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A massive complex from WhiteWater includes a combination Constrictor + Manta and an Orbiter. COURTESY IRTRA

IRTRA expansion doubles the existing water park, adding unique attractions

AT: *Jeffrey Seifert*
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

RETALHULEU, Guatemala — Established in 1962 by Guatemalan law, the **Instituto de Recreación de los Trabajadores** (IRTRA) is a unique public-private partnership created to provide high-quality, low-cost recreation for private-sector workers and their families. Funded primarily through a mandatory one percent monthly employer payroll contribution and guided for decades by visionary leader and IRTRA Chairman **Ricardo Castillo Sinibaldi**, the results have produced a recreation area that has evolved into a world-class resort and amusement network.

Initially, the recreational properties were modest, but in 1997, the institution opened the groundbreaking **Xocomil** water park in Retalhulea, which has won multiple awards over the years, including best water park from the **World Waterpark Association** and a Publisher's Pick Golden Ticket Award from *Amusement Today*.

Not resting on its laurels, this past summer IRTRA opened **Xetulhá**, a massive expansion within Xocomil. Adding nearly 50,000 square meters (12.3 acres) to the existing park, highlights include 13 major water attractions, 40 new waterslides, a wave river, a children's water play area, family cabins, themed restaurants, spa services, event venues, dining areas, multiple pools for every age group and two new IRTRA characters: Nauti and Nati.

The name Xetulhá comes from the Mayan language and means "under the water." It was inspired by Guatemala's cultural richness and its relationship with nature. The opening of Xetulhá marks the beginning of a new chapter for Guatemala as a place where recreation drives tourism, where tourism creates jobs and where jobs strengthen communities. It also continues the tradition of providing families with the opportunity to create moments that last forever.

▸ See IRTRA, page 8

NightFlight Expedition at Dollywood creates the only ride of its kind

Mack Rides utilizes multiple experiences into ride system

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

PIGEON FORGE — With new hotels, experiences and attractions, **Dollywood** hasn't slowed its momentum in both winning awards and pleasing guests. While its newest attraction, NightFlight Expedition, had a later opening than the park was hoping for, at its premiere, guests could understand why — it's like nothing ever seen before.

Or perhaps it is but not put together in such a comprehensive package as this new stunner is.

This attraction goes back several years. As Dollywood continues to embrace storytelling in its additions, NightFlight Expedition started with a story, not a ride. Wanting to illustrate the bioluminescent nature of nighttime in **Smoky Mountain National Park**, Dollywood challenged ride manufacturers to come up with a ride to do just that.

"You think about **Dolly Parton**, and she's a storyteller," said Park President **Eugene Naughton**. "We thought it would be a great way for us — before we decided upon a conveyance system to deliver what we want to accomplish — to write out our story first."

NightFlight Expedition started as a story before it was even developed into a

▸ See FLIGHT, page 10



The indoor space of Hidden Hollow Aviation makes the new attraction weatherproof to heat, cold or rain. AT/TIM BALDWIN

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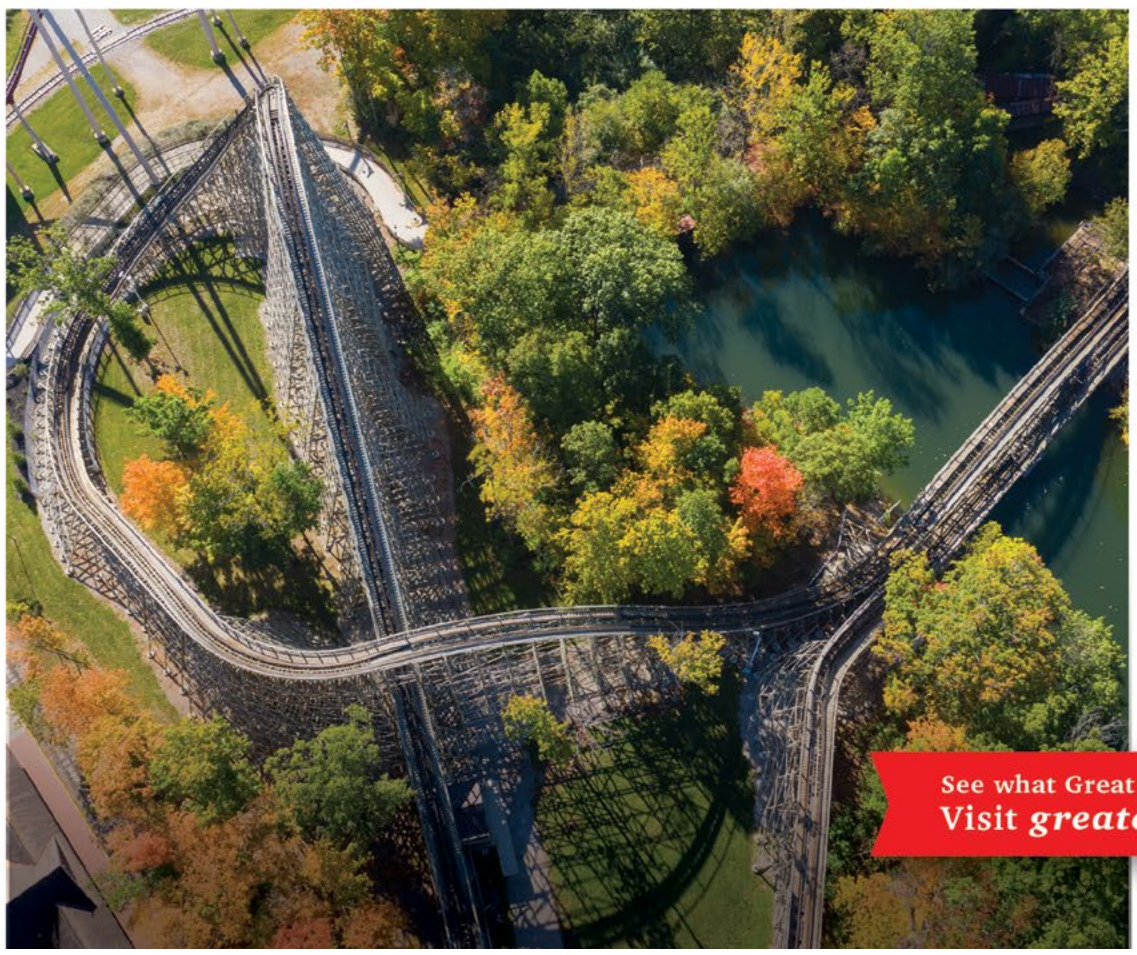


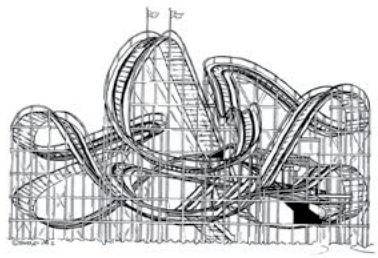
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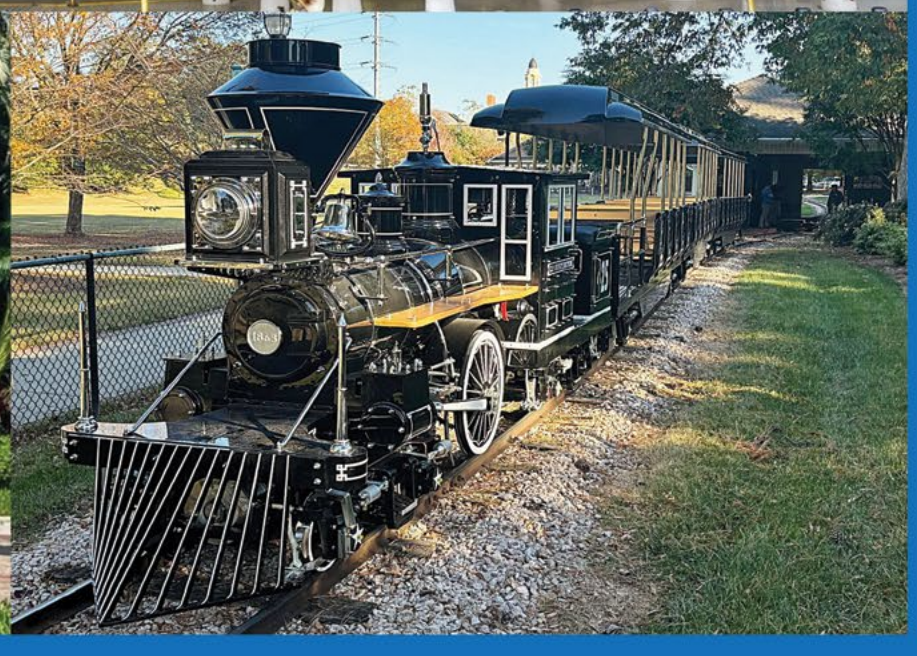
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AMUSEMENT VIEWS

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

The simplest of thrills



Robinson

The anticipation for each new season is headlined by what new attractions are debuting. What's the biggest? What's the fastest? What's the tallest? What's the first-of-its-kind? We live in an industry where technology is always advancing, and what's often on everyone's lips is, quite literally, the next big thing.

Roller coasters started as a simple train ride. Now they launch riders at more than 100 mph or drop 600 feet down a cliffside. Carousels were the highlight flat ride of every midway. Now, every year at IAAPA Expo, companies are debuting their new way to spin ya', flip ya' and make you regret that large ice cream just before getting in line.

Everything is new. Everything is different. Everything is bigger. Everything is crazier.

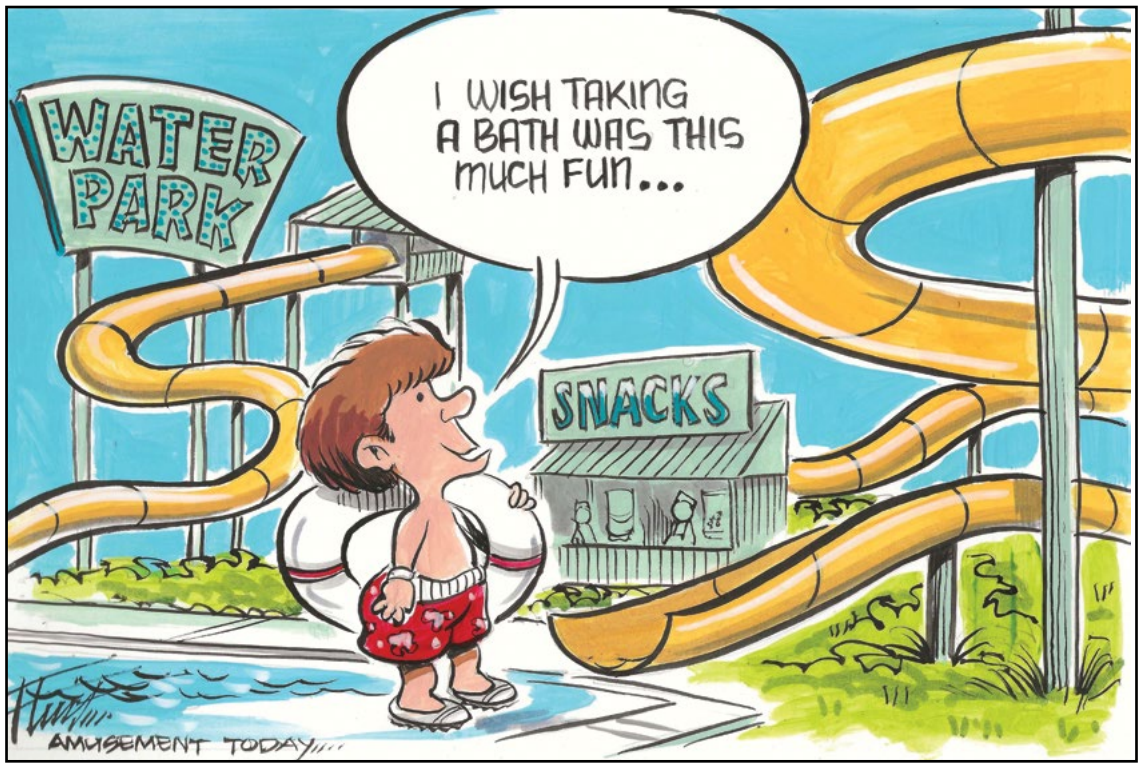
But then there's the most basic of thrilling attractions: the waterslide. Every waterslide is just a simple, bigger improvement on the slide from most of our childhood backyards or at our neighborhood pool. It's that first youthful thrill that we couldn't get enough of then and find ourselves often chasing now.

Of course we're chasing it now. What's better on a hot summer day than splashing through — and, often, into — some cool water after laughing our way down the twists and bumps of a slide? It's where childhood bliss meets adult relaxation, in one perfect curving creation.

Slides may get taller. How they curve may get wilder. The water may splash in new directions. A design decision may lead to guests experiencing it in a tube, alongside others or just sliding down solo with their body skimming the cool water.

No matter how many steps it is to the top, no matter how winding the twists, no matter the themeing may add to the atmosphere ... every waterslide is just that childhood moment relived again, splashing down in a moment of summer refreshment and youthful nostalgia.

FLINT'S VIEW: *Bubba Flint*



INDUSTRY VOICE: *Bob Owens,World Waterpark Association*

Every drop matters



Owens

Summer is almost in the books, with meteorological fall occurring this week. For many water park operators, however, the season ended with summer's unofficial finale, Labor Day.

A quick check of this summer's news often revealed stories about "heat domes" and climate change, with "hottest" paired with day, week, month or year. In parts of the country, including the West, those reports appeared alongside coverage of drought, water restrictions and conservation. Yet the same stories advised people to stay cool and beat the heat. In other words, it was water park weather.

Water parks offer something humans have long understood: being in the water is the best way to beat the heat. Just as important is sharing experiences with friends and family — creating memories, chasing an adrenaline rush, enjoying a relaxing float on the Lazy River, and spending time away from screens. In a warmer world, water parks help us cool off and reconnect.

When it comes to conservation, the water in our attractions serves countless guests looking to cool off. It is clean, treated and continuously circulated — a part of the magic many guests may not understand, and that is all right; they are there to have fun. Behind the scenes, the water park community stewards this resource through technology, innovation, responsible operations and best practices.

Each drop of water serves thousands of guests, keeps us cool on the hottest days, and brings us together through shared experiences. That is the story behind the fun: water used thoughtfully to create connection, relief and lasting memories. Bring on the heat!

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2 MINUTE DRILL



AT: Tim Baldwin

Cade Vereen, Pyek Group

Cade Vereen started his career 17 years ago in a lifeguard chair. Today he's vice president of operations for **Pyek Group**, keeping five water parks across Nevada, Texas and Florida running for over a million guests a year. Around the office he's known as the guy who can make any meeting fun, because, in his words, "We're in the business of creating fun and that shouldn't stop at the boardroom door." Off the clock, Cade is fully obsessed with his lawn. He fine-tunes fertilizer, watering schedules and the perfect mow height, and will gladly spend two hours hand-pulling weeds like it's a spa day. He powers it all with Chick-fil-A (more than 106,000 lifetime points on the app can confirm), and wakes up every morning to the howls of Nash, his two-year-old German shepherd-husky mix and self-appointed rooster of the house.



Pyek Group's Cade Vereen is known as the person who can make any meeting fun.
COURTESY PYEK GROUP

Title: Vice President of Operations

Number of years in the amusement industry: 17 years.

Best thing about the industry: The people — HANDS DOWN! The industry has the most creative, caring, supportive and motivated individuals. We are unified by one goal — make memories that our guests will carry with them for a lifetime.

Favorite amusement ride: Hagrid's Magical Creatures Motorbike Adventure.

If I weren't working in the amusement industry, I would be … Most likely working for or owning my own Chick-Fil-A restaurant. It's where I worked in the off-season when the water park was closed, and I had a blast doing it!

Biggest challenge facing our industry: Inflation. Costs are on the rise in almost every sector of our expenses. Labor is higher, new attractions cost more, food is more expensive, FF&E costs more than before, utilities keep rising. Every one of our expense lines is on the rise, and the consumer can't keep opening their wallets and spending more.

The state that surprised me the most was … Maine in the fall is spectacular!

First time in a water park: My dad took my sister and me to Schlitterbahn New Braunfels.

The best thing I make for breakfast is … Eggo Waffles, my claim to fame is definitely not preparing a scratch breakfast!

The thing I like most about amusement season: Interacting with our guests and team members is what I look forward to the most. Hearing the stories from our guests about why they love our parks. Hearing from team members about how we helped them grow into more outgoing or confident people; that's my motivation.

Favorite Halloween memory: As a kid, we always had a competition with our family to see who could get the most candy. So, we would race through the neighborhood with a pillow case in hand, go door to door, and then at the end of the night, we would take a scale and weigh all of our candy to see who had the most. Was I exhausted…. Yes. Did I win… NO!

In a single word, pumpkin spice is …basic!

Two things in the back seat of my car: ratchet straps and gloves… you never know when you are going to have to assist in a car accident.

The thing I admired the most about Dolly Parton: Her spirit and kindness. She has built her entire legacy on being generous and treating everyone with grace. She's a reminder that how you make people feel is what endures.

My first concert was … Kenny Chesney at the old Pizza Hut Park in Frisco, Texas.

The last manual I looked at was for … Klipsch in-ceiling speaker. I was trying to setup surround speakers in my living room…. Spoiler, I couldn't figure it out. LOL

THE INDUSTRY SEEN

Giving the walking tour a "Whirl"



ST. PAUL, Minn. — The 100th anniversary of the introduction of the Tilt-A-Whirl ride had special meaning at the 2026 edition of the Minnesota State Fair (August 27 to September 7), where the ride made its public debut a century ago. As part of the fair's walking history tour this year, a colorful sign was placed next to the Tilt-A-Whirl ride (background) highlighting the fact that the ride was invented and built in nearby Faribault, Minnesota. Though manufacturing of the popular ride continues today at a Texas facility, Faribault still promotes the fact that it is the original home of the Tilt-A-Whirl.
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The Xetulhá addition (above left) essentially doubled the size of the existing water park. The Twister slides (above right) end a few feet above the pool, resulting in riders going airborne when they exit the slide. COURTESY IRTRA

IRTRA

Continued from page 1

During the inauguration ceremony, Sinibaldi stated, "Xetulhá places Guatemala once again on the world map of recreation. We achieved this through the dedication of our people and the trust of the business community, making it possible for workers and their families to enjoy facilities in their own country that compete with the best in the world. In the land of 'yes, we can,' we don't dream small — we build big."

The water attractions and slides were supplied by Canadian manufacturers **ProSlide** of Ottawa, Ontario, and **WhiteWater West** of Richmond, British Columbia. Both companies provided the latest high-profile slides from their respective repertoires.

Among the attractions from ProSlide, the gigantic tower that houses both a MammothRiver with three FlyingSaucer sections and a double TornadoWave commands attention as one of the largest structures in the park. Both take advantage of custom five-passenger rafts to accommodate groups and families. Tucked back in the woods, a Dueling RocketBlast features multiple rally points, saucer sections, and of course, uphill water blasts. At the opposite end of the park, another tall MammothBlast/FlyingSaucer 45 is the first of its kind in Central America. This slide also takes advantage of higher-capacity, five-person rafts and, as the name implies, advanced blast technology uses water jets to propel the rafts uphill.



The ProSlide MammothRiver with three FlyingSaucer sections and a double TornadoWave commands attention as one of the largest structures in the park. COURTESY IRTRA

Classic Twister slides end a few feet above the splash pool, so riders go airborne as they exit the slide and plunge into a deep water pool. For the children, a KidzAdventure Tower will keep them happily playing all day.

WhiteWater's installations are equally as impressive, fusing some of the company's high-profile slides into one-of-a-kind attractions. The largest tower is home to a combination Constrictor + Manta and an Orbiter. This pair of slides takes advantage of large circular rafts that can hold up to five guests. Orbiter launches riders through an enclosed tube before plunging them down an open, twisted drop. Rafts race into the angled Orbiter loop, sweeping along the outer wall of the high-banked disc and gaining elevation until they reach the apex, followed by a high-speed drop into the splash pool. A second large tower is home to an Abyss massive funnel slide and a Constrictor + Tailspin combo. These two slides utilize a small, three-person raft.



The park is spectacularly themed and beautifully landscaped throughout. COURTESY IRTRA

Mat slide fans will find two large complexes to their liking. The Head Rush mat slide features four similar, but not identical, courses. The red, orange and yellow slides are completely enclosed as mat riders negotiate twists and turns, including a near 360-degree flat loop. The six-lane Whizzard is specifically designed for racing, with a long stretch of open lanes in the middle of the slide where competitors can see each other and determine their standing in the race, before plunging back into enclosed tubes.

For hours of fun, families will enjoy a FusionFortress 10 with more than 300 features, and multiple kids' slides including a long, enclosed body slide, a three-lane racing slide, a kids-sized bowl slide, two open body slides, and another very short open slide to appeal to young thrill-seekers-in-training who may be new to the experience. The youngest guests can get soaked playing with 46 AquaSplash Toys placed on a circular area coated with **Life Floor**. On the opposite side of the kids' area, younger guests can enjoy four mini slides that emulate the adult versions, including a Mini Rattler and Mini Boomerango.

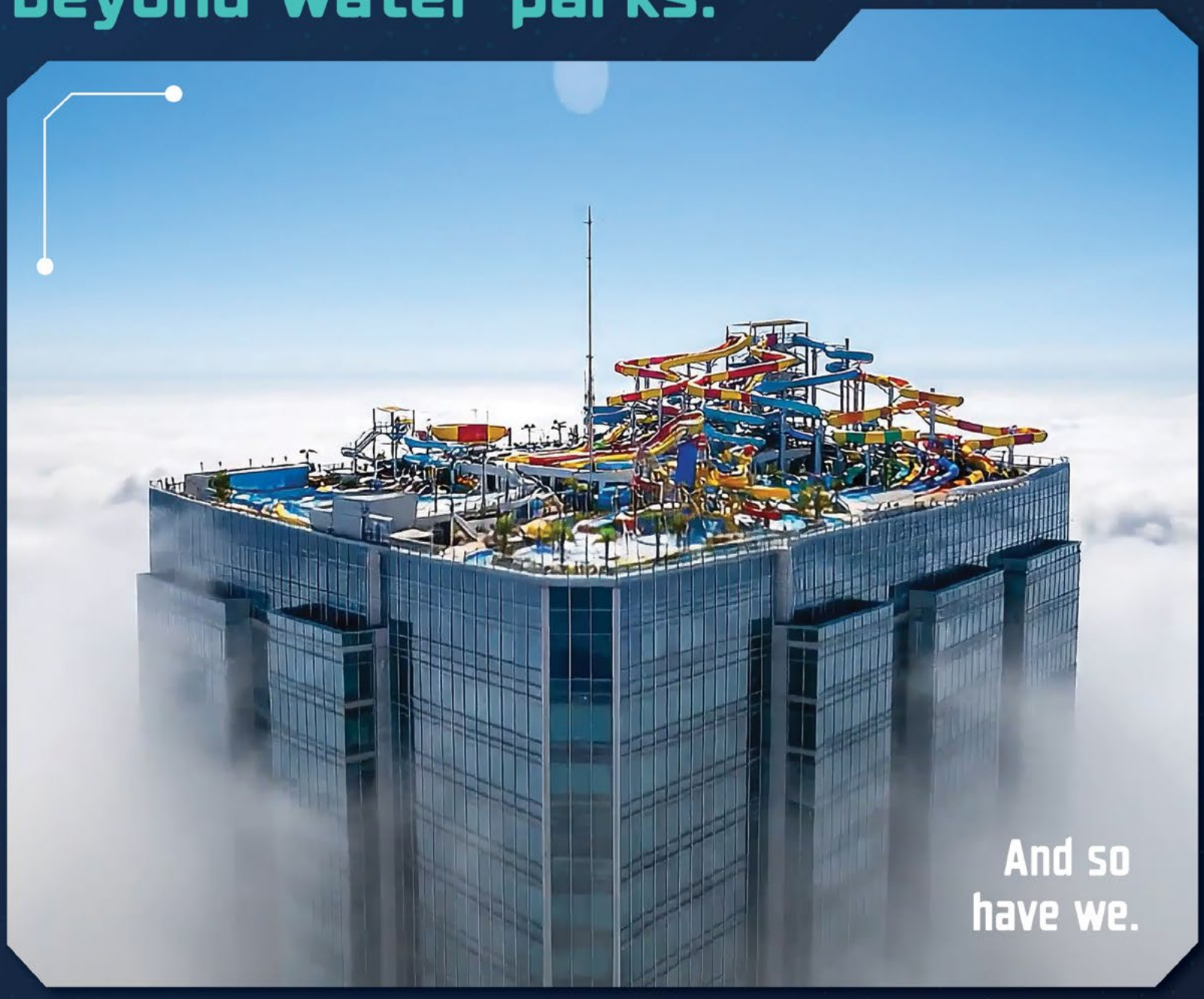
For a more relaxing adventure, guests can float their troubles away while navigating a wave river that winds its way amongst the attractions.

The opening of Xetulhá creates 500 new direct jobs, strengthening Retalhuleu's economy while benefiting hotels, restaurants, transportation providers, local businesses, farmers, entrepreneurs and the entire tourism value chain.

Since opening its parks and hotels, IRTRA has welcomed more than 105.7 million visitors. That figure represents generations of birthdays, family vacations, reunions, first trips and lifelong memories.

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FLIGHT

Continued from page 1

ride system.

"People come to the Smoky Mountains to not only visit the national park and to be around these beautiful mountains and this setting, it makes sense to tell that story at night," Naughton commented. "A lot of people don't know that the Smoky Mountains are one of the most bioluminescent places on earth. For us to be able to pull back the covers on that and to share things about the Smoky Mountains people don't know was a great way to honor them."





A constant flow of boat vehicles (above left) keep the capacity consistent on NightFlight Expedition. The queue helps tell the story of the bioluminescent life of the Smoky Mountains (above right). COURTESY DOLLYWOOD; AT/TIM BALDWIN

The search for bioluminescence begins in the queue inside Hidden Hollow Aviation, where guests see notes and experiments researching the science behind the phenomenon. Characters Jasper and Cora are overheard as they make progress, as well as the concept designs of the bioluminator vehicle.

Once aboard, guests enter the interior vastness of the 44,000-square-foot facility. What makes NightFlight Expedition so one-of-a-kind is its range of ride experiences. Within, visitors roar through rapids, drop on coaster track, enjoy a flying sequence and float on a boat ride, all within a dark ride setting. All the systems were orchestrated by **Mack Rides**.

"What excites me is that the guest never notices the transitions. Inside one ride you are flying, you are on a coaster, you are in whitewater, you are on a lake. As a rider, you just experience one continuous journey. Making four things feel like one thing is much harder than building any of the four on its own," said **Maximilian Roeser**, marketing, Mack Rides. "The second part is what it means for the industry. For years a park had to decide early: is this a coaster, or is this a water ride, or is this a dark ride? That decision then locked the story. Here the story came first, and the ride system followed it. That is the direction I think we will see more of."

"There are two sections I really like," added **Thorsten Koebele**, chief officer of sales, Mack Rides. "First there is the rafting section like we have done at **Futuroscope**. But here, we have added a media carousel with a motion base where you experience [a sense of flight]."

The media carousel has three chambers, allowing for high capacity. During the flight sequence, the rotation allows the next boat to enter while the previous boat experiences a backward coaster drop.



Adding to the far end of Wildwood Grove, NightFlight Expedition expands the award-winning kids' area. AT/TIM BALDWIN

This article, however, isn't going to give away all the secrets.

"I love that Dollywood put the ride indoors," Koebele told *Amusement Today*. "This ride needs a story behind it, and [the Rocking Boat] is fabulous for storytelling — you have the video, you have the rapids and the drops. There is huge potential creating a story around that. Tons of opportunities."

"You really have to ride it to experience it," said **Pete Owens**, vice president of marketing, Dollywood. "You will fly, you will go through rapids and float in a boat, and it is definitely a coaster. The ride vehicle engages with the track, but it is a completely different experience than anything anyone has ever tried."

When asked by *AT* if building such a huge attraction indoors was more challenging, Roeser answered: "It is different rather than simply harder. Indoors you gain control. No wind, no rain, no daylight fighting your projections. Show, audio, lighting and water all behave the same way at 10 in the morning and at 10 at night. For an experience built around bioluminescence, that control is not a nice extra, it is the whole premise.

"What you give up is room. Outdoors you can move a curve two meters. Inside a building, every centimeter is already assigned to something else, and often to somebody else's trade. The coordination effort with Dollywood and **Herschend Creative Studios** was a significant part of this project, and it worked because all three teams were in the same room from an early stage."

According to the park, NightFlight Expedition came with a pricetag of $60 million, the largest investment to which Herschend has committed to date.

"The reaction so far is 'Totally worth it!'" said Owens. "It's a fantastic experience."

This is the first installation of Mack Rides' Rocking Boat in North America.

"The system is proven. Mission Bermudes at Futuroscope has been running since June 2025 with nine boats. The free-floating upper hull, the track below the water surface, the speed control that repeats exactly regardless of how the boat is loaded — all of that has real operating hours behind it," said Roeser.

"The Flying portion of the ride was a development and learning from our AirificVR System where we tilt and move a bench," Roeser added. "The work at Dollywood went into the seams. Any single segment we can build. Handing the boat from one segment to the next without the guest feeling a catch or a jolt is the actual engineering. With the water-to-dry transitions in particular, the chassis stays engaged with the track at all times, so the boat leaves the water and comes back into it cleanly. It is what separates four rides in a building from one ride."

It is worth noting that Dollywood and Mack created a separate area for those with disabilities to load with more time and without a moving vehicle. Once ready, those riders can slide into the flow of boats.

Before her passing, Dolly Parton commented at the opening of the ride: "Growing up here, I learned to love these mountains in a way that stays with you your whole life. I always want folks who visit Dollywood to feel that same way. This ride truly is an adventure that lets you see the mountains the way I always remember them, full of wonder and beauty."

"NightFlight Expedition shows that family attractions can be every bit as ambitious, innovative and immersive as anything in our industry," said **Andrew Wexler**, CEO, **Herschend Family Entertainment**. "We're investing at that level because families deserve experiences that inspire wonder across generations. For Dollywood, that intersection of world-class innovation, authentic storytelling and shared family experience is where we see enormous opportunity for the future."

Having been rebranded as Dollywood in 1986, the park debuted something special not only for its 40th anniversary but also for generations of visitors to come. The park has established itself as a destination with world-renowned attractions.

MACK RIDES PRESENTS

LAUNCHED WATER COASTER



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Entertainment Industry Client



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FACILITIES & ATTRACTIONS

Lost Island adding RMC coaster — page 16 / Water Parks section expanded — pages 31-41

Vekoma family boomerang at Fraispertuis-City comes with message

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

JEANMÉNIL, France — Sixty years ago, **Fraispertuis-City** opened its gates. For this special anniversary, the park has added something new for families. It had been 12 years since the park had added a coaster.

"Indeed, a lot of time has passed since our last roller coaster," said **Frédéric Beck**, community manager, Frasipertuis-City. "We've wanted to open a new one for a long time, but we made a significant investment in the **Intamin** Giant Drop, Golden Driller, in 2017, and the lack of space to expand kept us postponing the possibility of adding another roller coaster. We took advantage of these years to renovate some older flat rides and make a few additions, but our visitors were demanding more."

For this season, the park opened Fireline Redwood in July. It's a **Vekoma** family boomerang, which has been a popular genre for the manufacturer.

"After discussions with Vekoma, a family boomerang ride allowed us to consider a new project, while still managing a limited space thanks to a layout adapted to what already existed in our park," Beck told *Amusement Today*. "We worked with Vekoma on several proposals that enabled this addition while minimizing the ground space and maintaining walkways. We took advantage of the fact that it's possible to travel under the lift hill and have an underground passage, which allows us to maintain traffic flow in the park and, at the same time, add a beautiful view of the spike and a great visual effect on board. We can say that we turned these constraints into great opportunities."





Fireline Redwood comes with a story surrounding firefighting (above). One of the coaster's most dramatic moments is diving underground (right). COURTESY ANDROLAND

Owing to the tight footprint, the layout twists and rises to scream through the top of the station, only to dart below ground level to make for an exciting and custom layout.

"From the beginning, the park was committed to the idea of a family boomerang," said **Camiel Bilsen**, concept engineer, Vekoma. "The main discussions focused on identifying the most suitable layout, as it was important to maximize the available space while minimizing the need to relocate existing attractions. Several configuration options were evaluated to ensure the coaster integrated seamlessly into the park while delivering the desired guest experience."

Fireline Redwood comes with a story.

"We knew we wanted to incorporate it into our forest zone. We already have a few attractions in this area, and we were looking for a strong identity to give it a unique character," said Beck. "Our park is beautifully situated in a valley surrounded by trees. It is a precious natural setting, and — as this year has unfortunately reminded us — forest fires can be truly devastating. We felt that adopting this theme and honoring firefighters from around the world would send a powerful message. We hoped it might help raise awareness in a small way."

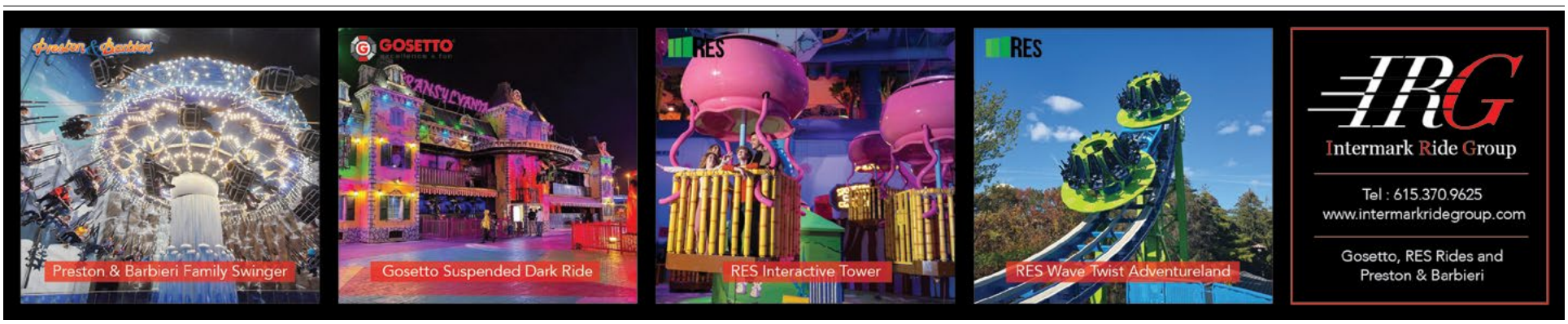
"Projects become especially rewarding when a park embraces storytelling and is willing to push creative boundaries," Bilsen told *AT*. "In the case of Fireline Redwood, the original theming concept was quite different. However, as the project progressed, the park felt that the initial direction did not fully capture the experience they envisioned and decided to pivot to the fire brigade theme. This change came at a very late stage, when preparations for the train moldings were already underway. Despite the tight timeline, the new concept immediately resonated with everyone involved."

The loading area is themed to a fire station, and the reverse spike that comes with this type of coaster rises out of a burning redwood, simulated with fog and red lighting.

"When developing the firefighter theme and expanding our area with redwood trees (like the one on Timber Drop right next door), we had the idea of adding special lighting, smoke and music effects to make this spike a real visual surprise," said Beck. "**Patrice Fleurent**, the park director, places great importance on ensuring that people who aren't riding the attractions enjoy watching them and seeing others having fun. I think that's where the inspiration came from."

"The lift height determines the amount of track we can fit into the layout, so we have to be very deliberate in how we make every meter count," noted Bilsen. "The compact nature of the ride doesn't prevent custom-

See VEKOMA, page 14



VEKOMA

Continued from page 13

ization; it challenges us to create as much variety and character as possible within the limited footprint. On Fireline Redwood, the tunnel and the passage through the station are examples of how the available space is used to give the ride its own identity."

To make room for the new installation, the park relocated a children's ride elsewhere in the park as well as dismantled a technical building. Previously, the park installed a **Zamperla** Nebulaz and called it Sawmill with the knowledge of where new additions would go, giving the area a cohesive feel.

"We have a unique initiative linked to our other roller coaster, Timber Drop, which we launched when it opened in 2011 and have continued ever since: we plant a new tree for every 500 riders," Beck shared with *AT*. "At the end of each season, we tally the numbers and donate funds to an organization to carry out these reforestation programs. While the theme here is different, the focus remains on raising awareness and protecting our forests — a vital regional asset and a cause shared with the U.S.A."

The new attraction has become popular.

"The reactions have been excellent," Beck said. "We saw the enthusiasm of our visitors for the attraction from its very first day, with people eagerly riding it several times throughout the day. The backward movement is obviously quite impressive and not everyone can handle it, but the track's length is well-suited to avoid making the attraction unpleasant and actually encourages people to go for another ride."

Children only have to be 95 centimeters (37 inches) to ride, which encourages riding as a family.

To maintain consistency with the surrounding attractions, two other attractions have had their queues improved.

Accessibility for guests with reduced mobility has been considered through the addition of an elevator at the exit and a specially designed car that facilitates the transfer from a wheelchair to the seat.

The area has been landscaped with around 60 trees, representing 20 different species. A multisensory experience has been created through two custom-composed soundtracks, as well as the addition of special effects and pyrotechnics along the track.

Also, another attraction was added for 2026. Les ours'hauts (High Bears) is a family drop tower from **Zierer** standing 11 meters (36 feet) tall. Made to be whimsical, two bear cubs are stranded atop the tower, frightened by the forest fires. The rotating ride gives visitors 360-degree views of the new land and attractions.

"We still hope to open a new roller coaster in the coming years if we can secure the necessary land, but we are delighted to have had the opportunity to add this magnificent model for our 60th anniversary season," Beck said.





The themed fronts of the trains sport a fire engine motif (above). Along with the coaster, a Zierer family drop tower themed to bears was added to the area (right). COURTESY ANDROLAND



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Iowa's Lost Island returns to RMC for next coaster, a world's first

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
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WATERLOO, Iowa — **Lost Island** loves its storytelling. When the theme park opened in 2022, guests were impressed that a regional park could be so immersed in legends and detailed realms. The park's tales even created its own lexicon.

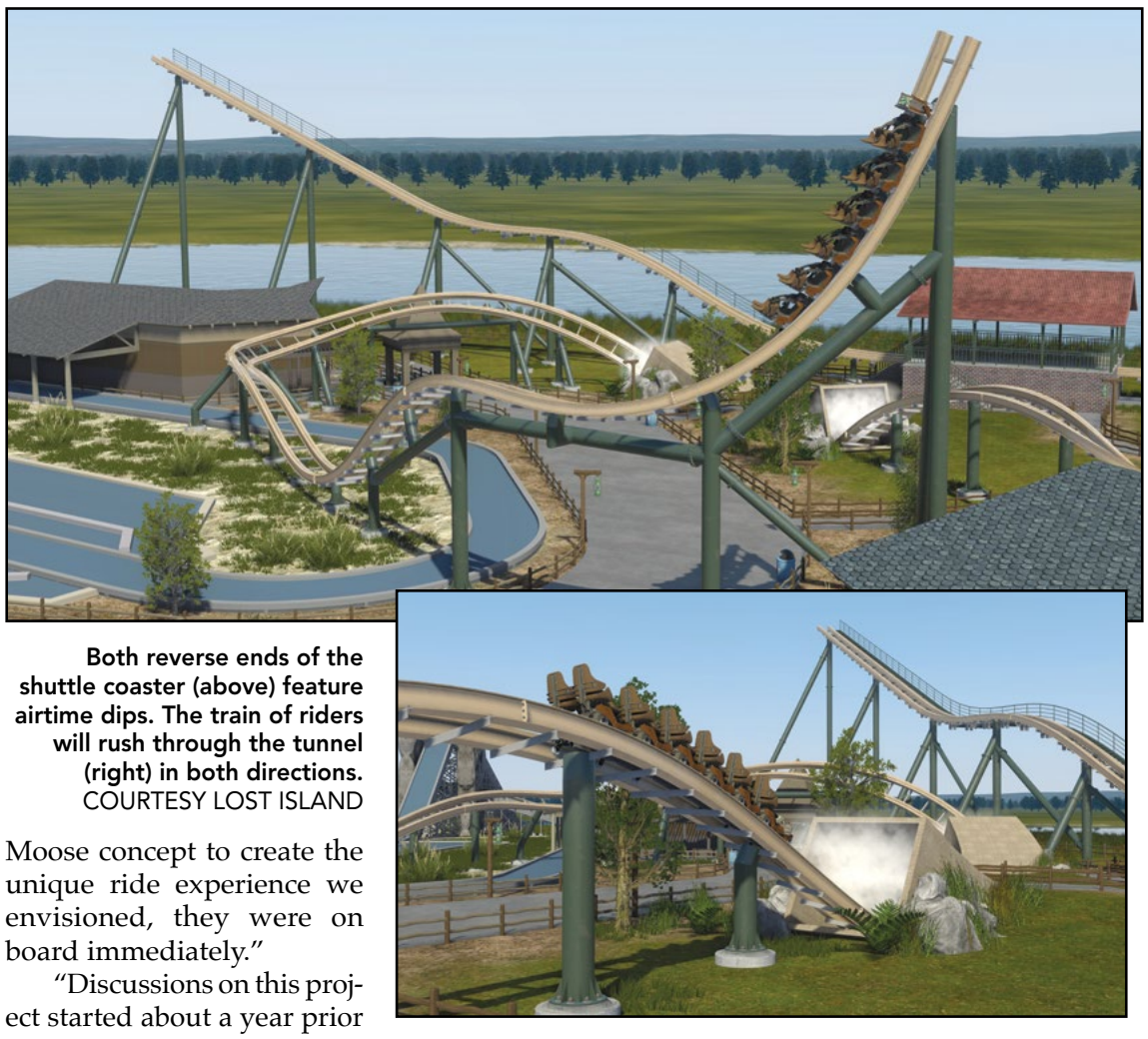
In 2027, the park will introduce its fifth coaster, this one aimed directly for the family audience. Forbidden Lair will be added to the park's Yuta realm.

"Of course, Forbidden Lair has a story! What ride at Lost Island doesn't?" smiled General Manager **Eric Bertch**. "Before Volkanu was contained, the Yuta saw the island as a wealth of commodities to harvest and dug deep into the earth in search of precious things. This abandoned mine is now home to creatures who can be very territorial. Explore if you dare, but beware the bawago!"

If all that leaves questions, then those may be the intriguing threads to bring in guests for the new installation.

Forbidden Lair is a return to **Rocky Mountain Construction** for Lost Island; the two companies partnered together for the previous coaster, Fire Runner.

"The path back to RMC was winding. We absolutely considered several manufacturers for this ride," Bertch told *Amusement Today*. "Ultimately, what brought us back to RMC was the great working relationship we developed with Fire Runner. When we suggested modifying their Wild Moose concept to create the unique ride experience we envisioned, they were on board immediately."



Both reverse ends of the shuttle coaster (above) feature airtime dips. The train of riders will rush through the tunnel (right) in both directions. COURTESY LOST ISLAND

"Discussions on this project started about a year prior to Fire Runner's completion. Working with the team at Lost Island over the years has created a familial partnership on both a business and personal levels," added **Hunter Novotny**, business development, RMC. "We have learned quite a bit in regard to what the possibilities of the family coaster market are and how many different ways we can make smaller rides fun, meet park expectations through different approaches, and bring RMC to a much different market than we've previously been a part of. The development of the Moose has been very rewarding, and our design approach proved to cater to some new innovative ideas that you'll see in the train and layouts."

Of note, it will be the very first introduction of the Wild Moose coaster from RMC. However, the park envisioned it as a shuttle coaster.

"The shuttle approach was a park directive for the project," said Novotny. "While it wasn't what many expected, I believe it will make a great example of how versatile the Wild Moose ride platform can be. The ride will have a substantial coaster feel, and with the broad demographic and unique layout, the ride should be a ton of fun."

The height requirement is only 39 inches to ride.

"The family coaster was always planned for Yuta. We changed the exact location, but Yuta will still be the smallest realm with only four rides once Forbidden Lair opens," said Bertch.

While the track length is only 910 feet long, the train full of 12 riders traverses over the course more than twice for a ride length close to 2,000 feet.

"There are a lot of elements. Of the 11 feature moments, not only are they taken in both directions, but three cars face each direction on the train, which allows riders to experience the ride two ways," said Bertch. "It starts with a 79-foot lift spike that releases you down a zero-G drop before flying through the station toward the first speed turn, then bank again into another airtime moment before another speed turn that rises up so that you get a good view. The train plunges into a 90-foot-long subterranean mine shaft that spits you out into a jr. wave turn over Yuta Falls where you experience two brief airtime moments before climbing the return spike over the midway. Then, half the riders will come face-to-face with an angry bawago before riding the whole thing in reverse."

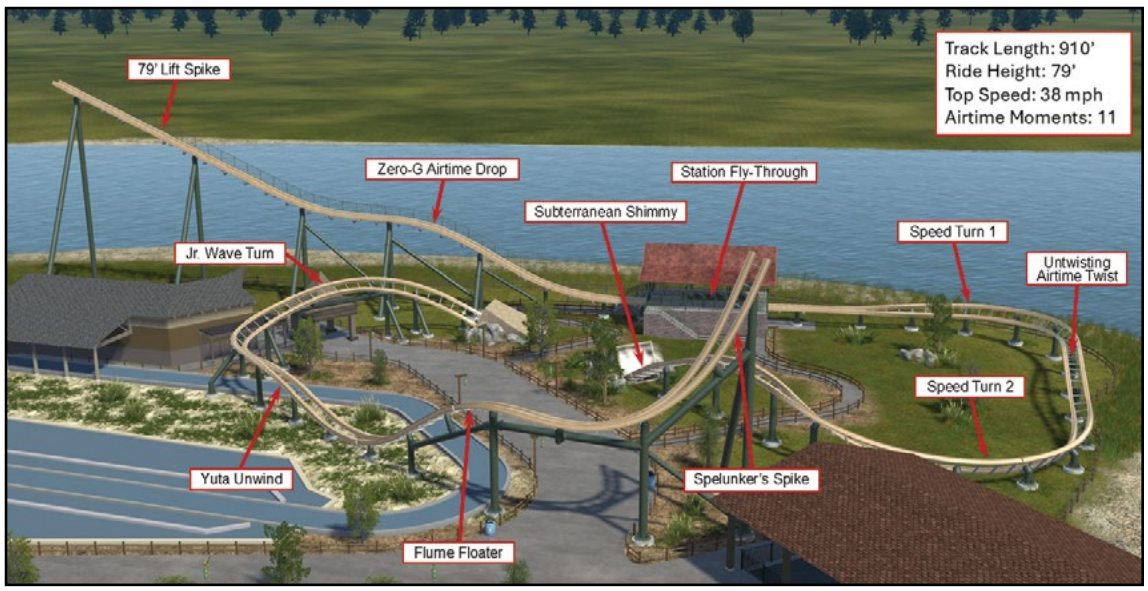
It's a lot of action for not only a family ride but also one of shorter length. The ride's art graphic notes fun names for elements like subterranean shimmy, spelunker's spike and flume floater.

"At RMC, we like interesting track — we are always wanting to set the riders up for the next element and to provide as much 'ride' as we can," Novotny told *AT*. "The airtime hill on the spikes should provide a smile-inducing sensation and the strongest airtime moment of the ride."

Prior to Forbidden Lair, the park's coaster offerings were high-thrill with one children's coaster. The new project will help fill a gap in the ride lineup.

As theming and the story develops, Lost Island plans to continue teases over the off-season until the ride debuts in the summer of 2027.





The above left model shows the thematic flair to the ride's entrance. The above right graphic notes the multiple elements experienced on Forbidden Lair. COURTESY LOST ISLAND

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Six Flags Fiesta Texas established fall legacy: "Monster Mash Bash"

Fright Fest spectacle features ensemble cast, high energy

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

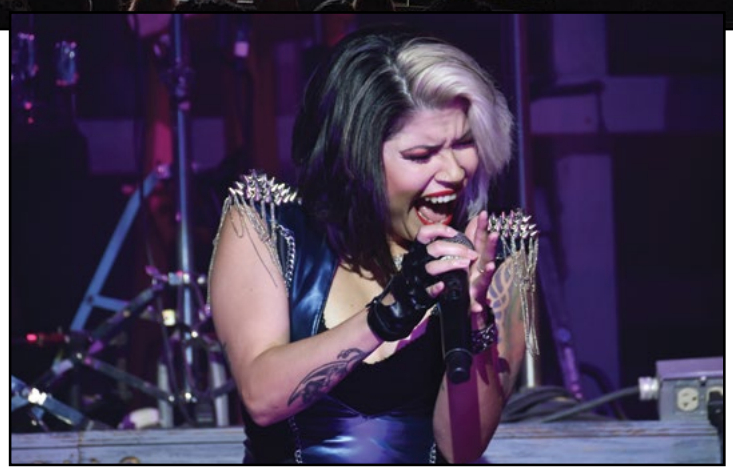
SAN ANTONIO — Since Halloween has reinvigorated the so-called shoulder season of theme parks in the last few decades, the industry enjoys some of its largest attendance days in the fall.

As each park grows and refines its frightful (or harvest) product, many go on to establish traditions. For **Six Flags Fiesta Texas**, the park has established a legacy.

For its Halloween festival, Fright Fest, the park offers the ubiquitous haunts and décor, but the park, known for its live entertainment, has created a monster — a monster show, that is. Over time, guests have become fans of the nightly "Monster Mash Bash" in the largest venue the park has. The casts from the park's daytime shows converge into a giant ensemble, typically around 25 performers, including a live band.

When asked if the performers enjoy being part of a huge group, Director of Entertainment **Ben McTyre** readily answered, "Yes, they do! We are lucky to have a high retention rate with our talent since we can employ them year-round. Due to the frequent changeover in show product from one event to the next, a performer can possibly be in up to eight or nine different shows over the course of an operating season at Fiesta Texas. 'Monster Mash Bash' is the show that everyone wants to be in. It is our biggest production and is generally the highlight of the year for most of our performers. For a couple of months, they get to feel like rock stars!"





The award-winning show had dramatic lighting, as well as fire and pyrotechnics (above). Performers (right) look forward all season to being able to rock out in the fall.
AT/TIM BALDWIN; COURTESY JASON KNUTSON

The show's origins weren't always so big. **David Blazer** — currently with **Enchanted Parks** in St. Louis — was McTyre's predecessor. He spoke on the show's origins.

"The first years of the show, 'Monster Mash Bash' was done in the streets of Rockville on a portable stage," Blazer told *Amusement Today*. "There were approximately 10 performers and a live band. The lighting and tech were that of a festival stage. It was nowhere near as big as it has become, but very popular. The event started with a parade of monsters."

That popularity prompted the Texas park to expand the production.



In 2019, Monster Mash Bash had a psycho circus-style storyline.
AT/TIM BALDWIN

"The streets of Rockville were packed. There was no room to grow," said Blazer. "**Melinda Ashcraft** had just become our park president and **Martin Bozer** our new operations director. They came to me during the show and were concerned about the crowd size, and things needed to change to make it a better experience. I had shared that we had a plan to move the show into Lone Star Lil's Amphitheater, but previous management was concerned that people wouldn't go into Lil's for the show. Before I could finish my thought, Melinda and Martin both said, 'Done! Let's move it!'"

For more than a quarter century, one thing has remained the same: change. The park has not done the same show twice.

"I've been involved for 21 years. I inherited the show concept when I got here in 2006," said McTyre. "We have gone through a lot of different iterations of the show since then. Some have been story-driven, and some have just been concert-style shows. We involve the entire team and everybody brings something different to the table from a creative aspect. A lot of different people have worked on it through the years, and I think that is what helps keep it fresh."

Having such a huge cast seems almost unwieldy, but it works.

"I have always been passionate about working with live musicians," McTyre said. "I spent my formative years in the industry mixing for live bands among other jobs. Having musicians onstage brings an energy that cannot be replicated with tracks."

Energy is a good description. "Monster Mash Bash" is a high-volume, high-energy extravaganza. Its previous edition easily took the recent Golden Ticket Award for Best New Show.

"Last year I just decided that I wanted to reset and get back to the basics. We didn't want to worry about a storyline or narrative that you have to find just the right songs for. Keep the spectacle and the visuals but just concentrate on high energy, entertaining music with broad appeal," McTyre noted.

For the performers, there is an excitement as fall approaches.

"It's my favorite season of the year. Getting to perform some of my favorite music with such a talented cast is something I look forward to every year," said long-time performer **Zander Herrera**. "I think it makes me a better performer being with so many people. Pushing myself to keep up with all the talented singers and dancers onstage helps me stay motivated to constantly keep improving on my talents."

"Getting through the heat of the summer gets you mentally and physically prepared to rock out for Halloween," added performer **Cassie Moczygemba**. "The takeaway for me performing with such a huge group is that everyone matters. Everyone needs to have that positive energy and light on and off stage, or the entire group can suffer."

"The hardest part of being in such a big group is just remembering the blocking and where to stand," noted Herrera. "Such big formations definitely are a challenge to remember!"

The production involves the musical components: band, singing, high choreography. But fire, sets and pyrotechnics truly make the show a smash.

"The fire effects don't cost as much as one would think, but the pyro is getting more costly, especially over the last couple of seasons," said McTyre. "We have a good relationship with a local vendor who has treated us well through the years."

Looking back, Blazer told *AT*, "It was truly a highlight of my career. I think the part of the legacy that makes me proud is that the show has grown and expanded, amazing sets have been added and the talent continues to be phenomenal. I was asked if it was hard to go back and watch shows you started. My answer is always that you want the shows to be bigger and better than when you were there because that means people took what you did and cared. Ben has done just that … he took a product that was successful and added what was needed to keep it strong and healthy, and it is now even better!"

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Cedar Point landscaping creations wow guests at HalloWeekends

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
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The fall season provides a canvas for Cedar Point to display its creativity. Almost like mosaics, the use of pumpkins is both festive and artistic. The variety of colors and sizes make the displays especially photo worthy. AT/TIM BALDWIN





SANDUSKY, Ohio — Theme parks have embraced Halloween events for decades. It is a time of year that sees incredible attendance. Most parks concentrate on haunts and scare zones. Each park fine-tunes its décor each year; several have impressive props and scenes. While a handful have attractive pumpkin or fall displays, "beautiful" isn't typically a term thrown around for frightful events.

Cedar Point has managed to cover it all. Along the midway stretching through Corkscrew, Top Thrill 2 and heading close to Magnum XL-200, guests find themselves stopping to take in the detailed landscaping arrangements crafted by the Cedar Point landscaping team.

"Most Cedar Point visitors are familiar with our landscaping team's gorgeous spring and summer displays, but they might be surprised to know the work continues well into the fall," said **Tony Clark**, regional manager of public relations. "Even though the world isn't thinking about planting this time of year, there are so many ways our talented team reinvents how various plants can be repurposed and displayed, from tree branches to pumpkins to mums. I'm still in awe at the work they do, with most of it done silently in the morning before any guest enters the gates."

"The Landscape Department oversees the design and installation of the displays," said **Kendra Welch**, landscaping foreman. "Some designs are carried over, but we try to create new designs each year. I don't have an exact start date of the displays, but we believe it may have begun in 2015 when we introduced a pumpkin-themed midway near Top Thrill 2."

It's not just standard pumpkins as gourds and colorful varieties and sizes of pumpkins become artistic tools for Cedar Point to craft its own artistic medium.

"The process actually starts in the fall for the following year," Welch told *Amusement Today*. "We talk to our local supplier (**Rowland Farms** in Bellevue, Ohio) and discuss pumpkin/gourd varieties for the following year. He then orders the pumpkin seed and plants those in the spring. We work closely with him to understand how the crops are growing so we know what varieties will be ready and at what time. There are a lot of variables that go into growing pumpkins, which affects when they will be ready to be cut. Once we know what the designs will be, we organize the logistics of delivery to the park."

Even before the assembly of displays can begin, the delivery of the produce is nothing short of massive.

"They can deliver 14 gaylords (pallet-sized boxes) at a time," Welch explained. "It takes almost a full week to get all the pumpkins here, and we receive roughly 250 gaylords a year."

To execute the artistic creations, Cedar Point has the process down.

"The designs are usually Halloween-themed, but some years we will incorporate something new that is happening in the park," Welch said. "Each year they are a little different. We place a weed mat fabric down and then use spray paint to draw a guideline for the pumpkin mosaics. The areas that are just patterns/designs are all placed freehand. We create 'assembly lines' of team members to get the pumpkins placed. It is really fun to see them all come together!"

Even though the process works like a well-oiled machine, it still requires manpower.

"After the designs are approved and mapped out, it takes around 50 people to move and place the pumpkins, and that's wrapped up in about four to five days."

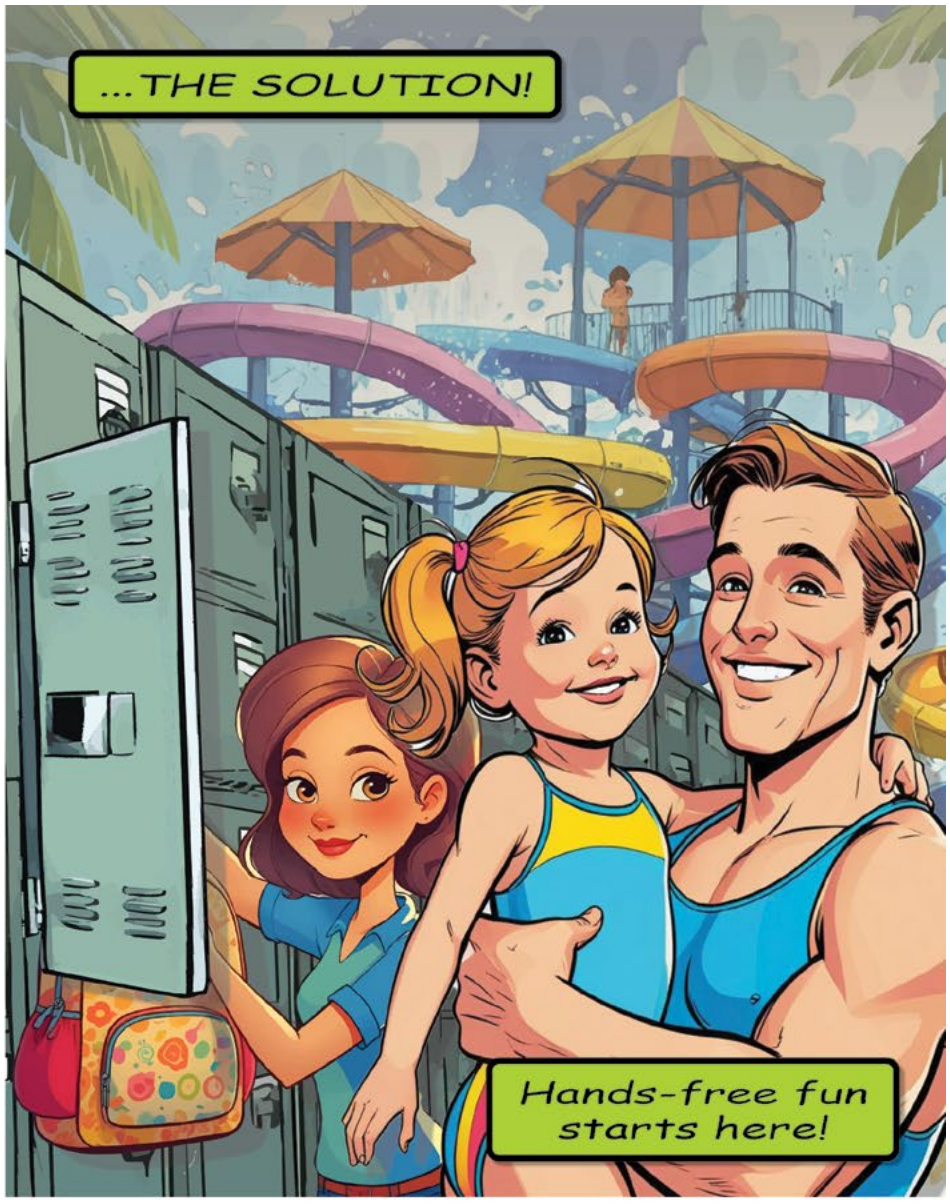
Although the scares are the main draw, to make sure HalloWeekends offers something for everyone, the pumpkin displays complement the live entertainment and family-friendly offerings as well.

"We do get a lot of positive feedback on the pumpkin displays," Welch told *AT*. "But along with those, there are some comments on their short lifespan. We do monitor the pumpkins daily and try to refresh them as frequently as we can. Weather is a huge factor in the longevity, so if we have a hot fall, we're replacing more frequently. Anything expired goes to a facility that takes yard waste and turns it into compost. At the end of the season, the good pumpkins and squash are donated to local food banks, schools, farmers, etc. The food banks will either give them out or make meals out of them. Schools will also take some for fun projects. Farmers like to feed their animals with them."

Along with nighttime scares, the park offers family-friendly activities during the day, such as crafts, trick or treating, games and the House on Boo Hill.

Cedar Point's Halloweekend event takes place September 17 through November 1 in 2026.





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Universal marks 35 years of screams with boldest anniversary yet

Halloween Horror Nights once again set spooky standard

AT: *David Fake*
dfake@amusementtoday.com



Aerialists and fire performers light up the Fear Factor Stage during "Nightmare Fuel: Blood Noir," the sixth edition of Halloween Horror Nights' signature stunt spectacular. AT/DAVID FAKE

ORLANDO — Halloween Horror Nights doesn't sneak up on **Universal Studios Florida** anymore. It arrives with three and a half decades of nightmares behind it, and this year, the event wants you to feel every one of those years.

Halloween Horror Nights 35 opened its gates August 28 under the banner "Infernal Carnival of Nightmares," running 49 select nights through November 1, the longest run in the event's history and, fittingly, its most self-aware. What started in 1991 as a three-night novelty called "Fright Nights," staged around a single haunted house, has grown into the biggest ticketed Halloween event on the planet. HHN 35 doesn't just acknowledge that lineage. It builds the entire season around it.

The clearest signal is the pairing at the center of the event's mythology. Jack the Clown, HHN's original and most enduring icon since his 2000 debut, is sharing top billing for the first time with Dr. Oddfellow, the more recent addition to the roster who last headlined in 2023 and is now stepping into just his second turn as a marquee character. Jack represents raw, chaotic menace. Oddfellow is the calculated, clinical counterweight, and their combined "Infernal Carnival of Nightmares" folds both into a single decaying carnival, with a wink built into the theme's own name. "Infernal Carnival of Nightmares" initializes to I.C.O.N.

"There were some really interesting creative foundations," **Mike Aiello**, Universal Orlando's senior director of entertainment creative development, said of the event's earliest years during a preview panel ahead of the season. Aiello has been part of Halloween Horror Nights for the better part of its existence, and he made clear the anniversary framing wasn't incidental, noting that the team has been building toward it since early last year and that Universal is pulling out all the stops for the anniversary.

That combination of chaos and control gets its clearest treatment in "Jack & Oddfellow: Chaos & Control," the house built around the pair's origin story and eventual, uneasy alliance.

Aiello framed the pairing as two different registers of fear working against each other. "You've got a cerebral end of the spectrum, and a visceral end," he said, describing how Oddfellow's calculation and Jack's chaos pull guests in opposite directions inside the same house.

He was just as animated talking about this year's **Ozzy Osbourne** tribute house, calling it a deliberate mix of scale and intimacy. "I'm particularly proud of how theatrical it feels," Aiello said of the Prince of Darkness maze, noting the house swings between huge, operatic moments and scenes built to feel unsettlingly close.

That history-forward instinct runs through the rest of the house lineup too, 10 strong this year and split between marquee licensed horror and original storytelling, the same combination Universal Creative has leaned on since day one. "Stranger Things 5" closes out Hawkins' fight against the Upside Down with the full weight of Netflix's final season. "Sinners" drops visitors into Club Juke as a party turns into a vampire massacre. "Evil Dead Burn" traps guests inside a house hunted by bloodthirsty Deadites. Pinhead finally gets his due in a long-awaited Hellraiser house, and Ozzy Osbourne anchors his own tribute maze, announced as the tenth and final house just weeks before the event opened.

Outdoors is where this year's event pulls back a bit. HHN 35 counts four true scare zones this season, fewer than some past years have offered, and the mix leans harder on street-level programming than raw scare density. "Downtown Clowntown" converts New York into clown territory, mixing Killer Klowns from Outer Space, Art the Clown and returning HHN characters Chance and Eddie Schmidt into one unhinged street party. Downtown

▸ **See UNIVERSAL, page 23**



A living gold statue of Jack the Clown watches over the carnival midway as Chance the Clown works the crowd in the Downtown Clowntown scare zone. AT/DAVID FAKE



UNIVERSAL

Continued from page 22

Clowntown is one of the event's largest scare zones, occupying multiple streets. Then there is "Sideshow of Decay" and "Fortnitemares," the latter dropping guests into a Battle Bus-adjacent Freaky Fields overrun by a familiar purple storm; "Infernal Carnival of Nightmares" turns the event's central icon zone into Jack and Oddfellow's own twisted midway. Club Horror, one of two returning "street experiences" alongside Mel's Die-In: Zombies, is a DJ-driven dance party with go-go dancers in San Francisco, more nightclub than nightmare, and Universal is upfront that it sits in a different tier than the four scare zones proper.

There is also the theatrical production Universal fans have come to treat as its own tradition: Nightmare Fuel. Now in its sixth annual incarnation, the stunt spectacular trades its recent circus arc for "Blood Noir," a vampire-infested metropolis built on pyro, aerial choreography and illusion work Universal itself describes as a sinister spectacle of pyro, aerialists and illusions. The production's pedigree isn't in question, and this year's incarnation is equally appeasing. A prior Nightmare Fuel edition, "Wildfire," won an **IAAPA** Brass Ring Award, with judges calling the franchise the highest-rated show in Halloween Horror Nights history.

The confidence behind Halloween Horror Nights' anniversary goes well beyond one show, too. Halloween Horror Nights carried *Amusement Today's* Golden Ticket Award for Best Halloween Event for 11 consecutive years before retiring the category altogether in 2024, a rare move reserved for winners of categories that had, by any reasonable measure, stopped being a real contest. Rather than crown the event again, *Amusement Today* elevated Halloween Horror Nights to Golden Ticket Legend status, the industry equivalent of a hall of fame induction. It's the kind of accolade that explains why HHN 35 leans so hard into its own history. There's no one left to beat except itself.

Add in the return of the Tribute Store, back in its original New York footprint and themed this year to a wandering sideshow called Sideshow Obscura, and a merchandise line built specifically around the 35th anniversary, and the throughline of the season comes into focus. Halloween Horror Nights isn't reinventing itself for its milestone year; it's reaching back through 35 years of clowns, carnivals and casualties and making the case that the scares were always the point. Never Go Alone, as the marketing has reminded fans for six years running, and at 35, with a Legend title already on the mantel, Universal is making sure you remember why.



Ozzy Osbourne's ghoulish likeness looms over the finale of "Ozzy Osbourne: Prince of Darkness," the tribute haunted house honoring the late rock icon.
AT/DAVID FAKE

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The enthusiast community was head-over-heels with excitement when it was announced that Six Flags Corporation had acquired ArieForce One from the shuttered Fun Spot Atlanta. AT/DAVID FAKE

Six Flags acquires ArieForce One, keeping fan-favorite coaster rolling

ARLINGTON, Texas — **Six Flags Entertainment Corporation** has acquired ArieForce One, the celebrated steel roller coaster from **Rocky Mountain Construction** (RMC) that captured the imagination of thrill-seekers around the world and quickly earned recognition as one of the most acclaimed coaster experiences of the modern era. Six Flags will introduce the attraction at one of its parks during the 2028-2029 operating seasons.

While the coaster's future home remains under wraps, the announcement officially launches what is expected to become one of the most closely watched and passionately debated conversations in the theme park industry: Where will ArieForce One rise again?

For three years, ArieForce One built a devoted following among roller coaster enthusiasts who traveled from across the country and around the world to experience its signature blend of speed, airtime, inversions and nonstop intensity. Named in honor of **Fun Spot America** founder **John Arie Sr.** by the family-owned company that developed the attraction, ArieForce One represented both an ambitious investment and a personal legacy for the Arie family.

When Fun Spot Atlanta closed in August, fans openly mourned the loss of a coaster many considered one of the finest steel roller coasters ever built. Since then, the question has echoed throughout enthusiast groups, online forums and social media channels: Can one of the world's most celebrated coasters be saved?

"From the moment ArieForce One closed, we knew how much this coaster meant to the enthusiast community and to guests who traveled from around the world to experience it," said **Mark Pauls**, chief operating officer of Six Flags. "This is a ride that consistently generated excitement, acclaim and passionate fan support. We are thrilled to preserve its legacy, invest in its future and bring this extraordinary attraction to a new generation of guests. This acquisition represents our commitment to delivering world-class thrills and creating unforgettable experiences across the Six Flags portfolio."

"When we built ArieForce One, we wanted to create something truly special. Something that would put Fun Spot America on the map with coaster enthusiasts and families around the world and create memories that would last a lifetime," said **John Arie Jr.**, CEO of Fun Spot America. "Seeing ArieForce One preserved and finding a new home with Six Flags means a great deal to me and my family. Its story isn't ending, it's beginning a new chapter, and we are excited that future generations will get to experience ArieForce One.

Once reassembled and enhanced at its new Six Flags destination, the attraction is expected to become one of the premier thrill experiences in North America, drawing coaster enthusiasts, vacationers and adrenaline seekers alike.

Park Post-its



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After more than three decades of fun, laughter and unforgettable moments, the **Selva Mágica** amusement park in Guadalajara, Jal., Mexico, has closed its doors, marking the end of a historic cycle for entertainment in the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area, according to a statement from **Shared Services for Entertainment**, the company that operated Selva Mágica.

Located in the northern part of the city, right next to the **Guadalajara Zoo**, the facility first opened on April 22, 1988, formally welcoming its first visitors during the month of May of that same year.

In its beginnings, Selva Mágica was a modest project. With an initial area of approximately just under 10 acres, its original concept was focused almost entirely on children. However, the overwhelming response from the public spurred its continuous evolution.

Over the years, the park managed to double its size and incorporate larger-scale attractions, establishing itself as the must-visit meeting point for families, students and adrenaline lovers of different generations.

Among its array of amusement rides, some attractions became true landmarks of Guadalajara's popular culture. The most iconic include the Titan roller coaster and Los Troncos classic water tour.

•

Meow Wolf is getting closer to unveiling its Los Angeles locale. Targeting late 2026, when the doors open, guests can anticipate a walk-around, floor-to-ceiling experience that pays homage to the art of cinema with a sci-fi, psychedelic-like bent.

And to bring that vision to life, the Santa Fe, New Mexico-based experiential art collective will be working with nearly 40 Los Angeles artists across multiple mediums. Expect more than a dozen sculptural and diorama artists to contribute, along with those who specialize in mixed media for interactive and video content. Local artists will also create a number of murals for the space, and a handful of artists have been chosen to curate their own life-size rooms in the venue at the West Los Angeles Howard Hughes entertainment complex.

.•

USJ LLC, the operator of **Universal Studios Japan**, is set to expand the site of the movie theme park in the western city of Osaka for the first time since its 2001 opening.

The Osaka municipal government announced last month that it will lease a land plot adjacent to the northern side of the theme park to the company. A lease contract is expected to be concluded in 2028.

By building new attractions on the site, the company hopes to attract more visitors to the popular theme park.

•

Fairytale Farm, Chipping Norton, United Kingdom, will transform into a wonderland of light, color and music this autumn when its popular Illuminated Evenings return from Oct. 23 to Nov. 15.

The after-dark event will run every Friday, Saturday and Sunday, as well as every evening during October Half Term from Oct. 24 to 1 Nov. 1. On each event date, the attraction will remain open until one hour after dusk.

New for 2026, visitors will be able to experience Journey to Alice's Wonderland fully illuminated after dark. Fairytale Farm's first ride takes guests aboard colorful snails on an indoor and outdoor journey featuring Alice, the Mad Hatter and other colorful characters from the story.

•

Travis Kelce is taking his love for amusement parks into the business world. The **Kansas City Chiefs** tight end has joined investment firm **JANA Partners** in a major stake in **Six Flags Entertainment**, adding another unexpected name to his growing portfolio.

For Kelce, the move has a personal connection too. He grew up in Ohio, where **Cedar Point**, Sandusky, Ohio, was a familiar part of life, making this investment feel closer to home.

•

Six Flags St. Louis, Missouri, has announced the park's new name: **Mid America Adventure**. Along with the name, the park revealed an updated logo and brand identity that honors its 55-year history in the heart of the Midwest while celebrating its diverse collection of attractions.

"We are excited about the changes and new opportunities that are ahead for us," said **Danny Snider**, park president, Mid America Adventure, during the announcement. "Earlier this year, we became part of the Enchanted Parks family of theme parks. Now, with the rollout of our new name, we look forward to continuing our history and tradition of providing families with safe, clean fun visits to this park so that they can make lasting memories together."

•

The **Mattel Adventure Park** in Glendale, Arizona, has a new developer, and it's the same company already building next door.

VAI Resort is now the developer, owner and operator of Mattel Adventure Park, according to a news story on a local ABC affiliate. **Epic Resort Destinations** is no longer the developer.

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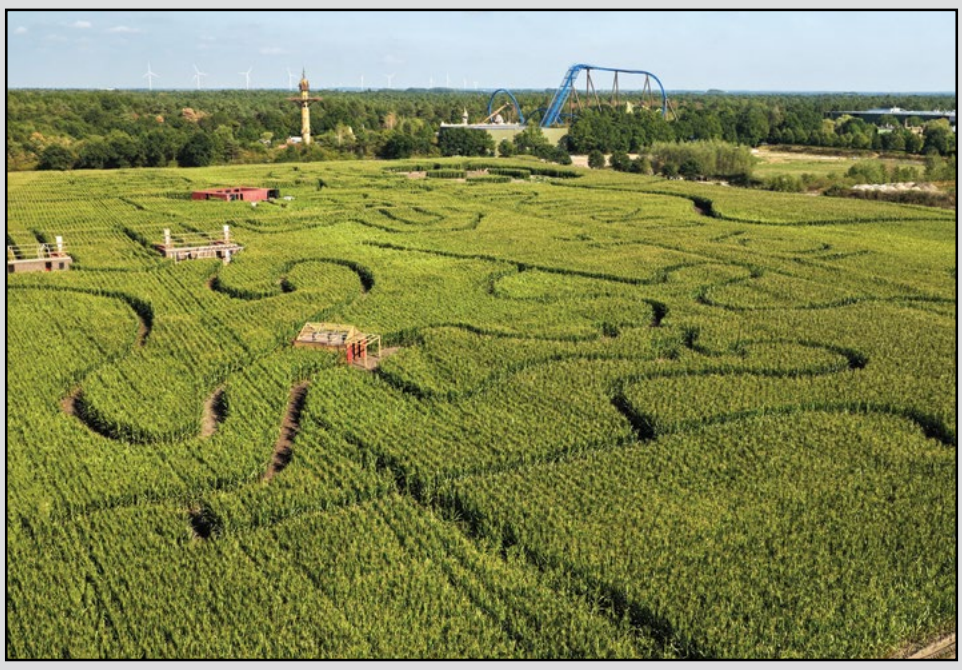
Spooky season transforms attractions into festivals of frights, fun



Las Vegas's Area15 will transform into a sprawling Halloween playground of music, performance, art and spectacle with the return of its annual ScAREA15 Massive on Saturday, Oct. 31, 2026. Beyond the music, ScAREA15: Strange Circus will fill AREA15 with a bizarre cast of roaming performers and characters, interactive photo opportunities, immersive art installations, festival-style vendors, craft makers and unexpected sideshow-inspired encounters. COURTESY AREA15



Celebrating five years of haunts in 2026, Hersheypark, Hershey, Pennsylvania, is offering its Dark Nights haunt experience. The event kicked off Sept. 12 and is running 23 days, including Halloween. To commemorate the milestone season, the eight-weekend event introduces the all-new Reese's Depot Of Doom scare zone, part of an expanded lineup of five haunted houses with evolved storylines and five scare zones included with admission. More than 50 rides and dark coaster experiences are also available. The park also offers daytime, not-so-scary activities for the younger spooks and goblins. COURTESY HERSHEYPARK



Preparations for the Halloween season are in full swing at Toverland Theme Park, Sevenum, North Limburg, the Netherlands. From Oct. 3, the park will host 17 family-friendly Halloween Days and 13 spine-chilling Halloween Nights. During Halloween Nights, no fewer than 170 scare actors will take over the park across six thrilling scare zones and six terrifying haunted experiences. New this year is Entwined: The Maze, a vast seven-hectare maze. Halloween Days offers a more family-friendly experience with the Pumpkin Farm, an easy-to-navigate hay bale maze and plenty of Halloween sweets. COURTESY TOVERLAND



Halloween at Gröna Lund in Stockholm, Sweden, transforms this historical amusement park into a mix of family-friendly autumn fun and terrifying haunted experiences after dark. The event runs on select dates from Oct. 10 through Nov. 9. The family-friendly small area features a special children's show starring the new character Gnuttätaren. COURTESY GRÖNA LUND



The gates of Phantom Fall Fest at Kennywood, West Mifflin, Pennsylvania, creaked open on Sept. 12 for 22 days and nights of Kennywood fall seasonal activities. Offerings this year include new daytime activities, a delicious fall tasting experience, fun rides and the park's signature haunted houses and scare zones that begin at 6 p.m. at night. COURTESY KENNYWOOD

Beginning Sept. 12, Six Flags Great Adventure's fall calendar came alive with the family-friendly Kids Boo Fest and Oktoberfest, followed by Fright Fest beginning Sept. 18. Four new haunted mazes lead the charge this year. Kids Boo Fest offers trick-or-treating, fall activities, games, live entertainment and favorite family rides in a playful Halloween atmosphere designed for children of all ages. COURTESY SIX FLAGS



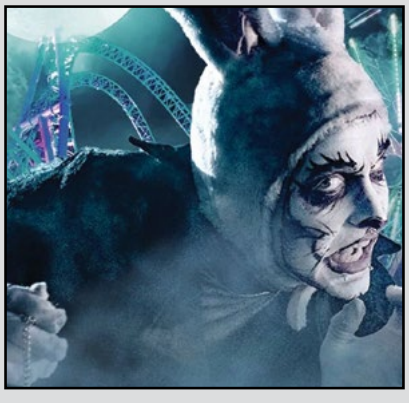
More haunting thrills and sights at attractions during Halloween



Halloween festivities at Great Escape, Queensbury, New York, kicked off on Sept. 26 and will run weekends through Oct. 25. The park presents Fright Fest with haunted attractions, scare zones, live entertainment and rides after dark. The park's Boo Fest offers festive entertainment such as character appearances, seasonal activities and not-so-scary fun throughout the park. COURTESY GREAT ESCAPE



Legoland, Winter Haven, Florida, brought out its Halloween event on Sept. 5, transforming the park into its Brick or Treat event. On select dates through Oct. 31, families are being offered trick-or-treat across the park, meet-and-greets with Lego Monster characters, live shows and opportunities to build Halloween creations and experience interactive adventures from day to night. COURTESY LEGOLAND



Phantom Fall Fest debuted for its fifth season at Adventureland (Altoona, Iowa) on Sept. 26. This year, visitors will take a twisted path into Wonderland in the park's newest experience, MALICE: Jabberwocky's Revenge, set to debut on opening night. COURTESY ADVENTURELAND



Valleyfair, Shakopee, Minnesota, kicked off its ValleyScare on Sept. 19. Running through Oct. 31, it transforms the park into a haunted experience with immersive, eerie, live entertainment. The park also brought back its non-frightening Tricks and Treats for a more family-friendly Halloween event. COURTESY VALLEYFAIR

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Ventola Projects completes immersive bowling installation in Ecuador

CUENCA, Ecuador — **Ventola Projects** has completed its first project in South America, delivering an immersive bowling experience for **PlayGo Entertainment** in **Mall del Alto**, Cuenca, Ecuador.

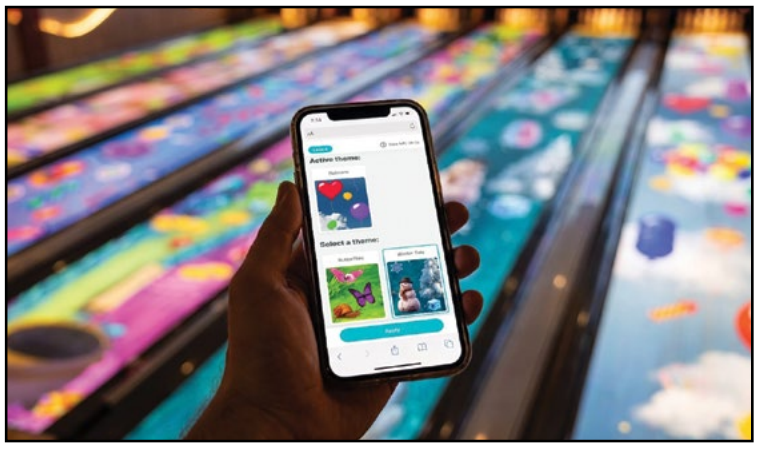
The U.K.-based company worked alongside U.S.-based **VAvR Alliance** partner **Evogence** to introduce ball-responsive projection technology across the venue's bowling lanes, transforming traditional games into interactive visual experiences.

The installation uses real-time tracking technology to project animations that follow each ball as it travels down the lane. Guests can scan a QR code at their lane, select from a range of themes and instantly personalize the appearance of their game without assistance from venue staff.

"Completing our first project in South America is an important step and demonstrates the international potential of the technology we have developed," stated **Mick Ventola**, CEO of Ventola Projects. "PlayGo Entertainment wanted to create a bowling experience that would stand out within a busy shopping and leisure destination. By combining responsive projections with a simple central management system, we have helped create an attraction that is visually engaging for guests while remaining straightforward for the venue's team to operate."

Content can also be managed centrally by the PlayGo Entertainment team, allowing staff to control themes, branding and promotional material across the entire installation from a single device.

Between games, the projections can be used to display venue branding, sponsor logos and promotions for events or food and drink. This provides the venue with an additional way to engage visitors and make use of the lanes during periods when they are not being played on.



Ventola Projects's immersive bowling content can be managed centrally from a single device across the entire installation. COURTESY VENTOLA PROJECTS

Cloud-based monitoring, device management and remote support have also been incorporated into the project to help maintain consistent performance and minimize disruption to the venue's day-to-day operations.

The project was delivered through the VAvR Global Alliance, an international network of technology partners established to make Ventola's immersive lighting and entertainment solutions available to venues around the world.

"Our partnership with Evogence and the wider VAvR Global Alliance allows us to combine international reach with knowledge and support on the ground,"added Ventola. "We are pleased to have completed the installation and to see the technology being used at PlayGo Entertainment."

Designed as a scalable system, the installation enables PlayGo Entertainment to update themes and promotional content as its requirements develop. Its interactive format is intended to encourage longer playing sessions, repeat visits and social sharing, strengthening the bowling venue's appeal within the wider Mall del Alto entertainment offering.

The completion follows Ventola Projects' delivery of immersive entertainment installations in the U.K. and North America. Its expansion into Ecuador marks the latest stage in the company's efforts to introduce its technology to new international markets through the VAvR Global Alliance.




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Waterville Valley Resort encouraged AGS to concentrate on the beauty aspect of the resort's new mini golf course, wanting to keep things feeling real and natural. COURTESY AGS

Waterville Valley Resort adds new mini golf course courtesy of AGS

WATERVILLE VALLEY, N.H. — **Waterville Valley Resort**, tucked entirely inside the **White Mountain National Forest** area of New Hampshire, recently added an 18-hole miniature golf course designed and constructed by **Adventure Golf and Sports** near the site of a new 16,000-square-foot Adventure Center building the resort has planned.

"We're shifting focus to make this a competitive and best-in-class New England resort community, not just a ski resort community," said **Tim Smith**, president and general manager of Waterville Valley Resort.

To complement the natural beauty of the valley and accommodate the region's changing seasonal weather, Adventure Golf & Sports built the course using their eco-friendly Modular Advantage Mini Golf system, where patented, interlocking, permeable panels and permeable turf are used instead of concrete for construction.

According to Smith, although Waterville Valley Resort already has hiking, biking, a nine-hole regulation golf course, championship tennis courts and pickleball, "those activities require so much energy. The parents and everybody, they get tired. What we were lacking was that last 'thing,' that memorable moment, that thing the entire family could do together. Miniature golf is one of those activities that will provide memories for our guests and encourage people to come, encourage people to stay, but also make that memorable moment that we're desiring as hospitality professionals that will stick with them and make them want to come back."

"13 holes are adaptive [ADA compliant] on one side of a creek," added Smith, "and you cross over a bridge to the remaining five holes on the other side of the creek, and there's a water fountain on that side and all of this is sloped down so there's multiple tiers with about 12 feet of grade difference."

The mini golf course won't open officially until June 2027. "We're going to have some hospitality days and probably some soft opening announcements, but the official opening won't be until June of next year," explained Smith.

Waterville Valley Resort owner **Jame Sununu**, discovered AGS at IAAPA Expo 2025. Sununu liked the construction aspects, loved the layouts that they did and was impressed that it was not concrete.

"That [modular] technology for the way that they [AGS] do the courses and don't use concrete was very appealing to us. Water issues are a primary concern across our entire valley," said Smith. "Being in the middle of a valley, the water comes off the mountains and just saturates everything. So having something that won't saturate or collect water is a very large advantage for us.

"They [AGS] arrived on site on time, they left on time, we had our hiccups here and there, and it was all managed very professionally," commented Smith. "It was all done on time, on budget, and made for a very smooth start to this adventure center construction project."



FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRAL

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Amusement Products is expanding its commercial go-kart lineup with the return of gas-powered racing and the introduction of the new Octane go-kart.

Developed for operators who continue to value the familiarity, performance and straightforward operation of traditional gas-powered karts, Octane provides another option for facilities seeking a commercial-grade racing experience backed by Amusement Products' decades of experience in the go-kart industry.

"Gas-powered racing continues to have a place in the market, and we wanted to give operators another strong option within the Amusement Products lineup," said **Dutch Magrath**, president of Amusement Products. "Octane was developed to deliver the durability and practical performance our customers expect while allowing us to serve facilities that still prefer a traditional gas-powered platform."

The Octane is available with either a **Honda** GX200 six-horsepower engine or Honda GX270 nine-horsepower engine, paired with an electric starting system, centrifugal wet multi-disc clutch, cog-belt final drive, hydraulic self-adjusting disc brake and commercial welded alloy-steel frame.

•

Intercard announced that **Family Entertainment Group** (FEG) will use Intercard's cashless technology as part of FEG's new strategic partnership with **Topgolf**.

Following a successful pilot program at seven Topgolf venues, FEG and Intercard have begun a nationwide phased rollout that will bring new arcades to nearly 100 Topgolf sites. Topgolf guests can expect more opportunities to play beyond the hitting bays through FEG's thoughtfully curated arcade experiences.

"At Intercard, we set standards," said **Rob Geiger**, Intercard's customer relations director, "and our products have become the industry standard for route and FEC operators who want to capture new revenue streams and plan for growth. We are proud to be part of this project with FEG and Topgolf, who continue to set standards for customer service and satisfaction in the amusement industry."

Each arcade will consist of games customized to reflect the unique character of its location while maintaining the high standards guests expect from Topgolf and FEG. Intercard's iTeller kiosks, iReaders and new kiosk-free Impulse Plus readers will enable FEG to maximize revenue by accepting multiple forms of payment, including play cards, credit cards, RFID and mobile payment.

In addition, Intercard's latest cashless technology has been chosen to manage the arcade at the new **Skyline Social & Games** in Apple Valley, Minnesota.

The massive, all-new FEC spans nearly 100,000 indoor and outdoor square feet. It is operated by the **Kolquist** family, which has run a popular bowling center in Hermantown, Minnesota, for over 70 years. Skyline Social, their second location, is a vibrant contemporary social hub that blends high-energy competitive games, casual leisure and an integrated full-service kitchen and bar.

•

Chuck E. Cheese announced a month-long fundraising campaign benefiting the **American Society for Deaf Children** (ASDC) in honor of National Deaf Awareness Month this September. The campaign shines a spotlight on how Chuck E. Cheese is making the guest experience more inclusive for every family — from its ASL Sign-Along video series, created in partnership with ASDC, to its long-running Sensory Sensitive Sundays program and its newly launched Sensory Sensitive Birthdays package.

"Language access changes the trajectory of a child's life, and community changes how a family experiences that journey," said **Katie Chubb**, executive director of the American Society for Deaf Children. "This partnership reflects a shared belief: every child deserves to be fully included, whether that's in the classroom or at a birthday party. Thanks to partnerships like Chuck E. Cheese, we're able to put free, deaf-led resources directly into families' hands, right when they need them most."

•

Round1, a Japan-based arcade and entertainment chain, has begun construction at a former Sears anchor space at **Haywood Mall** in Greenville, South Carolina. It will be the company's first South Carolina location and one of a handful in the region.

Round1 announced on Instagram on Aug. 31 that it will open a new store at the mall. The closest locations are in Atlanta and Greensboro, North Carolina, and the only other location in the Southeast is outside of Miami.

Construction fencing now rings a significant amount of parking on that side of the mall. The company has yet to formally announce an opening date.

A fence with Round1 signs has been installed in front of an entrance to the former Sears wing, promising a host of activities: arcade games, bowling, billiards, food and a bar. It will also feature Spo-cha, a timed play area where patrons can play various types of sports.

WATER PARKS

Sun World Resort debuts world's first ProSlide PowerRapids Ride

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PowerRapids's water is deeper than what is encountered on traditional waterslides, allowing for the creation of rapids (above). The attraction features multiple channels (below). COURTESY PROSLIDE TECHNOLOGY

PHÚ QUỐC, Vietnam — The roar of rushing water at Phú Quốc's **Aquatopia Water Park** has a distinctly new rhythm. Visitors at the premier Vietnamese destination stepped into history last June as the first riders on PowerRapids — the debut installation of an entirely original category of water attraction from **ProSlide Technology** of British Columbia, Canada.

For decades, water parks have adhered to reliable formulas: innertube shoots and gravity-driven slides. Traditional deep-water tube chutes typically featured a single tube, and the design often created stagnant zones or whirlpools, requiring substantial effort on the part of the rider to free themselves. Gravity-driven sliding delivers the high speeds and sharp turns that have long defined classic slides, but the downhill motion is fairly consistent. PowerRapids, developed by industry leader ProSlide and introduced at **IAAPA** Expo 2025, reimagines the typical water park slide by combining the best of both worlds, integrating dynamic floating channels directly into the slide path. Riders move seamlessly between traditional high-speed sliding sections and shallow, rushing-river channels, creating a continuous sequence of varying speeds and forces. The combination of motion, intensity, changing currents and shifting channels surrounds riders in an experience that feels much more dynamic than a traditional waterslide.

Fast-moving water, strong currents and shifting channels create lift waves, and lively turbulence that feels reactive, giving riders a sense of dynamic river motion that provides a more natural-feeling rafting experience from beginning to end.

"Today is the debut of an entirely new ride category and the future of family rafting," said **Ray Smegal**, president of ProSlide during IAAPA Expo Asia. "Every so often, a water ride technology emerges that will transform the water park experience, and PowerRapids is one of those moments. We set out to create an experience where the adventure never lets up, where every turn, every surge and every transition delivers something new. The result is immersive, dynamic and endlessly exciting."

The arrival of PowerRapids highlights a broader shift in the global attractions landscape. Park operators are increasingly turning toward multi-generational experiences that foster a collective experience that keeps groups of riders together for a longer period of time. By replacing deceleration zones with active river currents, the ride keeps energy levels high from dispatch to splashdown. The ride is fun and exciting, but not overly intense, making it appealing to family members of all ages.

The active river currents provide a sort of blocking mechanism, allowing for multiple rafts to traverse the attraction at the same time. This provides the park with a high-capacity attraction that can be enjoyed by a multitude of age groups. Aquatopia's PowerRapids has the potential to handle up to 1,440 people per hour.

Aquatopia Water Park provides visitors with more than 20 state-of-the-art ProSlide waterslides spread across six spectacularly jungle-island themed zones. The park offers a good mix of high-speed drop slides for thrill-seekers, a large lazy river and safe play zones for children. The thrill, however, begins long before guests set foot in the water.

Located on a remote island, the park can only be accessed via the world's longest three-rope-cable sea-crossing. The **Hon Thom Cable Car** traverses about 7.9 kilometers (4.9 miles) in 15 to 20 minutes, connecting An Thoi Station on the Phú Quốc mainland to Hon Thom Island (Pineapple Island). Built by Austria's **Doppelmayr**, it took three years to construct and



opened to the public in 2018. It holds the **Guinness World Record** for the longest non-stop three-rope cable car. The system was built to bring guests to the **Sun Group**'s Phú Quốc resort.

Sun World Hon Thom Nature Park was designed to preserve the natural, tropical landscape and lush jungle vegetation of Hon Thom Island. Despite the name, it is more resort than nature park.

The holiday destination includes Aquatopia Water Park; Exotic Park featuring a wooden roller coaster and other thrill rides; the spectacular Ciao Beach with miles of pristine sand, coconut groves and calm, clear, shallow water; and multiple hotels, including the **JW Marriott Emerald Bay Resort**. *Travel + Leisure* wrote that the Emerald Bay Resort was among the world's best hotels for transporting guests beyond reality into a world of imagination.

Sun World, the entertainment brand of Sun Group, operates seven major entertainment and amusement properties across Vietnam: Sun World Hon Thom Nature Park, **Sun World Ba Na Hills**, **Asia Park**, **Sun World Fansipan Legend**, **Sun World Ha Long Complex**, **Sun World Ba Den Mountain** and **Sun World Cat Ba Cable Car**.



WATER PARKS

PortAventura World expands aquatic park with Coral Bay addition

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SALOU, Spain — **Caribe Aquatic Park** expanded its footprint by 12% this past summer with the launch of **Coral Bay: The Lost Legend** (*La Leyenda Perdida*). The 6,000-square-meter (65,000-square-foot) family section introduces next-generation water features to **PortAventura World.**

Designed as an ancient pirate hideout newly emerged from the ocean, this immersive zone combines an interactive backstory with Caribbean-style landscaping, nautical shipwreck architecture and modern water attractions to appeal to the entire family.

Slides and play structures for the expansion were provided by Canadian firms **ProSlide Technology** of Ottawa, Ontario, and **WhiteWater West** of Richmond, British Columbia. Both have upped their game by providing Caribe Aquatic Park with first-of-their-kind attractions.

Bahía Pirata, considered the world's first multi-adventure pool, is an Aquadrenaline attraction provided by WhiteWater. Aquadrenaline is the first permanent water attraction built to solve a major industry challenge: capturing the tween-to-young-teen demographic. By pairing ninja-style competition with accessible, restriction-free design, it gives older kids a compelling reason to stick around. The adventure-style course does not require guests to wear a harness — the water is the safety system. The course can be dropped into an existing pool, or as is the case at Coral Bay, into a pool specifically built for the attraction.

Caribe Aquatic Park visitors are the first in the world to experience the Hive 6, which marks the global debut of body sliding within ProSlide's popular Hive series. By adapting the iconic design of the Hive 20 (tubing) and Hive 35 (family raft) into an experience built exclusively for body sliders, it opens up an entirely new ride category for water parks — giving Caribe Aquatic Park guests exclusive first access to a world-first attraction.

Cyclone, a ProSide Kidz Coaster, is the first of its type in Europe. Specifically designed for young riders making the transition from kiddie attractions to larger thrill rides, the Kidz Coaster delivers roller coaster-like sensations but on a smaller, family-friendly scale. Young guests can enjoy the excitement of being propelled uphill with ProSlide's patented blast technology, zipping along through twists and turns, and experiencing surprise drops, but without the intensity of a full-scale, adult version of a RocketBlast water coaster. The water coaster is fused with a Tornado 24 to provide an exciting conclusion to the attraction.



The Coral Bay expansion adds 6,000 square meters to the Caribe Aquatic Park (above). The Hive 6 (below) is the first body slide version of ProSlide's new Hive series of waterslide elements. COURTESY PORTAVENTURA WORLD, PROSLIDE TECHNOLOGY



Coral Bay balances high-energy thrills with safe, interactive play zones. A new Kidz Adventure Tower, The Crab, offers five distinct family-friendly body slides with varying speeds and styles. Included in the slide complex are a FlyingSaucer 8, Kidz Twister and two-lane Body RallyRacer. A dedicated spray park, Splash Port, adds a low-depth interactive playground that is packed with mini-slides, water cannons, and tipping buckets.





The Crab (above) features five distinct body slides including a FlyingSaucer 8, Kidz Twister and a two-lane Body RallyRacer. Bahía Pirata (right) gives older teens and tweens an adventure course that does not require the use of a harness or preserver. COURTESY PROSLIDE TECHNOLOGY, WHITEWATER WEST

"From the earliest stages of the project, our collaboration was centered on understanding PortAventura's vision and delivering innovative attractions that aligned with the park's long-term strategy and guest experience objectives," said **Aaron Wilson**, SVP, business Development – EMEA & LATAM at ProSlide. "As a long-standing partner of PortAventura, it's rewarding to continue supporting the park with industry-first experiences that help reinforce its position as a leader in family entertainment."

To fuel a full day of exploring, the expansion includes El Bucanero, a pirate-themed food-and-beverage outlet specializing in quick snacks, refreshing drinks, and ice cream.

Coral Bay opened alongside Makamanu Jungle—a new outdoor exploration trail with climbing challenges and dry stainless-steel slides in the main PortAventura World theme park —making 2026 a landmark year for the Spanish resort destination.

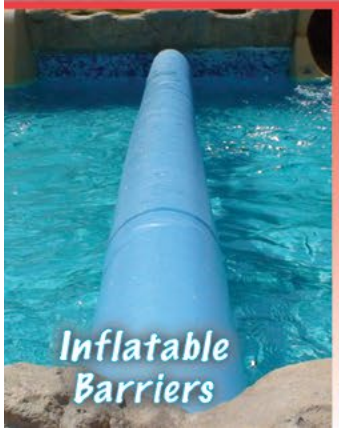
The park opened in 1995 as Port Aventura, a joint venture between **The Tussauds Group**, **Anheuser-Busch** and **La Caixa** banking foundation. In 2002, the Caribe Aquatic Park and two hotels were added, transitioning the park into a full-fledged entertainment resort. It attracts 5.3 million visitors each year, making it the most visited theme park in Spain and the sixth-most visited in the EMEA region.

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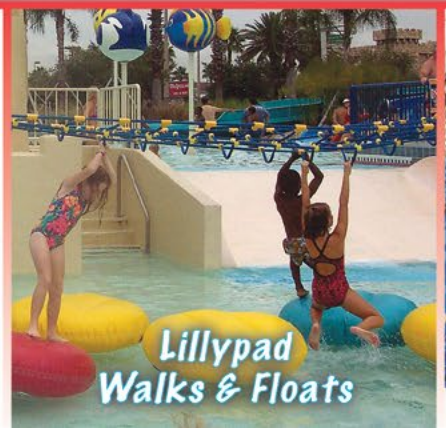
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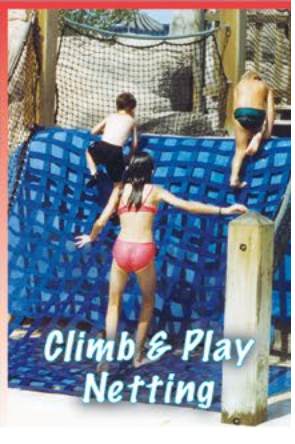
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WATER PARKS

WhiteWater delivers first optical illusion waterslide: Dragonfly Jet

ANTALYA, Turkey — **WhiteWater** debuted Helix Twist, a waterslide feature that uses a physically twisting flume profile to change riders' perception of motion, orientation and gravity.

The feature premiered as part of the Dragonfly Jet waterslide at The **Land of Legends** in Antalya, Turkey. It combines with WhiteWater's Master Blaster water coaster and Topspin open spiral drop to create a ride sequence that includes uphill blasts, high-banking turns and an optical illusion within one attraction.



Helix Twist uses changing geometry to create the impression that the slide is rotating around the rider. COURTESY WHITEWATER

Helix Twist is designed to create curiosity as well as excitement. Its unusual geometry encourages riders to repeat the experience as they try to understand how the movement and visual cues are produced. Its translucent sections allow guests to watch vehicles navigate the twisting structure, while its shape forms a distinctive part of the attraction's overall silhouette.

"The Land of Legends has always focused on bringing unique experiences to our guests," said **Mehmet Serin**, director of The Land of Legends. "Working with WhiteWater allowed us to introduce a world-first attraction that combines innovation with strong guest appeal. Helix Twist creates a ride experience that guests continue talking about long after they've left the park."

Unlike conventional slide features built on height or speed, Helix Twist uses changing geometry to create the impression that the slide is rotating around the rider. Although the flume remains stationary, its twisting profile can make riders feel as though they are rising, falling, banking, or rotating. Riders in one-to-two-person inner tubes begin with a familiar circular flume before encountering the twisting section. As the profile changes and speed increases, the ride surface appears to expand, contract and shift around the vehicle, creating a changing sense of direction and orientation.

The feature includes translucent sections that allow spectators to observe vehicles navigating the structure. Its compact design also enables installation upstream or downstream of any one- or two-person inner tube rides, providing layout flexibility for parks with limited space. The section can incorporate varying amounts of translucent fiberglass, from minimal coverage to fully translucent configurations, alongside themed lighting and AquaLucent effects.

"Helix Twist represents the kind of innovation that moves our industry forward by creating experiences guests have never encountered before," said **Onno Meeter**, president, Water Parks at WhiteWater. "It proves that the most memorable attractions are not only about bigger thrills, but also about sparking curiosity, inspiring repeat rides, and giving parks a unique story for guests to share."

With Helix Twist, WhiteWater is introducing a slide concept built around perception as much as motion. Its debut at The Land of Legends demonstrates how physical geometry can create a new category of ride experience centered on the relationship between structure, motion, and visual cues.





On Dragonfly Jet's Helix Twist, riders get a changing sense of direction and orientation as the ride surface appears to expand and shift around them as their speed increases. COURTESY WHITEWATER

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WATER PARKS

Heroes Paradise finds its wave via deputy's dream, ADG partnership

AT: *David Fake*
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Ethan Pennenga (above) the youngest of three Pennenga boys, rips an EpicSurf wave that his parents — Tim and Julie Pennenga (below) — spent a decade fighting to build beneath him. The couple, owners of Heroes Paradise FEC, were delighted to celebrate the grand opening of their EpicSurf. AT/DAVID FAKE



BRANDON, Fla. — **Tim Pennenga** spent his days working as a Hillsborough County sheriff's deputy while he and his wife, **Julie Pennenga**, spent evenings and weekends hauling brick and turf across an abandoned, vandalized tennis club they had bought in 2015. Their youngest son, Ethan, who was six years old at the time, tagged along while his parents rebuilt a property most people would have abandoned. Eleven years later, Ethan, now 17, is the best surfer on a 4- to 6-foot wave that opened this June as the largest standing wave on the East Coast. **Aquatic Development Group** (ADG) helped build it and ultimately did far more than install the ride. The dream the Pennengas pursued through zoning fights, permitting battles and an initial $30,000 electricity bill finally has a name: EpicSurf at **Heroes Paradise**.

The road there started with a family that simply wanted to build something worth staying for. Hillsborough County had other ideas. A master plan drawn up decades earlier called for townhomes on that land, not entertainment, and county officials seemed determined to oppose the Pennengas at every opportunity.

"They fought us on every aspect," Tim said. "Expect a fight on every aspect. The government's not here to help you."

It took five years just to clear zoning and clean up the site, and Tim eventually left the sheriff's office to finish the job full time. Heroes Paradise opened in 2020 with laser tag, while the family kept looking for the attraction that would define the place. A few tries on a FlowRider convinced Tim that this may be the "something bigger" he and Julie were looking for.

"Initially, I said there is no way in hell I can do that," he recalled, "and then I went and tried it and was like, all right, I got to do it again."

That instinct is what eventually led the Pennengas to EpicSurf, the deep-water wave system built by ADG, and to a partnership that turned out to matter as much as the product itself. ADG signed on with Heroes Paradise in November 2023, broke ground two years later, and delivered a finished wave in just seven months. But the harder work happened in the years the Pennengas spent fighting for permits ADG's engineers had rarely had to explain before. Florida's Department of Health calculates filtration requirements off surface area rather than actual bather load, which left the ride with a two-hour turnover rate sized for water that typically carries only one or two people at a time as opposed to a packed wave pool, which the requirements were created to control.



Inside the operator booth, a touchscreen labeled "Performance Change" lets Heroes Paradise staff dial the EpicSurf wave from beginner to advanced settings, with an emergency stop and drain-to-dry controls staged within reach. AT/DAVID FAKE

"This is why we never refer to it as a 'pool,'" said **Julie Kline**, VP of marketing and engineering with the manufacturer, noting the ride carries **ASTM** certification as a stationary wave rather than a swimming pool, a distinction that took real convincing with regulators who'd never seen one before.

What the Pennengas got for the fight is a ride built on true depth rather than a thin sheet of water skimming a padded surface. Pumps push water from tanks buried beneath the ride, through a flow table and into an adjustable reef that builds what Kline calls a pillow at the back of the wave, letting riders dig in fins and carve real turns instead of just sliding across a film.

"There's no foam or like padding behind it," Kline said. "That's really water coming in." Getting it right took real trial and error, she said, since "once you actually start building the wave out, it does change the hydraulics every single time."

The wave adjusts from 2 to 5 feet at the touch of a button, retractable training bars get most first-timers up and riding within 30 to 60 minutes, and a drain-to-dry safety system that can empty the ride in under eight seconds. The latter eliminates the necessity of the deep-water rescue lifeguards required for most pools.

But there was still another major unexpected hurdle yet to be crossed. When **Tampa Electric**'s first monthly bill arrived north of $30,000, it threatened to undo the math of the whole project. It was the kind of moment that could have buried the FEC. Instead, the Pennengas say ADG stayed in the fight alongside them the very same way it had through permitting, correcting a warranty discrepancy in the family's favor, absorbing a spec fix at its own cost, and stepping in to line up general contractor **Arco Murray**, the same firm behind the local **Top Golf** builds, when a bank suddenly demanded a single GC mid-project.

"The people at ADG have been so incredibly honorable in everything that they've done," Julie Pennenga said.

It's the kind of backing that let a family business survive unexpected obstacles that could not have been anticipated, and it is a major aspect of why Heroes Paradise was first in line among a 'wave' of new EpicSurf installations expected to open across the country by year's end.

Still, none of that shows up in how people find the FEC. Heroes Paradise has built its following almost entirely on word of mouth and a 4.9 Google rating the Pennengas insist they've never paid for, drawing a crowd that leans pro-law-enforcement and pro-military, the same values Tim carried over from his old badge. It's also not the kind of foot traffic FEC that people stumble into; guests must seek it out.

Much has changed since the Pennengas first set out on this journey, but what hasn't changed is the family at the center of it. An injury Julie experienced and Tim's workload have mostly kept them out of the water more than either would like, so for now it's still Ethan doing the family's best surfing, on the wave his parents spent a decade fighting to build underneath him — a wave that would not have been possible without the enduring support of a caring partner like ADG.



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The red-and-yellow, 96-foot-tall Riptide waterslide dominates the skyline at the Mesa, Arizona, water park.
COURTESY GOLFLAND SUNPLASH

Golfland Sunsplash adds new thrills with ProSlide's Riptide

MESA, Arizona —Thrill-seekers in Arizona have a new reason to head to Mesa. This past summer, **Golfland Sunsplash** unveiled its newest attraction, Riptide, claiming to be the tallest water slide in the entire Southwest.

Towering nearly 10 stories above the Desert Southwest, this record-breaking addition delivers high-speed drops, sharp, gravity-defying turns, and adrenaline-pumping fun for water park visitors.

The attraction, a TornadoWave 60 from **ProSlide Technology** of Ottawa, Canada, stands 96 feet high, dominating the park's skyline. It offers a stunning, bird's-eye view of the surrounding East Valley before the real excitement begins. After climbing to the summit, riders board cloverleaf rafts that can accommodate two to four people.

The adventure begins with an intense, 540-degree enclosed spiral through red and yellow translucent slide sections, before plunging down a steep drop. The incredible 65-foot descent rapidly accelerates the rafts to speeds reaching up to 45 miles per hour. From there, thrill-seekers are thrust into the ride's signature element: a sweeping launch up a nearly vertical wall. Gravity temporarily takes over as the raft shoots upward before weightlessly plunging backward, delivering intense G-forces and a rush of cool water before coasting back down the wall. The rafts again pick up speed and are funneled into another enclosed yellow and red chute with a 45-degree right-hand turn that has the raft full of adventurers hugging the wall as it screams towards the final splashdown pool.

The massive addition to Mesa's summer hotspot complements the park's expansive lineup of aquatic attractions. While seeking high-adrenanile experiences flock to extreme rides like the Double Dare trapdoor drop and the bowl-swirling Stormrider, visitors seeking a more relaxed pace can still drift down the lazy river or catch waves in the massive wave pool. On the dry side of the park, visitors can enjoy classic family entertainment, including miniature golf, laser tag and arcade games.

For aquatic enthusiasts across Arizona and the Southwest looking to beat the summer heat with maximum intensity, Riptide stands out as a worthy attraction. Combining massive heights, extreme speeds and shared group excitement, it delivers one of the most memorable water park experiences in the region.

Founded in 1953, **Golfland Entertainment Centers** are a chain of family amusement centers, miniature golf courses and water parks located in California and Arizona. The centers in Mesa, Arizona, and Roseville, California, each have a water park called **Sunsplash**. Founder **Lou Fusz** built early miniature golf courses in St. Louis before moving his business to Arizona. He started the Golflands in Roseville and Mesa in 1983 with miniature golf, an arcade and batting cages. A Sunsplash water park was added to both locations in 1986. The two Sunsplash locations have a number of nearly identical attractions. A similar Riptide was installed in California three years ago.

—Jeffrey Seifert



NEWSSPLASH

AT: Jeffrey L. Seifert
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AquaFun, in Soest, Germany, is getting a racing slide for 2027. The double tube slide is more than 90 meters (295 feet) long. Two people can choose to start simultaneously to compete against each other. The slide is being built by Swiss manufacturer **Klarer Freizeitanlagen** AG, a traditional family business in Hallau in the north of Switzerland.

The racer slide is a double slide with two tubes running side by side. A partition, partially made of acrylic, separates the two lanes, allowing riders to see their opponents during the ride. The slide starts from a height of approximately 10 meters (30 feet), winds its way through the air in a figure-eight pattern — partly outdoors — and ends in a landing pool on the exterior of the water park.

The slide can be used without tubes or mats and is considered easy to moderately difficult by the manufacturer. According to the manufacturer, it is suitable for children aged 8 and up; however, the final decision rests with TÜV (Technical Inspection Association).

The slides will be equipped with light and sound effects, and before the dispatch, a touchscreen allows guests to choose from one of three different themes.

A new, straight stainless steel staircase will also be built to provide access to both the new double slide and the existing flying slide.

According to the schedule, the foundations are to be laid in the fall and winter. The actual construction phase is planned for January or February 2027, during which time the pool will have to close for about two to three weeks after the Christmas holidays.

The new slide doesn't yet have an official name. "Magic Twice" is currently the manufacturer's working title. Guests will decide on the final name themselves as AquaFun is planning a naming contest.

•

On Saturday, July 18, **Deep River Waterpark** in Merrillville, Indiana, opened its doors for a first-ever adults-only night.

The event was created as a way to try something new at the park. Staff members had been discussing the idea for years, and finally decided to make it a reality. The idea was that members of the community would see the park as more than just a place with waterslides for kids.

The thought of an adults-only night was originally frowned upon, but the idea started to gain momentum within the community. The team felt it was time to give it a try.

Reactions to the night were generally positive. Guests commented that the lines were short, and that it felt like a private event. Parents appreciated a night out without the kids. Even those who did not ride the waterslides enjoyed an uncrowded lazy river, wave pool or simply relaxing in a lounge chair and enjoying the warm evening.

•

A closed wave pool in the capital city of Brasilia, Brazil, will finally see new life as a complex featuring a lazy river, water slides, children's pools and family leisure areas.

The wave pool at **Parque da Cidade** opened in 1978 and once drew thousands of visitors on weekends. Structural problems forced it to close in 1997, and the space has been idle since. An attempt was made in 2025 to rebuild it as a water park, but construction was halted due to lack of funding. The **Urban Development Company of the New Capital** has indicated that funding is now in place, and the project is expected to be completed in the first half of 2027.

•

The city of Pecos, in far West Texas, is making plans to build a $54.5 million indoor water park. Located roughly 75 miles west of Odessa, groundbreaking was expected to take place in September, with construction lasting through December 2027. The facility will be located down the street from the **Cyclone Ballparks**.

The 67,675-square-foot development will feature aquatic attractions, leisure and recreation areas, concessions, locker rooms and support spaces, creating a major new destination for family entertainment and community recreation.

Funding for the project is provided by Reeves County. The project has been in the works since 2022, when the county conducted a feasibility study for what was then a six-to-eight-acre outdoor water park.

•

The new **Kalahari Resort and Conventions** facility in Spotsylvania, Virginia, is currently on track for a mid-November opening. The resort has started taking reservations for stays beginning November 12.

The 175,000-square-foot facility includes 900 rooms, a 10-acre outdoor water park, a 90,000-square-foot Tom Foolery's Adventure Park and a massive convention center.

The $900 million property will be the fifth Kalahari resort in the country.

It is located along the busy I-95 corridor near Dominion Raceway.

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WATER PARKS

Okana Resort wins Aquatics International Dream Design Award

COHOES, N.Y. — **Aquatic Development Group** (ADG) announced that **Okana Resort & Indoor Waterpark** has been honored with a 2026 Dream Design Award by **Aquatics International**. The prestigious annual award program recognizes aquatic facilities across the globe that showcase exceptional design innovation, thoughtful architectural integration, dynamic guest experience and master planning excellence.

Developed in partnership with the **Chickasaw Nation**, the $400 million Okana Resort in Oklahoma City's Horizons District opened in the spring of 2025 and was selected for its transformative impact on the local community and its vision for year-round aquatic entertainment. ADG served as the owner's representative for the entire development and as the design/builder for both the 100,000-square-foot indoor waterpark and the 4.5-acre outdoor adventure lagoon area.

Set along the Oklahoma River, Okana successfully transformed a complex redevelopment site into a thriving waterfront anchor, turning unused riverfront real estate into an economic catalyst for the region. Unlike isolated resort properties, Okana was designed to build broad community connection. The resort seamlessly links public waterfront spaces and the region's culture, featuring indigenous-inspired art and decor spread throughout the facility and connected access to the adjacent **First Americans Museum**.



Oklahoma City's OKANA Resort & Indoor Waterpark was honored by Aquatics International with a 2026 Dream Design Award for its innovative design, range of attractions and appeal to multiple age groups. COURTESY AQUATICS DEVELOPMENT GROUP

"We are honored that Okana Resort has been recognized with a Dream Design Award," said **Jim Dunn**, president of ADG. "This award celebrates what is possible when vision, tribal heritage and multidisciplinary aquatic design come together. Serving as both the owner's representative and the aquatic design/builder allowed our team to preserve the integrity of the design vision from initial concept through final commissioning, delivering a world-class destination for Oklahoma City."

Judges highlighted the resort's balanced aquatic footprint. By combining a massive, climate-controlled 100,000-square-foot indoor waterpark with an expansive 4.5-acre outdoor adventure lagoon area, the facility delivers a year-round, weatherproof destination.

The project showcases a diverse spectrum of water experiences to engage every age group. Attractions range from thrill slides, an active obstacle course and a unique "fly" pool, to a 6,200-square-foot wave pool powered by ADG's proprietary WaveTek wave system, a 420-foot lazy river, a swim-up bar and dedicated adult-only lounge spaces.

Beyond the water parks, Okana serves as a fully integrated, multi-use resort hub. The development features a 404-room luxury hotel, a family entertainment center, flexible conference spaces, an outdoor amphitheater, and multiple retail and dining establishments, allowing guests to extend their stays and experience a complete vacation ecosystem in one location.

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BUSINESS & NEWSMAKERS

▸TEA announces 2026 Masters — page 47 / Legacy Sharing: "RAC" Carroll of Ellis & Associates — page 48

WWA expecting big things in Vegas, sells out trade show again

AT: *Pam Sherborne*
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

LAS VEGAS — The **World Waterpark Association**'s (WWA) upcoming 46th annual Symposium and Trade Show has been set, and planners are getting ready to welcome industry professionals, including water park owners, operators, developers, designers and suppliers, to the **Conference Center at Paris Las Vegas**, Nevada, October 6 - 9.

As always, there will be something for everyone at the show. The event's trade show will showcase new products, while educational sessions will provide knowledge from top industry experts in approximately 40 breakout sessions on an array of topics. In addition, there will be plenty of fun and networking opportunities arranged by the WWA, as well as taking up entertainment in Las Vegas.

"The trade show just sold out," said **Patty Miller**, WWA director of trade show and supplier relations, in mid-September. "We have 375 booths this year."

The WWA held its annual event in Las Vegas in 2024 and reported a great response. Last year, it was held at the Walt Disney World Resort, Orlando, Florida, and reported a sold-out trade show there. The continued growth of the WWA Symposium and Trade Show is directly driven by the industry's innovations in design and theming, said **Rick Root**, WWA president, as the association prepared for its 45th event.



The trade show portion of the WWA Annual Symposium and Trade Show coming up this month will showcase all the industry's new innovations as well as the tried-and-true. There are 350 booths set to welcome attendees during the sold-out expo. AT/JEFFREY SEIFERT



To kick off the 46th version this year, the WWA, once again, will be offering attendees a chance to participate in various aquatic certification courses. These courses begin Saturday, Oct. 3, with the **StarGuard Elite** Lifeguard program. It concludes the next day, Sunday, Oct. 4, with both the Aquatic Facility Operator (AFO) Certification Course and the Certified Pool Operator (CPO) Course. Both of these courses conclude on Monday, Oct. 5.

WWA University Workshops are planned to take place on Tuesday, Oct. 6. There will be a total of five WWA University Workshops this year: Ready, Set, Go! A Guide to Getting Started, Waterpark Maintenance School, Waterpark Design, Development and Expansion Workshop, Food and Beverage Deep Dive, and Leveraging AI and Technology in Waterpark Marketing.

Also on Tuesday is the Annual Golf Tournament, running from 11:30 a.m. until 6 p.m., at the **Sienna Golf Club Las Vegas**.

The WWA's extensive educational program breakout sessions begin Wednesday, Oct. 7, early and run throughout the day.

The opening of the trade show also happens on Wednesday. That kicks off with the Opening General Session at 11:30 a.m. running to 12:30 p.m., which ushers in the trade show. The trade show remains open until 6:30 p.m., with the popular trade show luncheon planned for 12:30 to 2:30 p.m., and the Welcome Reception from 5 to 6 p.m.

That evening is the Annual Reunion Party from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. Attendees will enjoy tasty food, fresh beverages and music while overlooking views of the Las Vegas Strip.

Break-out sessions begin again the morning of Thursday, Oct. 8. The trade show runs this day from 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The first of WWA's Keynote Sessions is set for this day at 10 a.m. Speaker **Stephen Shapiro** will speak on ways to select the best team for your facility in a talk called Are You Playing With A Full Deck?

The second Keynote Session will kick off the final day of the WWA Symposium and Trade Show, Friday, Oct. 9. It will be held from 9 to 10 a.m. and is titled What's Your Ripple Effect? And Why It Matters More Than Ever. It will be presented by speaker **Lisa Even**.

Breakout sessions will be held after this address and will conclude at 12:30 p.m.

WWA's focus on featuring breakout sessions for everyone leads to an abundance of topics so that when attendees leave on Friday afternoon, they will have gained valuable information they can take with them.

Some of the specific education course topics include Crisis

▸ **See WWA, page 43**

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WWA

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Communications; An Intro To Surf Basins; What Mobile Data Reveals About Waterpark Market Demand; Creating Value Through Park Renovations and Maintenance; Zone Charts: Safe By Design or Safe By Chance; Creating Elevated Guest Experiences With Luxury Service Training; Building Six-Figure Sponsorships Through Strategic Partnerships; It's Not Always the Lifeguard's Fault; Preventing Kitchen Nightmares; If You Can Text, You Can Vibe Code; Collaborative Discussion For Stay-And-Play Destinations; Why Some Waterparks Struggle and How Smarter Planning Can Help Fix It; 2026 Food and Beverage Trends; Most Expensive Hidden Cost in Your Mechanical Room; the First 10 Minutes: Why the Guest Experience Starts Before the Gate; Waterpark Inspections When Inspectors Look Beyond the Rides and Tech Talk 2026.

More topics include ASTM Standards and How They Are Created; How Strategic Design Can Fit More Attractions In Compact Parks; Designing, Operating and Marketing Aquatic Facilities for the Neurodiverse Community and Creating Engaging STEM Experiences.

All throughout the week, committee meetings have been scheduled as well. And, once again, the WWA will also feature the Chat With Committee Members on the trade show floor, where attendees can stop by the WWA booth at designated times to enjoy some one-on-one interactions with committee members. Those scheduled for the two days the trade show is open include Education, Marketing and Resort; Government Relations, Public Sector and Food and Beverage; Safety and Technology and Innovations; and Education and Marketing.

•waterparks.org



The WWA Annual Symposium and Trade Show will offer approximately 40 break-out sessions with course topics in a variety of areas. Certification courses also will be offered in the days prior to the official kick-off of the show.
AT/JEFFREY SEIFERT



World Waterpark Association 2026 Symposium and Trade Show

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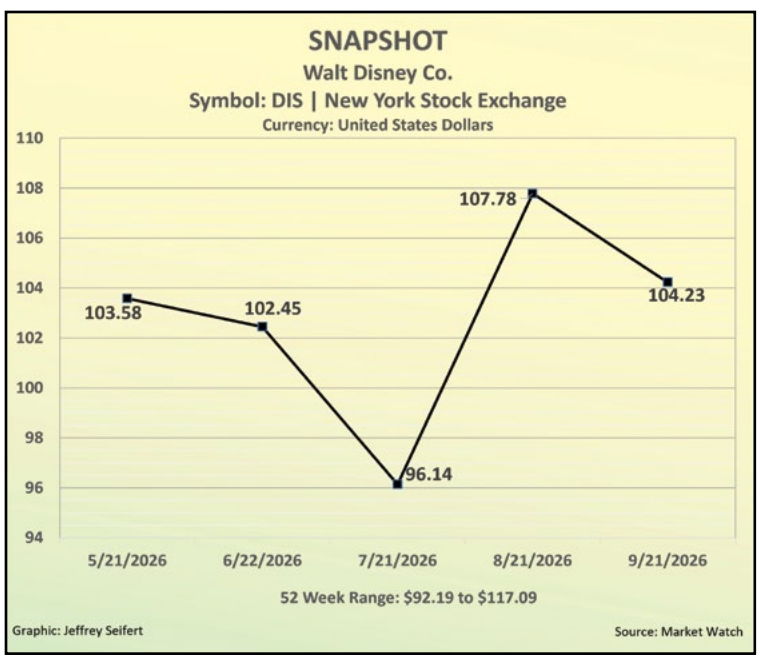
MARKET WATCH

COMPANY	SYMBOL	MARKET	PRICE 9/18/26	HIGH 52-Week	LOW 52-Week
PARKS AND ATTRACTIONS					
The Blackstone Group	BX	NYSE	124.96	189.88	101.73
Carnival Corp.	CCL	NYSE	21.84	34.03	21.81
Comcast Corp./ NBCUniversal Media	CMCSA	NASDAQ	22.74	32.86	21.28
Dave & Busters Entertainment, LLC	PLAY	NASDAQ	6.73	22.10	6.45
EPR Properties	EPR	NYSE	56.72	64.97	48.11
Fuji Kyoko Co., Ltd.	JP:9010	TYO	2,660	2,835	1,946
Haichang Holdings Ltd.	HK:2255	SEHK	0.171	1.060	0.164
Leofoo Development Co.	TW:2705	TSEC	15.35	18.20	14.90
Lucky Strike Entertainment Corp	LUCK	NYSE	5.53	10.82	5.30
MGM Resorts International	MGM	NYSE	37.81	51.59	29.19
Parks America, Inc.	PRKA	OTCQX	40.99	69.99	35.10
Royal Carribean Cruises, Ltd.	RCL	NYSE	245.81	356.39	232.10
Six Flags Entertainment Co.	FUN	NYSE	12.22	27.37	12.00
Tivoli A/S	DK:TIV	CSE	616.00	658.00	584.00
United Parks & Resorts Inc.	PRKS	NYSE	34.19	55.71	28.77
The Walt Disney Company	DIS	NYSE	102.67	117.09	92.19
Warner Bros Discovery Inc.	WBD	NASDAQ	27.80	30.92	17.08
SUPPLIERS/OTHERS					
Brogent Technologies, Inc.	TW:5263	TSEC	89.90	129.15	82.13
Callaway Golf Co.	CALY	NYSE	14.69	20.28	8.39
Falcon's Beyond	FBYD	NASDAQ	6.96	29.02	3.71
Sansei Technologies, Inc.	TYO:6357	TYO	2,794	2,849	1,990

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 9/14/26	Change from 1 year ago
East Coast	$6.158	$2.410
Midwest	$6.250	$2.540
Gulf Coast	$6.027	$2.638
Mountain	$6.066	$2.344
West Coast	$6.566	$2.432
California	$8.039	$3.068

CURRENCY

On 9/21/26 $1 USD =	
0.8705	EURO
0.7464	GBP (British Pound)
156.88	JPY (Japanese Yen)
0.8219	CHF (Swiss Franc)
1.4030	AUD (Australian Dollar)
1.3982	CAD (Canadian Dollar)

BUSINESS WATCH

Six Flags relocating corporate headquarters

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — **Six Flags Entertainment Corporation** announced plans to move its corporate headquarters in 2027 from Charlotte, North Carolina, to its current offices in Arlington, Texas.

"The decision to return the company's headquarters to Arlington is a continuation of our efforts to evolve the organization and enhance operational efficiency," said Six Flags President and CEO **John Reilly**. "After an extensive review, we determined that concentrating our personnel, processes and decision-making in our Arlington office, where a portion of Six Flags corporate employees are located, is the best path forward for the company. Bringing our corporate team together in the office will enhance collaboration across functions, strengthen our culture and improve coordination among our new executive leaders as we further align our organization around our key strategic priorities and long-term vision."

The Arlington headquarters will serve as the primary hub for the company's corporate leadership and shared business functions. **Choctaw Stadium** has served as a corporate office since 2020 and is currently home to a portion of the company's corporate workforce. The relocation reflects the company's continued evolution and strengthens its ability to support a network of 34 parks and nine resorts across North America. Located at the center of the Dallas-Fort Worth region, Arlington brings leadership closer to the company's five Texas properties. The transition is expected to be completed by March 2027.

Imagicaaworld unlocks capital growth

INDIA — **Imagicaaworld Entertainment Limited** announced that its board has approved the proposed divestment of its 287-room **Novotel Imagicaa** hotel at Khopoli to **Juniper Hotels Limited** for an aggregate consideration of nearly $26 million, marking a strategic capital allocation move that strengthens the company's next phase of profitable growth.

"The proposed divestment of Novotel Imagicaa marks an important step in the evolution of Imagicaaworld," stated **Jai Malpani**, managing director of Imagicaaworld Entertainment Limited. "The transaction is being concluded at an attractive valuation reflecting the premium associated with Novotel Imagicaa's unique positioning within the integrated Imagicaa destination. The transaction also provides us with additional growth capital and greater financial flexibility as we enter the next phase of our expansion."

The transaction reinforces Imagicaaworld's strategy of unlocking value from a mature hospitality asset and redeploying capital into its higher-margin core entertainment business, including park expansion, new attractions and indoor entertainment formats. The proposed transaction remains subject to definitive agreements and applicable statutory, regulatory and shareholder approvals.

Endless Surf, Flowstate announce partnership

VANCOUVER, B.C. — ***Endless Surf*** and **Flowstate** announced a strategic partnership bringing together two of the surf park industry's most advanced technologies to create a more connected technology ecosystem for surf park operators.

The partnership pairs Endless Surf's flexible, customizable wave technology with Flowstate's leading AI-powered computer vision, automated media and analytics platform. Flowstate will integrate with Endless Surf's existing software suite, alongside Surf Concierge, Swell Studio and Wave Doctor, while also being designed into future Endless Surf lagoons to optimize camera placement, media capture and other applications.

OBITUARIES

Singer, legend, dreamer Dolly Parton passes away

PIGEON FORGE, Tenn. — The legendary Dolly Rebecca Parton Dean died Tuesday, August 25, 2026, at Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center in Nashville following a brief battle with cancer. She was 80.

Born Jan. 19, 1946, one of 12 children in a cabin in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains of Sevier County, Tenn., Parton rose to fame as a country star, then pop superstar, movie and television star, philanthropist, theme park owner, author and international icon. She passed 17 months after her husband of 59 years, Carl Dean.

"A rhinestone life that shone bright enough for the world to see, Dolly will forever stand as an inspiration not only through her timeless music and prolific songwriting, but also her wit, warmth and kindness that made us all feel like family," stated Parton's family in her official obituary. "Dolly Parton's legacy is one of love, compassion and resilience. With a seven-decade career, she inspired multiple generations of artists and fans with her music and an unwavering commitment to making the world a better place. Her songs will continue to resonate with people of all ages, and her philanthropic work will have a lasting impact."

Composer of more than 5,000 songs, she earned 25 country No. 1 singles, eight top 40 pop hits, 11 Grammy Awards and 55 nominations, two Oscar nominations and an honorary Oscar, one national and two regional Emmy Awards and five nominations, a Tony nomination, Kennedy Center Honors, Country Music Hall of Fame membership, Rock & Roll Hall of Fame membership, National Medal of Arts, Library of Congress Living Legend Award, 12 CMAs and 12 ACMs, and more.



Dolly Parton



In 2023, Dolly Parton accepted Dollywood's Golden Ticket Award for Best Park alongside Dollywood President Eugene Naughton. Later that evening, she was honored as a Golden Ticket Legend. AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON

She turned a small mountain theme park into an international destination with 41 seasons of Dollywood. Partnering with Jack and Pete Herschend (Herschend Enterprises), it was the perfect pairing. Parton's name recognition was an incredible draw for building the success of the park. Over the decades, attendance has passed the three-million mark thanks to her influence. However, it was Parton's heart and soul that aligned with that of the Herschends.

"Great things are not accomplished alone. Jack and Pete refer to me as 'Dolly Part-ner' and that is the best compliment they could give me," commented Parton herself in a 2023 interview with *Amusement Today*. "Together, along with our amazing team at Dollywood, we do more and keep creating new experiences for our guests."

The importance of faith and family remained at the core of her decisions, as well as the brothers.

"God has always brought the right people into my life at the right time, and I am so blessed that together we [Jack and Pete Herschend] created a beautiful park that continues to grow beyond our earliest plans and dreams," added Parton. "We have not looked back.

"Through incredible people like the Herschends and the amazing team of people who joined us, I have learned so much. Together we have done more than we set out to do — and we are not done."

After her passing, the Dollywood Parks & Resorts family continues to celebrate the extraordinary life of its incomparable Dreamer-in-Chief, Dolly Parton, with plans to create several new experiences and installations that honor her remarkable contributions, enduring values and love for the people and places of the Great Smoky Mountains.

"The greatest privilege of my life has been helping Dolly bring her dreams to life at Dollywood," said Eugene Naughton, Dollywood Parks & Resorts President. "Dolly's heart was as vast as the mountains she cherished, and her compassion knew no bounds. She inspired generations to dream boldly and love deeply. While we grieve her loss, we are honored and committed to carry her light forward. Her legacy will continue to shine in every melody sung, every smile shared and every dream kindled within these gates."

Parton was an active humanitarian, giving back to her community and the world around her. Dolly's Imagination Library has had over 330 million books delivered. She gave a "transformational gift" to the Knoxville Children's Hospital, resulting in it being renamed Dolly Parton's Children's Hospital. She also supported the women's health center at her hometown hospital, her local Boys & Girls Club, the local children's home, the children's cancer wing at Vanderbilt Medical Center, scholarships for Sevier County students, wildfire relief, hurricane victims, the COVID vaccine and so much more.

But even as a business leader, world-renowned performer and theme park owner and philanthropist, Parton herself would assert: "My first love has always been music. So much so, my family jokes I was born crying in the key of G. Music has always been a part of everything I do, and being able to share that love with our park guests and fans is very special to me."

Her first No. 1, "Joshua," was followed three years later by a string of five consecutive No. 1 singles, including "Jolene" and "I Will Always Love You," which later would become Whitney Houston's signature song and be declared the biggest-selling song ever by a female songwriter.

Parton summed up her life and impact in her own beautiful way during her 2023 interview: "God comes to us. He connects us with others to learn from and can grow with. We just need to be open to hear Him. Through Him, I have been able to dream big and do even bigger things. For that, I am so thankful and blessed."

Redbone Products founder Steven E. Turner passes at 75

WILDWOOD, Mo. — Steven E. Turner passed away on June 7, 2026, at Barnes Jewish hospital in St. Louis, Missouri.

He was born December 9, 1951, in Athens, Texas, to the late George and Ira Nell (Daniel) Turner. Beloved husband of Lori (Jurkiewicz) Turner, father of Olivia (Hill) Verde, and Papa Steve to Kinsley.



Turner

Turner began his career at Six Flags Over Texas and moved to St. Louis in 1971 to help open Six Flags over Mid-America (now Mid America Adventure), where he developed many life-long friends including his best friend Lori, whom he married in 1978.

He went on to work for Acme Premium Supply before starting his own business, Redbone Products, in 1996. Turner's daughter Olivia joined him at Redbone in 2014, where she continues to provide game equipment and supplies to carnivals and amusement businesses around the world.

Turner loved to trout fish, kayak, camp, bike, eat at Michelin-star restaurants, read history and work harder than any one person possibly could. He was a friend, caregiver, teacher, mentor, and kid at heart who had unending energy to get things done and have fun.

Steve has left a lasting memory on so many, and his absence will be felt every day by his family and friends, especially Frankie and Luna.

He was preceded in death by his sisters Cynthia Kay and Tammy, and survived by his brother, Lieutenant Colonel Philip (Joyce) Turner.

ON THE MOVE

Lake Compounce Amusement & Water Park announced the appointment of **Daniel LLanas** as its new general manager.


LLanas

"I'm excited to join the Lake Compounce team and the Herschend family as my family and I make Connecticut our new home," said LLanas. "Lake Compounce has such a rich history and an incredible connection to generations of families, and I'm looking forward to working alongside the team to build on that legacy."

Llanas brings more than 25 years of leadership experience in the theme park, water park and destination-attraction industry to his new role, with a strong track record of driving operational excellence, revenue growth, guest satisfaction and team performance.

Most recently, he served as director of admissions for **Aquaventure World** at **Atlantis The Palm** in Dubai, where he led admissions and guest-arrival operations for more than two million guests annually across three major attractions. Prior to joining Atlantis, LLanas spent more than a decade in leadership roles with **SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment**, including serving as vice president of merchandise for **SeaWorld** and **Aquatica San Antonio**, as well as holding senior operations positions across multiple parks.

AI-powered digital content creation and guest-experience technology leader **Pomvom** — which builds and operates complete guest photography solutions for theme parks and attractions — has announced the appointment of **Deborah Eicher** as vice president, global sales and business development. Eicher will lead Pomvom's worldwide commercial strategy, partner acquisition and revenue growth across theme parks, attractions and entertainment destinations.


Eicher

"Deborah brings the commercial clarity, pace and strategic reach that match Pomvom's ambition," said **Matan Mandelbaum**, CEO. "Her leadership will be instrumental as we expand our global footprint and strengthen our partnerships with the world's leading attractions."

Eicher brings more than two decades of senior leadership experience across the attractions, leisure, retail and digital experience sectors, and is widely recognized for building teams and accelerating growth across the U.S., Europe, Middle East and Asia.

"Pomvom is at a breakthrough moment," said Eicher. "The technology, content and platform is world-class, the momentum is real, and the opportunity ahead is enormous. I'm excited to help drive the next chapter of global growth."

Zero Latency VR has launched a new global support function for its venue network, Venue Success, and named industry veteran **Brett Bovio** as senior venue success manager to lead it.

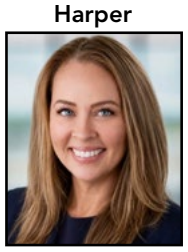

Bovio

Venue Success is a newly created program giving Zero Latency's global network of operators dedicated, practical support beyond the technology and license itself, covering areas like revenue growth, pricing and session strategy, local marketing, guest experience and operational best practice, benchmarked against data from across the network, all aimed at helping every operator maximize the performance of their venue and attractions.

Leading the function is Bovio, who brings almost 20 years of operational experience across the location-based entertainment industry, including **Walt Disney World**, **Sky Zone**, **Level99**, the **Boston Bruins** and, most recently, **Apex Entertainment**. Notably, Bovio has personally operated Zero Latency venues himself through MindTrek VR, giving him first-hand experience on the operator side of the business before stepping into this role.

Dave & Buster's Entertainment, Inc. announced a series of executive leadership appointments and promotions designed to strengthen the company's capabilities across operations, marketing, strategy, finance, revenue management, technology and governance.


Harper


Busby


Morgan


Rosales

In addition to the recent announcement of the appointment of **Darin Harper** as chief executive officer, the company has announced additional recent hires and promotions. **Amanda Busby** joined the company recently as chief operations officer, coming with decades of experience at **SSP America** and **Red Robin**. Additionally, the company recently promoted **Rachel Morgan** to serve as chief legal and administrative officer and corporate secretary, expanding her responsibilities to include oversight of both the legal and human resources organizations. The company has also promoted **Aldo Rosales** to chief strategy and revenue management officer.

Collectively, these leaders bring decades of experience across some of the world's most respected consumer, hospitality, entertainment, restaurant, media and technology organizations.

TEA announces the class of 2026 TEA Masters inductees

BURBANK Calif. — **The Themed Entertainment Association** (TEA) announced the 2026 TEA Masters inductees, honoring themed entertainment professionals whose careers have made significant and lasting contributions to the global industry.

"Each year, we look forward to announcing the newest TEA Masters," said **Melissa Ruminot**, CEO of TEA. "Their creativity, commitment and forward-looking ideas have helped shape the themed entertainment industry and continue to inspire exceptional places and experiences. On behalf of TEA and our global membership, congratulations to this year's incredible honorees."

The incoming TEA Masters represent a wide range of disciplines across the themed entertainment field, including design development, production, live events, experiential storytelling, technical direction, landscape architecture and art production. The class of 2026 includes:

Tom Acomb, AOA

Tom Acomb is co-founder, chief creative executive, and design principal at **AOA**. Over a career spanning more than 30 years, he has earned global recognition as a visionary leader known for his collaborative style, high creative standards and enthusiasm for the work.

Eric Baker, Universal Creative

Eric Baker has spent more than three decades making the impossible look real. His career spans the full arc of themed entertainment, from sculpting parade floats to directing the props universe of Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge. His work is woven into some of the industry's most celebrated immersive environments.

Christophe Berthonneau, Group F

Christophe Berthonneau is a director, scenographer and producer renowned for his imaginative use of light in all forms, including fire, flames, fireworks, video, drones, music and live performance. His large-scale outdoor works and "in-the-sky" theatrical productions have reached audiences around the world.

Susan Bonds, Animal Repair Shop

Susan Bonds is recognized for building the critical intersection between storytelling and technology. Over nearly four decades, she has helped redefine immersive entertainment through digital media, interactive experiences, alternate reality games and experiential narratives.

Paul Kent, RWS Global

Paul Kent's career spans three decades and three continents. He has contributed to some of the world's most ambitious attractions and has built a reputation as one of the industry's most trusted technical voices.

Patrice Ragusa, Universal Creative

Patrice Ragusa brings together two professional disciplines: fine art and landscape architecture. Through plants, hardscape and exterior environments, she weaves narrative and emotion into the guest experience.

Kirsten Ruhs, KirPaint, Inc.

Kirsten Ruhs' work can be seen and felt across six **Disney** and five **Universal** theme parks on three continents. Known for her meticulous attention to detail in painting, carving, texture and scenic finish, she began her themed entertainment career as a principal color and paint specialist with **Walt Disney Imagineering**. In that role, she oversaw artists and vendors as park-wide Show Art Installation Lead for Tokyo DisneySea — work spanning creative direction, storyboarding, scenic and ultraviolet painting, rockwork sculpture and team leadership.

Legacy SHARING

Richard A. "RAC" Carroll

Ellis & Associates

Wilmington, North Carolina



For more than five decades, **Richard A. "RAC" Carroll** has helped the aquatic and attractions industry keep its guests safe. As senior vice president and chief operating officer of **Ellis & Associates**, he manages the company's day-to-day aquatic safety and risk management consulting for more than 850 clients and oversees its litigation support, expert witness and insurance partnerships. A member of the **World Waterpark Association** Hall of Fame and an **IAAPA** Certified Attractions Executive, Carroll has spent decades volunteering with the industry's leading organizations, far from the lifeguard stand where a summer job at the beach started it all.

Lessons learned from lifeguard chair shape Carroll's life, career

WILMINGTON, N.C. — Ask Richard A. Carroll, more commonly known as RAC, what he wishes people outside this industry understood, and his answer skips past what you might expect. He does not mention risk, regulation or liability. He talks about the show: the planning, the teamwork and the overnight work that never reaches a guest. It is a telling response from a man who has built a career on the part of the operation nobody sees, the quiet work that keeps everything visible safe.

RAC's path to that work started in a lifeguard chair. He guarded at a local pool and at his high school pool, then went to college to play football until an injury ended his playing career. A friend had a summer idea: live at the beach and work at a water park. That summer brought him to Jeff Ellis, and RAC spent three years at Morey's Piers, Mariner's Landing and Raging Waters, rising from lifeguard to assistant manager. His parents were supportive but skeptical that it could become a career. Both were educators, and his father coached swimming. "Education is really what drives me," RAC said. "Educating kids to be lifeguards and operate rides, or educating people in risk management and safety and how to identify risks and do better and move forward. It's all education at the end of the day."

A contract position then took him to Fame City Waterworks in Richardson, Texas, where he still worked for Ellis. When the contract year ended, he took over management of the park, brought in a friend, Scott Disley, and the two ran it together for a year. RAC spent 15 years as an operator, and the job left little room for anything else. At the family park where he worked, the season went to six days a week on April 1 and seven by May 1. "We used to have a barber come to the park to cut our hair, because you couldn't get off work to go get a haircut," RAC said. In the winter, he was a plumber, electrician, laborer, painter and landscaper. Lifeguards doubled as security, and schedules were written out by hand on legal paper.

Asked what he carried from those years into his work today, RAC named work ethic first. The hours came at a price. "You're lucky if you get to tuck your child in at home before they go to bed," he said. "A lot of people in this industry know that." The second lesson was independence, the ability to be handed a task and go do it. The third was people. "It's all about people at the end of the day," RAC said. "Our business especially is about people." That includes inspectors who may sit on the opposite side of an issue; his answer is to make them friends, so he can learn from them, and they can learn from him.

RAC said his most impactful work was Vigilance Awareness Training. The program was introduced in 2002 and grew out of technology that tested how well lifeguards could detect a victim, using a life-size mannequin and a life preserver. When the testing began, the average detection time was 36 seconds. The training teaches guards what a victim looks like, gives each one a defined zone of protection, and tests them on the job with mannequins and silhouettes. Within two years, RAC said, the average detection time had dropped to under 10 seconds.

Still in use today, it has become the basic staffing approach for facilities. Debbie Bowser, marketing and crisis communications strategist for Ellis and Associates, said the program's reach goes well past one company. "Not just for E&A, but every lifeguard training program uses this vigilance awareness training model to create that accountability for their lifeguard teams."

RAC boils it down to a short list. "Remember who you are, where you came from, and do the right thing," he said. Teamwork, accountability, responsibility, and expectations are "not just lifeguard things," he said. "They're life things." He applies the same rule to a company. RAC said he is careful, personally and as an organization, to stay within Ellis & Associates' core, because that is what protects "the integrity and the respect and reputation" of a firm like it.

That instinct extended beyond the company. RAC has given more than five decades to volunteer leadership with the Council for the Model Aquatic Health Code, ASTM F-24, the World Waterpark Association and IAAPA, where he served on the Board of Directors. He is a member of the WWA Hall of Fame and an IAAPA Certified Attractions Executive.

The industry has changed around him. RAC came up before Motorola radios, cell phones or the internet, when finding a job meant leaving home, and the closest thing to a job board was Ellis's clients asking him for people, "a little bit of a pipeline and a network." Practices changed too. "We started doing things like audits, which is not something that was done back in the day," he said. He expects a good operator to welcome that kind of scrutiny. Safety comes first.

Asked what advice he'd give someone just starting, RAC kept it short: learn your craft. "Spend your time learning your craft. Don't move around," he said. "The time spent honing that craft at the bottom matters. That's what's going to carry you through the industry." He has watched people skip ahead and get tripped up because they had not put in enough time to support where they landed; a few ended up going sideways to catch up.

Near the end of a conversation, RAC returned to the part of the industry guests never see. They might notice the lifeguards or the ride operators, he said, but they do not see the six months of planning before a ride opens, the year of planning before a park opens, or the work done overnight to make the place look great before anyone arrives. "That's the magic, right?" RAC said. "They don't know the magic."

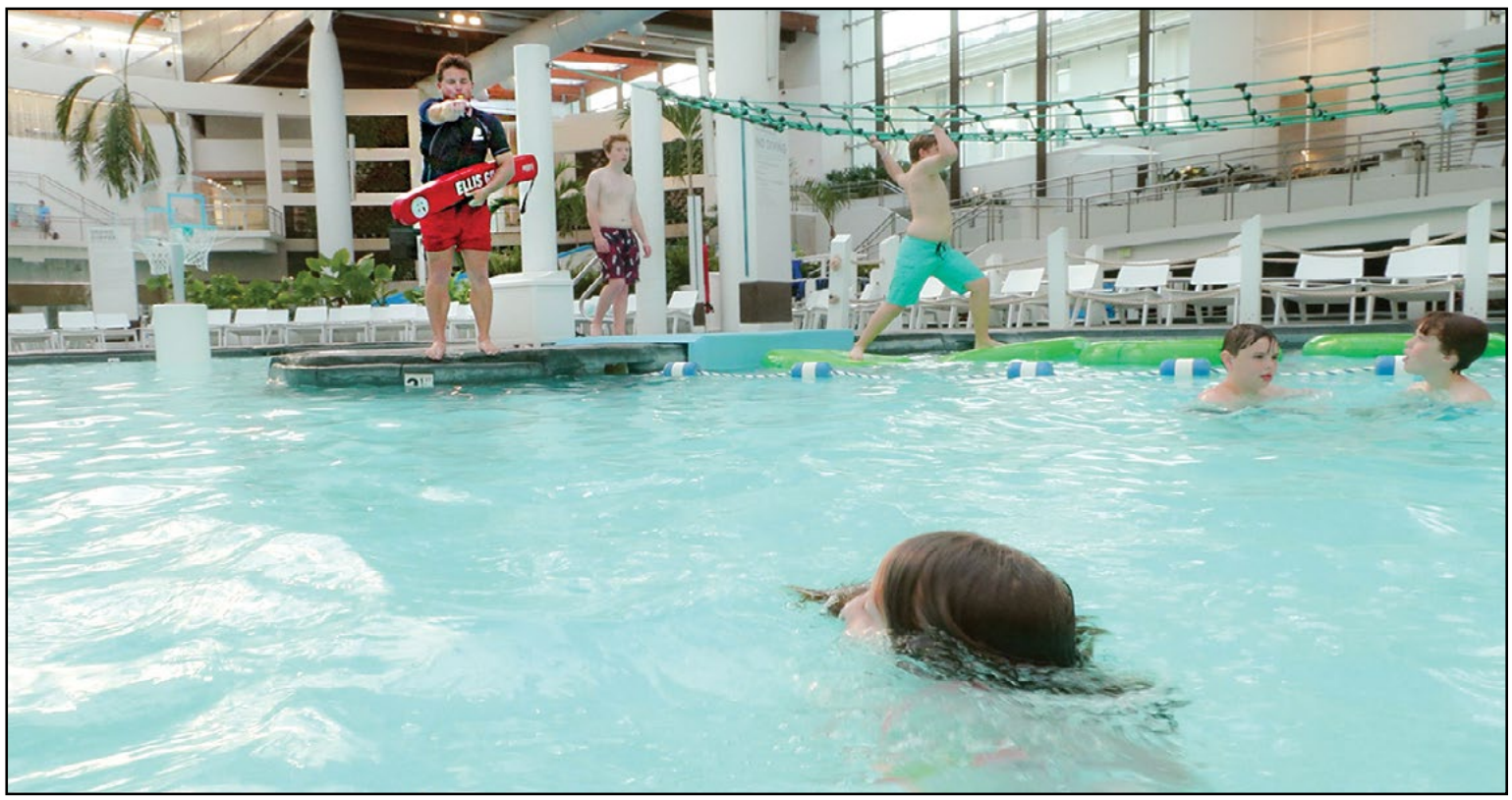
—Jack Lathrop

SAFETY & OPERATIONS

Legoland restores classic Cypress Gardens coaster — page 52 / Wilderness Resort adds new roof — page 54

E&A introduces powerful new interactive course on drownings

AT: *Susan Storey*
Special to Amusement Today



Ellis & Associates' (E&A) latest training, Scanning and Drowning Detection: Improving Recognition, offers aquatic facilities of any type an unprecedented and first-of-its-kind look at the real behaviors exhibited by a swimmer in distress. COURTESY ELLIS & ASSOCIATES

WINDERMERE, Fla. — As **Ellis and Associates** continues to apply technology to its globally recognized lifeguard training and risk management programs, its innovative and groundbreaking product, the **Ellis Aquatic Vigilance System** (EAVS), has led to the release of an all-new, one-of-a-kind online training course. Powered by **Ellis Learning**, this new session was created directly from data and critical learnings gathered by EAVS, including real-life footage of swimmers in distress. "Scanning and Drowning Detection: Improving Recognition" is an interactive, AI-supported eLearning experience that gives students an unprecedented look at real drowning events

"We train our lifeguards to constantly scan the water for signs of a swimmer in distress," **Joseph Stefanyak**, vice president, Ellis Learning, told *Amusement Today*. "Even the most tenured lifeguards believe they can immediately spot someone in need of help. This new course demonstrates that often the signs of drowning are quiet, subtle and easy to miss, even to a trained eye. By applying the data and learnings collected by EAVS, we are able to help our lifeguards more quickly recognize and respond to a swimmer in distress by showing them what drowning really looks like. This program studies and helps dispel commonly held beliefs of what drowning looks like."

The new course was developed using real-time video footage of actual drowning incidents captured at aquatics facilities of all sizes through the EAVS technology. Hundreds of data points and behavior patterns were collected through real-time camera monitoring and the EAVS behavior-recognition software.

"With the incredible data EAVS collects, we were able to aggregate live video footage of more than 25,000 rescues and hundreds of points of data," Stefanyak said. "Our goal with EAVS has been to not only collect data but to be able to apply and share it with our clients and the industry at large, so we can all better understand swimmer behaviors. This new course is a transformative step forward in drowning-prevention education. The data inspired and drove the content of the class and the critical insights shared will help save lives."

Since 1983, E&A has led the industry in aquatic safety and risk management. Driven by its mantra of zero drownings, E&A has pushed boundaries and changed prevailing norms for how lifeguards should be certified and trained. E&A understands that lifeguard training is a constant loop of feedback through monitoring, analyzing, sharing and training, and clients around the world turn to E&A to help keep their water safe for swimmers.

Through its best-in-class lifeguard training and certification, "train the trainer" program, education programs and online training, E&A demonstrates how continuous improvement is critical in the aquatics industry. With the launch of EAVS, E&A introduced a groundbreaking tool that uses technology alongside lifeguards in real time. The safety-focused technology powered by real-time camera monitoring and behavior recognition software sheds new, accurate light on what drowning really looks like, so lifeguards can learn to spot distress and react faster.

"This course is the intersection between research, continued education and real-world analysis," said **Richard 'RAC' Carroll**, ICAE, chief operating officer, Ellis & Associates. "Improving lifeguard performance requires a deeper, more accurate understanding of what drowning truly

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DROWNING
Continued from page 49

looks like. Now we are reshaping how lifeguards are trained and enhancing scanning effectiveness for the entire aquatics industry. Importantly, this new course is available to the entire aquatics industry — you do not have to be an E&A client to utilize the course."

Students who take part in the Scanning and Drowning course see multiple video clips from real drowning incidents. The examples are used to provide insight not only into what drowning looks like but also point to the more subtle warning signs that lifeguards should be more aware of so they can potentially provide assistance before a guest is fully in distress.

"During the training, we break down the behaviors, patterns and subtle warning signs of distress," Stefanyak furthered. "Our goal is to help our clients and students improve their response and the outcomes at their facilities."

E&A first announced the EAVS program in 2021.



Joseph Stefanyak

Through the company's proprietary AI-assisted vigilance and monitoring platform. EAVS provides "supplemental eyes" across aquatic facilities through high-definition cameras that are placed both above and below the water. The cameras capture live video and analytics that "learn" to identify patterns and behaviors specific to each client facility. Working in conjunction with a control room operator, EAVS supplements and supports on-deck lifeguards and alerts them to a potential issue. EAVS is scalable, customizable and suitable for venues of any size, and represents the most comprehensive drowning-prevention and safety-vigilance system available.



Through data and video gathered from thousands of hours of E&A's proprietary EAVS system, the new eLearning course helps lifeguards recognize the more subtle signs of drowning based on hard data, not just witness reports. COURTESY ELLIS & ASSOCIATES

E&A's new course, which is now available at jellis.com, is the next step in the EAVS journey. E&A has compiled and analyzed data collected across the EAVS platform to create a class aimed at helping lifeguards recognize a potential situation before it actually becomes one. During the immersive, scenario-based training, learners conduct simulated zone surveillance (scanning), identify the behaviors that indicate guests in distress, and compare their observations with real outcomes. By breaking down the exact behaviors that triggered each response and highlighting behaviors that were present but perhaps not recognized, the course teaches lifeguards the real indicators of distress and how purposeful, focused and deliberate scanning techniques dramatically improve their recognition and response times. The course also compares drowning behaviors across all ages and a wide range of aquatic venues.

E&A is presenting a preview session called "What Drowning Really Looks Like–Breakthroughs in Improving Recognition" during IAAPA Expo on November 17 at 4 p.m. Together, Carroll and Stefanyak will share highlights from the e-learning course with attendees.

"Information sharing is core to everything we do," said Carroll. "During our session at IAAPA Expo, we will share multiple video clips of real drowning incidents and insight not only into what drowning looks like, but how we can use data to improve training, response time and outcomes.

"The EAVS platform supplements and enhances our clients' eyes on the water. Now, with this important new class we are delivering information grounded in real-world data and detailed analysis of that data. This training does more than help lifeguards focus on when to respond to a guest who is in distress; it can help them provide lifesaving support before they are in crisis."





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Building a safer, stronger team through AIMS

Today's attractions operate in an environment where the margin for error has never felt smaller. Facilities are managing evolving technology, workforce turnover, tighter budgets, rising guest expectations and greater scrutiny. Safety training cannot be treated as a once-a-year requirement or a box to check. It must be an ongoing investment in people, culture, knowledge and operational consistency.

The **AIMS International** Safety Seminar gives organizations an opportunity to make that investment. By bringing together professionals from across the amusement industry, the seminar exposes attendees to current practices, emerging challenges and lessons learned beyond their own facility. Employees learn from experienced instructors and industry peers while gaining practical information they can bring home and apply to daily operations.

That outside perspective matters. Even strong teams can become comfortable with familiar routines. Participating in the seminar allows employees to compare procedures, ask questions and better understand how other operators, manufacturers and safety professionals approach common challenges. Those conversations can identify opportunities for improvement that may be difficult to see from within a single organization.

Sending team members also strengthens engagement and retention. Professional development shows employees that their organization values their growth and views safety as a career, not simply a task. When attendees return, they can share what they learned, reinforce best practices and help build a stronger culture throughout the operation. The impact extends well beyond the individuals sitting in the classroom.

AIMS certification adds another important layer. Certification provides an objective measure of an individual's knowledge and commitment to continued professional development. It gives employers a consistent benchmark when building teams, evaluating advancement and assigning greater responsibility. For employees, earning and maintaining certification demonstrates initiative, strengthens professional credibility and creates a clear pathway for career growth.

Certification complements a facility's policies and practices by helping professionals develop a broader understanding of safety principles and industry practices. In an operating environment shaped by rapid change and increased accountability, that broader perspective is increasingly valuable.

The strongest safety cultures are built by organizations that continually prepare their people, challenge assumptions, and share knowledge. Sending employees to the AIMS Safety Seminar and supporting their pursuit of certification are tangible ways to put those values into action. The investment returns to the facility through better-informed decisions, stronger leadership, greater consistency and a team better prepared to protect guests, coworkers and the long-term success of the operation.

Visit aimintl.org to register for the 2027 AIMS International Safety Seminar today.

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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Florida's last wooden coaster gets a second life at Legoland

MV Rides engineer Triple Hurricane into new Coastersaurus

AT: *David Fake*
dfake@amusementtoday.com





The Coastersaurus queue (above) is marked by its dinosaur-jungle theming and the coaster's wooden lift hill in the background. Following a months-long rebuild, the wooden coaster marked its return when Coastersaurus hauled its first official train up the hill on National Roller Coaster Day (right). COURTESY LEGOLAND FLORIDA RESORT

WINTER HAVEN, Fla. — The clack of wood-on-wood track is back at **Legoland Florida Resort**. Coastersaurus, the only fully wooden roller coaster left standing in the state, reopened, fittingly, on August 16, National Roller Coaster Day, after a months-long rebuild that park leadership describes as one of the largest single investments ever made in the ride.

That's a notable commitment for an attraction that is classified as a junior coaster with its 40-foot drop, 32 mph, 1,365 feet of track, and over in under a minute. But Coastersaurus carries weight that has nothing to do with size. It's a survivor of hurricanes, of bankruptcy auctions, of at least four changes in ownership, and Legoland's decision to rebuild rather than replace it says something about how the resort is thinking about its own history.

A coaster older than the park itself

Coastersaurus predates Legoland by seven years. It opened in 2004 as Triple Hurricane at **Cypress Gardens Adventure Park**, under owner **Kent Buescher**, and the name wasn't cute marketing — it referenced the trio of storms — Charley, Frances and Jeanne — that battered the property during construction. The original **Cypress Gardens** dates back to 1936, a botanical attraction billed as Florida's first commercial tourist stop, and by the time Triple Hurricane arrived, the park had already cycled through **Pope** family ownership, a stint under **Anheuser-Busch**, and a 1985 sale to publishing conglomerate **Harcourt Brace Jovanovich**.

The hurricanes that gave the coaster its original name also helped end Buescher's ownership. Cypress Gardens filed for bankruptcy in 2006 after sustaining an estimated $30 million in storm damage, and Polk County investment firm **Land South Holdings** picked up the park at auction for roughly $17 million in 2007. That ownership didn't hold either. The park limped through a scaled-back 2009 reopening, then shut for good that September, with Land South saying it had exhausted every option to keep it running.

Merlin Entertainments bought the site in January 2010 for about $22 million, preserved the historic botanical gardens, and rebuilt the rest as Legoland Florida, which opened October 15, 2011. Triple Hurricane got a new name and a dinosaur theme to match, Coastersaurus, but its wooden bones, engineered by Quebec-based **Martin & Vleminckx** (MV Rides), stayed the same as the coaster that park veterans had been riding for years.



The above reaction is exactly what Legoland's technical services team was rebuilding for: unfiltered screams as Coastersaurus' train tips over the hill. COURTESY LEGOLAND FLORIDA RESORT

What actually changed underneath

The scope of this year's work went well beyond a fresh coat of paint. According to Legoland, the project included a full replacement of the wooden coaster structure, an upgraded braking system, a new chain lift motor, refreshed lap-bar monitoring, and infrastructure and electrical work that guests will mostly never see. A smaller 2024 refurbishment had already addressed some sections of aging timber before this year's more comprehensive rebuild picked up where that work left off, beginning at the end of January.

Cory Lytle, technical services director at Legoland Florida Resort, has been the closest thing to a public face for the project. He explains that Florida's climate is unkind to wood. Humidity and termites erode structural timber in ways steel simply doesn't have to contend with, which is part of why the resort specified termite- and mold-resistant pine for the new structure. Lytle has also been candid about what the rebuild was and wasn't trying to do. "The uniqueness of a wooden coaster is you feel all the jostling. We've retained that, just smoothed it out a bit," he said, drawing a hard line between structural renewal and character preservation.

The trains riders board haven't changed since 2013, when the coaster's original **Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters** cars were swapped for **Great Coasters International's** Millennium Flyer trains — a shift that predates Merlin's current preservation push but shows the ride has been quietly maintained, not merely tolerated, for over a decade. **Andrew Walker**, Legoland Florida's head of ride maintenance, worked alongside Lytle's technical services team through the closure, coordinating a rebuild that had to run in parallel with the resort's other big 2026 capital project: the launch of the indoor coaster Galacticoaster.

Why bother saving a junior coaster

The easy move for a theme park sitting on a tired 20-year-old attraction is demolition. Legoland went the other direction, and Lytle has framed that choice as philosophical as much as financial. "If we take a ride down, it needs to come back feeling refreshed and brand new," he said, describing an approach the resort has also applied to refurbishments of Joker Soaker and Mia's Riding Adventure.

For an industry that too often treats aging wood coasters as liabilities to be quietly retired, Coastersaurus is a useful case study. It's the only fully wooden coaster operating anywhere in a Legoland park, and one of only two in Merlin Entertainment's global portfolio. This is a rarity even within its own corporate family, and Legoland is positioning the rebuild to buy it another 20 to 30 years of service. Park officials say guests should notice a smoother, quieter ride without the jarring roughness that had crept in, which is the mechanical equivalent of restoring a landmark building's facade while gutting and modernizing everything behind the walls.

For a piece of Cypress Gardens still rattling through the Florida heat two decades and four ownership groups later, that's not a bad second act.

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Wilderness Resort welcomes new roof, slides and added amenities

ProSlide's immersive Volcano Vortex highlights additions

AT: *Susan Storey*
Special to Amusement Today



ProSlide removed one of the park's two existing Dueling Mammoths raft rides to make way for an all-new experience from the company — the Volcano Vortex. COURTESY WILDERNESS RESORT

WISCONSIN DELLS, Wis. — **Wild WaterDome Waterpark** will reopen on October 9 at the **Wilderness Resort** after an extensive renovation that began in August. While the project was inspired by need, the popular indoor water park resort destination also saw an opportunity to enhance the entire space for its guests.

Starting with the complete replacement of the massive see-through roof, every corner of the waterpark has been touched. "The catalyst for the whole project was necessity," **Brandon Schindler**, assistant general manager of Wilderness Resort, told *Amusement Today*. "The entire roof had to be replaced and that meant we needed to close the waterpark for a couple of months. As we planned this project, we recognized we also had the opportunity to give back to our guests."

Spread across more than 600 acres, the Wilderness Resort, located in Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin, is the largest water park resort in the U.S. The resort features four indoor and four outdoor water parks and more than 1,100 unique sleeping options — from rooms to condos to cabins — for guests. The Wild WaterDome, the resort's largest indoor water park, opened in April 2006, with its state-of-the-art Foil Tec Roof, which allows guests to sunbathe and plants to grow indoors. The 70,000-square-foot water park is also home to the largest indoor wave pool in the country.

"The new roof is a 'one for one' replacement," Schindler said. "It will have some upgraded technology, but the key message is that our guests will still feel the warmth from the sun and can still tan through it as they enjoy the water park."

The roof replacement was just the beginning.

"We really hope our guests will notice and enjoy the many aesthetic upgrades we applied throughout the waterpark," Schindler continued. "Overall, we upgraded the theme of the park to a tropical look and feel. All of our walls are being repainted; we are replacing the flooring in the locker rooms and the main park itself. Our main eatery, Wooly's, has been renamed Castaway Café to reflect the new theme, and Survivor's Bar & Grille has all-new flooring, updated TVs, new lighting and new dining furniture."

"We're conscious about putting money back in our resort," he said. "We are making our way around the property and taking a critical eye to every area. This renovation has been completely focused on Wild WaterDome."

Along with the aesthetic and dining upgrades, guests will enjoy new water-filled thrills when the water park reopens.

The Wilderness's team worked with longtime partner **ProSlide** to remove one of the park's two existing Dueling Mammoths raft rides and make way to introduce an all-new experience, the Volcano Vortex.

Volcano Vortex is a ProSlide Hive ride. Described as the world's first immersive helix water ride, it offers a distinct combination of high-speed, tight turns, speed, motion, panoramic sightlines and versatility. Hive slides create a visual "room" that immerses guests with every revolution.

"This new raft slide is really impressive-looking and going to be a lot of fun," said Schindler. "It has a large volcano sitting outside of our resort and a smaller volcano inside the core of the helix that guests will rotate around during their ride."

"Volcano Vortex gave us an opportunity to do something really unique with the ride experience at Wilderness Resort," **Nik Paas**, senior vice president, business development and strategic accounts, ProSlide, told *Amusement Today*. "The way our Creative Studio team was able to integrate the volcano throughout the entire design of the Hive 35 gives it a really distinct presence and turns the attraction into more than just a great ride. It really becomes part of the story and experience of the park. We're very excited to see guests enjoying the ride, and of course proud to continue building on our longstanding partnership with the Wilderness team."

Volcano Vortex is a shared water attraction experience for five riders at a time. The park's remaining Dueling Mammoths ride remains at the park and has been renamed Paradise Falls to echo the park's updated theme and aesthetic.

Along with the thrills of Volcano Vortex, Wild WaterDome also added something for the park's youngest guests. The zero-

▸ **See WILDERNESS, page 55**



Wilderness Resort closed its indoor waterpark for two months to replace its roof with a state-of-the-art Foil Tec Roof. The new structure allows guests to sunbathe and plants to grow indoors. COURTESY WILDERNESS RESORT



WILDERNESS

Continued from page 54

depth kids' zone, Mini Mammoth's Cove, has been renamed Coral Cove and features new slides and gentle water-based interactive play areas.

"I think the new multilevel play structure really adds to the kids' area and will enhance their enjoyment of the park," Schlinder said. "This project has been a big one and reflects our approach to the entire park. Our goal was to replace the roof, and as part of that process we also identified additional ways we could improve the entire experience for our guests in the water park."

Even with a property the size of Wilderness Resort, Schindler noted the team recognized the work would impact guests and applied a significant change to this year's operating calendar.

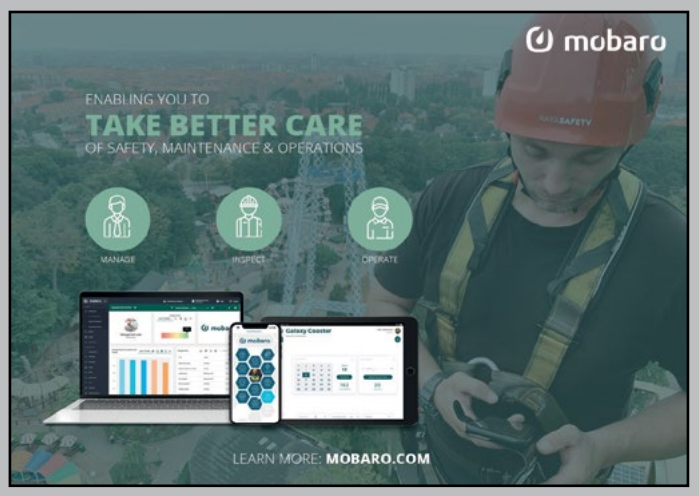
"While we have multiple indoor water parks that are open daily throughout our resort, because of the timing of this renovation, we decided to keep one of our outdoor water parks open later this season," Schindler said. "Traditionally, we close our outdoor water parks on Labor Day weekend, but to help offset the guest impact, we decided to keep Lake Wilderness Park open on weekends. Our guests have embraced this opportunity to continue to enjoy the outdoor space deeper into the season.

"Since we opened in 1995, Wilderness Resort has provided year-round family getaways. During the fall and winter months, we are proud to offer fun-filled indoor waterpark experiences, giving guests a reason to visit our community and town," Schindler finished. "The Wilderness Resort offers incredible variety. We will continue to make a conscious effort within our waterparks and with all of the attractions throughout the property to ensure we have something for everyone. We want our guests to stay and play during their visit and not need a reason to leave. You could say we are a 'cruise ship on land' — we offer something for everyone in the family, and we can provide as much fun as they want to experience, all in one trip."



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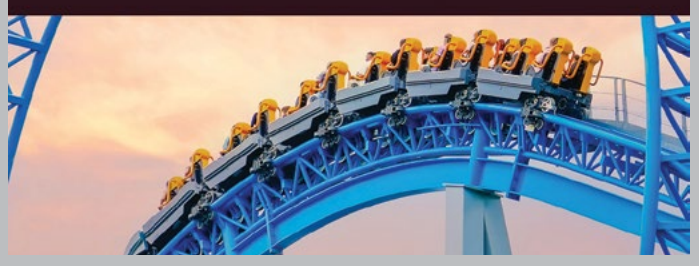


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Ohio Health Department proposes fee hike for food concessions

AT: *Pam Sherborne*
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

SPRINGFIELD, Ohio — Proposed changes to an Ohio state's administrative code guiding Ohio's food safety regulations have prompted the **Greater Ohio Showmen's Association** (GOSA) to have its lobbyist draft a letter of opposition to the **Ohio Department of Health**.

The change the association specifically opposes is the state's portion of the food concessions licensing fee, said GOSA's current chair, **Brian Linville**, who owns **Linville Food Services**. The state's portion is only a part of the total licensing fee.

"The association opposes this fee increase because there is no support for why they have to do it," Linville said. "Here in Ohio, we are inspected by the counties. The state doesn't do any of those inspections.



Brian Linville

All they do is send out the licenses. This just doesn't justify the increase."

According to the letter sent by GOSA, the changes to the fee schedule would see an increase in the state's portion of the licensing fee over the next five years.

The state fee increases proposed for mobile food operations are as follows:

- Thirty-five dollars for each license issued on or after December 1, 2026.
- Forty-one dollars for each license issued on or after December 1, 2027.
- Forty-three dollars for each license issued on or after December 1, 2028
- Forty-four dollars for each license issued on or after December 1, 2029
- Forty-six dollars for each license issued on or after December 1, 2030.

He said members of GOSA attended a meeting of the **Retail Food Advisory Council.** The Ohio Department of Health presented this proposal to that Council.

Linville said he asked the department about the increase.

"They basically said it needed to be increased, because they haven't increased in 20 years," Linville shared.

The department holds a quarterly meeting.

"Last week one was scheduled, but it was canceled," he said in mid-September. "I don't know when they will meet again."

GOSA is made up of 450-plus members in the outdoor amusement industry. Members service the county fairs in the state of Ohio as well as other festivals and community events. Members primarily operate in three business categories: food concessions, games and amusement rides. The proposed changes would affect just the food concessions.

The letter to the Ohio Health Department from GOSA stated: "The proposal in 3701-21-02 would significantly increase the costs of doing business in Ohio. All concessions must be licensed to operate in the state. It is in the public interest for the government to have some oversight over food operations to ensure they are clean and safely preparing the food served to the public."

The proposed fee is more of a burden for mobile concessionaires.

"We do not have a set location," the letter stated. "Instead, we travel to fairs, festivals and other events throughout the state. This creates a patchwork of regulations and oversight for our members. Because of local control, each local health department and fire department is able to have requirements and regulations above the state code.

"That means our members are subjected to changing requirements based on the event where they are operating. So even though we are only required to get a license from the jurisdiction where our business headquarters is located, we are beholden to any additional requirements in other jurisdictions."

As far as the Ohio Department of Health presenting this proposal to the Council, the letter continues: "…They did

▸ **See OHIO, page 57**



OHIO

Continued from page 56

seek endorsement to move forward. They did not demonstrate how or if increasing fees on Ohio businesses would increase food safety and decrease foodborne illness. The proposed increases appear to be intended for administrative expenses in the State Department of Health. Currently, based on documentation provided by the Department upon our request, the division supports nine state employees with these fees. This seems to be an excessive number of employees to process licensee paperwork. In addition, advances in technology over the past 20 years should have lowered processing fees, not increased the cost. The fee increases between now and 2030 do not consider the opportunity to lower administrative costs. A somewhat myopic view.

"The proposal fee increase is an administrative fee that does not provide any real benefit to food safety. Inspections are done at the local level, and the local health departments calculate their fee based on a formula in the administrative code, over and above the state fee. The state's portion retained is to manage paperwork and answer any questions from the public; it does not increase food safety. The department did not present alternatives to a fee increase, such as increased efficiencies or new sources of revenue. For example, temporary food permit holders are not assessed a fee by the state but are issued the same permit to operate as annual permit holders. These short-term, many times out-of-state operations are competing with our established Ohio businesses and have an advantage of not being charged the license fee.

"GOSA is firmly opposed to the proposal presented for comment. Thank you for your consideration of this perspective," the letter concludes.

Linville stressed that these changes are just proposed and could change. He is looking forward to presenting the opposition in person when the Ohio Health Department meets in person.

●**mygosa.net**



The state of Ohio has proposed an increase in fees for mobile food operations. Mobile food concessions are central to carnival and fair midways throughout the state, such as that of Talley Amusements during the Ohio State Fair. AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON



MOBILE MIDWAYS

▸Great New York State Fair's attendance up — pages 62-63 / Ohio State Fairgrounds adds carousel — page 69

Tennessee's Putnam County Fair delights, celebrates a century

AT: *Jack Lathrop*
Special to Amusement Today



James Gang's rides light up the night as the sun sets on another day at the Putnam County Fair. Rides in their collection include a Chance Zipper and an Eli Bridge Scrambler. COURTESY BRANDON KORGAN

COOKEVILLE, Tenn. — Despite heavy rainfall and a dazzling display of lightning, thousands of people happily talked and laughed as they walked into the final night of the **Putnam County Fair** in Cookeville, Tennessee. Fair staff directed traffic, greeted patrons and took tickets, all with smiles despite the less-than-ideal weather, and in the distance, an announcer could be heard saying the fair would go on, rain or shine. The weather might have deterred some, but you could not tell; almost everyone in attendance would tell you there was nowhere they would rather be than at the final night of the 100th running of this historic county fair.

Ask anyone here what they came for, though, and the answer rarely starts with a ride. It starts with a quilt somebody's mother spent a year on, a heifer somebody's daughter has been feeding since spring, a rib eye sandwich from the same vendor who has sold them every August for as long as anyone can remember. Putnam County has hosted some version of this gathering since 1856, when it began as a harvest festival near the courthouse. The fair has moved a few times, first to what is now **Tennessee Tech University**'s main quad, then again to a piece of land near the railroad through town, before settling onto more permanent grounds in 1926 when the current fair board was established. The Putnam County Fair Board hosted the yearly exhibition there until 1956, when that property burned to the ground. The fair moved to its current site in 1957 and has not left since, although it is about to again. What has not changed is the reason this event exists in the first place: agriculture.





Above left, Susanna Clouse (left) and Bill Dyer (Right) pose in front of the fair's historic mural painted on the side of one of its barns. Monster truck shows consistently bring in strong crowds to the fair. AT/JACK LATHROP; COURTESY BRANDON KORGAN

"We are an agriculture fair," said **Susanna Clouse**, vice president of the fair board. "We love every part of our fair, but we are an agricultural fair. One of the big issues was that we were not going to be able to have livestock or equine events at our new property this year. We couldn't go without those and still be the fair that we are."

"When I was in middle school and high school, the horse show drew people in. People wanted to come and watch the horse show because everybody had horses or their neighbors showed horses," recalled **Angie Glascock**, executive board member and fourth-generation fair volunteer. "Now in Tennessee, we lose 10 acres, an hour of farmland. People just aren't as interested as they used to be. So, a weeknight, main event, horse show just doesn't bring people in like it did for a demolition derby."

A few hundred yards from the arena, under the lights of thirty-some rides, a different kind of family keeps its own version of that same promise. **Eric Lane** has been an independent contractor with **James Gang Amusements** for 22 years and has known the family that runs it for 40. "I don't have the last name of James," he said, "but I feel like I'm part of the family." Three brothers, Jesse, Dwayne and Rodney James, run a show their parents started building out of Sarasota, Florida, decades before it became its own outfit in 1992; all three raised their own kids on the road, once taking the whole crew on group trips to a water park between towns. James Gang is also one of the last shows still staffed by American labor rather than the imported crews that now run much of the industry.

The fair had planned to move this year to a new fairgrounds, and staff had even

▸ **See PUTNAM, page 60**

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PUTNAM
Continued from page 58

relocated some operations there before discovering the new barns lacked finished electrical and water service. Rather than run the 100th fair without cattle and horse shows, the board decided to stay put one more year. Some events moved to the new site's convention center this year as a preview of what's coming; the full move is expected next year, contingent on the barns being finished.

That commitment shows up most vividly in an area the board calls Grandma's Barnyard, born when a board member asked staff to recreate the barnyard his own grandmother kept when he was a kid. Visitors there find dairy cows next to beef cows, a blacksmith, cast-iron cooking over a wood stove and an antique corn sheller kids can crank by hand.

Glascock treats the space as a classroom. "I want them to learn something," she said. "You don't have to be a farmer, but you should have to appreciate what farmers do."

Dyer says his own favorite corner of the grounds has nothing to do with rides at all. He gravitates toward the cultural arts building, where quilts, canned goods and handiwork sit under glass with the year's ribbons pinned beside them. "To me, the fair really starts when we have our entries in place and all the ribbons are out," he said.

Both sides of this fair are also watching something disappear. Glascock points to Tennessee losing an estimated 10 acres of farmland an hour, and to a generation of kids who have never stood close enough to a cow to know what one smells like. Lane describes an entire industry contracting around him: traveling circuses have gone from roughly 350 nationwide 40 years ago to about 25 today, and he counts DOT regulation and a shrinking pool of workers willing to live on the road among the biggest threats to what's left of the carnival business. "There are times I think we're a dying dinosaur," he said.



Cookeville's oldest Army Veteran (left) and newest recruit (right) cut into a cake celebrating the 250th anniversary of the U.S.A, the U.S. Army as well as the 100th running of the fair. COURTESY BRANDON KROGAN

This year, some of it showed up all at once. Rain fell during nearly every night of the 10-day run, and total attendance finished at 43,348, down from 59,615 in 2025, a drop of more than 27 percent. What held, even as the numbers dropped, was the crowd that did show up. On the final night, under the same rain that had dogged the run all week, people were still laughing their way through the gates, unwilling to let the weather write the story of the 100th year.

What has kept the Putnam County Fair standing through all of it looks less like a strategy and more like stubbornness dressed up as tradition. The board tinkers instead of overhauling: adding a selfie category one year to see if it catches on, retiring an entry class nobody enters anymore, moving toward the new grounds a piece at a time instead of all at once. James Gang has not missed a single opening in decades. This year, both traditions leaned into the moment together: the fair partnered with local Army recruiters to mark the service's 250th birthday alongside its own centennial, with the county's oldest living veteran cutting the first slice of cake for its newest recruit.

Ask anyone on the board what worries them about leaving this ground behind, and they will tell you it is not the move itself. It's whether the feeling survives the address change.

"We try to remind people it's moved before," Clouse said. "It was a big new thing when we moved here, too, and look what it became. We want to create a fair where new generations can make memories at that new property, just like we have here."

A hundred years in, the Putnam County Fair is still betting on the same thing it started with: get people here, teach them something and they'll keep coming back, generation after generation, long after the mud has dried.

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Attendance up for the 2026 edition of Great New York State Fair

Event loses a day to severe weather, yet succeeds overall

AT: *B. Derek Shaw*
bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — "Overall, we had particularly good weather for the 13-day run of the fair," said **Katie Rey**, associate director of public information for the **Great New York State Fair**. "Cooler but steady temperatures that stayed below 80 degrees helped make for a comfortable experience. While there were a couple of overcast days leading into a severe weather day on September 2, resulting in an early closure of the fair on that day, many fairgoers took advantage of a lovely stretch of New York weather."

When all was said and done, 962,795 people visited, up 36,806 from 2025. The highest attended day was Saturday, August 29, when 114,644 fairgoers were on the grounds. "This is what GREAT looks like" was the theme this year.

Wade Shows was again the midway provider, bringing 68 total rides, with a fair portion appealing to the kiddie set. There were six rides new to the spot that included Crazy Dance (**Fabbri Group**), Rock Star (**ARM**), Dream Wheel (**Technical Park**) and Wipeout (**Chance**), along with two kiddie rides.



Wade Shows had two major coasters at the Great New York State Fair — the Super Cyclone roller coaster (above) and the Mighty Mouse roller coaster (below). AT/B. DEREK SHAW



The most popular rides included the Giant Wheel (Chance), Big Apple Slide (**Euro Slide**) and Wave Swinger (Chance).

Frank Zaitshik, owner of Wade Shows, is proud of his crew: "The nucleus of this is what we call our East Coast unit. It's headed up by **Jimmy Danton**. He's been with Wade Shows before me. The team that's here, I can't speak highly enough about. Our office manager here is **Carmen Kellog**. She's been with us since she was a teenager." (Her husband used to move the Super Cyclone roller coaster (**Interpark**); now his son does the work.) "He's kind of overseeing the Sky Tram and the Vertigo (**ARM**) that belongs to my pal, **Corky Powers**, who loaned us that for several spots because he wasn't using it."

"Of course we bring **Dreamland** (**Amusements**) in here," said Zaitshik. "I can't say enough good things about them. They have been with us since the beginning. It used to be **Bob** and **Kathy DeStanfino**'s unit. When they got a couple of dates, they traded up, then **Gerry Shoup**, their son-in-law, came (to take over). They have several new pieces with us."

Wade Shows had tremendous success with advance sales, which started five years ago.

"I'm really proud of our advance sale program. In 2022, with about 30 days before the fair, they had not implemented an advance sale program. In discussions with them, they would prefer not to do it, so they turned that over to us," said Zaitshik. "With 30 days out, we had to scramble. We started out with a bang to get a lot of attention. We did a flash sale that we called the '20-20-20.' It was 20 days away, and for 20 hours only, and it was for 20 bucks. We had tremendous success with that. I think we grossed in 20 hours about $265,000. We thought that was just great. That program has grown to where this year we sold over 27,000 armbands, something like $664,000 in a 20-hour period!"

Promotions the carnival offered included Wacky Wednesdays with armbands for $25 and a one-dollar-per-ride day on the final day of the fair. During Tasty Tuesdays, all food stands had a three-to-five-dollar food item.

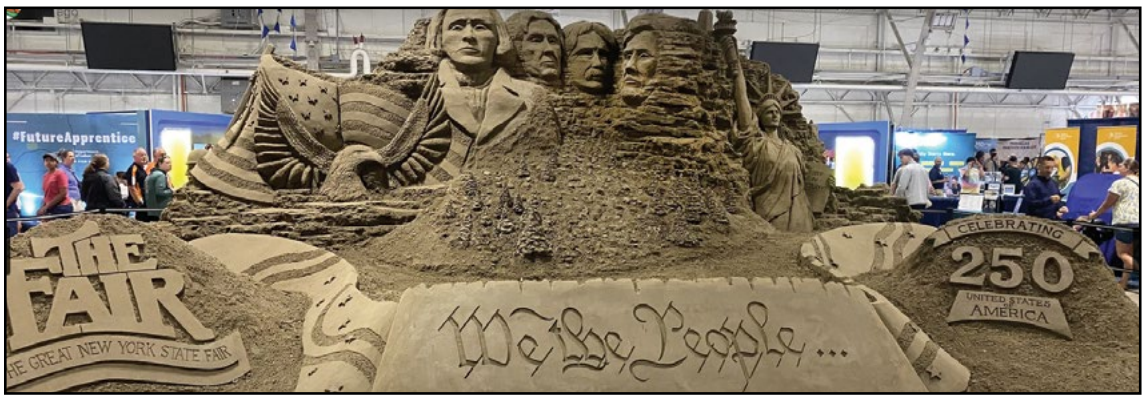
Zaitshik was also encouraged by the opposite end with pricing. "I'm all for raising prices where it is necessary. What I'm not

▸ **See NEW YORK, page 63**





Wade Shows brought 68 rides to the Great New York State Fair, with nearly half designed for the younger crowd. AT/B. DEREK SHAW





The America 250 anniversary was celebrated in many ways, including the annual sand sculpture (above). The popular eight-lane Big Apple Slide (right) also plays the Florida State Fair as well as the North Carolina State Fair. COURTESY THE GREAT NEW YORK STATE FAIR; AT/B. DEREK SHAW

NEW YORK

Continued from page 62

for is an unjustified raise just because your neighbor did it. Just because your neighbor can get $22 for a turkey leg, doesn't mean you should."

Zaitshik talked about working with the fair. "We realize that no matter where we are at, we're lucky enough to play in somebody else's sandbox. We're in the beginning of our relationship with the current administration. We're both learning to know each other and know what's important to each other. I'm extremely pleased with our relationship here."

Wade has been using H2B workers from Mexico since 1998.

"When we first started using it, there weren't the restrictions, or there wasn't the demand for workers. We always got our workers because we opened in the middle of January," Zaitshik said. "Now that's a challenge today. I'm really crossing my fingers and hoping that this year or (in) 2027 at the latest, that the certified workers bill will pass in Congress, which will make all carnival people's lives a lot easier. Particularly for a guy like me that opens in mid-January, we can't gamble and be at the mercy of a lottery."

Rey noted what sets this state fair apart: "We're the first and oldest state fair in the country, and we're also the most affordable fair at $8 full price per ticket. Adults 65+ and children 12 and younger were free every day. Included with the cost of admission were numerous entertainment opportunities, such as the **Chevrolet** Music Series, which featured 40+ national recording artists (and three to four concerts daily), as well as 17 acclaimed grounds entertainment acts, such as **Hollywood Circus** and **The Mentalist**, and multiple exhibits throughout the 375-acre New York State Fairgrounds."

When asked about their media mix and advertising budget, Rey explained, "We do not have this information yet, but we do know with certainty that social media is a big driver in awareness and information, with over 19 million views between August 12 and September 8."

Some of the more interesting food items included tater tot buckets with dill sauce; a broccoli, cheddar baked potato with hot Cheetos and sour cream; pickle wine slushies; vanilla boozy milkshake with a shot of whiskey; apple pie-filled burritos and teriyaki mac-and-cheese bowls with scallions.

The America 250 anniversary was on display in many ways at the fair, from the butter sculpture to the annual fair pin, sand sculpture, great American drone show and more. This was also the first year they offered entertainment in Suburban Pond, with **Ski Extreme Productions** offering stunts and tricks for fairgoers. The first indoor three-ring circus of any state fair was held inside Exposition Center. They also partnered with **Momentum Refresh** to provide an accessible mobile restroom experience.

Entertainment included **Third Eye Blind** with 49,000 people in attendance at Suburban Park, the biggest attended concert. Other acts throughout the 13 days included **The All-American Rejects**, **Flo Rida**, **Stella Lefty**, **Air Supply** and the **Shrekno Shrek Rave** closing out the schedule.

Rey summed up the fair: "The 2026 Fair was incredibly successful in many ways. Not only did we see an increase in attendance from previous years, with some early indications from our Midway Flash Sale, but we saw a very smooth fair from a safety and security standpoint. People could come through the gates with peace of mind, knowing we put their safety first. The fair is still very much a part of New Yorkers' summer plans, and we're proud to contribute to creating new memories for fairgoers."

The 2027 edition runs from August 25 to September 6.

●**nysfair.ny.gov**



Temps heat up Tennessee's biggest fair, more than 640,000 attend

AT: *Pam Sherborne*
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

LEBANON, Tenn.—Very hot temperatures brought down attendance this year at the **Wilson County Fair-Tennessee State Fair** held August 13 - 22 at the **James E. Ward Agricultural Center** in Lebanon, Tennessee.

The 2026 fair drew 647,118 visitors, down from 795,526 in 2025 and 861,425 in 2024.

Yet fair officials were pleased with the fair's results, even with temperatures approaching and/or at 100 degrees and humidity levels maintaining a daily average of around 73% and morning levels frequently spiking above 85%.

The fair's president, **Randall Clemons**, reported the fair drew record entries for competitions, shows and exhibits with over 3,000 events. There were more than 150 livestock shows, 16 stages of entertainment, over 150 activities and events, over 60 midway rides, more than 100 concessions and over 100 vendors and commercial booths.







Reithoffer Shows, the carnival operator for the Wilson County Fair-Tennessee State Fair, Lebanon, Tennessee, provided more than 60 rides to the fair's midway, including the popular skyride (below left). Nightly motorsports (below right) were also a featured attraction of the fair. The event saw a drop in attendance this year from 2025, due to very hot temperatures.
COURTESY WILSON COUNTY FAIR-TENNESSEE STATE FAIR

The fair's theme this year was Tennessee Voices and Volunteers Celebrating America 250! As part of the theme, fairgoers experienced a unique tribute to the nation's semi-quincentennial throughout the fairgrounds. There were patriotic displays and themed activities across the fairgrounds, including a Field of Flags, special photo opportunities and patriotic decorations celebrating across the fairgrounds.

Many of the fair's exhibits and competitions featured a Most Patriotic category, encouraging participants to showcase their creativity and American pride through art, crafts, photography, floral displays and more.

One of the most anticipated features of the fair's America 250 celebration was the arrival of the America 250 Freedom Truck, a traveling interactive exhibit that is making stops across the nation as part of the country's 250th anniversary commemoration. This unique attraction brings American history to life through interactive displays, inspiring stories and educational experiences that showcase the people, events and ideals that have shaped the United States over the last two and a half centuries.

Visitors to the fair also experienced the biggest and brightest midway ever presented, according to **Richard Reithoffer,** president of **Reithoffer Shows**, the fair's carnival ride provider. The midway included returning favorites such as the Gentle Giant, a 105-foot Ferris wheel, multiple roller coasters and the popular Sky Ride, which debuted at the fair last year.

"This year, our team has gone all out refurbishing several of our classic rides through complete rebuilds and extensive renovations," Reithoffer said before the fair kicked off. "I believe the show will look better than it ever has in Lebanon. We strive to provide the finest carnival ride experience of any traveling midway in America."

Among the attractions receiving a dramatic transformation is the Century Wheel, a 65-foot-tall Ferris wheel that has undergone a complete makeover. There was also a newly transformed Mystery Machine, formerly known as the Magic Bus. The carnival's Rocking Tug also received a fresh new look.

"We have one of the best ride refurbishment teams in the industry," Reithoffer reported. "Our maintenance supervisor, **Tom Popovich**, has more than 30 years of experience in the amusement business. When Tom finishes rebuilding a ride, it truly looks brand new."

New for midway visitors this year was a Saturday Armband Matinee, with ride armbands sold from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. that were valid until 5 p.m.

In addition to the 2026 theme, the fair featured its agricultural commodity, Year of Forestry. There was a spotlight on the role forestry plays in Tennessee's economy, environment and everyday life. Fairgoers were treated to exhibits, educational displays and interactive experiences showcasing forest management, forest products and the importance of conserving natural resources for future generations.

The 16 entertainment stages included performances of all types of musical genres and other performances, including bluegrass and country music, clogging and square dancing competitions. There were pageants, a hypnotist, strolling entertainers and more.

Two nights of the fair featured special concerts presented by **Bates Ford**. Grammy-award-winning country music artist **Linda Davis** performed on Sunday, August 16, followed by country music star **RaeLynn** on Monday, August 17.

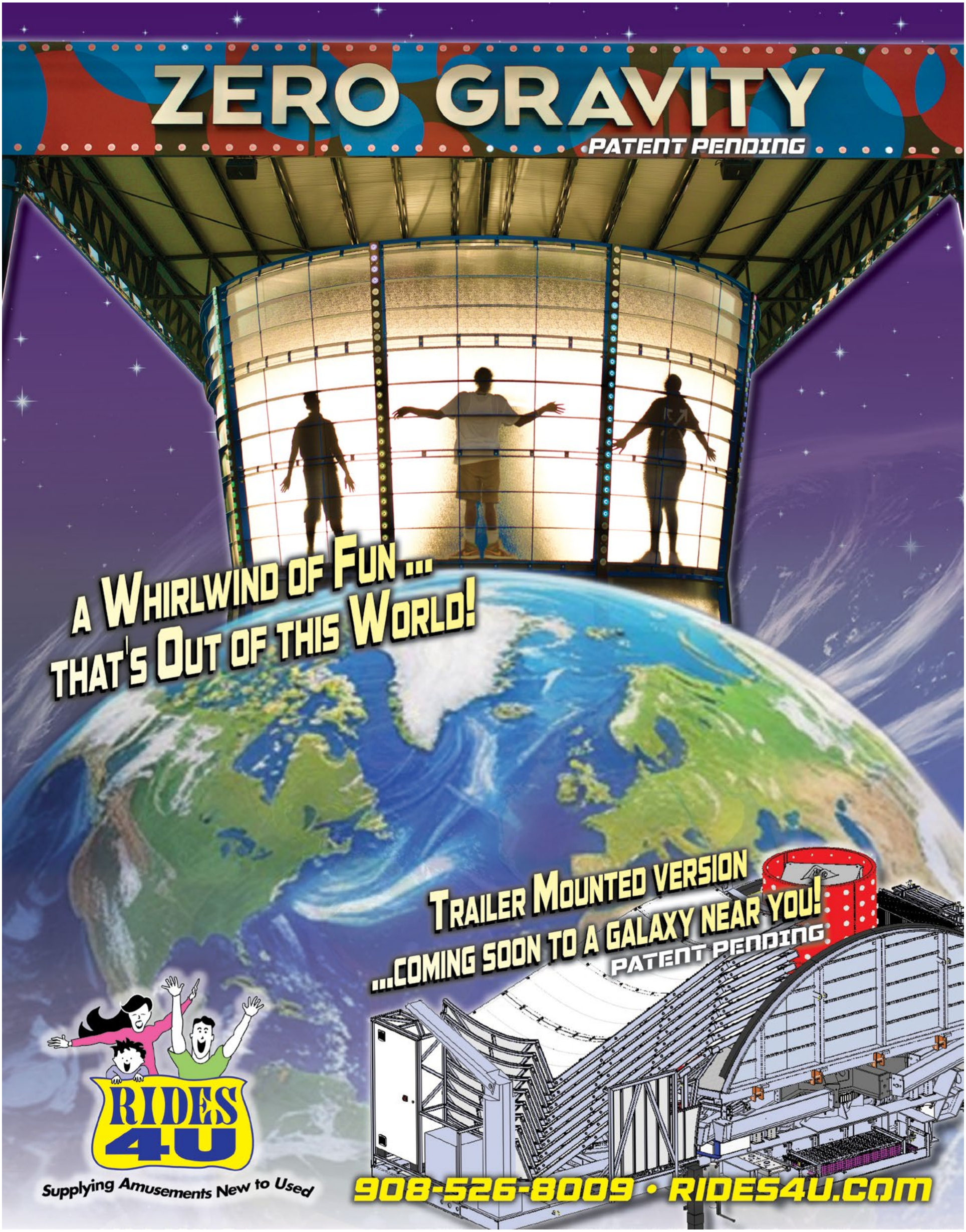
There were nightly motorsport events as well as nightly livestock events. The motorsports events included Monster Truck Show, Bump and Derby Run, Tractor Pull, 4 Wheeler Rodeo and Antique and Farm Tractor Pull.

Livestock auctions and competitions, with 4-H and FAA participation, included beef cattle, dairy cattle, goats, horses, mules, sheep, swine, poultry and rabbits.

And then there is the Wilson County Competition with local participation showing off their hay and field crops, creative arts, eggs, honey, baked goods, decorated round hay bales, horticulture and many more. New 2026 competitions included Log Sawing, Timber Callin' and Build a Birdhouse.

Another popular feature at the Wilson County Fair - Tennessee State Fair is the Historic Fiddlers Grove area. This year, the area included demonstrations, agricultural education, a petting zoo, the Paul Bunyan Lumberjack Show and more.

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SNAPSHOTS
Luehrs' Ideal Rides



Thomas and William Atkins, sons of Kristin Clair Atkins, help out in the Lemonade and other various food stands during their summer with Luehrs' Ideal Rides.



Andrew Schoendiest Jr., and wife, Benna, enjoy a sunny day together.



Pearl Schoendienst, daughter of Andrew Schoendienst, Jr., enjoys helping out in the Yum Yum Shoppe.



Kyle Keitzman has been overseeing the cones and floats ice cream stand for four years.



Josue Lozano has been working on the Century Wheel for Luehrs' Ideal Rides for 14 years.



Luis Castellanos is seen here taking tickets. He has worked with Luehrs' Ideal Rides for nearly a full decade.
COURTESY LUEHRS' IDEAL RIDES

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MIDWAYSCENE

AT: B. Derek Shaw
bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

The 2026 **Erie County Fair** Impact Report, highlighting the accomplishments and community impact of the Hamburg, New York, fair, was released shortly after the conclusion of their 12-day run.

"Following the 2025 Fair, we knew the rising cost of attending events was becoming a concern for guests. At a time when people are paying more for nearly everything, we did not want to simply accept that a day at the fair had to become more expensive too. Instead, we challenged ourselves and our partners to look differently at how we could create greater value for our guests," said **Jessica Underberg**, CEO and fair manager.

To that end, the fair lowered admission prices, introduced early bird pricing, continued free admission for children 12 and under and free parking, worked with the food concessionaires to provide an option for $7 or less, and partnered with **Strates Shows** to offer new ride promotions, including $2 ride day and Sunday pay-one-price matinees.

"Our goal was never simply to make the fair cheaper. It was to give fairgoers more choices and make it easier to enjoy the fair in a way that worked for their budget, without sacrificing the quality of the experience," said Underberg.

"What we saw over the 12 days was encouraging," she continued. "Fairgoers embraced that greater choice and flexibility. Some came early to take advantage of reduced admission. Some planned their visit around ride promotions. Others sought out lower-priced food options. There was no single way to experience the fair, and that was exactly the point. We want families to feel that the Erie County Fair is still a place where they can come together, enjoy the traditions they love, discover something new and make memories without feeling like every part of the experience is out of reach.

"That matters because the long-term strength of this fair is about much more than any one August. It is about making sure today's families continue to feel connected to the Erie County Fair and want to bring the next generation back with them. Just as important as affordability is safety. People should be able to come to the Erie County Fair with their families and friends and feel comfortable simply enjoying their day. Maintaining that sense of safety and trust is fundamental to the experience we want every guest to have, and it remains one of our highest priorities," cited Underberg.

On opening day, fairgoers donated 160,905 pounds of food to benefit **FeedMoreWNY**, pushing their partnership beyond one million pounds donated since 2013. More than 5,700 guests received hands-only CPR training; there were 9,000 competitive exhibit entries showcased throughout the fairgrounds, and the fair awarded $128,000 in scholarships to 41 deserving students.

Underberg summed things up by saying, "The 2026 Erie County Fair was a strong example of that balance; protecting the traditions people love while continuing to make the Fair more accessible, more welcoming and safer for everyone who joins us."

The 187th Erie County Fair returns next August 11–22.

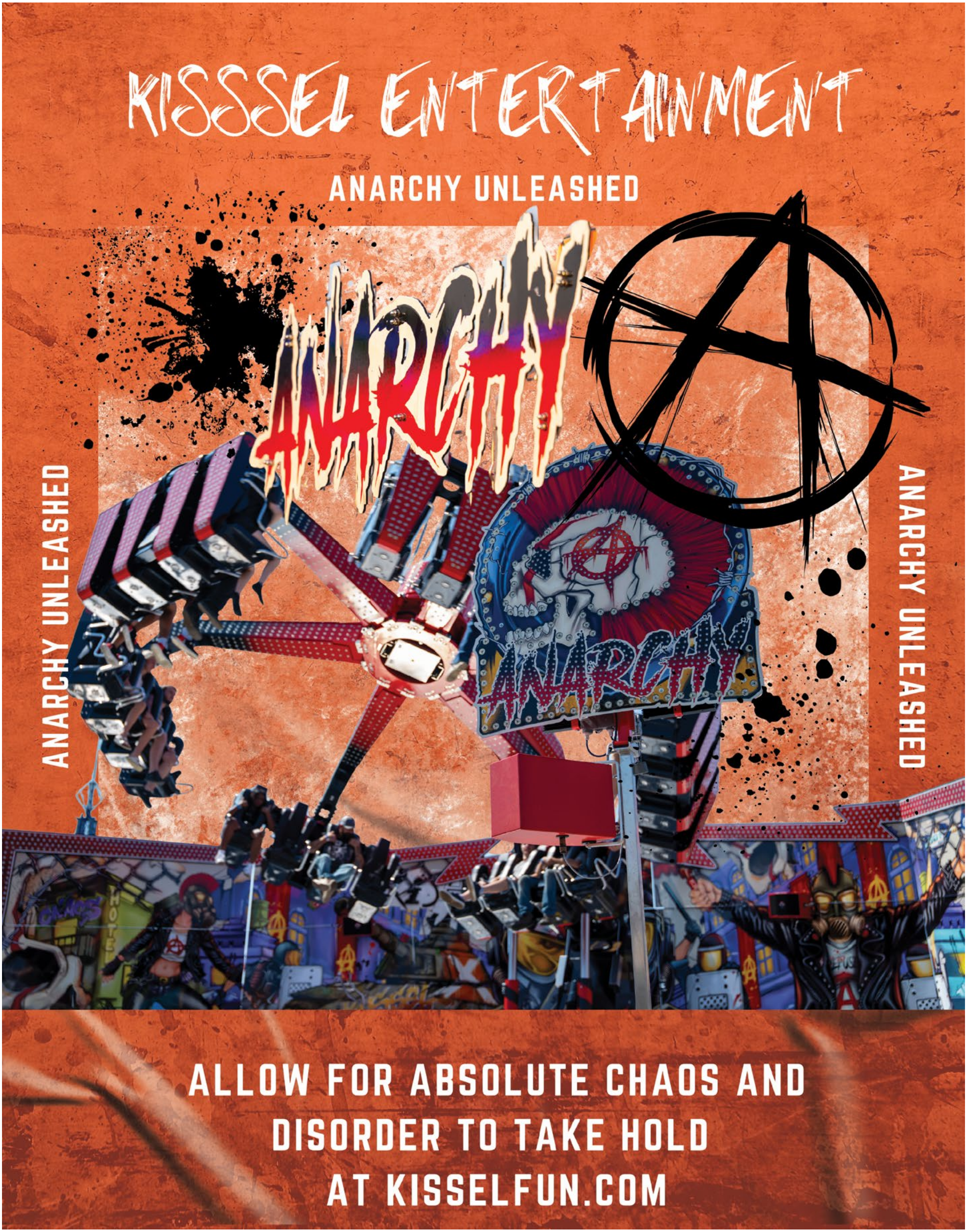
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The **International Association of Fairs & Expositions** (IAFE) has undergone significant changes over the past 18 months. It has updated systems, evaluated operations and identified opportunities to use its resources more efficiently while keeping focus where it belongs: on serving the members.

The IAFE board of directors took a comprehensive look at the IAFE headquarters building in Springfield, Missouri, that was constructed and built for the association in 1985. At one time, as many as 16 staff members worked in the 6,000-square-foot facility. Today, with most of their staff working remotely and just four employees working in the office daily, that leaves a significant portion of the building unused.

The board considered several options, including continuing to own and operate the building, leasing all or part of the space, and selling the property. After discussion about the current and future needs of the association, the board determined that selling the building was the best option for IAFE. In August, the board accepted an offer to purchase the property, which was finalized in mid-September.

IAFE staff have secured a new, smaller office space in Springfield. The new space better aligns with their current needs while allowing them to maintain a Springfield presence. Proceeds from the sale of the building will be placed in a restricted fund, preserving the value of this asset and allowing it to continue working for the benefit of the association. The new address is 4650 South National Avenue, Suite D1, Springfield, Missouri, 65810.


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2026 Ventura County Fair shines, foregoes independent midway

AT: *Pam Sherborne*
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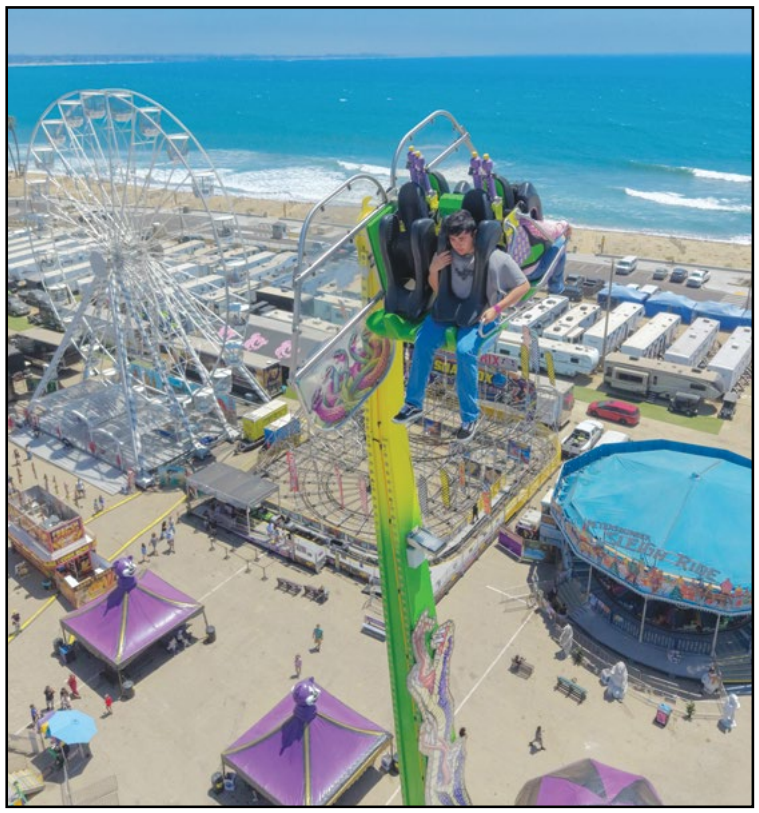
VENTURA, Calif. — The Ventura County Fair, Ventura, California, reported that almost 269,000 guests attended the 2026 edition, held July 29 to Aug. 9, slightly over the number the fair drew in 2025.

In addition, said Megan Hook, in charge of the fair's public relations, marketing and sponsorships: "We've focused on enhancing the onsite experience, which has helped encourage attendees to stay longer and enjoy more of what the fair has to offer."

Officials not only saw an attendance increase, but they also enjoyed a jump in concert ticket sales and carnival revenues, with revenues increasing in all fair categories but the rodeo.

The fair went from an independent midway to using a core, one-operator carnival company this year. The fair board contracted **Helm and Sons Amusements**, which brought more than 50 rides and attractions, many of them new to the midway, Hook said. The midway layout was also reimagined with family and kids' rides located in one location and thrill rides located closer to the ocean.

"There were a number of factors at play when deciding to move to a core carnival," Hook said, "but two of the biggest were the desire to create a more cohesive look and reducing the significant workload that comes with managing an independent carnival, especially for our small staff."





This year, fair officials contracted with one core carnival, choosing Helm and Sons Amusements, which brought more than 50 rides and attractions (above left). The midway also offered an array of midway games (above right). COURTESY VENTURA COUNTY FAIR

Fair officials decided to go with an independent midway in 2022 and operated that way for 2023, 2024 and 2025.

Reports showed that carnival sales jumped to $3.1 million this year, compared to $2.5 million in 2025. Wristbands for unlimited rides were available every day of the fair.

After the 2026 fair's success, the fair board signed a five-year extension with Helm and Sons.

Ride highlights included the Diamond Wheel that gave riders a beach and pier view, a double-decker carousel, the Big Splash water ride, three Ferris wheels total, Musik Express and Zipper. There were themed funhouses such as Upside Down, a Conjuring-themed haunted house and a Stranger Things-themed funhouse.



The Ventura County Fair is known for its robust free entertainment program, including its main stage acts. COURTESY VENTURA COUNTY FAIR

Another highlight this year was the fair's concert series.

"Our VIP model and layout continue to evolve and grow each year," Hook said. "We are the only venue within our county that offers electronic dance music (EDM) concerts, which have been hugely successful. We had **Marshmello** this year and **Diplo** last year."

People had the choice to buy VIP tickets and get better seats for grandstand shows. Or guests could just attend as part of their admission to the fair. According to a report posted on the Ventura County Star, people bought 3,645 VIP tickets for EDM Marshmello, the biggest draw of the fair.

Iration, the reggae-rock band founded in the Santa Barbara area, was second with 3,550 tickets bought, according to the same report.

Other performers that were part of that main concert series included **Bush**, who opened the fair, **Jake Owen**, **Herencia de Patrones with Banda Maguey and Banda Toro**, **Ashanti featuring Bow Wow**, **Switchfoot featuring Hoobastank**, and **Nate Smith**.

There were other free stages including the Pacifico Stage, Seabreeze Stage and the Gardens. All held daily entertainment.

Flying U Rodeo, a paid event, held five shows throughout the fair.

Hook said other highlights this year included a free petting zoo, free contests such as karaoke and a free Beerfest that included free samplings from local breweries.

New food items brought out big eaters. Some of the new offerings included Tiramisu Cinnamon Roll, Giant Chocolate Cookie, Mini Cookies, Blondies and Brownies, Vegan Udon Broth, Udon Noodle Bowls, Pork Belly Ramen, Spring Rolls, Buffalo Chicken Grilled Cheese, Pulled Pork Grilled Cheese, Avocado Empanada, Corn Burritos and Sushi Pops, just to name a few.

The Ventura County Star reported that there were $5.7 million in concession sales, with each visitor spending about $21 on food. That is a more than 14% increase over last year.

And it wouldn't be a county fair without livestock auctions and exhibits and competitions of all varieties. The Junior Livestock Auction included entries from the 4-H, FAA and Grange Youth. Those categories featured the likes of Broiler Meat Pens, Market Lambs, Rabbit Meat Pens, Market Steers, Supreme Champion Drive, Foundation Hog, Market Swine, Turkeys and Market Goats.

Other competitions and exhibits featured categories such as agriculture, amateur art, floriculture, gems and minerals, hobbies and collections, home arts, photography, professional art and small livestock.

The fair implemented a new Clear Bag Policy for 2026 as an ongoing commitment to guest and staff safety. Approved bags included clear plastic, vinyl or PVC bags not exceeding 12 inches by six inches by 12 inches; clear purses and fanny packs within size limits; medically necessary bags and diaper bags, with the last two subject to inspection.

Prohibited bags included non-clear backpacks, purses or fanny packs larger than the approved size of 12 inches by six inches by 12 inches; printed-pattern bags or tinted bags and camera bags, binocular cases and seat cushions with storage.

The fair did allow reusable drinking containers and water flasks as long as they were empty upon entering the fair. There were designated water filling stations inside the venue. Metal containers were allowed, but subject to inspection. Glass containers were prohibited.

●**venturacountyfair.org**

Children's Carousel permanent addition to Ohio State Fairgrounds

AT: *B. Derek Shaw*
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COLUMBUS — In late July, before the start of the 2026 **Ohio State Fair**, Governor **Mike DeWine** and First Lady **Fran** cut the ribbon on the new Ohio Children's Carousel at the **Ohio State Fairgrounds**. The two were also personally involved in the design of the carousel, a tribute to Ohio's children and the heart, history and heritage of the Buckeye State.

The 30 carousel characters include fair animals such as a goat, pig, sheep, llama, rooster, rabbit and steer; native Ohio animals such as a bison, white-tailed deer buck, bobcat, river otter, box turtle, beaver, monarch butterfly, bald eagle, trumpeter swan and cardinal; and horses that represent parts of Ohio's history.

"Fran and I think the new, permanent carousel will be a central gathering place for families at the Ohio State Fairgrounds," said Governor DeWine. "We created a carousel that is more than a ride. It's a journey through the Buckeye State, and we think this hand-carved masterpiece will help Ohioans build memories for generations."

The new, permanent carousel near the entrance to the **Ohio State Expo Center** also has two chariots. They feature woodland creatures and native Ohio flowers and plants. The Storybook Chariot depicts artwork by Ohio artist **Loren Long** and represents the importance of reading and **Dolly Parton**'s **Imagination Library** of Ohio, the free book program for children under the age of five in Ohio.



The 30 carousel animals (above) include a goat, pig, sheep, llama, rooster, rabbit and steer; native Ohio animals such as a bison, white-tailed deer buck, bobcat, river otter, box turtle, beaver, monarch butterfly, bald eagle, trumpeter swan and cardinal; and horses that represent parts of Ohio's history. In late July, Governor Mike DeWine and First Lady Fran DeWine are joined by family members and others involved in building the Ohio Children's Carousel to cut the ribbon on the new ride (below). COURTESY STEFAN HINZ, OHIO STATE FAIR



"We currently have more than 428,000 Ohio children receiving a free Imagination Library book in the mail every single month, which the research shows will help more children become ready for kindergarten," said First Lady Fran DeWine. "It makes sense that a storybook theme is part of this magical experience, along with Ohio's state flag, state seal, state bird, state flower and many key Ohio places and moments in history."

The carousel includes the names of all 88 counties, as well as 12 rounding boards depicting scenes such as Clifton Mill, Serpent Mound, the Ohio State Fair, **Neil Armstrong** on the Moon and the Wright Flyer III over Huffman Prairie. There are 12 other inner façade murals that depict Ohio landmarks such as Marblehead Lighthouse, Freedom Stairway, Old Man's Cave, Canton's **Palace Theatre** and Fountain Square.

Mary Talley, vice president of **Talley's Amusements**, was quite impressed with the carousel. "It's absolutely beautiful. It's unbelievable. There are animals on there that I have never seen on a carousel and they were all hand-carved. They have a chariot on it that has the governor's dog. The entire state is represented so very well on the carousel. This is like nothing I have ever seen before. It is all so well done. It is state of the art. The building is amazing — it's so high-tech. I had the opportunity to operate it, you know. I operated the Ohio Children's Carousel for the governor and the first lady! I've never seen a governor love the fair so much as he does."

With more than three decades of experience in the carousel field, **Todd Goings** led the team at **Carousels and Carvings** that designed and created the carousel in-house at its headquarters in Marion, Ohio. The manufacturer also restores antique carousels in-house.

"It's been an honor for every member of our team — including the carvers who shaped the animals and chariots, the artists who painted everything and the machinists who made the carousel go around — to create this carousel in our home state," said Goings, founder and president of the company. "Carousels are unique pieces of art, because riders get to interact with the art — and that's where the magic comes in."

"Ohio is special in that I can't think of any other fair that has its own custom carousel," said Ohio State Fair Executive Director **Adam Heffron**. "The Carousel creates an exciting new centerpiece for our fairgrounds for many years to come."

The Ohio Children's Carousel will be open during every 12-day Ohio State Fair and at select events throughout the year on that side of the fairgrounds.

"Fran and I think the new, permanent carousel will be a central gathering place for families at the Ohio State Fairgrounds," said DeWine. "

Next year, the fair will run July 28 through August 8.

Note: Other fairgrounds that have a permanent carousel in North America include Fair Park, Dallas, home of the State Fair of Texas and the Washington State Fairgrounds Event Center, home of the Washington State Fair, Puyallup.

•ohiostatefair.com





The ride's 30 animals — including this horse and bald eagle — are incredibly detailed (left). The carousel's rounding boards celebrate various activities throughout Ohio (above). COURTESY STEFAN HINZ

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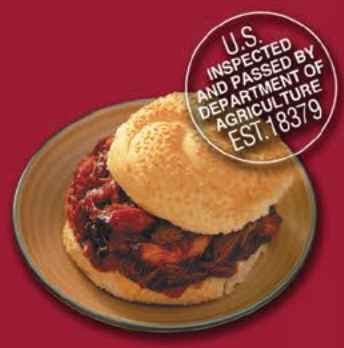
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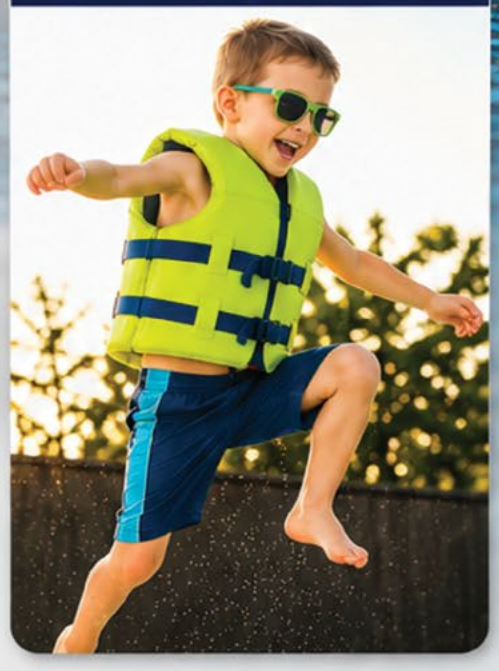
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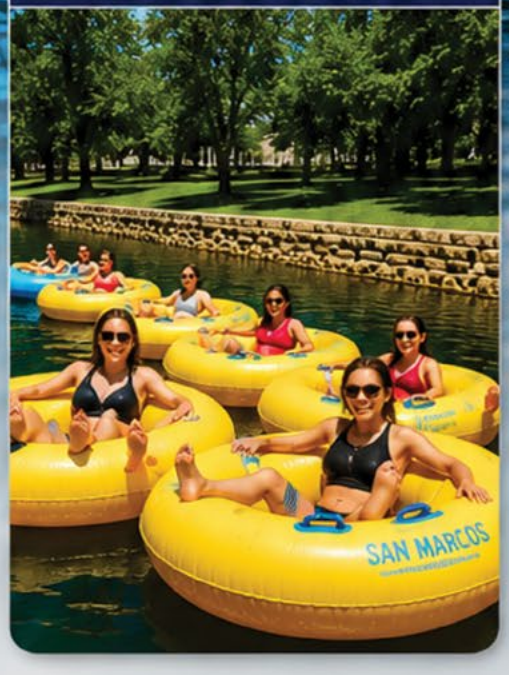
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