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Digital Edition

More rides, increased numbers expected at 2025 IISF Trade Show

AT: Pam Sherborne

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GIBSONTON, Fla. — The 2025 International Independent Showmen's Foundation (IISF) 2025 Super Extravaganza and Trade Show is almost here, and planners believe the upcoming show will be one of the better ones.

Set for February 11 to 14, the IISF show is hosted on the grounds of the International Independent Showmen's Association (IISA) grounds in Gibsonton, Florida. The IISF is the fundraising arm of the association.

The IISF show pulls together one of the largest arrays of products pertaining to the amusement industry from around the world. Some of the exhibits include rides, food supplies and equipment, concession trailers, electrical supplies, insurance companies, novelty items, plush toys, jewelry and much more.

There are more than 300 different exhibits to browse. Early indicators for planners of the event include the increase in pre-registration numbers.

"Our contracts are going well for our indoor and outdoor spaces," said Teresa Rimes, trade show secretary. "It seems a lot of our vendors are coming back this year with rides, so there will be an ample number of rides on the grounds."

In addition, Rimes said, "Our numbers are up. I truly believe this year's show will be one of our better shows."

The official kickoff of the trade show comes on February 11, but activities begin on February 9 with the club's Superbowl Trade Show Kickoff



Planners for the 2025 IISF Super Extravaganza and Trade Show expect the outdoor grounds to show even more rides than last year when the show opens February 11 on the club grounds of the IISA. Last year's array included a Watkins Expo Wheel (above), Frederiksen Fun Slides (above right) and portable Hammered ride from Altitude Attractions (right). AT/B. DEREK SHAW



at 5 p.m., in the club bar area. This is a tradition for the IISA as is the activity the next day, February 10, with the Annual Big Hearted Jerry's Memorial Golf Tournament, beginning with an 11 a.m. shotgun start. The tournament is held at the Diamond Hill Golf Course.

The golf tournament is the only event scheduled away from the IISA club grounds.

The trade show begins on Tuesday, Feb. 11. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., all four days, February 11 to 14.

Rimes said they will again offer the ServSafe Certification Class each day of the Super Extravaganza and Trade Show. It will run 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, Feb. 11 to 14, in the

Upstairs Boardroom.

Late that afternoon is the exhibitor light show. Outside vendors are encouraged to show off their equipment by lighting the evening sky from 5 to 7 p.m. Participation is optional.

That night, Rimes said they would have the dueling pianos back in the club bar area.

"We did this last year, and it went very well. So, we are bringing it back," she said. "We will have live music in our bar area every night."

Events Wednesday, Feb. 12, will feature the trade show and the ServSafe Certification Class. Added to the agenda that day is the

► See IISF, page 6

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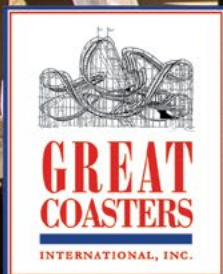
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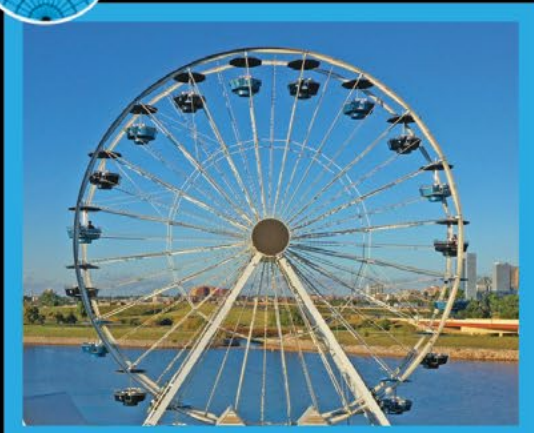
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AT NOTEBOOK: John W.C. Robinson, jrobinson@amusementtoday.com

FLINT'S VIEW: Bubba Flint

The value of the spectacle



Robinson

A recent visit to Orlando and Walt Disney World sticker shocked me when a pair of tickets for two days tallied well over \$700. Gate admission to the more local theme parks tends to camp right around \$100 or just over.

However, walking through the gates of a local fair or carnival trends toward the \$5-\$10 range, if not free. Once inside, some attractions are free, rides are paid for as desired and the midways are filled with one-of-a-kind sights and sounds that make the experience something to remember. Moreover, attending the fair or carnival often does not mean the expense of traveling out-of-state or even to a major city — these adventures in fun travel to the local communities ready to enjoy some smiles.

And while major theme parks invest millions of dollars in theming and making themselves bigger and faster than before, the carnival midways are loaded with history, unique attractions from yesterday side-by-side with modern marvels, as well as must-see shows and events that can only truly be experienced when these marvels travel to your town.

Ready to flip on a classic Eyerly Loop-O-Plane or go head-over-heels aboard a rare Chance Zipper? Want to feel the arena vibrate at the twist of the throttle of a motorcycle on the Wall of Death? Want to hear the crunch of metal as cars collide in a Demolition Derby? Feel like trying out the latest deep-fried treat or wacky ice cream flavor? Eager to witness ice sculptors honing their craft or talk to a 12-foot-tall Smokey The Bear? All of that and more is part of the "only here for a week" fun of the local fair or carnival!

Professional wrestling first grew in popularity thanks to the carnival's touring nature, featuring matches on the midways and touting popular stars of the day as they traveled to town for their only local appearance that year. The WWE parlayed this popularity and formula over time to a point where its TV rights for one show — one weekly chance to experience some of yesterday's carnival fun — sold to Netflix for \$5 billion!

Make no mistake, these affordable delights and spectacles of the outdoor midway have captured imaginations for generations and are some of the strongest — and more profitable — roots of family entertainment.

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



INDUSTRY VOICE: Greg Chiecko, *Outdoor Amusement Business Association*

Labor issue resolutions depend on all of us

It's a new year and our industry is still plagued with labor issues. The continued lack of certainty of a stable foreign guest worker program is taking its toll on our carnivals and events. Each year more individuals participate in the H-2B visa program forcing a lottery system to determine who gets workers. This practice is not sustainable for our industry, and we must make substantial changes to stabilize our labor force.

In the last Congress, we worked with lawmakers to allow our carnivals, food concessions and games to utilize the P4 visa category. This visa has been used for years by circus performers, sports athletes and entertainers. The program has no cap on it; clearly, we should have been in this visa program from day one. During the 119th Congress we will continue our push to enact these authorizing bills and we need everyone's help.



Chiecko

Last year we were able to secure 78 co-sponsors in the House. We need to expand this number to include as many congressional representatives as possible. The health and well-being of our industry is important to the many nonprofit organizations we serve, as well as our manufacturers and suppliers. We need everyone to contact their members of Congress and support our efforts.

At the time of this writing, we have not been assigned new bill numbers for the new Congress. However, we expect them to be in hand in early February and we will circulate the information through many channels to get the word out. When we do, please take a few minutes to reach out to your member of Congress. We will provide you with all the information you need to get the job done. The future of our industry depends on us all working together.

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2 MINUTE DRILL



AT: Tim Baldwin

Mary Talley, Talley's Amusements



Mary Talley, along with her husband **Tom**, have carried on a family tradition that dates generations. The family-owned operation — **Talley's Amusements** — has a reputation for beautiful equipment and professional maintenance. Expansions to the portfolio of the company's more than 60 rides were made in 2024 and 2025. On a personal level, her staff thinks she is "a hoot," and they are grateful that Talley has surrounded the team with "a great group of ladies." They will tell you that she doesn't do "anything halfway," and a word used to describe her is "vibrant."

Title: Owner

Number of years in the industry: lifetime.

Best thing about the industry: There's never a dull moment.

Favorite amusement ride: Megadrop.

If I weren't working in the amusement industry, I would be ... Political lobbyist or leading women empowerment seminars.

Biggest challenge facing our industry: H-2B.

The thing I like most about amusement/ water park season is ... carnivals don't have a "season."

A snack I always like to whip up for Super Bowl is ... Dorito nachos.

Oldest memory: I really have no idea.

Which would you prefer in front of the fireplace, hot chocolate or a good book?

Hot chocolate.

The celebrity I most admire is ...

Too many to name.

If given an extra hour in the day, I would use it ... to exercise.

It's Valentine's Day. Do you prefer a fancy dinner out or a cozy dinner at home? Neither.

Favorite television show as a kid: / Love Lucy — and still as an adult.

What factors go into you buying a new ride? Price, prototype. contracts.

Ice skating or roller skating? Roller skating.

The soup I like to make the most is ... hobo stew.

Describe your father in one word: Legend.

The last time I used a flashlight was ... December 10-ish.

Are you a bigger fan of the Dallas Cowboys or Texas Rangers? Neither.

The destination I've always wanted to see but haven't been yet is ... Oktoberfest in Germany.

The last time I spoke in public was ... January 3 at the Ohio Fair Convention.

THE INDUSTRY SEEN

Shock Wave celebrated with mural



ARLINGTON, Texas — After having its time in the spotlight of the recent ACE documentary, *The Legacy of Schwarzkopf*, Six Flags Over Texas's Shock Wave has been honored again. This time as a mural on the entry wall at a Walmart Neighborhood Market in South Arlington, Texas. The legendary Schwarzkopf coaster is highlighted in its current green paint scheme, along with its fellow icon the Intamin-built Oil Derrick observation tower and the RMC-built New Texas Giant. The record-setting Shock Wave opened on April 22, 1978, with its iconic back-to-back loops causing traffic on I-30 to come to a stop on its opening day as drivers watched in amazement as the coaster trains went upside down in the loops. AT/GARY SLADE

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IISF
Continued from page 1

H-2B Presentation and Discussion from 1 to 4 p.m., in the Carousel Pavilion.

This seminar session is conducted by **JKJ Workforce Agency** and the **Small Business Workforce Alliance**, and it is presented in an effort to continue the education about this important visa program and any changes that have been made. This session is free with trade show registration.

Wednesday evening is the Jamboree Museum Fundraiser from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. This is a fundraiser with a steak dinner for the IISA Carnival Museum, which is located across the road from the IISA club grounds.

Events for Thursday, Feb. 13, include, again, the trade show, the ServSafe Certification Class and a seminar on Custom

Prints presented by **Fare Foods**. This begins at 1 p.m., in the Carousel Pavilion.

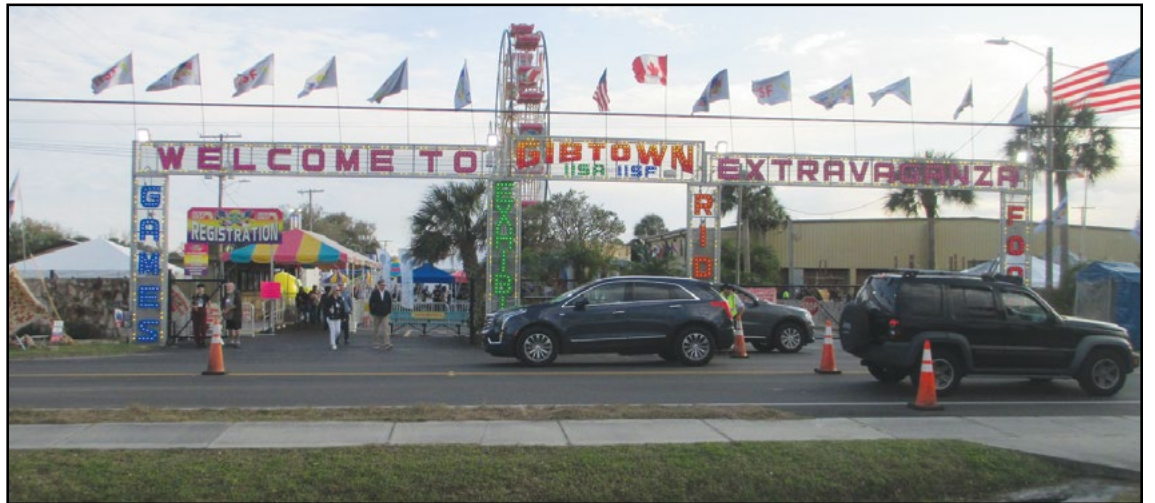
Audrey Poole and **Trampas Porter** from **Fare Foods** will show attendees different options for custom printing items for businesses or ways to update what a business may already have.

The Casino Night Shiner's Fundraiser is set for Thursday evening. It will run from 6 to 10 p.m.

Aside from the trade show and the ServSafe Certification Class, other events for Friday, Feb. 14, include the Showmen's Shrine Annual Meeting, beginning at 10 a.m. It will be held in the IISA meeting room.

The Cemetery Association Memorial Service will be held at noon with a mass to follow in the Carousel Pavilion.

At 1 p.m., also on that



The IISF 2025 Super Extravaganza and Trade Show is set to run February 11-14, 2025, on the club grounds of the International Independent Showman's Association in Riverview, Fla. AT/FILE

day, is the World Wide Past President's Fry located on the IISA club grounds.

The Showmen's League of America — St. Louis Member Meeting is set for Friday, also. It will begin at 2:30 p.m., in the main meeting room.

• gibtownshowmensclub.com

IISF Super Extravaganza and Trade Show at a glance

Sunday, Feb. 9, 5 p.m.,
Superbowl Trade Show Kickoff

Monday, Feb. 10, 11 a.m. start,
Big Hearted Jerry's Memorial Golf Tournament, Diamond Hill Golf Course

Tuesday, Feb. 11, through Friday, Feb. 14,
10 a.m.-5 p.m.,
Trade Show open

Tuesday, Feb. 11-Friday, Feb. 14, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.,
ServSafe Certification Class

Tuesday night, Feb. 11,
dualing pianos, club bar area

Wednesday, Feb. 12, 1-4 p.m.,
JKJ Workforce Agency
and Small Business Workforce Alliance,
seminar on H-2B Visa

Wednesday, Feb. 12, 5:30-8:30 p.m.,
Jamboree Museum Fundraiser

Thursday, Feb. 13, 1 p.m.,
Custom Prints seminar by Fare Foods

Thursday, Feb. 13, 6-11 p.m.,
Casino Night Shiner's Fundraiser

Friday, Feb. 14, 10 a.m.,
Showmen's Shrine Annual Meeting

Friday, Feb. 14,
Cemetery Association Memorial Service,
12 noon, with mass to follow

Friday, Feb. 14, 1 p.m.,
World Wide Past President's Fry

Friday, Feb. 14, 2:30 p.m.,
Showmen's League of America —
St. Louis Member Meeting.

(With the exception of Monday's golf tournament, all events held on the IISA club grounds)

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50% Off Plush	1003-1004	Hayes Specialties Corp.	303-306
5centRide	602	Hi Striker Carnival Corp.	714
Action Lighting Inc.	609	Honest Al Mfg.	Outside Space
American Inflates LLL dba Inflataking	Outside Space	IGPM Group	424-426
Amusement Devices & Mfg. llc	Outside Space	Imex Model Company Inc.	625-626
Amusement Entertainment Risk Insurance	727-728	Indiana Ticket Company	722-723
Amusement Today	601	Intercard Inc.	923
Audio Innovators Inc.	725-726	JKJ Workforce Agency, Inc.	830/930
BJ Toy Company, Inc.	810-816	Jung-Max Rides S.R.O.	Outside Space
B. Barton & Sons Intl Jewelry	301	Kahr.us Circuits	712
Backyard Canvas and Signs, Inc.	Outside Space	Knight Equipment Company Inc.	Slab D
Battech Ent. Llc	Outside Space	Kolmax-Plus, S.R.O.	Outside Space
Ben's Soft Pretzels	Outside Space	Kotila Spine & Join	409
Berk Concession Supply	410-412	Lamberink Ferris Wheels	Outside Space
Bertazon 3B S.R.L.	826-828	Lifetime Products Group Inc.	Outside Space
Best Toy Ltd. Llc	1018-1020	LJM & Associates Inc.	Non-Exhibiting Supplier
Bill's Lemonade	715	LKQ / Keystone Automotive	820-821
Bob's Space Racers, Inc.	Outside Space	Luna-Park Machinery S.R.O.	Outside Space
Burton & Company, P.A.	Non-Exhibiting Supplier	Magic Money	413-414/513-514
Cadillac Freight Enterprises LLC	Outside Space	Matt's Web Design	Breezeway Space
Caravan Softtoys/Big T Toys	318-325	McGowan Allied Specialty Insurance	403/503
CarnivalWarehouse.com	Breezeway Space	Midway Tents	Outside Space
Cavallaro Concessions	Outside Space	Moser's Rides S.R.L.	711
CCA/Custom Change Aprons	524-526	OA Finance, Llc	718
CDS Concessions	Outside Space	Peek-A-Boo Toys Ltd.	326-331
Central FL Canvas llc	610	Powersource Transportation Inc.	Non-Exhibiting Supplier
Chester Built Trailers Ltd.	Outside Space	Preston & Barbieri SRL	1023
Chestnut Identity Apparel Inc.	611-616	R2M2 Energy Solutions	Non-Exhibiting Supplier
Classic Toy Co., Inc.	703-710	Rapsure Concession Trailers	Outside Space
CMD Enterprises llc	627-628	Recreation By Design	Outside Space
Concession Mall	822	Red Bone Products, Inc.	1021-1022
Dalton Kid Rides Rebuilders Inc.	Outside Space	Retro Refurbishing	Slab C
Derby Industries	823	Rhode Island Novelty	504-507/603-607
Designs In Motion	819	Rides USA LLC	Outside Space
Dills Enterprises LLC dba Uniglide Comp	Outside Space	Rides 4 U, Inc.	Outside Space
Eli Bridge Co.	518-519	RM Trailer Ltd.	409
Equipment Solutions International	Outside Space	Rocken Graphics	Outside Space
Escapade	508-512	Russell Dean Foods LLC	Outside Space
Fabbri Group	724	Safe Strap Company LLC	Non-Exhibiting Supplier
Fare Foods Corporation	818	Sartori Rides SRL	405
Fields Consulting Group Inc.	713	Schantz Manufacturing	Outside Space
Fiesta	914-916	Showmen Supplies Inc.	Outside Space
Food Concession Signs	918-921	Soda Parts Express Inc./Midway Stainless	826-828
Forever Bunhouses	Outside Space	Space Craft Mfg., Inc.	Outside Space
Frederiksen Industries, Inc.	Outside Space	Specialty Insurance Ltd	415-416
Fun & Fun Toys, Inc.	621-624	Sterling Jewelers	1001-1002
Fun Tagg	419-420	Tap N Go / Price Chopper Inc.	824-825
Funtastic Entertainment	922	Technical Park S.R.L.	408
Galaxy Amusement Sales	Outside Space	Tig Artistics, LLC	Outside Space
Gautier Trailer Company	Outside Space	Toy Factory, LLC	924-928/1024-1028
Glitz N Glamour Custom Bling	Slab D	Triangle Poster & Printing Co.	630/730
Gloworks Imports, Inc.	1014-1016	Utility Body Werks/The RV Factory/CRV	Outside Space
Goffa International Corp.	719-721	Wadkins Expo Wheel	Outside Space
Gold Medal Products Co.	421-423/521-523	Waterloo Tent & Tarp Co., Inc.	Non-Exhibiting Supplier
Gosetto S.R.L.	701	Waymatic, Inc.	Outside Space
Gulf Coast Eco Trikes	Outside Space	WhirleyDrinkWorks!	515-516
Haas & Wilkerson Insurance	618-620	WorldRide Service & Supply Inc.	Outside Space



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OABA to be on hand with activities during IISF trade show week

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

TAMPA, Fla. — Members of the **Outdoor Amusement Business Association** will be visiting with each other as well as mingling with those at the **International Independent Showmen's Foundation (IISF) 2025 Super Extravaganza and Trade Show** when the two mobile industry organizations meet at the same time Feb. 11 to 14, in Gibsonton, Florida, at the club grounds of the International Independent Showmen's Association (IISA) club grounds. The IISF is the fundraising arm for the IISA.

The OABA activities will include the Thursday, Feb. 13, Top Golf fundraiser, which benefits the H-2B Visa Program. The money raised will help support lobbyists and attorneys fighting on



the outdoor industry's behalf for this program.

"Labor, or lack thereof, continues to be the largest challenge to our industry," said **Greg Chiecko**, OABA president. "We will continue our efforts in the new 119th Congress to push for our P4 Visa category. We did well last year by gaining 78 co-sponsors for our CARE Act. We really need everyone in the industry, carnivals, fairs and concessions to speak with Congressional representatives to support the bill."

Chiecko expected to have bill numbers by the time of OABA's Florida Week in Tampa.

"We will continue to work with our sister

organizations, the International Association of Fairs and Expositions and NICA, to formulate a stronger industry for all," he said.

Chiecko said he is hopeful to get the labor issues resolved.

"We have many other pressing issues like DOT regulations, amusement regulations and insurance costs that we need to address," he said. "We still address them but need to be more proactive than reactive."

Chiecko said the increasing cost of insurance is currently weighing on many businesses' minds. He said one way to address the rising costs would be for "fairs and carnivals to engage in more specific liability language by using better indemnification clauses and hold harmless agreements."

"These will be mutually beneficial to all

parties involved," he said.

But even with these challenges facing the industry, Chiecko expects the Florida Week in Tampa to be uplifting. OABA members will visit the IISF Super Extravaganza and Trade Show and take part in other activities on the grounds.

The OABA also will have some of its own activities. The OABA Hall of Fame Ceremony is set for 4:30 to 6 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 12, at the IISA Carnival Museum. It will be followed by a cocktail party inside the Carousel Pavilion on the IISA club grounds.

Hall of Fame Awards this year will go to **Danny Huston** from **North American Midway Entertainment (NAME)** and **Debbie Powers** of **Powers Great American Midways**. The Pioneer Award will go to **James Judkins** of **JKJ Workforce Agency**.

2025 OABA Award winners

2025 OABA Hall of Fame Awards:

Danny Huston from **North American Midway Entertainment**

Debbie Powers of **Powers Great American Midways**.

The Pioneer Award:

James Judkins of **JKJ Workforce Agency**.

Friday evening, Feb. 14, is the OABA Annual Meeting. It is set to be held at the **Sheraton Tampa Hotel**, Tampa, Florida. At that meeting, the changing of the gavel ceremony will take place.

Ben Pickett, **Ray Cammack Shows**, will turn over the chairship to **Blake Huston** of **NAME** for 2025.

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

PARKS, FAIRS & ATTRACTIONS

► EnterTrainment Junction closes permanently — page 20 / Gulf State Fair enjoys great attendance — page 23

New Netherlands' indoor theme park Bommelwereld underway

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

GROENLO, Gelderland, Netherlands — Near the border of Germany, a new indoor theme park is under construction set for an October opening. It is called **Bommelwereld** and is the brainchild of **Edwin Bomers**, owner of **Marveld Recreatie**.

The park caters to multiple generations as many people in the region grew up reading the stories of Olivier B. Bommel (a bear) through comics written by **Marten Toonder**. The character was created in the 1940s.

“Marten Toonder’s Dutch heritage deserves this, and we are happy to contribute to it,” said Bomers.

The park was designed by **Jora Vision**.

“The most interesting part is that we could work with so much material,” said **Matthijs de Graff**, marketing coordinator, Jora Vision. “The IP owner gave us a cartload of images, pictures, drawings and sketches we could use as inspiration. Still, sometimes a building that we wanted to bring to life in the park was only drawn once or twice. We had to create a whole three-dimensional building from these drawings. And we also have a big following to gratify; there still is a magazine publication and a very dedicated following of Bommel’s original author.

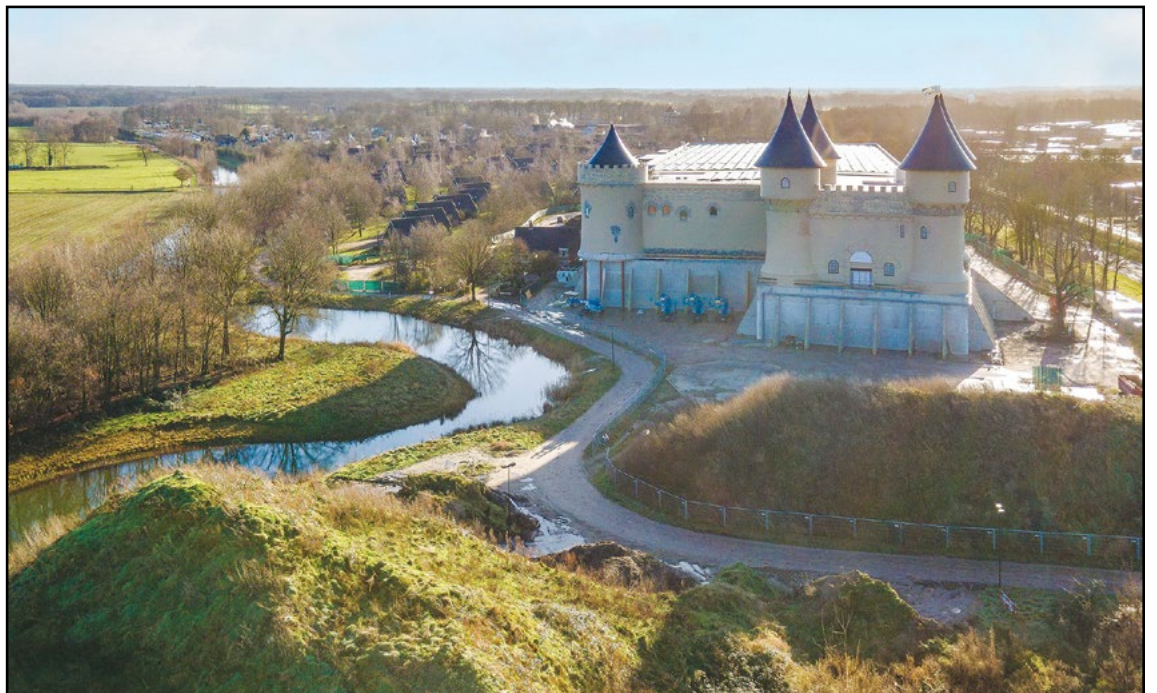


The above overview shows the different areas of the indoor facility. As construction continues, the castle exterior (below) already makes a striking presence to observers. COURTESY JORA VISION, BOMMELWERELD

This fan club has mentioned multiple times they are very happy with our work, as has the IP owner. This might be the most rewarding part of the job: that we can captivate new audiences while delighting the existing fans too.”

The Bommelstein Castle entrance is based on the building from the comic strips, the spires of which reach 69 feet tall. It will house a theater to acclimate visitors who may not be familiar with the stories of Bommel Bear and the

► See INDOOR, page 11



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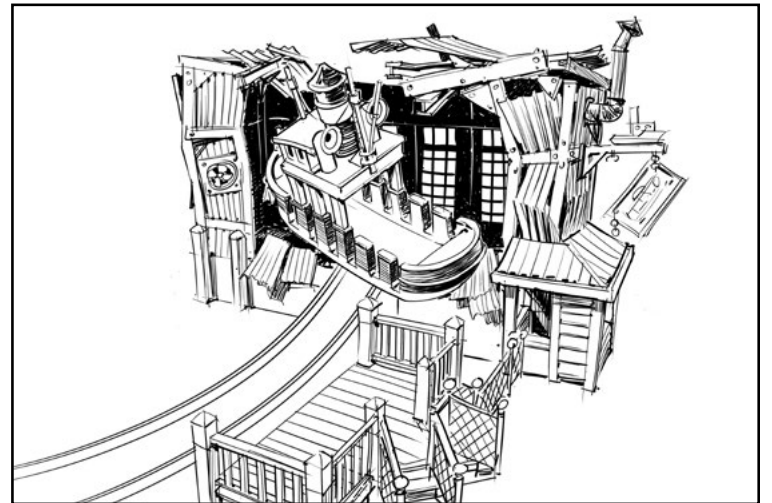
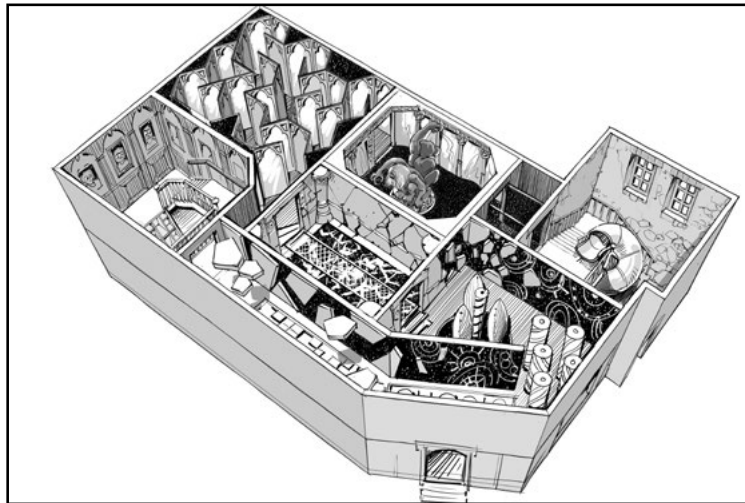
► **INDOOR**

Continued from page 9

various characters. Another entrance into the park is from a three-lane slide supplied by **Metallbau Emmeln**. It is 105 feet long.

The closest area upon entry into the park is a beautiful garden area. Within the foliage is an automobile ride, also provided by **Metallbau Emmeln**. It will sport six, four-passenger vehicles. Also in this land is a Go Go Bounce from **Zamperla** stylized to fish.

“For me, this Go Go Bounce 6.4 is one of the most beautiful designs we’ve created for a Go Go Bounce ride, both in terms of shape and colors — it’s incredibly fun and playful,” said **Enrico Patechi**, creative design manager, **Zamperla**. “Collaborating with **Jora Vision**, one of the leading design companies in Europe, was a fantastic experience. This project allowed us to showcase the



The **Gosetto** fun house is in two stories, with the top floor shown above left. **Zamperla's Rockin' Tug** is themed to look like it is crashing into the dock (above right). COURTESY JORA VISION

full mastery of our artisans, from modeling to fiberglass molding and decoration, as the final piece perfectly reflects the original concept created by the design company.”

The village area, **Rommeldam**, is at the heart of the park and will have a double-decker carousel as a central fixture and a bumper car ride, both from **Bertazzon**. Also in this section of the facility is a two-story fun house

from **Gosetto** themed to an evil wizard. It will feature a pre-show and 16 tricks and effects. Next to the fun house is a children’s play area from **Eli Play**.

“The [attraction] was a close collaboration between **Gosetto** for the building structure and tricks,” said **Lisa Gosetto**, CEO. “Together it was a great team effort with many different face-to-face and Zoom meetings, but in our opinion, it led to a great ride

that will tell a great story of the characters within the storyline of the park.”

The Harbor appropriately has water-themed attractions. A **Zamperla Rocking Tug** cleverly looks like it crashes into a building as it sways upon its track. A **Sunkid** tower ride and a **Zierer** drop tower are themed to cranes.

“Being Dutch, this project is meaningful to me,” **Jeroen Nijpels**, area sales manager, **Zierer**, told

Amusement Today. “I can remember it since I was a child, and it is very exciting to see that IP brought to life — and kind of brought back for another generation. We were involved in the early stages, and we are proud of that. It’s shaping up nicely.”

“After first talks in summer 2022, we are supplying and installing a **Sunkid Tower**, once again with another magnificent

► See **INDOOR**, page 12



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INDOOR

Continued from page 11

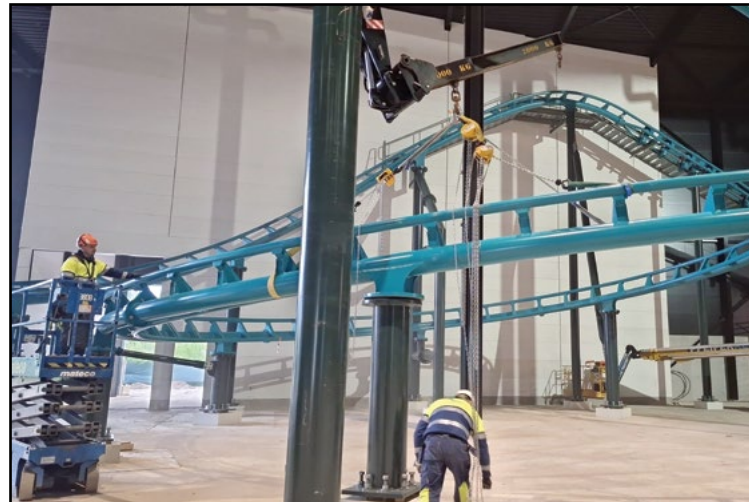
design,” said **Johannes Wiedorfer**, marketing, Sunkid. “This time, the theming shows a crane with a cab and an imaginary cargo next to the installation. The unique combination of an interactive climbing tower and vantage platform at a small footprint offers a special kind of enjoyment for the whole family. The seat units can be pulled up by the rope easily. At the same time, the tower will rotate slowly around its own axis, enabling passengers to see Bommelwereld from a 360-degree perspective from above.”

Also in the Harbor, a Metallbau Emmeln family ride places riders inside four-passenger ducks. A mini flume from **abc rides** of Switzerland continues the water theme. It will feature dark ride scenes during the experience.

“I like the level of detail that Jora Vision, the master planner and designer of this project, has put into this. That applies to our ride systems as well — the Mini Flume and the Crazy Cars,” said **Johan Forsbergh**, sales manager, abc rides. “From a ride suppliers’ point of view, we have had a very good time working together with the construction company of Bommelwereld. All the credit for the smooth running of construction goes to them.”

Nearby are a Zamperla dragon-themed Bounce Around stylized after one of the characters, as well as a small balloon wheel and a Mini Jet.

“It’s a wonderful opportunity to be part of such a unique and inspiring project,” said **Charles De Bruyne**, sales manager EU, Zamperla. “We’re excited to see our rides come to life in Bommelwereld, and it’s a true honor to contribute to what will surely be an unforgettable experience for future visitors.”



The shiny new coaster from Vekoma will have theming and other rides placed within its curves and spirals. COURTESY OMROEP GELDERLAND

“Our focus has always been on creating an immersive, engaging space, and it’s rewarding to see how well everything has come together,” added Patchi. “Our company takes pride in designing attractions that offer shared experiences for the whole family. By combining playful designs, vibrant colors and engaging themes, we ensure our rides are enjoyable for guests of all ages. Our collaboration in this project specifically brings a whimsical, child-friendly element while maintaining artistic quality that resonates with parents as well.”

Circus Krimp is a rotating flat ride by abc rides. And a swing ride from Bertazzon offers more spinning fun.

One of the first rides to complete construction was a family roller coaster from **Vekoma**. Standing at 41 feet in height, the coaster will zip families over 843 feet of track at 28 mph. The train curves and winds through thematic mountains, creating an experience made more exhilarating by the rocky theming.

“We have partnered with Jora Vision and Bommelwereld to create an exciting new indoor coaster experience and take great pride in having this indoor family coaster opening in our home country,” said **Carin Davits**, marketing, Vekoma. “This innovative ride is specifically designed to offer the entire family an unforgettable and thrill-

ing adventure, with a minimum height requirement of 95 centimeters ensuring that even younger guests can join in the fun! The coaster’s unique layout features extended columns, allowing visitors to walk beneath the majority of the ride and witness the action from a captivating perspective. To further enhance the experience, the curves are strategically designed to place other attractions in the center. This creates a dynamic and engaging environment as the coaster zigzags through the indoor space, offering guests multiple vantage points to enjoy the ride.”

Hoping to become a major Dutch tourist destination, management is projecting 100,000 visitors annually. A target date of October 1 has been set. With a hotel, a pool and sports and catering facilities, the year-round component of the theme park benefits the vacation complex owned by Marveld Recreatie.

Bommerlwereld will soon also offer a conference center, a large theater and space for the Bommel Museum.

“Bommelwereld is more than just an amusement park; it’s a celebration of Dutch cultural heritage,” said Bomers. “We’re excited to offer a year-round destination where families can create lasting memories while immersing themselves in the charming world of Olivier B. Bommel.”

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Universal Studios to retire Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit after 15 years

AT: David Fake
dfake@amusementtoday.com

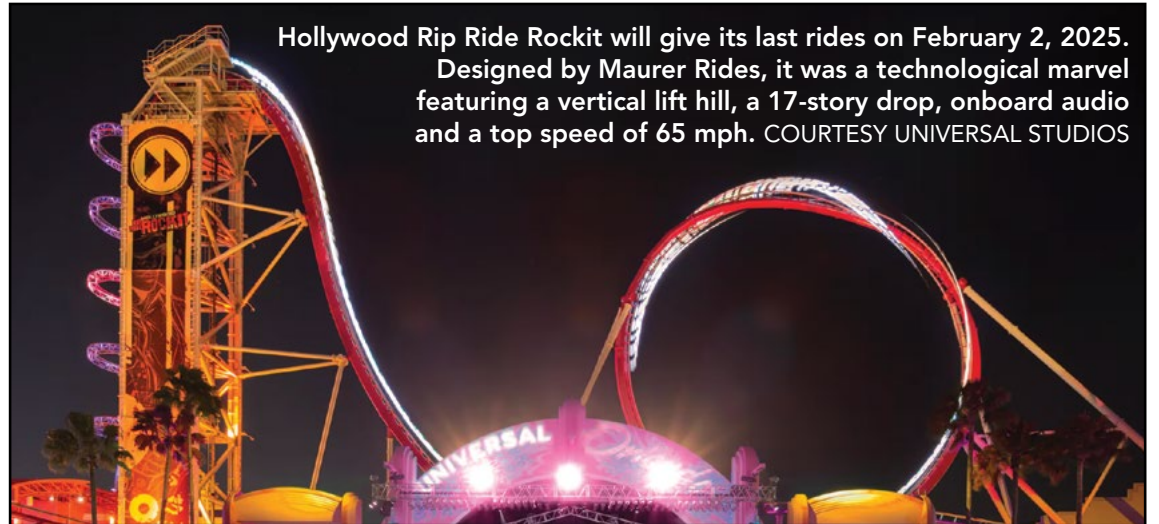
ORLANDO — Universal Studios Florida has confirmed the closure of its iconic Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit roller coaster, marking the end of a 15-year run for one of the park's most ambitious attractions. The announcement follows weeks of speculation triggered by the filing of demolition permits in late 2024, which hinted at significant changes on the horizon for the park.

The demolition permits filed were labeled as the "demolition of an existing structure" within Universal Studios Florida. The documents did not explicitly name Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit, but the location details strongly indicated its inclusion. Enthusiasts and industry professionals immediately began speculating about the future of the ride and what might replace it. On January 10, 2025, Universal confirmed that the roller coaster would close permanently in



early September 2025. The announcement came without details about a replacement, but Universal's statement promised "exciting new experiences" to come.

Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit opened on August 19, 2009, as a groundbreaking addition to Universal Studios Florida. Designed by Maurer Rides, the coaster was a technological marvel, featuring a vertical lift hill, a 17-story drop, and a top speed of 65 mph. Its unique non-inverting loop, known as a "tangent loop," became an



Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit will give its last rides on February 2, 2025. Designed by Maurer Rides, it was a technological marvel featuring a vertical lift hill, a 17-story drop, onboard audio and a top speed of 65 mph. COURTESY UNIVERSAL STUDIOS

instantly recognizable feature of the park's skyline.

One of the ride's most innovative elements was its onboard music and lighting system, which allowed riders to select their own soundtrack from a playlist of five music genres. From pop to country to hard rock, the system created a personalized experience for each guest. Hardcore fans discovered a secret playlist with hidden tracks accessed through specific combinations on the ride's control screen, fostering a loyal following and

adding a layer of mystique to the attraction. However, in recent years, Universal pared back the onboard playlist, removing some tracks and streamlining the selection, which left fans disappointed. The move was seen as part of broader cost-cutting measures and signaled the ride's gradual decline in prominence within the park.

Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit was also known for its frequent stop-and-start action, a result of the ride's unique design and operational

goals. Maurer Rides included multiple block brakes throughout the track, a feature designed to maximize the ride's capacity and meet Universal's request for a high hourly throughput. The additional block brakes allowed more trains to run simultaneously, reducing wait times but often interrupted the ride's pacing. Guests occasionally experienced unexpected full stops on mid-course brakes, which some found jarring and

► See ROCKIT, page 16

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Kentucky Kingdom announces new rides, family-themed land

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — **Kentucky Kingdom Theme and Water Park** has announced the addition of three new rides expected to debut in May as the 2025 season opens.

The new rides will be located inside an all-new, family-themed land, which will focus on celebrating the beauty and spirit of the Bluegrass State with a Kentucky twist for the park located in Louisville.

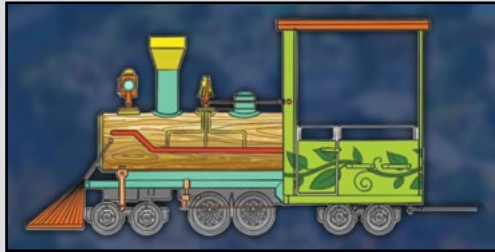
"As a family-centered park, we're dedicated to creating spaces that bring loved ones together, and this new land is our way of celebrating our Kentucky roots while offering exciting new experiences for our guests," said **Sarah Worrell**, Kentucky Kingdom general manager, in a release announcing the plans.

Park officials plan to announce further information on the new rides soon. But for now, they are saying they will have a train ride, a bird ride and a squirrel ride.

The new land also will feature 10 re-themed rides, a brand-new 4,800-square-foot playground and two reimagined dining locations.

The new land and its components represent \$11 million out of the \$25 million total investment the park will make over the next two seasons.

—Pam Sherborne



Kentucky Kingdom released the above sketches teasing the new rides opening this spring. COURTESY KENTUCKY KINGDOM

►ROCKIT

Continued from page 14

others saw as part of the ride's quirky character. Over time, this feature became a source of operational challenges and contributed to the perception of the ride as rough or inconsistent. Yet, the ride remained popular with guests, as evidenced by its wait times.

Despite its popularity, Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit faced criticism over the years for frequent technical issues, uncomfortable restraints, and interruptions caused by its block brake system. Its complex onboard audio system and unique lift hill design also presented maintenance challenges.

The coaster's closure fits into a broader trend of theme parks retiring aging attractions in favor of newer, more technologically advanced experiences. Universal Studios Florida has not officially announced what will replace Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit, but industry speculation points to a possible themed coaster.

Some believe the site may

be used for a *Fast & Furious*-themed roller coaster, building on Universal's history of incorporating major film IPs into its attractions. **Universal Studios Hollywood** is currently constructing an **Intamin**-designed launch coaster themed to the franchise.

Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit will be remembered as a bold experiment in blending music and thrill rides. Its secret playlist and customizable soundtracks gave guests a level of control that was unprecedented at the time. Its operational quirks and iconic design made it both a favorite for thrill seekers and a challenge for park operators. As the park looks to the future, Universal Studios Florida bids farewell to an attraction that left a lasting mark on its skyline and its guests' memories.

For fans and industry professionals alike, the retirement of Hollywood Rip Ride Rockit represents not just the end of an era, but proof of Universal's ongoing commitment to innovation and reinvention.

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Innovative Attraction Management (IAM), in Windermere, Florida, a leading provider of creative management services and strategic growth solutions for the entertainment and leisure industry, announced through a news release last month its acquisition of **Diggerland USA** in West Berlin, New Jersey, a theme park where guests can operate real construction equipment in a family-friendly environment.

This acquisition marks a significant milestone in IAM's expansion strategy, reinforcing its commitment to offering exceptional experiences for visitors of all ages.

Diggerland USA offers a thrilling and hands-on adventure with attractions that allow guests to operate diggers, backhoes and other heavy machinery under the supervision of trained staff.

The acquisition will enable IAM to leverage its expertise in attraction management and operational efficiencies to further develop and grow Diggerland USA while preserving the park's core value.

The lease that enables **California's Great America** in Santa Clara, amusement park to operate at its long-time South Bay site could be terminated in just over three years from now, public records show, according to a story reported online by *The Mercury News*.

The news story stated: "Real estate company **Prologis** could terminate the lease its affiliate has provided to California's Great America for the land beneath the iconic theme park as soon as June 30, 2028, documents filed on Jan. 6 with



the Santa Clara County Recorder's Office show."

If that happens, Great America may have to halt operations by no later than mid-2028. In 2022, a Prologis affiliate paid \$310 million for 112.6 acres at 1 Great America Parkway, where the theme park has operated for decades.

As part of the deal, Prologis agreed to lease back to **Cedar Fair**, the amusement park's operator and owner, the land the Prologis unit had just bought. In July 2024, Cedar Fair and **Six Flags Entertainment** completed a "merger of equals."

Prologis and Cedar Fair completed the updated lease agreement on Dec. 31, 2024, county documents show, the news story stated. At the point the initial term of the lease expires in mid-2028, the amusement park operator could exercise an option to extend the lease for one five-year period.

A timeline of any movement has not been set.

Workers are putting the finishing touches on the new **Peppa Pig Theme Park** in North Richland Hills, Texas. The park, which will feature a family-friendly roller coaster, a balloon ride and a drop ride, is expected to open on March 1.

The park also will have interactive attractions, shows and more from the world of the popular British TV show that's geared toward preschoolers.

Merlin Entertainments is the owner of the park. It opened the first Peppa Pig Theme Park in the U.S. in Central Florida in 2022.

Bumper Cars on Ice has returned to the **Bank of America Winter Village** at Bryant Park in Manhattan, NYC. It started on January 10 and will run through March 1, according to a story on yahoo.com.

The rides are 10 minutes long on a first-come, first-served basis within your designated booking window. Participants must be seven years and older and at least 36 inches in height.

Blue Man Group is ending long-running productions in New York and Chicago, but the new show will go on in Orlando, officials say. *The Orlando Sentinel* reported that a new 578-seat theater at **Icon Park**, an International Drive entertainment complex, is planned for a fresh Blue Man offering. The addition was announced in June, a groundbreaking event was held in September and an opening night is scheduled for April 3.

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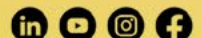
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EnterTrainment Junction closes permanently, displays will live on

AT: Pam Sherborne

psherborne@amusementtoday.com

WEST CHESTER, Ohio — Former **EnterTrainment Junction** General Manager **Bill Balfour** was wrapping up the liquidation sale at the entertainment center's site in West Chester, Ohio, last month. The center's last day was January 5, and the sale ran from January 11 to 26.

However, Balfour, who worked alongside the center's owner **Don Oeter** for 16 years, was glad to report that most of EnterTrainment's trains and displays had already been sold to two different businesses, which planned to continue to exhibit them so a whole new set of guests can enjoy them.

"We've loved making people smile over the years, and we are excited that our stuff has moved where people can continue to enjoy it," Balfour said.

Traintastic, a nonprofit museum in Gulfport, Mississippi, bought the components from the center's kiddie play area and its American Railroad Museum, an interactive 5,000-square-foot museum.

Firecrown, a publisher of



EnterTrainment Junction's main attractions included a 25,000-square-foot train layout, the Thomas Museum, the Thomas Outdoor Train and Neil Young's Lionel train, as well as an interactive 5,000-square-foot museum and kiddie play area. COURTESY ENTERTRAINMENT JUNCTION

more than 50 transportation magazines among other assets, purchased the 25,000-square-foot train layout, the Thomas Museum, the Thomas Outdoor Train and Neil Young's Lionel train display.

This company has plans to open a new museum in Chattanooga, Tennessee, which has been tentatively named the **Motion Museum**, as it will include all types of transportation exhibits.

The hope is to open that museum by the end of 2025 or in early 2026. **Craig Fuller** is the CEO and founder of Firecrown.

Prior to EnterTrainment Junction, Oeter was a successful Cincinnati businessman. He had a business, **Watson's Pools and Spas**, but sold that business in hopes of opening EnterTrainment Junction as he was also a train enthusiast.

"I was working at **Kings Island** in Mason, Ohio," Balfour said. "I was brought on because of my attractions background."

According to information on EnterTrainment Junction's website, Oeter's dream for the entertainment center was to "make it about the history of railroading, have it be interactive and for all ages."

The information states: "In early 2007, construction began, which was led by

Larry Koehl, the **Greater Cincinnati Garden Railway Club**, **Miami Valley Club** and other volunteers. They planned the train display area and began to lay track, construct mountains and build miniatures. After a hectic year of construction, EnterTrainment Junction opened in 2008.

Additionally, the center included an indoor kid's playground, a railroad museum, as well as a gift shop, a hobby shop, a snack bar and private rooms for birthday parties and events. Eventually, an old-style fun house was added to give it the feel of a nostalgic amusement park.

But, by 2024, Oeter was ready to retire, Balfour said. "He couldn't find anyone to actually buy the business, so he decided to shut it down," he said.

The building has been sold. Even though the main attractions were gone by last month at the start of the liquidation sale, Balfour said there was plenty left, including the inventory of the toy and hobby store and the gift shop as well as the building's furniture, racks, etc.

"The company that bought the building plans to gut it, so we are trying to sell what we can," Balfour said.

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Atomic City FEC converts to Semnox's technology

PADUCAH, Ky. — **Atomic City Family Fun Center** recently upgraded its point-of-sale system to **Semnox** powered by Parafait's suite of solutions for the 44,000-square-foot award-winning facility that is host to a variety of attractions, a large arcade, a full-scale bar and food and beverages.

The upgrade to Semnox also included arcade redemption, converting the attractions to cashless and tap-to-play arcade cards using RFID card readers, arcade redemption management and custom-themed kiosks.

Atomic City opened at the end of 2020. The FEC was spending a lot of time on the phone with the previous provider for technical support.

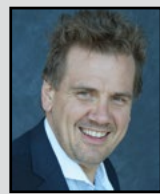
"Now, since converting to Semnox, everything is running so smoothly," said **Jeff Pierce**, co-owner of Atomic City. "Also, during the installation process, they met all of our deadlines and the leadership constantly followed up to assure everything was satisfactory."

"Not only did we need a system that was more dependable than what we were using, but it was also their non-pushy approach that we appreciate," continued Pierce. "Semnox showed us the demo a few years back, which we thought then looked really user friendly. We would see them at industry-related events, and they made an effort to keep in touch with us without being pushy, which turned into a good, established relationship. By the time it was time to switch technology, while we did interview with other companies, we pretty much knew we'd go with Semnox."

The Semnox self-service kiosks allow customers to purchase and reload game cards and upsell packages. The Lumin RFID card readers enable "tap-to-play" functionality for quick and easy access to gameplay, without the need for manual entry. It also tracks redemption points and eliminates paper tickets causing fewer issues for operators.

Semnox offers technology solutions for all-size operations, from one-unit locations to large, multi-unit clients. With a global presence in over 55 countries, Semnox Solution prides itself on top-notch customer service.

"No matter the size of the operation, our clients tell us that Semnox support is unparalleled in the industry," stated **Bepin Jose**, president of Semnox Americas. "We pride ourselves on our effective customer support processes that have been very effective."



FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRAL

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

Dave & Buster's Entertainment, Inc. announced a groundbreaking franchise agreement with **Winclub Mexico**. This development marks Dave & Buster's official entry into the Mexican market with plans for 10 locations across key cities, with the first store slated to open in Mexico City by the end of 2025.

"Partnering with Winclub Mexico is a pivotal milestone in our global growth journey," shared **Antonio Bautista**, chief international development officer at Dave & Buster's. "With a pipeline spanning seven countries across four continents in 2025, Mexico plays a crucial role in our strategy to bring the 'Eat, Drink, Play and Watch' experience to more audiences worldwide."

"It is a tremendous honor to bring Dave & Buster's to Mexico and revolutionize the way people experience entertainment," added **Oscar Salgado**, CEO of Winclub Mexico. "By combining exceptional dining, immersive gaming and vibrant social environments, we are setting a new standard for entertainment destinations. With plans for 10 locations, our goal is to establish Dave & Buster's as the go-to venue for families, friends and colleagues seeking world-class hospitality. The inaugural store in Mexico City will pave the way for an exciting journey that promises growth and success for both our companies."

Urban Air Adventure Park has once again been recognized as the number one family entertainment center in the adventure park category by Entrepreneur's Franchise 500. The brand achieved an overall ranking of 102 on the list, marking the seventh consecutive time Urban Air has taken the top spot.

The annual Entrepreneur Franchise 500 is a highly sought-after honor in the franchise industry and ranks brands on outstanding performance in areas including unit growth, financial strength and stability and brand power.

Urban Air's seven-year streak at the top of its category underscores the brand's ongoing commitment to innovation, cutting-edge attractions and exceptional franchisee support.

Nova Adventure Park — a massive 50,000-square-foot indoor amusement park — opened in December 2024 on the west side of Cincinnati, Ohio.

The park includes several different attractions, including a trampoline park, dodgeball court, basketball court, foam pit, climbing wall, ninja warrior obstacle course, slides, sports areas and more.

It also features an arcade equipped with virtual reality technology.

Funhub officially opened its doors in downtown Montreal, Canada, on January 8, 2025. With more than 120 arcade games, cutting-edge virtual reality experiences, immersive escape rooms, two full-service bars, pool tables and a curated local dining menu, Funhub strives to redefine fun for all ages.

Developed through the combined vision and efforts of a dedicated team, including **MontVR's** co-founders **Jay Michaud** and **Sébastien Coulombe**, Funhub transforms years of innovation and passion into a vibrant space for high-quality, diverse entertainment that welcomes everyone. With more than eight years of experience in virtual reality entertainment as the foundation, Funhub represents the evolution of MontVR's expertise into something greater.

"Funhub is more than just an arcade or a VR space; it's where all things fun collide," said partner **Kassandra Skoulikides**. "We've designed it to be as much about the experience as it is about the games."

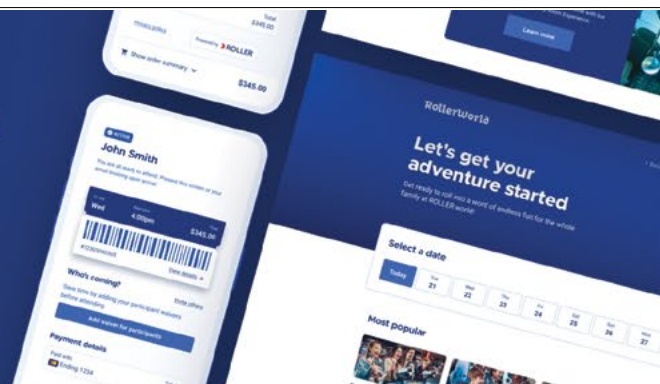
Thrill Factory, a multi-attraction entertainment venue, officially opened its doors on New Year's Eve in Madison, Wisconsin. Spanning an impressive 50,000 square feet, the destination represents one of Wisconsin's largest indoor venues and offers a diverse array of attractions, including a 12-lane bowling center, a state-of-the-art multi-level laser tag arena, fully immersive escape rooms, a cutting-edge redemption arcade and a themed mini-golf course.

The venue took 18 months to complete and is the latest addition to **Amusement Entertainment Management's** extensive portfolio of FECs.

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Good weather yields excellent attendance at Greater Gulf State Fair

AT: B. Derek Shaw

bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

MOBILE, Ala. — “We were fortunate to have excellent weather throughout the event, which played a significant role in ensuring a smooth experience for attendees. Ideal weather conditions encouraged more families and visitors to come out and enjoy everything the fair had to offer, from the rides to the attractions,” said **Lynda Franc**, corporate marketing director, **North American Midway Entertainment (NAME)**.

When all was said and done, 78,000 people came through the turnstiles over the 10-day **Greater Gulf State Fair** during late October into early November. Admission was \$10.00 and \$5.00 for children. Friday, October 25 - Sunday, November 3, 2023. Hours were 4PM to 10PM weekdays, 11AM to 11PM Saturdays and Noon to 10PM Sundays. The theme was Forever Fair. Fun. Food. Friends. Family.

NAME brought 58 rides of which, 27 were kiddie ones. They also had



Thrilling rides and attractions were popular during the 10-day **Greater Gulf State Fair** in Mobile. **North American Midway Entertainment** brought 58 rides, of which 27 were kiddie ones.

COURTESY NAME/SCOOTER KOREK, GREATER GULF STATE FAIR

31 games and 16 food stands. While there were no new rides at that spot this year, the three most popular rides were the Crazy Mouse roller coaster, (**Zamperla, Inc.**),

Polar Express (Mach Rides, GmbH) and **Himalaya (Wisdom Rides of America)**.

“North American Midway Entertainment continues to provide the best and most spectacular midway for our fair. The level of partnership and commitment the company has as our midway provider is unmatched. Once again, in 2024 they continued their level of professionalism and presented a show that was unmatched,” said **Josh Woods**, executive director of the fair.

NAME had an equally good experience with the venue. “The Greater Gulf State Fair puts on a fair filled with family entertainment and great programming on an established fairgrounds.



There’s plenty of parking and easy access, making it a breeze for visitors. The ten-day event has become a Gulf Coast fall tradition, and it’s always well-managed and well-marketed,” said Franc.

Special Promotions included a pre-fair “Twofer,” which were two ride wristbands and two admissions for \$49.99. Discounted tickets were also available until the fair began. In addition, there were discount days, \$5.00 admission Fridays, kid’s night and a student night. Unlimited ride passes at \$25 were available every night.

The fair advertised heavily in local media through a mix of traditional television, OTT, social media, and e-mail blasts.

Greater Gulf State fairgoers can count on being treated to jambalaya, po’ boys, boudin, and shrimp bayou, as well as classic state fair foods like chili dogs, BBQ, funnel cakes and corn on the cob. Top favorites include chicken-on-a-stick and funnel cakes at The Chomping Grounds, one of the fair’s most popular gathering places with more than 30,000 square feet of seated dining space. New food this year was Chinese cuisine, Tiki tea and crumble cookies.

In-house attractions augmented the rides, rodeo and other offerings, included goat yoga, speed dating on the big wheel, funnel

► See GULF, page 24



A ferris wheel-esque balloon sculpture — crafted by **Poppin’ Penelope** — was on display during the fair.

COURTESY GREATER GULF STATE FAIR

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GREATER GULF STATE
FAIR

► **GULF**

Continued from page 23

cake and corndog eating contests, senior bingo, pig races and a display of large animals such as bovines, horses and alpacas. Noah's Way exotic petting zoo was also a popular spot.

On-grounds entertainment is primarily from the surrounding Gulf coast area. This included Poppin' Penelope balloon artist, Brad Matchett comedy hypnotist, Danny and Lindsey Grant with their cowboy and cowgirl circuses, Lew-E the clown and a mobile glass blowing operation.

Every year during the fair, the property turns into "a city unto itself" for



The Greater Gulf State Fair, which ran for 10 days in late October through early November, is seen here at twilight.. COURTESY NAME/SCOOTER KOREK

10-days complete with its own power grid, police/medical control center, restaurants, and much more.

"The 2024 edition of the Greater Gulf State Fair was, I feel, the best product we have ever produced. This is supported by an increase in patron time spent on site as well as feedback from post fair surveys. I'm excited to continue this energy and excitement into the 2025

edition!" said Woods.

The fair is an annual project of the Mobile Jaycees organization, beginning as a fund-raising initiative on Blakely Island in 1955. The organization is also the parent organization of the Alabama Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo and the Azalea Trail Maids. The 70th annual fair returns October 25 – November 3.

• greatergulfstatefair.com

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Wall of Death continues to shift midway spectacle into thrilling gear

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

UNITED STATES — It is primal. It is not only in front of the audience's eyes, but it is filling their ears with the roar of classic motorcycles and filling the air with the scent of gasoline and rubber. It is the roar of the crowd and the ecstatic screams of witnessing a one-of-a-kind thrill. It is feeling the wooden walls flex as classic Indian and Harley-Davidson motorcycles roar by mere inches from onlookers. It is the Wall of Death.

Dan Weil, owner and operator of the **Wild Wheels Thrill Arena**, summed up what separates a Wall of Death show with a simple, genuine statement: "Kids come down, they want to high five us and



Weil

take pictures. They know they've seen something real. This is real deal stuff. They're never going to forget it!"

A true piece of Americana, the Wall of Death evolved out of early 1900s motordrome racing which came along shortly after the first mass-produced motorcycles were made. Motordromes — also known as board track racing — were race tracks made of cut two-by-fours, literally laid end-to-end at about a 45- to 60-degree bank. This style of track had those early racers reaching speeds as high as 100 mph. While highly popular, the mix of high speeds, bikes without brakes and hand-crafted tracks translated

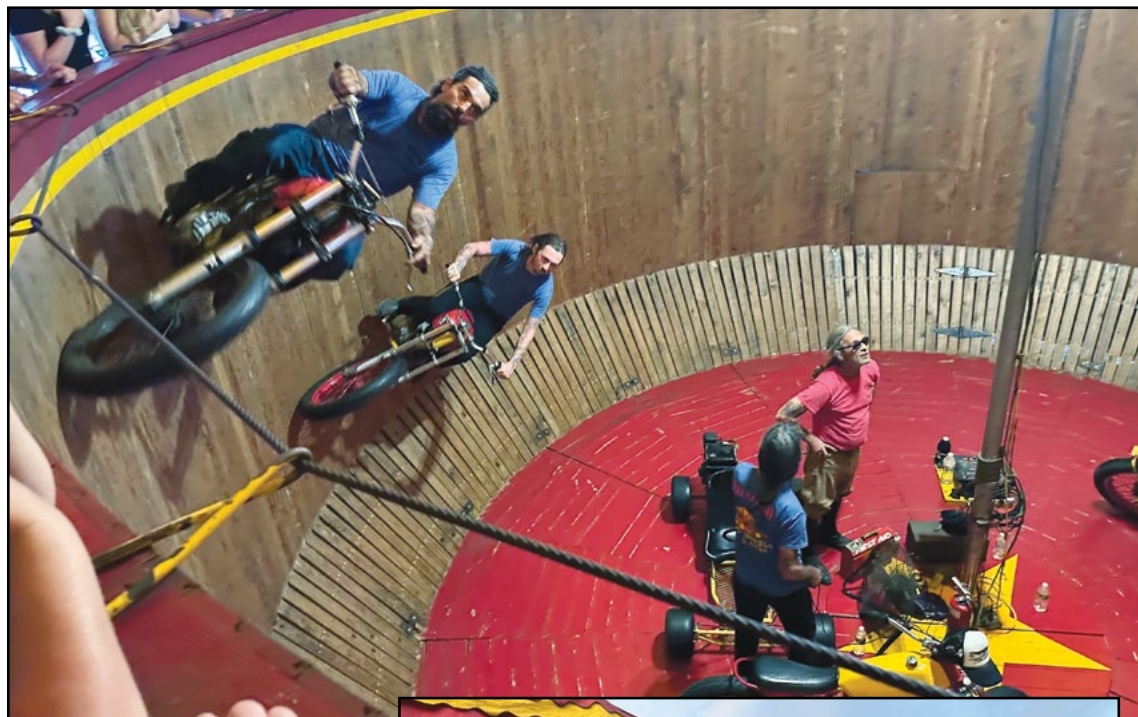
into it being a very dangerous sport fraught with risks and accidents.

However, evolving from these board tracks were silodromes (or motordromes) which featured walls at an almost gravity-defying 90-degree bank which created quite a spectacle. The very first carnival motordrome appeared at New York's **Coney Island** in 1911 with portable tracks beginning to appear on traveling carnival midways the following year. Becoming commonly known as the Wall of Death, they quickly became popular attractions as riders would perform death-defying tricks as they'd ride at dizzying speed around the wooden walls ... with the riders and their motorcycles near-horizontal with the floor 20 feet below.

In its heyday of the 1930s, there were more than 100 motordromes as part of traveling show midways and amusement parks.

"By the early-to-mid-1980s, there was maybe only one show left touring [in the United States]," lamented Weil. "The rest had been pretty much pigeon-holed into doing motorcycle venues. There were a couple of shows in the eighties and nineties that were hanging on, but they were primarily doing events such as Daytona Bike Week and Sturgis and so forth."

Today, the Wild Wheels Thrill Area — which began performing for audiences in 2016 — is one of only a few Wall of Deaths still touring actively. Weil maintains a regular schedule with mid-



The Wild Wheels Thrill Arena is one of precious few remaining touring Wall of Death stunt show attractions in the United States.

AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON

way provider **Amusements of America**.

"Right now, that I'm aware of, there are five usable motor drones in the United States," stated Weil. "Three of us are on a full-time route. Two more do an occasional — one or two — setups a year. I personally know where there's another four or five just sitting in some kind of storage."

The **Ives Brothers Wall of Death** is one of those remaining actively touring walls. With annual performances at multiple motorcycle shows, the Sturgis's **Buffalo Chip**, rallies as well as **Harley-Davidson** dealerships, the Ives Brothers will perform four to eight shows per day at each of their setups.



"It's adrenaline-fueled excitement," detailed Kyle Ives, owner of the Ives Brothers Wall of Death, elaborating as to why the attraction endures after all these years. "The Wall of Death delivers an electrifying experience, with us speeding upward on vertical walls, performing stunts, and defying gravity. The rush of adrenaline is contagious."



Ives

The Wall of Death experience is perfectly crafted for the hometown feel of most carnivals and fairs. Its intimate feel and up-close action amazes spectators on the traveling midways, and delivers something that can only be experienced in person. Film, TV and even the written word could never do it justice. It is an experience that can be sought out along the midway when the show comes to town.

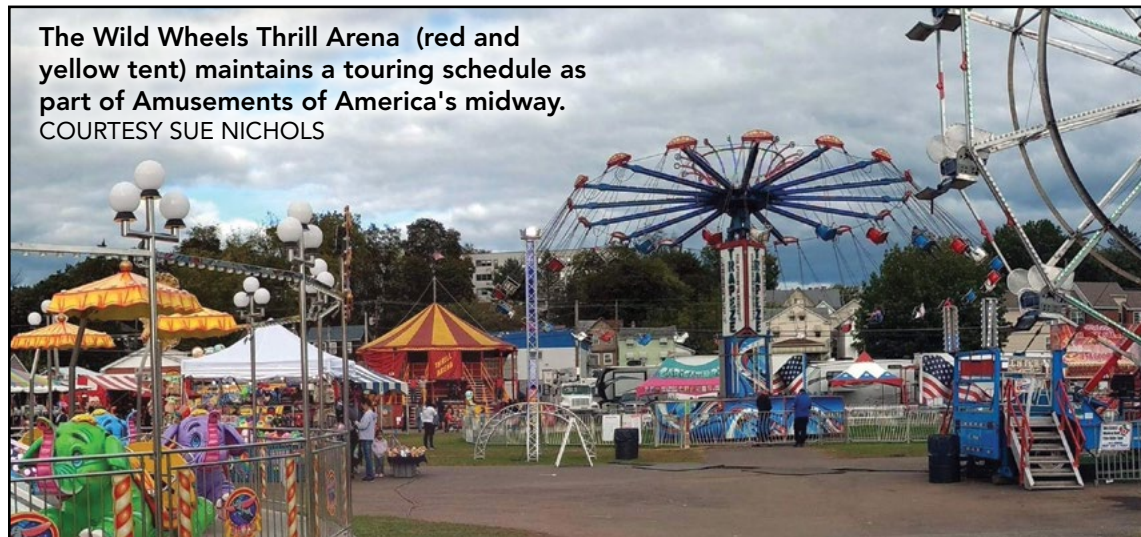
The Wall of Death is a vintage piece of midway wonder.

The circus has a barker, but the Wall of Death keeps the tradition alive with its "talker" amping up the crowd as they pass by the midway and luring them in for the wild treat inside the motordrome. The wooden structure is topped with colorful and eye-catching tenting, further enticing passersby to step onto the viewing platform and witness classic motorcycles (often Harley-Davidson and **Indian** models from the 1920s to 1950s) push the limits of what's believable as they ascend the vertical wooden wall. And all of it is completely portable.

"The motordrome, every single thing you see in the show — the motorcycles, the microphones, everything — goes on one tractor-trailer," said Weil. "It's a 40-foot flat-bed semi-trailer with a tandem-axle sleeper road tractor that pulls with the entire show, except for maybe the clothes we're wearing."

And everything is main-

The Wild Wheels Thrill Arena (red and yellow tent) maintains a touring schedule as part of Amusements of America's midway.
COURTESY SUE NICHOLS



► See WALL, page 27

WALL

Continued from page 26

tained on the road by the operators and riders.

"We actually maintain all of our equipment," asserted Ives. "My father and I built the wall that we ride in. We maintain the semi trucks used to haul it; we maintain the motorcycles. It is hard to find someone that understands how these bikes are used and what they are used for."

The difficulty in explaining what Wall of Death bikes are used for comes as little surprise, since describing the experience of witnessing a Wall of Death is truly unique.

"Unlike large arena events, the Wall of Death is often presented in a more intimate setting, allowing spectators to connect with the riders and experience the thrill up close," commented Ives.

The up-close nature of the show allows for one of its most thrilling — and profitable — stunts: the bill grab. Admission to the Wall of Death performances is often free (or of minimal cost), but awe-struck audience members barely need to be encouraged to up that ante by participating in the bill grab segment. Holding out creased currency just over the wooden wall, onlookers eagerly await the riders to speed past them and snag their eager gratuity.

"It's one of the few places where people are like gleefully handing you their money," added Weil. "But to me, that tells you the power of the show. Guests walk away from the bottle up [midway game] after giv-



Ives Brothers Wall of Death regularly tours bike and racing events, as well as Harley-Davidson dealerships (above left). Above right, a performer lures onlookers on a classic bike on the bally of the Wall of Death U.S.A. presented by the California Hell Riders, which is a regular spectacle during Dayton Beach Bike Week and Daytona Biketoberfest at the world-famous Iron Horse Saloon. AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON



ing them their money, and they didn't win the prize. But even if they win, they're not as happy as when they walk away from the motordrome."

The Ives Brothers show takes this one step further by not only offering Wall of Death T-shirts to those who offer \$20 or more to the rider but amaze the audience even more by eyeballing the denomination while whizzing by along the wall and delivering the T-shirt into the viewer's hands at the same time.

Like many carnival midway attractions, the Wall of Death is a heartfelt passion and often a generational and family affair.

Weil got his start with the Wall of Death because of his classic bike expertise.

After catching a performance of the **American Motordrome Wall of Death** — which also still tours actively — while in Daytona, Florida, a 25-year-old Weil's interest was piqued.

"I took a summer vaca-

tion cross country on a 1937 Indian motorcycle and ended up out in Sturgis in South Dakota during the rally," remembered Weil. "We went to the Wall of Death show and I got to meet the girl — it was the same girl, Samantha Morgan — from Daytona!"

Weil commented to Morgan about the old Indian that the crew had displayed up on the bally (the stage in front of the motordrome itself, used for eye-catching stunts and enticing the crowd to the show) and inquired, "Why isn't it in there with the rest of them working?" Morgan replied that they were unable to get the bike running and Weil, who had a passion for working on old Indians, exclaimed: "Well, today's your lucky day!"

It is that personal touch that just continues throughout the Wall of Death's history and its performances. There's a passion and history behind every twist of the throttle.

"Cody [Ives] and I grew up in the show business, our

father — Shawn — was in the circus," detailed Kyle Ives. "He was a performer. He did all kinds of things like walk the high wire and ride inside of the Globe of Death, which was our true introduction to everything we do now."

While linked by name, the Globe of Death is another motorcycle stunt show often associated with the circus and touring stunt performers. The steel cage nature of that performance keeps the audience at a distance, disconnected from the riders. By contrast, the Wall of Death is interactive with the audience literally feeling the motorcycles roar by directly in front of them.

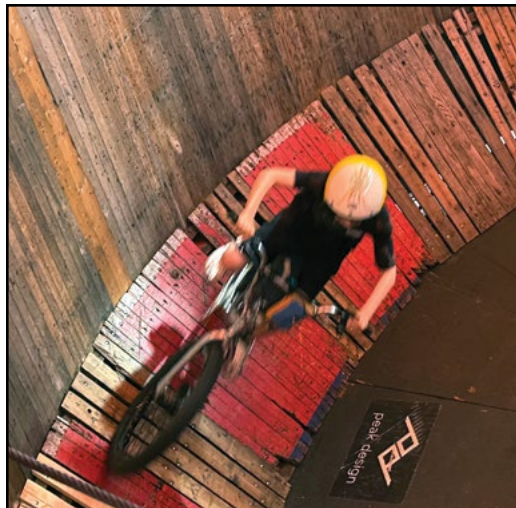
The Wall of Death is not exclusive to the U.S. In fact, it may even be more popular overseas. "There's probably a half a dozen shows in Europe," said Weil. "The Wall of Death has become popular in Southeast Asia and India." And, of course, the international riders and the power of

the internet have led to even more jaw-dropping excitement to add to the Wall of Death's legend. "If you look on the internet and watch what they're doing out there, it's pretty insane. They have giant motordromes with five cars and 10 motorcycles riding around at the same time. Oh, wow!"

While its overseas counterparts may be getting bigger and crazier, and United States operators may start experimenting with the addition of electric motorcycles and finding even more ways to connect with their audience, one thing remains clear: the Wall of Death will forever be a one-of-a-kind experience!

"The Wall of Death has been a staple of midways and carnivals for generations," offered Ives. "Its enduring presence evokes memories of childhood wonder, making it a beloved attraction that families return to year after year."

•wildwheelsthruarena.com
•theivesbrothers.com



Like many carnival businesses, the Wall of Death is truly a family affair. One of the younger members of the Ives family started off a spring 2024 performance showcasing his talents by pedaling his dirt bike along the fabled wall (above left). Stunt performers in the Wall of Death are often parallel to the floor below as they race past within arm's reach of onlookers (above middle). Vintage motorcycles are all part of the experience, such as this classic Indian bike on display outside of the Wild Wheels Thrill Arena (above right). AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON

2024 edition of Pensacola Interstate Fair one its best attended

AT: B. Derek Shaw

bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

PENSACOLA, Fla. — “We enjoyed the most pleasant weather we’ve seen in the last five years. It was neither too hot nor too cold, which can often be a gamble in this region during this season. Temperatures can swing dramatically in either direction,” said **Sharon Popovich**, administrative assistant with **Reithoffer Shows**. “Additionally, we were fortunate not to encounter any major rain events throughout the week.”

Dondi Frenkel, who heads up public relations functions for the **Pensacola Interstate Fair**, was also pleased with the outcome. “We had 11 days of beautiful sunshine, perfect weather!”

Over 250,000 people attended the annual mid-October event themed “Where Memories Are Made” for 2024.

The name of the fair itself indicates the draw is multi-state. In this case, attendees, competition contestants



and exhibitors came from Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana.

Reithoffer Shows brought in 55 rides, of which 26 were geared toward the younger set. Two of the kiddie rides made their first appearance at this fair, the Samba Balloon (CDSUD) and Treasure Island (Wisdom Rides of America). In addition, the brand-new funhouse, New York New York, (Gosetto S.r.l.) made its debut on the main midway.

Popovich talked about the most popular rides. “The Galaxy Coaster (Interpark), Giant Wheel (Chance) and Super Himalaya (Bertazzon) always have the greatest number of riders, but the Hulk (Technical Park) and Wave Swinger (also Bertazzon) are



New to the fair midway was a Gosetto, New York, New York two-story walk-through funhouse. COURTESY REITHOFFER SHOWS

fair fan favorites as well.”

She also noted, “Labor shortages are always a challenge, but we were fortunate to have most of our H-2B workers return to us in 2024. Each year, we face difficulties in filling all necessary positions. We continue to collaborate with our fair partners at the OABA to advocate for the H-2B program, as our labor force would be significantly reduced without it. Many of our H-2B workers come back year after year, along with our

dedicated American workers and staff, who have been with us for many years and are truly our greatest assets.”

With regard to event outcomes, Popovich added, “We enjoyed ideal weather throughout the week this year, resulting in higher gross revenues and attendance compared to previous years.”

Ever since the mid-1990s, the fair has utilized the Gibsonton, Florida-based operation. “Reithoffer Shows [Blue Unit] is always top-

notch, very easy to work with, [and has a] major focus on customer satisfaction and ride safety. [They are] always working to improve the midway in both appearance and functionality,” said Frenkel.

“This year, the Pensacola Interstate Fair welcomed a new fair manager, and the transition was seamless, bringing about a very positive experience,” said Popovich. “Our longstanding relationship with the fair committee has always been strong, and we truly enjoy collaborating with them as they are committed to delivering excellent entertainment and support for the community they serve.”

Frenkel is already looking forward to the fair later this year. “2025 will be our 90th anniversary and we are working already to ‘knock it out of the park’ and pull out all the stops for the 2025 Fair!”

The 11-day fair returns October 16 to 26, 2025.

•pensacolafair.com

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MIDWAYSCENE

AT: B. Derek Shaw

bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

It's award season. **Wayne Kunz** was presented with the first-ever **Showman's League of America** (SLA) lifetime achievement award at their annual banquet in Phoenix during the **IAFE** convention. The other inductees into the **Showmen's League of America** hall of honor were **Ron Burback, Sr. Funtastic Traveling Shows Inc., Carolyn Hanschen, Thomas Carnivals** and posthumously, **Dick VanderVorste**, self-employed in the amusement industry. Burback received the honor for his dedication to maintaining a sharp appearance every day, in spite of the hardships of carnival life. Hanschen received the award honoring the moment she became the first female member of the SLA, which prior to that had been a men-only organization. President **Nate Janousek** who presented all the awards presented VanderVorste's children — **Steve, Sharie** and **Susan** — with an award that highlighted his inventiveness. He was a dreamer and designer, presenting the newest, biggest and sometimes most unusual traveling attractions.

Rankings for 2024 recently came out for the top 50 fairs in North America, based on attendance numbers. The top spot went to the **Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, (Ray Cammack Shows)** followed by the **State Fair of Texas, Dallas** (Independent midway); **Minnesota State Fair, St. Paul** (Independent Midway); **Eastern States Exposition (The Big E) (North American Midway Entertainment)**, West Springfield, Massachusetts and the **San Antonio Livestock Show and Rodeo (Wade Shows)**.

The Big E had a fantastic year with a 14% attendance jump, coming in at 1,633, 935. The only fair with a higher gain was **Wilson County Fair/Tennessee State Fair, Lebanon (Reithoffer Shows)** with a 17% gain. The 20th-place fair saw 861,425 fairgoers.

The **International Independent Showmen's Museum** is actively searching for a curator to accept the torch that **Doc Rivera** kept burning so brightly for many years since the museum's inception. Interested parties with carnival and circus knowledge can contact **Tom Gaylin** 443-463-8181 or **Jim Frederiksen** 813-628-4545.

The **James E. Strates Shows** recently signed a long-term agreement with the **Manatee River Fair Association, Inc.** to serve as the exclusive carnival midway provider for the annual **Manatee County Fair**, Palmetto, Florida.

"Being part of the Manatee County Fair is an honor as the fair celebrates and highlights the community's rich agricultural traditions, diverse talents, and cultural heritage," said **John Strates**, third-generation carnival owner and director of operations. "Strates

Shows is dedicated to providing a safe and exciting carnival midway experience, where families can relax, have fun, and create treasured memories to last a lifetime."

"We look forward to partnering with the Strates Shows in providing a new midway experience for our guests," said **Danny Alfonso**, Manatee County fair CEO-fair manager. "The Strates family are highly respected in our industry, not only for their deep generational history, but more importantly for their excellence in professionalism as they truly partner with each fair, to provide a unique, safe and exciting experience."

The 109th edition of the fair took place January 16 – 26. The fair is considered the largest annual event in the Bradenton-Sarasota area. It also kicked off the season for Strates Shows.

Maui County, Hawaii is looking to revive the four-day **Maui County Fair**, an honored local tradition that hasn't been held since 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and increased shipping costs. Recently the Mayor's office asked the Maui County Council to allocate \$1.5 million in the 2025 fiscal year budget to the nonprofit **Festivals of Aloha** for the 2025 Maui County Fair.

Daryl Fujiwara, executive director of the Festivals of Aloha, wasn't prepared to share details. "I think it's definitely possible with the county's support. And if the funding does become available, I'm sure a wonderful version of the county fair can happen," he told **Hawai'i Journalism Initiative**

"We haven't really looked at the details, but it sounds like it's very promising, and if there's a lot of community support, I'm sure that we will find the funding to make it happen," said Council Chairperson **Alice Lee**, whose district includes Wailuku where the fair was held for decades.

The \$1.5 million the county is proposing would be used for a variety of fair-related costs, including transportation, entertainment and agricultural exhibitions. The largest costs include shipping rides, games and tents to Maui; traffic control and security by off-duty police officers; and insurance, the county said. There also are anticipated costs of repairing and acquiring fair equipment such as food booths, picnic tables, tents and benches. The bill to fund the fair was referred to committee for consideration.

Scott Fernandez, president of **E.K. Fernandez Shows, Inc.**, a family-owned company that's been providing the rides and games for Hawai'i fairs and carnivals for more than a century, said that the company misses Maui and is "open to the possibility of coming back for sure. It's been a long time, but we're willing to come if that's what the people of Maui decide and try and do our best to bring entertainment to the same level."

Rides at Pennsylvania Farm Show earn for scholarships

HARRISBURG, Pa. — There is no state fair in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, however the indoor Pennsylvania Farm Show is considered the "unofficial" version, minus the rides, except a pair used to raise scholarship funds for deserving students. Two rides are brought in each year generating scholarship revenue for both the **Pennsylvania State Showmen's Association (PSSA)** and the **Pennsylvania Farm Show Foundation**. The final amount raised will be announced at the end of January during the state showmen/fair convention in Hershey.



A 1946 Allan Herschell art-deco styled carousel was provided by SwikaS Amusements, spending eight days in the family living section of the main hall at the 109th Pennsylvania Farm Show in Harrisburg. AT/B. DEREK SHAW



The DelGrosso family of companies had a trio in their booth showcasing DelGrosso's Park & Laguna Splash, DelGrosso Sauces and Marianna's Fundraisers. Pictured left to right is Terri Fubio, private label sales; Michael Gilliland, fourth-generation family member and Sherry DelGrosso, wife of third-generation family member, Mike. AT/B. DEREK SHAW



PSSA members volunteer to sell tickets for rides on the carousel ride (l to r): Billy Horstman of Horstman Concessions and Lisa and Jerry Bartlebaugh of Bartlebaugh Amusements. In the background is part of a Chance Rides marquee, recently relit, courtesy of Majestic Midways. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

Carnival industry's fairer side shines brighter than any midway

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

UNITED STATES — Operating a modern-day carnival requires good business sense, a solid work ethic, some political lobbying and a lot of luck when it comes to the weather.

For many making their living on the midway at fairs and festivals, it's a generational family affair that fuels the fires of success.

Amusement Today reached out to several influential women in the industry who shared their background stories, views on important issues and other topics for this article.

Mary Brown Talley,
vice president,
Talley Amusements,
Fort Worth, Texas

Born into the business, Talley is the daughter of late showman **Buster Brown**, who owned the former **Bill Hames Shows**, also of Fort Worth.

"Dad was an industry icon, a great leader," she said. "He was killed in a car accident in 1990, and in 1995 Tommy (husband) and I started Talley Amusements.

We started by booking a single location and built it up from there. It's a lot harder managing the business now than when we were a 25-ride carnival years ago," she noted. Today, Talley Amusements carries in excess of 50 rides

Though her official title is that of VP, she wears a lot of hats in the demanding carnival industry.

"My job consists of many things. I do most of the booking, all of the public relations and marketing as well as the H2B visas," she said of the workload.

The show was on the road for 10 months in 2024, its longest season to date. Key events included the **Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo**, **San Diego County Fair**, **Del Mar, Calif.**; **Ohio State Fair**, **Columbus, Ohio**; **North Texas Fair and Rodeo**, **Denton**; and



Mary Brown Talley

State Fair of Texas.

While discussing issues facing the industry, Talley emphasized that the work visa program is one of the biggest concerns.

"It's our biggest challenge," she said of obtaining foreign help for the season. "We can't do this job without H2B, and we're looking for (political) change — hopefully for the better. We've been capped out there and need more help."

Also of concern is rampant inflation following the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Everything has gone up, and I think some people are taking advantage of it. We have a great safety record, yet our premiums are going up," she noted. "Costs of parts have also been impacted."



Powers Great American Midways provided rides at the 2024 North Carolina State Fair in Raleigh.
AT/RON GUSTAFSON

Talley Amusements fields more than 50 rides on its midway.
COURTESY
TALLEY AMUSEMENTS



While the carnival services a number of large events, Talley said smaller fairs are important to the overall health of the industry.

"Most smaller fairs are not subsidized, and they need carnivals," she explained. "A lot of people come for the carnival, and we bring a lot of money into the fairs. As a business, we continually like to set the bar higher to be a little bit better each year."

The Talleys also own and operate **Forest Park Miniature Railroad** in Fort Worth's Trinity Park.

Late showman **Bill Hames** opened the attraction in the late 1950s, incorporating a five-mile track layout to make it the longest miniature train ride in the world.

Rolling stock from the former **Miniature Train Company** of Rensselaer, Indiana, was used to entertain guests when the ride made its debut. In the early 1970s, the original trains were updated with C.P. Huntington models from **Chance Rides**.

As for the best things about the industry, "There's never a dull moment,"

Talley admitted. "I like the challenges and there's always something."

She served on the **Outdoor Amusement Business Association (OABA)** board of directors from 2002 to 2012 and also on the **Texas Association of Fairs and Events** board for six years.

The Talleys have three daughters actively involved in the business.

• talleyamusements.com

Debbie Powers, co-owner, **Powers Great American Midways (PGAM)**,
Corfu, New York

Powers is another industry "lifer," having been involved since childhood.

"I've been in the business my whole life. My grandparents were in the business, and I would go out with them and cousin **Barb Pokorny** working in ice cream and sausage stands and — at times — games, too," she reflected.

Today she operates **Debbie's Concessions** on PGAM while her husband, **Les (Corky) Powers**, oversees the 50-plus rides on the carnival. In addition, the couple entered the amusement park business in 2022 when they purchased **Family Kingdom** in Myrtle Beach, S.C., in partnership

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MIDWAYS

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with area businessman **Bill Prescott**.

"I've had the concessions business for so long, and that's really where I belong," she asserted. "I operate four food trailers, a booth at the park and two lemonade stands."

While the carnival company still maintains a New York address, the Powers have maintenance facilities and their home in North Carolina, making it somewhat easier to juggle life between the road and the amusement park.

For Debbie Powers, the presentation of products is vital in today's business climate and a subject she takes very seriously.

"For me, it's all about decorating. Where I place my signs and visual effects — that's all dependent on traffic flow," she said of the strategy, which is critical at larger venues.



Debbie Powers

The most popular offerings at her concessions are funnel cakes, fried Oreos and fried dough.

She readily admits that the Oreos weren't a hit when first put on the menu years ago, but over the years the product has proven successful.

"They are definitely a hot ticket, and I've had guests knocking on my door at 9 in the morning asking for them. I call them the breakfast of champions," she quipped. "Funnel cakes are strong at our locations, and fried dough is still popular in the north."



Christina Benner

Echoing concerns about the work visa program, she said it is the biggest challenge facing the carnival industry and "needs fixing." She is heavily involved with political leaders in addressing the issue.

A hands-on person, she's generally found working one of her trailers along the midway.

"I need to stay busy, and I don't like office work but have to do it," she noted. "I've done this forever, and this is absolutely not a business for everyone. I like that the family is involved, and so far, a grandson is also working



Penn Valley Shows provides its Hampton tractor flat ride for the Pennsylvania Farm Show. The attraction generates scholarship revenue for both the Pennsylvania State Showmen's Association and the Pennsylvania Farm Show Foundation. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

with us. We have family around us all of the time."

She is a past president of the **Showmen's League of America** (2017), OABA chair (2020 and 2021) and former secretary of the **New York State Showpeople's Association**. The Powers have four children actively involved in the industry.

•powersgreat
americanmidways.com

Christina Benner, co-owner, **Penn Valley Shows**, Middleburg, Pa.

Wearing a lot of hats to get things accomplished is the motto of this veteran operator from a small borough in Central Pennsylvania.

"I worked for my
► See **WOMEN**, page 32

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husband's (Kerry) parents when I was 13 on **Mid-Valley Amusements**. We were all from the same town and that carnival was dissolved in 2010 when my father-in-law retired," she said of her start in the business.

"We wanted to spread our wings after leaving Mid-Valley in 2007 and decided it was time to start over."

By 2010 the Benners had their carnival up and running, and today it's a genuine family affair, fielding 30 rides and a dozen concessions.

"Kerry and I own the majority with our children (Alycia, Chase) running games and food. Our son-in-law (Brett Klee) is a partner on the Expo Wheel," she said of the operation.

As for different roles in the business, Christina oversees the office and ticketing as well as lending a hand in managing the food and games. She has also spent time in the maintenance shop painting, noting: "That was my thing."

When asked about key issues facing the industry, she was quick to point out inflation and H2B employees.

"Costs have risen on everything — it's become so expensive. And H2B is very nerve-wracking as we never know if we are going to get those workers or not," she explained.

She pointed out that the carnival business is "very close-knit" and feels fortunate that the company works with good committees.

"I got to raise my kids on the road and that kept us very close, and now we have grandkids being raised out here, too. I love the business and have a passion for it," she emphasized. "I'm the daredevil, and while it takes a man to move the show, it takes a strong woman behind him to give him the push."

The carnival is a member of the **Pennsylvania State Showmen's Association** and the **International Independent Showmen's**



Beverly Burback

Association (IISA).

• pennvalleyshows.com

Beverly Burback,
Co-owner, **Funtastic Traveling Shows,**
Portland, Ore.

Safety is the most important element in operating a carnival and, perhaps, no one knows better than Beverly Burback.

For more than 20 years, she has chaired the **Northwest Showmen's Club Safety Seminar** and while doing so has had a hand in creating the classes while making certain the entire event comes off without a hitch. Under her leadership, the seminar has grown from a two- to a five-day event with three of the days hosted at the Funtastic Campus.

And there's no question that she is a seasoned veteran of the industry, having been involved since the age of 18.

"I'm 88 now and still come to work every day," she said of her daily routine, which includes implementing employee policies and hiring more than 3,000 workers annually for the show.

A native of Iowa, she moved to Portland as a teenager where she met and married **Ron Burback**. They will mark their 70th anniversary in October.

The couple worked at the former **Jantzen Beach Amusement Park** in Portland, where they managed the games.

In the early 1970s Funtastic Shows was formed, and the Burbacks have been at the helm ever since, operating up to three units at events mostly in the Northwest.



Lynn Ritchie

Their earlier travels took them as far away as the State Fair of Texas in Dallas and the **North Pole Festival** in North Pole, Alaska.

During that time she further established a reputation for running successful game operations, which led to her being hired by the 1974 **Spokane World's Fair**, Spokane, Wash., to manage its struggling operation. She succeeded in turning that concessions business around.

She is credited with creating a small children's amusement park and a dark ride called The Bear Cave.

Throughout her career, she has been the recipient of numerous accolades, including being named the Northwestern Showmen's Club Person of the Year and honored with the Walker Leroy and Irv Houston Safety Awards.

In addition, she has served on many industry boards and is a member of the Showmen's League of America, OABA, **Western Fairs Association, Carnival Guild, Oregon Fairs Association** and other organizations.

"This is not a business for everyone, and there are many good things about our industry," she reflected. "You have to be a hard worker and have a good attitude to be in this business. We're fortunate in that we are able to employ some very talented people."

She continued, saying, "The business has been very good to Ron and myself, and we try to give back by having the safety seminars here."

The Burbacks have three children, **Ron Edward, Debi** and **Tracy**; seven



Sandy Schmidt

grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Ron Edward and Tracy work with their parents in the business.

• funtasticshows.com

Lynn Ritchie, president,
Hammerl Amusements,
Buffalo, N.Y.

For more than 60 years, Hammerl Amusements has served communities in Western New York.

The carnival had a humble beginning in 1960 when Buffalo firefighter **Lou Hammerl** (1927-2018) purchased a truck-mounted Whip ride and drove it around the city, collecting a dime from patrons who wanted to take a whirl.

"We still have the Whip ride, though it isn't operational," daughter Lynn Ritchie recalled. "We plan on getting it back into operation in the future."

She and her husband **Frank** took over the business in 1991 when her father retired, and today the show has more than 20 rides. Frank is semi-retired, while their son, **Alex**, is taking over the management post held by his father.

John Mistretta, who has been with the company for more than 30 years, is vice president and operations manager and also owns rides.

"I handle all of the bookings, routing, advertising and promotions as well as payroll," she said of her role. "The business partnership has been amazing all of these years."

Like others in the industry, the employee situation is always one of concern.

"It's not easy, but we've been lucky," she admits. "We hire a lot of college

students and high school students. They're all great. The state allows 16-year-olds to run rides."

Being "50-milers" is also a factor in retaining local help as the carnival stays in the Buffalo/Rochester area. She pointed out that moving the equipment between spots can present challenges at times.

The show services a lot of college events as well as a large picnic for a Buffalo area auto dealership. Fairs and festivals round out the summer schedule with routing "as easy and simple as possible."

Commenting on the ever-changing business climate, she noted, "My dad agreed to contracts by shaking hands. Those days are gone, and now we have to jump through hoops due to so many regulations. And we have people retiring and no one to step up to the plate."

"This is a tough, physical business and not for the light of heart," she asserted.

When asked what she enjoys most about the industry, she was quick to respond, "The family that we have generated with all of our vendors. We have worked with some of them for 30 years and we are even invited to their family weddings."

Hammerl Amusements is a member of OABA.

• hammerlamusements.com

Sandy Schmidt,
owner/operator,
T.J. Schmidt & Co.,
Standish, Mich.

Being born and raised in the carnival business, Sandy Schmidt admits it's in her blood and really the only lifestyle she knows.

"My parents were **Ivan** and **Agnes Arnold** — both passed — and ran **Arnold Amusements**. My brothers, **Tom** and **Jon**, are still running the show today," she said.

Prior to forming their own carnival in 1980, Ivan and Agnes Arnold ran a unit for Michigan-based **W.G. Wade Shows**. It was on Wade Shows where

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MIDWAYS**▶WOMEN**

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Sandy met her husband, **Terry** (1958-2018), and eventually went to work with his parents, **Sherman** and **Joy**, on the former **Schmidt Amusements**.

"As the family grew, Terry and I broke off and started T.J. Schmidt and Company in 2008," she recalled.

Today the show fields between 18 and 23 rides during a 25-week schedule which includes five Michigan fairs, churches, festivals and civic organization events.

"Our schedule is manageable. We can start in the snow and end in the snow," she said of the route in Michigan's roller coaster weather.

Son **Kyle** serves as vice president and general manager of the business while his wife, **Courtney**, handles games and media. **Doug Burtch** is a business manager with his wife, **Ellen**, managing food and guest relations.

In addressing worker concerns, she said, "Typically, we have 40 to 45 H2B visa workers and around 20 domestic employees. Everyone's biggest challenge in the industry is labor and we're all dependent on H2B workers."

The economy is also of concern, she said, as "Everyone had jam-up years right after COVID, but now it's going the other way."

Another chapter in the family's history is that Ivan Arnold was instrumental in founding the **International Independent Showmen's Museum** in Riverview, Florida. He also served as the museum's president with son Tom now in that post.

"It was Dad's dream come to fruition," she added.

Sandy is the eighth family member to go through the chairs with IISA, currently serving as second vice president. She is also on the museum's board of directors.

"I love the fact that family is involved in this industry. Where else can

**Madison Kissel****Savannah Kissel Seibert****Marina Zaitshik-Small**

you go to work together and in the winter play together," she concluded.

T.J. Schmidt and Co. is a member of OABA, IISA and the **Michigan Association of Fairs & Exhibitions**.

•tjschmidtcarnival.com

Madison Kissel and Savannah Kissel Seibert, owners, **Kissel Entertainment**, Okeana, Ohio

"It's extremely rare for women to be in our positions in this industry," Madison Kissel said of the partnership with sister, **Savannah**, in the business founded by their great-grandfather, **Russell Kissel**.

The sisters have started to take the reins of the family carnival alongside their parents, **R.A.** and **Tammy Kissel**, who bought and rebranded the company in 2005 as Kissel Entertainment.

"Our father and mother work closely with Savannah and me. Our parents do not want to hold us back," Madison explained. "The business has grown alongside our careers — it's changed so much."

The show has an arsenal of more than 60 rides, including some of the newest international spectaculars found on very few U.S. midways. But a hallmark at Kissel Entertainment is a pair of classic Chance Rides Astro Wheels, both of which appear at larger fairs and festivals. The show also has another rarity: a Chance Rotor themed as Big Kahuna.

"Our father wants to keep these pieces alive so that many generations can continue to enjoy," Savannah said of the rare Ferris wheels.

"They are priceless to us and a timeless piece of culture's history. We offer guests a video of these engineering feats' history while they wait in line so they can learn and cherish just how iconic and unique they are."

Regarding running the business, Madison said, "We hold a lot of roles. I'm a senior account manager, and Savannah works on community relations and marketing. We both wear multiple hats and we're proud that we are working with family. We want to make our guests feel like they are also part of our family."

The carnival has an accredited traveling school, which allows their children to be with them during the season and receive a state-certified, top-notch education.

Taking a somewhat unconventional approach, the sisters also insist that their employees wear black shoes as part of their show uniform.

"Our father said our job was to change the perception people have about carnival workers," Madison noted of the policy. "And we are so tuned in to every aspect of the employee uniform, from hat, to belt, to shoes. We want customers to feel immersed in the experience, and uniformity allows for that. Perception starts with the first impression, and by doing these small things, they add up and make a difference."

She added that it's difficult to find employees to meet the show's criteria and standards, "which is why we work so hard to ensure we recruit the very best."

Madison also said the company's team is closely monitoring to ensure all communities experience

theme-park quality entertainment no matter their economic status through variable pricing structures.

As for growing up in the business, Savannah pointed out, "We saw the bright side of doing this. It's not a job, it's a lifestyle. I never considered doing anything else."

Madison also expressed her passion for the industry, saying, "I could never imagine doing anything else. I'm married to the company, Kissel Entertainment. My go-to person is my sister and vice versa."

•kisselfun.com

Marina Zaitshik-Small, co-owner, **Iconic Midway Rides**, Spring Hill, Fla.

Growing up on **Wade Shows**, Marina Zaitshik-Small said her best teacher in that journey was her father, **Frank**, owner of the legendary Michigan-based carnival.

"When I had time off — weekends and summers — I was on the road with the carnival," she reminisced. "At 9 years old I started working in pizza and made my own money. I wanted to learn every food stand operation that I could when I was a pre-teen and teenager."

After high school, she worked in the show's office and assisted with operational duties, a position she held for a decade. There she learned ticket sales, customer service, payroll, human resources, safety documentation and record keeping.

During that time, she recalled helping her father draw up proposals that landed the carnival the lucrative New York and Florida State Fair midway contracts.

In 2023, she decided

to change career paths and stepped out with her husband **Johan Small** to form **Iconic Midway Rides**, a supplier of independent attractions. She pointed out that the new venture is still connected to Wade Shows.

The company operates a **KMG** giant XXL pendulum themed as **Kraken**, a **Larson International** Ring of Fire themed as **Infinity** and a **Zamperla** Beach Shack. **Kraken** is a mammoth ride that swings more than 130 feet into the air and requires three trailers to move it.

"We took a huge risk purchasing **Kraken**," she noted. "At \$2.5 million it was one of the most expensive purchases in carnival history. Our rides are well-received at the independent fairs and some of our fairs haven't seen a Ring of Fire for years."

The company has a 175-foot swing tower from **Lamberink** scheduled for delivery this year. Themed as **Thunderbird**, the ride will be the first super spectacular of its kind in the nation.

The business employs a dozen people with her husband overseeing **Iconic Rides** maintenance work at the **Wade Shows** shop in Florida.

"The pandemic created the worst-case scenario in our industry," she said of the 2020 crisis. "And we're always dealing with the H2B labor issue, overall expenses and, of course, insurance."

She further explained, "I really enjoy what I'm doing now — to be able to zero in on just operating a couple of pieces and bring them to the biggest fairs in the country. The administrative and accounting work on the road keeps things interesting, and it's not as static as it would be in a traditional environment. I love the independent ride route and its flexibility and freedom to create our own schedule. My favorite thing about the carnival business is its history and how it has evolved over time. It makes me want to give my all and contribute to this and make a positive mark."

•wadeshowsinc.com

WATER PARKS & RECREATION

▶Kalahari Resorts set to expand Wisconsin Dells location — page 36 / News Splash — page 36

Cannon Beach: Surf lagoon, adventure park proposed for North Texas

AT: Jeffrey Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

MCKINNEY, Texas — In December, the city of McKinney, Texas, announced that it was pursuing an agreement with Cannon Beach Management to construct a \$200 million surf-focused, multi-use development. The new project is set to redefine recreation, tourism and economic innovation in North Texas. The 35-acre Cannon Beach is expected to be located near State Highway 121 and will feature a surf lagoon, a full-service resort-style hotel, restaurants, entertainment venues and business spaces.

This development will be anchored by an upscale resort hotel boasting a rooftop pool, offering breathtaking views. The hotel will include dedicated spaces for weddings and events. Nestled along a pristine sandy beach, the resort will provide relaxing lounge areas and cabanas with food service. Seamlessly integrated, the hotel will connect guests to the four-acre surf lagoon and a vibrant array of water activities, such as cliff diving and a stationary surf wave. The city envisions future expansion of this beachfront destination, incorporating a diverse range of amenities including a skatepark, cinema, bowling alley, fitness center and indoor recreational facilities.

The initiative is a collaboration between the City of McKinney, the McKinney Economic Development Corp. (MEDC), the McKinney Community Development Corp. and the Cannon



The 35-acre Cannon Beach is expected to redefine recreation, tourism and economic innovation in North Texas. COURTESY OF MEDC

Development Group led by Cole Cannon, the group responsible for a similar project in Mesa, Arizona, that just recently opened.

“We cannot be more excited to bring a beach paradise to McKinney, whose leadership shares our unparalleled vision for a world-class, family-friendly destination that will quite literally bring the ocean to its backyard,” said Cannon. “Cannon Beach promises to offer something for everyone, from families and thrill seekers to professionals and entrepreneurs.”

“This project is truly transformative, answering our community’s call for more family-focused activities while positioning McKinney as a premier destination for one-of-a-kind recreational experiences,” said Mayor George Fuller. “Cannon Beach perfectly reflects our city’s unique spirit, seamlessly combining innovative attractions with purposeful urban planning to drive economic growth.”

Michael Kowski, president and CEO of MEDC indicated that the city hopes



the project will serve as a “gateway into North Texas” for companies based on the west coast. McKinney, located about 30 miles north of Dallas, was ranked by the U.S. Census Bureau as one of the fastest-growing cities in the country. The city, already home to several Fortune 500 companies, is planning to expand its regional airport to accept commercial flights to further appeal to new businesses. North Texas, and McKinney in particular, have become a magnet for Californians leaving their home state in search of a safe community with better-paying jobs, a lower cost of living, more affordable housing

and lower taxes.

Despite its growth, the downtown McKinney historic district is still able to maintain its quaint, small-town feel with unique shops including art galleries, antique stores, apparel and accessory boutiques, and more than two dozen eateries and gourmet coffee shops.

With its historic downtown, tree-lined streets, vibrant art scene, museums, 289-acre wildlife sanctuary, and a 212-acre city-owned park with 10 miles of bike trails, the city draws visitors from all 50 states and more than 90 countries according to the Convention and Visitors Bureau.

“In addition to the tourism component of this project, Cannon Beach plans to deliver 100,000 square feet of state-of-the-art office space, positioning itself as a hub for top talent and innovation, from global corporations to ambitious startups,” Fuller said.

Although a surf lagoon may seem like excessive use of water in an area where water can be a concern, the lagoon is chlorinated and recirculated like a regular pool, and only water lost to evaporation needs to be replaced. Fortunately for the area, Bois d’Arc Lake, a newly created 26-square-mile reservoir led by the North Texas Municipal Water District is now fully operational. The reservoir was 20 years in the making.

Suppliers have yet to be determined but the surf lagoon promises to cater to both beginners and experienced surfers with adjustable wave technology utilizing hydraulics and wall shapes to create customized waves. The surf lagoon waves in Arizona are generated by Swell Manufacturing of Queen Creek, Arizona. Swell, a relatively new player in the industry, is owned by a team of engineers who are also life-long surfers.

Cannon Beach is set to break ground this year with the first phase opening in 2026. Once opened, it is expected to create more than 700 jobs and attract 300,000 visitors annually. Over the next 20 years, the development is projected to generate more than \$2 billion in economic impact, according to the city’s analysis.

•cannonbeachtx.com



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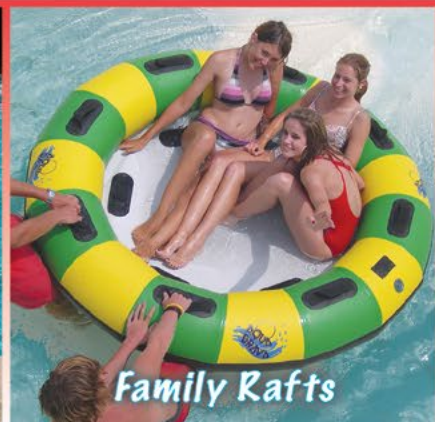
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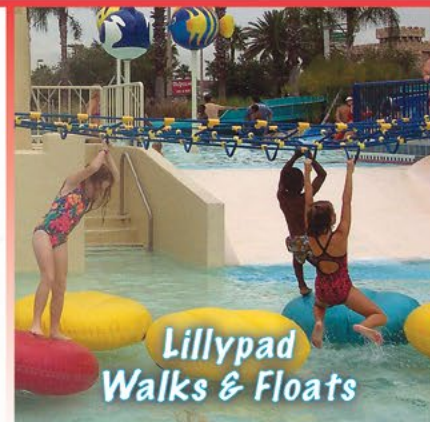
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Original Kalahari Resorts location sets expansion

AT: Jeffrey Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

WISCONSIN DELLS, Wisc. — In January, **Kalahari Resorts & Conventions** announced an \$85 million expansion of its original location in Wisconsin Dells. Already under construction is a 75,000-square-foot indoor water park expansion. The glass-enclosed addition from **OpenAire** will feature a retractable roof and house multiple attractions provided by **WhiteWater**. The new area was designed and engineered by **Martin Aquatic** with **Neuman Pools** providing construction.

Two of the three new waterslides will utilize six-person rafts for increased capacity. Wild Wildebeest will be the first installation of **WhiteWater's** Covered Boomerango with the bulk of the slide extending outside the building envelope. Green Python will be the first indoor installation of a six-person raft water coaster.

The third slide is a four-lane mat racer slide, but unlike traditional side-by-side racers, the Dells' version is two Parallel Pursuits which include conjoined sections with low separating walls where guests can see and hear their fellow competitors. The waterslide attractions start from a 70-foot platform that rises above the building's glass roof in a cupola extension.

Additional attractions include The Grotto adult swim-up bar, Lost Lagoon Spa Pool and a 10,000-square-foot Watering Hole Pool with zero-depth entry and tanning ledges with in-water lounge chairs. The Coral Cove Kiddie Slide Pool will feature seven themed slides entering a shallow pool.

"Kalahari could not be more excited to announce this indoor water park expansion in the Wisconsin Dells, the Waterpark Capital of the World," said **Todd Nelson**, CEO, owner, and founder of Kalahari Resorts. "With new slides, pools, a swim-up bar, spas and more, there's something for every member of the family to enjoy!"

The Kalahari resort in Wisconsin Dells opened in May 2000. The property has undergone several expansions and additions and currently has 756 rooms, a 212,000-square-foot convention center, a 100,000-square-foot Tom Foolerys adventure park, a 125,000-square-foot indoor water park, an outdoor water park and a championship golf course.

"My wife and I opened the first Kalahari Resorts in the Dells 24 years ago, and it's been an incredible journey," said Nelson. "Kalahari is so much more than a water park — It's a place where families can come together. After two and a half decades of creating memories here in Wisconsin Dells, we're excited to expand our offerings and invite even more families to experience the spirit of togetherness."

In addition to the new water park attractions, guests will enjoy a 40-foot wide big-screen TV display, additional food and beverage options, and enhanced seating and comfort options, including new cabanas and whirlpool cabanas.

The new indoor water park is one of several new amenities and renovations Kalahari has recently added. Other additions included 237 new rooms, a renovated Spa Kalahari, an all-new splash pad and dry playground, an expansive lobby renovation and two additional dining options: Sortino's Italian Kitchen and Cinco Niños, a modern Mexican restaurant and tequila bar.



NEWS SPLASH

AT: Jeffrey L. Seifert
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Big Surf Water Park in Linn Creek, Missouri, has been sold to Texas-based **Wheelhouse Waters**. The new company is a division of **Wheelhouse Ventures**, a private investment firm headquartered in Frisco, Texas, that provides equity capital, strategic advice and management expertise to underperforming, distressed or undercapitalized companies. This is the company's first venture into the water park arena, although it does have a second project in the works in Phoenix, Arizona.

Wheelstone Waters plans to invest approximately \$3 million in the property in the next few months. The park has been rebranded as **SuperSplash USA** and will increase in size from 13 acres to 20 acres. The expansion will include new attractions and enhanced amenities.

"We're committed to making SuperSplash USA a world-class destination, offering the best in family entertainment," said **Scott Johnson**, CEO of Wheelhouse Waters. "The Lake of the Ozarks deserves a family park that reflects its status as a premier vacation destination, and that's exactly what we're building.

"We'd like to give a special thanks to **Darin Keim**, the leading force behind Big Surf for the past 25 years, for his service in making the park one of the most beautiful and safest in America," Johnson added.

Following the success of the first **WaveGarden** park in Bristol, England, plans are underway for a second in Deal.

Initial local opposition has been dropped, and the Dover District planning committee has given the go-ahead, paving the way for **The Seahive** resort to proceed. The developers of the project are labeling it as the first surfing wellness resort and have committed to investing £50 million (US\$ 61 million). Plans are to include a 15-acre surf lagoon, a 120-room hotel, a gymnasium, a restaurant and a skate park.

Jim Storey, founder and CEO of The Seahive's founder explained that despite Deal being near the sea, there are very few surfing attractions or opportunities for people to learn how to surf. Those in the area who love to surf, either drive six hours to Cornwall or take a flight to somewhere abroad.

In keeping with the wellness aspect, Storey stated: "My vision has always been far greater than just creating an inland surf lagoon. The Seahive is a purpose-driven, inclusive destination anchored around the power of blue health and its impact on both physical and mental well being.

"Through running surf therapy programs, I don't just believe or hope that The Seahive can create positive life-changing outcomes for children — and adults — who struggle with anxiety, confidence, social exclusion, depression, bereavement, or even suicidal thoughts, I know it can. It is a critical component of the scheme."

Kalahari Resorts & Conventions is making plans to open the fifth iteration of its renowned African-themed resorts in 2026 in the state of Virginia. Construction is already underway for a \$900 million project in Spotsylvania County just off Interstate 95 near the Thornburg exit. The company said the resort will be the perfect adventure destination for families in the DC-Maryland-Virginia metro area.

The 175,000-square-foot facility will include the largest indoor water park in Virginia, along with a massive convention center and a 900 family-friendly suites hotel.

The **Meryal Waterpark** in Doha, Qatar, has been proclaiming it has the world's tallest waterslide for quite some time. In December, **Guinness World Records** made it official. The Rig 1938 tower made two entries into the record books as the world's tallest water slide tower and the first tower of its kind to have 12 waterslides. The record-breaking complex is an amazing feat of engineering provided by **WhiteWater** of British Columbia, Canada.

General Manager and Chairman of **Qetaifan Projects Company**, **Sheikh Nasser bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani** said in a press conference that the tower provides an exceptional experience that enhances Qatar's position as a world-class global tourist destination.

The **Plopsa Group** has decided to halt plans for the **Plopsaqua Mechelen** aquatic park in Belgium. The park has been in the works since 2017, and despite support from the local community, executives from Plopsa reported that the end process is no longer in sight and the outcome is too uncertain.

A meadow near the planned site in Mechelen has been given the status of nature reserve. While this is good for conservation, it makes obtaining a permit for development more difficult.

Because the permit procedure has been dragging on for seven years, what seemed profitable at that time is no longer feasible.

BUSINESS & NEWSMAKERS

► RWS sustains growth with new office locations — page 38 / The Gravity Group acquires new facility — page 39

Success continues for annual IAFE convention and trade show

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

PHOENIX, Ariz. — The 2024 International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE) Convention and Trade Show was a hit. Held at the Phoenix Convention Center, in Phoenix, Arizona, December 1-4, post surveys from attendees cited some of the highlights this year. One of the most enjoyed portions of the event was the Third Street Party on Sunday evening. Complimentary food, beverages, carnival games, and strolling entertainment were available for attendees to enjoy.

This event was scheduled immediately following the IAFE Education Foundation's Raisin' for a Reason Wagons and Whiskey fundraising event.

Approximately \$30,000 was raised and dedicated to supporting the Institute of Fair Management thanks to the live and virtual auctions, Young Professionals Putt Putt Palooza and Cornhole Shootout. Wagons and Whiskey is organized each year by the IAFE Agriculture Committee in conjunction with the IAFE Education Foundation.



With the 2024 IAFE Convention and Trade Show being local for Ray Cammack Shows, the company brought a carousel to the trade show floor (above). RCS also provided a wheel for the Third Street Party on Sunday evening.
AT/GARY SLADE

"This was one of the most high-energy conventions I've ever been a part of," said Marla Calico, now former president and CEO, IAFE. The 2024 convention and trade show was her last in that capacity.

"The atmosphere was electric and the halls were buzzing with the extensive networking that happened," Calico said.



There were 68 educational workshops presented focused on several aspects of the fair industry and were organized in various formats, including panel discussions and presentation styles.

In addition to the workshops, the convention included 28 Connections and Coffee, 13 networking events, four experiences, 12 committee meetings and three general sessions.

The 2024 IAFE Convention and Trade Show welcomed more than 2,500 guests to the Phoenix Convention Center.

Other highlights this year included the Institute of Fair Management (IFM) courses and graduation. The program continues to grow and develop,

► See IAFE, page 38



Ashley Wineland, center, performed to big crowds at the IAFE talent stage. AT/GARY SLADE

Marla Calico looks back

Marla Calico left her post as the president and CEO of the IAFE on the last day of 2024. First gaining her IAFE title in 2006, Calico took some time to reflect.

Amusement Today: What are the three top things that meant the most to you in your IAFE position?

MC: The people. Always the people. Our industry is built on strong and enduring relationships with one another, and I enjoyed interacting with so many of the folks from our members from across the globe. My most precious memories will be of the time spent chatting with them at meetings, visiting their fairs, and even traveling together.

That is number one. Number two are the opportunities to meet our members where they are, during their events or, for our associate members, in their places of business. Two of my most memorable visits to associate members were to leading ribbon manufacturers. I was amazed by the amount of handwork it takes to get those gorgeous rosettes out to our members. Number three is that I was able to wake up every day with enthusiasm and joy for what I did. My entire life in the industry, over 47 years, has been that way, and I especially felt that about working for the IAFE.

What do you think you will leave the organization?

A higher degree of member engagement than we ever dreamed possible. It was my top goal when I took the CEO position to motivate a more engaged membership and more energized leadership. I feel we have accomplished both. When I took over as CEO, the number of people serving on committees hovered around 250. Heading into the convention this year, we had 785 individuals serving on committees.

What do you think you will take with you?

Many precious memories! Very few people ever get a chance to hear from someone about what you did for them or how they felt because of an interaction with you. The week in Phoenix was filled with many reminders of this.

And what are some of your retirement plans?

The first thing is booked! I depart for a very secluded beach on a Caribbean island on January 18 to totally disconnect and spend time reflecting on the blessings of my life. As much as I have traveled so much for the job, I do plan to travel on my own schedule and without an agenda. One of my priorities, though, will be spending time with my 87-year-old mother, making up for lost holidays and birthdays, as well as helping her with medical appointments and such. Sometime in 2025, I'll take some baby steps into volunteering for a couple of performing arts groups in Springfield (Ohio). As a fair manager, I was so involved with this community but, for the past 20 years, not at all.

"It doesn't feel like a vendor, it feels
like a partnership."

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HWINS.com/partner

RWS sustains its growth with new offices in Shanghai, Orlando

NEW YORK — In 2006, **RWS** was founded by **Ryan Stana** with humble beginnings — out of his apartment. He was the only full-time employee. Today, the company, now known as **RWS Global**, employs 300 full-time team members and 8,000 seasonals.

Known for its world-class “live moments,” RWS Global has now expanded its worldwide operations by opening new offices in Shanghai and Orlando.

“Adding a headquarters in Shanghai positions us to expand our end-to-end services in Asia to include cruise, theater and sport clients with everything from master planning, design and build to execution and operations,” said Stana. “Opening an office in Orlando, the heart of the world of themed entertainment, will allow us to better serve our expanding Florida-based clients and team members both on land and at sea.”

Veronica Hart was appointed chief growth officer in 2024. Her role will allow her to leverage her extensive experience in franchise planning, global licensing, strategic



Ryan Stana of RWS Global announced the expansions at IAAPA Expo 2024. AT/TIM BALDWIN

planning, retail and brand positioning to guide and elevate the company’s marketing, business and client strategy across all markets.

“Veronica and I have known each other for more than two decades and, as a former member of the RWS Board of Directors, Veronica has already made a tremendous impact on our success,” Stana told *Amusement Today*. “There is simply no better expert in the entertainment industry to lead our worldwide growth than Veronica Hart.”

Hart has spent more than two

decades in leadership roles at **Paramount**, **HIT Entertainment**, **Sesame Workshop** and **CBS Studios** among others.

The teams based full-time in the new RWS Global Shanghai and Orlando offices will be supported by offices in New York City, Cincinnati, London and Sydney plus dedicated full-service rehearsal spaces at RWS Studios in New York City and the United Kingdom.

“We currently have dozens of remote employees who live in Orlando,” Stana explained. “This will give them a space to collabo-

rate in person daily, contributing to overall efficiency and teamwork. A Shanghai plan is still in the works, but we look forward to working in the same building with our new strategic partners, **Max-Matching Entertainments**, Asia’s leading location-based entertainment group.”

“This partnership represents an exciting opportunity for us to harness RWS Global’s extensive expertise and innovative practices to deliver even more engaging and unique experiences including themed experiences on cruise lines, award-winning musicals and top-selling concerts to the Chinese market. We look forward to this remarkable journey ahead,” said **Owen Zhao**, founder and president of Max-Matching Entertainments.

“We believe this synergy will foster exciting opportunities for growth and innovation in the entertainment sector. We look forward to delivering groundbreaking experiences that will redefine entertainment as we know it,” added Stana.

—Tim Baldwin

►IAFE

Continued from page 37

which was evident during Wednesday’s general session.

The IAFE recognized 39 IFM graduates, 10 individuals receiving their IFM Sponsorship and Revenue Building Grad Track certification, and, for the first time, three IFM Grand Champions (those individuals who have completed all six Grad Tracks).

The convention was planned under the leadership of 2024 IAFE Chair **Jo Reynolds**, **Warren County Fair**, Iowa, and 2024 Convention Program Chair **Alicia Shoults**, **Ohio State Fair**.

Throughout the year, the team of IAFE committee chairs and other volunteers met monthly to determine the theme, logo, keynote speakers and other convention programming elements.

In an effort to focus on building connections, the planning committee developed IAFE Connection Cards this year. A fair could donate to the IAFE Education Foundation to receive a set of cards to distribute throughout the year. During

IAFE meetings such as zone meetings, Institute Summit, Management Conference, online CyberSeminars and, finally, at the IAFE Convention, members were able to collect cards from their connections to add to their chain.

IAFE convention planners said the trade show aisles were packed and many reports from exhibitors indicated that they got bookings and deals done on the floor.

Mike Hnatt, **ShoWorks**, exhibitor and sponsor of the IAFE, told officials that the 2024 event was the “smoothest one in our nearly 30-year history. Loved the Third Street Party. Easy access. Great facilities/venue. Good schedules. Phoenix really worked well. Nice trade show floor.”

The sold-out IAFE trade show had 324 exhibit spaces and welcomed 20 showcasing acts within the two-day show.

Calico said earlier that they had to add more booth space to the trade show floor plan last August.

“We were sold out by October 1,” she said, adding they had to start a waiting list.

The Young Professionals



With the IAFE’s west coast location this year, the trip was not as far for the Burback family from Portland, Oregon. From left are **Ron Burback**, **Tracy Munoz**, **Beverly Burback** and **Fred Munoz**. AT/GARY SLADE

(YP) activities proved successful with a full house and positive reviews. Events included Ment-A-Minute, Connect and Cocktail, a workshop and a social outing on Tuesday evening. The YP Steering Committee also supports the Rising Star Award.

IAFE Ambassadors were present throughout the convention including social media, hosting the First Friends Reception, overseeing the swag and pin swap and serving as mentors to many IAFE members in attendance.

Four off-site educational experiences were offered to attendees, including **Footprint Center** and **WestWorld** of

Scottsdale, and Phoenix’s **Chase Field** and **Sysco Arizona**. These experiences were limited to a smaller quantity of participants to ensure a positive experience for all.

The 2024 convention also introduced the incoming president and CEO **David Grindle**. Grindle is an accomplished association executive with over 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. He holds the Certified Association Executive (CAE) designation from the **American Society of Association Executives (ASAE)** and is a Fulbright Specialist with the **United States Department of State**.

“The 2024 IAFE convention in Phoenix, Arizona, was a wonderful experience,” Reynolds said. “It was a great opportunity for networking, with many sessions and workshops offered to share ideas and celebrate and recognize our members’ award-winning achievements. We are all grateful for the connections made with friends and mentors, the ideas exchanged and the lasting memories made. Anyone unable to attend an IAFE convention should consider applying for a scholarship for next year’s Journey to the Top. The information and knowledge gained is worth the trip to help you build on your strong foundation.”

The dates for the 2025 convention and trade show are Nov. 30-Dec. 3, in Denver, Colorado.

The Gravity Group acquires new facility to accommodate growth

AT: Tim Baldwin
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CINCINNATI, Ohio — Founded in 2002, **The Gravity Group** was comprised of passionate roller coaster designers. Through innovation, the company has continued to bring wooden coasters into state-of-the-art technology.

The company has built numerous award-winning wooden coasters, with Hades, The Voyage and Ravine Flyer II all taking Golden Ticket Awards upon opening. In recent years, the company has received additional accolades with its engineered precut track. In 2021, this advancement took a Golden Ticket for Best New Innovation. The company prides itself on keeping the preservation and refurbishment of wooden coasters as a true *wood* solution.

But as The Gravity Group has numerous projects in refurbishment, the company has recently moved to a new facility.

"The demand for the engineered precut track is extremely strong," said **Michael Graham**, engineer and principal. "Because of that, we had a need to improve our facility."

Late last year, The Gravity Group purchased a building and renovated it for its own purposes. The staff moved in October 4, six weeks before IAAPA Expo.

"Now it's our own home, and it's wonderful and beautiful and everybody loves it," smiled Graham.



The new facility (above) has helped The Gravity Group successfully achieve more efficient operations. During the renovation process last September, a mezzanine provided a solution for second-story offices (right). COURTESY THE GRAVITY GROUP

"I have a window in my office!" laughed **Brian Kosmac**, engineer.

The team is excited about the advantages the new building provides.

"Everybody from the office to the shop enjoys big improvements," Graham told *Amusement Today*. "The 3,000-square-foot office space was a lower-level space. It was a steel processing plant, so it had a minimal number of offices needed. We demoed showers and locker rooms we didn't need and reworked it. There was a mezzanine, so we were able to double the office space."

During the renovation, where windows didn't exist, the crew cut and installed them.

"It is peaceful and quiet now, whereas at the old place, there was a lot of chaos," noted Graham.

"Our old office had

bright orange everywhere and high-walled cubicles where to get to the printer, you felt like a rat looking for cheese in a maze," said Kosmac. "If we ever give up roller coasters, **Chad (Miller)** and Michael have a career in interior decorating."

Another improvement was the meeting space. In the previous facility, the conference room and the break room were the same space, and the team admitted it did not work very well.

"Now those are separate rooms, and we have a large common area with a small 'huddle' breakout area," Graham said. "We have four group areas now, and we use all of them. All of them have a very good and effective need. It's been wonderful."

Bathrooms on both floors are an appreciated amenity.

One of the drawbacks



to the old facility was The Gravity Group felt the material flow and processing were stunted in the shop area, requiring moving many things around.

"There was a separation of shops at the old place, and now it is all under one roof," said Graham. "The material flow is very easy and very quick; it's almost effortless."

The storage for lumber and materials has also been advantageous.

"At the old place, it was inside/outside/spilling all over the place. And it was a multi-tenanted warehouse. We were not good neighbors," joked Graham. "We were bad neighbors."

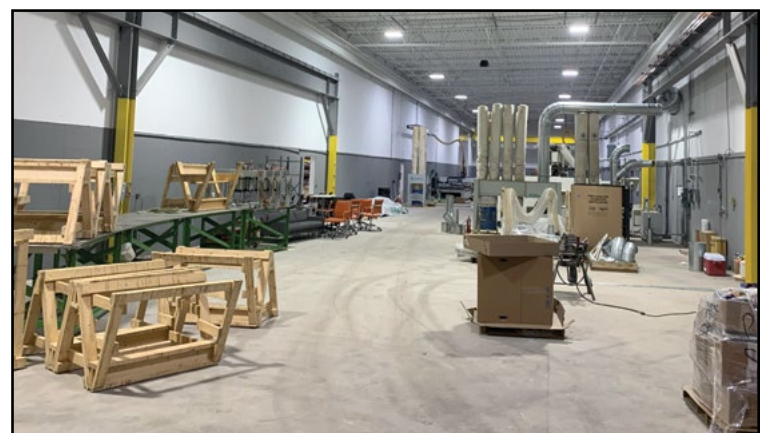
Their own lumber yard

on the back lot now provides quick and easy access.

"It was a huge effort moving everything — all the amount of stuff we accumulated over how many years was kind of astronomical," said Graham.

"Given my 11 years working at The Gravity Group — being in two different offices and seeing one of the original offices — I had my doubts about how aesthetically pleasing the place would look," smiled Kosmac. "Upon seeing the new facility for the first time, I felt like I was in one of those home makeover shows as the couple who had just seen the final product — well done!"

•thegravitygroup.com



The Gravity Group team took time out from its holiday party to pose in front of the new facility (above left). Larger space makes for better material flow, seen here before The Gravity Group officially moved in (above right). COURTESY THE GRAVITY GROUP

OBITUARY

Former O.D. Hopkins partner, DiGirolamo dies

PHOENIX, Ariz. — Donald Lee DiGirolamo, a former partner in then N.H.-based O.D. Hopkins died in Phoenix, Arizona, with his family on November 5, 2024. He was 80.

DiGirolamo was born in Springfield, Illinois, on May 31, 1944, to Cathryn and Gladstone DiGirolamo. He was the youngest of three children, having an older sister Gladys and brother Jim.



Donald Lee DiGirolamo

He excelled in sports during high school having played on both the wrestling team and football team. Following high school, he entered the service, serving two years as a cook for the U.S. Army.

Following stops in the job market, he became bored with the humdrum job of being indoors all the time. He met someone in a bar one day and asked what they did. The person replied that he "...worked at a company that had a ride at the Illinois State Fair" — and that interested DiGirolamo. The person said they had an opening for a truck driver and if he was interested, they would loan him a truck so he could go to the DMV and get his CDL license. DiGirolamo passed the test, got his CDL license and started his job in the early '60s with O.D. Hopkins and Associates.

Don started by driving the company truck around the fair circuit for Hopkins as needed. He would later move into management with the company where he worked closely with Jerry Pendleton for many years. Pendleton would make Don a partner in the company, which was now supplying numerous rides to the amusement park industry. Pendleton took care of all the logistics for the company, as well as the financial side. DiGirolamo was assigned the operations parts and service along with the management duties on the operational side of the rides.

Longtime friend Paul Borchardt of Wonderland Park, Amarillo, Texas, shared this about DiGirolamo: "In 1979 we first met Don, as he brought our O.D. Hopkins Sky Ride to us on the recommendation from Joe Malec of Peony Park in Nebraska. Don and my Father-in-Law (Paul Roads) immediately gave each other nicknames. Don enjoyed directing the workers, and Paul Roads kept asking him when he would start helping the workers erect the ride. This was the beginning of a long-trusted relationship, one that would result in the development of seven prototype Hopkins rides for Wonderland Park. During the next 40 years, Don and later Jeannie would be at the park for delivery, erection and testing of our new rides. Even if there was not a delivery to be made, he still found time to pass through Amarillo so he could stop to harass Paul and tease him that he only stopped to collect his pay from his friend Paul. They agreed that this was the only excuse needed to enjoy a few good Margaritas. Paul said this was good as he could pay in Margaritas as that was all he was worth. This is more of a story but shows that in this industry friendship is very valuable and full of good people, like Don, that we called our Friend!"

"I too can confirm the Margarita stories in Amarillo and the friendship both Pauls had with Don," added *Amusement Today* Publisher Gary Slade. "Don was among the great industry legends when it came to being a gentleman and industry friend. We all lost a dear friend, but Heaven gained an angel."

ON THE MOVE

Give Kids The World (GKTW) announced **Pamela Landwirth** will transition from her role as president and CEO of the nonprofit resort serving critically-ill children and their families on dream vacations to Central Florida. Landwirth has tirelessly served the organization for more than three decades, having succeeded its Founder Henri Landwirth in 1995.



Landwirth



Lomas

"Words cannot fully express our gratitude to Pamela for her leadership over these past 30 years," said GKTW Chairman **John Nichols**. "Pamela has made an indelible impact on the Village as she carried Henri's vision forward. She is cherished by all GKTW serves, having committed her life's work to ensuring GKTW remains a beacon of hope for critically-ill children and their families worldwide."

To lead this transition, GKTW's Board of Directors has named **Jordan Lomas** as interim CEO. Lomas most recently served as the senior vice president of information technology at **Darden Restaurants, Inc.** He is a founding member of the board of directors for **A Gift for Teaching**, a nonprofit organization that provides free school supplies to Orlando-area public schools, and he has served on the GKTW Board of Directors since 2024.

Deborah Eicher, international sales and marketing director at Swiss-based **RES Rides**, has been selected to serve on the **IAAPA** European & Middle East (EMEA) M&S Subcommittee beginning in January 2025. The EMEA M&S subcommittee is a constituency volunteer committee of industry leaders that represents manufacturers and supplier

members of IAAPA.

"I am honored to be selected as a member of the EMEA IAAPA M&S Subcommittee and I look forward to putting my more than 20 years' experience in the attractions industry and trade show space to work for the EMEA M&S constituency," said **Eicher**.



Eicher

Eicher has an MBA and an ICAE and is a past member of the **IAAPA Foundation** Board of Directors and the Global IAAPA M&S Committee.

Electrosonic has announced the appointment of two key personnel in North America. **David Whitemyer** will join the company as director of partnerships, museums and culture and **Kate Klipp** as a sales associate. Both are highly experienced in the entertainment industry.



Whitemyer

Whitemyer will be responsible for developing opportunities in the company's museums and culture practice while furthering partnerships to serve Electrosonic's clients' audiovisual and technology needs.



Klipp

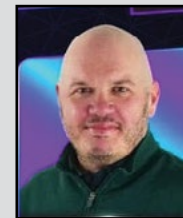
"David Whitemyer has built a track record of outstanding success throughout his career and his deep expertise in museums and entertainment will enable our clients and partners to thrive in our digital world," said **Chris Johnson**, vice president of sales and strategic partnerships at Electrosonic. He also added "Kate's understanding of relationships and strategy will be a vital link between our team and our partners."

Embed announces global movement for company's chief executive teams

SINGAPORE — **Embed** announced the global movement of its chief executive teams to kick off 2025. "We always say that our customers are at the heart of everything we do and how we do it — our customer-centricity has always been the driving force of our business," said **Renee Welsh**, CEO at Embed. Proving that actions



McMenamin



Hartgrove



Smith

are louder than words, Renee Welsh and CTO **Andy Welsh** recently relocated from Singapore to Dubai, U.A.E., Embed's headquarters in Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA), to deepen Embed's roots in a region with many Embed customers and unparalleled growth.

To support this regional vision, **Rob McMenamin** has joined Embed as the new EMEA general manager. McMenamin is entertainment giant **Majid Al Futtaim's** former director of leisure and entertainment and has an extensive amusement and entertainment background from the U.K., Australia as well as the Middle East.

Mike Hartgrove has also joined Embed as the new global director of customer experience, bringing his management expertise from multiple industries to lead the support and training teams, reinforcing Embed's 99% customer approval rating.

To aid in ensuring the Embed system's seamlessness and consistency in every location, **Michael Smith** takes on the role of Embed's global director of installation. Smith comes equipped with over 17 years of C-level executive leadership in health sciences industries and as president of wellness start-up, **The Virtual Formula**.

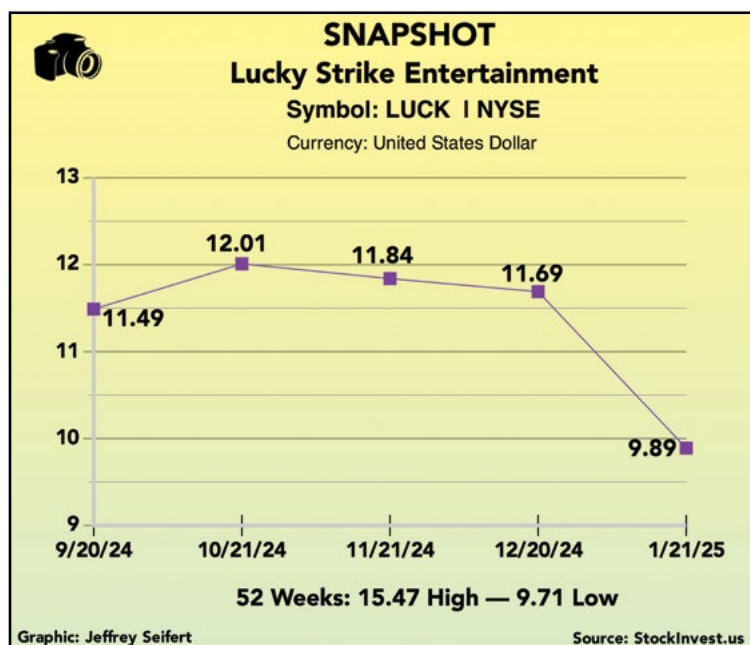
MARKET WATCH

COMPANY	SYMBOL	MARKET	PRICE 1/21/25	HIGH 52-Week	LOW 52-Week
PARKS AND ATTRACTIONS					
The Blackstone Group	BX	NYSE	181.52	200.96	115.82
Comcast Corp./ NBCUniversal Media	CMCSA	NASDAQ	36.97	47.11	36.15
Dave & Busters Entertainment, LLC	PLAY	NASDAQ	26.50	69.82	22.83
EPR Properties	EPR	NYSE	47.6	50.26	39.65
Falcon's Beyond	FBYD	NASDAQ	5.41	13.25	5.15
Fuji Kyoko Co., Ltd.	JP:9010	TYO	2183.00	4595.00	2083.00
Haichang Holdings Ltd.	HK:2255	SEHK	0.54	1.04	0.39
Lefoo Development Co.	TW:2705	TSEC	18.30	22.45	16.30
Lucky Strike Entertainment Corp	LUCK	NYSE	9.89	15.47	9.70
MGM Resorts International	MGM	NYSE	33.35	48.25	31.61
Parks America, Inc.	PRKA	OTC	0.40	0.61	0.32
Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ltd.	RCL	NYSE	243.28	258.70	113.10
Six Flags Entertainment Corp.	FUN	NYSE	45.37	58.70	35.93
Tivoli A/S	DK:TIV	CSE	624.00	770.00	620.00
United Parks & Resorts Inc.	PRKS	NYSE	52.89	60.83	44.72
The Walt Disney Company	DIS	NYSE	108.70	123.74	83.91
Warner Bros Discovery Inc.	WBD	NASDAQ	9.77	12.70	6.64
SUPPLIERS/OTHERS					
Brogent Technologies, Inc.	TW:5263	TSEC	141.50	205.50	108.50
Sansei Technologies, Inc.	TYO:6357	TYO	1228.00	1852.00	1156.00
Topgolf Callaway Brands	MODG	NYSE	8.58	16.89	7.22

Details and information available at amusementtoday.com/stocks

Worldwide Markets — CSE/DK: Copenhagen Stock Exchange; HK: The Stock Exchange of Hong Kong; JP: The Tokyo Stock Exchange; NASDAQ: National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations; NYSE: New York Stock Exchange; OTC: 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 1/13/25	Change from 1 year ago
East Coast	\$3.718	(\$0.274)
Midwest	\$3.532	(\$0.197)
Gulf Coast	\$3.321	(\$0.271)
Mountain	\$3.399	(\$0.356)
West Coast	\$3.776	(\$0.307)
California	\$4.716	(\$0.426)

CURRENCY

On 1/21/25 \$1 USD =	
0.9662	EURO
0.8165	GBP (British Pound)
155.91	JPY (Japanese Yen)
0.9107	CHF (Swiss Franc)
1.6041	AUD (Australian Dollar)
1.4396	CAD (Canadian Dollar)

BUSINESS WATCH**RocketRez partners with Morey's Piers**

WINNIPEG, Manitoba, Canada — **RocketRez** announced a new partnership with **Morey's Piers**. Located in Wildwood, New Jersey, Morey's Piers has delighted millions of guests with its boardwalk amusement parks, water parks and unforgettable oceanfront experiences for over five decades. RocketRez will collaborate with Morey's Piers to further enhance its operations and guest engagement through innovative ticketing, communication and analytics solutions.

"We are thrilled to begin this partnership with Morey's Piers," said **John Pendergrast**, CEO of RocketRez. "Together we can bring our world-class technology to their world-class attractions and help deliver seamless, elevated experiences for their guests."

"We are committed to providing the best possible experience to our guests and consistently look for ways to exceed expectations, including through guest-facing technology solutions," said **Will Morey**, CEO of Morey's Piers. "We are very enthusiastic about the technology capabilities demonstrated by the RocketRez team and excited about the value we see it bringing to our company and our customers' experience."

IAM acquires Diggerland USA

WINDERMERE, Fla. — **Innovative Attraction Management (IAM)** announced its acquisition of **Diggerland USA**, a one-of-a-kind theme park where guests can operate real construction equipment in a family-friendly environment. This acquisition marks a significant milestone in IAM's expansion strategy, reinforcing its commitment to offering exceptional experiences for visitors of all ages.

"We are thrilled to welcome Diggerland USA into the IAM family," said **James Harhi**, CEO of Innovative Attraction Management. "Diggerland represents an incredible opportunity to expand our portfolio with a unique and niche offering in the family entertainment space. We are committed to preserving its fun and educational appeal, while also bringing new, exciting elements to the park. This acquisition aligns perfectly with our vision of creating world-class experiences that inspire joy and wonder in visitors."

The acquisition will enable IAM to leverage its expertise in attraction management and operational efficiencies to further develop and grow Diggerland USA, while preserving the park's core value of offering an interactive, immersive experience for guests. IAM plans to invest in the park's infrastructure, introduce innovative new attractions, and enhance the guest experience through cutting-edge technology and personalized service.

PB Amusement, Spirello donate to food rescue

MECHANICSBURG, Pa. — In time for the holidays, **PB Amusement, LLC** and **Spirello BV** teamed up to donate nearly 9,750 pounds of Spirello (the only pre-cut, pre-fried, pre-frozen, spiral potato-on-a-stick) to **Table to Table**, a 25-year-old New Jersey's food rescue organization.

"**Robert Lutjehuisen** (owner, Spirello BV in the Netherlands) and I had discussed a few ideas for making positive use of some extra product we had on hand at the end of the season and settled on donating it to a community organization," stated **Pete Barto**, president of PB Amusement, LLC.

Table to Table is a nonprofit organization that has provided delivery of healthy foods that has helped create more than 300 million meals for food pantries, food banks, shelters, day care/after school programs and senior centers that serve people who are food insecure and economically disadvantaged in northern New Jersey.

Women INFLUENCE

A view from the top...

Perspective, diligence and intentionality drive **Molly Pivaler**, director of strategic partnerships at **Fivestone Studios**. From an early role as “tester of shoes” to helping hospitals create guest-focused cultures, Pivaler is a force of energy grounded in integrity and a dash of pixie dust.

Pivaler continues to bust boundaries

ORLANDO — Since she was a child, Molly Pivaler has understood the magic of the attractions industry. Her father worked for Walt Disney World, and her first part-time job saw her become a cast member.

“There is something important about going to Disney,” Pivaler shared. “I felt it as a kid and grew up wanting to be a part of it.”

She began in merchandise on Main Street and then moved to Epcot as a performer in the World Showcase Parade. Quickly, Pivaler found herself immersed in the unique world of creating memories for others. “Every day we focused on making connections with our guests,” Pivaler explained. “We understood what it meant to visit the park, to be a family who had saved for years so they could experience all the Magic Kingdom had to offer. Our teams were passionate about creating the magic of Disney for our guests.”

“We were intentional in everything we did,” she continued. “Every decision was made with the guest perspective in mind. At one point, part of my job was to try our entertainers’ shoes: how they looked, how they performed on the asphalt, how they complemented the look of the costume. I learned a great deal about a great deal, and I loved every minute of it.”

Pivaler’s guest focus shifted when she joined Disney’s Community Relations department. “The concept of EDU-tainment was still new and I was part of a community engagement initiative called, ‘The Disney Crew.’ It was an engaging puppet show that visited Central Florida’s schools and through creative storytelling encouraged kids to stay in school and say no to drugs. It was authentic and fun.” The role eventually led to an opportunity outside the attractions industry. “I made an intentional career shift and moved to Orange County Florida’s school district,” she said. “I brought all the tools Disney taught me and applied them, blending education with entertainment elements.”

A few years later, a life-changing

experience put Pivaler back on the attractions industry path along with a sense of purpose. “My son was diagnosed with leukemia, and we spent a lot of time in the hospital,” she remembered. “During one of those stays, I tried to distract my son from the pain of a procedure with a small lava lamp; my goal was to distract him with something visual and positive. I kept saying to myself he deserved better. Then, I started saying we had to do better. I began to meet with the heads of the hospital, the residents, the nurses, and I got them to listen.” Those conversations inspired the hospital to create a new department focused on viewing patients through a customer service lens. Pivaler was hired to direct the initiative and department. The role reminded her of her earliest training — guest service focus, making moments and being intentional.

Because of the work she was doing in the hospital, Pivaler was invited to speak at the Themed Entertainment Association’s (TEA) 2016 SATE conference. “I shared my family’s story and how themed design could be applied in places like hospitals. I discussed how the industry could create a better patient journey, and I challenged attendees to consider taking on pro bono projects in their communities.”

“There are things in life that drive us to the next step,” Pivaler continued. “My experience as the mom of a child with an illness pushed me to advocate for him and others like him. I used my voice, drawing from the industry I had started my career with. After speaking at SATE, I decided to return to the themed entertainment industry with roles with ITEC Entertainment, BRPH and (The Companies of) Nassal. They say timing is everything and in 2018, Disney announced a \$100 million commitment to help reimagine the children’s hospital experience. Nassal was hired to fabricate and install incredible new spaces for 14 hospitals across the country and I served as Nassal’s project manager for this amazing endeavor. It was a full circle experience

Molly Pivaler Fivestone Studios Orlando, Florida



both professionally and personally as I was once again working with Disney, the brand and characters, as well as designers and fabricators and hospital administration — all united in creating safe, beautiful spaces for children.

“We did amazing things in each hospital,” she continued. “Everything I learned about creating magical, intentional moments for guests in a theme park came together with this project. I found my place, working behind-the-scenes in themed entertainment. I will forever be proud and grateful to have been part of that effort.”

Throughout her career, Pivaler has applied her guest-first mantra to her clients and partners. In her current role with Fivestone Studios that means understanding trends, keeping abreast of technology and thinking ahead so she can present ideas and solutions that bring the highest outcomes to her clients. “That drives me today,” she said. “My number one responsibility is to manage relationships and build trust with our clients.”

“Our guests are our clients,” she furthered. “I want them to know they are heard and valued. And it’s important they know I am always thinking of them, anticipating their needs and sometimes, reaching out just because. We are a people industry, and we must take care of each other.”

Since her first experience as a guest speaker, Pivaler has remained a dedicated member of the TEA and currently serves on the TEA Eastern Division Board of Directors.

“I love volunteering and mentoring,” she said. “Serving others is an outlet for me. I like to use my voice for others who are still figuring out how to use theirs,” she finished. “Imagine if we all took a moment to do that for each other?”

Pivaler also believes it is important to remind others to push past boundaries — real and perceived. “The magic of our industry comes from what is beyond what we already know and do. If Walt Disney had not pushed boundaries years ago, we would not be talking today,” she explained. She points to organizations like TEA that create opportunities for industry professionals to come together and learn from each other. “I remind newcomers that showing up is the first step,” she said. “Then I encourage them to plan to stay for just a few minutes or challenge them to meet two new people. Pushing past our own personal boundaries/fears can help lead to a new opportunity. If you don’t ask the question, the answer is always no. However, think about what could happen when the answer is yes.”

—Susan Storey

SAFETY, MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

▶ VLocker partners with mountain resort — page 46 / Baynum Solutions widens its offerings — page 51

Education, connection lead to successful AIMS safety seminar

AT: Susan Storey
Special to Amusement Today

ORLANDO — “We’re the ones who make it safely fun.” With those words, **Jim Pattison**, CEO, **Ripley Entertainment**, helped kick off the 2025 **AIMS International Safety Seminar**. Pattison delivered the keynote address to attendees from 42 states and 21 countries who gathered in Orlando for the annual event. This year’s Safety Seminar included over 400 hours of educational content delivered by over 150 subject matter experts, speakers, veteran trainers and industry leaders. Educational content ranged from maintenance and inspection to aquatics, operations, portable amusements, adventure attractions, safety, security, risk management, and more.

“This year we honored and celebrated 60 years of delivering critical, important safety education to our attendees,” shared **Amy Lowenstein**, Executive Director, AIMS International.



Twelve young professionals volunteered as AIMS Ambassadors during this year’s seminar. In the front (l to r): **Brandon Kurecki**, **Natalia Skinner**, **Sofia Lanzi**, **Genesis Flores**, **Gabo Nunez Rojas**. In the back (l to r): **James Brown**, **Justin Peng**, **Eliza Throne**, **Mathew Saenez**, **Joely Ronchetti**, **Kylie Dryden**, **Brendan Lynch**. AT/GARY SLADE

“AIMS International is the world leader in amusement safety education and the annual AIMS International Safety Seminary is our premier event. Almost 800 attendees took part, all focused on furthering safety in our industry.”

Excitement and support for the AIMS International Safety Seminar could be seen, and felt, by the enthusiasm of this year’s sponsors. With record sponsorship and record

on-site displays from industry manufacturers and suppliers, the in-person connections and communication opportunities were just as important, and popular, as the course content and sessions.

“I especially appreciate being able to talk with the park mechanics who use our products,” said **Steve Lee**, **Gorilla Lube**. “They tell me what they like, and don’t like, about our products. At other industry events, we’ll meet



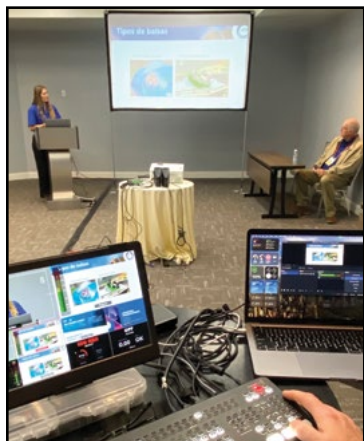
As the annual AIMS Safety Seminar celebrated 60 years in Orlando this year, four Arlington, Texas-based companies were represented, from left: **Dynamic Entertainment’s Karina Macias** and **Danielle Lesser**; **Ride Entertainment’s Kris Rowberry**; **AIMS International Executive Director Amy Lowenstein**; **Amusement Today’s Gary Slade** and **Concrete Graphics/Sa-So’s Marcos Garza**. COURTESY ERIC FLUET/AIMS INTERNATIONAL

management or corporate leaders, but during the AIMS Safety Seminar we learn how our customers use our products. We can have real conversations with clients and discuss how we can provide the right solutions for them. In addition, I meet potential new clients. We discuss their needs and how **Gorilla Lube** can meet them. They then go home to talk with their procurement teams and managers, and I follow up by sending samples of our products.”

A longtime partner of the Seminar, **Baynum Solutions**, returned this year as an event sponsor. “We have been a proud sponsor of AIMS International Safety Seminar since 2016,” said **Walter Bowser**, President, **Baynum Amusement Solutions**. “Personally, I have been a part of AIMS International as a member, participant and instructor since 1996. Each year AIMS has expanded its safety education and course content. Maintaining safety in

the industry is our top priority and it is incredibly important we all continue to invest in the future generations of amusement safety professionals.”

Part of that support for future leaders includes the AIMS International Ambassador program. This year, twelve ambassadors, co-lead by returning Ambassadors **Eliza Thorne** and **Matthew Saenz** volunteered to help the event. The Ambassadors assisted in every corner of the Seminar, including assisting with registration, staffing the attendee help desk, ensuring attendees received proper class education and overseeing the silent auction. Through it all, they also had the opportunity to learn and make their own professional connections. “This week was incredible,” Thorne shared. “Amy (Lowenstein) and the entire AIMS team gave us the opportunity to learn how to support a large event like the Safety Seminar, along with the time and ability to



Lina Ardila from **Cryogenic Plastics, Inc.** provided Spanish translation during this recorded class, so that the content can be shared online (above left). **Maegan Wallace** of **Maclan Corporation** celebrated **Maclan’s 50 years** alongside **AIMS International’s 60th year** celebration. AT/GARY SLADE



▶ See AIMS, page 44

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AIMS Continued from page 43

build our networks with people who are working in this industry.” A recent graduate from the Rochester Institute of Technology, Thorne said the collective, supportive spirit shared by Seminar attendees was infectious and positive. “This industry is very supportive of young professionals,” she explained. “Volunteering for AIMS gave us firsthand education and experience that we will carry with us.”

The volunteer spirit from the ambassadors was just one part of the total event puzzle. “It takes an army to successfully execute a seminar of this size and scope,” said **Eddie Kinder**, AIMS Safety Seminar Manager. “We are so incredibly grateful for the hard work and dedication of our 12 talented ambassadors, 150 instructors, and staff. They spent the past 12 months preparing to advance amusement safety education during this exciting week.”

Along with young professionals, seasoned industry leaders, too, came away from the Seminar with new insight and fresh perspective. “Watching how the AIMS education content, and Safety Seminar attendance, has grown over the past three decades is a testament to the amusement industry’s commitment to safety,” shared **Richard “RAC” Carroll**, COO, **Ellis & Associates**. “This year it was exciting for me as I attended as a student; even after 40 years in this industry, it’s important to remember we are all lifelong learners.” Along with providing educators to support the Seminar, **Ellis & Associates** also sponsored the Monday Power Hour event at the start of the week.

“With the addition of industry-leading programming over the last couple of years, AIMS has continued to expand its reach into aquatics, operations, portable, and the adventure attractions segments,” Lowenstein added. “The opportunity for more classes also gave way to larger classes and new this year, we added two accreditations: Certified Attractions Safety and Security Professionals (CASP) and the Inflatables and



The AIMS International scholarship winners included (l to r) **Audrey Nelson, Kelsey Heacock, Stevie Stevens, Sam Mitchell and Brett White. Amy Lowenstein and Pat Hoffman posed with them.** AT/GARY SLADE

Trampoline Accreditation.” “AIMS is at the forefront of advancing safety standards, fostering collaboration, and championing best practices for amusement rides and attractions,” Lowenstein continued, “However none of it would be possible without the hundreds of world-class instructors and volunteers who make it happen.”

Speaker and educator **Bob Hartline** was impressed by the number of attendees he addressed throughout the week. Teaching several classes grounded in electrical systems, power distribution and use, Hartline taught one class that brought in more than 140 attendees, demonstrating the importance — and hunger — for such educational content. With a core belief in leading with safety, supporting the Seminar, and volunteering as a returning teacher is an important way Hartline gives back to the industry while supporting its future.

First-timers continue to make up a significant part of AIMS Safety Seminar attendee roster. **Brian Knoebel** from **Knoebels Amusement Resort** was impressed and energized by the speakers and their content delivery styles and presentations. “**Tony Claassen** has encouraged me to attend the AIMS International Safety Seminar for many years,” Knoebel shared, “This year, I made the commitment, and I’m so glad I did. In addition to the wide array of educational classes moderated by the enthusiastic instructors, I really enjoyed meeting the sponsors. Having the ability to visit their tables was an unexpected added benefit. I was able to have real conversations with many vendors, suppliers and manufacturers on behalf of our team.”

Knoebel noted the January

timing for the Seminar is perfect for seasonal parks like Knoebels. “The Seminar takes place when most park maintenance departments have their rides disassembled and often are in need of solutions, ideas and answers from vendors as they ready for the season. Knowing that so many of them take part in the Seminar, I think park teams can combine the opportunity to meet face-to-face with vendors, with the opportunity to take part in continued education and connection. We are already discussing how many team members we will send on behalf of Knoebels next year.”

Local to Orlando, **Skyline Attractions** returned to the Safety Seminar as a table sponsor for the second year in a row. Echoing others’ experiences, **Chris Gray**, shared, “The AIMS Safety Seminar is a great play to meet and network with industry professionals who may not typically attend IAAPA Expo are still decision makers for their park or attraction. This week, dedicated to both learning and teaching is a must-attend for anyone who is committed to supporting a safe industry for us all.”

“The addition of new accreditations expanded educational offerings in emerging industry segments, a commitment to continuously updating programming, and the integrity of AIMS International certification are driving continued growth and attendance at the AIMS International Safety Seminar each year,” Lowenstein concluded. “We are already focused on curating and developing next year’s event and look forward to again hosting the world’s leading amusement safety seminar.”

The 2026 AIMS Safety Seminar will be held in Orlando on January 11-16.

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VLocker just one part of Brundage Mountain Resort's 10-year plan

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

MCCALL, Idaho — Brundage Mountain Resort is making major progress on its \$25-\$30 million improvement plan, first announced in November of 2021. The 10-year improvement plan includes quite an array of additions and expansions, both big and small, all geared toward benefitting guests who visit the McCall, Idaho, resort.

Spaced within such things as a new Mountain Adventure Center, centennial chair lift upgrade, a new entrance road, new ski patrol building, new mountain bike/hiking trail and a new employee housing facility are the newest in lockers and kiosks from VLocker.

The old-style electronic lockers have been replaced with the latest innovative technology from VLocker for the 2024/25 season.

This makes VLocker a part of Brundage's 10-year



VLocker installed 152 doors and four kiosks at the Brundage Mountain Resort, collaborating with the resort to optimize space in its new 17,000-square-foot Mountain Adventure Center. COURTESY VLOCKER

improvement plan. An innovative, electronic locker system company with more than 30 years of experience in the locker business, VLocker has supplied lockers to more than 700 locations globally.

The company installed 152 doors and four kiosks at the Brundage Mountain Resort.

"We are thrilled that Brundage Mountain chose

to extend our valued relationship with them," said David VanderWier, sales executive at VLocker. "They had the opportunity to explore other providers and chose to remain with VLocker for their upgrades. Their decision reflects our commitment to quality, reliability and exceptional customer service."

VanderWier said they

were happy that officials at the resort reached out to them before the design was completed.

"We were able to collaborate and optimize the space for our lockers," he said, making the installation "as smooth as a chairlift ride on a calm day."

The new installation of the lockers and kiosks is

improving and streamlining the process of getting from the check-in to the slopes quickly.

Brundage officials wanted the new locker and kiosks systems as part of the new Mountain Adventure Center, a 17,000-square-foot building housing tickets, rental and retail shops, guest services, the Mountain Sports School, new restrooms and more.

The ownership group that acquired Brundage Mountain in November 2020 has been working to build on the resort's established skiing legacy.

Priorities include enhancing the overall guest experience on the mountain and in the base area, expanding seasonal offerings and introducing overnight accommodations, all while preserving the classic Brundage Mountain vibe.

The resort is already seeing an increase in locker usage and profits.

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Cassandra Robinson begins term as ASTM International board chair

WEST CON-
SHOHOCKEN, Pa. —
Cassandra Robinson, engineer for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's National Urban Security Technology Laboratory (NUSTL), has started her term as the 2025 chair of the **ASTM International** board of directors.

ASTM International's board is made of 25 leaders from a variety of companies, associations, universities, government bodies and other organizations around the world.

"ASTM's process allows stakeholders to be involved, express their opinions, and share their knowledge and experience," said Robinson. "At the end of the day, we have to work together to come to a consensus, balancing requirements with what's technologically possible, so that everyone comes away knowing we're creating quality standards. I'm really excited to continue that mission in my role as chair."

Robinson serves as the lead for NUSTL's Big City Fire Working Group, as the subject matter expert for standards and conformity assessment, and as a member of project teams for operational field assessments and the System Assessment and Validation for Emergency Responders (SAVER) program.

Prior to taking her current position in 2023, Robinson spent 10 years as a physical scientist at the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (Gaithersburg, Maryland). She was responsible for leading the development of documentary standards and coordinating with other federal agencies, industry and relevant stakeholders in the development of standards and conformity-assessment systems.

An ASTM International Award of Merit honoree, Robinson became a member in 2006. She is

chair of the Homeland Security applications committee (E54) and vice chair of three E54 sub-committees. In addition, she is a member of the personal protec-



Robinson

tive clothing and equipment committee (F23).

Robinson has a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Clemson University and a master's degree in industrial and systems engineering from the University of Alabama.

At the same time, **Melissa Holbrook**, director

of quality at **Solmax Geosynthetics**; **Maria Knake**, acting group lead of the Standards and Conformity Assessment Services Group at the National Institute of Standards and Technology; **Pamela Kramer-Brown**, durability labs leader at **W.L. Gore Associates, Inc.**; **Philip Line**,

vice president, codes and regulations at the **American Wood Council**; **Michael Pluimer** of the **University of Minnesota** and **Richard Szecsy, PhD, PE**, CEO of **Big Town Concrete** all began their three-year term on the ASTM International board of directors.

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S&S WORLDWIDE

IRT's Ride Camp, NWSC Safety Seminar welcoming students in weeks to come

GALVESTON, Texas and PORTLAND, Ore. — Off-season safety and training seminars are continuing during the winter months. The **International Ride Training's (IRT)** Ride Camp Safety Seminar and the **Northwestern Showmen's Club (NWSC)** Safety Seminar are both just around the corner.

The 2025 IRT Ride Camp Safety Seminar for Ride Operators has been set for February 10 to 14, 2025.

IRT is a leading provider of safety training for amusement park ride operators. Its annual Ride Camp will be hosted at the **San Luis Hotel and Resort**, Galveston, Texas, this year. The hands-on training will be conducted at the **Galveston Historic Pleasure Pier**.

Day one of the event is for new instructor training and certification and the additional four-day event will focus on ride operator safety and recertification of operators,



IRT's Ride Camp includes multiple types of educational sessions, including breakout sessions featuring group discussions. AT/GARY SLADE

providing attendees with the knowledge and skills needed to ensure the safe operation of amusement park rides.

The event's theme this year is "Game On for Safety! Level Ops!"

"The theme throughout camp will be focused on achieving the highest standard in ride operations and being your very best as a leader," said **Cindee Huddy**, owner and managing member of IRT. "Attendees will learn skills to be both effective trainers and coaches in the field for your team of leaders who impact operators daily."

IRT's educational committee has been hard at work planning the seminar.

"This expert team has met monthly and has created a schedule and sessions that focus on ride operator training techniques, coaching safety at all levels, operational leadership, crisis planning and execution, maintenance terminology for operators, what operators need to know about ADA in the classroom and out at the rides, preventing normalization of deviance, creating effective standard operating procedures training tips and techniques out at the rides and much more," she said.

The Ride Camp Keynote Speaker is **Heather L. Barnes**, owner of **Improv @ Work**. This session of improv exercises is created to promote confidence in operational leadership and how to lead authentically. Barnes will additionally teach a session on the importance of executive presence for operations leadership and navigating difficult conversations.

"At IRT, ride operator

safety knowledge is our top priority," Huddy said. "Our Ride Camp seminar is designed to equip ride operators with the tools they need to ensure the safety of park guests and employees alike."

In addition to the safety training, IRT client attendees will have the opportunity to earn Instructor Certification as an iROC Ride Operator Safety Specialist upon successful completion of the seminar.

The 46th annual NWSC Safety Seminar has been set for February 17 to 21, 2025, on the **Funtastic Shows Campus**, Portland, Oregon. Classes during the seminar run from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., throughout the week. Meals will be served daily and are included in the seminar price.

There are several things that set the NWSC's seminar apart from other industry seminars.

"We have hands-on classes such as welding, forklift certification, fire extinguisher, first responder aid, first aid, inflatables, lubrication, where they actually get down and do the work," said **Tracy Munoz** of NWSC.

The last day of the NWSC's seminar is set aside for **NAARSO**, **AIMS**, Carnival Tech 101 testing as well as First Aid classes at an additional cost.

The NWSC Safety Seminar was established to promote continuing education by amusement industry professionals. It is aligned with **Portland Community College** for accreditation in their Continuing Education Units (CEUs) Program providing two CEUs for participation and completion of the seminar.

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Wildlife World Zoo, Aquarium and Safari Park continues progress

AT: Pam Sherborne
 psherborne@amusementtoday.com

LITCHFIELD PARK, Ariz. — **Wildlife World Zoo, Aquarium and Safari Park** located a little over 20 miles to the west of Phoenix in Litchfield Park, Arizona, continues with its move forward, announcing new additions for 2025.

The park, which opened in 1984, boasts Arizona's largest collection of exotic and endangered animals, with over 600 separate species on display. In addition to its diverse collection of animals, Wildlife World Zoo also offers an array of exciting attractions, rides and daily shows.

First up in 2025 in expansions and improvements is the zoo's new tiger exhibit.

"We're excited to share that our new tiger exhibit is expected to open in the spring of 2025," said **Kristy Hayden**, zoo president. "While we don't have an exact opening date yet, the progress on the project is generating a lot of excitement among our guests."

The exhibit features two



The Wildlife World Zoo's new tiger exhibit is expected to open this spring and features two mirror image habitats with common sleeping rooms behind a waterfall (above). A stainless steel woven cable, oxidized black has been used for the netting. The panels, from A-to-Z Netting in Tucson, Arizona, were chosen for their exceptional strength and durability and to enhance visibility. AT/GARY SLADE

mirror image habitats with common sleeping rooms in the back behind waterfalls. The are using a different type of metal screen/fenc-

ing that provides a much cleaner look and easier viewing for guests.

"They are made of stainless steel woven cable, oxidized black to enhance visibility," Hayden said.

The panels, sourced from A-to-Z Netting in Tucson, Arizona, were chosen for their exceptional strength and durability, Hayden said.

"They also minimize visual obstructions, providing an optimal viewing experience and improving photo opportunities for our visitors," she said.

In addition to the new tiger exhibit, Hayden said they also have announced the addition of two more new exhibits this year: jellyfish (moon jellies and sea nettles) and African wild dogs.

"For the African wild dog exhibit, we'll be using the same high-quality panels as the tiger exhibit to ensure the best possible experience for our guests," she said.

Wildlife World Zoo, Aquarium and Safari Park was founded by **Mickey Ollson**. He built the facility



from the ground up, starting with the zoo and then opening the indoor aquarium in 2009.

In 2016, the zoo completed a \$4 million expansion that included the addition of a restaurant and amusement rides. The ride section features a train ride, log flume, carousel, family coaster, sky ride and a **Soaring Eagle** Zip-line.

Ollson passed away in 2022, but his family contin-

ues to operate the park.

Today, along with all the above, the park offers a Sea Lion Encounter, a Capybara Encounter and Sloth Encounter. Shows include a Sea Lion Experience, Wildlife Encounter Show, Penguin Talk and Feeding and Lory Parrot Feeding.

The park offers a Safari Camp and Career Camp, as well as birthday parties and corporate events.

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The Fins Up Waterpark at Margaritaville at Lanier Islands is a project from WhiteWater West, that uses Baynum as its after-market sales provider. COURTESY BAYNUM SOLUTIONS

Baynum Solutions updates perspective, widens offerings “Beyond The Brush”

AT: Tim Baldwin
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NEWPORT, Ky. — Baynum Solutions has increased its breadth of services within the industry. Founded in 1983, it became known as a go-to provider for painting huge attractions within the amusement industry. Known for decades as Baynum Painting, the company rebranded in 2022. Now the company has an updated perspective: Beyond The Brush.

“Everyone we talk to says, ‘Hey, it’s the painters.’ Beyond The Brush for us is important,” said Melissa Bamford, director of marketing. “The employees who have helped us get to where we are today are also important on the journey that we’ve been on in our transformation into a solutions company.”

Bamford noted the introduction of water park services as a turning point.

“In 2018, Walt Bowser



As a certified installation partner of Splashtacular, Baynum Amusement Solutions completed this project in Little Elm, Texas. COURTESY BAYNUM SOLUTIONS

(President, Amusement Solutions) had been with us for about 12 years. He convinced (Founder) Chris Baynum into water park solutions for any type of environment,” she said. “We were able to schedule meetings at the IAAPA Expo that we had never had before. We talked to a lot of the suppliers, and we give a lot of credit

to WhiteWater West for naming us their after-market sales provider for refurbishment.”

That initiative from breaking out from the well-known hard parks to water parks led to considerable growth for Baynum.

“Walt is always looking for more ways we can be turnkey for parks,” Bamford told *Amusement Today*.

Soon, the company began talks about building attractions. Today, Baynum has three construction teams. In 2024, they constructed large water attractions from both WhiteWater and ProSlide.

Kevin Fife was also brought on prior to the pandemic, owing to his expertise in the amusement industry. He serves the company as construction project manager.

“I think it is super unique that we have the



The Baynum team has Goliath at Six Flags Magic Mountain looking sharp and shiny. COURTESY BAYNUM SOLUTIONS

▶ See BAYNUM, page 52

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►BAYNUM

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ability to do it all — painting, waterslide refurbishment, construction and installation,” Bamford said.

“Baynum represents and handles each of our projects like their own, but they represent Splashtacular’s brand to the highest stand possible,” said Brian Faulkner, vice president of operations, Splashtacular. “They are a true testament to a professional company specializing in the water park industry and handling tasks like a pro. Baynum is a huge part of Splashtacular’s continued growth.”

And the company’s project list is quite full, and it certainly hasn’t stepped away from painting. Bamford noted that when she started in 2018, the company typically had three to five big painting projects in the off-season. During the week of IAAPA Expo 2024, Baynum started eight coaster projects with Six Flags. Baynum has committed to 12 coasters to be painted.

Among the parks



The newly merged Six Flags Entertainment Corporation has 12 projects with Baynum at both Six Flags and legacy Cedar Fair properties. Millennium Force at Cedar Point (above left) is Baynum’s largest attraction to paint to date. The painted track on Valleyfair’s Wild Thing (above middle) looks stunning in the sunlight. Medusa at Six Flags Discovery Kingdom (above right) is also being worked on. COURTESY BAYNUM SOLUTIONS

are Darien Lake (Mind Eraser), The Great Escape (Flashback), Six Flags Over Georgia (Goliath), Six Flags Discovery Kingdom (Medusa) and Six Flags Magic Mountain (Goliath). On the horizon, further projects are Six Flags Over Texas (Titan) and Six Flags Fiesta Texas (Batman The Ride).

Since the Six Flags merger with Cedar Fair, those legacy parks also have projects in the works. Kings

Dominion is rebranding its 305-foot giga coaster as Pantherian. Following that, Dominator will also be receiving a refresh. Valleyfair (Wild Thing), Worlds of Fun (Mamba) and Cedar Point (Millennium Force) are all massive coasters as well.

“Millennium Force is the single-largest ride painting contract in the history of our company,” Bamford told AT.

Thematic work at an undisclosed park in Orlando

has kept the team also heavily involved.

Bamford noted that some of the projects involve new colors for the coasters, which makes the end result for fans particularly dramatic. Baynum Solutions is also involved in installations of Life Floor in water park facilities.

As construction managers, Fife along with Terry Stephens oversee three specialized, dedicated teams with the help of Mike Stuber

and Bart Perez leading the Life Floor division. Baynum has completed more than 100 successful construction installations and relocation projects since 2018.

As the company has branched out, the commitment to quality is still at the forefront.

“Our reputation is everything, and we are always known for doing things the right way,” said Bamford.

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