Amusement Corp. and Wood Entertainment Company.

There were two new rides at this year’s fair. They were Bishop’s Hip Hop (KMG) and Iconic Midway Rides Kraken (KMG). The three top-grossing rides again this year were Texas Star Wheel (SDC) run by Tom and Mary Talley, Texas Skyway (Doppelmayr) run by Mike Demas and Love Bug (Mack Rides) run by



At 55-feet, Big Tex greets fairgoers upon entering the area. COURTESY STATE FAIR OF TEXAS/KEVIN BROWN

Maurice Haworth. The fair owns six of the rides.

Running an independent midway is rare these days because of the amount of work that goes into it; however, the State Fair of Texas found it to be very beneficial for their model. They utilize many different operators. Note: There are only six fairs in the U.S. these days that use this method. Some carnivals will augment their

ride lineup by booking in other operators.

“At the State Fair of Texas, we run an independent midway, meaning we handpick every ride that enters our Midway to ensure they meet our extensive safety requirements,” said Rusty Fitzgerald, SVP of midway operations. “We are certain our ride and game owners provide a premier experience for all fairgoers, leaving them

with a smile and lifelong memories.”

Special promotions provided the opportunity for increased savings and value to attendees. These included season passes for all 24 days, a premium one-day admission, special pricing Monday through Thursday with discounted admission tickets of \$15, \$10 for seniors and children; \$5 senior day every Thursday and reduced general admission after 5 p.m. every evening.

Other companies and organizations had special promotions too. By bringing two jars of peanut butter on opening day, attendees got in for \$10, benefiting the North Texas Food Bank. That same organization also benefitted when fairgoers brought five canned goods on Wednesdays; they got in for \$5. Tuesdays and Thursdays were Dr Pepper value days if fairgoers purchased online, reducing admission to \$10. McDonalds restaurants had \$5 off discount coupons on tray liners and inside carry-out bags.

Discounts extended to the ride midway for Thrilling Tuesdays. Most rides on the midway are 4 coupons (\$4), with kiddie rides discounted to 3 coupons on Tuesdays. There were also group plans and corporate discount programs.

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► See TEXAS, page 28

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►TEXAS

**Continued from page 26** Choice Awards have been a staple of the fair; across 121 finalists, 53 celebrity judges, and 43 different concessionaires — only 45 entries made the cut to become part of the exclusive club of unique culinary creations over the years. The Big Tex Choice Awards has become a world-renowned food competition, putting the “Most Texan Place on Earth” on the map when it comes to innovative creations.

In the savory category, Dominican Fritura Dog, **Justin Martinez**; The Drowning Taquitos, **Tony and Terry Bednar**; Hippie Chips, **Rose and Tom Deschenes**; Hot Chick-in-Pancake Poppers, **Palmer and Amanda Fortune** and Texas Fried Burnt End Bombs, **Nick Bert**.

In the sweet category, Nevins Nutty Bar-laska, **Tami Nevins Mayes and Josey Mayes**; Rousso’s Cotton Candy Bacon on a Stick, **Isaac Rousso**; Strawberry Pop-



2,385,855 people attended the State Fair of Texas. This was up over 2% from 2023. COURTESY STATE FAIR OF TEXAS/KEVIN BROWN

Tarts Beignetfle, **Justin Martinez**; Texas Sugar Rush Pickles, **Heather Perkins** and Tropical Two-Step Punch, **Binh Tran**.

“With safety as a top priority here at the Most Texan Place on Earth, we have maintained several COVID-related safety measures put in place for 2021 to mitigate any further spread of COVID-19 at our annual event,” said Condoianis. The State Fair Clean Team frequently cleaned and disinfected tables and high-touch surfaces throughout the fairgrounds.

“As an annual celebration of all things Texan, the State Fair of Texas prides itself on bringing together fairgoers from all walks of life, upholding the utmost quality of Texan hospitality, and presenting an unforgettable experience to the millions who enter our gates all 24 days,” said

Condoianis. “From the crazy fair food concoctions and sights and sounds on the State Fair Midway to the hundreds of live music acts and shows available throughout the grounds free with your admission, there is truly something for everyone.”

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, the fair aims to support the community, both locally and statewide. The proceeds from the fair are used to preserve and improve Fair Park; underwrite community initiatives, support scholarship programs for students throughout the Lone Star State pursuing higher education, and Fair Park’s museums; and help improve State Fair operations. The annual State Fair of Texas serves as the organization’s largest fundraiser of the year. A successful 24-day run for the fair means more support for Fair Park and the surrounding community. In 2023, due to the success of the prior year’s fair, the State Fair of Texas was able to contribute nearly \$15.8 million through philanthropic and Fair Park giving.

“At the heart of the State Fair of Texas is a commitment to creating lasting memories and celebrating what makes the Lone Star State unique. This year we’ve seen incredible moments of joy and connection that remind us of the power of this tradition here at the most Texan Place on Earth,” said Condoianis. “It’s always a privilege to witness people from all walks of life come together to share in the fun, culture and community that makes the fair so special.”

The 2025 edition takes place from September 26 through October 19.

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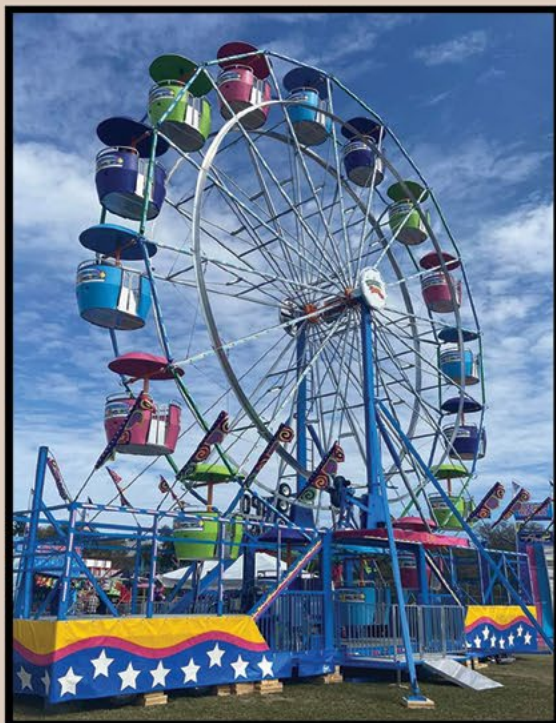


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# The Largest Carnival Trade Show in the USA



# More than 912,000 people visited this year's Washington State Fair

AT: B. Derek Shaw  
bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

PUYALLUP, Wash. — With good to great weather and a strong economy in the Seattle area, the 20-day fair saw 912,000 people go through the turnstiles. This was down from 973,000 who attended last year.

**Funtastic Traveling Shows**, the Portland, Oregon-based carnival provider, ran the ride midway, with 59 total rides, 28 of which were the kiddie variety. **Ray Cammack Shows** was asked to bring in its **Zamperla Crazy Mouse** roller coaster, which was the new attraction for 2024. The three most popular rides included Wildcat coaster (Schwarzkopf); Classic Coaster, the wooden roller coaster (John A. Miller) and Extreme Scream (S&S). The rides operate for just a couple of weeks each year during the spring fair in April and the fair in September. Eight of the rides are either permanent or remain on the grounds year-round in this unusual arrangement.

There were zero staffing issues, as Funtastic received 100% of its seasonal H2b workers this year.

For thrill-seekers, a Dizzy Pass was offered providing unlimited rides in both Thrillville and



There were 59 total rides, 28 of which were kiddie ones. Ray Cammack Shows brought its Crazy Mouse coaster (below), which was the new attraction for 2024. The three most popular rides included Wildcat coaster, the wooden roller coaster and Extreme Scream.

COURTESY JOEY ROSITA, WASHINGTON STATE FAIR



SillyVille midways, plus two free games. There was also a fair season pass good for all 20 days of the event.

"We have had an outstanding relationship forged over many, many years," said Ron Burback,

Jr., when talking about the fair. Game revenue was down; however, ride revenue was up.

That relationship actually goes back 54 years as

▶ See WASHINGTON, page 31

## Funcards side business for Funtastic Traveling Shows

PORTLAND, Oregon — For a quarter century, **Funtastic Traveling Shows** has had great success with a cashless card system called Funcard. **Amusement Consulting Services** is a division of the operation. This ticketing system is specifically designed for the carnival and fair industry.

Napa, California-based **gocashless** is the credit card provider that Funtastic worked with to integrate the payment gateway. This allows FunCard clients to offer encrypted-at-the-swipe credit card processing services to their carnival guests. Funtastic Shows currently provides the country's leading carnival midway cashless ticketing system.

Medium and large carnival companies in the United States are using this system, including **Strates Shows, Inc., Ranier Shows, Heart of America Shows, Ray Cammack Shows**, and others have installed a Funcard system. Fairs include the **Oregon State Fair, Salem**, and the **Washington State Fair, Puyallup**.

The Puyallup operation is one example of the use of the Funcard system and the growth it has experienced. The Washington State Fair has used the system for 10 years. This year there were additional kiosks for fairgoers to get their cards.

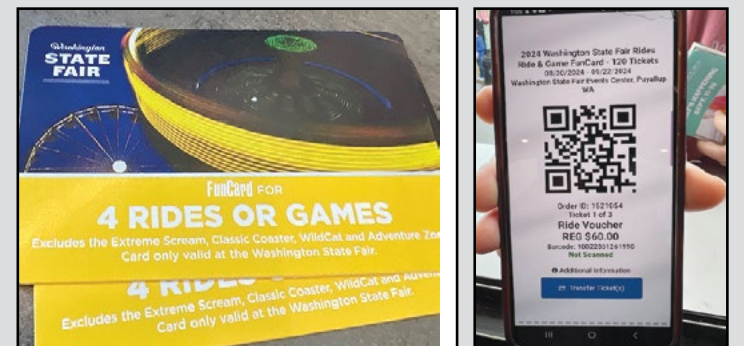
The carnival ride midway was the first area of the fair to use the Funcard program. As time went by, it expanded to include gating, then parking lots, food and most recently alcohol sales and concert seating. There are no fees for customers for concerts. In the games and concessions area, the card once accounted for 30% of all sales. Today it is up sharply, accounting for 60% of the transactions.

"Spending is up considerably. I'm extremely proud of what it has done for us at the fair," said **Ron Burback, Sr.**, president of Funtastic Shows

The latest addition is the use of mobile apps. "It does everything," said **Rob Rhew**, VP of both Funtastic Shows and Amusement Consulting Services. "Kiosks over live ticket sellers" is the direction things are headed. "People would rather buy from a kiosk than a person, except for older people. Our system is very user-friendly. We make it very, very simple."

Reflecting on the past 25 years of the Funcard system, Burback said, "The investment has really paid off."

• [funtasticshows.com](http://funtasticshows.com)



Funcards have been around the past quarter century with a mobile app (above right) the latest new feature. COURTESY FUNTASTIC TRAVELING SHOWS

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**MIDWAYS**

**► WASHINGTON**  
Continued from page 30

Ron Burback Sr. explains, "I've had the longest one-year contract, ever. I would sign a contract (for the next year) before or during the fair, never after." Following a series of one-year contracts, the fair board later extended it to five years. "What did I do right to get a five-year contract?" Burback chuckled.

The elder Burback talked about working with the fair staff. "Lots of just great people. It is wonderful being associated with them."

"Popnology" was a new exhibit that examined how pop culture has influenced our perception and reality of the future. There were interactive exhibits providing real-world experiences and showcasing the future of technology. There was an admission upcharge of \$9.

Foodies enjoyed Fair Meal Deals as more than 20 vendors offered a standard-size entree and side dish/drink for just \$10 during the week.

A new food vendor to the fair this year was **Pie Bard Ballard**. The Seattle-based store serves fruit and savory pies, along with pie-infused and late-night drinks. Of course, the always popular Earthquake Burgers were along the midway.

Entertainment was provided every night of the fair. Major acts included **Foreigner**, the **Happy Together Tour**, **Sawyer Brown**, **KIDZ BOP**, **Parmalee**, **Walker Hayes**, **Matchbox Twenty**, **Alabama**, **Thomas Rhett** and the **Steve Miller Band**.

Free activities included a fireworks show every Friday; the Farm at SillyVille: a "farmer for a day" experience that showed kids and families what it's like to be a farmer in Washington and Outpost 47; a family-friendly beer garden and food with daily entertainment and live bands.

Hobby Hall was a place to look at crafts and collections, from **Lego** displays to

toy collections to coins and everything in between. There were wood carving demonstrations, calligraphy, ceramics, egg artistry and more.

The **Puyallup Rodeo** ran September 5 - 8 and featured bull riding, bareback riding, tie-down roping, steer wrestling and barrel racing.

"We are already working on exciting new programming and significant

enhancements to our campus, so you won't want to miss the 2025 Washington State Fair," said **Renee McClain**, the Washington State Fair Events Center CEO, in a release.

The 125th Washington State Fair takes place from August 29 to September 21, 2025 (closed Tuesdays and September 3).

•[thefair.com](http://thefair.com)



Entertainment was provided every night of the fair. COURTESY WASHINGTON STATE FAIR

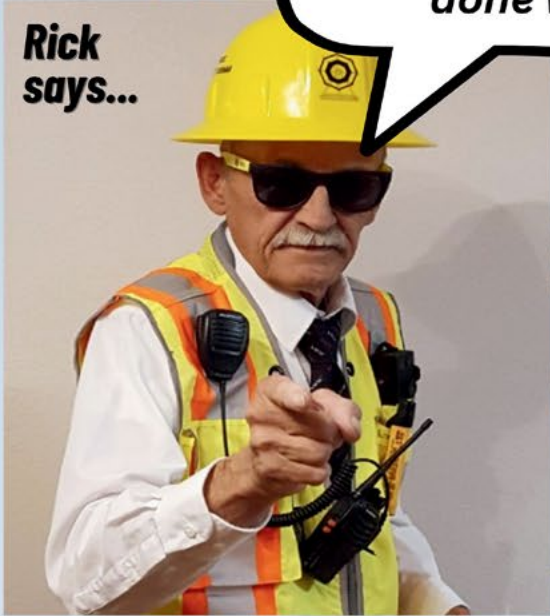


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# Rain dampened attendance but not spirits at State Fair of Louisiana

AT: Pam Sherborne  
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SHREVEPORT, La. — The weather did not cooperate this year at the **State Fair of Louisiana**, Shreveport, Louisiana. The fair ran this year from Oct. 30 to Nov. 17.

"We have just had a lot of rain," said **Robb Brazzel**, fair general manager. "We have had to open late at times and close early at other times."

The Sunday before the last week of the fair, the sun finally broke through the clouds.

But it has been challenging, as **Mary Talley, Talley Amusements**, the carnival on the grounds, also can attest. This is the first year for Talley at the Louisiana State Fair. She brought in 60 rides.

"It has rained a lot," she said. "Really just about every day."

Still, Talley is happy with her new fair.

Brazzel is happy with his new carnival. He said he put out an RFP in late April and wrapped up in early May.

"I have been at this fair for 16 years," Brazzel said. "I haven't been a manager for that long. I came up from maintenance and have been manager for one and a half years. But in all the time I have been here, this is the best carnival I have seen."

The carnival is not the only new part of the fair. Changes began last year under Brazzel. For exam-



This was Talley Amusements first year at the State Fair of Louisiana. The event ran Oct. 30-Nov. 17. The company supplied 60 rides. The LRCA Rodeo Finals, held Nov. 2-3, is a separate ticketed event and very popular at the fair (below). COURTESY STATE FAIR OF LOUISIANA

ple, musical entertainment is staged only on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, not every day of the fair.

"We started a good bit of strolling entertainment such as our Rock-It Robot, Kenya Safari Acrobats and Waggin Wheelz. We have a lot of local entertainment on the weekends as well."

Also last year, the fair implemented a youth minor policy and this year added a clear bag policy. The youth minor policy requires all youth under 18 years old to enter the fair with a chaperone 21 years of age or older. There needs to be one chaperone per six youths.

"The youth minor policy went really well last



year," Brazzel said. "We saw a lot more families, and that is what we wanted. So we included the clear bag policy this year. We have had no incidences or reports since we did this."

Daily fair attractions

included the Hollywood Racing Pigs, Circus Hollywood, Belmont World of Magic Show, Wild About Animals, Agmagic at the State Fair, Jump the Ultimate Dog Show, State Fair Zoo, Tractor Pull, Arty Dodger juggling and comedy show and more.

The LRCA Rodeo Finals, held Nov. 2-3, is a separate ticketed event and very popular.

The fair's Livestock Show brings together junior 4-H and FFA exhibitors from across Louisiana all vying for bragging rights, ribbons, prize money and the opportunity to participate in the ALTAC Jr. Livestock Auction. There were 5,000 animals showcased throughout the fair this year.

The fair pushed back its dates a week from last

year to accommodate Talley Amusements.

"They were coming from the State Fair of Texas," Brazzel said. "That closed on October 20 and originally ours opened on October 24. They just didn't have time, so we pushed back. I think we are all glad we did."

Talley said the week they came into Shreveport and began setting up, the weather was beautiful.

"It was great," she said. "But as soon the fair opened, it started raining."

Business has been pretty good for Talley Amusements this year. The weather was a little challenging at the first of the season but it cleared and they have had a good run.

Talley purchased quite a bit of equipment for this year. She took delivery in early 2024 of a **Fabbi Booster** which is being called the Defender. She also took delivery of a **Wisdom Himalaya** and are calling Thunderfest.

"We purchased an **A.R.M. Rock Star** that we are calling the Hard Rock," Talley said. "We purchased a new food stand at the end of 2023 and eight more kiosks from **Magic Money**. We also purchased a lot of trucks."

Talley Amusements was sporting the new rides and equipment at the State Fair of Louisiana this year.

Aside from the rides already mentioned, other spectacular rides on the midway included the Big Kahuna, Iron Dragon Coaster, Mega Drop, Scorpion, Sky Liner, Wave Swinger, Alien Abduction, Helix 360, Fast Trax Slide, Giant Wheel and the Beast.

Major rides included the Twister, Orbitor, Monkey Maze, Haunted House, Century Wheel, Jukebox Fun House, Zipper, Zumer, Tilt-A-Whirl, Rock-N-Cars, Dwndraft, Zero Gravity, Cliff Hanger and Spider.

There was also an assortment of family rides and kiddie rides.

•statefairloouisiana.com



The fair's Livestock Show brought out 5,000 animals this year (above left). The fair's Circus Hollywood was a very popular attraction this year (above right).

COURTESY STATE FAIR OF LOUISIANA







## MIDWAYSCENE

AT: B. Derek Shaw

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The **Fairground Heritage Trust** announced last March the **Dingles Fairground Museum** in Lifton, England, would close on November 3. The closure was based on a number of factors, including the effects of COVID-19.

"The pandemic was terrible for us; we lost tens of thousands of pounds and the costs have just run away with us," **Guy Belshaw** told *BBC News*. "It's also the fact that we're in a very remote location here and it needs to be more accessible to people, really." It first opened in 2003.

The collection of exhibits, operational fairground rides, band organs, vintage engineering and artwork is being moved by the **Statfold Narrow Gauge Museum Trust** in Tamworth, Staffordshire, where they have a new museum.

One of the rarer pieces in the collection is **John Shaw's** Moonrocket, a space-themed circular ride that was designed in Germany but built in the U.K. in the 1930s, under license. "This is the only one in working condition that has survived," said Belshaw. This ultimate white-knuckle thrill ride of the pre-war era opened in 1937 and enjoyed tremendous popularity.

In 2017, the **Outdoor Amusement Business Association** (OABA) and the **International Association of Fairs and Expositions** (IAFE) first banded together to push H.R. 1787, or **Carnivals Are Real Entertainment** (CARE) Act, before the United States House of Representatives, as well as its companion legislation in the U.S. Senate, S. 4040, the **Restoring Industry Development in Entertainment** (RIDE) Act.

These two acts advocate for a unique and threatened industry facing a labor shortage issue by correcting laws that exclude mobile entertainment employers from utilizing the P non-immigrant visa classification to secure the temporary, seasonal staff they need to succeed.

Between 2016 and 2023, the number of carnival companies operating in the United States dropped by 50%. This drastic decline is in large part due to a historic and acute worker shortage. Many outdoor amusement businesses use the H-2B visa program; there are 388,000 H-2-B certified jobs. However, in 2022, only 66,000 H-2-B visas were granted.

"The OABA is spearheading the passage of H.R. 1787 and S. 4040 to create a P4 visa category for our industry," explained **Greg Chiecko**, OABA President and CEO. "This category will allow carnival workers and food concessionaires to have a consistent workforce to service the thousands of fairs and events our members participate in every year. Working

with our partners at the IAFE, each day we get closer to achieving our goal."

Congress has been slow to respond, so on October 24, leaders in the amusement and entertainment industry appealed to policymakers in Washington D.C. The two largest U.S. carnivals, **North American Midway Entertainment** (NAME) and **Ray Cammack Shows, Inc.** (RCSFUN), were present, as well as representatives from three major U.S. fairs: **Wisconsin State Fair**, **Iowa State Fair** and **Eastern States Exposition** (The Big E).

The presentation began in the War Room of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building and traveled to the White House Press Room. Carnival and fair representatives articulated the fraught state of the industry and the dire need for congressional intercession.

**Gene Cassidy**, representing the Big E, shared that after numerous trips to Washington D.C. to advance the CARE Act and RIDE Act, this was "the first time that important policy writers were directly communicated to, and he was surprised by their deep interest in the matter. The shared hope of the industry is that this is a step in the right direction to secure jobs and American business."

Without the reliable carnival labor force that often hails from beyond U.S. borders, these organizations cannot deliver the same caliber of entertainment that they have for years. Their missions are jeopardized by the lack of labor, and they will crumble without immediate change.

Pennsylvania's rich tradition of celebrating agriculture and community spirit will again be highlighted at the 2025 **Pennsylvania Farm Show** (Harrisburg), thanks to the "Oh, Say, Can You Sing?" contest.

The contest was open to residents of all ages, individuals and groups. Each morning from January 4-11, the Farm Show will commence with the national anthem performed live by contest winners. This year's theme, "Powering Pennsylvania," underscores the importance of pride and freedom, values echoed through powerful renditions of "The Star-Spangled Banner." This initiative continued to foster state pride and offered a unique platform for Pennsylvanians to express their patriotism through song.

Estimated attendance is over a half million people during the eight-day run, which takes place early each January. This is the Keystone State's version of a state fair minus the rides. There are two rides (carousel and children's flat ride) that raise thousands of scholarship dollars for both the **Pennsylvania State Showmen's Association** (PSSA) and the **Pennsylvania Farm Show Foundation**.

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# WATER PARKS & RECREATION

► News Splash — page 35

## Seeing demand for comfortable spaces, Rulantica adds luxury suites

AT: Jeffrey Seifert  
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

RUST, Baden-Württemberg, Germany — Last year Rulantica, Europa-Park's water park, opened a massive new section — Nordiskturn - tower of the gods. It featured an eight-lane ProSlide RallyRacer, one of the largest to date. Although Vikingløp RallyRacer commanded most of the attention, the new brick-clad tower, constructed adjacent to the existing water park, was designed to serve as more than just a ride tower. Nordiskturn was also home to eateries, lounge areas and upper-floor luxury day suites that were — at that time — still under construction.

Although Rulantica opened with multiple cabanas, including eight Komfort Hyddas in an exclusive loft area, the park discovered that it needed more.

Germany is renowned for its health and wellness spas — dating back to the time of the Romans who took advantage of the natural hot and mineral springs found there. The country boasts more than 350 spas and resorts that are often housed within beautiful buildings, both historic and ultra-contemporary. Germans, as well as visitors to the country, have come to expect a certain level of pampering when they visit a spa. Since water parks are often closely associated with spas, guests are willing to pay extra for a similar indulgence.

Michael Kreft von Byern, director of Rulantica, told AT: "When we were planning our third slide



A spiral staircase (above left) in the two-story VIP Svits leads upstairs to a private sauna (above right). The relaxing Stillhet loft offers reserved sofa beds and lounge chairs in a quiet, peaceful environment (below). AT/TIM BALDWIN

tower, Nordiskturn, we knew from the very beginning that we wanted this area to be a mix between action and relaxation areas. Previous experience with our other relaxation offers taught us that there is a high demand for comfortable spaces which our guests can book in addition to their Rulantica ticket. We decided to use the top floors of Nordiskturn to create something really luxurious and elegant. Ann-Kathrin Mack, Europa-Park partner and head of Mack Solutions, together with our design team created six truly unique spaces — our Rulantica Svits and VIP Svits. Up until today, the demand for those day-suites are exceeding our expectations. The combination of luxury, elegance, modern facilities and extra services is definitely a very popular add-on among our guests."

The ground floor of Nordiskturn provides a quiet, adults-only section with Lågerhus sofas located in niches separated by airy curtains. Water park

guests can treat themselves to their own private spot for a bit of relaxation between all the slide fun. One level up, the first floor (second floor to most Americans) is a place for families to relax. Similar to the loungers on the ground floor, Stillhet sofas offer plenty of privacy on plush cushions. Both sofa suite types are available for an additional fee. Stillhet loft, also on the first floor, adds additional lounge chairs in a designated quiet area. While only steps away from the excitement of the water park, walking into the first-floor loft and cabana suites allows guests to transcend into a dreamy, tranquil environment. The expanded area can accommodate an additional 400 loungers.

The upper floors of Nordiskturn are home to the luxurious state-of-the-art day suites that made their debut later in the year. The four Rulantica Svits are located on the third floor of Nordiskturn. They are named for the four points of the compass — Nørd, Øst,



Sør and Vest. The suites can accommodate up to four people and are outfitted with high-end materials that include a private sauna, daybed, wellness bathtub, luxury shower, comfortable seating, smart TV, audio system, minibar and Wi-Fi. A private loggia allows guests to sit outside and enjoy natural sunlight or a warm breeze.

One more level up are the Rulantica VIP Svits, Sørvind and Vestavind. These two-floor suites can hold up to six guests and take water park pampering to a whole 'nother level. As with the

lower Svits, these are decorated with high-end materials including metallic tiles, wood panels and premium wall coverings.

The main floor features a spacious lounge area with a sofa, daybed, wellness bathtub, Smart TV, sound system, dimmable lighting controls and other amenities. The upper floor, accessed via a private spiral staircase, houses the private sauna with adjoining relaxation and lounging area, as well as a private fifth-floor balcony that overlooks

► See SUITES, page 36

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**O'Gliss Park** located in Vendée, France, finished the season with record breaking attendance. As the season was drawing to close in September, the park exceeded 235,000 guests, and it still had a few more operating days. That number represented a 15 percent increase compared to the same date last year. The park attributes the increase in attendance to its installation of a new Stingray waterslide, a first-of-its-kind attraction from **Polin Waterparks**. (See AT, October 2024)

Since its opening in 2016, the water park has garnered international acclaim with recognition and awards from the **World Waterpark Association, IAAPA, Aquatics International, Park World** and the **European Star Awards**.

Indonesia's **Waterbom Bali** recently introduced a new water play area. Called AquaPlay, the new attractions stands 15 meters (nearly 50 feet) tall and features multiple levels across 16 different platforms. Supplied by **WhiteWater of Canada**, it is an AquaForms 16 — one of the world's largest. The attraction boasts six slides, multiple water blasters, sprayers, tipping bowls, water jets and the quintessential tipping bucket.

Adjacent to the AquaPlay is a new chill-out area for parents. The new space offers seating for 120 guests, plenty of shade and an open-air family restaurant with a diverse menu.

In September, ground breaking took place on the first phase of the new \$22.5 million **Mobile County Aquatics Center** in Mobile, Alabama. The first phase will include an outdoor 50-meter com-



## NEWS SPLASH

AT: Jeffrey L. Seifert  
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petition pool with two dive wells, an indoor warm-up/instructional pool, locker rooms and rest rooms.

Phase II includes a short course indoor pool, spectator seating for 645, a lobby, offices, and a concessions area.

The center has been in development for almost a decade, although the vision for such a facility goes back almost 40 years.

The center will provide for aquatics club swimming, as well as schools. More than a dozen schools within Mobile County have swim or swim and dive teams. In addition to offering swimming and diving practice and competition opportunities for high school and youth swim clubs, the center will also provide recreational swimming, water exercise, wellness/therapy classes, and instructional programs that benefit water safety and lifeguard certification, stroke mechanics, SCUBA training and learn-to-swim and dive classes.

Most of the funding was provided by Mobile County which allocated more than \$19 million. Other sources included Commission district funds, federal grants, the City of Mobile and the Mobile County Public School System.

The first phase is estimated to be completed within 12 to 18 months.

Work continues on the construction of a new

\$32 million indoor aquatic center in Ames, Iowa, despite some minor issues. In one area, concrete was poured before a vapor barrier and insulation were installed. The contractor, **Sande Construction**, had to tear out the already completed work and provide replacement materials at its own cost. Fortunately, it looks like the project will remain on track for a November 2025 opening.

The **Fitch Family Indoor Aquatic Center** will be a 38,900-square-foot facility that will include a lap pool, recreational pool with play structure, a current channel, an indoor/outdoor waterslide and three warm-water basins.

Prior to March 2022, the municipal pool, located at **Ames High School**, provided indoor swimming opportunities for the school district and Ames community. That facility was closed and demolished in spring 2022 as the new Ames High School was opening. This left the community without an indoor swimming option.

"For years, **Mayor Haila** and the Ames City Council have explored options to provide year-round indoor aquatics to residents," said Parks and Recreation Director **Keith Abraham**. "From planning to location to funding, moving this project from concept to implementation has taken determination, creativity, collaboration, and leadership. The new facility will fill a significant recreation and wellness void for Ames."

Fundraising for the project began in 2021 with the city committing \$20.5 million. The remaining funds came from grants as well as 42 donors including \$3 million from **Rich and Mary Fitch**, for whom the facility is named.

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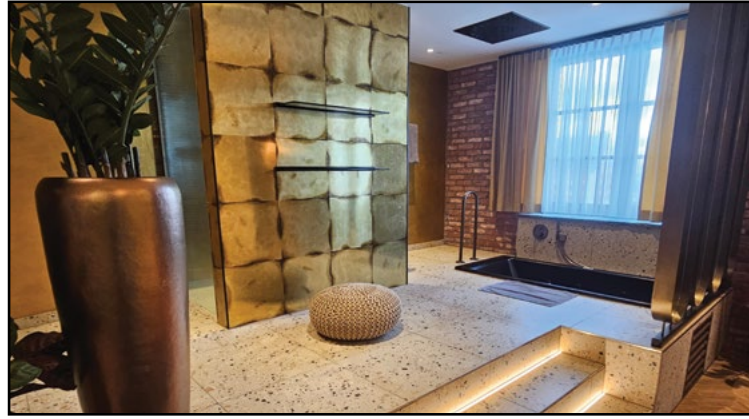
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The original Komfort Hyddas now include a quiet relaxation area with lounge chairs, a shared sauna and bucket shower (above left). Luxury materials decorate the VIP Svits (above right). AT/TIM BALDWIN

## ► SUITES

Continued from page 52

**Krønasår - The Museum-Hotel** and its adjacent waterway and fountain show.

A minibar comes stocked with a complimentary bottle of champagne and the mini-fridge has fruit kabobs. Each suite comes with souvenir drink bottles that can be filled all day long at the Coke Freestyle dispensers located within the restaurants in the water park. The suites also have private food and beverage service that can be ordered over the phone or via a touchscreen and delivered right to the door.

The six day suites are accessible via an elevator. That same elevator can be used exclusively by the suite guests to go to the top floor of the tower for special access to the Vikingløp racing slide. When guests exit the elevator, a rack of racing mats is waiting for them. An access door takes them right into the loading area at the front of the line where an operator will direct them to an available slide.

Guests staying in the Svits also have access to a third-floor sun terrace, Sølterrass, which is exclusively for those staying in the Nordiksturn day suites.

Prices vary depending on the time of the year. The Rulantica Svits start at €600 and the VIP Svits at €750.

Another expansion took place near the original Komfort Hydda cabanas, located on the upper floor within water world, close to all the action. Guests of those cabanas now have exclusive access to a peaceful area to escape the hustle and bustle. Behind the cabanas, a door leads to a private quiet area with a sauna, a bucket shower and lounge chairs facing a window overlooking the outdoor portion of Rulantica.

As Rulantica has expanded outdoors, so too have the comfort options, including the addition of three unique VIP land-based yachts (see AT, November 2022, issue 8.2). With the addition of the Nordiksturn day suites, guests now have 14 different options ranging from a cozy outdoor beach "Egg" to a spacious two-story luxury suite.



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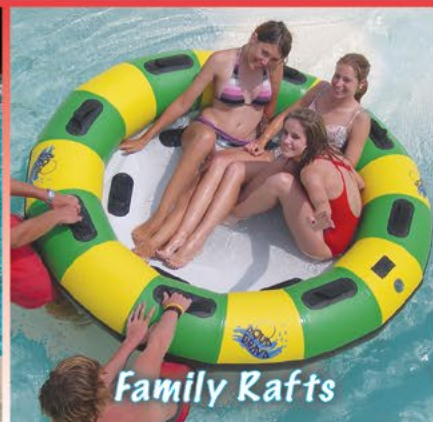
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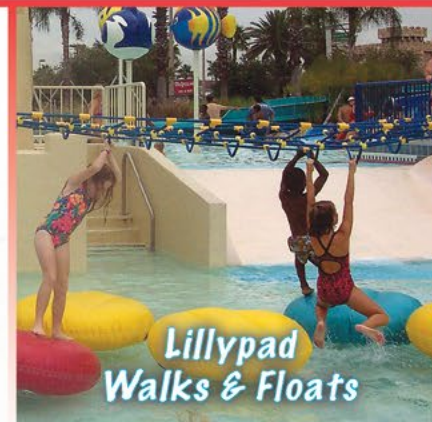
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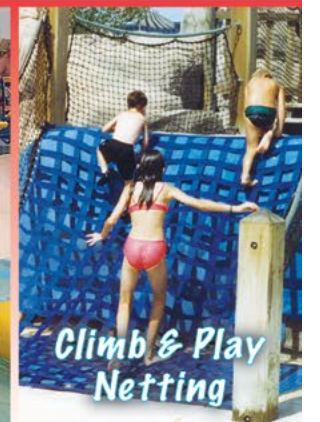
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# BUSINESS & NEWSMAKERS

► Silver Dollar City adding hotel — page 41 / Circus Circus Hotel provides security to performers — pages 42-43

## World Waterpark Association's trade show returns to Las Vegas

AT: Jeffrey Seifert  
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LAS VEGAS, Nev. — The 44th Annual World Waterpark Association Trade Show and Symposium took place at what is officially known as Le Centre de Convention at Paris Las Vegas with the Paris Las Vegas Hotel & Casino serving as the primary lodging venue. The last time the show was held in Vegas was two years ago. Close to 1,300 attendees enjoyed quality time in educational classes, networking opportunities or checking out the latest products or innovations on the trade show exhibition hall.

Education, of course, is key to the symposium. More than 120 speakers shared best practices on topics that meant the most to attendees. These included operational safety, new revenue streams and maintenance.

Although the WWA officially ran from October 9 through October 11, events and certification courses started on Sunday, October 6, with the first of two- or three-day certification courses. On October 6, the first day of a two-day Aquatic Facility Operator Certification Course took place. Another two-day course, the Certified Pool Operator Certification Course, likewise began on October 6. The first of three courses of the Ellis



Attendees had the opportunity to spend time on the exhibit floor talking to vendors who were eager to introduce their products and answer questions (above). The show offers plenty of in-depth training and learning opportunities from quality speakers holding multiple sessions spread over five days (below). Some were so popular they were standing room only.

AT/JEFFREY SEIFERT

& Associates Lifeguard Instructor Licensing Program also began on October 6.

Several WWA University offerings took place on Monday, October 7, as did the StarGuard Elite two-day lifeguard instructor development course. Things began to ramp up on Tuesday as the WWA University schools and workshops got started. Tuesday was also the day of the WWA Annual Golf Tournament held this year at the Arroyo Golf Club. This Arnold Palmer-designed course, located at Red Rock Country Club, is located in the master-planned community of Summerlin in Las Vegas. The Arroyo golf course is nestled between the spectacular landscapes



of Red Rock Canyon with its distinctive and dramatic red rock formations, tinted red by iron oxide. The course, located about 10 miles west of the strip, offers panoramic views of the Las Vegas cityscape. The tournament

delivered a fun and memorable way for WWA attendees to network in a relaxing environment.

Wednesday began bright and early for a few attendees with some committee meetings starting as

early as 7:30 a.m. The rest of the morning was full of activity with more workshops, roundtable discussions and meetings. Some of the sessions were so

► See WWA, page 39

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## ► WWA

Continued from page 38

popular they were standing room only for those who did not get there early enough to grab a seat. Finally, as the afternoon approached, everyone clamored to find a seat for the opening general session at 11:30 a.m.

Beginning with a welcome from WWA President **Rick Root**, the multimedia session included an address from several WWA board members, WWA news and announcements, and a plethora of recognition and awards leading up to the 2024 Hall of Fame inductees. After the opening general session, everyone headed to lunch on the show floor, and the trade show portion of the 2024 WWA Trade Show & Symposium was underway.

On Wednesday and Thursday, attendees had the opportunity to spend time on the exhibit floor talking with knowledgeable people eager to introduce their products and answer questions. The trade show floor also served as the location for lunch both days allowing for additional interaction between attendees and exhibitors. The usual players were there with **WhiteWater** and **ProSlide Technology** grabbing the spotlight with large booths, huge TV monitors and colorful display models showing off each of the company's catalog of attractions. **SplashTacular**, **Fibrart** and **Arihant** also had booths on the trade show floor.

Taking a project from concept to reality requires a design firm, and several were on hand to offer



AT's Jeffrey Seifert had the pleasure of presenting Rick Hunter of ProSlide with a duplicate of the 2024 Golden Ticket Award that was won by Holiday World (above left). AT's Publisher and founder Gary Slade presented a Golden Ticket Award to Harmony Liao and Andrew Mowatt of WhiteWater West (above right). AT/GARY SLADE, JEFFREY SEIFERT



their services to those looking to build a new park or expand or re-create an existing park. Designers such as **Aquatic Development Group**, **Martin Aquatics**, **Councilman-Hunsaker** and **Wet Engineering**, to name a few, had large, flashy, inviting booths that attracted a steady stream of visitors throughout the show.

Suppliers **CPI**, **Rave Sports**, **Tube Pro**, **Zebec** and **Z Pro Inflatables**, were touting their particular brands of inflatables, tubes, rafts, mats, lifejackets and other water park essentials. Others, such as **Safe Slide Restoration**, **Slide Guys Restoration** and **Baynum Solutions** were demonstrating products to rejuvenate or recoat slides, pools, and floors to make them brighter, shinier and safer.

Those familiar with the industry know a water park is a lot more than just pools, slides and lazy rivers. Water has to be pumped and filtered and treated and sometimes heated. Several companies were showing off

products that pump, filter and clean. Both water chemical and chemical alternative treatments were displayed to make certain that water quality never becomes an issue.

Vendors for just about anything needed to successfully run an aquatic facility could be found at the WWA show. Two days provided ample opportunity for facility owners and managers to discuss concerns, look for new items, or have the opportunity to meet with current suppliers face-to-face.

A highlight of the week was the Annual Reunion Party. Similar to two years ago, the event was again hosted by **The Pyek Group**, but this time instead of visiting **Cowabunga Bay**, the event was held at sister venue **Cowabunga Canyon** in Spring Valley. Bus transportation was provided from the Paris Hotel for those who did not want to deal with Las Vegas traffic. With food and drink provided by host **ProSlide Technology**, and comfortable seating provided by the venue, attendees

had plenty of opportunities for social interaction to network and simply have fun. Entertainment was provided by a band playing from a floating stage, as well as a light show reflecting beams of light off the water. The evening was topped off with an exciting fireworks display. It was a resounding success.

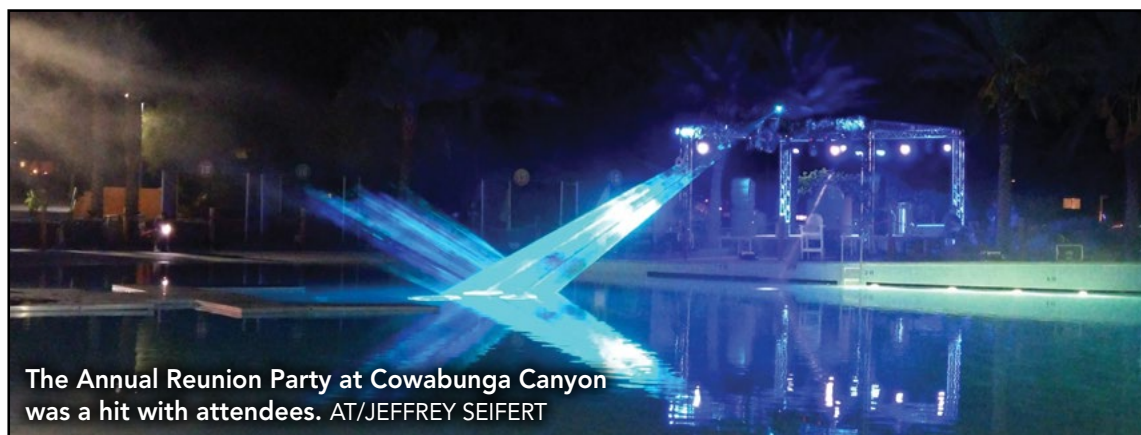
Keynote sessions took place on Thursday and Friday. Thursday's keynote speaker, **Darren LaCroix**, spoke of the unstoppable power of commitment. In 2001 LaCroix outspoke 25,000 contestants from 14 countries to become the World Champion of Public Speaking. He captivated attendees with stories of going "all in" and challenged individuals and teams to fully commit to their goals. During his talk, he offered local instances of commitment when he spoke of the unrelenting grit of **Mark Davis**, the owner of the **Oakland Raiders**, and his multi-year effort to relocate his football team from Oakland, California, to Paradise, Nevada. He also told an interesting tale of the "Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas" sign. It was designer **Betty Willis'** insistence that the sign remain in the public domain, that contributed to its success and notoriety. Had it been copyrighted; it likely never would have become famous.

On Friday, **Maureen**

**Zappala**, presented "Confidence is not a Rocket Science." Zappala spoke of Imposter Syndrome — the persistent feeling of not measuring up to one's resume. The chronic self-doubt can affect anyone, regardless of their age, gender or profession. Many smart and successful people, especially those in a creative, technical or educational career, can experience this feeling. Those suffering from the syndrome feel they are not as talented or as worthy as others believe and are scared that one day, people will realize that. Zappala offered practical strategies so those affected could recalibrate their thinking, regain their confidence and fearlessly move ahead.

Once again, the WWA Symposium and Trade Show proved that the water park industry is stronger than it ever has been before. From meeting new people, attending sessions, visiting vendors and catching up with old friends, the show has plenty to offer to participants who get to spend a few days with like-minded individuals who possess the same appreciation of this industry. By the end of the show, most attendees had met their goals and left knowing they had a positive experience.

The World Waterpark Association will host its 45th Annual Symposium & Trade at the **Walt Disney World Resort** on October 20 through 23, 2025.



The Annual Reunion Party at Cowabunga Canyon was a hit with attendees. AT/JEFFREY SEIFERT



# WWA celebrates 2024 Hall of Fame inductees at trade show event

AT: Jeffrey Seifert  
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

LAS VEGAS, Nev. — The World Waterpark Association (WWA) Hall of Fame exists to recognize noteworthy individuals in the development and advancement of the water attractions industry. Two outstanding individuals were inducted in 2024: **Chris Swartz** of **Saudi Entertainment Ventures** and **Ron Hood** of **The Walt Disney Company**.

Swartz grew up in the industrial heart of Ohio, surrounded by the values of hard work and dedication. His early love for amusement parks was sparked at **Cedar Point**, where a 10-ride marathon on the Corkscrew roller coaster sealed his fate.

Swartz knew early on that he wanted to work in the amusement industry. His interest began to crystallize when his family moved to the shores of Florida's Gulf Coast. There, Swartz fell in love with the water and became a certified lifeguard.

Following high school, Swartz headed to the

**University of Central Florida**, where he stumbled into a part-time job at **Wet 'n Wild Orlando**. What started as a convenient gig quickly turned into a full-blown career passion. Climbing the ranks from lifeguard to operations training supervisor, he was hooked on the fun-filled world of water parks.

After five years at **Wet 'n Wild**, Swartz moved to **White Water** and **American Adventures** outside of Atlanta, Georgia. Working at one of the largest water parks in the country provided a wealth of experience, including opening the world's first treehouse-style waterplay structure.

By the age of 24, Swartz was leading the charge at **NRH2O Family Water Park** in North Richland Hills, Texas. Chris ushered in new, largest-of-their-kind attractions at NRH2O including, the longest, tallest water coaster in 1998. NRH2O flourished under his leadership, earning its place among the best in the nation.

Swartz's connection with the industry deepened

when he joined the World Waterpark Association's board of directors in 2004. He quickly became a key player, taking on roles from secretary to board chair. Swartz continued to earn recognition and was featured as an Aquatics International "Power 25 Reinventor" in 2010 and received the WWA Executive Board Award for his leadership at NRH2O in 2013.

In 2014, Swartz and his family headed to Dubai, where he took the helm at **Wild Wadi Waterpark**.

In 2023, Swartz joined **Saudi Entertainment Ventures (SEVEN)** in Saudi Arabia as the executive director where he is developing the brand's waterparks. Swartz counts himself very lucky in his career and credits his parents and his wife Beth as central to his success.

Hood grew up in South Florida, just a few miles from the Keys. He was a natural in the water and spent summers working as a **Boy Scouts of America** lifeguard. In 1972, Hood's world changed forever during his family's first trip to the brand-new **Walt Disney**

**World**. From **Fort Wilderness** to the new **River Country**, Ron was captivated by the magic of the parks. Over the next two decades, he told everyone that when he retired, he was going to work at Disney.

After high school, Hood enlisted in the **U.S. Army**, serving as an electronic warfare/signals intelligence operator. His military service was distinguished by numerous awards, including the Bronze Star and the Legion of Merit.

When Hood and his family retired to Central Florida, he decided it was time to pursue his Disney dream. He began as a lifeguard at **Typhoon Lagoon** and **Blizzard Beach** coming full circle to his first water park experience at **River Country**. With his military leadership skills in tow, Hood quickly advanced into leadership roles, mentoring others and helping to shape the future of Disney's water parks.

For the past 27 years, Hood has been a cornerstone of Disney's Water Parks. In 2004, he became operations

manager for Disney's miniature golf and a year later for **Typhoon Lagoon**. In 2006, his team hosted the WWA Show's annual reunion party, and he has been a regular attendee at the WWA symposium and trade show ever since.

In 2007, Hood was honored with the Disney Partners in Excellence Award, a prestigious accolade given to less than 2% of cast members worldwide. Hood became operations manager at **Blizzard Beach** in 2009, then took on a whole new challenge as part of the opening team at the **Aulani Disney Resort & Spa Hawai'i**.

He returned to Florida as the project manager and senior duty manager for Disney's water parks and miniature golf. Hood's expertise has been pivotal in many projects.

In 2011, Hood received The Walt Disney Company Legacy Award, the highest honor given by **Disney Parks, Experiences & Products**. This award is a testament to his exceptional contributions, with fewer than 1% of cast members receiving this recognition.

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# Silver Dollar City begins half billion dollar investment with new hotel

AT: Tim Baldwin  
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

BRANSON, Mo. — The tagline, “You’ve got a great past ahead of you,” has been something fun Silver Dollar City has thrown around in its history, but the park can easily say the future looks very bright as well. The largest investment in the company’s 65-year history will change the theme park into a theme park resort.

In October, Silver Dollar City, part of Herschend Enterprises, announced that the Missouri destination will invest half a billion dollars over the next decade.

“This is more than just growth — it’s a new era,” said Brad Thomas, Silver Dollar City Parks & Resorts president. “Over the next decade, we will mindfully transform 1,200 acres into an authentic, only-in-the-Ozarks destination starting with our first resort. The new resort will combine Silver Dollar City’s spirit of playfulness, discovery, craftsmanship and exploration with all that makes The Heart of the Ozarks so special.”

The new hotel has begun construction and is targeted to open in late 2026. Once completed, it will feature 262 rooms with captivating vistas of the Ozark Mountains and Table Rock Lake.

“We have explored opening a resort for nearly two decades, and this serves as the first chapter in our decade-long plan,” said Thomas.

Sister park Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, has opened two resort hotels, the most recent, HeartSong Lodge, opened last fall. Both



The new resort hotel at Silver Dollar City will have a striking grandeur as guests arrive (above). An artistic rendering spotlights amenities and family activities behind the resort hotel (below). COURTESY SILVER DOLLAR CITY

properties operate campgrounds as well.

When asked if its sister theme park had learning curves to incorporate in Branson, Thomas told *Amusement Today*, “We knew families needed a new favorite place to stay, as Silver Dollar City has grown exponentially, becoming a leading vacation destination for millions of visitors from all over. With the Silver Dollar City Resort being Herschend’s third theme park resort, we will continue to build on providing the best guest experience possible.”

One of the most dramatic qualities of the hotel will be its scenic views.

“The views from the Silver Dollar City Resort will be unmatched — miles of shoreline of Table Rock Lake nestled in between the valleys of the Ozark Mountains,” said Dalton Fischer, communications manager. “In addition, guests will see our Showboat Branson



Belle dinner cruise attraction paddle-wheeling through the waters of the lake. Plus, it’s not just about what you see, but also what you hear, as the iconic steam whistle of the Frisco Silver Dollar Line Steam Train echoes through the hills.”

These never-before-seen vistas will take place from the 1,200-acre site high in the Ozarks.

The park has yet to roll

out information on the amenities, but when asked to explain “unparalleled access to Silver Dollar City” as mentioned in the announcement, Fischer teased, “We’ll be releasing more details, but for now, I will say staying at the resort will be the ultimate way to experience Silver Dollar City and our other area-attractions.”

The company’s other family-friendly attractions include White Water water park, Showboat Branson Belle dinner cruises, and Pink Jeep Adventure Tours.

The press statement specified a half billion dollars. AT asked what portion of that investment would be dedicated to the resort hotel. Fischer indicated that the resort accounts for a little over \$100 million of the half-billion investment over the next decade.

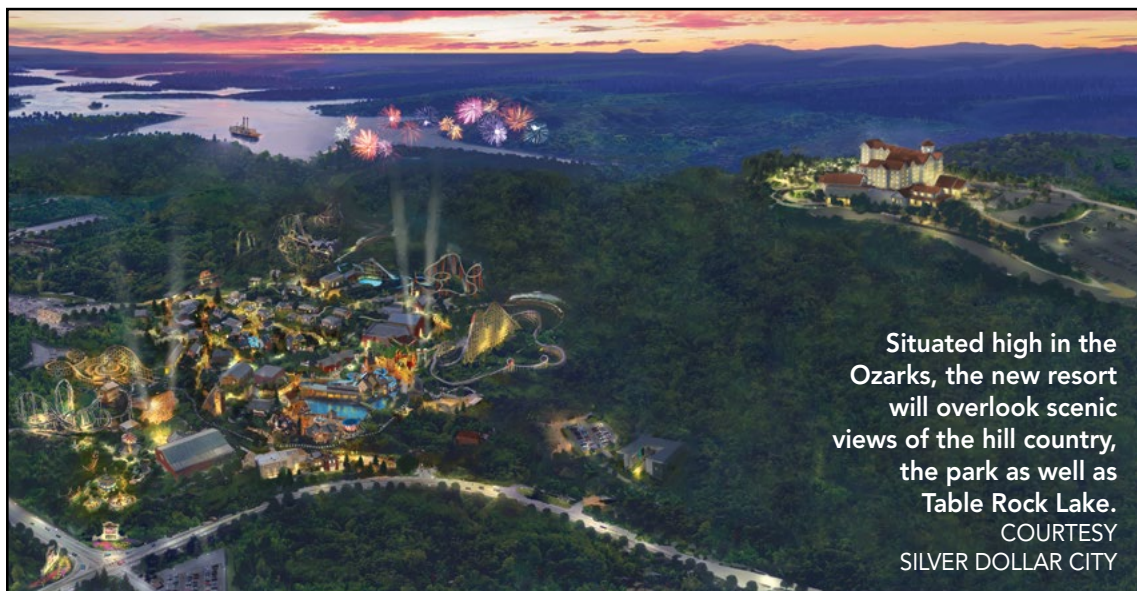
“This investment showcases Silver Dollar City’s commitment to tourism and economic growth in the

Ozarks and for the State of Missouri,” said Missouri Governor Mike Parson, in the park’s release. “We are excited to see this project bring thousands of new jobs and millions of new visitors to our great state.”

No stranger to spending, Silver Dollar City debuted its new Fire In The Hole, an award-winning \$30 million attraction, in the spring of 2024.

Silver Dollar City opened in 1960 on top of Missouri’s deepest cave, Marvel Cave. Themed to the 1880s, the park has become renowned for its craftsmen, award-winning shows, great food, friendly staff and spectacular Christmas event, Smoky Mountain Christmas. Over time, the park has added unique and signature rides and attractions.

With the remainder of that announced half billion still to be spent, exciting things will continue to be on the horizon.



Situated high in the Ozarks, the new resort will overlook scenic views of the hill country, the park as well as Table Rock Lake. COURTESY SILVER DOLLAR CITY



# Circus Circus Hotel & Casino home to world's largest permanent circus

**AT:** Ron Gustafson  
Special to Amusement Today

LAS VEGAS — Circus life can be hectic and demanding as performers move from town-to-town — sometimes overnight — in anticipation of the next gig on the circuit.

For some, it's seasonal work before taking an off-season break, yet having to stay in shape and rehearse to secure a position when the show hits the road again. For others, it seems like a revolving door as they seek new digs when circuses decide to update acts for the upcoming season.

At **Circus Circus Hotel & Casino**, working with the world's largest permanent circus has provided its performers with a genuine sense of security.

"We have not brought in a new act for around four years," General Manager **Shana Greedy** emphasized during an extended interview with *Amusement Today*. "We're lucky because we have performers here that our clientele really like, and we don't constantly have to go out to find talent."

A testament to Gerety's comments is the **Flying Poemas**, a family from Argentina who perform a number of awe-inspiring aerial acts.

"Noelle Poema has



Circus Circus Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas (above) caters to all ages with its Carnival Midway with circus acts and Adventuredome with amusement rides. The venue opened in 1968. COURTESY CIRCUS CIRCUS LAS VEGAS

been here close to 20 years," Greedy noted. "Her parents were with Ringling Brothers (Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus) as their children grew up and Noelle has been performing since she was young. Now her children fly — it's really a family here."

Solo aerial acts include trapeze artist **Noelia** as well as **Naira**, who has a stun-

ning performance using silk.

## Bring on the clowns

**Rocco** the clown has been generating laughs for more than 20 years at Circus Circus. The veteran performer is part of the clown team of **Dave, Tonya, Rocco and Huel**, which creates excitement before other acts take the stage or climb to the tra-

peze riggings high above the audience.

"We moved them from the **Adventuredome** (indoor amusement park) to do the pre-circus show. The kids go absolutely crazy, and Rocco is very involved with the crowds," Greedy said.

An NBC's *America's Got Talent* finalist is also among the mesmerizing acts on the

stage. Russian-born **Uzeyer Novruzov**, known professionally as Free Ladderman, displays feats of balance and skill using various sizes of free-standing ladders and other props.

He mixes comedy with acrobatics in the one-man spectacle, noting that one of his biggest inspira-

► See **CIRCUS**, page 43



The Carnival Midway stage is where circus acts perform at Circus Circus Hotel & Casino. Midway games are shown in the background. COURTESY CIRCUS CIRCUS LAS VEGAS



## ►CIRCUS

Continued from page 42

tions was silent film comic **Charlie Chaplin**.

"He came to us after *America's Got Talent* and has added additional routines," the resort executive noted. "He's a staple here and now uses a 20-foot ladder at the end of the show — standing on top and not being held by anything! He actually walks the ladder from one end of the stage to the other."

Also in the Circus Circus lineup are **Yongjian & Yong Zhang**, billed as twin juggling masters; solo juggling artist **Raul Cubillos** and Persian strongman **Hossein**.

"He (Hossein) has been with us for a long time," Greedy said. "He has evolved and continues to do great."

Another aerial act takes on a heavy metal theme as a performer works high above the stage using chains attached to a steel ring.

Most of the Circus Circus acts consist of international performers who have strong resumes in the circus world.

The 25-by-25-foot stage, with trapeze rigging overhead, has grandstand seating which offers visibility from all sides.

### Knocking on the door

"When we do have an opening for an act, the talent comes to us," said Greedy. "Circus Circus has such a strong name people are constantly asking how they can get booked here. We have more people come to us than we have slots for."

As for those on the performance schedule, the lineup is set three to four months in advance. Greedy said the artists plan their lives around the posted schedule and work together so it accommodates everyone. The artists reside offsite in the Las Vegas area, which provides them a home life when not in the circus spotlight.

Performances start at 1:30 p.m. Monday through



Trapeze artists perform high above the audience at Circus Circus. COURTESY CIRCUS CIRCUS LAS VEGAS

Thursday and 11:30 a.m. Friday through Sunday. Guests also have an opportunity to meet the circus stars after each show.

### Making it multi-generational

When Circus Circus opened in 1968, the facility was only a casino with circus acts, but soon adapted to draw a more diverse audience.

The circus acts are intertwined with the family-friendly Carnival Midway area at the resort — a second-floor attraction that affords an overhead view of casino gaming below.

Carnival Midway includes skill-based carnival games such as a derby race, balloon darts and water race, as well as popular arcade and video games. The resort uses rechargeable play cards for the games.

"Midway has been here for more than 30 years," Greedy said of the changes. "The dozens of video and skill games along with prizes keep the kids entertained. And we have a lot of adults in their 20s and 40s playing as well."

A redemption center also provides guests the



opportunity to cash in winning arcade credits for novelty items.

The 1971 James Bond film *Diamonds Are Forever* features actress **Jill St. John** — Bond girl Tiffany Case in the movie — playing the resort's water race game and winning a plush elephant stuffed with diamonds. The film also has

glimpses of the circus acts.

While much of Las Vegas is geared toward gambling and ticketed shows, Greedy made a point of saying Circus Circus is viewed as a multi-generational venue.

"We have so many people visiting time and again — even grandparents bringing kids," she noted.

"Circus Circus has a little bit of fun for everybody. We have a theme park with 28 rides and the Midway appeals to everybody.

"You know that you did a good job when you see kids coming out crying because they don't want to leave. We know what we worked for worked."

•circuscircus.com



## OBITUARY

## DeRusha, former OABA senior vice president, passes

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. — Alvin (Al) Joseph DeRusha passed away peacefully at his home at the age of 88 on November 4, 2024.

DeRusha was born to Mary and George DeRusha on November 8, 1935, in St. Paul, Minnesota.



DeRusha

In the summer of 1944, when DeRusha was 8 years old, the Bazinet Carnival had its show set up on Harriet Island. DeRusha got a job with Leo Magel's carnival game concessions while the carnival was in town. Impressed with his work ethic, Magel asked DeRusha to travel with the show for the rest of the summer. At this young age, DeRusha found his niche in games of chance. He fell in love with the "carnie" life — the music, food and atmosphere. He went on to travel and work with the Magels on several different carnivals including the Minnesota State Fair for the next 10 years.

DeRusha's career came full circle when in 1990, he took a position as the senior vice president of the Outdoor Amusement Business Association (OABA). DeRusha traveled throughout the country and into Canada to hold what came to be known as "Jammin Jamborees," at as many as 25 fairs and festivals every summer. The Jamborees raised money for the organization's lobbying efforts and post-secondary scholarships. Raising over \$4 million during his time with the OABA, DeRusha also attended many conventions and trade shows during the winter months.

DeRusha served a term as president of the Midwest Showmen's Association and was inducted into their Hall of Fame, Chicago's Showmen's League of America Hall of Honor and the Outdoor Amusement Business Association Hall of Fame.

Remarkably, DeRusha worked to the age of 85.

## ON THE MOVE

**Semnox Solutions** announced the latest addition to the team — **Kevin Kochman** — as a sales partner.

"We are thrilled to welcome Kevin to the Semnox family of sales professionals," stated **Phil Showler**, head of FEC sales for Semnox Solutions. "Kevin brings a high level of professionalism to the team that will help us as we continue to expand our footprint across North America."



Kochman

Kochman brings a wealth of experience to the Semnox team, with a background in global hospitality, operations and the entertainment industry. Growing up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Kochman enlisted in the **U.S. Air Force** after high school, which took him from Texas to South Korea. This initial overseas experience sparked his interest in working internationally. After returning to the U.S., Kochman began his hospitality career with **Applebee's Inc.**, where he served as director of international operations. During this time, he was instrumental in expanding franchise operations in Kuwait, Egypt, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico and Canada.

In 2008, Kochman transitioned to **Main Event Entertainment**, making his first venture into the attractions industry. During his 14-year tenure, he helped grow the company from eight centers in Texas to 45 centers across the U.S. This role allowed him to further hone his skills in operating systems, concept development and growth strategies.

"I am thrilled to be a part of a team that is innovative, growth-oriented and client-focused," added Kochman.

The **International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE)** announced **David Grindle** as its next president and CEO, effective January 1, 2025.



Grindle

Grindle is an accomplished association executive with more than a decade of leadership in national and global associations, including the **United States Institute for Theatre Technology** and **SMPTE**. He grew up on a dairy farm in the mountains of Georgia, and his career has taken him from professional stage management to university instructor to association management.

"Now more than ever, fairs and expositions play a vital role in bringing together our communities to connect with each other and with their food sources and natural resources," said Grindle. "Helping the IAFE and its members magnify their voice sharing that important mission with their local communities and various political bodies is one of the things that excites me about this position."

Grindle holds the Certified Association Executive designation from the **American Society of Association Executives** and is a Fulbright Specialist with the **United States Department of State**.

"David's expertise in growing membership, finding non-traditional revenue, leading remote teams, and coordinating government relations will continue to move the IAFE forward in innovative ways," said **Jeremy Parsons**, IFMG, CFE, IAFE search committee chair.

In his tenure as an association executive, Grindle has focused on providing increased benefits to highlight the return on investment of membership in organizations.

## Extreme Legacy debuts during IAAPA Expo 2024, names Jaimie Enterkin as chief executive officer

ORLANDO — During a press conference at the **Orange County Convention Center** during IAAPA Expo 2024, executives announced the launch and creation of **Extreme Legacy**, a full-service engineering design and manufacturing firm that services the amusement, attractions and leisure industries. A majority female-owned company, Extreme Legacy also announced the appointment of **Jaimie Enterkin** as its chief executive officer.



Enterkin

Based in Orlando, Florida, Extreme Legacy purchased **Extreme Engineering's** 30-year portfolio of attractions. Included in the purchase are the rights to Extreme Engineering's intellectual property and expertise in engineering design and fabrication. The company's name, Extreme Legacy, was chosen as a nod to Extreme Engineering's 30-year legacy of creating award-winning attractions and providing breakthrough solutions around the globe. While Extreme Engineering founder Jeff Wilson is retiring from this new chapter with

Extreme Legacy, he will continue the popular Flex Shade product line found in theme parks, zoos and outdoor facilities around the world.



Jeff Wilson

"Extreme Engineering has exhibited at IAAPA Expo for 25 years," shared **Phil Wilson**, chief development officer and president, strategic partnerships, Extreme Legacy. "We could not think of a better time or place to announce the launch of Extreme Legacy than right here. Today we acknowledge the history that brought us here while moving forward and inventing for the future.

"Orlando is the epicenter of the global attractions industry," Wilson continued. "And so it makes perfect sense that Extreme Legacy is based here. We are ready to provide excellent service and design to our clients while solving any engineering challenge they may have."

"Extreme Legacy is an inventive engineering design and manufacturing firm," Enterkin stated. "We approach each project by partnering with our clients to anticipate their



needs and then develop new products and solutions to meet them."

Along with the announcement of Enterkin as CEO, Extreme Legacy shared the members of the company's leadership team. Key executives include **Kris Benken**, president; Phil Wilson, ICAE, chief development officer and president of strategic partnerships; **Alex Yamich**, P.E., chief engineering officer; **Ryan Brooks**, director of operations and **Marsha Hafstrom**, manager of parts and services.

"I'm proud of the work this team has done to get us here today. Extreme Legacy is a majority woman-owned company and as its CEO, I'm excited to be here at IAAPA Expo, immersed in the diversity of talent and experience that defines this industry," added Enterkin.



# Women INFLUENCE

## A view from the top...

As someone who has ridden more than 665 rollercoasters, **Elizabeth Ringas** is an ardent fan of the attractions industry. As the current president of American Coaster Enthusiasts (ACE), she continues to use her fandom as a professional volunteer and advocate for the industry and others like her, focused on keeping parks welcoming, safe spaces for all.

## Fandom leads to preservation

GLEN ALLEN, Va. — Superfan, passionate guest, fervent enthusiast, partner, advocate, kin. Those words come to mind when meeting Elizabeth Ringas. Now serving her second term as president of American Coaster Enthusiasts (ACE), Ringas' journey has evolved from a casual member to the focused leader of ACE. Today she helps preserve park landmarks and rides while working tirelessly to ensure others know ACE is supportive and here for all.

In 1998, Ringas was a newlywed living in Cincinnati, Ohio. After graduating from Duke University, she and her husband relocated to the Midwest and like most young couples were very career-focused. For fun, they would spend weekends at Kings Island. Because they hadn't yet built a circle of friends, visits to the park allowed them to tap into their shared love for roller coasters and theme parks.

"We loved Kings Island," Ringas remembered. "During many of our visits, we noticed we would often see the same people. It was just an observation, and we didn't think much of it."

However, a TV news story elevated that observation from casual to the start of a 26-year-long adventure.

"I was getting ready for work one morning and saw a story about ACE. The media was at Kings Island celebrating the 20th anniversary of The Beast and were interviewing members. I shouted, 'Those are my people.' I saw some of those same guests we would run into and recognize. We're each other's people; we just didn't know it yet. I set out to join."

Ringas quickly mailed in her application and eagerly awaited the news that she would become a member. She had only ever visited five amusement parks, including Kings Island. That number would expand as she took part in ACE events at regional

theme parks and built a social network with others who loved the rides, sights, sounds and thrills of a park.

Ringas' life continued to grow, and when her family relocated to Richmond, Virginia, she made the decision to put her career on hold to focus on her two young children. Once again, her family's social life focused on the local theme park, Kings Dominion. However, unlike in Ohio, ACE's Mid-Atlantic Region wasn't as established, and Ringas saw an opportunity. "We felt like a piece of our complete life was missing without our ACE community. I knew there were others like us in the area, others who sought connection through parks." She saw the chance to volunteer with ACE as a way to expand her personal and social connections and utilize professional skills and knowledge.

"I earned a master's degree in counseling, and my career had been particularly focused on assisting women. A few years later I was a stay-at-home mom who volunteered with a roller coaster club. It might look like none of that is connected. I knew I was a good listener. As a therapist, you must listen. I focused on listening to my fellow ACEers and the parks we would visit. As I planned regional ACE events with park teams, I began to ask them, 'What do you need from ACE? How can we support you in your job?' I wanted the parks to see ACE as a partner, not just an annual picnic group."

Ringas' involvement with ACE grew with her family. She expanded her role and became communications director for the 7,000-member all-volunteer organization. When her home became an empty nest, she began to serve as president. She is the fourth female president of the 46-year-old club. "There is something so special about ACE I wish more people would understand," Ringas shared. "The people. There

## Elizabeth Ringas American Coaster Enthusiasts (ACE) Glen Allen, Virginia



are no better people than our members. They are caring and will do anything for anyone at any time."

Member kindness is not a surprise though. "ACE is an extension of the amusement and attractions industry," she explained. "While people think we only care about the rides themselves, the fact is the park employees, the ride operators, the food services team — all of those dedicated passionate people make parks the welcoming memorable places they are. Of course, like-minded people are drawn to the parks. We are all united by our passion for this industry."

Today, Ringas travels with the ACE Executive Committee, visiting parks and meeting others to support the industry.

"Over the last 20 years, ACE has donated over \$400,000 to industry preservation," she said. "We want to help keep roller coasters rolling and support the destinations that bring joy to others. Those funds are from member dues and events. We believe in giving back to the industry that has given us so much."

Ringas also wants everyone to know that ACE is more than a hobby club. "ACE is a network. It is a safe,

welcoming network," she said. "ACE says it's okay to be a little different." She shares that message with current members and with potential new members. "We provide Safe Space Training for our volunteers," Ringas furthered. "The world we live in is diverse and dynamic and we want our members to know we welcome them as they are. We provide a safe place to have fun and a support system. Just like ACE did for me more than 29 years ago, we help others find their people, find their family."

Ringas said she is making her childhood dreams come true. "In a different way than the traditional climb up the career ladder, of course," she laughed. "I make tough decisions and must choose what is best for ACE today, tomorrow and beyond, all while living to my true heart. I work with an amazing community of volunteers, and I help them embrace their skills and use them to support an ACE project or initiative. I get to help others find themselves and encourage others to be as they are. Experiencing more than 665 roller coasters along that way? That's just the top of the lift hill."

—Susan Storey



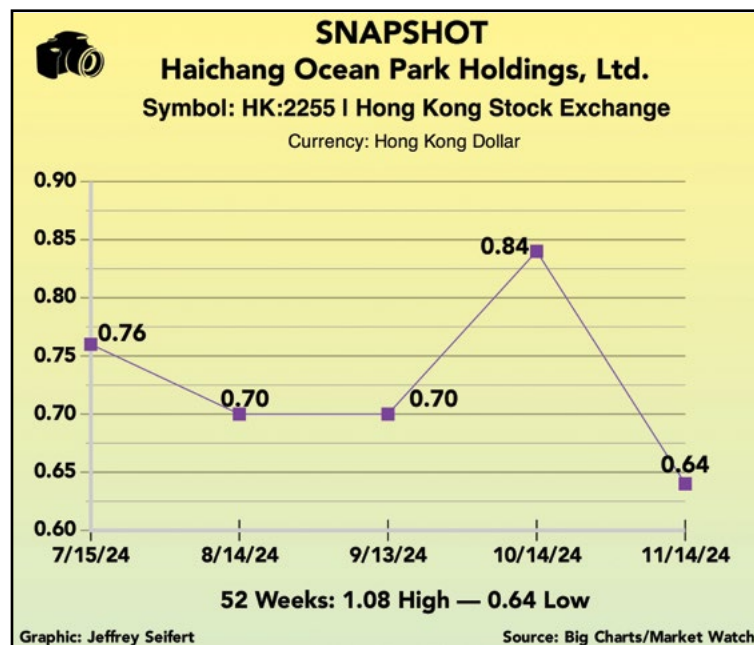
## MARKET WATCH

COMPANY	SYMBOL	MARKET	PRICE 11/14/24	HIGH 52-Week	LOW 52-Week
<b>PARKS AND ATTRACTIONS</b>					
The Blackstone Group	BX	NYSE	181.21	184.32	103.07
Bowlero Corp.	BOWL	NYSE	11.26	15.47	9.70
Comcast Corp./NBCUniversal Media	CMCSA	NASDAQ	43.48	47.11	36.43
Dave & Busters Entertainment, LLC	PLAY	NASDAQ	39.24	69.82	29.31
EPR Properties	EPR	NYSE	44.24	50.26	39.65
Falcon's Beyond	FBYD	NASDAQ	9.40	14.24	7.02
Fuji Kyoko Co., Ltd.	JP:9010	TYO	2418.00	4835.00	2314.00
Haichang Holdings Ltd.	HK:2255	SEHK	0.64	1.08	0.62
Leofoo Development Co.	TW:2705	TSEC	17.60	22.45	16.30
MGM Resorts International	MGM	NYSE	37.52	48.25	33.44
Parks America, Inc.	PRKA	OTC	0.41	0.61	0.23
Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ltd.	RCL	NYSE	233.01	238.10	102.77
Six Flags Entertainment Corp.	FUN	NYSE	46.55	58.70	35.93
Tivoli A/S	DK:TIV	CSE	680.00	770.00	668.00
United Parks & Resorts Inc.	PRKS	NYSE	58.75	60.36	44.72
The Walt Disney Company	DIS	NYSE	109.12	123.74	83.91
Warner Bros Discovery Inc.	WBD	NASDAQ	9.86	12.70	6.64
<b>SUPPLIERS/OTHERS</b>					
Brogent Technologies, Inc.	TW:5263	TSEC	155.50	205.50	108.50
Sansei Technologies, Inc.	TYO:6357	TYO	1430.00	1852.00	1092.00
Topgolf Callaway Brands	MODG	NYSE	8.40	16.89	8.24

Details and information available at [amusementtoday.com/stocks](https://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 11/11/24	Change from 1 year ago
East Coast	\$3.579	(\$0.641)
Midwest	\$3.504	(\$0.804)
Gulf Coast	\$3.170	(\$0.757)
Mountain	\$3.525	(\$0.831)
West Coast	\$3.757	(\$0.894)
California	\$4.666	(\$1.033)

## CURRENCY

On 11/15/24 \$1 USD =	
0.9484	EURO
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1.5456	AUD (Australian Dollar)
1.4019	CAD (Canadian Dollar)

## BUSINESS WATCH

## Disney reports its fourth quarter financials

BURBANK, Calif. — **The Walt Disney Company** reported earnings for its fourth quarter and full year ended September 28, 2024.

"This was a pivotal and successful year for The Walt Disney Company, and thanks to the significant progress we've made, we have emerged from a period of considerable challenges and disruption well positioned for growth and optimistic about our future," said **Robert A. Iger**, chief executive officer for The Walt Disney Company. "Our solid performance in the fiscal fourth quarter reflected the success of our strategic efforts to improve quality, innovation, efficiency and value creation. In Q4 we saw one of the best quarters in the history of our film studio, improved profitability in our streaming businesses, a record-breaking 60 Emmy Awards for the company, the continued power of live sports, and the unveiling of an impressive collection of new projects coming to our Experiences segment. As a result of our strategies and our focus on managing our businesses for both the near- and long-term, we are differentiating ourselves from traditional competitors, leveraging the deepest and broadest set of entertainment assets in the industry to drive attractive returns and further advance our goals."

An increase in operating income at the company's domestic parks and experiences reflected guest spending growth attributable to increases in per capita guest spending at Disney's theme parks and cruise line, lower sales of Disney Vacation Club units and higher costs primarily due to inflation, new guest offerings, increased technology spending and higher operations support costs, partially offset by the comparison to depreciation in the prior-year quarter related to the closure of Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser.

## United Parks &amp; Resorts shares third quarter

ORLANDO — **United Parks & Resorts Inc.** reported its financial results for the third quarter and first nine months of fiscal year 2024.

The company's attendance was 7.0 million guests, a decrease of approximately 0.1 million guests or 1.4% from the third quarter of 2023. Its total revenue was \$545.9 million, a decrease of \$2.3 million or 0.4% from the third quarter of 2023. The resulting net income was \$119.7 million, a decrease of \$3.9 million or 3.1% from the third quarter of 2023.

"We are pleased to report another quarter of solid financial results," said **Marc Swanson**, chief executive officer of United Parks & Resorts Inc. "Third quarter results were impacted by both a negative calendar shift and meaningfully worse weather, including Hurricane Debby in August and Hurricane Helene in September. The combined impact of the calendar shift and the meaningfully worse weather was approximately 320,000 guests, adjusting for these impacts, attendance would have increased approximately 3% compared to the prior year quarter, as we continue to see strong demand for our parks during normalized operating conditions and we are growing total revenue per capita. Our investments and strategies related to our in-park revenue areas continue to pay off as we again delivered record in-park per capita spending during the quarter which makes for 17 of the last 18 quarters of growth."

During its third quarter, the company repurchased 4.1 million shares for an aggregate total of approximately \$211.7 million, leaving approximately \$74.9 million remaining under the Share Repurchase Program as of September 30, 2024. Subsequent to September 30, 2024 through November 6, 2024, the company has repurchased an additional approximately 0.8 million shares for an aggregate total of approximately \$37.7 million.



# History in the making: a model for preserving the past at Iowa State Fair

**AT:** Mindy Williamson  
Special to Amusement Today

DES MOINES, Iowa — Whether it's the heart-pounding excitement of the midway, the irresistible aroma of fair food or the agricultural showcases that bring rural traditions to life, fairs, carnivals and amusement parks are about more than just entertainment — they're about connecting people to where they come from. The **Iowa State Fair**, known for its agricultural roots, thrilling rides and iconic food, is no exception. Beyond the hustle and bustle of the fairgrounds, there are two unique buildings where the fair's rich heritage is preserved: the **Iowa State Fair Museum Complex**. For employees and operators of fairs, carnivals and parks, this isn't just a museum — it's a testament to the enduring impact of these events and a source of inspiration for how people can preserve and pay tribute to each fair, park or carnival history.

## A walk-through history at the Iowa State Fair Museum Complex

Founded in 1854, the Iowa State Fair has grown to become one of the largest and most iconic state fairs in the country. Since 1987, its fairgrounds have been listed as a historic district on the **National Register of Historic Places**. At the heart of this history is the Iowa State Fair Museum Complex, a hidden gem at the fairgrounds. While it might require a bit of a walk, it's a journey worth making for any fair, park or carnival professional interested in how the past can shape your future.

Two distinct museums make up the complex, each offering a unique glimpse into the fair's evolution from its humble beginnings to the powerhouse it is today. In the stately, wraparound porch building (a former county pavilion), visitors can explore memorabilia, vintage fair posters, ribbons



Two distinct buildings (above left) make up the complex (l to r): the Ralph H. Deets Historical Museum and the Ronald and Margaret Kenyon Gallery. The museum is a great place to conduct interviews (above right) when covering the historical aspect of the 170-year-old fair. Children enjoy *Our Great State Fair*, a documentary produced in 2023 by Iowa PBS (below left). A mini carousel (below right) is featured in the Ronald and Margaret Kenyon Gallery. COURTESY IOWA STATE FAIR

and agricultural tools that highlight the deep-rooted traditions of Iowa. Visitors also find collections of quilts and 4-H awards — symbols of how fairs foster generations of competition and community spirit.

In 2005, the complex expanded with the opening of the **Ronald and Margaret Kenyon Gallery**, which added interactive exhibits and retail space. Here, guests can experience a range of fair legacies — from **Norma "Duffy" Lyon's** famous butter sculptures to historical midway rides, campground evolution and even grandstand concert memorabilia. There's also a livestock judging challenge and a revolving display of fair fashion that shows how events like ours have always been about innovation and creativity.

## Museums: more than just buildings

For those working behind the scenes at fairs, carnivals and parks, the Iowa State Fair museums are a reminder of the importance of preserving our shared stories. These exhibits aren't just for fairgoers; they are learning opportunities for all professionals in the industry. They show how fairs can not only entertain but also educate and engage visitors by preserving traditions and celebrating new additions at the same time. Whether one is manag-



ing rides, food stands or agricultural showcases, the museum complex reminds us that every part of a fair has its roots in history. From the evolution of fair rides to the changing styles of livestock shows and competitions, the fair's museums show how these elements have always been part of a larger, evolving narrative.

## Plan your visit — and be inspired

Open every day of the Iowa State Fair, the museums are staffed by dedicated volunteers, including historian **Ellen Hammond**, who has overseen these gems since 2021. With her expertise, the museums host tours, special events and continuing education programs in the off-season, offering the opportunity for the public and industry professionals the chance to dive deeper into the historical significance of their work. Hammond has also played a key role in launching an exhibition at the **Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery** in 2026,

which highlights the history of state fairs as part of America's 250th anniversary celebrations.

## The power of preserving fair histories

For employees of fairs, carnivals and amusement parks, the Iowa State Fair Museum Complex is more than just a stop on the fairgrounds — it's a place to reflect on how the industry has grown and evolved. It's a space where history comes alive through stories, artifacts and interactive exhibits, reminding visitors of the vital role fairs have played in shaping communities.

By learning from the past, we can continue to create lasting memories for future generations. Whether it's a first visit to the Iowa State Fair or a hundredth, a stop at the museums will leave guests inspired to celebrate and preserve the legacy of each fair or carnival, ensuring that history continues to be made with every new event and every new season.

• [iowastatefair.org](http://iowastatefair.org)

*Mindy Williamson has been the marketing director for the Iowa State Fair since 2015. However, Mindy's connections include being a former Bill Riley Talent Show participant, 4-H exhibitor, booth exhibitor and sponsor. Williamson has a background in nonprofit, government, and media relations, as well as event planning, advertising and marketing. She has a BS in BPMI from Iowa State University. Williamson also has certification in volunteer management and is a graduate of the Institute of Fair Management from the International Association of Fairs and Expos (IAFE). She is the incoming chair of the IAFE Marketing Committee, helping plan the IAFE Convention in Denver in 2025. Williamson loves the responsibility of helping millions of fairgoers make memories at the fair and enjoys building relationships with media from across the globe. The best part of the job is sharing the fabric of Iowa through the Iowa State Fair each August.*



# SAFETY, MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

► Disney's new Disability Access Service has negative impacts — page 49 / NAARSO registration open — page 50

## PACE Seminar trains more than 120 at Knoebels, in classrooms

AT: B. Derek Shaw

bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

BLOOMSBURG, Pa. — The annual ride safety education seminar offered by the Pennsylvania Amusement Parks and Attractions (PAPA) and the Pennsylvania State Showmen's Association (PSSA) took place from October 29 to November 1. The educational portion of the program was handled by members of the National Association of Amusement Ride Safety Officials (NAARSO). Known as the Parks and Carnival Education (PACE) seminar, there were 126 attendees, 98 from parks and 28 from shows and independent inspectors.

"Things went very well. This year we have right around 130 attendees, which is a little bit more than the average, but you have to understand that Knoebels sent a whole host of individuals,

which certainly helped our attendance numbers," said PACE Seminar Coordinator Gary Chubb.

Seminar classes were held at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. A full day of "hands-on" instruction took place at Knoebels Amusement Resort, Elysburg, Pennsylvania, where attendees were able to take an "up-close look" at a dozen rides and attractions. They included Merry Mixer (Garbrick), Downdraft (Battach), Galleon (Zamperla), Red Baron (Bradley and Kaye/Alan Herschell), Ribbit (Moser spring ride), Grand Carousel (Kramer Carousel Works, Carmel horses, Loeff frame), Twister (in house/Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters trains), Rock-O-Plane (Eyerly), Tumbling Timbers (SBF/Visa Group), Cosmotron (Wisdom custom Artic Circle), Tilt-A-Whirl



Seminar participants at Bloomsburg University take in one of the educational sessions (above). A Garbrick Merry Mixer was one of the rides attendees got to look over during the hands-on portion at Knoebels (below). COURTESY GARY CHUBB/PACE

(Selner) and Haunted Mansion (in-house dark ride/Pretzel cars).

Chubb was assisted by Registrar and Seminar Administration Managers Lisa and Jerry Bartlebaugh (Bartlebaugh Amusements); Assistant Seminar Coordinator Mike Funyak (DelGrosso's Park & Laguna Splash); Jeannie Reedy, Knoebels and Bloomsburg University Coordination; Dick Knoebel, sponsor procurement; Brian Knoebel, hands-on day and Knoebels coordination and Yvonne Brown (Amusement Ride Safety Division, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture), state paperwork and testing.

There were seven instructors for the four-day training. They were John Hartman, Wagner Consulting; Independent Inspector Joe Gallagher;



retired New York State Ride Safety Program Manager Ed LaSalle, Independent Inspector; Tom Jones, McGowan Allied Specialty Insurance, John Riggleman, retired from Universal Theme Parks; Joe Filoromo, supervisor, Amusement Ride Safety Division and Chubb with GC Amusement Consulting, LLC. Attendees were from seven states.

Participants represented a variety of amusement parks, traveling shows and inspectors. Portable traveling shows and independent inspectors included the Connecticut State Police, Russ Amusements, Bartlebaugh Amusements, Snyder's Attractions, Majestic Midways, Goodtime Amusements, Heritage Amusements,

► See PACE, page 50



Two PACE attendees go over Twister roller coaster train information with Justin Schiel of Knoebels. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

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## 12 great reasons to attend the 2025 AIMS International Safety Seminar

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2. Variety and diversity — no other seminar offers such a diverse range of classes.

3. Great opportunity to learn from industry experts and network with your peers!

4. The expanding Academy of Amusement Risk Management, Safety and Security (AARMSS) is back with a new curriculum. Apply now! Go to [aimsintl.org](http://aimsintl.org) for more information.

5. AIMS continues to partner with industry leaders — **Ellis & Associates** and **Intenational Ride Training** — to deliver fresh new content and hands-on experience at a local amusement park.

6. Networking opportunities — attracting more than 800 attend-

ees from across the industry: theme and amusement parks, water parks, carnivals, zoos, FECs, and more — attendees will learn from their peers and make connections they can use for years to come.

7. Returning in 2025 — Advanced Weld Inspection and Welder Certification! This training class will teach advanced methods of weld inspections per American Welding Society (AWS) requirements, and participants will have an opportunity to take a welder qualification test per AWS D1.3-18 Structural Sheet Steel requirements. Pass and receive an AWS Welder Qualification Record (WQR).

8. New for 2025 — Inflatable Accreditation. Gain a Trampoline and/or Inflatable accreditation with education and exam on these specialized attractions.

9. It's affordable! — Tuition is just \$849 (save \$100 through

December 14), with no requirement to be an AIMS International member. PLUS lunches, snacks, evening receptions, as well as a CEU certificate, are included in the price!

10. Apply for a Scholarship! — OABA offers four scholarships to OABA members who are first-time AIMS International Safety Seminar attendees. Visit [oaba.org/pageserver/scholarships](http://oaba.org/pageserver/scholarships) for more information.

11. Great opportunity to learn from industry experts and network with your peers!

12. Certification — opportunities to sit for any of the prestigious AIMS International certification exams will be available in person during the seminar, with review sessions available for those who feel the need for a little extra preparation. Exams are available in Spanish at the seminar and Virtual Spanish Track attendees will be able to take certification exams online the week after the seminar.

Did you notice numbers 3 and 11 are the same? That's because this is the best opportunity to meet directly with and learn from some of the top minds in the industry.

At the AIMS International Safety Seminar, everyone can choose classes that fit their needs, or (if preferred) there are specialized tracks to choose from Maintenance 1 & 2 and Inspection 1 & 2. Attendees may select courses from a variety of disciplines: operations, adventure attractions, aquatics and safety. Participants can talk with and hear directly from state regulators in courses taught by Authorities Having Jurisdictions (AHJs).

For more information about the 2025 AIMS International Safety Seminar, please email [info@aimsintl.org](mailto:info@aimsintl.org) or contact Eddie Kinder, seminar manager, at 972-757-5585.

—Amy Lowenstein,  
 AIMS International

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## ▶ PACE

Continued from page 48

Houghton Enterprises, Huey's Amusements, Double M Amusements, Bear Rock Junction, Edgie Designs, Swika-S Amusements, Adam Swika LLC, Drake Entertainment and Apex Entertainment.

On the amusement park side, they included participation by Knoebels, Hersheypark, Dorney Park, Kennywood, Idlewild, DelGrosso's and Bushkill.

Class instruction topics included hydraulics and pneumatics, ASTM F770, fun houses and dark rides, incident investigating issues, fire extinguishers, evacuation and weather, water park slides and play structures, NDT and thickness testing, comprehensive evaluation, signage, wire rope, basic OSHA, culture of safety, inspection tools, ride training, blocking, midway inspections,



Brady Petrovich with Knoebels, goes over proper maintenance and inspection procedures for an Eyerly Rock-O-Plane. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

documentation and inspection procedures and an inspector round table and other topics.

"It's a standard course. It's basic inspection information. We do go over a variety of things. One class that's relatively new in the last couple of years is PLC ladder logic, taught by John Hartman. That seems to be a very popular class," said Chubb.

Seminar sponsors

included *Amusement Today*, ARM USA, Great Coasters International, Haas & Wilkerson Insurance, International Rides Management (IRM Rides), McGowen Allied Specialty Insurance, Naughton Insurance, Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters, Sally Industries and Zamperla.

The 2025 PACE Ride Seminar will be held in late October, location TBD.

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# Recent changes to Disney's Disability Access Service reducing guest visits

ORLANDO — New research revealed during IAAPA Expo 2024 at the 2024 Themed Experiences and Attractions (TEA) Academic Symposium by Professor Barbara Burgess-Lefebvre of Robert Morris University and her daughter Johnna Lefebvre exposed significant impacts of recent changes to Disney's Disability Access Service (DAS).

The study, titled "Best Practices in Guest Assistance for Disabilities... When They Aren't," sheds light on the barriers disabled guests currently face, highlighting the exclusionary nature of the updated policies. The study is a followup on last year's "Best Practices in Guest Assistance at Theme Parks."

The study reveals a reality that while Disney's DAS once exemplified inclusivity, recent policy changes have drastically narrowed eligibility, excluding individuals with serious disabilities from needed accommodations. These changes — introduced in spring 2024 — have caused significant hardship for disabled guests and their families, prompting trip cancellations and damaging Disney's once-celebrated reputation as a leader in accessibility.

Key findings of the study included:

- 50% of guests denied DAS accommo-

dations indicated they would visit Disney less often, and 36% stated they would no longer visit at all.

- Nearly 90% of respondents reported heightened anxiety during the new DAS application process.

- Guests with various disabilities, previously accommodated, now find themselves ineligible under the new stricter guidelines.

The research also highlighted the perception that Disney's changes are financially motivated, pushing disabled guests toward expensive paid options like Premier and Individual Lightning Lanes, which were once unnecessary due to DAS accommodations.

The study was presented Friday, November 22, at IAAPA Expo 2024.

"This study and the fact that 86% of those denied DAS said they would visit Disney World less often or not at all proves that many who have been denied DAS were not 'cheating' or 'faking' but are simply disabled people who have had necessary accommodations taken away and can no longer safely visit Disney," stated **DAS Defenders**, a coalition of disability advocates and Disney fans.

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## Annual NAARSO Safety Seminar registration open

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The National Association of Amusement Ride Safety Officials (NAARSO) announced that registration for the 38th Annual Safety Seminar is now open. The seminar will take place from January 26 to 31, 2025, in Charlotte, North Carolina.

NAARSO, a non-profit organization committed to promoting safety within the amusement industry through the doctrine of "Safety Through Communication," is inviting industry professionals to register for this comprehensive event aimed at enhancing the safety and reliability of amusement rides and attractions.

Attendees will have the opportunity to learn from expert speakers and industry leaders about best practices in amusement ride safety.

Multiple networking opportunities will allow attendees to connect with peers, professionals and vendors from across the industry, fostering valuable relationships and collaborations.

Participants can enhance their qualifications with certification courses featuring specialized tracks, each with 40 hours of education and NAARSO certifications, with CEUs available.

In addition, attendees can gain practical knowledge by visiting Carowinds, including Carolina Harbor, where attendees will learn about the diverse needs for operations and inspections of various attractions with hands-on training.

Industry professionals are encouraged to mark their calendars for this enriching week dedicated to advancing safety practices within the amusement ride industry. Those who register now can secure their spot and take advantage of early bird rates.

NAARSO is dedicated to providing resources and education to amusement industry professionals, ensuring the safety and well-being of industry patrons.

• [naarso.com/safety-seminars](http://naarso.com/safety-seminars)


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At McGowan Allied, our experts simplify the process, ensuring you access to cutting-edge coverage and peace of mind. Beyond policies, we guide you through the intricacies of all coverages, ensuring your full understanding. Collaboratively, we equip your team for a safe and enjoyable guest experience.

### Unlock enhanced risk management with us:

- Overall cost reduction through use of our advanced loss control services.
- Free educational webinars and employee training.
- Dedicated to the Amusement Industry for over 40 years.



**Interested? Lets Talk.**  
McGowanAllied.com/connect  
140 Fountain Parkway N, Suite 570  
St. Petersburg, FL 33716  
727.547.3023





Double Heart

Opening in Asia in 2026



**FOOTPRINT**  
70 x 18 m  
229 x 59 ft



**LENGTH**  
325 m  
1066 ft



**MIN HEIGHT**  
120 cm / 48 in  
minimum



**CAPACITY**  
1 train: 660 pph  
2 trains: 975 pph



Family Thrill Launch

Opening in Europe in 2026



**FOOTPRINT**  
137 x 94 m  
449 x 308 ft



**LENGTH**  
670 m  
2198 ft



**MIN HEIGHT**  
105 cm / 42 in  
minimum



**CAPACITY**  
680 pph

# New thrills coming in 2026