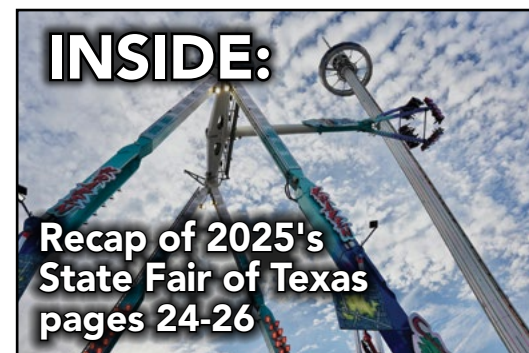


► First-ever end of the year Midway Roundup featuring 12 fairs, carnivals — pages 32-42

Amusement TODAY

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Issue 9

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Get the most up-to-date industry news from AmusementToday.com!



Big plans are in store for attendees to the 2025 International Association of Fairs and Expositions Convention set for Nov. 30-Dec. 4, at the Colorado Convention Center, Denver, Colorado. The convention pulls industry professionals together for furthering education, networking and entertainment. COURTESY IAFE

Planners expecting strong turnout IAFE Convention

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

DENVER, Colo. — There are big plans for the 2025 International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE) as members, exhibitors and other industry attendees descend upon Denver, Colorado, for the IAFE Convention and Trade Show, set for Nov. 30 to Dec. 4, at the Colorado Convention Center.

Attendance and exhibitor participation at the 2025 IAFE were looking strong and on pace with last year, reported Andrea Simeone, IAFE marketing manager, in mid-November.

Last year, the convention, held in Phoenix, Arizona, was a success. The convention welcomed more than 2,500 guests, while the trade show sold out with 324

exhibit spaces taken. There were 20 showcasing acts.

"We won't be duplicating last year's outdoor street party," said Simeone. "December in Denver isn't exactly ideal for that, but we've added several exciting new elements that truly reflect our industry. This year, we will be celebrating our agricultural foundation with a Celebration of Agriculture on Monday afternoon, December 1, which is perfectly aligned with our theme, 'Journey to the Top.'"

She expects this Celebration of Agriculture to be one of the IAFE convention highlights. It will include IAFE's agricultural awards and a special interview with the documentary filmmakers

► See IAFE, page 6

Zootopia: Better Zoogether! opens at Disney's Animal Kingdom

Family show delivers heart, humor and message of unity

AT: David Fake
dfake@amusementtoday.com

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — The citizens of Zootopia have come to life in a dazzling new way at Disney's Animal Kingdom within Walt Disney World, where the highly anticipated "Zootopia: Better Zoogether!" 4D show officially opened this month inside the park's iconic Tree of Life Theater, the former home of the opening day attraction "It's Tough to be a Bug" 4D show.

Now, when guests step beneath the sprawling roots of the Tree of Life, the celebration of "Zoogether Day" feels as though the animated metropolis has burst into the real world, filled with humor, music and a timely (and deeply Disney) reminder that everything in life and nature is connected.

Watching "Zootopia: Better Zoogether!" and its opening-day festivities unfold was a reminder of what Disney does best — weaving story and spectacle into something that feels both timeless and new. This is not

just a show, it's a love letter to connection, between species, between people and between art forms. The attraction invites audiences to laugh, sing and think, all while celebrating the bonds that unite them across every biome, real or imagined.

The experience begins as guests put on their "Carrot Vision" 3D glasses and take their seats for a lively watch party honoring Zoogether Day, a holiday from the Zootopia films that celebrates harmony among the city's diverse biomes. On the massive screen, guests are whisked through the city's vibrant districts for a flurry of performances, including ice-skating in Tundratown, synchronized swimming in the new Marsh Market, a dazzling mouse-scale drone show over Little Rodentia and a musical finale from pop icon Gazelle.

In the theater, fans are greeted by the show's effervescent host, Benjamin Clawhauser, the doughnut-loving cheetah from the films, brought to life as an audio-animatronics marvel. Wearing glow necklaces, bracelets and his glittery Gazelle tee, Clawhauser leads the festivities with

► See DISNEY, page 8



Clawhauser takes center stage as the host of the new 4D experience inside Animal Kingdom's Tree of Life Theater. COURTESY DISNEY



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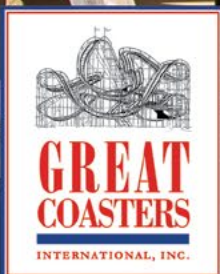
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AT NOTEBOOK: John W.C. Robinson, jrobinson@amusementtoday.com

FLINT'S VIEW: Bubba Flint

Pausing for the holidays



Robinson

Back when I first started reading *Amusement Today*, the cover of the December issue was always rather unique. It was not headlines, photos and copy. It was just art. Just a fun, full page cartoon by the amazing Bubba Flint with a holidays-meets-amusement park theme. And, if I'm being honest, those were always my favorite covers each year.

What was special about them was, that coming fresh on the heels of each year's IAAPA Expo, those *Amusement Today* covers reminded us that the month ahead was not like the other 11 we had just been through. Yes, the news was inside the pages of *AT*. Yes, work still needed to happen and life was anything but docile. However, in the time leading up to Thanksgiving and through December — aka, right now — it's also the time to shift priorities a little and embrace the holidays the opportunities they present us with friends and family.

During the 2025 Golden Ticket Awards, the *AT* staff compiled our annual "In Memorium" for the show, remembering those we'd lost in the past year. It was then that many of us remarked that it was our smallest memorium ever, that we'd had to publish precious few obituaries in our pages since the 2024 event. Then, sadly, the weeks that followed brought the passing of so many more, with nearly 10 industry friends and associates bidding their final farewell. It's been heartbreaking, to say the least.

So, I ask all of you to pause for the holidays. Yes, work is important. Yes, things need to get done and deals need to be closed. But we're about to enjoy days surrounded by loved ones, by dear friends, by family scooting themselves up to the dinner table. Embrace those moments, take in the memories those instances of togetherness can bring each and every one of us.

What lies within the holiday season is a chance to take a deep breath and remember what is truly important in this sometimes crazy world. Behind the cartoon cover of decor and greeting cards lie the chance to make new memories, to treasure new moments with those who've warmed our hearts over a lifetime.



INDUSTRY VOICE: David Grindle, IAFE

Rising together: the fair industry's journey to the top

The word "journey" means something different to each of us. The 2025 IAFE Convention theme, "Journey to the Top," has become something the fair industry exemplifies throughout the year.

"Journey" conjures images of adventure and venturing into the unknown. As an industry that is completely at the mercy of weather, 2025 has been a journey some in our industry would like to redo. Rained-out concerts, as well as flooded parking lots and fairgrounds, are among the realities faced. But so much more happened on our journey.

Fairs celebrated 175 and 260 years of existence. People stepped into new roles within fairs and businesses and achieved great success. This year's journey offers as many moments to smile about as it does to shake our heads over. We have watched people in our industry support each other through both good and bad times, just as we have always done. That support is part of the journey.



Grindle

Support and community are what we strive for at IAFE. In 2024, we recognized 39 Institute of Fair Management graduates and six Grad Track graduates. This year, eight Certified Fair Executives were honored, with additional graduates to be celebrated at the 2025 IAFE Convention.

These courses come with knowledge sharing and community building. IAFE committees offer another opportunity for building that network, especially as I have seen committee members reach out for advice and guidance.

There is often a desire to journey alone, but we always need to return to that group that understands the journey. The people who share our passion. We are all here to support one another, wherever we are on our journey to our chosen destination.

IAFE continues to seek ways to support people from all aspects of the fair industry. Together, we make an incredible industry that impacts people across our communities. The "Journey to the Top" is worth celebrating.

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



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2 MINUTE DRILL



AT: Tim Baldwin

Lorelei Schoendienst, Luehrs' Ideal Rides

Lorelei Schoendienst has been a vital part of the operations of **Luehrs' Ideal Rides** for years. Today, she serves as treasurer and is also a director for the **Outdoor Amusement Business Association**, an organization of which Luehr's has earned the Circle of Excellence. She was also the first woman president of the **Showmen's League of America**. On her calendar is a first visit to Italy.

Title: CFO

Number of years in the industry:
All my life. 71 years.

Best thing about the industry:
Show people! Forever optimistic.

Favorite amusement ride:
Gondola wheels. NO SPINNING!

If I weren't working in the amusement industry, I would be ... Broke. College diploma is in a lovely frame and while it is valuable, I'm not sure it ever made a payment.

Biggest challenge facing our industry:
The labor dilemma is a constant worry.

The thing I like most about amusement season is ... Opening day – exciting. Last day – gratitude.

The best soup I make at home is ... Chili!

The last time I went ice skating was ... 1962.

In a single word, wrapping gifts is ... thoughtful.

The thing I am looking forward to most about my upcoming trip to Italy is ... Spending time with Andy, my husband of 40 years.

In my opinion, the decade I thought was the "kindest" was ... the '70s

Favorite Christmas movie: *Christmas Vacation* of course. We all have a Cousin Eddy!

The probability of someone mispronouncing my last name is ... 99.9%.

When I look out the kitchen window, I see ... today, Paradise.



Lorelei Schoendienst has dedicated 71 years of her life and career to the mobile amusement industry.
COURTESY LORELEI SCHOENDIENST

Which would be easiest to give up: TV or fast food? Fast food.

Holiday shopping — start before Thanksgiving or wait until the final days? Definitely final days.

Pick one: a quiet evening in front of the fireplace or a snowball fight with grandkids? Quiet – always choose quiet. I own a carnival.

When it comes to potato chips, my favorite flavor is ... salt and vinegar.

The most I would spend on a new outfit would be ... I'm all over the spectrum. From Target to Saks...If I like it, I buy it!

I typically celebrate my birthday by ... Cake with the employees. We're always open on my birthday.

The celebrity I am tired of hearing about is ... P. Diddy. I mean...who cares?

The nicest hotel I've ever stayed in was ... We are always trying new and beautiful places. It just may be coming up!

If asked to list the 12 Days of Christmas off the top of my head, I could probably rattle off ... All of them. I am old and into Christmas!

THE INDUSTRY SEEN

Hungry for IAAPA Expo



ORLANDO — Setting up for the annual IAAPA Expo in Orlando can work up quite the appetite. Steven Wooley of VLocker was ready to satisfy his hunger at Beth's Burgers near the Orange County Convention Center. However, once he was served his loaded cheeseburger, he discovered his eyes — and appetite — appeared to be bigger than his mouth, as he struggled to decide how he could take a bite out of his towering feast.

AT/TIM BALDWIN

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► IAFE

Continued from page 1

behind “World Without Cows,” Michelle Michael and Brandon Whitworth. The celebration will close with a Journey tribute band, keeping the energy high and the theme front and center.

Another anticipated highlight will take place on the morning of Tuesday, December 3, for the first time at an IAFE Convention. Simeone said, “We’ll host a private screening of the *World Without Cows* documentary.”

The excitement continues on Wednesday, December 4, as the IAFE honors several award recipients, recognizes the 2025 Institute of Fair Management graduates, and announces the 2026 IAFE Board of Directors.

“Then we’ll move the celebration to the **National Western Stock Show’s** brand-new Legacy Building, where we’ll be the very first group to experience this beautiful new venue,” she said.

Simeone said that the IAFE membership requested more speakers from outside the industry. So they are giving them to attendees.

“In response, we have invited professionals from various fields, including the theme park industry, event law and small-town revitalization to present to our group,” she said. “Additionally, we are not only focusing on the findings of the IAFE Economic Study, but also on how to effectively use those numbers to advocate for fairs. And of course, we are excited to introduce the first-ever IAFE Film Screening.”

Registration for the convention begins Saturday, November 29.

On Sunday morning, November 30, there is a number of Coffee and Connections where attendees may attend a topic for networking. Those



Expect to see industry experts of all kinds exhibiting their items at the IAFE Convention and Trade Show (above left). There is also ample time for those in the fair and expositions industry to network during the event. COURTESY IAFE



topics include an array of industry areas such as ticketing, county fairs, state and provincial associations, human resources, marketing, strategic air for fair operators, agriculture, and commercial exhibit and concessions.

Sunday’s schedule is full of educational sessions as well.

Some of the topics that day include Art of Selling Sponsorships; Events Within Your Fair Bringing New Visitors; America 250 Celebrations at Your Fair; Marching for Success/Parade Planning for Fairs of All Sizes; We Drug Tested... Now What?; Wearing Two Hats/ Where the Board is the Staff; and Beyond the Gate/Innovation in Fair Access and Engagement.

Others are Creating Meaningful Connections/How Calgary Stampede Engages the Community and Creates Effective Partnerships; Fair Weather? Planning for Weather Safety; Principles of Food and Beverage; You Collected Data ... Now What?; Coordinating for Success/ Navigating Animal Activism at Your Fair; IAFE Impact Study/ Attracting Events to Your Fairgrounds; Successfully Managing by Walking Around With Your Eyes that See; Emergency Planning for Fairs and Fairgrounds and Save 30 Minutes or More in Your Work Day/ AI Tools and How We Use

Them and A Closer Look at Ticketing Trends.

The Wagons and Whiskey Fundraiser will be held that evening.

Monday morning will see more Coffee and Connections with non-fair facility usage, entertainment, safety and security, sponsorship, ticketing and technology, and board members and assistant managers. Zone meetings will also take place this morning.

A Main Stage event will be held that morning, with Colorado’s Commissioner of Agriculture **Kate Greenburg** welcoming attendees. This event will include the introduction of the IAFE Board of Directors and a celebration of some of the industry’s leaders, such as the 2025 IAFE Rising Star, **Kelly Collins**, IFMG, CFE, from the **State Fair of West Virginia**, and the 2025 Hall of Fame inductees.

The Grand Opening Ceremony of the trade show is on Monday at 11:15 a.m., followed by the opening of the trade show. Trade show hours that day are 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Committee meetings will be held throughout the afternoon.

That evening is the Celebrate event.

Tuesday, December 2, will begin with a review of the IAFE Institute of Fair Managers (IFM) program. During the convention, there are topic sessions specifically designed for those in that program.

That morning will

also offer the Coffee and Connections and some committee meetings.

There is an array of educational sessions that morning as well. Some of those topics include Building the Future/The Transformation of the National Western Center Parts I and II; Growth Strategies for Fairs Backed by Ticket and Marketing Analytics; How Partners Can Drive New Exhibitions in Competitive Exhibits; Ticketing Fees; Dollars and Sense; Latest Marketing Trends and How to Apply Them to Your Fair; How to Engage Community Organizations at your Fair and Fairgrounds; the Challenge of Free Speech; Leading Diverse Teams and more.

The trade show runs from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 3 to 5 p.m. on Tuesday.

In the afternoon, the Young Professionals Reception and the CFE and CVFE Reception are scheduled.

That evening is Denver after Dark, an event hosted by the Young Professionals Steering Committee. Attendees are invited to join them for a social outing at **Rock Bottom Restaurant and Brewery**.

The next morning, Wednesday, Dec. 5, will again see the Coffees and Connections along with more educational sessions.

Some of the educational topics for this day include: Fair Under Fire/ Crisis Communications and Decision Making

Workshops; Downtown Digital Dollars Bridging Local Businesses and Digital Innovations; the Idea Friendly Method: Open Up to New Ideas; Artisan Collection: A Curated Marketplace for Fairs of Any Size; A Look Behind the Carnival Curtain/ Operational, Logistical, Political and Educational and Safety Practices of the Carnival; Award Winning Agriculture Educational Programs; From Midway to Memory/The Art of Digital Storytelling and more.

The final Main Stage Event of the convention will be held on this day. It will include the prestigious IFM graduation ceremony, which celebrates the achievements of the 2024 IFM Management Grad Track recipients. IAFE will also recognize the top winners of the 2025 Communications contest. IAFE CEO **David Grindle** will deliver a state-of-the-industry address, and the new IAFE volunteer leadership will be welcomed.

Just for something extra, the IAFE is offering several opportunities for continued learning and experiences on the morning of Thursday, December 5. Those include an in-depth session on Sponsorship Reimagined and off-site educational experiences at the **Denver Zoo**, the **Clyfford Still Museum** and a **Footing School** introduction at the National Western Stock Show facility

International Association of Fairs and Expositions 2025 convention

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►DISNEY

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energy, humor and his trademark optimism.

The production is the result of an unusually deep collaboration between **Walt Disney Animation Studios** and **Walt Disney Imagineering**. Panelists at the attraction's debut called it "a dream you never even thought you could dream." **Jared Bush**, the chief creative officer at Walt Disney Animation Studios and writer-director of both *Zootopia* films, said the creative partnership elevated the storytelling. "To continue the story of these characters here in this park is enormous," Bush said. "It's like a dream you didn't know you could dream."

That dream was inspired by the belief that Animal Kingdom's message of conservation and coexistence could merge with *Zootopia*'s message of inclusion and empathy. Discussion Moderator **Shannon Smith-Conrad**, a 2024–2025 Walt Disney World ambassador, opened the panel by calling the new show "a perfect example of what happens when storytelling, animation and engineering come together."

For Creative Producer for Walt Disney Imagineering, **Priya Sampath**, aligning the attraction with the park's ethos was essential. "The Tree of Life is the heart of Animal Kingdom," she said. "Our story needed to belong here, to show how all living things are interconnected. 'Zoogether Day' became our bridge between Zootopia and the real world." Sampath described how the team designed every detail, from the movement



of Clawhauser's whiskers to the splash of water in Marsh Market, to reinforce the idea that joy and harmony can thrive in diversity.

That connection extends beyond the park. Bush revealed that the attraction includes new locations and characters from *Zootopia 2*, which debuted on November 26, marking a first for Disney. A park attraction and a feature film now share original content before the movie's release.

"Guests will see things here that aren't yet in the film," she said. "And when they watch *Zootopia 2*, they'll notice moments inspired by the show. It's an incredible creative loop."

Voice actor **Nate Torrence**, who returns as the exuberant Clawhauser, described the difference between recording for film and performing for an attraction as both challenging and rewarding. "In animation, you can be subtle," he said. "But for a



Nestled in the roots of the Tree of Life, *Zootopia: Better Zoogether!* feels perfectly at home among the park's living storytelling traditions. It is a vibrant fusion of film, technology and theme park magic. COURTESY DISNEY; AT/DAVID FAKE

live audience, you've got to project like you're on stage."

Torrence explained that animators filmed the voice actors' physical performances to inform every movement of the Audio-Animatronics. "They caught everything, even my hand gestures. It's surreal watching your quirks come to life in a robot that looks nothing like you but somehow feels like you."

Ginnifer Goodwin, who reprises her role as Judy Hopps, said returning to the character after nearly a decade was "like revisiting an old friend who had grown up too." She said the success of the first film gave her freedom to explore Judy's confidence and compassion from a new perspective. "I felt more empowered and more playful this time," she

said. "Disney gives you the space to experiment, to bring a little more of yourself into the character."

Chris Beatty, creative portfolio executive at Walt Disney Imagineering, called the show "the heart of Animal Kingdom." "When we began development, we knew it had to embody one of the park's central tenets, the interconnectedness of all living things," he said. "That's what 'Zoogether Day' is about. It's the harmony of nature, of biomes, of community. Together, we're stronger."

The panelists shared laughter and lighthearted moments too, including Torrence joking about his "sweaty" recording sessions and Bush teasing that Clawhauser's neon glow accessories were so iconic

they ended up in the movie's credits. Beatty revealed that Marsh Market, the bustling new marketplace featured in the attraction, was originally created by Imagineers before being added to *Zootopia 2*. "It's rare for a theme park idea to inspire part of a film," he said. "That's how closely we were working together."

The show ends with a musical finale that leaves audiences clapping and humming as they exit. "We love songs that stick with you," Beatty said. "It's pure Disney, the kind of melody that reminds you that the world is good."

Beyond the theater, the celebration continues at the new Zoogether Day Gathering Spot on Discovery Island, where guests can meet Judy Hopps and Nick Wilde in person, both sporting their updated outfits from *Zootopia 2*.

Nestled in the roots of the Tree of Life, "*Zootopia: Better Zoogether!*" feels perfectly at home among the park's living storytelling traditions. It is a vibrant fusion of film, technology and theme park magic, celebrating not only the world of *Zootopia* but the world we share. As the curtain falls and the lights rise, the show leaves guests with the same feeling voiced by Clawhauser himself: joy, gratitude and the unshakable truth that we are all, in every way, better Zoogether.



Guests can meet Judy Hopps and Nick Wilde at the new Zoogether Day Gathering Spot on Discovery Island dressed in their updated looks from *Zootopia 2* (above left). Merchandise for "*Zootopia: Better Zoogether!*" showcases the show's bright palette and message of unity (above right). COURTESY DISNEY; AT/DAVID FAKE

Amusement TODAY

ANNUAL HOLIDAY COOKING GUIDE

Tony Claassen

Herschend Family Entertainment

This is a large recipe and will fill a 9"x3" springform pan or about 18 cupcake-size individual cheesecakes.



Buttery Sugar Cookie Cheesecake

Ingredients (filling):

- 3 pounds very soft cream cheese
- 12 ounces sour cream
- 1½ cup softened butter
- 1½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1½ cup white sugar
- 6 extra-large eggs

Ingredients (crust):

- ¾ cup graham cracker crumbs (may need a little more if using cupcake forms)
- ¾ cup shortbread cookie crumbs (may need a little more if using cupcake forms)
- 4 tablespoon melted butter

Ingredients (topping):

- Course, raw sugar

Instructions:

- Preheat oven to 350°F.
- **To make crust:** Combine the cracker and cookie crumbs together. Mix in the melted butter thoroughly. Press the mixture into the bottom of the springform pan or cupcake forms. Bake for 5 minutes at 350°F. Set aside to cool to room temperature.
- **To make filling:** Gently blend together cream cheese, sour cream, vanilla, and butter. Add sugar until well combined. Add eggs, one at a time, until smooth.
- Pour filling into cooled springform pan or cupcake forms.
- Bake in a water bath at 350°F until center of cake is almost set. Cupcakes will take about 30 to 45 minutes while the springform pan will take over an hour. Remove from water bath and cool. (If using a springform pan, run a knife around the rim of the pan to loosen the cake, but allow to cool before removing the rim. See notes below regarding cupcake forms.)
- Top with course, raw sugar for a beautiful sugar cookie finish.

NOTES:

Use the full fat variety of cream cheese for best consistency; it must be very soft for best results. Use real butter and real vanilla for the best flavor.

I use silicon cupcake forms to make individual cheesecakes. They are much easier to handle and serve than one made in a springform pan. Once out of the oven and cooled, I place them in the freezer until frozen through. They will pop right out of the silicon form. I wait until each cupcake is removed from the form and then roll it in the sugar topping.

Cheesecake can be made ahead and frozen for up to a month if stored in an airtight freeze bag.

Jessica Gray

StarGuard Elite

Grandma's Apple Crisp

Ingredients (filling):

- 5 to 6 Apples (Granny Smith, Honeycrisp, Jazz, Fuji all work well)
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- 1 tbsp cinnamon
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 2 tbsp cornstarch
- 1 stick salted butter cold and sliced

Instructions:

Filling: Pre-heat oven to 375°F. Butter a medium sized casserole dish (8x8 works well). Peel and slice apples into approximately 1/4 to 1/2 inch slices. In a large mixing bowl or the baking dish you will be using, add the lemon juice to the apples and gently toss to coat the apples. Add the cinnamon, sugar, and cornstarch and gently mix until distributed throughout the apples.

Topping: In a separate medium mixing bowl, combine the flour, brown sugar, cinnamon and butter slices with a pastry cutter or two forks, until well combined and small crumbles form. Sprinkle topping over the apples. Bake the apple crisp for 45-50 minutes, until bubbling and the topping is golden brown. Let sit for 15-20 minutes to cool slightly, then serve warm with vanilla ice cream as desired. Enjoy!



Ingredients (topping):

- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg (optional)
- 1 stick salted butter cold and sliced

Sharon Parker

Universal Kids Resort

Jalapeño Cornbread Casserole

Ingredients:

- 1 box Jiffy Corn Muffin Mix
- 1 can cream-style corn
- 1 can whole kernel corn, drained
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter, melted
- 1 to 2 jalapeños, finely diced (adjust for spice level)
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese (optional but yummy)
- Salt and pepper, to taste



Instructions: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x9-inch baking dish. In a large bowl, mix together all of the ingredients. Stir until everything is just combined. Don't overmix it. Pour into the baking dish and smooth the top. Bake for 45-50 minutes, or until the center is set and the top is golden brown.

TIPS: For extra kick: Add a small can of diced green chilies. To make it more cornbread-like (less creamy): reduce sour cream to ½ cup.

PARKS, FAIRS & ATTRACTIONS

► Parks celebrate the winter holidays — pages 16-19 / End-of-the-year Midway Roundup — pages 32-42

SeaWorld San Antonio to debut B&M's Barracuda Strike in 2026

AT: Tim Baldwin
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SAN ANTONIO — Following on the heels of a family coaster in 2025, SeaWorld San Antonio will offer yet another in 2026, albeit taller and faster than the recent addition.

Barracuda Strike will be a family coaster designed for a wide range of ages and thrill levels, and with a minimum height requirement of just 42 inches. The manufacturer of the project is **Bolliger & Mabillard** (B&M).

“Barracuda Strike is a game-changer for family thrill rides, and we are excited to bring another great roller coaster to our guests in the spring of 2026,” said Park President **Jeff Davis**. “It will be fast, fierce and fun — bringing guests closer to the ocean’s energy and mystery in a way only SeaWorld can.”

SeaWorld is among the properties operated by **United Parks Parks & Resorts, Inc.** In the last two years, the chain has turned to B&M for family inverted roller coasters. The first was **Phoenix Rising** at **Busch Gardens Tampa Bay** in 2024, and **Big Bad Wolf: The Wolf’s Revenge** at **Busch Gardens Williamsburg** opened this past spring.

Of the three, the Virginia installation is the longest, but the San Antonio version, similar in length to the Tampa attraction, is taller than its Florida cousin, with a height of 90 feet. But it is other attri-



Built by B&M, Barracuda Strike will be aimed for fun thrills for the entire family. Construction is well underway on the coaster with part of the park’s ski lake being held back in order to pour concrete footers for the over-the-water swoop turn (top right). COURTESY SEAWORLD, XANDER LEE

butes rather than just stats that will make it a custom experience. Always fun for spectators, the track will soar over a main walkway.

“For two decades, The Steel Eel, SeaWorld’s second major coaster, has roared past and over spectators as they walked the pathway at SeaWorld. Barracuda Strike will have a similar effect, with it even being intertwined with The Steel Eel, said **Chuck Cureau**, marketing leader, SeaWorld San Antonio. “Spectators on the ground will enjoy hearing the screams and laughter of those riding it, which will hopefully draw them to experience the ride themselves.”

Another “cool factor” to the ride is how it will dive

and soar over the waters of the park’s ski lake, with nothing below riders’ feet.

“Zooming over the water in a coaster is exhilarating, especially with Barracuda Strike being floorless,” Cureau told *Amusement Today*. “In order to create this effect, portions of the lake will be sectioned off and drained so that support structures can be installed in and around the lake.”

The top speed is 44 mph. Skimming above the water’s surface in tight turns is sure to be a signature moment.

Catering to families is a notable industry trend. At **SeaWorld Orlando**, B&M has supplied that park with a traditional sit-down family



coaster, **Penguin Trek** (2024).

“We’re excited that this will be the first inverted family coaster in the state,” Cureau said. “Being a family coaster, it may be less intimidating to younger riders or those who prefer coasters that, while still exciting,

provide less extreme twists, turns and speeds. It’s important that we provide a variety of intensity levels within our portfolio of rides so that those with differing tolerance levels for speed and adrenaline boosts can still enjoy a coaster and not feel left out.”

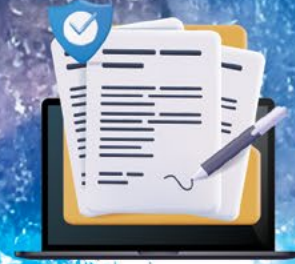


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Vekoma family coaster to debut at Kentucky Kingdom in 2026

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. – In 2025, **Kentucky Kingdom** opened the first phase of a \$25 million expansion with Discovery Meadow, a re-themed area of the park that included a handful of new rides. The remainder of that investment has since been made known. In 2026, the park will unveil Flying Fox, a custom **Vekoma** family coaster. It will be the park's first new coaster since 2019.

Recognizing the importance of family offerings, the height requirement will be only 38 inches to ride. Vekoma has found success in marketing its family suspended coaster to wide audiences.

"We are really intentional about creating experiences that every member of the family can enjoy together at Kentucky Kingdom," said General Manager **Sarah Worrell**. "Flying Fox adds a new dimension in that it's both thrilling enough for coaster lovers but approach-



The custom layout for Kentucky Kingdom will feature a sloop below ground. COURTESY KENTUCKY KINGDOM

able for younger riders, too. We want everyone, from first-time guests to lifelong thrill seekers, to find something that makes them smile."

With a queue and station themed to a barn, the story-driven design was inspired by Kentucky's agricultural heritage. The park was acquired by **Herschend Family Entertainment** in February 2021. Since then, the park has been guided into family-oriented attractions that take advantage of the stories the state of

Kentucky has to say. The attraction has been carefully designed by Herschend's in-house creative team, known for bringing stories to life in ways that feel both authentic and fanciful.

"The farm theme really grew from our love for Kentucky itself," Worrell told *Amusement Today*. "We wanted to celebrate the state's agricultural heritage in a fun, whimsical way that feels both familiar and unexpected. Our **Herschend Creative Studios** team developed the story of

Jeb Fox to bring that world to life with humor and heart. It's about adventure and fun with a Kentucky twist."

Flying Fox will be the sixth roller coaster at Kentucky Kingdom.

"The addition of Flying Fox is a significant milestone in our multi-year growth strategy," said Worrell. "We've worked closely with Vekoma to design a coaster that meets the highest standards for safety and fun while bringing an original story to life that resonates with our region."

"We've had a long-standing relationship with Herschend Family Entertainment and communicate regularly. Discussions specifically about Kentucky Kingdom began in 2023 and continued to evolve throughout 2024," said **Ricardo Tonding Eges**, vice president of sales – Americas, Vekoma. "The layout was fully customized to integrate seamlessly with the land, existing pathways, facilities and food-and-beverage areas. We also designed it to allow for future rides to be intertwined within the space. It was a fun challenge to work within the constraints while still delivering a unique and thrilling experience."

Flying Fox represents the latest step in a transformational, multi-year investment in Kentucky Kingdom, with more than \$33 million committed from 2024 through 2026. The park first elevated its seasonal offerings with the \$8 mil-

▶ See KENTUCKY, page 14

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Flying Fox will have a height requirement of only 38 inches. COURTESY KENTUCKY KINGDOM

► KENTUCKY Continued from page 12

lion debut of Christmas at Kentucky Kingdom in 2024, followed by the opening of Discovery Meadow in 2025, a new \$11 million family-themed land that redefined immersive play for guests. Now, the \$14 million investment in Flying Fox builds on that momentum.

The layout will also feature some engaging spectator appeal with a swooping dip below ground.

“The tunnel element is a signature feature of Dragonflyer at Dollywood, appearing right after the first drop,” noted Tonding Etges. “For Kentucky Kingdom, we wanted to include a tunnel as well — but with a twist. Instead of placing it at the beginning, we thought, Why not make it the grand finale?” So, we designed the tunnel to come at the end of the ride, followed by a dynamic overbanked turn just before the brake run. This sequence creates a powerful and memorable finish.”

Hand-painted murals will adorn the attraction, and playful audio features the character of Jeb.

“Our Suspended Family Coasters are a great example of ‘family-thrill’ rides — exciting enough for thrill-seekers, but accessible to younger riders,” said Tonding Etges. “With a minimum height requirement of just 38 inches, these rides offer a fast, fun and feet-dangling experience that the whole family can enjoy together. I am certain that Flying Fox is going to be a perfect fit for Kentucky Kingdom.”

The installation not only allows for thematic opportunities, but it also makes for efficient use of space.

“We carefully selected the location for Flying Fox to continue building on the momentum created by Discovery Meadow,” Worrell said. “The area previously housed Treetop Drop, along with Nature’s Bounty, Honeybee Buzzers and Seed Spinner, all of which were relocated last season to better complement the theming and family experience of Discovery Meadow. That transition created the perfect opportunity for us to reimagine this corner of the park with something fresh. While one ride was retired as part of that process, Flying Fox represents a major step forward in delivering a new, story-driven experience that fits seamlessly within our long-term vision for the park.”

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Six Flags parks shine with holiday sparkle, bright lights, cheer

AT: David Fake
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CHARLOTTE, N.C. — As the days grow shorter and the air turns crisp, **Six Flags Entertainment Corporation** has flipped the switch on some of the most dazzling spectacles of the season. In 2025, parks across North America will burst into color, light and sound for the return of some beloved holiday celebrations, as well as new festivities certain to become new favorites. The holiday magic stretches from Ontario to Vallejo to Mexico City across 14 parks and resorts, where over 25 million lights, more than 2,700 decorated trees and the unmistakable scent of cinnamon and cocoa will turn familiar thrill parks into winter wonderlands.

"This winter, we're turning thrills into timeless holiday traditions," said **Christian Dieckmann**, Six Flags' chief commercial officer. "Guests will be surrounded by millions of twinkling lights and joyful moments — from our iconic rides and slides to photos with Santa, live entertainment, festive shopping and a delicious lineup of seasonal treats."

At these events, families can glide across outdoor ice rinks, decorate cookies with Mrs. Claus and sip steaming mugs of hot chocolate while roller coasters rush overhead. Each park adds its own regional flavor to the festivities, ranging from



Across North America, Six Flags parks — including Canada's Wonderland (shown), Carowinds (below left) and Kings Island (below right) — celebrate the holidays with 25 million lights, festive food and family fun, making every visit feels like a gift waiting to be unwrapped. COURTESY SIX FLAGS



ginger horchata in Mexico to Snickerdoodle Sundaes in Texas and butternut squash soup bread bowls in California, proving that joy and holiday cheer, like good food, tastes better when shared.

The following are just a few of the 2025 holiday highlights that can be enjoyed across the park chain:

Six Flags Over Texas in

Arlington, Texas, celebrates a sparkling milestone: the 40th anniversary of Holiday in the Park. The event promises "more snow than ever" and 2.5 million lights illuminating Merry Main Street, where nightly snowfalls and Santa's new Christmastime Keepsakes Store await. Guests can warm up by fire pits for s'mores or watch "Tinker's Toy Factory," a cirque-

style spectacular inside the Southern Palace Theater.

"We're honoring four decades of holiday joy and tradition with something special for everyone," said Park Vice President **Mark Boyer**.

Further south in San Antonio, **Six Flags Fiesta Texas** is going even bigger. The park's 70-foot Christmas tree, the tallest in the city, anchors its

largest Holiday in the Park celebration ever. Guests can enjoy 14 live shows, including "The Majesty of Christmas" at Zaragoza Theater and "A Christmas Carol" at Rockville High School. Families can meet Santa, roast marshmallows by an open fire, and join nightly light shows synced to carols that spill across

► See **SIX FLAGS**, page 17



Show such as "Have Yourself a Looney Tunes Christmas" at Six Flags Fiesta Texas (above left) and "Tinker's Toy Factory" at Six Flags Over Texas (above right) augment traditional holiday interactions such as meet-and-greets with Santa Claus himself (above middle). COURTESY SIX FLAGS



Six Flags Fiesta Texas's "Majesty of Christmas" remains popular year-after-year (above left). At many of the winter events held at Six Flags parks, families can glide across outdoor ice rinks (above right). COURTESY SIX FLAGS

▶ **SIX FLAGS** Continued from page 16

Rockville Plaza.

"This season, we've gone bigger than ever," said Park Manager **Robert Bustle**. "It's the kind of holiday magic only Fiesta Texas can deliver."

On the West Coast, **Six Flags Discovery Kingdom in Vallejo** debuted WinterFest, its biggest holiday event ever. The wildlife and thrill ride park will feature five new themed areas, including Gingerbread Forest and Arctic Alley, alongside a towering 70-foot Christmas tree and a jazzy soundtrack from The Mistletones and Jingle Jazz. The park's new Reindeer Roundup brings animatronic performers to life in an irresistibly cheerful display of singing and hoof-tapping holiday charm. Discovery Kingdom's WinterFest also offers hands-on fun, from cookie decorating to letters to Santa, plus a sustainable twist,

solar carports, that offset 80 percent of the park's energy use during the season.

In the Midwest, at **Kings Island** near Cincinnati, Ohio, WinterFest returns through December 31, 2025, transforming the park into a glowing holiday spectacular filled with more than five million lights, a towering Christmas tree and a nightly ceremony that brings International Street to life in color and song. Guests can glide across the park's ice rink, sip hot chocolate beneath shimmering arches and enjoy an array of live shows, including Cool Yule Christmas and Four Drummers Drumming. Festive treats like the Turkey Dinner Ball and It's a Wonderful Chop add regional flavor to the celebration, while families delight in classic rides and the nostalgic charm that has made WinterFest one of the Midwest's favorite holiday traditions.

North of the border,



Millions of lights illuminate Merry Main Street at Six Flags Over Texas, where guests may also enjoy nightly snowfalls. COURTESY SIX FLAGS

Canada's Wonderland invites guests to step into its sixth season of WinterFest. The park shimmers with seven million lights and hosts nine live shows, including "Small Town Snowmance," "Cool Yule Christmas" and "It's Christmas, Charlie Brown!" featuring Snoopy and the Peanuts gang. Families

can skate on Snow Flake Lake beneath the shadow of Wonder Mountain or cozy up inside Jack Frost's Igloo Village.

"It's a magical experience to see the entire park lit up with lights and music and to enjoy a fun night out with family or friends," said Park Manager **Heather Hill**.

Six Flags' resort properties are also joining the festivities. From the **Great Escape Lodge** in New York's Adirondacks to **Castaway Bay** on Lake Erie and **Schlitterbahn Resort** in Texas Hill Country, guests can enjoy themed getaways complete with live entertainment, décor and indoor waterparks.

No matter the location, each Six Flags park celebration promises its own sensory symphony — flickering lights that dance to

the music, wafts of caramel corn and roasted nuts and the laughter of families bundled against the chill. Even thrill-seekers get a holiday remix at some parks where coasters race through tunnels glowing in red and green, while carolers serenade those waiting in line.

As snowflakes fall over coasters and carousels, Six Flags proves that the thrill of the season doesn't just come from speed and height — it's found in the glow of shared wonder, laughter echoing through the night and capped in the memories that sparkle long after the lights fade. This winter, Six Flags parks invite guests to trade the sleigh for a coaster car and discover the magic where "millions of lights make for the most wonderful ride of the year."

● sixflags.com



Even on-site accommodations are getting into the spirit of the season with holiday decor brightening Knott's Hotel (above left). Kids can also enjoy story time with Mrs. Claus during Holiday at the Lodge at The Great Escape Lodge (above right). COURTESY SIX FLAGS

North American parks transform into winter wonderlands



Hersheypark, Hershey, Pennsylvania, began its holiday celebrations on November 14, with the opening of the Christmas Candylane. It is featuring what park officials tout as the world's tallest Christmas tree, visits with Santa, five million lights and much more. The celebration runs through January 4, 2026. COURTESY HERSHEY PARK



Holiday cheer returned to Busch Gardens Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Virginia, for its annual Christmas Town celebration beginning on November 14. It is set to run through January 4, 2026. Guests are enjoying 10 million twinkling lights, holiday shows including the all-new Christmas Town Live, Santa's Workshop and the Christmas Town Express, festive sweet treats, hearty holiday meals, seasonal shopping and much more. COURTESY BUSCH GARDENS WILLIAMSBURG



The holiday season shines bright at Kennywood, West Mifflin, Pennsylvania, from three million twinkling lights as well as from Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer's nose. This year's Holiday Lights began on November 14 and runs through January 4, 2026. The holiday celebration not only features all the twinkling lights, but also what the park says is the tallest Christmas tree in the state. Guests are enjoying the new Gingerbread Junction themed area, the 25 rides at the park and specially themed food and beverage. COURTESY KENNYWOOD



Knott's Berry Farm, Buena Park, California, kicked off its Knott's Merry Farms on November 21, 2025, and will run through January 4, 2026, on select days. The park is featuring holiday decorations, special entertainment like the "Snoopy's Night Before Christmas" ice show, Peanuts characters in holiday attire, hourly snowfall in Ghost Town, and festive food and treats. A special New Year's Eve celebration with fireworks will take place on December 31, 2025. COURTESY KNOTT'S BERRY FARM



Legoland New York Resort, Goshen, New York, kicked off its 2025 Holiday Bricktacular on November 28, transforming the park into a Lego winter wonderland. Families are unwrapping the joy of the holiday season with ice skating, a Holiday Headquarters with Lego Santa meet and greets, holiday Lego characters and shows, a giant Lego tree, festive treats and more. Holiday activities run on select days through January 3, 2026. This year's Holiday Bricktacular will bring an extra special celebration on December 6 with the lighting of the 35-foot-tall Lego tree, built from more than 360,000 bricks. COURTESY LEGOLAND

Holiday cheer delivers winter guests to parks, attractions



Gilroy Gardens, Gilroy, California, North Pole Lights is running November 28 to December 31 this year. Guests are enjoying jolly characters, live shows, ice skating under the stars, festive food and drink, Santa's Workshop, a magical light display, a light tunnel and more. New this year is lunch with Santa. COURTESY GILROY GARDENS



Dollywood's Smoky Mountain Christmas kicked off at the Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, theme park on November 1. Running through January 5, 2026, the special celebration is featuring over six million lights, festive shows like "Christmas in the Smokies" and "O Holy Night," holiday food and drinks, seasonal shopping and a winter wonderland called Glacier Ridge. The park is showing off dozens of towering Christmas trees and more, all adding a cheerful glow to rides and attractions. Among new additions this year is the Peppermint Valley in Country Fair. COURTESY DOLLYWOOD



Holiday entertainment awaits guests throughout SeaWorld San Antonio. Guests can enjoy Christmas carols performed with a unique festive fiesta flair by the Merry Mariachis, and take pleasure in a variety of pathway shows. COURTESY SEAWORLD SAN ANTONIO



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The Zamperla Compact Spinning Coaster unveiled at Union Station is a nod to St. Louis's history as a rail hub.
COURTESY ZAMPERLA

New Zamperla family rides unveiled for Union Station

ST. LOUIS — In August 2025, a large ride collection opened in downtown St. Louis, Missouri's **Union Station**. Zamperla was chosen to provide the new collection of family rides for the expansion. The three rides redefined the outdoor space. St. Louis Union Station, once the city's railroad terminal, is now an indoor/outdoor entertainment zone.

Zamperla provided three attractions: Compact Spinning Coaster 123, Galleon and Flying Carousel.

"Working with Zamperla on designing and opening the new rides was a smooth process," said **Brian O'Loughlin**, vice president of **Lodging Hospitality Management (LHM)**. "They listened to our ideas and helped us come up with amusements that would complement the existing attractions, appreciate St. Louis' history and fit the footprint available in the Wheel Park. The final result is a seamless, colorful and exciting space that offers a lot of entertainment for our visitors

"The park asked us to lean into St. Louis history for the theming and design," said **Ramon Rosario**, Zamperla's director of sales. "The Compact Spinning Coaster is a nod to the city's history as a rail hub, the Galleon recognizes the steamships that ran up and down the Mississippi, and the Flying Carousel is a celebration of the 1904 World's Fair."

"The St. Louis Wheel has been a prominent landmark of St. Louis and Union Station for the past six years. The expansion further activates the outdoor space with rides that extend the experience and broaden the appeal to teens with thrilling new attractions," said **PGAV Destinations Architect Andrew Schumacher**. The St. Louis-based company master-planned and designed the expansion at Union Station.

The rides add to the park, which already has several attractions and a 50-meter Ferris Wheel. St. Louis Union Station offers many different indoor and outdoor activities. The location, close to where the city's professional baseball and hockey teams play, is a constant source of entertainment for crowds from all over the Midwest.

"It was great to hear the laughter and happy screams from St. Louis residents and visitors when they experienced the Wave Swinger, Flying Louie pirate ship and the Loco Motion spinning coaster for the first time. St. Louis has really embraced these exciting additions to the Wheel Park," said O'Loughlin.



The new illuminated Wave Swinger from Zamperla captivates the St. Louis skyline at Union Station alongside the location's other popular attractions.
COURTESY ZAMPERLA

Park Post-its



AT: Pam Sherborne
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Anakeesta, a mountaintop adventure park in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, is making more magic in the Great Smoky Mountains with a massive expansion and renovation that will include new attractions, dining and retail experiences and a new lift to the top.

Park leaders announced \$100 million will be invested in the park over the next five years. It's the largest expansion at the mountaintop park since its opening in 2017.

As **Legoland New York Resort**, Goshen, New York, wrapped up its fifth season this year, the family theme park began shifting into high gear for its next big experience: **Lego Ferrari Build and Race**, set to open in 2026. The brand-new attraction invites kids and **Ferrari** enthusiasts alike to step into the driver's seat to build, test and race their own Lego Ferrari creation using the creativity of Lego bricks combined with cutting-edge digital technology.

Lego Ferrari Build and Race features four unique zones: Garage Zone, Build and Test Zone, Race Track Zone and the Duplo Zone.

The new Ferrari experience will join Legoland New York's more than 40 rides, attractions, and seasonal events, all designed for families with children ages two to 12. The Resort also features a 250-room hotel, located just steps from the Park's entrance.

Six Flags Great Adventure, Jackson, New Jersey, hosted its Day of Giving on November 15, welcoming families from several charitable organizations such as **Chop, A Kid Again** and **Big Brothers Big Sisters** for a meaningful day of community, connection and celebration. The event was expected to support more than 3,000 children and family members, all receiving complimentary admission, parking, meals and drinks provided by Six Flags and access to the Boarding Pass Program.

Silverwood Theme Park, Athol, Idaho, recently donated more than \$38,000 to support local food banks.

In September, Silverwood Theme Park hosted Community Appreciation Weekends, raising funds for food programs in the Inland Northwest.

The park contributed \$4 from every general admission ticket and \$1 from youth and senior tickets to the cause.

Blackpool's Pleasure Beach Resort, Blackpool, England, has announced that it's set to showcase a brand-new ice show next season: *Alice, Frozen in a Wonderland of Dreams*.

The performance will be suitable for all ages and sees classic characters from the *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* novel re-imagined on the ice.

Stageworks Worldwide, Pleasure Beach's entertainment arm of the business, is known for putting creative twists on tales, as well as using state-of-the-art special effects.

Pleasure Beach will celebrate its 130th anniversary in 2026, as well as its 90th year of ice shows.

Shanghai Disney Resort announced on November 3 that it welcomed its 100 millionth visitor since opening in 2016. On the same day, the resort unveiled a plan to build its fourth themed hotel.

According to the TEA Global Experience Index 2024 released by the Themed Entertainment Association on October 23, Shanghai Disneyland recorded a record attendance of 14.7 million visitors in 2024. The park ranked fifth among the world's top 25 amusement and theme parks and remained the most visited in China.

The new hotel will be located adjacent to the main entrance of Shanghai Disneyland and will feature new shopping and dining facilities. It will join the existing Shanghai Disneyland Hotel, Toy Story Hotel, and a third hotel currently under construction.

Wales-based production company, **Wild Creations**, designer and fabricator of installations for leading global attractions, is celebrating 15 years in business. It has evolved into one of the U.K.'s leading producers of large-scale themed environments for **Universal, Merlin** and other global attractions brands.

Operating from a 40,000-square-foot facility in Cardiff, the company's full-time team has capabilities which span structural steelwork, sculpting, scenic finishing and in-house logistics, allowing full control of quality, scale and delivery.

Founded in 2010 by former *Doctor Who* set dresser **Matt Wild**, the company has developed a world-class reputation for delivering technically ambitious scenic and structural builds for permanent themed attractions around the world.



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AGS reintroduces a faux palm tree theme element

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. — AirFlow Palm Tree, a product designed to avoid wind damage to palm tree theme elements on cruise ships and other venues is being introduced by **Adventure Golf & Sports (AGS)**.

“Our tree lets wind flow through and not against it,” stated **Scott Lundmark**, president & CEO of AGS. “This design holds up for use wherever high winds may be a consideration and is engineered to reduce product failures requiring tree replacement or expensive maintenance. The flow through is stronger and designed to tolerate high velocity wind conditions. It’s safer and weighs less than other similar products.”

“Our company has installed faux palm trees, fabricated by others, on many ship decks, and discovered that most of the trees are compromised by severe winds. Suppliers who offered new tree designs did so at increased costs, often exceeding clients’ budgets. This prompted our design, engineering and installation teams to create the improved AirFlow Palm Tree.”

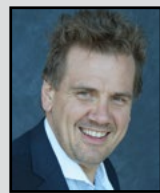
According to AGS, three priority goals emerged: reduce wind pressure on the palm fronds; prevent frond welds from failing; and reduce costs. AGS team reports noted that faux palm fronds, which are designed to look like real fronds, are heavy and offer too much wind resistance. The fronds flex and weaken the weld connection causing fronds to tear away from the trunk. Team members agreed on the concept to create a new type of palm frond that allows the strong winds to flow through and not against it. The result is a light-weight system fabricated from stainless steel tubes to represent the size and shape of palm fronds.

Welding the fronds to the trunk was replaced with a bolt-on mechanical system to attach each frond to the trunk. Key benefits include easy removal and reconnection or replacement of any frond, and the ability to incorporate two frond styles: curved or with pointed ends. The 9’ 8” high trunk is made from stainless steel with a powder coat finish and has a base that can be attached to a deck or concrete surface.

● agsgolfandsports.com



COURTESY AGS



FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRAL

AT: John W.C. Robinson
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Stern Pinball, Inc., in partnership with **AMC Networks**, revealed and released *The Walking Dead Remastered* — a technologically advanced version of one of the most beloved pinball games of recent history featuring one of the most well-known franchises in the world, AMC’s *The Walking Dead*. This property has captivated global audiences since its television premiere in 2010.

Powered by Stern’s new SPIKE 3 technology platform, Stern Pinball is excited to bring to life *The Walking Dead Remastered* to the current generation of pinball players, taking them on an epic journey through legendary moments from the series as they fight to survive the apocalypse. The *The Walking Dead Remastered* pinball game is available now in Premium and Limited Edition (LE) models, along with a full line of accessories available soon.

The development team, led by **John Borg**, the designer of the original game, have created a modern version of the original masterpiece. The playfield features enhanced versions of the “Cell Block C” Prison building, bicycle girl ramp and an interactive Well Walker toy. The fan-favorite crossbow device that shoots a pinball has been re-engineered and updated for increased precision and flexibility in gameplay. The game also features new RGB lighting and illuminated zombie heads on the slingshots.

Jimmy Donaldson, the entrepreneur better known as social influencer **MrBeast**, is adding another job to his growing resume: FEC founder.

Donaldson, in a social media post, announced the forthcoming opening of **Beast Land**, on November 13, 2025, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The park will be a temporary attraction and will run through December 27, 2025.

“Next week **Beast Land**, our brand new theme park, opens!!!!” Donaldson wrote in the post. “We built custom games modeled after our videos that don’t exist anywhere else and will have the world’s largest prize wall. I didn’t want this to be like a typical theme park.”

Donaldson commented that **Beast Land**

will be a themed world with rides, games, food and merchandise. **Beast Arena** will be filled with custom games, such as one called “Tower Siege,” where players load balls into catapults to land them in 60-foot tubes for points. Competitors will collect daily prizes and compete for an undisclosed grand prize.

The **American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA)** and the **American Amusement Machine Charitable Foundation (AAMCF)** celebrated **David Cohen**, past president of both AAMA and AAMCF and recipient of the 2017 AAMA Lifetime Achievement Award, and his wife, **Jane Taubenfeld Cohen**, as the couple were honored with the Sunrise Champion Award at the **Sunrise Association’s Dare to Dream Benefit**.

The Sunrise Champion Award honors members of the Sunrise community who go above and beyond in their dedication, generosity, and commitment to bringing the joys of childhood to children with cancer and their siblings.

Jane and David Cohen have demonstrated exceptional generosity and leadership since first connecting with Sunrise in 2018, through the AAMCF. That year, David — together with AAMCF colleagues **Allen Weisberg** and **Pete Gustafson** — met with Sunrise leadership and surprised the organization with a \$20,000 gift to support its growing camps.

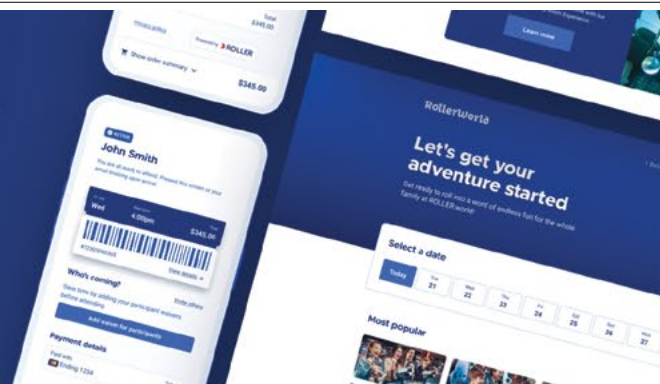
At **IAAPA Expo 2025**, **Intercard** unveiled the **Impulse Plus** reader. This new reader takes more types of payments, makes more upsells and can increase revenues by as much as 30%. It is ideal for the many route operators who want to capture credit card users while continuing to use coin-op.

The company also introduced the new **Recharge Station**, a small-footprint alternative to large kiosks. It allows operators to offer multiple points of sale throughout an arcade where guests can quickly add funds to their game cards. It’s cost-effective for route operators and owners of unattended arcades.

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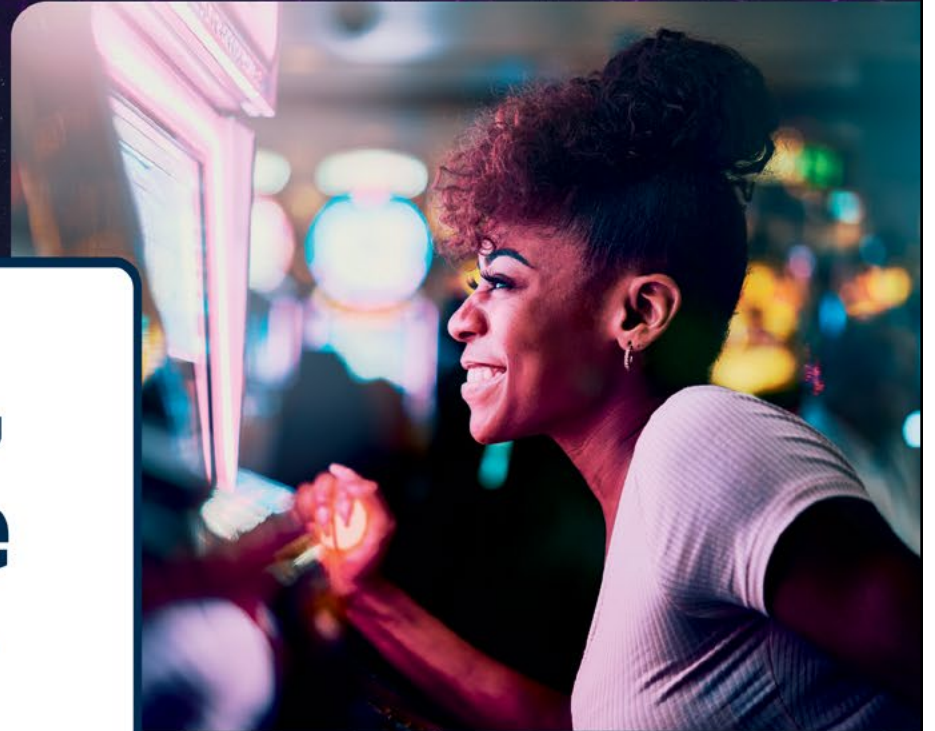
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State Fair of Texas attendance falls 15% during event's 24-day run

AT: B. Derek Shaw

bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

DALLAS — “Each year, the **State Fair of Texas** brings its own unique set of circumstances, and this season has presented several real-world factors that likely contributed to softer attendance compared to last year,” said **Karissa Condoianis**, senior vice president of public relations for the fair.

“First and foremost, broader economic pressures are weighing on many families. When budgets tighten, big entertainment outings are often one of the first things to be reconsidered. Second, the federal government shutdown at the start of the state fair has likely affected both sentiment and spending power for many Texans, including federal employees and contractors who may make up a portion of our fairgoer base.

“Additionally, heightened concerns within the Latino community, which typically represents more than 36% of our annual attendance, have had a noticeable ripple effect. Reports of immigration enforcement activity — including false reports of immigration enforcement near or on the fairgrounds during the State Fair — and fears around ICE operations have created understandable hesitation among families who would normally visit the State Fair in large numbers.

“Unseasonably warm temperatures may have also played a role. The 2025 State Fair of Texas experienced one of the warmest runs in recent history, with unseasonably high temperatures persisting through much of its 24 days.

“Lastly, there’s an undeniable atmosphere of global and national uncertainty right now. When the world feels unsettled, many people opt to stay closer

to home or reduce participation in large-scale events.”

Attendance for the fair was 2,020,064 over 24 consecutive days. That represents a decrease of approximately 15% compared to 2024’s more than 2.3 million fairgoers. The fair’s busiest day was Saturday, October 11, when 193,000 fairgoers came through the turnstiles that day.

The theme was “Texas Shines Bright.”

“We decided to step back and focus our spotlight on our iconic Texan ambassador. For more than 70 years, Big Tex has stood proud and tall in the heart of the Most Texan Place on Earth: The State Fair of Texas,” said Condoianis. “From the heel of his boot to the tip of his hat, he stands at 55 feet tall, but in our minds, he looms larger than life. A giant cowboy with an even bigger heart, he embodies everything admirable about the Lone Star State and its residents. With a friendly smile, a genuine wave and a hospitable catchphrase — “Howdy, folks!” — Big Tex is a beacon of goodwill and resilience. Big Tex is a gentle giant, one who inspires us all to be kind, have fun and show the world what it means to truly be Texan.”

The State Fair of Texas operates with an independent Midway, which had 74 total rides; 31 were kiddie rides. There were 24 carnival providers bringing anywhere from one to seven rides. Operators included **Alamo Amusements, Inc, Armco, B-Thrilled Attractions, Bishop Amusement Rides, Caprice Enterprise, D&K Amusements, Fair of Fun, Fair Ride Entertainment, Great American Entertainment, IconicMidwayRides, JoyRide, Lauther Amusements, Lone Star Entertainment, M&C Attractions, McBubbles LLC,**



Standing 55 feet, Big Tex greets fairgoers at The State Fair of Texas. The event featured an independent midway with 74 rides with 31 just for the younger set.

AT/SAMMY PICCOLA; COURTESY STEFAN HINZ

Mr. Ed's Magical Midways, Pinnacle Fair Equipment Inc., Prime Pacific Entertainment, Skyway Transportation, State Fair Spectaculars, Talley Amusements, Triple T Amusement, Wanderlust Amusement Corp. and Wood Entertainment Company.

“Operating as an independent midway has once again been a great experience for the State Fair of Texas,” said **Rusty Fitzgerald**, senior vice president of midway operations. “Our operators and their teams always go above and beyond, and we couldn’t be happier with their hard work and professionalism, ensuring a positive experience for our fairgoers.”

There were two new rides at this year’s fair. They were a Thunderbird observation wheel (**Lamberink**) brought in by Iconic Midway Rides and a Defender (**Fabbri**), brought in by Sky Spectacle Inc. The three top-grossing rides again this year were Texas Star Ferris wheel (**SDC**) run by **Tom and Mary Talley, Texas**

Skyway (Doppelmayr) run by **Mike Demas** and **Love Bug (Mack Rides)** run by **Maurice Haworth**. The fair itself owns six of the rides, with one that was retired during the fair.

First introduced to the fair in 1986, the **Arrow** log flume quickly became a must-do for visitors looking for thrills and a cool break on a warm Texas day. For 40 years, the ride has carried countless families, friends and first-timers, cementing itself as part of the fair’s shared traditions and memories.

“The Log Ride has been a cherished part of the state fair experience for decades,” said Fitzgerald. “As we look to the future of the fair, we want to honor the role it has played in bringing joy and excitement to our guests.”

Special promotions provided the opportunity for increased savings and value to attendees. These included season passes for all 24 days, (both digital and hard card), a one-day flex admission, special pricing Monday through

Thursday with discounted admission tickets of \$15, \$10 for seniors and children, and \$7 senior day every Thursday, with reduced general admission after 5 p.m. every evening.

Other companies and organizations had special promotions too. By bringing two jars of peanut butter on opening day, attendees got in for \$10, benefiting the **North Texas Food Bank**. That same organization also benefited when fairgoers brought five canned goods on Wednesdays; they got in for \$7. Tuesdays and Thursdays were **Dr Pepper** value days if fairgoers purchased online, reducing admission to \$12.

Discounts were extended to the ride midway for Thrilling Tuesdays. Most rides on the midway are four coupons, with kiddie rides discounted to three coupons on Tuesdays. There were also group plans and corporate discount programs.

The advertising budget

► See TEXAS, page 25

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First introduced to the fair in 1986, the Arrow log flume quickly became a must-do for visitors. It was retired at the conclusion of the 2025 fair. COURTESY STATE FAIR OF TEXAS/KEVIN BROWN



► TEXAS

Continued from page 24

was approximately \$1.1 million, which was the same as in 2024, with some reallocation between the different types of media.

For the past 20 years, the Big Tex Choice Awards have been a staple of the fair. This year, there were 76 entries representing 50 different concessionaires. 30 entries made the cut to become semi-finalists, to finally, 15 that became part of the exclusive club of unique culinary creations. The Big Tex Choice Awards has become a world-renowned food competition, putting the "Most Texan Place on Earth" on the map when it comes to innovative creations.

In the savory category, Hans Brisket & Brew Stuffed Pretzels, **Glen & Sherri Kusak**; Crab & Mozzarella Arancini, **Stefan T. Nedwetzky**; Deep Fried Deli Tacos, **Brent & Juan Reaves**; Vietnamese Crunch Dog, **The Le Family** and Wagyu Bacon Cheeseburger Deviled Egg Sliders, **Kendall Williams**.

In the sweet category, Candy Lemon Sour Face, **Heather J. Perkins**; Chill & Thrill Delight (drink), **Tony & Terry Bednar**; Dubai Chocolate Cheesecake, **Stephen El Gidi**; Rousso's Dubai Chocolate Funnel Cake Fries, **Isaac & Joey Rousso** and Tex's Toast à la Mode, **Michelle & Jayse Edwards**.

More than 25 acts performed on the Chevrolet main stage this year, with **TLC**, **Village People**, **Paul Wall**,

and **Cold War Kids** drawing the largest crowds at the free (with admission) concerts.

Condoianis reported that staffing during the 24-day event was strong. "Of our more than 2,000 part-time and seasonal team members, over 90% were returning this year — a true reflection of the positive culture and sense of community we foster. Part-time and seasonal employees who have worked three or more fairs are even eligible for college or trade school scholarships for themselves or their dependents," she said.

"All State Fair employees are hired, trained and retained based on our core values — texantude, enthusiastic customer focus, exemplary team spirit, affection for the fair and our mission, and stewardship of the tradition — which continue to guide our staffing success year after year," Condoianis added.

"There's nothing quite like the magic of the State Fair of Texas — where millions of Texans from every corner of our state come together to celebrate who we are and what we love," said Condoianis. "Beyond the rides, food, and fun, the State Fair is about connection — bringing our community together while helping us give back year-round through scholarships, agricultural education, community grants and programs that nourish and strengthen our fellow Texans."

The 2026 fair will run consecutively from September 25 through October 18.

• bigtex.com



MIDWAYS SCENE

AT: B. Derek Shaw

bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

Out of an abundance of caution, the **Pensacola Interstate Fair** closed a day early due to forecasted thunderstorms and unsafe weather conditions. In the spirit of cooperation, the **Greater Gulf State Fair**, Mobile, Alabama, rose to the occasion and honored last-day ticket holders who had for the other fair.

On Pensacola's Facebook page, they said, "We're incredibly grateful to our friends at the Greater Gulf State Fair in Mobile for their generosity — they are offering to honor any unused online admission tickets from the 2025 Pensacola Interstate Fair. Thank you, Pensacola, for an amazing 90th anniversary year, and thank you to our neighboring fair family for this wonderful gesture of kindness and community spirit."

• **The State Fair of Texas**, Dallas, donated thousands of pounds of food, supplied by its vendors, at the conclusion of the 139th fair. Since 2015, the State Fair Cares initiative has partnered with state fair vendors to donate their unused food and distribute it to non-profits and community organizations in and around South Dallas. This year, the food benefited 10 food pantries and shelters.

Senior vice president of public relations for the fair, **Karissa Condoianis**, said donations "can range from fresh produce to great meats. We have bacon, we have steaks, we have turkey legs that are out here to go help people in need in this direct community" [initiative].

Isaac Rousso, president of **Rousso Concessions**, is one of the vendors who donated. His family came to the U.S. from Cuba in 1962.

"The community helped my family. For me to be able to give back to this community, it's such an important part of my family," Rousso said. "Being able to bring back food that we're not going to be using this year, making sure that we can give back to the community and help is what's important to us."

Each year, the fair partners with more than 80 of its concessionaires for "State Fair Cares," which is the initiative to collect any leftover food from participating vendors after the fair concludes. **Big Tex Urban Farms** also donated fresh produce this year.

"It feels incredible to make this impact in partnership with our vendors out here. This is product they spent their hard-earned money on, and they see this as a great opportunity to let that not go to waste," said Condoianis.

• At this year's **South Carolina State Fair**, visitors got the chance to sign a replica of the **Declaration of Independence**, nearly 250 years after the original document was signed in Philadelphia. The **SC 250** committee set

up an interactive exhibit featuring a larger-than-life document where fairgoers could add their signatures alongside the founding fathers.

"It gives folks the idea that they are part of this project that our country started," **Brett Bennett**, president of SC 250, told **WIS-TV 10**.

The exhibit proved so popular that organizers had to add additional blank areas three times for fairgoers' signatures. Exhibit guides reminded fair attendees that signing the original Declaration of Independence was a dangerous act in 1776.

"Just to wear the clothes of a Revolutionary put you in danger. The people who signed the Declaration of Independence were signing a death warrant because they were committing treason," said **Lynn Rennebaum**, an exhibit guide.

• With inflation and costs on the rise, at least one fair is going in the opposite direction. The **Darke County Agricultural Society**, Greenville, Ohio, will make it a bit easier for attendees to the **Great Darke County Fair** next year. At their board's monthly meeting in November, they lowered the cost of a single-day admission.

The board supported a motion to lower the cost from \$9 to \$7 on the weekends (Friday, Saturday and Sunday) and to \$5 on Monday through Thursday. The board will also continue its free event until 3 p.m. event on Thursday. Director **Jayden Hicks** told the **Daily Advocate**: "We really heard from the community. Some people are hurting out there who really want to come to the fair. We understand that."

"This board is willing to adjust," added Director **Craig Bowman**. "Attendance was hurt last year, and we need to do something to bring it back."

The board also agreed to keep weekly fair passes at \$25 through July 31, 2026, going up to \$30 through the end of the fair.

• The **Rocky Springs Carousel**, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, will soon have a new home. After a decades-long search for a permanent home, the **Rocky Springs Carousel Association** recently announced that it has signed a Letter of Intent with the **Choo Choo Barn Foundation** to relocate the historic 1924 **Dentzel** carousel to a permanent home in Strasburg, Pennsylvania.

Tracy Artus, president of the Rocky Springs Carousel Association, said **Choo Choo Barn**, a train display tourist destination located in Strasburg Township, is currently in the process of expanding, so more details on installation aren't available yet.

The carousel was part of **Rocky Springs Amusement Park** in the south end of Lancaster, which closed permanently in 1981.

Attendance slips slightly at N.C. State Fair despite great weather

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

RALEIGH, N.C.—Despite near-perfect weather during its 11-day run, attendance at the 2025 North Carolina State Fair (October 16-26) dipped slightly to 946,881, fair officials announced. The tally was down 52,045, or 5.2 percent, from the 998,926 turnout in 2024.

"It's been a very strong year, and we are happy with that," state Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler said following the fair's closing.

Fair Director G. Kent Yelverton told *Amusement Today*, "We're proud of this year's fair as we had strong attendance, fantastic weather, and no major incidents. The dip in attendance was within the range of normal fluctuation we expect."

While the annual exposition was rain-free during operating hours, the decline at the turnstiles was reportedly attributed to — at least in part — sold-out concerts held at an adjacent arena not affiliated with the fair. Traffic concerns were aired on area news broadcasts due to the fair and concerts being held at the same time.

In 2024, a similar situation existed, causing traffic to be snarled for hours near both



Powers Great American Midways presented its new KMG X-Drive on the main midway, dubbed "Colossus" (above left). The main midway at the North Carolina State Fair was packed with guests as well as many thrilling rides. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



venues. Some concertgoers never got into one show last year due to the gridlock.

"News media coverage of the potential traffic issues this year was more impactful than what actually occurred," Yelverton explained. "We coordinated and planned to reduce the traffic impact and saw the positive results of that. The highway patrol was a tremendous partner in getting people into our parking lots and to the fair."

As for the weather, the only threat was from a storm front that pushed in some gusty winds the first Sunday evening, but rain never materialized at the fairgrounds.

Continuing a trend, Saturdays were the busiest at the fair with 105,030

attending on October 18 and 116,462 on October 25. More than a million guests have passed through the turnstiles at numerous previous fairs, the last time being 2017. The all-time attendance mark of 1,091,887 was set in 2010.

PGAM provided huge midway

Powers Great American Midways (PGAM), Whiteville, North Carolina, provided a massive midway of 91 rides in marking its 19th year in Raleigh.

"We had a slight dip in revenue," show owner Les "Corky" Powers told AT. He noted that the arena concerts and traffic concerns likely impacted the fair.

PGAM showcased its new

X-Drive (KMG), themed as Colossus, on the main midway along with other thrill and spectacular rides. The carnival also presented its Wave Swinger (Zierer), Vertigo and Sky Hawk (ARM), Flying Bobs (Chance Rides), Inferno Loop (Larson), Techno Jump (Sartori) and a rare SBF/Visa Tekno Fly, themed out as Lunartic. PGAM's Sea Ray (Mulligan) and Tivoli Orbiter, themed as Tesla AC, were located on the north side of the fairgrounds on a separate ride midway.

Frank Zaitshik's Michigan-based Wade Shows again supplied a complement of rides to the PGAM lineup in Raleigh, a partnership that has existed since Powers landed the fair contract in 2006.

Wade returned with its

Mighty Mouse (Zamperla) and Super Cyclone (Interpark) roller coasters as well as a Super Himalaya (Reverchon), Alpine Bobs (Chance) and Mega Drop (Fabbri) on the main midway. The show's Street Fighter 360 (Technical Park) and Wave Swinger (Bertazzon) were spectaculars on the north midway.

Big wheels

In recent years, five large gondola wheels have been spaced throughout the fairgrounds, and 2025 was no exception. PGAM's 33-meter Lamberink wheel was the largest included in the wristband program, overlooking the fair near Gate 1. The show's Itsy Bitsy (AMC Rides) 24-meter wheel was positioned on the west side of the fair.

Wade's Chance Rides Giant Wheel was on the main midway, and its Friendly Wheel (Technical Park) on the north midway.

The State Fair SkyGazer wheel, a 155-foot Lamberink, returned to the 344-acre fairgrounds near the Graham exhibition building. The wheel was operated by Wade Shows and Wood Entertainment (San Antonio, Texas) and required a separate \$7 ticket to ride (\$6 pre-sale).

Kiddyland had more than 20 attractions, including Wade's double-deck Chance carousel.

All-day ride wristbands were \$30 pre-sale and \$40 at the fair. Ride ticket cards were offered at a pre-sale discount of 18 for \$10, or \$1 each at the fair. Rides required four to eight tickets.

Like many large fairs,

► See N.C., page 28

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►N.C. Continued from page 26

food is a big draw, and vendors pulled out the stops in presenting 88 new food items in Raleigh. Among them were pickle juice freeze pops, deep-fried chicken feet, cotton candy iced tea, cheese curd tacos, and chocolate-covered potato chip caramel apples.

"We're a ride and food fair," Yelverton asserted.

Fair admission and school promotion

Pre-sale fair admission was \$10 for adults (ages 13 to 64); \$5 for kids (6 to 12); \$5 for seniors (65-plus). Kids 5 and under were free. Day-of gate admission was \$13 for adults, \$7 for kids and \$8 for military. Group rates were offered for \$8 (adults) and \$4 (youth).

The fair also had an advancesaleschool promotion using assigned codes. For every adult admission using a code, the fair donated \$2 to the designated school. Schools received \$1 for every child admission purchased.

Parking was free at all fair-operated lots.

Smithfield Foods Hunger Relief Day was held on the final Thursday, with those donating six canned food items given free admission. Fair officials reported 16 tractor-trailer loads of food were collected, which will provide around 150,000 meals to those in need.

Livestock sale

The final day of the fair featured the **Junior Livestock**

Sale of Champions and raised \$214,830 for champions and the junior livestock scholarship program.

More than 27,000 general and livestock entries competed, including a rebound in apple entries in the horticulture department after the devastation caused in 2024 by Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina.

A highlight of the horticulture competitions was the pumpkin and watermelon weigh-offs. A new state fair record was set with the pumpkin entry by **Albert Rodebaugh**, Craigsville, West Virginia, tipping the scales at 2,244.5 pounds. The winning watermelon came in at 288.6 pounds, entered by **Chris Kent**, Sevierville, Tennessee.

Entertainment

United Pullers of the Carolinas presented tractor pulls on the opening weekend in the grandstand. Admission for each of the three events was \$10 per person, with kids under 5 free.

Motorsports Mayhem featured monster trucks, quad racing and a minivan derby in the grandstand, the final weekend with the same admission.

Draft horse and mini horse pulls and a rodeo were staged at the **Hunt Horse Complex**. Admission was \$10, under 5 free.

Free entertainment throughout the fairgrounds included: **Agri-Cadabra - The Magic of Agriculture; The Birdman: World Class Bird**



High flyers on the Vertigo got a view of the huge midway at the North Carolina State Fair in Raleigh. AT/RON GUSTAFSON

Show; Brad Matchett, comedy hypnotist; **Casey's Clubhouse; Heritage Circle Bluegrass & Folk Stage; Ember Fire Arts; Hot Diggity Dogs**, dogs and hogs show; **Rocke-It Robot**, high-tech body puppet; and the **Melody Farm Follies** animatronic theater.

Also, new to the lineup was a Wild West-style roping and knife-throwing show by cowboy and World Fastest Draw Champion **Andy Rotz**.

More than 60 acts performed at the **Live And Local Waterfall Music Stage**, with each evening capped off by fireworks over the fair's pond.

The 2026 edition of the North Carolina State Fair is slated for October 15 to 25.

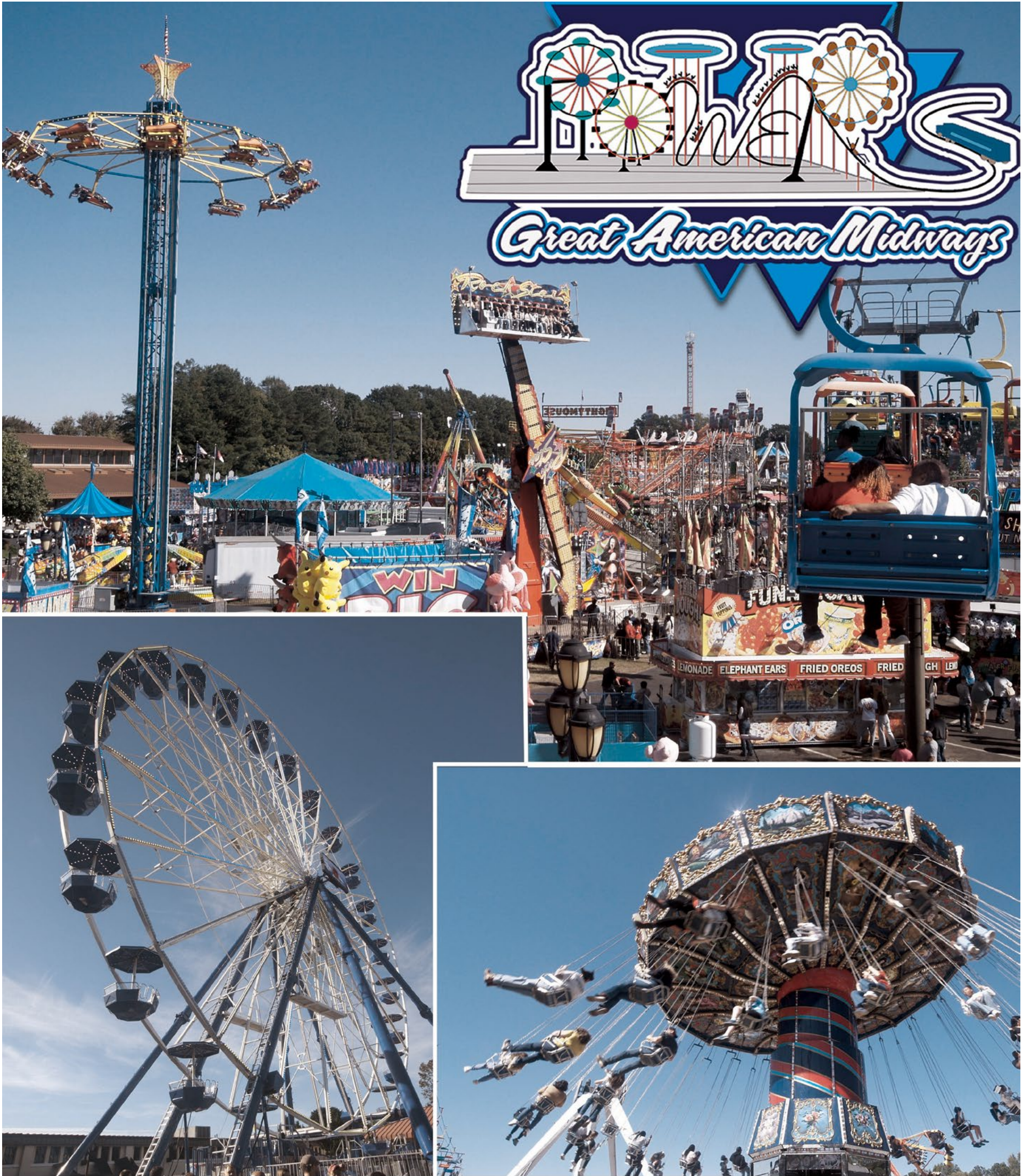
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Minnesota State Fair has good weather, nearly two million attendees

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

ST. PAUL, Minn. — A stretch of good weather helped attendance at the 2025 Minnesota State Fair (August 21 to September 1) total 1,940,869, the fifth best in the fair's history. Record attendance was in 2019 when 2,126,551 passed through the gates.

"As the 2025 Minnesota State Fair has come to a close, we pause to remember the tragedy at Annunciation school and the devastating loss of others in our community who were victims of violence. Even in the shadow of heartbreak, the fair showed its true purpose: bringing Minnesotans together," said the fair's CEO, **Renee Alexander**.

"Over the 12 days, the weather created a beautiful backdrop for people to share traditions, discover new favorites, and celebrate the spirit of our state. We're grateful to guests, vendors, exhibitors, volunteers, performers, safety and security professionals and staff members who helped make this year's fair a place of joy, connection and belonging. Together, we proved once again why the Great Minnesota Get-Together is more than a fair — it's a reflection of who we are and what we can be, together."

Thousands of entries

The fair's agricultural and creative competitions drew more than 35,000 entries, with competitors vying for a share of ribbons, trophies and special awards and nearly \$2 million in prize money.

Competitions included events for livestock, horses,



The Minnesota State Fair midway shines as the sun sets behind it (above). New rides at the fair this year included **Overdrive** (below left) and **Scorpion** (below right).

COURTESY MINNESOTA STATE FAIR



school projects, dog trials, baked and canned goods, fruit, vegetables, crafts, bee and honey products, fine arts, farm crops, flowers, butter, cheese and more.

Fair admission was \$20 for adults and \$18 for kids 2 to 12, as well as seniors (65-plus). A presale discount was \$15 for the adult ticket.

Grandstand attendance was reported at 95,342, which did not include the fair's Amateur Talent Contest Finals. Tickets ranged from \$33 to \$149 for the shows.

Headline acts

Old Dominion, with special guest **Yam Haus**, took the stage before a sold-out crowd on August 21, with **Nelly** with special guests **Ja Rule**, **Mýa** and **Ying Yang Twins** also selling out for their August 30 show.

Other headliners included: **Melissa Etheridge** and **Indigo Girls: Yes We Are Tour**; **Happy Together Tour 2025** featuring **The Turtles**, **Jay and the Americans**, **Little Anthony**, **Gary Puckett**

& **The Union Gap**, **The Vogues** and **The Cowsills**; **Def Leppard** with special guest **Brother Cane**; **Hank Williams Jr.** with special guest **Marty Stuart** and **His Fabulous Superlatives**; **Daryl Hall** with special guest **The Rascals**; **The Avett Brothers** with special guest **The Milk Carton Kids**.

Plenty of free entertainment was found throughout the fairgrounds with more than 100 acts and 900 shows spanning over the course of the 12-day exposition.

Featured artists included **Arrested Development**, **Los Lobos** and **Rachel Platten**.

Independent midway

The independent midway had dozens of rides presented by numerous operators from throughout the nation. **Wood Entertainment Company**, San Antonio, Texas, was one of the most prominent, with its Crazy Mouse spinning coaster (**Reverchon**), Techno Power (**Tivoli**) and 155-foot gondola wheel (**Lamberink**). The wheel operates in partnership with **Wade Shows** and was \$7 to ride.

Iconic Midway Rides, Spring Hill, Florida, brought its Thunderbird to the fair's Adventure Park for the first time. The towering swing ride stands at a jaw-dropping 175 feet. It is the first large mobile ride of its stature in North America, built by Lamberink.

The Mighty Midway section featured **Alpine Bobs** and **Zipper (Chance Rides)**, **Rock Star (ARM)**, **Iron Dragon** roller coaster (**Interpark**), plus numerous other thrill rides. New to that midway were **Scorpion (Fairmatt)** and a **Spinner (Kolmax Plus)** decked out as **Overdrive**.

Kidway area had more than 20 children's attractions along with a dark ride, glass house and **Tilt-A-Whirl (Larson International)**.

Ride tickets were \$1 each, 44 for \$40, or 80 for \$70. Rides required four to seven tickets each.

The fair also has a permanent Haunted House attraction — labeled as a staple fair classic — which is \$5 per person to walk through.

Huge impact locally

Founded in 1859, the Minnesota State Fair sits on 322 acres and showcases Minnesota's finest agriculture, art and industry.

The fair estimates it has an annual economic impact of \$290 million in the Twin Cities. The expo is financially self-supporting and does not receive government appropriation. The 2026 edition of the Minnesota State Fair is slated for August 27 through Labor Day, September 7.

•mnstatefair.org



Little Farm Hands area at the fair is where agriculture was on display (above left). The Minnesota State Fair's Eco Experience building (above right) helped to educate fairgoers. COURTESY MINNESOTA STATE FAIR



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Ray Cammack Shows provides midway for Arizona State Fair

PHOENIX, Ariz. — “Grow Happiness” was the theme of the 141st **Arizona State Fair**, which operated Thursdays through Sundays, September 19 to October 26, 2025.

General admission (\$17.50) included Coliseum concerts, grandstand shows, tribute bands, cultural performances on outdoor stages and a petting zoo. A pre-sale online discount offered four passes for \$40.

A September Nights Dream Pass online promotion offered fair admission, 10 rides or games for \$45. It was valid only during evenings in September. Fair parking was \$15.

Coliseum headliners were: **2Chainz, The Cult, The Format, AJR, REIK, Mastodon** and country star **Brett Eldredge**. Monster trucks, figure-eight racing, bull riding and rodeos were featured at the grandstand.

Ray Cammack Shows, Laveen, Arizona, presented more than 50 rides on the midway, including its new **Sound Storm (Fairtrade)** and **Heidi Coaster (Reverchon)**. The carnival offered an online special valid for the final week of the fair: unlimited rides for \$60, plus two free games. Ride ticket value packs ranged from four tickets for \$5 to 40 for \$50. Rides required three to 10 tickets each.

Though no official attendance numbers were available, more than 1.4 million had passed through the gates in recent years. The fair has yet to announce dates for the 2026 expo.

—Ron Gustafson



Ray Cammack Shows's midway delivered a spectacle of lights every evening of the Arizona State Fair's 2025 run. COURTESY RAY CAMMACK SHOWS



Riders on Titan enjoy their view high above the midway at the Arizona State Fair. COURTESY RAY CAMMACK SHOWS

The Iowa State Fair offered an independently provided midway with 43 rides featured. COURTESY IOWA STATE FAIR



Iowa State Fair overcomes challenges to record an excellent turnout

DES MOINES, Iowa — Despite challenging weather, organizers say the 2025 **Iowa State Fair** drew 1,160,121 attendees, marking the third-highest turnout in its history. The fair — which ran August 13 to 23, 2025 — faced multiple days of rain and temperatures averaging eight degrees higher than the previous year.

The fair is one of a half dozen across the country that operates an independent midway. This year, nine carnivals provided 43 rides, 20 of which were kiddie. There were five carnival food stands with 20 carnival games. Participating portable operators included **Alamo Amusements, First Class Attractions, Lauther Amusements, Luehrs Ideal Rides, Midwest Rides, Moore's Greater Shows, Ride Worx, Sam's Amusements** and **TransAmerican Amusements**. The three most popular rides included **Downdraft (Battech)** brought in by Midwest Rides, **Musik Express (Wisdom)**, also brought in by Midwest Rides and an RL 33-meter observation wheel (**Lamberink**), brought in by Ride Worx.

A highlight was a record-breaking grandstand attendance with 131,755 concertgoers enjoying diverse performances from Christian to hip-hop artists. The previous record of 128,504 was set in 2019. Concerts included **Pit Bull** with special guest **Neon Bros, Lynyrd Skynyrd** with special guest **The Outlaws, Rascal Flatts** with special guest **Neal McCoy, Def Leppard** with special guest **Phil X & the Drills** and **Hank Williams Jr.** with special guest **Old Crow Medicine Show**.

Pete and Alba Caspers of Peosta, Iowa showcased a giant pumpkin weighing 1,409 pounds, surpassing the weight of the largest boar at the fair.

Winn & Sara's Kitchen's bacon chicken ranch eggroll won the People's Choice Best New Food Award with 44.7% of the votes. The best new drink with alcohol was awarded to **JR's SouthPork Ranch** for the pink pony cooler, while **Jada's Funnel Cakes** won best new drink without alcohol for their watermelon lemonade.

The Iowa State Fair partnered with the **Iowa Lottery** to set a Guinness World Record with 1,380 people scratching lottery tickets simultaneously on August 14.

If asked to describe the 2025 Fair in one word, **Jeremy Parsons**, Iowa State Fair CEO would use “chill.” “Despite rain, mud, heat, electrical outages, etc., fairgoers were “chill,” genuinely happy to be at the fair and appreciative of the improvements we made to the facilities and to programming. Underlying that positive attitude from our fairgoers were the great attitudes of our staff and volunteers who met every challenge put before them this year.”

The 2026 Iowa State Fair is scheduled for August 13-23.

—B. Derek Shaw



For the fair's 2025 edition, nine carnivals provided attractions including 20 kiddie rides. There were also five carnival food stands and 20 carnival games. COURTESY IOWA STATE FAIR



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Reaching for the stars, the 2025 edition of Alaska State Fair sets new records

PALMER, Alaska — The Alaska State Fair set an attendance record during a three-week event with 388,880 making it through the gates — up 18,000 fairgoers from 2024. This year also saw a new state record eggplant (2.72 pounds), a jump in racing and rodeo grandstand audiences, and sunny-day traffic jams. The theme was, “Reach For the Stars.” Hours were 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day, closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays from August 5 through September 1, 2025.

Golden Wheel Amusements, based in Chugiak, Alaska, brought all 42 of their rides to the fair, of which 15 appealed to the younger set. They augmented that with 12 games and 5 food stands. The most popular rides were the Century Wheel (**Chance Rides**), Aftershock super cyclon roller coaster (**Pinfari**), Flying Bobs (**Chance**) and the 1001 Nights (**ARM Rides**).

Kiddie-Land continues to be a popular area at the fair. “I remember when I was going on rides as a little one. One minute, I was on a space ship. Get off — get back on again. The next minute, we were on a wild safari! That’s what Kiddie-Land is all about!” said **Jacqueline Leavitt**, Golden Wheel Amusements owner on their website.

Leavitt talked about a notable highlight at the fair. “We brought two pallets of fresh apples from Yakima, Washington to the fair. That was a real treat.” They are hard to come by in the land of the midnight sun. She also gave praise to the fair manager. “**Jeff Curtis** is a genius. He loves carnivals and the ride midway. He is interested and engaged in everything.”

Grandstand attendance was up 34%, thanks



Golden Wheel Amusements brought 42 rides to the midway of the Alaska State Fair, including the company's Century Wheel from Chance Rides. COURTESY ALASKA STATE FAIR

in part to five sold-out concert performances including **Rainbow Kitten Surprise**, **Billy Currington**, **Foreigner** and two **Weird Al Yankovic** shows. Other entertainment on the grandstand included a demolition derby, monster trucks, 406 FMX freestyle motocross and a rodeo.

In addition to all the fun, fairgoers showed community support, too — donating 5,000 pounds to the **Mat-Su Food Bank** and helped volunteers recycle 49,543 pounds of aluminum, plastic, paper and cardboard.

“Thank you to everyone who visited the 2025 Alaska State Fair,” said Fair CEO **Jeff Curtis**. “It was an overwhelming success! Voted the 7th-best state fair

in the country, this year’s fair delivered a magical experience that celebrates Alaska and the people who call it home.”

The fair was first held in 1936 and coincided with the opening of the Knik River Bridge that connected Anchorage and Mat-Su by road for the first time. This, combined with the railroad, meant that people from all over the state could attend, according to historical information on the fair’s website. That year’s events included the crowning of the fair queen, a baby show, boxing matches, horse races, dances, a rodeo and baseball games.

The 90th anniversary fair runs August 21 to September 7, 2026.

—B. Derek Shaw



During a successful Carolina Classic Fair, Strates Shows's Jimmy and Nick Strates were all smiles alongside Strates Shows's General Manager Johnny Galler and Carolina Classic Fair Director Cheryl Hartley.

COURTESY STRATES SHOWS

Strates Shows supplies 50-ride midway for Carolina Classic Fair

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — The **Carolina Classic Fair**, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, drew 251,213 guests this year during its October 3 to 12, 2025, run. That total was a little down from last year, but does continue a five-year upward trend.

The theme for 2025 was Barn to be Wild. There were 19,861 competitive entries this year and guests brought in 2,600 pounds of food for the **Crisis Control Ministry** and 7,500 school supplies to the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County schools.

The fair offers grandstand entertainment with musical performances, rodeo, tractor pulls, Monster Truck and more.

There also was an ice arena with ice skating and ice hockey games taking place.

James E. Strates Shows supplied the midway with over 50 rides. The 2025 edition of the Carolina Classic Fair marked the 61st time Strates Shows brought its midway magic to the City of Winston-Salem.

Marty Biniasz, Strates manager of fair and community development, marketing, promotions, media relations, said carnival spending was in line with the show’s three-year average.

“We continue to be pleased with how the Fair is trending from a midway standpoint despite rain on the final day of the fair in 2025,” Biniasz said.

Among the highlights of the winter refurbishments was the rebuilding and restoration of the show’s **Reverchon Himalaya**. It underwent a full top-to-bottom transformation last spring.

“Every inch of this fan-favorite ride was meticulously restored by our expert team in preparation for our action-packed fall fair route,” he said. “The ride made its debut earlier in the route and now features bold new graphics, a dazzling state-of-the-art, exterior LED lighting package and a giant video ball that replaces the traditional mirrored centerpiece.”

The 2025 fair also marked the final fair for Fair Director **Cheryle Hartley**, who retired in November. Hartley began her career with the City of Winston-Salem in 1990 and was named as the fair’s director in 2018.

—Pam Sherborne



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Kissel delivers for Kentucky State Fair

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — “All Things Kentucky, All In One Place” was the theme of the **121st Kentucky State Fair**, which ran from August 14 to 24, 2025.

“The Kentucky State Fair is an 11-day celebration of who we are as a state and we saw pride and passion of Kentuckians from Pikeville to Paducah come together to showcase our traditions, talents and communities,” said **David S. Beck**, president and CEO of **Kentucky Venues**, which produces the fair.

More than 33,000 entries were placed at the exhibition, including 16,706 general exhibits and 676 for beer and wine. More than 1,500 were first-time exhibitors. Livestock competitions had more than 6,000 entries, with 4-H and Future Farmers of America youth entries totaling 9,185.

The fair included 10 nights of headline acts, including **Sawyer Brown**, **Happy Together Tour** with ‘60s and ‘70s legends, **Sister Sledge** and **Grand Funk Railroad**.

Kissel Entertainment, Okeana, Ohio, the midway provider since 2021, presented more than 50 rides with top-grossing attractions being twin Astro Wheels and Matterhorn (**Chance Rides**), Python roller coaster (**D.P.V.**), and Nemesis 360 (**KMG**).

“We are proud to announce that the revenue was up,” said **Madison Kissel**, senior account manager for the family-owned carnival. “This year, we unveiled 1932 Avenue at our entrance, which is a beautifully designed area welcoming our guests to the park and paying homage to the Kissel family’s company inception nearly 100 years ago.”

While no official attendance is reported by the fair, the event is said to draw around 600,000 guests.

The 2026 Kentucky State Fair, August 20-30, has adopted the theme “Where Country Traditions Meet Our Country’s Celebration” in joining to celebrate America’s 250th birthday.

—Ron Gustafson



KENTUCKY STATE FAIR
AUGUST 2025 KY EXPO CENTER

Twin Astro Wheels on the Kissel Entertainment midway are highlighted by a spectacular sunset during the Kentucky State Fair. COURTESY KENTUCKY STATE FAIR

Broome County Fair celebrates its 150th year

WHITNEY POINT, N.Y. — The **Broome County Fair**, Whitney Point, New York, celebrated its 150th anniversary this year by spending more money on free entertainment that their guests could enjoy. **Rita Smith**, fair treasurer, said they still held their grandstand events, but the free entertainment, such as magicians and high wire acts, were very popular.

Grandstand entertainment this year included a rodeo, truck and tractor pulls and demo derbies.

The fair — held July 22 through 27, 2025 — held an array of 4-H shows, offered an abundance of animal exhibits and saw numerous auctions such as the livestock auction and pie auction.

The fair drew close to 23,000 this year, which is about on par with past years.

Gillette Shows provides the midway for the Broome



Gillette Shows provided a 20-ride midway for the 2025 edition of the Broome County Fair. COURTESY GILLETTE SHOWS

County Fair. **Betty Gillette** said they brought 20 rides with them this year.

Her son, **Jules Gillette**, said they received two brand-new rides but didn’t get them until the last two weeks of its season. They received a new Street Fighter called Zeus from **Technical Park** and a Zero Gravity

called Casino from **Battech**.

“Last year, we bought a new **Kolmax** elephant ride,” he said.

Gillette Shows ended its season on October 22 with a still date. Its last fair was the **Sandwich Fair**, Sandwich, New Hampshire, which ran October 11-13.

—Pam Sherborne



A full parking lot translated to a big day of fun along the **Reithoffer Shows** midway at the State Fair of West Virginia. COURTESY STATE FAIR OF WEST VIRGINIA

Reithoffer provides midway for State Fair of West Virginia

LEWISBURG, W. Va. — The 100th **State Fair of West Virginia**, Lewisburg, saw record-breaking attendance of 200,000 fairgoers celebrating a century of tradition and community involvement. Economic impact is estimated at \$16.9 million. Fairgoers enjoying the August 7 to 16, 2025, event were encouraged to snap photos in front of welcome signs near the entrances as they entered the gates.

The fair is a perfect blend of agriculture, tradition, and national-caliber entertainment —

Gates opened at 8am each day with rides running from 11:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.

Reithoffer Shows (orange unit) brought in 45 rides, 21 of which were kiddie rides. New to the fair was a fun house named South of the Border (**Gosetto**) The most popular rides, in addition to the fun house, were the Dutch Wheel (**Kroon**), The Beast (**Technical Park**) and Wild Mouse (**Zamperla**).

Some of the grandstand shows included **T-PAIN**; **Kansas** and **38 Special**; **Zach Top**; **Cornell Gunter’s Coasters**, **Drifters** and **Platters**; **Lauren Daigle**; **Jeff Dunhan** and **Miranda Lambert** and **Myles Morgan**. Top and Lambert were both sold out shows.

To celebrate their centennial, the fair featured food specials from vendors, special merchandise, and a drone show on Friday, August 15, with fireworks on both Saturday evenings. The fair offered a commemorative poster created by **Robert Tuckwiller**, a native of Greenbrier Valley who has strong family ties to the fair.

“We are incredibly proud of the generations who have helped to build this fair into what it is today, and just as excited for the future,” said **Kelly Collins**, CEO.

From an original two-acre plot in downtown Lewisburg where the West Virginia State Fair began to drawing crowds in the hundreds of thousands, the yearly event has grown into one of the Mountain State’s most beloved traditions.

The fair continues to offer a mix of concerts, carnival rides, agricultural exhibits, food and family-friendly entertainment that draws thousands in celebration of a long-standing tradition, set in one of the most scenic fairgrounds in the country.

The fair receives no appropriation from the state, supporting itself from admissions, fees charged to vendors, and rental of the fairgrounds to other groups. It does receive in-kind support from the state **Department of Agriculture** and from **West Virginia University**.

The fair returns August 13 – 22, 2026.

—B. Derek Shaw



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Oklahoma State Fair shows attendance increase for 2025

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. — Attendance was up nearly 4% at the 2025 edition of the **Oklahoma State Fair** as approximately 825,000 attended the annual expo, fair officials announced.

With a theme of “Eat, Ride, Repeat” during the event’s September 11 to 21, 2025 run, fairgoers apparently did just that.

Michigan-based **Wade Shows**, with 71 rides on the midway, reported revenue up thanks to a virtually rain-free run. All-day ride wristbands were offered for \$35 on Wednesdays, \$25 on Thursdays, or \$50 valid any day of the fair. Reloadable ride credit cards were also available with 30 ride credits for \$35 or 50 for \$50. Rides required four to six credits each.

Gate admission was \$16 for ages 12 and up, and \$10 for kids 6 to 11. Children 5 and under were admitted free.

Temperatures did climb into the 90s on some afternoons, but evening crowds were strong, according to the fair.

Country star **Trace Adkins** was a headliner in the new OG&E Coliseum, which also featured **Disney On Ice** for the first five days. Free entertainment included the **Piccolo Zoppe Circus** and a stunt dog show.

Fair officials noted that 75 percent of the visitors were local, with the remaining 25 percent being from out of town. The fair reportedly produced an economic impact of \$91.79 million in direct spending into the Oklahoma City economy.

The 2026 exposition is set for September 17 to 27.

—Ron Gustafson



North American Midway Entertainment supplied the midway for the 2025 South Carolina State Fair. COURTESY FORREST CLONTS

Nearly 400,000 guests enjoy 12-day 2025 edition of the South Carolina State Fair

COLUMBIA, S.C. — The 2025 **South Carolina State Fair** drew 399,103 guests when it ran in October 8 to 19, 2025. **Kathy Allen**, the fair’s director of human resources and marketing, said that attendance was slightly below the 2024’s total of 404,864.

“But we had a really, really rainy Sunday,” Allen said. “We did feature two new exhibits this year that were very successful.”

Since America will turn 250 next year, the fair introduced an exhibit about the revolution and South

Carolina’s role in that.

“It was very interactive and was a big success,” she said. “We will have the group that did this back next year in some form.”

The other new exhibit was about **Anne Frank**. It, too, was very popular.

North American Midway Entertainment (NAME) supplied the midway for the fair. **Lynda Franc**, NAME’s corporate marketing manager, said the carnival brought in 61 rides, three of them being new to the fair. Those included the **Downdraft**, by **Battech**,

Flash Dance by **Kolmax** and **Mulligan Swing**.

“The **Downdraft** was actually debuted for the first time at any event,” Franc said. “The ride had come fresh from the factory and South Carolina was the very first to have the opportunity to enjoy that particular **Downdraft**.”

Franc said NAME had a wonderful time at the South Carolina State Fair.

“We’re always working hard with their team to keep what people love, but also bring some fresh and exciting ideas to the table,” she said.

—Pam Sherborne



The Himalaya was one of more than 70 rides on the Wade Shows midway at the Oklahoma State Fair.

COURTESY OKLAHOMA STATE FAIR



Kids and families attending the Oklahoma State Fair were all smiles as they enjoyed the swings on the Wade Shows midway.

COURTESY OKLAHOMA STATE FAIR

Ohio's oldest fair celebrates anniversary

BURTON, Ohio — Ohio’s oldest fair, the **Geauga County Fair**, marked its 203rd anniversary while recording its best attendance in 10 years with 294,269 passing through the turnstiles during its run from August 28 to September 1, 2025.

The fair touted apple pie, chicken frying, rooster crowing and frog jumping contests along with plenty of free entertainment.

Grandstand events included truck and tractor pulls, rodeo and a demolition derby.

“We had a normal year,” **Brad Dallman**, general manager of **Bates Brothers Amusement Co.**, told *Amusement Today* after the Wintersville, Ohio, carnival closed out its season.

The Geauga County Fair midway featured 20 rides, including **Rock Star**, **Shock Drop**, **Vertigo (ARM)**, **Eagle Ferris wheel (Eli Bridge)** and **Crazy Cabs (SBF/Visa)**. Wristbands were \$25 with a \$15 special on Labor Day. Individual ride tickets were \$1 each, with rides requiring four and five tickets.

“Overall, we had a good season,” Dallman reflected. “When we had rain, it was at the right times after closing. For us in Ohio, games were off the most, but rides held their own.”

Fair admission was \$10, with seniors and military were admitted free on Friday.

Dates for the 2026 expo are September 3-7.

—Ron Gustafson



In 2025, the Geauga County Fair marked its 203rd anniversary. COURTESY BATES BROTHERS AMUSEMENT

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Reithoffer Shows debuted its new Kolmax attraction dubbed "Joker" on the Wilson County Tennessee State Fair midway. COURTESY REITHOFFER SHOWS

Reithoffer Shows ride midway shines through Tennessee heat

LEBANON, Tenn. — Very hot temperatures did not keep guests away from the 2025 **Wilson County Tennessee State Fair** held in Lebanon, Tennessee, on August 14 through 23, 2025. According to the fair's **Anna Cate Kulas**, this year's year's attendance hit 795,523, which is the second highest attendance in the fair's history.

The fair set two single-day attendance records. One was on August 21, which, at 70,602, was the biggest weeknight attendance ever and the other happened the next day, Friday, August 22, when 89,768 guests came through making it a record-breaking Friday.

"We had fairgoers from all 95 Tennessee counties, all 50 states and 25 countries," Kulas said.

The fair's theme this year was "Goin' Hog Wild and Bacon Memories at the Fair." There were 15,260 exhibitors this year and 30,023 entries and more than 150 livestock shows. The fair celebrated America's 250th birthday with a 10-foot-tall cake, historical info, decorations and fireworks.

Reithoffer Shows provided the midway with 61 rides this year. According to the carnival's **Sharon Popovich**, Reithoffer Shows was finally able to get the new Tennessee Sky Ride permitted and opened.

"Tennessee has some very strict standards and protocols for this ride and we got it done," Popovich said. "We hope it will become one of those rides that becomes a family tradition to ride every year."

The Tennessee Sky Ride is a permanent structure on the fairgrounds, but is owned and operated by Reithoffer Shows. It was manufactured by **Ride Tek** out of Chattanooga, Tennessee. It reaches a height of 40 feet at its highest point and spans 1,050 feet. It has 70 chairs that can hold two riders each.

"We also debuted two brand new rides this year, the Lightning (**Fabbri**) and the Joker (**Kolmax**)," Popovich said. "Both are spectacular new additions to our ride inventory."

She said they also brought in a few rides that had not been to the Wilson County Tennessee State Fair previously including the Treasure Island by **Wisdom**, The Red Baron by **Zamperla** and an **Allen Herschel** Star Jet.

—Pam Sherborne



The local media came out in full force for the opening of the new Sky Ride at this year's Wilson County Tennessee State Fair. Ricky Reithoffer of Reithoffer Shows, spoke with the press during the opening. COURTESY REITHOFFER SHOWS

Rainy weather leads to attendance drop for Wisconsin State Fair

WEST ALLIS, Wisc. — During its August 1 through 10, 2025 run, inclement weather contributed to the loss of one full day of this year's **Wisconsin State Fair**. The 174th fair sustained a drop in overall attendance over last year, with 892,968 visits in 10 days versus 1,136,805 over 11 days in 2024. The rain put a halt to the fair's three-year consecutive stretch of more than 1 million visits.

The independent midway consisted of a dozen operators who brought in anywhere from one to five rides. They included **Arnold Amusements, Inc.**; **B-Thrilled Attractions**; **D&K Amusements**; **FairRide Entertainment**; **Fun Attractions**; **Iconic Midway Rides**, **Prime Pacific Entertainment**; **Rainbow Valley Rides**; **Reithoffer Shows**; **Sunny Hill Attractions**; **Thomas Lauther**; **Wanderlust** and **Wood Entertainment**.

One new kiddie ride was added to the SpinCity, a Jumping Jumbos (**Sellner Manufacturing**) brought in by Arnold Amusements.

Some of the grandstand performances included **Boyz II Men** with **Bobby V**; **Queensrÿche** with **Great White** and **Quiet Riot**; **We The Kingdom & Josiah Queen**; **Gabriel "Fluffy" Iglesias** and **Darius Rucker** with **Uncle Kracker**. Cancelled, due to inclement weather were **Lynyrd Skynyrd** and the "**Happy Together**" tour.

Here's a look at some of the numbers. There were 10,676 competitive exhibits; 81,659 slides down the Giant Slide; 31,855 potatoes eaten from the Wisconsin Products Pavilion; 330,000 Original Cream Puffs served (all produced in the newly renovated Dairy Building); \$381,350 raised during the Governor's Blue Ribbon Livestock Auction and a record-breaking \$81,000 raised during the Blue-Ribbon Dairy Products auction.

"Our team, vendors, exhibitors and, of course, our fairgoers look forward to the 11 days of State Fair all year long, and to have that cut short by a 1,000-year rain event is heartbreaking," **Shari Black**, CEO of Wisconsin State Fair Park told **On Wisconsin**. "While the end of this state fair is not what we had hoped for, the 10 days that we came together to celebrate Wisconsin was truly unforgettable."

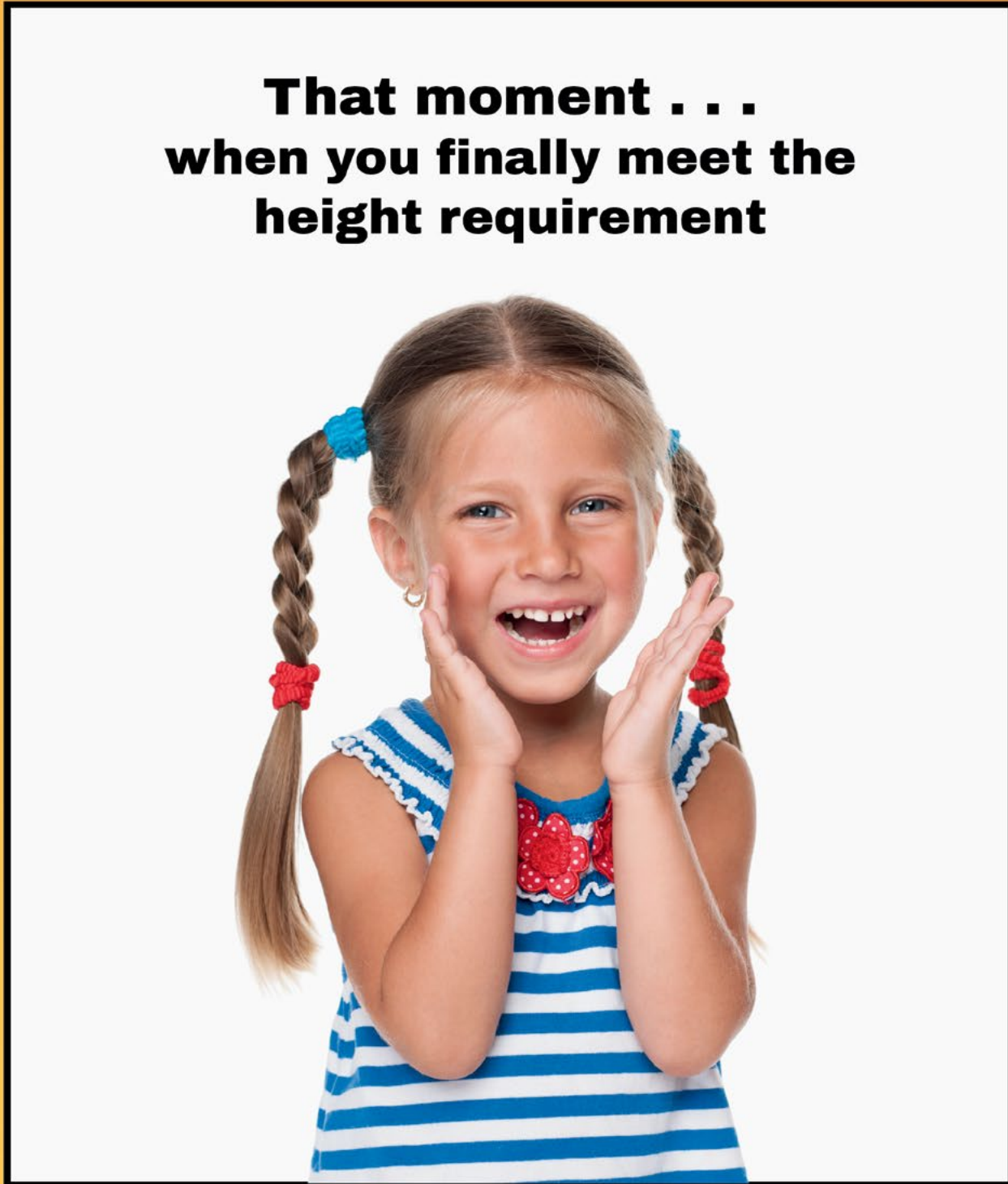
Next year's 175th Wisconsin State Fair will be held August 6 to 16.

—B. Derek Shaw



The 10-day Wisconsin State Fair's independent midway saw more than one dozen carnival operators bring in anywhere from one to five rides each to entertain guests and create thrilling smiles during the run. COURTESY WISCONSIN STATE FAIR

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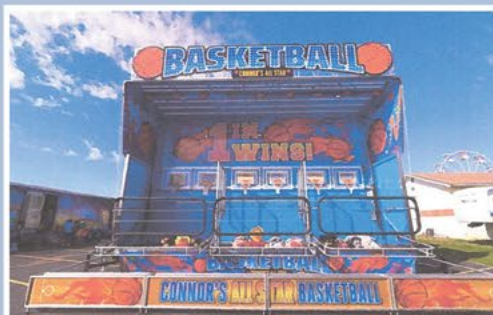
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WATER PARKS & RECREATION

▶ NewsSplash — page 42 / WWA inducts new Hall of Fame class — page 42 / Seen at the WWA Show — page 43

Water World Parc opens Europe's first Double TornadoWave 60

AT: Jeffrey Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

LLORET DE MAR, Spain — This past summer, **Water World Parc**, one of Spain's largest water parks, celebrated its 40th anniversary with the introduction of a high-profile attraction from **ProSlide Technology** of Canada.

Dubbed Tornado King, the slide is the first Double TornadoWave 60 in Europe. It represents a significant investment for the park in a major high-thrill, high-capacity waterslide. The iconic TornadoWave 60 utilizes ProSlide's patented reducing-radius technology from the Tornado60. The exciting lead-in drop has a raft full of riders build up speed so as they encounter the wave wall, they arc along the top, giving both a moment of weightlessness and a predictable curved path from one side of the wall to the other. As the name implies, a Double TornadoWave has two wave walls back-to-back for twice the thrill.

Water World's slide starts from a height of 23 meters (75 feet). Riders board specially designed five-passenger cloverleaf tubes that have con-



The massive green and blue slide complex dominates the east end of the park. Specially designed cloverleaf rafts (right) allow up to five full-grown adults to ride together.

COURTESY WATER WORLD PARC

veniently been brought to the top of the tower by a conveyor. Upon dispatch, the raft enters an enclosed blue tube section with translucent white stripes that get narrower as riders progress down the slide, enhancing the perception of speed. A brief open section surprises riders with a quick burst of daylight, before they are thrust back into an iridescent green chute. The raft builds

up speed, then riders are propelled into the first wave wall for that airtime moment of weightlessness that thrill seekers crave. Upon exiting the first wave wall, a second open chute with another drop leads into the second wave wall for repeat airtime. A short runout takes riders into the splash pool.

Tornado King follows the successful debut of Tornado Land in 2024, a new Kidz zone that introduced eight custom-designed children's slides. The kids' slides hinted at what was to come the following year. Among the eight slides were kids' versions of a FlyingSaucer, Mini Tornado, and the world's first kids' configuration of a Double TornadoWave. These additions demonstrate Water World's long-term strategy of delivering ride experiences tailored to all age groups,



particularly families seeking excitement and safety.

"We're proud to continue our strong partnership with Water World, a park renowned for its commitment to innovation and exceptional guest experiences. With a legacy of delivering standout attractions, Water World is rapidly establishing itself as a premier destination in Europe," said **Aaron Wilson**, vice president of business development at ProSlide.

"In just the past two years, the park has launched a series of groundbreaking rides: the world's first Kids Double TornadoWave and EMEA's [Europe-Middle East-Africa] first FlyingSaucer

8 in 2024, and now, Europe's first Double TornadoWave 60 — the iconic King Tornado. These bold investments underscore Water World's dedication to thrilling, high-capacity, family-friendly experiences, making it an ideal partner for ProSlide. We're excited to help bring their vision to life with world-class, high-thrill attractions designed for guests of all ages," added Wilson.

Founded by **Josep Tarré** and **Josep María Cama**, pioneers in aquatic leisure in the 1980s, Water World was the first water park in Spain. Covering more than 150,000 square meters (37 acres), it is one of the largest in the country. It is located on the edge of Lloret de Mar in the Catalonia region, one of the country's most popular tourist destinations, featuring beautiful beaches, castles, Gothic and modernist architecture, and the Gardens of Saint Clotilde. Tourists comprise nearly 60 percent of the water park's visitors, with area locals making up the remaining 40 percent.

ProSlide first joined forces with the Cama and Tarré families in 2021 at **Aquadiver** in Platja d'Aro, introducing KIDZ Rides to the park. In 2024, the collaboration expanded to Water World, bringing in a broader range of family attractions, from gentle experiences to bold adventures, including the aforementioned FlyingSaucer 8. The addition of this latest attraction helps to advance the park's position as a trailblazer among European water parks.



Thrill seekers enjoy a moment of weightlessness as they reach the apex of the wave wall. COURTESY WATER WORLD PARC



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The former **Sandos Caracol Eco Resort** in Playa del Carmen, Quintana Roo, Mexico, has been rebranded as the **Sandos Caracol Nature Resort & Water Park**.

The property's renaming was preceded by a comprehensive, multi-million-dollar renovation that updated dining outlets, common areas, amenities and guest rooms, while also introducing new features like cenote pools and an adults-only beach club.

According to the company, the new name reflects the opportunities for guests to connect with nature and experience the beautiful destination as well as the rich traditions of the land's Mayan ancestry.

The new name is also meant to bring attention to the 29-slide water park, to which all guests are granted complimentary access within the price of their all-inclusive stay.

The proposed **Jacksonville Surf Park** in Florida could be in jeopardy. The 5.5-acre surf park, part of a larger, 45-acre space, is planned in the **eTown** development in South Jacksonville. It has an estimated capital investment of \$100 million.

The surf park developer, **Aventuur Inc.**, told the city that the original construction cost projections have grown by more than 20% following the results of geotechnical studies performed on the project site.

In order to keep the project moving forward, the office of economic development is requesting approval of a 10-year 75% Recaptured Enhanced Value (REV) grant for the project which can allow



NEWSPLASH

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a rebate on the new taxes a facility generates.

Great Wolf Resorts has appointed new general managers for three of its properties.

Ron Hassani is the new general manager of **Great Wolf Lodge Grand Mound**, in Washington state. Hassani, who brings over 35 years of industry experience, previously served as the resort's assistant general manager starting in 2022.

John Taffin has been named general manager of **Great Wolf Lodge Maryland**. Taffin most recently served as GM of Great Wolf Lodge Grand Mound, where he oversaw a \$40 million renovation and operational improvements.

Jordan Austin-Harris is the new general manager of **Great Wolf Lodge Webster**. Austin-Harris joins the team with over 25 years of hospitality expertise, having most recently been the GM of **Great Wolf Lodge Southern California** since January 2024.

Great Wolf Resorts, which owns and operates family-focused indoor water park resorts across North America, recently celebrated new openings in Webster, Texas; Naples, Florida; and Mashantucket, Connecticut. Site work has begun on the newest Great Wolf Lodge in Jackson, Tennessee, but vertical construction is still pending and will not begin until design plans are finalized and funding is secured.

The city council of Fellsmere, Florida, has approved a development plan and agreement for a surf park at **Mesa Park**, a closed motocross facility, officially green-lighting the project.

Located about halfway between Orlando and West Palm Beach, the \$30 million facility is expected to become a major draw for action sports tourism and provide a boost to local businesses.

Point Surf Park will be powered by **Endless Surf's** ES36 technology. The system can generate waves two to seven feet in height and offer rides of up to 19 seconds. Endless Surf's heart-shaped design creates an authentic beach environment that can accommodate various skill levels simultaneously while also offering high-action views for spectators.

Wild Water Adventure Park in Clovis, California, is finally getting its long-awaited endless river attraction.

Ground was broken in September on what will become an endless river of more than 900 linear feet and a zero-depth, beach-style entry. The river will also feature multiple access points and food and beverage pop-ups along the way.

"This is a major addition. It's going to change the flow of the park attendance throughout the day, and it's going to reorganize how we do things," said COO **Kathy Siggers**, whose husband founded the park in 1973. "We're a mom-and-pop organization. We depend on the community support for every milestone we've met."

The river has been in the planning stages for 25 years. It is expected to open in February or March of 2026.

WWA Hall of Fame Class of 2025 inducted during annual expo

ORLANDO—The **World Waterpark Association** (WWA) Hall of Fame exists to recognize individuals who have made noteworthy achievements in the development and advancement of the water attractions industry. Two outstanding individuals were inducted in 2025.

Bonnie Sprague, Soaring Eagle Waterpark and Hotel

Bonnie Sprague was born to a Spanish father and Native American mother in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and raised in St. Johns, Michigan. Her early life included assisting her mother with community volunteer work. After high school, she moved to the **Isabella Indian Reservation** to live with her grandmother and to experience the traditional culture of her tribe, the **Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan**.

Sprague started her career with the tribe as a summer youth worker, becoming a full-time secretary and then a bookkeeper in the accounting department. In 1980, as the tribe faced poverty due to federal funding cuts, she was part

of a group that went to Florida to learn about high-stakes bingo from the Seminole Tribe. This led to the launch of the Saginaw Chippewa's gaming operations, where Sprague rose from accounting supervisor to bingo manager. In 1995, she was instrumental in completing the construction and opening of the new **Soaring Eagle Casino & Resort** in 1996, which generated significant state revenue.

In 2008, Sprague transitioned to hospitality, becoming general manager of the **Soaring Eagle Inn & Conference Center**. She championed the project to transform it into the **Soaring Eagle Waterpark and Hotel**, which opened in May 2014, followed by the **Soaring Eagle Hideaway RV Park**. These projects boosted local economic growth and tourism, and the waterpark became Michigan's first to earn the certified autism center accreditation.

Sprague is a respected tribal elder who continues the spirit of giving. She and her husband, **Bernie**, have been a foster family for more than 33

at-risk or endangered children, adopting three of them. Her contributions have earned significant recognition, including being named Outstanding Citizen of the Year by the **Mt. Pleasant Area Chamber of Commerce** in 2019 and receiving the Industry Professional of the Year award from the **American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association** in 2020. She is known for her unwavering commitment to community, people and the hospitality industry.

Chris Swartz, Saudi Entertainment Ventures

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

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

in love with the water and became a certified lifeguard, navigating both spring-fed rivers and underwater caves.

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

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

By the age of 24, Swartz was leading the charge at **NRH2O Family Water Park** in North Richland Hills, Texas. He ushered in new, largest-of-their-kind attractions at NRH2O including, the longest, tallest water

coaster in 1998. NRH2O flourished under his leadership, earning its place among the best in the nation.

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

In 2014, Swartz and his family decided they wanted to see more of the world. They headed to Dubai, where he took the helm at **Wild Wadi Waterpark**.

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

Moments captured during 2025 WWA Symposium & Trade Show



Fahd Alhattad of Unicorn Labs was a dynamic keynote speaker. AT/TIM BALDWIN



Amusement Today's Jeffrey Seifert (center) presented Phil Hayles (right) and Jeff Janovich (left) of ProSlide Technology with a duplicate of the 2025 Golden Ticket Award that was won by Chimelong Water Park for its Hydromagnetic LIM water coaster. AT/TIM BALDWIN



The activity never seemed to let up at the WhiteWater booth. AT/JEFFREY SEIFERT



Brian Krider of Ben's Pretzels grabbed attention with a two-pound pretzel. AT/TIM BALDWIN



Mobaro and Ellis & Associates were showcasing their recent partnership. AT/TIM BALDWIN



Attendees could sample various food items they might wish to offer at their facilities, such as the irresistible salt water taffy from Taffy Town. AT/TIM BALDWIN



The Tuesday evening social at Typhoon Lagoon was an opportunity to visit and network. AT/TIM BALDWIN



The StarGuard Elite team was ready to help parks and cruise ships with lifeguarding solutions. AT/TIM BALDWIN



First-time exhibitors, Sunbite White Lobster, provided samples of a product designed to treat skin after sun exposure. AT/TIM BALDWIN



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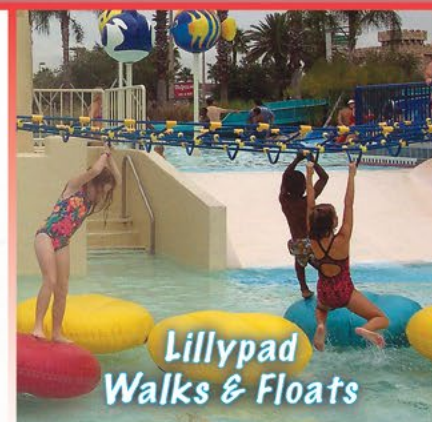
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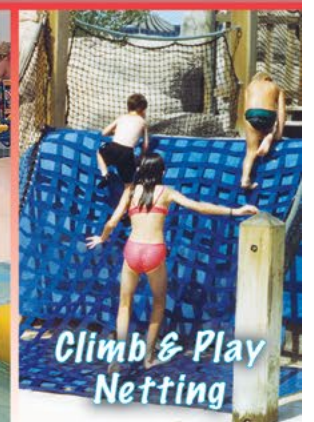
Family Rafts



Sidewinder Tubes & Rafts



Lillypad Walks & Floats



Climb & Play Netting



BUSINESS & NEWSMAKERS

▶Carnival operators take delivery of new rides — page 51 / Woman of Influence: Tess Kerksen — page 54

SeaWorld and Aquatica celebrate with Sea of Trees, Illuminate

AT: Susan Storey
Special to Amusement Today

ORLANDO — A pair of limited-time events is bringing light to Central Florida this holiday season. **SeaWorld Orlando's** famous Christmas Celebration returned in November, along with an all-new event, **Aquatica Orlando's** all-new Illuminate — A Lantern Festival.

SeaWorld's Christmas Celebration, an annual staple for the park, is best recognized by its Sea of Trees, which features a lagoon filled with sparkling trees dancing to holiday classics across the lagoon. Popular IPs drive the festivities with the "Sesame Street Christmas Parade," "Elmo's Christmas Wish Show" and "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer in Rudolph's Christmastown." The uplifting "O Wondrous Night" features life-size puppets and live animals, the beautiful "Winter Wonderland on Ice" show dazzles with its full cast of talented skaters, and the "Holiday Reflections: Fireworks Finale" rounds out the complete holiday-filled experience. Recognized by *USA Today's* 10 Best Readers' Choice Awards as one of the top holiday theme park events in the country, SeaWorld's Christmas Celebration is an annual must-do for Central Floridians and visitors alike.

Now SeaWorld Orlando has expanded its wave of



Giant Gummy Bear lanterns light the way to the sweet-smelling, Candy Cascade Falls, one of five realms at Aquatica Orlando's new Illuminate – A Lantern Festival event. AT/DAVID FAKE

limited-time, fun-filled events by flowing into Aquatica Orlando. Last month, Aquatica blended the magic of its AquaGlow after-hours event with childlike wonder and creativity to light up the night and the imagination to create Illuminate – A Lantern Festival. The event shines a light on new realms and new guest experiences.

Each night of Illuminate, the park is transformed and comes alive with glowing walkways that lead guests through five different realms, each with its own feel, theme and story. The twinkly evening begins with larger-than-life lantern

versions of Aquatica's mascots, Roa the Kiwi, Papa the Spoonbill, Wae Wae the Takahe, Kata the Kookaburra, and Ihu the Gecko, beckoning guests as they enter. Glowing footprints and echoey sounds of laughter help create an immersive feel.

"Illuminate invites families to explore the park on foot, surrounded by glowing lanterns and shimmering realms full of light," said **Bradley Gilmour**, park president of Aquatica Orlando. "The event is unlike anything we've ever done at this park.

"Each realm appeals to all of the senses," he continued.

"We added scent elements; the audio and background sounds are all distinct; the colors and brightness of the lanterns match the theme and tone. Illuminate is fully immersive," Gilmour continued. "Along with sights, sounds and smells, there are special interactive moments throughout the park. As guests wander in wonder, we want them to be immersed in the mini story we are telling in that moment."

Illuminate's Enchanted Lagoon realm, for example, is home to a glowing blue and green mermaid who watches over guests' wishes. Located on the

sandy shores across from the mermaid, guests pause to take part in an activity that invites them to make a wish, write it down, and then place it in a small bottle. As part of the "Wishes by the Water" activity, the wish is then transformed and presented as a glowing light before being released to float on the water. Throughout the evening, as the wishes grow in number, their light is reflected across the pond, glowing around the mermaid for all to see. Guests take a keepsake from the meaningful activity home. Not far from the mermaid, a life-size unicorn lantern stands guard on the banks of the lagoon, watching over the wishes and winking at guests as they stroll by.

"Stepping out and creating events here at Aquatica is really exciting," Gilmour continued. "Along with AquaGlow, we have held nighttime events here before, such as movie nights. Those mostly appealed to our passholders. We challenged ourselves to produce something new that would appeal to a broad audience. Illuminate is a seasonal event, and it's all about families coming together. By creating interactive activities, we shifted Illuminate from a passive walk-through to an engaging, multi-faceted

▶ See ILLUMINATE, page 50

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► ILLUMINATE

Continued from page 49

experience. We want our guests to pause and look at the lanterns, take part in the curated activities and make memories together.”

While the holidays are not a headline theme at Illuminate, the park made sure to include seasonal elements. Leaning into the park’s South Pacific theme, guests can meet with the tropical “Kiwi Santa” in his surfboard-themed Jolly Wave workshop. As they wait their turn, kids write letters to Santa and can leave them with him or drop them in his special mailbox. For adults, the new Trader Turi’s Tinsel Bar features holiday-themed drinks, including eggnog, and the S’mores by the Shore experience brings families together around a glowing campfire. Guests can purchase individual s’mores kits complete with marshmallows, graham crackers, chocolate and, of course, long sticks for toasting and roasting.

“We launched



Kata the Kookburra (above), one of Aquatica’s mascots, is one of the first larger-than-life lanterns guests encounter when they first enter Illuminate. The “Wishes by the Water” (right) activation invites guests to make a wish and place on a lantern near the whimsical mermaid. AT/DAVID FAKE

AquaGlow two years ago and it’s been incredibly successful,” Gilmour continued. “The event helped us recognize how incredibly beautiful this property is at night. Now, Illuminate allows us to light up the park and show it off in a new way. The lanterns and lights invite families to spend time together here

at Aquatica and do things they’ve never done before.”

“Illuminate stays true to our DNA,” he furthered. “The Safari Train Ride, complete with land-based animal lanterns, is a nod to our sister park, **Busch Gardens Tampa Bay**. A little further down the path, we have flamingos and dolphins, which speak



to **Discovery Cove**. And if you look overhead, we even have sting rays, which of course speak to SeaWorld.”

The other realms of Illuminate include the **Myst Wood Waters**, featuring dragonflies, colorful macaws and toucan birds, and a moving chameleon, complete with a long, moving tongue. The rainforest-themed realm is filled with fog-filled bubbles that float through the air.

The most creative realm is also the most playful. **Candy Cascade Falls** is filled with soft, pastel colors. Giant gummy bears stand at the entrance before taking guests down a pathway lined with glowing lollipops and sparkling gumdrops. Sweet, sugary scents surround the senses, and families come together to pose between two larger-than-life ice cream cones. Interactive moments include “macaron” buttons that engage the trees and make the lights of the candy forest dance.

Aquatica’s water slides and pools are closed during Illuminate. Colorful tunnels serve as walkways between the realms, and the park’s food and beverage

locations feature exclusive Illuminate menu items.

“Our guests love the limited-edition foods we serve during our **Seven Seas Food Festival** and **Christmas Celebration at SeaWorld Orlando**,” Gilmour shared. “For Illuminate, we challenged our culinary team to apply the same creativity and mastery. They came back with a complete menu of more than 25 all-new, unique items, including **Brisket Mac and Cheese**, **Apple Cider Churros** and even **S’mores Pizza**.”

Priced for families, tickets to Illuminate start at just \$24.99 each, and Illuminate runs on select nights through the end of January 2026. **SeaWorld’s Christmas Celebration** is included with park admission and runs through January 5, 2026.

“I’m so proud of the team,” Gilmour concluded. “Our entertainment team rolled out of **Howl-O-Scream** and immediately fully transformed two parks to create two distinct and different events for our guests. The feedback we have received about Illuminate has been exciting and makes all that hard work worthwhile.”

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Several carnival operators take delivery of new rides, attractions

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

UNITED STATES — There was no lack of new equipment arriving on the lots of U.S. carnival operators in the early fall.

Gillette Shows, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, took delivery of a Street Fighter pendulum ride from Italian manufacturer **Technical Park**. It themed the one-trailer spectacular attraction as **Zeus**.

Putting a new twist on the popular Zero Gravity from **Battech Enterprises**, Salem, Oregon, show owner **Jules (Mim) Gillette** bet on colorful roulette wheel decor and named the ride **Casino**.

A Battech Downdraft

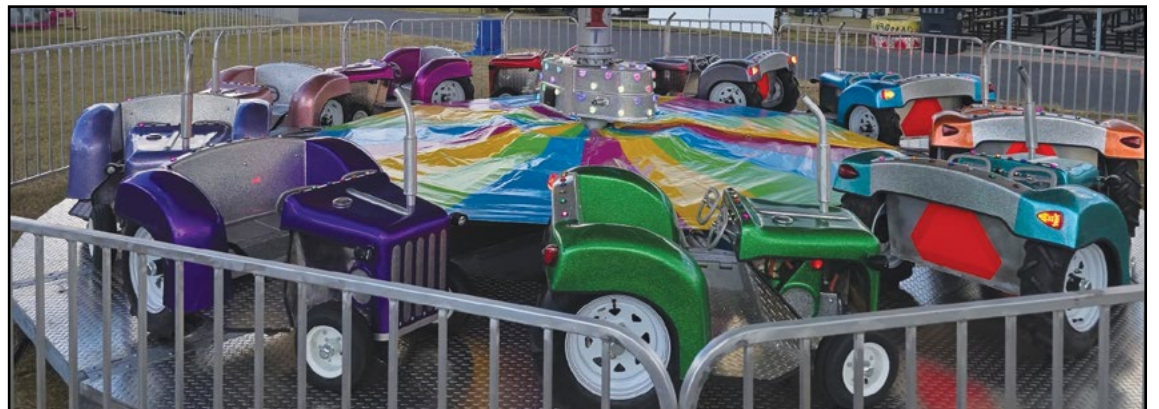
made its way to **North American Midway Entertainment**, Farmland, Indiana.

Big Rock Amusements' Matt McDonagh added to his kiddyland lineup with umbrella rides from **Dalton Kid Ride Rebuilders**, Foley, Missouri. The Dundee, Michigan, carnival purchased farm tractors it calls **Crop Cruisers**, and VW cars, dubbed **Love Bugs**.

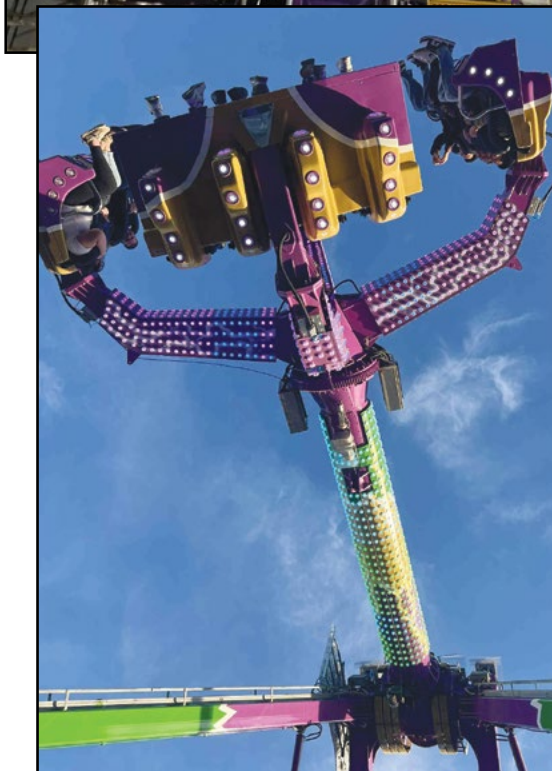
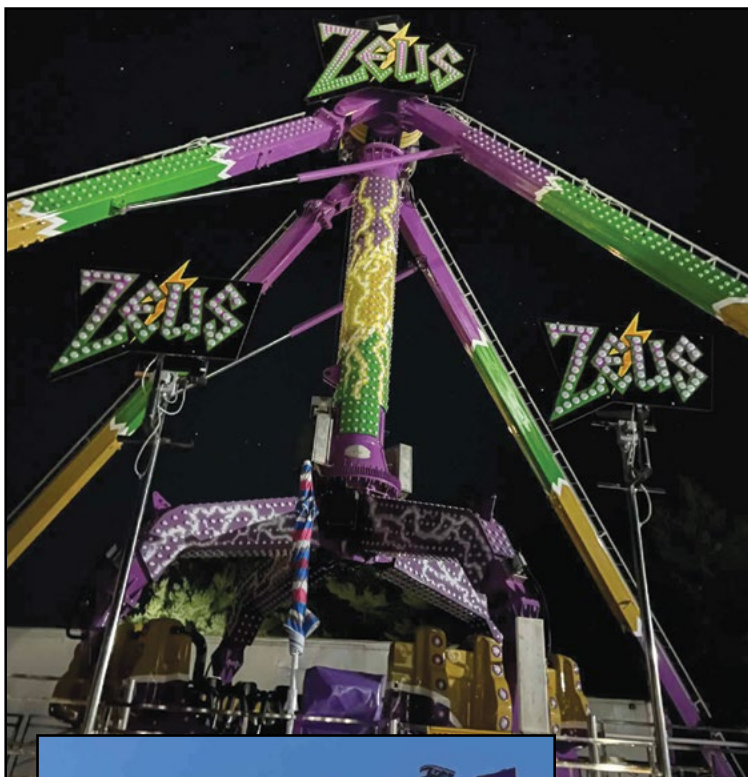
McDonagh told *Amusement Today* he is awaiting delivery of a new Orbiter from **Tivoli Rides** of Great Britain, and a Spinner he will call **Crazy Dance** from **Kolmax Plus**, Czech Republic. Both rides are expected to be on Big Rock's route in 2026.



Gillette Shows themed its new Zero Gravity as **Casino**. COURTESY GILLETTE SHOWS



Big Rock Amusements has two new umbrella rides from Dalton Kid Ride Rebuilders. The Dundee, Michigan, carnival purchased farm tractors it calls "Crop Cruisers" (above), and VW cars, dubbed "Love Bugs" (left). COURTESY BIG ROCK AMUSEMENTS



Zeus is the new thrilling Street Fighter pendulum ride from **Technical Park** on **Gillette Shows** (above, left). COURTESY GILLETTE SHOWS

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OBITUARY

Tomás Hofmann of Sacoa Cashless leaves legacy with recent passing

MAR DEL PLANTA, Argentina — Sacoa Cashless System paid tribute to Tomás “Tomi” Hofmann, a key figure in the company’s history whose career helped shape the foundation of its technological innovation and culture of collaboration.

Hofmann passed away in Buenos Aires on October 29, 2025, leaving behind a legacy of innovation, mentorship and passion that continues to inspire those who had the privilege of working alongside him.

He joined Sacoa in its earliest days and played an essential role in developing many of the projects that positioned the brand as a leader in cashless technology. Over the decades, his ingenuity and dedication

were instrumental in creating solutions that redefined how entertainment centers operate worldwide.

“His open mind has been contributing to make the projects a reality,” said Jorge Mochkovsky, director of Sacoa. “Each challenge was for him a new endeavor, and we are proud to have worked side by side — as humans and as industry innovators — with him and his team.”

Hofmann served Sacoa with commitment and creativity until his retirement in 2019 as director of research and development at Sacoa PlayCard.

Sacoa released in a statement: “Tomi Hofmann’s legacy continues to inspire the Sacoa team and the broader amusement and cashless-system industry, reminding all who knew him of the lasting impact of curiosity, teamwork and genuine human connection.”



Hofmann

ON THE MOVE

Outdoor Amusement Business Organization (OABA) introduced **Dawn Chipman** as the organization’s new communications coordinator. Among other things, Chipman will lead the production of member publications *ShowTime* magazine and *Xtra* newsletter.



Chipman

“I’m excited to be working with [OABA President **Greg Chiecko**] and the rest of the OABA team to support our members and collaborate with industry colleagues,” Chipman commented.

Her experience includes almost 15 years at **Disney** working as a magazine editor, writer and event collaborator. She has also produced digital content for healthcare employees and business leaders.

Falcon’s Creative Group (FCG) announced that **Mitchell Magill** has joined the team as its president. In this leadership role, Magill will oversee FCG’s strategic, creative and operational direction as well as guide growth and innovation across the strategy, development and delivery of themed experiences and destination projects worldwide.



Magill

“Mitchell is a rare talent and inspiring creative leader with a unique blend of strategic insight and operational expertise that will

elevate our work to new heights,” said **Cecil D. Magpuri**, CEO of Falcon’s Beyond. “His ability to unite teams around bold ideas and deliver transformative experiences makes him the perfect fit to lead our creative studio.”

The **Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture** recently promoted two staff members within the Bureau of Ride and Measurements Standards. They include **Tammy Luckenbill**, who started as a weights and measures inspector in 2008, then a supervisor for six years prior to becoming bureau director nine months ago. Quality Assurance Safety Supervisor **Randall Arndt** was promoted on September 6, 2025. He started with the state in 2011 and had 27 years prior experience with amusement rides in the private sector.



Luckenbill



Arndt

“Tammy Luckenbill and Randall Arndt bring a combined 32 years of experience, and a wealth of knowledge to their new roles,” said Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Acting Deputy Secretary for Consumer Protection **Chris Davis**. “They play a critical role in making sure visitors to Pennsylvania amusement parks, fairs, and attractions have a safe experience, and we have confidence that they are the right people for the challenge.”

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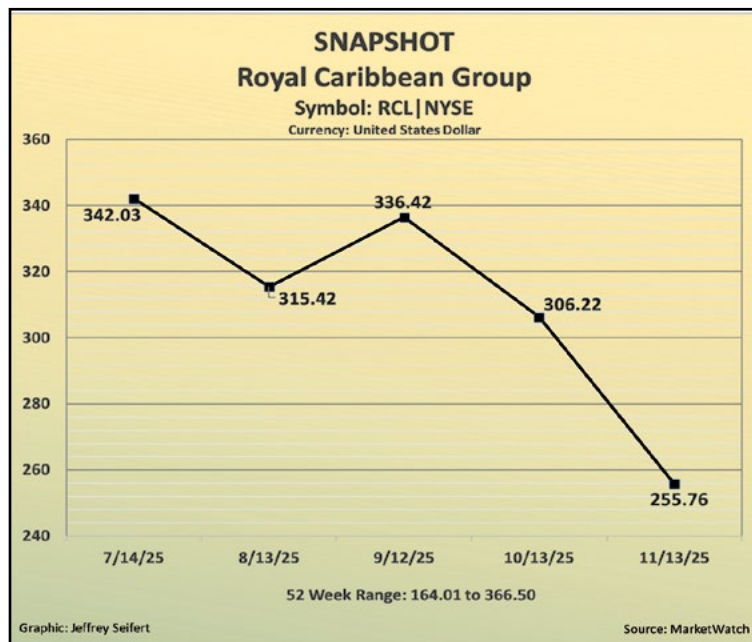
MARKET WATCH

COMPANY	SYMBOL	MARKET	PRICE 11/13/25	HIGH 52-Week	LOW 52-Week
PARKS AND ATTRACTIONS					
The Blackstone Group	BX	NYSE	139.53	200.96	115.66
Carnival Corp.	CCL	NYSE	26.14	32.80	15.07
Comcast Corp./ NBCUniversal Media	CMCSA	NASDAQ	27.97	44.03	25.75
Dave & Busters Entertainment, LLC	PLAY	NASDAQ	14.97	40.10	13.12
EPR Properties	EPR	NYSE	50.87	61.24	41.75
Fuji Kyoko Co., Ltd.	JP:9010	TYO	2177.00	2704.00	1908.00
Haichang Holdings Ltd.	HK:2255	SEHK	0.73	1.06	0.39
Leofoo Development Co.	TW:2705	TSEC	16.90	19.35	14.80
Lucky Strike Entertainment Corp	LUCK	NYSE	8.41	13.25	7.66
MGM Resorts International	MGM	NYSE	32.82	41.32	25.30
Parks America, Inc.	PRKA	OTCQX	39.12	69.99	30.01
Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ltd.	RCL	NYSE	255.76	366.50	164.01
Six Flags Entertainment Co.	FUN	NYSE	15.06	49.77	14.13
Tivoli A/S	DK:TIV	CSE	592.00	692.00	586.00
United Parks & Resorts Inc.	PRKS	NYSE	33.13	60.83	31.94
The Walt Disney Company	DIS	NYSE	107.61	124.69	80.10
Warner Bros Discovery Inc.	WBD	NASDAQ	22.14	23.19	7.52
SUPPLIERS/OTHERS					
Brogent Technologies, Inc.	TW:5263	TSEC	92.10	168.50	82.00
Falcon's Beyond	FBYD	NASDAQ	12.22	16.35	3.62
Sansei Technologies, Inc.	TYO:6357	TYO	2369.00	2400.00	1031.00
Topgolf Callaway Brands	MODG	NYSE	10.58	11.60	5.42

Daily industry stock information available at amusementtoday.com!

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

—SOURCES: Bigcharts.com



DIESEL PRICES

Region (U.S)	As of 11/10/25	Change from 1 year ago
East Coast	\$3.823	\$0.244
Midwest	\$3.891	\$0.387
Gulf Coast	\$3.436	\$0.266
Mountain	\$3.803	\$0.278
West Coast	\$4.161	\$0.404
California	\$4.988	\$0.322

CURRENCY

On 11/14/25 \$1 USD =	
0.8608	EURO
0.7599	GBP (British Pound)
154.61	JPY (Japanese Yen)
0.7953	CHF (Swiss Franc)
1.5259	AUD (Australian Dollar)
1.4010	CAD (Canadian Dollar)

BUSINESS WATCH

Six Flags not pleased with third quarter

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — **Six Flags Entertainment Corporation** announced results for its 2025 third quarter ended Sept. 28, 2025. The company also provided a fourth quarter performance update through November 2, 2025, and updated its previously provided full year Adjusted EBITDA guidance.

"Following strong performance in July and August, as discussed in our Labor Day update, attendance trends moderated in September," said Six Flags President and CEO **Richard Zimmerman**. "Our efforts to stimulate demand did not achieve the desired returns and our decision to shift to more advertising spend earlier in the year in an effort to drive consumer awareness further impacted third quarter results, particularly at our underperforming parks. We are disciplined in our approach to capital allocation and prepared to prioritize investments in our highest return properties moving forward."

During the third quarter of 2025, operating days totaled 2,573 (net of 27 closed days) compared with 2,585 operating days (net of 29 closed days) in the third quarter of 2024. The minor variance reflects normal calendar differences and the removal of lower-volume operating days at certain parks. For the quarter ended September 28, 2025, net revenues totaled \$1.32 billion, down \$31 million (2%) versus the third quarter of 2024 (\$1.35 billion).

United Parks & Resorts reports third quarter

ORLANDO — **United Parks & Resorts Inc.** reported its financial results for the third quarter and first nine months of fiscal year 2025.

Attendance was 6.8 million guests, a decrease of approximately 240 thousand guests or 3.4% from the third quarter of 2024. Total revenue was \$511.9 million, a decrease of \$34.1 million or 6.2% from the third quarter of 2024. Net income was \$89.3 million, a decrease of \$30.4 million or 25.4% from the third quarter of 2024.

"We are obviously not happy with the results we delivered in the quarter," said **Marc Swanson**, chief executive officer of United Parks & Resorts Inc. "Performance during the quarter was negatively impacted by an unfavorable calendar shift, poor weather during peak holiday periods, a decline in international visitation and less than optimal execution. The consumer environment in the U.S. appears to be inconsistent, as has been outlined by a number of other leisure and hospitality businesses. Nonetheless, we can and expect to do better."

IRM celebrates eventful 2024/2025 season

WILDWOOD, N.J. — **International Rides Management (IRM)** finished the combined 2024-2025 season busy and strong.

"2024 was our 35th anniversary, but I think we will wait until our 40th to celebrate," said IRM's **Samuel Shurgott**. "IAAPA's **Mike Shelton** did send the much-appreciated thank you for 36 years of IAAPA membership. We were getting solicited to update our logos and other media vessels, but it's the IRM team that really makes the connection with the clients and families, not the name or logo."

IRM completed the **Joyland** (Lubbock, Texas) liquidation with the last remaining rides going, including the Scrambler to the city of Hinton, Oklahoma, and **Gobberts Farm** taking the G-16 train. More liquidations came into play, as IRM began the process to dismantle **The Beach** water park in Mason, Ohio.

"Supplying **Lake Winnie** with a **Majestic Catch N Air** for their 99th season was the highlight of our 2024 season," commented Shurgott. In 2025, **Dutch Wonderland** in Lancaster, Pennsylvania received a replacement **Chance CP** Huntington Train. Several agri-entertainment-based farm operations — including **Schnepf Farms** in Arizona and **Sweet Pickin's Pumpkin Patch** in Montana — also received rides.

Women INFLUENCE

A view from the top...

Attention, enthusiasm and passion coupled with constant learning drive **Tess Kerksen**. As the Director of Marketing and Communications at the **Wisconsin State Fair Park**, she celebrates discomfort and change to provide great experience.

Theme park experience leads to bright career with state fair

MILWAUKEE, Wis. — When your full-time career is with a regional theme park, the question professionals like Tess Kerksen are often asked is, “What do you do in the winter when you are not open?” When you’re leading marketing, communications and guest services for a fair that operates for only 11 days, that question is asked in more earnest.

“It’s almost funny when people ask what we do all year,” Kerksen explained. “There is so much planning that goes into those 11 days — food, rides, entertainment, ticketing, staffing and, of course, the livestock and animals.”

Like many in the attractions industry, Kerksen started in high school. “I applied for a job in the rides department at Six Flags Great America,” she said. “I got a role in the ‘Wiggles World’ area.” At first, she was unsure if she was the right fit for a kiddie area, but she embraced the opportunity and learned all areas of the operation. “I remembered a quote from Bob Iger where he says if you don’t execute well, you create problems for your guests. The insight and information I learned about procedures in the park helped lay the foundation for my next role. When I was offered an internship in public relations at the park, I carried all of that with me.”

Kerksen’s internship opened an unexpected door that led to a position within group sales. A few years later, the park needed a communications manager and Kerksen applied. It was also a moment that tested her to push past internal self-doubt.

“I earned an Associate’s Degree and was competing for the role with others who had more formal education. During the hiring process, our park president, Hank Salemi, told me there were a lot of

good people in the talent pool who were also applying. I realized I could shrink back, or I could demonstrate why I was the right person. I said to him, ‘Yes, there are. And I am one of them.’ He later told me my response set me apart and showed him I was indeed the right person.

“Resolve sets us apart,” Kerksen continued. “Attitude, enthusiasm and passion matter. Whether you are a ride operator, a welder, a marketing executive or the CFO, our core function is to make people happy.”

A few years later, after shifting her career focus to outside the attractions industry, she saw the opportunity with the Wisconsin State Fair and recognized it as the right next step, as well as a return to guest service, marketing and communications.

“I went into it a little naïve,” she said. “I thought after supporting a park operation that operated 200 days a year, working somewhere that operated for ‘only’ 11 days would translate easily. Quickly, I learned the Fair is just one part of what we do. We support events in our exposition center and Indy Car racing on the famous Milwaukee Mile track. We are constantly busy. And during those 11 days of the actual Fair, we welcome over one million guests. It’s amazing.

“The mission of the state fair is to educate and bring awareness to Wisconsin’s agriculture industry,” she continued. “The fair industry is about celebrating and sharing where our food comes from and the people behind it. A key part of the Wisconsin State Fair is providing opportunities that communicate and celebrate the farmers and families supporting the cranberry, honey and dairy industries in our state.”

While new to the fair segment of the industry, Kerksen understood success meant setting up solid systems within the operation that



Tess Kerksen

Wisconsin State Fair Park
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

would lead to positive, seamless experiences for the Fair’s guests.

“I got involved with the International Association of Fairs and Expos, and began to meet everyone I could,” she shared. “I also took part in the Institute of Fair Management program. I learned a great deal, and it provided a baseline for how fairs operate and serve guests. The education sessions were intense and tremendously helpful.”

Today, Kerksen leads a team of five and pushes them to think outside of every box and to make changes that produce growth. “The uncharted path is where I belong,” she said. “I believe in breaking norms, breaking the box, and then building a structure that supports every aspect of the operation. Innovation and growth opportunities inspire me, and I find I seek spaces that provide those opportunities. The discomfort of change gives us the greatest chances for growth. I thrive in those spaces.”

Kerksen says part of that thriving also comes with understanding the subtle nuance of meaning between two words. “Understanding and accepting are very different words and mean very different things,” she

explained. “It’s important that we accept who we are. It also helps us to understand when and why it may be the right time to make a change. My role at Six Flags, my time owning my own business, and later joining the Wisconsin State Fair, were the right opportunities for me. And when I also allowed myself to understand and accept it may be time to change, I was able to embrace the next adventure at the right time.”

Kerksen also believes in the importance of supporting others even when they are not there to see it firsthand. “I tell my team, ‘I will say your name in rooms you are not in,’” she shared. “It is so important that we champion others.

“I also remind them not to hold themselves back or make a decision in their head before the real decision has even been made,” she concluded. “My career path has been non-linear and non-traditional, and that’s because I discovered what I love and pursued it. In this industry, we create and provide incredible experiences for people so that they can find joy in experiences. I am so proud to be a part of it.”

—Susan Storey

SAFETY, MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

▶ PACE Seminar held at Sesame Place — pages 58-61 / Larson fabricating for Peachtree Rides — page 62

Roller iQ unveiled — AI assistant designed for attractions industry

AUSTIN, Texas — For more than 15 years, Roller has supported owners and operators in the leisure and attractions industry with its all-in-one venue management platform. Roller's

innovative solutions have put intelligence and data in the hands of its clients to help streamline processes, increase efficiencies and drive profit. In October, Roller introduced Roller iQ, a revolutionary AI assistant that helps operators turn their venue's data into instant insights, making intelligence a competitive edge for Roller's customers.

The increased use of AI, along with consumer demand, helped inspire the Roller team to create a product with tangible, applicable and unique responses for its clients.

"Operators have more data, and more ways to access that data, than ever before," shared **Ian Duncel**, vice president of marketing at Roller. "Turning that data into clear, actionable insight takes time and expertise. We recognize this time could be better spent focusing on their employees and guests."

Unlike general-purpose AI tools, Roller iQ is grounded in an operator's own data and does not generate generic answers. Roller iQ understands the venue, its capacity, events, and its guests, and turns

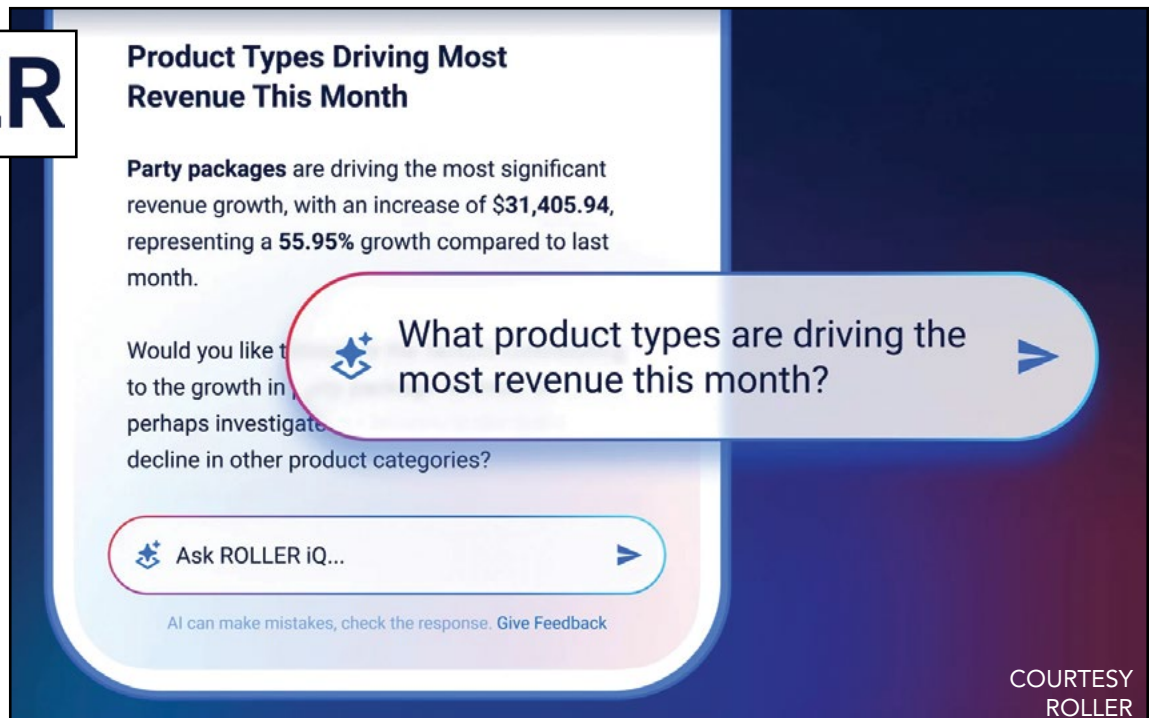
ROLLER

that data into instant insights operators can act on right away.

"Roller iQ is a new kind of assistant, built specifically for the attractions industry," said **Luke Finn**, co-founder and CEO, Roller. "It understands our clients' businesses, their capacity and guest behavior and turns that data into clear, actionable insights. Roller iQ is always at the ready with answers, so it can help our clients move from analysis to action in seconds."

Roller began beta-testing the new product and making it available for early client access ahead of its official launch in November. To date, more than 50 customers have enrolled, applying Roller iQ's intelligence to their daily operations.

"Roller iQ provides valuable insights that would typically take hours to uncover while also helping clients discover new growth strategies," continued Finn. "Instead of digging through reports, operators can ask questions like 'What products are driving the most revenue growth compared to last month?' or 'What are the most important changes



I should make based on guest feedback?' Roller iQ then responds in an easy-to-understand format so that teams can confidently make decisions that impact their business."

Access, anywhere, any time, is another cornerstone of Roller iQ, and users can access their data on desktop and mobile applications.

Along with the announcement and introduction of Roller iQ, Roller closed out 2025 with the release of the Roller 2026 Attractions Industry Benchmarks Report and enhancements to its price rules applications and channel management capabilities. Through Roller's channel management products, venue offerings are automatically listed on

global marketplaces including **Google Things To Do, Klook, Viator** and **GetYourGuide**. This new step syncs pricing, capacity and availability in real-time, and ensures bookings from every channel are fed directly into their all-in-one Roller solution, giving operators a complete picture of performance and guest demand.

Roller's 2026 Attractions Industry Benchmarks Report provides a comprehensive look at how venues in the attractions and leisure industry are performing across the world. The data comes from more than 3,000 Roller customers, and the report is available free of charge on Roller's website. In early 2026, the report's data will be available through Roller iQ, allowing operators

to see their venue's real-time performance and then instantly compare it to industry trends, all in one easy-to-digest view. Operators will be able to access and apply key learnings and best practices from others in the industry to help them continue to enhance their business operations.

"The launch of Roller iQ follows a year of rapid innovation at Roller," added Finn. "We released more than 100 new product enhancements in 2025 alone. Each improvement has been guided by the needs of our incredible community. Roller iQ is the latest way we are bringing intelligence to the industry and helping operators grow as they provide incredible guest experiences."

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ANNUAL REHAB SUPPORT

E&A International Aquatic Safety School returns with 2025 events

AT: Susan Storey
Special to Amusement Today

MAITLAND, Fla. — The Ron Rhinehart International Aquatic Safety School (IASS), presented by Ellis & Associates (E&A), is recognized as the largest and longest-running aquatic safety school in the world. The 40th annual comprehensive IASS program will now be held on two continents. Attendees will return to Phoenix, Arizona, January 18-23, and a second program will take place in Abu Dhabi, UAE, February 8-13, 2026.

IASS is more than a training program. The rigorous curriculum features a deep dive into ongoing education, networking and certification. Guest speakers and opportunities to make connections with fellow attendees are built into the fully synchronized week. The program has been considered best in class for the aquatics community and also serves as a kickoff moment for attendees to help prepare and energize them for their facilities' new year, new season, new team members



and new guests. Leading with E&A's long-held mantra "zero drownings" as the guiding principle, the message of safety and vigilance is woven through every message and activity of the IASS program. Along with excellence in guest service and "first and only" moments related to advancing and supporting safety in and around water, IASS is a core product for the entire Ellis community.

Ellis's leadership team and IASS dedicated faculty members spend months preparing the immersive program. The all-volunteer faculty is united by their passion for aquatics and supporting the generation of lifeguards and aquatics industry leaders. The intensive week is a complete matrix of education opportunities, including classroom



IASS is more than a training program. The rigorous curriculum features a deep dive into ongoing education, networking, and certification. The event is led with E&A's long-held mantra "zero drownings" as the guiding principle.

COURTESY E&A

sessions, hands-on lesson training, interactive teach-back scenarios and more. The sessions focus on core competencies and lessons required to earn or renew instructor and instructor trainer licenses, while also providing professional development and networking opportunities.

After the 2025 IASS program, Richard "RAC" Carroll, senior vice president and chief operating officer, Ellis & Associates, said, "IASS is the re-energization of creativity and passion. Safety school sets attendees up for the season ahead by focusing on the techniques needed to help convey the responsibility and professionalism of being a lifeguard. It helps excite



them about being aquatics leaders."

For the upcoming IASS programs, E&A is offering sponsorship opportunities that include a unique opportunity to select a custom program for the U.S.-based or international audience. Interested partners may choose from sponsorships that range from logo recognition and brand alliance to on-site

demonstrations. Optional sponsor benefits include logo recognition, video placement, social media presence, swag support and more throughout the week.

Attendee registration for IASS 2026 is still open. "Join the world leaders in aquatic safety at IASS 2026," invited Carroll. "And be part of the future of aquatic education and innovation."

•jellis.com



The program is considered as best in class for the aquatics community, serving as a kickoff moment for attendees to help prepare and get energized. COURTESY E&A





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Some great reasons to attend the AIMS International Safety Seminar

1. Safety is the top priority in the amusement industry, and the **AIMS International** Safety Seminar is consistently rated as the best and most comprehensive amusement industry safety program worldwide.

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

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

4. Are you a Safety/Security professional? The Academy of Amusement Risk Management, Safety and Security (AARMSS) offers targeted sessions designed just for you. Apply now! Learn more at aimsintl.org.

5. AIMS continues its strong partnerships with **Ellis & Associates** and **International Ride Training** to deliver *fresh new content* and hands-on experience at a local amusement park.

6. Powerful networking opportunities — Meet over 800 attendees from theme and amusement parks, water parks, carnivals, zoos, FECs and more. Build lasting professional relationships that will strengthen your network

for years to come.

7. Returning in 2026 — Advanced Weld Inspection & Welder Certification! This training class will teach advanced methods of weld inspections per **American Welding Society** (AWS) requirements and provide an opportunity for attendees to take a welder qualification test per AWS D1.3-18 Structural Sheet Steel requirements. Pass and receive an AWS Welder Qualification Record.

8. New for 2026 — Two-Day Inflatable Operators Package. This new two-day program is designed by IOA specifically for inflatable operators and qualifies participants to take the IOA Owner/Operator Level 1 certification test.

9. It's affordable! At just \$895 (save \$100 through *December 12th*), tuition includes lunches, snacks, evening receptions, the Wednesday night Celebration event and a CEU certificate — all with no membership required!

10. Apply for a scholarship! — **Outdoor Amusement Business Association** (OABA) offers four scholarships to OABA members

who are first-time AIMS International Safety Seminar attendees. Visit oaba.org/pageserver/scholarships for more information.

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

12. Certification Opportunities — Take your career to the next level with in-person AIMS International certification exams. Review sessions are available, and all exams are also offered in Spanish.

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

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PACE Seminar trained almost 70 at Sesame Place, in classrooms

AT: B. Derek Shaw
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LANGHORNE, Pa. — The annual ride safety education seminar jointly offered by the Pennsylvania Amusement Parks and Attractions and the Pennsylvania State Showmen's Association took place October 28–31 at Sesame Place. The educational portion of the program was presented by members of the National Association of Amusement Ride Safety Officials (NAARSO). Known as the Parks and Carnival Education (PACE) seminar, there were 50 in-person attendees and 19 people virtually online from parks, shows and independent inspectors. Attendees could select either 24 hours of certification or 32 hours of certification, depending on their recertification needs.

Seminar classes were held in the Sesame Place



Gary Chubb, seminar coordinator, talks with PACE attendees before the hands-on day inside the park begins (above). A maintenance department staff member from Sesame Place discusses lift hill and chain upkeep of Oscar's Wacky Taxi with PACE attendees (right). COURTESY MIKE FUNYAK/PACE

administration building. The second day of instruction was conducted in the park, where attendees were able to take an "up close look" at 16 different rides.

"This park has a lot of Zamperla pieces, but they also have some other rides as well," said PACE Seminar Coordinator Gary Chubb. "For instance, Wacky Taxi is a wood coaster by The Gravity Group; we have Vapor Trail,

which is Vekoma; an Orbiter, that's a Tivoli. There's a variety of rides."

The number of rides inspected for training this time was higher, due to the compactness of the park, which made ride visitation easier to accomplish.

"Things have gone very well with attendees from a variety of parks and

► See PACE, page 60



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► **PACE**

Continued from page 58

shows. It was a respectable crowd." Chubb was assisted by Seminar Administration Manager **Lisa Bartlebaugh** (Bartlebaugh Amusements), Assistant Seminar Coordinator **Mike Funyak** (DelGrosso's Amusement Park), NAARSO Outreach Chairman **Ed LaSalle**, and NAARSO Education Chairman **John Hartman**. In addition, **Rob Schultz** and **Andrew Wheeler** from Sesame Place coordinated the seminar for the park. Director **Tammy Luckenbill**, **Randall Arndt**, and **Tony Catalano** from the Pennsylvania Bureau of Ride and Measurement Standards assisted with the Pennsylvania state class and testing. **Jeannie Reedy** and **Dick Knoebel** (Knoebels Amusement Resort) assisted with getting sponsors for the event.

The instructors included **John Hartman**, NAARSO;



Ed LaSalle, NAARSO, Independent Inspector/Consultant; **Joe Gallagher**, retired New York state ride inspection chief; **John Riggleman**, retired from Universal Parks, an ASTM F24 committee member; **Chris Tobin**, Zamperla Rides; **Mark Kwapis**, Skyline Services and Chubb of GC Amusement Consulting, LLC.

Traveling shows that were represented included **AEB Amusements**, **Bartlebaugh Amusements**, **Goodtime Shows**, **Houghton Enterprises**, **Huey's Amusements**,

► See PACE, page 61



Two of the three days included classroom training in the Sesame Place administration building (above). **Jim Huey** of Huey's Amusements inspects the Flying Cookie Jars — a 2003 Zamperla Samba Tower — ride vehicle while attendees on the left are checking out the family ride's control box (right).

COURTESY
MIKE FUNYAK/PACE;
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▶ PACE

Continued from page 60

Majestic Midways, Riley's Concessions, Service Team/Country Spirits, Skelly's Amusements and Wizards Festival of Fun. Amusement park attendees included Hersheypark, DelGrosso's Amusement Park, Funland (Rehoboth Beach, Delaware), Sesame Place, Dorney Park, Legoland Discovery Center, Great Wolf Lodge and Splash Lagoon.

Class instruction included Zamperla ride information, basic PLC and ladder logic, ASTM F770, investigating issues, evacuation/weather, limited specialties, basic NDT/ASNT, wire rope, thickness testing and corrosion, inspection technique, steel coasters, drone inspections, fun houses and dark rides, hydraulics/pneumatics, employee safety, basic fasteners, waterslides and play structures, basic electric, unique rides and an inspector round table along with an update from the Pennsylvania amusement ride safety office.

Seminar sponsors included *Amusement Today*, ARM USA, Great Coasters International, Haas & Wilkerson Insurance, Herschell Carousel, International Rides Management, Majestic Rides, Naughton Insurance, Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters, ProSlide and Sesame Place.

The 2026 PACE ride seminar will be held in late October in western Pennsylvania. Dates and location: TBD.

NOTE: From 1985 through 2006, this seminar was known as the Pennsylvania Ride Safety Seminar. In 2007, it became known as the PACE Ride Safety Seminar. In or about 2007, Phil Slaggert, a private ride safety consultant, picked up the name of the Pennsylvania Ride Safety Seminar and has been running two additional seminars in the Commonwealth each year since that time.

•paceseminar.com

At right are the leaders of the PACE safety seminar (l to r): Assistant Seminar Coordinator Mike Funyak, with DelGrosso's Amusement Park; Seminar Coordinator Gary Chubb, with GC Consulting; Seminar Administration Manager Lisa Bartlebaugh with Bartlebaugh Amusements and Jerry Bartlebaugh, also Bartlebaugh Amusements.
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Larson, others fabricating new attractions for Peachtree Rides, Inc.



AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

ATLANTA — **Peachtree Rides, Inc.**, will be adding several new attractions for the 2026 season, according to Operations Manager **Phil Guthrie**.

A **Ring of Fire** from **Larson International** is currently in production at the supplier's facilities in Plainview, Texas. Larson will also provide a **Jumping Jumbos**.

Guthrie added that the family-owned carnival will also acquire a new **Magic Maze** from **Semcor Manufacturing**, of La Porte, Indiana, as well as a new Ferris wheel from **Rides U.S.A.** based in Montgomery, Texas.

Peachtree Rides has been in operation for 53 years and services metro Atlanta and Northern Georgia.

● peachtreerides.com



A new **Ring of Fire** is shown under construction at the Larson International facility in Plainview, Texas. This unit will be delivered to Peachtree Rides in Atlanta, Georgia. AT/GARY SLADE

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Fort Wayne Zoo, Blue Jacket present accessible Fort Wayne LightFest event

FORT WANYE, Ind. — Indiana's holiday season is getting brighter as the Fort Wayne Zoo partners with Blue Jacket — a Fort Wayne, Indiana-based nonprofit that helps people with barriers to employment — present Fort Wayne LightFest.

Within Fort Wayne LightFest, guests can drive through the three-mile stretch of the beloved Fantasy of Lights and brand new this year, enjoy Wild Lights at the Fort Wayne Zoo.

"We are excited to partner with Blue Jacket to make the Fort Wayne holiday season twice as bright while also furthering the mission of two community non-profits," explained **Rick Schuiteman**, Fort Wayne Zoo director and CEO. "The heart of Fort Wayne LightFest is to create an inclusive, joyful holiday experience that strengthens families and inspires people to care."

A new family tradi-



COURTESY FORT WAYNE ZOO

tion, Wild Lights at the Fort Wayne Zoo begins in Santa's Cottage with the opportunity to meet Santa himself. Guests can then journey into the zoo and walk among a dazzling display of nearly one-million lights, attend a dance party and nightly tree-lighting hosted by Santa's elves, toast s'mores, ride the Evergreen Express, decorate sugar cookies with festive favorites, and even get nose-to-nose with Santa's reindeer! Indiana Family Farm, Central Zoo, Coastal Cove, Red

Panda Ridge and parts of Australian Adventure will be open for guests to walkabout.

"This is truly an all-encompassing experience for everyone: the family-tradition itself, Fantasy of Lights, a Christmas Village with a variety of vendors and the brand-new Wild Lights!" stated **Tony Hudson**, CEO of Blue Jacket. "This collaboration perfectly reflects our shared commitment towards creating a meaningful experience for families across our city."

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