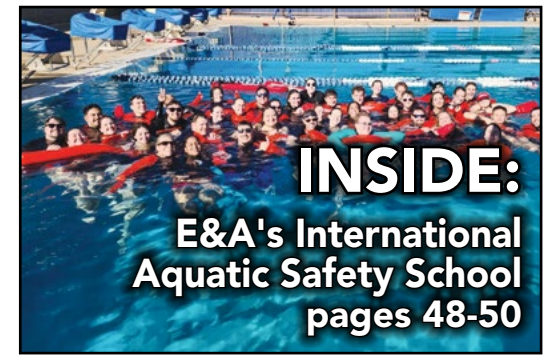


# Amusement TODAY

Your Amusement  
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NEWS Leader

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Digital Edition



Amusement Expo International continues to experience consistent growth, with the 2025 edition expected to set records. It will be held March 17-20, 2025, in the Las Vegas Convention Center, Las Vegas, Nevada.  
COURTESY AMUSEMENT EXPO

## 2025 Amusement Expo poised to shatter records

AT: Pam Sherborne  
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

LAS VEGAS, Nev. — Amusement Expo International (AEI) continues to experience consistent growth, with the 2024 event being the largest in its history. The upcoming March 17-20, 2025, event in Las Vegas had already sold out exhibit space by mid-February.

AEI is set to be held at the Las Vegas Convention Center, Las Vegas, Nevada. The educational portion will run March 17 and 18, while the trade show runs 19 and 20.

The overwhelming demand for exhibit space underscores AEI's leading role in the out-of-home entertainment industry. Organizers are making every effort to accommo-

date companies on the waitlist, highlighting their ongoing commitment to improving the event and reinvesting in the sector.

The theme for this year is "Power Up," a deep dive into the technologies, business models and strategies that will drive profits and propel businesses in the out-of-home and family entertainment industry.

AEI is unique in that it is owned and hosted by two leading professional associations, the Amusement and Music Operators Association and the American Amusement Machine Association. AEI brought on the Billiard and Home Leisure Expo in 2022. It is owned by the Billiard

▶ See AMUSEMENT, page 6

## Slick City's growth isn't slowing; new location opens in Houston

AT: Tim Baldwin  
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

HOUSTON — From the humble beginnings of a single location to becoming a nationally recognized brand, Slick City shows no signs of slowing down. The first Slick City location opened in Denver, Colorado, which was followed by four additional locations in Missouri, Arizona and Texas. With experience in the corporate world, Founder Bron Launsby envisioned success in becoming a franchise brand.

Growth came quickly. By the end of 2024, nine parks had come online with two more about to open their doors. During this year the number of properties will double — with even more lining up.

As the holidays approached, the Willowbrook location in Houston opened its doors just before 2024 wrapped up.

"It has been super successful. It's crazy how all these slides attract so many people," said Jorge Pina, district manager. "It's for kids and adults. We've had people that are like 86 or 90 years old doing it."

There is no doubt that part of the success is the aesthetic allure of the slides — colorful, shiny and outlined with LED lighting. What kid wouldn't want to rush

to it? Ironically, about one-fifth of revenue is attributed to adults aged 18 and over.

According to reports, Slick City Action Parks owns 48 patents.

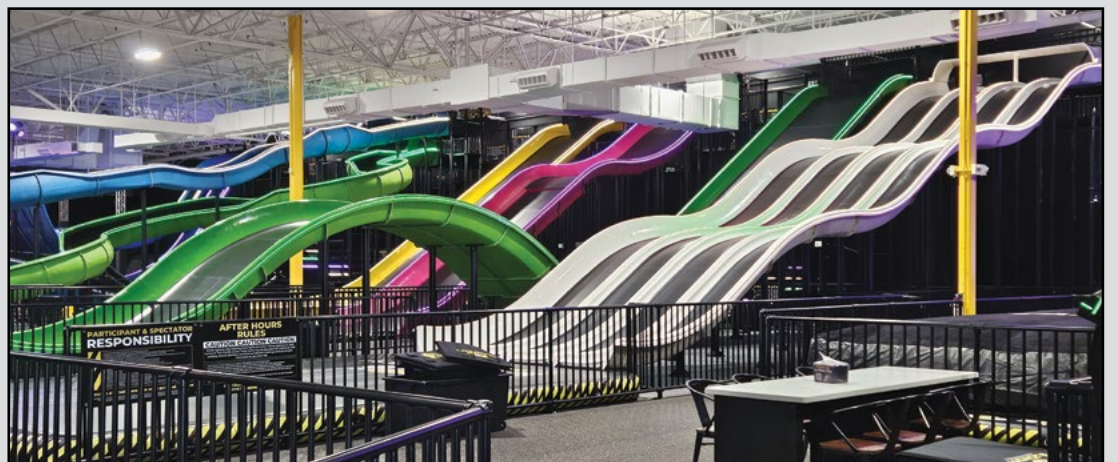
Slick Slide, a sister company, provides all the structures and mats. A special surface is painted onto the slides, and the mats zip over the coating at fast speeds.

"When we clean them, we don't use water," said Pina. "We use acetone. Plus, if we see a slide performing slower, we can use a special oil. We call it the 'slick sauce.'"

All mats fold and have handles to make it easy to carry. Every slide is ridden head-first, which enhances the fun.

"One of our brand taglines, 'Fast as Friction,' while fun, also alludes to the scientific nature of our slides and the coefficient of friction between the slide surface and the mat material," Launsby told Amusement Today. "Through extensive research involving the field of tribology, analysis utilizing professors at MIT, consultation with former astrophysicists at NASA, and loads of trial and error, we've developed a coefficient of friction with the experience of

▶ See SLICK, page 8



A large variety of slides keeps kids engaged. AT/TIM BALDWIN



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- Passengers per Train: 12

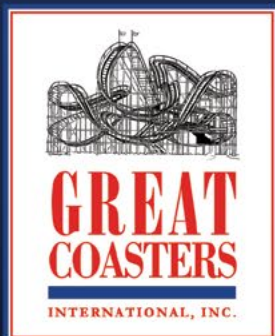
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AT NOTEBOOK: John W.C. Robinson, jrobinson@amusementtoday.com

## The big top soon to stop



Robinson

Driving across the country with my parents back in the early-1980s, it was well-established that Las Vegas would be a multi-day stop. However, this was a time before roller coasters and family entertainment had stepped into the lights of the famed Vegas strip. In fact, minors were barred from setting foot on the actual casino floors. At only about eight years old, what fun would Las Vegas be for me?

However, having a family deep in the amusement industry was to my advantage ... because my father knew exactly where to arrange our stay: Circus Circus.

Live circus acts could entertain my youthful eyes. An array of midway games lined the concourse, captivating the attention of this eager traveler. There were magic shops and stuffed animals and delicious park treats such as cotton candy and popcorn. In the midst of Sin City, here was a child's paradise.

And it was a brilliantly smart business back then. My father could enjoy the Blackjack tables while my mom took me around the indoor midway. It was a business model which proved so strong that — in the 1990s — Vegas took the idea and ran with it ... creating a family-friendly version of itself, with coasters on top of buildings, arcades in every hotel, animal and pirate shows for youthful eyes to enjoy, as well as entire amusement parks inside casino walls. What Circus Circus had pioneered became the norm for the city for several years.

Alas, like everything in Vegas, time takes its toll and things evolve. This past year, while attending Amusement Expo 2024, I opted to stay at Circus Circus once again. Time had run down its walls, the entire facility just didn't compare to the modern Vegas we'd come to know. The nostalgia was special and the new Spongebob dark ride from Sally was a treat, but no longer were the lights shining as bright at the destination which captured my attention as a child.

In the past month, it's been revealed that the land Circus Circus sits on is up for sale. The eventual sale will likely spell the end for this once one-of-a-kind destination. The innovative idea that evolved into the cornerstone of family entertainment for the entire Las Vegas Strip will likely soon be no more. However, the memories it created and the world it pioneered will live on as immortal.

FLINT'S VIEW: Bubba Flint



INDUSTRY VOICE: Yannick Gemme, Triotech

## The next wave of entertainment

What do guests expect from entertainment experiences? The U.S. market has rebounded, but the landscape has changed. While revenues have returned to pre-pandemic levels, operational costs remain high, forcing operators to rethink their approach. At the same time, guest expectations have shifted toward interactive, social and competitive entertainment, driving new trends in attractions.

Interactivity and group-based experiences will shape the next wave of attractions. Guests no longer want to simply watch. They want to compete, collaborate and influence the action in real time. This demand is fueling the growth of interactive multiplayer attractions where players can challenge each other, track scores and return to improve rankings. Attractions that integrate gameplay mechanics, high-energy experiences and leaderboard systems create a sense of engagement and replayability.

Meanwhile, venues are evolving. Large malls are seeing a resurgence as entertainment



Gemme

destinations, with arcades and FECs playing a key role in revitalizing these spaces. Hybrid concepts like competitive gaming bars, interactive social hubs and immersive multiplayer experiences are also gaining traction. These venues go beyond traditional games, creating an environment where guests connect, compete and socialize. This aligns with the growing trend of competitive socialization, now making its mark in the U.S. market.

Beyond interactivity, operators are also focusing on venue adaptability and efficiency. Many are investing in attendant-free attractions and cashless systems to streamline operations and reduce staffing needs, helping them maintain profitability despite rising costs.

The demand for shared experiences, interactivity and engagement is higher than ever. Operators who invest in attractions that blend competition, immersion and high replay value will be best positioned for long-term success in this evolving market.

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



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# 2 MINUTE DRILL



AT: Tim Baldwin

## Shane Huish, Bullwinkle's/Cowabunga Bay

**Shane Huish** has the amusement industry in his blood. The Huish family was heavily involved in family entertainment centers, so it is small wonder that today he is owner and operator of **Bullwinkle's** and **Cowabunga Bay**. From a roller coaster enthusiast in his younger years, the passion transitioned into the family business. With experience in both the family entertainment center sector as well as water parks, he has a wide range of knowledge and expertise. Throughout his life, he has been a collector of industry memorabilia, of which many aficionados would be quite jealous. He loves welcoming visitors from the industry to his various properties and is known for a huge smile.



Family entertainment is a family business for Shane Huish of Bullwinkle's and Cowabunga Bay. COURTESY SHANE HUISH

**Title:** Owner/Operator

**Number of years in the industry:**

I started in 1976 as hourly, but officially 37 years.

**Best thing about the industry:** It's fun!

**Favorite amusement ride:** It was Montezooma's Revenge, but now I revert to Olympia Looping.

**If I weren't working in the amusement industry, I would be ....** A dentist

**Biggest challenge facing our industry:** Security — Unruly and self-entitled guests.

**The thing I like most about amusement/water park season is ....** I like that it has an annual start and finish. I know where the finish line is; I just have to keep running.

**Favorite superhero movie:** *The Incredibles!*

**When I was a kid, our family always did this for spring break:** We always went to Magic Mountain (upon my insistence).

**The last time I wore a suit was ....** My birthday.

**The thing from the '90s I would love to see brought back would be ....** Freedom from cell phones.

**If my vote determined the Oscars, my choice for Best Picture of 2024 would be ...** *Wicked!*

**Hot dogs — ketchup or mustard?** Chili and Cheese and then mustard

**In a single word, the inside of my car is ...** immaculate.

**My favorite moment from my wedding was ....** Meeting Elvis (Vegas wedding, of course, he wasn't the real one).

**Which would you prefer to have in your personal game room — pinball or air hockey?** Pinball and it would be Monster Bash.

**The worst thing to happen to me while on vacation was ....** I drank the water in Mexico...it also used to be my favorite roller coaster.

**When flying, window or aisle?** Window.

**The first roller coaster I ever rode was ...** Matterhorn.

**Pick one: lying on the beach or skiing down a mountain?** Beach.

**The Broadway show I've seen the most is ...** "Starlight Express."

**The thing I worried about the most when raising a kid was ...** That I would do it wrong. They are turning out pretty good, so I guess I had nothing to worry about.

**Who should be the next James Bond?** Travis Kelce.

**Favorite National Park:** I'm not a big nature person. Can Disneyland count?

**The most I ever paid for a cocktail was ...** I live in Vegas, so every cocktail is expensive. I once paid more than \$50 for a tequila shot.

## THE INDUSTRY SEEN

### Freddi enjoys fun times, friends



GRAND PRAIRIE, Texas — As part of his duties, Chairman of IAAPA Massi Freddi (second from right) visits IAAPA members around the globe. On one of his tours, Freddi traveled to North Texas. *Amusement Today* staff members Tim Baldwin (far left) and Jeffrey Seifert (middle) were excited to show him, along with IAAPA Vice President Michael Shelton (third from right), member facilities in the area, including Bolder Adventure Park. Freddi was intrigued with the diversity of attractions concentrated in the Dallas-Fort Worth region. AT/TIM BALDWIN

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► **AMUSEMENT**  
Continued from page 1

**Congress of America.**

The AEI show is managed by **W. T. Glasgow Inc.**

According to feedback from previous attendees, the accessibility to games and services as well as the company leaders who represent them at AEI is vital. The hundreds of exhibits feature the latest product and service innovations for the out-of-home entertainment industry which



Organizers of the 2025 AEI event are offering over 23 educational sessions and roundtables that land within four essential categories that include human resources, artificial intelligence, arcade's significant comeback and the future of location-based amusements. COURTESY AMUSEMENT EXPO

includes virtual reality (VR), amusement arcades, family entertainment centers, digital music and much more.

AEI offers multiple options for networking, bringing together industry leaders, game and enter-

tainment professionals and other experts. The event is designed to foster connections through various events such as Beers and Cheers, educational roundtables, the popular industry gala and an amazing keynote luncheon. This year that keynote luncheon will feature **Dana Monique**, who is expected to deliver an inspiring, powerful message through an incredible musical performance.

Attendees can maximize their industry knowledge at AEI's two-day education conference, a must for sustained business growth. Participants can explore more than 23 sessions and roundtables within four essential categories that include Human Resources, Artificial Intelligence, Arcade's Significant Comeback and the Future of Location-Based Amusements.

Some of the educational seminars that are set include Making Real Money from Virtual Reality; The Unconference; **Bob Cooney's** Big Picture: The State of VR, AR and MR; The Future of Land-Based Entertainment; AI 201: Custom GPTs for Amusement Business Efficiency; From Arcades to Classrooms: VR's Role in Education; Can VR Be Social? Insights from **Mirra VR** and **Two Bit Circus**; Laser Tag: Off-Peak Marketing Ideas to Maximize Revenue; Optimizing Your Venues: Performance, Data, Technology, Food and Beverage; Path to Capital: Strategies for Securing Loans & Financing; Augmenting Reality: Engaging New Audiences with AR Technology; Emerging Industry Trends: Everything Old is New Again and How to Evaluate Games and

**FAST FACTS**

**Event:**  
Amusement Expo International Conference and Trade Show

**Date:**  
March 17-20, 2025, Las Vegas Convention Center

**Format:**  
Two days of education (March 17-18) followed by two days of trade show (March 19-20)

**Attendees:**  
Over 4,500 industry professionals expected

**Exhibitors:**  
More than 1,000 exhibit booths providing access to thousands of games, amusements, and co-locating show attractions

**Attractions.**

Others include: Numbers Don't Lie: Where is Laser Tag Trending?; Reflections and Insights from the Unconference; Salesmanship: Create Winning Partnerships with Your Locations; Employee Evaluations and Best Practices; The Downloadable Theme Park; Laser Tag: Anchor vs. Afterthought; Mastering the Balancing Act, How to Achieve Growth Without Sacrificing Stability; The Premium Experience Economy; Today's ATM Operations; Industry Roundtables and The Next Generation of Location-Based Experiences: Narrative, Immersion and Interactivity.

Tuesday afternoon the Unconference Reflection and Wrap-up along with the special guest keynote will be held. The All-Industry Gala Reception will follow that evening.

Exhibit hall hours for Wednesday, March 19, are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., with Beers and Cheers Reception with Industry Awards to follow from 5 to 6 p.m.

On Thursday, March 20, the exhibit hall will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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

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**ALTITUDE RIDES AND ATTRACTIONS**

**Amusement Expo International 2025 show board**

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- Bob Burnham, Paradise Pinball & Amusements LLC
- Joe Camorata, Alpha Omega Sales
- Jeff Blair, Sureway Gaming
- Allen Weisberg, Apple Industries, Inc.
- Tim Zahn, American Amusement Arcade



# 2025 Amusement Expo International exhibitor listing

List is current as of February 17, 2025.

4Leaf Technologies	1912	Greenspan Projects Ltd.	1557	PSI	1849
A&A Global Industries	917	Grupo Dcrejart	2043	Puloon Technology Inc	2052
A.E. Schmidt	1541	Guangzhou LiFang Amusement Equipment Co., Ltd	801	Pulse Box	2301
Adrenaline Amusements	848	Guangzhou Noah Touch Technology Co., Ltd.	2309	Pyramid Technologies, Inc.	1813
ALAN-1	1901	Guangzhou Yanhe Trade Co., Ltd.	2207	QubicaAMF Bowling Products	2152
All American Classic	1110	HF Cloth	1252	R & R Outdoors	1315
Allpoint Wireless	1807	Hoffman Mint	315	RAM Game Room	1535
Allstar Vending	1004	Hot games	2206	Redemption Plus	505
Alpha Omega Sales	330	Huizhou Double Star Sports Goods Co., Ltd	1548	RedPlum Skill Games	1835
American Alpha, Inc.	2026	IAAPA	1607	RePlay Magazine	1734
American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA)	2312	ICE Games	1136	Retro Arcade LLC	1635
American Changer Corp.	311	IceFuns Amusement	2307	Rhode Island Novelty	956
AMI Entertainment	327	iCombat Laser Tag	2355	Rilix VR	451
Amusement & Music Operators Association (AMOA)	2332	ID Tech	2205	Rocket Amusements	2100
Amusement Connect	129	Ideal One Amusement Software	147	Roller	640
Amusement Source International LLC	949	IGPM Distribution	1817	Ryken Security	1736
<b>Amusement Today</b>	<b>939</b>	iKiosk Technologies	1906	S & B Candy and Toy	2227
Andamiro Co., Ltd.	437	Imperial International	1235	Sacoa Cashless System	205
ANDY Cloth	1149	Imply Bowling USA	1658	SafePark USA	1657
Anirollz	1058	Incredible Technologies	627	S-Cabinet Supply	2038
Apex Commercial Capital	2234	Incredivend	401	Screaming Eagle Amusements, LLC	2031
Apple Industries	927	Indoor Adventure Parks	2238	Seasons	1707
Approvely	1939	Indoor Playgrounds International	2251	Sega Amusements International Ltd	211
Arachnid	715	Innovative Concepts In Entertainment, Inc.	410	Semnox Solutions	2113
Ardosia Nacional Slate	1358	InterCard	1027	Service First Processing	2311
Ardosias Santa Catarina LTDA	1608	International Currency Technologies Corporation	346	Shaffer Distributing	541
Art Attack	501	iPlayCO	1802	Shot Darts	1443
AstroSystems Inc	2219	Ivey Promotions LLC	2019	Silent Partner Software, LLC	340
ATI	1941	Iwan Simonis, Fusion Tables, Strachan and Aramith	1305	Skee-Ball	1213
ATM Merchant Services	602	J&J Snack Foods/Dippin' Dots/Slush Puppie	1702	Skeech Games, LLC.	1107
Aurora Technolgy, Inc. (ATI)	2117	J. Pechauer Custom Cues	1109	SkillGameKiosk.com	2001
AVS Companies	635	Jenka Lab LLC	2013	Smart Industries	815
Bandai Namco Amusement America	126	Jet Games Corporation	837	Smart Software	709
Banilla Games	1715	JK Coin Supply	605	SSM Vending	905
Baton Lock & Hardware Co., Inc.	247	Kestell Furniture	1105	Stern Pinball, Inc.	827
Battle Company	2201	Kettler International, Inc.	1456	Sureshot Redemption	241
Bay Tek Entertainment	727	KioSoft	2037	Sureway Games	1839
Betson Enterprises	227	Klopp: Money Handling Equipment	842	Suzohapp	1609
BidderBros.com	1703	Koda Sports	1515	Sweet Robo	1753
Big Daddy Games, LLC	2027	Komuse	105	TBC	2153
Birmingham Vending Company	2135	Kynoa SA	1603	Team Play Inc.	141
Bissell Commercial	1043	LAI Games	549	Teddy Mountain	2313
Blacklight Attractions	556	Langfang Mater Sporting Goods	1134	The Inflatable Depot	2353
Blue Motion Games	1949	LaserBlast	546	The Really Big Crane Company	509
BMI Leisure	1613	Laserforce / Square Entertainment	1649	The TerraBall Table Company	1538
BMI Merchandise	317	Lasertag.com by Zone	1648	Tierplay	2235
Bowling Center Management	1639	Legacy Billiards	1349	Tigapo	2302
BowlMarc Robotics	2107	Legacy Coin Operated Distributors, Inc.	658	Tiger Products, Inc.	1204
Brand Vending Products	1019	Lock America Inc.	127	Tobias Design	1118
Brunswick Billiards Group	1127	Lockdogs	734	Tokens Direct	800
Brunswick Bowling Products	301	LOU Powered by Evosus	1200	Toltec	1439
California House	1327	M3T	958	Top Vending Machine Electronics Co., Ltd.	1605
Calplush Toy Corporation	857	Magnetic Cash - Cashless System	1553	TouchMagix Inc	350
candymachines.com	911	MC Data Solutions LLC	2202	TouchTunes	515
Cantaloupe	2148	Metagrow	200	Toy Factory	201
Captain's Auction Warehouse	937	Meucci Cues	1311	TrainerTainment	1036
Caravan Softys / Big T Toys & Sports	2306	Monarc Systems	2101	Trestle Gaming	941
Cardinal Distributing	1009	Moss distributing	104	Triotech	304
Cardinal Xpress	1641	Mr. Billiard International	1153	Tweeten Fibre Co., Inc.	1503
Cash Depot	2318	Mueller Recreational Products	1449	Unattended Card Payments Inc.	2250
CenterEdge Software	1615	Nanoptix	1948	Unique Animation	2213
Championship Billiards	1435	National Dart Association	2236	UNIS Technology (Canada) Ltd.	305
ChargerGoGo	2041	Nayax	1737	United L&R	1001
Charms Co.	1005	NBVA Scholarship Booth	903	Uplay America	1038
Coast to Coast Entertainment (ELAUT)	808	Netronic	1549	Upside Games	2305
Coastal Amusements	527	NextGen Gaming	1803	US Bowling Corporation	1041
Coin Tech S.A.	447	Olhausen Billiard Mfg., Inc.	1115	US Fun Machines Corp.	1851
Complete Signs	855	Omega Carpet	701	USINGWIN	1718
Coney Island Arcade	332	Otis Spunkmeyer	2050	Valley Dynamo	117
Cornilleau Game Tables	1343	Padishan International	1606	Valo Motion	1037
Cotton Candy Factory	1002	PAI	1758	VapeTM	557
CountR GmbH	1741	Paradise Distribution of Wyoming	743	Venco Business Solutions	334
CPBA/Universal/Moori/TP	1202	Party Center Software	1804	Verse Immersive	2350
Creative Works	1035	Patriot Gaming & Electronics	2106	VGame	1836
Cuestix International	1427	PAX Technology, Inc.	2252	Viking Cues	1403
Cuetec	1505	PDC	2049	Vision Sports Enterprise Co., Ltd	1100
Daiwa By U.S Jaclean, Inc.	1705	Pearson Cues	1602	VSR Industries, Inc.	2248
DataSpan - Motorola	2042	Phoenixdarts USA INC.	151	VTail LLC	1706
Delta Strike USA, LTD	1619	PIA Products	342	W.T. Glasgow, Inc.	1026
Diamond Billiard Products Inc.	1205	Pipeline Games	805	Wansheng Sports	1116
Digital Centre America	502	Plank & Hide	1527	Watch Time Inc	901
DongGuan Jingyunding Sports Goods	1640	Player One Amusement Group	2127	We Create Entertainment	1827
DSM Sales & Manufacturing, Inc.	2249	PocketMint.AI	1756	Wedges/Ledges	2048
Dynaspheres	1256	Pop-A-Shot	2149	Western Equipment Finance	2051
EasyLinx - GeWeTe	2139	Poptoy	2150	Wholesale Vendors of Texas	2204
Elaut Group USA	337	Predator	1411	Wider Matrix (GZ) Technology Co.,Ltd	2053
Embed	641	Presidential Billiards	1333	Workforce.com	2253
Eomac Ltd	2316	Prestige Gaming / Fish Game Kings	1627	World Plus Inc	705
ESD/Greenwald	2312	Prime Slot	1907	WPA/BCA/PBIA	1555
exA-Arcadia	1049	Primer Games	1727	WTWireless	758
Factory Direct Party	1650	Prominent Games	1913	Z-Lite	1249
FECFIN	1039	Promotex USA Inc.	1716	Zoom Studios/Barron Games	1927
Fire Phoenix	2105				
Flatline Corp.	1015				
FPG Sports	1250				
Fun Express	326				
Fuzhou Tita Technologies Co., Ltd.	2007				
GameBox Builders, LLC	351				
Gel Blaster	2348				
GLD Products	1227				
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## ►SLICK Continued from page 1

a dry slide similar to that of a water slide — our secret recipe, if you will.”

The most popular slides seem to be Maga Launch, Big Wave and Fast Lane, but the selection of slides is impressive.

“Countless hours of modeling and testing to ensure safety and performance helps determine what works,” said Launsby. “Then we donate our bodies to scientific research, cross our fingers, close our eyes and test it ourselves.”

Each slide lands on a cushioned surface.

Launsby added, “All slides are carefully modeled based on their coefficient of friction, coupled with their pitch and shape to determine the trajectory a body will take at different sizes and what landing would be appropriate. To go a step further, we’ve added an additional layer of safety to our airbags in an ‘under-cushion’ to prevent any opportunity for user error in inflation or deflation.”

Not everything is slides, however. Basketball is provided on a fun, springy court. Likewise, the Freestyle Air Court can let kids play dodgeball or perform gymnastic stunts. Acrobat Alley finds kids hanging by a rope and zipping along through the air. Most of the activities are for ages 4 and up, but there is a play structure called Junior Jungle that lets younger siblings still have ways to play.

Certain locations have

go karts, although the Willowbrook location does not. Various locations have larger arcades as well.

While wristbands are timed, the length of stay can be extended with games or food and beverage.

“We have everything kids like,” said Pina. “Mozzarella sticks, hot dogs, chicken tenders, pizza. We have **ICEE**, **Dippin’ Dots** and **Blue Bunny** ice cream.”

Guests purchase wristbands for a 90-minute or two-hour block of time. Participants can play for as long as they like on all the recreational activities. Like most physical recreation properties, guests sign waivers and must obtain the proper footwear (which only needs to be purchased once at \$4.95).

Lockers are provided by **VLocker** in each facility. Customers can use them to lock up backpacks, valuables and personal items.

“We are thrilled to partner with Slick City, providing electronic guest storage lockers that enhance the visitor experience,” said **Steven Wooley**, COO, VLocker. “Our lockers offer secure, convenient storage, allowing guests to fully enjoy the exciting attractions without worrying about their belongings. This partnership is a perfect fit, as both our companies are committed to innovation and customer satisfaction. We look forward to supporting Slick City’s rapid growth across the U.S. market.”

**Roller** is another partner of Slick City.

“Recently, Roller, the point-of-sale supplier for all Slick City parks, and



Slides in Slick City mimic those in the water park industry. Like a waterless waterslide, the attraction below drops sliders through a hole. COURTESY SLICK CITY; AT/TIM BALDWIN



VLocker have worked to integrate and innovate to improve the guest experience even further,” added Wooley. “With this new and exciting partnership for all three brands, guests can now pull out a form of payment once, go straight to the lockers, and get to having fun without feeling as if they are being nicked and dimed at each pay point in the park.”

“This is my first time using Roller, and I love it,” Pina told AT. “Even when I’m not here, I can access

[data] on my cell phone. It’s easy for me to switch between locations.”

Previously, the building was occupied by **Bed, Bath and Beyond**. According to the company, the majority are second-generation boxes (previous stores, gyms, FECs, trampoline parks, etc.). However, the company is willing to “build to suit” for potential franchisees.

“Every single park is unique, and we approach it that way,” said Launsby. “From the layout of the

slides, the slide sizes, how they interact with each other — we are always maintaining our focus on the experience. We want the sliders to be wowed — not only by the experience of going down the slides, but the entire experience — visually, tactically, all should be exhilarating!

Slick City Action Parks — once plans in place reach fruition — will eventually be in 18 states with more than 50 locations.

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



In addition to slides, other recreational activities are offered (above left). The engineering of the slides comes from Slick City’s sister company, Slick Slide. Customers catch airtime on some of the slides (above right). AT/TIM BALDWIN; COURTESY SLICK CITY





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# PARKS, FAIRS & ATTRACTIONS

► Urban Air Adventure Parks add slide complexes — page 20 / Meow Wolf opens fifth location — page 24

## Warner Bros. Movie World opens *The Wizard of Oz*-themed land

AT: Tim Baldwin  
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

QUEENSLAND, Australia — Follow the yellow brick road. Or so guests will be inclined.

Warner Bros. Movie World has opened the world's first themed area (which the park calls a precinct) to the legendary film, *The Wizard of Oz*. And when all things “wicked” seem quite timely, the new land is sure to enthrall guests.

“The Wizard of Oz precinct is like nothing we have ever done at Movie World, where incredible theming and technology complement the physical ride elements to provide a unique and immersive guest experience,” said Clark Kirby, CEO, Village Roadshow.

“We have been incredibly buoyed by the response from our guests to The Wizard of Oz precinct over its opening period with strong visitation numbers visiting across our



Warner Bros. Movie World's new precinct is based on the classic film, *The Wizard of Oz*. Flight of the Wicked Witch (above) is a smooth, suspended family thriller around and through the Wicked Witch's castle.

COURTESY LUKE SCIACCHITANO, VEKOMA

peak period,” said Bikash Randhawa, COO, Village Roadshow. “It has been extremely pleasing to see so much positive feedback from guests of all ages who are really enjoying the precinct's theming and rides.”

The theming is what tells the story. Visitors find an Emerald City palace as a starting point for the two new roller coasters added to the park. Once inside, they are bathed in green with Oz, the Great and Powerful addressing them. Then they make the choice between the two rides. One entrance is to Flight of the Wicked Witch; the other takes guests to Kansas Twister.

“The iconic Royal Palace of Oz is the centerpiece,” said Randhawa. “Guests then enter the Wizard's Chamber where a mix of projection mapping and audio technology lay the platform for the journey ahead with the Wizard issuing the challenge. For Flight of the Wicked Witch, guests enter through the Spell Room on an elevated platform to be surrounded by beautiful red poppies before a dramatic change in mood as they



encounter the much darker Haunted Forest.”

The thematic touches immediately take guests to scenes in the movie.

“As they traverse the Forest, they then make their way to the Witches Castle where the ride platform is located,” explained Randhawa. “The Flight of the Wicked Witch coaster track has riders soaring through the skies with the Wicked Witch's winged monkeys and reaching speeds of up to 67 kilometers per hour as they travel along the 453-metre track which zig-zags through the castle.”

The second coaster is actually a pair. Two side-by-side family boomerangs allow family and friends to see each other as they race and duel on twisted track that

curves and spirals around a farm-like landscape.

“For Kansas Twister, guests first enter through Dorothy's house as the tornado is in full swing with audio and visual technology combined with sloping floors fully encapsulating guests to experience what being in the eye of a tornado would feel like,” Randhawa told *Amusement Today*. “After coming out of the tornado, guests then enter the heavily themed farmhouse where they board the dueling coaster to experience a whirlwind journey through the Kansas Farmlands on two racing tracks of 225 and 220 meters in length and reach speeds of up to 58 kilometers per hour.”

► See OZ, page 12



Kansas Twister features a pair of family boomerang coasters from Vekoma. COURTESY LUKE SCIACCHITANO



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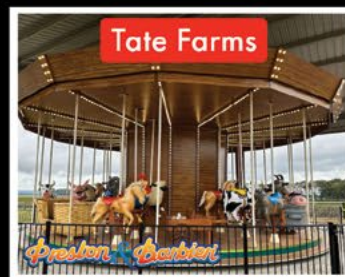


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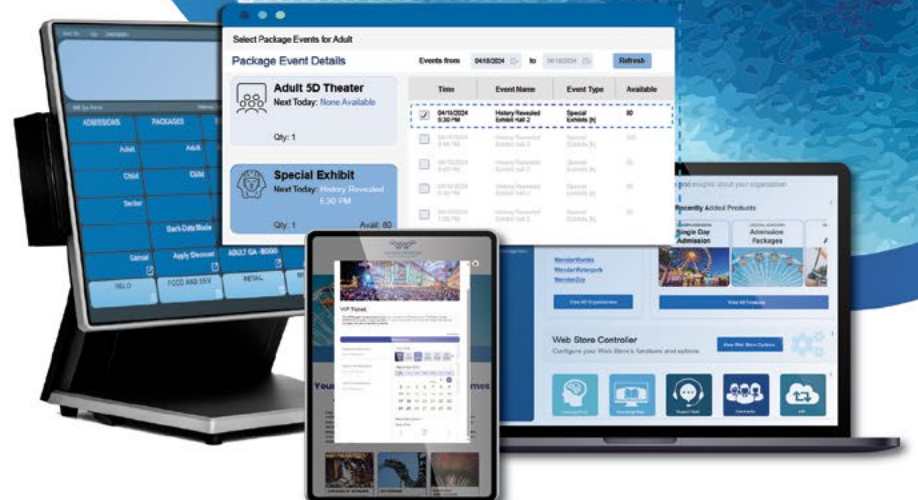




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Kansas Twister not only races the other train, but also travels forward and backward.  
COURTESY VEKOMA

### ► OZ Continued from page 10

Both roller coaster attractions were supplied by Vekoma.

"Movie World needed rides (especially coasters) that could cater to the family demographics, with a lower rider height restriction. Road Runner is an extremely popular coaster at the park and they felt that they needed more," said Ricardo Tonding-Etges, sales, Vekoma. "In this case, we discussed different successful family-thrill rides and the idea of combining two of our most successful ride models, the Suspended Family Coaster and the Family Boomerang, came up. Even better, the dueling Family Boomerang, with the racing factor and the higher capacity. The interaction of the three coaster tracks and trains in one area is also mind-blowing and world's first. The coasters offer a unique combi-

nation of different family-thrill experiences, with suspended, sit-down, forward, backward and racing experiences, all at one place."

"When looking at new attractions for the park, our focus is always on bringing innovative experiences that will complement our existing line-up of attractions, and these two new rides have done exactly that," added Randhawa. "We worked closely with Vekoma to identify their Suspended Coaster and Dueling Coaster as the best attractions for this precinct as they have the perfect combination of family-friendly height restrictions and high-capacity throughput, mixed with moderate-level thrills to provide something for guests of all ages and comfort levels."

The area, which also includes munchkin-sized buildings and the yellow-brick road as photo ops, was all built on the site of a removed

suspended looping coaster.

"The Wizard of Oz precinct was constructed in the retired Arkham Asylum coaster footprint," Randhawa noted. "Our Group Projects team did an amazing job working with our partners at Warner Bros. Discovery Global Experiences to maximize the space and truly transform the area to this world-first precinct themed around the 1939 film."

"Village Roadshow Theme Parks and Movie World are great partners, and we were extremely happy and honored to be able to work with them again on such a massive project," said Tonding-Etges. "When Arkham Asylum - Shock Therapy reached the end of its lifespan, it was definitely time to develop something new together. The Wizard of Oz precinct is unique, beautifully themed and full of life — kudos to the park team and everyone involved!"

"We knew *The Wizard of Oz* IP holds a very nostalgic and emotive place with viewers and that our guests would have a strong connection with the precinct, but to see the next generation of children visiting the precinct dressed in Dorothy outfits, singing along to the songs, and seeing the pure elation on their faces when the characters are in the precinct has been a wonderful and positive surprise," Randhawa told AT. "We have seen some beautiful organic social posts coming through with families recreating scenes from the movie, and it has been amazing to see how popular our Wizard of Oz-themed merchandise has been, with many of our items such as the Toto plush toy and Dorothy dress selling out."



The interaction between the two new coasters makes them even more exciting.  
COURTESY LUKE SCIACCHITANO





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# Sally Dark Rides introduces fresh concept with its Mini Dark Ride

AT: Tim Baldwin  
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Those who spoke with representatives from Sally Dark Rides last November at IAAPA Expo 2024 were able to see a new concept from the dark ride company. It was called the Mini Dark Ride.

“The Mini Dark Ride was created through necessity,” said Rich Hill, chief creative officer. “Over the years, we’ve spoken with clients who were interested in purchasing an ‘E-Ticket’ level dark ride attraction but didn’t have the space in their park or FEC for a massive show building.”

Typically, with dark rides acquiring a certain amount of real estate when big ideas are conceived, it would appear that Sally was seeking a logical solution.

“With the industry not having a product that fit that mold perfectly, it seemed like a fun design challenge for our team to take on,” Hill told *Amusement*

*Today*. “During the height of COVID, we had something you don’t usually get as designers — time to tinker!”

Sally prides itself on being a provider of turnkey solutions. “One contract, one signature” is a motto that simplifies things for the customer.

“Determined to find a solution to the ‘no-space’ problem, we took a long look at our popular large dark rides like Justice League and Sesame Street from a guest experience perspective. Distilling the most impactful ride elements down into their purest form seemed to be the key,” said Hill. “The first thing we identified was ride motion. Traveling briskly through physical sets and scenery is important in a quality dark ride. Also, having impactful encounters with animatronic characters along the path seemed to be a key ingredient. Additionally, wrap-around media screens were important to the mix. They allow us to travel (virtually) long distances at

high speed. Finally, having an individual, first-person experience where you don’t encounter other ride vehicles made the ride feel larger and more custom tailored.”

The meeting of the minds among the Sally team brought about results. “Taking those elements and playing with their arrangement, we ended up



Sally has designed a Mini Dark Ride that gives a high-profile experience in a smaller, confined space. COURTESY SALLY DARK RIDES

vehicle duck into a central room, allowing the second vehicle to pass by unseen.”

This concept resulted in a nine-scene, individual experience that — from the guests’ POV — feels exactly like a 20,000-square-foot dark ride in only 2,000 square feet, according to the renowned manufacturer.

The idea was pitched at the recent IAAPA Expo. Throughput is theorized to be 300 riders per hour. However, a third or fourth vehicle can be added with more “spokes,” or for increased capacity, vehicles that seat eight or 10 are an option.

“The reaction from clients and the industry has been very positive,” said Hill. “While the Mini Dark Ride isn’t a replacement for a traditional E-Ticket ride, it does allow an entire new segment of the attractions industry access to a style of ride it once thought too big or expensive. Yes, as you might imagine, this new style of ride is also *very* budget-friendly!”

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# Busch Gardens Tampa Bay's Wild Oasis readies for spring 2025

AT: David Fake  
dfake@amusementtoday.com

TAMPA, Fla. — **Busch Gardens Tampa Bay** is set to debut Wild Oasis in Spring 2025, a dramatic transformation of the former Jungala area that aims to redefine family-friendly entertainment with a blend of immersive attractions, interactive play elements and a multi-species animal habitat. With design led by Busch Gardens' parent company **United Parks & Resorts** and ride manufacturing by **Moser Rides**, this reimagining seeks to recapture the vibrancy of the space while aligning with the park's broader vision of seamless integration between animal encounters and themed attractions.

Originally opened in 2008,

Jungala provided a jungle-inspired setting with up-close animal encounters, aerial playgrounds, and smaller-scale rides. Over the years, the area saw dwindling guest engagement, with several attractions falling into disuse. **Erick Elliot**, vice president of engineering and general services at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, acknowledged the need for change: "Bringing Wild Oasis to the Jungala area of the park is really exciting; this is something we've been looking forward to for a long time. It brings the excitement back to this part of the park in a way that hasn't been seen before."

Wild Oasis is engineered to cater to families and younger guests while preserving the park's signature

blend of thrill and nature. It introduces Tree Top Drop, a reimagined and fully rebuilt 35-foot drop tower featuring multimedia integration via digital screens and onboard audio enhancements.

"[Moser Rides is] completely rebuilding the ride from the ground up — new seats, new thematic elements, and a fresh on-ride story that will be revealed soon," explained **Tony Perry**, project manager for Wild Oasis.

The Canopy Climb makes its return, featuring a four-story climbing structure with net tunnels and rope bridges spanning 200 feet, offering guests a treetop perspective of the park's newly developed ani-

▶ See BUSCH, page 18



Wild Oasis is taking shape as Busch Gardens and construction is in full swing. AT/DAVID FAKE

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## Fun Spot America Atlanta opens Hook & Slice



ATLANTA, Ga. — On Saturday, February 1, 2025, Fun Spot America Atlanta opened an exciting new attraction, a Mini Reverse Time ride by SBF-Visa Group. The golf-themed ride dubbed "Hook & Slice" combines spins and twists with high-flying action. Last fall, Fun Spot America announced it would open five new attractions across its three parks in 2025 and Hook & Slice is the first to debut. The rides come to the parks through a deal brokered by Rides 4 U of Somerville, New Jersey. The attractions had been previously installed at The Funplex Myrtle Beach which closed permanently after the 2024 season. COURTESY FUN SPOT AMERICA

## ►BUSCH Continued from page 16

mal habitats. Complementing the kinetic energy of these attractions is Enchanted Falls, a water play zone with splash towers and fountains, providing much-needed relief from Florida's heat.

The most significant shift in Wild Oasis is its approach to animal interactions. The new Habitat Hideaway offers multilevel viewing experiences, allowing guests to observe capybaras and giant anteaters from underwater vantage points and squirrel monkeys from elevated perches.

"One of the things I'm most excited about is giving guests the chance to see these animals from so many perspectives, just like they'd experience in the wild," said **Kayla Wendzel**, zoological curator for Busch Gardens.

The habitat was designed with both guest engagement and animal welfare in mind.

"We worked closely with species survival plans and other zoos to ensure responsible animal sourcing. Conservation and education are core elements of this project," Wendzel added. This

messaging aligns with the broader mission of United Parks & Resorts as it positions itself as a leader in ethical animal experiences within the theme park industry.

Wild Oasis incorporates an educational component through Rainforest Quest, an interactive scavenger hunt that challenges guests to discover hidden stations throughout the land. **Nick Pelisek**, manager of creative design at United Parks & Resorts, emphasized the park's decision to focus on physical engagement rather than digital screens: "We wanted this to feel like a real exploration — so there are no touchscreens."

Wild Oasis represents more than just a new land — it's a reinvestment in Busch Gardens' commitment to immersive, educational and family-centric experiences. With a blend of hands-on animal encounters, kinetic play structures and refreshed thrill elements, it sets a new precedent for what a modern family adventure realm can achieve. As Erick Elliot summed it up: "This is a place where adventure, education and fun collide. We can't wait for guests to experience it for themselves."



Amusement parks and attractions in North America began gearing up in early 2025 for the season ahead by starting efforts to staff up.

Officials at **Kings Island**, Mason, Ohio, announced in early February they would host multiple hiring events over the next two months. This park is looking to hire about 5,000 seasonal employees.

**Knott's Berry Farm**, Buena Park, California; **Six Flags Magic Mountain**, Valencia, California; and **Dorney Park**, Allentown, Pennsylvania, all are hoping to hire 2,000 employees during weeks-long hiring blitzes for seasonal jobs.

Meanwhile, **Six Flags Great Adventure**, Jackson, New Jersey, declared the weeks of February 1 through 22 as National Hiring Weeks. Officials there want to hire up to 4,000 seasonal employees.

**Cedar Point**, Sandusky, Ohio, and **Michigan's Adventure** in Muskegon also were using mid-February to begin hiring.

**Six Flags Darien Lake**, Corfu, New York, wants to hire 1,500 seasonal workers for the 2025 season before opening day on May 16. The amusement park started holding hiring events in February to start filling open positions.

**Canada's Wonderland**, Vaughan, Canada, has already started its hiring campaign. They are looking for 4,000 seasonal employees.

**Adventureland**, Farmingdale, New York, has announced it will be freezing its prices. The park is keeping its admission rates, group rates, season pass rates and birthday party rates at the same prices as the 2024 season.

"At a time when everything around us is going up, we are proud and excited to be able to provide our guests this price freeze on admission," said **Jeanine Gentile**, Adventureland Park Manager. "We are still making additions to the park, so you will definitely see some great changes for this upcoming season. But one thing that will not be changing is the admission prices for the 2025 season!"

For the first time, the amusement park is offering payment plans through FlexPay for online orders of \$100 or more. This brand-new option will allow visitors to book tickets and purchase season passes online now and conveniently pay over

time. Daily tickets and season passes are currently available for purchase online.

Last year, Adventureland announced plans for a multi-year, five-phase \$15 million redevelopment. Now in phase two, this season will include two new outdoor games, Wave Blaster and Jungle Run. Additionally, plans are in place to install three new concession stands and a third restroom facility. Park officials also are debuting Wave Twister, scheduled to open this spring.

The opening weekend of the 2025 season will be March 22 and 23.

An expansion to Muskegon's art museum in Michigan is officially opening to the public after more than four years and \$15.4 million in fundraising and construction.

The **Muskegon Museum of Art** expansion was unveiled on February 6.

Officials at **Elitch Gardens**, which is co-owned by **Revesco Properties** and **Kroenke Sports and Entertainment**, said its 2025 season will begin in April as usual in its current location next to **Ball Arena** in downtown Denver, Colorado, despite expectations the park would relocate.

But there are still questions regarding where Elitch Gardens will go once a 62-acre redevelopment project, known as the River Mile project, gets started.

Officials at Revesco Properties have said for years Elitch Gardens will move, but where it will move to and when are not known.

The **Metropolitan Museum of Art**, New York City, New York, announced new details for this year's Met Gala and The Costume Institute's spring exhibition, *Superfine: Tailoring Black Style*, on view at The Met Fifth Avenue from May 10 through October 26, 2025.

The exhibition and benefit are made possible by **Louis Vuitton**.

Major funding is provided by **Instagram**, the **Hobson/Lucas Family Foundation**, **Africa Fashion International** founded by Dr. **Precious Moloi-Motsepe**, and **The Perry Foundation**.

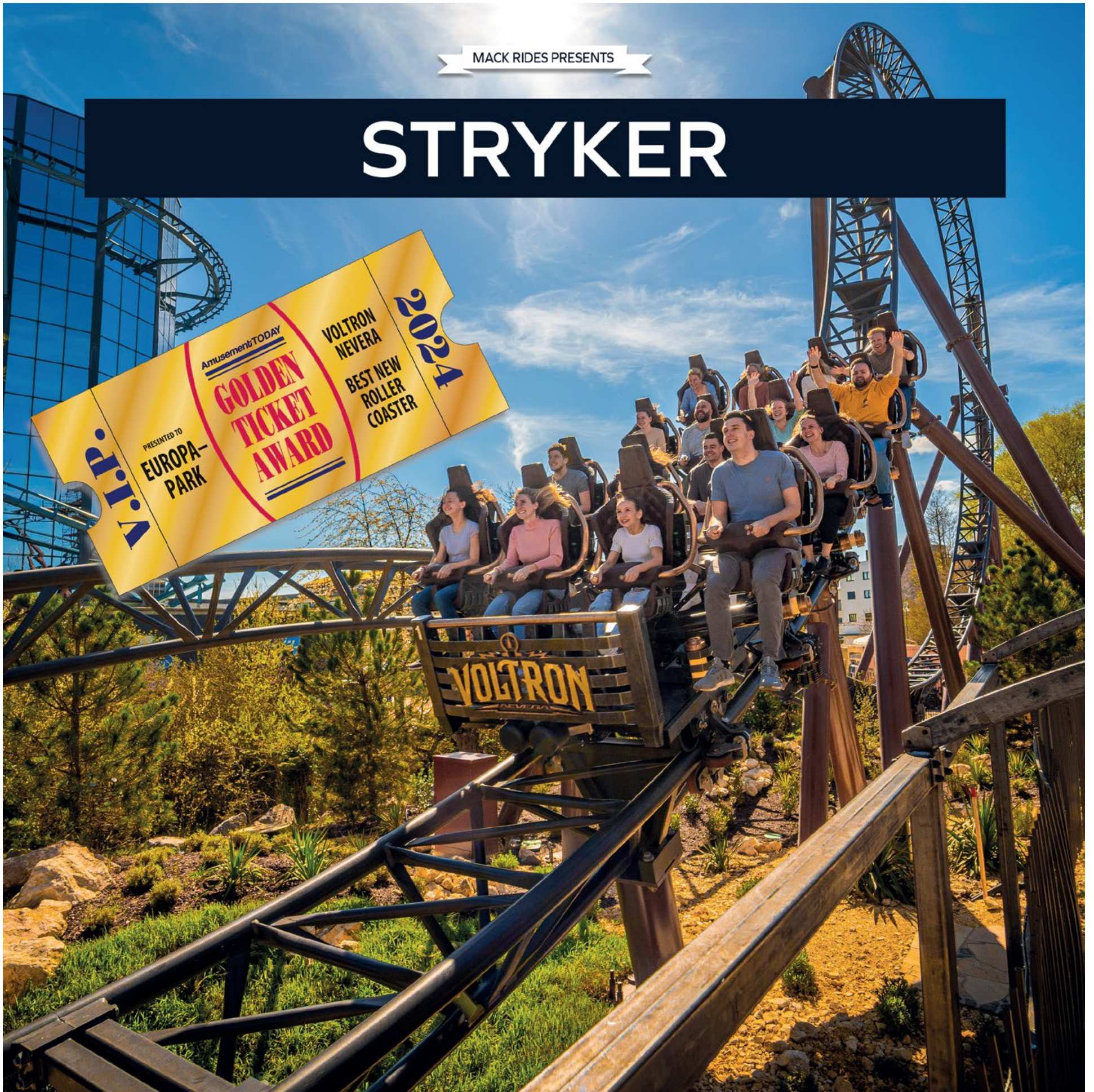
**Falcon's Beyond Global** is celebrating the 25th anniversary of its **Falcon's Creative Group** division, a themed entertainment company that has delivered over \$120 billion worth of experiences worldwide across 27 countries. Founded in 2000 as **Falcon's Treehouse** by CEO **Cecil D. Magpuri**, the company has grown from three employees to over 200 team members.

The company specializes in master planning, attraction design and experiential design, collaborating with major brands including **Disney**, **Universal Studios**, **SeaWorld**, **Marvel** and **National Geographic**. Notable projects include **Aquarabia** (Saudi Arabia's first water theme park), **Heroes and Legends at Kennedy Space Center**, and **IMG Worlds of Adventure** in Dubai.



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# Urban Air Adventure Parks add slide complexes in two locations

AT: Tim Baldwin  
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

SOUTHLAKE and FORT WORTH, Texas — By January of this year, 200 Urban Air Adventure Parks had opened their doors. While the company has seen phenomenal growth since opening its first store in 2011, it isn't a cookie-cutter formula. Urban Air is always innovating.

When the first facility opened (Southlake), the main focus was trampolines. Kids love them, but soon the company was branching in numerous directions, and now Urban Air properties have a wide portfolio of offerings.

"We've taken the trampoline concept and blown it up by adding ropes courses, warrior courses, climbing walls and dodgeball," said **Tim Sharp**, brand president, Urban Air.

Each facility may have something different to offer. "Some parks have go karts, sky rider, indoor skydiving — we look to innovation and finding new things," Sharp told *Amusement Today*. "We try them out, and if they resonate with the customers, we roll them out across the country."

Virtual reality and amusement rides can also be found at certain locations.

The original store was eventually relocated and is now somewhat of a "test kitchen" for other properties.

The newest concept is indoor slide complexes —



Multiple slides give guests at Urban Air a range of choices. AT/TIM BALDWIN

think water park attractions without the water. Mats are the conveyance to provide the speed on the slick surfaces.

"It's no secret that slides are becoming a thing in many areas, and we are looking for new ideas. Slides have been around forever — I rode slides as a kid," Sharp commented. "We saw the ability to integrate this exciting new slide technology into our parks to give our guests another choice."

When asked who the supplier was, Sharp replied, "We actually are the manufacturer. **Urban Air Attractions** is the licensed manufacturer." Other than go karts and hard rides, Urban Air Attractions creates all the trampoline equipment, slides, sky rider and other recreational structures.

The selection of slides is not typical playground equipment. Lighted lumi-

nescent rings, wedge-shaped attractions and jumps make for slides with a cool factor.

"You look at this and see there are five different slides," Sharp pointed out in Southlake. "We wanted five different experiences. Kids' attention spans these days might be less than when we were kids; we want to keep them invigorated by having something to do. We wanted them to have a 'wow' factor."

In Fort Worth, an additional slide called The Scoop is installed.

"We look at the space, and the space says you can put 'X' in, and change [the setup] to fit the space," Sharp explained.

In Southlake, the facility retired what they refer to as platform attractions (basketball, Wipe Out, etc.). Sharp explained that those products were viable, but they had been around for

five or six years, so they didn't consider repurposing them elsewhere.

"We look to keep the parks refreshed, and we want it to look new," he said. "We give guests a new view, so they never get tired of us."

The slide complex is both colorful and has attractive lighting. Sharp reported that the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Offering broad choices was the first learning lesson Urban Air gained from its first years.

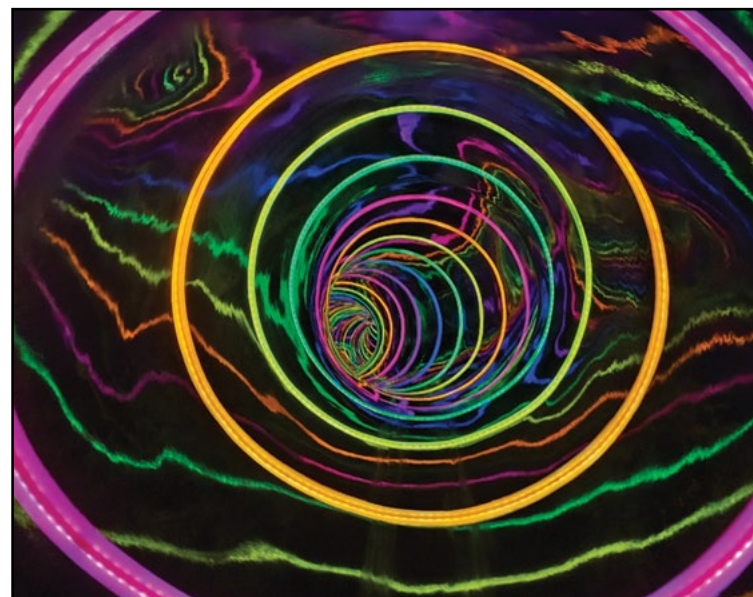
Of the slides, two are standard feet first-type slides that let kids — and adults — slide through colorful rings. Two others — launch slides — send riders head-first down a steep drop and then off a ski slope-style edge that sends visitors airborne, landing on their stomachs atop an inflated air pillow. The surf slide oscillates back and

forth. The scoop slide swirls at the bottom as if going down a drain.

The slides in Southlake stand 18 feet tall. The Fort Worth complex is 23 feet, and Sharp says some properties have ceilings as high as 34 feet if they choose to go the slides route.

"We feel positive about these first two test installations that we want to put them in more facilities," Sharp told AT. "We held a franchisee open house on December 10 to talk about [the specifics] of putting them in."

The slides maintain a 40-inch height requirement, following ASTM standards and analysis of G forces. Sharp is on an ASTM committee studying indoor attractions such as these, and he says it behooves the industry to always keep safety top of mind.



Riders go airborne on the launch slides (above left). A surf slide offers more of a halfpipe experience (above middle). When sliding down the enclosed tube, visitors experience a tunnel of colorful rings (above right). COURTESY URBAN AIR; AT/TIM BALDWIN



# Soft Play works with Thanksgiving Point, opens Jurassic Jungle

AT: Pam Sherborne  
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LEHI, Utah — A new attraction at **Thanksgiving Point**, a nonprofit indoor and outdoor farm garden, and museum complex in Lehi, Utah, has children and families alike excited and has had both groups making multiple trips since it opened on December 17, 2024.

The new attraction, located in the complex's Museum of Ancient Life, is called **Mountain America Jurassic Jungle** and is a five-story expansive indoor play world. Through play, the area teaches children in a hands-on way about prehistoric creatures through animatronic dinosaurs, slides, bridges, games, puzzles, playground elements and audio and visual effects that immerse children in the experience.

"Jurassic Jungle has been an absolute hit," said **Abby Allard**, Thanksgiving Point communications manager. "The first few weeks after



**Thanksgiving Point** partnered with **Soft Play** to create the components of the **Jurassic Jungle** at the complex. With hands-on and interactive components, children are learning about dinosaurs while playing. COURTESY SOFT PLAY

opening, almost every single day was sold out. Over 20,000 tickets were reserved the first week we put them on sale and member tickets were reserved nearly a month in advance."

Thanksgiving Point partnered with **Soft Play** for the components of the new attraction.

Allard confirmed it has been extremely positive.

"Guests are very excited about the size and interactivi-

ty within the venue," she said.

**Rich Albright**, vice president and general manager for Soft Play, said Soft Play's approach to helping attractions' owners bring their venues alive is to deeply understand the broader market trends that their clients are moving toward, as well as the park owners' overarching strategy and develop tailored play solutions to meet those needs.

"It's a blend of getting

the play value right, getting the design right, the look and feel, as well as getting the economics right," Albright said. "I emphasize the word tailored, because each activation presents unique challenges, making a one-size-fits-all solution ineffective."

Albright said Soft Play has a portfolio of projects that demonstrate the capability to completely transform a space. The company has transformed spaces

from retail spaces to theaters (including an IMAX theater), converting spaces that function as a stand-alone revenue generation or as part of a broader experience.

"Our goal is to ensure a capital payback in a period that makes fiscal sense for the owner," Albright said. "We have seen payback periods as short as six months and nearly all of our projects

► See SOFT, page 22

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## ►SOFT Continued from page 21

recouping investment in less than 18 to 24 months.”

Albright said determining what components to use in a space is more art than science.

“But we have a world-class design team that works directly with the park owner’s design team to discuss options of structure, design and play value,” he said. “Our design process is highly collaborative, typically with several iterations. We need to be play experts that offer broad solutions, but we also need to listen.”

Albright continues to see a trend toward extensive theming. From dinosaur-inhabited jungles such as Mountain America Jurassic Jungle at Thanksgiving Point to exploring outer space like Planet Play at the **Kennedy Space Center**, to incorporating licensed solutions like **CoComelon**, more operators are driving toward those immersive environments.

Mountain America Jurassic Jungle is a structure

built with almost two miles of steel, 122 sculpted elements and 14,000 feet of netting that keep the kids safe. There are animatronic dinosaurs, multiple slides, places to climb, a turning tunnel, a light board and illuminated fossil bones.

One of the main interactive components for them, as far as interactivity, are the RFID wristbands. Guests can explore the venue — searching for yellow beacons — with the wristband tracking their progress.

“If they find all the beacons, they get a free prize from our gift shop,” Allrad said.

In some of the larger spaces Soft Play has done, the company has made sure there are areas for kids just to run.

The company is also seeing the emergence of Phygital play. “Activations that include play elements that are highly interactive, from digital problem-solving games, which could be STEM-based, to immersive competitions that use technology to create unique gameplay,” Albright said.

•softplay.com

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# Meow Wolf opens fifth location in Houston, focuses on music vibe

AT: Tim Baldwin  
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HOUSTON — Gradually, Meow Wolf is becoming a nationally recognized brand. Those who have experienced the mind-bending properties are immediately captivated. Late in 2024, the company's fifth location opened its doors.

Called **Radio Tave**, the immersive art experience is unlike previous installations, owing to its emphasis on music. Houston-based artists were a top priority in this installation. The local flavor and the city's vibrant art scene provide a distinctive influence.

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

"We have over 50 artists that are local to Houston that are represented," said **Laura Siebert**, director of marketing. "If you go through the exhibit, you can find some Houston Easter eggs. One hallway [features] the history of Houston hip hop. In the bark of one of the trees, there is a hole you can look into and see the NASA Space Program."

Meow Wolf installations are all about exploration. There is a story to be told, but visitors discover it in their own way. At this location, a radio station crew has seemed to disappear, but rumors have it that they are still broadcasting from another dimension.

The mysterious ETNL radio station is a starting point. Radio Tave is the most sound-driven Meow Wolf



Upon entering public radio station ETNL, visitors find the crew has disappeared. After entering the station manager's office (above left), they enter the first portal into other dimensions (above right). Within the realms of Radio Tave is **Cowboix Hevvven**, a honky tonk in which customers can sit alongside beings from other dimensions trapped there eternally (below). AT/TIM BALDWIN; COURTESY MEOW WOLF

location to date. ETNL is a community radio station that now spans dimensions taking ticket holders with them.

"Everything you hear is from local musicians," Siebert told *Amusement Today*. "We do have big things planned for the summer to incorporate more Houston bands and musicians into our campaign. We have a lot of fun stuff coming up."

The overused phrase "Everything is bigger in Texas" has some clout here. The sheer size of the facility is one of the largest footprints among the various surreal properties. While vast, the sensory overload is also deeply immersive.

"There is a common thread of a storyline that goes throughout the location, but in addition to that there are some anchor spaces — obsidiopolis, the amalgam, the radio station itself — where the storyline is more incorporated in those spaces," said Siebert. "Once you get out of the main anchor spaces, you are now in The Strange in which all the locations live within."

If none of that makes a lick of sense, then that is exactly what makes Meow Wolf so



amazingly captivating. It's like an art exhibit meets fun house meets *Lost In Space*. The innate qualities of Meow Wolf that make it inexplicable to others makes it so fun to tell friends and at the same time so baffling in how to do so.

Radio Tave has integrated advanced interactive technologies — from augmented reality to immersive soundscapes that respond to visitors' movements — to create an artistic wonderland.

As Meow Wolf does, the existing space has been repurposed for this grand reimagining. The building had been vacant for years, but previously it was a paper factory.

Cowboix Hevvven is a

futuristic, albeit weird, food and drink spot, which Meow Wolf states: "serves up dive-bar food." It's a Texas twist where country meets cosmic. The otherworldly honky tonk serves those who have ticketed admission, but it can be catered for private events during non-exhibition hours, as can the large space in the center of Radio Tave. Cowboix Hevvven is a new take on the Meow Wolf concept as food and drink are served within the mind-trippy experience. There, it is perpetually Friday Night and the interdimensional beings (who might be seated at the table) can never leave.

"It is an interdimensional bar that is in The Strange that is a hub for Tavers — who are people that can transport from one dimension to another through portals," Siebert said (as naturally as anyone else would offer directions). "All the characters who were transported here from ETNL Radio are stuck there for eternity."

Of note, ETNL pays homage to the original Meow Wolf location, **House of**

**Eternal Return**, in Santa Fe.

Community engagement is at the heart of Meow Wolf Houston's mission. Partnerships with local schools, community organizations, and cultural institutions have been established to ensure that its impact extends beyond the walls of the installation. These partnerships include art education programs, community workshops and special events that aim to make art accessible to a wider audience. By fostering a sense of community and inclusivity, Meow Wolf Houston strives to be more than just an art installation — it seeks to be a vital part of Houston's cultural fabric.

"The surprises are constant; I've never walked through and not seen something new," Siebert told AT. "The reception in Houston has been very surprising to me, a native Houstonian. Everybody appreciates the art and the interactivity. We are here for Houston; Houston is representing Houston. We are a part of this larger collaboration; we want to be a part of the community."



Obsidiopolis (above left) is a story-driven art exploration dimension within Radio Tave. Art meets cosmic is rule of thumb in Meow Wolf installations. AT/TIM BALDWIN





## FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRAL

AT: John W.C. Robinson  
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**Betson Enterprises** announced the completion of a 30-piece game room installation at **GoodTimes** in Troy, Alabama. This marks the second collaboration between Betson and GoodTimes.

Under the guidance of Betson Sales Representative **Bob Sommer**, the arcade was designed to deliver a dynamic and wide-ranging experience for guests of all ages. Sommer worked closely with the GoodTimes team to carefully select an engaging mix of games, including redemption favorites and arcade staples. **Nina Byron**, from Betson's finance department, also collaborated with GoodTimes to provide flexible leasing and financing options, ensuring a comprehensive arcade package tailored to their business needs.

"Expanding to a second location was a massive undertaking, and there were many moving parts," shared **Scott Good**, owner/general manager of GoodTimes.

Growing movie chain **RoadHouse Cinemas** has chosen **Intercard** cashless technology for the new arcade at its Tucson, Arizona, location. It is Intercard's second installation for RoadHouse, which already uses the company's system at its location in Colorado Springs, Colorado. **Saul Scribner** of Intercard did the installation.

The huge new arcade boasts more than 86 games managed by 126 card readers connected to three kiosks and three POS stations. It is part of a 36,000-square-foot expansion of the cinemas that adds 14 lanes of bowling, **Topgolf** Swing Suites and ax-throwing.

**Sacoa Cashless System** announced the successful installation of its products at the newly opened **In The Game Fremont Street** arcade, operated by **Family Entertainment Group** (FEG), on the iconic Las Vegas Fremont Street.

The modern venue chose to install Sacoa's latest reader, the Spark Reader, as well as its three-time award-winning K4 Kiosk, POS and Redemption 2 system. These integrated solutions enhance the guest experience by providing seamless transactions, efficient customer service, and streamlined prize redemption processes.

"We are thrilled to partner with Family Entertainment Group and contribute to this exciting new destination on Fremont Street," said **Sebastian Mochkovsky**, C.E.O. of Sacoa U.S.A.

In The Game Fremont Street is a cutting-edge entertainment venue featuring a diverse mix of games and attractions.

**Beat The Bomb**, the world's first immersive social video game company, has opened its sixth U.S. location and the first in Texas. Centrally located in Houston's historic Fifth Ward, the venue joins existing locations in Atlanta, Brooklyn, Charlotte, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.

"Houston was an obvious choice for the newest location of Beat The Bomb," CEO and Founder **Alex Patterson** said. "Its vibrant arts community, lively social scene and strong corporate presence align perfectly with our mission to create human connection through our immersive, colorful gaming technology."

The 10,000-square-foot location includes The Bomb Bar, a full-service bar with an array of cocktails, wine and colorful bomb slushies, as well as a 1,500-square-foot beer garden.

Beat The Bomb offers a unique gaming experience where teams of four to six players don hazmat suits, dodge lasers and crack codes to help disarm an explosive Paint Bomb, Foam Bomb or Slime Bomb.

New England FEC operator **Apex Entertainment** announced a new, four-year partnership with **Rockland Trust** for the naming rights to its popular go kart track in Marlborough, Mass. With new graphic treatments, branded karts, and other elements around the track, the newly named **Rockland Trust Speedway** opened to drivers on February 20, 2025.

"When Rockland Trust opened an office in the APEX Entertainment Center Plaza, it created a perfect opportunity for us to partner with the bank to create a brand experience for the 5,000 or more weekly guests we serve at APEX Entertainment," said **George Aronstein**, chief operating officer of APEX Entertainment.

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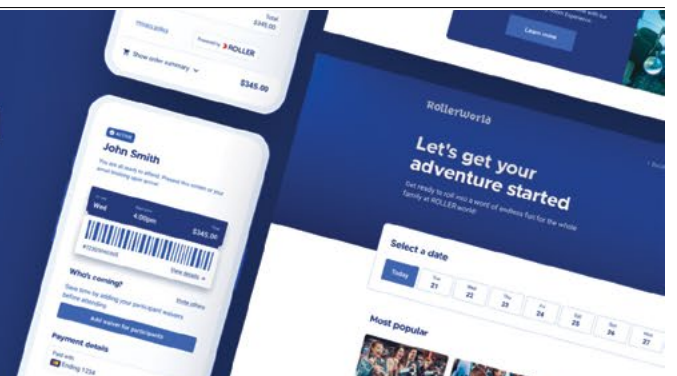
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# Sandy Creek Mining Co. supplies interactive fun for 35 years

AT: Tim Baldwin  
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

FOSTORIA, Ohio — Founded in 1991, **Sandy Creek Mining Company** enters its 35th year of business. Supplying a unique (and entertaining) product — sluices, the company has grown. Today, it has serviced more than 800 locations in more than 26 different countries.

“Sandy Creek Mining was founded in 1991 by **Woody and Terrie Woodruff**,” said son and General Manager **Justin Woodruff**. “We started small, with just \$5,000 and a few buckets of rough gemstone material.”

The concept is simple. Customers purchase a bag of, well, dirt. Eager participants take their bags in hopes of unearthing gemstones using a sluice.

“We began in the show cave industry (**National Caves Association**) and have expanded into amusement parks, agritourism, FECs, museums and every-



Sandy Creek Mining Company exhibits at IAAPA Expo to show off its product. AT/TIM BALDWIN

thing in between,” Woodruff explained. “Our product’s educational and hands-on nature makes it a natural fit for any location that caters to families and young people.”

The dual water system of their sluice packages assures clear and pristine water flows while customers pan for their treasure. Stainless steel linings in the construction add strength and longevity.

When asked where Sandy Creek obtains the prized gems,

Woodruff told *Amusement Today*, “We source gemstones and fossils from mines around the world, including Brazil, India, Madagascar, Columbia, Peru, China, South Africa, Nigeria, Canada and Morocco. Many of these materials are mined commercially for jewelry, while others, like iron pyrite (‘fool’s gold’) or Fluorite are often mined for their mineral content. Once the deposits are found, they are extracted and shipped to

us for further crushing and cleaning, if necessary.”

According to their formula, the rough mining material retails for two and a half to three times its cost. “Repeat business is excellent, and we’re proud to be one of the largest profit centers, second only to admissions/ticketing, for many of our customers — both large and small,” said Woodruff.

Because of the interactive nature of the experience,

mining is a natural fit for themed environments, from caves to theme parks.

“Our largest installation is at a theme park in Haikou, China, and can accommodate 200 guests at a time,” Woodruff told AT. “Our largest domestic project is at **Natural Bridge Caverns** in New Braunfels, Texas, which can accommodate approximately 125 guests at a time and features large water towers, waterfalls and a unique ‘around the porch’ design. Natural Bridge has been a customer for some 28 years and we are proud to say we have most of the original customers we started with 34 years ago.”

And new customers are still coming.

“We’re excited to be expanding with multiple amusement parks in the USA in 2025 and continuing to grow within the agritourism industry with several new locations planned. We also have plans for new FECs and camp locations in 2025,” said Woodruff.

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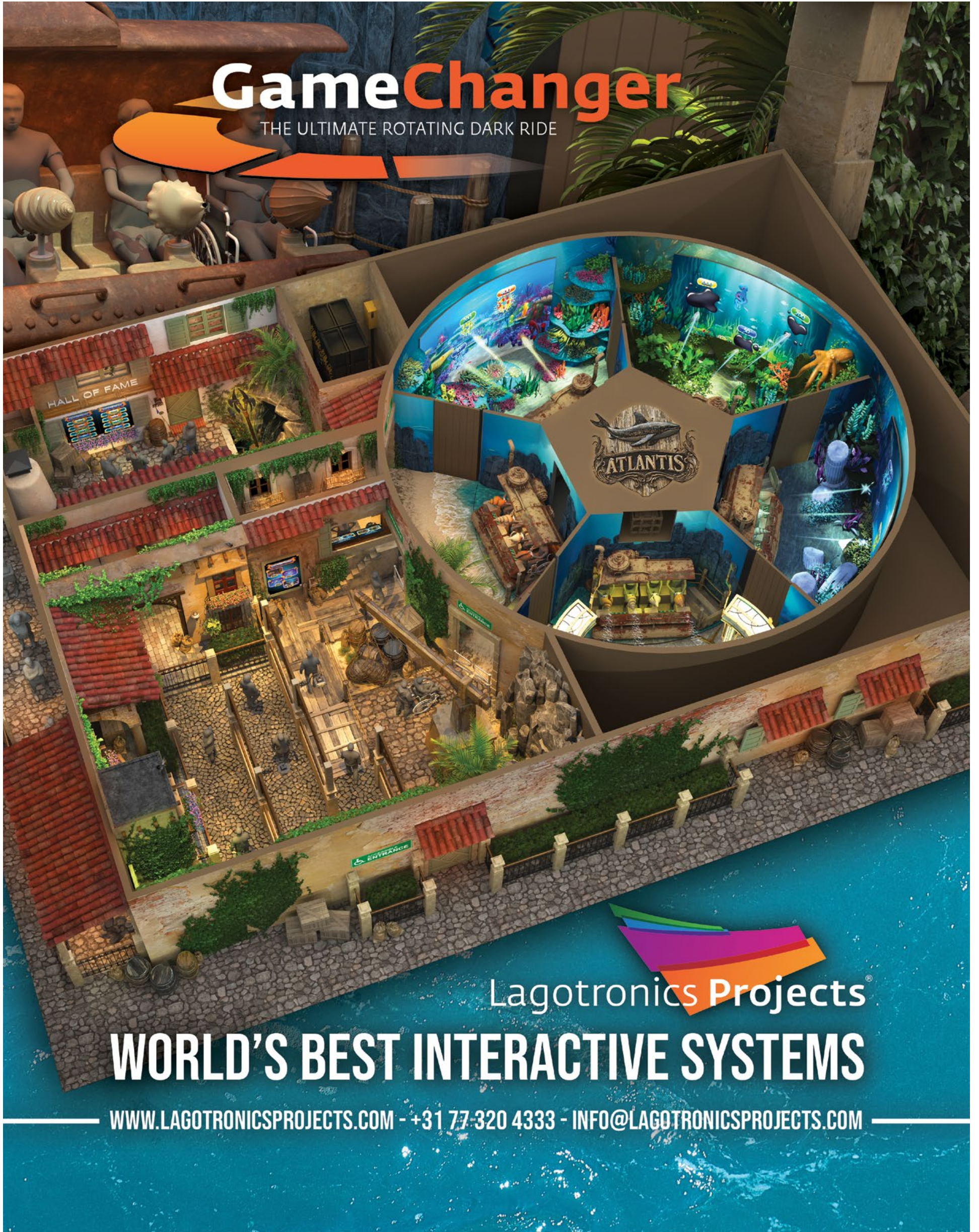
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# Attendance up 120,000 at the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo

AT: B. Derek Shaw

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FORT WORTH, Texas — The weather this year was an inverse of the 13 days of cold temperatures experienced during the 2024 Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo (FWSSR). While there were a few evenings in the 20s, most of the daytime temperatures were in the 50s and 60s, with three days soaring into the 80s. The 23-day show that ran January 17 through February 8 ended with an estimated attendance of 1,263,920, nearly 120,000 more visitors over 2024. The theme this time was “Hustle and Show.”

“Unlike last year, we experienced abnormally warm temperatures for our 2025 Show, which gave a crucial boost to attendance. Large crowds returned and guests appeared to enjoy themselves,” said Communications Director Matt Brockman.

The fluctuating temperatures made it tricky for Talley Amusements, the carnival provider. “It’s a big gamble to play in January [in Fort Worth],” said Mary Talley, co-owner of the show.

Fortunately, the hometown carnival only had a 12-mile trek from its quarters to the stock show. Talley brought in 50 rides, the majority of which were from Talley Amusements with some from other family members and a few booked-in pieces. In addition, Talley provided numerous food stands and games. The new rides this year were a Wisdom Rides Himalaya, which the carni-



## FORT WORTH STOCK SHOW & RODEO

val has named Thunderfest, along with an A.R.M. USA Rock Star called Hard Rock. The most popular rides were Thunderfest and a Lamberink 33-meter Ferris wheel. “We have the prettiest wheel rolling,” said Talley.

She said the stock show staff is “like family for us.” “We began as a live-stock exhibition in 1896, and livestock and horse shows remain a bedrock of our identity,” said Brockman. “Our carnival/midway compliments our entertainment offerings perfectly with something for everyone from toddlers taking their first-ever ride on the Choo Choo Express or the Teacups all the way to teenagers and adults getting their adrenaline charge on exciting thrill rides like the Cliff Hanger, Tilt-A-Whirl

The midway (above) experienced bigger crowds as the weather was more cooperative this year with several warm days. In the background is Talley Amusements’s 33-meter Lamberink Ferris wheel. The carnival provider utilizes Magic Money (below), a cashless midway ticketing system. AT/SAMMY SPICCOLA



or Kamikaze. We have a great working relationship with Talley Amusements.” The stock show has strong support from the section of the city where it resides. “Located in the heart of our vibrant city’s cultural district, we are very fortunate to be strongly



► See WORTH, page 30

All told, Talley Amusements brought 50 rides in for the 27-day event. COURTESY FORT WORTH STOCK SHOW & RODEO

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A.R.M. USA's Rock Star, which Talley calls Hard Rock was new to the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo. It first debuted in July 2024 at the Ohio State Fair, Columbus. AT/SAMMY SPICCOLA

## ►WORTH Continued from page 28

embraced by local residents and the greater North Texas community. Showcasing our traditions and the western lifestyle is important to us while also being innovative in our efforts to appeal to an increasingly diverse local demographic," said Brockman.

In 1918, the stock show organized the world's first indoor rodeo. 107 years later, the FWSSR ProRodeo tournament is among the top five professional rodeos in the United States. The stock show and rodeo advertise its product across numerous media, including digital (paid social, display and search), along with television, radio and print.

**Pulido's Rodeo Kitchen** was featured in one of the large cattle exhibition facilities. The longtime local favorite Mexican restaurant was a hit with both exhibi-

tors and guests alike.

The auditorium entertainment series was quite successful with **Clint Black** and **Pug Johnson**; **Jim Gaffigan**, **Aaron Lewis** and the **Stateliners** and **Chris Janson**. Local and regional acts performed in the Roadhouse and Corkyard venues.

Brockman reflected on this year's show: "Organizing an event like ours takes a tremendous amount of work. Our amazing staff goes the extra mile to make sure the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo is the best it can be. Our volunteer base also does an excellent job in ensuring our guests, exhibitors and competitors are treated well. It's a labor love for the event that is truly legendary — the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo."

The 128th stock show returns January 16 through February 7, 2026.

•fwssr.com



New to the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo this year was a Himalaya from Wisdom Rides, which the carnival calls Thunderfest. AT/SAMMY SPICCOLA



## MIDWAYSCENE

AT: B. Derek Shaw  
bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

Austin Texas-based **Thomas Carnival, Inc.** recently sold all its stock to **Five Star Amusements LLC**. Thomas Carnival will continue operations under the new stockholders, with current management remaining in place. **John Hanschen** has committed to serving in management through at least the 2028 season. The operation provides traveling carnival midway entertainment across 11 states each year.

Five Star Amusements is owned by **Timothy** and **Jessica Bessette**. Jessica is the daughter of **Mike** and **Connie Featherston**, who own **Gold Star Amusements**.

Hanschen stated in a release: "We are excited to announce this new arrangement, which aims to perpetuate the service provided by Thomas Carnival for almost 100 years. The 2025 season will mark my 50th year, and the 2027 season will celebrate our 100th consecutive year on the road. All written contracts currently in place for carnival services at fairs and events will be honored as promised. The new stockholders will determine how many additional fairs and events the company will pursue beyond our current commitments. Change is necessary; operational costs pose a significant challenge, and we have not always kept pace with the increases. Our longstanding friendship and collaboration with the Gold Star group and the Featherston family will aid in this transition, and I am committed to enhancing our customer service."

A change is coming to the operational season of the four-day **Bradford Agricultural Fair**, Starke, Florida. For more than 60 years, the fair was traditionally held in early March. That continued this year with **Hildebrand Amusement Rides** as the carnival provider. This year there are two fairs as they permanently move to the fall, with an early October timeframe.

"It's a bit of a change, but we think moving to the fall will be a positive one," **Bob Milner**, president of the fair, told **WJCB-TV**. "So far, everything has been very positive. People are excited because of the better weather and the chance to avoid competing with other events."

The fall fair will feature more attractions, bigger rides, additional food vendors and expanded entertainment options.

This year the **Greater Ohio Showmen's Association** (GOSA) celebrates its 75th year in operation. The nonprofit organization, with 455 members, represents midway providers at fairs and festivals across the state of Ohio. This includes food, rides and game businesses.

GOSA was instrumental in creating the Ohio amusement ride safety advisory council, and the first rider responsibility law in the United States. GOSA has two seats on the

advisory council, as well as representation on the Ohio food services advisory board and the Ohio game rule advisory board.

"Ohio's ride safety regulations are among the strongest in the country, which help ensure a safe experience for fairgoers. ODA commends the Association for their strong industry representation, dedication and focus on safety," said **Brian Baldrige**, director of the **Ohio Department of Agriculture**.

"Our amusement industry is evolving every year with more sophisticated rides, menus, food options and staffing challenges," said **Bill Sterling** GOSA president. "We need to leverage our advisory affiliations and continue to work in concert with our members, government, and industry partners advocating for common sense regulation to achieve efficient operations while staying on our toes to meet every challenge. And we will, as we have done for the past 75 years."

The **International Association of Fairs and Expositions** (IAFE) is conducting a 2025 economic impact study that will provide insights into the economic and fiscal contributions of fairs to their host communities.

All fairs in the United States (regardless of whether they are a member) are encouraged to participate by completing the form that can be found on the IAFE website. "The more fairs that participate, the better and more meaningful the tool will be. We are aiming for a 70% response rate to ensure the most accurate information possible in the final report," said **David Grindle**, president and CEO of the organization.

The form asks simple questions, including both fair and non-fair attendance and revenue, public sector support, sales tax rate and lodging tax rate.

The final report will be made available to IAFE members early this summer.

A piece of DeKalb County Indiana's history, a former vehicular bridge that spanned the CSX railroad tracks, will be brought back to life. The **Auburn Board of Works and Public Safety** sold the bridge pieces to the **DeKalb County Fair Association** for \$1.00 earlier this year.

The bridge will further connect the fairgrounds to a lot used for camping and parking. "One of the most important considerations with the old railroad bridge was ensuring it remained within DeKalb County, given its historical and cultural significance to our community," said Auburn Mayor **Dave Clark**.

The 147-foot-long steel Warren Pony Truss timber rail bridge stood for more than 75 years. It was dismantled by the county in 2014 because railroad officials feared it could collapse onto the tracks. In 2021, the city acquired the dismantled bridge from the county.





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# Nearly 400,000 attend Florida State Fair, midway revenue solid

AT: Ron Gustafson  
Special to Amusement Today

TAMPA, Fla. — The Florida State Fair soared past last year's attendance mark with nearly 400,000 passing through the turnstiles during the Feb. 6 to 17 expo.

The fair estimated 397,992 attended the 12-day event, posting a 17.5 percent increase over 2024.

"Strong winds and rain impacted the majority of the final Sunday, affecting total daily and final attendance figures," said Cheryl Flood, CEO of the Florida State Fair Authority. The fair closed the following Monday, Presidents Day.

Fairgoers were not hesitant to take in all the fair had to offer, and midway revenues were reflective of that trend.

## Midway money

"We had record per-cap spending and the third highest midway revenue ever at the fair," an enthusiastic Frank Zaitshik, owner of Michigan-based Wade Shows, told Amusement Today. "We were within a nose of having an all-time ride revenue record and the last Saturday of the fair was a record for us.

"I'm proud of our team as we had to make to tight move from West Palm to Tampa," he added. "It required a lot of pre-planning and pre-setup — they just did a great job."

Of the massive arsenal of 88 rides on the midway, only one had not been "stickered" for the fair's opening on Thursday, Feb. 6, Zaitshik noted.

"The Thunderbird opened on Friday as it was a new ride," he said of the attraction's one-day delay.

Operated by Iconic Midway Rides, Spring Hill, Fla., Thunderbird is a tower swing ride standing at a jaw-dropping 175 feet. It is the first large mobile ride of its stature in North America built by Lamberink of The Netherlands.

Iconic also provided its KMG XXL giant 130-foot pendulum-themed as Kraken, which was erected adjacent to Thunderbird. Both mammoth rides were highly visible from nearby Interstate 4. Iconic's Larson International loop, themed as Infinity, was also on the midway.

"This year's Florida State Fair had as good of a selection of rides of any midway in America," the show owner stated. "It took a lot of cooperation from others to have this great midway."

Powers Great American Midways, Corfu, N.Y., led the pack in supplementing the layout with six rides. They were Sky Hawk (A.R.M. USA), Tesla (Tivoli), Crazy Cabs (SBF/Visa Group), Zero Gravity (Batech Enterprises), Jumbo Elephants (Kolmax Plus) and Dragon Coaster (Jung-Max).



A two-story funhouse (above) was one of more than 80 attractions on the Wade Shows midway at the Florida State Fair. The giant Lamberink wheel and State Fair Super Slide were highlights at the fair (right).  
AT/GARY SLADE

Dreamland Amusements, Lake Tahoe, Nev., and Wonderland Midway, Brooklyn, N.Y., each pitched in with a couple of rides, while Wood Entertainment, San Antonio, Texas, provided three pieces, including the Sky High 155-foot Ferris wheel. The Lamberink wheel was purchased in partnership with Zaitshik in 2017.

"We also had our new Candy Adventure funhouse/glasshouse combination with



a 130-foot front," Zaitshik said. It was built by Chuck Wheeler of Ohio's Amusement Wraps.

## Kudos for the carnival

Flood praised Wade Shows' midway, stating: "Our younger guests were dazzled by the new Candy Adventure offering a sensory journey through a sweets-inspired funhouse. The Florida State Fair was excited to work with Wade Shows to offer fairgoers new thrills on the midway for 2025, including Thunderbird and Kraken. All of the new experiences meant more memorable moments for our guests."

The midway had more exciting offerings, including the 210-foot, eight-lane slide State Fair Super Slide (SFB/Visa). Zaitshik said his giant slide plays only the state fairs of Florida, New York and North Carolina.

Other spectaculars Wade

provided included: Alpine Bobs, Sea Dragon, Giant Wheel and Zipper (Chance Rides), Cyclops (KMG), Hit In 2000 Himalaya (Mack Rides), Mega Drop (Fabbri Group), Mighty Mouse Coaster (Zamperla), Quasar themed as Music Express (A.R.M. USA/ARM UK), Orbiter (Tivoli), Rock Star and Vertigo (A.R.M. USA), Street Fighter 360 (Technical Park), Super Cyclone coaster (Interpark) and Waver Swinger (Bertazzon).

The carnival also operated its Sky Ride along Lake Road in the fairgrounds.

Ride wristbands for all ages were \$35 each Monday through Thursday and \$45 Friday through Sunday and Presidents Day.

Fair admission was \$7 for kids 6 to 11, Monday through Thursday, Friday through Sunday and Presidents Day



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► See FLORIDA, page 34



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Thrill rides were a major part of the Wade Shows midway at the Florida State Fair. AT/GARY SLADE



Thunderbird swing soars 150 feet into the air at the Florida State Fair. AT/RON GUSTAFSON

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► **FLORIDA**  
 Continued from page 32

\$11; Adults 12 to 54 paid \$12 Monday through Thursday, Friday through Sunday and Presidents Day \$16. Seniors 55-plus paid \$11 Monday through Friday. Parking was free.

**Entertainment a hit**

Flood also pointed out highlights of the fair's entertainment lineup.

Sunny Nights was an evening water stunt show produced by renowned daredevil and circus performer **Bello Nock**. It featured the fair's mascot, Sunny, and LED illumination on the center water feature at the fairgrounds.

The fair official said food-eating contests were expanded to feature a different food each day of the fair and the presentations were a fan favorite.

Capacity crowds

were on hand for **Jurassic Kingdom**, produced by **Colonia Productions**. The interactive show for kids had multiple daily performances. Fireworks were presented on weekends.

**Circus and motorcycles**

The **American Motor Drome Company's** vintage Wall of Death featured motorcycle daredevils performing gravity-defying stunts in its silo-shaped structure, while **Aaron Radatz** dazzled audiences with his unique illusions on **The Mall**. **Cycle Circus Live**, the largest FMX freestyle show of its kind, was presented at the Grand Prix Arena with a demolition derby held in the covered arena.

**Circus Hollywood** performed daily shows under the big top along Mall Way with the **Royals' Spectacular** trapeze near the Gate 2 entrance.

Six music stages placed throughout the fair were busy each day with a variety of acts from tribute bands to the Navy Band Southeast's ensembles.

**Exhibits and more**

There were more than 1,900 exhibitors at this year's expo and more than 1,500 creative exhibitors, plus hundreds of vendors in Expo Hall.

Agriculture shows were held daily with the Champion of Champions Contest and Awards Ceremony on the final day.

Cracker Country, a living history museum on the fairgrounds with 13 original structures from the 1800s, was open to the public during the expo's run.

The 2026 Florida State Fair is slated for Feb. 5 to 16.

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# WATER PARKS & RECREATION

▶ Adventure Bay adding Hyperlight Slide — page 36 / News Splash — page 36

## Splash, play, repeat: Tech behind Splash Lagoon's arcade success

AT: David Fake

dfake@amusementtoday.com

ERIE, Pa. — For more than two decades, **Splash Lagoon Indoor Water Park Resort** has stood as one of the premier indoor water parks in the United States. Owned by **Scott Enterprises**, a family-run hospitality powerhouse with over 70 years of community-driven success, Splash Lagoon has welcomed millions of visitors looking for year-round aquatic adventure. With nine water slides, an interactive tree house, and one of the largest indoor wave pools on the East Coast, the park offers an immersive experience that extends far beyond the water.

Yet, while the water park remains the star attraction, **Treasure Island Arcade**, the 6,500-square-foot gaming haven within Splash Lagoon, has quietly become an additional key revenue driver and guest favorite at the resort. With more than 100 games and cutting-edge attractions, including the wildly popular **Virtual Rabbids: The Big Ride** and **Godzilla Kaiju Wars VR**, the arcade delivers thrilling experiences that keep families entertained long after they've dried off from the waves of Splash Lagoon.

A major contributing factor to **Treasure Island Arcade's** success is the cashless technology and support provided by **Embed**. Its innovative technology and partnership have helped modernize and streamline operations at the arcade and provide a seamless and data-driven guest experience.

With spring break season now in full swing, the park faces one of its most intense staffing challenges as high



**Splash Lagoon guests enjoy a virtually effortless fun arcade experience riding Virtual Rabbids: The Big Ride (above right), with the help of Embed's cutting-edge cashless solutions. Guest engagement is enhanced with custom-designed game cards (top left) and marketing materials from Embed's eSHOP platform (bottom left). COURTESY EMBED, SPLASH LAGOON**

school and college employees return to their studies, creating a labor shortage. Embed's solutions, particularly **GoTrain** virtual training sessions and **Mobile Wallet** technology, have stepped in to streamline operations, reduce reliance on on-site staff, and improve the guest experience during these high-demand weeks.

For more than a decade, Embed has been an integral part of **Treasure Island Arcade's** transformation.

"We've been working with Embed for years, and the impact has been outstanding," said **Ryan Cherry**, general manager at Splash Lagoon. "One of the biggest advantages they bring to the table is their customer service. Their response time is incredible. If a reader goes down, you're losing revenue, and Embed understands that urgency."

At the core of Embed's support is the **Mobile Wallet**, an innovation that has re-

defined the guest experience. Instead of waiting at kiosks or counters, visitors can reload funds instantly from their smartphones, ensuring uninterrupted gameplay.

"The convenience of **Mobile Wallet** has been fantastic," Cherry emphasized. "Parents love that they can reload game cards from anywhere — whether it's from their hotel room or while dining [nearby]. It's all about making it as easy as possible for guests to have fun."

Splash Lagoon's commitment to staying ahead of industry trends means leveraging deep data analytics, and Embed's **STATS** dashboard has become a game-changer.

"In an arcade, data analytics is everything," said Cherry. "A great game in the wrong location might not perform well. With **STATS**, we can track spending patterns, optimize game placement and even adjust prize payouts

to maximize engagement and revenue."

The numbers speak for themselves. Within six months of integrating **Mobile Wallet** and **STATS**, the arcade experienced a 200% increase in **Mobile Wallet** reload revenue, a doubling of reload volume and a tripling of guest registrations. Registered guests were more likely to return, reinforcing the long-term value of these digital solutions.

Operational efficiency has seen a boost thanks to Embed's **GoTrain** virtual training sessions. Arcade floor staff who underwent gamified training saw their **Mobile Wallet** reloads increase by almost triple, while the average reload value nearly doubled.

"Training is a massive challenge in our industry because of seasonal staff turnover," Cherry noted. "Embed's approach has made it easier than ever for our team to get up to speed quickly and pro-

vide top-tier guest service."

The shift toward a cashless, frictionless experience is not just a convenience — it's an expectation. Recognizing this, **Treasure Island Arcade** has fully embraced Embed's ecosystem, from smart-TOUCH card readers to the custom-designed arcade cards available through Embed's **eSHOP**.

"Personalized cards are a big win for us," Cherry explained. "Guests love them, they help reinforce our brand after they leave the arcade."

In addition, Embed's **eSHOP** has simplified the process of acquiring marketing materials and equipment.

"Our team has used **eSHOP** to order promotional items, and it's been a great resource," Cherry said. "Being able to easily access what we need, just makes our jobs easier."

Splash Lagoon and its **Treasure Island Arcade** show no signs of slowing.

"We're always keeping an eye on new trends and ensuring our guests have fresh experiences every time they visit," Cherry said. "With Embed's support, we can continue to innovate, optimize, and deliver top-notch entertainment."

As the **FEC** landscape continues to evolve, partnerships like the one between Splash Lagoon and Embed exemplify how the right technology and operational strategy can create not only a better guest experience but also drive sustainable business growth.

For Splash Lagoon, the journey doesn't end here — it's just getting started and Embed is ensuring that future-proofed fun is leading the way.

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## Adventure Bay adding Hyperlight Slide for 2025

AT: Jeffrey Seifert  
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

ALTOONA, Iowa — When the summer season kicks off on May 24 at **Adventure Bay**, **Adventureland Resort's** water park, guests will be able to enjoy a new attraction. The park's former Typhoon waterslide has been transformed into Hyperlight, offering an all-new waterslide experience.

The Hyperlight slide offers a full-sensory experience with the addition of vivid lights and dynamic sound. Riders should prepare to hold onto their tubes and get ready to launch into a galaxy far away as they race through the tunnel to the bottom. With several different combinations of laser lights and sound to choose from, no two rides will be the same on Hyperlight.

Hyperlight is a slide augmentation provided by **iSlide Technology** of the Netherlands. The new slide will include color-changing lights, lasers and dynamic surround sound for a full sensory experience. The existing Typhoon waterslide was an enclosed **ProSlide** Mammoth with an enclosed Tornado 18. It uses a two-person round raft.

"Our park team is continuing our massive park-wide transformation project in 2025 with yet another new experience for our visitors to enjoy," said Adventureland Resort General Manager **Mike Lusky**. "This summer, the thrills are going to shine brighter in Adventure Bay as we introduce the completely reimagined Hyperlight water slide, offering summer fun in a whole new light for every rider."

Hyperlight is the first new upgrade coming to Adventure Bay since 2012. The park was acquired by Palace Entertainment in 2021 and the organization has made several park-wide enhancements including the addition of a roller coaster and log flume in 2023.

Adventureland was founded by **John F. "Jack" Krantz**, who in the 1970s felt that the state of Iowa was lacking fun, family activities. He started with a hotel, Adventureland Inn, which opened in 1973. The park, Adventureland, opened in June of the following year after a delay caused by a tornado. It was modeled after **Disneyland** and was touted as Krantz's Midwestern take on one of the greatest theme parks of all time. In 1978, the park added a wooden coaster named Tornado, in reference to the actual tornado that delayed the park's opening four years earlier. The Krantz family operated the park for nearly half a century. When Jack Krantz died in 2006, the park was left to his four children. They continued to operate the park until 2021 when it was sold to **Palace Entertainment**.

The first water attraction to open at Adventureland was Kokomo Kove in 2008, a large water play structure provided by **WhiteWater West**. The attraction included seven waterslides and more than 100 water features spanning multiple levels, topped with a tipping bucket. Two years later five slides were added along with changing areas, lockers for rent, lounge chairs, food service and a full-service bar. The new area became Adventure Bay water park. The Breaker Beach wave pool was added in 2012 along with Shipwreck Shores, a kiddie pool with a pirate ship-themed water slide for kids and a swim-up beverage center just for kids.



## NEWS SPLASH

AT: Jeffrey L. Seifert  
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

The City Council in Miamisburg, Ohio, is making plans to repair and re-open the closed **Sycamore Trails Aquatic Center**. The center, which opened in 1996, closed in late 2023 owing to issues with the piping infrastructure that led to significant water loss.

The council expects the revamp to cost at least \$12 million. The plan is to have a center with five independent bodies of water including an eight-lane 25-yard competition pool; a three-lane, 42-foot-long exercise pool; a fenced-in kiddie pool with splash features and toddler slides; a zero-depth entry recreational pool with climbable floats, in-water basketball and volleyball areas; and a splash pad that was installed in 2023. The project is also set to include a 22-foot slide tower with three body slides.

"What we're intending through this design is five separate bodies of water that are all independently mechanically functional and heated and chemically treated ... so any shutdown or mechanical issue or anything in one facility does not affect all of them," said **Ryan Davis**, the city's parks and recreation director. "They can all kind of operate independently. It actually gives us a lot of flexibility, both from an operational perspective and from that mechanical perspective as well."

The aquatic center revamp also will feature more seating, shade and improved accessibility.

With surf parks popping up all over the world, it may be hard to believe that one has yet to be built in China. That is about to change, however, as China will see the opening of its first surf park, the **Riyue Bay Surf Resort**, in Wanning on Hainan Island.

The development, which is the first of its kind in China comes via an international partnership between **American Wave Machines** and **China Tourism Group**. The wave-making capabilities will be provided by American Wave Machines' exclusive PerfectSwell technology.

The multi-use development will feature the PerfectSwell surf pool, a skate-park, a 132-room surf-themed hotel, a shopping center, bar, restaurants and a surf retail shop.

"With the launch of PerfectSwell, China solidifies its commitment to developing world-class athletes across all Olympic sports, surfing included," said **Kuan Zhao**, surf park director of the resort, in a press release. "Riyue Bay Surf Resort delivers unparalleled training opportunities allowing us to cultivate homegrown talent. At the same time,

the venue will deliver a world-class resort experience for all levels of surf tourists. We will expand the surfing community throughout the country while welcoming the diverse and broad spectrum of surf enthusiasts from around the world."

A California developer is hoping to revive plans to build an Atlantis Resort in Hawaii. **Atlantis Ko'Olina** would be built on the island of Oahu on 26 acres of land located next to **Disney's Aulani Resort**. The project was first pitched 20 years ago but failed to come to fruition. **China Oceanwide Holdings Group** purchased the land about 10 years ago but never developed it. Oceanwide declared bankruptcy in 2023 and began liquidating its properties in 2024.

In January of this year, **Newage Ko Olina**, a subsidiary of California-based developer **Kam Sang Company**, purchased two parcels of land from Oceanwide and has submitted updated plans for the two properties. The proposal calls for an Atlantis resort to be developed on the 26.3-acre site with 500 hotel rooms and 500 vacation-stay or condominium units.

The other 17.3-acre land parcel will potentially house an upscale hotel brand such as **Regent**, **Mandarin Oriental**, **St. Regis** or **Waldorf Astoria** with 250 rooms and 250 vacation-stay units. Kam Song currently operates the Waldorf Astoria in Las Vegas.

When completed this will be the first Atlantis hotel/water park resort in the United States.

A new inflatable adventure park is planned for the city of Angus, Scotland. The **Monikie Country Park** aqua park will be the first of its kind in Angus when it opens at the beginning of May. To be installed at a cost of £135,000 (US\$170,000) it will be located on the park's north reservoir.

The city has asked students at the primary schools of Monikie and Newbigging to name the project. Once complete, the pupils will be among the first visitors to try out the water park.

**Kellie Smith**, head teacher at Monikie and Newbigging primaries, said: "Given that the country park is just a stone's throw from our school, this is a very fitting project for our children and comes at an excellent time.

"It's rewarding to know our pupils will form their own legacy, naming something that we hope will be really popular in the community and will be something they will always remember."



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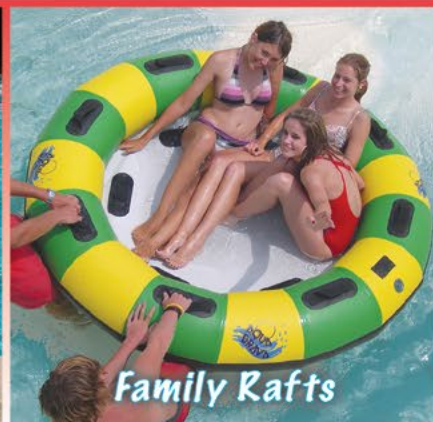
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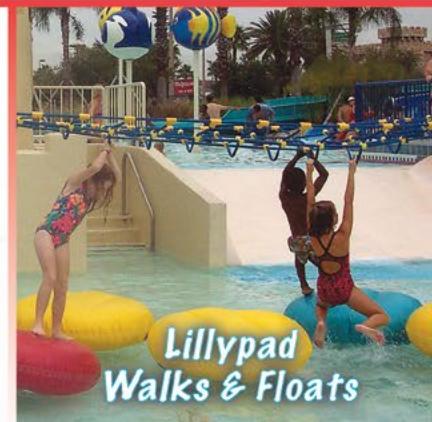
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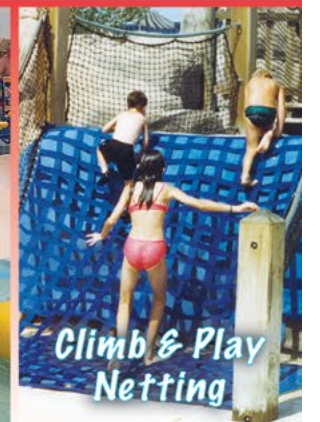
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# BUSINESS & NEWSMAKERS

▶ Women of the attractions industry gather — page 42 / Pa. Showmen/Fair convention a success — page 46

## IISF Super Extravaganza and Trade Show lives up to its name

AT: Ron Gustafson  
Special to Amusement Today

RIVERVIEW, Fla. — The 57th Annual International Showmen's Foundation (IISF) Super Trade Show & Extravaganza lived up to its name during the Feb. 11 to 14 run.

"It was absolutely the biggest show post-COVID — even six years before the pandemic," an ecstatic Teresa Rimes, show secretary, told *Amusement Today*.

The four-day event, staged at the International Showmen's Association (IISA) property, featured 175 exhibitors with 19 of them first-timers. The weather cooperated with sunny skies and temperatures reaching into the low 80s.

According to Rimes, "Qualified buyers attended because of the product. We haven't seen stuff like this in years at the show."

"Attendance was roughly the same as last year at around 5,500," she noted. "Our available indoor space was sold out with 100 vendors,



Patrons at the IISF Super Trade Show & Extravaganza take in the outdoor exhibits). AT/RON GUSTAFSON

and there were 75 outdoors. Eighteen international companies exhibited."

While some vendors offered mixed reviews, others were happy with the show's outcome.

"Russell Dean Foods raved and raved about the show," Rimes said of the Ohio company's debut as an exhibitor. "They never anticipated the results they got here at their outdoor booth."

She emphasized that the trade show is not only a time to see what's new in the

industry but also like an "old home week" for many. IISF is the fundraising arm of IISA.

Of the 23 rides displayed outside, most were spoken for when the event closed. A handful of other rides slated for the show didn't appear due to transportation delays.

"We're selling everything we make," said Jim Frederiksen, Frederiksen Industries, Tampa, Fla., maker of the popular Fun Slide. Powers & Thomas Midway Entertainment, Wilmington, N.C., purchased the 65-foot slide on display, and before closing Friday, the adjacent 90-footer had been sold to Fun Time Shows, Fairdealing, Mo.

"We've sold four slides already in the first part of the year!" Frederiksen added.

Rides 4 U, Somerville, N.J., was busy showing the new portable version of the SBF/Visa Group's 32-seat Pirate ship. Poor Jack Amusements, Milton, Ind., had purchased the display unit prior to it arriving in Florida, while Connecticut showman Robert Stewart, owner of Stewart Amusement, attended to see the ride as he



A portable Pirate 32 from SBF/Visa Group drew a lot of attention at the Rides 4 U display. AT/RON GUSTAFSON

## Helm & Sons adds attractions from Fun Light



COURTESY FUN LIGHT AMUSEMENTS

LIVINGSTON, Texas — Alan Ferguson, U.S. representative for Fun Light Amusements of the Czech Republic, was enthusiastic while talking to *Amusement Today* during the IISF Trade Show, highlighting two sales going to Helm and Sons Amusements, Riverside, Calif.

"Davey Helm has recently taken delivery of a two-story Ghost Train dark ride themed as 'The Conjuring,'" Ferguson noted. "He also has a three-story funhouse scheduled for delivery next year."

Ferguson has represented Fun Light since 2011 and has been a staple at the IISF event for years. Fun Light touts itself as the largest supplier of amusement equipment in Eastern Europe with a diverse catalog of rides, and in recent years the company has delivered a number attractions to U.S. customers.

currently has one being built by the Italian supplier.

Rides 4 U's Len Soled said his company sold six rides during the four days. Morris Vivona Jr., Amusements of America, Plainsboro, N.J., bought the SBF/Visa Groovy Bus on display, while the manufacturer's trailer-mounted spinning coaster was sold to TDK Entertainment, Punxsutawney, Pa. TDK also ordered an SFB/Visa Mini Tagada, and another was sold to Beauce Carnival of Canada.

"We're seeing a number of parks coming back to the show,"

Soled noted. COTALand, under construction in Austin, Texas, has an SBF/Visa Safari Jeep on order.

Soled said another sale was made to Gillette Shows, Pittsfield, Mass., with a Street Fighter under contract with Italian manufacturer Technical Park.

Amusement Devices & Mfg. (ADM), Schaller, Iowa, had an impressive six-ride layout with the highlight being the new Sugar Slide swing. Instead of traditional

▶ See IISF, page 41

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

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## ► IISF

Continued from page 40

seats, riders lie on platforms for a unique ride experience. ADM also showcased its new clamshell basketball game.

"We're sold out a year in advance," the company's **Chandler Woodke** said. "We are building up to three rides a week and using some of our same framework designs that go back 30 years."

Woodke noted that ADM equipment is affordable and easy to move with steady sales to parks, carnivals, family entertainment centers and rental companies.

Three gondola Ferris wheels were displayed at the show, with **Luna-Park Rides**, Czech Republic, the first in line as you entered the show grounds. That ride had been sold prior to the expo.

**Kevin Exum**, **Rides USA**, Montgomery, Texas, presented an 18-meter wheel from Brazilian supplier **Fabripark**, which was also sold prior to being exhibited. Exum said he expects to conclude five or six additional ride sales from the show.

A **Wadkins Expo Wheel** anchored the far end of the show grounds with **Roger Wadkins Jr.** saying the display wheel and two in production at the White Marsh, Md., plant are all sold.

**Kolmax Plus**, Czech Republic, presented two Spinners (Break Dance) and two teacup rides during the show, all of which were sold.

"We were busy," Sales Manager **Irena Zvarova** told AT. She reported that by Friday three Spinners, four teacups and a flying elephant were under contract.

**Joel Golder** and son, **Paul**, owners of **Palace Playland**, Old Orchard Beach, Maine, stopped by to examine the Spinners. The park takes delivery of the spectacular ride this year. According to Zvarova, another Spinner was sold to Canada's **West Coast Amusements**.

**Fun Crew USA** of Orlando, Fla., purchased one of the displayed teacups, while the other unit went to **Rainbow Amusements** in Connecticut.

"We're having a good year," said **Bob Cassata**, founder of **Bob's Space Racers**, Holly Hill, Fla. "I've



A Luna-Park Rides wheel (above left) welcomed attendees as they entered the expo. Rides USA also brought in a wheel from supplier Fabripark (above right). AT/RON GUSTAFSON



been here every year but one."

The company displayed a 10-person water race game outdoors.

**Battech Enterprises' Albert Frieden** reported numerous projects on the books for his Salem, Ore., company, including a Zero Gravity going to **Belmont Park**, San Diego, Calif., and a **Cliff Hanger** to **Palace Playland**.

**A.R.M. USA** President **Mike Gill** said the Winterville, Ohio, company will be busy into most of 2026 with five different projects in the shop now. He noted that a Steam Punk, a 360-degree full rotation Ali Baba thrill ride, is going to **Skinner's Amusements**, Marengo, Ill.

"It will be an upgrade for them," Gill said. "It (Ali Baba line) remains our top seller as youngsters and grandparents alike will ride it. Vertigo, our drop towers and Screamer remain popular as well."

**Gina Guglielmi** with the **Fabbi Group** reported two 40-meter Boosters will be delivered stateside this year from the Italian manufacturer. One is going to **Oasis Lake of the Ozarks**, an amusement park slated to open this summer in Osage Beach, Mo. The other is going to **Reithoffer Shows**, Gibsonton, Fla.

**Michele Bertazzon**, CEO of Italy's **Bertazzon 3B SRL**, said the company's production schedule is five years out.

"Bumper cars do very well," he said of business. "Showmen are also looking to replace existing large equipment with new rides that are not as heavy."

He said popular mobile pieces include Wave

Swingers and Himalayas.

**Massimo Sartori**, president of **Sartori Amusement Rides**, reported that his company is busy with the Techno Jump series and worldwide sales are strong. The Italian supplier is also building its first (two-arm) Twin Twister for the U.S. market with the attraction going to **Powers Great American Midways**, Corfu, N.Y.

**FunTagg**, a digital ticketing company in Cary, N.C., reported a strong response to its product, which was launched in 2019.

"We now support 26 of the top 50 events in the nation," noted **Harry Riegel**, director of business development.

Numerous carnivals as well as **Family Kingdom Amusement Park**, Myrtle Beach, S.C., are current FunTagg clients.

**Kathy Skelton**, owner of **Hi Striker Carnival Corp.**, Rolla, Mo., reported selling all four units on display at her booth.

AT talked to numerous vendors in the exhibit hall and got mixed reactions. Some reported brisk business, while others thought foot traffic was sluggish. Some voiced concerns that afternoons became too hot and humid in the hallways when outdoor temperatures peaked.

The heat didn't cool activities for some vendors, though.

"We were writing orders all week," said **Hutch Costello**, sales manager for **Rhode Island Novelty**, Fall River, Mass. "We had our busiest Friday at the show in a long time."

**Sue Nichols** of **5centride**, Williamsport, Pa., echoed Costello's remarks.

"I was busy the last two hours of the show, and



At the Bob's Space Racers outdoor exhibit were (l to r): Jack Cook, Bob Cassata and Jack Mendes. Cassata is the founder of the company. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



Companies producing colorful signage and tents were among more than 150 vendors at this year's trade show. AT/RON GUSTAFSON

that was hard to believe," she said of her custom art merchandise sales.

**Lorinda Miller**, owner of **Central Florida Canvas**, Riverview, said it was a "good week" for her at the show and that her company is extremely busy with orders.

**Stefano Moser** of Italy's Moser Rides announced that **City of Fun Carnival**, Pleasant Grove, Utah, will take delivery of the first Speed Flip in the U.S. this year.

"We have been very busy with towers — our most popular attraction," he said. "Wave Swingers are also a strong line."

**Francesco Ferrari**, president of **Preston & Barbieri**, another Italian manufacturer of major attractions, said a Music Express is currently in production and a portable Hyperjump was delivered to **Palace Playland** last year. **North American Midway Entertainment** and **Deggeller Attractions** both received new Wave Swingers from the firm in 2024.

**Patty Sullivan**, president and CEO of **Eli Bridge Co.**, Jacksonville, Ill., along with General Manager **Tim Noland**, were on hand at their booth to meet current and new clients.

"It's really a good networking opportunity for us and to keep communication open with those in the industry," Noland said. "We are staying busy at the plant."

**Peter Theunis**, North American sales for Italy's **Gosetto**, said the maker of dark rides and funhouses is sold out through 2029.

"**Kissell Entertainment** (Okeana, Ohio) is getting a new dark ride next year, and **Butler Amusements** (Fairfield, Calif.) is getting a double-deck funhouse this year," he reported.

A number of seminars and workshops were presented during the expo as well as a hall of fame ceremony and cocktail party presented by the **Outdoor Amusement Business Association (OABA)**. (See the April 2025 edition of AT for a report on OABA activities.)

**Dale Hersberger** was thrown a surprise party Wednesday evening in honor of his company — Audio Innovators, Inc., of Riverview — marking 50 years in business. The event took place at the Carousel Pavilion on the show grounds and was coordinated by family with many industry friends attending.

•gibtownshowmensclub.com



# Attractions industry gathering draws 200 women, inspires future

AT: Susan Storey  
Special to Amusement Today

ORLANDO — Women are an integral part of the attractions industry, and last November more than 200 women from all over the world came together for a casual evening of networking and connection. The one-of-a-kind event was dubbed “Amazing Women of the Attractions Industry.”

The idea to bring women together outside of traditional programmed events originated several years ago with **Una de Boer**, chief marketing officer, **WhiteWater**.

“When I joined the attractions industry a decade ago, I noticed there were few women working in the manufacturer and supplier sector,” de Boer shared. “Then, I started recognizing the same women at industry events. We would greet each other but usually that was all. Trade shows and conferences are busy experiences, and it is hard to have time for meaningful conversations.”

De Boer wanted to strengthen those casual connections, and during IAAPA Expo Asia several years ago she took a chance.

“I invited the women I recognized to come together for a ‘temperature check’ — a chance to pause, connect, share excitement and even talk about stress related to the Expo. With that, we began to build a supportive network and base of recognition,” she said.

**Emily Popovich**, head of business development, **L3DFX**, attended that first gathering. “We saw we are all part of an underrepresented group,” she shared. “We recognized that many of us yearned for opportunities to come together and support one another. Titles and experience levels did not matter. We felt a connection and embraced the opportunity to openly be together in a welcoming space. The conversations veered back and forth



More than 170 women came together at Sports & Social for the Amazing Women of the Attractions Industry mixer preceding IAAPA Expo 2024. AT/SUSAN STOREY

from questions about the tradeshow to discussions about our industry and our roles, even to our personal lives. It was free-flowing and open.”

“We next held a similar event during IAAPA in Paris,” de Boer continued. “More women came. We reached out by word of mouth, and almost 30 women took part, representing suppliers, operators and IAAPA staff — a mix of women who truly reflected our diverse industry.”

Momentum and enthusiasm for future events continued. **Marah Rodriguez**, regional vice president of sales North America, **Mobaro** partnered with Popovich and de Boer to coordinate the November 2024 event.

“Women often navigate similar challenges in the workplace, whether it’s balancing career growth with personal responsibilities, overcoming biases or finding their voice in male-dominated spaces,” Rodriguez said. “Having a network of other women who understand these shared experiences creates a sense of solidarity and support that goes beyond traditional networking. I was honored to help plan something for women in our industry.”

“It was an experiment,

too,” Popovich added. “As we lined our schedules together, we almost questioned if we should go forward. We didn’t want to create something that would be a burden or stress for people to get to.”

The group opted for Monday night and chose nearby restaurant **Sports & Social Orlando** as the location, due to its proximity to the convention center.

“We were hoping for 50 people,” said Popovich. “We invited women we knew and created a simple invite that could be easily shared and encouraged others to share it. It did not matter who invitees worked for or what position they had. Our goal was to host an event where all women in our industry felt — and were — welcome.”

Enthusiasm spread quickly. “We kept telling the restaurant, ‘We need more space, we probably need another server,’” said Popovich. “The support we received was exciting. Women enthusiastically responded and thanked us for putting the event together.”

“We didn’t have an agenda and there was no cost to come,” de Boer added. “We provided the time and the location. Almost 200 women came. Events like this are

critical, and the women in our industry are hungry for them.”

The cross-section of women representing all facets of the industry including **Hersheypark**, **TEA**, **Universal Creative**, **Palace Entertainment**, **Sally Dark Rides**, **Museum of Illusions**, **The Disney Company**, **Extreme Engineering**, **Merlin Entertainments**, and many more.

“It is easy to have tunnel vision and solely focus on your day-to-day role, especially during big events like IAAPA Expo,” de Boer furthered. “And it is hard to ask others to add one more thing to their calendar. That doesn’t make it any less important that we make time to invest in our networks, our careers and our community.”

“I’m proud to be a woman in the attractions industry,” shared Rodriguez. “It’s an industry built on creativity and innovation and having diverse perspectives — especially from women — helps push it forward in meaningful ways. As more women step into leadership roles, they are mentoring others and shaping the future of the industry. They also seek ways to connect with other women. Creating and planning events like the one we had in November

helps us build a network of strong, talented women who are breaking barriers and making space for the next generation.”

“I’ve been asked if we’re being exclusionary and why ‘women only’ events are necessary,” de Boer said. “We must have these events because women are still underrepresented. We need to encourage more inclusive leadership within our industry. Businesses thrive when leadership tables have more diverse perspectives around them, working together.”

“To achieve that it is necessary to create spaces that welcome and support women in the industry, as well as providing opportunities that help strengthen our networks. Who you know helps you access information,” she continued. “Knowing who to turn to if you have a question goes a long way. And asking a friend is better than contacting a stranger. That’s why networking works and events like this one are so important. More than 200 women attended our self-organized mixer. This shows what we can achieve together.”

Rodriguez, Popovich and de Boer have continued to build on the momentum from the November gathering. They created a group on LinkedIn, **Female Leaders of Amusement Parks and Attractions**, to keep the conversation and connections thriving. In January, Rodriguez invited women attending the **AIMS International Safety Seminar** together for quick connection and check-in. Plans are also underway for similar networking events at industry conferences throughout the rest of the year.

“Supporting and helping empower women is important,” de Boer concluded. “I’m proud to continue to keep this ball rolling and don’t plan to stop. In the words of **Mahatma Gandhi**, I believe we can all ‘be the change [we] want to see in the world.’”



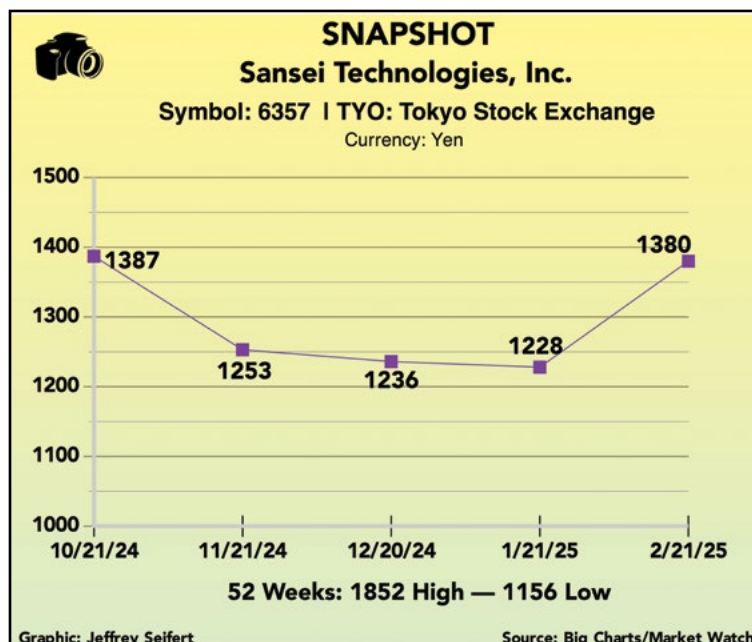
## MARKET WATCH

COMPANY	SYMBOL	MARKET	PRICE 2/19/25	HIGH 52-Week	LOW 52-Week
<b>PARKS AND ATTRACTIONS</b>					
The Blackstone Group	BX	NYSE	166.85	200.96	115.82
Comcast Corp./ NBCUniversal Media	CMCSA	NASDAQ	36.48	45.31	32.50
Dave & Busters Entertainment, LLC	PLAY	NASDAQ	25.20	69.82	22.83
EPR Properties	EPR	NYSE	49.19	50.26	39.655
Falcon's Beyond	FBYD	NASDAQ	6.86	13.25	3.62
Fuji Kyoko Co., Ltd.	JP:9010	TYO	2373.00	4090.00	2083.00
Haichang Holdings Ltd.	HK:2255	SEHK	0.54	1.04	0.39
Leofoo Development Co.	TW:2705	TSEC	18.00	22.45	16.30
Lucky Strike Entertainment Corp	LUCK	NYSE	10.99	14.92	9.61
MGM Resorts International	MGM	NYSE	38.34	48.25	31.61
Parks America, Inc.	PRKA	OTC	0.3965	0.61	0.32
Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ltd.	RCL	NYSE	264.01	277.08	119.48
Six Flags Entertainment Corp.	FUN	NYSE	47.31	58.70	35.93
Tivoli A/S	DK:TIV	CSE	610.00	760.00	604.00
United Parks & Resorts Inc.	PRKS	NYSE	54.59	60.83	44.72
The Walt Disney Company	DIS	NYSE	111.35	123.74	83.91
Warner Bros Discovery Inc.	WBD	NASDAQ	10.89	12.70	6.64
<b>SUPPLIERS/OTHERS</b>					
Brogent Technologies, Inc.	TW:5263	TSEC	125.50	205.50	111.00
Sansei Technologies, Inc.	TYO:6357	TYO	1417.00	1852.00	1156.00
Topgolf Callaway Brands	MODG	NYSE	7.35	16.89	7.13

Details and information available at [amusementtoday.com/stocks](https://amusementtoday.com/stocks)

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

—SOURCES: Bigcharts.com



## DIESEL PRICES

Region (U.S)	As of 2/17/25	Change from 1 year ago
East Coast	\$3.791	(\$0.449)
Midwest	\$3.602	(\$0.408)
Gulf Coast	\$3.382	(\$0.462)
Mountain	\$3.510	(\$0.447)
West Coast	\$3.863	(\$0.391)
California	\$4.839	(\$0.419)

## CURRENCY

On 2/20/25 \$1 USD =

0.9583	EURO
0.7937	GBP (British Pound)
151.69	JPY (Japanese Yen)
0.9038	CHF (Swiss Franc)
1.5740	AUD (Australian Dollar)
1.4206	CAD (Canadian Dollar)

## BUSINESS WATCH

### Maurer Rides becomes B Corp certified

MUNICH, Germany — **Maurer Rides** has become the first roller coaster manufacturer worldwide to receive the prestigious B Corp certification. This recognition highlights the company's commitment to social responsibility, environmental consciousness and sustainable business practices.

"We pursued B Corp certification to better structure our diverse sustainability efforts and identify further areas for improvement," stated Maurer Rides CEO **Jörg Beutler**. "Sustainability is a personal priority for me, and I firmly believe that everyone benefits from it — our company and employees, our customers and society as a whole."

The B Corp certification is awarded by the nonprofit organization **B Lab** and certifies that companies meet the highest standards in social responsibility, environmental sustainability, transparency and corporate governance. Maurer Rides has undergone this rigorous certification process, demonstrating that economic success and responsible action can go hand in hand. Currently, there are over 9,000 B Corp companies worldwide, with just more than 100 located in Germany.

### SimEx-Iwerks updates logo, brand identity

BALTIMORE, Md. — **SimEx-Iwerks** announced the release of its new brand identity. This marks the first time the company's logo and visual identity have been updated since its founding in 1981 by **Michael Needham** and **Shiori Sudo**. The rebranding is part of a larger restructuring initiative following the company's transition to being management-owned in June 2024. The company will also launch a refreshed website and will increase its social engagement.

"This is an exciting time for us, and our rebrand is just the beginning," said **Kate Magnusson**, vice president, marketing and partnerships. "It's a reflection of our unwavering commitment to delivering high-quality, out-of-home experiences that inspire, entertain and educate."

SimEx-Iwerks has built its legacy on groundbreaking work in the entertainment industry, specializing in immersive attractions and experiences that combine storytelling, special effects and close collaborations with leading studios.

### Disney releases first quarter financials

BURBANK, Calif. — **The Walt Disney Company** reported earnings for its first fiscal quarter which ended December 28, 2024. Revenues increased 5% for the first quarter to \$24.7 billion from \$23.5 billion in 2024's first quarter.

"Our results this quarter demonstrate Disney's creative and financial strength as we advanced the strategic initiatives set in motion over the past two years," said **Robert A. Iger**, chief executive officer of The Walt Disney Company. "In fiscal Q1 we saw outstanding box office performance from our studios, which had the top three movies of 2024; we further improved the profitability of our Entertainment DTC streaming businesses; we took an important step to advance **ESPN's** digital strategy by adding an ESPN tile on **Disney+**; and our experiences segment demonstrated its enduring appeal as we continue investing strategically across the globe."

Domestic parks and experiences' operating results for the current quarter were unfavorably impacted by Hurricane Milton and, to a lesser extent, Hurricane Helene. As a result of Hurricane Milton, Walt Disney World Resort was closed for a day and the company canceled a cruise itinerary. Operating results at Disney's domestic parks and experiences decreased compared to the prior-year quarter due to higher costs primarily due to the fleet expansion at **Disney Cruise Line** and inflation, lower volumes attributable to declines in attendance which reflect the impact of the hurricanes as well as increased guest spending.



# Focus on the HORIZON

## A career in fun hits the 'spot'

ORLANDO — “It was a family trip to Hersheypark that ignited my passion for roller coasters, and this industry,” shared Frank Hamedl, Corporate Human Resources Manager for Fun Spot America Theme Parks. “As a young child, I was afraid of big rides, but when I finally rode sooperdooperLooper, everything changed. It was like a light switch turned on to what became my favorite pastime.”

Originally from Fishkill, New York, Hamedl became an avid “Roller Coaster Tycoon” player and member of American Coaster Enthusiasts (ACE). He also began to envision a career designing roller coasters. “I thought that would be the perfect role for me and I headed in that direction when I started college as an engineering student,” he said. However, like many college freshmen, Hamedl soon realized his chosen major was not really his passion. “As I began to rethink my career goals, I also spoke with a friend who was enrolled in the Rosen College of Hospitality Management at the University of Central Florida,” he said. “I began to see new pathways and opportunities that would lead to a career within the industry.”

Hamedl transferred to Florida, and a natural people person, connected with students who also wanted to work in the attractions industry. “I joined the Future Theme Park Leaders Association (FTLA) and got a student membership to IAAPA so I could attend the tradeshow. I began to network and meet industry leaders,” he said. “It was during the IAAPA Expo that I ran into George Frantzis from Quassy Amusement Park. He remembered me as an ACE event attendee and as a seasonal summer employee. That connection and conversation led to his offering me my first management role as a rides operations manager.”

Hamedl worked at the park the following summer between semesters before returning to Florida again for school. Soon after, Hamedl first heard of the IAAPA Foundation.

“I was paying out-of-state tuition at Rosen,” he explained. “And in 2017 I learned about its scholarship program. It felt like an opportunity designed just for me.” Hamedl applied and earned a scholarship from the Foundation. “It was an incredible steppingstone,” he remembered. “It led to me getting involved with IAAPA’s Young Professionals Task Force and expanding my personal and professional network.”

Hamedl also earned an internship with Universal Orlando Resort and upon graduation, began his career in Event Operations.

“It was everything I had hoped it would be, and all I had worked toward,” he said, “But as they say, ‘COVID happened’ and like many others, I had to find something new when our department closed. I wanted to stay in the industry and willing to do whatever it took.”

An opportunity at Fun Spot America Theme Parks also reminded Hamedl of one of his earliest lessons. “I applied for a managerial role at the park. It was a great opportunity but also unusual because Fun Spot is known for promoting from within. It was going to be tough to get the role coming from the outside. I had several interviews, including one with Fun Spot CEO, John Arie Jr. The first thing he said was he had called George at Quassy to ask about me. It was an example of the power of relationships and a reminder to always leave a company on good terms. That one call, asking about a role I’d had five years earlier, led to the job which is now my amazing career.”

Hamedl is passionate about his position with Fun Spot and its space in the diverse attractions industry.

“Fun Spot is a unique company,” he said, “We have similarities with family entertainment centers and with our incredible rides, we’re similar to seasonal amusement parks. However, we are open year-round, so we identify with destination parks, too. We are everything in between.”

An operations professional at heart, Hamedl was surprised when in 2023 the park approached him

## Frank Hamedl Fun Spot America Orlando, Florida



with an opportunity to shift his focus behind the scenes. “Our corporate team offered me the chance to move into Human Resources,” he said. “I was surprised at first and then my operations experiences gave me perspective and insight into the roles we have at Fun Spot and the tasks our team members need to do. This was a chance to have a role that would help build the future of Fun Spot’s parks.”

Hamedl believes the heart of the attractions industry is with its people. “While at Quassy, I remember an instance when the park needed a certain part to open a ride. Jerry Brick from Lake Compounce told us they had that part and drove it to Quassy so we could open our ride. Even though the parks are competitors, they are united in this industry. They taught me when one park does well, we all do well,” he said.

“We have that same culture at Fun Spot,” he furthered. “We support each other and others parks like ours. It is something special.”

“Fun Spot encourages us to

be involved with the industry, too, and I am so proud to give back,” Hamedl added. “I have spoken at IAAPA Expo for the last four years, attended the *Amusement Today* Golden Ticket Awards and remain connected with Rosen College. I love to share my story and encourage others as they build their careers in this industry.”

In 2024, he was honored as the recipient of the IAAPA Young Professional of the Year - North America. “The connections I have made through this industry are incredible. I even met my wife during IAAPA Expo. Never underestimate the power of networking,” Hamedl laughed.

When asked what advice he has for others, Hamedl’s applies to everyone, regardless of where they are in their career. “Don’t compare yourself to others,” he said. “There is no one singular path to success. Stay true to yourself. This industry is filled opportunity if you’re willing to look and work for it.”

—Susan Storey



## ON THE MOVE

**Merlin Entertainments** announced the appointment of **Fiona Eastwood** as chief executive officer with immediate effect. This follows her initial appointment to the role on an interim basis at the end of November 2024. She will be responsible for leading the implementation of the business's transformational strategy and to ensure it is well placed to grow at scale and deliver a sustainable, thriving future.

"Fiona has a deep understanding of the business, the strategies required for sustainable growth and the vision to spearhead our ongoing transformation," stated **Roland Hernandez**, chair of Merlin Entertainments. "As Merlin's former chief operating officer, she recognizes the significant role each location plays in our ongoing success, and she will be instrumental in bringing our global attractions together into one united business. The Board looks forward to continuing working with Fiona."

Eastwood's appointment has been made following a robust search process by Merlin's Board, with consideration of external and internal candidates. She has nearly a decade of experience at the business, including most recently as chief operating officer with responsibility for gateway attractions, including **Madame Tussauds**, the **Eye Brand** and **Sea Life** along with Merlin's resort theme parks. She joined the business in 2015 as global marketing director for gateway attractions, responsible for driving strategy and marketing across an expanding portfolio of brands.

Prior to Merlin, Eastwood worked as managing director of consumer products at **BBC Studios**, leading the successful turnaround of the division through organisational restructuring, digital transformation and international growth.

**Morey's Piers and Beachfront Waterparks** announced the creation of a new director of games operations position and the promotion of long-time Games Manager **Mike Weimar** to this key role.

Weimar, a seasoned amusement industry veteran with more than 20 years of dedicated service to Morey's Piers, will now oversee the overall management, including budgets, expenses and revenue of the park's expansive games program, which boasts more than 30 games across three piers.

"Mike's unwavering dedication and proven success within our Games department make him the ideal candidate for this leadership role," said **Will Morey**, president and CEO. "We are confident that under his expert guidance, the Games department will continue to flourish and provide our guests with unparalleled levels of entertainment."

The **Elaut Group** has officially promoted **Laurens De Smedt** as the company's new CEO of Elaut Group Europe. Laurens carries on the legacy of his grandfather **Achiel Verstraeten** — who founded Elaut 65 years ago — bringing top quality to the entertainment industry.

"Taking over the responsibility of the European entities, has got me very excited," said De Smedt. "We've got a world of opportunities ahead of us, so I'm looking forward to working closely with our team, customers and players to make the world's best games."

Laurens graduated as a mechanical engineer from **KU Leuven Belgium**, and started his career at **ABInBev** where he moved through different roles in sales, production and finance among others in the **Stella Artois Brewery**.



Eastwood



Weimar



De Smedt

He made the jump to the ELAUT Group, the Verstraeten family business, back in 2019 where he worked in many departments, getting to know the games, the industry and players inside and out.

Industry veteran **Jim Wyatt** has been named president of VR attraction manufacturer **Rilix**. He officially assumed his role on February 10 and will be responsible for all external activities involving Rilix's VR product lineup, including sales, distributor relations, public relations and promotions.

"We are thrilled to welcome Jim to our team. We know our product better than anyone, and we know how to support our customers," offered **Franco Gonçalves**, COO and founder of Rilix. "But Jim has a deep understanding of what our customers need — he can advise them not only on how to operate our VR attractions, but also whether they are the right fit for their businesses."

**Busch Gardens Tampa Bay** has appointed **Jeff Davis** as its new park president. He moves into this role after serving as park president at **SeaWorld San Antonio**.

Davis has a distinguished and extensive career in the theme park industry. He has served in executive roles at several well-known venues such as **Sesame Place Philadelphia**, **Playland Park**, **Lake Compounce Amusement Park**, **Nickelodeon Universe at American Dream** and **Dorney Park & Wildwater Kingdom**. In addition, he has played a significant role in the amusement sector as a board member and former president of the **Pennsylvania Amusement Parks & Attractions**.

"We're excited to have Jeff in the leadership role as one of our most seasoned executives," stated **Kyle Miller**, chief parks operations officer at **United Parks & Resorts**, parent company to Busch Gardens Tampa Bay. "I'm confident he will help guide the team to success as we continue to make investments to further solidify the park's status as a premier destination for thrill-seekers and families alike."

French President **Emmanuel Macron** named **Europa-Park** Founder **Roland Mack** "Officer de la Légion d'Honneur" and **Michael Mack**, managing partner of Europa-Park and CEO of **MACK One**, "Knight de la Légion d'Honneur." Only very few Germans have achieved this honour as yet. The Legion of Honor is the highest French honor.

The titles are the French president's way of honoring the exceptional commitment of Roland and Michael Mack to Franco-German friendship. In his statement, he said that Roland and Michael Mack are "great friends to France" and that for decades the Mack family have made a very successful effort in mutual understanding between both peoples.

"We understand the honors we've been conferred as both a responsibility and a motivation to speak up with all our might for the preservation and development of this fundamentally important partnership," said Roland Mack.

"The Franco-German friendship is fundamental to stability and trust," added Michael Mack. "Europe needs a clear vision for tomorrow, and our border region offers numerous opportunities to that end."



Wyatt



Davis



Roland Mack



Michael Mack

## OBITUARY

## Showman Richard "Little Richard" Thomas passes

PENNSBURG, Pa. — Richard James Thomas — affectionately known as "Little Richard" — who passed away peacefully on Monday, December 23, 2024, at the age of 92.

Thomas was a lifelong resident of Pennsburg, Pennsylvania, and originally hails from Emmaus, Pennsylvania. He was the beloved husband of Dolly (Ott) Thomas for an enduring 71 years. Born to the late Earl and Flossie (Keyser) Thomas, he lived a full and vibrant life, touching the hearts of many in the community.

Thomas's entrepreneurial spirit and love for food and family led him to build a successful legacy. He began his career as a food vendor at the Qmart and Zerns markets, where he spent over 50 years providing delicious meals to locals and visitors alike. His passion for this work eventually blossomed into a family-run business, with himself, Dolly, and their children actively participating in fairs and festivals.

A true icon in the area, Richard was also the former manager, primary food vendor and owner of the Kutztown Folk Festival, a beloved cultural event that drew visitors from near and far.

In addition to his food business, Thomas was involved in numerous other ventures, including the Pennsburg Diner, a local carwash and several other businesses throughout the Upper Perk Valley.

He was known for his kindness, generosity and unwavering dedication to those he loved. Thomas is survived by his loving wife, Dolly; his sister, Faith Sideris; his children: Robin and Donald Laudenslager, Sandra and David Higman, and I.V. and Christine Thomas; his 19 grandchildren and 28 great-grandchildren.



Thomas



# More than 1,600 attend Pennsylvania Showmen/Fair convention

AT: B. Derek Shaw

bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

HERSHEY, Pa. —

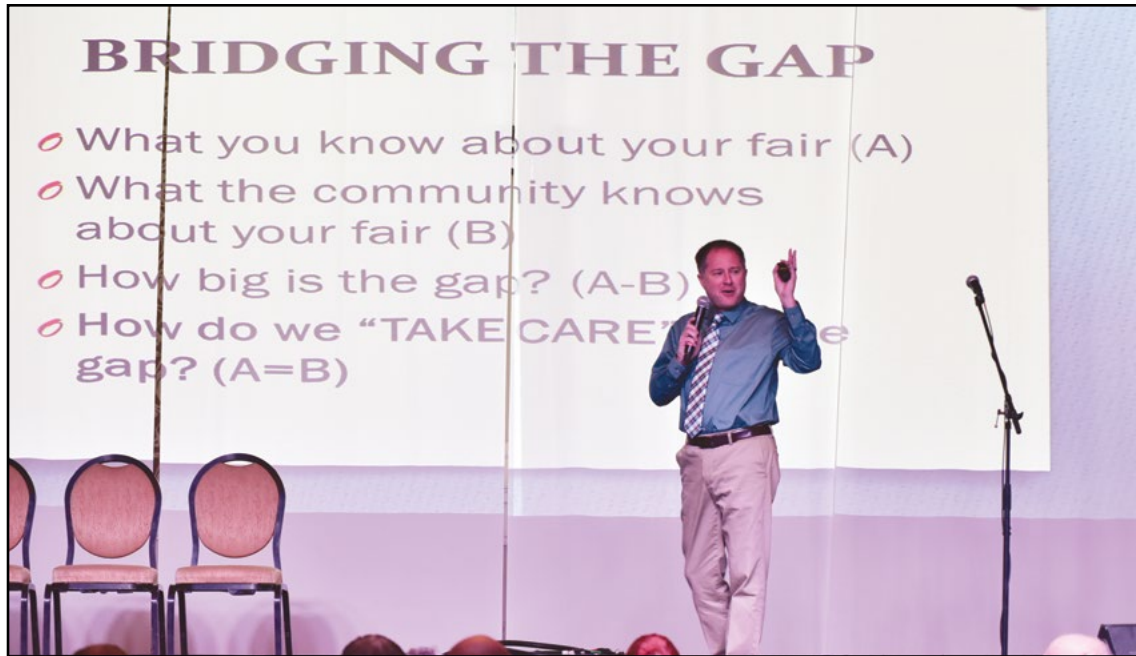
The Pennsylvania State Showmen's Association (PSSA) and the Pennsylvania State Association of County Fairs (PSACF) 112th annual convention took place January 22 – 25 with the theme "Cultivating the Future Generations." Of the 107 fairs in the state, 94 sent representatives. There were more than 1,600 attendees.

The 32,000-square-foot Great American Hall at Hershey Lodge and Convention Center, Hershey, Pennsylvania, was the site of the two-and-a-half-day trade show, with 165 vendors, which was considerably higher.

"Attendance has been really good. It's like a hill of ants coming in here. We offer vendors to the fairs, anything the fair would use in entertainment, ticketing, publicity, marketing — whatever they need, it's here," said Dick Horstman, coordinator of the trade show.

Six carnival operators had booths: C&L Shows, Houghton Enterprises, Main Event Amusements, Penn Valley Shows, TDK Entertainment and Tons of Fun Shows.

Keynote Speaker was Jeremy Parsons, CEO of the Iowa State Fair, who spoke about taking care of fairs. "We in the fair industry don't always tell our story well of all the things that we do for our communities. None of us are owners of our fairs." Parsons feels it is



Jeremy Parsons, CEO of the Iowa State Fair, was the keynote speaker during opening ceremonies of the 2025 convention. He encouraged fairs to do a better job of telling the community all they provide to the area they serve (above). The 112th annual convention featured numerous seminars throughout the event. Topics included Changes in the Fair Industry, Fairs 101, Safety and Security Considerations at Your Fair and Looking Back to Move Your Fair Forward. COURTESY TIM MCGOWAN STUDIO



important that fairs focus on what makes their fair special and make sure that the community knows that, along with doing things that make their fair relevant.

The annual convention featured seminars and table topics comprising the educational component. Some topics included Changes in the Fair Industry; Fairs 101; Serv-Safe; Junior Fair Boards — The Reasons Your Fair Needs Them; Safety and



Security Considerations at Your Fair and Looking Back to Move Your Fair Forward.

Wednesday evening centered around a talent showcase, consisting of 19 acts providing all types of music and other entertainment. Many of these same acts had

a presence on the trade show floor with a booth or strolling the aisles. Over half were self-booking.

Thursday evening's banquet, held by PSACF, began with introductions of all 61 Fair Queens who were vying for the 2025 Pennsylvania Fair

Queen title. Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding talked about the results of an economic impact study ordered by the department that Pennsylvania's 107 county and local fairs contribute \$1.14 billion to the state's economy annually. A seasonal backbone of the state's \$76 billion tourism industry, Pennsylvania fairs support more than 10,700 full-time jobs, and four million annual fair visitors spend \$673 million in the largely rural communities where fairs are held.

"Fairs offer unique opportunities to experience local culture and traditions and make lasting family memories," said Secretary Redding. "Fairs fill hotels and inns with visitors who spend in stores and restaurants and inject tourism dollars into hometown economies. Pennsylvania fairs present opportunities for our farmers to sell directly to visitors and compete for prizes that demonstrate the quality of their products and give their small businesses credibility and trust in the marketplace year-round."

Craig Lash with the Westmoreland Fair, Greensburg, is the 2025 president. Ben Haagen with the Centre County Grange Encampment & Fair, Centre Hall is the new vice president. Dr. Sally Nolt with the Elizabethtown Fair was the Fair Person of the Year

► See SHOWMEN, page 47



There were six carnival operators that had booths on the trade show floor. Pictured are the principals from Houghton Enterprises: (l to r) Jimmy Gladys, Jim Sr. and Jason Houghton. All told there were 165 exhibitors. AT/B. DEREK SHAW



Harry Reffner (left) and Mary Ott are the executive secretaries of their respective organizations: the Pennsylvania State Association of County Fairs and the Pennsylvania State Showmen's Association. AT/B. DEREK SHAW



## ►SHOWMEN

Continued from page 46

honoree. Four zone awards were presented: Zone 1 **Cameron County Fair**; Zone 2 **Centre County Fair**, Zone 3 **Claysburg Farm Show** and Zone 4 **Plainfield Farmers Fair**. There were four scholarships awarded to deserving students. Country artist **Alex Miller** provided the entertainment. He was a competitor on *American Idol* season 19 and was brought in by **Variety Attractions**.

Friday evening's banquet, held by the showmen, was a black-tie affair this year. **Steve Swika III**, owner of **SwikaS Amusements** was named Showman of the Year. A check was presented to the **Pennsylvania Farm Show Foundation** for \$24,875 — half the proceeds from the Showmen's **Herschel** carousel and **Hampton** mini tractor rides that operated during the eight-day **Pennsylvania Farm Show** earlier in January. Nine deserving students were presented with

scholarships. Three individuals received presidential awards: **Jeff and Judd Good**, **Goodtime Amusements** and **Mary Ott**, executive secretary of PSSA. The banquet also included the installation of the 2025 PSSA President, **Judd Good** with **Goodtime Amusements**. Entertainment was provided by **The Uptown Band**.

The 39th annual Pennsylvania State Fair Queen Coronation took place Saturday evening. **Ava Immel** representing the **West Lampeter Fair** was named the 2025 queen. She is currently a senior in high school and, following graduation, plans to pursue a degree in animal science. **Brooke Beamesderfer**, who represented the **Lebanon Area Fair**, was selected as the alternate. Currently, she is pursuing an interdisciplinary degree in agricultural business at the **University of Alabama**. Both the queen and alternate will travel the commonwealth this year representing Pennsylvania's rich agricultural heritage

Saturday evening was the state fair queen coronation (l to r): **Ava Immel**, 2025 queen, **Russell Redding**, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture secretary and **Brooke Beamesderfer**, 2025 queen alternate. There were 61 people vying for the title at this year's event.

COURTESY  
TIM MCGOWAN STUDIO

and serving as an ambassador for the fair association.

"This program not only empowers young women in Pennsylvania but also highlights the vital role of agriculture in our state. It's an honor to be part of this initiative that educates and uplifts future advocates for the ag industry," said Redding.

Also, that evening, **Lily Ansell**, nominated by the **Butler Farm Show**, was named the Junior Fair Person of the Year. The 18-year-old has volunteered with the fair for the past five years, handling public relations matters before and during the show.

Reflecting on the convention and the upcoming year,



Ott said, "It looks like we have a little bit bigger crowd this year." As for this season, "I'm very optimistic. I'm hoping we have a good year out."

"This year went very well," said Reffner. "We're coming back to our pre-COVID numbers. Some fairs in 2024 did very well [while]

other ones had rain five days out of the seven. It's really hard to predict. We're expecting a good year if Mother Nature works with us."

The 2026 edition is scheduled for January 21 through 24 at Hershey Lodge.

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# SAFETY, MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

► IROC Camp sees significant growth — page 52 / NAARSO concludes 2025 safety event — page 56

## E&A's International Aquatic Safety School excites and educates

AT: Susan Storey  
Special to Amusement Today

MAITLAND, Fla. — “There is something special about Safety School,” shared **Denise Beckson**, vice president and chief administrative and external affairs officer, **Morey's Piers & Resorts**. “It’s immersive, it’s intensive, it’s an esprit de corps event. There is no other experience like this one.”



Beckson

Beckson is referring to **Ellis & Associates’** Annual International Aquatic Safety School (IASS). The week-long program, which brings together Ellis & Associates clients for continued training, education, networking, certification and camaraderie, took place last month in Phoenix, Arizona. Since 1983, Ellis & Associates (E&A) has been the leader in aquatic safety and risk management, serving clients around the world. Along with excellence in guest service and “first and only” moments related to advancing and supporting safety in and around water, IASS is a core product — and value — for the entire Ellis community.

“My relationship with this school has been the longest in my life,” shared **Richard “RAC” Carroll**, senior vice president and chief operating officer, Ellis & Associates. “IASS is something we are incredibly proud of. The attractions industry is filled with leaders who



The 2025 Ellis and Associates International Aquatic Safety School welcomed more than 275 attendees to Arizona. The annual conference is the world’s longest running and largest aquatic risk management training program. The faculty members (below) all volunteer their time, talent and expertise and lead attendees through every aspect of their week. COURTESY ELLIS & ASSOCIATES

began their careers in aquatics. Even if they have moved into an area beyond aquatics, such as human resources or finance, if you ask a former IASS student, ‘Do you have a favorite safety school memory?’ the answer is always yes. Safety school is a core memory and experience.”



Carroll

“Our mission at Ellis & Associates is zero drownings. This unites us,” Carroll continued. “Everyone in attendance at IASS is hyper-focused on reducing the loss of life due to drowning. Our students are trainers in their aquatic facilities, and this week reminds them of the critical behaviors they should expect from their lifeguards — and each other.”

At its core, IASS is a “Train the Trainer” conference, but Carroll is quick to stress it’s

much more than that. “We believe that everyone is a life-long learner. IASS reinforces Ellis’s core training and values and builds upon them. IASS is the re-energization of creativity and passion. Safety school sets attendees up for the season ahead by focusing on the techniques needed to help convey the responsibility and professionalism of being a lifeguard. It helps excite them about being aquatics leaders.”

The magic of IASS is in the details. It comes from Ellis’s leadership team and the dedicated faculty who spent months preparing the immersive program.

“The IASS faculty is 100% volunteer,” Carroll continued. “They are here because they are passionate about aquatics and supporting the next generation of lifeguards and leaders in the aquatics industry. IASS is an intensive week. It requires everyone’s focus. The days are dedicated to presenting



and teaching, and for our faculty, the work continues deep into the night preparing for the next day.”

This year, 24 client faculty members led the daily sessions which included classroom sessions, hands-on lesson training such as advanced water rescue, interactive teach-back scenarios and more. Long before attendees arrived in Arizona, the IASS Directors were putting together the faculty curriculum and attendee schedule.

“We improve each year,

and IASS grows upon itself. The dedication and focus of our IASS Directors and faculty team is unmatched,” Carroll said.

“It’s in the Ellis DNA that we are passionate about safety, and that passion is extended through the IASS faculty,” he added. “This program is only possible because of the volunteer faculty who carve out the time to be here, and the incredible volunteer IASS Directors who

► See AQUATIC, page 50

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## AQUATIC

Continued from page 48

put the program together. This year's IASS Directors, Denise Beckson and Trish Lyon from Morey's Piers & Resorts, Mike Bengston with Splish Splash Waterpark and Liz Caywood from Fort Wayne Community Schools built an outstanding week. It is because of their personal commitment and their companies' support for their involvement, that IASS continues to get better each year."

Along with classes focused on core competencies and lessons required to earn or renew instructor and instructor trainer licenses, attendees are immersed in a breadth and depth of topics that matter in the water — and beyond. Pamela Landwirth, who led the nonprofit organization Give Kids The World for more than 20 years, opened IASS as the guest keynote speaker. Landwirth inspired attendees as she shared examples of how leaders can unite teams when they find their personal "why" and purpose within their roles and organizations. Later in the week, guest presenter Matt Heller, founder of Performance Optimist Consulting, spoke to IASS attendees about "life in the middle."



Guest speakers and special sessions round out the IASS experience. Pamela Landwirth — pictured above with Jeff Ellis, CEO, Ellis & Associates (far left) and RAC Carroll, Senior Vice President and COO, Ellis & Associates (far right) — kicked off the week with the opening keynote address. COURTESY ELLIS & ASSOCIATES

"IASS attendees have a shared focus on the same mission of zero drownings," Heller said. "Keeping guests safe in the water in front of them is their main task. However, that is not their entire responsibility. Their days are spent in the middle of guests, peers and colleagues, and management. This year we discussed how building better relationships can lead to more efficiency and productivity. Relationship building is a skill that can be applied at any stage of someone's career — and life."



Heller

Jerica Cyr, chief oper-

ating officer, Jeff Ellis Management, wants IASS attendees to return home with a better understanding of the big and small ways they make a difference every day. "It is a privilege to work closely with Jeff Ellis," she said. "He has instilled in all of us at Ellis the core values of integrity and caring for others. We carry that message forward throughout IASS and encourage attendees to look for ways they can implement caring in the water park setting, with guests and with each other. Soft skills are just as important as the techniques we practice and teach."

The IASS experience extends beyond the classroom setting. Attendees visited the nearby Kiwanis Wave Pool for in-service lessons and water-based rescue refreshers and took part in a fun-filled networking event and team trivia competition at Great Wolf Lodge Scottsdale.

"Taking part in IASS is an investment for our attendees and their companies," Beckson continued. "Attendees give a lot to be at IASS and it requires their full focus and attention. You could call it a "boot camp" that fully ingrains its attendees in all aspects of maintaining water safety."

"Everyone who takes part in IASS comes ready to learn, share and work. They leave feeling motivated and valued," she finished. "They learned from and with each other how to engage and motivate their lifeguard teams while keeping safety at the forefront of all they do. It is an incredible program I plan to be a part of for a very long time."

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# NEWS & NOTES

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## Applying what has been learned

It's already March 2025! In preparation for the new season, many have attended training and education sessions to enhance their knowledge and skillsets. The next step is to strive to make that training meaningful, not just remembering facts, but embedding them into decisions and mindsets, turning theoretical concepts into real-world actions. It is time to "live what has been learned" in the classroom and apply that knowledge to daily work. Below are tips on just how to do that:

### Practice consistently

Repetition: just like with any skill, practice is key. Whether it's safety protocols, communication skills or problem-solving strategies, practicing these concepts in real-world settings helps solidify them.

### Reflect on what you've learned

Self-Assessment: regularly take time to reflect on what's been learned

and how it's being applied. Ask "Am I living out the principles I learned in class?" For example, learning about incident response means ensuring that the team knows the process.

### Adapt to the real-world context

Problem-solving in action: sometimes, the classroom lessons aren't directly transferable without some adjustment. For example, a safety protocol that works in a controlled environment may need tweaking when applied to a chaotic, fast-moving setting. Flexibility is key.

### Learn from experience

Trial and error: it's okay to not get everything right immediately. Living what has been learned often involves trial and error. Every time a mistake is made or a challenge is faced; it's an opportunity to learn from it and adopt the knowledge. Seek feedback from others, whether that's a mentor, peer

or even self-reflection. Feedback helps us understand where we're excelling and where we might need more work.

### Stay open to growth

Continual Learning: just because a lesson has been learned doesn't mean we know everything about it. Stay open to further learning and refining the approach. Acknowledge that work teaches lessons outside the classroom too. Believe that abilities and understanding will grow with effort and experience. This mindset encourages us to keep applying what has been learned while being open to new insights.

### Teach others

Sharing Knowledge: teaching others what has been learned is one of the best ways to solidify our understanding. Whether it's guiding a peer, mentoring someone or sharing knowledge informally, teaching helps reinforce what we've learned and

holds us accountable to live it out.

### Set goals and act on them

Goal-oriented action: break down what has been learned into actionable steps that can be pursued. If improving communication skills is the goal, for instance, make it a point to practice in daily conversations, whether that's active listening, clear articulation or nonverbal cues.

### Applying it by living it

Living what has been learned is about seeking growth, being intentional in applying knowledge and reflecting on it. It is not one-and-done. It is an ongoing process of integration into our daily lives with the overall goal of keeping us, our teams and our guests safe.

Putting new lessons into action helps us continually learn and improve.

—Amy Lowenstein,  
 AIMS International

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# International Ride Training IROC Camp sees significant growth

AT: Tim Baldwin  
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

GALVESTON, Texas — Now in its 15th year under the **International Ride Training** brand, Ride Camp saw a major attendance spike in 2025. The event took place from February 10 – 14 at the **San Luis Resort**.

“Last year, we had 134 and this year we have 191,” said **Cindee Huddy**, owner, IRT. “We have about 18 new properties that have come onboard. A couple more are looking at it, so we might have more by the end of the week.”

In addition to park representatives from all over the country, Denmark, Canada and Mexico also had parks in attendance.

Ride Camp had a 2025 theme of “Game On For Safety.” The video game theme served as inspiration for each team. Attendees are grouped into “cabins” for the week of Ride Camp, each with its own counselor from within the industry. Once gathered with their assigned colleagues, the activities and sessions were diverse.

“We used to just have teams or tables with our ‘faculty,’” Huddy explained. “**Erik Beard** and **Matt Heller** were having a conversation and went, ‘Oh wow. This is like camp for ride operators.’ So, tables became ‘cabins,’ and the faculty became camp counselors, and we ran with that theme.”

“There are three levels of Ride Camp from beginners to those with a lot of experience,” added **Shaun McKeogh**, auditor, IRT



Speaker Heather Barnes engaged attendees, the largest gathering at Ride Camp to date (above left). A social event at Kemah Boardwalk allowed for networking in a fun environment (above right). AT/TIM BALDWIN



and CEO of **Attractions Academy**. “We [assign attendees] with those with like seniority. The focus on networking and having colleagues across the industry is really there. We hope by the end of Ride Camp they leave with solid connections.”

**Heather Barnes**, owner, **Improv at Work**, was a keynote speaker. With her **Second City** background, she helped attendees go beyond their comfort zone, and in turn, helped supervisors become more effective at their job. Barnes had everyone laughing while learning to become better in their field.

During her first session, she noted from the *Harvard Business Review*: “The overall success of a company is strongly tied to the CEO’s mood, energy and demeanor.” Barnes continued by noting this follows through to individual leaders.

In addition to the main sessions, there are multiple



Each table represented a “cabin,” which were themed to a video game. AT/TIM BALDWIN

days of breakout sessions, classes and cabin activities. Topics ranged from ADA, normalization of deviance, operational efficiency and ride control systems to workplace recognition, spiels and leadership presence.

“I just took a great class on visual confirmation,” said first-time attendee **John Sutton**, director of operations, **Story Land**. “I’ll definitely take that back with us.”

**Marie Ruby**, director of operations at **Kennywood**, was a return attendee. “I was nervous the first time, but I was looking forward to getting back to these classes. My favorite part is the speakers. They’re really good. My biggest takeaways come from networking. It’s nice to see old friends but also make new ones,” she said.

“Considering the role I’m in, this may be stuff I know but it has been beneficial because they provide real-life examples,” said **Allie Banks**, operations manager, **Six Flags Over Texas**. “The

group activities are not typical and ordinary. They make them interactive and fun. It’s nice to share experiences within the group.”

IRT prides itself on making Ride Camp distinct.

“It’s completely focused on ride operations,” Huddy told *Amusement Today*. “It’s a certification that is specific to our clients. It is for certification and recertification of our IROC program and the 10 critical components of safety that every operator has on each ride.”

There are many levels of courses, but classes focus on training the trainer. The certifications build confidence, give credibility, provide consistency and adhere to manufacturers’ and ASTM standards.

“Our standards are three levels up above minimal standards,” noted Huddy. “So, if you slip — and we’re all human — there are variables, so you never slip below minimal levels.”

In addition to classroom instruction and main session

speakers, Ride Camp offers lighter moments — war chants, videos and the socks and sunglasses parade.

“Our awards show is fun every year,” said Huddy. “We give camp awards for Best Student, Spirit of Ride Camp, Heart of Ride Camp, and Audit Awards.”

A social event took place at **Kemah Boardwalk** one evening, which allowed attendees to see another property. Owing to inclement weather, the at-the-ride sessions planned for **Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier** were moved to the San Luis.

“We all have similar situations,” Sutton told AT. “It’s neat to see and hear what the approaches and styles are from different parks. We’re all here to satisfy our guests and make sure they have the most enjoyable experience possible at our parks. The tactics and strategies might be different, so it’s nice to pick people’s brains. It’s nice to bring nuggets back to our parks.”

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Erik Beard conducts a breakout session on ADA accessibility. AT/TIM BALDWIN



## Worldwide Safety Group purchases Ridebooks.com, preserves resource

PLANT CITY, Fla. — **Ridebooks.com** has been purchased by **Avery Wheelock**, president of **Worldwide Safety Group**.

"I bought the company to make sure that the tool that I have used since it was created was preserved and expanded upon," Wheelock told *Amusement Today*. "I have always believed in promoting safety through communication and that is why I have gotten involved and lowered the cost of the (online) subscription so anyone can have access to the quick search function for the information."

Ridebooks.com contains what it calls Rideopedia: a comprehensive database of

more than 400 manufacturers, more than 5,000 bulletins, NDTs, manuals and other ride documentation.

Subscribers are also invited to post valuable comments and photos related to specific rides.

"We are not selling the content," Wheelock emphasized. "We are selling the ease of finding the information with a few clicks instead of digging through boxes of paperwork."

Worldwide Safety Group specializes in state ride certifications, third party safety inspections, operator training, risk and loss surveys and other services.

—Ron Gustafson



Avery Wheelock of Worldwide Safety Group has purchased Ridebooks.com, an online database for the amusement ride industry.  
AT/GARY SLADE

## Ralph S. Alberts Co. introduces new paint system

MONTOURSVILLE, Pa. — **Ralph S. Alberts Co.** has a legacy of solving tough problems and seizing opportunities for improvement in the amusement industry and beyond. It's no secret that Foam/PUR ride safety pads do not last forever. The typical life of ride padding is anywhere from one to five years depending on the combination of ride cycles and the environmental conditions specific to the attraction. To reduce premature wear and extend the useful life of ride safety padding everywhere, Ralph S. Alberts Co. has created a solution to improve the first line of defense on its foam pads: the outer paint layer.

The company announced the full production rollout of Ride Armor 63: Innovation Coated in Legacy.

Ride Armor 63 is an aliphatic paint system formulated to deliver the highest durability in coating for I-skin flexible foam padding. It possesses UV and chemical resistant properties which aid in withstanding the elements exposed to the attraction. The gloss and matte finishes provide consistent performance in a wide range of colors which are specifically matched to both the color and gloss of OEM standards and can be custom formulated upon request.

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# NWSC Safety Seminar concludes with good results, compliments

AT: Pam Sherborne  
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

PORTLAND, Ore. — The 2025 **Northwestern Showmen's Club** (NWSC) Safety Seminar is now in the books, and organizers, year after year, continue to be pleased with the turnout as well as responses from attendees.

There were 112 attending this year during the event, which was held February 17-21, on the campus of **Funtastic Shows** in Portland, Oregon.

There were many highlights this year according to NWSC **Tracy Munroz**, not the least of which were the compliments she received from attendees. Munroz said they had a couple from Oklahoma services that came for the first time this year.

"They said they had been to two different seminars other than ours and said, by far, they felt that ours was the best one that they



Drawing 112 attendees, the 2025 Northwestern Showmen's Club Safety Seminar was held, on the campus of Funtastic Shows. It featured various courses such as this one led Avery Wheelock of Worldwide Safety Group. COURTESY TOM JONES/MCGOWAN ALLIED SPECIALTY INSURANCE

had gone to," Munroz said. "They said that they felt so welcomed and it was more of an intimate-feeling program where they really got to interact with the instructors. And sitting down and having breakfast, lunch and dinner with the participants was a great networking time for them. They got a lot of phone numbers and information to take home with them in case they need help along the way.

"Now that's a great compliment," she said.

The NWSC safety seminar was established over 40 years ago to promote continuing education by amusement industry professionals. The interactive classes and settings deliver a great venue for raising the level of safety awareness within the carnival industry.

Each year classes change, according to the

needs of the industry.

The seminar is aligned with **Portland Community College** for accreditation in their Continuing Education Program providing two CEUs for participation and completion of the seminar.

Munroz said seminar organizers have been continuing efforts to increase attendance. She said they have made it a purpose to keep their costs low for attendees.

The seminar is \$200 for four full days of classes and that also includes breakfast, lunch and dinner every day.

"Sometimes I think because we keep our costs down, people think it must be a rinky-dink school when in reality we have industry leaders as instructors," Munroz said. "Our seminar is not just for the managers; it's for the guy pushing the button on the ride."

The NWSC offers **AIMS**, **NAARSO** or **CPR** and **First Aid** testing on the final day for attendees. These tests are an additional cost.

Among the highlights this year was a new session called **Lessons Learned Not in the Manual**, presented by **Tom Jones** of **McGowan Allied Insurance**.

"**Craig Hamelund**, **OSHA**, always brings the latest of new standards

▶ See NWSC, page 55

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► **NWSC**

Continued from page 54

regarding creating safe and healthy working conditions," Munroz said. "And then, of course, there is Avery Wheelock's ride evacuation classes that are life savers."

Munroz said there were so many classes this year, there were just too many to list.

"There are classes designed for everyone that makes the seminar work for everyone," she said.

Another highlight had to do with Wheeler as well.

"Avery got a big happy birthday song from all that attended," she said.

One of Munroz's favorite sessions she highlighted is the basic fire extinguisher class.

"You get to really use the extinguisher, so you know what to do in case it's needed. After attending this class, you know your staff knows how and when to use the extinguisher."

The other aspect of the seminar that the students like but has nothing to do with the educational part comes at the end of the session. When students turn in their check-in sheets, they get a ticket. On the last day at the banquet meal, Munroz pulls numbers out of a jar and attendees win prizes that are donated by seminar sponsors.

"They love being treated to gifts after a hard four days of classes," she said.

Munroz gives thanks to all of the safety seminar sponsors. They not only donate the gifts, but they also donate to make the free breakfasts, lunches and dinners during the seminar possible.

Sponsors this year included: *Amusement Today*, McGowan Allied Insurance, Showfolks of America, Davis Shows Northwest, Funtastic Shows, Gallagher, Chestnut Identity Apparel, Prime Pacific Amusements, MCM, Outdoor Business Association, Battech Enterprises and Haas Wilkerson.

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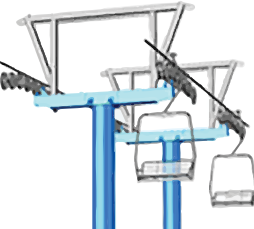
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# NAARSO concludes successful 2025 safety event in Charlotte

AT: Ron Gustafson  
Special to Amusement Today

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — More than 300 persons took part in the 38th Annual Safety Seminar presented by the National Association of Amusement Ride Safety Officials (NAARSO) at the Hilton Charlotte Airport January 26 through 31, 2025.

NAARSO Education Chairman John Hartman noted that 215 were on hand for in-person classes, while another 150 participated online. In addition, one classroom was dedicated to a 16-hour Spanish language ride inspection track, sponsored by the Outdoor Amusement Business Association.

"We had a lot of people who took the test for the first time — around 150," NAARSO President David Bertozzi told *Amusement Today* after the seminar closed. "Overall, it was a good week with a lot of newer, younger people, which is always good. We had lower in-person attendance, which we anticipated, but virtual participation was stronger. It's good to see new blood coming into the industry."

Following an opening reception on Sunday, January 26, course instruction kicked off Monday morning in numerous meeting rooms in the hotel's conference center. Certifications were offered in the following categories: inspector levels one to three, operations levels one to three, aquatic operations, qualified crane signal/rigging person, fall protections and forklift training.

The Primary Track was aligned for individuals with five years or less in the amusement industry and centered on multiple disciplines associated with most amusement rides and devices. Classes focused on electrical, hydraulics, introduction to industry standards, basic ride inspection techniques and more.

Those seeking certification in the operational side of amusement rides and devices — park and traveling equipment — registered for the Operations Track. Workshop topics ranged from employee



Above left, Avery Wheelock (far left) and Wesley Tart (far right) had an extensive class on welding techniques as well as non-destructive testing. Above right, Carowinds' Daryl McNeill (far left) goes over components from a roller coaster train, explaining where to look for wear. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



relations, inspection checklists, rider screening, preventative maintenance, ASTM standards for various materials, products, systems and services, as well as additional classes.

The Aquatic Operations Track seminars are related to those working at water parks or with water-related attractions. Among the courses were those on water quality, fiberglass maintenance and repair, liquid chemical feed and flow measurement, mechanical and pump room inspections, filtration and sanitation and pumps and motors. The track offered instruction at basic and advanced levels.

A Specials Track was offered for those operating inflatable devices and trampolines.

NAARSO's education committee selects class instructors from all aspects of the amusement industry with expertise in selected fields. The organization's objective is to provide quality education in the areas of inspection, maintenance and operations.

Membership is a diverse group from all areas of the amusement industry, including parks, carnivals, regulatory agencies and independent inspectors.

Case studies played an important role during a number of presentations at the dozens of classes on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday.

Bob Renner, Valleyfair, Shakopee, Minn., spoke intently during his sessions on "everything welding." During a Tuesday class, he outlined the step-by-step procedure taken after a crack was discovered on a steel

support on a major attraction.

His case study went from the visual inspection that revealed the issue to the conclusion, which was a resolution offered by an engineering firm.

He also explained some misconceptions between an industry standard and a code.

"A standard is an accepted guideline in an industry, whereas a code is mandatory," he noted.

Bill Hamilton, All Aquatics/Bill Hamilton & Associates, Titusville, Fla., covered various topics before the aquatics track on Monday and Tuesday. His Tuesday session focused on plumbing maintenance in the water attractions industry, honing in on rusty flanges and bolts, PVC welding, color coding, directional arrows and valve labeling.

Tony Perry, Safe Slide Restoration, Fredericktown, Mo., noted in his aquatics presentation that 75 percent of premature coating failure on water attractions is due to improper preparation of a corrosion site. He explained proper procedures to ward off coating breakdowns.

Another case study session concentrated on the lack of proper inspection of water rides and roller coaster supports. In highlighted photos, support footings were buried by debris for prolonged periods of time, resulting in rust on footer bolts and — in some instances — rot on support columns and beams. Other photos showed supports undermined in locations subject to rain runoff.

Avery Wheelock, president of Worldwide Safety

Group, Plant City, Fla., and Wesley Tart, supervisor with the North Carolina Department of Labor, presented an extensive class on welding and welding procedures as part of the Primary Track.

Wheelock emphasized the importance of getting the repair procedures from the ride's manufacturer before going through the welding process.

The NAARSO event shifted gears for hands-on training Wednesday at Carowinds amusement park, only minutes from the hotel.

Charter buses shuttled seminar participants to the park for an 8 a.m. start with the registrants split into 12 groups. Training sessions, headed up by Carowinds staff as well as other industry experts, were staged at selected rides and attractions and each group transitioned to a new location about every 20 minutes.

One of the most engaging exercises involved a mock incident on a ride, moderated by NAARSO Membership Chairman Dean Corl. Team members were charged with collecting witness information, interviewing ride staff and maintenance, filing reports and confronting upset guests.

Carowinds maintenance technician Daryl McNeill provided a close-up look at various components on the Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters, Inc. trains which operate on the Hurler, the park's large wooden roller coaster. He emphasized how critical daily inspections are to identify any worn parts which might need to be

changed out as well as other things which might be overlooked in the process.

A demonstration in drone inspections on the mammoth Fury 325 steel coaster (Bolliger & Mabillard) was conducted near the ride's entrance by the park's Drew Green.

Operating the drone from a utility trailer equipped with a large-screen monitor, he explained how the camera-equipped "eye in the sky" is used to inspect the 325-foot ride.

"We actually use it on four steel coasters here," he said of the process. "Basically, anything we can't reach with a crane — 80 feet and above — we can use the drone."

During the procedure, he showed how the camera zooms in to provide a clear view of bolt heads and nuts high above the ground with the results readily accepted by state ride inspectors.

"It's our second year doing it," Green added. "We do three quarterly and one yearly inspection on the steel coasters and can do a spur-of-the-moment if necessary."

Other rides with hands-on training during the day-long event included a Huss Troika themed as Do-Si-Do, Scrambler (Eli Bridge), and Zierer Wave Swinger named Zephyr. Those in the aquatic track trained at Carowinds' adjacent Carolina Harbor Waterpark.

Certification testing was held Friday to conclude the safety seminar. Besides the annual safety seminar in January, NAARSO also presents outreach programs throughout the year as well as customized training.

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