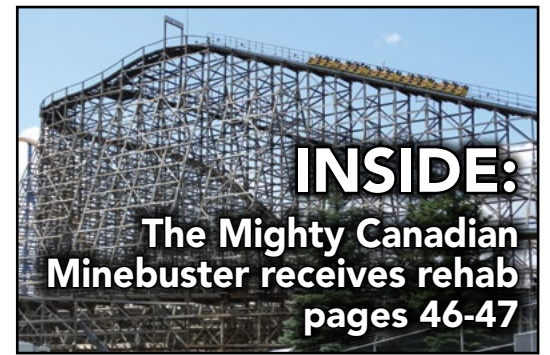


Amusement TODAY

April 2025
Vol. 29
Issue 1

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Peppa Pig welcomes guests, families with new theme park opening in Texas

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

NORTH RICHLAND HILLS, Texas — On March 1, the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex added yet another amusement industry attraction to the region. What makes this one particularly distinct is that its focus is on the very young. Named after the character from the British cartoon *Peppa Pig*, **Peppa Pig Theme Park** welcomes little ones who might be overwhelmed with larger theme parks.

At the grand opening on February 28, officials and performers stood on a stage adorned with bluebonnets and yellow roses to solidify the park's place in Texas. A crowd adorned in pig ears was eager to see what was inside.

Despite it being a British IP, **Merlin Entertainments** feels Texas is a good fit.

"North Richland Hills is the perfect place to open a theme park designed for families with children 6 and under," said **Julie Estrada**, public relations director,



Peppa Pig Theme Park officially opened in Texas on March 1. AT/TIM BALDWIN

Merlin Entertainments. "They really just want to play. You could spend the day playing on five different attractions and nine different playscapes, including a splash pad where you can have 6,000 gallons of water pouring down on you. It's a great way to create their very first theme park experience."

"The reaction has been great!" said General Manager **Jeremy Aguillen**, "We've been working on this for two years now. The guests who have visited so far have been super excited. We've been really

welcomed by the community." There are various things to do, among which are five rides.

Daddy Pig's Roller Coaster is a great ride for parents to ride with kids on their very first coaster. It is supplied by **Zamperla**. Daddy Pig sits in the front car, but the 10 cars behind him seat up to 20 passengers.

"Zamperla is thrilled about the third Family Coaster 155 we are opening with Merlin Entertainments,"

► See PEPPA, page 6



Daddy Pig's Roller Coaster from Zamperla has a tire lift and a mid-ride launch. AT/TIM BALDWIN



Poland's Mandoria expands with new rides

AT: Tim Baldwin
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RZGÓW, Poland — As a relatively new park (opening in 2021), **Mandoria** is part of the **Plak Fashion City** mall. As parents can ride every ride except for two small ones that only accommodate children, the park likes to tout: "Forget about your date of birth and let yourself be carried away by the fun."

With the marketing claim of Largest Indoor Park in Europe, Mandoria is themed with the atmosphere of a 16th-century trading city, combining historical charm with modern entertainment. Themed structures, walkways lined with watery vistas and a diverse mix of interactive attractions make for an engaging afternoon.

Up until 2025, three family coasters, various flat rides and children's attractions made for a fun time inside, regardless of the weather outdoors.

"Mandoria is a relatively new park, but its success led us to move forward with the expansion," said **Daniel Zieliński**, vice president of Mandoria. "Additionally, we always listen to our guests, their needs and their wishes regarding the types of attractions they would like to experience."

As the new year started, Mandoria opened its newest

► See MANDORIA, page 10

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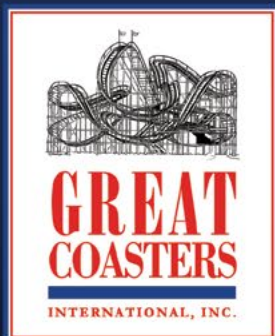
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AT NOTEBOOK: John W.C. Robinson, jrobinson@amusementtoday.com

Sharing the positivity



Robinson

Recently I attended the Amusement Expo International in Las Vegas, Nevada. Always a delightful time, the event is a wonderful expo with a much more intimate feel than many of the industry expos. It is nice to truly be able to network, talk or even just chit-chat with industry friends and associates as we all prepare for what the next year and season have in store.

Sadly, on day one of the event, I had no voice. I had to reschedule interviews and meetings for the next day in the hopes that I would be able to speak. However, this turned out to provide one of the most uplifting experiences of my expo tenure. As I went meeting-to-meeting on day two, I would take time to showcase our publication to my counterparts, leafing through the pages and sharing some of the stories within. In multiple meetings, an ad or a headline would catch my subject's eye and they'd comment, "Oh, they are doing such a wonderful job over there," or "It's really amazing the way she's lifted that organization." The funny thing was, they were always referring to the same person — an individual I had an interview scheduled with for later that day.

Needless to say, I mentioned the high praise she had been receiving at the start of our interview. I could see the genuine delight on her face upon hearing the news, which was only augmented by the first bit of news she shared in winning an industry award the evening before.

As we close each issue of *Amusement Today*, I try to make it a point to email the staff and be thankful for their work, time, effort and going above and beyond. At the annual Golden Ticket Awards event, the industry sees winners surprised by awards and genuinely overcome with emotion at the appreciation and being noticed by their peers.

All of us in this industry spend our days striving to provide the best for our guests and our customers. However, it's beyond essential that we make sure to share with our employees, our teams, our associates, our peers and even our competitors just how much of a difference they make and how much we notice their effort and dedication through each project and moment.

In the end, we're all on a team for this industry together and it is invaluable to keep lifting our teams higher.

FLINT'S VIEW: Bubba Flint



INDUSTRY VOICE: Kris Rowberry, Ride Entertainment

Exit through the gift shop

With everything going on in the world today, coupled with the daily requirements of successfully running our businesses, it can be easy to forget what we really do in the attractions industry: create positive, lifelong memories.

Recently, I was able to attend the opening of a new theme park here in the Dallas / Fort Worth area, which was debuting two of our company's attractions. Walking in, I felt the sense of pride knowing that we had helped make the park a success.

But when I got to the exit of one of our rides and saw all the smiling faces of children and their families — running right back into line to experience the fun again — it was a cathartic moment for me.

In fact, it was a not-so-subtle reminder that sometimes, it is not about hit-



Rowberry

ting those daily "per caps," posting record-breaking revenue for shareholders or even making a post bragging about our success on social media.

No, it's about those smiles and family togetherness — two things that seem to be lacking in so many of our lives these days.

Think about it: what other industry brings families together anymore? Young and old making core memories that will last a lifetime; what a privilege it is for all of us to make a living, being a part of something so special.

So, the next time you're trying to make sense of the world, take the time to get out of your office and stand at the exit to one of your attractions. It's amazing how quickly it will remind you that we're in the business of fun ... for everyone.

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



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Amusement Today is an independent, privately-owned trade news-based publication for the greater amusement, theme and water parks industries, published by Amusement Today, Inc., P.O. Box 5427, Arlington, Texas 76005. *Amusement Today* publishes 14 issues per year (distributed digitally); EXTRA! EXTRA! Desktop Edition (daily digital news); *Amusement Today.com* (information based website) and posts as needed on social media platforms. Amusement Today, Inc. conducts an industry survey, with numerous categories, and releases results during the awards ceremony and on GoldenTicketAwards.com (website for Golden Ticket Awards).

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2 MINUTE DRILL



AT: Tim Baldwin

Kevin Messick, Northwest Coasters

As president of both **K&G Construction** and **Northwest Coasters** (Lewiston, Idaho), **Kevin Messick** has had construction in his blood. He is a fourth-generation contractor. After a friend in the amusement industry asked for his help with a construction project, he eventually found himself erecting roller coasters and other attractions. Members of his staff admire him for his strength and honesty in leadership. His sense of humor puts people at ease, and the way he treats his team inspires loyalty. "He believes in second chances, and sometimes third or fourth chances," said his office manager. A family man, he is excited to see his second grandchild born this month. His team would say he treats them like family as well.



Kevin Messick is a fourth generation contractor behind K&G Construction as well as Northwest Coasters. COURTESY NORTHWEST COASTERS

Title: President.

Number of years in the industry: Nine.

Best thing about the industry: The people.

Favorite amusement ride: It's hard to pick just one!

If I weren't working in the amusement industry, I would be ... Just running my other company at home.

Biggest challenge facing our industry: Qualified employees.

The thing I like most about amusement/ water park season is ... It's our only time off since we work in the off-season.

When eating steak, I order it ... Medium well.

The last time I was at a zoo was ... Three years ago in Nashville.

In a single word, my life is ... Great (but it's just like a roller coaster).

A place I've never been to but hope to one day is ... Alaska.

The decade that best describes my fashion sense: Maybe the '90s.

The last cruise I took was to ... I have never been on a cruise (unless you count in a classic car).

The funniest sitcom ever is ... *Home Improvement.*

Morning person or night owl? Morning. I am at my office normally by 4 a.m.

The room in the house I neglect the most is ... I don't think I neglect any rooms.

Growing up, Easter with my family meant ... Time with the family.

Pick one: heavy snow or heavy rain? Heavy snow.

It's baseball season! I'll be rooting for ... I don't follow sports — unless it has to do with horsepower.

The most I ever paid for a hotel room was ... about \$300.

The thing other drivers do that angers me the most is ... Play on their cell phones.

The best thing about having kids: The grandkids.

French fries or tater tots? Fries, crispy!

My biggest non-work-related talent would be ... Working on classic vehicles.

The household chore I do the most is ... barbecue.

THE INDUSTRY SEEN

Leaving Las Vegas as a winner



LAS VEGAS, Nev. — At the Beers & Cheers Reception and Awards Ceremony on Wednesday, March 19, 2025, Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA), American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA) and the greater Amusement Industry recognized individuals and companies who have made an impact on Out of Home Entertainment. The more than 20 awards and honors presented included AAMA's Supplier of the Year Award which went to Embed. The award was accepted by the company's CMO and Growth Officer Sara Paz who commented, "I was almost in tears! There's a lot of big dogs in this industry and — while we are small but mighty — we just never thought we'd be in consideration as a Supplier of the Year. It's a validation of the way we layer value for our customers." COURTESY AMUSEMENT EXPO INTERNATIONAL

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►PEPPA

Continued from page 1

said Adam Sandy, roller coaster sales and marketing, Zamperla. “They helped us create the concept of a family coaster with both a lift and a launch, and it has become a standard part of the Peppa Pig experience the company provides around the globe. With a minimum height requirement of 36 inches, it is a fantastic first roller coaster experience for the smallest of riders while also serving as the anchor for the Peppa properties.”

“All of it is wonderful, but if I had to be pushed on my favorite, I loved seeing children come in today and squeal



Granddad Dog's Pirate Boat Ride (above left) and Grampy Rabbit's Dinosaur Adventure (above right) were supplied from Metallbau Emmeln, ideal for parents to ride with kids. AT/GARY SLADE



with delight on the roller coaster,” said Fiona Eastwood, CEO, Merlin Entertainments.

The ride is most likely a first coaster experience for many children and smoothly

delivers just enough “pink-knuckle” thrills.

Another attraction from Zamperla is a Jumping Star 6 themed to Mr. Bull's High Striker.

Metallbau Emmeln provided the adorable Grampy Rabbit's Dinosaur Adventure and Granddad Dog's Pirate Boat Ride.

“These attractions were installed last year in Texas and a part of a series of attractions we have delivered for Peppa Pig parks and themed areas in Florida, Germany and Italy,” said Frank Suelmann, Metallbau Emmeln. “However, our collaboration with Merlin extends far beyond Peppa Pig. Over the past years, we have successfully delivered numerous projects for Merlin, including attractions for Legoland parks in California, Florida, New York, Denmark, Germany, England, Malaysia, Dubai, Japan and Korea.”

Like most offerings at Peppa Pig, Metallbau Emmeln's rides are meant for parents to share the experience with their children.

“Metallbau Emmeln is a strong partner in the field of family-friendly attractions, especially for children aged 2 to 12,” Suelmann said. “With our many years of experience and a wide range of attractions, we specialize in tailoring rides with elaborate theming to perfectly match the specific needs of each park. This flexibility, combined with our high standards in design and quality, makes us a valued partner for theme parks worldwide — a proven success in many projects.”

Peppa Pig's Balloon Ride is the park's tallest attraction, offering overviews of the entire park. It was manufactured by Technical Park.

“We're thrilled to have supplied the balloon tower ride for the new Peppa Pig Theme Park. It's truly an excit-

ing project for us, especially because this ride is the tallest attraction in the park, making it the main eye-catcher!” said Marco Grigolo, sales, Technical Park. “We take great pride in this supply, as it's not our first balloon tower ride — Technical Park has become quite the specialist in these trendy, popular Peppa Pig park projects popping up around the world. It's a wonderful feeling to see our work being part of these immersive experiences for families globally.”

The ride sports eight gondolas.

“Additionally, we're proud to mention the inclusion of ADA-compliant gondolas, which ensures wheelchair access,” Grigolo told *Amusement Today*. “Accessibility is a key consideration in our designs, and it's important to us that all families, regardless of mobility needs, can enjoy the ride together. These gondolas feature a larger door to accommodate wheelchair access, along with additional safety provisions to securely hold the wheelchair and allow a companion to sit comfortably next to the guest. What's particularly great is that from the outside, these gondolas look exactly like the others, ensuring that the ride maintains its cohesive and harmonious appearance. This design choice not only ensures inclusivity but also provides a seamless experience for all guests, making everyone feel really welcomed without compromising the aesthetic of the attraction.”

The park is also a Certified Autism Center. Employee training, posted information on signage regarding specific sensory needs, and available quiet rooms make it easier

Amusement Today catches up with new Merlin Entertainments CEO Fiona Eastwood

Stepping into the role of CEO of Merlin Entertainments in mid-February, Fiona Eastwood is ready to tackle the challenges the exciting new position entails. At the grand opening of Peppa Pig Theme Park in North Richland Hills, *Amusement Today* sat down with her to see what the future entails.

AT: The pandemic was a time of uncertainty. Now in the rear-view mirror, speak toward the growth of Merlin as it has navigated through this time in history.

Eastwood: I was at Merlin during the pandemic, and like many organizations in that period, we didn't just survive, we thrived during and after COVID. What we saw very quickly was that all the theme park businesses bounced back very fast. Unsurprisingly, given it was outdoors, people felt safe. We also continued to invest during COVID. Experiences like this were in our long-term plans. We continued to invest in our existing estates as well as new attractions. We also opened Legoland Discovery Centers around the world during COVID.

Merlin's portfolio is large. From huge theme park resorts to attractions aimed at preschool children to venues within malls to city Ferris wheel landmarks, there is a wide range of audiences. Speak about how all that works.

We have 140 attractions around the world in 23 countries. It's a broad portfolio. Pre-schoolers today, kids 6 to 12 in our Legoland estates and then we have thrill parks such as Alton Towers catering to that teen-and-above market. We also have attractions catering to tourists to gateway cities around the world such as London and the iconic London Eye that appeal to a really broad spectrum. Plus, we have both indoor and outdoor attractions, making us perfectly positioned for all occasions throughout the year.

What are the factors you look for when expanding your brand to new locations?

I love this particular market. We already have successful attractions in Grapevine — SeaLife Aquarium, Legoland Discovery Center and Peppa Pig World of Fun. The U.S. market is very important to us with huge growth potential. We also have the biggest Legoland park in the world opening this year in China.

Merlin Entertainments has stated the importance of taking care of Earth. What initiatives are involved?

We have a series of initiatives in terms of the ES2 program. That includes caring for animals, our commitment to recycling and sustainability in terms of our existing estates and new attractions. We have a series of targets that take us up to 2030.

Last year, the transformation of Nemesis at Alton Towers received a Golden Ticket Award for Merlin's reinvestment in reimagining the ride. What goes into the decisions on when to reinvest?

It's an amazing ride, and actually, we've invested in the area around it in terms of making that a themed world as well. We didn't want to lose it. We created an entirely new theme around it. It's also faster than it was before.

When you sat down in your chair that first day, what were your goals?

Ultimately, essential to our business is our people. Start with happy people, happy guests and happy shareholders. That's where my big priorities are — around the people and also where our growth opportunities are, where we are going to invest next and also investing in our existing estates.

—Tim Baldwin



Eastwood



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▶PEPPA

Continued from page 6

for parents, as does a published guide on accessibility.

The Peppa Pig Theme Park aims to create a family-friendly environment where children can immerse themselves in the vibrant and animated world of Peppa Pig. Not all the attractions are rides.

Owing to Texas' extreme heat in the summer, Muddy Puddles Splash Pad lets families, particularly kids, find some relief in the colorful splash area provided by **Vortex**.

The park includes numerous themed interactive play areas and live entertainment that are designed to bring the characters and stories to life.

Fun Fair lets kids play carnival games for free. Typically, playing the game is more fun than winning the prize, so larger-than-life versions simply let kids try their luck at succeeding. Indoor facilities let people cool off while riding tricycles through props or watching



Peppa Pig's Balloon Ride (above left) is the tallest attraction in the park. Signage and theming around the park features childlike whimsy (above right). AT/SAMMY PICCOLA, JEFFREY SEIFERT



episodes of *Peppa Pig*.

"We now have 11 implementations of the Peppa Pig brand throughout Merlin attractions," said **Brittany Williams**, North America senior public relations manager, Merlin. "This is the third Peppa Pig Theme Park. The first one is in Florida and the next one opened last year in Germany. Texas was the perfect place for us to expand because we have the **Peppa Pig World of Play**, **SeaLife Aquarium**, and **Legoland Discovery Center**

attractions in Grapevine. There are so many families here in North Richland Hills, it was a great place for us to expand in Texas."

Other areas undeniably cater to the park's intended demographic. Sand play areas allow kids to dig and create. The Cinema offers large pillows to lie on and watch episodes of *Peppa Pig*. Playground equipment lets children climb, slide and burn off energy.

The colorful atmosphere has artificial turf on numer-

ous hills and walls adding to a playful park "feel."

The park was built on a piece of real estate that was formerly a **Mountasia** miniature golf course. A rocky, mountainous waterfall was retained. A large oak tree in the park was also preserved.

The current plan is a seasonal operation, with most dates through December being open to the public.

"We're looking to add more days," Aguillen told AT. "We're open through December and then evaluating the January and February months."

As families flock to North Richland Hills to experience this new attraction, the Peppa Pig Theme Park is set to become a cherished destination, spreading joy and creating magic for visitors of all ages.

When asked what he felt when confetti and streamers opened the park, Aguillen said, "Excitement, excitement, excitement! I was looking at all the faces in the crowd, and that's what means the most to me. The theme park was built with pre-schoolers in mind — it

FAST FACTS

Location: North Richland Hills, Texas

Opening Date: March 1, 2025

Size: Between 12 and 13 acres

Mecahnical ride suppliers: Zamperla, Metallbau Emmeln, Technical Park

Splash pad provider: Vortex

Employees: 100 to 110 full-time and part-time

Regular Admission: \$27.99

Parking: Free

Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

made me super happy."

Annual passes are available that include the Peppa Pig Theme Park and Peppa Pig World of Play.

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► MANDORIA

Continued from page 1

zone, which added three new rides. Aquila, a launched coaster from Vekoma, is the new headliner.

"Vekoma manufactured this fantastic new coaster, which, even after visiting many amusement parks worldwide, I find hard to compare to any other — it's truly unique," said Zieliński.

"Aquila is the result of a wonderful collaborative effort, built on passion and dedication. Seeing the concept come to life and witnessing the overwhelming reactions has been truly rewarding," said Camiel Bilsen, designer and concept engineer, Vekoma.

"After boarding the train at the station, the platforms are lowered to clear away from the safety envelope. When the specified clearance is achieved, the train is pushed slightly forward after which the electromagnetic launch immediately will kick in," added Stefan Holtman, executive sales director, Vekoma. "The 20-passenger train suitable for children from 95 centimeters (37.5 inches) is then accelerated to 70 km/h (43 mph) in just three seconds. This is the fastest accelerating Family Coaster for this target group. And if this is not enough, after riding the full circuit, the train is relaunched again on the fly from 45 to 75km/h creating a totally different experience."

One of the striking attributes is a new 25-meter tower constructed for the

FAST FACTS

Aquila

Manufacturer: Vekoma

Speed: 43 mph/70 kph;
75 kph second circuit

Height: 53 feet

LIM Launch, top speed
in three seconds

Passengers: 20

Length: 1,460 feet
(taken twice)

coaster, giving the park more of an iconic presence from the outside.

"Working with Mandoria has been a real pleasure. Their knowledge of the rides, creativity and cooperation was fantastic. It has been an intense but very fun journey," said Holtman.

The track length of 450 meters (1,460 feet) is doubled as the ride sends passengers through the layout twice. Skimming through themed structures, over walkways and around scenic props seems to accentuate the ride's 46 mph speed.

"Building this ride in an existing building with a roof level of only seven meters was quite a challenge," Holtman told *Amusement Today*. "Not only the tight footprint and ceiling but also the structural pillars of the building could not be touched. Therefore, we had to stretch the boundaries of the Family Coaster to the maximum. This though created a unique and thrilling ride



Zippering through structures and thematic elements enhances the sense of speed on the Vekoma coaster (above). Le Chariot (below) was created by Wood Design out of the Netherlands. COURTESY MANDORIA

with speeds like never before seen on this type of attraction. The pacing is enormous, and it feels like a runaway train. Combine this with the high level of theming at Mandoria and many near misses and it makes it a winner. Plus, the dynamics of the ride with lots of airtime and not too many positive forces make it very rideable. People are just riding this coaster on and on and on."

Aquila unquestionably raises the thrill component of the indoor park.

Joining Aquila is Le Chariot, a Ferris wheel sporting a carriage wheel thematic motif. Laźnia is a circular ride themed to Mediterranean spa baths. The two attractions were produced by Wood Design from the Netherlands and Zierer from Germany.

"Mandoria chose the Zierer Round About ride as one of the new family rides for the expansion area because of its evergreen appeal," said Jeroen Nijpels, sales, Zierer. "And then they



decided to give it a unique twist with some very special custom theming. The gondolas are themed like wooden bathtubs and the whole ride is set in a Roman bathhouse."

Wood Design prides itself on rich details in its creations. The Ferris wheel is no exception.

With the addition of a new zone, *Amusement Today* asked Zieliński if the space had already existed and had been unused.

"That's correct," he replied. "Part of the building served as storage space and was otherwise unused, so we were fully able to repurpose it for the expansion. For the construction, we had to build a 25-meter tower and slightly extend the building for the coaster."

The park is pleased with its success and hasn't stopped thinking about the future. More attractions and the possibility of outdoor expansion are in the works.

"Guest reaction has exceeded our expectations," Zieliński told *AT*. "There's no doubt that the roller coaster is the most extreme ride in

Mandoria, so guests experience a mix of excitement, fear, fascination and pure fun. The other attractions bring smiles to their faces as well."

"Mandoria is quickly becoming one of the leading forces in the Polish attractions industry," complimented Nijpels. "By growing organically at their original site near Łódź, as well as their other developments, including the very recent takeover of Le Parc du Petit Prince in France, they are expanding at an impressive rate."

In addition to the new rides, the expanded area also features fantastic photo spots specifically designed for great pictures, as well as delicious dining options. Craft burgers and homemade ice cream are popular favorites.

"The opening of the new zone has been a tremendous success. The enthusiasm of our visitors and their interest in Aquila and other attractions are the best proof that Mandoria continues to move in the right direction, delivering unforgettable experiences and exceptional moments," said Zieliński.



A rendering shows how the new tower expansion allows the coaster to have significant length (above left). The new flat ride from Zierer has a humorous thematic twist as bathtubs (above right). COURTESY VEKOMA, MANDORIA

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PARKS, FAIRS & ATTRACTIONS

► Six Flags Fiesta Texas debuts DC Universe area — page 16 / Bullwinkle's FEC receives updates — page 26

Cedar Point Historical Museum, Merry-Go-Round Museum partner

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

SANDUSKY, Ohio — Although known primarily for the summer resort of Cedar Point, the city of Sandusky does offer other facilities that are more year-round. The Merry-Go-Round Museum is one such attraction that visitors to the Lake Erie destination have enjoyed since 1990. The museum closes briefly in the winter; its doors are closed in January and has only weekend operation in February. During the spring months, the schedule extends to five days a week.

Inside is a new tenant. The Cedar Point Historical Museum joined the various exhibits on December 4, 2024, in what is hoped to be a permanent arrangement.

"I thought the home



At the museum, artifacts are seen in display cases, on the walls and hanging from the ceiling. AT/TIM BALDWIN

needed to be in Sandusky, and I searched through downtown," said David Kaman, executive director, Cedar Point Historical Museum. "Never having run a museum, I reached out to one of the board

members here at the Merry-Go-Round Museum, and I was gaining knowledge. The more we talked, the more the light bulb went off in his head: 'Hey, this is the perfect marriage.'"

A room off to the side

of the Merry-Go-Round Museum was available. While Kaman and the Cedar Point Historical Museum do not receive profits from the admissions, neither do they have rent or overhead, and the museum is already staffed. "It's two museums in one," he said.

As a repository for thousands of items, visitors will find memorabilia that spans more than 150 years. Souvenirs from plates to pin buttons are displayed. Banners hang on the walls and from the ceiling.

"I worked at Cedar Point in the early '70s, and my job was to work [overnight] changing light bulbs," Kaman told *Amusement Today*. "Seeing the stars from the beach and the sunrise, I fell in love with the Cedar Point peninsula."

That love turned into a postcard collection started by his father, and soon pennants were added. Before long, Kaman found himself

going to garage sales and antique stores. Over 50 years, he amassed a huge collection of artifacts. A few years ago, he sold his longtime home and had all the memorabilia in storage.

"Shortly after that, Cedar Point announced that they were not going to reopen the Town Hall Museum within the park," he said. "Knowing I had everything in storage and moved back to Sandusky, I decided to take a shot and open a Cedar Point museum."

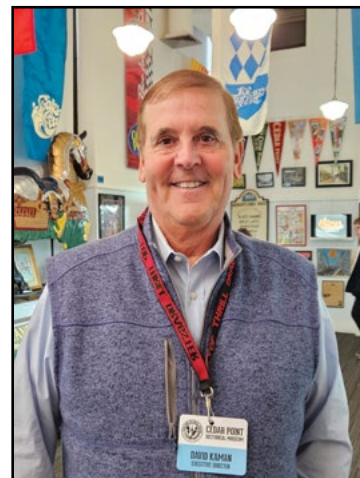
Kaman knew he needed Cedar Point's permission and even garnered Six Flags' blessing following the 2024 merger. However, even with permission to use the name, the museum is not affiliated with the park or Six Flags.

Kaman claims that about 80 percent of the collection is his. As for the other 20 percent, he said: "It has been a wonderful experience. I've met so many fantastic people with Cedar Point ties. We are receiving a lot of donations."

A meeting with Candy Frankowski, a retired manager from Cedar Point who oversaw the Town Hall collection, was able to fill in some holes in Kaman's collection. "It has been a wonderful relationship ever since," he said.

After David Francis, author of *Cedar Point: The Queen of American Watering Places*, and his wife passed away, their niece donated their collection as well. Kaman attributes about 10 percent of the museum's

► See MUSEUM, page 14



Located on a hall off the Merry-Go-Round Museum, the new Cedar Point Historical Museum gives visitors two experiences for one price. The museum is a passion project of David Kaman (above), executive director. AT/TIM BALDWIN

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Since 1990, visitors to Sandusky's Merry-Go-Round Museum (above left) have been able to enjoy a wide range of carousel artifacts, watch actual carvers and take a spin on the museum's own carousel. One of the more unusual collections are miniature replicas of the logoed trash cans that Cedar Point has had over the decades (above right). AT/TIM BALDWIN

► MUSEUM

Continued from page 12

acquisitions to each of these two collections.

He is excited to see his 80 percent figure reduced as visitors continue to keep offering donations. Because of this, more cabinets and display cases were ordered to expand into the main floor just after a few weeks of being open.

"It all ties into why the Merry-Go-Round Museum is

in Sandusky," said **Bonnie Behm**, volunteer coordinator, Merry-Go-Round Museum. "We were created because of [Cedar Point's] Kiddieland carousel and the 1988 postage stamp that represented one of the horses. The two museums correlate very well together. It's one of those attractions that help Cedar Point enthusiasts find their fix during the off-season, plus they get a ride on our historic carousel."

Behm points out that

it is a bit of a thrill ride because while most carousels go about 2 to 3 mph, the museum's is three times faster at 9 mph.

"Our carousel gives people a better appreciation of Cedar Point as well as the nostalgic value of the pieces in the downtown Sandusky museum," said Behm.

Interestingly, a few select items were not collected, but created. Fans of the park will find recre-

ations of (unusual) Cedar Point sights — trash cans, as well as parking lot signs and height requirement signs — all done in miniature.

"It's such a wonderful marriage; it's where we would like to be forever," Kaman told AT. "The public response has been amazing — even from other states. We have so many intricate items, people are spending hours, not minutes."

The pairing of the muse-

ums has definitely boosted attendance.

"We have had people come in that have been [longtime] employees of the park but had never been in," said Behm. "People in the area had knowledge that we were here who had always planned to visit on 'another day.' Amusement industry enthusiasts are getting more background knowledge on the park, so it is reaching new audiences."



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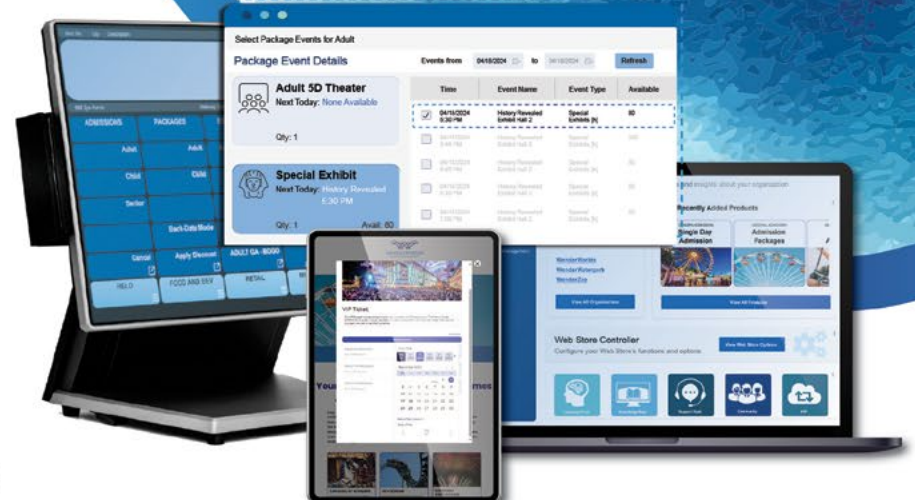




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Zamperla supplies rides; Fiesta Texas debuts DC Universe area

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

SAN ANTONIO — Fans of superheroes (and villains!) had reason to rejoice. On March 1, Six Flags Fiesta Texas fully opened the long-awaited DC Universe. The park proclaims it to be the largest DC Universe themed area in the U.S.

The section encompasses a wide range of thrills. Some rides are geared toward families with the younger set, while others can get the pulse racing.

"The reaction to DC Universe has been everything we hoped for, especially based on what our guests asked," said Park President Jeffrey Siebert. "They wanted more rides and experiences that everyone can go on together. We have increased our arsenal; we now have 25 rides that mom, dad, grandma, grandpa ... all heights and ages can now all ride together."

The park currently has 36 rides. Many of the park's existing rides have been renamed and rethemed to make the area cohesive.

"It has been a part of our multigenerational strategic initiative. It's great to see it come to fruition," Siebert told *Amusement Today*. "The Green Lantern (airplane) ride was one we repainted and rethemed. The ridership has gone up dramatically. We now have an overflow queue for a ride that never had one. [The Vekoma Roller Skater] is a ride that has been in the park since Day One, but now that it is Batgirl, it is bringing



Cyborg Cyper Revolution (above) is a hypnotic rotating thrill ride that captivates onlookers as much as riders. Shazam! Tower of Eternity (right) provides 360-degree views and fun, unexpected drops. AT/TIM BALDWIN

new life and new attention but more importantly real throughput."

But it is the three new rides from Zamperla that have park guests all excited.

The company's popular NebulaZ ride drops into Fiesta Texas as Cyborg Cyber Revolution. Its mesmerizing, interlocking arms demand the attention of onlookers. Rotating in numerous directions, the circular rotation delivers all sorts of sensations.

"The ride package Six Flags Fiesta Texas chose for the D.C. Universe expansion showcases the next generation of family areas," said Ramon Rosario, sales director, Zamperla. "A wider age gap between children in families is a big driver in a different type of themed area. Thirty years ago, parks focused on 'kiddie' areas that were for younger kids. Now, parks are adding family areas. The difference is subtle, but substantial, because these new areas invite families to spend the

entire day together."

Shazam! Tower of Eternity is a family-friendly drop tower that carries guests 70 feet in the air before surprising them with unpredictable drops and bounces.

Interestingly, an aerial tramway, Metropolis Transit Authority, was one of the most eagerly anticipated rides. Such observation rides are very uncommon in the South, and the broad range of views makes it fun for the whole family.

"As simple as it sounds, we've made sure there is shade and creature comforts," Siebert said. "For instance, there are benches in the lower level as you're waiting. You don't have to just stand in line. It's like a real train station. There are big subway tiles and medallions like you'd see in a 1930s/1940s art deco style."

"The Aerial Ride ties the area together thematically, has a 36-inch height requirement and has inclusive features like the roll-on/roll-off wheelchair vehicle," said Rosario. "The NebulaZ and SkyTower are both 42 inches to ride and add significant dynamic energy to the area — more than traditional kiddie rides. The NebulaZ has an attention-grabbing motion that doubles its capacity because there are as many people watching as riding. The SkyTower rounds out the experience with a vertical experience that gives younger riders a tower ride. When combined with the great theming using the D.C. characters, we know that this

collection of attractions raises the bar for storytelling at Six Flags parks globally."

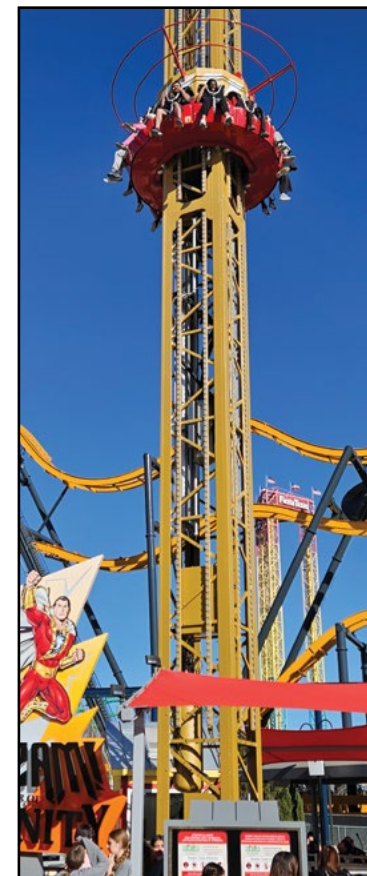
"Shazam! is kind of a like a baby brother to *Scream* (200-foot S&S combo drop tower)," said Cyle Perez, public relations. "It rotates 360, so it's a different thrill. I'm not a big [thrill seeker], so I like the Metropolis Transit Authority. It's beautiful. You get to see all of Six Flags, you're within the quarry wall, seeing the kids running around beneath you in their capes — I like it. But I've ridden them all."

The area has transformed gradually over the past year. In addition to rides, an eatery and retail outlet have taken on newly remodeled updates.

"When you think of Six Flags, you think of big thrills. That's what the name above the door stands for," said Siebert. "But we don't get as much credit for family rides and kids' rides. Now that we have 25 of those rides, it has changed that perception. We have watched blogs and trip reports. More and more, we see families are acknowledging the fact."

When the park was built in 1992, this section of the park was geared toward younger guests. Over time, management felt the family offerings were lacking. This expansion helps bolster the options for all ages.

"That's what makes DC Universe so exciting, Perez told AT. "It's really family-friendly for everyone. Whether you are a new superhero getting your cape or someone seasoned in



thrills, we have something for everyone. Everyone can enjoy the Metropolis Transit Authority and enjoy a leisurely ride around DC Universe with panoramic views. That's a good place to start, just to see what you want to do. But you can work your way up to Cyborg, which is a really thrilling ride."

"What catches my eye is that [the area] is busy," Siebert said. "This area in the center of the park was on many days, even on our busiest days, lightly attended — or for lack of a better term, a ghost town. Now it is 'action alley.' At night it's stunning. There is just a lot of eye candy."

Kudos can be given to the park during the construction process. The long-in-the-works project at the year-round park managed to keep many of the rides open as the new attractions were being installed around them.

"There is no doubt when you are building right in the center of the park, it is a dance," Siebert noted. "There is additional planning and cadence to make sure it can all work together. Things opened and closed in different phases, even for the resurfacing. It really is a dance. We'd prefer not to have to do it again because of the added layer of complexity, but the finished product was really worth it. It's much more action-rich and inviting."



The Metropolis Transit Authority offers views of the new DC Universe and much of Fiesta Texas. AT/TIM BALDWIN

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AT: Pam Sherborne
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Lagoon Amusement Park, Farmington, Utah, is shutting down the zoo featured in its Wild Kingdom train ride.

According to a story that ran last month on *KSL News Radio* from Salt Lake City, there had been some criticism of the zoo at the park, but according to **Adam Leishman**, park spokesperson, that is not why the park is phasing out the zoo.

The news station stated: "Leishman said it's because Lagoon is expanding other parts of the park and preparing new attractions."

Leishman said the big cats had been rehomed toward the end of 2024 to an accredited facility in the U.S.

Lagoon's Wild Kingdom train ride and zoo exhibit opened in 1967.

The nonprofit team behind **Morgan's Wonderland**, the groundbreaking "ultra-accessible" theme park in northeast San Antonio, Texas, is moving into the digital space, according to *KENS5* news agency.

"Morgan's has announced the launch of **Morgan's Studios**, anchored by the YouTube series *Inclusion Unlimited*, which will share stories, perspectives and segments 'aimed at creating a more inclusive space in the media landscape' with its focus on people with disabilities," the article stated.

Morgan's founder **Gordon Hartman** said in a press release that *Inclusion Unlimited* launched on Morgan's YouTube Channel. It will feature episodes between two and 10 minutes long produced.

The first episode, posted on March 3, featured an interview with **Sharon Newhardt**, the organization's director of inclusion and culture.

Before its official opening for the 2025 season, **Bay Beach Amusement Park**, Green Bay, Wisconsin, will be open for limited hours during the NFL draft in April. The 2025 NFL draft is set for April 24-26 at **Lambeau Field** in Green Bay, home of the **Green Bay Packers**.

Bay Beach Amusement Park plans to open from noon to 6 p.m., April 23-26. The dates and times may change before the draft, said Parks, Recreation and Forestry Assistant Director **James Andersen**.

The amusement park will officially open for the 2025 season on May 3.

Admission to the Bay Beach

Amusement Park is free and there is no parking fee. This will remain true for the days it is open during the draft.

Bay Beach ride tickets cost 25 cents each, with most rides requiring at least one to two tickets per rider. Ticket prices won't be increased during the draft.

The Blair County commissioners and the company that holds a lease on **Lakemont Park**, Altoona, Pennsylvania, until 2066 are trying to figure out what will become of the park long term, according to a news story in the *Altoona Mirror*.

The article stated: "For the second year in a row, the **Lakemont Partnership** will offer access to batting cages, basketball and volleyball courts, mini-golf and picnic pavilions, while hosting special events, but will not operate the water park complex or the amusement rides because they're not financially viable, according to partnership President **Andrea Cohen**."

It seems the county commissioners feel the park has a historical value and would like to see it preserved but haven't reached a resolution on just how that will happen.

The Lakemont Partnership has talked to amusement park consultants and operators in an effort to come up with an idea.

The *Altoona Mirror* article states that the park was left in trust to be open to the public. It also quoted a local official, who said that since 2019, income from ticket sales has never offset the operating costs of those rides.

The water park has not been operational since 2019.

Blackpool Pleasure Beach, United Kingdom, plans to close five rides in 2025. According to officials there, these rides are smaller and less popular.

According to a story on *bbc.com*, park officials also "teased a possible Wallace and Gromit ride update, saying the team loved the *Vengeance Most Fowl* film and advised visitors to 'stay tuned.'"

The five rides to be closed this season are the Eddie Stobart Convoy, Alpine Rallye, Thompson Carousel, Gallopers and Red Arrows Skyforce.

"The smaller rides were already being run on reduced opening times, and our rider data showed that they have some of our lowest throughput," theme park officials said in a statement on its website. "After a great deal of thought, it was clear to us that the right decision is to make changes that will allow us to reinvest into a bigger and better future."

Oakwood Theme Park, in Pembrokeshire, West Wales, announced last month that it will close permanently after nearly 40 years of operation.

Aspro Parks, the owner and operator of Oakwood Theme Park, said it reached the difficult decision due to financial challenges caused by rising costs and declining visitor numbers.

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Expedition Odyssey to soar in 2025 with dual Mack Flying Theaters

AT: David Fake
dfake@amusementtoday.com

ORLANDO — SeaWorld Orlando is preparing to launch its most technologically ambitious attraction yet with Expedition Odyssey, a dual Mack Rides Flying Theater experience set to open later this spring. The announcement of the attraction's name was made during an exclusive media hard hat tour, which showcased the attraction's cutting-edge ride system, state-of-the-art real-world visuals and an integration with the park's Arctic animal habitats that aim to set a new standard for themed entertainment.

"The combination of high-energy motion, real-world cinematography and dynamic sensory effects is something unlike anything we've done before," said Conner Carr, Corporate Director of Rides and Engineering at United Parks & Resorts. "This is not just a simulation. We are taking guests to the Arctic."

Industry insiders received a firsthand look at the ride's infrastructure and queue layout during the hard hat tour, which featured a walkthrough of the preshow area and seating tests for the gondolas. The attraction boasts a massive 50-foot-diameter screen with three high-resolution projectors, providing a seamless visual experience. The sound system, consisting of onboard speakers and a tower of subwoofers behind the screen, ensures that guests not only hear the Arctic's sounds but



Construction crews work tirelessly inside the transformed Wild Arctic building at SeaWorld Orlando (above left). Jon Peterson, park president of SeaWorld Orlando, walks media through the extensive renovations (top right). Conner Carr, corporate director of rides and engineering at United Parks & Resorts, tests the custom-designed ride seats, offering a sneak peek at the immersive flying experience (bottom right). AT/DAVID FAKE



feel them as well.

The new attraction is a significant transformation of the park's former Wild Arctic building. The SeaWorld and Mack Rides teams have repurposed the structure to accommodate the two-level flying theater, featuring dual 15-seat gondolas per level and two independent theaters, allowing for high-capacity throughput. The experience itself is designed to take guests on an Arctic expedition that will see them gliding across the vast tundra, soaring over glaciers, and plunging into icy waters, encountering belugas, orcas and polar bears along the way.

SeaWorld tapped into award-winning production

teams, including Mousetrap Media and Polar X, to film exclusive footage of Arctic wildlife. "This is 100% real," Carr emphasized. "Everything guests will see — the landscapes, the animals — was captured in the Arctic using specialized camera rigs, drones and underwater cinematography." The film was shot over the course of a year across three separate expeditions to ensure seasonal accuracy and the most dynamic footage possible.

The attraction's integration of multi-sensory effects — including scent, mist, wind and lighting — enhances the realism. "We're bringing the Arctic to life in

a way that will make guests feel like they are actually there," Carr explained. "We want them to feel the chill, smell the crisp air and experience the movement of an unpredictable environment."

Adding to the experience is the ride system itself, developed in collaboration with Mack Rides, known for its precision engineering in themed entertainment. The system's continuous rotation design allows for simultaneous boarding and ride experiences, ensuring maximum efficiency and minimal wait times. "As one group of guests is experiencing the Arctic in the main theater, another is loading in," Carr detailed. "That's what makes this system one of a kind."

Beyond the ride, Expedition Odyssey seamlessly transitions guests into SeaWorld's Arctic animal habitats, where they can see beluga whales, walrus and other marine life up close.

"We've always been about the intersection of thrilling rides and real animal encounters," said Jon Peterson, park president of SeaWorld Orlando. "This is the next evolution of that. Then when guests exit the ride, they step into the world they just explored."

Peterson emphasized

SeaWorld's commitment to conservation, explaining that the park took great care to ensure that the construction of Expedition Odyssey did not disrupt the resident animals. "We took every step necessary to make sure our belugas, walrus and other Arctic animals were completely unaffected by the work happening next door," he said.

Aspects of the attraction also follow SeaWorld Orlando's recent trend toward family-friendly ride experiences with lower height requirements. With a minimum height restriction of just 39 inches, Expedition Odyssey joins last year's Penguin Trek (42 inches) in expanding accessibility to younger guests and families.

"We believe the best memories are created together, and that's what this ride is all about," said Carr.

"With each new ride we build, we push the envelope further," added Peterson. "This is a game-changer for our park, and we can't wait for our guests to experience it."

SeaWorld Orlando has yet to announce an official opening date, but with construction nearing completion and final testing underway, Expedition Odyssey is expected to welcome guests this spring.



Scaffolding surrounds the towering rock formations as SeaWorld's artisans craft the Arctic environment that will soon again be the home of an array of native Arctic wildlife. AT/DAVID FAKE

Themed areas announced for the forthcoming Universal Kids Resort

AT: Pam Sherborne
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FRISCO, Texas — **Universal Destinations and Experiences**, a division of **Comcast NBCUniversal**, has revealed the themed lands kids and families will experience at **Universal Kids Resort**, a first-of-its-kind resort specifically designed and developed for families with young children.

Set to open in 2026, with construction progressing since the groundbreaking in November 2024, Universal Kids Resort will feature family-friendly attractions, interactive and playful shows, unique merchandise, fun food and beverage venues and character meet-and-greets. It will offer lands themed around beloved characters including **DreamWorks Animation's** Shrek, Puss in Boots, Trolls and Gabby's Dollhouse; **Nickelodeon's** SpongeBob SquarePants; **Illumination's** Minions and Jurassic World.

The resort area also will include a 300-room themed

hotel giving families a place to stay and play following their day of adventure.

"It's an amazing opportunity to bring these iconic stories to life for kids and families to experience, interact with and play together," said **Sarah Gibbon**, vice president and executive producer, **Universal Creative**. "At each point, we considered how we could design a place, especially for kids where they could explore, imagine and adventure with their families and friends. They'll be able to do all this while being fully immersed in some of their favorite stories, ones full of curiosity, laughter and joy."

In DreamWorks' Shrek's swamp-themed playground, kids can stomp, ride, laugh and play as they celebrate the magic of friendship, the warmth of family and the power of love.

Nickelodeon's SpongeBob SquarePants, Patrick, Sandy Cheeks and Squidward will show guests around their neighborhood under the



The Universal Kids Resort is set to open in 2026.
COURTESY UNIVERSAL

sea. From earning a boating license to relaxing on the beach as bubbles float by, kids and their families and friends can enjoy the nautical, non-sensical delights.

Next, let the games begin as Illumination's Minions overrun a peaceful vacation retreat. When yellow Minions attempt to rein in their purple counterparts, it leads to a wave of unpredictable, water-soaked fun.

In Jurassic World, kids will come face to face with dinosaurs, being able to dis-

cover and interact with the animated creatures. This new adventure is exclusively created for young explorers and will be both exhilarating and awe-inspiring.

Then it will be on to a music festival with DreamWorks' Trolls. At this colorful, joy-filled, and, of course, glittery fest, guests of all sizes get to join Poppy, Branch and the rest of the gang to bring their voices together in harmony while shining brightly.

That merriment continues with DreamWorks' Puss

in Boots, Kitty Softpaws and Perrito. A kitty adoption drive is in full swing with fabulous decorations, sideshow games, fun rides and festive food.

For those needing a cat nap, guests can recharge in a sensory garden.

The central hub of Universal Kids Resort will feature shady lawns and interactive play areas. Plus, guests can meet characters like Gabby from DreamWorks' Gabby's Dollhouse in a unique immersive retail experience.

"At Universal Kids Resort, children will have the opportunity to play, sing, dance and discover with some of their favorite characters," said **Dan Cuffe**, vice president and general manager of Universal Kids Resort. "Beyond the highly engaging attractions and shows, families will find ample areas to rest and also enjoy themed food and beverages and shop for fun character souvenirs. Each of these areas elicits wonder with a lush, colorful environment."

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Legoland Florida unleashes ninja action with Ninjago Weekends

AT: David Fake
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WINTER HAVEN, Fla. — Ninjago Weekends at Legoland Florida Resort wrapped up another run, giving fans of all ages the chance to step into the world of their favorite ninja heroes. Held on select weekends from late January through mid-February, the event transformed the park into a high-energy training ground filled with live entertainment, immersive activities and special appearances that brought Ninjago to life like never before.

One of the most interactive features of the event was the Path of the Dragon, where guests chose an elemental dragon power and completed a series of challenges throughout the park. With each completed task, they earned elemental stickers, culminating in the reward of an exclusive Lego Ninjago headband. Families participated in this adventure, with kids proudly sporting



Vincent Tong, the longtime voice of Kai in the *Lego Ninjago* animated series, signs autographs and meets with excited fans at Legoland Florida Resort. COURTESY LEGOLAND FLORIDA

their headbands as proof of their ninja mastery. A brand-new scavenger hunt featuring the mysterious creature Thunderfang added an extra layer of excitement, as guests searched the park for hidden markings to unlock a commemorative pop badge.

Legobuilding enthusiasts were also treated to the Dragon Rising Mosaic Build and Heatwave Dragon Superbrick Build, where they worked together to construct

massive Lego dragons. The collaborative effort paid off with stunning results, as the completed displays became a focal point of the event. Meanwhile, the Ultimate Dragon Competition Build challenged guests to create their own unique dragons, fueling friendly competition among builders of all ages.

Entertainment played a key role in the event, with multiple live performances captivating audiences.

Lloyd's Elemental Challenge showcased dazzling special effects, martial arts-inspired stunts and dynamic storytelling that kept fans on the edge of their seats. The School of Spinjitzu brought aspiring ninjas together for hands-on training in the signature moves of the Lego Ninjago universe. The action continued at the Fun Town Theater, where guests could experience *Ninjago: Masters of the 4th Dimension* in an immersive 4D format.

A highlight of Lego Ninjago Weekends was an appearance by Vincent Tong, the longtime voice of Kai in the *Lego Ninjago* animated series. Legoland Florida annual pass holders were treated to an exclusive meet-and-greet event with Tong, who signed autographs and participated in a private screening of *Lego Ninjago: Masters of the 4th Dimension*.

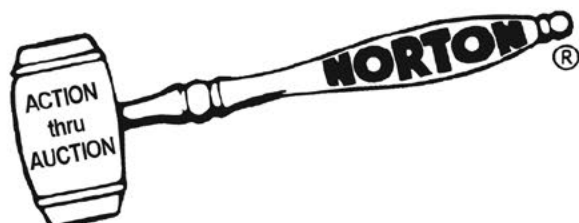
"I had no idea just how cool Lego Ninjago Weekends at Legoland Florida Resort would be!" said Tong.

"Seeing this beloved series come to life in the park was incredible — but hearing my own voice on the Lego Ninjago ride? That was a childhood dream come true."

Throughout the event, guests had the chance to interact with Lego Ninjago characters, including Lloyd, Master Wu, Kai, Sora, Arin, Nya and Zane.

As Lego Ninjago Weekends concluded, guests who experienced the event were left to reflect on the unforgettable memories made during the event. Whether mastering Spinjitzu, participating in dragon-building competitions or meeting the voice of Kai, guests were fully immersed in the world of Ninjago from the moment they entered the park.

Lego Ninjago Weekends once again proved to be a highlight of the season, reinforcing the continued popularity of the Ninjago franchise and Legoland Florida's ability to bring it to life in a way that resonates with fans of all ages.



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Amusement Expo continues to shine under the lights of Las Vegas

AT: Pam Sherborne
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LAS VEGAS, Nevada — The success at the 2025 Amusement Expo International (AEI) continues to prove the power of play and profits. The 2025 event saw an uptick in both exhibitors and attendees over 2024 when it ran March 17-20, at the Las Vegas Convention Center, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Planners for AEI reported 217 paid and a total of 228 total exhibiting companies this year, breaking 2024's record of 209. There were 703 booths this year, 50 over 2024 numbers.

There were 2,295 buyers to date at the 2025 event, compared to last year's final count of 2,509. As for nonbuyers and exhibitors, there were 2,194 counted so far for 2025, compared to the final 2024 count of 2,220.

The educational portion of AEI ran March 17 and 18, while the trade show ran 19 and 20.

"The show was very upbeat and there appeared to be a lot of hungry and positive energy all around," said **Alyse Sklover** of **Roller**, just one of the exhibiting companies on hand this year. "There are a lot of new products and ideas, and everyone seems eager to showcase what's next."

Another exhibitor, **Yannick Gemme** of **Triotech**, said: "Overall it was a great show. We had a lot of solid interactions and high-quality meetings with those in attendance. I would say this show exceeded our expectations."

Robert Tomkinson, **TouchTunes**, said the AEI show has been a great event



The showfloor of the 2025 Amusement Expo International was a hotbed of activity, innovation and networking (above). Wednesday evening's Beers & Cheers event featured awards honoring many industry leaders (below).

AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON; COURTESY AMUSEMENT EXPO INTERNATIONAL

to showcase the company's growth and the evolution of the entire industry.

"Last year, we announced TouchTunes' purchase of **Arachnid** at the Amusement Expo," Tomkinson said. "This year, we're eagerly celebrating that company's 50th anniversary with the debut of its new Golden Bull game as well as showcasing our newly redesigned TouchTunes app."

The AEI is unique in that it is owned and hosted by two leading professional associations, the **Amusement and Music Operators Association** (AMOA) and the **American Amusement Machine Association** (AAMA). AEI brought on the **Billiard and Home Leisure Expo** in 2022. It is owned by the **Billiard Congress of America** (BCA).

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

The theme for this year was **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.

The 2025 show was the 14th year with AEI co-locating with the **National Bulk Vendors Association**. NBVA had a pavilion on the show floor dedicated to its members with 13 exhibitors and 40 booths. That is seven booths more than in 2024.

This was the third year for co-locating with **Billiard Congress of America** (BCA). Its pavilion on the show floor had approximately 58 companies and 216 booths, which about doubled from last year. BCA has agreed to extend its agreement into 2026.

Concerning virtual reality, there were six exhibitors totaling 10 booths for the AEI. The Virtual Reality Arcade Game Summit took place on Monday, March 17, and Tuesday, March 18. The VR education had 199 registrants in attendance.

The Foundations Entertainment University's Las Vegas Program at AEI achieved record attendance this year with 115 participants as it kicked off its 23rd year.

As the industry's longest-running program, The Foundations University AEI program remains true to its original vision of arming new entertainment developers and exhibition facility operators with the tools needed to navigate today's challenging business environment.

Featuring four faculty members, 16 subject matter experts and two guest operators, the two-day program has mentored more than 3,000 graduates.

Some of the educational seminars that were held this year included **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 Attractions**.

There was an abundance of award winners this year. The AMOA Innovator Award Winners went to **AMI Entertainment** for **Phantom**, **Amusement Source International** for **Case Pro** and **S & B Candy and Toy** for **The Gateway**.

AMOA's Operator Choice Award Winners were **S & B Candy and Toy** for the **Gateway** and **Team Play**, for **Pixel Pix Gen 4**.

AAMA awards went to: **Apple Industries**, **Manufacturer of the Year**; **Embed**, **Supplier of the Year**; **Bruno's Arcade**, **Allied Member of the Year**; **Alley Cats of Burleson**, **FEC Location of the Year** and **Joe Camarota** of **Alpha Omega**, **Lifetime Achievement Award**.

The AAMA Hall of Fame included the 2025 Entity Winner, **Humpty Dumpty**; the Legacy Winners, **Tico Bonomo**, **Faith Guthrie** and **Al Simon**; and the Living Winners, **Rich Babich**, **Peter Betti**, **Bob Geschine**, **George Gomex**, **Frank Happ**, **George Petro** and **George Smith**.

The Best Booth Award winners were **AMI Entertainment**, **Apple Industries**, **Intercard** and **Arachnid**.

AEI offered multiple options for networking this year. The event is designed to foster connections through various events such as **Beers and Cheers**, educational roundtables and the popular industry gala.

The keynote speaker this year was **Dana Monique**, who delivered an inspiring, powerful message through an incredible musical performance.

Attendees were able to navigate 2025 AEI on their iPhones, Androids and other devices. Smart Planner features included the exhibitor's list, event map, session list, speaker list and product gallery.

The 2026 AEI will be held once again in Las Vegas on March 16-19, 2026.

•amusementexpo.org



Triotech's Super Blaster was just one of several of the company's offerings that were popular with attendees (above left). First-time exhibitor Altitude Attractions (above right) showcased its unique attractions on the showfloor. AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON

Enhancements coming to Allevity Entertainment



ABERDEEN, S.D. — Allevity Entertainment announced a major expansion of its offerings, including a new sports bar, an upgraded restaurant and menu, as well as additional arcade games. Since opening in 2020, Allevity has remained committed to delivering a unique eatertainment experience in the Aberdeen area. As guest expectations evolve and industry trends shift, Allevity hopes these enhancements will provide an even more engaging and dynamic atmosphere for visitors of all ages. COURTESY ALLEVITY ENTERTAINMENT

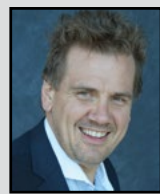
FACE Amusement Group is a "Great Place To Work"

JOHNSON CITY, Tenn. — FACE Amusement Group announced that it has received the "Great Place to Work" recognition for its company for 2025 for the third year in a row from **Great Place to Work**. The prestigious award is based entirely on what current employees have said about their experience working at FACE Amusement Group.

"We're proud to announce that FACE Amusement has earned the 'Great Place to Work' certification for the third consecutive year!" stated **Bucky Mabe**, CEO, of FACE Amusement Group. "Thank you to every team member for your hard work, leadership, and dedication."

"Your passion and commitment make our company not just a workplace, but a thriving community!" he added. "This achievement speaks volumes about the incredible culture we've built together — one where our employees genuinely feel valued, engaged and excited to come to work each day."

Great Place to Work is a global authority on workplace culture, employee experience and leadership behaviors proven to deliver market-leading revenue, employee retention and increased innovation. The certification recognizes employers who create an outstanding employee experience. Certification is a two-step process that includes surveying associates and submitting a questionnaire about our workforce.



FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRAL

AT: John W.C. Robinson
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Five Star Parks announced the opening of its new **Malibu Jack's** location. The indoor theme park, located in the heart of North Richland Hills, Texas, will span an impressive 137,000 square feet, making it the largest indoor theme park in the state.

"The opening of Malibu Jack's in North Richland Hills is a big moment for Five Star Parks, and we're beyond excited to welcome the community to our newest location this summer," said **John Dunlap**, CEO of Five Star Parks. "With so many incredible attractions to enjoy, we're certain that it will quickly become the go-to spot for families seeking fun and adventure."

Malibu Jack's North Richland Hills will offer something for everyone. The park includes an enormous 30,000-square-foot indoor go-kart track, the Cowabunga spinning roller coaster, the Jumpin' Jacks Drop Tower and the zero gravity Whirlpool ride with a dramatic floor drop.

Mirai Arcade — a brand-new Japanese-themed crane arcade — has officially opened its doors in Orlando, Florida. The FEC offers a cutting-edge entertainment experience that promises to captivate both locals and visitors.

Mirai Arcade is equipped with **Sacoa Cashless System's** state-of-the-art cashless system, making transactions faster, smoother and more convenient than ever. Using RFID PlayCards and the Sacoa App, guests can easily reload credits, track balances and experience a frictionless, seamless journey throughout the arcade.

"We're excited to be a part of this revolutionary new destination in Orlando," said **Sebastian Mochkovsky**, CEO of Sacoa U.S.A. "We can't wait to see how guests enjoy the seamless, innovative solutions we've brought to Mirai Arcade."

Dave & Buster's announced the opening of its completely reimagined location in Buffalo Walden, New York.

The all-new Dave & Buster's location brings everything families and crew connectors alike love, reimagined with innovative gaming activities and groundbreaking ways for crews to play — including private game

suites and an immersive watch experience.

"We are thrilled to open the all-new Dave & Buster's Buffalo Walden as a premier entertainment destination," stated General Manager **Kristian Solberg**. "From our giant 40-foot WOW Wall to the immersive gaming environment and high-tech darts and digital shuffleboard, it's the ultimate experience."

Betson Enterprises announced the completion of a 9,600-square-foot, 102-game installation at the newly opened **Incredibowl Entertainment** in Toledo, Ohio. This project marks the second major collaboration between Betson and Incredibowl Entertainment, following a 6,000-square-foot arcade installation in Winter Haven, Florida, in 2020.

"We truly value the partnership we've built with Betson," said **Chelsea Ducat**, who oversees finance and marketing at Incredibowl. "Working with a family-owned business makes a difference — you feel like more than just another client. Beyond the installation, Betson provides ongoing support, including wellness visits, game layout optimization and technical training to ensure long-term success."

The newly installed arcade features an exciting lineup of popular titles, including **Godzilla Kaiju Wars VR (Raw Thrills)**, **Photoma Photo Booth (Apple Industries)**, **Carnival Wheel (Team Play)**, **Quarterback Pro (ICE)**, **Drakons (Adrenaline Amusements)** and **Big Shot (Jet Games)**.

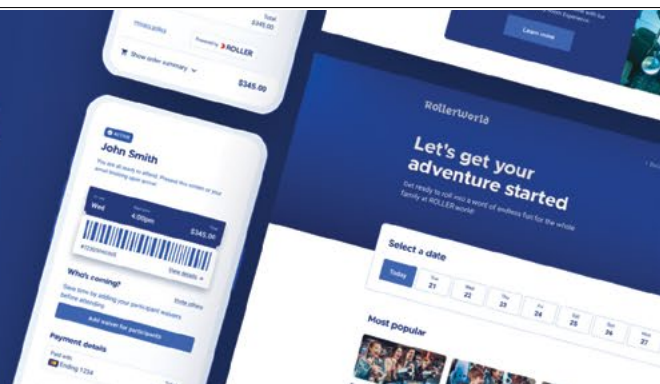
K1 Circuit announced its acquisition of Indiana's **Whiteland Raceway Park**, the nation's oldest continuously operating go-kart track. This marks the company's second location, following the successful launch of **K1 Circuit Winchester** in Southern California last year.

"It's an honor to take over the reins of Whiteland Raceway Park," said **David Danglard**, CEO and founder of K1 Circuit. "This venue is special, having been established in 1958, only two years after the invention of the go-kart. Our investment and expertise will help this historic track thrive."

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Upland Bullwinkle's FEC receives bright new life; quality attractions

AT: Tim Baldwin

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UPLAND, Calif. — To call the recently reopened **Bullwinkle's** family entertainment center a "remodel" would be missing the mark. Visitors to the property are impressed with the transformation.

"We tore it down to the bones and basically rebuilt it," said owner **Shane Huish**.

The origins date back to IAAPA Hall of Fame members, **John and Jim Huish**.

"My dad and my uncle bought the land in the 1970s. There was nothing around except for strawberry fields," Huish told *Amusement Today*. "They decided they were going to take miniature golf to extremes. They built two courses in a building about the size of a football field, they built two outdoor miniature golf courses, and on the roof, they built two more miniature golf courses — for a total of six."

Back then, it was one of the largest if not *the* largest miniature golf facility in the world. It was also open 24 hours a day. The Huish family operated it into the 1990s, adding other activities.

Eventually, it was sold to **Palace**, and over time had become branded by other names. Its final owner, **Apex**, went bankrupt during the pandemic, and the land returned to the Huish family.

Shane Huish, along with his brother **Scott** and cousin **Dyke**, purchased the land and tore out most of the existing offerings, all but starting over from scratch.

"We added about 8,000 square feet onto the build-



Bullwinkle's FEC (above) was recently transformed with a massive reimagining. Its indoor miniature golf courses have elaborate Western (below left) and Storybook Land (below right) themes. COURTESY BULLWINKLE'S



ing," said Huish. "We now have new go karts, a new FEC building that includes a full-service restaurant and bar, axe throwing we bought from **Lasertron** (along with laser tag), **Triotech** XD dark ride and **RDC** bumper cars — we completely redeveloped it. We rebranded it from [its most recent name] **Boomers** to Bullwinkle's Food and Fun."

The strawberry fields that were once nearby in the last century have been replaced with affluent neighborhoods, and the placement of Bullwinkle's is right along I-10.

"I heard there are 100

million cars that go by a year," chuckled Huish. "There is about a thousand feet of freeway frontage on it. It's a great piece of property right in the middle of the Inland Empire."

He told *AT* that he is proud that the indoor courses have been restored to their former glory. The indoor courses are themed to a Western course and Storybook Land course.

"On Friday nights, we can have a 45-minute wait to play the Western course. We hired a painter from **Disney**, and she painted murals on

the wall and antiqued the themed buildings that were there. We added all kinds of lighting and sound and smells — it's phenomenal," Huish told *AT*. "The Storybook Land course is pretty authentic to what it was when it opened in 1972."

The two outdoor courses are classic style, and the owners are slowly developing thematic areas to those.

The recreational choices are vast. Go Karts from **J&J**, Spark Bowling by **Brunswick**, batting cages, bumper boats and an arcade with more than 150 redemption, VR and video games provide a variety for all tastes.

Making use of the Bullwinkle and Rocky IP, the bar is called **Badenov's**, named after the cartoon villain. The food venue specializes in upscale pizza and shareable appetizers.

"There is a unique history to Bullwinkle's," Huish said. "It's been there since 1972. A lot of people in the area grew up there and had their birthday parties there. It's amazing when I walk around

the city in my uniform and it's like I'm a rock star. People want to tell me the stories of their birthday parties. The thing that is really nice is that we have brought that back to the community; they have really missed it. They are so happy to have it back."

The Huish family somewhat inherited the cartoon IP. The individual who secured the **Warner Bros.** characters for the **Great America** parks for **Marriott** acquired the Bullwinkle rights as well. Once the theme park projects were completed, this individual started up pizza restaurants and called them Bullwinkle's. He went on to sell franchises.

"They had really nice food. It was an upscale animated show, a **Dancing Waters** show and an arcade. It was pretty popular," said Huish. "When my father was looking at adding food, we ended up buying a franchise."

The family built three Bullwinkle's. When the stand-alone facilities went out of business, the Huish family obtained the company and license.

"We've just kept it. We've added Bullwinkle's restaurants to our Seattle site and Portland site. It's a license we can only use for food, so we can't have the characters walking around the park," he noted. "They used to be called **Huish Family Fun Centers**, but Bullwinkle's is what people remember, so we've just kept it."

Huish said they hired about 200 people to staff the park.

"Every one of them was excited to work there. Their parents had had birthday parties or first dates there," he told *AT*. "We had a Legends Night, and we invited everyone who had an affiliation with the park in the 1970s. We had general managers and supervisors; some wore their old uniforms. There were about 150 people to celebrate Bullwinkle's; it was exciting."

Starting in April, the facility is open from 12 to 9 p.m. daily through the rest of the year.



Go karts from **J&J** are part of the outdoor activities (above left). More than 150 games provide redemption, video or VR excitement (above right). COURTESY BULLWINKLE'S

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Penn Valley Shows optimistic about 2025; adds Himalaya to arsenal

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

MIDDLEBURG, Pa. — Penn Valley Shows co-owner **Christina Benner** is optimistic about the 2025 season as the family-owned carnival enters its 16th year.

“We’ve added a Himalaya (**Wisdom Rides of America**) for this year, and it’s an adrenaline rush,” she said of the acquisition from **Majestic Midways**, York, Pa. “We don’t want to become stagnant.”

Fielding more than 20 rides, the show operates from late March through September with locations throughout Pennsylvania.

“We were younger when we started out and love the business. We have a genuine passion for it,” she told *Amusement Today* during a lengthy interview. “I worked for my husband’s (**Kerry**) parents when I was 13 on **Mid-Valley Amusements**. We were all from the same town and that carnival dissolved in 2012 when my father-in-law retired.

“We actually left Mid-Valley in 2007 with one ride and a few games,” she recalled. “It was time for us to start over.”

And start over the Benners did.

Hitting the road in 2010 under the Penn Valley name — a show previously owned by **Tom Johnson** — the Benners had a dozen rides to field but had to establish a route for the carnival.

26 weeks for first season

“Kerry’s older brother, **Kenny**, bought out the Penn Valley route, so Kerry had to make phone calls to secure dates that first year,” she noted. “We did get four locations from his father, which helped, and we ended up



Penn Valley Shows lights up the night at one its Pennsylvania midway locations (above). A Loop-O-Plane from Eyerly Aircraft (below left) remains a popular attraction on Penn Valley Shows. The Beast, a Technical Park Street Fighter Revolution, marked the largest single investment made by the carnival (below right). COURTESY PENN VALLEY SHOWS



playing 26 weeks.” The following season, the Benners acquired a new cotton candy/popcorn trailer from **Hitch-Hiker Manufacturing**, New Middletown, Ohio, as they continued to build the business.

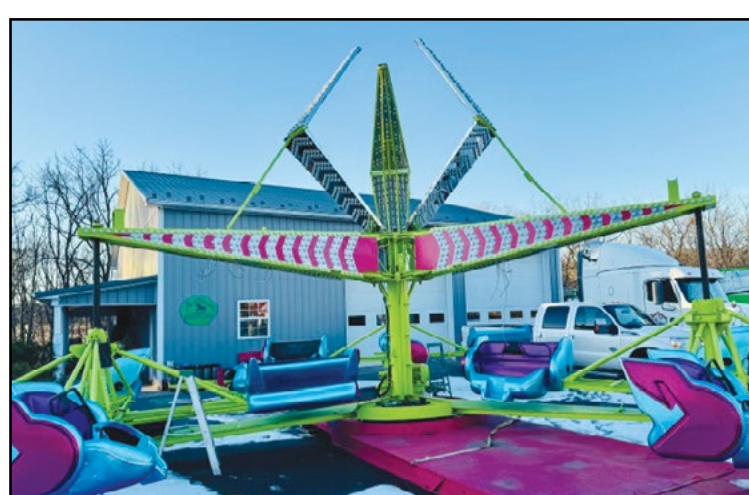
They also bought a 16-seat **Nittany** Ferris wheel from **Kenny Benner** and added a **Denny’s Electronics** light package to it.

“We purchased a lot of used equipment and rebuilt it ourselves,” she noted.

Among those early attrac-

tions were a **Paratrooper** and **Round Up** (**Frank Hrubetz & Co.**), **Loop-O-Plane** (**Eyerly Aircraft**), **Scooter bumper cars** (**Majestic Mfg.**), and **Dragon Wagon** (**Wisdom**), all of which are still on the show.

The carnival’s largest single investment came in 2022 with the purchase of a **Technical Park Street Fighter Revolution** themed as **The Beast**. Penn Valley took delivery of the spectacular



Penn Valley Shows has completed a total rebuild of its Sizzler ride for the 2025 season. COURTESY PENN VALLEY SHOWS

▶ See PENN, page 29

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MIDWAYS

► **PENN**
Continued from page 28

piece in March of last year. Another attraction that has a large presence on the midway is a Sea Ray swinging ship from **Mulligan Engineering**, acquired from **Penn Wood Shows** in 2021. Also newer to the route is a **Dartron Hurricane**, purchased from **Powers & Thomas Midway Entertainment**.

Happy 4th of July

Penn Valley also replaced its Nittany wheel when an **Expo Wheel** arrived on the show on July 4 of last year. Other attractions include a **Casino (Chance Rides)**, **Wisdom Gravitron** themed as **Apocalypse**, **Mardi Gras glass house (Owen Trailers)** and **Fun Slide (Frederiksen Industries)**.

Kiddieland features a carousel (**Chance**), farm tractors (**Dalton Kid Ride Rebuilders**), **Monkey Mayhem (Sellner)** and a **Rio Grande train (Zamperla)**.

The food line-up includes

the popcorn trailer as well as pizza, funnel cakes, elephant ears, corn dogs and more. The games' operation is all under Penn Valley ownership with **Skee-Ball**, balloon bust, water race, duck pond, goldfish and long-range basketball.

"Kerry and I own the majority of the business," she explained. "Our kids (**Alycia** and **Chase**) have games, food and our son-in-law (**Brett Klee**) partners on the Expo Wheel. We got to raise our kids on the road and that kept us very close, and now we have grandkids being raised out here, too."

Son, **Chance**, has moved on to the amusement park side of the industry in Orlando, Fla.

"Yes, we did name him (**Chance**) after the ride company," the carnival owner sniggered.

Facelift for Sizzler

The off-season was busy as refurbishment of the show's **Sizzler (Wisdom)** was completed for this year.

"We took it down to the bare bones and went through



The carnival features a delicious and varying food line-up (above left). Above right are two Hrubetz rides popular among Penn Valley Shows offerings: a Paratrooper (left) and a Round Up (right). COURTESY PENN VALLEY SHOWS

everything," Benner said of the project. "We put new lights on it and Tony Brown made new seats. It's ready now and a great ride that is easy to move."

Benner reflected on the days when she was busy at winter quarters.

"I used to paint — that was my thing," she explained. "Alycia does the majority of the painting now, and she is our main sprayer. I might add that she is very good at it, better than her

mother. The men take care of the mechanical work."

With the business continuing to grow, Benner said she has good reason to be optimistic about what lies ahead.

"There is some competition in Pennsylvania, but plenty of work for everybody," she emphasized. "We work with great committees and just keep bettering ourselves. Rarely do we book in anybody as we have enough options as it is."

Penny Valley plays still dates, including baseball sta-

diums, in the spring before a strong summer schedule of established festivals and nine fairs. The show also plays its "hometown" **Beaver Community Fair** in nearby Beaver Springs.

"We just signed an extended contract for the **Ridgway Fire Department Carnival** and an extension to the **Warren County Fair (Pittsfield)** agreement," she said in looking forward to the upcoming season.

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San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo hampered by inclement weather

AT: B. Derek Shaw

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SAN ANTONIO, Texas — “We were marred with extremely cold weather, more than our fair share of cold rainy days,” said Frank Zaitshik, owner of Wade Shows, when describing what they experienced during the February 6 to 23 San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo. “Financially, it was a success, just not the success we were looking for. We did what we could do. It just wasn’t in the cards.”

Still, an estimated 1,300,000 people attended, spending an estimated \$101 million at this year’s 18-day event. This is down from the 1.5 million visitors in 2024. Wade Shows brought in 52 rides, with 25 being family and kiddie ones. They also had 40 games and 15 food stands. As part of that number, Wade booked rides from Carnival Americana (Alan Cockerham), Mark Cox Concessions LLC with family rides and a few also from Glen Wood.

New to the spot was a KMG Afterburner, known as Beach Party. The most popular rides were Giant Wheel (Chance Rides), Big Slide (Dartron), Super Polar Himalaya (Reverchon), Time Zone (a Wisdom

Rides Gravitron) and Super Cyclone Coaster (Interpark). “The roller coaster is a perennial favorite. We have a lot of other great thrill rides, too,” said Zaitshik.

Fast Lane was used for the first time at the stock show. This beat-the-line pass proved to be popular. “It was well received. This is a great addition for our customers,” said Zaitshik.

Pre-event sales have been growing. For the third year, Big Ticketing was in place for the show. “This is our long-term answer. It will increase our advance sales,” said Zaitshik.

Carnival tickets could only be purchased at the carnival starting opening day, February 6, with weekdays \$40, with fast pass \$60, any day \$50, and with fast pass \$70.

At the suggestion of the stock show staff, Wade utilized indoor space the second year in a row calling it a Kids’ Carnival. Due to the cold temperatures, a few operational days were suspended outside. “Quite to our surprise, [being inside] performed quite well,” said Zaitshik. The show provided family and kiddie rides along with a few games inside Expo Hall 2, expanding the offerings from 2024. Other inside activities throughout



This year Wade Shows had more rides at the stock show than it has had for quite some time. The carnival just signed a new multi-year contract. In 2025, an estimated 1,300,000 people attended, spending an estimated \$101 million. COURTESY SAN ANTONIO STOCK SHOW & RODEO

the complex included over 200 shops, live music and dancing, Texas high school rodeo finals, livestock judging and a wildlife exhibit.

“This was the most company rides [we’ve had] at the stock show in many years. We are happy with them and our relationship with them. I appreciate their competence,” said Zaitshik regarding the stock show staff. “We’re really excited as we just signed a new multi-year contract. This is the best rodeo team we’ve worked with. They seem intent on growing the carnival revenue.”

The biggest challenge the carnival operations encounter each year is move in and



move out with a shorter window for tear down, as this is normally the parking lot used for San Antonio Spurs basketball team games.

Free admission to the fairgrounds on opening day, February 6, was offered to

those who downloaded a voucher from their special promotions and offers website page. Pricing for fairgrounds admission tickets was \$15 for adults (13-64) with a two-dollar savings in advance, children (3-12) \$5, seniors 65+ also \$5 and military gained free grounds admission with military ID.

One of the more popular special promotions included \$3 Thursdays. That was where grounds admission, carnival rides and select carnival foods were only \$3.. There were three such opportunities during the duration of the 2025 event.

In recent years, the stock show had food vendors offering Elephant Ears and Korean Corndogs, which have been a hit alongside more traditional carnival fare.

The event started in 1950 with a mission to promote agriculture, education and Western heritage. Since then, it has grown into one of the largest and most prestigious rodeos in the country. It returns next year February 12 to March 1, 2026.

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VIDEO

OABA adds to Hall of Fame; announces Pioneer Award winner

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

TAMPA, Fla. — Debbie Powers, Powers Great American Midways (PGAM), and Danny Huston, North American Midway Entertainment (NAME), were inducted into the Outdoor Amusement Business Association (OABA) Hall of Fame during the organization's February 10 to 14 events.

In addition, James Judkins, president of JKJ Workforce, received OABA's Pioneer Award.

All three were honored during a February 12 reception held at the International Independent Showmen's Association Museum in Riverview as well as during OABA's 60th Annual Member Meeting and Chair's Reception on February 14 in the ballroom at the Sheridan Tampa Brandon Hotel.

"They are each unique and very dedicated to our industry," said Greg Chiecko, OABA president and CEO. "I couldn't be happier for them."

Powers, an industry leader honored numerous times throughout her career in the carnival business, served two terms as OABA chair, is a past president of



Honored during the OABA's 60th Annual Member Meeting and Chair's Reception were (l to r): James Judkins, Pioneer Award, and Hall of Fame inductees Danny Huston and Debbie Powers. On the far right is outgoing OABA Chair Ben Pickett, who presented the awards. COURTESY OABA

the Showmen's League of America, and former secretary for the New York State Showpeoples Association.

She built a successful food business, Debbie's Concessions, starting with a single ice cream sundae stand. The operation now consists of four food trailers and two lemonade stands on PGAM. She and her husband, Les (Corky) Powers, own the Corfu, N.Y., carnival, which has its maintenance shop in Whiteville, N.C.

Debbie Powers has been a steadfast lobbyist on numerous fronts to raise industry standards and address labor issues.

She also holds the record for staging the largest OABA Jamboree fundraiser ever.

Started at a young age

Huston got his start in the industry when he was 12 by working as a dunk tank clown in his hometown of Muncie, Indiana.

In 1979 he met Diane Pugh while working on the former Pugh Shows, based out of Lancaster, Ohio. They started dating, were eventually married and started purchasing their own equipment in 1981. Huston's dedication to the show enabled him to become a unit manager for the carnival.

After acquiring Pugh



Tom Arnold (left), president of the International Independent Showmen's Museum, accepts a \$5,000 check from Greg Chiecko, OABA president and CEO, during a reception at the Riverview, Fla., facility in February. The donation was made possible through OABA's nonprofit corporation, Mobile Amusements, Inc. AT/RON GUSTAFSON

Shows' Orange Unit, Huston formed Mid-America Shows and merged the operation in 2005 to become part of NAME. The gigantic carnival went through several ownership transitions in the years that followed until Huston became sole owner in 2018.

Today, NAME is recognized as the largest midway company in the world with six units playing 120 events and entertaining more than 17 million festival and fairgoers annually.

A past OABA chair, he readily credits his employees with his success.

Visa kingpin

Judkins ran away and joined a circus as a young man, learning the business from the ground up, while at the same time rising through the ranks.

Working with foreign labor to recruit artists and staff, he has lobbied with Congressional lawmakers in a relentless effort to better the H2B visa program.

Judkins is known for demanding fair wages and housing for foreign workers and has created partnerships with other countries to shape and solve the amusement industry's labor shortages.

At the helm of his Harlingen, Texas, company, he has more than 40 years of experience in visa labor solutions.

Busy week

Chiecko reported that the 9th Annual OABA Topgolf Foreign Worker Advocacy Fundraiser staged at Topgolf in Tampa on February 13 was "one of the best ever."

Numerous educational sessions and workshops were hosted by the National Independent Concessionaries Association (NICA), Brandon, Fla., February 10 through 12 at the hotel, while OABA held a lobbying update Wednesday morning with a capacity crowd on hand. Much of that conversation focused on H2B litigation and strategy, Chiecko noted.

OABA members were also afforded plenty of time to take part in the 57th Annual International Independent Showmen's Foundation Super Trade Show and Extravaganza in nearby Riverview. The four-day event was one of the largest in recent years with 175 exhibitors on hand, including 19 first-timers.

OABA held a social hour at the Carousel Pavilion on the IISA grounds Wednesday evening, sponsored by Craftsmen Industries, Inc., St. Charles, Missouri.

"With around 300 at our annual member meeting and other activities, it was a good week to celebrate all things OABA," Chiecko said of the gathering.

•oaba.org

OABA names its scholarship recipients

WEST SPRINGFIELD, Mass. — The Outdoor Amusement Business Association (OABA) announced this year's Duke Smith Memorial Education Fund Scholarship recipients.

The Duke Smith Memorial Scholarship of \$3,000, the largest single erudition, went to Payton Lockey, a high school senior from Madison, Mississippi.

Duke Smith Memorial Scholarships of \$1,000 each went to the following college students: Logan Anderson, Greer, South Carolina; Aubrey Berger, Olathe Kansas; Piper Burrows, Escanaba, Michigan; Jarett Galante, St. Charles, Illinois; Emma Janas, Rochester, New York; Kalista Kastl, Tucson, Arizona; Paige Massie, Naperville, Illinois; Autumn Marie McDaniel, New Braunfels, Texas; Chuck Elliot Moody, Knoxville, Tennessee; Gianni Palmieri, Phoenix, Arizona; Harley Pickett, Phoenix, Arizona; Jesse Robinson, Happy Valley, Oregon; Sabrina Shugart, Kansas City, Missouri; Emily Siefker, La Porte, Indiana; Joseph Skerbeck, Holland, Michigan; Eva Tutak, Faribault, Minnesota; Nathan Yaffe, Sharon, Massachusetts; Roman Zeise Roman, Escanaba, Michigan.

Duke Smith Memorial Scholarships of \$1,000 each went to the following high school students: Abigail Floyd, Lebanon, Tennessee; Sophia Skerbeck, Holland, Michigan, Drew Yaffe, Sharon, Massachusetts.

Nick Alberts Memorial Scholarships of \$1,000 each went to the following trade school students: Armstrong Sankowsky, Kingsland, Texas; Matteo Simonian, Whiteville, North Carolina; Matthew Schott, White Lake, Michigan.

In 1996, OABA created the scholarship program as a nonprofit corporation, Mobile Amusements, Inc. Since that time generous gifts from McGowan/Allied Specialty Insurance, Gold Medal Products and donations from the OABA board and individual members have provided more than 500 scholarships.

Funtastic Shows's Ron, Beverly Burback bring in next generation

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

PORTLAND, Ore. — **Funtastic Traveling Shows**, a leader in the carnival industry in the Pacific Northwest since 1971, announced on the first of 2025 that it is transitioning the leadership responsibilities of the business to the next generation of children.

On January 1, 2025, **Ronald Edward Burback** (Ronnie) succeeded his father, **Ronald Earl Burback** (Ron), as the show's president. The elder Burback will take on the role of chief executive officer (CEO).

In addition to his son taking on a different role, his daughter, **Tracy Burback Munoz**, will assume the role of executive vice president and carry out the duties of her mom, **Beverly Burback**.

The parents will continue to be involved with Funtastic in an oversight role for the immediate future.

Burback has been an icon in the outdoor amusement

business industry. He has over 77 years of experience and numerous board, director and leadership positions in various amusement organizations, guilds, clubs and leagues.

He spent 35 years operating at amusement parks and 50 years operating carnival attractions at fairs, centennials, world fairs and festivals, from North Pole, Alaska, to Memphis, Tennessee, and many stops in between.

As CEO, Burback will continue to utilize his wealth of experience and knowledge.

"I am honored to take on the role of CEO and lead Funtastic Shows into the next chapter of growth and innovation," Burback said. "I look forward to working closely with my wife, son, daughter and our talented team to build on our success."

Burback's son and the new president of the show grew up in the business at the early age of 11 years old. He manages the rides, staffing event logistics, and transportation



Ron and Beverly Burback, Funtastic Traveling Shows, have passed the baton of leadership to their son, Ronnie Burback, and daughter, Tracy Burback Munroz. AT/GARY SLADE

and has been instrumental in assuring the "show goes on" at each location at the right time, with the right people and with the right execution.

"I have big shoes to fill in a challenging industry, but I am excited to take on the role of president and continue to perpetuate Funtastic's brand and reputation," the younger Burback said. "I am committed to working with my father, mother, sister and our team to continue to deliv-

er a superior experience to our customers to keep them coming back."

The Burback family has been a dynamic team for decades and has been role models in the carnival industry. They set out to raise the bar for safety, professional staff, game innovation and ride quality.

Burback started in the industry when he was 14 years old by picking up ping pong balls at the fish game

at **Jantzen Beach Park** in Portland, Oregon. In 1971, he and his partner, **Bob Bollinger**, formed **Burback and Bollinger Traveling Shows**. In 1985, Bollinger retired and Burback, along with his wife, formed **Funtastic Traveling Shows Inc.**

Funtastic Shows operates two to three complete carnival operations weekly during the season. The company owns and operates a 15-acre permanent office campus facility in southeast Portland and a six-acre winter storage in Vancouver, Washington.

The show's repair and maintenance complex features an 80,000-square-foot warehouse, state-of-the-art paint shop and a 5,000-square-foot corporate office staffed by 35 full-time employees.

Major events include the **Washington State Fair** in Puyallup, Washington, the **Portland Rose Festival**, many county fairs and other diverse events throughout the Pacific Northwest.

funtasticshows.com

Atlantic City hosts NJAA's 30th East Coast Gift & Variety Show

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — The **New Jersey Attractions Association** (NJAA) again held its East Coast Gift & Variety Show at the **Golden Nugget Resort and Casino**, Atlantic City, on February 26 and 27. Billed as "the trade show to keep you connected to the amusement industry in the tri-state area," there were 23 participating vendors that brought their newest games, prizes and food for attendees to see, purchase and implement in their establishments. On the first day of the expo, the NJAA hosted its 34th annual scholarship kickoff cocktail party on the trade show floor.

More than 400 attendees from various segments of the tourism and amusement industry included owners, partners, managers and buyers, as well as workers of amusement parks, arcades, games, concessions, piers and restaurants.

"The show was positive and upbeat. Everyone is looking forward to the 2025 season," said **Kim Samarelli**, NJAA executive director.

The show began in the mid-1970s at the **Aztec Hotel** in Seaside Heights, New Jersey. Vendors operated out of their rooms, with attendees traveling from room to room. Other recent locations have included the **Trump Marina Hotel Casino** and **Taj Mahal**, both in Atlantic City. This was the 16th time at the Golden Nugget.

The NJAA is a proactive organization, that identifies concerns while working for the safety, health and overall economic betterment of the amusement industry.

•njamusements.com



Irwin Siegel, a long-time plush sales representative with the **Good Stuff Company**, stands alongside his product. COURTESY SAM SHURGOTT



At the show were **Dave Sandstrom**, vice president of international sales, **Bob's Space Racers**, and **William Catanosa**, vice president of **Steel Pier**, Atlantic City, New Jersey. COURTESY SAM SHURGOTT



Jody Lovechuck, one of the owners of **Jilly's Stores**, Ocean City, New Jersey visits with **Scott Simpson**, owner of **Playland Castaway Cove**, also in Ocean City. COURTESY SAM SHURGOTT



Taking a break from the trade show are **Josh Karu**, park president **Diggerland**, West Berlin, New Jersey; **Debbie Karu**, park general manager and **Adam Lupton**, manager, both with **Casino Pier**, Seaside Heights, New Jersey. COURTESY SAM SHURGOTT



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MIDWAYSCENE

AT: B. Derek Shaw

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The **Washington State Fair**, Puyallup, recently announced construction is underway for six new restaurants and a rooftop bar in time for the fair's 125th anniversary in late August. The 1900 Food Hall & Rooftop Bar is named after the fair's first year in operation.

"[The rooftop bar] is probably one of the coolest views you'll get at the Spring Fair and State Fair," Public Relations Manager **Stacy Van Horne** told the *News Tribune*. "It's so pretty during the day and night too, with all the rides surrounding it. It's a central hub of the fairgrounds. We feel like having this diversity in six restaurants really gives something to everybody."

The new hall will replace International Village, which had been a fair fixture for 40 years. The new food hall is part of a \$28 million renovation project.

"The building was old and decrepit — so for aesthetic reasons, for safety reasons, for good variety and to continue to become a first-class facility, we knew that we had to bring this building down and find a great way to rebuild it," Van Horne said.

The 20-day fair returns August 29 to September 21 with **Funtastic Traveling Shows** providing the rides.

NASCAR fans visiting **Dover Motor Speedway** this summer will have the chance to explore more of Delaware because of a partnership with Visit Delaware. Free shuttles will take fans from the track to Rehoboth Beach and the **Delaware State Fair** in Harrington from July 17-19.

Two shuttles will depart daily from Dover Motor Speedway, giving visitors time to go to other Delaware summer attractions before returning to the track in time for race events.

The fair takes place July 17 - 26 with **Wade Shows** providing the rides.

It appears there will be a **Maui County Fair**, Hawaii, this fall after a six-year hiatus. Mayor **Richard Bissen** signed a bill in mid-March to allot \$1.5 million to nonprofit organization, **Festivals of Aloha** to organize the storied event. According to Daryl Fujiwara, director, this year marks the first time the county is footing the bill for the fair.

The last fair was held in 2019, the 97th annual event, before COVID forced planners to cancel it the year after. Resurrecting the four-day fair has been a goal for many elected officials and organizers over the past six years, and Fujiwara admits doing so has proven to be a tall order.

"If we're going to call it the Maui County Fair, it has to have that same blueprint and be a variation of what it is. So, a lot of those components that were traditionally used are definitely being worked into the programming," Fujiwara told *Island News*.

Components could still include the opening parade, rides, food vendors, merchants selling clothing and goods, exhibitions and live entertainment all at the **War Memorial Complex** in Wailuku.

Moving forward, there are a few setbacks. The gymnasium that houses the art exhibit is still closed for construction and the food vendor facades are showing signs of aging and in need of repair.

Organizers are still seeking donors and other funding streams to augment the funds. The event will also follow the same framework of allowing organizations to participate as a fundraising opportunity.

The fair is slated to take place October 2 to 5, 2025.

For the past quarter century, **Gladys Trigg** has been volunteering for the **South Florida Fair**, West Palm Beach. Late last year she turned 100.

Trigg volunteers in Yesteryear Village, a living history park where interpreters share stories of life from days gone by. She sits on the building's front porch, sharing first-hand stories with guests.

"She remembers so many of the things that are in the building from way back that kids never experienced," daughter **Karen Schmitt** told the *Palm Beach Florida Weekly*. "She tells them about the butter churn, how she had to use an outhouse, had no indoor plumbing and how she would get water out of the well."

"At 100 years young, Gladys has shown us that no matter your age, you can always find a way to contribute. She is an inspiration for staff, fellow volunteers and the many people whose lives she has touched," said Volunteer Services Manager **Stacy Wakefield**.

The centenarian was born in Missouri and moved to Florida in 1959, raising 10 children. She does not take any prescription medications. Her only health issue is hearing. Her secret to reaching 100? "I keep busy." Trigg likes word searches and puzzles and loves dark chocolate.

The fair returns January 16 to February 1, 2026, with Wade Shows providing the midway.

Recently the scholarship committee of the **Showman's League of America** (SLA) met to review applications from college students with backgrounds in the amusement industry. Over \$125,000 was awarded this year to over 50 deserving students.

Wayne Kunz, an SLA member since 1959 as well as 1976 SLA president, served on the very first scholarship committee. Upon verifying there was no age limit for scholarship applicants, Kunz announced his intention to enroll at **Auburn University**. His application will be reviewed next year.

WATER PARKS & RECREATION

▶ SunSplash adding ADG wave pool — page 38 / World's Largest Swimming Lesson returning in June — page 40

Disney Treasure cruise ship features water fun above the high seas

AT: Susan Storey
Special to Amusement Today

PORT CANAVERAL, Fla. — Disney Cruise Line's newest ship, the Disney Treasure, joined the fleet and set sail on December 21, 2024. At 1,119 feet long and 144,000 gross tons, the 15-deck ship's 1,555 crew members create magic for up to 4,000 guests on each cruise. Like its sister ships, the Disney Treasure's design has families in mind with spaces and entertainment dedicated exclusively for kids and adults to enjoy on their own, and even more to experience together.

Bringing traditional water park experiences to the ship, the Disney Treasure features 10 pools and several splash-filled play areas. Water fun rises higher than sea level aboard the AquaMouse, Disney Cruise Line's exclusive family attraction. The unique experience, which seats two guests at a time, blends the world of the Mickey Mouse animated shorts with an all-

new water coaster experience. Suspended above the ship's upper decks, powerful water jets propel guests through 760 feet of winding tubes, while simultaneously providing views of the ocean and the ship's activities below. The use of multimedia puts riders in the middle of an exclusive new story that follows Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse on a zany misadventure into an ancient temple.

Since debuting on *The Disney Channel* in 2013, the Emmy Award-winning Mickey Mouse shorts have delighted millions of viewers and even provided inspiration and theming for the Disney Parks' Mickey and Minnie's Runaway Railway attractions. The AquaMouse on the Disney Treasure is Disney's second attraction at sea; the first debuted on the Disney Wish in 2022. The AquaMouse transports the animated characters from screen to attraction. Aboard the Treasure, guests are immersed in a silly story told as they drift and slide



The AquaMouse and the Slide-A-Saurus Rex family waterslide are located on the top deck of the Disney Treasure (above). The AquaMouse (right) is Disney Cruise Line's first-ever Disney attraction at sea and can be found on the Disney Treasure and Disney Wish ships.

AT/SUSAN STOREY;
COURTESY DISNEY CRUISE LINE



The Slide-a-saurus Rex family waterslide (above left) delights guests aboard the Disney Treasure. The Toy Story Splash Zone (above right) provides soft play, water-filled fun for toddlers and young kids. AT/SUSAN STOREY

along the water coaster's path. The "Curse of the Golden Egg" takes Captain Mickey and Captain Minnie on a search for a legendary treasure that's hidden within the mysterious ruins of an ancient temple. The story begins — and ends — during the AquaMouse experience. Located on the top deck of the ship, the AquaMouse includes water effects and an original musical score.

Other water-focused shipboard fun entertains the ship's youngest guests. Bathtime is often a toddler's favorite time of day, and the Disney Treasure brings the world of toys to life

with interactive fountains and water play at the Toy Story Splash Zone. The movie franchise's characters are recreated as inspired, larger-than-life bath toys that move and spray water. The Splash Zone, created for children ages 6 and under, includes pop jets, geysers, two soft slides and bubblers. Trixie's Falls, a six-inch-deep wading pool, includes a small fountain and waterfall while the nearby Slide-a-saurus Rex family waterslide takes guests to "swimfinity and beyond."

Throughout the rest of the Disney Treasure, guests are

treated to unique experiences inspired by beloved Disney Parks attractions. The Haunted Mansion Parlor is the next chapter of the Haunted Mansion saga and seamlessly blends the Haunted Mansion tradition with new and unexpected treats. The Parlor is complete with the iconic and beloved purple wallpaper, the ambiance and story of the Haunted Mansion remind guests there is always room for one more happy haunt in its eerie drawing room. The centerpiece of the Parlor is the breathtaking Ghost Fish

▶ See TREASURE, page 36



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The AquaMouse transports two guests at a time for a zany, splash-filled 760-foot-long water coaster experience. COURTESY DISNEY CRUISE LINE

► TREASURE

Continued from page 35

Aquarium. A first of its kind, the Aquarium is no ordinary fish tank, featuring some of the most complex effects and illusions ever installed on Disney Cruise Line.

The Haunted Mansion attractions' famous Hitchhiking Ghosts brought their otherworldly passports aboard the Disney Treasure. To welcome the popular trio to the guest experience, **Disney Imagineering** used the same dimensional character reflection technology from **Walt Disney World** and **Disneyland**. The team filmed the animatronic characters at the park attractions so that the ghosts could mystically appear in the mirror behind the Parlor's main bar. And while the Hitchhiking Ghosts remain on the ship when it returns to port, guests take home the infamous Hatbox Ghost in the form of a light-up collectible sipper. Exclusive drinks, including one with a hidden message only visible with a black light, complete the spooky, exclusive menu.

Other park-inspired spaces include the Periscope Pub, which transports guests to another famous Disney ship, Captain Nemo's Nautilus. Celebrating the design and theming from the legacy Disney Parks attraction, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea: Submarine Voyage and the 1954 film with a similar name, Periscope Pub is a "ship within a ship" experience. One special detail can only be seen by looking up. A video of swimming sea creature shadows passing the Pub's ceiling "windows" features the real sea animals from EPCOT's The Seas with

Nemo and Friends pavilion. Another park-inspired location, the Skipper Society Lounge offers a *boatload* of adventure and a menu inspired by the ponderful Jungle Cruise attraction.

Throughout the entire ship, the Disney Treasure honors beloved stories and characters. Classic Disney films such as *The Aristocats* and *Mulan* have their own spaces alongside newer films and storylines. For example, fans of the 2016 Disney film *Zootopia* can visit Jumbeaux's Sweets ice cream shop to enjoy delicious desserts, ice cream, gelato and exclusive treats including Nick Fox's favorite, the Jumbeaux Pop. Shipboard restaurants celebrate *Coco* and *Guardians of the Galaxy* while immersing guests in an interactive multi-course dining show. The mix of both classic and modern characters aboard the Disney Treasure seamlessly unites generations of guests.

Along with its entertainment venues, retail and dining, the Disney Treasure has 1,234 staterooms. Sailing originates from Port Canaveral, Florida, for seven-day cruises to the Caribbean and Disney's private island, Disney Castaway Cay. Later this year, the new **Disney Destiny** will set sail from Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Complete with a "Heroes and Villains" theme, the Destiny will feature a larger-than-life sculpture of Spider-Man and his Spider-Bots on the back of the ship. Also debuting this year, the Disney Adventure will set sail from its homeport in Singapore and will feature for the first time ever a new stage show, special encounters and other experiences with Duffy the Disney Bear and his friends.



NEWS SPLASH

AT: Jeffrey L. Seifert

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Monkeys Canopy Resort in Malaysia has recently opened **Monkeys Splash Zone**, a covered water park. Although not quite indoors, the entire water park is under a large spacious building with high ceilings and open sides that shield guests from the sun and the rain. Inside the building, guests will have the opportunity to enjoy a wave pool and several waterslides. The adult slides, although not overly large, include Double Dash, a pair of racing slides; Zoomie Glide with high-speed twists and turns; and Whirlpool Whirl, a vortex slide.

A water playground designed for children includes a climbing structure with multiple slides and a tipping bucket. Also in the kids' area are smaller versions of a four-lane racing slide and a wall slide.

A kiddie Cove designed for smaller children includes shallow pools, water spray toys and an inflatable obstacle course.

Monkeys Canopy is a jungle-themed full-service resort with unique accommodations offering breathtaking views of the nearby rainforest. It has several indoor and outdoor activity venues including a spa, indoor extreme park, eSports arena, driving range, snow world, international karting circuit, dinosaur land and a safari escape playland.

The city of Delta in British Columbia, Canada, approved a schematic design for a new aquatic and fitness center. The new center will completely replace the existing aquatic center at **Winskill Park**. The new aquatic center will be built on the east side of the park allowing the existing facility to remain open until the new center is complete. Once the new facility is finished, the existing building will be leveled, and the land will be used to expand parking.

The new two-story 90,000-square-foot facility will include a 10-lane, 25-meter lap pool with diving boards; a four-lane teaching pool; a leisure pool with a lazy river and waterslide; sauna, hot pool, cold plunge pools, gymnasium, a fitness gym, multipurpose rooms and meeting space for Boys and Girls Clubs.

The combined surface area of the swimming pools will be 14,000 square feet — twice the size of the pools in the existing facility. Additionally, the 6,000-square-foot fitness gym in the new facility will be double the size of the current one.

The entire project carries a CA\$130 (US\$89.7) million budget, including \$120 million for the new facility and the demolition of the existing facility, and \$10 million for the reconfiguration of the

park space, including new sports fields and amenities.

A controversial water park development project that was completed in 2023 has provided a boost to the economy of Cowell in South Australia.

The AU\$11 (US\$6.88) million proposal to develop a marina, boat ramp, wetlands and a water park, was initially met with opposition, but the visionaries behind the project were persistent and the ambitious project took place.

The development has made the rural town on South Australia's Eyre Peninsula a tourist destination, rather than a rest stop for travelers en route to Adelaide.

Franklin Harbour Hotel licensee **Sue Blum** said the playground and marina development had been a boost for local businesses, particularly the water park.

"Once it was finished, the crowds came and they've been here ever since," Blum said. "[During] school holidays, it explodes, and it's the best thing for the town."

The project was first proposed in 2017, and it took five years to build.

"The amount of money council was proposing to spend was controversial, but over time, as it has become a reality, I think the town is really proud of it," said **Shane Gill**, Franklin Harbour District Council chief executive.

A developer in Québec has resurrected a water park project in Mirabel City, located about an hour's drive northwest of the city of Montreal. Plans for the **Cité Mirabel** recreational facility include more than 20 unique water attractions including a water coaster and a lazy river.

Originally announced in 2021 as **Moana Aquatics Center**, that project was supposed to break ground in 2023, but it never materialized. Now under the leadership of real estate developer **Investissement Ray Junior**, construction is set to begin next summer.

The full project, with a price tag of CA\$175 to CA\$200 (US\$138) million, is to include a pair of hotels, a 1,500-seat performance hall, a 70,000-square-foot convention center, and rooftop reception halls to accommodate large events and weddings. Also included are recreation shops dedicated to outdoor sports, trendy restaurants, fast-food restaurants, beauty and spa services and a multi-level parking structure.

The facility is being designed to minimize its ecological footprint by utilizing state-of-the-art water filtration systems to cut down on consumption.

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SunSplash Water Park to open Paradise Cove, ADG wave pool

AT: Jeffrey Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

CAPE CORAL, Fla. — SunSplash Family Water Park is getting ready to open a new section that includes a wave pool attraction. Wave pools, typically, one of the most popular attractions at a water park, provide a controlled and clean alternative to the natural ocean's chaotic surfs — minus the sharks, jellyfish and other bothersome sea creatures. The expansion area, dubbed Paradise Cove, aims to deliver this safe, family-friendly, wave-riding adventure to water park visitors.

The focal point of the new Paradise Cove addition is a 12,000-square-foot wave pool holding more than 160,000 gallons of water. The wave generation equipment, provided by **Aquatic Development Group**, has the ability to produce adjustable wave patterns. The pool is accessed through a zero-depth beach entry and it gradually gets deeper until it reaches a maximum depth of five feet.

In addition to the pool, the Paradise Cove expansion will bring new deck areas with seating to accom-



The focal point of the new Paradise Cove addition is a 12,000-square-foot wave pool which will hold more than 160,000 gallons of water. COURTESY SUNSPLASH FAMILY WATER PARK

modate 300 more guests along with new shade areas. The cove will also feature more luxury cabanas which guests can rent for an additional fee. An audiovisual system also will be added for private events, team building and company outings. The system features a 16-foot by nine-foot video screen that can be used to show movies, play sporting events or display other entertainment. A deck near the back of the pool will be able to stage deejays, kara-

oke, small bands and more.

Paradise Cove will be located in a previously undeveloped section of the back of the park near the large catering pavilion and the existing three high-speed thrill slides. Additional restrooms are being built as well to accommodate the greater number of guests in that area, along with additional food and beverage options.

"This exciting new addition enhances our commitment to providing unforgettable family experiences but also offers adventure for all ages," stated **Eric Reed**, general manager of SunSplash Family Waterpark. "Guests can catch a wave or chill at the beach entry, making it an ideal spot for fun in the sun. We can't wait to welcome families to create lasting memories in this new aquatic paradise."

"We are so excited to be a part of the exciting growth of Cape Coral and Southwest Florida. We believe that Paradise Cove wave pool will be a game changer for SunSplash, and we are thrilled to be able to bring it to our amazing guests to enjoy for years to come," said **Ron McKenzie**, chief marketing officer, **ProParks Attractions Group**.

A wave pool has been in the works for quite some

time. However, the project was postponed when Hurricane Ian struck South Florida on September 28, 2022. The storm caused widespread flooding along the coast and inland with the cities of Sanibel, Cape Coral and Fort Myers suffering catastrophic damage. SunSplash suffered significant damage and cleanup efforts took five months as the park prepared for the upcoming season. The park opened for the 2023 season with a pass-holder week-end preview on March 11 and began its regular season on March 18 just in time for the spring break crowds. As business returned to normal in the 2024 season, management decided it was time to dust off plans and begin construction of the wave pool. Groundbreaking took place on October 17.

At the ceremony, ProParks' chief executive officer, **John Hyltin** said, "Since we took over the water park, the attendance has grown so much that we were getting concerned about customer satisfaction coming into the park, and so this capital expenditure is needed, and we're very excited about the groundbreaking today."

SunSplash opened in 1992 as a recreational amenity for the community of Cape Coral and for nearly 30 years had been operated by the Cape Coral Parks and


Recreation Department. As the population and attendance increased, the city began looking at developing a public/private partnership for the operation and maintenance of the water park. In 2021, city of Cape Coral executed a long-term lease agreement with ProParks.

ProParks is a diversified hospitality company seeking to create fun and safe experiences for families. Through its global platform, it seeks to invest and serve in the local communities in which it operates. The group owns and operates various projects, as well as provides third-party management and advisory services with a focus on regional theme parks, water parks, family entertainment centers, hotels and resorts, cruise ships and similar assets.

The partners and managers who comprise ProParks come from a diverse background that includes experience with several well-known companies including **Schlitterbahn Waterparks & Resorts**, **Wet'n'Wild**, **Six Flags**, **Universal Resorts**, **Walt Disney Parks and Resorts**, **CNL** and **Palace Entertainment**. In 2019 Pro Parks Management Company merged with **Innovative Attraction Management** to become ProParks Attractions Group. •sunsplashwaterpark.com

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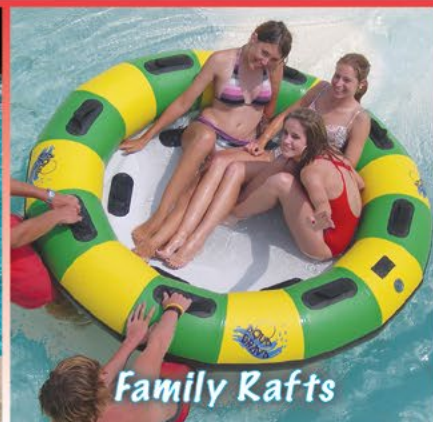
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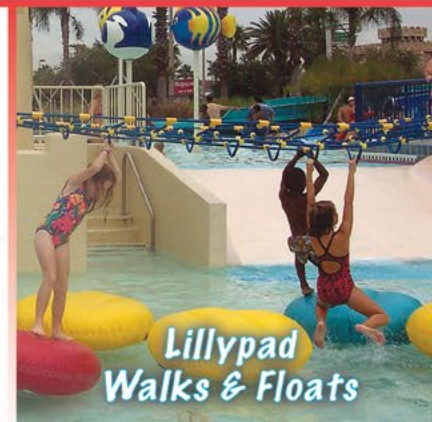
Inflatable Barriers



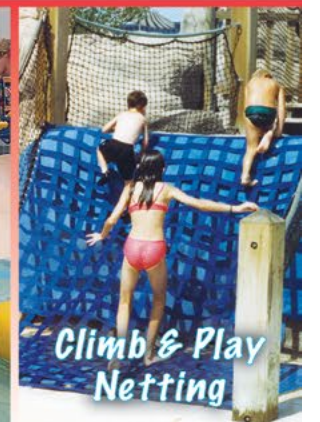
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World's Largest Swimming Lesson will continue with 16th edition

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. — On Thursday, June 26, 2025, the World's Largest Swimming Lesson (WLSL) is scheduled to occur at hundreds of venues across the globe. Now in its 16th year, WLSL was created by the **World Waterpark Association** as a platform to help the aquatics industry build awareness about the fundamental importance of teaching children to swim to help prevent drowning, which is the leading cause of accidental death for kids ages 1 to 4.

Amusement Today is proud to be a gold supporter of the event to help spread the word that a significant number of drowning deaths can be prevented. *AT* encourages aquatic facilities and trainers in the local community to help parents connect the dots between learning to swim and staying safer in



and around the water.

The 16th Annual World's Largest Swimming Lesson will take place at more than 600 facilities on six continents.

The purpose of the event is to provide kids and parents exposure to life-saving water safety skills and educate parents about the vital importance of vigilance and teaching children to swim to help prevent drowning. Even though it is a one-day event, getting children introduced to the water, helping them realize that water can be safe and fun and sparking an interest in learning how to swim can

go a long way to preventing accidental drownings.

"They won't come away knowing how to swim, but they will come away with the skills to save their life," said **Rick Root**, president of the World Waterpark Association.

Each year, WLSL events provide more than 15,000 man-hours of water safety training in a single day. Since its inception, tens of thousands of children and adults in more than 50 countries have participated in WLSL lessons.

Per the World Health Organization, drowning is the third leading cause of

unintentional injury-related death, accounting for seven percent of all injury-related deaths. In the U.S., drowning remains the leading cause of injury-related death for children ages 1 to 4, and the second leading cause for children under 14. It is estimated that for every fatal drowning victim, another five to 10 victims receive hospital-related care for nonfatal drowning injuries.

According to a research study conducted by the **American Red Cross** in 2020, 56 percent of children ages 4 to 17 cannot perform the basic water safety skills they need to save their own life.

Research shows participation in formal swimming lessons can reduce the risk of drowning by 88 percent among young children, yet many kids do not receive formal swimming or water safe-

ty training.

Even those who don't own an aquatic facility can get involved. The WLSL is supported by a coalition of leading national and international water safety and training organizations. Supporting organizations can help promote the WLSL event to their members and constituents in order to grow the number of facilities participating this year. Organizations can send emails and e-newsletters to encourage members to participate. They can help by posting news and information about the event on social media, and they can show their support by attending a WLSL event in their local market.

Those wanting to help, participate or learn more about this phenomenal global program should visit wsl.org.

—Jeffrey Seifert

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World's Largest
Swimming Lesson

June 26, 2025

WLSL.org

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BUSINESS & NEWSMAKERS

▶ PAPA spring meeting — page 43 / Women of Influence: Una de Boer — page 45

TEA celebrates the industry at 31st annual Thea Awards Gala

AT: Susan Storey
Special to Amusement Today

BURBANK, Calif. — The 31st Annual Thea Awards Gala, hosted by the **Themed Entertainment Association (TEA)** celebrated innovation and design in the themed entertainment industry. More than 700 professionals attended the evening which followed the annual TEA Inspire conference and program.

The Thea Awards celebrate the work and sheer audacity of the industry’s designers, architects, engineers, technicians and business leaders. The 2025 recipients were the most diverse and global to date.

Reflecting on the week of events, TEA President and CEO **Melissa Oviedo** shared, "The themed entertainment industry creates bold, audacious experiences. This year's Thea Award recipients were diverse and unique. From projects that developed new technology, like the memorable BDX Droids, to the creation of places that entertain guests without the use of technology, like **Ghibli Park's** Valley of Witches, we continue to see this industry's creators push past boundaries.

"Projects only happen because of the people behind them," Oviedo continued. "This Thea Awards Gala celebrates the collective and collaborative work of the incredible teams and creative individuals who bring each project to life."

Unexpected surprises during the gala included a guest appearance from Grammy-nominated, award-winning artist **Deborah Cox**, who presented the Thea



The 31st Annual Thea Awards Gala was attended by more than 600 professionals from the themed entertainment industry. **Bob Rogers**, founder and CEO of BRC Imagination Arts, met the BDX Droids on the event's red carpet. COURTESY FRANK DORSEY



Award for Outstanding Achievement at a Museum to the **International African American Museum**. Actor and writer **Wil Wheaton** shared the stage with the delightful Disneyland Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge BDX Droids. Wheaton joked no one was listening to his introduction of the Thea Award for Outstanding Achievement in Technological Innovation to **Walt Disney Imagineering Research & Development** and **Disney Research Zurich**, noting that instead all were enamored by the little robots. Adding heart to the night, the Los Angeles-based musical duo, **Korbee**, performed during a "VIP table" raffle fundraiser which supported Californians impacted by this year's wildfires.

This year's Buzz Price Thea Award for a Lifetime of Outstanding Achievement recipient, **Rick Rothschild** was honored for his commitment to excellence and creativity. His varied career, which included working for more than 40 years with Walt Disney Imagineering, includes work on outstanding

rides and attractions around the world. During his acceptance, Rothschild thanked his family and colleagues, reminding everyone that great work comes from teams and that no successful project comes from one person or idea.

During the gala, Oviedo also surprised attendees by announcing the 2026 Thea Awards Gala and TEA Inspire program will be held in Orlando, Florida.

"Orlando is the center of the themed entertainment industry and many of our members have offices and teams based there," Oviedo stated. "Orlando is welcoming, easily accessible and the perfect place for us to honor our next class of Thea Award recipients."

"TEA is a volunteer-driven organization, and this year, our International Board of Directors and regional boards worked together to help us create a powerful event that provided key learnings, sharing opportunities and value to our attendees," Oviedo added. "The thought-provoking Leadership Forum kicked off Inspire week with

its focus on issues and topics of concerns facing our industry."

"Associations play a crucial role in ensuring stability in business relationships during times of uncertainty," added **Wendy Heimann-Nunes**, co-founder and co-managing partner, **Nolan Heimann LLP**, and member of the TEA International Board of Directors. "They provide a support network for sharing industry insights, best practices and resources that help businesses navigate challenges. TEA is now more important than ever. Through its collective advocacy, collaboration, access to reliable information and the creation and facilitation of events like TEA Inspire, TEA is fostering trust, resilience and adaptability among its members."

The popular Spotlight Stories sessions returned to Inspire week and added presentations from the first-ever class of Recognition of Merit recipients. The new category honored three distinct projects: **Treasure Hunt: The Ride**, **The DigiWave Experience**; and **The Time**

Travel Agency at Electric Forest Festival. The sessions surprised — and delighted — attendees with an attack from a band of pirates and a live electric cello performance from **Dolce Wang**. Host of the Spotlight Stories, **Erik Essig**, Vice President of Development, **B. Morrow Productions** and TEA Board Member shared, "TEA produces outstanding educational conferences that celebrate incredible work and help Inspire tomorrow's outstanding experiences. Attendees will apply the new ways of thinking and takeaways they learned this week to their day-to-day roles."

The highlights of the TEA Inspire program were the focused presentations that peeled back the curtain to reveal the stories behind creating this year's Thea Award winners. Each Award was celebrated as the creator teams told their story. The event ended with a celebratory presentation about the Thea Classic Award recipient, the **Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man at Universal Orlando Resort's Islands of Adventure**. **Eric Parr**, senior vice president, **Creative Studio at Universal Creative** and **Marc Watson**, senior vice president, Real Estate, **UDX** shared insights about the attraction and its enduring legacy. It earned the Thea Award of Outstanding Achievement for Attraction in 2000, and this year's honor bookended the accolades Spider-Man continues to earn.

The 2026 TEA Inspire and 32nd Annual Thea Awards Gala will take place from April 29 to May 2, 2026 at the **JW Marriott Orlando, Grand Lakes**.

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ON THE MOVE

Baynum Solutions announced the upcoming retirement of Managing Director **Daniel Adams** and promotion of **Walt Bowser** to president and chief executive officer. **John Andrews**, longtime leader of the successful commercial and industrial division, will assume the role of SVP, Baynum Solutions and **Kevin Gessner** joins in the role of SVP, administration.

Bowser, a former **Six Flags Entertainment Corporation** executive, joined Baynum Solutions in 2016, expanding the company's Amusement Solutions division to include painting, construction, theming and maintenance. In his new role as president and chief executive officer, he will assume responsibility for all divisions of the company.

Adams, who joined Baynum Solutions in 2006, has served as managing director since 2022, leading the company through a period of significant growth. Lauren Adams, director of human resources, will also be retiring from the company after 28 years of service.

"Dan and Lauren have been a remarkable part of our success and have helped build a fantastic team here," said Baynum Solutions Founder **Chris Baynum**. "Our company is better and stronger than ever thanks to them, and I wish them the very best."

Willy Walser has passed on the day-to-day management of **RES Rides** into new hands. The company announced that **Roman Rothe**, a skilled engineer with over 15 years of experience in the field, will now take over the management of RES Rides.

During his career, Rothe has demonstrated exceptional expertise and creativity in designing and the execution of impressive complex large-scale projects. Walser expressed confidence that Roman will not only meet but exceed industry expectations in his new role.

Walser will remain part of RES Rides. With his experience and knowledge; he will continue to actively support Rothe and the company's team. Together, the two will ensure that the company's projects continue to stand out through innovation, quality, and passion.

Ann-Kathrin Mack, daughter of **Marianne** and **Roland Mack**, has been appointed as an additional managing partner of **Europa-Park**. The 35-year-old architect, who has held a leading position in the company for nine years, is already responsible for the Mack Solutions/Construction Management division. In her new role as managing partner, she will additionally take on responsibility for the marketing, sales and digital division.

With this appointment, Ann-Kathrin Mack is the first woman in the almost 250-year history of the family-owned company to be appointed to the management board.

"In her role overseeing numerous construction projects in recent years, Ann-Kathrin has impressively demonstrated that she is able to combine functionality, aesthetics and unique theming in an ideal way," offered Roland and **Jürgen Mack** in a joint statement. "With her appointment to the management board, we are ensuring the continued development of our family business and guaranteeing that our visitors will continue to be thrilled every day."

After completing her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in architecture at the **University of Applied Sciences** in Konstanz, Germany, Ann-Kathrin Mack gained extensive practical experience in multiple architectural firms. She further deepened her knowledge by working internationally in theme parks around the world.



Bowser



Andrews



Gessner



Rothe



Mack

Hershey Lodge and Convention Center hosts the annual PAPA spring meeting

AT: B. Derek Shaw
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HERSHEY, Pa. — Ninety members and guests of the **Pennsylvania Amusement Parks & Attractions Association (PAPA)** gathered on February 24 and 25 for the annual spring meeting at **Hershey Lodge and Convention Center**. Attendees were comprised of member parks and attractions, suppliers, manufacturers and individual members. PAPA strives to foster an environment where industry peers can gather and learn from one another.

Day one included a board of directors meeting in the afternoon followed by a reception and banquet that evening. Both the board meeting and evening proceedings were led by PAPA President **Scott Silar**, assistant director of attractions at **Hershey Entertainment & Resorts**.

The popular 50/50 raffle for the **Barbara J. Knoebel Scholarship Fund** took place. As a result, more than \$900 was raised. The winner, **Mike Ebersole**, with **Hersheypark**, donated his portion back to the fund. Each year, ten \$1,000 scholarships are awarded to students who work at any of the participating member parks or attractions. Upon the conclusion of dinner, many attendees retired to the Revelry, elsewhere in the hotel, to continue networking and imbibing.

The second day started with the annual breakfast membership meeting. Association business included reports on various aspects of the industry: legislative updates, Amusement Ride Safety Advisory Board, a recap of the fall PACE (Parks and Carnivals Education) ride safety seminar, water park issues, PAPA website, new hall of fame inductees, marketing and human resource matters.

Silar spoke about things accomplished during his term in office. "We developed monthly roundtables for everyone to be able to learn from each other," he said. "Our membership continues to grow, both from a facilities



Before the dining meeting, attendees gathered around for a social hour. There were 90 members and guests at the annual spring meeting. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

standpoint and from a vendor standpoint. At this meeting, we inducted the largest class of Hall of Fame members that we have ever had before. We took an opportunity to recognize the pioneers who have come before us who have built and operated facilities, who are inventors and innovators so that the next generation of leaders and managers have that history, so they can appreciate that vast history that is in Pennsylvania," added Silar.

The seven new Hall of fame honorees are **Joseph Fourestier Simpson**, the inventor of **Skee Ball** in 1908; **Earl Clark**, founder of **Dutch Wonderland**; **Fred DelGrosso**, owner of **Delgrosso's Park & Laguna Splash**; **Herbert Schmeck**, wood roller coaster designer with **Philadelphia Toboggan Company**; **Frederick Ingersoll**, designer and builder of the first chain of amusement parks (44 Luna parks) and 277 roller coasters; **Jim Futrell**, author and amusement park historian and **Jack Silar**, VP/general manager of **Hersheypark** and past PAPA president who was also instrumental in the original Pennsylvania Amusement Ride Safety law.

This was Silar's final year of a two-year term as president. The new team consists of Rick Knoebel, 4th generation owner of **Knoebels Amusement Resort** as the 53rd president and **Ricky Spicuzza**, general manager of **Kennywood Park** as vice president. **Dick Knoebel** who has served as secretary/trea-

surer since 1988, has stepped down; however, before he did, he informed attendees with his three famous words, "We are solvent." **Jeannie Reedy** with **Knoebels** has been named to that position.

The incoming president commented, "I am humbled [by] this position. I have some big shoes to fill. This is the best amusement park organization in the best state of the union and the best industry in the world."

Upon conclusion of the meeting, some of the attendees participated in the always-popular, roundtable discussions. It was held in the **Hersheypark** service center conference room with lively conversation, covering a variety of topics on the parks.

This was the 90th edition of the spring meeting of PAPA. The organization was formed in 1935 with **R.L. Plarr** from **Dorney Park** serving as the first president. In 1946, famed roller coaster designer **Herbert P. Schmeck** from the **Philadelphia Toboggan Company** was president. The annual spring meeting is traditionally held in Hershey. The 2025 summer fun meeting will be held at **Great Wolf Lodge**, Scotrun, Pennsylvania, on July 21 and 22. The next PACE ride safety seminar takes place October 28-31 in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, with **Sesame Place** being the location for the "hands-on" training day.

The 2026 summer meeting will be at **Knoebels** in honor of its 100th anniversary, while **Sesame Place** will host in 2027.



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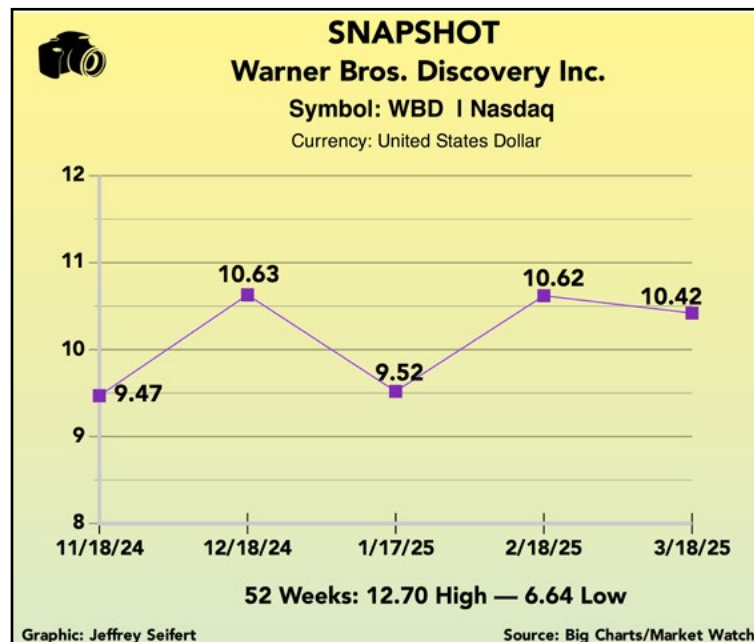
MARKET WATCH

COMPANY	SYMBOL	MARKET	PRICE 3/20/25	HIGH 52-Week	LOW 52-Week
PARKS AND ATTRACTIONS					
The Blackstone Group	BX	NYSE	148.75	200.96	115.82
Comcast Corp./ NBCUniversal Media	CMCSA	NASDAQ	36.50	45.31	32.50
Dave & Busters Entertainment, LLC	PLAY	NASDAQ	19.32	69.82	17.015
EPR Properties	EPR	NYSE	51.61	54.25	39.655
Falcon's Beyond	FBYD	NASDAQ	8.40	13.25	3.62
Fuji Kyoko Co., Ltd.	JP:9010	TYO	2286.00	4090.00	2083.00
Haichang Holdings Ltd.	HK:2255	SEHK	0.67	1.04	0.39
Lefoo Development Co.	TW:2705	TSEC	18.50	22.45	16.65
Lucky Strike Entertainment Corp	LUCK	NYSE	10.06	14.92	8.87
MGM Resorts International	MGM	NYSE	32.53	48.25	29.99
Parks America, Inc.	PRKA	OTC	0.3999	0.48	0.32
Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ltd.	RCL	NYSE	214.72	277.08	125.06
Six Flags Entertainment Corp.	FUN	NYSE	37.13	58.70	33.83
Tivoli A/S	DK:TIV	CSE	600.00	756.00	586.00
United Parks & Resorts Inc.	PRKS	NYSE	48.78	60.83	44.72
The Walt Disney Company	DIS	NYSE	98.86	123.74	83.91
Warner Bros Discovery Inc.	WBD	NASDAQ	10.65	12.70	6.64
SUPPLIERS/OTHERS					
Brogent Technologies, Inc.	TW:5263	TSEC	115.00	205.50	111.00
Sansei Technologies, Inc.	TYO:6357	TYO	1380.00	1852.00	1156.00
Topgolf Callaway Brands	MODG	NYSE	6.61	16.89	5.59

Details and information available at amusementtoday.com/stocks

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

—SOURCES: Bigcharts.com



DIESEL PRICES

Region (U.S)	As of 3/17/25	Change from 1 year ago
East Coast	\$3.679	(\$0.448)
Midwest	\$3.463	(\$0.492)
Gulf Coast	\$3.245	(\$0.500)
Mountain	\$3.376	(\$0.592)
West Coast	\$3.715	(\$0.433)
California	\$4.766	(\$0.437)

CURRENCY

On 3/20/25 \$1 USD =	
0.9166	EURO
0.7701	GBP (British Pound)
149.45	JPY (Japanese Yen)
0.8780	CHF (Swiss Franc)
1.5756	AUD (Australian Dollar)
1.4318	CAD (Canadian Dollar)

BUSINESS WATCH

Herschend acquiring Palace attractions

ATLANTA, Ga. — **Herschend** and **Parques Reunidos** have signed a definitive agreement under which Herschend will acquire all of **Palace Entertainment's** U.S. entertainment properties from Parques Reunidos. This agreement represents a significant milestone for both organizations — supporting Herschend's strategic expansion in family entertainment and hospitality while allowing Parques Reunidos to reinforce its strategic focus on its core European market.

"Today's announcement marks a natural expansion and continuation of that vision," said **Andrew Wexler**, CEO of Herschend. "By growing wisely and staying true to our purpose, we are building a future where we can continue creating memories worth repeating for generations to come."

Palace Entertainment's over 20 historic and beloved entertainment venues across 10 U.S. states will join Herschend's growing family of world-class destinations. Palace's diverse portfolio of amusement parks, water parks, family entertainment centers, campgrounds, and hotels includes notable properties like **Kennywood** in West Mifflin, Pennsylvania; **Dutch Wonderland** in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and **Lake Compounce** in Connecticut.

RWS Global acquires Harmony Helper app

NEW YORK — **RWS Global** announced it has acquired **Harmony Helper**, a patented app which helps singers learn their part of a song. Through the acquisition of Harmony Helper, RWS Global's clients will unlock significant rehearsal cost savings, while thousands of singers in productions around the world will benefit from a one-of-a-kind tool that streamlines learning vocal parts anytime, anywhere. This is the fifth acquisition in the company's history and the third software acquisition the company has made in the last year.

"We are thrilled to welcome Harmony Helper to the RWS Global family as we continue to deepen and diversify our investments in production and technology and deliver best in class shows around the globe," said **Ryan Stana**, chairman and CEO, RWS Global.

"This tool allows vocalists to practice at their own pace so they come to rehearsals more prepared with show ready vocals," said **Craig Laurie**, chief creative officer, RWS Global. "Harmony Helper will be a game-changer for our clients who are looking to elevate and save on their vocal productions."

United Parks & Resorts reports fourth quarter

ORLANDO — **United Parks & Resorts Inc.** reported its financial results for the fourth quarter and fiscal year 2024.

"We are pleased to report another quarter and fiscal year of strong financial results," said **Marc Swanson**, chief executive officer of United Parks & Resorts, Inc. "In the fourth quarter, we delivered near record attendance, record in-park per capita and near record total revenue per capita despite particularly poor weather impacting the quarter. For the full year, we delivered near record revenue, record in-park per capita and record total revenue per capita despite unfavorable weather during the year. We have now grown in-park per capita for 18 of the last 19 quarters and total revenue per capita for seven straight years. Our revenue strategies are working and continue to demonstrate our pricing power and the strength of consumer spending in our parks."

Attendance was 4.9 million guests, a decrease of approximately 79,000 guests from the fourth quarter of 2023. Total revenue was \$384.4 million, a decrease of \$4.6 million or 1.2% from the fourth quarter of 2023.

"We repurchased 9.4 million shares or approximately 15% of our total shares outstanding last year underscoring our history of returning excess cash to our shareholders," added Swanson.

Women INFLUENCE

A view from the top...

Una de Boer leads the marketing strategy for **WhiteWater West**. De Boer's talent and focus drives her work while her passion for creativity, diversity and community inspire her soul.

Control what you can, be the change

VANCOUVER, Canada — Una de Boer says she found her niche, passion and talent early in her career, but acknowledges it all came by accident.

"I grew up on a dairy farm," de Boer shared. "It was wonderful and special while also being very hard. I knew I didn't want to stay in farming, but that didn't mean I knew what I wanted to do either," she said. "At university, I earned a degree in English Literature Honors because I enjoyed reading books. It was that simple," de Boer shared. "After graduation, I went backpacking around the world by myself because I still didn't know what I wanted or was supposed to do. I believed at some point I would just figure it out. I met my husband in Southeast Asia, completed my adventure and returned home."

Then her career began, and she was almost immediately drawn to marketing.

"Marketing is about problem-solving and communicating," she furthered. "It's about understanding why people buy something and making sure that you sell the right things they need. You put all the bits of the jigsaw puzzle together, and I found it all very interesting. It also allowed me to think conceptually and use skills like storytelling and creativity."

After several years though, de Boer decided to go back to school and enrolled in a full-time MBA program.

"I was worried I was becoming a specialist in direct marketing, and I wanted to broaden my knowledge. I loved what I was doing but was not sure it was what I should be doing forever," she said.

Upon graduation, she was still drawn to marketing and helping organizations connect with each other.

"When most people hear the word 'marketing' they think of the glamorous side — business

to consumer stuff. Business-to-business marketing is seen as the 'poor cousin'. However, I found my place in this area, particularly when it came to international experience," she said.

A few years after de Boer and her family had relocated to Vancouver, Canada, she came across a job posting for a marketing director for WhiteWater. "The role was business to business, it was international, it was about selling products and services. I told myself, 'I can do that' — and I applied. It's probably a good thing they did not ask if I had ever been to a water park as part of the job requirement," she laughed.

De Boer credits Geoff and Paul Chutter for giving her the opportunity to lead marketing for WhiteWater and for understanding the company needed to shift its focus and recognition to more than just a sales support function.

"They have continued to encourage and enable me to make changes to what we do and how we communicate within the industry. Their trust in me has been an incredible honor and gift, and we have evolved a great deal."

De Boer also found herself excited by the industry and WhiteWater's role within it.

"The incredible mix of creativity, engineering, entertainment and experience all make this industry special," she explained. "I love that our currency is joy. We sell experiences that can fit in so many unique environments. What we do applies so broadly and has so much scope that it's an interesting, dynamic place. We are reinventing things all the time, but at the center of it is that what we do isn't about just selling waterslides but rather about moments that connect people."

As de Boer focused on growing and expanding WhiteWater's brand and recognition, she con-



nected with industry professionals and leaders and noticed that women leaders were not as visible.

"I would see and recognize the same women at tradeshow and events, but the focus was always on the event at hand," she said. "Then at the end of the week, we'd pack up and begin to plan for the next event. I saw how easily the men in this industry all connected, and I felt there was an opportunity — a need — to find a way to do the same with women so that we could meet each other and celebrate what everyone was doing."

A few years ago, she invited a small group of women to get together during one of IAAPA's international expos. The reaction was positive.

"One of my mantras is 'Control what you can control,'" de Boer continued. "I could not change the entirety of the industry, but I could bring people together. I could help bring positive awareness to the women in this industry. The first rule in marketing is to make people aware. To make people aware, you start talking about something and you start showing it to others. So, I started talking about bringing women together."

De Boer started to invite more women to similar events during industry meetings and conferences, encouraging everyone to bring friends and colleagues.

"These events were not company sponsored in any way," she explained. "They weren't about titles or who you work for. I wanted to help create opportunities where women could champion each other and build on the camaraderie and mutual respect we have for each other."

De Boer added, "This is an international and diverse industry. Women bring their voices to the table, and they help make space for everyone to be heard. We need more of that."

De Boer pointed to a statistic from the World Economic Forum that projects full gender equality will not be achieved until 2158. "That is five generations away," she said. "It will be after my lifetime. It will be after my daughters' lifetimes."

"That doesn't mean we give up," de Boer concluded. "I believe in leaving this world a little better than how I found it. One way I can do that is by celebrating the talent of the women in this industry and encouraging others to do the same."

—Susan Storey

SAFETY, MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

► Pennsylvania Ride Safety Seminar — page 48 / Walt Disney World manatee care — page 52

Gravity Group, Canada's Wonderland work on signature woodie

AT: Tim Baldwin
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VAUGHAN, Ontario — In 1981, Canada's Wonderland opened its gates just north of Toronto. Its iconic mountain was the park's focal point, but upon approach, the entrance drive gave great views of the park's most gigantic ride, The Mighty Canadian Minebuster. It was the largest of the park's three wooden coasters.

In those early years, the ride was standing practically isolated in a far field. The empty surroundings contributed to the coaster's massive nature. Today, the ride is adjacent to other attractions and slices directly through Canada's Wonderland's water park, knifing its way through waterslide structures.

"Original attractions have a special place in everyone's hearts," said Peter Switzer, director of maintenance and construction. "Where we have the



The Gravity Group's Engineered Pre-cut Track adds strength and durability to the course. COURTESY THE GRAVITY GROUP

opportunity to extend the life of a ride and bring more years of enjoyment to our guests, it's something we want to seriously consider. It's a special thing to contribute to generational memory-making, where parents and grandparents can share memories with children riding the same ride, even if those moments are decades apart."

Canada's Wonderland partnered with The Gravity Group on the pro-

ject. This isn't the first time for Cedar Fair to work with The Gravity Group on refurbishing a legacy wooden coaster.

"I had the chance to visit Kings Island last summer to ride The Beast and The Racer — two wooden coasters that received the Engineered Pre-cut Track treatment by The Gravity Group," Switzer told *Amusement Today*. "I wanted to see what the ride experience was like — from



a guest perspective but also an engineering one. I was impressed by the result and decided it would be worth the investment on Minebuster back home."

"Engineered Pre-cut Track is a great way to maintain the integrity of the wooden roller coaster," said Korey Kiepert, engineer and principal, The

Gravity Group. "By turning wood on its side and machining it to the perfect shape, we are able to give parks a track that is stronger and delivers a smooth ride. Also, wood as a material is carbon positive, making it a much greener solution than metal."

► See GRAVITY, page 47



The refurbishment project continued even through the winter weather. The ride slices through water park structures (above right). COURTESY CANADA'S WONDERLAND

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RIDE RELOCATION
PICTURED: HONKER DINGER DERBY, SESAME PLACE

►GRAVITY

Continued from page 46

Designed by **Curtis Summers**, the ride's stats put it at 90 feet tall with a length of 3,820 feet. Two trains from **Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters, Inc.** each seat 30 passengers. The speed is an estimated 56 mph.

Even though Canada can have harsh winters, Switzer confirmed the winter weather didn't impact this project.

"My first ride on Minebuster was in 1981, the year the park opened," said Switzer. "My mother worked at the park, and my sisters and I, as a result, had the chance to be at the park a lot. Riding coasters like Minebuster likely helped cement my interest in engineering and the amusement park industry and propelled me to where I am today."

Approximately 960 feet of track is being replaced.

"This project promises



The Gravity Group engineers the track offsite (above left) to precise specifications and then transports the track to the park ready to install. **Mighty Canadian Minebuster** (above right) is one of the park's original rides, and was the tallest roller coaster at the park when it opened in 1981. COURTESY THE GRAVITY GROUP; AT/TIM BALDWIN

a stronger track system, a smoother ride and a better experience for our guests overall," Switzer said.

All labor for this project onsite is being done by a team from Canada's Wonderland, with oversight from TGG.

Canada's Wonderland was part of the **Kings Entertainment Corporation** chain of parks through 1992. It was acquired by **Paramount** and operat-

ed under that overarching name through 2006. Purchased by Cedar Fair in 2006, it helped expand that company's portfolio. In 2024, Cedar Fair merged with **Six Flags**, creating the largest theme park company in North America.

Canada's Wonderland has preserved all the original coasters built at the park in 1981, which include an **Arrow** multi-looper and a **Mack** powered ride.

"We were thrilled to have the opportunity to work with Canada's Wonderland on this project. Our engineers had visited the park to gather data on the ride so that we could produce the track," Kiepert told *AT*. "This involved gathering survey and 3D scan data of the existing ride. We have been working with the talented team of carpenters at Canada's Wonderland to allow them

to do all of the installation in-house. The **Mighty Canadian Minebuster** has been a defining part of the Canada's Wonderland experience since 1981. We are excited to help ensure that a ride that is nearly 45 years old can entertain guests for generations to come."

Canada's Wonderland reopens for the 2025 season on May 8.

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Pennsylvania Ride Safety Seminar draws more than 300 attendees

AT: B. Derek Shaw
bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

HARRISBURG, Pa. — The Pennsylvania Ride Safety Seminar, held twice each year, trains and tests hundreds of amusement ride inspectors in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and beyond. From March 4 through 6, 311 people from various amusement operations received ride safety training and testing conducted by third-party operator **Slaggert Risk Management** for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Bureau of Ride and Measurement Standards. Classroom participants were primarily from Pennsylvania and neighboring states; all told there were attendees/instructors from 14 states.

The spring session provided 222 hours of instruction over the three days. Seminar participants selected the specialty courses they



felt most beneficial for their career path, job description, abilities and employer benefit. Some of the course areas included amusement, FEC and carnival rides; extreme sports; inflatables; regulations, inspections and compliance; water attractions; maintenance; go karts; zip lines and climbing walls. The weather's only impact on outdoor events occurred during Tuesday morning's opening session. The active shooter course is always a popular topic, presented by the **Pennsylvania State Police**.

"We have one of our record attendances, and we've added some new classes that went very well," said **Joe Filoromo**, ride safety supervisor for the Commonwealth of



There were 311 attendees from 14 states along with 71 volunteer instructors and staff at the spring Pennsylvania Ride Safety seminar. The three-day training offered 222 classroom hours for attendees to select from. This photo was taken during the general session on Wednesday. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

Pennsylvania. "We've been concentrating on better communications with [the] press, the public and with officials on sight as far as emergency responders, police and so on." One of the new classes offered was **Getting the Word Out**.

Tammy Luckenbill,

the newly named director of the Bureau of Ride & Measurement Standards was pleased with what she saw. "There's a lot of people here, a lot of different classes going on — pretty well organized," she said. "I'm really impressed for my first time being here. I think we can

never push safety enough. People that are here have a lot of lives in their hands."

The 71 instructors and staff are all volunteers with a wide spectrum of specialties that impact the amusement industry, traveling from all

▶ See SEMINAR, page 49

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► SEMINAR

Continued from page 48

across the country. Testing was provided for Class 1 and 2 ride inspectors, general qualified inspectors and specialized inspectors. The Pennsylvania certification is recognized in many states across the country, including RCMT (Recognized Certified Maintenance Technician), the program in place in New Jersey.

Chris Noveral with **TAIT Towers** was a first-time presenter.

"I gave two presentations. One was on an overview of the design world; we design with the ASTM suite of standards in mind, and that's obviously a pretty large swath of good guidance," Noveral said. "The other presentation was Considerations for Staging and Rigging. I work at a company that primarily supplies equipment for touring or any entertainment operations. A lot of amusement parks around the state and country have entertainment venues and live shows. It's great to have a seminar like this. Having gone to ASTM for 15 years, there are always good conversations to be had there. It's nice to bring a little of that perspective in [to this program]."

The amusement ride safety division has developed a new safety sign that can be enlarged and placed throughout a park, fair, carnival, water park or any other attraction, offering



Support staff for the semi-annual training provided by third party operator Slaggert Risk management — (l to r): Carol Mason and Sharon and Sarah Slaggert — stand behind some of the certificates for those who have completed the necessary hours for certification or recertification. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

tips for having a safe day out. There are two QR codes on the document; one that leads to an eight-minute carnival safety video and the other to a ride safety flier.

"We realize that kids like to scan QR codes," said Filoromo. "Meanwhile we have had this eight-minute-long ride safety video for kids that we never had a way to get it to them. We're able to distribute ride safety brochures and safety information to the public a lot better and cheaper than we did before. This is one of the things we are doing

for outreach this year."

Since 1984, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture has inspected and registered amusement rides under the Amusement Ride Safety Act and regularly participates in education and outreach seminars that include classes and hands-on demonstrations. The next seminar is scheduled for November 12 to 14 at the **Red Lion Hotel and Conference Center** in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

• paridesafety.com

NOTE: The Pennsylvania Ride Safety Seminars are not to be confused with the annual Parks and Carnival Education (PACE) seminar, jointly sponsored by the Pennsylvania State Showmen's Association and the Pennsylvania Amusement Park & Attractions association. That seminar, presented by the National Association of Amusement Ride Safety Officials (NAARSO), is scheduled for October 28-31, 2025, with Sesame Place being the location for the "hands-on" training day. PACE offers inspector training for Pennsylvania-certified inspectors and/or NAARSO levels.



Fred Strathmeyer, deputy secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, with the newly named director of the Bureau of Ride & Measurement Standards, **Tammy Luckenbill**. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

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VLocker, P2:3 Consulting cooperate to enhance guest experiences

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

WILMINGTON, Del. — VLocker, a supplier of electronic smart locker storage, and P2:3 Consulting, a water park consulting firm, have joined forces to bring state-of-the-art guest storage solutions to parks across the country.

This partnership aims to enhance the guest experience by providing secure, reliable and technologically advanced locker systems, ensuring that visitors can enjoy their time at the parks

without worrying about the safety of their belongings.

“The partnership between P2:3 and VLocker has united like-minded organizations dedicated to delivering exceptional service and support to our clients,” said **Steven Wooley**, chief operating officer, VLocker. “Together, we are enhancing every aspect of the guest experience, from arrival to departure, with a focus on optimizing in-park spending and ensuring a five-star experience for all visitors.”

Jessica Kusak, director

of client success, Philippians 2:3 Consulting, said the partnership has enhanced the company's ability to gather data on guest flow with a park.

“Additionally, it has streamlined the process for guests purchasing secure locker storage, thanks to VLocker's seamless integrations with multiple partners supported by P2:3's extensive network,” Kusak said.

Officials at both companies feel the partnership will help to revolutionize guest storage, more like setting game-changers and new standards.

With successful projects already underway and more on the horizon, VLocker and P2:3 Consulting are poised to make a lasting impact on parks across the country.

So far, one of the notable successes of this partnership is the installation and improvement of secure locker storage solutions at **Olympia Water Park** in Puerto Rico.

Olympia Water Park offers attractions like Ola Marina, Villa Enchumbá, the Olimpia Sky Trail, Campo Chico mini-golf park and the Olympic Museum. Guests already are experiencing a secure place to store belongings.

The partnership also is making waves with new construction projects like **Pecan Valley Resort** in Hurricane, Utah. Pecan Valley Resort offers amenities like golf courses, pickleball courts, pools and surfing sessions. Wooley said VLocker's



One of the notable successes of the partnership between VLocker and P2:3 Consultants is the installation and improvement of secure locker storage solutions at Olympia Water Park in Puerto Rico. Pictured in front of a VLocker installation at the facility (l to r) Rene Stansbury of VLocker, Yaritza Díaz Figueroa and Juan C. Santiago Navarro of Olympia Water Park and VLocker Installer Aaron Stansbury. COURTESY VLOCKER

secure storage solutions play a crucial role in this transformation, ensuring guests can enjoy the resort's offerings without worrying about their belongings.

Additionally, VLocker and P2:3 Consulting are installing guest storage solutions at **Zion Utah Jellystone Park**, the newest RV park in Southern Utah. Located near **Zion National Park** and St. George, Zion Utah Jellystone Park offers a unique blend of outdoor activities, water attractions and relaxing accommodations.

VLocker's advanced locker systems here along with the consulting by P2:3 provide guests with a secure place to store their belongings, allowing them to fully enjoy their vacation.

VLocker was founded in 1991. Since its inception, it has been known for creating custom lockers tailored to meet specific needs. The company works with its clients to manufacture, install and manage locker systems.

Wooley said the company prides itself on using premium materials to build tough and reliable lockers suitable for high-traffic areas.

“Whether it's a durable outdoor storage solution or a secure locker for a particular purpose, VLocker delivers high-quality products designed to last,” he said.

In addition, VLocker's lockers are engineered to

be smash- and vandalism-proof, ensuring the safety of valuables. Their Vrent terminals, designed for locker rentals in public spaces, feature advanced technology for easy, secure, and efficient operation.

Wooley also said they have remote access options for locker management from anywhere, eliminating the need for on-site staff.

“VLocker continually updates its technology to meet the highest performance and safety standards, making it the best choice for robust, intuitive locker rental solutions available 24/7,” he said.

P2:3 Consulting, named after Philippians 2:3, has a rich history in the amusement park industry. Founded by the visionary behind **Splash Kingdom Family Waterpark**, P2:3 Consulting has been instrumental in designing and developing new parks and increasing their revenue potential.

With successful projects like **Typhoon Texas** and collaborations with the City of El Paso to open new water parks, P2:3 Consulting has proven its expertise in the field.

The team at P2:3 Consulting works diligently to understand their client's needs and provide solutions based on experience and financial responsibility, all while maintaining a partnership mentality.

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Rob Gavel joins AIMS International's board of directors

AIMS International announced the election of **Rob Gavel** to its board of directors, effective April 1, 2025. Gavel, president of **LJM & Associates** and owner of **GCS Safety**, brings 17 years of industry experience to the board. He succeeds departing member **Dr. Kathryn Woodcock** of **Toronto Metropolitan University**, who served on the board since April 2019. AIMS and the board thank Dr. Woodcock for her years of dedication and service.

"On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to take this opportunity to welcome Rob Gavel to the AIMS Board," said Board President **Pat Hoffman**. "Rob has devoted countless hours teaching at AIMS seminars and representing us at AIMS-On-The-Road events. His background as a Maryland state ride inspector and current role as owner of LJM ride inspection services position him to share knowledge and talent that will certainly benefit the board and the amusement industry."

"I'm thrilled to join the AIMS Board of Directors," said Gavel. "Sharing best practices, industry collaboration, and ongoing education are pillars of amusement safety education, and I am



AIMS Board President Pat Hoffman (right) welcomes Rob Gavel (left) to the organizations board of directors. COURTESY AIMS INTERNATIONAL

proud to support the industry in this new role."

Gavel began his career as a ride inspector with the state of Maryland, eventually becoming the supervisor of its Amusement Ride Safety Unit. He later served as program manager for the Maryland State Safety Unit, overseeing inspections not only of amusement attractions but also elevators, boilers, pressure vessels and railroads.

In 2018, Gavel transitioned from state service to work full-time as the principal of GCS Safety, a

third-party consulting firm. He also worked with LJM & Associates, Inc. as a contract consultant, conducting inspections and facility audits. In January 2023, he purchased LJM & Associates, Inc. and assumed the role of president.

"Rob's commitment to advancing safety practices in the industry makes him a great addition as we strive to enhance our safety education offering worldwide," said **Amy Lowenstein**, executive director of AIMS International.

In addition to his professional work, Gavel volunteers as an instructor for both AIMS and the **National Association of Amusement Ride Safety Officials**. He holds AIMS Level II Ride Inspector certification, as well as NAARSO Level III Inspections and Level II Operations certifications.

Remaining actively involved in the industry, Gavel plays a key role in professional development, both as a leader and educator in the fields of ride inspection and maintenance. He is also a voting member of several **ASTM F-24** Committee on Amusement Rides and Devices.

Gavel was elected to the board by AIMS membership during the annual meeting in January.

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Walt Disney World enters a grand new chapter in manatee care

AT: Susan Storey
Special to Amusement Today

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — The manatee is a beloved mammal primarily found in the coastal waters around the state of Florida. The manatee does not have any natural predators, yet the survival of the species is precarious as they are always at risk of injury and death from poor fishing practices, boat strikes and the critical decrease of their primary source of food, natural seagrass, due to habitat loss and pollution. Manatees were listed as an endangered species in 1973 and later downlisted to threatened in 2017. Today only 13,000 manatees are estimated left in the wild,

and in 2021, Florida set a record for manatee deaths in the wild, totaling 1,100.

In February, **Walt Disney World** announced an important shift in its focus and care to help protect manatees. Through its ongoing collaboration with the **Manatee Rescue & Rehabilitation Partnership** and the **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**, the ocean-themed pavilion at EPCOT, The Seas with Nemo & Friends, has transitioned to become one of several facilities participating in a cooperative initiative that is focused on rescuing, rehabilitating and releasing manatees back into the wild.

Disney helps to address the critical needs of Florida's



Mermaid, a rescued manatee, was brought to EPCOT in mid-March as part of Disney's collaboration with the Manatee Rescue and Rehabilitation Partnership.

COURTESY LONDON MCREYNOLDS/ WALT DISNEY WORLD RESORT

manatee population while also responding to the increase and need of additional support due to strandings by manatees and rehabilitation centers

overwhelmed by increasing numbers of animals requiring veterinary care. Disney began its transformation from providing long-term permanent manatee care to

one that provides short-term, critical care several months ago. For decades, Disney has provided extraordinary care for thousands of fish and marine mammals that have served as ambassadors for their species, while aiding global conservation and research efforts. This strategic and important shift in focus — to rescuing, rehabilitating and releasing manatees back into the wild — is the next step in furthering this work.

Coupled with the announcement of the new focus and cooperative initiative, Disney also introduced the arrival of two new manatees named Cider and Mino. The manatees arrived at The

▶ See MANATEE, page 53

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►MANATEE

Continued from page 52

Seas in need of immediate veterinary care: Cider had an infection, and Mino was severely underweight. Disney announced the pair would be cared for, and shall remain, at The Seas until they are deemed healthy enough to be released. A month later, Disney announced the arrival of a third new manatee in need. Also severely underweight, the female manatee, nicknamed Mermaid, required focused care and support to help rebuild her strength.

"We are really excited to be shifting from more long-term manatee care to short-term rescue and rehab care," shared Dr. **Jen Flower**, clinical veterinarian, Disney. "These animals are in trouble in the wild and the more animals that we can get in here to Disney and rehabilitate and release, the more we are contributing to the manatee population in the wild."

"Our role begins once critical and acute care has been completed. At that point, we may receive a stable manatee that simply needs some time to grow or gain weight before being released. In other cases, we provide specialized care and expertise to help the manatee recover," shared Dr. **Geoff Pye**, animal health director, Disney. "Our goal is to ensure they are healthy and strong enough for a successful release back into the wild. We expect most will remain with us for approximately six to nine months at a time."

The Seas provides Disney with an optimal environment for manatee rehabilitation. The facility features a medical lift floor that allows the animal health team to perform needed blood draws and radiographs. In addition, the on-site veterinary hospital at **Disney's Animal Kingdom** has a CT machine large enough for manatees. While manatees typically weigh an average of 1,000 pounds, they can grow to weigh over 3,000 pounds.

During their rehabilitation, the manatees in Disney's focused and expert veterinary care will also serve as ambassadors for their species. Their stories will help educate guests about the

urgent conservation needs of manatees, and the steps they can take to help manatees and other animals in the ocean. Guests can see manatees like Cider, Mino and Mermaid, along with future animals, during their visit to EPCOT and learn.

To successfully transition its facilities so that it could be ready to serve manatees in need of short-term care in the best way possible, Disney also had to develop a plan for its resident manatees, Lil

Joe and Inigo. As part of the process, Disney partnered with the **Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park** in Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida, and relocated the beloved pair in January. Designated unable to be released to the wild, Lil Joe and Inigo now have a forever home in a newly renovated manatee habitat at the Gulfarium. Their move was a result of a three-year vision that began in 2022 when **Patrick Berry**, CEO of the Gulfarium, approached the

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. He shared that the Gulfarium wanted to create a manatee haven dedicated to supporting manatees in need of long-term care. Disney and the Gulfarium worked together to transport Lil Joe and Inigo, ensuring they would be well taken care of for the rest of their lives. The Gulfarium's renovated manatee habitat features more than 300,000 gallons of water, a medical area and specialized resting ledges for the manatees.

"The Gulfarium is honored to welcome Lil Joe and Inigo," said Berry of the pair's arrival in January. "Our vision has always been to create a caring environment where manatees can continue their healing journeys while inspiring our guests to connect more deeply with marine life. By taking on the long-term care of these animals, we enable facilities in central Florida and elsewhere to devote critical resources to those manatees in acute need."

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Advertiser Index

ADVERTISER	PAGE #
Aeria Insurance	38
Altitude Attractions.	33
AIMS International	51
ARM Rides.	33
ASTM	53
Audio Innovators.	33
Baynum Solutions	53
Chance Rides.	3
CPI.	54
Eli Bridge Co.	50
Embed.	25
ETF	18
Fabbri	30
Gallagher Insurance	43
Gateway Ticketing.	15
Gerstlauer	19
Get It Done Marketing	18
Great Coasters Intl.	2
Golden Ticket Awards.	9
Haas & Wilkerson	41
Hodgdon Consulting.	53
Hoffman Consulting	53
Intermark Ride Group	12
International Ride Management.	21
International Ride Management.	34
Irvine Ondrey Engineers.. . . .	53
Kumbak Engineers	49
Lagotronics	21
LJM & Associates	53
Kay Park Recreation	5
Maclan.	48
Montgomery Inn	17
Naughton Insurance	18
Northwest Coasters	49
Norton Auctioneers.	22
Norton Auctioneers.	55
Parks Plus Insurance	8
Premier Rides	46
Rides 4 U	27
Ride Entertainment Group	7
Ralph S. Alberts Co, Inc.	52
Roller	24
Sartori	33
S&S Worldwide	50
Severn Lamb	14
Sippers By Design.	28
Skyline Attractions.	13
Sunkid	49
The Gravity Group.	47
V Locker.	35
Wiegand Sports.	18
Whitewater West	37
William H. Robinson, Inc.	29
Wildlife World.. . . .	55
World's Largest Swim Lesson	40
World Waterpark Association	11
Worldwide Safety Consultants	49
Zamperla	56
Zebec Inc.	39

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