

AMUSEMENT TODAY

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Digital Edition



Attractions celebrate the U.S.A., patriotism throughout the industry

▶ SEE PAGES 14 & 15

Mammoth coaster is huge step for Fun-Plex Omaha

70-foot-tall addition by Preston & Barbieri is a game-changer

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

OMAHA, Neb. — Fun-Plex opened its doors in 1979. It started with go-karts, miniature golf and batting cages. As it grew, established rides and waterslides helped make it a sizable family entertainment center, if not a small amusement park.

In 2026, Mammoth, a new roller coaster, has arrived, pushing the park into more of a realm of an authentic amusement park. There are still bumper boats and go-karts, but at

nearly 70 feet tall, Mammoth gives the park some legitimate clout in the region.

To build anticipation, Fun-Plex launched an imaginative marketing campaign centered around the fictional discovery of a mammoth. The campaign introduced Marco the Mammoth, a 13-foot-tall mascot that began appearing throughout the community at public events, pep rallies and special appearances. The campaign gained traction and helped develop widespread curiosity.

The new-for-2026 attraction debuted on June 12.

The coaster was supplied

▶ See MAMMOTH, page 8



Meticulously planned from the ground up, Aquarabia stands out with distinct landscapes — from camel rock formations and desert canyons to shaded grottos and wave-filled lagoons. COURTESY WHITEWATER

Saudi Arabia opens the country's first fully-themed water park

AT: Jeffrey Seifert
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QIDDIYA CITY, Saudi Arabia — A major new destination water park, **Aquarabia**, has opened in Saudi Arabia, bringing together more than 22 rides and attractions, including a multitude of record-breaking and first-of-their-kind attractions.

Qiddiya City is a massive mega-development spanning more than 360 square kilometers (138 square miles). The city is situated about 45 kilometers (roughly a 40-minute drive) from downtown Riyadh and about 70 kilometers from King Khalid International Airport. Designed as the world's first city built entirely around the "power of play," it is a flagship pillar of Saudi Vision 2030, blending entertainment, sports, and culture. Backed by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund as part of

the kingdom's Vision 2030 initiative, both parks and the wider Qiddiya Investment Company will share operational expertise.

Aquarabia launched in April adjacent to **Six Flags Qiddiya City**, which made its debut on New Year's Eve 2025. Situated side by side, the two attractions form the cornerstone of Qiddiya City's grand vision: establishing itself as a premier global entertainment destination rather than just a local getaway for Saudi residents.

The under-construction Qiddiya Entertainment Zone sits just to the left of Six Flags Qiddiya City and will eventually link the two destinations. Guests staying at the soon-to-open 550-room **Aquarabia Park Hotel** will enjoy stunning views of the water theme park and the spectacular scen-

▶ See SAUDI, page 10



The addition of Mammoth from Preston & Barbieri signifies real growth for Fun-Plex Omaha. COURTESY JOE CADMUS



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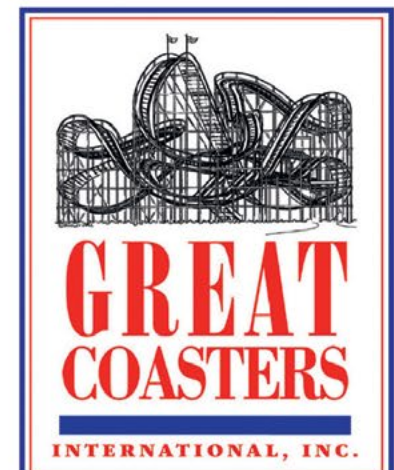
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AT NOTEBOOK: John W.C. Robinson, jrobinson@amusementtoday.com

FLINT'S VIEW: Bubba Flint

It is classic Americana



Robinson

As we inch closer to the Fourth of July, the nation's celebration of its 250th birthday, we've become surrounded by patriotism, nostalgia and all-things Americana.

What is American? The classic answers are that it's apple pie, rock 'n' roll, fireworks in the sky, motorcycles, cowboys, etc. Also in that conversation are roller coasters. To

me, there's almost nothing more pure Americana than a day at the amusement park ... with friends, with family, with the kids, on a date ... it's just the chance to spend the day immersed in moments that can last forever.

Much of my youth was spent immersed in Americana, quite literally. My parents met at LeSourdesville Lake Amusement Park (of Middletown, Ohio). My father worked there as a vice president, and it was where the first several summers of my youth were spent. In 1976, the park was given the designation as the country's only "'official' Bicentennial Amusement Park." Following the 1977 season, the park was rebranded as Americana, The Great American Amusement Park.

In those years, the park was ahead of its time and immersed its guests in literal Americana. A Drum & Fife Corps marched and played through the midways. The park's classic wooden coaster was rebranded The Screechin' Eagle. Guests could enjoy "The Great American Thrill Show" attraction, a classic circus and even be a cowboy in the park's Tombstone Territory. The park's mascot — Uncle Freddie, the Funtime Bear — sported a classic Uncle Sam top hat and would lead his band of Krazy Kritters in rock 'n' roll performances on the park's main stage.

The memories of those summer days still live on with the residents of Southwestern Ohio. Uncle Freddie was even featured in recent years on a classic t-shirt by local novelty brand Cincy Shirts. The moments live on because laughing, screaming and smiling at Americana was the personification of the patriotism of that era. Remembering the fun and beauty of the red, white and blue. Moreover, an amusement park — in its classic or even modern forms — is 100% pure, real Americana. It is the literal embodiment of apple pie, hot dogs, rock 'n' roll, family, friends, coasters and fireworks.

May the memories of enjoying an amusement park — and the stars and stripes — last forever.



INDUSTRY VOICE: Tim Baldwin, *Amusement Today*

America and the amusement industry

As the United States deservedly takes time to celebrate the monumental milestone of 250 years as an independent nation, those of us who love the amusement industry so much can see its development right alongside the country in its growth and innovation.



Baldwin

While pleasure gardens existed in Europe and traveling showmen offered amusement rides, the idea of amusement parks found a foothold with Coney Island in New York. Innovative attractions and extraordinary entertainment were interwoven in the fabric of the Empire State's seaside destination. The Wonder Wheel stood above it all — and still does — along with the Cyclone, which turns 100 next year.

Just as America had its ups and downs, so did the perception of amusement parks and pleasure piers. As all things should, change occurred. Walt Disney, Walter Knott and Louis Koch had visions of family-friendly places that not only provided thrills but also told stories.

Disney's love of America inspired such

attractions as Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln and the Sailing Ship Columbia traveling through the Rivers of America at Disneyland. Following his lead, Walt Disney World would feature the Hall of Presidents and EPCOT boasted the impressive American Pavilion.

Marriott extended its hospitality from hotels to theme parks, and during the bicentennial, opened two parks centered on the theme of America itself.

No matter what one's age might be, there are probably childhood memories of amusement parks or theme parks. For me, it's my oldest memory — a ride on the Runaway Mine Train at Six Flags Over Texas — or being enthralled at seeing Kings Island on television in episodes of *The Brady Bunch* and *The Partridge Family*. The amusement industry couldn't be more integral to American culture.

On pages 14 and 15, *Amusement Today* looks at parks and attractions inspired by this great land.

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



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2 MINUTE DRILL



AT: Tim Baldwin

Matthew Blumhardt, Holiday World & Splashin' Safari

Father of two kids (ages 2 and five months), **Matthew Blumhardt** is nervous about what they do, but in the sweetest way, says his wife, **Leah**. At **Holiday World & Splashin' Safari**, he is known for holding team members to a high standard. Whether at home or at work, he focuses on things that need attention and is known for being detail-oriented. He cares very deeply about everything he does and becomes passionate about certain topics, such as throughput and the basics, as well as being laser-focused on daily cash sheets. "He's unstoppable," says his team.

Title: VP & COO – Holiday World & Splashin' Safari

Number of years in the amusement industry: 18 years.

Best thing about the industry: The number of disciplines that can be learned.

Favorite amusement ride: The Legend at Holiday World.

If I weren't working in the amusement industry, I would be ... a wine critic.

Biggest challenge facing our industry: Rising costs.

The thing I like most about amusement season: Thanksgiving dinner at Holiday World.

If I'm cooking, my go-to chicken dish is ... pesto pasta with breaded chicken.

In a single word, my newborn is ... adorable.

A state I haven't been in but is high on my list is ... Hawaii.

Biggest nightmare of babyproofing the house: installing lots of gates.

The first thing I do when I walk into my office is ... check the per caps from the day before.

My favorite thing in Holiday World's 4th of July area: Star Spangled Carousel.



Leah Speight's efforts at Six Flags Over Texas — and her love for Beyoncé — have earned her the nickname of "The Queen." COURTESY HOLIDAY WORLD

The television character I'm most like: Jack Donaghy in *30 Rock*.

On a scale of 1 to 10, my hometown is ... a 7.

A person from the 1950s I would like to meet would be ... Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The longest drive I've ever taken was ... from Michigan to Wyoming.

Pick one: an extra hour of sleep or an extra hour to get work done? Extra hour of sleep.

The last movie I saw at the theater with my wife was ... *The Eyes of Tammy Faye*.

Beating the summer heat: swimming pool or air-conditioning? Bahari Wave at Splashin' Safari!

Strongest sports team loyalty: Kansas City Chiefs.

My favorite memory of my wedding was ... integrating the carousel horses from the Star Spangled Carousel into the reception décor ... and of course, seeing my beautiful wife Leah during the first look.

THE INDUSTRY SEEN

Remembering together



PLEASANTON, Calif. — The Alameda County Fair will present an exhibit titled "Rising Together: In Remembrance of 9/11" during the fair's June 19 to July 12 run. Marking 25 years since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the exhibit will feature a portion of a huge steel beam from New York's World Trade Center. The center's Twin Towers were destroyed in the attacks, which claimed nearly 3,000 lives. The historic beam, owned by generational carnival families of Debbie Helm and Tom Davis, was brought to Northern California, in partnership with Butler Amusements of Fairfield, California. The fair hosted a processional ceremony on May 21 as fragments of the Twin Towers were escorted onto the property by police and first responders. Alameda County firemen stand at attention in front of the steel beam during the May ceremony. COURTESY ALAMEDA COUNTY FAIR

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Towering over Fun-Plex's midway, the coaster features multiple elements and is cleverly designed. The front of the train features tusks (above middle) to capitalize on the ride's name. COURTESY JOE CADMUS, PRESTON & BARBIERI, FUN-PLEX OMAHA

► MAMMOTH Continued from page 1

by Preston & Barbieri.

"When Fun-Plex came to us, they were looking for a high-profile roller coaster with a captivating track design and strong customization options. Thanks to our long experience in the industry, we knew this model would perfectly meet their expectations," said **Francesco Ferrari**, Preston & Barbieri. "This roller coaster features a fascinating design with highly banked curves, a 21-meter (69-foot) lift hill, a 470-meter (1,542-foot) track length, and a top speed exceeding 70 km/h (43 mph). The total area occupied by the attraction (excluding the station) is 61 by 26 meters (200 by 85 feet), and the base is self-supporting. To achieve these specifications, we carefully designed and calculated all accelerations and forces, then developed a dynamic layout of curves and counter-curves with significant banking to maintain speed throughout the entire ride experience."

"We wanted something thrilling but accessible," said **Katie Anderson**, general manager. "We wanted families to be able to ride together and for younger guests to experience their first coaster without being intimidated."

During negotiations, the manufacturer suggested Fun-Plex officials test out Sea Viper at **Palace Playland** in Old Orchard Beach, Maine. A similar model operates there.

"After riding it, they immediately understood that this was the right coaster for them," Ferrari told *Amusement Today*. We'd like to thank **Joel and Paul Golder** at Old Orchard Beach for showing them the ride and reporting their experience. Palace

Playland remains very satisfied with their Sea Viper, praising its reliability, high hourly capacity, speed, striking appearance, lighting package and overall characteristics."

Following the climb up the lift, a left-hand turn sends passengers down an initial diving curve. Unlike many coasters of this type of structure, Mammoth has multiple moments close to the ground. Grand, swooping curves are combined with directional changes, dips and a high-speed helix.

Mammoth has its own flair with tusks on the front of the train.

"The custom-designed attraction allowed Fun-Plex to create a ride uniquely its own," Anderson said. "From the earliest stages of development, Mammoth was envisioned not only as a coaster, but as a branded experience that could become a signature attraction for the park."

A single train seats 24 passengers.

"For a park our size, Mammoth can move a tremendous number of guests," Anderson told *AT*. "It's a big step forward in the overall guest experience."

"With this roller coaster, we achieve a capacity of [around] 500 passengers per hour using a single train, and each ride lasts more than 90 seconds," said Ferrari. "When passengers finish, they immediately want to ride again!"

In addition to the coaster, further expansion comes with it.

Mammoth serves as the centerpiece of a newly developed area known as Mammoth Landing. Designed as a gathering place for guests, Mammoth Landing combines rides, food, retail and entertainment into



a destination within the park. The area includes ride photography, themed merchandise, Marco's permanent home and a new concession location. Cleverly named The Tusk, the new coffee drink and donut outlet takes care of the munchies when near the ride. A brand-new go-kart track has also been added.

"The Tusk introduces new offerings to Fun-Plex, including iced coffee and mini donuts served in Mammoth-themed souvenir buckets," Anderson said. "The area also enhances the park's nighttime experience, providing guests with a unique atmosphere to enjoy after dark throughout the summer season. We wanted Mammoth Landing to be more than just a coaster queue. It's a place where guests can gather, watch the ride, enjoy the atmosphere and really be part of the excitement."

To help create buzz, Marco the Mammoth began making appearances. "Mammoth sightings" became the talk of the town.

"Marco really became part of the Fun-Plex family," Anderson said. "Operating the character requires two team members and an internal camera system, making Marco nearly as elaborate as some attractions themselves. Following Mammoth's debut, the mascot found a permanent home within the coaster's themed area, where guests can continue interacting with him and taking photos."

Mammoth gets its name

from a tongue-in-cheek bit of lore where the park states that while building the coaster, remains of an ice age mammoth were dug up. The front of the coaster train has thematic tusks, which add a bit of humor and imagination to the ride experience.

"The Mammoth's design style was developed internally by our graphic designers based on Fun-Plex's ideas until we reached the exact result they requested," said Ferrari.

"This ride is an excellent fit for Fun-Plex. The park attracts a wide audience — families, teenagers and adults alike — and the Mammoth's design and technical features allow everyone to enjoy a thrilling experience," Ferrari noted. "This installation will have a major impact on the park's overall style and will offer guests a completely new and memorable attraction."

Adding Mammoth required far more than installing a new attraction.

To accommodate the project, Fun-Plex undertook one of the most significant ride park transformations in its history.

The park's longtime go-kart track, which had occupied the same location for more than four decades, was completely removed and relocated. The redesigned Fun-Plex Speedway now features tighter corners and a faster layout, creating an upgraded racing experience for guests.

Additional attractions, including the Tilt-A-Whirl and Wipeout, were relocated to create a more centralized thrill zone. Walkways were redesigned, infrastructure improvements were completed, and new lighting was installed to support

the expanded nighttime operations.

The result is a ride park that feels both familiar and entirely new.

The erection of the coaster was the responsibility of **Joe Cadmus**, president and CEO of **Mind Changing Entertainment**. He oversaw the receiving and unloading of all the containers, staging and organizing the structure, installation, wiring and electrical, testing and commissioning.

"This is the first ride built that is mirrored from the previous [models]," said Cadmus. "There were some integrated challenges that needed to be modified on location."

Since its opening, the ride has been a true success.

"It's fun to see parents riding with their kids," Anderson said. "You can hear the screams and excitement throughout the park. People come off smiling and want to ride again."

"That's what it is all about," added Cadmus. "That's the best part of it all. Any frustrations go away. Everyone's screaming and having a good time. That's the part you take away with you — you created fun."

The park's continued growth was originally spurred by the addition of a water park in 1990. The continuation of that is now seen with Mammoth. Fun-Plex was without a roller coaster after the removal of a previous, smaller Zyklon following the 2017 season. Mammoth is the largest roller coaster in Nebraska.

Also for this season, Friday Night Rides is a new offering for 2026 to ride attractions later on every Friday night in the summer.

Preston & Barbieri

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► SAUDI

Continued from page 1

ery beyond. Aquarabia and Six Flags are just the beginning of a much bigger plan that also includes a Dragon Ball theme park, the **Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Stadium**, a gaming and esports district, a high-speed rail link and a full hotel portfolio. The **Qiddiya Speed Park Track** — destined to host the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix — will pass by both Aquarabia and the neighboring Six Flags theme park.

Aquarabia Qiddiya City introduces a new direction in water park design by seamlessly blending traditional water attractions with unexpected, complementary rides. Spanning more than 250,000 square meters, Aquarabia features eight themed zones inspired by the Arabian Peninsula's local wildlife and natural landscapes. The water theme park boasts five record-breaking slides and 24 food and drink outlets.

The entire park was meticulously planned from the ground up, and the design truly stands out with distinct landscapes — from camel rock formations and desert canyons to shaded grottos and wave-filled lagoons. Each zone boasts its own unique identity and custom rides.

One prime example is the park's centerpiece, Camel Rock, highlighted by Junoon — the world's tallest and longest Family Master Blaster at over 42 meters (183-feet) high. Engineered by **WhiteWater**, the company that provided almost all of the park's attractions, this unique waterslide merges a Family Blaster, Constrictor and Boomerango into a single ride. Guests navigate intense hills and steep drops in custom seven-person



Amwaj Bay (above left) is a wave pool that includes exciting waves and calm waters making it suitable for all ages Wave Wadi. Hyper Viper, a Shoot-the-Chute water ride rarely seen in a water park features a dramatic 15-meter drop (above right). COURTESY AQUARABIA, WHITEWATER



rafts designed with higher walls, allowing riders to experience the thrill in street clothes while staying completely dry.

Viper Canyon features Slithereel, the world's longest rotating WhiteWater slide wheel at 315 meters (more than 1,030 feet). Viper Canyon is also home to the Aquaticar: Legend of the Glowing Guardian, a ride that is unlike anything else in water park history. Aquaticar, first unveiled at IAAPA Expo 2017, is the world's first underwater riding adventure. California-based **Sub Sea Systems** designed the ride and partnered with Oregon-based **Miles Fiberglass** for molding and production of all the fiberglass body components for a unique submersible car. Once guests enter the water, the cars gracefully descend to a depth of approximately nine feet. Guests remain completely dry from mid-chest up, by air trapped in the vehicle. Once submerged, the bubble engine comes to life, propelling the vehicle along the underwater course. The ingeniously designed rotors harness the uplifting force of air bubbles, creating a powerful method of ride propulsion.

For the next four and a



Aquaticar: Legend of the Glowing Guardian is the world's first underwater riding adventure. COURTESY AQUARABIA

half minutes, guests are transported to another world — an underwater lost city with mythical creatures, vibrant effects, and immersive storytelling. Two-thirds of the ride is set beneath rockwork, with unique lighting and visuals that create an environment similar to a dark ride.

Alongside the 360-degree spinning SlideWheel, Viper Canyon also hosts Hyper Viper, a rare Shoot-the-Chute water ride that features a dramatic 15-meter drop. The ride creates a massive splash for both passengers and onlookers, adding a dynamic new layer to the park's entertainment lineup.

Dhub Grotto is a shaded fortress for older kids. The FusionFortress 17 is billed as the world's largest play structure, with 181 interactive elements and 10 water slides in one structure. It is conveniently located near the pools and cabanas, making it easy for guests to locate and enjoy.

At Wave Wadi, guests can either relax or be thrilled. Amwaj Bay is a wave pool that shifts between calm waters and exciting waves, making it suitable for all ages. With scenic theming and a DJ booth, it's the perfect spot for both relaxation and high-energy fun. Wadi Tahaddi, WhiteWater's spinning rapids ride, expands the typical theme park rafting experience by adding spinning action as the rafts traverse the 600-meter (1,968-foot) long course.

Herding Grounds is something guests will not find at a typical water park. Built for true thrill-seekers, this extreme water sports complex trades lazy rivers for pure adrenaline. KayaXtreme has guests navigating fast-flowing river

rapids packed with drops and obstacles. Those craving a rush can feel the excitement of cliff diving as they step off the Jump Jolt free-fall platform from varying heights. For the ultimate adventure, Colossal Canyon blends hiking, sliding, rappelling, and swimming through rugged terrain. Guests can also conquer Raft Republic — the Kingdom's first 450-meter man-made white-water rafting run — or test their grip at Yolo Solo, a nerve-wracking deep-water free climb where the pool below is the only safety net.

Positioned at the heart of Aquarabia's Surftopia zone, an Endless Surf lagoon introduces customizable, ocean-quality waves into one of the world's most ambitious waterparks — marking a major step forward for surf within the global attractions industry. The Surf Lagoon, powered by **Endless Surf**, is designed for surfers of different skill levels. The system allows operators to adjust wave size and shape to serve a broad range of guests. Surf offers a new "cool" kind of guest engagement to the attraction mix: one built not only on thrills, but also on repeatability, skill progression, and the surf lifestyle appeal. The lagoon represents one of the first true integrations of a surfing lagoon within a large-scale waterpark and theme park environment.

The ES32 lagoon within Surftopia is designed to operate at scale — delivering both high capacity and a wide range of surf experiences within a single footprint. Powered by 32 pneumatic wave-generating caissons, the system enables high-throughput surfing across multiple user groups.

In split peak mode, the

lagoon offers four distinct zones, allowing beginners to learn in The Shore while more advanced surfers ride higher-performance waves at The Peak, all simultaneously. In single peak mode, fully customizable waves on demand create a premium surf environment suited for world-class events and activities planned at Qiddiya City.

"Aquarabia is a powerful example of how surf is evolving within the global attractions landscape," said **Paul Chutter**, president and co-founder of Endless Surf. "We're seeing surf move beyond standalone venues into fully integrated destinations like this — where it plays a central role in the overall guest experience. Delivering at this scale, within a project of this ambition, requires a level of control, flexibility and reliability that is fundamental to Endless Surf. Aquarabia is a clear expression of that, and we're proud to deliver it as part of this landmark project."

Millions of years ago, central Arabia was a shallow tropical sea. After the water receded, an arid, rugged desert landscape was left behind. The fossil-rich geography attracted only intrepid travelers seeking off-the-beaten-path expeditions. Qiddiya City is rewriting the land's history again with the introduction of a \$40 billion entertainment and leisure development built into the dramatic desert landscape of the Tuwaiq Mountains. At the heart of this massive transformation is Aquarabia: Saudi Arabia's very first water theme park, the largest of its kind in the Middle East, and one of the most ambitious aquatic destinations ever created.

•aquarabiaqiddiyacity.com

FACILITIES & ATTRACTIONS

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Patriot's Run roller coaster unveiled at Jenkinson's Boardwalk

Rides 4 U brokered deal debuts new SBF/Visa Cyclon coaster platform

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

POINT PLEASANT BEACH, N.J. — The wait was over for patrons of Jenkinson's Boardwalk as the highly anticipated Patriot's Run roller coaster opened to the public on Friday, May 29.

"It's super exciting and a great ride for us," Alexander Taylor, Jenkinson's marketing and brand manager, told Amusement Today. "We're looking forward to many, many people riding the new coaster this season."

The all-steel, figure-eight ride was manufactured by Italy's SBF/Visa Group and is decked out in an Americana theme, fitting for the nation's 250th anniversary this year.

"When we were thinking about ideas for the coaster, America 250 made perfect sense from the station's decorative panels to the ride's cars," Taylor explained. "We customized it and made it super unique."

Three eight-passenger trains are brightly painted, sporting the stars and stripes with a blue flame effect added to the lead car on each of the two-car trains. The station's loading platform decor carries the



same patriotic theme as the trains, with the roof trim lined with red and white stripes. The coaster's track is all dark blue.

The ride is from SBF/Visa's new Cyclon coaster platform, which is similar to the Zyklon series built by former Italian manufacturer Pinfari. Jenkinson's ride is 33 feet high and traverses 1,099 feet of track. The maximum speed is 25 mph with a ride cycle of 80 seconds and a capacity of 500 to 600 riders per hour.

Better product

"SBF/Visa acquired the rights to build this ride that has been on the market for 70-plus years," noted Len Soled, president of Rides 4 U, Somerville, New Jersey. Soled's company represents SBF/Visa in North America.

"They [SBF/Visa] made a lot of improvements on the coaster and really got creative with the car designs," Soled asserted. "They reengineered the coaster, beefed it up and made it easier to operate. They put on a service track system for the trains, and the ride is fully galvanized. Jenkinson's, being on the oceanfront, also had stainless steel electrical boxes installed."

"The views on the coaster are awesome,"



Patriot's Run is the new SBF/Visa Group roller coaster at Jenkinson's Boardwalk in Point Pleasant Beach, New Jersey. A miniature replica of the Statue of Liberty (right) is part of the ride's theming.

COURTESY JENKINSON'S BOARDWALK

Taylor explained. "You can see the entire amusement park and beach from up there, and that's something you can't replicate — the real Jersey shore boardwalk experience. Once we get deeper into the season, we will be rocking!"

He continued, saying: "Jenkinson's is family-oriented, and this coaster captures that. Now that it's up and running, we will have lots of people calling to get photos and come out to experience it."

After making its initial climb, the ride makes a 180-degree turn and then plunges for its first drop,






then makes another turn leading into a second drop before entering a spiral. The coaster train emerges into a straight run with a trim brake, another turnaround, followed by a bunny hop and the return to the station.

Industry interest

Soled noted that with Patriot's Run erected and operational, it is raising eyebrows within the amusement industry.

"We're seeing continued interest in this coaster as it

► See PATRIOT, page 12

 <p>Deggeller Attractions Preston & Barbieri Flying Swinger</p>	 <p>Preston & Barbieri Junior Coaster</p>	 <p>RES Rides Oracle</p>	 <p>Water Jumble</p>	 <p>IRG Intermark Ride Group TEL 615.370.9625 www.intermarkridegroup.com Fabri Group Gosetto Preston & Barbieri RES Rides Moser Rides</p>
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The first drop of Patriot's Run (above left) brings out the screams as patrons enjoy the new coaster. The coaster is a welcome addition to the popular ride area at Jenkinson's Boardwalk (above right). COURTESY JENKINSON'S BOARDWALK

► **PATRIOT**
Continued from page 11

is not only a great ride, but it represents a sweet spot in pricing," he said. "This gives any size park or carnival a reasonably-priced big coaster. A portable model is being built now in Italy, and we see a lot of potential for that. We have another Cyclon being installed at C.J. Barrymore's (Clinton Township, Michigan)."

Patriot's Run replaced Tidal Wave, a spinning SBF/Visa coaster which

made its debut in 2019. Before that, a Flitzer steel coaster from German manufacturer Zierer ran in the same location from 1992 until 2018.

Gearing up for the centennial

Taylor pointed out that Jenkinson's Boardwalk is ramping up for its centennial in 2028 and is currently seeking photo submissions for a limited edition 100th anniversary "coffee table" book.

In addition, the property

will introduce a new attraction in 2027 dubbed Maelstrom. To be located inside the South Beach Arcade building, it will feature a heavily themed Scrambler thrill ride (Eli Bridge Co.) with immersive storytelling and special effects.

"We're always looking for new ways to improve and enhance guest experience while continuing to offer something unique for families visiting the Jersey Shore," Taylor said of the upcoming attraction. "We can't wait to share more

details as the project progresses."

Owned by the Storino family since 1976, the boardwalk facility was founded in 1928 when Charles Jenkinson opened a pavilion building housing refreshment stands, plus a separate novelty store and swimming pool.

Today, the property features 28 rides, restaurants, novelty foods, an arcade and aquarium.

Classics to new thrills

The amusement park at Jenkinson's Boardwalk has a lineup of rides for all ages, including classics along with some of the latest kiddie and thrill rides.

Among the classic kiddie rides are wet boats (Allan Herschell Co.), fire engines (W.F. Mangels) and Bulgy the Whale (Eyerly Aircraft). Rounding out the selection for younger riders are Convoy, Doggie Dash and Flying Buccaneers (SBF/Visa), swings (Zamperla) and motorcycles (Hampton Umbrella Rides).

Numerous family attractions are also offered, including carousel and C.P.

Huntington train (Chance Rides), Crazy Cabs (SBF/Visa), elephants, Kite Flyer, Samba Balloon, tea cups and balloon Ferris wheel (Zamperla), Dizzy Dragons (Sellner Mfg.) and Fun Slide (Frederiksen Industries).

Thrill-seekers have plenty to look forward to with Pendolo, a Zamperla pendulum; Seven Seas and Starship 3000 (Wisdom Rides of America), Shark Escape coaster (SBF/Visa), Super Himalaya (Mack Rides), and Wave Swinger and bumper cars (Bertazzon). Two adventure rope courses are among the other attractions.

Specials include Family Mondays when parents and grandparents ride and get a round of mini golf for free with a paid child (one parent or grandparents per paid child). Friday evening wristbands, 5 p.m. to closing, are \$25, and Tuesdays feature all-day wristbands for the same price.

Fireworks are held on Thursday evenings, and Jenkinson's Boardwalk also hosts concerts and movies on the beach.

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American Thunder thrills audiences at Six Flags St. Louis. AT/TIM BALDWIN



Opened during the bicentennial, the Great American Revolution at Six Flags Magic Mountain was the first modern roller coaster with a vertical loop. AT/TIM BALDWIN



Holiday World recently installed new portals at its park, including this one for 4th of July, seen here at night. COURTESY 3DX SCENIC



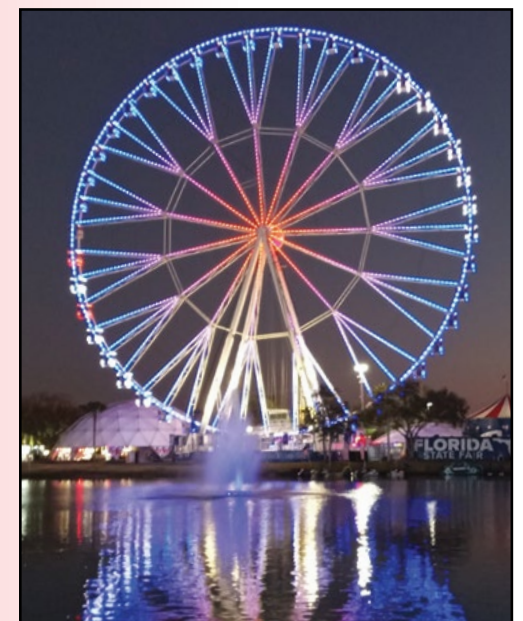
The Screamin' Eagle at Six Flags St. Louis is celebrating its 50th anniversary this season. AT/GARY SLADE



Two roller coasters are named Patriot. They operate at Worlds of Fun (above) and Castles 'n Coasters (below). AT/TIM BALDWIN



In 1973, Six Flags Over Georgia opened the majestic Great American Scream Machine. AT/GARY SLADE



Currently playing the fair circuit, The America 250 Wheel is the country's largest touring wheel and is operated by Biggest Wheel, LLC. The nation's 45 presidents appear on the ride's gondolas. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



Two Great America parks opened in 1976 during the bicentennial. Six Flags Great America (above left) and California's Great America (above right) celebrate 50 years in 2026. AT/B. DEREK SHAW, TIM BALDWIN

At Canobie Lake Park, both the Boston Tea Party (above) and Yankee Cannonball (below) give a nod to American history. AT/GARY SLADE



Indiana Beach's All American Triple Loop sports the red, white and blue. AT/TIM BALDWIN



Fun Spot America parks can be found in two Florida locations. AT/GARY SLADE



In celebration of the America's 250th in 2026, Disney upgraded both its EPCOT and California Adventure Soarin' experiences into Soarin' Over America. The updated attraction includes a new film featuring American landmarks. AT/DAVID FAKE



Pennsylvania's Hersheypark unveiled a patriotic version of the park's logo and multiple special events at the facility in celebration of American's 250th. COURTESY HERSHEY PARK

Often considered the birthplace of the amusement industry in America, Coney Island has featured its venerable Cyclone roller coaster for 100 seasons. AT/TIM BALDWIN



American Eagle is a massive dual-track wooden roller coaster at Six Flags Great America. AT/TIM BALDWIN



Vekoma's Flying Fox suspended coaster soars at Kentucky Kingdom

AT: Tim Baldwin
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LOUISVILLE, Ky. — In 2024, Kentucky Kingdom kicked off a three-year, \$33 million investment in the park with an \$8 million Christmas event. Last year's Discovery Meadow reimagined a section of the park that embraced the state's roots. This year, a \$14 million roller coaster, Flying Fox, continues this momentum.

"Herschend took [that first year] to see what Kentucky Kingdom had to offer and how the guests interact with the park," said Carli Uglow, marketing director, Kentucky Kingdom. "They did some research as to what our guests wanted. They started putting together a plan of what they wanted to see in the future."

Since that time, the park has embraced the family dynamic in the experience as well as a beautification overlay.

While guests might assume that Flying Fox might be animal-oriented, the new coaster spins its own tale, one that invites riders to join the daring adventures of Jeb Fox, a local legend and crop-dusting pilot. The theming on the ride is centered around agriculture.

Manufactured by Vekoma, Flying Fox stands 65 feet tall and features 1,380 feet of track and a top speed of 37 mph. Reaching for a wide audience, riders of a mere 38 inches can hop aboard. A single train offers seating for 20 guests each circuit.



Flying Fox is a smooth multigenerational Vekoma coaster experience. It is the first coaster at the park to travel over a midway (below). COURTESY KENTUCKY KINGDOM; AT/TIM BALDWIN

"For a suspended coaster experience, openness and freedom of movement are essential to creating the sensation of floating," said Ricardo Tonding Etges, VP of sales and marketing – Americas, Vekoma. "Vekoma places a strong emphasis on designing restraint systems that are not only safe but also highly comfortable and unobtrusive. The goal is to maximize rider comfort while preserving that open, unrestricted feeling, which is a key part of the suspended ride experience. This installation is a great example of how those design principles come together."

"This is another exciting milestone in Kentucky Kingdom's story and a reflection of what we believe at Herschend," said Andrew Wexler, CEO of Herschend. "When we became stewards of this park in 2021, we made a promise to invest in Kentucky Kingdom and in Louisville. Flying Fox is the latest example of that promise in action, as we con-



tinue to create new experiences that bring families from Louisville, Northern Kentucky, Southern Indiana and beyond together."

"Discovery Meadow was the first introduction of adding new rides to the park," said Uglow. "We put in three new rides and moved some rides from this area of the park, which caused people to wonder what might be happening here. Our fans were looking forward to the whole construction phase of a new coaster and keeping up with the story and theming."

The station for the coaster sports a barn theme. The idea was for guests to have a key landmark that was visible.

"There hadn't been any consistent theming throughout the park over the years," Uglow said. "We are transitioning into a theme park. We're in the state of Kentucky and we want to bring in some of those elements. Discovery Meadow was the first phase of that, with the flora and fauna and nature elements you'll find throughout the state. This part of the park is now more

agriculture-based. Barns are found all over Kentucky. So, the story is Jeb Fox looking for recruits who have what it takes to take care of the crops and farmland. The suspended coaster helps give that sense of flying."

Flying Fox is the first coaster at the park to cross over a midway, which brings in more interaction.

"This ride has been completely custom-designed for the site, with both current operations and future expansions in mind," Tonding Etges

told *Amusement Today*. "From the beginning, there was a clear focus on creating strong interaction between the ride and park visitors along the layout. Key elements include the overbanked horseshoe, which serves as a marquee entrance feature, and the tunnel section, where guests can experience the train diving in at close proximity. These moments were intentionally designed to enhance the overall guest experience, even for non-riders. The final tunnel element is one of the highlights of the ride and delivers a spectacular grand finale to the overall experience."

"Vekoma has been a great partner with our maintenance team," added Uglow. "It opened on time, and the feedback has been amazing."

"This is a true family-thrill coaster designed to appeal to a wide audience and bring families together on the same ride," Tonding Etges noted with the 38-inch height requirement. "It delivers enough speed, forces and thrill elements to satisfy thrill seekers, while remaining approachable and non-intimidating for guests who are not as brave. The low minimum rider height combined with a glass smooth ride experience makes the attraction accessible to a broad demographic."

In addition to the new coaster, Kentucky Kingdom will also entertain patrons with five new live entertainment shows and new dining options.



The family suspended coaster hits a top speed of 37 mph. AT/TIM BALDWIN



The coaster's station is themed to a barn, common across Kentucky. AT/TIM BALDWIN



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ART Engineering adds Wild Swing XL at two European locations

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

GOTHENBURG, Sweden and YPRES, Belgium — When ART Engineering introduced the Wild Swing in recent years, it immediately found an audience. Numerous installations took place throughout Europe (12 locations), as well as one in the United States. The family-friendly ride had just enough thrill to cater to all audiences. It offered a dramatic swinging motion without inversions.

In 2026, the German company introduced a larger version.

“The ride concept is the same. Some customers asked for a bigger ride with more capacity, said **Georg Behringer**, managing director, ART Engineering. “The XL ver-



Capturing the flavor of Gothenburg’s harbor, Stormvåg’s thematic approach is a good fit for Liseberg. COURTESY LISEBERG

sion has 24 seats instead of 16. In addition, the size of the ride is bigger. The height has been increased to 48 feet versus 40 feet.”

Two of these larger models have opened this

season, one at **Liseberg** (Sweden) and one at **Bellewaerde** (Belgium).

Stormvåg is the name of the attraction at Liseberg. It resides on the former site of Kristallsalongen, a mirror

maze dating back to 1962.

“We experienced the smaller version of the ART Wild Swing a couple of years ago, and were quite impressed,” said **Andreas Andersen**, president and CEO, Liseberg. “There are not that many innovative, mid-sized family attractions out there. And when we found a good placement for the ride in the park, it was really an easy choice.”

“We are so happy that Stormvåg has arrived at Liseberg,” said Project Lead **Emelie Spelmans**. “In many ways, it feels like Stormvåg has always belonged here and is a perfect complement to the rest of the park.”

The park feels it is a perfect bridge between the children’s area, Kaninlandet and the more intense thrill rides.

Riders as small as 95 centimeters can ride with an adult or 120 centimeters to ride alone.

The gondola seats 24 passengers back-to-back in rows of 12. Positioned between two swinging arms, the drive system offers dynamic swinging with comfortable seating.

The theme of the ride at Liseberg was inspired by the city’s harbor and the Swedish West Coast.

“As with all theming at Liseberg, we try to take

a starting point in our own history, being part of the city of Gothenburg. And there is a long tradition for ship-building in the city and on the West Coast,” Andersen told *Amusement Today*. “Our theming is rather light, though. We are not a theme park per se, rather a city park with themed environments, building on the long tradition of European pleasure gardens.”

Now with two sizes, ART Engineering has more variety to cater to parks’ specific needs.

“The Wild Swing XL takes the concept [of the original] one step further — not through a completely different ride feeling, but through longer intense ride moments, higher capacity and an overall more dynamic operation,” Behringer told AT.

“The guest reaction has been fantastic,” said Andersen. “The ride is incredibly broad, and it is super fun to see 4-year-olds and thrill-seeking teenagers sitting side-by-side and both enjoying the ride. We have also, with just over a week under our belt, reached a very healthy capacity. We are very happy with the project.”

At Bellewaerde, the

▶ See SWING, page 19

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► SWING

Continued from page 18

theming is centered around Canada and the wooden timber theme of the area. The ride is called Seasaw Swing.

"We are very impressed with the variety of theming that we have already made for the original versions," commented Behringer. "From artistic painting to heavily themed elements, we have the ability to realize the ideas of the customers. Theming is often a challenging project itself. This makes it very interesting!"

"This unique ride combines thrills and adrenaline with a breathtaking view over the large pond," said Bellewaerde in a press release. "It's a future family favorite, accessible from age five."

According to ART Engineering, the hourly capacity of the XL model is 750 riders per hour.

At Bellewaerde, the ride is positioned right at the edge of a lake, adding more excitement to the dramatic swinging.

Seasaw Swing is just one new addition to the new Canada area. Timber Trail is a spectacular wooden adventure course suspended above the water, offering 500 meters (1,640 feet) of pure fun.

"Adventurers can choose an accessible route, while the more daring can opt for a more challenging path," the park statement noted.

Additionally, a new restaurant, The Canadian Burger, has been fully renovated and heavily themed combining the park's natural identity with its waterside location as well as the Canadian atmosphere. The restaurant has an indoor seating capacity of 600 with a large outdoor terrace.

"These new features have been welcomed with great enthusiasm by visitors," said **Audrey-Laure Verhost**, content creator and press officer, Bellewaerde.

•artengineering.de



Seasaw Swing at Bellewaerde is one of two new Wild Swing XL installations from ART Engineering. COURTESY ART ENGINEERING

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SeaWorld Orlando reimagines Expedition Odyssey as Fire & Ice

Reworking allows Mack ride to truly soar with guests

AT: David Fake
dfake@amusementtoday.com

ORLANDO —Theme park attractions rarely get a second draft. The verdict handed down on opening day, whether a hit, a dud, or something in between, tends to stand, and sometimes for generations. **SeaWorld Orlando's** Expedition Odyssey is a rare exception. Barely a year after its debut, the park stripped the attraction back to its bones and reimagined it as Expedition Odyssey: Fire & Ice.

The original, which opened in 2025, centered around **Mack Rides'** dual-level flying theater, the first of its kind in North America, was never a failure so much as a missed opportunity.

Guests admired the Arctic wildlife cinematography, but the experience landed softly and fell short of the

expectations SeaWorld had set for its highly anticipated new attraction. Two shortcomings stood out. The film never asked the ride system to do what it was engineered to do, and its imagery never quite reached the crisp, clear quality the park had hoped to put on screen.

Justin Newton, senior vice president of attraction development and delivery for **United Parks & Resorts**, noticed both. Newton had just joined the company as the original opened. "I remember thinking it was a really beautiful film about animals," he said. "But I saw potential to add a stronger narrative story and to do things that would create more of a flying experience to pair it well with the ride." He also saw untapped technical range, citing "the color range and resolution of the projection system" that the first film simply never exploited.

His diagnosis was blunt. "The nature of the ride sys-



The reimagined entrance to Expedition Odyssey: Fire & Ice rises from the former Wild Arctic building at SeaWorld Orlando. AT/DAVID FAKE

tem is that it wants to be a flying ride," Newton said. "If you are going to have a ride that's built for flying, you should create a film that's designed to fly." The original, he argued, had the priorities reversed: "They developed a beautiful film

about animals, and then they just overlaid a ride to it. To me, this was all about having a very intentional design of every element."

That intention now plays directly to the Mack hardware's strengths. The new film engineers deliberate

moments of speed and acceleration against long stretches of hovering stillness, what Newton called "compression and decompression," choreographed to the system's true vertical movement and

► See SEAWORLD, page 21

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SEAWORLD

Continued from page 20

its low-to-the-water passes. From the original's debut, United Parks corporate director of rides and engineering **Conner Carr** had touted exactly that capability, noting the Mack system delivered motion profiles more dynamic than traditional flying theaters from other manufacturers.

Mack's role in the relaunch was engineering testing behind the scenes. One early motion profile sent riders plunging through a hole cut in the Arctic ice toward a pod of belugas with a jolt you felt in your chest. "You really, boom! You hit that water, and you felt it when you hit the water," Newton recalled. "And that was great. But running that profile and its forces hundreds of times a day for a decade, he explained, would wear on the structure. Mack ran the analysis and advised, 'Hey, you probably want to dial that back a little bit.'"

The system's other



underused asset was the throughput transition, a point Mack Rides CEO **Christian von Elverfeldt** had emphasized when the venue first opened. "It improves the capacity a lot," he said of the dual-sided, continuously rotating gondola design, which loads one group while another flies. "You have enough time to load, the time of the film, and even the turning is fun."

What truly set this reimagining apart, though, was the clock. Newton and chief creative **Kevin Boutte** gave themselves a deadline that still strains belief: roughly three and a half months from idea to opening. "This happened on a schedule that I don't think anybody will even believe if you print it," Newton said.



Guests are briefed inside a themed Arctic research outpost helping to create an illusion that they are loading onto a drone. COURTESY SEAWORLD ORLANDO

To hit it, the team embraced what Newton called "the mother of all field art direction projects," building a themed Arctic research outpost from corrugated metal and wood panels, "stuff we can go buy today," and making decisions on the fly. A fully original score was composed and recorded with a symphony in London inside the same window, after what Newton estimated was "four dozen iterations of notes." Where

the loading bay had once been plain and purely functional, drifts of snow now gather at the threshold, and the bay dissolves into the ride theater in darkness. "I didn't want it to feel like you were riding a ride," he said. "I wanted to create an illusion that you are loading onto a plane."

Expedition Odyssey: Fire & Ice opened to SeaWorld Orlando pass members on May 23 before welcoming the public on Memorial Day, May

25. For Newton, the rebuild is more than a one-off rescue. He sees it as a template, a proof of concept for a wave of story-driven attractions, including narrative coasters, over the next five years.

"This was really the gateway to what comes next," he said. Yes, theme parks seldom get a second attempt, but on the strength of what they have done here, SeaWorld has had a successful mulligan with Expedition Odyssey: Fire & Ice.

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Intamin's Aviktas swings into the Blackpool Pleasure Beach skyline

AT: Tim Baldwin

tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

BLACKPOOL, England — For more than a century, towering attractions at **Blackpool Pleasure Beach** have dominated the skyline across the seaside town. In 1994, the park unleashed the tallest coaster in the world with **The Big One**. Over time, new attractions have cleverly been installed to make the best use of space in the ride-heavy park, which caters to the very young up to the most avid thrill seekers.

New for 2026 is **Aviktas**. A giant Gyro Swing from **Intamin**, the new addition is adorned with gold snakes, and its towering legs make a solid impact on the Pleasure Beach's skyline.

"Pleasure Beach has always had a reputation for going big and pushing boundaries — **Aviktas** is no exception," said CEO **Amanda Thompson**. "Its sheer size and presence speaks for itself; there is simply nothing like it in the U.K. You're able to see its massive



Aviktas swings 40 riders at a time 138 feet into the air. Weightlessness and dramatic views of the park and sea make the ride a significant attraction.

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stature swinging from large stretches of the promenade, and it is a constant reminder of the excitement waiting inside the park."

"The new Pleasure Beach Gyro Swing soars to full height in just a few swings, driven by one of the most powerful direct drive systems available on the market," Intamin stated in a release. "Continuously refined by Intamin, this cut-

ting-edge technology ensures significantly reduced noise levels for a smoother, more enjoyable experience."

The Gyro Swing's system recovers up to 40 percent of the energy required to operate the ride, delivering energy savings and lower operating costs.

To make room for the attraction, the park demolished **Bowl-A-Drome**, a dated arcade and amuse-

ments venue.

"One of the park's most unique characteristics is the ability to deliver a huge thrill offering within a relatively small footprint," Thompson told *Amusement Today*. "At 42 acres, Pleasure Beach is one of the most ride-intensive theme parks in Europe, meaning every new attraction requires consideration to make the best possible use of space."

When in motion, riders

reach a height of 138 feet and swing beyond a 90-degree angle, giving true moments of weightlessness. The views of the park and sea are dramatic from that angle and that height.

The ride comes with a new plaza area, decked out in wood and stone. The snake motif is seen on signage and at the apex of the support structure.

"**Aviktas** represents a landmark addition — not just for the Pleasure Beach, but for U.K. theme parks as a whole," Thompson said. "A ride of its kind and stature offers a new experience in this country, and the response from guests has reflected just that, with many already calling it the best flat ride in the U.K. Its place in the lineup of Pleasure Beach rides also serves as a great reminder to what makes the park so unique — world-class new attractions stand alongside rides with over a century of heritage, showcasing what 130 years of innovation truly looks like."



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Fiesta Texas to wow guests with family launch roller coaster in 2027

Vekoma ride to be the world's longest family coaster

AT: Tim Baldwin
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SAN ANTONIO — Ingeniously announced at 8:18 p.m. as a rare blue full moon rose into the Texas sky, Six Flags Fiesta Texas revealed the big news following many teases in the previous months. The park will debut Werewolf Gorge in 2027, the world's longest family launch roller coaster.

"Werewolf Gorge represents one of the most significant single-attraction investments in the park's history, and it reflects our long-term commitment to both innovation and to the San Antonio community," said Park Manager Robert Bustle. "We're not just building something large — we're building something that competes on a global scale. Our goal is to deliver a world-class experience right here in San Antonio that our community can take pride in and that attracts guests from across the country and beyond."

In an era of so many types of rides, marketing spin can be applied to many attractions, but Werewolf Gorge is no Lone Star bravado. It's the real deal with a Texas-sized list of elements and accolades.

Manufactured by Vekoma, Werewolf Gorge will be installed on a rocky hillside of the quarry terrain of Crackaxle Canyon.

"We actually had a lot of fun designing for such a unique site," said Ricardo Tonding Etges, VP sales and marketing — Americas, Vekoma. "The natural topog-



Fiesta Texas is going big with the world's longest family launch coaster with a considerable amount of cool elements. COURTESY SIX FLAGS

raphy really became an integral part of the experience. There's about an 85-foot elevation difference between the entrance and the hillside, and rather than seeing that as a constraint, we used it as a key design driver. Over the full length of the ride, it allowed us to create a layout that truly 'conquers' the site. By combining the terrain with multiple launches, we were able to maintain a strong pace throughout the entire experience — constantly changing elevation, direction and speed."

"The location was very intentional," Bustle told *Amusement Today*. "The park's natural hillside and quarry walls gave us a dramatic canvas you simply can't replicate in a traditional setting. We leaned into that terrain to enhance both the storytelling and the thrill experience — creating

something that feels organic, unpredictable and fully integrated into its environment. It's a great example of how Six Flags Fiesta Texas can use its landscape to deliver something truly unique."

Purchased and designed in 2024, ground clearing and construction began in 2025.

Digging in, what will make the ride so special, other than its marketable world record? Quite a bit. The ride will feature four launches, a backward rollback, near-miss elements and an astonishing 32 moments of floating weightlessness.

"From the very beginning, the goal was to create a ride that feels full from start to finish — so the number of elements wasn't really a surprise [to us], it was a conscious design objective," Tonding Etges said. "We wanted to make sure

there is always something happening, with a variety of experiences layered into the layout. That includes four launches in different forms, each of which brings a different sensation and rhythm to the ride. One of the highlights is the mid-course swing launch, which introduces an unexpected backward movement and really changes the dynamic of the experience. It creates something that is quite rare in this category: a family-thrill coaster that is both long and consistently engaging."

"For me, it's the length and how much ground this ride really covers. You're traveling nearly a mile of track through this incredible natural quarry environment, and it just keeps delivering new moments from start to finish," said Cyle Perez, regional manager, public relations. "The rollback

into a launch is something guests are going to love — it introduces an unexpected element you don't typically see on a family coaster. And honestly, I can't wait to experience it at night. With the setting, onboard lighting and story elements, that's when it's really going to take on a completely different personality."

Although there is 85 feet of elevation change, the largest drop is 40 feet, and the top speed is 45 mph, well within a multigenerational tolerance level.

The ride comes with a story, as so many great attractions do. New character Jasper Bunyan owns a roadside attraction, taking tourists through the Museum of Cryptids and a Werewolf Museum. (Cryptids are mysterious, unverified creatures — and Texas has a few.)

"With Werewolf Gorge, we're taking theming to an entirely new level," Bustle said. "This is the most immersive, story-driven attraction we've ever created, where every detail — from the queue to onboard audio to the final moments of the ride — works together to fully transport guests into the experience. It blurs the line between a traditional ride and a fully realized adventure and reflects where we see the future of our industry heading."

"Werewolf Gorge exists on the outskirts of Crackaxle Canyon as its own distinct setting," added Perez. "That ties into Old Blues BBQ as well, helping explain why Jasper settled here — and guests will begin to see that story continue with addi-

► See FIESTA, page 27



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Park Post-its



AT: Pam Sherborne
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The shutdown of **Primm Valley Resorts**, the last full-time casino still operating in Primm, Nevada, that was set for July 4, has been averted by an agreement between the **Primm** family and **Terrible's**, a gas station and casino operator, according to a story that ran June 9 on *Fox 5 KUVV* in Las Vegas.

The story stated that **Terrible's** will operate the hotel-casino and related properties in Primm, renewing a partnership between two prominent Nevada families with a storied history of running successful businesses.

The story continued that: "**Cory Clemetson**, grandson of Primm founder **Ernie Primm** and president of the **Primm South Real Estate Company**, said the Primm family is 'delighted to partner with **Terrible's** and the **Herbst** family to help our family manage and operate these properties that are so important to Southern Nevada, our economy and the people who live, work and play at Primm.'"

It had been announced on May 1, 2026, that the Primm operations at Primm Valley Resort, **Buffalo Bill's**, **Whiskey Pete's**, the **Primm Center** and the **Flying J** truck stop all would close permanently. The company had even notified employees living in employee housing that they were to vacate their properties by July 6. Employees of and visitors to this niche area just over the California border were relieved that the area would stay open.

The City of Green Bay, Green Bay, Wisconsin, said the month of May brought record ridership to **Bay Beach Amusement Park**, according to an online story from a local *Fox News* affiliate.

The story stated that Green Bay Parks Director **Dan Ditscheit** credited the historic month to a number of factors. Those factors included good weather; better ride uptime percentage, an increase in school groups attending and a strong Memorial Day weekend.

Aimed at enhancing the guest experience, **Dreamworld**, Queensland, Australia, has launched this season an Australian-first \$89 Annual Dining Pass, giving guests a meal and snack every time they visit the theme park for one upfront cost. According to *Australasian Leisure*

Management magazine, park officials designed this pass to make planning easier and let guests enjoy a full day out, or drop in for a spontaneous visit, without having to think about food costs each time.

From quick bites between rides to meals with family and friends, the pass covers a variety of favorites, including burgers, chips, salads, snacks, ice creams and desserts.

Dreamworld Chief Executive **Greg Yong** stated in the story that the new pass reflects a continued focus on making the park experience easier and more rewarding for guests. "We know families are thinking carefully about how they spend, especially when it comes to days out. The Annual Dining Pass is about making a visit to **Dreamworld** feel easier, more flexible and better value from the moment you arrive."

Dorney Park and Wildwater Kingdom in Allentown, Pennsylvania welcomed more than 4,600 children and family members to the park on June 7 as part of its annual Day of Giving, a community initiative that provides complimentary admission and special experiences for families served by local nonprofit organizations.

Through the program, **Dorney Park** donated tickets to families participating through **United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley, A Kid Again, Lehigh Valley Reilly Children's Hospital, Pediatric Cancer Foundation of the Lehigh Valley, Camelot for Children, CHOR Youth and Family Services, Valley Youth House, the Michael Ann and Saquon Barkley Hope Foundation** and more.

"Day of Giving is one of the most meaningful days of our season," said **Kim Solis**, park manager of **Dorney Park**, through a press release. "We're honored to welcome thousands of children and families to **Dorney Park** and partner with organizations that work every day to provide hope, support and opportunities for those they serve. Seeing the smiles, laughter and memories created today is a powerful reminder of why this event means so much to all of us."

An annual tradition, Day of Giving reflects **Dorney Park's** ongoing commitment to supporting the communities it serves and strengthening partnerships with organizations dedicated to improving the lives of children and families across the region.

Kennywood Amusement Park, West Mifflin, Pennsylvania, has expanded its chaperone policy twice already for 2026. In a Facebook post, **Kennywood** officials announced that its evening chaperone policy would be in effect for the entire day on June 6. Under the policy, guests ages 17 and younger must be accompanied by an adult age 21 or older with a valid photo ID to enter the park. Park officials also extended the policy on May 30.

The move has come amid concerns about the trend of "teen takeovers" put together from posts on Facebook.



Six Flags officials feel the cool factor of **Werewolf Gorge** will be accentuated at night. COURTESY SIX FLAGS

► FIESTA Continued from page 26

tional enhancements coming soon. We're excited to keep building out this world over time."

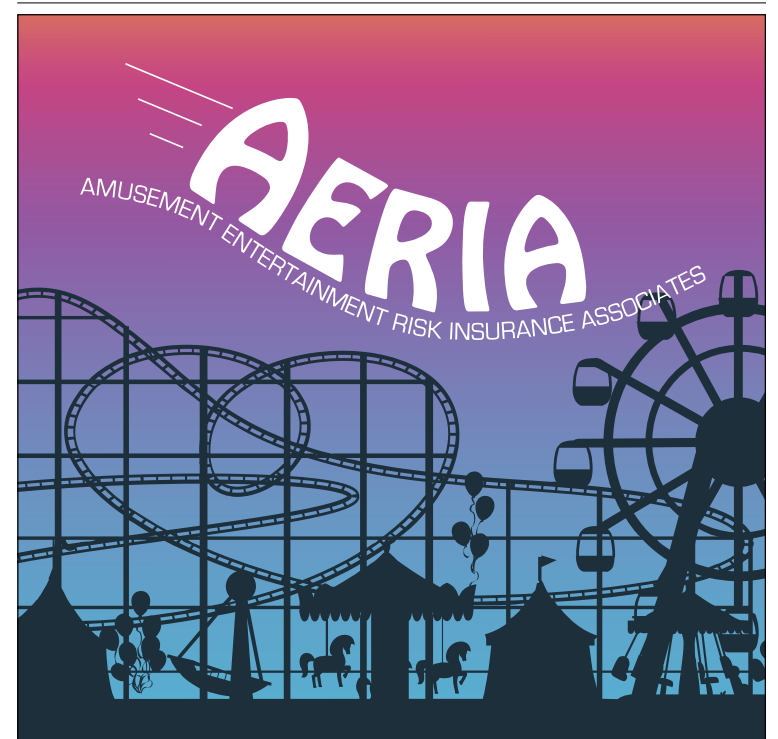
Three trains of 16 are able to take tighter turns than models in the past. Two will be ADA trains. The rider requirement is only 39 inches.

"Accessibility was a priority from the very beginning," Perez said. "The 39-inch height requirement opens this experience up to a much broader audience, while still delivering meaningful thrills and dynamic movement throughout.

What makes it special is the shared experience it creates — you can have someone conquering their first major coaster sitting next to an enthusiast, and both walk away feeling like they had something memorable. With ADA accessibility built in as well, it allows even more guests to be part of that experience. This is the kind of ride that becomes both a first — and a favorite — for a lot of people."

LIMs and a battery launch system will prove to be more efficient.

When it opens next year, it will be the longest roller coaster in the park, of its arsenal of 12.



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Carowinds announces record-breaking super flume Rip Roarin' Falls

WhiteWater to provide new flume attraction for 2027

AT: Jack Lathrop
Special to Amusement Today

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Carowinds has announced Rip Roarin' Falls, a super flume manufactured by WhiteWater set to open in 2027. The attraction will break three world records and represents the park's answer to years of documented guest demand for a water ride investment.

Since at least 2016, guests have provided feedback on what they would like to see at Carowinds, with a log flume consistently ranking as the most-requested addition. The new attraction will be located on the former site of Rip Roarin' Rapids, a water ride that was retired in 2019, leaving Carowinds without a water attraction.

For WhiteWater, it is the largest super flume the company has produced. "A log flume checks a lot of boxes," said Chris Foshee, Carowinds communications manager. "It's high capacity. It's accessible to families. It fills in all the gaps. This is going to be synonymous with the park."

WhiteWater's super flume system drives the ride's record-setting specifications: a 100-foot forward drop (the tallest log flume drop on record), a 42-foot reverse drop (the tallest reverse drop) and a 32-foot reverse camelback (the tallest reverse camelback). Riders board eight-passenger boats for a 6-minute, 30-second circuit through 2,240 feet of water, with two high-speed reversing switches directing the boat forward



Rip Roarin' Falls (above) was announced during a media event held at Carowinds in June 2026. The ride will blend traditional flume elements with modern twists. The ride will boast multiple themed transfer track moments throughout (below), allowing guests to experience sections of the flume both forward and backward. COURTESY CAROWINDS

and backward before the final 100-foot plunge at 50 mph. The height requirement is 35 inches when accompanied by a guest 16 or older, and 42 inches unaccompanied.

For WhiteWater, it is the largest super flume the company has produced. David Chesney, ride engineer at WhiteWater, described the development approach as incremental innovation built on a proven platform.

"It's a classic attraction with a modern twist," Chesney said. "We took what everyone knows and loves about a log flume and incrementally built up from there. The challenges are real for the engineering team, but in the end, you're taking something familiar and making it better."

Ken Parks, corporate vice president of planning and design for Six Flags Entertainment, helped lead the development of the ride. "We knew if we were



bringing back an attraction, and especially in the location where we had Rip Roarin' Rapids, that we had better do it big," he said.

"We always start with the story," Parks added. "The lumber industry was a natural for us. It began here in the Carolinas. As you go into the backwoods, you often hear lore about haunted, abandoned buildings. In this case,

we have an abandoned sawmill. Guests will find out what's happening there when we open in 2027."

Parks also cited the 35-inch height requirement as a deliberate business consideration. "Families can go on it together," he said. "It's not often that you get something as thrilling as this with that kind of accessibility."

"This level of investment

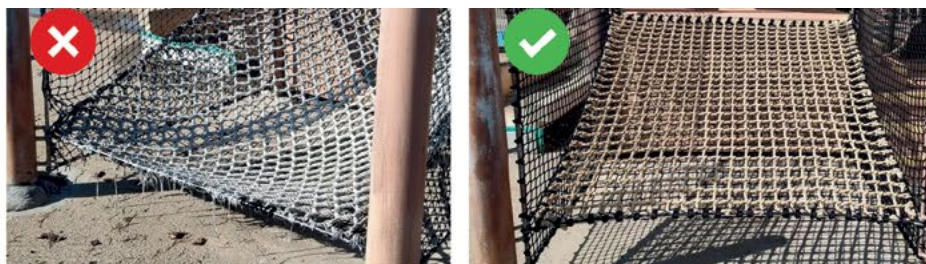
and innovation is a true testament of our team's commitment to bringing legendary attractions and world-class experiences to the Carolinas," said Bridgette Bywater, Carowinds president.

Rip Roarin' Falls joins Fury 325, Copperhead Strike and Snoopy's Racing Railway among the park's signature attractions

•carowinds.com



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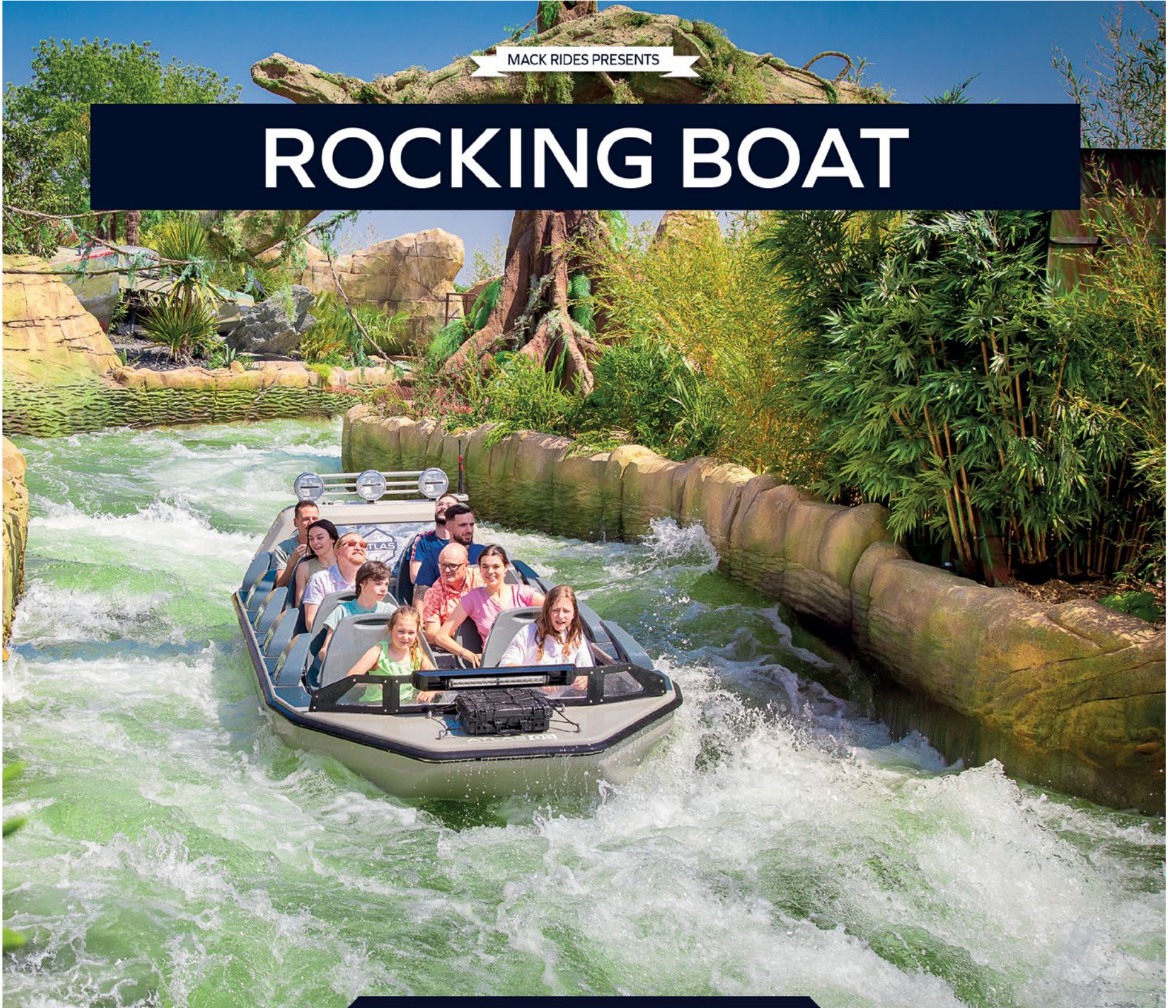


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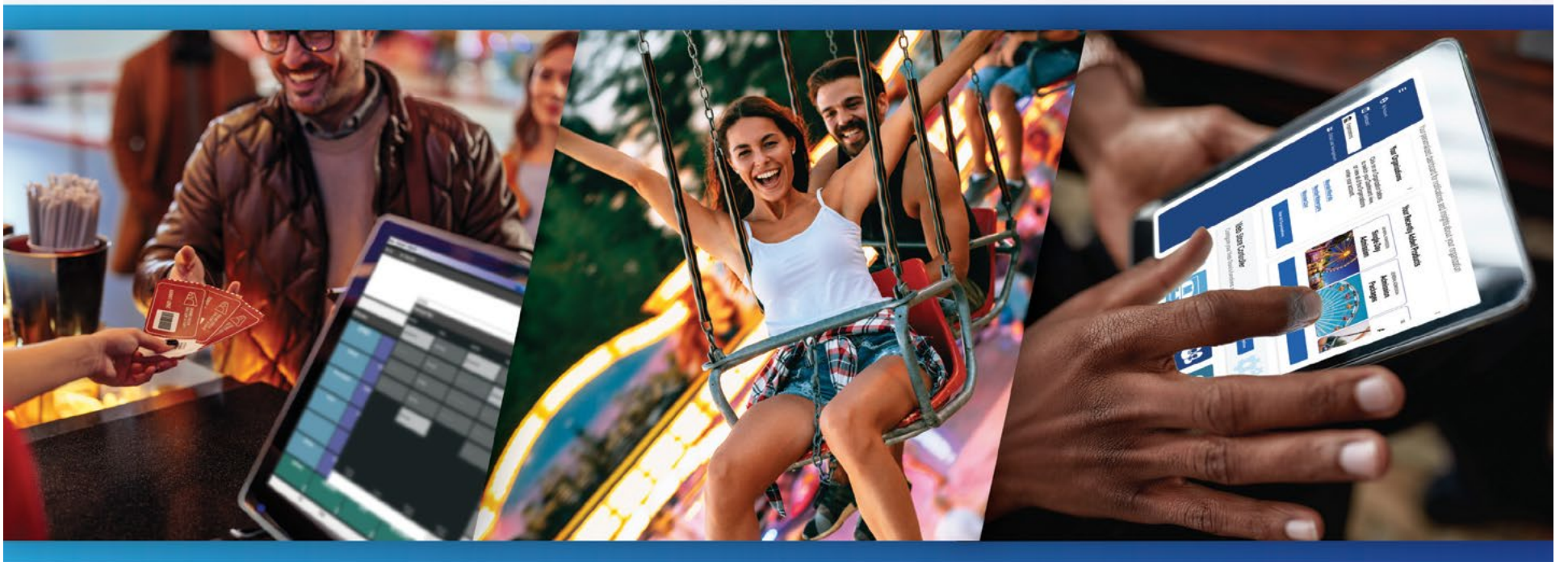


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La Jolla Adventure Park visitors bike through woods, zip over trees

Unique FEC at the La Jolla Reservation experiences growth

AT: Pam Sherborne
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PAUMA VALLEY, Calif. — Tucked away in a pristine wilderness on the La Jolla Indian Reservation is the La Jolla Indian Adventure Park. Just a short drive from San Diego and Temecula, the outdoor park offers a variety of outdoor activities, and it seems more and more visitors are either just finding out about the park or have decided to go outdoors.

Owned by the La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians, it is managed by Applied Adventure.

“La Jolla Indian Adventure Park has experienced significant growth in guest attendance over the past two years,” said Abby Burt, owner and CMO of Applied Adventure. “Across our adventure offerings, we’ve seen strong increases in visitation, particularly at Luiseño Bike Park and Zip Zoom Ziplines, as more guests discover the unique combination of outdoor recreation, camping and adventure experiences available on the La Jolla Indian Reservation.”

Burt said the park is seeing a growing demand from both day-trip visitors from Southern California, as well as guests who choose to stay overnight and make a weekend out of their visit.

“The continued growth reflects both increased awareness of the destination



The ziplines at the La Jolla Indian Adventure Park carry participants high above the ground with stunning views of the La Jolla Reservation. COURTESY LA JOLLA INDIAN ADVENTURE PARK

and ongoing improvements throughout the property,” she said.

Over the past few years, one of the most significant additions to the park has been the opening and major development of Luiseño Bike Park, Southern California’s only year-round downhill mountain bike park. The park has quickly become a destination for riders throughout the region.

More recently, the tribe has invested heavily in infrastructure improvements throughout the property, including upgrades to roads and a new campground shower facility.

“Guests can expect ongoing improvements across the destination,” Burt said. “Looking ahead, the focus is on the continued development of the overall guest experience to further establish La Jolla Indian Adventure Park as one



of Southern California’s premier outdoor adventure destinations.”

Specific offerings at the park:

- Zip Zoom Ziplines — Participants can feel the rush racing along three, side-by-side lines reaching speeds up to 55 mph and stretching over 6,200 feet. Park officials describe this one for adrenaline junkies

- Luiseño Bike Park — As mentioned, this is one of the newer activities at the park. Visitors are able to pedal through a variety of trails designed to challenge and

delight, from exhilarating downhill sections to scenic loops that showcase the park’s breathtaking surroundings.

- Tubing on the San Luis Rey River — Visitors can experience the beauty and serenity of the river as they tube down the scenic San Luis Rey River.

- Mountainside Family Splash Pad — The family can beat the heat and keep the kids entertained at the park’s refreshing water play area, perfect for campers of all ages.

- 76 Roadside Grill — This park grill offers hearty and comforting bites and craft beers after a day of outdoor fun, perfect for unwinding and sharing stories with fellow adventurers.

Currently, La Jolla Indian Campground offers tent camping and RV camping accommodations.

“One of the things

that makes La Jolla Indian Adventure Park unique is that we’re essentially a year-round destination,” Burt said. “Southern California’s climate allows us to operate outdoor activities throughout much of the year.”

Zip Zoom Ziplines, Luiseño Bike Park, and La Jolla Indian Campground all operate year-round, as do the on-site dining and convenience store facilities.

“Some amenities and specific areas within the campground do close in the winter months, but we’re happily welcoming visitors all year long,” Burt said.

The La Jolla Indian Reservation has been home to the Luiseno people, whose deep connection to the land is the heart of everything done at the La Jolla Adventure Park. The park began as a campground along the San Luis Rey River in the 1930s.

•lajollaadventurepark.com



Officials of Applied Adventure, the company that manages the La Jolla Indian Adventure Park, say the park has seen an increase in attendance of both day visitors and overnight or weekend campers, over the last couple of years. COURTESY LA JOLLA INDIAN ADVENTURE PARK



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Atlas9 is narrative-driven, immersive art experience that puts visitors at the center of the story. COURTESY ATLAS9

Appeal still remains at Atlas9 after enjoyable first year open

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — It has been almost a year since Atlas9, a 46,000-square-foot, narrative-driven, immersive art experience, officially opened its doors in Kansas City, Missouri. And, by all accounts, it has been a success since that day, Sept. 18, 2025.

The venue is a unique idea from those at **Dimensional Innovations (DI)**. The large building surrounds a transformed 1990s movie theater that shifts into a “living” cinematic universe, putting visitors at the center of the story.

In addition to its engaging box office area inside, the venue includes numerous themed rooms and corridors, a 1940s-themed jazz club and a speakeasy, a 240-seat auditorium with projection mapping, an arcade, pizza parlor and more.

“The response to Atlas9 since opening has been tremendous,” said **Chad Hutson**, DI’s chief strategy officer. “We’ve welcomed visitors from across the country to experience what is quickly becoming one of the Midwest’s most talked-about attractions. Our growing national profile recently received a major boost when USA Today’s 10Best Readers’ Choice Awards named Atlas9 the No. 2 Best New Attraction in the United States for 2026, further elevating Kansas City’s reputation as an emerging destination for immersive entertainment and experiential tourism.”

What has been most rewarding, Hutson said, is hearing directly from the guests.

“Visitors have been blown away by the immersive and interactive nature of the experience, the energy and talent of our live performers and the genuine hospitality shown by our team,” he said. “Seeing people leave inspired, surprised and eager to share their experience with others has been the greatest measure of success for us.”

Atlas9 was an entirely new, ground-up development that introduced a first-of-its-kind fusion of immersive storytelling and live performance to the Midwest. It was developed as a joint venture between DI and **Homefield**.

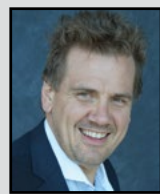
When visitors enter Atlas9, they are set to discover that as a result of a projection experiment gone awry, stories from within film reels have come alive. Guests investigate the events and anomalies in the theater, exploring the rooms and corridors as the narrative unfolds.

It is like an immersive playground where visitors can dive into dynamic installations, conspire with performers and explore the environment to unfold the mysterious story. It holds a classic video arcade, hidden story points, a clandestine government agency and a mysterious story to solve.

The catalyst for this experience came from DI’s CEO **Tucker Trotter**, and brought DI and its sister company, **DI Build**. Aside from the already mentioned companies, other partners included **Infinity Sign System**, **Swell Spark** and **Perspective Architecture + Design**.

DI engaged **Christie Digital Systems USA, Inc.**, early in its development. Christie is a global visual technologies company and a wholly owned subsidiary of **Ushio Inc.**, Japan.

—Pam Sherborne



FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRAL

AT: John W.C. Robinson
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Periscope Equity, a Chicago-based private equity firm, recently announced that it has invested in **Amusement Connect**, a cashless specialty payment solutions provider, purpose-built for the amusement industry. This investment represents the first platform in Periscope Equity’s third fund, which closed last year.

Amusement Connect was co-founded by industry veteran **Frank Licausi** and automotive executive and engineer **John Tarpley**, long-time friends who recognized an underserved market within route operators and smaller, independent family entertainment centers. Headquartered in Kansas City, Amusement Connect now serves more than 800 unique customers and more than 3,000 locations across FECs, arcades, bowling centers, skating rinks, bar-cades and restaurants.

“John and Frank have already established Amusement Connect as a trusted leader in payment solutions for the amusement industry nationwide, and we see tremendous global potential,” said Periscope Principal **Joe McIlhatten**. “The business checks every box in Periscope’s mandate: founder-led, tech-enabled, mission-critical to its customers, and offers a wide variety of achievable value creation levers.”

Attraktion! celebrates the sold-out opening weekend of **Querion Hypermedia Entertainment Park** in Piechowice, Poland. Querion introduces a year-round, all-weather entertainment destination for families, tourists, groups and event audiences.

Developed by hotel operator **Górskie Resorty** together with Attraktion!, Querion is a new generation of hypermedia entertainment: a place where immersive architecture, artificial intelligence, interactive media, motion-based attractions and shared digital spaces come together in one connected guest journey.

Attraktion! served as lead development partner and supplier for the project’s media-based attractions, shaping the overall park experience and delivering the complete ride package for the indoor park.

Slick City Action Park announced the appointment of **Josh Cole** as its first chief marketing officer. Cole joins the company’s executive leadership team as Slick City continues its rapid expansion across North America and internationally, with 40 parks now open and 110 more in development.

“Josh has been part of the Slick City story from almost the beginning,” said **Bron Launsby**, CEO and co-founder of Slick City. “He began advising our team when we had just two locations open and played a strategic role in helping establish the foundation for our franchise growth. As we scale nation-

ally and internationally, bringing Josh into the organization full-time is a natural next step. His track record of building category-defining brands and supporting franchisees at scale makes him uniquely qualified to help lead Slick City’s next chapter.”

Cole previously served as a strategic advisor to Slick City and brings extensive experience scaling consumer and franchise brands. As CMO of **Sky Zone**, he helped grow the brand from 80 to more than 200 locations across 10 countries. As vice president of digital marketing and e-commerce for **Universal Studios Hollywood**, he helped grow direct-to-consumer revenue from \$1 million to more than \$125 million annually.

The **GrowthPro Group** shared its Summer 2026 educational lineup, featuring two Peer Talks and a webinar designed specifically for FECs, bowling centers and attractions.

The series kicks off on June 11 with a Peer Talk focused on Artificial Intelligence in the Entertainment Industry. On July 16, industry veteran **Beth Standlee** will host an Open Forum Peer Talk, giving operators the opportunity to ask questions, share challenges and learn from peers facing similar issues in sales, operations, staffing, leadership and guest experience. The summer series concludes on August 13 with a webinar dedicated to one of the industry’s most important revenue drivers: Birthday Parties.

“Our industry has always been strongest when operators come together to share ideas and learn from one another,” said **Candi Kelley**, CEO of The GrowthPro Group.

The Peer Talk series is made possible through the support and participation of industry-leading partners, including **Embed**, **Semnox**, **Roller**, **Betson**, **Party Center Software**, **A&A Global Industries** and **Shaffer Distributing**.

Semnox Solutions has partnered with **Funzy Playground**, a new indoor family entertainment destination located inside Arena Mall in Bacău, Romania.

As its first venture into the entertainment industry, Funzy Playground sought a technology platform capable of supporting arcade operations; kids play management for trampolines, slides and interactive zones; access control and future business growth through a centralized system.

“We spent a lot of time researching different systems before moving forward,” said **Solomon Andrei**, owner of Funzy Playground. “What stood out with Semnox was how comprehensive the solution was and how everything worked together.”

Waldameer's Water World launches another expansion in 2026

AT: Jeffrey Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

ERIE, Pa. — This past June Waldameer's Water World opened Presque Isle Plunge and Big Water Bend, a two-slide complex from ProSlide Technology of Ottawa, Ontario. The park also added a new endless river, Winding Waters.

The two slides were built as part of an expansive water park transformation project that cost over \$12 million. It is the biggest investment in the park's history, and it comes just a few years after the opening of RocketBlast, a \$9 million ProSlide water coaster. That addition earned Waldameer a Golden Ticket Award for the Best New Water Park Ride of 2023. Just a few years prior, the water park debuted Rally Racer, a massive six-lane mat-racer also from ProSlide.

Both of the new-for-2026 slides utilize specially designed five-person cloverleaf-style rafts from Z-Pro, allowing guests to enjoy the excitement together, as well as giving a boost to the water park's overall capacity. The rafts are conveniently brought to the top of the tower via a conveyor system that both slides share. The two slide-complex replaces a previous tower that held multiple slides including a pair of open-air body slides that had been at the park since 1987. One of those removed slides was also called Presque Isle Plunge. The two body slides were from Waterforms Inc., a fiberglass fabricator that supplied flumes and slides in the 1980s. Those two



The large cloverleaf rafts are capable of holding up to five people. COURTESY WALDAMEER PARK & WATER WORLD

body slides were the first two waterslides at Water World when it opened in 1987. Two inner tube slides from 1989 were also removed to make way for the new attraction.

Presque Isle Plunge incorporates a TornadoWave 60. The ride begins with a tight helix through an enclosed tube punctuated with special lighting effects. Upon exiting the helix, the top opens up and thrill seekers plunge down a steep drop and into the tornado wave, where they experience a brief moment of weightlessness before diving back down from the wave wall and into the splash pool. ProSlide's TornadoWave made its debut in 2011 and is famous for its engineered curved wall that has rafts following a predictable, sweeping, zero-G arch. It was awarded an IAAPA brass ring award for Best New Water Ride in 2014.

Big Water Bend is a

next-generation ProSlide Mammoth family raft slide built alongside the new Presque Isle Plunge. It features a combination of enclosed tunnels and open flumes, sending riders through tight spirals and unexpected dips. Rider's are surprised when near the end of the slide, the enclosed flume becomes a tight helix that is completely clear all the way around. The ProSlide Mammoth, introduced in 1990, has been one of ProSlide's top-selling attractions. This newest generation takes advantage of dark and translucent sections to provide fun visuals as riders transverse the course.

Both slides have weight restrictions for the rafts, with a group scale simply displaying a go, or no-go situation. On Big Water Bend the maximum combined weight is 875 pounds. Presque Isle Plunge is a little more restrictive with a combined limit of 700

pounds, or an average of 140 pounds per rider. Obviously five full-grown adults are likely to be over the limit, but a family with a mix of adults and children should be fine.

For those seeking a more tranquil experience, Waldameer also opened Winding Waters, a slow-moving curvy, continuous river from Wet Engineering of Jacksonville, Fla. that includes a new beach entry making it more accessible to guests. Guests on inner tubes pass around and through multiple water features and even a squirting frog, all provided by Rain Drop Products from Ashland, Ohio. The new river replaces the original lazy river that opened with the park in 1987.

Steve Gorman, president and CEO of Water World told AT, "I feel that we have grown Water World into a first-class water park that is an important complement to

Waldameer's amusement attractions. Water World is the main reason that we have increased our season pass membership.

"In the past 12 years, we have invested \$19 million into Water World. Our 2026 addition of \$12 million replaces our lazy river and several original water slides. The two new ProSlide family raft slides increase rider capacity significantly and offer a new type of slide to our guests, both important reasons for selecting that design. We also knew from experience that ProSlide would deliver an exciting, quality product."

Waldameer, one of the longest-running parks in the United States, dates back to 1896 when it opened as a popular picnic spot for the Erie Electric trolley line. The park added Water World in 1987 with two body slides, a lazy river and a children's water play area.

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The OpenAire structure at the Bradley, Illinois, location is beginning to take shape
COURTESY OPENAIRE

OpenAire confirms retractable structures at Mattel Water Parks

MISSISSAUGA, Ontario, Canada — **OpenAire**, the world-wide leader of all-aluminum large span structures with retractable roofs, confirmed in May its collaboration with **American Resort Management** to provide retractable roof enclosures for the upcoming **Mattel Wonder Indoor Waterparks**.

As previously announced, Mattel is partnering with several notable firms to bring its iconic intellectual properties to life. Four locations throughout the United States have been confirmed: Orlando, Florida; Bellevue, Nebraska; Bradley, Illinois and Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina. Discussions are taking place about a possible fifth location.

Each of these destination parks will include an all-aluminum retractable roof building designed, engineered, fabricated and installed by OpenAire.

Each curved roof structure will span 185 feet in width and measure approximately 375 to 400 feet in length with 35-foot-high glass sidewalls and vertical glass ends. The roof will feature motorized retractable roof panels that open to the sky, allowing fresh air and natural sunlight in during the day and providing an escape for built-up chlorine and other air impurities at night. The operable windows are engineered to deliver optimum airflow, resulting in an estimated 15% in annual energy savings, contributing to a more sustainable operational footprint for the water parks.

Every structure will be custom-engineered to withstand the specific regional climates of each Mattel Wonder Indoor Waterpark location, ensuring optimal performance against snow, heavy rain or hurricane-force winds.

Mark Albertine, CEO of OpenAire, stated, “Mattel Wonder Indoor Waterpark represents the future of the indoor water park industry. By engineering and building structures that can withstand the harsh chemical realities of indoor water parks, while at the same time saving both money and reducing energy use, means we are turning indoor water parks into viable economic solutions for municipalities around the nation.”

Richard Coleman, CEO at American Resort Management, said, “OpenAire will bring a competitive innovation advantage to the new Mattel Wonder Indoor Water parks. By putting these new indoor waterparks in energy-efficient, retractable-roof, corrosion-free aluminum buildings, these parks operate more cost-effectively than traditional indoor water parks. These water parks will establish the new standard that global brands will need to exceed. It is critical that owners of water parks plan for the future in terms of partner reliability, building performance and operational excellence. As the operator of other parks in OpenAire retractable roof buildings, our team knows that these structures both meet and exceed all expectations.”

OpenAire designs, engineers, manufactures and installs both fixed and operable skylights and retractable roof enclosures. From cold mountain climates to humid tropical regions, OpenAire has delivered nearly 1,300 structures worldwide, with projects throughout North America, Europe and the Middle East.

—Jeffrey Seifert



NEWS SPLASH

AT: Jeffrey L. Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

The Wheeling Park District in Wheeling, Illinois, is set to borrow up to \$12 million to fund a new aquatic center, which will replace the recently demolished facility on Community Boulevard. While the park board approved the bond issuance in April, Executive Director **Jan Buchs** noted that the final borrowing amount remains undecided to maintain financial flexibility.

The overall project is anticipated to cost \$32 million. Buchs reaffirmed that the venture will be funded by cash reserves and will not impact the local property tax rates. Borrowing a portion of the funds allows the district to protect its capital reserves from being entirely drained by a single project. Additional funding will include a \$500,000 state grant and a requested payout from a municipal tax increment financing district for the Dundee Road corridor.

Demolition of the 33-year-old **Family Aquatic Center** wrapped up last month, leaving the site clear. Buchs joked that the area is currently a “dusty mess” as crews grind down mounds of concrete for recycling in the new build. The upcoming facility will feature a 16,500-square-foot main pool, an adult pool, a play structure, three waterslides, a bathhouse, concessions and party cabanas. Construction is slated for completion by spring or summer 2027.

•
Kalahari Resorts & Conventions — home to America’s largest indoor water parks — has officially launched its “Safari Migration.” This spectacular multi-state road tour features an eight-semi-truck caravan transporting more than 40 massive, handcrafted, life-sized animal sculptures. The journey began on Tuesday, April 14, in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, and is making high-visibility stops across major markets on its way to Spotsylvania, Virginia.

This epic road trip celebrates the highly anticipated grand opening of Kalahari’s newest resort on November 12, 2026.

Tour stops featured media events, interactive experiences and chances to win a future stay at the resort. Throughout the journey, crowds gathered to get an up-close look at the stunning, life-sized elephant and giraffe sculptures.

According to General Manager **Brian Shanle**, the new Spotsylvania location will be a premier, all-in-one destination boasting a 907-room hotel, a massive convention center, and a 175,000-square-foot indoor water park.

Hawaiian Falls has geared up for its 2026 season by introducing a variety of fresh attractions, upgraded facilities and special events across its North Texas water parks. The locations in Roanoke, Mansfield and Waco kicked off the summer by welcoming season pass holders on May 2, followed by the general public opening on May 9.

Park officials have invested \$1 million during the offseason to refresh the properties. According to **Ron McKenzie**, senior director of marketing, teams worked hard to deliver new amenities, enhanced food and beverage choices, and expanded entertainment lineups built for summer-long family fun.

Among the new additions this year is a Dive-In Movie Series, which will showcase family-friendly films on giant LED jumbo screens right by the wave pools. The parks also plan to host sports-themed days featuring live-streamed games and special guest appearances from local team mascots.

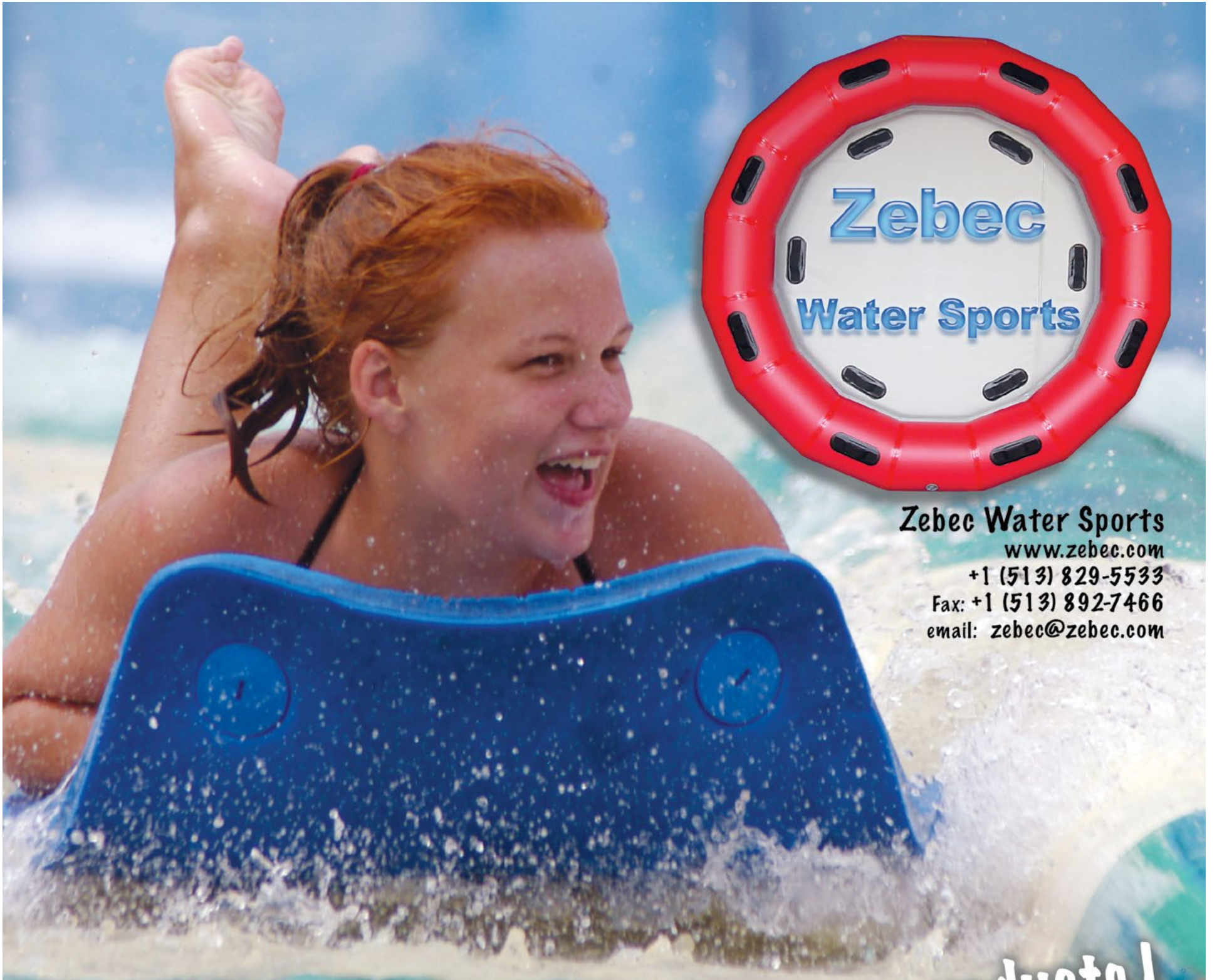
Additionally, a season-long patriotic theme will take over the parks in honor of America’s 250th birthday. Visitors can look forward to themed photo backdrops, exclusive giveaways and limited-time menu items. As part of this celebration, active military members, veterans, and retirees with a valid ID can purchase daily admission tickets for a discounted price of \$17.76.

Hawaiian Falls has been a Texas staple for more than two decades. Originally acquired by **ProParks Attractions Group** in 2017, the three water parks were recently bought in 2025 by Orlando-based **Ripley’s Believe It or Not! World Entertainment**.

•
Sonata Hospitality Management Group is planning to build a brand-new water park on-site at the **Hard Rock Hotel Riviera Maya**, located just south of Playa del Carmen. To kickstart the development, the company recently submitted its proposal to Mexico’s Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT).

According to the proposal, the goal is to create a high-capacity, safe recreational space dedicated to family-friendly leisure and water-based entertainment.

The development is slated for a property known as El Trébol, which spans 53,400 square meters (13.2 acres). Specific details regarding the water park’s exact features remain under wraps for now, as SEMARNAT has not yet released the full public file.



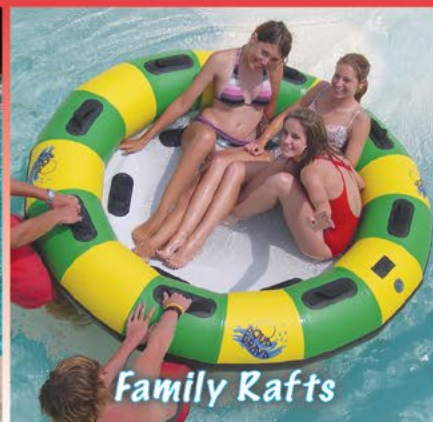
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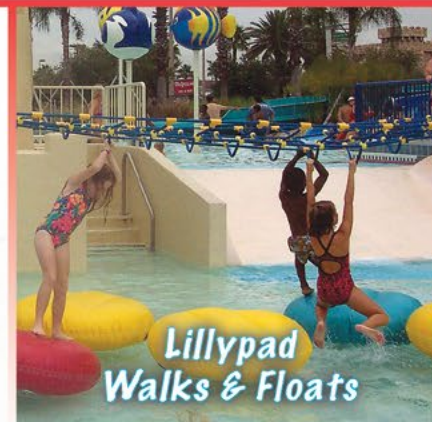
Inflatable Barriers



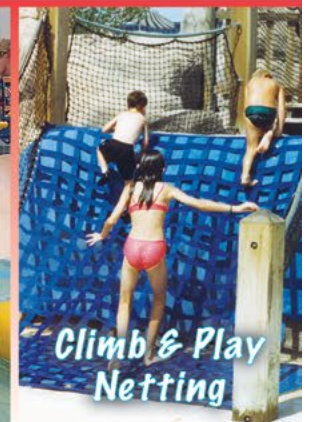
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► Cedar Point – Rolling Through the Years — page 40 / Legacy Sharing: Dick Knoebel of Knoebels — page 43

Frontier City gets creative new catering venue: Wildcat Pavilion

Unique dining area allows park guests to eat within an active roller coaster

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

OKLAHOMA CITY — Sometimes great ideas come from unique circumstances.

Most amusement parks and theme parks have catering spaces for group outings. Frontier City, while being one of the smaller parks in the Six Flags chain, has pavilions on the north edge of the park.

“Group Sales is a unique and interesting part of our park offerings,” said Park Manager Zach Vobornik. “Frontier City offers a group outing opportunity that cannot be replaced with a bowling event, movie night, lake trip or anything else. It’s

exciting for our groups, because there’s only one place in Oklahoma where you can bring your employees to enjoy rides, games, and theme park meals and snacks. It’s exciting for us because it allows us to establish relationships with local and national business owners and accounts. Truly, a win-win.”

This spring, an opportunity presented itself, and Vobornik got creative. American Coaster Enthusiasts was holding its 2026 Spring Conference in Texas and Oklahoma. Looking for something out-of-the-ordinary to offer the passionate group, he came up with the idea of dining “inside” a roller coaster.

The new venue opened just in time for the aficionados’ visit. Utilizing the Best of the Southwest food outlet near the park’s Wildcat wooden coaster, Wildcat



Positioned between Wildcat’s first drop and ride finale, the Wildcat Pavilion offers groups fun views to add a unique touch to the outing (above). Sixty picnic tables were made in-house by Frontier City carpenter staff (right).
AT/TIM BALDWIN



Pavilion offers great Tex-Mex food via buffet lines and allows guests to dine within the roller coaster. Needless to say, it was a hit with the group.

When *Amusement Today* asked if he felt it would appeal to future group outings, he replied: “Absolutely. When conceptualizing this, our biggest motivation was the opportunity to provide something wholly unique. If there’s another place where you can enjoy your meal while inside a roller coaster infield, I’m unaware of it. Anyone who wants to treat their employees to a one-of-a-kind experience should consider booking their event here.”

Guests select their food and build their tacos and

nachos with the ingredients they like, then drinks and cutlery are available once patrons enter the pavilion.

Following their meal, guests get nice views of the first drop of the 1991 wooden roller coaster (which dates back to 1967 when built at Fairyland in Kansas City). Industry legend Gary Story moved the coaster to Oklahoma, preserving it for future generations. In addition, spectators can watch riders scream past on the coaster’s finale in a splashing trench.

“The Wildcat Pavilion project was typical of how

we tackle most projects at Frontier City,” Vobornik told AT. “Our goal is to break the mold and manage all three legs (good, fast and cost-effective). “To say this isn’t easy is an understatement, but we pride ourselves on achieving the near-impossible. For the pavilion, we purchased a prefab carport-style building, poured concrete foundations and built and painted the fencing, picnic tables and concession stand in-house. We’re extremely proud of the end result and are looking for-

► See FRONTIER, page 40



While the majority of the seating is in the covered pavilion, those seeking to enjoy good weather have outdoor tables as well.
AT/TIM BALDWIN

“It doesn’t feel like a vendor, it feels
like a partnership.”

Entertainment Industry Client



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Cedar Point – Rolling Through the Years — a second edition excels

REVIEW: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

When Cedar Point celebrated its 150th anniversary in (technically) 2020 but carried into 2021 owing to the global pandemic, the park was the subject of a book equally as monumental as the milestone.

Author Ken Miller worked in the park's history museum until it closed down around the time of the COVID crisis. He is one of the most knowledgeable people about the park and its history. When issued six years ago, Miller achieved something envious of every park in existence. The size of the book, *Cedar Point – Rolling Through the Years*, was gigantic.

"The game plan was always to update the book every five years," Miller told *Amusement Today*. I ran into a delay this time around, so it's been six. We figured that there were enough changes to the park

to warrant a new edition."

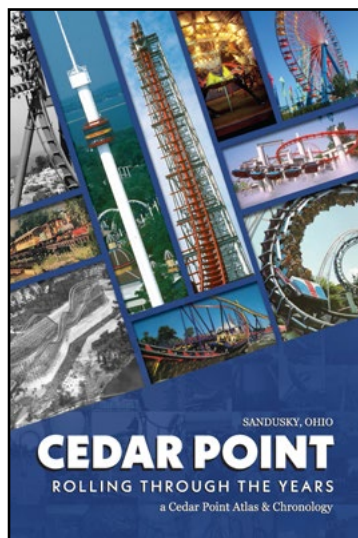
Indeed. The first edition was just shy of 400 pages. The latest edition has added more than 50 pages, with a new page count of an incredible 450. There are numerous changes and additions.

"The new edition includes new biographies, a two-page spread on why Cedar Point doesn't open in the winter, etc. There are now 1,600 images, up from 1,250 before," Miller noted. "Feedback on both editions has been great."

It should be.

Like before, the book is divided into two halves. The front half, the atlas, is a tremendous resource that documents everything — Cedar Point boats, hotels, awards, historical designations, key management figures, former rides, current rides and much more. Now it is even bigger.

The second half is a 155-year chronology that takes



the reader back to the beginning. These pages convey what happened each year (events, rides added, attractions removed), and once the 1970s are illustrated, park maps go along with each year.

There is no way for a review to describe the size and weight of this book. A price tag of \$125 might seem hefty, but once the masterpiece is in one's hands, it is clear that it is a massive accomplish-



Author Ken Miller worked in Cedar Point's history museum until it closed down and is one of the most knowledgeable people about the park and its long history. COURTESY KEN MILLER

ment. Every Cedar Point fan or industry enthusiast should consider this a top-tier acquisition; likewise, any new team member in the park's management should immediately obtain this masterful resource and consider it essential. It is *the* industry

book to measure all other historical publications against.

Cedar Point – Rolling Through the Years is available in Sandusky at all of the local museum gift stores, as well as on the website 1870PublishingGroup.com or on Amazon.

Periscope Equity makes strategic investment in Amusement Connect

CHICAGO — Periscope Equity announced it has invested in **Amusement Connect**. This investment represents the first platform in Periscope Equity's third fund, which closed last year.

Amusement Connect was co-founded by industry veteran **Frank Licausi** and automotive executive and engineer **John Tarpley**, friends who recognized an underserved market within route operators and smaller, independent FECs. Headquartered in Kansas City, Amusement Connect now serves more than 3,000 locations across FECs, arcades, bowling centers, skating rinks, bar-cades and restaurants.

"John and Frank have already established Amusement Connect as a trusted leader in payment solutions for the amusement industry nationwide, and we see tremendous global potential," said Periscope Principal **Joe McIlhattan**. "The business checks every box in Periscope's mandate: founder-led, tech-enabled, mission-critical to its customers, and offers a wide variety of achievable value creation levers."

Periscope will support Amusement Connect in accelerating new product development, strengthening its sales and marketing capabilities, and expanding



into new markets, with the goal of international growth.

"As a longtime route operator and family entertainment center owner, I saw a clear market opportunity," said Licausi. "John and I set out to bridge the gap and drive innovation in specialty payment solutions for the entire amusement industry, and we're excited to say we've made an impact. We're proud of what we've created, and we're thrilled to have Periscope's support in our next chapter."

"Looking ahead, this partnership is about accelerating what we build for our customers," continued Tarpley. "Our customers will see the benefit in better tools, more features, and the same dependable U.S.-based support they count on every day."

Licausi and Tarpley will be moving forward with Amusement Connect as Chief Executive Officer and Chief Customer & Brand Officer, respectively, in partnership with longtime President **Tom Jayroe**.

► FRONTIER Continued from page 39

ward to the reactions of guests as they enjoy a meal while watching the Wildcat roar past."

Vobornik is elated to have dedicated team members and is quick to give his team members full credit for the park's fantastic appearance — from signage to landscaping to carpentry.

"Frontier City boasts some of the most talented artists in the company," he said. "From our ride signs to our Fright Fest haunted houses to the 60 picnic tables that needed to be built for the new Wildcat Pavilion, we conceptualize, design, build and paint everything in-house. The two key figures in this endeavor are **Lisa Quishenberry** (who started at Frontier City in 1998), who hand-paints the park murals and signs and designs our Fright Fest logos and **Alejandro Morales** (who started at Frontier City in 2007). He is genuinely the most talented carpenter I've



Guests get to see fun views of the coaster's first drop from the special area. AT/TIM BALDWIN

ever seen. Between them, they can take any idea and turn it into reality. Truly a magical duo."

Frontier City enjoyed exceptional spring attendance, surpassing daily goals for the vast majority of the time. With the addition of the new Wildcat Pavilion, it is now poised to offer group outings more options or bring in additional groups on the same days.

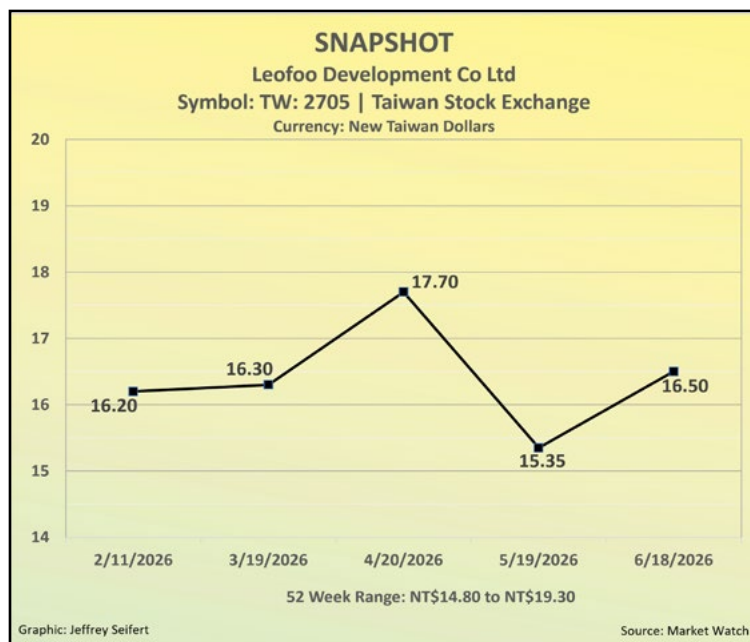
MARKET WATCH

COMPANY	SYMBOL	MARKET	PRICE 6/24/26	HIGH 52-Week	LOW 52-Week
PARKS AND ATTRACTIONS					
The Blackstone Group	BX	NYSE	112.99	190.09	101.73
Carnival Corp.	CCL	NYSE	28.99	34.03	23.45
Comcast Corp./ NBCUniversal Media	CMCSA	NASDAQ	22.64	34.34	22.13
Dave & Busters Entertainment, LLC	PLAY	NASDAQ	12.09	35.53	9.61
EPR Properties	EPR	NYSE	58.94	62.08	48.11
Fuji Kyoko Co., Ltd.	JP:9010	TYO	2,505	2,704	1,946
Haichang Holdings Ltd.	HK:2255	SEHK	0.335	1.060	0.310
Leofoo Development Co.	TW:2705	TSEC	16.15	18.90	14.90
Lucky Strike Entertainment Corp	LUCK	NYSE	7.67	11.61	5.71
MGM Resorts International	MGM	NYSE	47.09	51.59	29.19
Parks America, Inc.	PRKA	OTCQX	40.90	69.99	33.00
Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ltd.	RCL	NYSE	320.95	366.50	232.10
Six Flags Entertainment Co.	FUN	NYSE	23.02	33.50	12.51
Tivoli A/S	DK:TIV	CSE	622.00	658.00	584.00
United Parks & Resorts Inc.	PRKS	NYSE	46.87	56.95	28.77
The Walt Disney Company	DIS	NYSE	101.12	124.69	92.19
Warner Bros Discovery Inc.	WBD	NASDAQ	27.20	30.00	10.75
SUPPLIERS/OTHERS					
Brogent Technologies, Inc.	TW:5263	TSEC	101.00	130.00	82.66
Callaway Golf Co.	CALY	NYSE	18.08	18.63	7.84
Falcon's Beyond	FBYD	NASDAQ	17.31	29.02	3.71
Sansei Technologies, Inc.	TYO:6357	TYO	2,479	2,849	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 6/22/26	Change from 1 year ago
East Coast	\$4.886	\$1.096
Midwest	\$4.751	\$0.974
Gulf Coast	\$4.415	\$0.979
Mountain	\$4.795	\$1.106
West Coast	\$5.238	\$1.156
California	\$6.468	\$1.575

CURRENCY

On 6/25/26 \$1 USD =

0.8805	EURO
0.7589	GBP (British Pound)
161.69	JPY (Japanese Yen)
0.8117	CHF (Swiss Franc)
1.4491	AUD (Australian Dollar)
1.4226	CAD (Canadian Dollar)

BUSINESS WATCH

Fertitta enters agreement to acquire Caesars

LAS VEGAS and RENO, Nev. — **Caesars Entertainment, Inc.** announced that it entered into a definitive agreement to be acquired by **Fertitta Entertainment, Inc.** in an all-cash transaction valued at approximately \$17.6 billion, including the assumption of approximately \$11.9 billion of Caesars' outstanding debt.

Under the terms of the agreement, Caesars shareholders will receive \$31 in cash for each outstanding Caesars share. The consideration represents a 49% premium over Caesars' unaffected share price as of February 25, 2026, which was the last trading day before rumors of a potential transaction.

The board of directors of Caesars Entertainment has approved the transaction and recommends that Caesars shareholders adopt and approve the merger agreement. The board, after detailed consideration with the assistance of its outside financial and legal advisors, determined that the immediate cash premium offered by this transaction is compelling for Caesars shareholders, and its approval of this transaction underscores its commitment to drive and deliver value for shareholders.

Ripley's purchases Adventure Seekers

ORLANDO — **Ripley's Believe It or Not! World Entertainment** has announced the acquisition of the **Adventure Seekers and FlyRide** attraction in Branson, Missouri. The popular local attraction is now officially part of Ripley's Believe It or Not! World Entertainment, bringing even more family-centered fun to the entertainment capital of the Ozarks.

"Ripley's Believe It or Not! World Entertainment has always been committed to creating unforgettable family fun," said **Jim Pattison Jr.**, president of Ripley's Believe It or Not! World Entertainment. "Bringing Adventure Seekers into the Ripley's family gives the company another popular attraction right here in Branson. We are incredibly proud to welcome the talented Adventure Seekers team members and look forward to building on the wonderful legacy they have created."

The acquisition marks an exciting expansion of Ripley's footprint in Branson, where the company already operates the world-famous **Ripley's Believe It or Not! Branson, Ripley's Super Fun Park Branson** and **Creative Custom Fabrication**, an innovative fabrication studio known for bringing one-of-a-kind concepts to life.

"Building Adventure Seekers has been an incredible journey, and it has been an honor serving the millions of families who visit Branson every year," said **Randy Little**, former owner of Adventure Seekers. "When looking toward the future of this attraction, I wanted to ensure it would be in the hands of a company that values community, family fun, and exceptional guest experiences."

Brogent Technologies unveils new Taiwan hub

KAOHSIUNG, Taiwan — **Brogent Technologies** has inaugurated the new **Ciaotou Science Park** branch in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, marking a milestone in the company's global expansion strategy for immersive entertainment and amusement ride systems. The facility serves as an advanced hub for research, development, manufacturing, system integration and testing, strengthening Brogent's end-to-end capabilities for the global attractions industry.

"The Ciaotou Science Park facility is far more than a conventional manufacturing plant," said **Chih-Hung Ouyang**, chairman of Brogent Technologies. "It is a 'Dream Factory' where engineering, creativity and immersive storytelling converge. Equipped with automated production systems and Brogent's proprietary AI-powered dynamic simulation technology, the facility accelerates development cycles and transforms creative concepts into world-class entertainment experiences."

OBITUARY

Erievue Park operator Don Woodward passes at 67

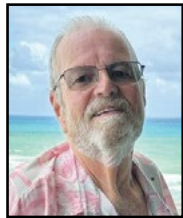
GENEVA-ON-THE-LAKE, Ohio — Don “Woody” Woodward passed away peacefully surrounded by his family on May 8, 2026, at the age of 67.

He was born December 21, 1958, in Geneva, Ohio, to Donald G & Martha Woodward. Woodward was a 1977 graduate of Geneva High School. Following graduation, he attended Thiel College, where he earned his bachelor’s degree in Business Administration.

Woodward spent his career carrying on and continuing to build his family’s legacy businesses through hard work, grit, determination and dedication. Since graduating in 1981, he enjoyed working closely with his family and business partners in Geneva-on-the-Lake.

Woodward was deeply devoted to his community. Over the years, he never met a stranger, took immense pride in the village and spent countless hours making Geneva-on-the-Lake the beloved town that it is. He operated Erievue Park in the area and later was a partner in Old Firehouse Winery, which opened on the park’s former property.

He served on the Village Council for 31 years. He valued tourism and the continued success of Geneva-on-the-Lake, working closely with the Ashtabula County Convention and Visitors Bureau and serving as a member of the Board of Trustees for the Geneva-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce. Don belonged to the GOTL Fire Department for 19 years and served as Assistant Fire Chief for five years. He additionally served on the Ohio Advisory Council of Amusement Ride Safety.



Woodward

ON THE MOVE

Park Presidents return to 10 Six Flags properties

DALLAS, Texas — **Six Flags Entertainment Corporation** announced the reintroduction of park presidents at 10 of the company’s key properties. The change is part of a new operating structure designed to better support the unique needs of each park and strengthen performance across the company’s portfolio. It reinforces Six Flags’s commitment to being more strategic, flexible and responsive as its business continues to evolve.

Each park president will serve as a single, accountable leader with clear responsibility for overseeing park performance, operations and the overall guest experience. This role is designed to help these parks maximize opportunities and respond quickly within their local markets. This updated structure positions Six Flags for continued growth while staying true to what makes each park special.

The new park presidents include **Christopher Mortensen, Canada’s Wonderland; Bridgette Bywater, Carwinds; Colleen Brady, Cedar Point; Tony Carovillano,**

Kings Island; Raffi Kaprelyan, Knott’s Berry Farm; Mike Fehnel, Six Flags Great Adventure; John Krajnak, Six Flags Great America; Brian Oerding, Six Flags Magic Mountain; Richard Pretlow, Six Flags Over Georgia and Pete Carmichael, Six Flags Over Texas.

“These changes are about putting leadership, expertise and accountability as close to our guests and team members as possible,” said **John Reilly**, president and CEO of Six Flags. “By strengthening park-level leadership, and aligning our support model with our strategic priorities, we’re empowering our teams to move faster, innovate locally and deliver exceptional experiences every day.

“The ultimate goal is simple: to consistently deliver the best possible guest and team member experience across all parks,” Reilly added. “With the introduction of these park presidents, we are confident we have the right leaders in place to unlock the full potential of our parks and elevate performance.”

H. Betti Industries, Inc. announced the appointment of **Michael Arnone** as senior director of marketing.

Arnone brings more than 20 years of experience building brands, strengthening customer engagement and aligning marketing to business performance across global and multi-division organizations. His background spans brand strategy, digital transformation, lead generation and sales enablement, with a consistent focus on improving market visibility and driving measurable growth.



Arnone

“Michael brings a unique combination of strategic perspective and hands-on execution,” said **Jonathan Betti**, vice president of sales and business development. “His experience building integrated marketing programs and aligning them closely to sales and business performance will play an important role in our continued growth.”

In his new role, Arnone will lead H. Betti Industries’ marketing strategy and execution across the organization.

RWS Global has announced that Founder, Chairman & CEO **Ryan Stana** will transition to executive chairman. Current Chief Operating Officer **Jake McCoy** has been appointed interim CEO. The transition was announced by Stana with the support of **Bluestone Equity Partners**, RWS Global’s minority investor, as well as the company’s board of directors.

This transition marks a pivotal milestone in RWS Global’s growth. After five years of exponential expansion, the company is well positioned to enter its next stage of evolution. This leadership structure will enable Stana to focus on long-term strategy, vision and new growth frontiers while McCoy focuses on driving operational excellence and day-to-day execution.

“Jake has been instrumental in our growth and is the right leader for RWS Global today,” said Stana. “I have had the privilege of guiding the business through significant growth and M&A with a clear focus on building for the future. The priority now is ensuring the right leadership is in place to sustain that momentum.”

Amusement Today has welcomed **Eric Fluet** to its team. A respected marketing and business development professional with more than 30 years of experience in the amusement and attractions industry, Fluet brings a unique com-

ination of operational expertise, strategic marketing insight, and relationship-building skills to the organization.

“It’s been a long multiple year search to find the right person to add in our open advertising position, but with Eric’s business and industry knowledge, this decision was a quick one.” said *Amusement Today* Publisher **Gary Slade**. “Eric’s strong commitment to safety, through his continuing work with **AIMS International**, also checked all our boxes. I’m excited to have his insight and knowledge on our team.”

With two decades of experience at various Six Flags parks and as the founder and principal of **Get It Done Marketing**, Fluet has partnered with more than 40 amusement parks, water parks, family entertainment centers, hotels, campgrounds and industry suppliers. Throughout his career, he has helped organizations strengthen their brands, increase revenue and foster meaningful customer and industry relationships.

In his role with *AT*, Fluet will help oversee advertising sales, Golden Ticket Awards sponsorship development, strategic partnerships and other business growth initiatives. His extensive industry network and deep understanding of the attractions business position him to expand the publication’s reach while delivering value to advertisers, sponsors and industry stakeholders.

Gilroy Gardens announced that **June Mallory Aiello** would be taking on the role of chief advancement officer (CAO) for the educational nonprofit park. As CAO, Aiello will serve as the senior executive responsible for building, leading and expanding all philanthropic, fundraising, community engagement, and external relations strategies at **Gilroy Gardens Family Theme Park**.

Aiello brings more than 25 years of experience in grant management, resource development, volunteer recruitment, donor cultivation as well as strategic planning and management for a number of different nonprofit agencies and organizations, including **Second Harvest Food Bank, Habitat for Humanity** and **Boys & Girls Clubs**. She earned her B.A. in Fine Arts from **California State University Bakersfield**.

“We are excited for our new Chief Advancement Officer to join our team and help further advance our mission by identifying new partnerships and funding sources to sustain the long-term viability of the park,” stated **Dan Harney**, chairman of the Gilroy Gardens community board of directors.



Fluet



Stana



McCoy



Aiello

Legacy SHARING

For nearly four decades, **Richard "Dick" Knoebel** led his family's amusement park into a new era, growing **Knoebels Amusement Resort** into the largest free-admission park in the U.S. A third-generation steward of the resort his grandparents founded in Elysburg, Pennsylvania, in 1926, he is responsible for landmark additions such as the Phoenix and Flying Turns roller coasters. Today, he serves as chairman of the board and president emeritus as Knoebels mark its 100th anniversary.

Decades of growth have shaped Knoebel's legacy in the industry

ELYSBURG, Pa. — Ask Dick Knoebel what has made running his family's amusement park difficult over a hundred years, and his answer skips past what you might expect. Water supply, sewage disposal, the road network and forces of nature. It is a telling response from a man whose name is inseparable from and helped guests enjoy their days at one of the world's most celebrated amusement parks.

Knoebel was born in 1939, 13 years after his grandparents, Henry and Hattie Knoebel, opened a picnic grove and swimming hole along a creek in Elysburg. He grew up immersed in it. He earned his Eagle Scout badge in 1953 and graduated from Lehigh University in 1961 with a degree in engineering geophysics. That same year, he joined the U.S. Marine Corps, training as an aircraft maintenance officer and serving in both the United States and Japan before returning home. He brought that engineering discipline with him and applied it straight to the family business.

That discipline shaped nearly four decades at the helm of Knoebels Amusement Resort. Sewage was one of the first problems he solved personally, building an on-site treatment facility that, as attendance grew to more than one million annual guests, eventually required a deal to route wastewater to the local township's system. Parking tested his patience longer. For decades, Knoebel leased the park's main lot from a neighboring farm, periodically offering to buy the land from the owners. The answer was always no, until this year, when the family's matriarch and patriarch had passed, and their children were ready to sell. Knoebels purchased the land in 2026, just ahead of the

resort's centennial.

One of his signature achievements remains the Phoenix, a wooden roller coaster he and legacy team member and longtime friend John Fetterman brought to Knoebels in 1985. They had wanted to bring a wooden coaster to the park for some time. Unable to afford the cost of a new ride, the pair turned to relocating an existing coaster. Built in 1947 as the Rocket at Playland Park in San Antonio, Texas, the ride sat dormant for years after that park closed in 1980. Knoebel negotiated its purchase, dismantled it, and reconstructed it in Pennsylvania for roughly a quarter of what it would have cost to build a brand-new coaster. When asked, Knoebel said that it was "one of the best things we ever did." We were in the big leagues after that." The Phoenix has since won *Amusement Today's* Golden Ticket Award for best wooden coaster in seven consecutive years, the longest streak in the award's history.

His son Brian, who was 12 when the coaster arrived, remembers the move less for the negotiations than for what it did to the park's popularity. "My dad flattened my kickball because it just got busy," Brian said, recalling the games he, his cousins and friends used to play in front of the park office before Phoenix turned Knoebels into a destination.

Knoebel applied that same stubbornness to Flying Turns, a wooden bobsled-style coaster he spent seven years reviving after the ride design had largely disappeared following the 1930s. Skeptics called it impossible. Impossible, however, is not a word that Dick Knoebel understands,

Richard "Dick" Knoebel Knoebels Amusement Resort Elysburg, Pennsylvania



and in 2013, Flying Turns opened to the public. He has also personally overseen the restoration of antique attractions, including the Flyer, the Looper, and the Haunted Mansion, each one a small act of refusing to let something he loved to disappear. "Old rides are simpler to operate," he said. "We grew up with them. When people ride those older rides, it brings them back to their youth."

That instinct extended beyond his own park. Knoebel helped shape Pennsylvania's Ride Inspection Act in the mid-1980s, a framework that other states later modeled their own safety laws on and built a reputation industry-wide to be inducted into the IAAPA Hall of Fame in 2014 and named a Golden Ticket Legend in 2022.

Asked what advice he'd give the next generation of park operators, Knoebel didn't hesitate: work the job before you manage it. "You don't know what you're managing otherwise," he said. This is a rule he has applied to his own family as much as to his employees.

Even after stepping down as park president and handing the reins to his son, Knoebel is still doing everything he can to ensure Knoebels is the greatest

amusement park it can be. Brian remarked that he just doesn't know how to quit, and that there is absolutely nothing else that his father would rather be doing. When Knoebel visits the park, he has someone take him around on a golf cart to observe the property, and then he gives Brian and the team a to-do list.

"The man doesn't miss a thing. In one lap, he notices a company picnic's sign is missing, that we need more napkins at an ice cream stand, the merry-go-round is not being operated as efficiently as it should be, or a light bulb needs replaced. How he notices all that is beyond me. He wants to do everything in his power to make Knoebels the greatest destination on the planet."

Asked why any of it still matters to him, Dick Knoebel needed only four words: "It's in my blood."

Near the end of a long conversation about all of it, Brian asked his father one more thing: how many rides were at Knoebels when he came home from the Marine Corps in 1964? "16," Dick said. "And there's now 63," Brian said.

"Yep," Dick said. "There's your story."

—Jack Lathrop



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Amusement Today's annual 2025 Golden Ticket Awards (shown) were held at Carowinds. The annual event recognizes the best of the best within the amusement industry. AT/JACK LATHROP

Reserve your space now for the 2026 Golden Ticket Awards at COTALand

AUSTIN, Texas — Registration is open for the 2026 Golden Ticket Awards. Dubbed "The Networking Event of the Year," the weekend is full of opportunities for all industry professionals to gather and not only celebrate achievements but also see other facilities' operations and learn from each other.

The 2026 dates are September 11 and 12. The weekend promises to be full of opportunities for everyone working in the industry. Two fresh facilities — COTALand and Kalahari Resorts & Conventions will welcome attendees with everything from food and drink to rides and activities. Thanks to the gracious support of our sponsors, the event continues to be FREE for industry professionals. Here's why it should be on your park's calendar.

Come to network

Throughout the event, the activities scheduled allow for time to connect one-on-one with peers as well as leaders and industry suppliers. The relaxed atmosphere allows for meaningful conversations and insightful perspectives into our shared careers.

The two-day event will include receptions and dinners to meet up with industry colleagues over festive drinks, great food and many laughs.

Come to explore

Both host facilities are relative newcomers to the amusement industry. Kalahari opened in 2020 and is a beautifully decorated resort with authentic artwork celebrating the African culture acquired from regional artists. The indoor water park offers a range of giant slides and family-friendly attractions.

New kid on the block, COTALand, expands the Circuit of the Americas campus with a new theme park. Leaning into Austin's "weird" vibe, the park combines uniqueness and racing in its many overlays. Roller coasters include Circuit Breaker from Vekoma and Palindrome from Gerstlauer. Many other rides from SBF-Visa, S&S Worldwide, Zamperla, Chance, Bertazzon, Levent, Fabbri and more offer a broad brushstroke of attractions. Attendees will experience everything this new-for-2026 park has

to offer, as well as geek out with some F1 style while at the gargantuan facility.

Come to support

What better way to let one's hair down than with some less-than-serious friendly competition? The annual Charity Golf Event on Friday morning benefits the National Roller Coaster Museum and Archives. Look for late-night laughs at B-Lux & Bowling at Kalahari. This charity event will benefit the beloved and heartwarming Morgan's Wonderland in San Antonio, the innovative ultra-inclusive campus that contains an amusement park, water park, sports facilities and more.

Both these worthy causes will also benefit from some high-speed rides. Attendees can hop in with a professional racecar driver and take a Hot Lap at COTALand.

Come to celebrate

The Golden Ticket Awards are the perfect way to acknowledge the Best of the Best with applause and fanfare as the results of an international poll recognize outstanding rides, leaders in the industry and notable achievements. It's a ceremony sure to be filled with cheers, congratulations and perhaps a couple of surprises.

No matter what one's role might be, the evening is full of celebration and enjoyment.

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The event's business casual, friendly atmosphere has earned it the moniker of "The Networking Event of the Year!" AT/TIM BALDWIN



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SAFETY & OPERATIONS

▶ IATP shows enrollment increase — page 50 / AlignOps BusyBusy rolls out new safety module — page 55

Kissel Entertainment becomes the first iROC-certified carnival

International Ride Training accreditation compliments midway providers' core values

AT: Pam Sherborne
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TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — **Kissel Entertainment**, one of the top-rated traveling entertainment providers, has made industry-wide history as the first carnival to be **International Ride Operator Certified (iROC)** by **International Ride Training (IRT)**. The iROC program is the world's only third-party ride operator certification and draws on decades of experience training, managing and developing ride operators.

Those certified in the program include those with a total commitment to a safe, efficient and professional ride operation. The iROC front-line operators pay strict attention to safety while maintaining efficiency and professionalism.

Madison Kissel, Kissel Entertainment's COO, who spearheaded this initiative between Kissel Entertainment and IRT, said she learned about the certification while instructing a class at the **NAARSO** annual safety conference.

"It just seemed like a no-brainer for us," she said. "We were already doing all of this, maybe in a little bit of a different order or sequence. But it was an easy tweak for us."

Plus, Kissel said that



Kissel Entertainment became the first carnival to be International Ride Operator Certified by International Ride Training. Celebrating were (front row, l to r) Kissel Entertainment's Russel Kissel, Madison Kissel, Brittany Lane and Starren Cooper as well as (back row, l to r) Patty Beazley and Megan Putnam of International Ride Training alongside Barend Botha, Savannah Kissel and Alain Zerbini also of Kissel Entertainment.

COURTESY KISSEL ENTERTAINMENT

she loves a certification. Anything that can be done to ensure a safer, better experience on their midway is a plus. Her sister, **Paris Kissel**, and their partners are now heading up the company.

"We are a fourth generation on both sides of our family," she said. "We love and breathe the carnival industry."

Patty Beazley, an IRT partner, was onsite for the certification. She said that the program used for the carnival didn't differ from the program held for all new clients.

"We taught the exact same program we use for all our new clients," Beazley

said. "We held a two-day certification class in which we trained seven instructors in our iROC teaching methodology and protocol. The seven newly trained instructors can now certify their designated trainers within their organization and conduct front-line classes based on our critical components."

On the third day, Beazley said they trained the front-line staff on IRT's iROC protocol.

"And it rained," she said. "We taught outside in a tent for the classroom portion and still managed to use audiovisual aids. A little rain didn't dampen anyone's spirits, and we managed to

conduct hands-on training at the rides as well. The majority of the Kissel Entertainment team members speak English as a second language. We used two supervisors from Kissel who assisted us with translation."

Beazley said some of the highlights for her during this initiative were meeting the Kissel family.

"They have a wonderful operation with well-maintained rides, and the entire family has so much passion for the amusement industry," she said. "They truly want to be the best traveling show in the industry."

In that regard, Kissel said safety has always

been an unwavering core value for their family. This achievement builds upon Kissel Entertainment's long history of advancing ride safety, with roots in advancing inspection protocols in Kentucky. The company contracts with third-party certified inspectors and ensures its internal team undergoes ride-specific and advanced operational training.

The Kissel Entertainment team also participates in the **OABA Circle of Excellence**.

"Our entire staff is now totally certified under the IRT program," Kissel said.

In addition to the program, Kissel said her company added to their IRT package.

"We wanted to add more audits to our package," she said, late in June. "In fact, we had our first audit last week."

"IRT sets a very high standard," she said. "We want to ensure that our industry receives the most up-to-date, top-of-the-line resources to guarantee guest and employee safety. Guests of any carnival deserve the same level of safety commitment that theme parks provide."

This is another landmark achievement for Kissel Entertainment, which made history by becoming the first traveling entertainment provider to achieve **Sensory Inclusive Certification** from **KultureCity**.

"We have had a sensory room on our midway for four years," Kissel said.

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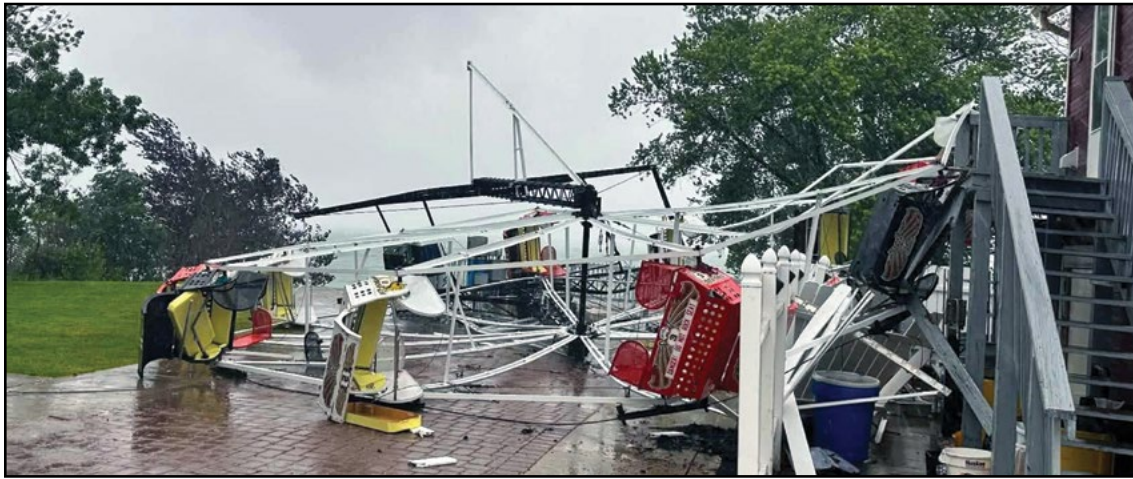
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Storm topples historic Eli wheel at Geneva-On-The-Lake winery



The Eli Bridge Co. Ferris wheel at Old Firehouse Winery in Ohio was blown over during a violent storm on June 14, 2026. The ride was originally purchased in 1956 as a new attraction at the former Erieview Park. It was acquired and relocated by the winery five decades later when the park closed. COURTESY DAVE OTTO

GENEVA-ON-THE-LAKE, Ohio — The historic Eli Bridge Co. Ferris wheel at Old Firehouse Winery was toppled Sunday, June 14, when a violent storm swept in from Lake Erie. No injuries were reported at the lakefront property.

Located on the winery's Sunset Patio, the #5 Big Eli wheel was originally purchased in 1956 as a new attraction at the former Erieview Park. When the amusement park shuttered in 2007, the adjacent winery acquired the ride and refurbished it prior to relocating it.

It marked the second tragedy in little more than a month for the winery as co-owner Donald P. 'Woody' Woodward passed away on May 8. The Woodward family operated Erieview Park and co-owns the winery with Dave Otto.

Woodward's son, Donald C. Woodward, told *Amusement Today*: "We had just refurbished the wheel for the second time just a couple of years ago. We put in a new axle during that work, and since one of our themes is a Dalmatian, we painted the ride black and white. All new cars were added last year.

"We had already closed it when the storm was approaching — we have a protocol for that. The wind came in straight off the water."

"We knew a storm was coming, but we certainly weren't prepared for what we got," noted General Manager Joleen Anderson, who also witnessed the fast-moving storm.

She said a waterspout came off the lake, picked the wheel up, and tossed it forward before it crashed on its side.

Wind gusts of 75 mph were reported in the area around 3:30 p.m., knocking power out in the community due to downed power lines and trees.

The future of the 70-year-old attraction remains uncertain.

"We are still waiting on our insurance," Woodward asserted. "It was a very popular attraction here, and perhaps it will make a return."

—Ron Gustafson

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IATP shows significant increase in its membership enrollment

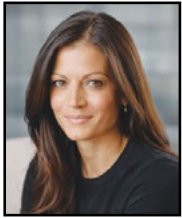
Pivot in operations in wake of COVID leads to 67% bump

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

HARRISBURG, Pa. — The pivot in operations the **International Adventure and Trampoline Park Association (IATP)** began making two years ago has brought the industry association not only back from a flat-line of new membership enrollment to a 67% percent increase in membership year-to-date over 2025, according to information release by IATP’s chair **Gina Elliot**.

Elliot, who is also the vice president of strategy and administration at **Slick City Action Parks**, said the original foundation of the IATP was strong, but that it was built for a different phase of the industry.

“In the wake of COVID, that gap became impossible to ignore,” according to Elliot.



Elliot

“Financial pressures forced operators to reevaluate every expense with a renewed focus on return on investment and tangible value. As expectations changed, the association’s existing model, built for a different phase of the industry, was no longer aligned with the evolving industry.”

So the organization pivoted leading to that dramatic increase in membership enrollment. That increase also is leading to an anticipated increase in



attendance to the upcoming **IATP Annual Conference**, which is set for Sept. 14-16 in Clearwater, Florida. The conference has traditionally been a place where park owners, operators and suppliers come together for three days of insights, innovation and networking. This year will be no exception.

“We are expecting strong growth at our upcoming September conference,” **Alexis Kierce** said, IATP executive director. “Last year, we welcomed just over 150 park attendees and approximately 150 vendors, for a total of about 300 attendees.”

“This year, we are expecting at least 250 park attendees, along

with another 150 vendors, bringing total attendance to approximately 400,” she said. “That represents an increase of at least 100 attendees overall or about a 33 percent increase in total conference attendance.”



Kierce

Elliot reported that the change in the industry started with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic when over 100 trampoline and adventure locations closed permanently in 2021. As the industry stabilized, operators changed, shifting toward a different model of attraction with multiple experiences being offered. They also started, “aggressively managing costs while increasing investment in revenue-driving areas like birthday parties and guest experience.”

It became clear IATP’s existing model built during consistent growth was no longer as relevant as it once was. That was when the organization knew they had to change with the times.

The association’s shift is now underway. Some of the things that have been

The increase in IATP membership enrollment is leading to an anticipated increase in the **IATP Annual Conference**, which is set for Sept. 14-16, 2026, in Clearwater, Florida. The conference includes educational sessions, vendor exhibits, networking and more. COURTESY IATP

done include the launch of the IATP Academy in 2024 that introduced a Learning Management System offering more than 35 microlearning courses for park operators across areas such as marketing, technology, security fundamentals, talent development and compliance. The platform also includes conference presentations, allowing members to access and revisit content year-round.

A new safety video was developed in 2026, in partnership with risk and legal experts, to align with the most current ASTM F2970 standards.

Digital infrastructure also was overhauled with a new website that launched in late 2025. It now serves both prospective and existing members by clearly outlining who it supports, why it exists and the resources and partnerships available.

The association launched **Connected** in March 2026. It provides industry insights, operator stories, best practices and dedicated sections on standards and insurance.

A member portal is launching in late summer 2026 and will further enhance the online experience.

For this year’s conference, Kierce said attendees can expect the same strong, traditional three-day format with a few new additions. Attendees can look forward

to a new mock deposition session designed to provide a real-world, educational look at legal and operational issues parks may face. The conference’s keynote speaker, **Anthony Lambatos**, will add fresh, engaging elements to the conference.

Various Educational programming is planned with a mix of panel discussions and classroom-style sessions. There will be a Welcome Bash and a reception for the kickoff of the Exhibit Hall. The Awards and Celebration Dinner will be held at the **Clearwater Marine Aquarium**.

Kierce said a few trends they are seeing in the industry leading into this year’s conference include continued interest in attractions that go beyond traditional trampolines, including adventure-based activities, competitive and social experiences and offerings that appeal to a wider age range.

“Operators are also looking closely at ways to improve efficiency through technology, whether that’s through better booking systems, staff training tools, guest communication or operational automation,” Kierce said. “Safety, risk management and staff training continue to remain top priorities, especially as parks expand their attractions and experiences.”

•indooradventureparks.com



Throughout the **IATP Annual Conference**, attendees are encouraged to engage in educational sessions, roundtable discussions and the interactive exhibit hall showcasing the latest products and services. COURTESY IATP

P2:3 Consulting welcomes aquatic facilities surfacing partner Aqua Tile



CANTON, Texas — P2:3 Consulting is partnering with Aqua Tile to help waterpark operators address one of the most common challenges in aquatic facilities: keeping wet guest areas safer, more comfortable and easier to maintain. Aqua Tile offers a practical solution for high-traffic wet environments. Their aquatic surfacing products are designed to provide a more comfortable, slip-resistant and durable surface for areas where traditional materials can become hot, slick or difficult to maintain. Aqua Tile's surfacing solutions are designed for aquatic environments such as pool decks, splash pads, water park walkways, locker rooms and other wet-use areas. With a focus on durability, slip resistance, comfort and visual appeal, Aqua Tile helps operators address both guest-facing improvements and behind-the-scenes maintenance concerns. For P2:3 Consulting, the partnership reflects a continued commitment to connecting water park owners and operators with high-quality companies that bring meaningful value to the industry. COURTESY P2:3 CONSULTING

IAAPA working with FAA on drone-free airspace proposal

WASHINGTON D.C. — The **Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)** took a significant step recently by publishing a proposed rule that would allow amusement parks and other eligible facilities to formally petition for drone-free airspace above their properties. This is something the amusement industry has been pushing for since **Congress** first directed the FAA to create this process back in 2016. A decade later, the rule is finally moving.

Unauthorized drones over crowded facilities aren't a hypothetical. They've disrupted operations, threatened guest safety and complicated everything from fireworks shows to aerial entertainment. This rule creates a formal, permanent pathway for eligible facilities to apply for restricted airspace, a meaningful tool that has not existed previously.

Congress explicitly named key parts of the attraction industry as eligible for these protections, alongside energy infrastructure, oil refineries and state prisons.

The proposed framework, however, has raised real questions for the amusement industry. IAAPA's Public Affairs team has reviewed the full proposal and identified provisions that could significantly affect which facilities qualify, what airspace they can protect and how the process works in practice. The team at IAAPA plans to share more in the coming weeks — breaking down the key provisions and preparing this network to weigh-in.

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June meeting held by Pennsylvania ride safety advisory board

AT: B. Derek Shaw
bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Representatives from the amusement industry, along with community volunteers selected at large, met at the **Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture** headquarters in early June for a quarterly meeting of the **Pennsylvania Ride Safety Advisory Board**. Input from this body is used to help the Bureau of Ride & Measurement Standards determine its course of action on each piece of equipment in the ride approval process. Typically, the options are approval, conditional approval, or table the vote for a future meeting.

There were 17 ride/equipment approvals from eight different amusement entities to come before the advisory board. Of those, 15 were approved, one was tabled until the next meeting and one had no action taken.

Chris Davis, chairman of the advisory board and deputy secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, ran the



meeting. He made a few opening comments. "With the amusement season starting, we appreciate you (advisory board members) being here. Safety is of utmost importance for the Commonwealth."

Also, right before the approvals process began, **Randall Arndt**, division supervisor, mentioned that his predecessor, **Joe Filoromo**, was in attendance in the back of the room with the general public.

(All attractions are based in Pennsylvania, unless otherwise noted.)

Amusement Devices & Manufacturing (ADM) had two rides that were approved: an Alien Invasion for **Crazy Monkey, Inc.**, a rental company in Erie, and a Firestorm for **TDK Entertainment**, Punxsutawney. This is the first time the Shaller, Iowa, manufacturer has had

equipment in Pennsylvania. TDK also gained approval for a **Visa International** mini Tagada.

Cheer Amusement, a Nanjing, China manufacturer of indoor equipment for FECs, had three approved for use at **ClimbZone** Philadelphia, which is opening soon. They included a ropes course, softplay structure and a space softplay unit. The indoor climbing and FEC also was approved for a climbing wall, manufactured by ClimbZone's parent company.

An Ultimate Play unit, manufactured by **Dreamland Playground**, also a Chinese company, was approved for use at **Ultimate Play** Doylestown.

SkyZone, Exton, received approval for a complete soft play structure. The equipment was manufactured by **Global Fun Sports**, another indoor playground company, based in Poland. They also were approved for three items from their parent company, SkyZone: air court, warrior course and a trampoline court. The court has various elements, including dodgeball, drop zone and a main court.

Lakeland Orchard & Cidery in Jermyn is expanding its amusement operations with the addition of a **Guven Rides**, 26-meter (85-foot), rim-



During the June meeting of the Pennsylvania ride safety advisory board, TDK entertainment received permission to operate a Visa International Mini Tagada ride similar to this one exhibited by Rides 4 U during IAAPA Expo 2025. COURTESY RIDES 4 U

drive Ferris wheel. The manufacturer is based in Turkey. The orchard is expanding its agritainment offerings, which already include a train ride (self-manufactured), an **Eli Bridge** Scrambler, **Allan Herschell** carousel and Jumbo Jumper air pillows.

A Playport unit, manufactured by **Qilong Amusement Company**, Zhejiang, China, was approved for **Joyland Club**, Oxford Valley Mall, Langhorne.

A ropes course was approved for **Fun City Adventure Park**, an FEC in York. It was manufactured by **Sviya Group**, a Chinese company.

A launch slide, manufactured by **Slick**

Slides, Phoenix, Arizona, was "tabled" until the next meeting. Slated for SkyZone Exton, the attraction currently has stairs that are not of uniform size. They are more of a triangular landing area, a platform for loitering. Also, the advisory board directed them to install handrails in these areas with elevation changes.

The item where "no action" was taken was for **Dino-Cars**, a German company that specializes in go-karts and trampolines. Their pedal cars can be used in a number of applications. There are four types: junior, twin, quad and Americana. Depending on the use, approval may not be needed. If the cars are on a defined course, approval would be needed. No amusement entity submitted for them. The manufacturer was being proactive,

Upcoming dates for the quarterly ride safety advisory board meetings for the rest of 2026 include September 23 and December 8. All meetings start at 10 a.m, lobby conference room, Department of Agriculture, 2301 North Cameron Street, Harrisburg.

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Safety is a continuous journey

As **Knoebels Amusement Resort** celebrates its 100th anniversary, we asked fourth-generation owner **Brian Knoebel** to reflect on the practices that have helped sustain the park's long-standing commitment to safety, operations and maintenance. His answer points to a lesson that applies across the attractions industry: safety is never a destination. It is a continuous journey.

Over the years, rides, standards, technology, training methods and guest expectations have evolved dramatically. The parks and operators that endure are those willing to evolve alongside them. For Knoebels, one of the keys to longevity has been a commitment to never becoming complacent and never assuming they have all the answers.

Experience matters. But curiosity is essential.

That mindset is one all operators can learn from. Knoebels has spent 100 years learning, and, as Brian Knoebel shared, they have no intention of stopping. A major part of that learning has come from actively seeking outside perspectives. For many years, **Avery Wheelock** and the team at **Worldwide Safety**

Group have conducted annual independent ride inspections. Knoebels also utilizes annual operational and maintenance audits through **International Ride Training**, along with yearly risk-management reviews and data analysis from **Haas & Wilkerson Insurance**.

These outside evaluations help identify trends, uncover blind spots and strengthen operations. Most importantly, they challenge teams to move beyond "this is how we've always done it" and toward "how can we do this even better?"

Training and continuing education are equally important. **Tony Claassen** has been instrumental in encouraging Knoebels team members to attend AIMS programs and pursue ongoing education. The park has participated in and hosted **PACE** programs for more than three decades, regularly attends **IAAPA** Expo in Orlando and the **IISF** Super Extravaganza ad Trade Show in Gibsonton, Florida, and continues to learn from manufacturers, regulators, consultants and industry peers.

Inside the operation, communication keeps

safety at the forefront. Weekly ride maintenance meetings bring teams together to discuss inspections, projects, concerns, manufacturer updates, lessons learned and proactive improvements. Those conversations help ensure safety remains a daily focus, not simply a seasonal checklist.

Knoebels has also long supported industry-wide safety efforts. **Dick Knoebel** served on the committee with **Gary Chubb** and **Jack Silar** that helped develop Pennsylvania's Amusement Ride Safety Act, reflecting the belief that shared knowledge and stronger standards benefit everyone.

Ultimately, though, inspections, audits and training only succeed because of people. Knoebels' maintenance professionals, operators, supervisors and managers take pride in their work and understand that every inspection, repair and decision helps protect the trust families have placed in the park for generations. After 100 years, Knoebels is proud of its history. But its greatest lesson may be this: longevity is earned by learning, improving and recommitting to safety every day.

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

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SeaWorld summer camps provide career inspiration for teens

AT: Susan Storey
Special to Amusement Today

ORLANDO — Finding the right summer camp for kids during the summer months can be a challenge for parents. While most camps are aimed at grade school-aged children, **SeaWorld Orlando** provides camp experiences for teens through their senior year of high school. These camps are curated to both educate and inspire campers.

“SeaWorld is committed to inspiring the next generation of animal advocates, scientists and conservationists at every stage of their development,” shared **Stephanie Bechara**, director of communications, SeaWorld Orlando. “Our camp programs begin as early as pre-school age and continue all the way through high school, allowing campers to grow with us year after year. As participants get older, the experiences become increasingly more immersive and

SeaWorld’s summer day camps welcome kids from pre-school age through senior year in high school.

Teen camps provide a glimpse into career paths at the park, including animal husbandry and ride engineering.
COURTESY SEAWORLD

hands-on, evolving from animal discovery and exploration to marine science, conservation and career-focused learning.”

SeaWorld’s high school camp experiences focus on providing hands-on activities that combine learning with, in a word, work. “Our middle and high school campers participate in activities such as fish preparation,” Bechara explained. “They learn how our animal care teams prepare daily diets for SeaWorld’s animals, including portioning, measurement and preparation.”

High school age campers also participate in activities, including mock swim



test, assist with stingray habitat cleanings and take penguin ice walks.

“While younger campers focus on animal encounters and behind-the-scenes discussions, teens dive deeper into what it means to care for and work with marine animals,” Bechara explained. “Today’s campers will be tomorrow’s leaders in theme parks, zoos and aquariums.”

Corey Gabriel, one

of SeaWorld’s senior animal trainers, agrees. “I truly credit my summers at SeaWorld Careers Camp for the reason I was able to make my childhood dream come true. The dolphin trainers and other zoological specialists taught me everything that was required to become a trainer, including what degree I should pursue, and what experience I needed on my resume,”

she said. “Their guidance was instrumental, and my care today might not have been possible without my SeaWorld camp experience.

“One of the most rewarding aspects of the program is seeing the full-circle impact it can have,” Gabriel continued. “We have team members who first visited the park as campers and left inspired to pursue careers in zoology, education, conservation and other fields. For many participants, camp is more than just a summer experience; it’s a glimpse into the future.”

“Our teen programs are specialized,” Bechara added. “For example, Marine Biology 101 focuses on marine science, conservation and animal care, while Thrill Seekers explores the engineering and operations side of SeaWorld’s attractions.”

Aiden Edmonds start-

▶ **See CAMPS, page 55**

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AlignOps BusyBusy rolls out an all-new module improving consistent heat safety

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

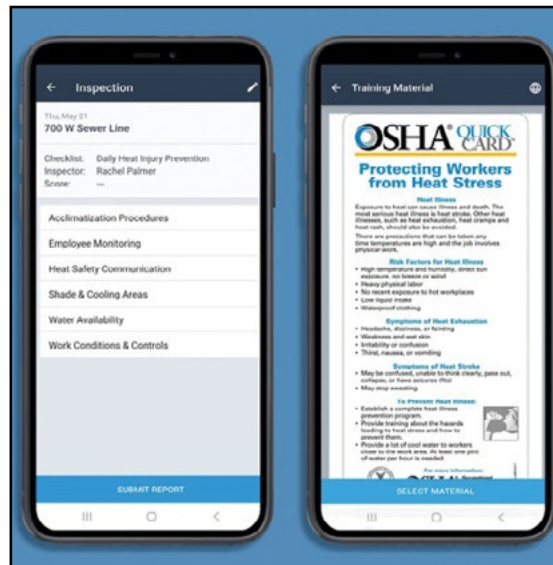
INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. — **AlignOps BusyBusy**, a company that provides simple, mobile-friendly time tracking and GPS-enabled crew management for construction companies, has recently rolled out a new safety module to help contractors ensure heat-specific job site safety and inspection readiness.

The new module was introduced in May of this year and is currently being used primarily in construction-related fields such as general contractors, roofing, asphalt, paving and other trades that work extensively outdoors. Although the company doesn't have any users in the attractions industry, it is reaching into other fields, said **Jim Wahl, Wahl Marketing Communications**, working with BusyBusy.

This brand-new tool helps contractors ensure that their safety programs are effective and **OSHA** inspection-ready, creating even more consistent safety processes.

"As OSHA tightens heat-related enforcement, companies are taking heat-related issues more seriously, and that's where the BusyBusy Safety comes in," Wahl said. "It helps users develop heat-related safety processes specific to their industry and situations, and then monitor, track and store all the information in a single site, simplifying compliance while enhancing safety."

This new module helps users create heat-specific job site inspections, create daily heat safety job safety analysis (JSA), document water and shade station checks, encourage employees to report heat hazards immediately, deliver and



The new AlignOps BusyBusy safety module will help contractors ensure heat-specific job site safety and inspections readiness. COURTESY BUSYBUSY

track heat safety training, track heat-related incidents and near misses, assign and track corrective actions and centralize everything so they are always inspection-ready.

Having already a top-rated workforce management and timecard app, AlignOps BusyBusy was able to fast-track the development of a comprehensive safety module. Safety features now available to BusyBusy users include incident reporting, safety observations and JSAs. Offered within the time-tracking app, these safety features enhance compliance and ease of use for the field team.

•alignops.com

►CAMPS Continued from page 54

ed attending SeaWorld Camp the summer before kindergarten. It has become a summer tradition for him and several of his friends. Now in high school, he still looks forward to the fulfilling week. "I return to camp because of the counselors," he said. "Each year we do more things. This summer we dissected a squid and they talked to us about what to study in college. I really like how they motivate us, and I hope to be a camp counselor some day."

Education and inspiration are shared values at SeaWorld's three parks. **Busch Gardens Williamsburg** and Orlando's sister park, **Busch Gardens Tampa Bay**, also offer day camps for kids through twelfth grade.

The Tampa park even features an exclusive week-long Resident Camp that includes overnight accommodations in the park's onsite dormitory.

"Over my 23-year career working for SeaWorld and **Discovery Cove**, I've had the honor of caring for dolphins, penguins, sloths, and otters," Gabriel concluded. "I truly credit my summers at SeaWorld Careers Camp for the reason I was able to make my childhood dream come true. SeaWorld camp is definitely the place to start if you are someone wanting to pursue a career working with animals."

Corey Gabriel credits her experiences as a teen SeaWorld camper for providing her earliest inspiration and guidance to pursue her dream of becoming an animal trainer for the park. COURTESY SEAWORLD



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MOBILE MIDWAYS

▶ Kolmax introducing new, portable attraction — page 64 / 2026 Tennessee Strawberry Festival — page 66

El Dorado County Fair packs days with fun, increased attendance

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

PLACERVILLE, Calif. — The El Dorado County Fair, held annually in Placerville, California, wrapped up its 2026 year on June 21 with officials feeling tired but believing the final attendance tally would show there were more fairgoers this year than last.

The four-day event, that started June 18, really packs in abundance of entertainment and attractions everyday.

“The weather was great this year,” said Amanda Koch, fair spokesperson. “We don’t have final attendance figures for this year, but we do believe we were up from last year. We had 84,000 visitors here in 2025.”

Paul Maurer Shows provided the midway this year, bringing in 22 rides to the fair, said Paul Maurer.

WG Concessions introduced a couple of new food stands. One was a loaded



The El Dorado County Fair, Placerville, California, ran from June 18 to 21 this year and, by all considerations, officials there feel they topped the 84,000 visitors who attended last year. Paul Maurer Shows supplied the midway, including a Freak Out attraction (above left). The provider moved its Expo Wheel (above right) into the kiddie area for 2026. COURTESY THE EL DORADO COUNTY FAIR

baked potato stand and the other was an unlimited free refill juice drink stand shaped like a boat.

“We also did a facelift on our own concessions,” Koch said, adding they gave them more of a western theme. “We also updated our bar. It was called Tiki Bar, but we themed this in a western style.”

It was renamed Old Hangtown Saloon.

Some of the fair’s activities included the Junior Livestock Show and the Junior Livestock Auction. There is the Pee Wee Rodeo, Mutton Bustin’ and the Studebaker Wheelbarrow Rodeo. The fair held a Truck and Steam Tractor Pull and an abundance of competitive exhibits. The latter included fine arts, crafts, clothing and sewing, canned and dried

foods, flowers and plants, minerals and mining, photography and more.

Grounds entertainment included the Racing Pigs, Jeremy the Juggler, Trixie the Magical Clown, Uncle Sam and Miss Liberty Stilt Walkers from Animal Cracker Conspiracy, Circus Imagination and Clown College and Freckle Farms Petty Zoo and Pony Rides.

“We also had camel rides,” Koch said. “This is the second year for that and it has been popular.”

Koch said she took a camel ride last year.

“It was bumpy; that is the way I describe it,” she said. “On Father’s Day, we had our Family Look-A-Like Contest. That one is always fun.”

Maurer has played the El Dorado County Fair for five years. He said the fair has been good for his company. His show plays Idaho, Montana, Washington, Oregon and California.

“We begin our season in February and play spots until the middle of November,” Maurer said.

The year has been going well, so far, even though he was not able to get any of his H-2B Visa workers for this season. The H-2B Visa allows U.S. employers to hire foreign nationals for temporary, non-agricultural jobs. The work must be seasonal, intermittent, a one-time occurrence or a peak-load need. It is primarily used in industries like landscaping, hospitality, construction and seafood processing. Many mobile amusement companies also use employees from the H-2B Visa program.

“I am missing a lot of key people,” Maurer said. “I have had some of these workers for 22 years. So, it has been tough.”

He said the impact has

▶ See EL DORADO, page 58



The Pee Wee Rodeo (above left) and Racing Pigs (above right) are always a big hit for the event. COURTESY THE EL DORADO COUNTY FAIR



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North Carolina State Fair Director G. Kent Yelverton stands in the banquet room on the second floor of the new Midway Event Center on the fairgrounds (above left). Finishing touches are being put on the building in preparation for its October opening. A full-service bar will be located in the event room on the second floor of the event center (above right). AT/RON GUSTAFSON

North Carolina State Fair is poised to open a new Midway Event Center in October

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Midway Event Center at the **North Carolina State Fairgrounds** is in its final stages of construction and poised to open for the October 15 to 25 state fair.

Fair Director **G. Kent Yelverton** afforded *Amusement Today* an exclusive media tour of the multi-million-dollar, 30,000-square-foot facility and pointed out the many amenities the year-round structure will offer.

"We will have eight permanent vendors downstairs with food and beverage service," he said. "Four additional spaces will be offered on rotation, primarily during the fair. Those will have window service on the back side of the building, which has terraced landscaping and a stairway leading down to the event center."

The permanent vendors will tap into utilities and ventilation systems already installed in the new building.

"They will supply their own equipment and build it out from what is provided here," Yelverton explained. "A large cooler room will be shared by the vendors and, again, they will tap into the utilities but supply

their own refrigerators and freezers."

Seating will be available on both floors of the building as well as the veranda, which overlooks the main midway area on the 344-acre fairgrounds. Restrooms are located on both floors, as well as elevator service.

The spacious second floor features a banquet hall and event room, which will be offered for private rentals. Full-service bars are on both levels.

"The great thing, too, is that we have plenty of parking right here on the fairgrounds, outside of the 11-day state fair," he said. "This will be the ideal venue for weddings, ceremonies and other celebrations."

Yelverton was excited about the decor that will be installed and said he was currently shopping for tables and chairs to fill out the seating areas.

The Midway Event Center replaces what was known as "restaurant row," an aging structure that, for years, housed several lunch stands that operated during the state fair. That facility was demolished after the 2023 fair.

—Ron Gustafson

► EL DORADO Continued from page 57

led him to carry fewer rides to dates and play fewer dates.

"This past spring was the first spring in 22 years that we haven't played two spots a week," Maurer said.

But, they have been able to hire some very good workers, he said.

"We have had to train, train, train," he said. "I have a very good group of workers that have been with me for a long time."

This group has worked hard on the training aspect.

"I am getting calls from all over the country, too, right now, from people wanting to work, so that is good," he said. "And I am getting a lot of young workers."

Along with everything else the El Dorado County Fair has to offer, it also has a long lineup of musical entertainment everyday. Koch said they had the Spazmatics return this year and the Outlaw Mariachi band was on hand as well.

"The mariachi band took the year off last year, but returned this year," she said.

Other musical performers include acts such as The Tritons, Jimmy and the Deadlies, **Michelle Lambert**, Brisco County, Rod Crew Band, **Tony Quinn**, Smokin' Violets, **Shauna Lee** and the Hired Guns, Cadillac Rodeo, Southband and North Forty.

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Patriotic stilt walkers were part of this year's entertainment at the fair. COURTESY THE EL DORADO COUNTY FAIR



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Calaveras County Fair and Jumping Frog Jubilee was hopping

AT: B. Derek Shaw

bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

ANGELS CAMP, Calif. — [The fair enjoyed] “nice spring weather, [however, it was] a little windy on Sunday afternoon,” said Laurie Giannini, CEO, Calaveras County Fair & Jumping Frog Jubilee.

“The weather was good. It was moderate and not real hot,” said George Dolivo III, owner of Classic Amusement, LLC, the ride company.

When all was said and done, 45,000 fairgoers went through the turnstiles. According to the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), the economic impact of the fairgrounds is 5.2 million dollars annually.

Tied in with the 250th anniversary of the United States, the theme this year was “Let Frogs Sing and Freedom Ring.”

One of the longest-running fairs in California, this four-day event draws participants from towns not only all around the country, but also all around the world. It is located in the beautiful rolling foothills of California’s Gold Country, just outside the quaint Gold Rush town of Angels Camp, in Northern California. The Calaveras County Fair and Jumping Frog Jubilee commemorate the story that launched writer, essayist and humorist Mark Twain’s career.

Classic Amusement, based in Hayward, California, brought five spectacular rides, nine major and 12 kiddie ones. This also included 12 games and three food stands. New to that spot were a 1001 Nachts (A.R.M. Rock Star), a haunted dark ride (Pat Boyle), a Battach Zero Gravity and for the first time a carousel (Chance Rides). “It actually did really well,” said Dolvio. Typically, the carousel is used on the rental side of their business.

A few of the more



popular rides included their Wadkins Expo wheel, Wisdom Himalya, two fun houses, Jumanji (Boyle) and Beach Party (Owen Trailers).

The fairgrounds are very mountainous, with two separate ride midways. The majors are located on a flat spot at the top, while a quarter mile away at the bottom, on another flat area, are the rides and attractions for the younger set.

“It’s a hard midway to play,” said Dolvio. He described the setup as steep and brutal; the location is “unbelievable.”

Classic Amusement has not received its H2B workers yet, relying on 50 Americans to handle both its carnival and rental operations. “My son (George IV) has literally touched every single ride we own at every spot we go to,” said Dolvis. The season started for them in February. “80% of our bunkhouses are new. I stay in a lower Z bunkhouse, a 6 by 6 cubicle.”

While Giannini did not disclose the ride midway revenue, she did say it was “above expectations.”

Dolvio had a positive experience with Giannini and her staff. “Laurie is a great fair manager. It’s a beautiful setting, up in the mountains, making for a good community. The people are good.”

When asked about the fairs’ experience with Classic Amusement, Giannini said, “They are wonderful.”

During the off-season, Classic Amusement stores



Classic Amusement brought five spectacular rides, nine major and 12 kiddie ones to the Calaveras County Fair and Jumping Frog Jubilee. For the first time ever, the fair had a carousel (below left). At night, the Wadkins Expo wheel is ablaze with lights (below right). COURTESY KELLY JO JONES PHOTOGRAPHY



90% of its rides indoors, utilizing a 30,000-square-foot warehouse as the main building. Dolvio feels his rides are the best-looking ones in the state. “They are immaculate.”

Special promotions at the Calaveras County Fair included advanced ticket sales, along with a senior day and a kids’ day.

On the first day, First 5 Calaveras brought Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library to the fair. Families with children ages birth to 5 were able to stop by and sign up to receive free books mailed directly to their home every month. Since 2023, this program has delivered more than 25,000 books to Calaveras children — helping build a lifelong love of reading, one story at a time.

The \$20,000 advertising budget was spread across numerous media platforms, including television,

radio, newspaper, special appearances and social media.

A new and unusual snack item at the fair included alligator jerky.

This year, a new stage was added inside one of the halls, devoted to family entertainment. Also, the very first junior welding competition was held with over 20 young craftsmen and women participating in the event.

Entertainment included country singer Pam Tillis, a rodeo and a demolition derby, which was held on the last evening of the fair.

Of course, what sets this celebration apart from others is their jumping frog jubilee. The backstory centers around Mark Twain, a key figure in American literature who lived in a cabin south of Angels Camp. Legend has it that Twain overheard a story in a local tavern that inspired his first published short

story in 1865, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*. The City of Angels Camp held the first modern frog jump in 1928. The event became part of the annual fair in the 1930s.

The frog jumping competition ran all four days of the fair, with various frog jumping heats held daily. The Top 50 frogs who jumped the farthest qualified for the International Frog Jump Grand Finals, which are held annually on the last afternoon of the jubilee. The current world record was set in 1986 by Rosie the Ribeter. Rosie jumped 21 feet, 5 ¾ inches. The cash prize for breaking the world record is \$20,000.

A committee of volunteers works year-round on the jubilee.

Giannini summed up the fair and jubilee in five words. “It was a great fair.”

The 134th edition comes around May 13-16, 2027.

•frogtown.org



MIDWAYSCENE

AT: B. Derek Shaw
bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

Blake Allen is the new CEO of the **Alaska State Fair**, Palmer, succeeding **Jeff Curtis**, who recently took a position with the **Deschutes County Fair & Expo Center**, Redmond, Oregon.

Allen brings nearly two decades of leadership experience in hospitality, retail operations, event management, and large-scale venue management. He most recently returned to **Denali Park Village** in interior Alaska as lodging operations manager in January 2026. Prior to that, he had worked multiple seasons at **Denali National Park** and **Glacier National Park**, Montana. His career also includes serving as a district manager for **ALDI**, overseeing multi-unit operations across five U.S. states, and experience in event management and security as a regional manager with **Stadium People**.

Jason Ortiz, fair board, noted that Allen is well-suited to guide the fair into its next chapter. His background in large-scale event environments and commitment to guest experience are expected to support the Fair's continued growth and innovation. "His operational expertise and commitment to guest experience will help guide the Fair into its next chapter."

"I am honored to join the Alaska State Fair and serve the community in this new capacity," said Allen. "The fair is a treasured tradition in Alaska, and I look forward to working with the team, partners and community members to continue building on its strong legacy."

The 2026 fair returns August 21 to September 7, with **Giant Wheel Amusements** handling the ride midway.

The **Kansas State Fair** is offering a first-time payment plan option for concert tickets this year, which allows fairgoers to spread payments over multiple months at no additional cost.

"We've had some people saying, 'Wow, I'd love to go, but I can't afford it right now,'" Kansas State Fair General Manager **Bryan Schulz** told the *Salina Post*. "This way, it gives you the opportunity to pay it over the next few months."

The payment option will be available for the **Jo Dee Messina** concert on September 13 and for previously announced concerts as well.

Ongoing renovation work continues inside **Bison Arena**, which will create approximately 13,000 square feet of usable space for exhibits and events, including the 250 Museum display.

The fair is also continuing fundraising efforts for restoration work on the historic **Ye Old Mill** attraction. Schulz said planned improvements include canal repairs, updated boats and other

aesthetic upgrades while preserving the ride's historic character.

"The old mill has been around the hutch (Hutchinson) area for many, many years. (It) was located down on South Main for a few years and then was moved up to the Kansas State fair in 1915," said Schulz. "Since then, it has been a very iconic piece to our fair."

The 2026 Kansas State Fair runs Sept. 11-20 in Hutchinson. **North American Midway Entertainment** is the carnival operator.

This year will mark the fifth year in a row that the **Maryland State Fair**, Timonium, has operated three weekends — 13 days versus 12 consecutive days. The dates are August 27 to 30; September 3 to 7; and September 10 to 13. This opportunity came about when the **York, Pa. State Fair** in 2020 moved from 10 days after Labor Day to a late July schedule, one that **Deggeller Attractions** was unable to accommodate, due to previous scheduling. **Strates Shows** now plays the Pennsylvania fair, returning July 24 to August 2.

"Dream Big" is the theme of the 145th Maryland State Fair with various patriotic-themed competitions, prizes, strolling entertainers, a veteran's showcase and more to help celebrate America's 250th.

"The Maryland State Fair has always been a place where Marylanders can come together to showcase their talents, hard work and passion through friendly competition," said fair General Manager **David Gordon**.

"Our goal is to provide a safe, enjoyable, and family-friendly experience where exhibitors and fairgoers can make lasting memories at the Maryland State Fair. To help maintain that environment for everyone attending, we will continue our policies of no admission after 9 p.m. and requiring anyone under the age of 18 to be accompanied by an adult age 21 or older," said Gordon.

Deggeller, the Stuart, Florida carnival provider, then heads south to Doswell, Virginia, to play the **State Fair of Virginia**, September 25 to October 4.

The **Appalachian Fair** in Gray, Tennessee, is celebrating its 100th anniversary this season. Part of that celebration includes expanding the fair from six days to eight. It returns August 22 to 29 with **Drew Exposition** handling the ride midway.

Since 1926, the Appalachian Fair has celebrated the heritage, agriculture and community spirit of the Appalachian Highlands. What began as a small community gathering in northeast Tennessee has grown into one of the region's largest annual events, welcoming more than 200,000 fairgoers each year.

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Two giant wheels receive new EWorks Pro light packages, launch new displays on the same May evening



WILDWOOD N.J. and PIGEON FORGE, Tenn. — The switch was thrown in mid-May on spectacular new light packages on giant Ferris wheels at Morey's Piers, Wildwood, New Jersey, and The Island, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. More than 300,000 LEDs make up the display on the 156-foot wheel — from Vekoma Rides Manufacturing of The Netherlands — at Morey's (above left), while The Great Smokey Mountain Wheel from Chance Rides in Wichita, Kansas, at The Island (above right) has more than 400,000 LEDs on its more than 200-foot-tall structure. The light packages were provided by EWorks Pro Lighting of Winter Park, Florida. "Our software allows for easy light show creation," said EWorks CEO Anders Johansson. "The first video we imported into the Morey's Pier light show and pattern generator software was a waving American flag." About 16.7 million vibrant colors are produced by the newest-generation of LEDs, Johansson noted. COURTESY MOREY'S PIERS, THE ISLAND

Levent Lunapark, Fantasy Rides represented by Ride Trader in U.S.A.

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

MONROE, Ga. — Bryan Waller, owner of Ride Trader LLC, which represents amusement ride supplier Levent Lunapark in the U.S., said production remains steady at the manufacturing facility in Ankara, Turkey.

Two Ferris wheels are currently being constructed, as well as a portable spinning coaster.

"Both wheels — a 22- and 33-meter — will be ready for delivery in September," he noted. "Our standard wheels in those sizes come with open-air gondolas, with enclosed ones as an option. We can deliver any of the three rides at IAAPA [Expo] or Gigtown."

The coaster will stand 43 feet high with eight four-passenger cars traversing 1,377 feet of track. The ride will transport on five trailers for the mobile industry and may be installed as a permanent attraction at parks.

Levent produces a variety of spectacular, family and kiddie rides for the amusement industry.

"I also just signed on to represent Fantasy Rides Industry (Villafranca Padovana, Italy) and their line of portable walk-through attractions such as mirror mazes and funhouses," Waller added. "I also broker used equipment."

Carnival operators Talley Amusements, Fort Worth, Texas, and Powers & Thomas Midway Entertainment, Wilmington, North Carolina, both took delivery of new Levent



Gondola Ferris wheel components (above) take shape at the Levent Lunapark manufacturing facility. Spinning coaster cars are also awaiting deployment at the company's Ankara, Turkey, facility (below). COURTESY RIDE TRADER

gondola wheels last year.

Talley's is a 33-meter version with 24 collapsible enclosed gondolas for a capacity of 144 passengers.

"It has PLC (programmable logic controller) operations to increase capacity," Waller said. "It currently moves on six trailers, and they are working to get it down to five."

Powers & Thomas also debuted a 22-meter wheel last year.

Levent has also supplied rides for COTALand Theme Park in Austin, Texas, which will host the 2026 Golden Ticket Awards, presented by *Amusement Today*, in September.

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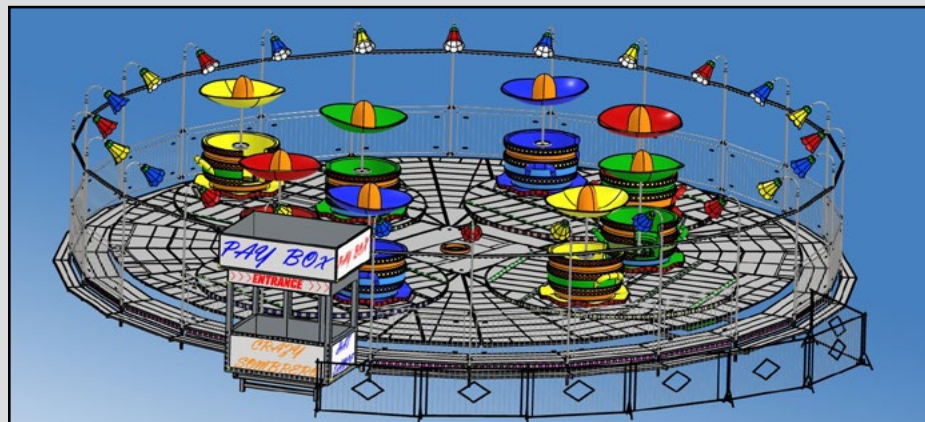
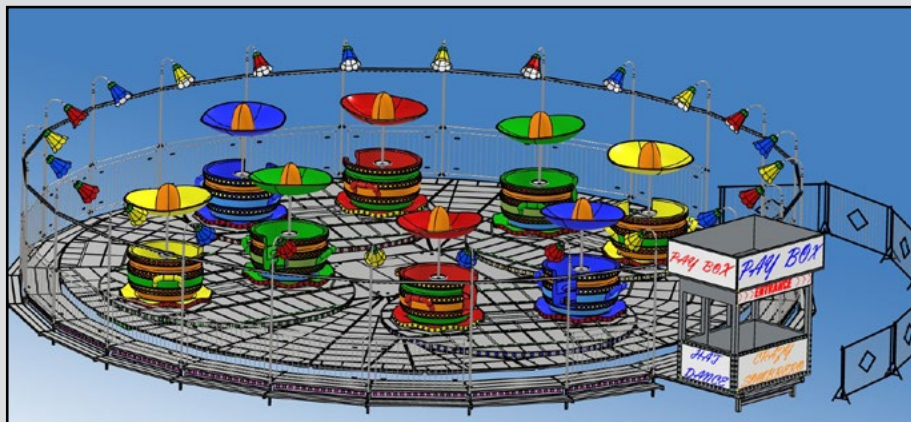
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Winter Park, FL

Kolmax is introducing new, portable family attraction



PRAGUE — Kolmax Plus of Ostrava, Czech Republic, has a new family attraction in development called Crazy Sombrero. The platform ride will accommodate up to 48 passengers, with an anticipated setup of four hours with just two people. The ride will be transported on a single trailer. Kolmax Plus told *Amusement Today* it expects to showcase the new attraction next February at the International Independent Showmen's Foundation (IISF) Super Trade Show & Extravaganza in Riverview, Florida. The company produces the popular Flying Elephants, Spinner and teacup rides, as well as other attractions. COURTESY KOLMAX PLUS

2026 San Angelo Stock Show and Rodeo a success in all categories

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

SAN ANGELO, Texas — Even though the weather didn't completely cooperate this year during the **San Angelo Stock Show and Rodeo**, San Angelo, Texas, held April 3 to 19, officials there deemed the event a success.

The 2026 event includes PRCA and WPRA competitions as well as an abundance of youth livestock sale categories. The **Dairy Queen Midway and Carnival** was powered this year by **Amusement Midway Providers (AMP)** and continued to be a popular highlight.

"We were extremely pleased with the success of the 2026 San Angelo Stock Show and Rodeo," said the event's **Josh Hilton**. "The energy all week long was incredible, and the support from our fans, sponsors, volunteers and community continues to make San Angelo one of the premier rodeos in the PRCA. It is also exciting to continue building on our reputation as one of the top-paying rodeos in professional rodeo."

Hilton said the event welcomed approximately 70,000 fans for the rodeo performances alone. That figure does not include the tens of thousands who attended the midway carnival and stock show activities. He figures those numbers push overall attendance to 135,000 plus.



Amusement Midway Providers powered the Dairy Queen Midway and Carnival for the 2026 San Angelo Stock Show and Rodeo. The carnival brought in approximately 30 rides with some new attractions in the mix. COURTESY SAN ANGELO RODEO

"Attendance was up from 2025," he said, "although it is not a record year. The economy and weather played roles in the numbers.

"We saw strong engagement across the board, particularly in concessions, merchandise, VIP experiences and the carnival midway," he continued. "Fans are looking for a full entertainment experience, and we continue to see families spending more time on the grounds beyond just the rodeo performances."

The San Angelo Rodeo inaugural event was held in 1934. Although rodeo has changed over the years, San

Angelo is committed to the PRCA and WPRA-sanctioned event that is open to cowboys and cowgirls across the world who are members or permit holders of their respective organizations. It is held in the **CRC Roofers Coliseum** on the San Angelo Fairgrounds and produced by the **San Angelo Rodeo Association**.

The rodeo features stock events such as bull riding, saddle bronc riding, and bareback riding, as well as timed events like team roping, tie-down roping, steer wrestling and women's barrel racing.

Junior Livestock Shows include shows in categories

such as market lamb show, breeding sheep show, ewe lamb futurity, wool and mohair fleece show, market steer show, breeding heifer show, longhorn show, market goat show, Angora goat show, Angora wether futurity, Boer goat show, Texas stars wether doe show and sale, market barrow show, breeding gilt show, stars gilt show and sale, market rabbits and commercial and fancy rabbits.

Other junior events outside of the livestock include agricultural public speaking, agricultural mechanics, food challenge, robotics -agrobotics and

inventions, sheep and goat skill-a-thon, equine skill-a-thon and beef skill-a-thon.

The AMP offered approximately 30 rides this year on the Dairy Queen Midway and Carnival.

"There were several crowd favorites throughout the run, and the carnival partner did introduce some newer attractions to the event," Hilton said. "From what we observed, the larger thrill rides and family attractions were especially popular with guests."

Hilton said event officials continued enhancing the overall fan experience with improvements in production, entertainment elements and scheduling efficiencies.

"We also focused heavily on creating a more engaging atmosphere both inside and outside the arena, including expanded social and hospitality experiences for fans and sponsors," he said.

After a full day of rodeo, livestock and midway activities, the San Angelo Stock Show and Rodeo invited guests to the Buffalo Social Club, which has become a great place to sit back, have a cold beer and enjoy the entertainment, which is free with grounds admission. This year's performances were given by **Grant Gilbert, Sterling Elza, Bottomland, Austin Meade, Atlas, Dalton Torres, Hayden Baker, Case Hardin and David Lewis**.

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Record crowds enjoy the 2026 Tennessee Strawberry Festival

Cruise-in, parade and carnival draw big for the event

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

DAYTON, Tenn. — Record crowds converged on this small city to take in all of the activities and entertainment during the 79th Annual Tennessee Strawberry Festival.

"We had a ton of day-trippers, and hotels were pretty much at capacity on Friday and Saturday," said Alex Fine, director of the Rhea County Department of Tourism, which helped promote the May 5 to 9 event.

Though she said she was waiting for official numbers to be released, Fine told *Amusement Today* this year's festival was significantly busier than in previous years.

"Attendance was very high — a record — and there were probably around 50,000 people here compared to about 40,000 last year," she noted. "Hotels reported guests from throughout the Southeast and as far away as New Jersey."

Initially presented by the Dayton Lions Club in 1947 as a one-day event, the five-day festival is now operated by the Dayton Chamber of Commerce along with an all-volunteer committee.

While fresh strawberries were at the heart of the celebration, Fine said the largest crowds were on hand for the Friday cruise-in,



The midway of the 79th Annual Tennessee Strawberry Festival featured rides and attractions presented by Fun Time Shows. The company's Carousel (below left) provided a colorful setting in Dayton's Washington Park. The festival parade — which featured a patriotic color guard (below right) — had a record 114 units participating. COURTESY SCENE IN RHEA COUNTY



Saturday parade and carnival.

Keep growing

More than 130 classic cars and trucks roared into town for the cruise-in night, while the parade had a record 114 units participate.

"The parade is a festival favorite and draws a super huge crowd," Fine asserted. "People set up along the street hours in advance, and we had to extend the parade route this year just to spread out the crowds."

Inclement weather took its toll on Wednesday evening's Strawberry Shortcake and Faith and Family Night, but despite the rain, the festivities were held. That was the only day the festival was impacted by the weather.

A variety of contests, arts and crafts, food vendors and a Golden Berries Pageant were also on the schedule.

Live free entertainment was performed nightly

and throughout the day on Saturday. Southern rockers **The Kentucky Headhunters** headlined the entertainment Saturday night to close out the festival.

Fun in the park

Missouri-based **Fun Time Shows**, which has a multi-year contract with the festival, reported a solid run at the event.

"It's a good spot for us," said show owner **Clint Payne**. "We lost Wednesday to rain, but it was solid from there. We're off to a good start this year."

The carnival fielded more than a dozen rides in the city's Washington Park, including an Eagle 16 Ferris wheel (**Eli Bridge Co.**), Pharaohs Fury (**Chance Rides**), Round-Up (**Frank Hrubetz & Co.**), Cliff Hanger (**Battech Enterprises**), Hurricane (**Dartron**),

Tornado, Sizzler and Orient Express (**Wisdom Rides of America**), Puppy Roll and Jumbo Elephants (Sellner), carousel and flying turtles (**San Antonio Roller Works**), Loop-O-Plane and Rock-O-Plane (**Eyerly Aircraft**) and Fun Slide (**Frederiksen Industries**).

Weekday evenings featured \$35 ride wristbands. The carnival switched to ride tickets only on Saturday, which were \$1.25 each, with rides taking four to five tickets. Discount ticket packs were 22 for \$25 and 45 for \$50. Three food concessions and six games rounded out the midway.

Payne, who represents the third generation of family to own the show, had a second unit operating at the same time in Kennett, Missouri, as part of the Jaycees' BBQ Cook-Off. The carnival was founded by his grandparents, **Harold and Lorene Payne**, in the 1970s and turned over to his parents, **Kenny and Janet Payne**, in 1988. Clint Payne acquired the company in 2008.

"We just spent two and a half years going through our 1976 Round-Up," he said of the classic ride. "We took it down to nothing — pretty much everything on it is new now. Battech also went through our Hurricane, and we put newer seats on it."

Fun Time Shows services clients in Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas, Illinois, Kansas, Oklahoma and Indiana.

Already planning

"My hat is off to the chamber of commerce and planning committee," Fine emphasized. "They are already planning for next year — it's a constant thing — and it's all volunteer work. I'm super proud of this community!"

The 2027 Tennessee Strawberry Festival is slated for May 3 to 8.

•tnstrawberryfestival.com



Riders enjoyed thrills on the Orient Express roller coaster (above left) at the festival while youngsters enjoyed the turtle kiddie ride (above right). COURTESY SCENE IN RHEA COUNTY

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Tourism down on the farm: harvesting success in all 50 states

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

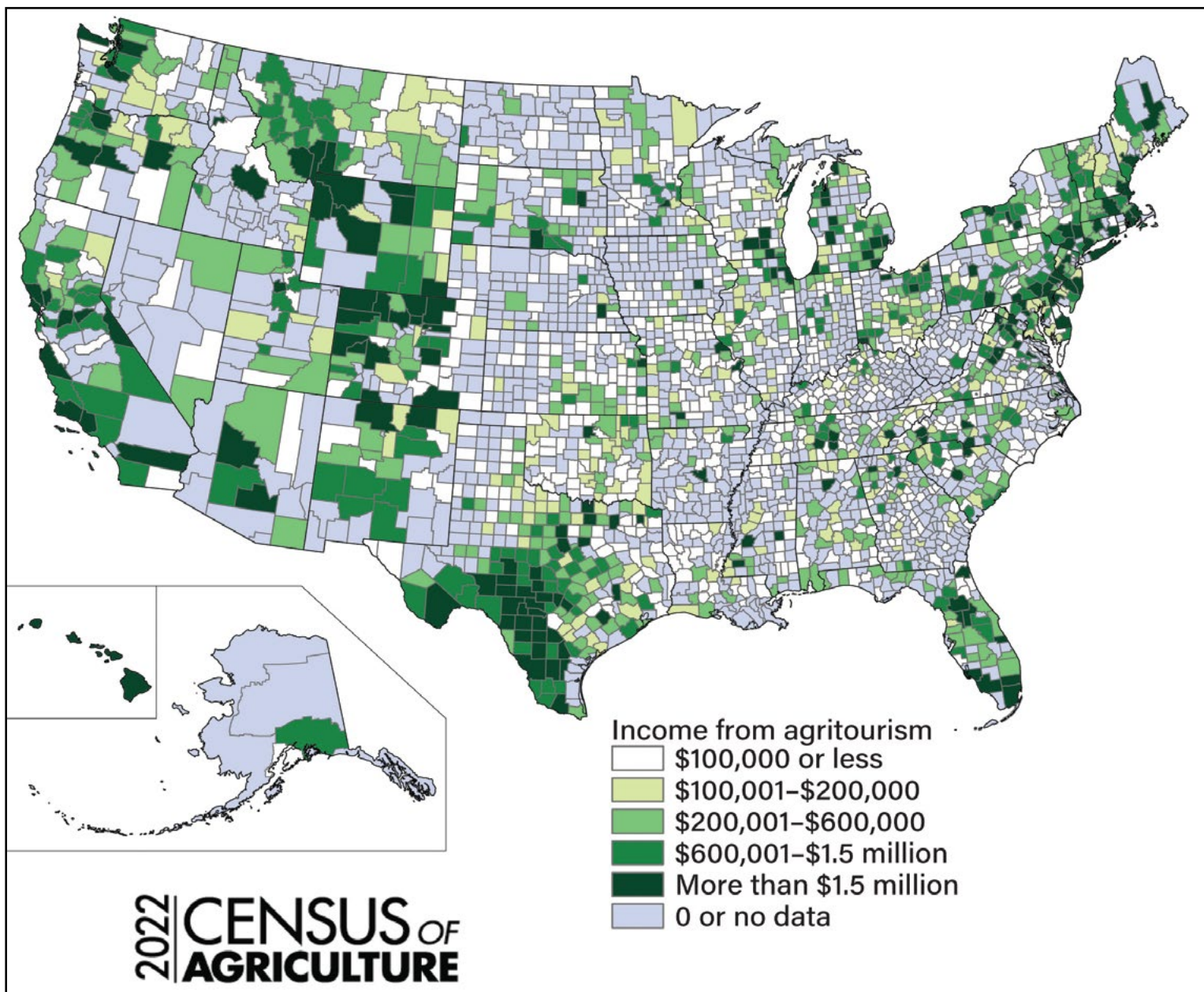
UNITED STATES — Tourism is thriving down on the farm.

Commonly known as agritourism — or in some instances agritainment — family-operated farms have become creative in providing experiences on their properties which go far beyond setting up roadside produce stands.

“Agritourism is diverse and vibrant. Our farms host a wide variety of experiences, from pick-your-own operations and seasonal festivals to corn mazes, hayrides and even unique attractions that blend agricultural education with entertainment,” **Amy Zeigler**, manager and team lead for the **Iowa Tourism Office**, told *Amusement Today (AT)*. “We’re seeing strong momentum in agritourism and excitement from visitors, with many farms offering on-site retail, events, classes, farm-to-table dinners and more.”

The trend has also become somewhat of a lifeline for those struggling with soaring operational costs to plant and bring in fall harvests.

“We’re also seeing a new generation coming back to the farm, which requires more income,” said **Suzi Spahr**, executive director of the **NAFDMA International Agritourism Association**, Indianapolis, Indiana. “Farms now need additional revenue to support more family members who are returning to farms. The income that



A map generated from 2022 census data shows agritourism income by county across the 50 states (above). A Watkins Swinger (below left) is popular with guests at Remlinger Farms. Barnyard Dance is a spinning family coaster from SBF/Visa at Bengtson’s Farm, Homer Glen, Illinois (below right). COURTESY U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COUNTY, REMLINGER FARMS, RIDES 4 U



► **FARM**

Continued from page 1B

supported original family members is not enough.”

The association represents entrepreneurial farm families that invite guests to visit farms and experience the food and fun in efforts to sustain their livelihoods. Founded in 1986, the non-profit trade association is made up of farmers, extension agents, suppliers and others.

“We average around 750 members of our organization, with virtually all family-owned operations,” Spahr explained. “There are some farm families that have chosen to have outside investments for loans or working capital, but in all cases, the family retains the majority of ownership.”

Most of the NAFDMA member farms also incorporate attractions into their operations, such as trackless trains, slides, small amusement rides and hayrides.

Spahr said the wagon rides are the most popular attraction offered by association members.

Economic impact

The economic impact of



Avery Wheelock (holding microphone) was a speaker at The MAiZE Corn Party 26 in San Antonio, Texas, where he discussed the ASTM Hayride Standard before a group of attendees. He is president of Worldwide Safety Group. COURTESY WORLDWIDE SAFETY GROUP

agritourism has expanded into all 50 states.

The United States Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service reported 57 percent of the counties across the nation generated income through agritourism, according to the latest (2022) census figures.

The census report said most of the \$1.26 billion in revenue was collected in 23 states, which accounted for a 12.4 percent increase from the previous survey.

“Actually, some farms are becoming more involved

in the agritainment industry than the farming industry. The crops generate so many dollars, but the added income from activities on the farm has, in some cases, far greater returns than just agriculture alone,” noted **Avery Wheelock**, president of **Worldwide Safety Group**, Plant City, Florida. He is an authority on amusement device inspections, operations and maintenance and is a frequent lecturer at industry gatherings.

Wheelock was a speaker earlier this year regarding

standards used to regulate agritourism farms at **The MAiZE Corn Party 26** in San Antonio, Texas. The MAiZE is an agritourism consulting firm and has designed more than 4,000 corn mazes since 1996.

Safe operation

According to Wheelock, thanks to The MAiZE group and NAFDMA, farms are being made aware of **ASTM International**, which has established standards used worldwide to improve quality, enhance safety and

facilitate trade. Many states are adopting and enforcing the ASTM standards, he noted.

“Some states are implementing inspections of farm-operated (amusement) slides, typically those that are at least 20 feet tall at the start platform. Trackless trains should have a standard coming out soon, similar to the ASTM hayride standard F3168 that is already in effect in many states,” Wheelock said of safety oversight in agritourism.

“Insurance companies and state jurisdictions are more frequently asking for engineering on homemade attractions — typically trains and slides — to catch up with the times,” he added.

The popularity of corn mazes during the harvest season also comes with related safety concerns, a topic with which Wheelock is quite familiar.

“When we go out and do a walk-through inspection for an insurance company or just as an internal audit for the owner of the farm, we are always looking for potential trip and fall hazards as well as fire risks and anything

► **See FARM, page 4B**

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This welcome center is at Roca Berry Farm in Roca, Nebraska. COURTESY ROCA BERRY FARM

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► **FARM**

Continued from page 2B

else,” Wheelock said of maze assessments. “Trips and falls are the number one claim in the insurance business.”

State oversight

He also encourages farms that want to add attractions to do some homework before investing in them.

“Many states regulate some attractions or rides, but not all. I always tell our clients to verify with the local authority having jurisdiction to see what they are supposed to register for a permit to operate,” he said. “One of my biggest concerns is the lack of inspections due to either the farm not being aware of current industry standards and best practices or

wanting to fly under the radar, so to speak.”

The North Carolina Department of Labor responded to an AT inquiry related to agritourism and required inspections. The state said farms that operate amusement devices must comply with the rules and regulations set forth by the state’s Elevator and Amusement Device Bureau. That division inspects and certifies all amusement devices in the state, including stationary amusement park and carnival rides.

Wheelock is very active with National Association of Amusement Ride Safety Officials (NAARSO), serving on the education and certification committees as well as chair of the primary courses for



Planting season is still a big chore on Roca Berry Farm, Roca, Nebraska (above). Hellerick's Adventure Farm & Mini Golf has a climbing wall resembling a farm silo (right). COURTESY ROCA BERRY FARM, HELLRICK'S



beginner inspectors.

He urges farms to consult with professional inspection companies, like his Worldwide Safety Group, to learn about the current industry best practices and to join ASTM International to learn about operator training and standards for hayrides and inflatables.

“National organizations for agritourism are pushing for more awareness of the inspections and for safety-related topics to be discussed at their functions,” he added. “Also, insurance companies are starting to realize there is a huge market for insuring farms that have entertainment functions on their grounds.”

attractions all year long,” said Len Soled, president of amusement ride supplier Rides 4 U, Somerville, New Jersey. “It’s picking up more for us now as they used to buy just used equipment, and now they are buying new.”

Among the most popular attractions purchased through Rides 4 U is the spinning coaster supplied by Italian manufacturer SBF/Visa.

“It’s being themed with cows and pigs and doing very well. A great example is the Barnyard Dance coaster at Bengston’s Farm (Homer Glen, Illinois),” he noted. “The drop tower is

also a home run and can be themed as a silo. We also have a family tractor ride.”

Soled said the bulk of the business serviced by Rides 4 U is in the Midwest.

He continued: “It’s exciting jumping into new markets, and the good news is these guys are great mechanics as they work on their own farm equipment, so it’s natural for them to maintain their own amusement rides.”

Jim Frederiksen, Frederiksen Industries, Tampa, Florida, has found

► See FARM, page 5B



Tires were used to create this dragon play area at Dutch Hollow Farms, Modesto, California. COURTESY DUTCH HOLLOW FARMS

Amusement industry impact

“Some of the farms are now operating their



Jim Frederiksen stands at a slide he sold to Connors Farm during February’s IISF trade show in Riverview, Florida. Slide sales in agritourism are brisk for his Frederiksen Industries, Tampa, Florida. AT/RON GUSTAFSON

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► FARM**Continued from page 4B**

agritourism to be a great outlet for the popular Fun Slide he produces.

"In the past five to six years, I've sold a dozen slides to the agritainment industry," he said.

Connors Farm, Danvers, Massachusetts, took delivery of a new Fun Slide, which was on display in February at the **International Independent Showmen's Foundation Super Trade Show & Extravaganza** in Riverview, Florida.

Amusement Devices & Manufacturing (ADM), Schaller, Iowa, also caters heavily to the market, with a page on its website dedicated to agritourism.

"Any swing ride we make is popular with farm operations," said ADM's **B.T. Woodke**. "We use a corn theme on our pirate ship, and the Shockwave can be done as the Barn Swing."

For the **Swanee**

River Railroad Company, Lufkin, Texas, agritourism was what jump-started the business.

"We really got our start with **Lark Ranch** in Indiana," noted Swanee River owner **Todd Swan**. "They started with our 15-inch gauge model, and we ended up building four more trains for their locations."

With all three Lark Ranch facilities in Indiana, the company features pumpkin patches, corn mazes, slides and other small amusement devices, including a selection of ADM pieces.

Of the 49 trains "currently out in the real world," Swan said at least a dozen are operating on farms. Swan said he is currently working on two train orders in his Texas shop.

Dalton Kid Ride Rebuilders, Foley, Missouri, maker of the popular series of umbrella rides, has also found sales growth in agritainment.

"Our farm tractor



This ADM Cyclone Swing ride is featured at Roca Berry Farm. COURTESY ROCA BERRY FARM

ride is very popular with pumpkin patch, apple orchard and other farm businesses," said **Matthew Kleeschulte**, the company's vice president.

Fine farm examples

There are a vast number of farms touting agritourism as part of their operations and below is a sampling of a few that stand out.

Hellerick's Adventure Farm & Mini Golf in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, a NAFDMA member, was established as a working farm more than 230 years

ago and today is owned and operated by seventh-generation members of the Hellerick family.

"There are many farms in our area, and our family took over this property in 1870," said **Paul Hellerick**, who runs the farm with his brother, Bruce.

It continues to be a working farm with "you pick" flowers from May to October and sunflowers in early August until the end of the season. Late summer brings in a crop of raspberries and blackberries and ushers in

the annual creation of a five-acre corn maze.

"Years ago, we were just a pumpkin patch and strawberry farm," Hellerick asserted. "Bruce had the idea of putting in a little play area and charging for it — five or six things for a dollar each. We then decided to try a hayride for five dollars, then the corn maze. In 2017, we went crazy and put in a rope course. We were adding things left and right."

Today, the farm draws more than 50,000 guests annually, with fall being the busiest season. Miniature golf and a unique climbing wall themed like a farm silo round out the available attractions.

"It is flourishing, doing very well," the operator added. "There is no other climbing wall that looks like ours. We had some local Amish carpenters come in and put a cap on the climbing wall so it

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Remlinger Farms operates a 16-seat Ferris wheel from Eli Bridge Company (above left). Pillow jumps (above middle) and trackless trains are popular attractions on farms branching out into agritourism to bring in additional revenue. Finishing touches are being put on a mini pirate ship — which will soon set sail on a farm in Kansas — at the ADM facility (above right). Guests of Roca Berry Farm often enjoy a train ride during the sunset hours (below). COURTESY REMLINGER FARMS, NAFDMA, ROCA BERRY FARM, ADM

► **FARM**

Continued from page 5B

resembles a silo.”

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Division of Amusement Rides and Attractions oversees the process by which attractions are registered and properly inspected in the state.

“As owners, we are required to take a class every three years so we can do inspections and send in reports,” Hellerick said of the process. “We hire an outside consultant to check our rope course every year.”

Hill Ridge Farms, Youngsville, North Carolina, is also a major player in agritourism.

Originally a pick-your-own produce farm in 1968, the family-owned property shifted toward activities to educate children about

farm life.

Today, Hill Ridge Farms offers a carousel, jumping pillow, trackless train, slides, splash pad and a maze. Its annual Festival of Lights during the holidays features a 25-minute wagon ride through the pastures to view millions of lights.

Big on attractions
Remlinger Farms, Carnation, Washington, annually hosts more than 200,000 guests from around the world at its 350-acre property.

Established as a roadside produce stand in 1965 by Gary and Bonnie Remlinger, the property now features an arsenal of amusement rides, a full-service restaurant, an ice cream parlor, large picnic areas and U-pick fields.

Still family-owned, the farm touts what it says is the largest harvest festival in the

Northwest every October.

More than a dozen rides are located in its Country Fair Park section, including a Scrambler and 16-seat Ferris wheel (Eli Bridge Co.), Swinger (Grover C. Watkins), Venture River (Venture), and the Mine Twister roller coaster (E&F Miler Industries).

“We wouldn’t be where we are today without agritourism,” said Jeff Schaefer, founder of Roca Berry Farm, Roca, Nebraska. “I remember 46 years ago, we were just trying to grow the best crop we could for the community and reinvest every penny back into the farm, and at the end of the day, we just never gave up.”

The 180-acre family-owned pumpkin patch, founded in 1980, has 35 acres of activities including a train, swing rides, corn mazes, haunted attractions



and special events.

Its Rocamotive Railway 24-gauge train has a diesel hydraulic-powered engine that pulls four 15-passenger cars around a three-quarter-mile loop.

The farm has more than 30 acres of pumpkins, along with seasonal berries and offers year-round private event rentals in two barns.

“I’m lucky we got into it 20 years ago,” noted John Bos, owner, Dutch Hollow Farms, Modesto, California. “There are several agritourism farms in the area now and we have 15 acres dedicated to it.”

What started as a roadside tulip stand is today a 62-acre property with pick-your-own seasonal flowers and cherries, a family zip line, spider web climbing wall, gem mining, and a jump pillow housed under cover.

“We started an animal safari last year with tickets available online. Our farm

animals come running to the wagons so guests can feed them. Our livestock is really our signature now, and the safari was a huge hit,” he added. “Pumpkins and our corn maze are also big for us.”

Lemos Farm, Half Moon Bay, California, has been in business since 1942 and is also a family-owned property, maintaining its roots as a pumpkin patch, Christmas tree farm and grower of corn and hay.

The farm is big on entertainment, too, with a petting zoo, slides, hayrides, a train and a year-round haunted house — both scary and non-scary.

Regardless of where one lives in the U.S., it’s safe to say interested visitors won’t have to look very hard to find some wholesome, homegrown agritainment near them.

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