

INSIDE:

Powers & Thomas
Midway Entertainment
PAGES 46-47

Kings Island and Sally raise the curtain on Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare

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

MASON, Ohio — In a time when licensed IP is everywhere in theme parks, it is truly unique when a park can engage guests with IP of its own creation. However, that's exactly what Ohio's **Kings Island** has done! Originally debuting in 1992 (shortly before the park was then-acquired by **Paramount**), Phantom Theater was a fun dark ride at the edge of the park's children's area. However, its unique cast of characters — originally created by industry veteran **Rick Bastrup** — were retired in 2003 as the dark ride was transformed into Scooby-Doo and The Haunted Castle (and into Boo Blasters on Boo Hill in 2010) by **Sally Dark Rides**.

However, they just can't keep a good spook down. This season, Kings Island partnered with Sally Dark Rides once again for the 2026 season and restored Bastrup's classic characters in the all-new Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare.

"This ride is like the former ride. Kings Island fans will

▶ See PHANTOM, page 8



After nearly a quarter century absence, the classic characters of Kings Island's Phantom Theater return — with new friends, new interactive fun and updated effects — in the Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare dark ride.
AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON



The reimagined Rock 'n' Roller Coaster courtyard at Disney's Hollywood Studios features a psychedelic new paint scheme and a piano motif at the base of the iconic red guitar marquee.
AT/DAVID FAKE

The Muppets have taken the wheels of Disney Studios' Rock 'N' Roller Coaster

Colorful theme, easter eggs revamp popular Vekoma coaster

AT: David Fake
dfake@amusementtoday.com

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Florida — Walk into the Rock 'n' Roller Coaster courtyard at **Disney's Hollywood Studios** and something will look different before you even get to the queue. The iconic red guitar marquee is still there, but now it's got a psychedelic paint job, a piano motif at its base with one gold key nodding to Dr. Teeth's famous gold tooth, and a whole lot more chaotic energy than the old G-Force Records sign used to project. Which, honestly, is exactly on brand. Yes,

the Muppets have arrived.

Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring The Muppets opened to the public May 26, at **Walt Disney World Resort**, replacing the attraction's original **Aerosmith**-themed experience that had been a Hollywood Studios fixture since July 1999. For nearly 27 years, the coaster launched guests from 0 to 57 mph in under three seconds through a darkened soundstage filled with neon-lit highway signs, oversized Aerosmith iconography, and the unmistakable sound of "Love in an Elevator." It was, for its era, one of the most ambitious indoor coasters Disney had ever built. The new version keeps the layout, the launch and the elements, but swaps almost everything else.

The story now centers on

The Electric Mayhem Band, the Muppets' resident musicians racing guests across Hollywood to reach their sold-out concert on time. The backstory includes Muppet tycoon J.P. Grosse has purchased G-Force Records and installed his nephew Scooter as the man trying to herd the band out the door. Scooter is now rendered as the attraction's first-ever audio animatronic figure, built using motion-capture technology to replicate his movements, expressions and mannerisms down to the smallest detail, including the puppet hand rods. If you know anything about the Muppets, you already understand how well the whole herding operation is going.

Bette Lombardi, the

▶ See MUPPETS, page 10



AMUSEMENT VIEWS
Page 6



FACILITIES & ATTRactions
Pages 11-28



BUSINESS
Pages 29-37



SAFETY
Pages 38-42



MOBILE MIDWAYS
Pages 43-50



CLASSIFIEDS
Pages 51



**WORLD'S OLDEST MATERIAL
TAKES FUN TO A NEW LEVEL.**

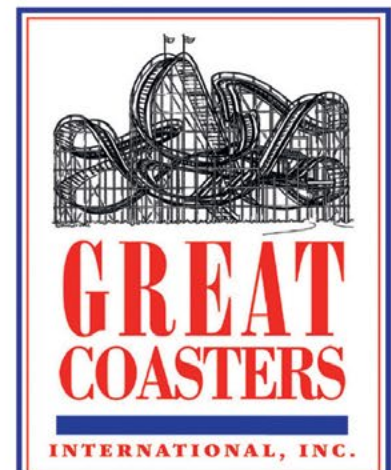
Pure Wooden Thrills. Engineered to Last.

Great Coasters International creates award-winning wooden roller coasters that combine classic design with modern engineering. Known for smooth, twisted, high-quality rides, we deliver unforgettable thrills—backed by lifelong partnership, service, and support.

Contact:

Headoffice: Great Coasters International,
2627 State Route 890, Sunbury, PA 17801, USA

Sales Office Europe: Günter Engelhardt GmbH,
Bischofsholer Damm 77, D-30173 Hannover, Germany





Turning Bold Ideas Into Guest Experiences



CHANCERIDES.COM



AMUSEMENT INDUSTRY PROPERTY INSURANCE "DONE RIGHT"

It's Our Specialty!

Dedicated Property Insurance for:

- Theme Parks
- Water Parks
- Other Amusement Industry-Related Risks

Highlights:

- All Risk Coverage
- Earthquake, Flood, and Named Windstorm available
- Tailored deductible options
- Customized, manuscripted policy form specifically designed for the Amusement Industry
- Amusement underwriting expertise with 50+ years combined experience

Contact:

David A Chodzko, C.I.P. | davidac@parksplusinsure.com
quotes@parksplusinsure.com | 216.820.4133

Managed By:

ParksPlus Underwriting Agency LLC
An affiliated division of Intersure Insurance Brokers Corp

Park Owners & Risk Managers:

*Give this brochure
to your insurance
agent/broker to
access the ParksPlus
Property Program!!*

We've been insuring
Amusement Risks for
20+ years!



Insurance Underwriting & Security: Talisman Insurance Company Inc. has satisfied statutory financial requirements, and their reinsurance support is provided by companies with an excellent A.M. Best Rating. The company is A.M. Best "A" rated.

THE AMUSEMENT GROUP



Zamperla's First Family Thrill Launch

Kyûbi Unchained at Parc Spirou



HEIGHT
12 m
39 ft



FOOTPRINT
Ø 13 m
44 ft



INSTANT CAPACITY
16 adults

Discover more on
[zamperla.com](https://www.zamperla.com)



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

AI doesn't make memories



Robinson

It's everywhere. Like it or not, artificial intelligence (AI) is finding its way into all aspects of our evolving world. And, to be honest, there's a place for it. AI is a great tool. It's a time-saver, it's a new way to simplify some of the more complicated tasks in front of us.

Something like that has always been around. Correcting a photograph used to require a professional, an airbrush and precision skill. Then came Adobe Photoshop. Now, there's AI, which can almost automate Photoshop's tricks to change things almost instantly.

AI can be handy. AI is a tool and, in the right toolbox, it can save time without hindering creativity or vision.

AI can also be an easy cheat, to do work that has no heart, no vision, no real creativity. It can create products from a description that appear to be OK and often earn the comment — from the bean-counter in the room — of "It's good enough." Reality check: it's not good enough.

I use AI as a tool, often. It's replaced my use of clip art for some designs, and is a great way to evolve a thought before creating a finished product.

What don't I use AI for? To make the finished product itself. Yet, for some reason, I appear to be in an increasing minority for that. Every local club, bar and charity event by me is making all — ALL — of their event flyers via AI. The result? They all look the same, none make an impact and are quite forgettable. Yet, they are making them in abundance.

Surprisingly — and sadly — I've already seen a couple cases where amusement and theme parks have been using AI themselves ... to design gift shop merchandise. That's right, come spend a day immersing yourself in our park, make one-of-a-kind memories, and remember the day with a souvenir that took no heart or emotion or vision to create.

The cover stories to this issue are attractions with unique vision and creativity behind them, ideas that have stood the test of time for decades. We shouldn't be disregarding brilliance like that with AI, and we shouldn't be attempting to immortalize that brilliance with AI-created souvenirs.

FLINT'S VIEW: Bubba Flint



INDUSTRY VOICE: Michael Andre, Gateway Ticketing

Evolution in customer, guest interaction

The attractions industry is entering a pivotal new era, one where artificial intelligence is becoming the front door to consumer demand. Increasingly, guests are discovering, evaluating and purchasing experiences through AI-powered assistants rather than traditional search or direct website visits. The operators that succeed in this environment will not simply be those who add a chatbot to their business. The real advantage will belong to organizations that unify their commerce, ticketing and operational data so AI systems can respond with speed, accuracy and confidence.

This evolution ushers in the age of agentic commerce: intelligent systems capable of not only analyzing information, but also observing patterns, making recommendations and taking action in real time without waiting for a human to recognize the opportunity. In the attractions space, that could mean pricing models that automatically adjust to demand fluctuations, inventory systems that optimize availability dynamically or digital storefronts that surface the right offer



Andre

before a guest even knows what they are looking for.

Importantly, adopting AI is not about replacing people. It is about equipping teams with smarter tools that allow them to operate more strategically and deliver better guest experiences. AI-driven systems can help reduce cart abandonment, improve accessibility, personalize purchasing journeys and create more seamless interactions.

Preparing for AI-augmented shopping will become as essential as adopting e-commerce was in the early 2000s. Some consumers may never interact directly with a company's website. Purchases and planning will increasingly happen through AI agents communicating on the consumer's behalf with AI-enabled commerce platforms.

For attractions operators, preparing for this agent-first future is a requirement for remaining competitive. AI-enabled tools expand the ability to drive innovation in our industry, while staying ever conscious of our shared goal to create great experiences and lifelong memories for our guests.

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



Call **(817) 460-7220** for advertising, circulation or editorial inquiries



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

The following are registered Copyrights and Trademarks 2026 by Amusement Today, Inc.: "Amusement Today"; "AmusementToday.com"; "EXTRA! EXTRA! Your Desktop Edition"; "Golden Ticket Awards" and "GoldenTicketAwards.com."

Guest opinions appearing on Amusement Views editorial page are the opinion of the guest author, not of Amusement Today. Subscriptions to Amusement Today and EXTRA! EXTRA! are distributed electronically FREE by signing up at: amusementtoday.com/subscribe. Reproduction in whole, in part, in any language, or the use of any logo without the permission of the Publisher is prohibited.

Address: P.O. Box 5427, Arlington, Texas 76005-5427, USA

Deliveries: 2001 E. Randol Mill Road, Suite 109 Arlington, Texas 76011, USA

Phone: (817) 460-7220

AmusementToday.com, GoldenTicketAwards.com

Founder & Publisher

Gary Slade • (817) 460-7220
gslade@amusementtoday.com

Accounting & Classified

Sammy Piccola • (817) 460-7220
spiccola@amusementtoday.com

Advertising

John Robinson • (513) 256-1441
jrobinson@amusementtoday.com
Gary Slade • (817) 460-7220
gslade@amusementtoday.com

Editor & Production Manager

John Robinson • (513) 256-1441
jrobinson@amusementtoday.com

Editorial

Tim Baldwin • (972) 697-9745
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

David Fake • dfake@amusementtoday.com

Jeffrey Seifert • (817) 460-7220
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

B. Derek Shaw • (717) 843-3050
bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

Pam Sherborne • (615) 308-3310
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

Monthly Contributors: Bubba Flint, Ron Gustafson, Jack Lathrop, Susan Storey

Association Memberships: ACE, AIMS International, ASTM, IAAPA, IISF, IRT/IROC, NAARSO, NEAAPA, NJAA, OABA, PAPA, PACE, SLA, TTA, WWA

Industry Affiliated Charities:

Give Kids the World Village, Morgan's Wonderland, National Roller Coaster Museum & Archives

2 MINUTE DRILL



AT: Tim Baldwin

Ilesha Speight, Six Flags Over Texas

Married to her husband **Tony** and mother of two sons, **Ilesha Speight** is known in her role as not only being open to new ideas and responsibilities, but she also has a great attitude and has a reputation for "getting stuff done." Her **Six Flags Over Texas** coworkers depend upon her for figuring things out or knowing where to go for answers. She has received the nickname "The Queen" for two reasons: out of deserved respect and for her love of Beyoncé (and never missing her concerts).

Title: Events and Execution Manager, Marketing and Sales.

Number of years in the amusement industry: I started at the SFOT front gate scanning tickets 29 years ago. I have been on the sales team for 20 years this year. Feb. 6, 2006!

Best thing about the industry: Making people smile every time they walk through the gates!

Favorite amusement ride: Batman The Ride.

If I weren't working in the amusement industry, I would be ... a high school counselor.

Biggest challenge facing our industry: Competition from other fun places to go or the comfort of just staying home and watching a streaming service.

The thing I like most about amusement season: It is like the first day of school, new beginnings, fresh starts, fun times ahead.

The ice cream flavor that doesn't do it for me is ... Butter Pecan.

In a single word, cell phones are ... LIFELINES.

Bigger fan: Dallas Cowboys or Texas Rangers? Dallas Cowboys.

Number of U.S. states visited: 21.

The thing that piles up most in my office is ... Sticky notes.

My first kiss happened ... At school in the stairwell.



Ilesha Speight's efforts at Six Flags Over Texas — and her love for Beyoncé — have earned her the nickname of "The Queen." COURTESY SIX FLAGS OVER TEXAS

The most I've cried in a movie is ... *Beaches*, after my mother passed away. I love that darn movie.

On a scale of 1 to 10, my driving is ... 10.

Six Flags has been open for 65 years. If I could bring one ride back from its history, it would be ... Flashback.

The best barbecue in town is ... Well.. I am from Dallas and grew up in Dallas so I would say Smokey Joe's, but if I have to be Arlington specific — Hurtado.

Pick one: a quiet afternoon with a good book or a sports bar cheering on the game? This is tough; I love them both, but a quiet afternoon with a good book.

Which is more annoying: endless Texas heat or inevitable Texas ice storm? Texas ice storm.

A hidden talent no one knows I have is ... I am not that cool.

The last time I bought shoes, they were ... Wow, maybe last year, new tennis shoes — New Balance.

The oldest family vacation I can remember is ... A road trip to California for Disney/Hollywood and we went to the Grand Canyon. I was probably between 10 and 12.

THE INDUSTRY SEEN

Celebrating TEA time



ORLANDO — *Amusement Today* staff members Susan Storey and David Fake took part in the 32nd Annual TEA Thea Awards Gala, which was attended by more than 900 global industry professionals. Destinations including Universal Epic Universe and Legoland Shanghai Resort were honored during the event, which was held in Orlando, Florida, for the first time in its history. The Thea Awards honor outstanding achievement in themed entertainment and the industry professionals and suppliers. COURTESY TEA

www.kaypark.com



SCAN
NOW TO
EXPLORE
PRODUCTS



Commercial Quality Construction
Low Maintenance & Easy Cleaning
Size and Color Varities Available
Weather Resistant Materials
Long Term Value

Bleachers | Benches | Bike Racks | Picnic Tables | Grills

▶ PHANTOM

Continued from page 1

remember Phantom Theater, but now we have No Legs Larry leading us through, and the assignment is a little different," stated **Tony Clark**, regional manager of public relations for Kings Island. "Now we, as riders, have to help. It's The Maestro's first performance at Phantom Theater, and a storm outside has led to lightning striking the theater and releasing 'ghost notes.' Riders now help No Legs Larry round up those notes and get them back in the pipe organ so that the show can start."

No Legs Larry and The Maestro are returning characters from the original version of the ride. That ride — dubbed simply Phantom Theater — was popular with Kings Island guests for providing some air-conditioned fun in the midst of the summer sun. In addition, those original characters found a place in the hearts of young guests at the time.

"Working with the KI staff, in the early 1990s, we determined that an old abandoned theater would be a great setting for a dark ride," remembered **Rick Bastrup**, now of **R&R Creative Design**. "I researched the vaudevillian era and came up with a cast of characters, including a daredevil, The Great Garbanzo; an operatic singer, Hilda Bovine; a magician, Houdelini; the star of the show, The Maestro and several others. Each had their own personality and costume."

Bastrup's history with the classic ride saw **Six Flags** utilizing him as a consultant when designing the new attraction. He was even able to contact **Richard Doyle**, the original voice actor for The Maestro, and have him reprise his role in the updated version.

"For the original ride, I



No Legs Larry sets himself up as the narrator of Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare right away as he greets guests in the ride's queue hovering at the theater's snack bar (above left). Guests ride through the attraction seated in the "opera boxes" and use their spellbound flashlights to round up ghost notes (above right). AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON; COURTESY KINGS ISLAND

wrote the storyline that as the vaudevillian age came to a close, the performers and theater crew refused to leave the boarded-up, spooky theater," explained Bastrup. They were not intended to be ghosts but eventually turned into the phantom characters who still perform their acts for anyone brave enough to enter their forgotten world."

The fiction of that narrative has become somewhat of a reality as the theater and those original characters have lived for the past several years in the memories of Kings Island patrons. Not abandoning their theater, they are resurrected as just the beginning of this new adventure.

"We were very fortunate to have such a sound foundation upon which to create this new version of Phantom Theater," said **Lauren Wood Weaver** of Sally Dark Rides. "While the original attraction was a 'passive' experience — guests simply rode past the sets and characters — the new version is a 'narrative' experience, and tells a story with a beginning, middle and end. Plus, of course, guests can now enjoy an interactive aspect, which is also different than the original attraction."

Still, behind-the-scenes, the

creation of Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare wanted to remain relatively true to a traditional dark ride, and provide a real and almost tangible experience for park guests.

"Dark rides, in general, have come a long way since the original Phantom Theater was designed and installed in 1992," Weaver continued. "For this new version of the old ride, which closed in 2002, we decided to recapture the vibe of the original through the use of actual sets and animatronic characters. There are isolated uses of media in the ride, but only a minor use of screens. Overall, we sought to create a 'You are there!' experience for guests, which echoes the feel of the original attraction."

Phantom Theater, even in that original form, engaged with the audience on a slightly more interactive level than most dark rides of that era.

"I wrote Maestro to directly speak to the audience which [was] unusual for a dark ride," explained Bastrup. "When he says 'What are you looking at?' or 'Come to see the theater have you?' and 'You'll be back, you'll be back, the audience is drawn into the story rather than just watching.'"

Aboard the new Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare, the interactivity is raised to more modern levels. The ride vehicles are no longer nameless coaches moving along the ride's path; they are "Opera Boxes" with guests literally taking their seats for the theater.

"We've added scents and air blasts to increase the immersion and allow for a 360-degree experience for everyone on board," said Clark.

And, of course, there is the addition of "spellbound flashlights," which guests use to



target and capture the flying ghost notes. The notes — targets — themselves are created using projection mapping throughout the dark ride's walls. The flashlights are hand-held by patrons and cast an identifying color on the walls — just like a real flashlight — to allow guests of all ages to aim with ease. The flashlights vibrate with a haptic to let riders know they've made contact with a ghost note.

"Sally has effectively used the vibrating haptic in several other interactive dark ride attractions — Justice League: Battle for Metropolis, and SpongeBob's Crazy Carnival Ride, for example — all of these dark rides have an interactive device that vibrates when you hit a target," explained Weaver. "It gives the rider confidence that they're playing the game correctly, and adds a physical layer to the experience."

The attraction also features **Alterface's** new generation interactive pointing system, delivering ultra-low latency performance and high-precision tracking to support a fully immersive flashlight-based gameplay experience. With response times as low as 30 milliseconds, the system provides instant feedback between guest input and on-screen reactions.

The ride is all about the experience. Rerideability for the Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare comes in the attraction's attention to detail, as well as the park's and Sally's focus on creating an engaging dark ride even without the interactive elements.

"Six Flags and Kings Island wanted the new Phantom Theater to be an interactive attraction, which our Sally design team immediately embraced," explained Weaver. "However, we all agreed that the ride should not be depen-

dent upon the interactive element to be a success. So when guests experience Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare, whether they engage the interactive flashlights to get rid of the ghost notes, or whether they just enjoy watching the story unfold, they will be presented with a supremely entertaining dark ride experience."

That care for the storyline and developing an enjoyable dark ride that also happens to be interactive helps ensure the attraction is fun for guests of all ages and interests.

"The gaming aspect is fun for friends and fun for families," commented Clark. "If you don't want to do the gaming portion of it, you can just enjoy it as a dark ride and just watch the story. That's what's great about it for small children and for grandparents."

Phantom Theater and its cast of characters have now been an IP created by Kings Island for Kings Island for nearly 35 years. And, while the original dark ride shuttered in 2002, the new attraction is far from the first time that this vibrant cast of characters have had a chance to revisit with guests of the park. Multiple times over the year, the park's Haunt event has seen sets and ride vehicles from the original ride grace the midway as some rather unique spooky decor.

Most significantly, in the summers of 2022 and 2023, the stage production of "Phantom Theater: Encore!" entertained on the stage in the Kings Island Theater as part of the park's 50th anniversary celebrations.

"The stage play and display of our original models and designs in the lobby were important in keeping the story and characters alive,"

▶ See PHANTOM, page 9



► PHANTOM

Continued from page 8

said Bastrup.

During that run, Bastrup was able to attend a couple of performances of the show and, for the first time ever, interact with the characters he originally created.

"That show brought these characters to life on stage," said Clark. "And when we had that show, guests continually commented 'This show is great, but you've got to bring the ride back!' In the end, we asked and asked and asked, and — finally — we were able to work with Sally Dark Rides to bring the story back to life in a new, creative way. We have new technology and new characters. We're going to give people what they wanted, but we're also able to give them a little bit more with the surprises that we have."

The new ride is that delicate balance of hitting familiar notes (pun unintended) to feel that vibe of nostalgia, while also delivering something completely new, updated and fun for a whole new generation.

"Nostalgia — especially among theme and amusement



Kings Island and the team at Sally Dark Rides worked with original ride creator Rick Bastrup — shown building some of Phantom Theater's original characters — to help ensure they captured the spirit of the classic attraction (above left). The team at Sally updated the character designs from the originals as they created, built and painted Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare's animatronic cast of new and classic characters (above middle, above right). COURTESY RICK BASTRUP, SALLY DARK RIDES

park fans — is an incredibly powerful factor which cannot (and should not!) be ignored," explained Weaver. "Everyone involved in the development of a new version of Phantom Theater wanted to remain true to the brand. Even though the new ride features a new backstory and interactivity, the heart and soul of the original ride remain. And, we've even added numerous easter eggs in ode to the original ride, that many die-hard fans should appreciate."

The ride is a homage to the past, but has added new characters and additional fun to not only stoke the memories of guests who remember the

ride from their childhood, but also to help create vivid new memories for the children who visit the park today.

"With Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare, we already had the foundation of a beloved and recognizable cast, each with their own unique personality and charm," said Weaver. "We drew inspiration from the original character designs while also adapting them for today's audience — particularly younger park guests. Since the attraction is located in the kids' area of the park, it was important to create characters that felt fun and approachable rather than overly frightening."

And as these characters come to life before their eyes, this zany bunch will live on in the memories of guests for even more decades to come.

"The new technology will make this long-lasting for generations — new and old — to come now and ride this version," added Clark.

Original Phantom Theater creator, Bastrup offered, "I think that one reason the characters endure is because they take themselves seriously, but they are still funny and likable. The characters have changed some, but they still live in their original madcap world.

"Creating your own

characters and personalities is of course much more difficult than using known stories and characters [from licensed IP]," Bastrup added. "However, the outcome, if done right, is far more rewarding. I think people are always looking for new experiences and stories and will respond to new worlds."

With Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare opening in April with Kings Island's 2026 season receiving rave reviews from guests new and old, there's real evidence of just how rewarding a little imagination — and a little nostalgia — can be.



The coasters trains (above left) got a refresh to match the entrance to the Rock 'n' Roller Coaster courtyard. The attraction's queue features the first-ever audio-animatronics figure of Scooter, which was built using motion-capture technology (above middle). Statler and Waldorf — who spent years heckling from their Muppet*Vision 3D balcony — are very much back in business and serve as a finale to the ride (above right). AT/DAVID FAKE; COURTESY WALT DISNEY WORLD

► MUPPETS

Continued from page 1

attraction's producer at Walt Disney Imagineering, told *AT* during the May 20 media event that the fit was never really in question. The Muppets have spent five-plus decades in the company of musical guests and putting them at the center of a music-driven ride experience was a short creative leap. The real work was execution.

That work started, by Lombardi's account, years before opening day. The on-site installation itself ran just three months, a timeline she describes with the kind of pride that only comes from having survived it. "We had

lots of people working all times of the day," she said. "We also had months of design and buildup to set us up for success for that install. I am really proud of how everyone came together to problem solve and troubleshoot and just bring the attraction to life in the way that it does today."

That front-loading of design and fabrication work is what made the compressed installation possible — a model that parks and suppliers in this industry know well. The fastest build-outs and re-themes in the amusement industry rarely happen because someone moved fast in the field. They happen because someone did the

thinking early.

The music selection process was every bit as deliberate, if a little more chaotic-sounding in the retelling. "You throw noodles at the wall and see which ones stick," Lombardi said, "but really just narrowing in and focusing on the songs that work with the intensity of the ride, the energy of the ride, and that also make sense being delivered by the Muppets." Several songs that looked good on paper didn't survive actual test rides. Once you're in the launch vehicle and the coaster is doing its thing, you find out quickly whether a track's pacing and energy actually lines up with what's happening physically. The ones that didn't fit got cut.

One song that never wavered: **Blur's** "Song 2," the two-minute burst of distorted guitar and "woo-hoo" energy that became a favorite early and stayed one. Guests won't hear just that track, though. The attraction runs one of five possible songs per ride cycle, including **Electric Mayhem** covers featuring collaborations with **Jennifer Hudson** and **Questlove**, **Def Leppard**, **Kelly Clarkson**, and **Camilla the Chicken**. It's a detail that gives repeat riders genuine reason to come back and gives operations teams something interesting to manage.

The partnership behind the creative work is worth noting for the industry. Even though Disney outright owns the Muppets brand, the project operated as an equal collaboration between Walt Disney Imagineering and **Muppet Studios**, with Creative Director **Danny Iglesias**

embedded throughout the full development process. His role was to contribute ideas as well as maintain guardrails at every stage, since, like all IP, the Muppets have rules, character logic, physical limitations built into their storytelling DNA (they don't defy gravity, for instance).

"Ideas from both sides, and which ones worked and which one didn't was equal," Lombardi said. "We really would have not been this successful had we not had that relationship with them."

For guests who grew up with Muppet*Vision 3D, the **Jim Henson**-era 3D film attraction that anchored the Muppet Courtyard at Disney's Hollywood Studios presence for decades before its closure last year, the new attraction is loaded with reasons to slow down and look around. The legacy of that beloved show, one of Henson's last projects, is woven into nearly every corner of the experience. Muppet Labs technology figures prominently in the backstory, with **Bunsen and Beaker's** mad-scientist contraptions appearing in various forms throughout the queue and ride environment. The Muppet Mobile Lab, the elaborate self-propelled robot vehicle that once roamed the park's streets during the Muppet*Vision era, is back in full. It's been worked into the attraction's narrative as part of **Bunsen and Beaker's Automotive Division**, which is exactly the kind of division you'd expect those two to run.

Even some old sight gags survive. Muppet*Vision fans will remember the "key under the mat" bit at the film

attraction's entrance. It's been updated for the new show: look for the door to **Gonzo's Stunt School**, posted with a sign that reads "At the concert! Keys under mat!" The mat is there. So are the "keys," but this time they are piano keys.

And **Statler and Waldorf**, the famously curmudgeonly duo who spent years heckling from their Muppet*Vision 3D balcony, are still very much in business. They show up at the end with the kind of commentary that only comes from two guys who have been watching things go sideways for a very long time. It is, in the best possible way, completely in character.

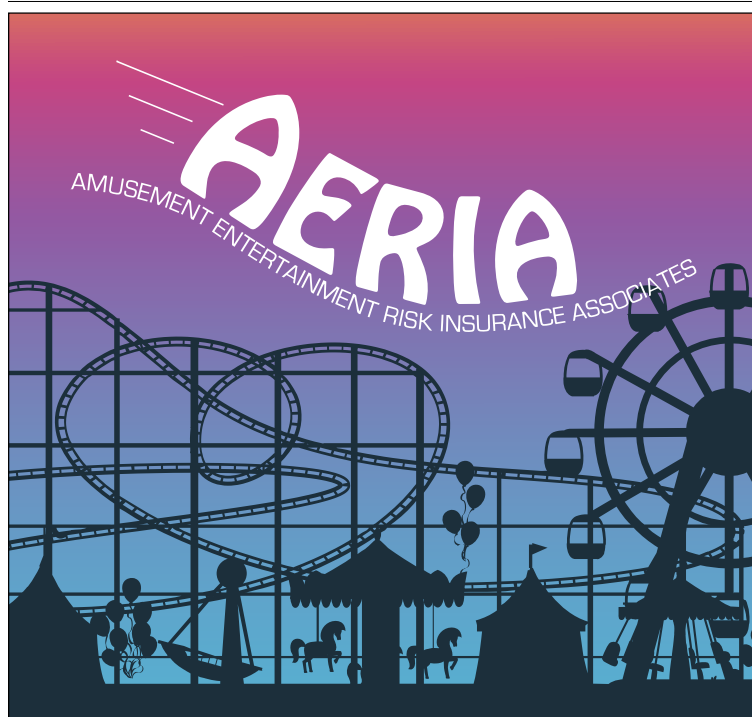
Lombardi said her favorite part of the finished attraction isn't any specific scene or song, it's what happens when guests come off the ride and she gets to watch them process it for the first time. She's been living with this project for two years. For the guest who just boarded on a Tuesday afternoon with no idea what to expect, all of that is brand new. "This is why we're here," she said. "To bring joy and delight to all of our guests."

That impulse is the oldest idea in the amusement and attractions industry. The mechanism changes. The technology gets more sophisticated. The IP cycles through. But the goal at the end of a three-second, 57-mph launch into the dark has always been the same: make them scream, make them laugh, make them want to do it again.

Ultimately, **Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring The Muppets** does finally get the band to the concert. And from all accounts, the show is worth the trip.

AERIA

AMUSEMENT ENTERTAINMENT RISK INSURANCE ASSOCIATES




Providing insurance to the amusement industry for over 65 years.

Gene Berger (215) 579-6487
Rick D'Aprile (215) 579-6488
Samuel Ryan (215) 579-6419

www.amusemententertainmentrisk.com

Our commitment to providing knowledgeable and informed service to our clients in the amusement industry is second to none.



FACILITIES & ATTRACTIONS

Wild Adventures celebrates 30th anniversary — pages 16-17 / Aquamania Jungle Park opens in Egypt — page 24

Indiana Beach puts a new spin on family fun with Zero Gravity

Rides 4 U delivers SBF/Visa's take on classic attraction

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

MONTICELLO, Ind. — Celebrating a milestone in 2026, **Indiana Beach** has a century-long history of fun. Over those 100 years, the park has blended a special mix of both classic and new rides. This year, the new addition practically does that in a single attraction.

Zero Gravity, a new spinning ride, joins the lineup. The park began giving its audience the opportunity to give it a whirl on May 16.

Manufactured by **SBF/Visa** and distributed through **Rides 4 U**, Zero Gravity is a new hit for both companies.

The ride mimics the experience from the old



On opening day, patrons lined up to get their chance at the new experience, or at least to take a look. COURTESY ADAM SERWACKI AND MATT MCLINDON/CROW MEDIA TEAM

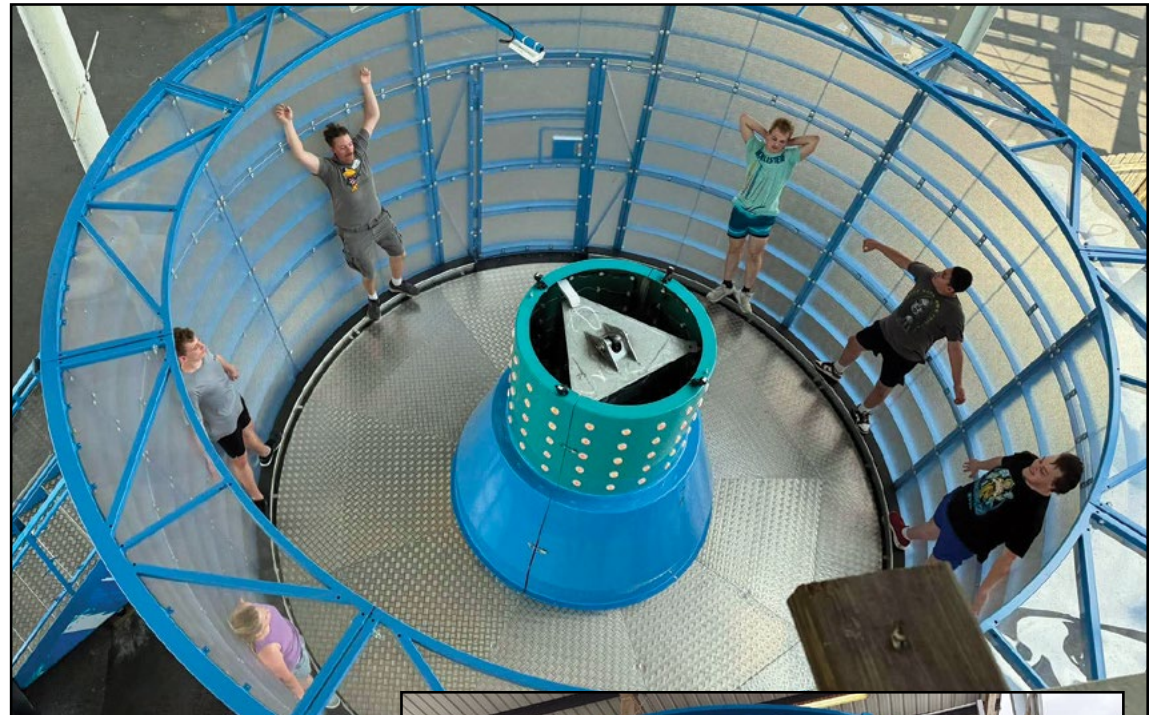
Rotor, an innovation of the late 1940s and sold by various companies in the second half of the 20th century.

Riders stand facing inward in an upright barrel. As the drum rotates at high speed, centripetal force is achieved, pressing riders against the wall. At full speed, the floor is lowered to leave riders stuck in place against the wall, eliciting screams and giggles. The maximum speed is 28 rpm.

What makes the modern version even more captivating is the clear, translucent walls of the drum drawing in crowds of spectators on the outside.

Zero Gravity can hold 24 riders per cycle, bringing in a theoretical hourly capacity of 480 riders.

“Zero Gravity brings something completely fresh to our lineup — a modern, high-energy take on a classic Rotor experience that we haven’t had in years,” said **Tom Crisci**, IB Parks and Entertainment. “Guests ride in a spinning drum with dynamic lighting and effects. It expands our offerings by adding a high-capacity, high-thrill flat ride that delivers intense forces and a memorable 'stuck to the wall' moment, perfect for thrill-seekers who want something beyond our coasters like Steel Hawg, Hoosier Hurricane or the new All American Triple Loop. For our 100th anniversary, it



Because of the compact nature of the ride, Zero Gravity easily fit into a suitable space at Indiana Beach. Riders encircle the wall of the ride's drum for an unforgettable and gripping experience (above). COURTESY ADAM SERWACKI AND MATT MCLINDON/CROW MEDIA TEAM



perfectly blends nostalgic ride styles with modern technology and effects, giving families and teens a unique, shareable thrill.”

Indiana Beach has placed the ride at the north entrance, steps away and across from the Falling Star.

“It’s in a high-traffic area, which should make it easy for guests to find and ride as soon as they enter the park,” said Crisci. “We did not retire any rides to make space for it. We were able to add Zero Gravity


while keeping the entire existing ride lineup intact, which is exciting because guests will have even more options this season.”

The park has an array of flat rides that offer various experiences.


“What drew us to Zero Gravity was its perfect fit for Indiana Beach’s personality,” Crisci told *Amusement Today*. “Classic fun with a modern edge, ideal for

celebrating 100 years. It’s a brand-new SBF Visa model, which means reliability, strong visuals and that wow-factor ‘floor drop’ moment that creates instant excitement. We were also looking for a ride that fills a gap in our current lineup. We have excellent coasters and family rides, but this adds a different kind of


► See GRAVITY, page 12




Deggeller Attractions
Preston & Barbieri Flying Swinger




Preston & Barbieri Junior Coaster



RES
Delivery 2025
RES Rides Oracle



RES
Water Jumble



IRG
Intermark Ride Group
TEL 615.370.9625
www.intermarkridegroup.com

Fabrizi Group
Gosetto
Preston & Barbieri
RES Rides
Moser Rides

Niagara Amusement Park not opening for 2026

GRAND ISLAND, N.Y. — May 2026 started off with heartbreak for amusement park fans in the Niagara Falls area. **IB Parks & Entertainment** — which owns and operates several small amusement parks — announced that it would not be opening **Niagara Amusement Park & Splash World** for the 2026 summer season.

"Since taking stewardship of this property, we invested significant effort to revive and improve the park," stated IB Parks in a release. "We believed deeply in its potential and worked to preserve a place that has created memories for generations of families. Throughout this process, our local team worked tirelessly to prepare the park for the upcoming season while continuing to make meaningful improvements across the property."

The park was originally known as Fantasy Island, prior to shuttering in 2020 and subsequently leased by IB Parks to operate under the new "Niagara Amusement Park & Splash World" moniker.

"Ultimately, attendance and revenue levels in recent seasons were not sufficient to sustain operating costs and the continued investment required to rebuild the park," IB Parks release continued. "Over the offseason, we explored every reasonable path to open this year and worked diligently to find a sustainable way forward. We understand many in the community were seeking updates during that time, and we sincerely appreciate your patience as those efforts continued."

The future of the park has been at the center of



Home to the Custom Coasters International Silver Comet Wooden Coaster, Niagara Amusement Park & Splash World will be shuttered for 2026 with its future uncertain. AT/TIM BALDWIN

local speculation for much of the off-season, with past guests of the former Fantasy Island pointing out on social media that no jobs were posted on the park's website, despite a May 23 opening date listed online.

IB Parks would not inform local media whether this is a permanent closure, saying only that the company's focus was "...on responsibly managing this transition and evaluating future opportunities for the property."

While the park will remain closed, plans are still in place to host the annual July 4th fireworks on the park's property, with details to be released soon.

►GRAVITY

Continued from page 11

spinning, high-G thrill that complements everything else without overlapping."

While the spinning creates strong forces, the experience is actually not dizzying. Interaction between riders — laughs and comments — creates a contained environment. Cameras inside allow the ride operator to monitor safety.

SBF-Visa is headquartered in Italy. According to **Tommaso Frison** in sales, the company has been manufacturing the ride for about 10 years, but its new popularity has skyrocketed. More than 80 units have been sold, and by the end of this year, that number will approach 100.

Indiana Beach offers a selection of roller coasters, aerial rides, flat rides and water attractions. In addition, there are lodging and cabin accommodations right at the park's Lake Shaffer setting.

WILLIAM H. ROBINSON, INC.

The Big Idea People!

513.737.9012 • www.TheBigIdeaPeople.com



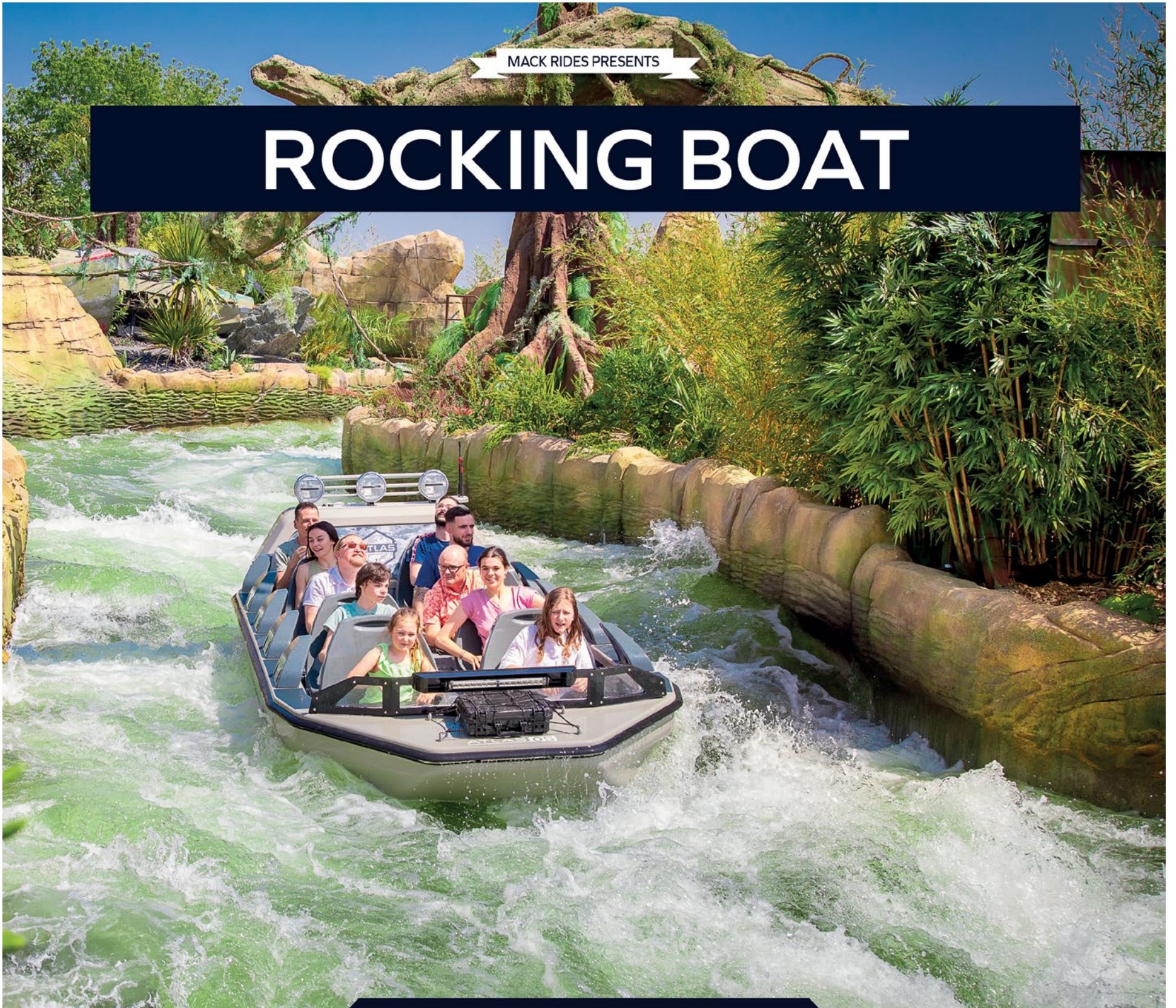
LET OUR BIG IDEAS LEAD TO BIG EYES & SWEET CROWDS!
 GRAPHIC DESIGN • MARKETING • PRINTING • PRODUCTION • PRESS RELEASES

A Creative Services Company Serving the Amusement, Water Park & Support Industry for over 50 Years!



MACK RIDES PRESENTS

ROCKING BOAT



Our 2025 multi-award winner: Golden Ticket Award, IAAPA Brass Ring Best New Product, IAAPA Brass Ring Impact Award, Parkscout Plus Award, Parkworld Excellence Award, European STAR Award



Ride the current of innovation: The Rocking Boat by Mack Rides brings the energy of whitewater rafting into a compact, highly dynamic attraction. With tight turning radii and forward and backward movement, every journey feels unique. The open layout allows for seamless integration of theming and storytelling, turning a simple boat ride into an immersive adventure. Whether calm cruise or wild ride – the Rocking Boat delivers unforgettable moments in every drop.

Back and bluer than ever: Blue Man Group returns to Orlando

AT: David Fake
dfake@amusementtoday.com

ORLANDO — When Blue Man Group shuttered its long-running residency at Universal Orlando Resort on February 1, 2021, the exit was as quiet as its three Blue Men, who communicate exclusively in percussion and paint. A pandemic-forced hiatus became a permanent farewell to a venue that had hosted more than 6,000 shows since 2007, leaving a noticeable void in one of the world's most entertainment-dense tourist destinations.

Five years later, the Blue Men are back — and they brought a building with them.

Blue Man Group officially opened its new Orlando residency on May 1 at ICON Park on International Drive, marking the first time in the franchise's 35-year history that a venue was designed and built specifically for the show. The 790-seat custom-built theater sits beneath the



The new Blue Man Theater (above) at ICON Park is located behind The Orlando Eye (right) on International Drive. AT/DAVID FAKE; COURTESY ICON PARK

steel frame of the Orlando Eye observation wheel. It appears modest from the outside but is revelatory within.

For Stacy Rave, senior production manager and a Blue Man veteran since the late 1990s, the return is personal. "We felt the hole not being here anymore," she said. "And I think the community felt it as well. They have welcomed us back in an overwhelmingly supportive way."

The ICON Park partnership gave Blue Man Group something it has never had at a permanent venue: the ability to design the experience before a single seat was installed. "This is our first custom-built theater just for Blue Man," Rave said. "That was a big leap for us — to literally start from a pile of dirt and build a venue and put a brand-new show into that venue."

The interior is a genuine



surprise. Enveloping LED screen walls and a redesigned lighting package dissolve the line between stage and audience in a way that feels engineered, not incidental. The show's immersive qualities are not a feature. They are the architecture.

The new production retains classic Blue Man signatures (a la paint drumming, PVC instruments, the Cap'n Crunch chaos), but this show is built for the here and now.

"Most of the material is new, specifically for this show," Rave said. At its center is an all-seeing artificial intelligence character that learns alongside the audience, framing segments that explore what technology can amplify and, more pointedly, what it cannot replace. "As human beings, we're really in a new time in our reality," she said. "This show does a great job of touching on how we deal with connection as people."

The score is equally new, composed alongside the performers and built to breathe. "Our musicians really are riffing off what the Blue Men are doing with audience members," Rave said. "Everybody's bringing their A game every day. And the music is beautiful."

Casting Blue Men remains among the most demanding parts of the operation. "It takes a long time to find Blue Men who are really up for the task," Rave acknowledged. They seek natural musicianship, a physical non-verbal acting style, and an innate curiosity that can be refined but not manufactured. "It's one of those things where you can't describe it, but you know it

when you see it."

When pressed to distill what the show delivers, Rave set aside the specs entirely. "It really is a show that just brings people joy," she said. "It's fun to watch people spend 90 minutes rediscovering their inner child and connecting with others. Our show ultimately really is about connection."

Joy. Curiosity. Connection. Combined, these appear to be the creative north star that has guided Blue Man Group since its 1991 Off-Broadway debut, as well as what has drawn more than 50 million people worldwide since. Now, under the Cirque du Soleil Entertainment Group umbrella and performing in the first theater ever built for the brand, those three words carry fresh weight in a city that knows something about the power of a great show.

Yes, these Blue Men have never needed words, not even when making their exit from Orlando in 2021. As it turns out, they did not need them for a comeback, either. Blue Man Group breaks five years of silence with one hell of a drumbeat at ICON Park.

●blueman.com



The new Blue Man Group performance brings people real joy. AT/DAVID FAKE

Sippers by Design.
FATHER'S DAY

CUSTOM DRINKWARE
GUARANTEED TO
BOOST YOUR SALES
MADE IN THE USA
IN STOCK READY TO SHIP

Celebrating
30 years
of Business

MEXICAN RESTAURANT

The Grill Father

BORCELLE BBQ RESTAURANT

CONTACT US NOW
800.395.9980
SALES@SIPPERSBYDESIGN.COM



GERSTLAUER
Amusement Rides GmbH

Airtime Coaster



Discover all our products!

www.gerstlauer-rides.de

Fun for the Whole Family

For over 25 years, we have successfully designed roller coasters that deliver extraordinary adventures for all generations.

We offer both standard and fully customized layouts, precisely adapted to local conditions and individual requirements.

Our award-winning rides always provide a unique experience, delighting both young guests and the young at heart.



Bobsled Coaster



Family Coaster



Spinning Coaster



Bob Coaster



Family Suspended Coaster

Running wild: Wild Adventures celebrates 30th anniversary season

AT: Jack Lathrop
Special to Amusement Today

VALDOSTA, Ga.—Wild Adventures first opened its gates in May 1996. Founded by Kent and Don Buescher, Wild Adventures originally opened as Liberty Farms Petting Zoo. Over the course of 30 years, the park has evolved from its humble origins into a regional destination. Not simply an amusement park, Wild Adventures is also a water park, music venue and zoo, all in one.

This transformation didn't happen overnight. While the Bueschers' vision was always rooted in family and nature, over time it evolved to include rides, which began appearing in the mid-to-late 1990s. Splash Island Water Park followed in 2003, effectively turning the property into two parks on one ticket. In 2007, Herschend Family Entertainment acquired Wild Adventures, bringing with it a hospitality philosophy that would shape the guest experience for years to come.

"It opened originally as a petting zoo, and then over the years it's turned into so much more," said Donald Spiller, who joined Wild Adventures as general manager this season after nearly three decades in the industry. "And that's what really makes Wild Adventures a unique property."



Wild Adventures's Vekoma Boomerang was recently renovated (above). With animals being a feature attraction at the park, guests can seize rare opportunities such as interacting with one of the park's Tamanduas (below). AT/JACK LATHROP; COURTESY WILD ADVENTURES

What sets Wild Adventures apart isn't simply the breadth of what it offers; it's how naturally everything fits together. There are no hard seams between the multifaceted attractions. You walk through the front gates, and you'll spot a macaw. You pass the roller coasters, and you're likely to see lions and tigers. Head toward the water park, and the tamanduas come into view. The Safari Campground, which launched in 2024, takes the integration even further.

"When you're staying at the campground, you're sleeping next to zebras and giraffes and wildebeests," said Spiller.

The park's 12,000-seat amphitheater adds yet another dimension. Season



passholders attend concerts at no additional charge, a value Spiller is quick to point out. Past performers have included Destiny's Child and Dolly Parton. The 2026 lineup features Kansas, Travis Tritt and The Beach Boys.

"You wouldn't think a lot of big-name artists would

come play in Valdosta, Georgia," said Asher Raymond, marketing and communications manager. "But because we have a great 12,000-person amphitheater, we're able to do that."

At the center of it all, literally and philosophically, are the animals. Wild Adventures is home to a one-horned rhino, lions, tigers, alligators, giraffes, zebras and so much

more. They aren't simply a scenic backdrop; rather, they're woven into the guest experience through feeding encounters, up-close interactions, and an education-driven entertainment lineup that covers animal habitats and diets.

"It's not something you can just do every day," Raymond said. "And with that comes really cool stories."

One that is playing out right now. Bakari, the park's giraffe, and Kurtsie, a zebra, formed an unlikely bond shortly after Kurtsie was born. Guests arriving for giraffe feedings have begun noticing the pair together, and the story has quietly taken on a life of its own among regulars.

"For the animals to have a connection that they share with the guests has been really one of the most impactful things in the time I've been here," Spiller said.

The 30th anniversary has brought a meaningful round of park-wide investment. The Alapaha Trail, a nature walk winding through Wild Adventures' South Georgia swamp setting, was reopened after a section had been closed for a decade. New up-close animal experiences debuted this season for two-toed sloths, giraffes and tamandua anteaters. The spider monkey exhibit, home to Mambo and Jojo, was expanded to more than three times its previous size.

► See WILD, page 17

The Scrambler

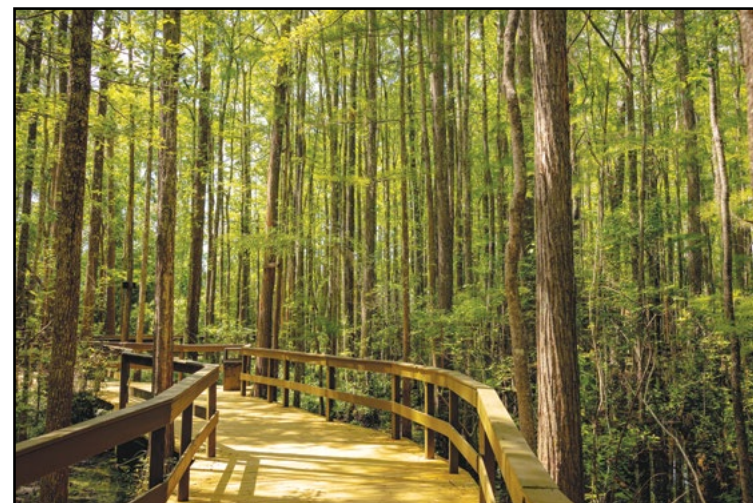
- Seats remain on ride for transport
- Fast Set-up and Tear-down
- 36-Passenger Capacity
- Simultaneous Loading
- Fan Light Package
- Mast Covers
- Sweep Panels
- 28-Foot Trailer





217-245-7145 fax 217-479-0103

info@elibridge.com elibridge.com



The park has reopened the Alapaha Trail, which winds through the Georgia swampland the park calls home. AT/JACK LATHROP

► **WILD**

Continued from page 16

On the rides side, the Boomerang coaster received a full overhaul in collaboration with **Vekoma**, including a new braking system and control system. The Safari Train now operates two locomotives during peak season. Island Falls, the beloved shoot-the-chutes attraction, returned to operation after being sidelined since 2020.

"It wasn't just a simple 'let's put a 30th anniversary logo on things,'" Raymond said. "There was definitely a crucial point to make sure we're hitting it home with our local community."

That community connection runs deep. Wild Adventures is widely regarded as one of Valdosta's defining institutions. The park maintains partnerships with **Second Harvest of South Georgia**, the **American Red Cross**, **United Way**, and the **Boys & Girls Club**. In recognition of the anniversary milestone, Lowndes County officially declared a Wild Adventures Day, with Board of Commissioners Chairman **Bill Slaughter** presenting the proclamation in person.

The anniversary also gave birth to a new brand campaign: "No One Funs Like Us." Five words that capture the full scope of what the park has become, and according to Raymond, it's given the marketing team the freedom to show it.

At the heart of everything is hospitality. "So, if you're going on a ride and you get your restraint checked, there's an interaction. If it's a positive interaction, that makes a difference," said Spiller. "They're going to come off that ride saying, 'Wow, that was really fun. Also, wow, everyone here is very nice.' That's what we always try to strive to do, and we're going to keep striving to have that here for the next thirty years."

Guests can expect to have a great time at Wild Adventures and leave wanting to return because Spiller, Raymond and the rest of the team strive

to make every guest's experience as amazing (and wild) as possible!

Spiller came to Wild Adventures with high expectations and found them exceeded, with even more room to grow. The property sits on 170 acres, not all of it developed, and he sees room for the park to grow its regional draw without compromising what makes it work.

"We'll never lose our core of what that is: being a family park," he said. "Our

legacy will continue to be holding on to those core values but expanding them in a way that our guests are looking for."

Wild Adventures is now open daily for its 30th anniversary season.

Wild Adventures has several large animal exhibits, allowing guests to see wild life — such as this zebra — enjoying a natural environment and relaxing in their home.
AT/JACK LATHROP



AMUSEMENT PARK MARKET PLACE



Naughton
Insurance, Inc.
EST. 1947

Specializing in Insurance Programs for
Amusement Parks, Water Parks and
Family Fun Centers.

www.naughtoninsurance.com



50
Years

THE ORIGINAL ALPINE COASTER CREATORS AND STILL THE BEST

www.wiegandsportsusa.com



Lagotronics Projects



Interactive **Dark Rides** for Theme Parks,
Amusement Parks and FECs!

www.lagotronicsprojects.com

Reliable Lighting For Amusement Rides



Eworks PRO LIGHTING
877-EWORKSPRO
eworkspro.com
Winter Park, FL



HODGDON
CONSULTING

The destination for building your brand
and maintaining its presence

- Advertising & Branding
- Public Relations
- Social Media & Email Marketing

hodgdonconsulting@gmail.com
207-536-8192

Consulting Services for the Amusement & Entertainment Industries



Specializing in:

- Third Party Safety Inspections
- State Ride Certifications
- Operator Training
- Documentation Reviews
- On-site Operational Audits
- Risk & Loss Control Surveys

WORLDWIDE SAFETY GROUP
Avery L. Wheelock
President
Cell: 813-505-3938
avery@worldwidesafetygroup.com
www.worldwidesafetygroup.com

**Keep our amusement park industry strong!
Buy products and services from these suppliers.**

Zamperla opens family launched Kyūbi Unchained at Parc Spirou

AT: Tim Baldwin

tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

MONTEUX, France — Having opened its gates less than a decade ago, **Parc Spirou Provence** has now grown its coaster count to five. **Kyūbi Unchained** is a family thrill launched coaster from **Zamperla**.

The theme park opened its gates in 2018 based on Spirou, a comic book character. At that time, it debuted with a trio of **Zierer** coasters, all geared toward young ones and families. The following year, a fireball model from **RES Rides** enticed some older kids. Now, the park has expanded its lineup — and its audience — with a notable ride that has distinctive features that differentiate it from the rest of the offerings.

“Zamperla is one of the leading ride manufacturers in the world, with excellent engineering teams and strong expertise in immersive attractions. For this project, we needed a partner used to working with globally recognized IPs, and that is definitely one of Zamperla’s strengths,” said **Hervé Lux**, CEO. “They understood very quickly that this attraction was not only about thrills, but also about storytelling and immersion within the Naruto universe.”

Kyūbi is a manga character, a fox with nine tails. Video screens when entering the station feature the character, and once guests queue in the gates, they note the fox’s visage on the front car and tails on the back.

“The IP drove this entire project — layout, storytelling and area development,” said **Adam Sandy**, roller coaster sales, Zamperla. “They also wanted an attraction that the majority of their guests could ride. That is why we only considered 42 inches (105 cm) from the outset of design. The engineers at our Roller Coaster Business Unit utilized elements that were different from existing coasters at the park.”

The coaster is the anchor

Kyūbi Unchained is Parc Spirou Provence’s largest coaster. Both the front and back (inset) of the train characterize **Kyūbi’s** features. COURTESY PARC SPIROU



to a new Naruto-themed land. The Japanese manga series is about a young ninja who dreams of becoming the leader of his village.

The details of the attraction bring newer and higher thrills. Rising to 103 feet, **Kyūbi Unchained** stands as the park’s tallest roller coaster. In addition, a section of switch track allows the coaster to rush through the station. Those riders unaware might think the ride is coming to an end, but the experience is only halfway finished as a boost launch sends the train of 28 riders on a different section of track. On this section, the train climbs a vertical spike, only to return to the station in reverse.

Except for the last car. Why? The last car is turned backward, letting those four riders have a different experience when it comes to the opposite directions. Those riders return to the station facing forward.

“We were thinking of ways to offer something different. While other coasters have had the last car reversed, we thought it would be better here because the centerline is broad appeal and not pos-

itive-G heavy,” Sandy told *Amusement Today*. “After riding it, our thoughts were confirmed; it is a great experience, but not too intense for riders of all ages.”

The ride uses tire-propelled launches.

“We are using tires for Family Thrill launches under about 60 mph (100 km/h). They require about ¾ the power of a comparable LSM system and therefore less electrical infrastructure,” Sandy said. “With so many parks look-

ing to lower their installation costs after they have spiked in the past few years, we felt this was important. In addition, the system is simple. It is a motor, a belt and a tire. There is no gearbox, which eliminates significant maintenance time and costs.”

As part of the same project, the park installed a Zamperla **NebulaZ** called **Rasengan Chakra Rotation**.

“Like our recent **Lotte World** installation, it was another integrated rides project,” Sandy noted. “The **Nebulaz** placement was considered during the coaster design. Clients get significant benefits by purchasing an integrated ride package, such as one point of contact for project management and thematic continuity between all the rides. Between the two attractions, the area has over 1,000 pph

ride capacity.”

The rides officially opened to the public on April 4.

“The reaction has honestly been incredible,” Lux said. “Guests are really impressed by the level of immersion and detail throughout the land. We see fans taking time to explore every corner of the village, taking pictures, discovering references from the anime and manga, and sharing the experience together. What is particularly rewarding is that the land appeals both to **Naruto** fans and to families discovering the universe for the first time.”

As guests approach the ride, the entrance path winds below much of the layout, building anticipation.

The ride was installed by **RCS GmbH**. The track length is 2,198 feet, although the second half is traversed in both directions.

“What surprised us the most was the emotional reaction from the fans,” said Lux. “Some visitors traveled from very far away just to discover the land, and many told us they had been waiting for an experience like this in Europe for years. We also noticed that even guests who were not familiar with **Naruto** before entering the land became curious and engaged with the universe afterward.”



Part of the new ride package was a Zamperla **Nebulaz** integrated into the coaster. COURTESY PARC SPIROU

Valkyrie keeps Vekoma Family Boomerang's momentum going

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

BRETTEVILLE-SUR-ODON, Normandy, France— In production since 2011, the **Vekoma Family Boomerang** has found its niche and continues to remain incredibly popular, now with more than 40 installations in the past 15 years.

The latest model to open is Valkyrie at Festyland. It is the second Family Boomerang to open in 2026 (April 4), with a whopping six more poised to open later this year.

Theming sets this one apart with its Medieval station and highly stylized lead car. Flickering lanterns among the gothic architecture help set the stage, and like all rides of this genre, the ride begins with a backward climb.

Once released, riders rush back through the station, this time racing through a plume of smoke.

In contrast to most rides of this type, the twists and dips continue to extend outward in its layout instead of spiraling turns. Valkyrie

launches from the Viking zone and runs the full length of the park.

This is the first roller coaster for the park in more than 20 years. Festyland opened in the late 1990s and hasn't seen a new roller coaster since 2005. Valkyrie is the park's largest roller coaster.

"Since its opening, visitor feedback has been extremely positive. Valkyrie has quickly become one of the park's flagship attractions," said **Aline Chaignon**, communications. "Visitors particularly appreciate the balance between thrills, family accessibility and thematic immersion. The visual integration of the attraction within the Viking area also generates a great deal of enthusiasm."

Norse mythology had the Valkyrie maidens help transport warriors to Valhalla. The park has tried to remain aligned with the Nordic mythology in its theming.

"From the very first glance, Valkyrie's train pulls you right into the story," said **Carin Davits**, market-



The theming on the front of the train (above) elevates the ride in its story-driven theme. Vekoma Family Boomerangs use a reverse point (right) to cause riders to experience the second half of the ride backward. COURTESY FESTYLAND



ing, Vekoma. "The level of detail is incredible, and the adventure really begins even before guests take their seats. It's hard not to admire how the design captures the spirit of Valkyrie so strongly and makes the experience feel complete from the very first moment. Working closely with Parc Festyland and [creative designer] **Morgan Fix** was an absolute joy, and seeing it all come together like this makes us incredibly proud."

"Vekoma was chosen because the quality and reliability of its creations, its ability to support custom projects, as well as its expertise in creating thrilling family roller coasters," Chaignon told *Amusement Today*. "We worked closely with Vekoma's teams to design an experience consistent with the site's constraints, the park's identity and its ambitions."

Rising to a height of 27

meters (88 feet), 20 passengers rush along 460 meters (1,509 feet) of track in both directions.

Construction relied on the expertise of close to 30 companies, predominantly based in Normandy.

With more than €4.5 million invested, the project took 18 months for design and construction. More than 20 trees were planted to help aid the aesthetics of the area.



Designed & built in the US for the US
Extensive global network of dealers & service centers



Built for long-term confidence



Leasing & flexible finance terms available

COMPACT MOBILITY EVs



UTILITY EVs





SEVERN LAMB
TRAMS INTERNATIONAL

Web: www.severn-lamb.com
Email: sales@severn-lamb.com **Tel:** (562) 231-1770





The Raptor roller coaster was announced for Family Kingdom Amusement Park in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, during IAAPA Expo 2025. Construction of the coaster has been delayed. The attraction will no longer debut in 2026 and is poised to open for the 2027 season.

COURTESY ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONSTRUCTION

Family Kingdom's Raptor coaster pushed to 2027

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. — Construction of the highly anticipated Raptor, single-rail steel roller coaster at **Family Kingdom Amusement Park**, has been delayed until later this year, according to **Les (Corky) Powers**, an owner of the seaside attraction.

Powers said the park is currently working through some permitting and other challenges before the ride will be installed at the property. It will not be operational for the 2026 season.

Initially, Family Kingdom had a target date of opening the coaster for July 4th of this year after unveiling the project last November at the **International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions Expo** in Orlando, Florida.

Rocky Mountain Construction (RMC), Hayden, Idaho, is the supplier of the Raptor coaster, which is featured at a handful of larger theme parks in the nation. When operational, it will be the first such RMC installment in the Southeast.

Family Kingdom's new coaster will be 100 feet tall with 1,920 feet of track. The ride will reach speeds of 50 mph and include five airtime moments after soaring through a large inversion after the initial drop.

The park, which opened for the season in April, does feature other new attractions this year, including **Inferno**, a **Larson International** loop; a **KMG X-Drive** themed as **Colossus**; **Crazy Chopper (Fajume)**; and **Kraken**, a **Battech Industries** **Black Widow**.

The park's legendary **Swamp Fox** roller coaster celebrates its 60th anniversary this year. It was designed by famed coaster engineer, the late **John C. Allen**. Most of the track on the ride has been replaced since the park was purchased by Powers and local businessman **Bill Prescott** in 2022.

Powers and Prescott were honored at last year's Golden Ticket Awards, presented by *Amusement Today*, with the Renaissance Award for their continued devotion to the industry and for saving the park.

●familykingdomfun.com
●rockymtnconstruction.com



Six Flags Great Adventure announced a new partnership with **Project Purple**, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness and funding support for pancreatic cancer research and patient programs.

As part of the partnership, the park's 2027 coaster project, currently known publicly as "Project Purple," will serve as more than just a code name. Through June 1, 2027, Six Flags Great Adventure will work alongside Project Purple to help spotlight the organization's mission and create meaningful opportunities for awareness, fundraising and community engagement.

"We're excited to partner with Project Purple and use the visibility of this incredible new attraction to help shine a light on an important cause," said **Mike Fehnel**, park president of Six Flags Great Adventure. "This partnership is especially meaningful to me personally, having lost my father to pancreatic cancer. It's a disease that impacts far too many families, including mine. As Project Purple rises on our skyline, we have an opportunity to raise awareness, inspire support and create a meaningful connection between unforgettable experiences and real impact."

A new experience is hopping into **Peppa Pig Theme Park**, Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas, this summer, as families can meet Miss Rabbit starting June 5, kicking off a season of limited-time events and interactive family fun. The park's summer lineup begins with **Bubblepalooza**, May 21 to June 4, a bubbly pre-summer celebration that kicks off the festivities. It is followed by **The Pig Family Travel Adventure**, alongside **Muddy Puddle Mania**, both running June 5 to August 16, giving guests plenty of opportunities to join in the fun all summer long.

In addition to its headline experiences, the park will host a series of limited-time events, including **Daddy Pig's Magic Days**, June 13 to 30, **Peppa's Music and Arts Festival**, July 1 to 23, and **Peppa's Story Book Celebration**, July 24 to August 16, bringing new ways for families to play, explore and celebrate all season long.

Lake Winnepesaukah Amusement Park, Rossville, Georgia, reopened for the season on Friday, May 1, bringing back rides, attractions and a new

experience for visitors.

Park officials said this year's opening comes with the opening of a new roller coaster, **Lookout Safari**. The ride features a 656-foot track, includes two laps and reaches speeds of up to 21 miles per hour. The 20-foot-tall **Zierer** coaster previously operated at the **Indianapolis Zoo** as **Kōmbo**.

Story Land, Glen, New Hampshire, has introduced an all-new lineup of experiences for 2026, bringing fresh energy and new ways to play for parkgoers. This season highlights brand-new shows, reimagined offerings and the return of fan-favorite attractions.

Included in the improvements this year is the return of two iconic rides. They are the **Turtle Twirl** and **Crazy Barn**. A new interactive experience, **Topsy Turvy Party: A Mad Royal Bash**, is being enjoyed by parkgoers. In addition, the park's **Character Dinner** has been reimagined and is now packed with musical fairytale fun where dinner guests can expect appearances from **Cinderella**, the **Mad Hatter**, and **Alice**.

The park also introduced the **TimeSaver Pass** for 2026, a new addition that allows visitors to spend less time waiting in line.

Peppa Pig Theme Park, Winter Haven, Florida, is hosting its new **Pig Family Travel Adventure** event, offering interactive activities designed for preschoolers and their families, according to a story that ran on a local news agency, **WFTV**.

According to the story, "the limited-time event began on May 23 and will run through June 28."

"It invites families to join Pig and her family on their first holiday as a family of five, transforming the park into a globe-trotting journey for little ones," the story stated. "Families complete interactive challenges, explore new environments and collect stamps as they visit each destination. This encourages creativity, imagination and shared family moments. Guests who complete all activities receive a special-edition pop badge, while supplies last."

The **Pig Family Travel Adventure** is being included with regular park admission.

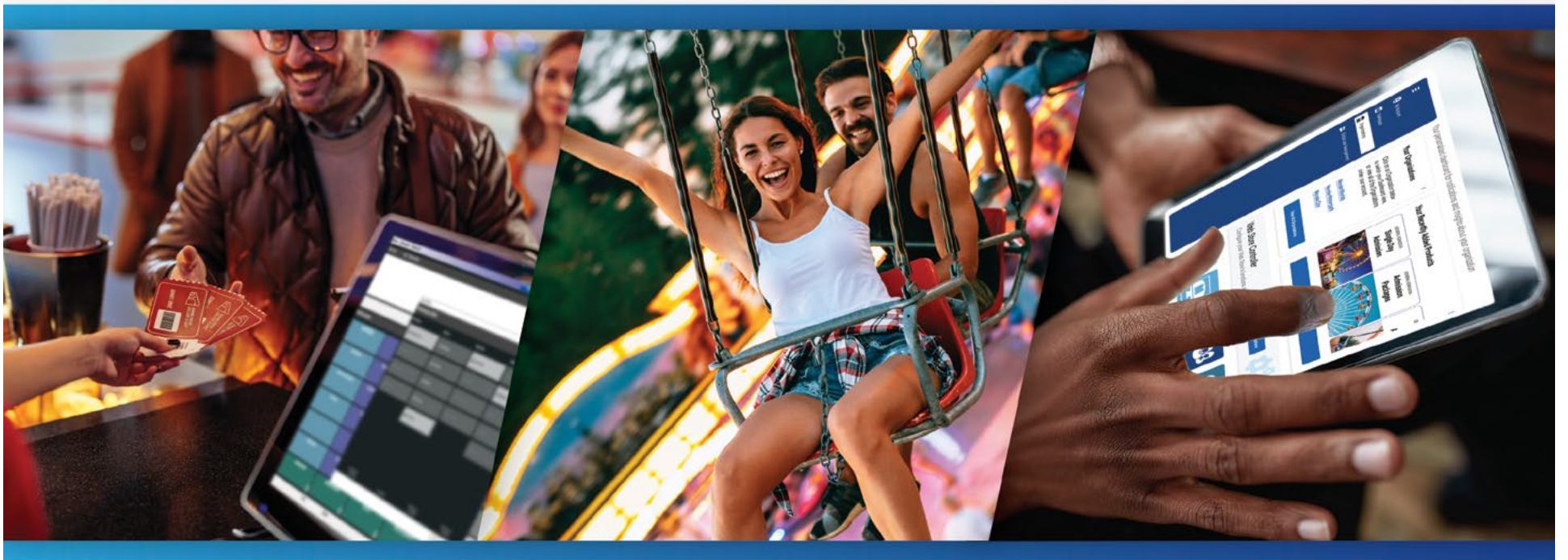
North Carolina's iconic **Wizard of Oz** theme park, located in Winston-Salem and known as the **Land of Oz**, will reopen this summer for the 2026 season and again in the fall, after being closed last year due to Hurricane Helene's impact on the state. The first is the **Tea with Dorothy and Aunt Em**, which features a new musical comedy with live performances from Dorothy and familiar faces. It also includes transportation up to the mountain to the **Land of Oz** and a guided stroll along the **Yellow Brick Road**. Only 1,700 tickets are available for this event.

The event is set for select dates in June and July. Then, **The Land of Oz** will reopen for the **Autumn at Oz** event, which will return in September.

Gateway

TICKETING SYSTEMS®

**ONE PLATFORM.
ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES.**



TICKETING • RETAIL AND FOOD & BEVERAGE POS • MEMBERSHIPS • CRM
ACCESS CONTROL • SELF-SERVICE • WAIVERS • OTA CONNECTIVITY

GALAXY
8

**LEARN
MORE**



gatewayticketing.com

Launch Family Entertainment expands, bounces into Texas location

AT: Tim Baldwin

tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

ARLINGTON, Texas — In a competitive field for the family dollar, **Launch Family Entertainment** is making its presence known in the Texas market. Its latest park in Arlington opened in early May.

“The company started in Warren, Rhode Island,” said **Mike Stout**, chief development officer, Launch Family Entertainment. “The company was founded by **Rob Arnold** in 2013. He still sits on the board of Launch. This was at the beginning of trampoline parks. He was on a vacation with his family in Orlando. There was too much rain going on, so they found an indoor entertainment facility with a trampoline park. The kids enjoyed the experience, and they thought, ‘This is something we could do and maybe do it better on our end.’ Instead of pursuing a franchise, they decided to do their own concept.”

Stout says that after the initial locations opened, they began to evolve the facilities. He said the COVID pandemic took a toll on the FEC industry, and they decided to do a full pivot into family entertainment destinations.

“That’s what our focus has been the last few years,” he told *Amusement Today*. “We feel that is something that really differentiates ourselves from a typical trampoline park. We offer a whole host of attractions in our parks that are around



Battle beam (above), rock climbing, dodgeball, trapeze and trampolines are fun options at the Arlington location. Full-length Brunswick bowling lanes (right) can be rented by the hour for up to six people. AT/TIM BALDWIN

high-energy, active entertainment. [We have] bowling, arcades, a full-service food restaurant and our beverages include a full bar. With birthday parties and corporate events, it really becomes a community gathering space.”

“All our attractions we chose to put in cover the entire family,” said **Hemnath Kumar**, owner of the Arlington location. “Some places cater to certain age segments. We want to be certain there is something for every age group that walks in here.”

As is typical of many large FEC ventures, the Arlington location repurposes part of a large building that previously served as a **Sam’s Club**, **Burlington Coat Factory** and a furniture store.

“The soft play area is good for kids from 1-year-olds to grade school kids,” Kumar told AT. “Kids love this. We have a lighted tunnel section in the back that is a great attraction for kids

at the first level to get them excited to go climb. You slide down it. We made sure custom lights [are placed] to eliminate dark spaces so kids feel safe.”

The soft play area has a clearly marked wheelchair entrance point for ADA children to have easier access to their own personal climb.

There are numerous interactive play activities: trampoline jumping space, dodgeball, VR gameplay, battle beam, rock climbing and trapeze.

“I’m excited about the trapeze. Kids swing in and jump and have a safe landing,” Kumar said. “It’s something new. Our rock wall is for the younger ages, and they don’t have to put on a harness — they can just fall.”

Six lanes of traditional **Brunswick** bowling are available for rental by the hour for up to six people, which includes shoes.

A large launch slide is coming to the Arlington location, but it had not

arrived by the opening.

Adventurous kids will enjoy a ninja course and basketball court, both of which have a springy jumping surface which makes it great for falls as well as gaining height when shooting baskets.

“Safety is paramount,” said Kumar. “The ninja course has a side for younger kids where they feel safe. This surface is more expensive, but we felt it was important to go for it. It’s easier to clean than foam too.”

Adjacent to the arcade games is a **Valorena**, a supremely interactive projection mapping game involving numerous scenarios.

The park’s mascot is **Joey**, a kangaroo — a fitting character for a facility that involves a lot of jumping. He appears at birthday parties and hourly in the main area.

Gourmet pizzas are elevated above the norm at **Krave**, and mason jar milkshakes offer a “special occasion” item.

Having repeatable guest

experiences across a range of demographics is something Launch hopes to bridge the gap from just children’s entertainment into a full family entertainment center.

Families can bundle packages for the day or just pay hourly for the specific attractions they want. Adults not participating can attend for free.

Launch has seen considerable growth. Of the 30 facilities, 10 have evolved into the FEC model, six of which opened last year. The first developed family entertainment center under the brand opened in 2022. In 2026, Launch hopes to open eight or nine family entertainment concepts.

Although primarily in the northeast, Texas has become a new target. When asked why the Lone Star State was a key target, Stout answered, “Texas is just a hot market. It follows some of the activity we had in Alabama and Florida. It’s been a very high-growth market for retail.”

The Arlington location was the third in Texas, with a fourth opening soon north of the Dallas-Fort Worth area in Denton.

In 2026, Launch Family Entertainment will be opening facilities in Texas, North Carolina, New Jersey, New Hampshire, California and Florida.

“We don’t operate corporate parks,” said Stout. “Our focus is very heavily working with franchisees.”



Arcade games (above left) are fun for competition or redemption prizes. Ninja courses (above right) and basketball courts feature a springy landing surface that cushions falls and makes for extra bounce. AT/TIM BALDWIN



FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRAL

AT: John W.C. Robinson

jrobinson@amusementtoday.com

Jay Gee's Ice Cream & Fun Center, a family entertainment center in Methuen, Massachusetts, has upgraded its arcade game room with the support of **Betson Enterprises**.

The arcade spans approximately 3,000 square feet and features 45 games, giving guests a wide variety of ways to play, compete and enjoy their visit. The upgraded game room adds another layer of excitement to Jay Gee's already robust lineup of family-friendly attractions.

"I was inspired to open an arcade because I wanted to create a place where families and kids could come together, have fun, and make lasting memories," said **Joe Giuffrida**, co-owner of Jay Gee's Ice Cream & Fun Center. "Adding the arcade felt like a natural way to bring more energy and excitement to the facility. Betson provided an excellent experience from our first conversation about purchasing games all the way through installation."

Intercard recently celebrated 15 years of its winning relationship with **Sky Games**. The Latin American chain has nine FECs in Paraguay and 12 in Bolivia, with plans to expand into Chile and Brazil. The FECs offer a diverse array of active attractions for children, including trampolines, soft play, educational play and bumper cars, plus arcade games for all ages.

"We chose Intercard because of the company's reliability and trustworthiness, as well as its excellent software and after-sales service," said **Mario Quiroga Blanco**, owner of Sky Games. "The benefits of using the Intercard system are very important for revenue control and managing our operations."

Sky Games has enjoyed special benefits from Intercard's award-winning iQ reader that reads QR codes. It is installed on 10 VR games at Sky Games' TUPI Marketplace center in Asunción, Paraguay.

Sacoa Cashless System strengthened its presence in the U.S. family entertainment market with the successful installation of its innovative cashless technology at the two newest locations of **The Rush Funplex** in Utah.

During the first half of 2026, Sacoa completed installations at The Rush Funplex Logan, which opened in March 2026, and most recently at The Rush Funplex Hurricane, inaugurated in May 2026. With these additions, The Rush Funplex now operates nine entertainment venues across the United States.

"We are very happy with Sacoa's work and fast execution," said **Alejandro Santoro Jr.**, IT project manager at The Rush Funplex. "Their ability to complete these installations within such a short timeframe allowed us to successfully open two new locations only two months apart. It has been a true win-win situation. Our guests also appreciate the smoother and more enjoyable experience at our centers."

Thrillz Atlanta, a first-of-its-kind new indoor adrenaline park is coming to Atlanta, Georgia. The forthcoming location was officially announced in mid-May 2026.

In total, Thrillz Atlanta will boast more than 20 attractions when it opens in June 2026. The park claims to be the first in the U.S. to combine unique offerings like full-size indoor carnival rides, a mega slide, tower and airbag obstacles all under one roof.

When it opens, the FEC's attractions will be highlighted by a 35-foot indoor mega slide tower, a 40-foot indoor Drop Tower, a more than 10,000-square-foot Soft Play Jungle Gym and one of only four Grave Digger VR experiences in North America.

In addition to the upcoming space in Atlanta, Thrillz also has locations in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, and Danbury, Connecticut.



COURTESY SLICK CITY WOODBURY

Slick City Action Park adds second Minnesota location

AT: Pam Sherborne

psherborne@amusementtoday.com

WOODBURY, Minn. — A new **Slick City Action Park** opened its doors in Woodbury, Minnesota, last February, making it the second one in Minnesota. And, by all accounts, it will be another successful venture for owners **Annie** and **Mike Kelly**, who own the second Minnesota location in Maple Grove.

"The response from Woodbury and the surrounding communities has been incredible," said Annie Kelly. "We've felt so welcomed and the energy in the park has been amazing since day one."

Kelly said their first experience in the FEC space was with the opening of Slick City Maple Grove in March 2025.

"That location marked our entry into the industry, and the success there gave us the confidence to expand and bring Slick City to Woodbury," she said.

The Slick City brand, which was founded in 2022 by **Bron Launsby** and **Gary Schmit** and began franchising in 2024, has expanded to over 150 signed or open units globally.

Kelly said she and her husband became familiar with the brand while visiting family in Missouri.

"Mike works in investment banking, and I am a former elementary school teacher and, with three kids, we've spent a lot of time visiting family entertainment centers over the years," she said. "While visiting family in Chesterfield, Missouri, I was introduced to Slick City by my sister and immediately saw how unique and different the concept was. I called Mike right away and said, 'We need to bring this to Minnesota.' From there, everything moved quickly."

Slick City Woodbury is about a 53,000-square-foot indoor action park designed for all ages. Some of the standout features include 16 unique slides, a dedicated junior play area for kids five and under and a 4,000-square-foot arcade with 67 games and a full redemption center.

"Guests also love our City Café, air courts for basketball and dodgeball and our zipline attraction," Kelly said. "It's a high-energy, all-weather destination built for fun, movement and memorable experiences."

Betson Enterprises supplied the games. The company designed the game mix to appeal to a wide audience. From concept to completion, Betson provided guidance on game selection, layout planning and installation to help ensure the arcade complemented the venue's high-energy attractions.

Vlocker supplied the center with its innovative Electronic Smart Lockers solution.



VLocker

Unlock the experience.

Hands-free fun starts here!

www.VLocker.com • 469.567.0956

ProSlide celebrates the opening of Aquamania Jungle Park in Egypt

AT: Jeffrey Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

NABQ BAY, SHARM EL SHEIKH, Egypt — In March, the Rixos Radamis Sharm El Sheikh Resort opened Aquamania Jungle Park, a new 35,000-square-meter (8.6-acre) water park that is set to redefine tourism in the area. This new destination offers a diverse array of water attractions, providing high-energy, shared experiences for guests of all ages visiting the Red Sea.

ProSlide Technology Inc., of Ottawa, Canada, an industry leader in water-ride manufacturing and design, was the primary supplier of 28 next-generation water-slides, along with a Ride House waterplay structure for children.

The park is designed to be a fully integrated water attraction experience, complemented by dedicated children's areas, splash zones and premium guest amenities that support a full-day experience within the luxe, all-inclusive Rixos Radamis resort.

The park showcases several regional firsts and high-impact attractions for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

MENA's first Hive 20 has two-person rafts rotating around an open central core. It delivers high-speed helix turns with positive G-forces and panoramic sightlines for an exciting ride. The slide at Aquamania features back-to-back Hive elements — one clockwise, the other counterclockwise.

A duo of ProSlide Switchbacks deploys quick turns and near-zero G forces with fast up and down oscillations, creating a dynamic and interactive ride experience. The slide utilizes ProSlide's specially designed face-to-



The Switchback and Hive slides are interwoven with two body slides and offer a surprising amount of slide in a compact space (above). The four-lane RallyRacer has two midcourse rally points so competitors can check their progress as they race downhill (below). COURTESY PROSLIDE TECHNOLOGY

face tubes, so riders are never quite sure which direction they will be heading.

A towering four-lane RallyRacer has lanes in pairs that split left and right after the first rally point, with a second midcourse rally point featuring the two pairs — but riders will be on opposite sides from where they started. All four lanes converge just before the finish, so competing groups can determine who placed first.

The RocketBlast Water Coaster begins with a horizontal flat launch that leads to an uphill launch. Like most water coasters, it features multiple drops and upward blasts and even includes a flying saucer section. The 350-meter (1,100-foot-long) ride spans walkways and guest areas, and with its clear sidewalls provides high-impact visual appeal and thrills to both riders and spectators.

The Hive 20 and SwitchBack were specifically chosen for their space-efficient design and striking visual presence, making them ideal for resort environments



where both performance and guest impact are paramount.

The RideHouse interactive play structure is equipped with a multitude of spray features spread out over several levels. Two gentle slides from the first level are specifically designed to initiate small children and first timers into the world of waterslides. Three slides from the highest level offer a little more excitement and emulate the adult versions found elsewhere in the park, with features found on the big slides, such as a flying saucer on the body slide and rally points on the racing slide. The play structure is

topped with the quintessential tipping bucket.

In addition to the slides and rides, the park includes a food court and various kiosks to provide dining options for guests throughout the day.

Erkan Yildirim, CEO of Rixos Hotels Egypt, said: "The opening of Aquamania Jungle Park represents an exciting new chapter for Rixos Radamis Sharm El Sheikh and for family entertainment in the region. Our goal is always to elevate the guest experience by combining world-class hospitality with innovative attractions. This aquapark offers some-

thing truly special, making every stay even more memorable within our Ultra All-Inclusive concept."

"We're proud to support the opening of Aquamania Jungle Park with attractions that bring families and friends together through shared adventure," said **Aaron Wilson**, ProSlide's senior vice president, business development — EMEA & LATAM. "Destinations like Aquamania at Rixos Radamis continue to raise the bar for integrated resort entertainment, and we're excited to see guests experience these rides for the first time."

The launch of Aquamania Jungle Park further expands ProSlide's global portfolio of installations across leading water parks and integrated resorts. With continued investment in the Middle East's expanding tourism and leisure sector, ProSlide remains a trusted partner for operators seeking innovative water ride experiences designed to drive guest engagement and long-term park performance.

The Red Sea coast of Egypt has long enticed visitors with its natural beauty, including crystal-clear waters and golden sandy beaches. With its warm, calm waters and stunning coral reefs, it has become a popular location for scuba diving and other water sports such as snorkeling, boating, canoeing and parasailing. Sharm El Sheikh is located on the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula at the north end of the Red Sea. It is one of the most visited cities in Egypt, attracting more than 3 million visitors. Nabq Bay is a rapidly growing resort area northeast of the city. It offers a less crowded, high-end, all-inclusive vacation experience compared to other parts of Sharm El Sheikh.

SGE
StarGuard ELITE

AQUATIC SAFETY SOLUTIONS THAT SAVE LIVES WORLDWIDE

WWW.STARGUARDELITE.COM



Zebec Water Sports
www.zebec.com
+1 (513) 829-5533
Fax: +1 (513) 892-7466
email: zebec@zebec.com

Splash into quality water sports products!

- Rafts •
- Tubes • Racer Mats •
- Lily Pads • Bumper Collars •
- Safety Padding • Rope Netting • Heavy Duty Tubes •
- Bumper Boat Tubes • In-Line Rafts • Snow Rafts • Life Vests •



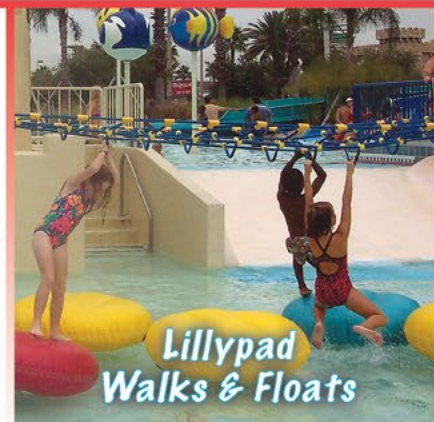
Inflatable Barriers



Family Rafts



Sidewinder Tubes & Rafts



Lillypad Walks & Floats



Climb & Play Netting



COURTESY ROYAL CARIBBEAN

Royal Caribbean's Perfect Day Mexico is in jeopardy

AT: Jeffrey Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

MAHAHUAL, Quintana Roo, Mexico — Royal Caribbean's \$600 million **Perfect Day Mexico** has been formally rejected by Mexican environmental authorities. Mexico's Environment Secretary, **Alicia Bárcena**, announced that permits will not be approved due to severe ecological concerns regarding the area's coral reefs and mangroves. The project was scheduled to open in late 2027 in Mahahual on the country's Caribbean coast.

A **Change.org** petition drawing nearly five million signatures argued that the proposed 200-acre project would endanger sea turtles, mangroves and local ecosystems, while also restricting residents' access to the ocean. In response, SEMARNAT, Mexico's environmental ministry, stated on X that ecosystem protection remains a top priority.

The decision impacts Mahahual, a small town of under 3,000 residents celebrated for its clear waters and proximity to the Mesoamerican Reef — the largest reef system in the Western Hemisphere and a major draw for scuba divers. Opposition to Perfect Day Mexico by environmentalists and online activists had been mounting in recent weeks. Greenpeace Mexico celebrated the outcome on X, calling it a "great victory for civil society."

"We must not do anything that affects that area, which has a very important ecological balance, particularly for the reefs," said Mexican President **Claudia Sheinbaum**, adding the project could be moved to another part of Quintana Roo that is not so sensitive.

Royal Caribbean Group expressed disappointment with the ruling while acknowledging the authority of Mexico's environmental officials.

Royal Caribbean Group issued a statement expressing: "We are disappointed by SEMARNAT's decision and respect the role of Mexico's environmental authorities. Mahahual is a special place that deserves care and protection. We continue to believe in Mexico, and are optimistic about the potential to advance our investment responsibly."

The statement continued: "Over the coming weeks, we will re-engage stakeholders to move forward in a way that delivers shared prosperity through the development of essential environmental infrastructure, the creation of thousands of local jobs, and community programs that support the people of Mexico."

Perfect Day Mexico was planned to be a massive 200-acre private cruise destination for the seaside village of Mahahual on the country's Caribbean coast. It was intended to be the cruise line's largest land-based project to date, featuring a 15-acre water park with more than 30 waterslides across five towers, including a 170-foot-tall Jaguar's Peak — planned as the tallest water slide tower in the Americas. The park was also to include the world's longest lazy river, stretching over a mile, complete with rapids, waves, hidden float-up bars and a "crazy" section. Themed neighborhoods were also planned, including seven distinct zones that included 10 pools, three beaches, and 12 eateries, as well as an expansive 50,000-square-foot adults-only retreat featuring live DJ entertainment and swim-up bars.



NEWS SPLASH

AT: Jeffrey L. Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

The **Mall Lifestore Bangkoe** in Bangkok, Thailand, has opened a massive rooftop water park on the third level of the mall. Known as **Harbor Island**, the park features nine different zones spanning 11,000 square meters (118,000 square feet). The different zones are designed to appeal to different segments offering thrilling attractions, family-friendly slides and small children.

Super Island is a giant slide complex featuring 18 different slides; Wave Island includes a dynamic wave pool; and Lazy Island features a relaxing tubing float along a current river.

Little Island is hailed as the largest spray park in Bangkok and is geared for families with children. A step up from that is Jungle Island and outdoor adventure zone with zip line and ropes course activities. Three zones are designed especially for young children: Toy Island, Sand Island and Art Island. The Harbor Island Water Park is connected to **HarborLand**, a large indoor playground located within the shopping mall.

The new \$55 million **Henry County Aquatic Center & Waterpark** in Georgia is on track to open in early June. The new center is set to offer diverse water-based activities promoting recreation, relaxation and sporting events.

Thrill seekers will appreciate the 30-foot slide tower with four slides including open and enclosed body slides, a speed slide and a four-lane mat racer. Those looking for relaxation can take advantage of the mellow lazy river and wave pool. A kiddie pool features water-themed obstacles and is topped with a tipping bucket. An outdoor 25-yard lap pool and an indoor 50-meter competition pool with stadium seating will fill the need for recreation and sporting events. The center also includes an indoor ADA-compliant therapeutic multipurpose pool, a food truck concessions area and a rooftop bar with views of Henry County.

The pool was funded primarily through a special-purpose local option sales tax that was passed in 2019.

The former **Quality Inn & Suites Palm Island Waterpark** in Batavia, New York, is getting a \$10 million investment to renovate the existing property. The project was recently approved by the Genesee County Economic Development Center.

The proposal calls for transforming the property into a 99-unit **Holiday Inn** and a 68-unit **Candlewood Suites** along with significant redevelopment of the indoor water park.

The city planning commission of Paso Rablos, California, approved a plan to move forward with expansion of the **Ravine Waterpark**. The commission approved a plan to construct a new, no-splash pool and hot tub designed for adult visitors. After it was approved, **Ranch & Coast Properties, Inc.**, a residential management property company, filed an appeal to stop the project.

After hearing the concerns, the appeal was ultimately denied by the council, but they did agree to add new conditions related to drainage and parking to the proposal to satisfy some of the concerns.

For the first time ever, all **Great Wolf Lodge** locations are offering season passes, allowing local residents the opportunity to enjoy the water park without having to book a stay at the hotel. The pass is only good for one short season: May to August, September to December, or January to April, and there are blackout dates.

Prices vary by location; the weekday only pass is priced anywhere from \$90 to \$130, whereas the seven-days-a-week pass is \$300 to \$500. The parks currently offer daily passes ranging from \$40 to \$100 depending on the time of year. A single night for a room varies seasonally and by location but typically ranges from \$150 to more than \$1,200 for a suite.

Great Wolf Resorts started experimenting with day passes several years ago at select resorts, and now every lodge offers some type of day pass, although reservations may be required and some days may not be available.

A surf park in Saxony, Germany, that has been in the works for years is one step closer to becoming a reality.

"We have been working on this ambitious project for years. Now we have finally taken an important step: We have acquired the land," says **Mike Berus**, of **Stoke Real Estate**.

Plans also include a publicly accessible village square with a reception area, restaurant, and three small surf shops. In addition, a multi-purpose hall for concerts and sporting events, a fitness and wellness area, playgrounds and areas for basketball and volleyball are planned. Parking spaces for camper vans and a chalet area for overnight guests are also envisioned. Up to 40 holiday homes could be built. If everything goes well, the first surfers could be riding the waves in the southern Leipzig area by 2030 at the latest.

LOADING



Make guests question everything – including gravity



Introducing
the Helix Twist.



Helix Twist delivers a disorienting new ride experience. Riders enter an enclosed flume and almost immediately lose their sense of direction. The slide appears to rotate around them. G-forces build. Up and down stop making sense.

What happens next is something no amount of description fully prepares you for — which is exactly the point.

Find the Future First with WhiteWater.

www.whiteswaterwest.com/products/helix-twist/



WHITEWATER®

EST. 1980

SEE YOU IN VEGAS!

WORLD WATERPARK ASSOCIATION 46TH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM & TRADE SHOW | OCTOBER 6-9, 2026

WWA 2026



WWAShow.org | +1-913-599-0300

BUSINESS & NEWSMAKERS

► Nominations, details 2026 Golden Ticket Awards — page 34 / Women of Influence: Jennifer Mance — 37

Star Lanes Polaris receives AAMA honor as "FEC of the Year"

Embed, AEM celebrate client's win at AEI 2026

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Star Lanes Polaris located in Columbus, Ohio, was named the 2026 American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA) FEC during the Amusement Expo International in Las Vegas, Nevada, on March 18, 2026.

The 35,000-square-foot, bowling-anchored venue was founded in 2013 by Doug and Jeff Mechling. Doug Mechling said he feels the success of Star Lanes Polaris has been due to the staff, the people, the overall venue and the ownership caring about the experience of their customers.

"We have learned a lot over the years," Doug Mechling said. "Details matter to us. We can control what goes on within these four walls. So we owe it to our customers that pay us for them to have a good experience here."

Mechling said they have a l w a y s catered to families as well as to group-based e v e n t s . Walk-ins are about 65% of the business there. The other 35% comes from the group-based events.

"We have always done very well with the corporate and group events," he said.



Mechling



Star Lanes Polaris features 20 bowling alleys, Hyperbowling (below right), an AR darts game (below left), a 4D theater (above), an arcade and redemption center and a restaurant. COURTESY STAR LANES POLARIS



The two brothers do plan to grow their business in the area. They have taken their time looking at several different locations for a second Star Lanes. They do now have one.

"We are getting very close to a second location," Mechling said. "It will be located near the Ohio State University campus. And, because of that location, we will probably go more toward social engagement games. We are very excited about this."

Mechling said if he could have his wish, he would like to open the second location sometime in late summer or fall of 2027.

"We would like to capture that Q4 and Q1 business," he said. "We opened Polaris in the spring and that wasn't the ideal time to open an indoor facility."

Jerry Merola, managing partner, Amusement Entertainment Management LLC (AEM), which provides consulting services to Star Lanes Polaris, feels the



combination of elements there has been a real plus.

"The strategic advantages were ultimately in the uniqueness of the venue," Merola said.

The venue does offer a variety of activities that can be enjoyed by families with varying ages or for those adults wanting social competitive elements.

Star Lanes Polaris features 20 state-of-the-art bowling alleys, all with state-of-the-art scoring systems. There is a surround sound

entertainment system, lane-side food service, kid-friendly bumper bowling and HD projection screens.

"In July, Polaris will get a Neoverse LED wall," Merola said.

The Neoverse LED wall is an immersive, high-definition visual system designed specifically for bowling centers to create a vivid, immersive atmosphere. It integrates with scoring systems

► See POLARIS, page 30

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

Entertainment Industry Client



Look closer. We're different.



HAAS & WILKERSON INSURANCE

Westchester®
A Chubb Company

Haas & Wilkerson Insurance is an independent agent, working with Westchester, a Chubb Company, Programs Division. Insurance provided by Ace American Insurance Company and its U.S. based Chubb underwriting company affiliates. Chubb is the marketing name used to refer to subsidiaries of Chubb Limited providing insurance and related services. All products may not be available in all states. For a list of these subsidiaries, please visit www.chubb.com.

HWINS.com/partner



The 35,000-square-foot, bowling-anchored center opened in 2013 and has been going strong since. COURTESY STAR LANES POLARIS

► **POLARIS**
Continued from page 29

to display reactive 3D animations.

Polaris also offers Hyperbowling, which, according to Star Lanes Polaris's website, is a set of revolutionary new bowling games that brings together a hi-tech blend of software, futuristic user interfaces and lights and sensors to deliver an experience that plays like a physical video game on a bowling lane.

Hyperbowling combines exciting elements and competition for players of all ages and skill levels.

Aside from bowling, Star Lanes Polaris includes a variety of other attractions and activities. There is AR Darts, a cutting-edge augmented reality darts game. The company's website describes this game as "an auto-scoring dart system that delivers an immersive, high-tech experience where every throw is tracked in real time."

Those visiting Star Lanes Polaris also may experience a major theme park-style interactive 4D theater attraction. Guests can compete against each other in one of the shoot em' up, action-packed movie adventures. The XD Dark Ride has been a great success, even with corporate parties.

The facility's Omniverse VR Arena is immersive gameplay. Players have full freedom of movement and are allowed to choose their own game and track their performance. Up to four players can play together.

Billiards and ping-pong also are available.

And, then, there is the arcade. There are 60-plus games available that can be played for points for redemption prizes. The redemption center offers everything from candy to iPads.

Star Lanes Polaris's party and event rooms are within easy access to all the activities. Attached to the amusement room are three separate birthday party rooms that can accommodate up to 16 guests each. There is a VIP room with six

additional private bowling lanes, a full bar and seating to accommodate 150 people. Attached to the VIP room is an 80-seat, audio-visual equipped conference room.

The facility's Point Bar and Grill offers a full-service bar and an extensive menu. There is an executive chef, and the menu is comparable to a casual dining restaurant. The catering menu is also extensive.

Star Lanes Polaris owners have continued to make upgrades in their technology. Sara Paz, Embed, wasn't surprised with Star Lanes's honor of the 2026 FEC win. Embed has been working with the owners since its opening, launching with Embed's cashless system and using it as a foundation for growth.

"Five years ago, they modernized their entire venue with RFID SmartTOUCH+ readers, unlocking greater operational efficiency, stronger revenue performance, and a more seamless guest experience," said Michael Andrew Lopez, GM of North America Embed.

Paz said that Star Lanes reflects the very best of the Embed customer community.

"Doug and his Star Lanes Polaris team embrace experimentation, optimize every opportunity and collaborate to push what's possible," Paz said.

Star Lanes was one of five finalists for the 2026 AAMA FEC honor. The other finalists were Downtown Flavortown, Fun Warehouse, High Five Lakeway and Uptown Alley to take the top spot.

•starlanespolaris.com

The #1 Leading Slide Manufacturer in America!
World's Largest 5 Lane, One Trailer Slide — 108 ft.!

- Financing and Leasing Available
- Slide or Rain Bags
- Trades Considered
- 90 ft. Fiberglass Slide
- 65 ft. Fiberglass Slide

FREDERIKSEN INDUSTRIES, INC.
5212 St. Paul St. • Tampa, Fla. 33619 • (813) 628-4545 • FAX (813) 621-3679
funslide.com

"World Famous" KIDDIE BUMPER BOATS™
ENTERTAINING CHILDREN IN OVER 40 COUNTIES
FOR THE PAST 50 YEARS

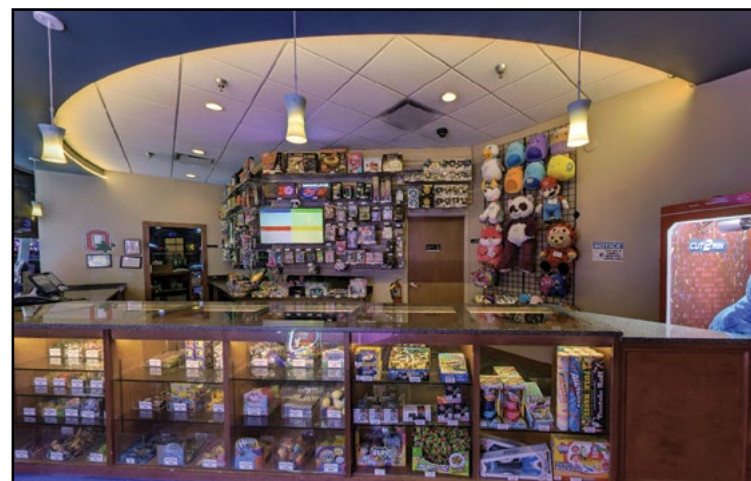
2026 MODELS

WWW.KIDDIEBUMPERBOATS.COM
INFLATABLE POOL SYSTEMS
Stock and Custom Sizes Available

Manufactured & Distributed by
Bumper Boats Inc.
Newport, Rhode Island USA

MADE IN THE U.S.A.

SCAN ME



Star Lanes Polaris has a variety of rooms for birthday parties to conferences, as well as a huge prize redemption center (shown). COURTESY STAR LANES POLARIS



Congratulates

FEC of the Year

Star★Lanes

POLARIS



Watch how this winner is
**POWERED BY THE
INDUSTRY'S BEST.**
MAKING BOWLING AMAZING



EXPERIENCE THE EMBED AND QUBICAAMF DIFFERENCE

**GAYLORD OPRYLAND RESORT & CONVENTION CENTER, NASHVILLE, TN
BOOTH #656 | JUL 1-2**

New book recaps history of Ohio's Geauga Lake

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

For more than a century, **Geauga Lake** had a storied history. Like a long-running television series, many fans of the park might have a certain stage of its operation that they appreciated the most. Author **Mike Funyak** covers it all, spotlighting the many eras in the park's story in *Geauga Lake - Always a Funtime*.

Within its 237 pages, eight chapters divide the history of the park into core eras, often owing to new ownerships. The first chapter takes the reader back to the 1880s and Giles Pond. From there, the park established itself as a major destination with its 1925 coaster Sky Rocket, later renamed Clipper and eventually what it was widely known as — Big Dipper. Through the chapters, ownership changed hands. Individual owners would eventually lead to "The Funtime Era," only to be replaced by other groups: **Premier Parks**, **Six Flags** and **Cedar Fair**. The final chapter recaps what happened to the park following its closure in 2007 and **Wildwater Kingdom's** in 2016.

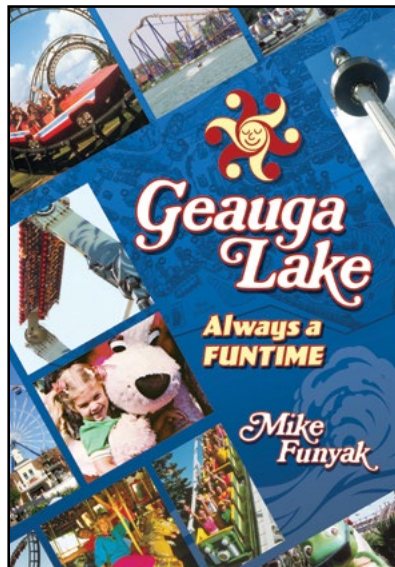
Funyak had previously written *West View Park: The Story of the T.M. Harton Company*. When asked why he selected Geauga Lake as a subject, he told *Amusement Today*: "In 2021, I met **Dale Van Voorhis** at the IAAPA Expo in Florida. Over a series of conversations, we discussed his career in the amusement industry and at one point, discussed Kennywood, since I am from Western Pennsylvania. Additionally, I shared how my family visited both Geauga Lake and **Sea World Ohio**. I mentioned how I wrote a book on **West View Park**, a park Dale recalled. I became intrigued with Dale's business acumen and career. After getting to know each other more, I decided one day to call Dale and pitch my book idea. After Dale passed away in late 2024, I wasn't sure if I wanted to continue with the project, but in the end, I decided to soldier on and turn it into a tribute to him."

Key figures and the various companies that owned the park also illustrate what parks did to survive setbacks — sudden deaths, fires, The Great Depression — and how clever marketing and the importance of new attractions made the amusement industry thrive — and fiercely competitive.

The book is packed with photos, documenting so many aspects of Geauga Lake Park. Typical for books involving long histories, pictures are black-and-white, making the reader long for the park's full story to unfold in living color.

For anyone who ever visited Geauga Lake in any of its forms, this book is a reminder to cherish what brings joy and remind us of what is lost.

The hardback book retails for \$30 and can be found on **Amazon**, **Barnes and Noble**, **Strand Books** website and other online book retailers.



ON THE MOVE

Paul Roeder has been named senior executive vice president and chief communications officer of **The Walt Disney Company**, effective March 19, 2026. A 25-year veteran of Disney, Roeder most recently served as executive vice president, communications — Disney Entertainment Studios, Direct-to-Consumer and International.



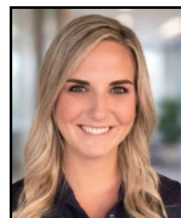
Roeder

"Paul Roeder is an accomplished and highly respected executive with keen instincts and integrity, and he has built strong relationships in every area of the company and across the entertainment industry during his 25 years with Disney," said Chief Executive Officer **Josh D'Amaro**. "He has a passion for Disney and a deep understanding of what it stands for, and I know he'll do an outstanding job leading our exceptional Communications teams worldwide."

As chief communications officer, Roeder will report directly to D'Amaro and will be responsible for leading Disney's worldwide communications and public relations strategy and operations and will serve as its lead spokesperson. With oversight of enterprise and business segment communications, as well as regional communications teams in EMEA, APAC and Latin America, his responsibilities include media relations, executive communications, enterprise editorial strategy, internal communications and employee engagement, public affairs and corporate social responsibility.

Venue management software platform **VenueSumo** announced the appointment of **Jamie Turnbow** as vice president, Americas.

Turnbow joins VenueSumo following senior operational leadership roles at **Altitude Trampoline Park** and **Sky Zone**, where she led large, multi-site portfolios across the United States. Her appointment comes as VenueSumo accelerates global expansion and deepens its partnership-first approach with venue operators.



Turnbow

"Jamie has lived and breathed the day-to-day realities of running large, high-volume family entertainment venues," said **Alex White**, director at VenueSumo. "She understands exactly what matters most to operators on the ground. That experience is invaluable as we continue to scale globally and serve our customers."

FACE Amusement Group announced the appointment of **David Knight** as vice president of **Guy Fieri's Downtown Flavortown**.

"David brings disciplined operational leadership and deep experience across complex hospitality environments," said **Bucky Mabe**, CEO of FACE Amusement Group. "As Guy Fieri's Downtown Flavortown continues to scale as an entertainment-driven destination, his background in high-



Knight

volume, experience-based venues will be critical to delivering consistency, energy and guest engagement across the brand."

Knight brings more than two decades of hospitality and gaming operations experience to the role. He most recently served as vice president of operations at **Liv Hospitality, LLC**, where he oversaw operational performance at two casino resorts in Deadwood, South Dakota. His background includes senior leadership positions across resort, casino and large-scale entertainment environments nationwide.

Wainwright Family Enterprises (WFE), the company behind family attractions on Long Beach Island in New Jersey, including **Fantasy Island Amusement Park** and **Thundering Surf Waterpark**, has promoted longtime leader **Matt Freed** to chief operating officer as the organization continues to expand its operations.



Freed

Freed has been a leader within Wainwright Family Enterprises for the past eight years, first serving as general manager of Fantasy Island Amusement Park and later as managing director of both Fantasy Island and **Sand Trap Mini Golf**. In his new role as chief operating officer, Freed will oversee operations across all WFE entertainment properties, which include Sand Trap Mini Golf in Ship Bottom, Fantasy Island Amusement Park, Thundering Surf Waterpark, and **Thundering Surf Adventure Golf** in Beach Haven.

"Matt has been an integral part of the growth of our organization," said **Brian Wainwright**, chief experience officer and owner of Wainwright Family Enterprises. "His leadership, passion for the amusement industry and relentless drive are at the heart of our success."

Accesso Technology Group announced that **Lee Cowie** has been appointed chief executive officer. The appointment follows a planned leadership transition.



Cowie

He succeeds **Steve Brown**, who founded the company's namesake Accesso business in 2008 and has led the company as CEO in recent years, establishing it as the operational technology backbone for more than 1,100 venues across 31 countries.

"My focus from here is on making that infrastructure more intelligent, more connected and simpler for the operators and visitors who depend on it," offered Cowie. "The AI era is coming into our industry and we are ready for it."

"This transition has been carefully planned, and I'm leaving the business in very good hands," said Brown. "Accesso has a strong foundation, a talented team and expanding data intelligence capabilities that position it well for its next phase of growth."

OBITUARIES

Whalom Park owner, NEAAPA Hall of Fame member Elizabeth L. Bowen passes away

WESTMINSTER Mass. — Elizabeth (Beth) L. (Lewis) Bowen died at home on Wednesday, March 11, 2026, after a long illness. She was born in Boston in 1944, the daughter of Robert E. Lewis and Elizabeth D. (Mazzola) Lewis. She was married to John A. Bowen. They lived in Westminster for more than 50 years. Bowen was the oldest of nine children. She was raised in Leominster and attended St. Leo's Elementary School and St. Bernard's High School in Fitchburg. She graduated from Regis College in Weston, Massachusetts, with a degree in economics.

Bowen owned an advertising agency—B-Square Enterprises — for 20 years, serving local and regional

businesses. She then became a financial advisor under the banner of American Express and Ameriprise.

She and her husband were part of the ownership group of Whalom Park. She became a member of the Board of Directors of The Northeast's Entertainment Association (NEAAPA) in 1985 and served as its Secretary/Treasurer from 1990 to 1995; Bowen and her husband, John, were inducted into the NEAAPA's Hall of Fame in 2014. She also served as chairman of the IAAPA Awards Committee.

Earlier in her career,



Bowen

Bowen worked for New England Telephone and Telegraph Company in Worcester as a corporate trainer and then as the Girls' Athletic Director at Windsor High School in Vermont, where she also coached girls' field hockey, basketball, volleyball and softball.

Bowen was a Westminster Library Trustee from 1974 until 1983, also serving as its chairman. She was also a member of the Massachusetts Board of Library Trustees. She was president of the Westminster Historical Society on three occasions. She had also been the local chairman of the Council for Children and a member of the Board of Overseers of Plimoth Plantation.

Showmen Tim Coleman, co-owner of provider Coleman Brothers Shows passes at age 70

LAKELAND, Fla. — Timothy (Tim) Joseph Coleman, 70, passed away on March 28, 2026, in Lakeland, Florida.

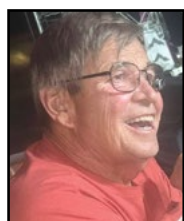
He was born in Hartford, Connecticut, and raised in Middletown, Connecticut. Tim graduated valedictorian of his class from St. Thomas More Preparatory School in Oakdale, Connecticut.

He went on to become co-owner of Coleman Brothers Shows with his sister, Mary Ellen Oakes, proudly continuing a family business that began in 1916 with his grandfather, Richard Coleman, and great-uncle, Tom

Coleman.

That legacy, carried on by his father, Robert Coleman, and the entire family for more than 100 years, meant everything to him. Coleman took great pride in the show and the people who were part of it. In 2022, he was honored as Showperson of the Year by the New York State Showpeople's Association.

In a social media post, Coleman Brothers Shows



Coleman

shared: "He was a smile and heart that lit the midway. A great man who brought fun and smiles to every town our show has ever been to. He will be missed more than words can ever describe. The midway was definitely his first love, and he loved it til the very end."

Coleman was funny, kind, always smiling and full of laughter. He loved his family deeply, was a great friend and an avid golfer. He believed in treating everyone fairly and with kindness, and that's exactly how he lived his life.

Daughter of Arnold Amusement Company owners, Lauren Ashely Arnold, passes at 33

HOLLAND, Mich. — Lauren Ashley Arnold, age 33, passed away peacefully with her family by her side, at Holland Hospital on March 27, 2026, in Holland, Michigan.

She was born on November 10, 1992, to Jon and Karen (Lawrence) Arnold, co-owners of Michigan's Arnold Amusement Company.

Although born with physical challenges, Arnold

brought love and light into the world and lived each day to its fullest. One of her famous bear hugs could brighten anyone's day.

Without speaking a single word, she taught everyone whose path she



Arnold

crossed about the true meaning of resiliency and unconditional love. The mischievous twinkle in her eyes, along with her silly little laugh melted many hearts in her short time here on Earth. There is deep comfort knowing that she now runs and plays freely in heaven above, pain-free, and without any physical limitations.

Creative pioneer, producer Sid Krofft passes away at 96

LOS ANGELES — Sid Krofft, the television producer behind such popular American children's shows as *H.R. Pufnstuf* and *Land of the Lost*, died April 10, 2026, in Los Angeles, California, at the age of 96.

Alongside his late brother, Marty Krofft (1937–2023), he helped build a beloved children's television empire that was influential for generations.

Born in Montreal in 1929,

Sid Krofft took up the craft of puppeteering as a young child. By the time he was a teenager in the 1940s, he was working with puppets in vaudeville shows and, eventually, in the Ringling Bros. circus. His own original stage show, "The Unusual Artistry of Sid Krofft," was followed in the 1950s by a more mature puppet show he produced in collaboration with his brother, Les Poupées de Paris."

Through these performances, Krofft honed his skills and artistic vision. In 1968, the pair got a job designing characters and sets for the Hanna-Barbera television show "The Banana Splits," a job that helped put them on the map as TV creators.

Also in 1968, Sid & Marty Krofft actually got their theme park start at Six Flags Over Texas. Angus Wynne, the creator of the park, brought them in to build immersive puppet shows and attractions that thrilled generations of guests. The duo created shows which were held in the 1,200-seat Krofft Puppet Theatre and featured elaborate marionette acts. The puppet shows ran until 1973. In addition to the shows, the Kroffts helped design other beloved park features, including animatronics on the Log Flume and the volcano on the Fiesta Train.

Their creation, *H.R. Pufnstuf*, was introduced to the world the following year, and though it only ran from 1969 to 1970, its impact on the field of children's programming was tremendous. Known for its vibrant characters and whimsical worlds, the show was characterized by fantastical settings, psychedelic design elements, and inventiveness that etched it into the memories of an entire generation.

"It's amazing how [the kids who watched] took all our shows with them their whole lives," Krofft told *Smashing Interviews Magazine* in 2018. "Pufnstuf was done 45 or more years ago. You should just see us at Comic-Con, which we go to every single year. They're all adults[now]... They come up and want to touch us, and they cry. It's very emotional for us, because we triggered something in a lot of people's minds and lives. We really appreciate all of that."

Other shows followed, including "Lidsville" (1971-'73), "Sigmund and the Sea Monsters" (1973-'75), and the fan favorite "Land of the Lost" (1974-'76). They also created "Electra Woman and Dyna Girl," a live-action superhero show that has since become a cult nostalgia favorite.

Sid and his brother also extended themselves into variety programming in the late 1970s through such shows as "The Brady Bunch Hour" (1976-'77), "The Krofft Supershow" (1976-'78) and "The Donny and Marie Show" (1976-'79).

Together, the duo opened The World of Sid and Marty Krofft — a short-lived indoor amusement park that operated in downtown Atlanta, Georgia, in 1976. Located inside the Omni International complex, it was the first wholly indoor, multi-story theme park. The attraction sadly closed after just six months of operation.

The pair earned a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Daytime Emmys, a Pop Culture Award from the TV Land Icon Awards, and a Life Career Award at the 29th annual Saturn Awards, among other honors.



Sid Krofft



**Thank you to our
2026 Sponsors!**



Event details, Registration and
discounted hotel rates available at

www.GoldenTicketAwards.com



The 2026 Golden Ticket Awards will be hosted by the brand new COTALand theme park in Austin, Texas. COURTESY COTALAND

Golden Ticket Awards are coming to COTALand; award nominations open

AUSTIN, Texas — Industry professionals are invited to attend the 2026 Golden Ticket Awards on September 11 and 12. The host facilities this year will be the brand-new theme park, COTALand, built on the campus of Circuit of the Americas in Austin, and Kalahari Resorts & Conventions in nearby Round Rock. Registration for the event will be open soon at goldenticketawards.com.

Thanks to the many generous GTA sponsors — including our Gold Sponsors of Gerstlauer, Ride Entertainment, Rides 4 U / SBF-Visa and Vekoma — the event remains free for those working in the industry.

Anyone who has never attended will be surprised by the diversity of networking activities. Beyond the awards ceremony, there will be behind-the-scenes tours, social receptions, time in the parks, dinners and fun fundraising opportunities for National Roller Coaster Museum and Archives and Morgan's Wonderland.

Nominations are open

The Golden Ticket Awards will be presenting acknowledgements in 21 voted-on categories, as well as Show Person of the Year, Publisher's Pick and Legend awards.

Several categories are open for nominations: Best New Attraction Installation (acknowledging impact), Best New Show, Leadership (individual, park or company) and Best Innovation. Likewise, nominations for Standout FEC are being accepted as well. Nominations can be submitted at goldenticketawards.com/nominate.

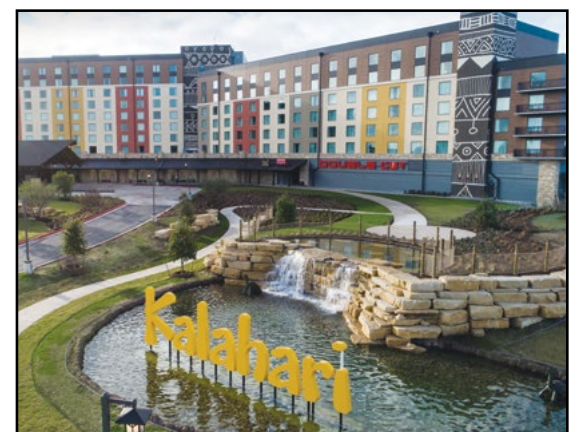
All other categories are open for any qualifying attraction or park.

Looking to recognize a new installation that has impact or a leader who exemplifies industry excellence? Is a new show a total wow? Is a new product, attraction or procedure innovating the guest experience or safety? Take a moment to nominate.

Nominations will be accepted through June 30.

Host hotel

Kalahari Resorts & Conventions is the host hotel. Attendees will enjoy access to



Attendees are invited to stay at the 2026 Golden Ticket Awards host hotel, Kalahari Resorts & Conventions in Round Rock, Texas. COURTESY KALAHARI

the massive indoor water park during their stay, as well as the various FEC options throughout the family areas. The stunning resort is beautifully decorated with African artistry and makes for a great getaway. Discounted room reservations are available via goldenticketawards.com starting June 1, 2026.

Circuit of the Americas

Circuit of the Americas opened in 2012 as the nation's Formula 1 racetrack. Since that time, it has grown, now containing a concert venue and various year-round options such as a sports field, karting and miniature golf. The newest addition is COTALand, opening in the summer of 2026. In addition to roller coasters, water rides and family rides, thrill-seekers can step up for the ultimate ride, Hot Lap, where they will sit alongside a professional race car driver and hit speeds of more than 100 mph.

Amusement Today is thrilled to welcome the industry to the Networking Event of the Year. The connections made, experiences enjoyed and entertaining networking opportunities are sure to be worthy of placing the 2026 Golden Ticket Awards on the calendar. Registration includes admission to the parks, food and drink, the awards ceremony and more!

•goldenticketawards.com



COTALAND™

THEME PARK



COTALAND.COM



**SEPTEMBER 11 & 12
2026**



OFFICIAL HOST HOTEL - Check It Out

Kalahariresorts.com/Texas

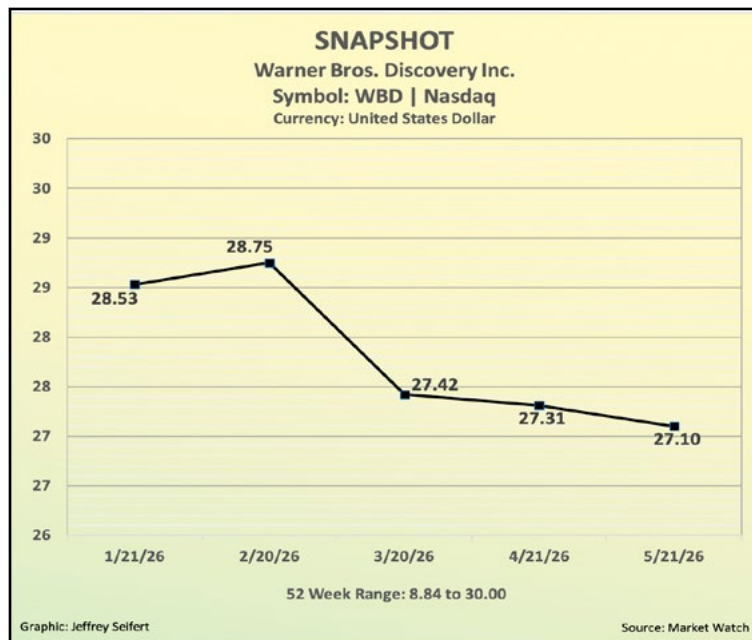
MARKET WATCH

COMPANY	SYMBOL	MARKET	PRICE 5/21/26	HIGH 52-Week	LOW 52-Week
PARKS AND ATTRACTIONS					
The Blackstone Group	BX	NYSE	118.57	190.09	101.73
Carnival Corp.	CCL	NYSE	26.18	34.03	21.62
Comcast Corp./ NBCUniversal Media	CMCSA	NASDAQ	25.08	34.34	24.12
Dave & Busters Entertainment, LLC	PLAY	NASDAQ	11.56	35.53	9.61
EPR Properties	EPR	NYSE	58.71	62.08	48.11
Fuji Kyoko Co., Ltd.	JP:9010	TYO	2,045	2,704	1,908
Haichang Holdings Ltd.	HK:2255	SEHK	0.420	1.060	0.310
Leofoo Development Co.	TW:2705	TSEC	15.40	19.30	15.10
Lucky Strike Entertainment Corp	LUCK	NYSE	8.81	11.61	5.71
MGM Resorts International	MGM	NYSE	37.66	40.94	29.19
Parks America, Inc.	PRKA	OTCQX	36.52	69.99	30.01
Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ltd.	RCL	NYSE	260.32	366.50	232.10
Six Flags Entertainment Co.	FUN	NYSE	19.72	35.65	12.51
Tivoli A/S	DK:TIV	CSE	628.00	658.00	584.00
United Parks & Resorts Inc.	PRKS	NYSE	36.12	56.95	28.77
The Walt Disney Company	DIS	NYSE	103.58	124.69	92.19
Warner Bros Discovery Inc.	WBD	NASDAQ	27.10	30.00	8.84
SUPPLIERS/OTHERS					
Brogent Technologies, Inc.	TW:5263	TSEC	112.00	130.00	82.66
Callaway Golf Co.	CALY	NYSE	15.88	18.00	5.87
Falcon's Beyond	FBYD	NASDAQ	19.10	29.02	3.71
Sansei Technologies, Inc.	TYO:6357	TYO	2,714	2,745	1,444

Daily industry stock information available at amusementtoday.com!

Worldwide Markets — CSE/DK: Copenhagen Stock Exchange; JP: The Tokyo Stock Exchange; NASDAQ: National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations; NYSE: New York Stock Exchange; OCT: Over-the-counter stocks; SEHK: The Stock Exchange of Hong Kong; TSEC/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 5/18/26	Change from 1 year ago
East Coast	\$5.420	\$1.840
Midwest	\$5.749	\$2.268
Gulf Coast	\$5.122	\$1.921
Mountain	\$5.549	\$2.037
West Coast	\$5.920	\$2.092
California	\$7.222	\$2.387

CURRENCY

On 5/22/26 \$1 USD =	
0.8609	EURO
0.7446	GBP (British Pound)
159.01	JPY (Japanese Yen)
0.7872	CHF (Swiss Franc)
1.4013	AUD (Australian Dollar)
1.3770	CAD (Canadian Dollar)

BUSINESS WATCH

United Parks first quarter results fall short

ORLANDO — **United Parks & Resorts Inc.** reported its financial results for the first quarter of 2026. Total revenue was \$278.3 million, a decrease of \$8.7 million from the first quarter of 2025. First quarter attendance was 3.2 million guests, a decrease of approximately 171,000 guests from the first quarter of 2025.

"First quarter results fell short of our expectations primarily due to unfavorable weather (including unfavorable weather in San Diego and Florida in January and February, and again in Florida and Texas during their peak Spring Break periods) and a decline in international attendance," said **Marc Swanson**, chief executive officer of United Parks & Resorts Inc. "Attendance in the first quarter was negatively impacted by approximately 140,000 guests due to weather and approximately 80,000 guests due to declines in international visitation. Adjusting for these impacts, attendance would have increased more than 1% for the quarter."

"We continue to strongly believe our stock is materially undervalued and, as such, continued to repurchase shares in the first quarter buying approximately 2.6 million shares for nearly \$93 million," Swanson continued. "This action emphasizes the strong cash flow generation of this company, our long-standing commitment to returning excess cash to our shareholders and our belief that our shares are materially undervalued."

Six Flags's first quarter shows hope

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Six Flags Entertainment Corporation announced its results for the first quarter ended March 29, 2026. Both net revenues increased 12% to \$225.6 million and total attendance increased 4% to 2.9 million visits when compared to the first quarter of 2025.

"We delivered meaningful year-over-year improvement in the first quarter, driven by higher attendance, increased guest spending, and disciplined execution," said **John Reilly**, Six Flags president and CEO. "Despite the seasonally low first quarter operating profile of our business, these results demonstrate the resiliency of our operating model and the progress we are making executing against our strategic priorities. Although it is still early in the season, demand trends in the second quarter are encouraging. We are seeing a positive early response to changes in our season pass and membership offerings, including expanded regional access to more parks on certain products, which we believe are supporting increased guest engagement and a more favorable product mix."

RWS Global announces U.K. headquarters

LONDON, U.K. — **RWS Global** announced a landmark acceleration of its U.K. operations with the opening of a state-of-the-art global production hub in England's Milton Keynes. Set to launch in January 2027, this move reinforces the company's long-term commitment to the U.K., where live entertainment continues to thrive.

The new 40,000-square-foot headquarters will feature open office space, private offices, a film studio, media production lab, costume shop, a music production suite and RWS Studios, including several cutting-edge rehearsal studios, dedicated vocal rooms and breakout locations for casts. Designed as a full-service campus under one roof, the facility will enable creative collaboration and enhance overall production efficiency.

"Our acceleration in the U.K. market is more than just growth; it's a foundational investment in British infrastructure," said **Jake McCoy**, interim CEO of RWS Global. "The region's vibrant cultural landscape, combined with the surge in large-scale entertainment developments across Southern England, positions the U.K. as a global production powerhouse."

Women INFLUENCE

A view from the top...

A post-college seasonal role introduced **Jennifer Mance** to the idea of working where she loved to play. 30 years later, she is back at the park where her career began. As sales and marketing director for **Great Escape Resort**, Mance leads with a people-first approach as she partners with her colleagues.

Mance's inspiration comes from people, lifelong desire to learn

QUEENSBURY, N.Y. — When describing her career in the attractions industry, Jennifer Mance admits she did not design or plan it. Instead, it came from her early childhood love of parks, and a chance discovery that such a career was possible.

"While I was growing up, our family would visit a theme park every summer," Mance shared. "In particular, we visited Six Flags New England a great deal. I always loved those trips and visiting different parks, but it wasn't until I graduated from college that I realized I could also work where I loved to play."

After freshly graduating from SUNY Plattsburgh in upstate New York, Mance got her first seasonal role at Great Escape Resort.

"A few of my roommates were from the area near Great Escape, and they invited me to move to Lake George with them for the summer," she said. "I got a job in the park's food department, running a pizza stand. I saw it as an amazing opportunity to work for a place I loved as a kid. Summer ended, and I never left."

Mance moved into Group Sales the following January. She continued to learn, moving into marketing, and became marketing and sales director in 2001. After several years leading the park's marketing strategy, she tried something new and left the park in 2008. However, she quickly found she missed being part of park operations.

"No one day is ever the same," she said. "Every day is a new adventure, and I wanted to be back in a park environment, so in 2010 I moved to Massachusetts to lead marketing for Six Flags New England."

She shifted roles a couple of times,

serving as regional brand manager and later regional manager - field activation for Six Flags Entertainment Corporation. In 2019, she had the opportunity to once again lead Great Escape's marketing. "Simply put, I returned home," she said.

"This industry is special," Mance continued. "Every day we sell something that people want. Whether we are talking with corporate groups, school trips or vacationing families, we are selling fun. Who else can say that?"

Mance says the continued addition and application of technology in the industry — both guest-facing and behind the scenes — keeps her on her toes and constantly learning. "When I think about everything I learned in college, the truth is, none of it applies to what I do now. I've had to keep learning."

"When I first started in group sales, I was given a file cabinet, a Rolodex, and a phone," she joked. "We had to figure things out then, and in many ways, we are still doing that now. I've had to teach myself how to use computer programs. I've had to learn social media and how it applies to our marketing matrix. I'm constantly learning and applying those learnings so we can do better and be better for our guests and our operation. When people ask me for advice, I always tell them to keep learning and growing. There are so many ways to continue to advance your skills. Find podcasts, YouTube videos, books and network. It is possible and important to continue to learn no matter how many years we have been in our careers. I believe we should always be open to learning something new. The only thing that is guaranteed is change, and

Jennifer Mance Great Escape Resort Queensbury, New York



how we respond to that change makes all the difference."

Change may be inevitable, but according to Mance, the attractions industry has two constants. "I can't imagine a scenario where we will ever stop selling fun," she said. "People will always seek it, and we will always be the place they come for it." She points to one of the park's most beloved roller coasters, the Comet, as an example. "The Comet has no idea that we changed the name of the park, its ownership, its leadership — nor does it really care," she laughed. "The Comet is going to continue to run. People are going to continue to come here to experience it, and they will love it every time. Our core purpose is to sell fun. That will never go away."

Mance also believes that people are — and will remain — the heart and soul of the industry. "No matter what AI or other technology advancements come our way, we will always seek ways and places to connect with each other," she explained. "Our guests come to us for those experiences because we are a people-focused industry."

That focus applies externally and internally, Mance furthered. "It's easy to say we must work well with others, but so much more goes into that. We have to live it. Every department is intertwined. Marketing depends on operations and operations depends on maintenance. Finance depends on food, games and retail. Every team member and every department is connected. I believe it is important that I always treat others the way I want to be treated, and I share that with new employees. The behind-the-scenes teamwork sets the park up for success long before the first guest comes through the front gate.

"I love the people I work with," she finished. "Knowing that we are all working together to create an experience for our guests that they can only get at Great Escape drives me. We provide a getaway from our guests' realities. When they are not at work or at school, they come here to have fun. Years ago, I had no idea this industry offered such incredible careers. Today, I can't imagine doing anything else."

—Susan Storey

SAFETY & OPERATIONS

► Oaks Amusement Park begins improvements — pages 40-41 / AIMS celebrates leadership — page 42

New perspectives offered for performing mouth-to-mouth rescue

AT: Tim Baldwin

tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

PALM BAY, Fla. — It's a traumatic situation, but potential drownings can be possible when humans and water are involved. Water parks and aquatic facilities train for the occasion, but oftentimes the reality of the situation doesn't play out as the training teaches.

George Panton, vice president for Water Safety Products, provides lifeguard equipment and uniforms for facilities. Sharing his own personal experiences, he knows each member of a safety team can learn — and re-learn — during typical operations. He often speaks on the topic of mouth-to-mouth at safety seminars. He hopes his own personal experience helps revisit the topic for operators.

"How does mouth-to-mouth taste? How does it feel?" Panton poses to class attendees, as well as real-life lifeguards. "It's not all gumdrops and butterflies."

Panton recalls his story of doing mouth-to-mouth on an unconscious person: "I could feel my air and the heat of her inner body coming back into my mouth."

A hallmark of many lifeguard trainings is crowd control; it is essential. Ensuring someone is managing the scene allows for someone to keep track of time, which in the urgency of the moment, can feel like forever. That person can also make sure the proper emergency services are notified. When placed in a situation where one doesn't know the people, ask for a volunteer to handle these steps.



The Big Easy mask (above left) from Water Safety Products can improve safety and efficiency in mouth-to-mouth rescue. Repetition of training, such as this class by StarGaurd Elite, helps lifeguards build confidence in a rescue scenario. COURTESY WATER SAFETY PRODUCTS; AT/TIM BALDWIN



Panton has seen that excellent lifeguard training will teach lifeguards to open the airway, and also "re-tilt and re-adjust if the first breath doesn't go through." He confirms that repetition of this skill made him confident after the first breath went in that he should re-adjust and give it another attempt. During his situation, the second breath went in.

Direct mouth-to-mouth contact involves risk. If possible, ask a friend or family member if the victim had any known diseases.

The appropriate life-saving equipment can be vital. Functional CPR masks should be checked daily for rescue readiness. When a friend arrived with a Big Easy CPR mask not far away, Panton could tell it greatly improved the quality of the breaths, as well as the safety of the experience.

All too often, lifeguard training may end with "EMS arrives and the patient leaves the premises" or "the AED advises shock, shock is provided, and the patient is revived." In Panton's story, he experienced the exact opposite. EMTs arrived, tried to apply an

AED, and it said: "shock not advised." They then applied a bigger, more powerful AED, and it also said: "shock not advised." It was a devastating blow to a hopeful group of people, including him. However, he had been trained many times that the chance of survival was very low. AEDs have a high expectation of being the enviable solution, but team members sometimes are not trained to where the AED will advise *not* to shock, monitoring that the conditions aren't suitable. Students should be trained for this reality.

"Train students for the potential of a happy ending but also train them for the potential of a sad ending," he said. "I felt prepared for this moment by knowing the chance of survival was low."

Panton emphasizes that following the incident, the moment stays with you. "Talking about your experience is important. Having friends check in is helpful," he says. "This reinforces trainings that suggest being there for each other after a critical event."

Dr. Justin Sempsrott, medical director for StarGuard

Elite, adds, "Although overall survival rates from out-of-hospital cardiac arrest are low, it is not hopeless. Bystander CPR can mean the difference between life and death for that person. In sudden cardiac arrest caused by heart problems, compression-only CPR and rapid application of an AED are the most important treatment. For cardiac arrest in children, drowning or respiratory causes, high-quality chest compressions *and* rescue breaths are critical to survival. Even if you don't have a CPR mask, mouth-to-mouth rescue breaths can deliver critical oxygen to the brain until EMS arrives. Having a pocket CPR mask in your car, purse, toolbox or backpack can make the decision to start CPR and give breaths even easier."

For lifeguards, critical skills involve being proactive, including watching for signs that someone has swam past their limits.

It is important to know that CPR isn't clean or just technical; it can feel scary.

Takeaways Panton shares:

- Not every emergency has a happy ending.
- Even so, that doesn't

mean efforts were wasted.

- Giving the family a chance to say goodbye can have a meaningful impact.

- Every training session has the potential to make a difference.

There were an estimated 263,711 adult out-of-hospital cardiac arrests (OHCA) attended by EMS in the U.S. in 2025, according to Sempsrott. The most recent data from the 2024 Cardiac Arrest Registry to Enhance Survival Annual Report, cited in the 2025 AHA Guidelines, reports a survival-to-hospital discharge of 10.5%, with favorable neurologic survival of 8.2%. This data is not specific to drowning and considers all causes of OHCA, but suffice it to say that the overall survival-to-hospital discharge is low. The harsh reality is that CPR is often unsuccessful.

Panton concluded, "CPR can happen at any moment. I always thought that it would be my responsibility. I would be a lifeguard and suddenly someone would drop in front of me, and I would have all my tools, and I would know exactly what to do. But that's not the case at all; it just happened."

PREMIER SERVICE™
A division of Premier Rides

DEDICATED TO SAFETY 24/7/365

PREMIER RIDES

1007 EAST PRATT STREET

BALTIMORE, MD 21202

WWW.PREMIER-RIDES.COM

INFO@PREMIER-RIDES.COM

+1.410.923.0414



QUEUE GATE SYSTEMS
PICTURED: PNE PLAYLAND, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

E&A launches new, groundbreaking eLearning course

ORLANDO — Ellis & Associates (E&A) has released its newest online training course, Scanning and Drowning Detection: Improving Recognition. Available at jellis.com, this highly interactive eLearning experience provides an unprecedented look at the real behaviors exhibited by a swimmer in distress.

Developed using real-time video footage of actual drowning incidents captured through advanced aquatic safety technology, the course challenges long-held assumptions about what drowning looks like. Drawing on hundreds of data points and behavior patterns collected through real-time camera monitoring and behavior-recognition software, the program reveals that many signs of drowning are quiet, fast and easy to miss.

“Improving lifeguard performance requires a deeper, more accurate understanding of what drowning truly looks like; this course provides that breakthrough,” said Ellis Learning Vice President Joe Stefanyak. “Our commitment to continuous research and real-world analysis enables us to reshape drowning-recognition training and enhance scanning effectiveness throughout the aquatics industry.”

The course offers learners the ability to observe true drowning behaviors across all ages and a wide range of aquatic environments.

Through immersive, scenario-based training, learners conduct simulated lifeguard scans, identify guests in distress, and compare their observations with real outcomes. By breaking down the exact behaviors that triggered each response, the course teaches purposeful, focused and deliberate scanning techniques.

Supported by findings from more than 25,000 rescues and hundreds of data points collected from live footage, the program is a transformative step in drowning-prevention education.

• jellis.com

SAFETY MARKET PLACE

SAFETY, SECURITY, OPERATIONS, RISK MANAGEMENT & INDUSTRY DEFENSE

SERVING THE AMUSEMENT INDUSTRY

The **Hoffman Consulting** Group



464 Mississippi Ave.
Palm Harbor, Fla. 34683
(419) 607-0431
email: pat@thehoffmancg.com
www.thehoffmancg.com

NWC
NORTHWEST COASTERS

CONTACT US FOR YOUR CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE NEEDS!

Email: kmessick@northwestcoaster.com
Office: 208-553-4440
Website: northwestcoaster.com

Locked and Monitored Seatbelt Systems

Kumbak has developed a range of products to improve the restraint systems of your attractions

Please contact us for more information or further assistance

www.kumbak.nl
info@kumbak.nl
+31 495 583100

Kumbak
The Amusement Engineers

Controlled Locking Retractor



Single Latch Monitored Lock



motion.
controls.
engineering.
solutions.



let's talk.

on-time.
on-budget.

VALERITY
AUTOMATION

valerity.com/automation

Sunkid
we move, you smile.



Contact us!
sunkidworld.com
Tel: +43 5412 68131
info@sunkidworld.com

Sunkid – Interactive Family Rides!
We make your guests smile for over 40 years

BAYNUM
AMUSEMENT SOLUTIONS

WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED

- Waterslide Interior Gelcoat & Exterior Coatings
- Ride Vehicle Automotive Refinishing
- Tower & Aqua Play Unit Restoration
- Attraction Installation & Relocation
- Steel & Wood Coaster Painting
- Theming & Rebranding

www.baynum.com
(859) 491-9800 office
info@baynumpainting.com

GLOBAL INSPECTION SERVICES

Ride Inspections
Risk Management Services
Administrative Review
Incident Investigation
Training

443-299-7658
LJMsafety.com
rgavel@ljmsafety.com

PROTECTION THROUGH INSPECTION

LJM
Associates, Inc.

Bee Aware - Bee Ready - Bee Safe

JOIN TODAY!
www.astm.org/COMMIT/F24



ASTM INTERNATIONAL
Committee F24
Amusement Rides and Devices



Keep our amusement park industry strong!
Buy products and services from these suppliers.

Oaks Amusement Park begins long-range improvement plans

AT: Pam Sherborne
 psherborne@amusementtoday.com

PORTLAND, Ore. — **Oaks Amusement Park**, located in Portland, Oregon, is in its first phase of a 20-year master plan that will update and modernize the park. Yet, while updating, special attention is being paid to saving and maintaining the park's historic charm. The project aims to blend modern amenities with the preservation of historic features, including the replacement of old-growth tree canopy lighting.

Oaks Amusement Park opened in 1905, and it has attractions that date back to 1906, such as the Oaks Park Roller Rink. It opened in June 1906 and features a 100 by 200 square-foot, Wisconsin

rotunda maple wood floor. The Noah's Ark Carousel, built by **Herschell-Spillman**, was built in 1912 and installed in 1926. There are a 1955 **Eli Bridge Company Scrambler** and a 1960 **Eyerly Aircraft Company Rock-O-Plane**. The park also sports an Eyerly Spider, an octopus-type ride that features six arms with two cars each and rotates counterclockwise on an off-axis. It opened originally in 1974 and was rebuilt in 2017.

In addition, there is an **Allan Herschell Company Sky Fighter**. The kiddie ride was built in the 1950s.

Framing the park's main entrance leading to the midway, the structures that currently house **George's Grill**, **Trolley Park Pizza Co.**



The restoration of the Oaks Amusement Park's Historic Dance Pavilion was completed in 2025. COURTESY OAKS AMUSEMENT PARK

and **Sugar Rush** have been standing strong since 1905.

Then, there is the Historic Dance Pavilion that, as part of the long-range plans, received its restoration in 2025. The restoration was focused on improving accessibility and safeguarding the vintage space

for future generations. Among the improvements, the updates included removing the drop ceiling to expose the beautiful, original timber ceiling.

According to **Emily MacKay**, Oaks Amusement Park marketing and events director, the renovations will

touch just about every part of the park by repurposing existing sections, utilizing unused space and adding new attractions, such as the drop tower set to open in 2027.

"Oregon is definitely excited for the updates and improvements," said MacKay. "We are adding an **RMC Rides (Larson Int'l) Super Shot Drop Tower**. Construction starts next month, and that is scheduled to open when our season begins in March of 2027. We will be kicking off a naming contest soon for our new drop tower as a way to give our neighbors, who are so invested in this place, a way to participate."

As part of this first phase

▶ See OAKS, page 41

FLUME RESTORATION



HOLLAND FIBERGLASS
AN AFFILIATE OF RALPH S. ALBERTS CO., INC.

- ✓
Project Management
- ✓
Initial Quality Inspection and Damage Evaluation
- ✓
Excavate, Grind, and Repair Fiberglass Damage
- ✓
Complete Restored Gel Coat Finish









SALES@HOLLANDFIBERGLASS.COM

WWW.HOLLANDFIBERGLASS.COM

(813) 582-7816

► **OAKS**
Continued from page 40

of the 20-year master plan, MacKay said the park is repurposing the center section of the park from picnic space to an attraction zone.

"We will be relocating several existing rides into the new attraction zone, improving access and circulation throughout the park," she said. "We are not losing any picnic space, but rather the picnic grounds are shifting to the south. A large empty field located at the south end of the property is being set up as new picnic grounds."

The new attraction zone will also feature some new lights, which are replicas of the early lighting features that were on the midway, which the park took from the 1905 Lewis and Clark exposition when that closed down.

Park officials also plan to give visitors more interplay with the Willamette River through views from the rides.

"We are also working on a new signage and super



Park layout and infrastructure revisions are part of the ongoing renovation, which included shifting the railway and enhancing the entryway. COURTESY OAKS AMUSEMENT PARK

graphics package that will be part of the phase one improvements," MacKay said.

During this season, there will also be a focus on bank reinforcement, laying the footings for the new drop tower and moving utilities for the new entertainment zone that will center around the new drop tower.

MacKay stated the park is working with Lease Crutcher

Lewis — who performed the renovations to the Dance Pavilion — as the construction partner for the project.

"We also are retheming our Willamette Willy Game and the Zoosoom Coaster over the next six weeks, in partnership with local artist Mike Bennett," she said.

The unveiling of the updates to Willamette Willy is scheduled for May 30. The unveiling of the new theming of the Zoosoom Coaster is set for June 13.

Later phases of the 20-year plan include relocating one of the historic gazebos into the new picnic areas, building a new office to open up space at the main gate for improved ticketing and guest services facilities, and adding greenery and vegetation features in both the parking lot and in the attraction zones.

"Once we get through phase one, we'll identify what updates will be included in phase two and what those timelines will be," added MacKay.

oakspark.com

SWING
INTO THE SEASON WITH
NEW PARTS!

S&S WORLDWIDE
WHERE EXCITEMENT BEGINS

Place your part orders today!
parts@s-s.com
+1-435-752-1987

Celebrating 50 years in the Industry!



MACLAN.COM • 800.788.3951 • LAKELAND, FLA.

- **LOAD WHEELS • GUIDE WHEELS • UPSTOP WHEELS •**
- **CNC HUB MANUFACTURING •**
- **FLUME WHEELS • NYLON WHEELS & PARTS •**
- **SOLID URETHANE PARTS •**





NEWS & NOTES

www.aimsintl.org

Amusement Industry Manufacturers
and Suppliers International, Ltd.
P.O. Box 4037 • Dallas, Texas 75208
Phone: (714) 425-5747 • Fax: (714) 276-9666

Celebrating safety leadership across the attractions industry

Safety is the foundation of the global attractions industry. From amusement parks and water parks to family entertainment centers, zoos, aquariums, museums and portable attractions, every memorable guest experience begins with a commitment to protecting guests, employees and partners. While innovation and technology continue to evolve, safety remains the industry's most important shared responsibility.

Every day, attractions professionals work behind the scenes to uphold rigorous safety standards. Maintenance teams conduct detailed inspections before gates open. Operations staff monitor ride systems and guest activity throughout the day. Trainers prepare employees to respond quickly and effectively, while manufacturers, inspectors, consultants, suppliers and operators collaborate to strengthen procedures, reduce risk and improve industry-wide best practices.

This culture of safety is built through continuous improvement, education, account-

ability and leadership. Although much of this work goes unseen by guests, it is essential to creating environments where families can relax, explore and make lifelong memories with confidence.

AIMS International is proud to recognize individuals and organizations demonstrating exceptional leadership and dedication to safety through its annual Safety Awards Program. These awards honor professionals who advance safety practices, champion education and training, mentor others and contribute to a stronger and safer attractions industry worldwide.

Nominations are now open, and industry professionals are encouraged to submit candidates who exemplify excellence in safety leadership. Whether it is a ride operator prioritizing guest well-being, a maintenance technician implementing innovative inspection procedures, a trainer elevating operational standards or an organization fostering a strong culture of safety, every contribution

plays a vital role.

Recognizing safety leaders not only honors individual achievement but also reinforces the values that unite the industry. By highlighting best practices and sharing success stories, the awards program helps inspire continued progress across all sectors of the attractions community.

With safety remaining the industry's top priority for guests and employees worldwide, advancements continue through new technologies, enhanced training and education programs, and strong leadership that influences others to raise standards across the industry.

Now is the time to spotlight the individuals and organizations demonstrating leadership, innovation, and foresight in improving safety throughout the attractions industry.

The deadline to submit nominations is June 15.

Additional information, award categories and nomination details are available at aimsintl.org/awards.

Space for this AIMS page is provided courtesy of Amusement Today as a corporate partner of AIMS Intl. Content is provided by AT & AIMS.



SAFETY AWARD NOMINATIONS NOW BEING ACCEPTED

The AIMS International Safety Award is presented annually to the individual or organization that demonstrates leadership, innovation, and foresight in improving safety in the amusement industry.

Nominations for the AIMS International Safety Award can be easily submitted via the button below. The nominee's name, contact information, and a short description of why the nominee deserves to be recognized is all you need.

The award will be presented during the Golden Ticket Awards in September 2026.

**The nomination deadline is
June 12, 2026.**

LEARN MORE at
aimsintl.org/awards

Ellis & Associates Awarded
2025 Safety Award;
Jerry Aldrich Awarded
Lifetime Contribution Award



MOBILE MIDWAYS

► Michigan's Maple Syrup Festival — page 44 / Powers & Thomas friendship evolves into midway — pages 46-47

Weather effects attendance during 2026 Miami-Dade County Fair

AT: B. Derek Shaw

bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

MIAMI, Fla. — “We had several days of heavy rain during the 2026 Youth Fair and were only open for two hours on Sunday, March 15, due to several weather conditions,” said Eddie Cora, president of the Miami-Dade County Fair and Exposition (commonly referred to as the Youth Fair).

“The event got off to a bit of a slow start with several rainy days, but things quickly picked up,” said Lynda Franc, corporate marketing director of North American Midway Entertainment (NAME). “Overall, 2026 turned out to be a solid year, finishing just slightly below previous years despite the early weather challenges.”

All told, 456,169 people visited the 21-day fair, down from the half million through the turnstiles in 2025. The theme was “Wild About the Fair.”

NAME brought 87 rides spread over three ride midway zones: Majorland, Kiddieland and Kiddieland Too. Thirty-eight of the rides were kiddie ones. It also brought a full lineup of games and classic fair foods.

“We were especially excited to debut two new rides this year — Pegasus and Super Miami, both by Technical



NAME brought 87 rides, spread over three ride midway zones: Majorland, Kiddieland and Kiddieland Too. Super Miami (above right) — manufactured by Technical Park — was one of two new rides at that spot and quickly became one of the favorites of fairgoers. COURTESY NAME/SCOOTER KOREK

distinction. “At the Miami-Dade County Fair, our approach is rooted in collaboration. When everyone works toward a shared goal, it creates a stronger, more enjoyable experience for every guest. Our goal is to make guests feel special, so they can have a wonderful time with their family.”

Special promotions included \$5 days (March 12, March 18 and April 1) where guests enjoyed \$5 admission, \$5 select food items and \$5 off the regular on-grounds unlimited ride all day price. There was half-off regular admission before 6 pm, Monday to Friday; \$6 deals before 6 p.m. on select food, games and merchandise. Free admission was offered every Thursday for military and first responders, while guests 5 and under and guests 65 and older received free admission every day. Finally, there were scout and college day offers of free admission.

“Our media mix included heavy digital, social and radio advertising. We also included TV, cable and OOH (Out-of-home) elements,” explained Cora.

The fair had 150 food stands with nearly 40 new foods, including affogato (Italian dessert); berry wild Pop-Tarts sundae; Biscoff cookie butter cheesecake and funnel cake; snake

shape churros; fried frozen watermelon; hot Cheetos dust dumplings; maple bacon fried cheese curds and mojo pork megaton.

The youth fair experienced many firsts this year. The annual scholarship and youth hall of fame ceremonies occurred during the fair. There was a “tendies competition,” where contestants ate chicken tenders covered in different levels of hot sauces.

“This year’s ‘Wild About The Fair’ theme allowed us to get creative with how it was implemented, including during the daily parade with animal-themed floats and was extremely well-received by fairgoers,” said Cora. “The inaugural fundraising event, the evening before opening day, Frost & Flavor was a food and wine experience showcasing fair food vendors, area schools’ culinary programs and local restaurants. The event was set around the ice rink with a performance of the ice show. All proceeds went to help fund the fair’s philanthropic mission.”

There were numerous entertainment experiences, including the Wild Adventures on Ice Show. Sea Lion Splash, The Youth Fair Circus and tribute shows on the main stage (Bee Gees; Earth, Wind and Fire; Queen; the Rat Pack; Motown;

Aerosmith and the Eagles).

Add to that strolling entertainment from Stilt Circus, DJ Fate, Giant Flamingo, The Fritters, Animal Crackers, Tadpole & Katie the Clowns and The Amirrorcan Men.

“The employment pool was strong this year,” said Cora. “Concessionaires, games and fair staff were able to fill available positions. Most received their H2B visa employees immediately before the start of the fair.”

Throughout its history, the Youth Fair has contributed more than \$11 million to the community in Miami-Dade County and has positively impacted the lives of countless adults and children since 1952.

The Miami-Dade County Fair & Exposition, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to enriching the community by promoting education and South Florida agriculture while showcasing and rewarding youth achievement. It accomplishes this by producing a first-class fair with quality entertainment and providing facilities for year-round events. The fair has been held in Tamiami Park since 1972.

The 75th annual fair returns March 18 to April 11, 2027 (except March 29-30 and April 5-6).

•thefair.me/thefair

Park. These attractions quickly became guest favorites, drawing strong crowds and adding a fresh level of excitement for thrill-seekers looking for something new,” said Franc.

They were two of the most popular rides on the Majorland midway. Others included the Sky Ride (Bergathon, operated by NAME), Super Wheel by Ronald Bussink/Dutch Wheels, and the Euroslide from SBF/Visa.

Cora summed up their experience with NAME this year, in one word: “Excellent!”

“Working with the Miami-Dade County Youth Fair team is always a great experience. They’re incredibly collaborative and dedicated to putting on the best possible event for the Miami community, and that really shows in the final product. We’re already looking forward to being back again next year,” said Franc.

NAME is celebrating its 22nd anniversary in business this year. The company has an arsenal of 230 rides and a traveling and temporary staff of over 5,000 people.

Cora likes the fair’s



Pegasus from Technical Park was one of two new attractions on the Majorland midway. COURTESY NAME/SCOOTER KOREK



MIDWAYSCENE

AT: B. Derek Shaw
bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

Taylor Talley of **Talley Amusements** has secured the contract to bring The Freedom 250 Ferris Wheel (**Levent Lunapark**) to the **Great American State Fair** on the **National Mall** in Washington, D.C. The 16-day exposition runs June 25 through July 10. The event is organized by Freedom 250, a nonprofit, public/private partnership.

Talley had this to say on Talley Amusements social media: "As America celebrates its 250th birthday, it's an incredible honor for our family and team to be part of such a historic moment. This is more than just bringing a Ferris wheel to our nation's capital; it's being part of a once-in-a-generation celebration of America, tradition and the spirit of the midway. We cannot wait to light up the D.C. skyline this summer and give millions of guests a view they'll never forget."

Also making an appearance is the recently refurbished **Smithsonian Institute** national carousel (formerly the **Gwynn Oak Amusement Park** carousel), which reopened on the National Mall in late April, after a three-year restoration. It is a 1947 **Allan Herschell Company** carousel with 54 restored animals and chariots.

The Great American State Fair celebration will unite and showcase all 50 states and six territories in a single World's Fair-scale event. Each will have a pavilion with interactive experiences highlighting their unique characteristics and contributions. There will also be five other national pavilions that center around the themes Made in America, American Heartland, American Innovates, The American Canvas and Faith & Family. The event will take place between Constitution and Independence Avenue SW.

There will also be livestock and rodeo-associated events that are connected with many state fairs.

The fair will open at 10 a.m. each day and close at 9 p.m., with some days featuring a later closing time.

The Dubuque County Board of Supervisors (Iowa) recently voted to sell the **Dubuque County Fairgrounds** to the fair association. This settles months of back-and-forth conversation over the property's ownership. **John Bries**, general manager of **Dubuque County Fair Association**, had been asking county leaders for a permanent fix to the association's lack of a lease since October 2024. The fair association is pleased with the transfer of the property to their organization.

The transfer is expected to unlock new fundraising opportunities and allow the association to begin planning long-delayed upgrades to buildings, infrastructure, and event facilities.

The fair returns July 28 to August 2, with **Wilson's Family Show** providing the ride midway.

Since February, **SunShine Shows**, Middleburg, Pennsylvania, has added eight new rides and other related items to its lineup. Some equipment is brand new, while others are new to them. They bought a **Wisdom Rides** Go Gator (steel kiddie roller coaster), **Frederiksen Industries** Fun Slide, **Garbrick** Flying Saucer ride and **Garbrick Amusements**, who recently closed operations. They also bought an **ARM** Rock Star, **Chance** Rok'n'Rol, a train ride and a Scooby Doo train ride, both **Ital-Resina**.

The carnival also purchased three ticket boxes from **Steve Swika, SwikaS Amusements** (that also shuttered), which they are going to repurpose for their Magic Money operations, along with hot boxes and wire.

T.J. Schmidt provides the midway for Michigan's 85th Maple Syrup Festival

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

VERMONTVILLE, Mich. — This small village in southern Michigan springs to life each April thanks to a long-standing tradition.

The community of 800 played host to the **85th Annual Vermontville Maple Syrup Festival**, April 24 to 26, which featured numerous events, a carnival midway and a drone show.

"Our attendance was a little better than normal," **Mary Ann Hayes**, festival spokesperson, told *Amusement Today* the morning after the event closed. "We had around 10,000 come out this year, thanks to better stage entertainment and more hype about the festival. The weather was good — a little chilly on Saturday, but Sunday was gorgeous."

It also marked a bittersweet season opening for midway provider **T.J. Schmidt & Company**, Standish, Michigan, which lost its main maintenance building to fire on March 12.

Doug Burtch, chief operations officer for the carnival, said the devastating fire not only destroyed the building, but also two major rides in the shop at the time. The show's gondola Ferris wheel — not in the building during the fire — is also currently off the road due to the blaze.

"We lost our Mega Shot drop tower (**ARM U.S.A.**), Tilt-A-Whirl (**Sellner**) and 12 of the 16 Ferris wheel seats," he noted. "We had just completed refurbishing the Tilt and used it only three times. The Ferris wheel seats were also inside for work."

Roger Wadkins (Wadkins Expo Wheel, Inc.) has been great in helping, as he is trying to build new seats for us as fast as he can. Of course, we lost all of the tools and other maintenance equipment in the building. We will certainly miss the drop tower on our midway because of its height and ease of moving."

Burtch said the company has a plan to replace one of the destroyed attractions and will debut it in the coming weeks.



Bumper cars were part of the family fun-filled midway provided by **T.J. Schmidt & Company**. COURTESY ROBERT YOUNGS, VERMONTVILLE MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL

"With challenges come opportunities. This is an opportunity for us to purchase equipment," he said of the tragedy.

Despite the losses at winter quarters, T.J. Schmidt & Company fielded 12 rides under contract for the three-day festival. Pre-sale ride wristbands were offered for \$20 with a three-day pass for \$50. Wristbands were \$25 at the event.

Among the featured attractions were Scooter bumper cars (**Majestic Manufacturing**), Grand Carousel (**Chance Rides**), Silver Streak Himalaya (**Wisdom Rides of America**), Fun Slide (**Frederiksen Industries**) and Big Top Circus (**Gladiator Playport**).

"We were very happy with the rides they provided and their operations went smoothly," Hayes emphasized. "It was a new carnival for us, and we kept in contact with them after the fire. They guaranteed us they would be here, which they were. We had good success with the pre-sale ride program, and the ticket booths were busy."

"It was a good opening weekend for us," said Burtch. "Consumer confidence appears steady and the festival is a big draw to a small community — a great event in small-town America."

Hayes pointed out

she shares responsibility with husband, **Steve**, as "co-presidents" of the not-for-profit **Vermontville Maple Syrup Festival Corp.**, which stages the annual affair.

Recognized as the original maple syrup festival in Michigan, the event features local syrup producers throughout the village with booths selling syrup, candles and maple syrup cotton candy.

Saturday of the festival was busy with a children's parade and a 5K walk/run in the morning, followed by the afternoon grand parade on Main Street.

"The afternoon parade is always a huge draw, and we had 59 units in it this year," Hayes said. "Our local high school band, fire departments and floats were among the participants. The evening drone show (**Starlight Aerial Productions**) kept people in town longer than normal. Businesses helped sponsor the show, and we had a lot of donations from private individuals."

Other highlights included a vendor market, food court, talent show, flea market, petting zoo, princess pageant, pancake derby and arm wrestling.

"We're proud to be going 85 years strong," Hayes concluded.

The 2027 festival is slated for April 23 to 25.

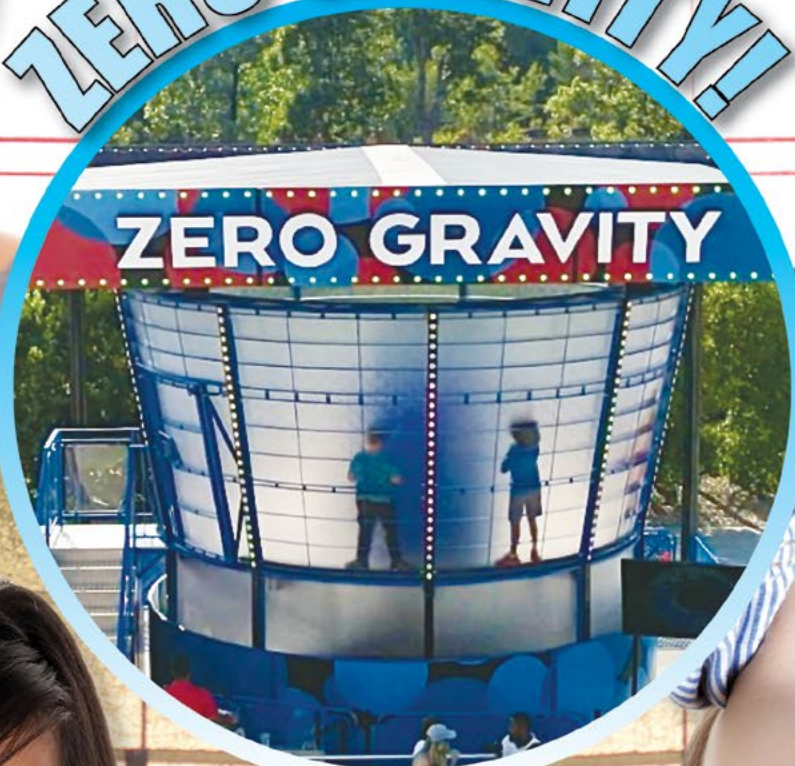
•syrupfest.org

SPIN WITH FRIENDS!

GET YOUR SMILE SIDWAYS!



ZERO GRAVITY!



**GOOD TIMES,
NEW PERSPECTIVE!**

FEAR HAS NOTHING TO STAND ON!



Supplying Amusements New to Used

**908-526-8009
RIDES4U.com**

Powers & Thomas Midway Entertainment — evolution of a friendship

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

DURHAM, N.C. — While working as teenagers for their families' carnival operations, **Ed Powers** and **R.D. (Ron) Thomas** likely never envisioned that someday they would become partners and launch their own successful business.

"I first met Ed when we were teens," Thomas recalled during a casual conversation with *Amusement Today*. "I was working with my dad (Ronnie), and Ed helped his father (**Les (Corky) Powers**)."

At the time, **Ronnie Thomas** was an independent ride operator with Les Powers' **Amusements of Rochester**, based in Corfu, New York. Thomas booked in his **Octopus (Eyerly Aircraft)**, **Scrambler (Eli Bridge)**, **Tilt-A-Whirl (Sellner)** and a mouse game with the regional show.

"I was 13 or 14 when I met the Thomas family," Ed Powers noted. "The best thing that ever happened during that time in my life was learning a work ethic on my dad's carnival."

Today, the husband-and-wife teams of Ed and **Amy Powers** and R.D. and **Tracy Thomas** — Tracy Thomas and Ed Powers are siblings — own and operate **Powers & Thomas Midway Entertainment**. The Wilmington, North Carolina,



In the show's new tool shop trailer are (l to r): Ed Powers, Ronnie Thomas and R.D. (Ron) Thomas. AT/RON GUSTAFSON

show embarked on its 12th season this spring with the second stop on its route at the Durham County Stadium complex, April 10 to 19.

R.D. Thomas learned the ropes of the ride business by working alongside his father. The elder Thomas turned 80 this year and remains active in daily operations on the show while his wife, Marie, still works the mouse game.

Ed Powers purchased his first attraction in the late '80s, a **Kid Power** play port that he booked on his father's show, allowing him to stay close to the Thomas family.

By 1991, the young Powers was operating a second unit, **Light Blue**, with Amusements of Rochester while his father



The Powers & Thomas Midway Entertainment cashless system and kiosks (above left) were updated in 2026 through Tap N Go. A 22-meter gondola wheel from Levent Lunapark was new to the show last year (above right). AT/RON GUSTAFSON



managed the original **Dark Blue** unit. The two combined at larger fairs along the New York to North Carolina route. Amusements of Rochester is now doing business as **Powers Great American Midways (PGAM)** with offices and maintenance facilities in Whiteville, North Carolina.

"**Len Soled** sold me my first ride in 1993, a **Fire Chief**, when he worked for **Zamperla**," Thomas said of his initial attraction purchase. Soled went on to establish **Rides 4 U** in Somerville, New Jersey, and today represents a number of manufacturers of new rides and also sells used equipment. The ride still operates on the carnival and underwent refurbishment

during the past winter.

With years of experience under their belts, Ed Powers and R.D. Thomas took advantage of the opportunity to establish their own carnival late in 2014 when a deal was struck to purchase **Swank's Steel City Shows**, based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The following spring, Powers & Thomas Midway Entertainment made its debut.

"They are really great people," Powers said of **Bill and Patty Swank**, who owned the Pennsylvania carnival. "They wanted to retire, and it really helped us out as we also picked up nearly 90 percent of their route."

Powers and Thomas already owned a **Pharaoh's**

Fury (Chance Rides), **Swing Buggy (Bertazzon)**, **Quadzilla (Majestic Manufacturing)**, **Sizzler (Wisdom Rides of America)** and **Tilt-A-Whirl** when they took ownership of Swank's 15 rides.

Powers and Thomas still feature the **High Flyer (ARM USA)** as a spectacular attraction on their midway, which was included in the Swank acquisition. The other equipment purchased from the Swanks has been replaced over the years. The carnival has continued to update equipment in recent years, with a **Levent Lunapark** 22-meter gondola wheel debuting last year. Based in Ankara, Turkey, Levent is represented in the U.S. by **Ride Trader LLC**, Monroe, Georgia.

"We installed LEDs on the wheel ourselves," Thomas noted. "We got them through **Chad Griffith (CMD Enterprises)**, Clemmons, North Carolina) and the 24-volt lights all run independently of each other without a controller, which really saves on maintenance."

Also new in 2025 was a **Fun Slide** from **Frederiksen Industries**, Tampa, Florida, with a New York New York double-deck funhouse from Italian manufacturer **Gosetto** added in 2024.

"I'm tracking our new **Wave Swinger (Bertazzon)** now on my phone as it crosses the ocean," Powers said of the spectacular ride the carnival has been waiting on for more than two years. "It's not unusual to wait that long for a new big piece due to

100% MADE IN ITALY

IMPACT

Ø 18 M FOOTPRINT
9.4 M HIGH
16 SEATS
PARK & TRAVELLING
ONLY ONE TRAILER

VIDEO

WWW.FABBRIGROUP.COM

► See POWERS, page 47

► POWERS

Continued from page 46

production schedules at the manufacturers."

The Durham lot, referred to as a still date for the carnival, featured the show's Freak Out (KMG), Magic Maze (Owen Trailers), Genesis and Sizzler (Wisdom), Farm Tractors (Dalton Kid Ride Rebuilders), Dizzy Dragons (Larson International), three abreast carousel (Chance), Fun Slide, gondola wheel, Tilt-A-Whirl, New York New York funhouse and R.D. Thomas's original Fire Chief.

PGAM brought in its new Spinner (Kolmax Plus) themed as Casino, Orbiter (Tivoli) decked out as Tesla AC, Zero Gravity (Battech Enterprises), Mini Reverse Time (SBF/Visa) themed as Wipe Out and Jumbo Elephants (Kolmax).

Booked in pay-as-you-go attractions included kiddie bumper boats (Bumper Boats Inc.), bungee and a climbing wall.

Around a dozen games, all booked in, and six show-owned food concessions rounded the early-season midway. Around two dozen games will be on the show once fair season begins.

Admission to the Durham carnival was \$5, with ride wristbands \$35. The operation updated its modern trailer-mounted point of sale kiosks this year to Tap N Go, Orlando, Florida. The cashless system is used for wristband purchases and amusement ride credits on reloadable cards. Powers said the \$5 admission helps with security at the Durham event and the show purchased perimeter fencing for the location a few years ago.

The carnival will bring out additional equipment at the height of its route, including Scooter bumper cars (Majestic Manufacturing), Air Raid Booster (Fabbri), Monster Trucks (Wisdom), Dragon Coaster (Jung-Max) and Jumbo Elephants and Tea Cups (Kolmax).

A new bumper car structure is on order for next year from Kolmax, with cars to be provided by Bertazzon, Powers noted. The Tilt-A-Whirl on the show is the same unit Ronnie Thomas operated with Amusements of Rochester decades ago — a



New York New York double-deck funhouse was a recent addition with Powers & Thomas Midway Entertainment. AT/RON GUSTAFSON

1958 model he is proud to talk about.

"I go through it every year at winter quarters and over time have replaced the bull plates, catwalks and other components," he said. "Did you know there are 1,100 pieces in a cable-drive Tilt?"

"Dad bought that Tilt 50 years ago, and I started working on it as a teenager," R.D. Thomas asserted. "I've learned to be a ride mechanic, truck mechanic and electrician by working with him. He still does the Tilt teardown with our crew and will sometimes help with the Swing Buggy after that."

A new trailer for the Tilt-A-Whirl was also built by the elder Thomas, replacing a 1948 version.

"I built it from the ground up—everything but the axles," he said. "The ride moves as a double load, and I've built a few other Tilt trailers for other operators."

The father and son team were also enthused in talking about the carnival's new mobile tool shop. Formerly used by a NASCAR race team, the spacious trailer allows for virtually every hand tool needed for maintenance to be properly cataloged and stored.

A second mobile shop has welding and electrical supplies and other components accessible on demand as the carnival travels 36 weeks throughout North and South Carolina, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland and New York.

Music on the spectacular rides has also been updated this year with professional audio gear from Discosmash, Antwerp, Belgium.

"It's all controlled from the office," Powers said of the state-of-the-art system. "We control the song selections

and volume from an iPad, so nothing can be adjusted on the midway. It was a good move as it saves on the equipment, and the ride staff can't control it."

Growth of the carnival has also brought about changes in how the business operates.

"Our route has changed dramatically," Powers admits. "We started as a small carnival, and now we're considered a medium-sized show, moving 100 loads a week. Due to overhead, we had to give up some of the small county fairs and other events we used to play.

We have three contracts with my dad (PGAM) and it's great working with him. It's a big jump into Rhinebeck (Dutchess County Fair in New York) from a fair in Maryland, so we get 10 to 12 pieces in there (Rhinebeck) early."

The help situation is a constant issue facing carnival owners across the nation, but Powers and Thomas feel fortunate.

"We're lucky this year, but I'm already thinking about next year," Powers said of the H-2B visa program, which allows U.S. employers to hire foreign nationals for seasonal work. The show employs around 100.

When the season closes, the carnival winters in Holly Ridge, North Carolina, where a 20,000-square-foot maintenance and storage facility was recently constructed.

"It's a solid partnership," Powers said of the two couples sharing ownership of the business. "Tracy and Amy run the office and our mom (Mary Powers) is in charge of the food. Everyone has their own niche, and it works very well for all of us. You've got to love this business, and we certainly do."

•powerstomas.com

SNAPSHOTS Powers & Thomas Midway



Marie and Ronnie Thomas operating their popular mouse game. COURTESY POWERS AND THOMAS



Bob McKnight manages game concessions with the show. COURTESY POWERS AND THOMAS



A fifth generation in the family carnival business is Shane Powers, son of Amy and Ed Powers, who co-own Powers & Thomas Midway Entertainment. He works the pizza and lemonade trailer. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



Matteo (left) and Michael Simonian are concessionaires with Powers & Thomas Midway Entertainment. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



Mary Powers (far left) manages show-owned food stand while Tracy Thomas is a co-owner of the carnival and works in the office. They are a mother and daughter team with Powers & Thomas Midway Entertainment. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



FROM HEART RACING MOMENTS TO HEARTFELT MEMORIES!

Kissel Entertainment puts you in the present, fully immersing you in fun that stays with you for a lifetime. Since 1932, Kissel Entertainment has been a trusted name in delivering exceptional entertainment and continuing the longstanding American tradition of carnivals, fairs, and festivals.

Today, we're not just continuing our legacy, we're revolutionizing it. We transport fairgoers to a realm of unparalleled excitement and unforgettable moments with Orlando-quality attractions and amenities, delivered straight to your city.



Contact us at: www.KisselFun.com



***Scan Here to
See Patriot in Action***



16

Passengers

60

Feet High

360

***Degree
Rotation***

www.armrides.com

MIDWAY MARKET PLACE

REVERCHON
a world of emotions
www.reverchon.eu

FLUME RIDE
GLIDING COASTER
RAFT RIDE
SC STALL TURN

R FAMILY ADVENTURE STARTS NOW - **HOLD TIGHT!**
CONTACTS US! sales@reverchon.eu



PROUDLY WORKING WITH THE FOLLOWING
NORTH AMERICAN COMPANIES:

- Premier Rides • Arihant • E&F Miler • PTC •
 - Fibrart • Larson International • Swanee River RR •
- irmrides.com • Facebook.com/IRMRides

SARTORI
AMUSEMENT RIDES

Where Fun takes Shape

Sartori Rides S.r.l.
+39 0429 800 222 - info@sartorirides.com
www.sartorirides.com

HAMMERED

Phone: 435-258-7901
www.altitudeattractions.com

ALTITUDE
RIDES AND ATTRACTIONS

Keep our amusement park industry strong!
Buy products and services from these suppliers.



The Merced County Spring Fair included carnival, entertainment, exhibits, livestock shows and community events.
COURTESY MERCED COUNTY SPRING FAIR

2026 Merced County Spring Fair has a successful run, strong attendance

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

LOS BANOS, Calif. — This year's **Merced County Spring Fair**, held this year April 29 to May 3 in Los Banos, California, was fantastic, according to **Cinnamon Howell**, who manages the fair.

"We saw strong attendance throughout the run of the fair and overall attendance was up compared to 2025," Howell said. "There was great energy on the grounds each day, with families really coming out to enjoy the carnival, entertainment, exhibits, livestock shows and community events."

Howell said fair officials believe one of the biggest contributors to the increase in attendance was the partnership with **Valley Children's Healthcare**, which allowed the fair to provide free admission for all children age 12 and under.

"That opportunity made the fair more accessible for families and helped create an affordable, family-focused experience for the community," Howell said. "It really reinforced what the fair is all about, bringing people together and creating memories."

Howell said a free entertainment lineup on the main stage was introduced this year. It generated a lot of enthusiasm from

fairgoers. This year featured several popular tribute performances, including **Twist on Taylor**, a tribute to **Taylor Swift**, a **Selena** tribute honoring **Selena**, a **Morgan Wallen** tribute, and a tribute to **Journey**.

"The community was incredibly excited about the lineup, and we saw strong crowds gathering each night for the performances," Howell said. "The stage area really became a nightly soundtrack for the fairgrounds, somewhere between a concert venue and a community reunion."

Butler Amusements returned to the Merced County Spring Fair this year. The carnival brought 26 rides to the midway.

"The carnival is always one of the biggest attractions for fairgoers and this year's lineup offered a great mix of family rides, thrill rides and classic favorites," Howell said.

In fact, she said, it is definitely a highlight.

A few of the new rides featured at the fair this year included the **Quasar**, manufactured by **ARM**; **Wacky Shack**, **Owen Trailers**; **Bear Affair**, **Sellner**; and **Quad Runner**, **Hampton/Dalton**.

"Those additions brought some fresh excitement to the midway and were especially popular with younger guests and families looking to try something new under the

carnival lights," she said.

A trend Howell observed this year at the Merced County Spring Fair was a noticeable increase in fair food revenue, which really reflected how much the community enjoyed the variety of food options available throughout the grounds.

"Fair food has always been a big part of the experience, and this year guests truly embraced everything from classic favorites to over-the-top specialty items," she said.

Along with everything else already mentioned, the Merced County Spring Fair offers the FFA and 4H Champions livestock competitions, truck and tractor pulls, demolition derby, rodeo, cowgirl tricks and a variety of food competitions such as those for the best bacon bites, cheesecakes, muffins, cookies, homemade sausage and much more.

There was a hypnotist and lots of dancing.

"Overall, this year's Merced County Spring Fair was an incredible success for our community. It was wonderful to see families, friends, exhibitors and visitors come together to celebrate our local traditions, agriculture, entertainment and community spirit. From the livestock barns to the concert stage, there was truly something for everyone to enjoy."

•countyofmerced.com

SOLD CLASSIFIEDS

AUCTION

NORTON AUCTIONEERS

THE INDUSTRY EXPERTS!

Professional Auctioneers & Appraisers
*Carnivals • Parks • Carousels
 FEC's • Museums • Tourist Attractions*

P.O. Box 279, Coldwater, MI 49036

(517) 617-1104

email: Dan@spiethandsatow.com
 www.nortonauctioneers.com

FOR SALE



- Vekoma Family Boomerang Coaster.....Call for Price
- ARM Vertigo (P/M).....\$599,000
- Zamperla Red Barron.....\$59,000
 - Altitude Rides Drop Tower.....\$99,000
- Zamperla Air Race.....\$399,000
- Chance Moby Dick.....\$399,000
- Technical Park Aerobat.....\$549,000
 - ARM G-Force.....\$399,000
- ARM Mega Bounce.....\$499,000
 - Satori Balloon Ferris Wheel.....\$69,000
 - Kilinski Slide.....\$39,000
 - Visa Mini Bumper Cars (6).....\$69,000
 - S & S Frog Hopper.....\$49,000

Call Len or Earl
 (908) 526-8009
 www.Rides4U.com

Advertiser Index

ADVERTISER	PAGE#
2026 Golden Ticket Awards	34, 35
AERIA	10
AIMS International	42
ASTM Committee F24	39
Altitude Rides & Attractions	50
ARM	49
Baynum Solutions	39
Chance Rides	3
Eli Bridge Company	16
Embed	31
EWorks Pro	17
Fabbri Group	46
Frederiksen Industries, Inc.	30
Gateway Ticketing	21
Gerstlauer Amusement Rides GmbH	15
Great Coasters International	2
Haas & Wilkerson	29
Hodgdon Consulting	17
Hoffman Consulting Group	39
Intermark Ride Group	10
International Rides Management	50
Kay Park Recreation	7
Kiddie Bumper Boats	30
Kissel Entertainment	48
Kumbak Amusement Engineering	39
Lagotronics Projects	17
LJM & Associates, Inc.	39
Mack Rides	13
Maclan Corporation	41
Montgomery Inn	52
Naughton Insurance, Inc.	17
Northwest Coasters	39
Norton Auctioneers	51
Parks Plus Insurance	4
Premier Rides	38
RS Alberts/Holland Fiberglass	40
Reverchon	50
Rick Bastrup/Adventures in Theme Park Design	8
Rides 4 U	45, 51
S&S Worldwide	40
Sally Corp	9
Sartori Amusement Rides	50
Severn Lamb Trams International	19
Sippers By Design	14
StarGuard Elite	24
SunKid	39
Valerity Automation	39
VLocker	23
WWA	28
Whitewater West	27
WHR, Inc.	12
Wiegand Sports USA	17
Worldwide Safety Group	17
Zamperla	5
Zebec	25



**2026 Media Planner
 NOW AVAILABLE
 online!**



Subscribe for FREE at
amusementtoday.com/subscribe



Serving Montgomery Inn Barbecue is as easy as:



Heck, we even fold the wet naps for you.

WE'RE MONTGOMERY INN, AMERICA'S #1 RIBS RESTAURANT*.

We've been providing great meals, featuring our world-famous Montgomery Inn Barbecue Sauce, for theme parks and other attractions for years. We know how the aroma of smoked barbecue pulls in the customers. We know how important it is please your guests with delicious, nutritious meals. We know how our pulled pork barbecue and pulled smoked chicken barbecue sandwiches melt in your mouth and we know how incredibly easy these meals are to prepare.

Make your guests happy. Make your food servers happy. Make the easy choice of Montgomery Inn.



FOR MORE INFO, CALL EVAN ANDREWS AT 513-791-1942 OR E-MAIL HIM AT EVANANDREWS@MONTGOMERYINN.COM.