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COTALand welcomes guests with its own distinctive Austin vibe

Gerstlauer, Rides 4 U, Vekoma, Zamperla all supply attractions

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

AUSTIN, Texas — Good things come to those who wait. For Texans, **COTALand** finally opened in late September.

Why "finally?" It has been an interesting six-year journey.

Matt Hughey, vice president of operations, has been with the process since the beginning. When brought aboard, owing to his expertise from numerous years with **Six Flags**, he came with a wealth of knowledge to a workforce that knew nothing of the amusement industry.

"The ownership had purchased a few little kiddie rides that were in the Grand Plaza," he said. "That was sort of the beginnings of COTALand."

COTALand is the latest addition to the 1,500-acre campus. Following two years of construction, **Circuit of the Americas** opened as a certified F1 racetrack in the fall of 2012. The facility became home to Formula One United States Grad Pris, **MotoGP** (Motorcycle Grand Prix) of the Americas, **NASCAR** and more. Over the past decade, COTA Carting has offered high-speed go-karts, a **Soarin' Eagle** zipline has been installed, and a miniature golf course was added to offer family fun.

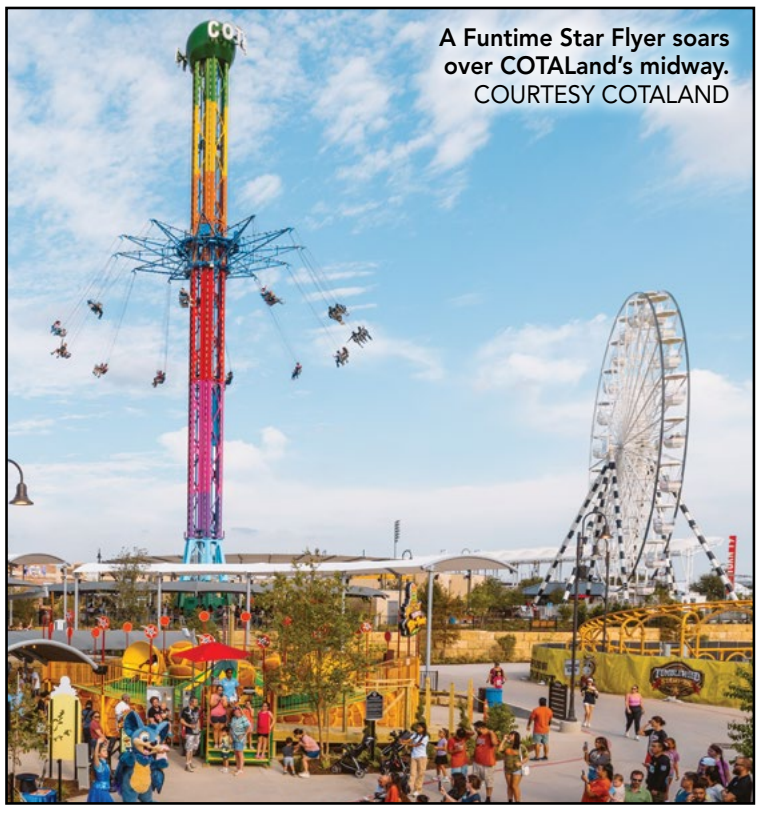
One of COTA's primary investors, founder **Bobby Epstein**, recalled San Antonio's **Kiddie Park** from his childhood. He thought something like that might be nice for Austin.

"We soon realized that a lot of the equipment that had been purchased was great for little kids, but the parents really could not enjoy the attractions with them," Hughey reflected. "The thought was … let's just add a few family rides."

He said a handful of thrill rides followed, "mish-mash" being the term used. "There was no real plan, just some rides."

Things got bigger.

▸ See COTALAND, page 8


A Funtime Star Flyer soars over COTALand's midway.
COURTESY COTALAND

Tivoli Gardens opens major re-theme to park area — Hikari



The new area at Tivoli Gardens, Hikari, bears a striking resemblance to a street in Japan.
COURTESY BAX LINDHARDT/TIVOLI

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
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COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Rare is the park that can boast a history ranging beyond a century, but **Tivoli Gardens** is one of the few that can claim that right. Dating back to 1843, the world-renowned amusement park is actually closer to 200 years than it is a mere century. As expected, during that time frame, various aspects of the park have changed. While embracing its established architecture, flowers and classic attractions, it is also vital to remain current, and the park has recently opened Hikari, a refreshed area of the park.

For two decades, the park had an Oriental themed Asia area, but park management felt that a makeover of the space was due. The new area is termed Hikari, and it strikes a modern, Japanese-inspired tone. "Hikari" means "light" in Japanese.

"The China-themed area with its lanterns had been there for 20 years. We decided to redevelop the area," said **Rasmus Altenborg**, design and development director. "The state of the buildings and everything wasn't in the best shape. Even if we spent a lot of money, it

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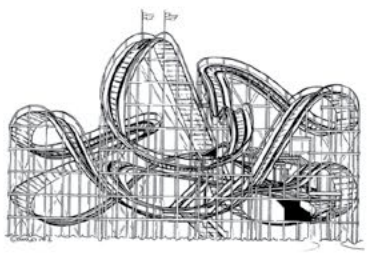


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AMUSEMENT VIEWS

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

Family rides are our heart



Robinson

Roller coasters get taller and faster. Innovative thrill rides find new ways to spin, flip and otherwise churn guests' stomachs. Water rides keep people cool on a blazingly hot summer day. But at the center of it all — in almost every park in the world — a carousel spins slowly, filled with the laughter of youngsters and smiles of their parents.

It's easy to overlook the quiet majesty of the carousel, but its presence is almost mandatory for any amusement park. It's the original family ride, the one enjoyed by all ages ... the first one that kids pull at their parents' arms in excitement to ride.

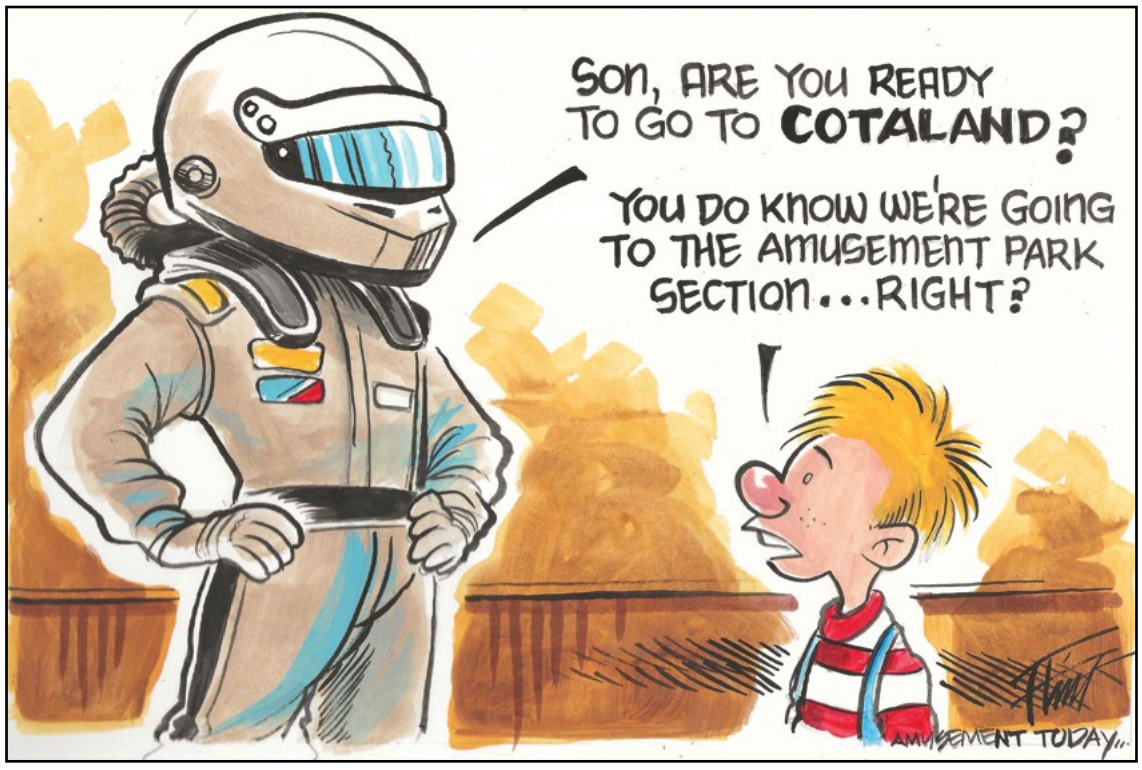
As simple as the ride is, its lure is undeniable. Even in theme parks that redefine high tech (such as Disneyland, Magic Kingdom, Islands of Adventure and Epic Universe), a carousel still draws attention and eager riders regardless of the "ground-breaking" attractions that may surround it. Cedar Point, with its double-digit lineup of record-breaking coasters, finds the carousel has such lure for guests that its midways have not one, not two but three carousel rides for them to enjoy.

And therein lies the heart of the matter. Rides can get more high-tech, overly interactive and immersive. They may find ways to be flashier, faster and even scarier. However, that simple carousel will always draw attention from families, and ear-to-ear grins from children and parents alike.

Those families are the ones walking through our gates, buying a treat to eat while there, winning a prize to take home and planning a whole day — a whole vacation — to enjoy our parks. At their core, families just want that memorable moment, that unforgettable experience of smiling alongside one another as they take in the experience and forever have the mental picture packed with emotion.

A carousel delivers that. It always has. The best rides — those family rides — are the ones that don't try to impress anyone, but rather delight everyone.

FLINT'S VIEW: *Bubba Flint*



INDUSTRY VOICE: *Todd Andrus, IAAPA*

Bigger than ever, bringing our industry together



Andrus

There is something special about November in Orlando as attractions professionals from around the world come together for IAAPA Expo. This year, I'm especially excited to welcome you to IAAPA Expo 2026, Nov. 16 to 20 at the Orange County Convention Center, as we celebrate the largest Expo in our event's history.

We're expanding into the West Building, growing our trade show floor by nearly 50% compared to last year, with a record-breaking 630,000 square feet of exhibit space and more than 1,350 exhibitors. This exciting milestone means we can welcome even more members, exhibitors and industry professionals, creating greater opportunities to connect, collaborate and do business. Across the expanded trade show floor, you'll discover innovations in ride technology, immersive attractions, themed entertainment, food and beverage, as well as operational solutions that are shaping the future of our industry and creating new possibilities for memorable guest experiences.

This year's expo also brings exciting new experiences, including an expanded Food & Beverage Pavilion, the What's New Theater and dedicated Cruise and Glamping Lounges, alongside returning attendee favorites.

Beyond the show floor, nearly 200 education sessions, industry EDUTours, networking opportunities and more than 25 exhibitor press conferences offer countless ways to learn, exchange ideas and build relationships. We'll close out the week with IAAPA Celebrates at Universal Epic Universe.

While this year's expo is our largest yet, what makes it truly special remains the same: the people, partnerships, and shared passion that bring our industry together and drive it forward.

I look forward to welcoming you to Orlando for an incredible week of innovation, inspiration and connection!

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2 MINUTE DRILL



AT: Tim Baldwin

Todd Andrus, IAAPA

Todd Andrus has been a part of the **IAAPA** team for just under a year, but he is proving to be a good fit. His team members have taken to his sense of humor, and his top-notch work ethic and knack for marketing and sales were primary reasons for being brought on. Married and a father of two kids, he hasn't lost his sense of adventure, as he was seen scaling the via ferrata mountain experience at **Bolder Adventure Park** at an FEC meetup in Grand Prairie, Texas. Andrus attended his first Golden Ticket Awards as a presenter this past September.



After nearly 30 years in the amusement industry, Todd Andrus has just gotten his first year under his belt as part of the IAAPA team. COURTESY IAAPA

Title: Vice President & Executive Director – IAAPA North America

Number of years in the amusement industry: 27 years of learning and evolving.

Best thing about the industry: The PEOPLE!! And helping families make memories!

Favorite amusement ride: VelociCoaster, as I get to ride it with my eldest son! It's all about making memories together!

If I weren't working in the amusement industry, I would be … Really unhappy. But I would try to get by with being a charter boat fishing captain.

Biggest challenge facing our industry: Workforce development. We need to encourage the next generation to become skilled in the attraction space. The opportunities are endless — from fabricators to marketers to chefs — there is something for everyone. Now, we need to get the word out that it's rewarding work worth doing.

The thing I like most about amusement season: The buzz in the air as families strike out to experience something new. They walk away from the day-to-day mundane to reconnect. When I think back on my childhood experiences, the peaks were days spent in the amusement season.

My contribution for Thanksgiving dinner is … a smoked turkey. To me it's more of a work of art, even though I don't eat meat.

My wardrobe is … predictable.

Snow skiing or water skiing? Snow Skiing. Much more freedom! And fewer alligators.

The person at work that makes me laugh the hardest is … usually the person who tells me "no."

The strangest place IAAPA travels have taken me would be … Xcaret, Mexico. Less strange and more BEAUTIFUL. It's a really good example of cultural tourism — celebrating the beauty of Mexico.

My first IAAPA Expo: It was life-changing. It really opened my eyes to the entire industry. But the repeat visits and connections led me to where I am today.

The best time to put up Christmas decorations is … December 1. Let's all give Halloween and Thanksgiving their time in the sun.

The best teaching-a-child-to-drive advice to any parent: It's best to accept that sometimes you're not in control.

If I were in the next *Avengers* movie, I would want to play … IAAPA-Man! He has the ability to connect folks together for the betterment of our industry! I can't think of a better super-power. Well, except for flying. That would be cool.

On a scale of 1 to 10, the organization of my photos is … They are at a -1. It's a hot mess. Waiting on AI to go in and clean up for me.

A celebrity from the 1950s I would love to meet: Jack Kerouac. I would love to hear stories from his time traveling America as an iconic beatnik.

Best band of all time: Violent Femmes. I stopped evolving musically in the '90s.

Pick one: caramel apple or apple pie? Apple Pie. Add a little milk and some sugar, and I'm back in my grandmother's house.

THE INDUSTRY SEEN

London Eye intercepts the Colts



LONDON, U.K. — The Indianapolis Colts recently took London Game Week to new heights through an exclusive partnership with the London Eye, one of the United Kingdom's most iconic landmarks. Ahead of the Colts NFL matchup in London against the Washington Commanders, fans had the opportunity to ride in a Colts-themed London Eye pod and take in panoramic views of London as excitement buit toward the NFL's 2026 London Game at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on October 4, 2026. Access to the pod was provided through special contests. Select ride experiences featured appearances from Colts legends, cheerleaders and the team mascot, Blue (shown). COURTESY THE LONDON EYE

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A Screamin' Swing from S&S swoops out over a small area of water (above left). Palindrome (above middle) is a Gerstlauer Infinity coaster that goes backward and forward. Bertazzon's Music Express (above right) is supremely flashy — and popular — in the nighttime hours. Soggy Logger from SBF-Visa (below) has fun elements on the ride and in the queue. AT/TIM BALDWIN

COTALAND

Continued from page 1

"Then the idea came, like, 'Why don't we just go ahead and build a full-size park?' When that kind of talk happens — knowing the costs and what's involved — you hear about parks all the time that never come to fruition," Hughey told *Amusement Today*. "I thought we could do something, but I never thought it would be what it is today."

Delays and ever-changing plans pushed the development of the project back by numerous months, if not years. COTALand has now opened its doors to the world, whether it be locals or global racing fans.

Before the park was built, the plot of land was just a pathway for visitors to make their way around the track. Now it is a landscaped, colorful destination filled with rides.

The entrance to COTALand is flanked by vibrant video screens. Guests' arrival and departure are a stroll through bright images of Texas' natural wildflowers and such.

A small-town feel greets visitors in the front plaza with retail, coffee shops, ice cream parlors and the like. More impressive is a fountain area. In the center is a sculpture created by artist **Kai**. Dubbed "The Perfect Hug," it comes with a backstory of a brother and sister sharing time together.

Rides in this area make an immediate statement with a Star Flyer, one of two rides from **Funtime**, a Ferris wheel and one of the park's signature roller coasters, Palindrome.

Decorated with an assortment of tongue-in-cheek signage (for example, "racecar" is the same forward as it is backward), the clever naming of this **Gerstlauer** Infinity shuttle coaster has surprised visitors. Its snappy elements, forward-backward direction and upside-down hangtime over a working roadway make the ride memorable.

Ride Entertainment was partnered with in the contracting of the ride and also used for the erection.

Throughout the park, there is a selection of family rides, as well as some options for the very young, ensuring that there is something for everyone. Many installations are from **SBF-Visa**, brokered through **Rides 4 U**.

"For a brand new park, I think it's a very good ride package," Hughey told *Amusement Today*. "Do we have everything? No. But that gives us a chance to add new things. You look at a place like Six Flags in North Texas, and it's been around for over 60 years. They've got a few years on us, but I think we're doing quite well for the segment we're in for a brand-new park."



Some visitors well-versed in the theme park world might be surprised that the log flume is from SBF-Visa. Called Soggy Logger, it perhaps has the best storyline and theming of any ride in the park. A backstory of a logging company is told through "historic" black-and-white photos. One clever poster has a beaver posing for Employee of the Month. A large water wheel graces the midway side of the attraction. The drop on the back side, however, has a curving slope to the eventual drop, making for an exhilarating plunge.

"It has a little bit of a water coaster feel to it; once you get to that top hill, you go around and get going," said Hughey. "It's a fun little feel."

Numerous ride manufacturers were involved in the park. In addition to SBF-Visa (11 rides), Funtime (Star Flyer and drop tower) and Gerstlauer, the park offers product from **S&S Worldwide**, a Screamin' Swing; **Vekoma**, a tilt coaster; **Levent Lunapark** (five rides); **Zamperla** (three rides); **Chance**, carousel; **Bertazzon**, Music Express; **Ital**, kiddie train and **Fabbri**, Telecombat.

Asked by *Amusement Today* why Levent was a significant supplier, since they aren't as well-known in the U.S., Hughey answered: "The idea of spending a million dollars for a ride just wasn't in the cards at that point. So, I was tasked with finding some unique rides that were affordable. As I was looking through stuff, I ran across them by pure accident. We took a shot with them. Our Wacky Worm, compared to others out there, is very quiet. The little log ride, I think, is very cute. We were fortunate enough to find something that we felt that the bones of them were quality, and they were wanting to get into the United States."

At the opposite end of the park is COTALand's





Hot Lap (above left) is a unique amusement park experience found only at COTALand. The entrance to COTALand (above right) is visually engaging both during the day and at night. AT/TIM BALDWIN

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COTALAND

Continued from page 8

other high-profile roller coaster. Circuit Breaker, a tilt coaster from Vekoma, had given preview rides at events as far back as fall of 2025. Now seeing full operation, the dynamic thriller is wowing audiences with its adrenaline-pumping tilt, smooth track, onboard sound and dramatic lighting.

While the ride's lineup is primarily comprised of brand-new rides, a handful of saved rides are in the mix as well. A **Sellner** Tilt-A-Whirl is cleverly themed to one of the park's mascots, Turbo, a turtle who wants to go fast.

"When creating characters, we thought, 'Well, Austin is known for its bats.' And it's Texas, we should have a horse. And we started having fun with racing, so we had a turtle who wanted to go fast and played on that," Hughey said. "I think Turbo turned out really cute. And anything a boy can do, a girl can do, so Checkers is kind of adventurous. Those four ambassadors have really hit the spot."

Fang, Buck, Turbo and Checkers welcome visitors when they arrive. Characters appear in pop-up shows within the park, as well as appearances from the park's princesses.

Another classic ride saved is a **Schwarzkopf** Wildcat, the only remaining 45-meter model in the world. However, COTALand has spectacularly made this ride something special. Now called Retro Rambler, the coaster is adorned with various neon signs saved from Austin's history. Local residents are sure to recall some of them, and those too young to remember will think they simply look super cool.

Unquestionably, COTALand's most signature ride is Hot Lap. Being right on the edge of the F1 track, guests can climb in with a professional driver and take a 3-mile lap in a souped-up racecar, speeding more than 150 mph. At an upcharge, that is. Even at a hefty price tag starting at $175, Hot Lap is finding an audience. It is the only experience of its kind in a U.S. theme park.

"People love it," Hughey shared. "To be honest, I thought it was interesting, but I wasn't sure what the appeal would be for everybody. But getting in a racecar with a professional driver, that's not something you get to do all the time. I don't know anywhere else you can do this. It's been very, very well received. It has done quite well."

Race fans will also get a charge out of the park's major restaurant, T20. Massive in size, it is a two-story eatery and bar that overlooks Turn 20 on the Circuit.

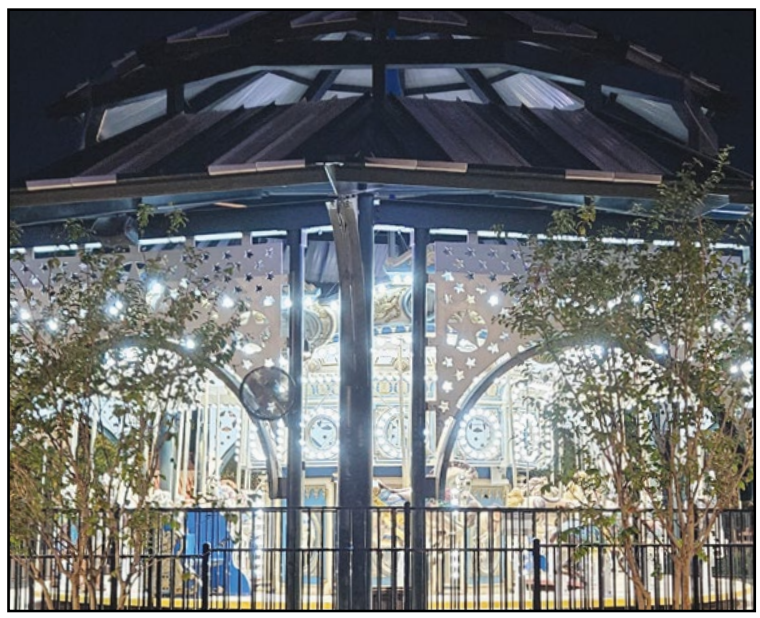
Although the park opened on September 26, some fine-tuning and getting the final rides open still took a few more weeks. Hughey doesn't dismiss that there were challenges and stress along the way, but he has enjoyed the journey.

"Looking back, it's been six years now. I never could have imagined this was something that would have come to fruition," Hughey told *AT*. "It's fun to dream and talk about it, and then when you actually see it — the statue and fountain and we've got the trees and the shade and the rides and the energy — it's a pretty cool thing to be a part of."





Vekoma's tilt coaster, Circuit Breaker (above left), is the park's high-profile attraction A preserved Schwarzkopf Wildcat takes on an Austin vibe as the Retro Rambler (above right). AT/TIM BALDWIN



The Grand Carousel by Chance is ornately inviting at all times of day. AT/TIM BALDWIN



"The Perfect Hug," a work of art by Kai, is in the center of the entrance plaza fountain. AT/TIM BALDWIN



HIKARI

Continued from page 1

wouldn't live up to our own expectations and not even the guests'. So, we decided to do something else. We kept three buildings, but everything else is new."

Owing to the layout of the area, Altenborg said any re-do would have to maintain a street design.

"We wanted to enhance the street feeling and also keep a little of the Asian vibe," he told *Amusement Today*. "It's very difficult going from one kind of theme to a totally different kind of theme. That's where we decided to go with the more Japanese direction. We wanted to make it more like Shibuya, an area in Tokyo. You have a lot of shops, and there's a lot of young people."

The themed area is where the park's Dæmonen roller coaster resides, so that floorless coaster from **Bolliger & Mabillard** has received a new entrance featuring a Japanese Maneki-neko cat. With the new area connecting with the young, teenagers are a primary audience for the roller coaster.

However, two new attractions have been installed. Themed perfectly inside a Japanese pagoda, Typhoon's Eye is a Zero Gravity ride from **SBF-Visa**, which offers spectator thrills owing to its translucent drum, through which guests can see riders pinned to the wall as they spin. According to the park, the ride is the only one of its type in Scandinavia. Hotel Hikari is a second funhouse for the park, offering interactive chaos and sensory experiences as visitors walk through. Beginning in a hotel elevator and then experiencing the hotel's various "rooms" that spark curiosity, wonder and a challenge to the senses, illusion and laughs take hold. While built in-house, Tivoli partnered with **Gosetto** for some effects. This attraction makes use of space by bridging above the park's walkway.







Hotel Hikari (above) is a sensory fun house, the second such playful attraction at the park. Kokeshi dolls, collectable in Japan, make for fun photo props (far right). Large fiberglass figures (right) are typical of Japanese settings. COURTESY JAKOB MELGAARD/TIVOLI; AT/TIM BALDWIN

But Hikari is about atmosphere. The new area feels current, with all the vibrant colors and lights of a Tokyo setting. Photo ops abound with new décor and themed environments.

The area covers 2,000 square meters (21,500 square feet) and represents an investment of several hundred million Danish kroner.

"We had help from Japanese experts to ensure that whenever we do go in another direction, it's still something Japanese," Altenborg said. "Respectful, so you don't do something opposite of Japanese culture."



A Zero Gravity attraction from SBF-Visa finds a spectacular home underneath a Japanese pagoda. COURTESY BAX LINDHARDT/TIVOLIE

Whether aware of the park's efforts or not, guests can appreciate the details. Authentic Japanese materials have been incorporated into the set design. This includes reclaimed windows and doors, vintage elements and more than 60 tons of roof tiles imported from Japan. Bamboo, distinctive ginkgo trees, sculpted pines and azaleas transport guests into the heartbeat of the Asian country.

Being conscious of Denmark's varying weather, the area also has a lot of covered seating. Restrooms have also been added to the section.

"We wanted to create a place where our guests could stay for a longer period," Altenborg told *AT*. "Before we changed it, a lot of guests didn't go there because they didn't want to ride the coaster. Why go to this area? We had food stands before, but now we have five outlets. It's all coordinated — Japanese-inspired food. We have two retail shops selling Japanese retail."

The eateries are a mix of Tivoli restaurants and tenants, although Tivoli has final say on menus to ensure options stay with the theme.

The new area has been in development for five years. Construction began two years ago, so during the downtime, the park sent off its B&M trains for renovation, while the ride received new sensors.

According to the park, Tivoli Gardens has long looked to other parts of the world for inspiration, and since 1843 has embraced distant cultures. Tivoli Gardens' founder **Georg Carstensen** had a goal of bringing the world to Denmark.

"With Hikari, we wanted to create something that was entirely our own," said **Susanne Mørch Koch**, CEO, Tivoli Gardens. "Tivoli's designers and developers have designed the area from scratch. Over the years, we have travelled to Japan to experience the culture for ourselves, gather impressions and draw inspiration. Every detail has been carefully selected. From the art and architecture to the planting, lighting, scenography and gastronomy. Everything has been brought together by Tivoli's own experts and employees, as well as skilled advisers, and made a reality by our talented craftsmen. Not to build a Japan in Tivoli but to let ourselves be inspired by the world and interpret it in our own way. That is how Tivoli has developed for more than 180 years. We have always drawn inspiration from around the world and made it part of Tivoli's own story."

The opening date of August 15 was intentional, as the park celebrates its anniversary on that date each year. 2026 is the park's 183rd anniversary season.

As guests stroll Hakari, a feeling of old Japan mixes with the new.

"We wanted to create this city street atmosphere," Altenborg said. "Everything here is run by Tivoli, but it should look like it is a different kind of people who have been living here, building it. We also tried to make the scale of the building look bigger, so when you walk [through], you feel you are within a city. In Japan, you have trains running above you; here we have a coaster coming over you."

After having just been open five weeks, the amusement industry in Europe had already taken notice, as Hikari placed second for Europe's Best New Theming 2026, as acknowledged in the European Star Awards presented by *Kirmes & Park International*.

"We are proud to see Hikari take second place in such a highly regarded industry award," said Mørch Koch. "Hikari has only been open since August, so receiving this recognition so soon, together with the positive response from our visitors, means a great deal to us. Of course, we always aim for the top, but coming second to **Disneyland Paris** and its new Frozen-themed area is something we can certainly be proud of. Congratulations to Frozen, which has been a blockbuster success for almost two decades."

Tivoli Gardens remains open through the holiday season and ceases operation until Easter in the spring.

FACILITIES & ATTRACTIONS

Embed tech allows for continued roller skating success — page 38 / Hyland Hills adds Summit Canyon — page 52

Europa-Park opens Riverside Western Lodge, its seventh hotel

Location captures the Old West in its decor and theming

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

RUST, Germany — Now more than 50 years old, the Europa-Park Resort has maintained its incredible growth. Part of that success came when — against the predictions of numerous skeptics — the park chose to build its first hotel in 1995. Not only did this drive attendance, but it also dramatically generated revenue. That momentum has continued for more than three decades, as the resort has now opened its seventh hotel.

Interestingly, the various hotels can be found in multiple locations. The first five are grouped near the park's resort entrance. When Rulantica opened in 2019, it had an adjacent hotel near the indoor water park. In the past two years, Europa-Park has transformed the previous campground near the park's front gate. Over the years, rental slips as well as various cabins, covered wagons, tipis and more took on a western flair. Simple food outlets, a bar, shops and a night theater kept those in the campground accommodated, but much more was on the horizon.

Last year, the area began a reimagining into Silver Lake City. Glamping sites, a new train-themed Diner Hall Station dining hall and a saloon were built. This year, Riverside Western Lodge made Silver Lake City a complete town. This new hotel and street could serve as a Hollywood set for any classic western.

Ann-Kathrin Mack, managing partner of Europa-Park, brought her architectural skills to the project. "We wanted to create a place that feels alive, with its own character and little stories waiting to be discovered," she said. "I love seeing guests strolling down the main street, sitting together on a wooden porch or enjoying an evening by the campfire. It's wonderful how naturally people become part of the atmosphere. As an architect, it was particularly important to me that Silver Lake City should feel like a town that has grown naturally over generations, rather than an artificially created setting. For me, that's one of the greatest challenges of good themed architecture: creating a place that feels authentic and has a life of its own."

Riverside Western Lodge welcomes guests with 119 rustic rooms. A brewery serves freshly tapped beer, which can be enjoyed next door in the Wild Horse Bar. Further, it is just a five-minute walk from the front gate.

Rooms can accommodate six guests. The décor is classic western, and everything from the check-in area to the hallways captures the atmosphere of everything cowboy.







Straight out of the Old West, the new Riverside Western Lodge feels like a true city (above). A chapel (below left) brings both charm and a place for quiet meditation in the lively area. Rooms accommodate six and strike a rustic feel to complement guests' time away from home (below right). AT/TIM BALDWIN

Out on the street, guests catch the feeling of a real town, with various facades of the hotel bringing to life ambience from classic movies and television westerns.

At night, street entertainment, as well as performers in the saloon and theater, make the fun from time in the park continue into the evening by bringing in the themed excitement of a faraway land. Of course, ice cream, pizza slices and candy from retail shops can indulge those willing to indulge while on vacation.

"Space was certainly one of our biggest challenges. Silver Lake City's Main Street already had buildings and Western facades on one side and with the Riverside Western Lodge, we had the opportunity to complete the opposite side and bring the entire street together," said Mack. "At the same time, we needed to accommodate 119 guest rooms and a variety of experiences, including a brewery, shop, sauna and YULLBE on the ground floor. It was also particularly important to us to find space for our Kinderhaus 'Kleine Helden', a charity project very close to our family's heart."

In the center of the street lies a delightful church, a thematic accent that exudes charm.

"The chapel is a very meaningful part of Silver Lake City for our family," Mack told *Amusement Today*. "From an architectural perspective, a small church belongs naturally to the image of a traditional Western town. It gives the street a sense of history and community, making the whole setting feel more authentic. But for us, Chapel

See RIVERSIDE, page 12





A new brewery creates Europa-Park's own beer, which is available in the adjacent bar. AT/TIM BALDWIN

RIVERSIDE

Continued from page 11

San Antonio has a much deeper meaning. Faith and Christian values have accompanied our family for generations. My grandparents passed those values on to us and places of reflection have always had a special place at Europa-Park. It welcomes everyone who wishes to enjoy a moment of peace. I find it beautiful that, even in a place dedicated to adventure and entertainment, there is room for quiet moments and reflection."

Amenities include complimentary parking, early entry to the parks, shuttle service between the theme park and water park and a sauna area. A multistory parking garage has been erected to help accommodate vehicles for resort guests. Running and walking trails are nearby for those who want to escape into the greenery of nature.

Some of the rooms contain balconies that overlook all the activity happening on the street below.

"What makes Silver Lake City particularly special is that it really has grown over the years. What began as a small campground almost 25 years ago has developed into an entire Western town and a resort in its own right, where guests can create unforgettable memories even beyond Europa-Park," Mack said. "As a family, we believe in building for generations, and seeing this vision come to life while preserving the original spirit of the place is incredibly rewarding. I'm very proud of what our entire team has created here."



The theming of the hotel is created with an entertaining flair of stepping back in time. AT/TIM BALDWIN

Children's House Little Heroes an important part of new resort

A certain section of Riverside Western Lodge has a special place in the Silver Lake City setting. Children's House Little Heroes is a separate wing of five accommodations that welcome families who have a child recovering from cancer. The rooms are large and fully accessible. Europa-Park works with local charities and the support of **Stiftung RTL** (**We Help Children Foundation**).

This idea has been 10 years in the making. **Miriam Mack** oversees wellness for the resort. The Little Heroes project was a passion project and is personally rewarding for her.

"It feels so good it is finally here," she said. "It's a new happy feeling every Monday when the families are arriving. I got personally inspired by **Give Kids The World** when I visited **Chip** and **Kathy Cleary**. The seed was planted. The United States has the **Make-A-Wish Foundation**. Here we are working with RTL, a television station with a charity department."

Families welcomed by the resort can stay five days, and in addition to visits to Europa-Park and **Rulantica**, the special guests can visit various other facilities nearby such as the Talent Academy or Yullbe virtual reality. Retired employees will look after families on a voluntary basis. Doctors have to approve which families can visit.

"Our part is [providing] entertainment, a theme park and joy," Miriam told *Amusement Today*. "If you get in touch with those families, it humbles you. I'm a mother of two sons and I'm so thankful they are healthy. You don't take it as guaranteed."

While staying at Little Heroes, additional space is important for those with these special needs.

"There is more room to move around," she said. "Especially for the wheelchairs. And if they spend five days, they have a little more luggage. A family usually comes with three children, so we have made sure that next to the bedrooms there is a little space for privacy. We were searching for an area at the existing hotels where we could implement maybe one or two rooms to start. It was not so easy, so this hotel came at the right time. It fits in here so well. The hotel was newly built, so we could plan it properly."



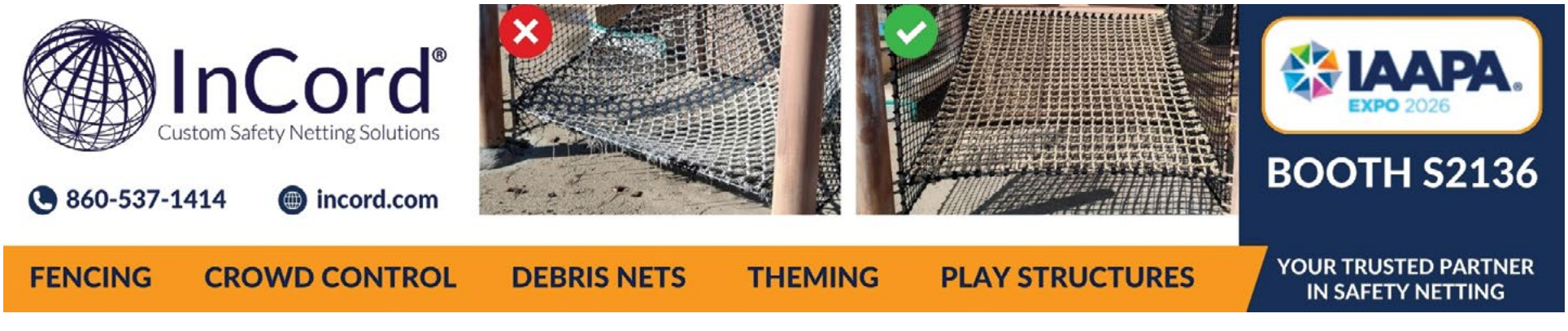
Miriam Mack is in charge of corporate health at the Europa-Park Resort. AT/TIM BALDWIN

The special rooms are also conveniently located to the wellness center, which is open to all hotel guests.

"What we really want is to just give the families a time without fear, without stress, without anger and just having time together," Miriam said.

"Since we announced the Europa-Park Children's House Little Heroes, we have received nothing but positive feedback," said **Roland Mack**, owner of Europa-Park. "Seeing the happy looks on their faces proves to us this project is a resounding success. Strengthening family bonds after the ordeal of battling cancer is hugely important, and we hope that their stay with us will bring them some joy and help them return to normality. It is not only the child but also the siblings and parents who have been through a very difficult time. Our aim is to further support the healing process."

The first families from Germany with a child who has had cancer were welcomed in July. As autumn arrived, more countries were being added.




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Zamperla and Reverchon supply rides in new land

New Asterix-themed attractions bring popular IP to Belantis

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

LEIPZIG, Germany — Opened in 2003, **Belantis** has seen multiple owners. Sold to **Parques Reunidos** in 2018, a more recent acquisition by **Compagnie des Alpes** in 2025 sees major plans on the horizon.

Last December, Compagnie des Alpes announced that the park will be entering a slow transformation into a second theme park themed to Astérix and Obelix, comic book characters known throughout France. The comic series first appeared in 1959. Today it is the best-selling comic book series in Europe. **Parc Astérix** near Paris premiered in 1989, where the characters of the Gaul village have come to life in whimsical fashion throughout attractions. If reports are accurate, the slow transformation of Belantis into the next Astérix theme park could happen with an expected name change around 2030.

This season, Idefix's Abenteuerland (Adventure Land) sports new rides and additions for the German park. Idefix is a dog character in the comic strip. The entire land is heavily themed into the woodsy, hand-built style of an ancient, rustic village.

Zamperla supplied three of the new additions. According to the park's website, all new attractions are suitable for children 3 and up as long as they are at least 95 centimeters (37.5 inches) tall.

Driving School Frischling is a highly themed Speedway 8 from the Italian ride manufacturer. Eight, two-passenger vehicles have exciting whip action at the ends of the oval track.





Heavily themed, three family rides were provided by Zamperla: Speedway 8 (above left), Magic Bikes 6 (above right) and Gogo Bounze 6.4 (below). COURTESY BELANTIS

Aerobix Flying Machine is a Magic Bikes 6. As riders pedal the six hang-glider vehicles, the interactive involvement controls the movement of the ride's arms. Kids enjoy being in charge of their ride experience.

Soapbox Derby is the name of Zamperla's Gogo Bounze 6.4. This classic flat ride experience provides fun bouncing in a circular rotation. Soapbox Derby has seating for 24 children or a mix of adults and kids. In terms of storytelling, the world of Idefix and the Indomitables is humorously affected by a magical mishap caused by Amnesix.

"We are proud that Compagnie des Alpes involved Zamperla right from the start for three rides in Belantis' new area, Idefix' Abenteuerland. Their decision to partner with us for their first park in Germany reflects the trust built between our teams, and we are glad to see guests enjoy the new area," said **Charles De Bruyne**, sales manager Europe, Zamperla.

Idefix's River Journey, a children's boat ride was provided by **Reverchon**. Bringing a refreshing water ride, the journey is 86 meters (282 feet) in length and offers gentle turns and small drops.

Idefix's Hiding Place allows kids to burn off energy in a themed playscape where they can crawl, climb and run. The playground is designed for ages 3 and up and was supplied by **Spielart GmbH**.

Character meet-and-greets with Astérix and Obelix complete the kid-friendly experience. Children enjoy posing with these heroic characters.

Bringing an eatery to the new setting, Bei Köstlix serves crispy oven-baked bread ham-and-cheese sandwiches, crepes, refreshing desserts and more. The dining setting is adjacent to the park's lake.



A new land wouldn't be complete without retail, and this introduction of the comic characters into Belantis is a perfect reason for kids to take home IP plush and souvenirs at Idefix's Treasure Chest.

The land is very inviting to kids and families with its natural materials and warm colors accented with the themed details.

The managing director of **Les Éditions Albert René** said, "After years of highly successful collaboration in France, Les Éditions Albert René is delighted to continue its partnership with Compagnie des Alpes and jointly advance this wonderful project to transform the Belantis family theme park with Asterix, Obelix, Dogmatix and all the indomitable Gauls in Germany. Our readers, our fans and all children in Germany will finally have the opportunity to experience magical moments and exciting adventures with their favorite heroes! We would like to sincerely thank CDA for this renewed trust in our famous little Gaul."

Total investment in the new land was €5 million, with €3 million of that spent on the new attractions.

The Astérix theming will continue in 2027 as the park has announced a **Gerstlauer** launched coaster, which will be the anchor attraction for a comprehensive design of the former Beach of the Gods area.

According to Compagnie des Alpes, the Astérix IP has an 89% brand awareness in Germany.





A gentle boat ride from Reverchon lets parents take a refreshing journey with their kids (left). Idefix's Hiding Place provides a place where kids can run, climb, crawl and burn off energy (above). COURTESY BELANTIS


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The Gravity Group designs new woodie "Durango" for MagicLand

M&V to construct new coaster for a 2027 season debut

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

VALMONTE, Italy — The country of Italy has been without a wooden coaster since 2007. That's about to change.

MagicLand is located less than 30 miles from Rome. In 2027, the theme park will open Durango, a new wooden coaster designed by **The Gravity Group**. The ride will be constructed by **Martin & Vleminckx** (MV Rides).

"We had plenty of options and considered many of them, but we wanted to make a different choice from our competitors. Italy currently has no wooden roller coaster, so our first goal was to bring something unique to the country," said **Sandro Sciarretta**, marketing, MagicLand. "We also strongly believe in this type of attraction, which we consider a timeless classic. Wooden coasters have a distinctive character: they are powerful, raw and offer an authentic ride experience. Durango will also be located within our existing Western-themed area, making it a natural fit."

The coaster will stand 98 feet tall.

"When you approach it, it won't seem so tall, but with tunnel areas below ground, you're going to pick up tremendous speed," said **Korey Kiepert**, engineer and one of the owners of The Gravity Group. "That's going to surprise a lot of people."

The ride will have two tunnels, and a dramatic moment will be a barrel roll inversion emerging from the first tunnel and diving back underground into the second one. The first tunnel is almost 100 feet long, and the second one is more than 260 feet.

"To do an inversion on a wooden coaster, you need a certain amount of speed and energy," said **Chad Miller**, designer, engineer and co-owner of The Gravity Group. "The challenge was to get the energy to go upside down. By using tunnels, we gained the extra energy and speed we need."





Use of underground tunnels (above) help provide both speed and excitement. The inversion (below) will be one of the most dramatic moments on the ride. COURTESY MAGICLAND

The coaster will reach 50 mph (80 km/h) and produce 13 moments of airtime in addition to the inversion.

"You want to create a memorable attraction that peo-

▸ **See DURANGO, page 19**



DURANGO

Continued from page 18

ple want to ride over and over again," Kiepert said. "This ride is going to have a lot of airtime, high speed and fast turns — people are going to get off and say, 'I rode in the front, now I want to try it in the back.' This wooden roller coaster is bringing a new era of wooden coasters into Europe."

"This wooden coaster is going to be very special because it is going to use the most advanced, state-of-the-art wooden coaster technology," said Miller. "This is going to be something low to the ground and be very fast. It's going to look very twisted up."

The site was previously home to a Flying Island ride, which was removed to make room for Durango.

"The new coaster required more than 10,000 square meters (107,640 square feet) of space. We also wanted it to sit alongside the main road outside the park, making it highly visible to passing traffic and creating a striking attraction that draws attention from beyond our gates," Sciarretta told *Amusement Today*.





Construction of the tunnel is underway (above left) on Durango, which will be Italy's only wooden coaster. The beautiful locomotive fronts to the train (above right) make for a striking vehicle. COURTESY MAGICLAND

The addition of Durango is a catalyst for other changes in the area. In all, it is a reported €15 million investment.

"The project also includes retheming the existing fast-food restaurant next to the coaster and the café opposite the restaurant," Sciarretta explained. "Durango will therefore bring an expansion of our existing Western-themed area, with the surrounding dining venues becoming part of the setting."

When asked how the name was chosen, Sciarretta told *Amusement Today*, "Our audience chose the name through our social media channels, and it ties into the legend behind the attraction. The story takes us back to 1887, when Jack Dawson and Miguel Ortega discovered a lost mine in the mountains of northern Mexico. Around that treasure, the Durango Mining Company was established, followed shortly afterward by Old West. Now, the gold rush begins again: guests will board a steam locomotive and venture deep into the mountain in search of its richest gold veins."

The ride will be built out of Southern Yellow Pine. According to park data, the wood used for Durango comes from forests managed according to reforestation practices.

Scirretta appreciates a unique connection during the construction. "Some of the Mexican workers helping to build Durango were actually born in Durango!" he noted. "This coincidence has given them an even stronger personal connection to the coaster they are building."

The train sports a beautiful steam train on the front.

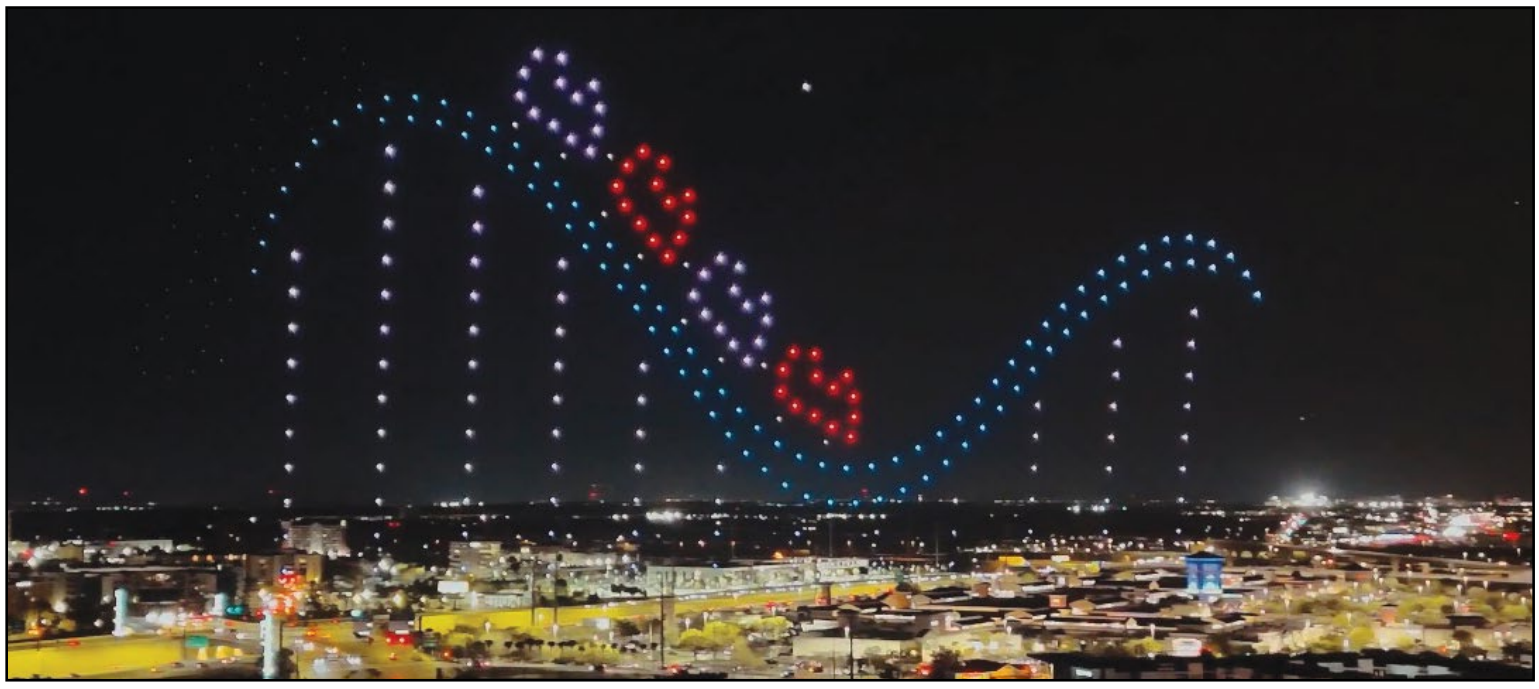
"It's not the biggest in the world, but it will be one of the few wooden coasters in Europe with an inversion. It was very important to MagicLand," Miller said. "The challenge was … how do we do it? I think we've come up with a great solution that's really going to add to the ride experience."

The ride is expected to open in spring of 2027.



Fun Spot America Florida locations are moving forward and up

AT: *Pam Sherborne*
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Fun Spot America Orlando is planning a spectacular drone and light display by Aerial Illuminations Drone Light Shows for guests from IAAPA Expo 2026. The spectacle will feature 3,000 drones. COURTESY FUN SPOT

ORLANDO and KISSIMMEE, Fla. — The closing of **Fun Spot America Atlanta**, which was located right outside Atlanta within the city of Fayetteville, Georgia, was disappointing for Fun Spot America officials. It officially opened in 2018 and closed its doors permanently on August 2, 2026, with over 25 rides and attractions on the grounds.

Fun Spot America CEO **John Arie Jr**. reported that consistently low attendance and financial challenges that failed to improve enough, even after the 2023 opening of the $18 million ArieForce One roller coaster, were the reasons the decision was made.

Several rides were moved from the Georgia park to the Fun Spot America parks in Orlando and Kissimmee, Florida. The rest were sold at auction, which began on September 22 and closed on October 14.

"The auction was very successful," said **John Chidester**, Fun Spot director of traditional marketing. "We were very pleased with it."

ArieForce One was not part of the auction. It sold separately to **Six Flags**, which has plans to relocate and reopen it at a portfolio park in 2028 or 2029.

The Tilt-A-Whirl from the Atlanta park moved to Kissimmee, while the Screaming Eagles moved to the Orlando park.



The Screaming Eagles flying scooter ride is being installed at Fun Spot America Orlando after being removed from the now-defunct Fun Spot America Atlanta. COURTESY FUN SPOT

"We were excited to be able to put the Tilt in Kissimmee with this being the 100th anniversary of that ride," Chidester said. "The Screaming Eagles is here in Orlando. We already have it on property, and we are hoping to have it up and running by Thanksgiving."

But, it could be even earlier, as Fun Spot Orlando is set to host an event during **IAAPA** Expo 2026, set to run November 16-20 at the **Orange County Convention Center**, Orlando. The Fun Spot America event is set for Wednesday, November 18, and expo attendees are invited to attend.

"The Screaming Eagles could be up and running by then," Chidester said. "It just all depends on inspection timing. But, attendees will be able to see it here even if it isn't operating."

Even though company officials had to make the disappointing decision to close the Georgia park, they are continuing to move forward and already have plans in the air, literally, and particularly in the Orlando park. And, it isn't just the Screaming Eagles ride.

Fun Spot America Orlando is planning a spectacular drone and light display when it hosts the IAAPA attendees. The drone show will showcase 3,000 drones along with other light show enhancements.

It won't be the typical show.

"It will be an incredible show," Chidester said. "The last time we had a drone show here, we had 300 drones. This is 3,000. Having that many drones in the sky will be incredible. We are very, very excited about it. With this many drones, you will see motion. You will see different shades of color. Some of the drones will be equipped with pyrotechnics."

The show is being put on by **Aerial Illuminations Drone Light Shows,** based in Orlando. Aerial Illuminations is known for large-scale, synchronized drone swarms, lighting effects and multi-record-setting performances.

One of the enhancements that the Fun Spot America drone show by Aerial Illuminations will include is the 500W WRGB Sky Laser that projects a vertical beam of light visible from up to 12 miles away. They also plan four Sky Beams that will be positioned on the roof where guests come into the park.

"They will be right above you as you enter the park and they will shoot down the midway," Chidester said. "We will have fog machines going as well."

The pyrotechnic capabilities of the drones will bring custom designs to life with precisely timed bursts of light, sparks and effects.

Another enhancement is the audio technology that comes with the show. There will be a PA system, but guests will be able to listen to the show on their phones in real time.

"There will be a QR code for guests to scan," Chidester said. "All you will have to do is scan it and tap into it on their phones."

The show is expected to last about 15 minutes.

"This seems to work very well," he said.

The theme of the drone show will be Theme Parks, of course.

"We will be tipping our hats to theme parks through this show," he said. "It will be a show worthy of IAAPA."



The drones will be set up in the north parking lot of the park prior to launching. They will be lined up in a grid.

As if that is not enough, Chidester said there will be a **Guinness World Record** set at Fun Spot America in Orlando during this event.

Chidester would not disclose what the record will be, but it won't be the number of drones.

"There have been drone shows with that many drones before," he said. "Maybe not at this park, but they have been done."

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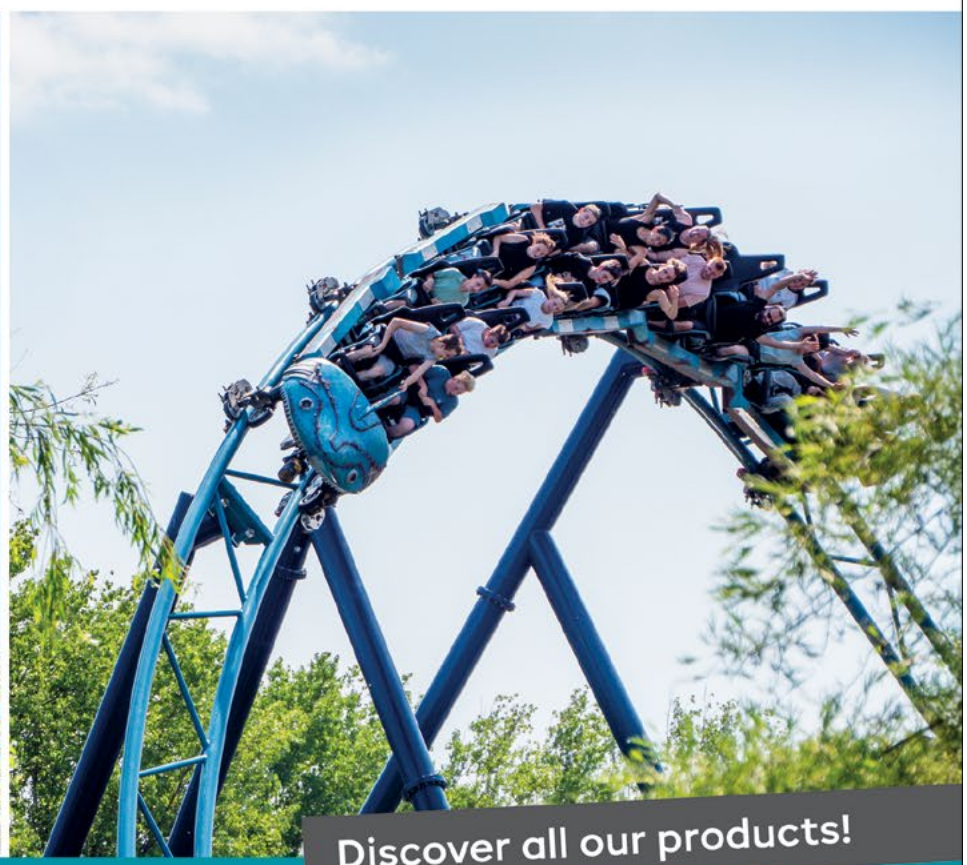
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Nigloland goes Supersonic with new Mack Rides shuttle coaster

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

DOLANCOURT, France — **Nigloland** will celebrate a 40th anniversary in 2027, and the park is celebrating in a big way. Debuting next season will be Supersonic 1887, a new shuttle coaster from **Mack Rides**. When it opens, it will be the park's seventh roller coaster, six of which will be from Mack.

"We wanted to create a major attraction that matches our ambitions," said **Rodelphe Gélis**, park president. "Supersonic is a project conceived by our creative and technical teams, which we have entrusted to a leading manufacturer renowned for the quality of its work and the richness of its innovations. It is the most ambitious project ever undertaken by Nigloland."

The new attraction is a Stryker coaster, as Mack terms it, in which winged seats on each side of the train hang over the track. The biggest introduction of this genre was Voltron Nevera at **Europa-Park** in 2024.

"Nigloland came to us with a goal rather than a product," said **Maximilian Roeser**, marketing, Mack Rides. "This is the largest investment in the park's history. They wanted their first real thrill coaster, they wanted it to sit on the lake at the heart of the park, and they had a defined footprint. The Stryker came out of those constraints. A shuttle layout gives you a lot of ride inside a small piece of land. And of course, the Gélis family knows Europa-Park very well, and our really long relationship was a big decision driver."

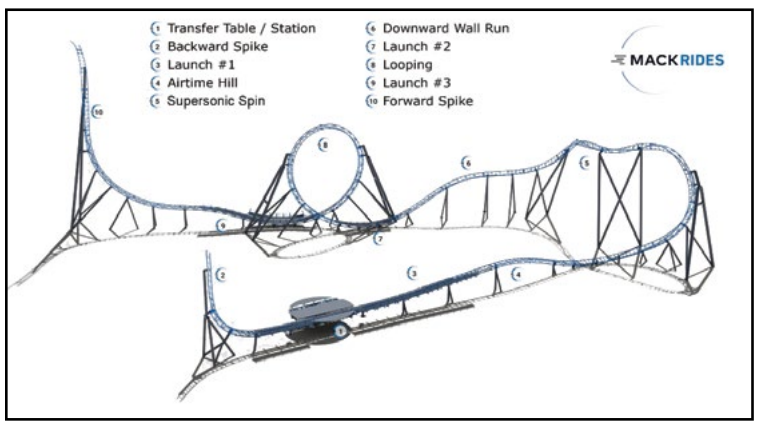


Supersonic 1887 will make an impressive impact on Nigloland's skyline. The ride is part of an €18 million investment. COURTESY MACK RIDES

The ride is a shuttle coaster. Although the length is 1,165 feet, riders traverse the stretch in both directions, as well as a multi-pass launch. Its three inversions are taken in both forward and backward directions.

Two elements have interesting names — Downward Wall Run and Supersonic Spin.

"The Downward Wall Run is a descending curve that steepens a second time while you are still in it," Roeser explained. "Think of a double down but banked and turning. On a straight double down, you see the second drop coming. Here you do not, because the track is already carrying you sideways. Your body is committed to one direction and the ride adds another. That is where the name comes from. You are running along a wall that keeps falling away underneath you."



He continued, "The Supersonic Spin is a double-inverting Immelmann. It takes you through two inversions inside a single element, and it is the visual signature of the layout. Both elements sit over water, so from the ground you see the train against the lake. That was deliberate. We wanted the two moments people will photograph to also be the two moments that are hardest to read from the queue."

When asked by *Amusement Today* if Mack Rides learned anything with Voltron, Roeser answered, "Yes, though not in the way people might assume. The train is the clearest carryover. Sixteen seats, four across, including eight wing seats where your feet hang free. That configuration proved itself and riders responded to it. The bigger lesson was about launches. Supersonic 1887 has three launch sections, which means six acceleration sequences across one ride, forward and backward. Sequencing that reliably day after day is experience you only get by operating a ride like this. And of course, you need to take into account how dynamic a ride can be, especially when you ride the layout backward to the station."

Even though it is a shuttle coaster, a turntable will allow for two-train operation.

"This is the classic weakness of a shuttle coaster," Roeser told *AT*. "One train, one course, and the whole queue waits for it to come back. The turntable solves that, but the interesting part is not just that a second train fits; it is what happens with the time — while one train is out on the course, the other one is being loaded. The turntable rotates fast enough that the station is never the thing everybody is waiting for. So, the dispatch is not dictated by how quickly the crew can get guests in and out. It is dictated by the ride itself, which is where you want it.

"That changes what a shuttle coaster means operationally. On a busy Saturday the queue keeps moving because loading and riding happen at the same time instead of one after the other. For a park adding its biggest attraction, that matters more than any single number on a spec sheet. A ride that performs beautifully on a quiet Tuesday and falls apart in August is not a good investment. We think about this as an operator, not only as a manufacturer."

The park has reported it is an investment of €18 million ($20.1 million).

The ride will take on a steampunk tone, rooted in an era of 19th-century expositions. Contrary to its predecessors, Supersonic will have an additional iconic lead car (zero car) with a smokestack to complement the train.

Universal Rocks has been contracted for the theming.

Nigloland was founded by two brothers, **Patrick** and **Philippe Gélis**, who operated on the French fun fair circuit. Following a visit to **Walt Disney World**, the brothers decided to sell off their fun fair equipment and start a theme park on a piece of real estate the family owned. Nigloland opened in 1987.





The Mack Rides Stryker coaster will feature breathtaking moments with dramatic inversions. COURTESY MACK RIDES

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Sunkid creates a hit for Lotte World with Sundancer Galaxy ride

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
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BUSAN, South Korea —**Lotte World Adventure Busan** has enjoyed a full year with its Dancing Mauris ride. Supplied by **Sunkid**, it was the world's first Sundancer Galaxy ride. The South Korean theme park installed the attraction in the summer of 2025 and has now enjoyed more than a year of success.

Each gondola seats four passengers in a circular fashion.

Dancing Mauris is part of the themed area Joyful Meadow. This particular installation has four gondolas. Sunkid is able to produce the attraction with one, two, four or eight gondolas.

"The Sundancer Galaxy exemplifies our product extension strategy: maintaining the key features of our popular family rides while significantly increasing capacity," said **Michael Kalsch**, CEO, Sunkid. "It's the same compact design and family-friendly accessibility, with a significantly higher theoretical capacity of 480 people per hour at the same time."





The four-vehicle Sundancer (above) has an hourly capacity of 480 riders. Dancing Mauris (right) joined the Lotte World Adventure Busan park in 2025. COURTESY SUNKID

Each gondola seats four, making for 16 riders each cycle.

"From an R&D perspective, it's not just a matter of expanding from one to four cabins. We had to take a completely renewed look at load distribution, drive systems, dynamics and control," said Kalsch. "Other factors that drive our extension strategy: greater visibility within a park without investing in more space, and more emotional, interactive and distinctive family rides."

The mix of movements is the ride's selling point. When in motion, the ride rotates, with each gondola orbiting in a circular path. Each gondola swings out as well. An interactive component allows the riders to control the tight rotation of the vehicle, giving a unique spin to each time visitors ride.

Even with the sizable capacity of the flat ride, the needed footprint is only 11.5 (38 feet) in diameter.

"As part of our anniversary (50 years of Sunkid Heege), we focus on larger, operator-run Family Rides, with special offers for the four-cabin Sundancer Galaxy and the eight-cabin Loopster," said **Johannes Wiedorfer**, head of marketing, Sunkid. "Both attractions combine interactive ride fun with a wide range of customization and theming options, opening up new possibilities for creating distinctive guest experiences."

Sunkid is a global provider of year-round leisure attractions for the whole family. Properties can choose selected attractions that fit their facility well or collaborate on customized, comprehensively designed, turnkey projects. From lifts, conveyors and other transportation modes to family rides, dry tubing slopes and play elements, Sunkid Heeg has more than 9,500 projects worldwide.

"Recent highlights (of 2025/2026) include the world's first Sundancer Galaxy to enter operation at Lotte World Adventure Busan in South Korea, as well as the new SCT 1201 roller coaster train series, which is approximately 20 percent lighter," Wiedorfer told *Amusement Today*. "The first vehicle in the series was delivered to **Avonturenpark Hellendoorn** in the Netherlands, while **Gold Reef City** in Johannesburg, South Africa, received the first suspended-train version."





The gondolas swing out while in operation, and the riders control the spin. COURTESY SUNKID

Sunkid's family ride lineup expands, more unveiled at IAAPA Expo





IMST, Austria — For Sunkid, 2026 was all about the 50th anniversary of its German subsidiary, Sunkid Heege. The company celebrated this special milestone while noting the decades of experience, technical expertise and close collaboration across the company provide the foundation for new ideas and customized attractions for customers worldwide. Recent highlights include the continued development of Sunkid's most exciting ride concept, the Rocking Tower (above right). The design is now 85% complete and a prototype will be available for interested customers to test in 2027. In addition, after winning IAAPA Brass Ring Awards two years in a row, Sunkid will once again unveil an exciting addition to its family ride lineup during IAAPA Expo 2026. Visitors to Sunkid's booth will also be able to take a seat in the year-round toboggan run Mountain Coaster by Sunkidworld (above left) and learn more about the company's portfolio of water park conveyor systems. COURTESY SUNKID



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BoldMove Nation's Spinfinity boasts an all-new ride category

AT: *David Fake*
dfake@amusementtoday.com

LONDON — **BoldMove Nation** says it has not built a water coaster. It has built a new ride category, and France will receive the first installation.

BoldMove Nation and **O'Gliss Park** unveiled Manakai – Typhoon Coaster during **IAAPA Expo Europe**, confirming France's largest water park as the launch site for the world's first **Spinfinity Splash Coaster**. The attraction will run a 465-meter track up to 19 meters high (62 feet), with four-passenger vehicles dispatched two at a time for a combined capacity of 1,000 guests per hour.

Clément Trigatti, communication manager at O'Gliss Park, said the ride fills a gap nothing else in the water park world currently occupies.

"Manakai will offer an entirely new experience in the world of water parks," Trigatti said. "To date, there is no comparable attraction on the market combining a roller coaster and water park experience in this way. With this new attraction, our visitors will experience the excitement of a roller coaster while remaining immersed in the aquatic world they came for, all within an exotic setting inspired by French Polynesia."



Manakai is themed around French Polynesia, with water effects built into the ride from the queue through the splashdown finale. COURTESY O'GLISS PARK

That setting is the point as much as the engineering. Manakai draws its theming from the power and mystery of the ocean, building an aquatic island world that runs through the queue, the station, the vehicles and the surrounding landscape as one continuous story rather than a ride dropped into generic scenery after the fact. O'Gliss Park has described Manakai as the anchor of an entirely new themed area and a deliberate step in the park's own evolution from a water park into what the company calls a fully immersive water destination.

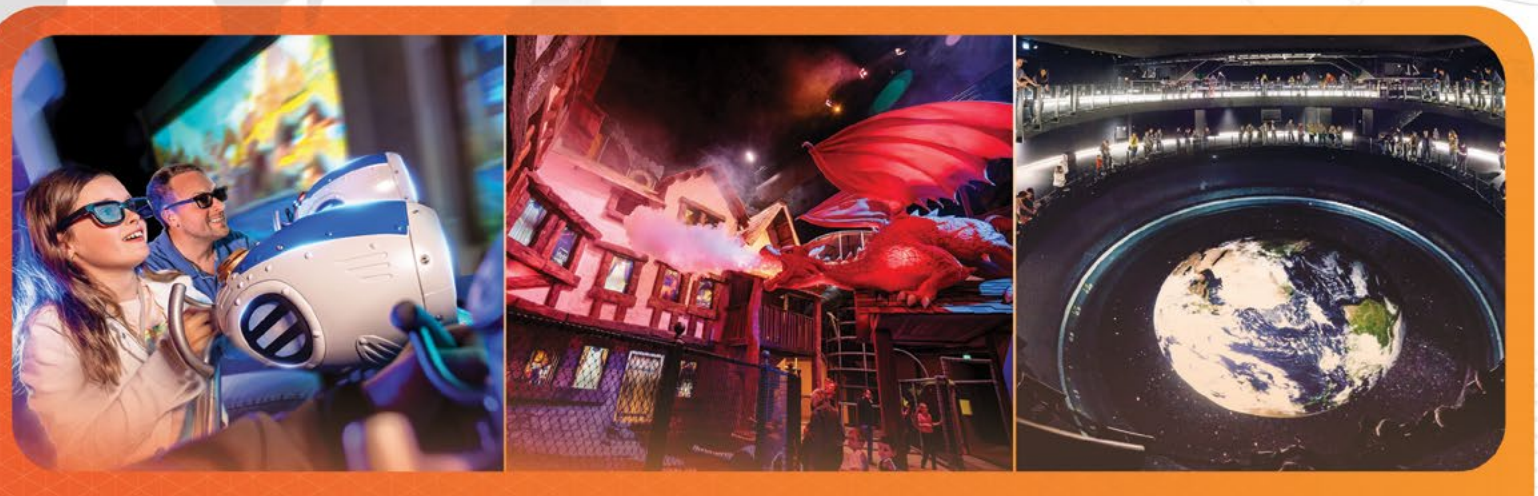
O'Gliss Park has welcomed more than two million visitors since opening in the Vendée region in 2016, and set a record of 270,000 guests in 2025, according to the companies. French outlet **Le Bonbon** has reported that Manakai carries a price tag of roughly €6.5 million, part of a broader €22-million investment program running through 2028 across O'Gliss Park and its sister property, **O'Fun Park**.

Michaël Thibaud, founder and CEO of O'Gliss Park, framed the investment in terms that went beyond throughput numbers. "When guests immediately want to experience the ride again, it means we have built more than an attraction," Thibaud said. "We have created a memory. And that, since the beginning of my journey, is why I continue doing this job."

The ride itself is built on BoldMove's Spinfinity platform, a coaster line the Brussels-based company has been developing since 2021, first as an indoor-outdoor hybrid dark ride coaster, then as a fully outdoor scenic version, and now in a splash configuration engineered with longtime technical partner **E&S Rides**, while architectural firm **Soho Playtime** shaped the Polynesian-inspired structures and landscaping. What distinguishes Spinfinity

▸ **See SPINFINITY, page 32**

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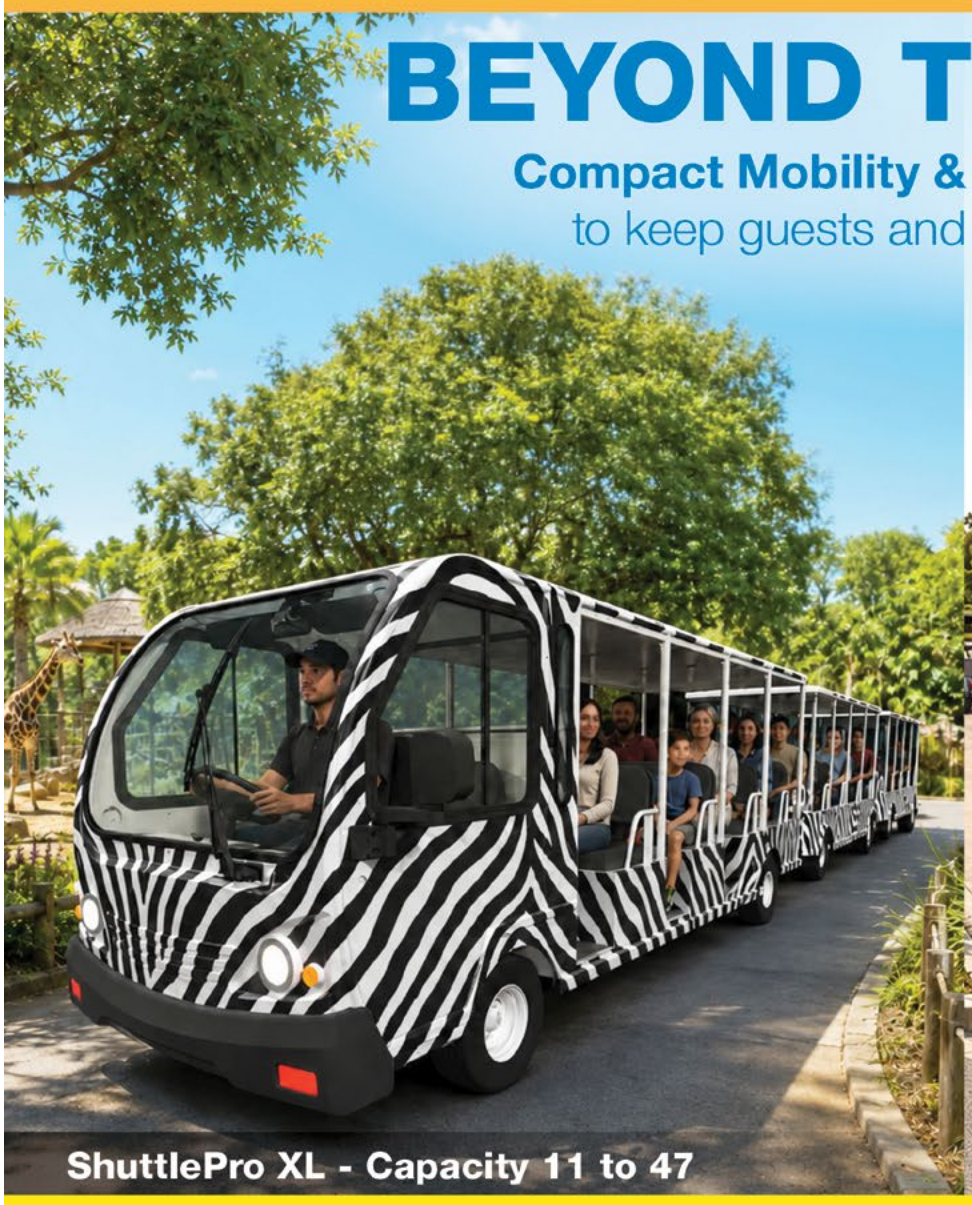
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The 465-meter track threads openly across O'Gliss Park's grounds (above left) rather than running through an enclosed structure. Manakai's vehicles (above right) seat riders face-to-face, part of the Spinfinity platform's design for a shared, social ride experience. COURTESY O'GLISS PARK

SPINFINITY

Continued from page 36

from a typical family coaster is its seating: riders face each other rather than forward on the track, turning every drop and controlled spin into a shared, visible reaction instead of a private one. On Manakai, that social design folds together with orchestrated rotations and water effects, culminating in a splashdown through a pool engineered to throw a wave over both riders and onlookers standing nearby, extending the soak well past the vehicle itself.

Benoit Cornet, CEO of BoldMove Nation, described the design philosophy behind Spinfinity as a deliberate departure from how family coasters typically get built.

"With Spinfinity, we rethink the coaster experience around something very simple: sharing the moment and leaving nobody behind," Cornet said. "The result feels less like a coaster placed inside a water park and more like entering a complete world in which the ride itself becomes part of the story."

Cornet founded BoldMove Nation in Brussels in 2021 alongside co-founder **Anja D'Hondt**, building the company's reputation around pairing proven ride technology with story-first design. Its catalog includes the Smash & Reload interactive dark ride and the trackless Rogue Rides vehicle platform, the latter featured in Rally Flåklypa, a dark ride that was recognized among the year's top media dark ride honors at the same IAAPA Expo Europe gathering where Manakai made its debut. The Spinfinity line itself is designed to flex well beyond this single installation; the platform's water output can scale up or down for year-round operation in colder climates, and BoldMove has previously floated tropical, pirate and Viking theming as equally viable directions for parks that want the ride without the Polynesian dressing O'Gliss Park chose.

For O'Gliss Park, Manakai represents a bet that a thrill ride can deepen a water park's identity rather than dilute it. The vehicles' face-to-face layout and the open, walk-through footprint are both built around turning bystanders into part of the show, so a guest waiting poolside sees the ride, feels its spray, and wants to be in the next vehicle before the current one has finished its splashdown. That kind of pull, Trigatti and Thibaud both suggested, is worth more to a regional water park than raw statistics about track length or top speed.

Manakai – Typhoon Coaster is scheduled to open at O'Gliss Park in Le Bernard, France, in 2028.



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AT: Pam Sherborne
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On Friday, November 13, 2026, the Space Shuttle Endeavour will once again be open to the public at the **California Science Center**, Los Angeles, California, after a nearly three-year hiatus. This time, visitors will see it as generations of astronauts and ground crews once did before launch, standing vertically, nearly 200 feet tall, mated to an external tank and two solid rocket boosters.

The exhibit will mark the first time in history that the public can see and stand directly beneath a complete, authentic Space Shuttle system in its "go for launch" position. Even for those who saw shuttle launches in person, safety protocols historically kept spectators at a distance. NASA's press site, for example, was about three miles from the launch pads.

The new exhibit will therefore offer something that even many lifelong shuttle enthusiasts have never experienced: the ability to appreciate the scale of the fully assembled vehicle from a perspective once largely reserved for the people who built, maintained and flew it.

•

In Los Angeles, a group of volunteers, **Friends of Griffith Park,** are in the planning to restore the 100-year-old **Griffith Park** merry-go-round. The ride, built by **Spillman Engineering** in 1926, has been motionless for years.

According to a story that ran in the *Los Angeles Times*, the group is being led by **Tracy James** of the **City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks**, alongside theme park veterans. The merry-go-round has 66 hard-carved horses with jewels and real horsehair tails, plus carvings by **Charles Looff** and **Charles Carmel.**

It was moved to Griffith Park in 1937.

The story in the *Los Angeles Times* said the City of Los Angeles purchased the merry-go-round last year for $1 million. The restoration is expected to cost between $3 and $4 million over the next two years.

•

The **San Antonio Zoo,** San Antonio, Texas, hit a major attendance milestone last month, welcoming its one millionth guest of 2026 and reaching the mark two months earlier than last year.

In a press release dated October 12, the zoo said the one millionth guest was celebrated on Friday, October 10, when the **Ibarra-Lorenzo** family of six arrived for a visit during the zoo's Community Locals Day. The family was greeted at the gates with a celebration that included Cowboy the Rhino, complimentary zoo memberships for a year, animal encounter tickets and a gift basket.

The zoo said the moment was especially meaningful for **Jenny Ibarra,** a mother and grandmother whose family has visited the zoo for generations.

•

The countdown to the return of Holiday in the Park at **Six Flags Great Adventure,** Jackson, New Jersey, began at the beginning of the month, as the official opening was just a few weeks away on November 21.

Last month, the park revealed new details about the completely reimagined event, giving guests their first look at immersive holiday lands, spectacular entertainment, seasonal flavors and unforgettable family experiences.

There will be millions of twinkling lights, larger-than-life decor, live entertainment, holiday characters, seasonal foods and interactive experiences throughout the park.

Four all-new themed worlds will be awaiting guests. These are Glittering Gateway, Santa's Arctic North Pole, Coastal Christmas and Sweet Street, each offering its own festive atmosphere, entertainment and holiday traditions. Some of these offerings include a 65-foot-tall Christmas tree, nightly tree-lighting spectacular, thousands of synchronized twinkling lights, falling snow, visits with Santa Claus, interactive holiday characters, sparkling palm trees, festival gathering and more.

•

Harbin Ice-Snow World in northeast China, touted as the world's largest ice-and-snow theme park, will set a new record this winter by expanding its site to 1.25 million square meters (308.882 acres), with a total of 400,000 cubic meters of ice and snow used.

The announcement was made last month at the opening ceremony of the 2026-2027 ice and snow season promotion event, held by the Heilongjiang provincial ice and snow tourism development promotion association.

In February 2026, the winter attraction in Harbin, Heilongjiang's provincial capital, received more than 120,000 visitors in a single day, a historic high, winning praise from domestic and international tourists.

•

Comcast has pumped more than £250million ($281 million) into its new, currently under-construction, **Universal United Kingdom Resort** theme park in Bedfordshire, England.

The U.S. media giant's commitment ranks among the biggest investments ever made in British tourism, latest accounts show.


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Dutchman's Deck to set sail at Mall of America's Nickelodeon Universe

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. — **Mall of America** is bringing an all-new adventure to **Nickelodeon Universe** with the opening of Dutchman's Deck, a towering new play experience inspired by the Flying Dutchman, SpongeBob SquarePants' legendary ghostly pirate and main antagonist of the recent *The SpongeBob Movie: Search for SquarePants*. Opening in March 2027, the attraction will give kids a new way to climb, explore and play high above the theme park.

Dutchman's Deck packs five towers, seven bridges and two slides into multiple levels of adventure. Kids can crawl through tunnels, explore interactive features and find plenty of ways to climb and swing.

"Dutchman's Deck gives kids a place to stay active, spark their imaginations and have fun," said **Jill Renslow**, chief business development and marketing officer at Mall of America. "From climbing and exploring to racing down the slides, there's something to discover around every corner. We can't wait for families to set out on an adventure and experience it for themselves."

Standing at nearly 55 feet tall, Dutchman's Deck brings the Flying Dutchman's ghostly ship to life, complete with a crow's nest, lookout towers and seafaring-themed play elements on every level. Lighting and underwater effects will add to the experience and make Dutchman's Deck a colorful addition to the theme park.



Opening in March 2027, the Dutchman's Deck play experience promises to deliver interactive fun themed to the ghostly pirate of *SpongeBob SquarePants* fame. COURTESY MALL OF AMERICA

Interactive games and musical play features keep young swabbies busy, with activities sized just right for the littlest buccaneers. Four **Nickelodeon** brand-themed birthday party rooms inside Dutchman's Deck let families celebrate their big day on board while enjoying Nickelodeon Universe.

Dutchman's Deck will be part of the Nickelodeon Universe wristband experience, with admission beginning at six points.




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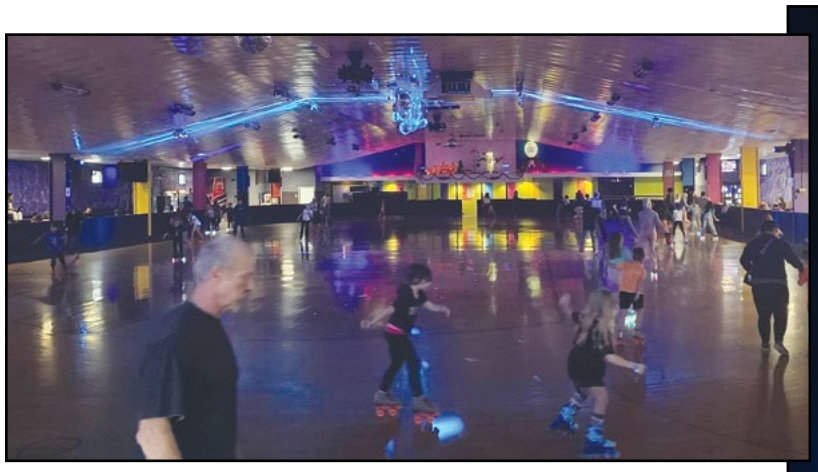
AT: *Susan Storey*
Special to Amusement Today

ELYRIA, Ohio — For many family entertainment centers (FECs), a single attraction remains the heart of the business. As guest expectations evolve, operators are looking for ways to enhance the experience without losing that core identity. Adding attractions and events is one approach; upgrading technology to help improve guest service and increase revenue is another.

At **The Roll Arena** in Elyria, Ohio, an aging arcade prompted a technology overhaul that extended beyond the games to point-of-sale systems, package sales and guest payments.

Since 1948, The Roll Arena has offered families a place to roller skate and celebrate birthdays. Guests still skate around its original wood floor under colorful lights while listening to a mix of popular and nostalgic music. The venue is also home to the **Buckeye Skating Academy**, which has produced several national roller-skating champions and brings a steady stream of skaters to the facility.

Over the years, The Roll Arena added an arcade featuring an assortment of redemption, video and merchandising units. A route operator maintained the arcade for the Arena.





The Roll Arena's original maple rotunda skating floor (above) remains the heart of the FEC, but it has added Embed's fully integrated processing and Mobile Wallet to its operation. Embed will unveil its slim self-service kiosk — Kiosk+ emOne (right) — at IAAPA Expo 2026. COURTESY THE ROLL ARENA, EMBED

"When our operator offered us a buyout on the machines, we were faced with a challenge and an opportunity," **Allan Mitschke**, general manager of The Roll Arena told *Amusement Today*. "The machines were plagued with old token and ticket mechanics and did not operate consistently. We had a decision to make — either replace everything or explore a new system. We began to research a partner to help us install a new system.

"Initially, we thought we'd add a system that would serve the arcade machines only," Mitschke continued. "Then we learned a point-of-sale system was also required and we saw the opportunity to look at the entire Roll Arena guest experience. That led us to **Embed**. They are on the right side of technology — ahead!"

Embed, an FEC technology partner of choice for the amusement, entertainment and leisure industries, has been providing solutions for operators like The Roll Arena for almost 30 years. The team quickly realized it could not only assist with the rink's immediate needs but also provide the opportunity to help it increase revenue and guest satisfaction.

"The Roll Arena was dealing with poor token and ticket mechanism-related issues, causing the business to comp or refund more than they sold," said **Michael Lopez**, Embed's general manager for North and South America. "Allan wanted to resolve these issues by replacing all mechanics with a card-based system like ours. We were able to seamlessly integrate Embed's ecosystem with all of their existing hardware, including their servers, PCs and networking gear."

"With the chance to still use the hardware we had in place, we were able to maximize our budget," said Mitschke. "Embed was the clear choice."

Retaining existing hardware was one priority. Preserving the venue's established operating practices was another.

"At Roll Arena, we do things very differently from other businesses," Mitschke continued. "We came to Embed with many questions because we wanted to be sure we could continue to operate the way we always have. Moving from a cash register to a full POS system was going to be an adventure. From the beginning, Embed was patient and put all of our concerns at ease."

"Embed is known for providing incredible support," Lopez said. "We understand around-the-clock customer care and availability is crucial for operators like The Roll Arena, especially during peak hours. You could say our global team follows the sun to provide consistent help to our customers."

"Our journey with Embed started with two sales terminals and a redemption station," said Mitschke. "Today we use the fully integrated processing and Mobile Wallet. Embed has helped us grow our business and empowered us each step of the way."

Embed's technological products made all the difference. Embed's award-winning Mobile Wallet product is the only Apple- and Google-certified virtual game card solution on the market. First launched in 2019, the Mobile Wallet seamlessly integrates with Embed's Toolkit platform, does not require guests to download an additional app for use and gameplay and use starts immediately.

"Our partnership with our customers does not end when the system goes live," said Lopez. "We follow through with continuous training, support and ongoing optimization so operators can get the most out of their Embed system. We recently launched a new arm of our training component, GoTrain, the Learning Hub. In this platform, operators and their staff can access both full courses and micro-learning resources to help maximize their Embed solutions, drive higher revenue, support smoother operations and provide an elevated guest experience."

For The Roll Arena, the transition has also created opportunities to bundle skating, food and arcade play, track sales and encourage repeat visits.

"Since this transition, Embed has helped us discover all sorts of opportunities for package sales as well as sales tracking," Mitschke said. "We are now able to offer one price for skating, food and some game credits. We've also been able to provide birthday party guests with play credits that drive reloads. When we reload the card, we'll also include a free admission that is good for a few months after the party — that drives return visits!"

"All negative comments about the arcade have vanished," Mitschke said. "Embed has allowed us to renew an older arcade that now generates revenue instead of providing frustration to our guests and team."



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Sacoa powers cashless arcade spending at Bowling by Arena



BASEL, Switzerland — Sacoa Cashless System, in collaboration with Schwab Spielautomaten AG, has brought its technology to Bowling by Arena at Arena Cinemas in Basel, Switzerland. The arcade recorded over 10,000 plays during its first full month of cashless operations. Located at Stücki Park, Bowling by Arena features Switzerland's first hyperbowling center, along with arcade games, air hockey, basketball, pinball and attractions for younger visitors. The installation includes 35 Spark RFID readers, a K4 kiosk, a POS terminal and RFID PlayCards, allowing guests to purchase, recharge and use their cards throughout the arcade without coins. "The biggest improvement is the visibility," stated Laurent Gregoire, president of the board at Schwab Spielautomaten AG. "We can now track each machine's performance by day and hour, making informed decisions about placement, replacement and pricing. The system also provides transparent monthly settlements for our venue partner, strengthening our operating model for future locations." COURTESY SACOA





FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRAL

AT: John W.C. Robinson
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People in the St. Cloud, Minnesota, area will soon have a new entertainment option. **Maui's Indoor Theme Park** is coming to St. Cloud's **Crossroads Center**.

There are signs on the old **Macy**'s location at Crossroads indicating the park is moving into the building. Maui's Indoor Theme Park features attractions like go-karts, bowling, laser tag, virtual reality, bumper cars, a kids' play zone and arcade games.

According to the contractor, **Jester FEC** of Lexington, Kentucky, is the business behind Maui's Indoor Theme Park. Jester FEC operates both Maui's Indoor Theme Parks and **Malibu Jack's Indoor Theme Parks** in Kentucky, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana and Colorado. St. Cloud will be its first Minnesota location.

•

Big Top Xtreme in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, celebrated its grand opening in mid-October, transforming the site of the former **Admiral Benbow Inn** into a family attraction featuring go-karts, mini golf, paintball, arcade games and Big Banjo Pizza.

While the opening marks a milestone for the city, getting the project to this point was not without challenges. **Ryan Watley**, CEO of **Go Forward Pine Bluff** stated that the FEC faced consisent challenges through construction, planning, architectural design to actually getting the construction done and adding amenities. But overcoming those challenges led to the FEC the public can enjoy today.

The **Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency** purchased the former Admiral Benbow Inn property in 2020, beginning a redevelopment effort that would take nearly six years to complete.

•

Warner Bros. and **Legendary Entertainment** are bringing the world of **Denis Villeneuve**'s *Dune* films to downtown Los Angeles in November, with a new immersive attraction that lets visitors encounter giant sandworms, sit on Paul Atreides' throne and get an up-close look at actual props from the blockbuster franchise.

Dune: The Experience will open November 20 — a month before *Dune: Part Three* arrives in theaters on Dec. 18 — and run through December 20, 2026. The hourlong walkthrough is produced in partnership with entertainment platform **Fever**.

The attraction will recreate several of the films' most recognizable settings, from the desert planet of Arrakis to the imperial throne room. Visitors can take the Bene Gesserit test, decipher hidden Fremen messages and come face-to-face with a colossal sandworm. There's also a collection of original costumes, weapons, props and production artifacts from across Villeneuve's trilogy.

•

Henderson Sport & Social in Henderson, Nevada, is a new 180,000-square-foot venue that is part gym, part sports complex, part family entertainment center as well as a restaurant and a laser tag emporium.

Built through a public-private partnership between the city of Henderson and Chicago-based **KemperSports**, the $70 million facility is quite expansive.

"We really like these types of projects, because it has something for everyone," KemperSports CEO **Steve Skinner** noted during Henderson Sport & Social's ribbon-cutting ceremonies in October.

The two-level venue also features a large bar and dining area in the center of the ground floor, and a full gym upstairs with a child care center to watch the kids while Mom and Dad pump iron. Henderson Sport & Social is intended to double as a stand-alone FEC while also suiting the sports and fitness needs of the region.

•

Just six months after opening, a popular FEC in Pocatello, Idaho, has closed, but conflicting reports leave questions about whether the closure is temporary or permanent.

Extreme Rush opened in April after years of planning and construction, bringing a multi-level indoor go-kart track, laser tag, arcade games and other interactive attractions to the area.

A sign posted at the business's entrance on October 19, 2026, stated that the facility was temporarily closed for maintenance and operational restructuring. The notice apologized for the inconvenience and directed customers with questions about previously booked events to an email contact. No anticipated reopening date was provided. In addition, several people identifying themselves as employees have reportedly said they were notified by email that they had been laid off.

A separate webpage — which appears to be hosted on Extreme Rush's official website but is not readily accessible through its homepage — stated that the business is undergoing reorganization and will remain temporarily closed "for the foreseeable future."

•

Niagara Falls is getting a new Sky Bar attraction for summer 2027. The **Aerobar** will lift riders 133 feet into the air for sweeping views of the city skyline and the American side of Niagara Falls.

Live! Incorporated, the company behind the existing **Live On Air Fallsview Balloon Ride** in Niagara Falls, is adding the aerobar ride, which it has named **SkyBar Niagara Falls**, to its newly acquired **Hard Rock Cafe**.

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FEC

Book Hocking, Wiegand bringing Ohio its first alpine coaster

3,600-foot-long ride coming in 2027 to Hocking Hills

AT: *Jack Lathrop*
Special to Amusement Today

LOGAN, Ohio — Hocking Hills has never been short on scenery. Caves, waterfalls and miles of hiking trail pull visitors from Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton and Detroit for a weekend in the woods. What it has been short on is something to do once the hike is over.

Jake Ryan has heard that more than anyone. He founded **Book Hocking** a little over three years ago, and the company now manages roughly 270 rental cabins, making it the largest property management company in the area. The guest feedback kept landing in the same place — we need more to do.

"The biggest overarching thing that I felt that people need is just more things to do in the area," Ryan said. "There's a lack of attractions."

His answer is the **Hocking Hills Mountain Coaster**, the first alpine coaster in Ohio. Built by **Wiegand**, the gravity-driven ride will run more than 3,600 feet through the trees near Logan, with a ride time of five to six minutes. Track installation is about halfway done, and the station and retail building broke ground in October. Ryan is targeting a March or April 2027 opening.

The average stay in Hocking Hills is two and a half days, and Ryan has a familiar comparison for it. "The best example is a little Gatlinburg," he said. "It's just a much smaller version of that."

Ryan looked at restaurants, arcades and smaller attractions before landing on an alpine coaster. Ohio didn't have one, and the concept had already proven itself in tourist towns across the country. "We couldn't find anything, even from a financial standpoint, that would make more sense than this," he said.

Ryan had no amusement industry background, so he did his homework, flew out to ride existing coasters, and picked Wiegand. "They're the leader by a long, long shot," Ryan said. "They've proven me right."

Picking the ride was the easy part. Finding the hill took a year. A mountain coaster needs a flat base for a commercial building, serious elevation behind it, and the right pitch over the right distance. **John Greene**, who works in rides development for Wiegand, evaluated site after site with Ryan before they found it.

"He really wanted to have a particular ride, something that would make a great representation for an alpine coaster in Ohio," Greene said.

Wiegand likes to start with at least 200 feet of elevation, but height alone doesn't cut it. Because the ride runs on gravity, a hillside full of fingers and draws can box a layout in. "If you have the elevation you need, but you're stuck back into a draw where it's closing in on you from all sides, it just will not allow you to make a good representation for the ride," Greene said.



The aerial rendering and inset highlight the more than 3,600 feet of track winding through the forest on the 55-acre property near Logan. The coaster and building use about 15 acres, which leaves room for future additions. The nearly 5,000-square-foot building faces the parking lot (below), with the coaster's return track winding out of the trees at right. COURTESY JAKE RYAN



Every layout starts on a screen. Wiegand aims for more than 2,100 feet of down track, and Greene calls 2,400 to 2,500 feet "a sweet spot for owners and their ROI." From there, crews walk and stake the hill before the order goes into manufacturing in Germany. Components ship over in container stages, and once the first container lands, installation takes about three months.

The Hocking Hills site, just down the road from Old Man's Cave, turned out to be a forgiving one. The track sprawls up the hillside in full view of the road, and the surrounding forest gives it the same four-season pull that sells fall color in the Smokies, minus the traffic.

"It's not terribly far off the beaten path for visitors to find," Greene said. "But when you're on that hillside, you're going to feel like there's nothing else around you."

For Greene, this one is personal. He grew up in Cincinnati and camped in Hocking Hills as a kid. "When I got the call to come out to Hocking Hills to put an alpine coaster in, I was over the moon," he said.

The ride is a Wiegand 2.0 model, the platform the company now uses for every new install. Older 1.0 coasters are getting a 1.5 upgrade with many of the same safety improvements. Two-seat sleds will top out at 26 mph, with riders controlling their speed by hand brake.

"We're just trying to streamline everything to make it function as smoothly as possible and keep safety a top priority," Greene said.

The coaster is the anchor, not the whole plan. The property covers 55 acres, and the coaster and building use about 15 of them. A gem mining station will open with the ride, giving younger guests something to do while their parents and older siblings take a lap. Mini golf, an arcade and a small kids' train are all on the table for future phases.

Early announcement videos have pulled in millions of views. Not every reaction has been positive, and Ryan understands why.

"A lot of the locals don't love the tourism aspect, but it's a double-edged sword," he said. "Logan is beautiful, and the roads are well maintained because of the tourism industry. There are good-paying jobs because of this industry."

For Ryan, how the coaster gets built matters as much as what gets built. "I was intentional about the land that I put it on. I'm intentional about every tree that I take down to build this thing," he said. "If you have the right person doing it with intentionality and thoughtfulness, then I think it's a good thing."

•wiegandsportsusa.com





Two-seat sleds return to the station beneath a timber pergola (above left). The ride will run 30 of Wiegand's Alpine Coaster 2.0 sleds (above right), which feature many improvements over the first generation. COURTESY JAKE RYAN


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WATER PARKS

Hyland Hills Water World opens Summit Canyon from ADG, ProSlide

AT: *Jeffrey Seifert*
jseifert@amusementtoday.com



The new Summit Canyon is close to the front of the park and has its own entrance to the parking lot, allowing for private events and limited mini-park admission for Hyland Hills residents. Guests on Marmot Mayhem (below) scream past a large marmot in the center of the Hive 20 section. COURTESY WATER WORLD

FEDERAL HEIGHTS, Colo. — This past summer **Hyland Hills Water World** celebrated the opening of Summit Canyon, a new 2.5-acre development that was the park's biggest expansion in more than four decades.

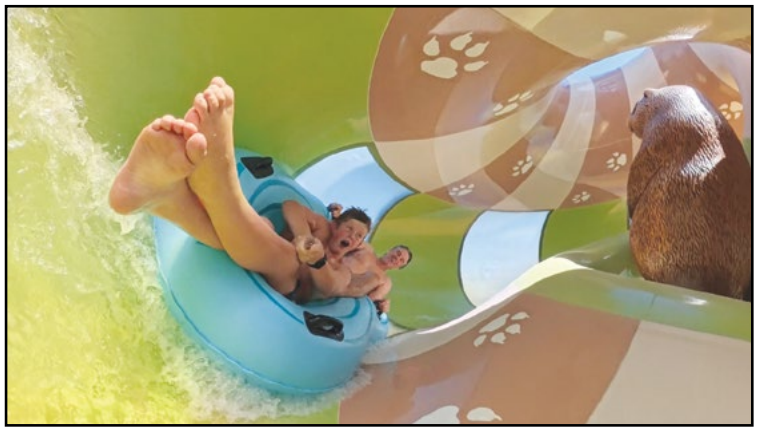
The new zone reimagines the park's historic entry footprint into an immersive, outdoor adventure-themed experience that highlights Colorado's natural beauty and mountain landscape. The expansion features nine additional water slides, leisure and activity pools, a 7,500-square-foot children's play zone, enhanced food and beverage options, and new opportunities for community events and programming.

To bring the project from concept to reality, the park turned to **Aquatic Development Group** of Cohoes, New York, and **ProSlide Technology** of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

Summit Canyon replaced the former Calypso Cove, a Caribbean-themed section of the park that had been there for more than 40 years. To the dismay of long-time season-pass holders and regulars, the rebuild of that section meant the closing of some legacy favorite rides like Screamin' Mimi and Tortuga Run. According to Water World's director, **Bob Owens**, the natural slope at the front of the park was part of the reason for the area's demise. That section of the property was not ADA-compliant, and it was difficult for families with strollers to navigate. That area received a large capital investment in the 1990s, and it did buy the park a few more decades; they knew eventually that a major rebuild was going to be necessary.

Serving as the centerpiece of Summit Canyon, the 60-foot Lookout Tower introduces four new ProSlide water attractions to the park. The line-up includes the region's debut Hive 20 experience, Denver's first SkyBox with TurboTwister, a translucent Twister slide, and a SwitchBack slide coupled with a Tornado 18.

On Marmot Mayhem, which includes the Hive 20, guests board two-person rafts with both riders facing the same direction. As riders spin through the Hive 20, they are greeted by a 12-foot Marmot in the center of the hive that watches them spiral through. Runoff Rapids utilizes ProSlide's recently introduced dual, face-to-face rafts. As thrill seekers encounter both the Tornado and the Switchback, they never know which way the raft will exit, so riders do not know whether they will be traversing the next section forward or backward.



The two body slides, Aspen Falls and Columbine Cascade, both start from the very top of the tower with either a SkyBox floor-drop capsule or a traditional seated dispatch. Both feature dark and translucent sections as well as colorful patterns and stripes. As they get closer to the end, both slides alternate between solid sections and crystal-clear sections, allowing spectators on a nearby walkway to observe riders as they scream through the final spirals.

Children will find plenty to occupy themselves at Critter Cove, a 7,500-square-foot children's pool outfitted with nature-inspired slides and interactive water features. The slides are built into a natural small hillside. Three of the slides feature short, straight drops perfect for small children who are trying their first slide, as a parent or guardian can easily wait at the bottom or even walk alongside and assist their child with any or all of the slide experience. The remaining two are a little larger and feature curves for enthusiast-in-training looking for a little more excitement before they graduate to the big slides.

For older kids and adults, Creekside Crossing offers a place for them to traverse rope vines, floating logs and lily pads in the over-water obstacle course or shoot hoops with three in-water basketball hoops at Puddle Dunker.

Adults seeking relaxation will find solace at Emerald Lake, a leisure pool dedicated to guest relaxation with waterfall features, in-water seating and float lounging.

Owing to the size of Water World, the city has established a unique way for visitors to enjoy just this new area of the park. As Owens explained, "pocket parks" or smaller neighborhood parks were taking away some of their customers.

"A mom and dad with family may not want a full-park experience. They only have a couple of hours; they want to park the car and get in right away," explained Owens. "If a family is a resident of the taxpaying resident of the Hyland Hills Parks and Recreation District, they can get in for $9. Those outside of the district can enter for $13.99."

Called Summit Canyon Adventure, it was a three-hour mini-park experience to just Summit Canyon; guests were given a non-removable color-coded wristband that corresponded to the time of their visit. Staff members, called rangers, monitored the two gates that led to the rest of the park, and anyone with a wristband was not allowed to pass through the gate. Rangers also checked the bands periodically to make sure that they were not staying beyond their designated time, but Owens indicated that most guests knew when their time was up and left the

See SUMMIT, page 54

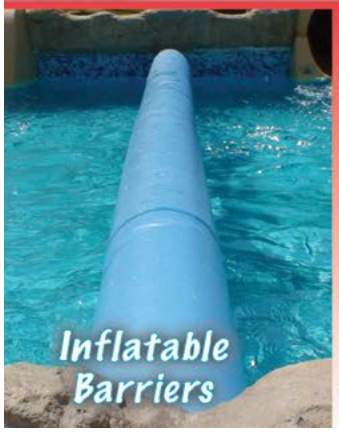


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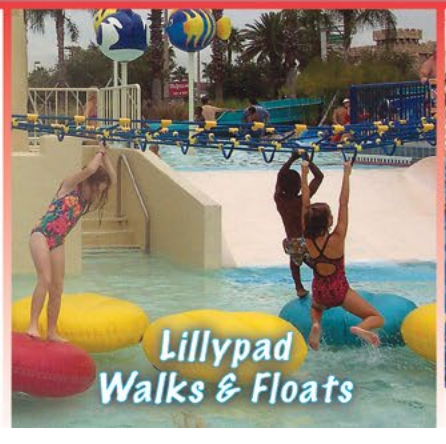
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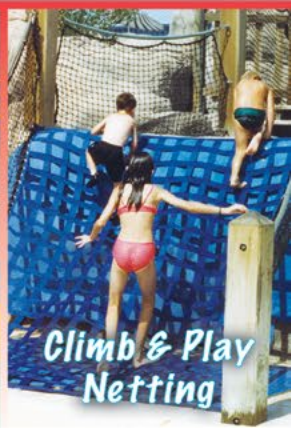
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The two body slides feature crystal-clear sections, allowing spectators on a nearby walkway to observe riders as they scream through the final spirals. COURTESY WATER WORLD

SUMMIT

Continued from page 52

park on their own. Owens added, "It was old-school, not technology-driven, but it worked very well."

The park also added lights to Summit Canyon, making it suitable for buy-outs and private events. Owens said, "Water World is a 70-acre park, but few companies can rent 70 acres of water park; they normally want to rent just an area, but moving guests around and controlling guests and making sure they are not getting into dark water can be difficult. Summit Canyon being self-contained is ideal, so we added lighting. It has a separate entrance from the parking lot, and we can offer a wide variety of experiences; it gives us an opportunity to offer programming we haven't been able to do in the past, and we can do it with minimal staff."

Summit Canyon also allows the park to extend its operating season. Once school begins, there isn't enough staff to operate the entire park, but there are enough to keep Summit Canyon open. Endless Summer Days at Summit Canyon was available for a special price and kept the park open for an additional 14 days.

Another addition to Summit Canyon is a learn-to-swim pool. Although it is connected, it has its own parking area and its own guest entrance. Swimming lessons are offered all day and sometimes even before the park opens. Although the learn-to-swim pool is separated, it can be added to private programming nights.

The new addition increases seating from 250 people to 750 people, adds nine new cabanas, two picnic shelters and extensive shading for seating. The restrooms have been updated, with nine private universal changing rooms for families. The restaurant facilities were also rebuilt and offer traditional park fare, which guests appreciate. There are also enhanced options for grab-and-go items, but the main focus in this area is gourmet mac and cheese with a variety of add-ins. An additional adult beverage outlet called the Ice Chest is also new.



The Criter Cove children's pool is outfitted with nature-inspired slides built into the hillside, and interactive water features. COURTESY WATER WORLD



NEWSSPLASH

AT: Jeffrey L. Seifert
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One of the largest indoor water parks in southeast Brazil has opened its doors in the state of Minas Gerais near the border with São Paulo.

Integrated into the **Vale da Mantiqueira Farm Hotel**, **AcquaVale Park** began operating on September 1. The water park features 11 pools, water slides and various attractions in indoor and outdoor areas.

The 18,000-square-meter (193,000 -square-foot) facility features a 6,000-square-meter (65,000-square-foot) indoor section under a translucent building with a retractable roof. The covered area features a wave pool, beach area, swim-up bar, cabanas, whirlpool and a children's area with a water playground that includes several waterslides. The indoor section is climate-controlled as temperatures in the Serra da Mantiqueira region can drop to near-freezing in the winter months.

Adult slides are found in the outdoor section, with seven waterslides including body sides, raft slides and a mat racer as well as a lazy river.

Currently the water park is only available to guests staying at the hotel, but admission is not included in the room rate and must be purchased separately. However, guests who book a room for three or more consecutive nights receive a complimentary day pass per person. After the initial rollout phase, the park plans to offer season passes and perhaps day passes to the local audience.

•

California Surf Club Co-Founder **Allen Sanford** has introduced an initial concept to transform Redondo Beach's aging Seaside Lagoon into "**Ocean Park**." The proposed year-round facility would feature a swimming lagoon, picnic areas, green space, and a compact wave pool.

Plans are still in the preliminary stage and the wave technology has yet to be selected, but the project is described as a compact wave pool that can operate all year long.

The proposal comes as Redondo tries to decide what to do with its increasingly troublesome Seaside Lagoon. The city has secured $10 million in state funding and committed another $1 million toward modernization. The aging facility has accumulated approximately $175,000 in water-quality penalties over two years, while a 2025 pump failure reportedly cost $60,000 and shuttered it for roughly two weeks.

•

Okana Resort & Indoor Waterpark in Oklahoma, launched its inaugural OkanaFest — a sprawling food, wine and entertainment celebration — in October.

Executive Chef **Wyatt Rogers** and his culinary team showcased signature bites from the resort's 14 dining spots, featuring highlights like lobster rolls, fresh oysters and risotto served right out of a Parmesan wheel. Alongside the gourmet food, attendees enjoyed craft beer, wine, and spirit tastings, paired with live music, DJs, and aerial performers.

Headlining the festival was celebrity chef **Christina Wilson** — winner of "Hell's Kitchen" season 10 and former vice president of culinary for **Gordon Ramsay North America** — who hosted a live cooking demonstration and Q&A session.

Following the festival, the fun continued with a free block party along the Okana Boardwalk, where the University of Oklahoma vs. University of Kentucky football game was broadcast across more than 35 screens.

•

Schlitterbahn Galveston in Texas, donated 1,200 brand-new life jackets to Surfside Beach in Brazoria County.

Surfside Beach is located on Follet's Island, along the Gulf of Mexico about an hour's drive south of Houston. The city has four miles of continuous coastline and typically sees six to eight drowning deaths a year. Officials had been drawing up plans for some type of life jacket donation program, when in May a 10-year old boy drowned, a tragedy that made headlines nationwide.

Surfside Police Chief **Philip Hester** put out a call on social media, and Schlitterbahn Operations Manager **Nancy Trachim** saw Hester's post and reached out.

The water park happened to have pallets of life jackets on hand that had become surplus when the park ownership changed hands.

Getting the life jackets from Schlitterbahn "took some back and forth through email to get it all approved, but once it was approved, it was super-easy," Hester said. He plans to place the life jackets on racks built from 4x4s and PVC pipe, one at each of the five public entrances to Surfside's beaches. The public is free to use them, but Hester asks that they please return the jackets after use.

"This is life-changing," Hester added. "We were getting 20 life jackets here and 10 life jackets there. Now, we're looking at $40,000 or $50,000 worth of life jackets."

Most won't be put out until the town's beach season starts up again next season, but a few will be available immediately.

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WATER PARKS

Washington's Wild Waves Theme & Water Park calls it a wrap

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com





The water park (above left) was a key driver for attendance to the park. The future of the 1980s Arrow corkscrew coaster (above right) is uncertain, but it is unlikely to find a new home. AT/TIM BALDWIN

FEDERAL WAY, Wash. — After 50 seasons, **Wild Waves Theme & Water Park** has ended its run. The Seattle-suburb amusement park opened in 1977 as **Enchanted Village**. Initially, the small park had a handful of rides, play equipment and a petting zoo. In 1984, Wild Waves Waterpark was built adjacent to the amusement park, marking a new era for the property. Over time, new rides and slides kept the park growing.

Currently, **EPR Properties** owns the park, and it is operated by **Premier Parks**.

As preparations for the 2026 season were being developed, the idea was to celebrate 50 seasons. However, that 50th season would turn out to be the last.

"We found out in early December that the park would be closing," said **Wes Petree**, director of sales and marketing, Wild Waves. "Our 2026 marketing plan went right out the window, and we kicked into full gear. A lot of businesses quietly ride out their final season and surprise the public when it's over. We didn't want to do that. We wanted to lean into it. The park opened in 1977, so we didn't quite make it to the 50th anniversary, but 2026 was going to be our 50th season. That became the celebration, and we wanted everyone to have the chance to say goodbye."

The community reacted as evidenced by attendance numbers. The park had a very strong summer.

"Wild Waves is an iconic park in the Puget Sound region, and generations of families have grown up here," Petree said. "We wanted to honor that by giving people one more summer to relive old memories and make new ones. So, we put it out there loud and clear: this is it, here's your last chance."

He admitted that things weren't the same after reopening following the pandemic. Attendance had slipped, and costs — for everything — had risen. After several down years, the decision was made to pull the plug, but the park gave its audience one final season.

"Rising costs, minimum wage [increases], insurance has tripled," Petree pointed out.

"I think it was the right thing to do," Petree said. "There have been generations of families that have grown up coming to Wild Waves Theme Park, and we wanted to give them the chance to make new memories, relive old ones and just kind of celebrate the 50 seasons of the park."

The park offered both wet and dry attractions. Following the summer season, the waterslides and pools closed on Labor Day, but the amusement park remained open as it transitioned into its Halloween event, Fright Fest. On November 1, the gates were closed for the last time. The taglines "Catch the final wave" and "Catch the final fright" were used as the calendar inched its way to the eventual farewell.

According to management, Wild Waves has a few months to clear the property. In the future, the land will be used for a large warehouse.

The park operated four roller coasters. The two largest, Timberhawk-Bird of Prey wooden coaster from **S&S** and an **Arrow** loop-corkscrew called Wild Thing, are less likely to find new homes. The woodie is very site-specific, and the steel looper dates back to 1984 when it was at **Rocky Point Park** in Rhode Island. The two smaller coasters, a powered kiddie and a wild mouse (both **Zamperla**), would be easier to relocate. Likewise, the park has numerous flat rides and children's rides.

"The timeline for clearing the park and the plans for our rides and water attractions are still being discussed and have not been finalized," said Park President **Jody Kneupper**. "There has been a lot of interest in some of our classic rides, so I wouldn't be surprised to see them find a new home."

Saying goodbye comes with a range of emotions. When a park is part of a community, that makes it difficult for people to know it will be their last visit.

"The community was shocked," said Petree. "People in this region thought it would be around forever. I have a 4- and a 7-year-old, and I have tons of memories from my youth at this park. As a father, I'm not going to be able to relive those with my children. Multigenerational families have lost their summer traditions, and people have come out of the woodwork to share how much of a bummer it is that their kids won't get to enjoy the park like they did."

Kneupper will remain on board to oversee the distribution of attractions and clearance of the park. Petree will take on a new role with Premier Parks.

"Since 1977 this park has been a place where generations of families have come to create lasting memories," Kneupper told *Amusement Today*. "While saying goodbye has been difficult, I'm incredibly thankful to our guests, our team members and the entire community for making our final season one we will never forget."





Wild Waves had a hilly, tree-filled setting that made a home for numerous rides. A Zamperla zigzag coaster (above right) would be one of the easier rides to relocate. AT/TIM BALDWIN



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WATER PARKS

Whitewater's Riptide Racer an is added treat Castaway Cove

AT: *Pam Sherborne*
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

WICHITA FALLS, Texas — Even though **Castaway Cove**'s Riptide Racer has been open for a year at this water park in Wichita Falls, Texas, there seems to have been no letup in long lines of visitors wanting to experience the four-lane mat racer over and over again in the 2026 season.

"Riptide Racer has exceeded every expectation, and it quickly became one of the most popular attractions at Castaway Cove Waterpark," said **Jimmy Holmes,** president of **H Two Management**, the management company for the city-owned Castaway Cove. "The addition of this four-lane racer helped drive a record-breaking revenue season in 2025. Families love the thrill of racing side-by-side, and the finish-line timer gives every ride a winner and plenty of bragging rights. It's created an experience guests want to enjoy again and again."

The slide is a **Whitewater West** Whizard mat-racer.

"It was an addition to an already existing tower," said **Scott Heke,** Whitewater vice president of business development for Canada and the Western United States. "We received reports that the slide was very well received and had lines all day long. It is an amazing slide."

The partially-enclosed slide allows up to four guests to race side-by-side down high-speed bumps with a checkerboard finish line. It is equipped with a starting light system and an automated timer at the finish line to track individual and competitive times.

The slide had an estimated budget of a little over $1.6 million and opened May 14, 2025. It was Castaway Cove's first major slide addition since 2016 with the opening of Pirates Plunge, a 60-foot-tall tower featuring a 37-foot vertical free-fall drop slide that accelerates up to 40 mph through a 360 loop.



Castaway Cove Waterpark has been experiencing continued excitement from guests for Riptide Racer, a four-lane mat racer from Whitewater West. COURTESY CASTAWAY COVE

Castaway Cove's other features include Nellie's Rolling River, a lazy river connecting various parts of the park together; Shipwreck Beach, a tidal wave pool equipped with water geysers; and Buccaneer Bay and Hideaway Harbor, with interactive wet play structures and lagoon pools designed for younger kids and water sports like volleyball and beach basketball.

It also offers cabanas, chaise lounge chairs throughout the park, and food and beverage items.

Holmes had said during the announcement of the ride in 2025, one of the reasons it was decided to add the Riptide Racer was to help drive attendance. It seems it has done just that.

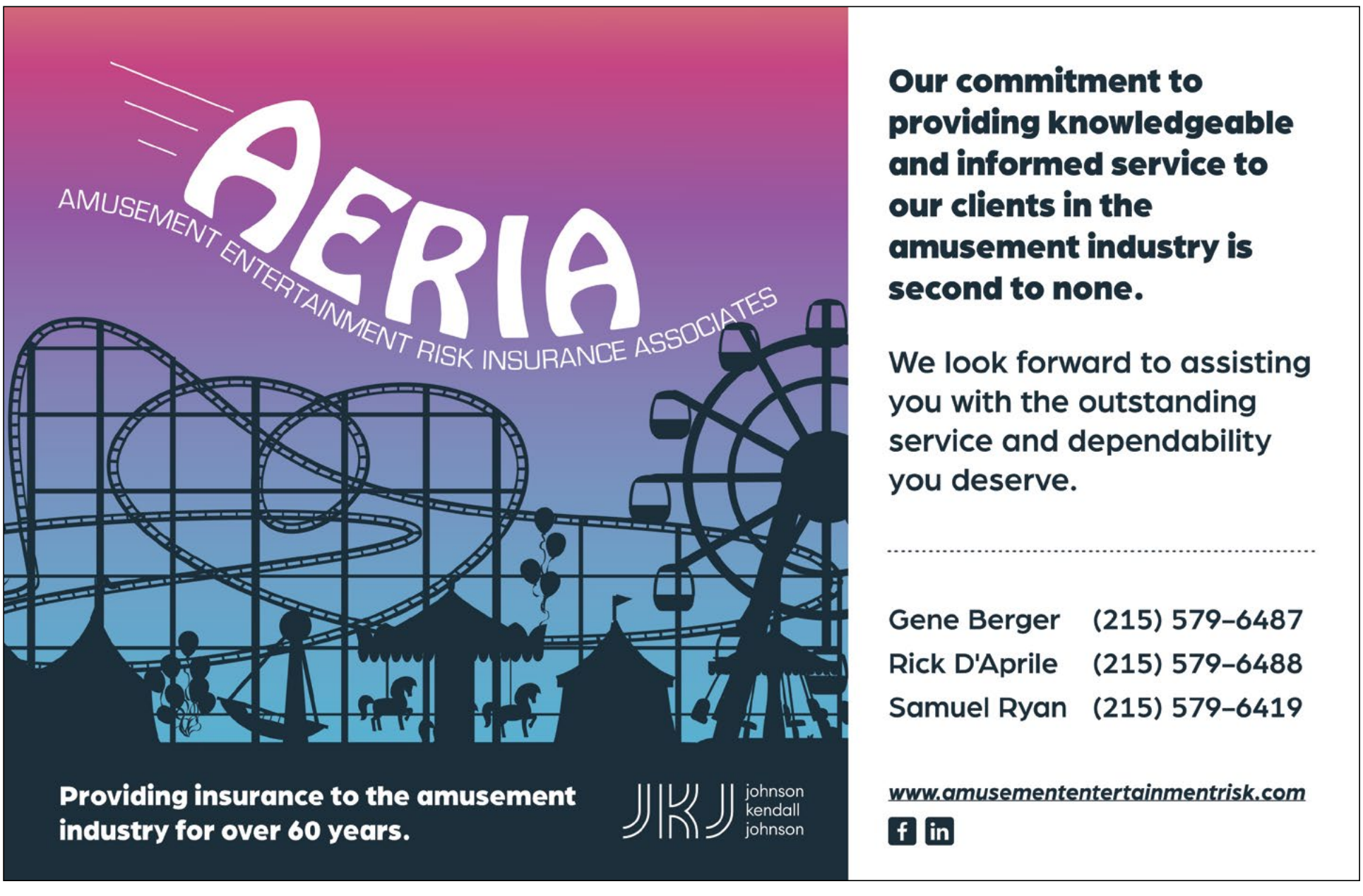
The park welcomed over 80,000 visitors in 2025, a reported nine percent increase over the previous year, according to information that was announced on *KFDX-TV*, a local **NBC** affiliate. Also, according to this report, the park's profits increased 91 percent over 2024.

This season's numbers aren't available as of yet.

Steve Vaughn is the park's general manager and director of operations.

Holmes is also the president of **360 Park Management**. In early 2026, his company expanded its footprint by acquiring the historic Wonderland Amusement Park in Amarillo, Texas.

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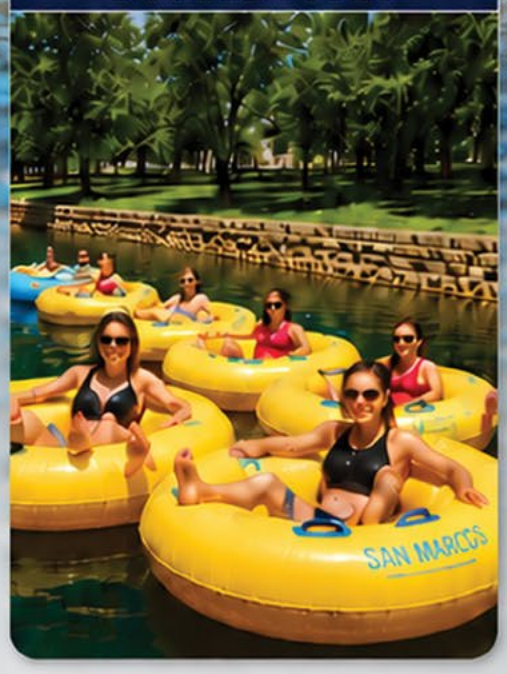
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BUSINESS & NEWSMAKERS

3dxScenic builds new workshop — page 66-67 / *Focus on the Horizon:* Plague Production's Jon Cooke — page 69

Still spinning, popular Tilt-A-Whirl ride marks 100th anniversary

Larson re-engineers Tilts for future fun, offers new themes

AT: *Ron Gustafson*
Special to Amusement Today





The Sellner company used the above left flyer to promote its Tilt-A-Whirl ride in 1928. The Rice County Historical Society in Faribault, Minnesota, has a Tilt-W-Whirl car (above right) on display outside of its building. COURTESY RICE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FARIBAULT, Minn. and PLAINVIEW, Texas — This small city, about 50 miles south of Minneapolis-Saint Paul, is best known as the birthplace of the ever-popular Tilt-A-Whirl amusement ride.

The attraction has tickled the tummies of countless patrons at amusement parks, fairs and festivals through the years and has withstood the test of time as it marks its 100th anniversary in 2026.

Herbert Sellner, the ride's inventor, got his start in furniture design and toy manufacturing with his father, **Frederick**. The family immigrated to Minnesota from Germany in the late 1880s.

"Herbert Sellner was a tinkerer as well as an inventor," **Jenna Nelson**, curator of the **Rice County Historical Society** in Faribault, told *Amusement Today*. "He kept meticulous day-to-day records and had a family history of being inventive. One of his first patents was for a sander and polishing machine for woodworking."

In 1912, at age 25, Herbert Sellner established **Sellner Woodcraft Company** and introduced his first amusement ride a decade later: the water toboggan slide. Emerging from a 100-foot track, riders hydroplaned across the water on a single-person sled. They quickly became trendy at lakeside amusement centers.

"He got orders from throughout the U.S. and Europe," Nelson said. "He also built a water wheel ride soon after the toboggan. It looked like an upright mill wheel, and as you went over the top you would slip into the water. It was for smaller kids and became very popular with orders from around the world."

Building a legend

Sellner was also "tinkering" with a water merry-go-round during that time and, according to Nelson, his brother, **Martin**, suggested adopting it for land.

"They first called it the Tiltulator and then the Tilt-A-Whirl," she noted. "The first ride was entirely wood — even the wheels. The initial prototype was in 1926 and had nine two-person cars. Sellner applied for a patent for the ride in April of that year."

The attraction made its debut September 3, 1926, at the **Minnesota State Fair** with rides costing 15 cents. It was an immediate success.

In 1927, **Sellner Manufacturing Company** became incorporated, with Martin Sellner named as vice president and treasurer.

"They started to use steel in the production shortly after and by the time World War II came around, the ride was fully steel," Nelson said. "Martin, who served in the Army during World War I, had a heavy stake in the company and was Herbert's sounding board. He handled all of the advertising and promotion and is really credited with the longevity of the company."

An early ad for the attraction touted it as being "safe as a grandma's rocker."

A seven-car version of the ride was soon developed, and it eventually replaced the original Tilt-A-Whirl, becoming the "long-term" product built by Sellner Manufacturing. Nelson said upwards of 600 of the rides were built in the Faribault facility.

Herbert Sellner was diagnosed with leukemia in 1927 and died in 1930 at age 42. Martin Sellner took over the company, and it remained in the family until the business was sold in 2011.

A Ferris wheel of sorts

The company also built a ride called the Swooper for a short period of time.

It had seats similar to a standard Ferris wheel, but the frame was shaped like an elongated oval.

"It was a squashed version of a Ferris wheel," said Nelson. "It did not take off for the company and was discontinued."

A one-off for the company was a Super Tilt-A-Whirl (built circa 1980) which was double the size of the standard ride. It reportedly operated for only one season at **Valleyfair** in Shakopee, Minnesota. Today, the park has a standard model of the ride.

The company diversified under Sellner's grandson, **Bruce**, with the introduction of the Berry-Go-Round in the late 1980s. It evolved into a highly popular spin ride with themed characters such as dragons, bears, monkeys and puppies.

Bruce Sellner is also

See TILT-A-WHIRL, page 62

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Valleyfair, Shakopee, Minnesota, features a classic Tilt-A-Whirl it calls Tilter (above left). Display cases at the Rice County Historical Society outline some of the history of the Sellner Manufacturing Company, which built the famous Tilt-A-Whirl ride in Faribault, Minnesota (above middle). A Tilt-A-Whirl with cars themed as giant ice cream cones (above right) was designed by Larson and debuted at San Diego's Belmont Park. COURTESY VALLEYFAIR, RICE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, RMC

TILT-A-WHIRL

Continued from page 61

credited with advancing the typical cable-driven Tilt-A-Whirl into an all-electric model called the Electric 7. Seven electric motors propel the trolley wheels along the ride's track instead of a cable running under the circumference of the platform. During that era (1993), a new Tilt-A-Whirl — cable drive or Electric 7 — was $35,980. A trailer for the mobile industry was an extra $6,700.

Bruce Sellner passed away in 1995 at age 44, and an economic downturn that followed led to the company being sold.

Reason to celebrate

Nelson said the 100th anniversary of Tilt-A-Whirl has sparked a lot of interest in the Rice County Historical Society.

"We had interest even before the anniversary year with students — some with their parents — coming in to do research on the Sellner company for a school paper," she noted. "School tours are coming to town as this was the place where the Tilt-A-Whirl was manufactured, and there is still a lot of local interest here. We also have people coming down from the city."

A Tilt-A-Whirl car is on display in front of the historical society, and the plant is still on Fowler Avenue, today occupied by **Gold Star Stages & Manufacturing**. Two vintage Tilt cars are located in historic downtown Faribault, and the exterior wall of the **Paradise Center for the Arts** features a large mural honoring the timeless amusement ride.

The Minnesota State Fair celebrated the ride's centennial this year with a history walking tour in partnership with the **Minnesota Historical Society**. A stop along the tour was at the fair's Tilt-A-Whirl, located on the Kidway.

Still in production

When Sellner was sold in 2011, most of the company's assets were acquired by **Larson International**, a ride manufacturer in Plainview, Texas. New Tilt-A-Whirls are still being produced to this day at the Texas facility.

"We're working on number nine and 10 right now," said **Hunter Novotny**, business development for **Rocky Mountain Coasters** (Hayden, Idaho), builders of the Tilt-A-Whirl at Larson International.

Novotny said little has changed in regard to the traditional ride design, and one in production now will be on display at **IAAPA** Expo in Orlando, Florida, in November.

"We're building a 100-year anniversary Tilt to take to IAAPA. It will have a modernized touchscreen control system, providing better maintenance team feedback," he said. "It will be themed in red, white and blue — paying homage to the ride as it stands and will feature classic vehicles, horizontal fencing and LED versions of fluorescent lights. We've beefed up the track on our versions and are doing customized (themed) seating for clients. "

In the case of the Tilt-A-Whirl, some things never grow old.

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A new Tilt-A-Whirl with an all-American theme was designed and built by Larson for Fun Spot America Orlando. COURTESY LARSON






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New after-hours dining experience debuts within Europa-Park

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com





Pirates in Batavia has been a long-loved dark ride at Europa-Park. Elevated cuisine (above) is a highlight of the dinner adventure. While enjoying dinner, the tales from Pirates in Batavia come alive with music and performance (right).
COURTESY EUROPA-PARK

RUST, Germany — **Europa-Park** is no stranger to dining experiences. In addition to the vast selection of cuisines throughout the park and its various hotels, dinner shows and holiday experiences have found themselves interwoven in the park's history. Even more so, the **Eatrenalin** dining experience blended a **Mack Rides** conveyance system with fine dining and multisensory elements when it opened in the fall of 2022, located outside the gates of both the resort's parks.

Now, the latest idea has emerged. On October 23, guests began enjoying an after-hours dining adventure within the park.

Located in the Dutch area, Pirates in Batavia was built in 1987 as a slow-moving boat ride through numerous exotic scenes. The dark ride suffered a horrific fire in 2018. Reopened in 2020, bigger, more elaborate and more sophisticated than ever, one element remained. The final approach to the station has boats passing by an indoor restaurant. Bamboe Baai, an Asian-themed restaurant, overlooks riders as they float by. Across the water, a small stage allows for occasional performers.

The new concept brings guests into the park in the evening. The ticketed experience grants admission to the park at 5 p.m., with the Adventure in Batavia – Immersive Dinner Experience beginning at 7:30 on select nights.

The adventure begins immediately, as guests can enjoy an aperitif while riding the Pirates in Batavia attraction. The culinary evening features a four-course meal with an all-inclusive beverage package, transporting guests directly into the world of the "Pirates in Batavia."

The menu, created by head chef **Florian Herrmann**, opens with a glass noodle salad served in a bamboo basket. This is followed by a Thai Tom Kha soup, while the main course features an Indian biryani, a flavorful rice dish. The meal concludes with a dessert of pineapple in a crispy coating. Vegetarian versions are available for every course.

Under the direction of **Katja Mack**, the innovative format blends the attraction itself, fine dining, storytelling and live entertainment into a unique, cohesive experience. The narrative of the Pirates in Batavia is not only extended through the inclusion of beloved characters like Bartholomeus van Robbemond but is brought to life in collaboration with the guests themselves. The show integrates the characters and original scenery of the beloved attraction into a full-length dinner experience.

"One of the most rewarding aspects of creating the Adventure in Batavia Dinner Experience is the opportunity to showcase the incredible talent we have within Europa-Park in a completely new way," Mack told *Amusement Today*. I am particularly proud that we have developed two entirely new aerial acts specifically for this production, performed by students from our Talent Academy. These young artists have been part of our Academy for many years, and seeing them grow, take on new creative challenges and bring these performances to life is incredibly fulfilling."

The performers — singers, dancers, actors and acrobats — take on specific roles within the narrative. Two aerial acrobatic acts were developed exclusively for Adventure in Batavia in close collaboration with long-standing members of the Talent Academy.

"What makes this experience so special is that we bring the beloved characters and stories of Pirates in Batavia, one of Europa-Park's most popular attractions, to life beyond the ride itself," she said. "By combining live entertainment, specially composed music, breathtaking artistry and an exceptional culinary journey, we invite our guests to experience this fascinating world in an entirely new way. For me, the most rewarding part is seeing our artists' creativity and passion come together to create something truly unique. It's wonderful to give our talents a stage to shine while creating unforgettable moments for our guests."

Children are also catered to with a menu that includes a tramezzini roll as a starter, a creamy carrot soup, a main course of corn-fed chicken with vegetables and potato gratin (or a vegan "beef" alternative), and a delicious chocolate mousse for dessert.

The adventure is an evening full of entertainment. The immersive dinner experience begins at 7:30 p.m. and continues until 11. Tickets are €155 for adults and €105 for children 4 to 11. The experience is offered on select dates between October 23, 2026, and January 7, 2027.



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3dxScenic moves in to 30,000-square-foot workshop of its own

AT: *Jack Lathrop*
Special to Amusement Today







Above left, 3dxScenic co-owners Matt Waldenmeyer (left) and Mark Rosenzweig pose in the new 30,000-square-foot Cincinnati shop. A member of 3dx's composites team works on a row of composite enclosures for an upcoming museum display (above middle). A CNC technician sorts tool holders beside the Kuka robot cell (above right). Almost every 3dxScenic project starts in CNC. AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON; COURTESY 3DXSCENIC

CINCINNATI — Long before **3dxScenic** was building parade floats and show sets for theme parks, most of its work was built to last about a week. The company was founded in 1999 as the custom fabrication division of **Iacono Productions**, a Cincinnati live event production company, and for its first decade, live events were the business.

"The jump into themed entertainment came about through relationships," said **Matt Waldenmeyer**, now principal and chief operating officer of 3dx. In the early 2010s, the company's general manager at the time had connections at **SeaWorld** that got the ball rolling. "Some of our live event projects got really big and elaborate, so the transition was easier."

Scale was not the problem. Durability was.

"The biggest hurdle was lifespan," Waldenmeyer said. "Live events last only about a week, so we had to research what we needed to do to make sets last." A park installation has to hold up for years, not days, and the crew's background helped close that gap. "Having a staff with theater backgrounds helped; we're used to being inventive," Waldenmeyer said. "It's all theater, in a way. The language, inventiveness, and a lot of the materials and methodologies cross over."

One of 3dx's first large-scale park projects came in 2013, when the company built two nearly identical Madagascar shows, one for **SeaWorld San Diego** and one for **Busch Gardens Tampa**. Two years later, 3dx moved into parades. In 2015, it built its first parade float, a single vehicle designed to augment the existing parade at **Sesame Place**. That float led to a much larger order: three complete parades of 10 vehicles each, recreating the Sesame Place parade at additional parks across the country. One float had turned into 30.

"Brand equity for the 3dxScenic name continued to grow as the company took on additional projects with parks outside of the **United Parks** umbrella, both corporate and family-owned," said **Mark Rosenzweig**, now principal and chief business officer. "We always aim to meet or exceed expectations for a project and look to establish long-term partnerships with our clients."

Rosenzweig credits the company's growth in the market to three hallmarks it carried over from the live event side: integrity, transparency and collaboration. "The number of projects and repeat clients in the industry that we have been fortunate enough to work on and with speaks to this," he added.

In 2019, Columbus-based **Live Technologies** acquired Iacono Productions, and 3dx came with it. As part of a larger live event company, the shop was still splitting its people and its calendar between two very different kinds of work, and the two did not mix well. Live events run on tight turnarounds; park projects run for months.

"While trying to do both types, we would regularly have to shift labor from a longer-running project to the live event, causing delays in production and overtime to get caught up," Waldenmeyer said.

In mid-2023, 3dx and Live went their separate ways, and Waldenmeyer and Rosenzweig took over as co-owners that fall. For the first time in its history, 3dx was an independent company, and its focus was themed entertainment.

"Now that we're focused solely on themed entertainment, we are better able to stay on top of scheduling and have dramatically reduced our overtime," Waldenmeyer said.

One tie to Live remained: the building. 3dx kept working out of the shop the two companies had shared until the lease ended in late 2025, and the search for a new home became a chance to build around the way 3dx works.

The result is the first shop in 3dx's history laid out around the way the company actually builds. The 30,000-square-foot facility, which 3dx moved into between October and December 2025, gives each of its core disciplines (CNC, fabrication, composites and scenic paint) its own dedicated space, with project management and administration under the same roof.

"We wanted a building that could provide adequate space for each sub-department to control their own shop, separated from the other departments but with easy access for production flow and communication," Waldenmeyer said. "Our new building provides that very well."

The shift to themed entertainment shaped the new building, too. 3dx still takes on some live event work, but it has reorganized around the park market, Rosenzweig said, which has meant "beefing up departments where there is greater demand like composites." The composites team, which works in fiberglass and polyurea, now has a shop of its own.

The old building had plenty going for it: 50,000 square feet, 24-foot ceilings and all the power the team could need. What it lacked were walls between departments, easy forklift access to the outdoors and good airflow. The team searched across the north side of Cincinnati to keep commutes close to what they had

See 3DX, page 67



3DX

Continued from page 66

been, and found a building a quarter mile from the old shop. "Extremely fortunate," Waldenmeyer called it.

Before committing to a floor plan, the owners asked the shop team how each department should be laid out. The result follows the path work takes through the building.

"It's a circular layout that follows our primary production process: CNC to Fabrication, Fab to Composites, Composites to Scenic Paint," Waldenmeyer said.

CNC, home to the flatbed router and **Kuka** robot, sits beside both fabrication and paint, so parts headed for fabrication travel only a few feet and signs go straight to paint. Foam sculpts come off the robot and move into composites, through fabrication and on to paint. Loading docks on the east and west sides of the building let suppliers deliver materials to the part of the shop where they will be used.

The new building does have one trade-off: its ceilings are 17 feet, seven feet lower than the old shop's. "I wouldn't exactly call it a limiting factor though; our first project in the new space was a 48-foot-tall German nutcracker for **Lagoon**," Waldenmeyer said. "We just need to approach large projects from a different viewpoint."

Getting into the building meant moving a working shop. "Moving while in production was a dance," Waldenmeyer said. He planned the move around each department's schedule. The composites assembly team relocated just as parts were being demolded, so it could pick up the next step in the new building, and other departments followed as they wrapped up their tasks. The spray booths were the hardest piece; they required contractors, permits and inspections.

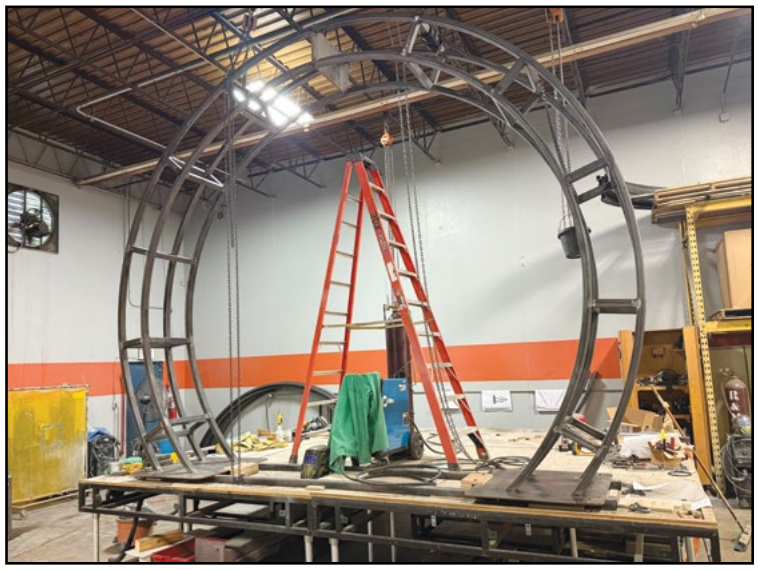
Asking the shop floor to help plan the layout reflects how the owners want to run the company. Rosenzweig brings 25 years of sales and marketing experience in themed entertainment, and Waldenmeyer joined 3dx 25 years ago as a scenic carpenter and has overseen the shop since 2004. Both spent time inside larger companies. "Large companies run like machines and can become less personal," Waldenmeyer said. "Our goal is to change that and never lose sight of the people."

The nutcracker has already led to repeat business. The 20-person team is back at work for Lagoon on the park's J3 Grand Prix project, building several large scenic elements, including three giant tire sculpts that one of the ride's launches will pass through.

Over the next five years, Waldenmeyer expects 3dx to complete multiple long-range fiberglass projects, build a larger presence at industry expos and grow its team as the business grows. The company plans to study how it uses the new space to decide whether it will eventually need a larger building.

For now, the focus is on the clients the new shop was built to serve. "No matter what the request is, we are always up to the challenge of collaborating on all levels to deliver scenic elements that meet the requirements of any project," Rosenzweig said.

•3dxscenic.com



A large circular steel frame for Lagoon's J3 Grand Prix project takes shape in the fabrication shop. AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON





Venu+ places locker security directly into the palm of guest's hand

AT: *David Fake*
dfake@amusementtoday.com

ORLANDO — The locker kiosk line is about to get a lot shorter, because the verification camera guests need is already in their pocket.

Venu+ is set to unveil GoPod Mobile Face Scan, an industry-first locker technology that lets guests enroll and verify their own face through their smartphone, bypassing the kiosk entirely. The company is showcasing the system at **IAAPA** Expo 2026 in Orlando, alongside a newly announced partnership with **HID**, the biometric authentication firm behind camera technology already trusted by **Clear** and **TSA** checkpoints nationwide.

A guest scans a QR code at the locker bank, enrolls a facial record through the GoPod Mobile app, and selects a PIN. There is no second trip to a kiosk, no fob to misplace, and if the phone stays in the locker, the PIN or a kiosk scan still opens the door.



Guests no longer need a wristband, a locker key or a free hand — their own phone and their own face are the only credentials necessary to use Venu+'s GoPod Mobile Face Scan to access a locker. COURTESY VENU+

"GoPod Mobile Facial Recognition will change how facial recognition is used in the locker industry by turning each guest's personal device into their facial recognition device," said **Kevin Miranda**, director of locker solutions at Venu+. "Guests can register using their own phone, reducing transaction times at the kiosk and making locker access faster and more convenient. Combined with our patented keypad technology, GoPod offers multiple ways to access a locker, giving guests the freedom to choose, including the option to opt out of facial recognition. At Venu+, we believe innovation should enhance convenience while keeping security, privacy and guest choice at the forefront."

A guest uncomfortable with a facial record can simply enter the PIN instead, no different in function, just different in how the locker recognizes who is standing in front of it. Paired with the patented keypad and QR-code entry, a guest has four ways into the same locker, all built to meet ADA and GDPR standards.

Jean-Baptiste Milan, head of commercial sales at HID Global, framed the partnership in similar terms. "At HID, we're focused on delivering trusted biometric technologies that make everyday interactions more secure, convenient and user-friendly," Milan said. "Our collaboration with Venu+ on GoPod Mobile Face Scan demonstrates how advanced identity verification can help create seamless, frictionless experiences while maintaining a strong commitment to privacy and user control."

GoPod Mobile Face Scan builds on kiosk-based Face Scan technology Venu+ debuted at IAAPA Expo two years ago, following a growth year for the company's locker division via the **VLocker** and **Tiburon** Lockers acquisitions. The mobile capability launches only on the GoPod and DualPod lines for now. **Liz Hawkins**, director of marketing at Venu+, compared the lineup to a car manufacturer's model range, where not every trim level needs every feature.

Venu+ says the system is finished and awaiting signatures, with two prospective customers about 75% closed; the technology can deploy as soon as either signs.

Asked why operators should trust a system built on someone else's camera technology, Miranda did not hesitate.

"Clear trusts them," he said. "TSA trusts them. We can too."



Focus on the HORIZON

Career that is inspired by fear

APOPKA, Fla. — For many, Halloween is a favorite holiday. For Jon Cooke, it's a way of life. As Founder and CEO of Plague Productions, Cooke has crafted a career creating memorable — and terrifying — haunted house experiences.

When describing his path to a career in themed entertainment, Cooke says, like his company, it has been unique and unconventional. Originally from California, he grew up frequently visiting Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm. Those early experiences left an impression.

"There is something special about Disneyland," he said. "It is the park that started it all, and you get to walk in the footsteps of Walt (Disney). When you think about what he and the Imagineers did as they built the park, they just got it right. Today, in many ways, the industry is still following their formula."

After graduation, Cooke toured the world recording music and performing for live audiences. During a break from touring, he returned home, and he joined friends for his first visit to Knott's Scary Farm. The experience pulled him toward something new. "It was so cool, and I was hooked," he said. "The following year, I went back and applied to be a scare-actor." He didn't get the part. Instead, he landed a carpentry job building haunted houses for the annual event. It proved to be an unexpected way in.

"That was the beginning," he said. "Once I was hired, I was able to talk my way into becoming a scareactor."

"That first season I learned about both the artistry behind the attractions and the community that brings them to life. I embraced the shared camaraderie between everyone who was part of Knott's Scary Farm. It was a unique experience. There are not too many jobs where you find yourself feeling crazy tired, wiping make-up from your face while sitting in Del Taco at 2 a.m. All of that, wrapped together, made me appreciate and really love the industry. It drew me in."

The seasonal role opened the door to a new career, and Cooke spent the next 15 years at the park doing everything from carpentry to set dressing to prop fabrication for the annual Halloween event.

"One year, I pitched an idea for a house called 'Special Ops Infected.' Instead of just accepting the idea, I was told I could also design it. They told me, 'You'll figure it out.' And I did. That became my first design and led to my moving into the design department full-time."

He discovered he had a unique talent for designing and art directing haunted houses. "It definitely is my niche," he said.

As his haunted houses for Knott's gained attention, others in the industry began approaching Cooke for help with their own designs. Those opportunities inspired him to start Plague Productions.

"Today we are a scrappy punk rock company," he said. "We started with a few of my friends in my garage, and today we have 40 employees and a 40,000 -square-foot facility. We do all of our work in-house — design, props, animatronics, lighting, building. You could say we live in constant chaos."

While Cooke did not envision working in the industry as a child, he admits, designing and providing fun experiences for others started at an early age. "I remember staging a mini carnival in my backyard for my friends," he said. "I dug a hole in the ground and charged everyone one dollar to try to catch a goldfish."

Today that same impulse inspires and drives his work, just on a much larger scale.

"Creativity feeds more creativity, and I feel a compulsion to keep creating and designing," he said. "The more I get to create, the more I love Halloween, and the more I love Halloween, the more I am driven to create fantastic Halloween experiences."

He shares that drive alongside his equally motivated team. "We have a team of amazing and cool people who are just as driven as I am. Together we make cool stuff and experiences for others."

Earlier this year, John and Plague Productions celebrated their role in being part of the incredible team of creators and professionals who brought Las Vegas' John Wick Experience to life. The attraction earned a coveted Thea Award from the TEA.

With ongoing projects from theme park companies including Six Flags, Inc. and Universal Orlando Resort, Cooke continues to build on the unconventional career he chose. His advice to others is simple and straightforward: "I took a leap and never looked back. I just started doing it. That is the best advice I can give to someone — start today, start now."

"I often see amazingly talented people hesitate, and the truth is, life can catch up with you, and then it can be too late to take those chances and risks," he added. "A little bit of recklessness tied with passion and drive can pay off."

For Cooke, the art of the scare begins with immersing guests in their surroundings while forcing feelings and emotions. "Successful houses safely make people think they are in danger and force feelings and emotions," he explained. "Put people in the dark and let their imagination's fill in the blanks — that really helps set them up for a good scare."

Today, Halloween remains central to Plague Productions, but the company is also becoming well-known for its Christmas-themed projects. For Cooke, the two specialties fit together.

"You could say we infuse fear and we infuse cheer," he said. "Our team is uniquely comprised of artisans who have grown up in this crazy world of themed entertainment. We live, breathe, dream and consume this stuff all year."

"I'm proud of the work we do," Cooke said. "We push boundaries and lead the charge when it comes to designing and building haunted attractions. We set out to be a great haunted house company, and we ended up as a great themed entertainment company. It's all been incredibly fulfilling."

—Susan Storey

Jon Cooke

Plague Productions

Apopka, Florida



OBITUARY

Ride engineer, industry leader Christian Reverchon passes away

SAMOIS-SUR-SEINE, France — Christian Reverchon of Reverchon Rides passed away on October 22, 2026.

A talented engineer, an exceptional metalworker, a respected business leader and a renowned entrepreneur, Reverchon was first and foremost deeply devoted to his family.


Reverchon

Reverchon devoted his life to his company. In 1952, at the age of 23, he joined the company his father, Gaston Reverchon — the inventor of bumper cars — had founded. Driven by a love of travel and discovery, he travelled throughout Eastern Europe and the United States, overseeing the delivery of amusement rides, including Himalaya rides and numerous children's attractions.

In 1976, the company's first flume ride designed specifically for an amusement park opened at Parc Bagatelle. Fifty years later, the ride is still in operation, standing as a testament to the quality, durability and enduring vision behind this creation. That same year, Reverchon and his son Gilles worked together to develop the Matterhorn, embarking on a new chapter of creative and technical innovation.

Over the years, one creation followed another: the Tacots, the Explorers, the Cyclotrons, carousels and roller coasters, culminating in the Spinning Coaster. Each of these attractions reflects the breadth of expertise, craftsmanship and unwavering commitment to innovation that defined his work.

Christian remained passionately involved in his company and alongside the teams who have worked there over the years, bringing remarkable energy and enthusiasm to his work until his final days. As recently as the end of September, he was still at the office every day, faithful to the principles that had always driven him: building a business, finding solutions, sharing his knowledge and moving projects forward.

A man of strong character, conviction and passion, he left a lasting impression on all those who had the privilege of knowing him and working alongside him.

Former Cedar Point PR Director Robin B. Innes dies at age 72

HURON, Ohio — Robin B. Innes, age 72, of Huron, Ohio, passed away unexpectedly on October 12, 2026.


Innes

Innes was born March 8, 1954, in Elyria, Ohio, to the late George S. and Wanda A. (Wykrent) Innes. He attended school in North Ridgeville. Upon graduation, he continued his education by attending Bowling Green State University where he earned a bachelor's degree in Journalism.

Innes was employed in the public relations department of Cedar Point (Sandusky, Ohio) for 37 years. While employed by Cedar Point, he conducted media swings, interviews and press releases with many news and radio stations. He served as the park's public relations director from 1995 through 2012, during which time he helped promote Cedar Point's 125th Anniversary (1995), the 20th Anniversary of Magnum XL-200 (2009) and the announcement of Shoot the Rapids (2010). He was also employed by Sandusky City Schools as a substitute teacher, where he was known endearingly as "Mr. I".

During his tenure at Cedar Point, Innes met his wife Kathleen "Katie" (Koch). They were married on March 24, 1984 and started a family when they adopted Cassidy Leigh. They were married for 42 years and would eventually welcome five cherished grandchildren, Dawson Boyd (Papa's namesake), Lily, Ivy, Olly, and Ozzy.

ON THE MOVE

The **Eldridge Park Carousel Preservation Society** has announced the hiring of **Tarrah Seaver** as the new park general manager.

"The board of directors has searched for a professional manager who understands the balance between the business and community side of running a vintage amusement park," said Board President **Mike "Robby" Robertson**. "We have several projects in the works and needed professional leadership to help with fundraising and marketing to a larger audience.


Seaver

Seaver has a bachelor's degree in business and nearly eight years of experience as owner of **Laurabelle's Bakery** in Corning, New York. With a strong background in business operations, customer service, leadership and community engagement, Seaver has stepped forward to fill the role immediately.

"I look forward to bringing my experience, enthusiasm and dedication to Eldridge Park and helping continue its tradition as a special place where families and the community can come together to make lasting memories," said Seaver.

Gilroy Gardens, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, announced the addition of two new community members to its volunteer board of directors. As board members, **Heather Crowley** and **Eric Wasinger** will help support the park's mission.


Crowley


Wasinger

Since making Gilroy home, Crowley has been actively involved in the local community, serving as PTG president and gala chair for **St. Catherine School**. She joined the Gilroy Gardens Board of Directors to bring her fundraising and community-building experience to the organization.

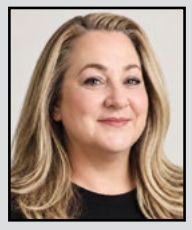
"I am truly passionate about strengthening Gilroy Gardens' mission to educate children while creating fun and lasting memories in a beautiful garden setting," said Crowley.

Wasinger joins the board with a robust professional background in the facilities industry, financial management and public administration. A resident of Gilroy for 34 years, Wasinger joined the board out of a deep desire to give back to the local community and ensure the park remains a vibrant space for future generations.

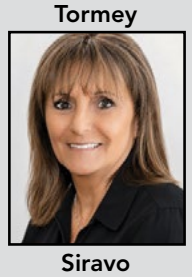
"I am proud to be part of the Gilroy Gardens Board of Directors and look forward to collaborating with other members of our local community to help the park continue to thrive," Wasinger added.

RLI Insurance launches entertainment, amusement product with familiar faces

PEORIA, Ill. — Decades of industry expertise are behind **RLI Insurance**'s new entertainment and amusement offering now available through brokers.


Tormey


Shugart


Siravo


Harris


Gillander

The RLI Amusement and Entertainment team is led by **Kym Tormey**, formerly of **AXA XL**, and includes underwriters **Tammy Siravo**, **Glenn Harris** and **Jenna Gillander**. **Annie Shugart** leads the group's marketing efforts. The team members previously worked together at **McGowan Allied Specialty Insurance** and collectively bring more than 50 years of entertainment and amusement insurance experience to the market.

"I fell in love with not only the industry but the people in it as well," said Tormey. "That connection inspired me to bring an insurance alternative to the market that is strong, reliable and flexible. I believe we're able to offer exactly that at RLI. And with an impressive in-house claims team behind us, we're well positioned to support our customers when they need us most."

Backed by RLI's deep underwriting expertise, financial strength and commitment to specialty insurance markets, the new offering gives agents and brokers another solution for addressing the evolving risks and insurance needs of entertainment, amusement and attraction businesses.

With an experienced team that understands the industry firsthand, RLI is poised to build strong relationships and deliver specialized solutions for the unique amusement and entertainment market.

"Simply put, they know the industry — and the people who make it thrive," added Shugart.

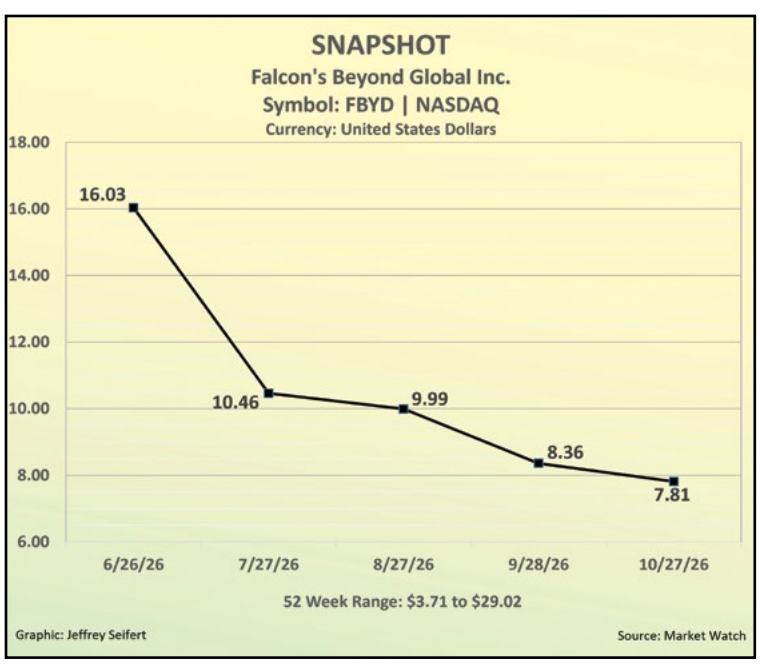
MARKET WATCH

COMPANY	SYMBOL	MARKET	PRICE 10/27/26	HIGH 52-Week	LOW 52-Week
PARKS AND ATTRACTIONS					
The Blackstone Group	BX	NYSE	116.70	165.14	101.73
Carnival Corp.	CCL	NYSE	27.74	34.03	21.45
Comcast Corp./ NBCUniversal Media	CMCSA	NASDAQ	21.84	32.86	20.48
Dave & Busters Entertainment, LLC	PLAY	NASDAQ	7.58	22.10	6.26
EPR Properties	EPR	NYSE	56.01	64.97	48.11
Fuji Kyoko Co., Ltd.	JP:9010	TYO	2,702	2,835	1,946
Haichang Holdings Ltd.	HK:2255	SEHK	0.265	0.760	0.139
Leofoo Development Co.	TW:2705	TSEC	14.90	18.20	14,85
Lucky Strike Entertainment Corp	LUCK	NYSE	4.37	9.59	3.76
MGM Resorts International	MGM	NYSE	27.26	51.59	27.38
Parks America, Inc.	PRKA	OTCQX	40.11	42.99	35.10
Royal Carribean Cruises, Ltd.	RCL	NYSE	298.54	356.39	222.22
Six Flags Entertainment Co.	FUN	NYSE	7.55	26.28	6.60
Tivoli A/S	DK:TIV	CSE	604.00	608.00	604.00
United Parks & Resorts Inc.	PRKS	NYSE	31.03	50.17	28.77
The Walt Disney Company	DIS	NYSE	109.06	110.15	108.75
SUPPLIERS/OTHERS					
Brogent Technologies, Inc.	TW:5263	TSEC	88.60	129.15	85.04
Falcon's Beyond	FBYD	NASDAQ	7.72	29.02	3.71
Sansei Technologies, Inc.	TYO:6357	TYO	2,563	2,585	2,545

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 10/26/26	Change from 1 year ago
East Coast	$6.079	$2.356
Midwest	$6.480	$2.488
Gulf Coast	$5.951	$2.601
Mountain	$6.521	$2.835
West Coast	$6.614	$2.519
California	$8.155	$3.221

CURRENCY

On 10/28/26 $1 USD =	
0.8968	EURO
0.7505	GBP (British Pound)
157.78	JPY (Japanese Yen)
0.8282	CHF (Swiss Franc)
1.4229	AUD (Australian Dollar)
1.4029	CAD (Canadian Dollar)

BUSINESS WATCH

Universal theme parks see decline in profits

PHILADELPHIA — **Comcast Corporation** reported results for its third quarter, which ended September 30, 2026. Compared with last year, **Universal**'s theme parks (a division of Comcast) have seen a drop in revenue and earnings at the tail end of summer. In the earnings report, Comcast's theme park revenue fell 4.4% to $2.6 billion, and the adjusted EBITDA dropped 17.1% to $780 million, which represents a decline of $160 million from a year ago.

"While we continue to see near-term demand pressure across portions of the parks business, including in Orlando and certain international markets, we view these trends as temporary rather than structural due to the confluence of a few factors," said Comcast co-CEO **Mike Cavanagh**.

"In addition to the macroeconomic and geopolitical headwinds we have referenced in the past, we believe two other factors have contributed to this recent softness. First, we believe competitors were quicker to anticipate and recognize softness in demand and adapt their marketing strategies," he added. "Second, we continue to work through capacity challenges and ride throughput at **Epic Universe**, given the complexities of opening the most technologically advanced theme park ever built."

InCord recognized as "Top Workplace"

COLCHESTER, Conn. — **InCord** has been recognized as one of the *Hartford Courant*'s "Top Workplaces," earning the Manufacturing Industry Award along with recognition for Purpose & Values, Employee Well-Being and Employee Appreciation.

InCord has received this award every year since 2011. The recognition is based on employee feedback about leadership, workplace culture, communication and the overall employee experience. The Manufacturing Industry Award recognizes organizations that have built people-first workplace cultures within the manufacturing sector, highlighting employers that create environments where employees can grow, contribute, and thrive.

For InCord, the recognition reflects a culture intentionally built around its people, purpose and values.

"Thirty years ago, the founders of InCord had a vision: to create an exemplary workplace where employees feel safe, valued and empowered," said **Meredith Ritz Shay**, CEO & owner of InCord. "We believe in focusing on people and process, delivering quality products and always doing the right thing. Thank you to our employees for believing in this vision and bringing it to life every day. To our customers, thank you for your trust and partnership. We believe that when employees feel valued and empowered, our customers experience the difference."

IAAPA launches insurance solution

ORLANDO — **IAAPA** has announced the launch of **IAAPA Insurance Solutions**, a new licensed insurance agency established through a joint venture between IAAPA and **Higginbotham Insurance Agency**. The insurance will provide members with access to insurance and risk management support specifically designed for the attractions industry.

IAAPA's Board of Directors supported the program in response to an increasingly challenging insurance market, where rates have risen, carriers have pulled back from certain classes of business and the attractions industry has lacked a unified voice in the insurance marketplace. IAAPA Insurance Solutions will work directly with IAAPA members to identify shared risks and exposures and develop group insurance programs tailored to the unique needs of the attractions industry.

The program is initially launching in North America and is available now to members in the United States; IAAPA membership is the only eligibility requirement.



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SAFETY & OPERATIONS

IRT opens European office — pages 76-77 / SafeStrap launches aid for riders with prosthetics — pages 84-85

Canada's Wonderland, Vekoma rework coaster from rail to restraint

Flight Deck SLC is revitalized as new DareDeviler

AT: *Jack Lathrop*
Special to Amusement Today



New Vekoma seats pair a lap bar and restraint vests with a stepless redundant locking system (above left). Targeted track refinements smoothed the ride without changing its layout, speed or inversions (above right). COURTESY CANADA'S WONDERLAND

VAUGHAN, Ontario, Canada — Thirty-one years in, **Flight Deck** needed more than a fresh coat of paint. **Canada's Wonderland** gave it one anyway, along with corrected track, new trains and a new ride control system. The **Vekoma** Suspended Looping Coaster (SLC) returned for the 2026 season as **The DareDeviler**, and the work behind the new name offers a road map for the many first-generation SLCs now nearing 30 years of service.

"We believe in balancing investment in major new attractions with meaningful improvements to the rides our guests have enjoyed for decades," said **Christopher Mortensen**, park president at Canada's Wonderland. "Following the introduction of **AlpenFury**, The DareDeviler was an opportunity to take a classic attraction and give it a fresh experience through new trains, targeted track refinements and a completely reimagined theme."

The engineering brief was ride comfort, and Vekoma framed the options plainly. "There are generally two ways to achieve a significant improvement in ride comfort: by implementing track improvements and/or by installing new trains," said **Harm Schreurs**, service relation manager at Vekoma. "Naturally, the best overall result can be achieved by combining track improvements with new trains, as both measures contribute to a smoother and more enjoyable rider experience."

Canada's Wonderland chose both.

The track work started with a ride, not a spreadsheet. Vekoma's track specialists rode the coaster several times to flag problem areas, then surveyed them using 3D measurement. Vekoma's engineering team compared the measured banking lines against the theoretical banking lines from the original design and wrote repair procedures for each location.

Minor deviations were corrected in place by Vekoma's specialists using localized heating. Larger ones required more invasive work: track ties were cut and re-welded to bring the rail back to its intended geometry. The park's maintenance team carried out the welding, while Vekoma handled the remaining track activities. The track was then realigned to restore correct gauge, every weld was subjected to non-destructive testing (NDT), and G-force measurements confirmed the ride's forces stayed within design boundaries.

"It was a very targeted process," Mortensen said. The result is a smoother ride on the same layout, speed and inversions.

The trains are where the most visible changes live. The DareDeviler's train is largely similar to Flight Deck's above the wheels, but Vekoma has replaced much of the fabricated steel with machined components, sharply reducing the number of welded connections. The biggest difference is in the suspended seat assemblies. "The previous suspended seat frames consisted of numerous plates welded together, whereas the new design utilizes machined blocks and therefore requires only a limited number of welds," Schreurs said. For a maintenance department, fewer welds means fewer joints to inspect over the life of the train.

The new seats use Vekoma's latest-generation design: a stepless redundant locking system and an ergonomic lap bar paired with restraint vests, replacing the over-the-shoulder harnesses that defined the first-generation SLC ride experience. Schreurs said the configuration provides "optimal rider containment while ensuring a comfortable seating position and a more open riding experience." Mortensen said it chose the trains specifically for the seating and the more open feel of the vests.

The trains were designed as a drop-in retrofit and required no track modifications. The seats did not fit quite so neatly. The new suspended seat assemblies carry a larger clearance envelope than the originals, so Canada's Wonderland had to modify several columns to provide the required clearances.

The controls posed a bigger question. Ordinarily, Vekoma would integrate a new train control system with the existing ride control system. On a ride more than 30 years old, many original components were no longer available, so the park replaced the entire control system instead. Schreurs said the decision both simplified integrating the new trains and improved the long-term maintainability and reliability of the attraction.

Guests noticed. Mortensen reported ridership up roughly 20% through the summer compared with recent Flight Deck seasons, despite the new trains carrying fewer seats. Queue lengths and wait times more than doubled.

"Perhaps most importantly, we've received strong feedback from guests about the improved ride comfort, which was a key objec-

See VEKOMA, page 74



VEKOMA

Continued from page 73

tive of the transformation," Mortensen said. "Overall, both the operating metrics and guest sentiment have exceeded our expectations."

The retheme gave the hardware a story to sell. Tied to the park's Grande World Expo area, The DareDeviler borrows from 1920s barnstorming, complete with a biplane, audio effects and new colors, and the relaunch extended to merchandise and The DareDeviler IPA with Something in the Water Brewing Co. "The goal was to give longtime riders a new reason to rediscover the coaster while introducing it to a new generation," Mortensen said.

For operators still running first-generation SLCs, the lessons reach well beyond Vaughan. Schreurs noted that Vekoma's fabrication methods have changed dramatically since the mid-1990s. Rails are now shaped on a 3D bending machine with enough accuracy that post-adjustment is almost unnecessary; in the past, roughly 80% to 90% of all rail sections required realignment after bending.





Above left, Park President Christopher Mortensen (center) cuts the ribbon on the revitalized DareDeviler. Despite fewer seats per train, ridership rose roughly 20% over recent Flight Deck seasons. COURTESY CANADA'S WONDERLAND

That gap explains why older SLCs can often be improved substantially through targeted track corrections alone. Vekoma was candid that it is not always enough. "There are situations where track corrections alone are not sufficient, or where the steel structure has deteriorated to a point where replacement becomes the best, or even the only, viable solution," Schreurs said.

Trains are the ride's largest wear item, and Schreurs said operators whose upper train structures remain sound often replace only the suspended seat assemblies. Some parks run one train with original seats and one with the new design, and guests frequently wait for the newer train rather than board the older one, with the open lap bar a particular draw. Control system replacement has become another common upgrade, driven by component obsolescence and the diagnostic capabilities of current systems. All modern Vekoma control systems include Ewon remote access as standard, letting the company's engineers diagnose problems and push software changes without an immediate site visit.

"By carefully selecting the most appropriate combination of track improvements, train upgrades and control system modernization, operators can ensure that guests continue to enjoy these iconic attractions for many years to come," Schreurs said.

Canada's Wonderland is not committing to a formula. "Every attraction has its own history and characteristics, so decisions about future investment will depend on the individual ride and the opportunities available to enhance the guest experience," Mortensen said. "This project is a great example of how we can honor an attraction's legacy while finding new ways to make it relevant for today's guests."



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International Ride Training launches its new European office in Spain

AT: *Pam Sherborne*
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

MADRID, Spain — International Ride Training Attractions Consulting SLU (IRT Attractions Consulting), the new wholly owned subsidiary of International Ride Training LLC (IRT) that was recently launched for its European clients, is now open for business and has already begun working with clients throughout Europe.

IRT, a recognized leader in ride operational safety, training, auditing, certification and consulting for the attractions industry, made the announcement about the newly formed company last month.

The new company will allow IRT to better serve its growing client base across continental Europe, said Erik Beard, managing member and general counsel of IRT and administrator of IRT Attractions Consulting. The new company will provide all the same services its parent company provides, such as ride and aquatic operations training, safety education, auditing, advisory services and operational support.

It will provide the onsite training, auditing and advisory services, interactive safety education, leadership development, standard operating procedure development and safety consulting just as its parent company does now.

It will also be holding its International Ride Operations Certification (iROC) program in Europe. Details are still being worked out for the first one, but it is expected to be held in spring 2027. The iROC program focuses on ride and aquatic operator safety, efficiency and professionalism.

"Europe has been a key driver of IRT's growth over the last three years," Beard said. "In January 2022, we had zero European clients and, aside from an occasional one-off project, we rarely set foot on the continent.

"Fast forward just a few years and we currently have client relationships with more than 20 amusement parks and water parks in eight different countries," he said. "And we are expanding our services to new clients and countries every year. We always strive to provide the highest level of client service and, given the volume of work we now have, we thought having a consistent, local presence was the natural next step in providing the level of service our clients expect from IRT."

Beard said IRT chose Spain after considering a number of factors. First and most importantly, the company currently has

See SPAIN, page 77



IRT recently announced the launch of its new, wholly-owned European subsidiary, International Ride Training Attractions Consulting SLU, and it is already up and running. Erik Beard (pictured left alongside Anna Danau, IRT's director of strategic engagement) is the administrator of this newly formed division. COURTESY IRT



SPAIN

Continued from page 76

more clients in Spain than in any other country in Europe, including four facilities certified under iROC program and two others for whom are provided other safety and efficiency consulting services.

Secondly, Beard said: "Financial considerations were also relevant. While the tax structure throughout Europe tends to be more burdensome than in the United States, Spain offers certain tax benefits for small businesses that made it a comparatively attractive jurisdiction. Finally, I'd be remiss to overlook that Spain is simply a beautiful country with amazing people and a rich culture. While Europe is full of amazing cities and countries, Spain, and Madrid in particular, really stand out."

Beard said he and Anna Danau, IRT's director of strategic engagement, have been to Europe more times than he can count over the last three years, working with current clients and meeting with potential prospects to make them more aware of IRT and how the company can support their operations.

IRT has also attended the IAAPA Europe Expo for the last several years and exhibited for the first time at the 2026 show in London.

"While all that has been fruitful, our clients have been the most important factor in cultivating new relationships," Beard said. "We've are blessed to have incredible relationships with some of the finest companies — Tivoli Gardens (Denmark), Parque Reunidos (Spain), Portaventura (Spain), the Looping Group (France) — in the European attractions industry. We are so grateful that they have enough confidence in our work to recommend us to their peers in the European industry."



IRT rolled out its International Ride Operations Certification (iROC) program at Slagharen in the Netherlands. COURTESY IRT

As to the Madrid office space, Beard said some details are still being worked out.

"Currently, our office is a shared space with our legal team that has helped get us off the ground in Madrid," he said. "As we expand and settle in, that could certainly change, but the arrangement works perfectly for our current size and scope. We will eventually have permanent staffing based in Spain, but the precise timeline is still being worked out."

In the meantime, Beard will be overseeing European operations and will split time between the U.S. and Spain.

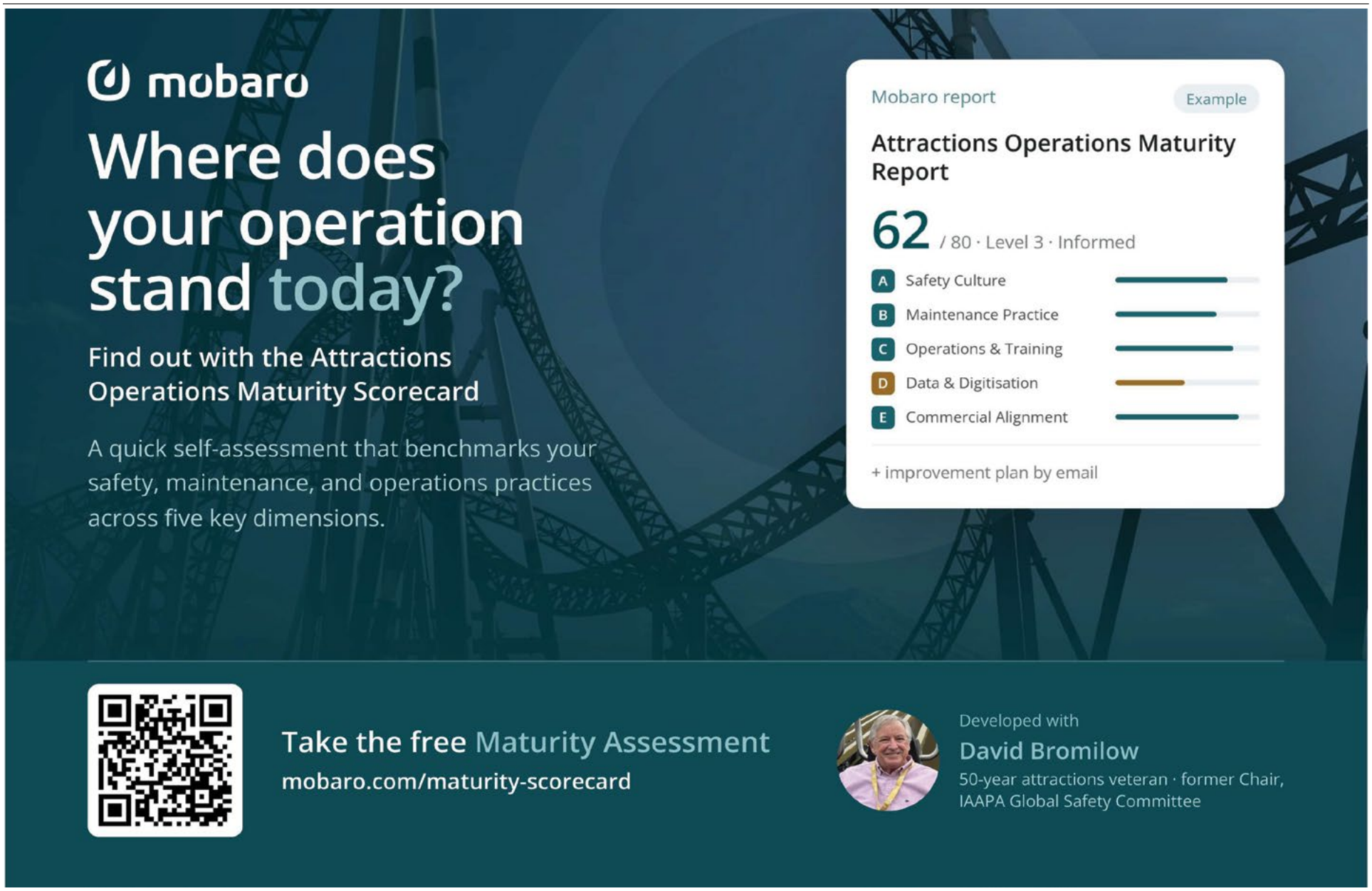
"Last summer, I spent almost three straight months in Europe to ensure that our clients there had easily accessible support locally during the busiest time of their operating year," Beard said.

In addition, he said they rotated other members of the IRT staff into Europe on an as-needed basis. The company will continue that model until final decisions are made on permanent placement and/or hiring in Spain.

IRT Attractions Consulting SLU is a completely separate but related company to the U.S.-based parent. IRT co-owners Cindee Huddy and Patty Beazley are involved in managing and operating the new company just as they are with the U.S.-based IRT.

"In fact, Cindee has already conducted an on-site training in Denmark and has been hard at work making arrangements for our inaugural European operations safety conference that will be held in 2027," Beard said. "Patty is integral to our certification and auditing functions globally, including in Europe. We have a great team that has helped IRT succeed for nearly 20 years, and we want that same team to bring their energy, passion and commitment to IRT Consulting and our European clientele."

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Pittsburgh Zoo and Aquarium is working to save the red panda

AT: *Pam Sherborne*
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

PITTSBURGH, Penn. — The **Pittsburgh Zoo and Aquarium**, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, got its first red panda, Xia, on August 6, 2012. That lone female red panda not only created excitement among visitors to the zoo, but also helped create a conservation effort by staff at the Pittsburgh Zoo called Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) Red Panda program.

Red pandas are a popular and charismatic species that garners favor among zoo visitors. Xia is now part of a pair of female red pandas at the zoo. The other, Azula, was brought to the zoo in 2023.

Of course, the red pandas aren't the only animals at the zoo. The Pittsburgh Zoo and Aquarium boasts approximately 14,000 individual animals representing more than 600 species, most of which are small fish and invertebrates in the aquarium. It welcomes 900,000 visitors annually.





The Pittsburgh Zoo and Aquarium has created a SAFE program for the Red Panda (above). The zoo has workers trained at a facility in Nepal (right) to help out with the Red Panda SAFE program. COURTESY PITTSBURGH ZOO AND AQUARIUM

But the red pandas are special, particularly with the challenges they face in the wild.

The SAFE Red Panda program isn't the only SAFE program out there. SAFE is a collaborative global conservation initiative launched in 2015 by the **Association of Zoos and Aquariums** (AZA). It unites over 200 AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums, field-based conservation partners and millions of annual visitors to protect threatened wildlife. There are dozens of SAFE programs covering animals like African penguins, Asian elephants, black rhinoceros, cheetahs, gorillas, sharks, sea turtles, monarch butterflies and radiated tortoises.

The SAFE program involves habitat restoration, anti-poaching support, community awareness, scientific research and direct species reintroductions. Each species program creates a strict three- to five-year action plan with clear goals for field conservation, public education and funding. The program shifts the focus from managing animals inside zoo walls to actively restoring and protecting wild populations and their natural habitats.

The SAFE Red Panda program is new.

"We are a founding

▸ **See PANDA, page 80**



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AIMS International announces Jamie Gaffney set to deliver keynote address at 2027 Safety Seminar

AIMS International has announced that **Jamie Gaffney**, corporate vice president of maintenance and engineering for **Six Flags Entertainment Corporation**, will deliver the keynote address at the 2027 AIMS International Safety Seminar. The seminar takes place January 9–14, 2027, at its new location, the **Rosen Centre Hotel** in Orlando, Florida, directly across from the **Orange County Convention Center**.

Gaffney brings more than 35 years of amusement industry leadership, combining technical expertise with a practical operational approach focused on guest safety, ride reliability and maintenance performance. Previously, he served as **Cedar Fair**'s corporate vice president of maintenance and engineering and held leadership positions at **Kings Island** and **Carowinds**. His experience includes major attraction projects such as Thunder Striker, Orion and Mystic Timbers.

"Jamie understands how engineering standards and maintenance practices translate into safe, reliable operations every day," said **Randall Wilke**, AIMS International board president. "His experience leading teams and major attraction projects will bring a valuable perspective to our attendees and reinforce the importance of continued learning at every level of our industry."

The seminar brings industry professionals together for education, hands-on learning and networking focused on ride safety, inspection, maintenance, operations and risk management. Attendees can tailor their schedules to their responsibilities and professional development goals while connecting with instructors and industry colleagues to share experiences and bring practical knowledge back to their organizations.

New for 2027, the Maintenance Level III track offers advanced education for experienced maintenance professionals and those in leadership roles, including managers, supervisors and directors.

"The annual seminar reflects our commitment to helping amusement industry professionals continue to grow and strengthen safety across the industry," said Amy Lowenstein, executive director of AIMS International.

In addition to the seminar, AIMS offers the Academy of Amusement Risk Management, Safety and Security (AARMSS), built around safety, security, emergency management, and risk management. Applications are still being accepted at aimsintl.org/education/aarmss.

The 2027 seminar will run Saturday, January 9, through Thursday, January 14, rather than the traditional Sunday to Friday schedule. Attendees should adjust their travel plans accordingly.

For seminar details and registration information, visit aimsintl.org.

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



PANDA

Continued from page 78

member of the SAFE Red Panda program, with two of the four steering committee members working at our zoo," said **Jenn Torpie**, Pittsburgh Zoo's vice president of Conservation, Education and Community Engagement. "The program plan was published in 2025."

According to Torpie, the SAFE Red Panda program has two goals. One is to support the conservation of red pandas in their natural habitat. The second is raising public awareness of red pandas and their conservation needs.

"Many of our conservation projects support the **Red Panda Network**, our primary field partner," Torpie said. "That includes supporting feral dog vaccination campaigns, GIS data collection and analysis on red panda home range movement and testing canopy bridges to help red pandas traverse fragmented habitats."



The Pittsburgh Zoo and Aquarium, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, held a ribbon cutting ceremony for its new entrance in April, 2026. COURTESY PITTSBURGH ZOO AND AQUARIUM

Currently, there are approximately 134 red pandas in 100 AZA zoos in North America. According to a report released by Pittsburgh Zoo, it is now providing leadership for collective impact for 27 zoos and other institutions that have joined forces in the SAFE Red Panda program.

"Using the skills that zoological institutions have with conservation science, husbandry, animal health and behavior and education, the SAFE Red Panda plan unites zoos and their collective expertise to help address the threats facing red pandas in the wild," the release stated.

Pittsburgh Zoo Director of Conservation **Shafkat Khan** is the vice program leader of the **Conservation Action Lead of the SAFE** program, which allows the zoo to have even more of an impact.

Lauren Kane, the Pittsburgh Zoo's senior associate veterinarian, is co-leader of SAFE Red Panda's One Health workgroup that unites zoo veterinarians, veterinary technicians and animal care professionals to confront this challenge and design and operate a campaign that vaccinates feral and domestic dogs against canine distemper virus and rabies, a challenge for red pandas in the wild.

"Continually integrating the stories of this SAFE's work and that of our field partners into educational programs at partner institutions will be a vital part of this SAFE's success," Torpie said. "Additionally, it will support partner institutions in implementing SAFE Red Panda activities with their home audiences."

SAFE Red Panda is the 41st SAFE Program added to the AZA's roster.

The red panda is very vulnerable to climate change as well as habitat loss. Populations in its home range of Nepal, India, Bhutan, Myanmar, and southern China dropped by about 50% in the last two decades.

Population growth in impoverished communities and development in Nepal are fueling the decimation of red panda habitat. The Zoo's partnership with the Red Panda Network works toward a solution of getting people to value the forest and providing economic benefits to them.

The Pittsburgh Zoo and Aquarium participates in 11 total SAFE programs, including African Lion, Sharks and Rays, African Penguin, Gorilla and North American Songbirds.

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SafeStrap launches its aid for riders with prosthetics at Efteling

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com





Riders with prosthetics gathered for the launch of the SafeStrap at Efteling (above left). Passing with flying colors, the test aboard Baron 1898 (above right) let prosthetic users enjoy the dive coaster. COURTESY EFTELING

KAATSHEUVEL, Netherlands — Inclusion in the amusement industry has made tremendous leaps in the last few decades. The implementation of wheelchair ramps of years past was just the beginning. Inclusivity has become a top-of-mind topic for both parks and manufacturers.

It was unfortunate that many people were turned away owing to certain physical conditions. While fitting properly within restraints is still vital to the safety process, a new development has been introduced that might offer the joy of thrills to a formerly restricted audience.

Often, people with leg prostheses are prohibited from riding or must remove them in certain situations. A new approach is rectifying that.

If a prosthesis is worn during the ride, there is a risk of it coming loose, compromising the safety of both the prosthesis user and other visitors.

Veerle, a young **Efteling** fan, spoke with her rehabilitation physician, who contacted the park. Her wish set something in motion. Her rehabilitation physician, **Iris van Wijk** of **De Hoogstraat Rehabilitation and Orthopaedic Technology**, joined forces with patient association **KorterMaarKrachtig** to discuss the issue with Efteling and **Delft University of Technology** (TU Delft). As part of her graduation project at TU Delft, **India Hoekman** then developed a safe and innovative solution: SafeStrap.

"We are proud to have developed this solution together with our partners and to now be able to use it to further improve accessibility at Efteling," said Park and Resorts Director **Nicole Scheffers**. "We hope SafeStrap will be adopted much more widely, giving people with a leg prosthesis greater safety and freedom. We will also be pleased to recommend SafeStrap to other amusement parks in the Netherlands and abroad."

SafeStrap was tested at Efteling in early September and became available on October 1. During the launch, several people with leg prostheses boarded Baron 1898, a **Bolliger & Mabillard** dive coaster. Participants wore both their prostheses and SafeStrap.

Riders with prosthetic legs go to the designated entrance for guests with disabilities. There, a staff member fits the rider with the safety strap and checks it for security. The safety strap keeps the leg prosthesis securely in place during the ride. Following several development and testing phases, practical trials at Efteling and a safety assessment process, SafeStrap is now ready for use.

Guests at Efteling are informed of the innovation's availability at specific rides on the park's website and app.

The park has approved the device for four rides

See EFTELING, page 85

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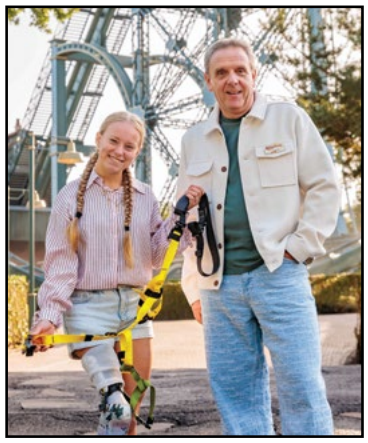
EFTELING

Continued from page 84

where guests are in seats where legs dangle freely: the Baron 1898 coaster, a swing ride, new-for-2026 **Zierer** family drops towers (Hooghmoed) and a new **Vekoma** flat ride opening at the beginning of winter.

"From the very beginning, we worked together with prosthesis users, healthcare professionals and Efteling to develop a solution that is both safe and practical for users and amusement parks," said Hoekman. "I find it incredibly special that the product I designed as part of my final-year project is actually being used now."

Veerle is delighted: "Now I can finally ride Baron 1898 with my friends without any hassle."





Veerle and Efteling Safety Advisor Frank Bersch are seen with the new innovation (above left). The new-for-2026 Zierer family drop towers, Hooghmoed (above right), is another attraction on which the SafeStrap is available. COURTESY EFTELING

Following its launch at Efteling, the SafeStrap is now available worldwide to prosthetic users and theme parks. Parks wishing to use the SafeStrap must, in consultation with their own regulations, obtain approval for its use on each ride. Efteling was the first amusement park to introduce SafeStrap use, but the goal is to see more inclusion worldwide.

SafeStrap was developed through a collaboration between Efteling, Delft University of Technology (TU Delft), De Hoogstraat Rehabilitation and Orthopaedic Technology, patient association KorterMaarKrachtig, **Edge Safety**, certification body **TÜV NORD Netherlands** and people with lived experience. Edge Safety is responsible for the production and sale of SafeStrap.

There are both adult and child sizes of the strap, and guests are permitted to bring their own. Park operators can contact **Vekoma Rides** Parts and Services for the distribution of SafeStrap. Specific training for staff and clear communication to guests are the next steps once a park wishes to make SafeStrap available. The product should be inspected annually. It can also be used for zipline parks, skydiving companies and bicycle rental centers.

While prosthetic users make up a tiny fraction of a theme park's audience, advancements such as these emphasize a moment that shows what ultimately matters: enabling people with specific physical challenges to take part and enjoy a day at an amusement park.

"At Efteling, we aim to make every guest feel welcome and enjoy a carefree day," Scheffers told *Amusement Today*. "At the same time, our attractions must meet a wide range of safety requirements. Without SafeStrap or her prosthesis, Veerle would have needed assistance in the event of an evacuation. With SafeStrap, she can now experience the attraction while wearing her leg prosthesis, just like other guests. The SafeStrap is safe and gives guests the freedom to enjoy attractions with confidence."

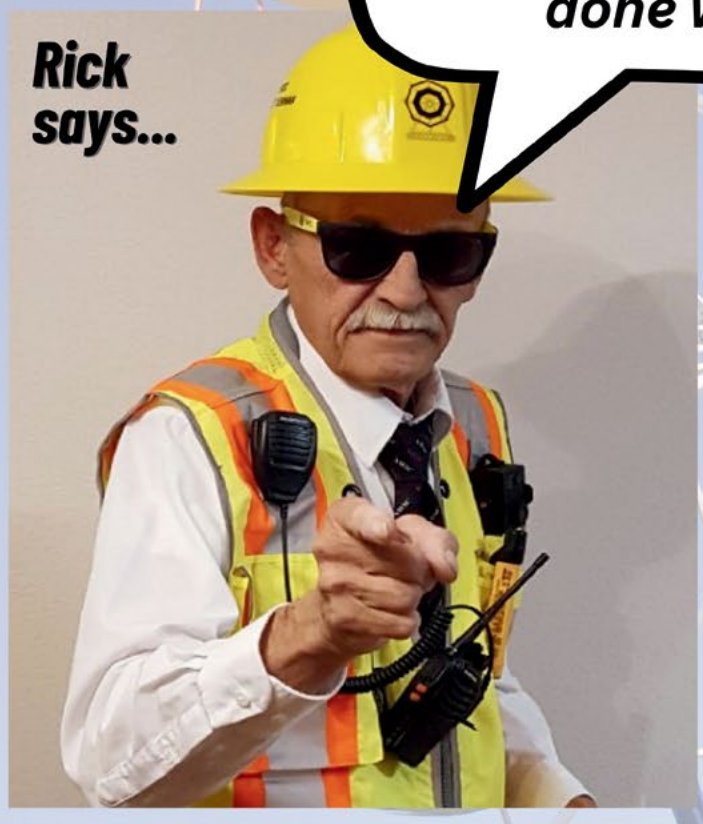


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▸Big Fresno Fair sees dip in attendance — page 90 / Kissel Entertainment adds KMG Move it — pages 92-94

Luehrs' Ideal Rides carries on family tradition, celebrates 70th year

AT: *Ron Gustafson*
Special to Amusement Today

COLLINSVILLE, Ill. — **Andrew Schoendienst, Jr.** is thankful for the advice his late grandfather, **H. W. "Hub" Luehrs**, gave him years ago before he accepted a full-time position with the family-owned carnival.

Today, Schoendienst, 39, is general manager of **Luehrs' Ideal Rides**, a mid-sized show celebrating its 70th anniversary in providing midways for fairs and festivals in the nation's heartland.

"I was very fortunate as a child to be on the road with my grandfather and parents (**Lorelei** and **Andy Schoendienst),"** he reflected. "I was the youngest of Hub's grandchildren, and he made sure that I loved the business. He took me for ice cream every day, and by the time I was 7, he had me help set up the Dragon Wagon (roller coaster) with two others on the show. I loved the physical labor."

According to Schoendienst, Hub Luehrs had a strict rule all of the children in the family had to follow.





The Luehrs' Ideal Rides midway shined at night during the 2026 Tippecanoe County 4-H Fair in Lafayette, Indiana (above left). The display on the Century Wheel (inset) highlights Luehrs' Ideal Rides 70th anniversary celebration. COURTESY SCENIC VALLEY PHOTOGRAPHY; LEUHRS' IDEAL RIDES

"He insisted we go to college and then decide if we wanted to come back to the family business," he said. "I had nine cousins on the carnival, and we all grew up on the road together."

As with most carnival families, Hub and wife, **Winnifred**'s (Winnie), children, **William, Jon, Jean** and Lorelei, all worked in some capacity with the family-owned business while growing up. All four also attended college. Jon passed away in 2013 and William in 2018. Winnifred Luehrs died in 1983 and Hub in 1999.

In 1996, Lorelei and husband Andy Schoendienst and **Jean** and husband **Joe Clair** purchased the company, thus cementing a future for the carnival due to their combined extensive expertise in running the operation.



The Centrifuge is one of the most popular rides on the midway. COURTESY LEUHRS' IDEAL RIDES

Return after college

After obtaining a Bachelor of Arts Degree from the University of Missouri in 2009, Andrew Schoendienst, Jr. returned to the carnival as part of the third generation, taking care of game operations and moving some of the rides.

"My parents came to my graduation, and Dad made me a novel offer, and I had to work my way up in the business," he said of the transition. "I stayed in the bunkhouse at first and eventually started a partnership with my father with rides, games and food. It all blossomed from there."

Schoendienst and wife, **Benna**, also now have their own concessions on the show.

Luehrs' Ideal Rides opens the first full week of April in the St. Louis area with a route that runs until late October. The carnival supplements the midways at the **Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo**, Houston, Texas, in March and the **Iowa State Fair**, Des Moines, in August. The core of the show's route is Missouri, Illinois, Indiana and Iowa.

An 'Ideal' midway

When the business started 70 years ago, it hit the road with a meager five rides.

Today, Luehrs' Ideal Rides has an attraction lineup appealing to all ages, including Extreme, a **Technical Park** Street Fighter; Yo-Yo, Zipper, Century Wheel and Pharaohs Fury (**Chance Rides**); Baja Buggy and Crazy Bus (**Zamperla**); Dragon Wagon, Cobra coaster, Jungle Twist coaster, Avalanche, Centrifuge and Sizzler themed as Cyclone (**Wisdom Rides of America**); Tilt-A-Whirl and Dizzy Dragons (**Larson International**); Fun Slide (**Frederiksen Industries**); VW buses themed as Surfer Dude Train and Flying Puppies (**SBF/Visa Group**); Magic Maze (**Owen Trailers**); Scooter bumper cars (**Majestic Manufacturing**); and Hang Glider (**Battech Industries**).

"Our carousel is rather unique," Schoendienst said of the three-abreast ride. "The center is **Allan Herschell** with Chance horses and scenery on a Wisdom mount."

The show took delivery of a new generator from **Semcor Manufacturing**, La Porte, Indiana, this summer and has a new walk-through fun house, described as "the first of its kind," coming from **Rides USA**, Houston, Texas.

Food concessions — generally around eight at any given location — are show-

▸ See LUEHRS, page 88

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LUEHRS
Continued from page 87

owned by the Schoendiensts and **Kristin Clair Atkins**. A dozen games are also all owned "in-house and very well received," according to Schoendienst.

Ahead of the game

"When the fair season starts, we don't have much time between spots, so we have to plan way in advance," he said of the logistics in keeping with his grandfather's traditions. "We get equipment to the next spot and set up on location. Following Hub's format, we are done before evening, so the staff has time to rest before the crowds come out. We're steadily growing alongside some of our larger events and try to maximize our operations everywhere we go."

Key to getting the show moved and managed on the lot are **Wayne Closson**, who oversees ride supervision, and James **Tieman**, who heads up transportation and is in his 40th year with Luehrs.

As general manager, Schoendienst also touted the show's clean reputation and employee standards, saying: "We don't allow piercings or long hair and require stringent drug testing and background checks.

We're very fortunate in maintaining long-term relationships with some of our locations. We just finished our 70th year at the **Decatur County 4-H Fair** (Greensburg, Indiana). We know every business in town, and they know us. There are no surprises from anybody."

Luehrs has also provided the midway at July's **Tippecanoe County 4-H Fair** in Lafayette, Indiana, for more than 40 consecutive years.

Committees at many of the fairs serviced by Luehrs' Ideal Rides are comprised of volunteers, Schoendienst asserted.

"We deal with a lot of volunteer committees, especially in Indiana," he said. "About 90 percent are volunteer, even at the larger fairs. They do an incredible job and have a passion for 4-H."



Kids and familes enjoy the Flying Puppies along the Luehrs midway. COURTESY LEUHRS' IDEAL RIDES

Ride deals

Advance sale ride ticketing continues to grow yearly for the show, Schoendienst said, with a $10 discount on a $30 22-ticket pack. Rides require two to four tickets each, with Extreme needing five tickets. The carnival also offers wristbands for $30 and $35 at select locations. Other specials include one ticket per ride and two people ride for the price of one.

"We'll be launching a new customized system next year to generate more online sales," he said. "We're very excited about it."

The show winters in Caseyville, Illinois, a suburb of St. Louis, where all of the equipment is stored and worked on inside.

OABA ties

Hub Luehrs is credited as being one of the founders of the **Outdoor Amusement Business Association** (OABA) in 1965 and served on the board for many years and was chairman in 1980. He was inducted into the association's inaugural hall of fame in 2001.

Andrew (Andy) F. Schoendienst, who serves as Luehrs' company president, went into the hall of fame in 2023, while **Jean Clair**, the carnival's secretary, was inducted in 2015.

Lorelei Schoendienst is treasurer of the family business, Joseph Clair is vice president, and **Kristin Clair Atkins** handles human resources, marketing and social media.

Andrew Schoendienst, Jr., serves on the OABA Board of Directors and is an **AIMS International** certified level 2 operations technician and is also certified through the **National Association of Amusement Ride Safety Officials**.

Luehrs' Ideal Rides is also a recipient of OABA's prestigious Circle of Excellence, signifying the carnival is among the best in the industry.

●luehrs.com



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2026 Big Fresno Fair sees dip in attendance, but fun remains high

AT: *Pam Sherborne*
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

FRESNO, Calif. — While fair officials at the **Big Fresno Fair,** Fresno, California, which was held October 7 to 18, are still auditing the 2026 attendance figures, they are anticipating the final numbers to be slightly below the 2025 figures. But even as they anticipate the numbers to be below their annual average of 500,000, officials report a successful event.

"We are pleased with the strong community support throughout our 12-day event," said **Danielle Griffin**, marketing and communications. "We welcomed thousands of families and visitors who came together to enjoy everything the Big Fresno Fair has to offer."

Griffin said there are always several factors that can influence fair attendance.

"It's difficult to attribute changes to any one issue," she said. "However, we recognize that rising costs of everyday necessities, inflation and continued economic uncertainty are impacting household budgets. Families are being more selective about how they spend their discretionary income, particularly when it comes to entertainment and recreational activities."

And while unseasonably warm weather may have also played a role, Griffin said fair officials remain focused on providing a safe, affordable and enjoyable experience, offering numerous promotions and savings opportunities throughout the 12-day event.

"We are grateful for the continued support of our community and everyone who joined us for the 2026 Big Fresno Fair," she said.

The 2026 Big Fresno Fair featured a huge array of entertainment and attractions. Some highlights included the addition of a PRCA-sanctioned rodeo and a Demolition Derby. The concert lineup was very popular. It featured the return of comedian **Gabriel** "Fluffy" **Iglesias**, **Tower of Power and WAR**, **Bush**, the fair's first-ever EDM concert featuring **Diplo** and a sold-out performance by **Los Tigres del Norte**.

The fair also hosted its Second Annual Big Fresno Fair Car Show, featuring 75 cars, trucks, motorcycles and bicycles, along with the 11th Annual Beer and Wine Fest, which welcomed more than 856 attendees and featured 41 breweries and wineries.

Another highlight was the new Midnight Manor Haunted House held in the Pop! Cultural Experience area of the fairgrounds. It featured scares and scary creatures, themed horror environments, professional make-up on skilled actors and Hollywood-quality special effects. Guests were able to explore the attraction without the live scare actors during the day. But starting at 6 p.m., the scares came to life with the full haunt experience featuring the live scare actors.

An additional highlight this year was the return of $3 Fair Bites on both Thursdays of the fair that featured bite-sized food offerings from 58 vendors. After its debut in 2021, the return of the Livin' Local Marketplace has continued to grow and provide a showcase and support for local businesses.



Attendance at the 2026 Big Fresno Fair, Fresno, California, which ran October 7 to 18, may be slightly down compared to 2025 but fair officials were very pleased with the turnout and the strong community supports. Among the attractions at this year's fair was the midway provided by Butler Amusements. The carnival fielded more than 50 rides and attractions. COURTESY BIG FRESNO FAIR



One of the highlights at the 2026 Big Fresno Fair was the addition of PRCA-sanctioned rodeo that turned out to be very popular. COURTESY BIG FRESNO FAIR

"Of course, traditional fair favorites remained at the heart of the experience, including our exciting carnival provided by longtime partner **Butler Amusements**, incredible competitive exhibits and our livestock program, which generated more than $1.6 million in auction sales to support local **4-H** and **FFA** youth," Griffin said.

Butler Amusements, which has been a partner at the Big Fresno Fair since 1981, provided over 50 rides and attractions. New to the midway this year was the Ballistic, manufactured by **Amusement Devices and Manufacturing LLC** in Iowa. This chair swing ride accommodates up to 16 riders at a time and reaches a near 45-degree angle at full speed. It features an onboard sound system with pre-ride announcements, music during the ride and post-ride announcements.

Butler Amusements' Kiddie Carnival provides a large selection of kiddie rides such as Wacky Shack Funhouse, Puppy Roll, Pirate Jet, Frog Hopper, Quad Runner and more. The Kiddie Carnival is located inside the Grandstand track with a concrete midway to make walking from ride to ride even more convenient.

There were other new attractions and experiences as well. One was the new Kids Dance Party Adventure in Kids' Town, and it was definitely a hit this year. It transformed Kids' Town into a high-energy, interactive entertainment destination designed especially for families and young fairgoers. Free with fair admission, this immersive experience featured a live DJ spinning kid-friendly hits, an illuminated LED dance floor, dynamic video wall content, bubble and fog effects and interactive games. Crowd-favorite performers, including the Drum Heads, along with the new Kiddle Karoo's Barnyard Bash, brought excitement to the stage. There was a photo booth and hands-on activities.

Another new experience was the Puppy Pals Live dog show featuring talented rescue dogs. The dogs performed stunts such as jumping rope, climbing ladders and backflips. Audience participation added non-stop surprises.

The fair also introduced the new Sip and Shop Bar in the Commerce Building, offering a relaxing spot for guests to enjoy specialty cocktails while shopping, along with the return of the Ivy Bar in the historic Paddock area.

Competitive exhibits at the 2026 event ranged from fine arts and photography to home and hobby and agriculture and livestock.

The Fresno Fair's Livestock Competitive Exhibits are in collaboration with 4-H and FFA programs. The fair reported more than 2,500 entries at the livestock show. There were almost 900 animals put up for auction across the Dairy Sale and the Jr. Livestock Auction.

The 2027 Big Fresno Fair is set for October 6-17.









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Kissel Entertainment adds heavily-themed Move-It 24 from KMG

Kolmax Plus Pigasus added, Reverchon flume refurbished

AT: *Ron Gustafson*
Special to Amusement Today





Anarchy (above left), a KMG Move It on the Kissel Entertainment midway, is one of the newest attractions for the family-owned business. The company went all out in theming Anarchy, including costumes (above right) for promotional videos and still photos. Pigasus (below) is a new family attraction with Kissel Entertainment and provided by Kolmax Plus. COURTESY KISSEL ENTERTAINMENT

LOUISVILLE, Ky. - **Kissel Entertainment** has a history of going the extra mile to present a theme park-like experience on its carnival midway.

Such was the case when the family-owned business, based in Okeana, Ohio, unveiled its newest spectacular attraction, Anarchy, at the **Kentucky State Fair** (August 20 to 30).

The ride is a Move-It 24 from Netherlands manufacturer **KMG,** and the Kissel team pulled out the stops to incorporate a doomsday theme with red and black decor and created additional publicity hype with unique operator costumes.

"It's a big hit, and they (KMG) sure hit the mark on delivery — right on time as they said," **R.A. Kissel**, chief innovations officer for the carnival, told *Amusement Today.*

"We ordered it two years ago and have a great working relationship with KMG. I told them if you get an open production slot, let us know, as we want another KMG ride."

Kissel was also enthusiastic as the ride was quickly commissioned for its debut in Kentucky.

"The inspectors loved it," he said. "We took some of the panels off so they could see the safety system inside. They were impressed."

"The theme is the big thing, and the triaxial action is amazing," **Paris Kissel**, communications consultant



▸ **See KISSEL, page 94**



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KISSEL

Continued from page 92

for Kissel Entertainment, added to the conversation with her father, R.A. "People enjoy standing out front watching it."

"The theme Paris came up with was amazing," R.A. asserted. "The red and black kind of makes it ominous, but this ride is also a rock and roll experience."

"The custom soundboard gets the crowd immersed in it," Paris added. "Raise your hands, hear your scream!"

As for the themed costumes on Anarchy, she said the ride personnel wear them only for special occasions, including promotional events.

The 24-seat attraction moves on a single trailer and can be assembled in three to four hours. Kissel Entertainment also has a KMG Swing It themed as Samurai, Inversion 12 it calls Nemesis and a Speed decked out as Alter Ego.





Kissel Entertainment spared no expense in adding a fishing camp theme to its Reverchon flume ride dubbed Swamp Splash. The overhead signs add a few chuckles as riders make their way up the inclines (above right). COURTESY KISSEL ENTERTAINMENT

Pigs do fly

By late summer, the carnival also debuted its new Pigasus attraction from **Kolmax Plus** of the Czech Republic. Incorporating Kolmax's popular Flying Elephants platform, Kissel Entertainment wanted to prove that pigs do fly and did so by having the traditional elephant seats swapped out for a colorful herd of winged porkers. The themed family ride has a capacity of 20 persons.

Making waves

R.A. Kissel was also excited to talk about the company's **Reverchon** (Samois-sur-Seine, France) flume ride, which went through a total refurbishment during the off season at winter quarters in Clanton, Alabama.

"We bought it two years ago out of Scotland and finally brought it out in June of this year," he said of the spectacular water attraction. "We went through everything, including the rollers on both conveyors, and if something needed galvanized, we went the extra mile on it."

As with many Kissel attractions, the company heavily themed the ride as Swamp Splash.

"We got rid of the old loading station features and bought used corrugated roofing, so it has a rusty, swampy look to it," he noted. "We pile a huge chain out front, which we need a crane to lift to put in place."

Adding to the Southern fishing camp theme are whimsical overhead signs on the two lifts, pelicans perched above the lighted Swamp Splash sign, and weathered clothes draped on lines.

"We use dye so the water is green, and we even have an old outhouse out front as a prop," Paris said.

The massive ride requires up to 10 loads to move over the road.

●kisselentertainment.com



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Few soggy weather days dampens State Fair of Virginia attendance

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

DOSWELL, Va. — "**The State Fair of Virginia** is held during hurricane season, so rain is often a challenge. This year's run — September 25 to October 4, 2026 — started strong and held strong until the final weekend when we experienced heavy rain on Saturday that extended into Sunday. We were amazed that 12,500 people attended on a dismal, drizzly, chilly Saturday!" said **Marlene Pierson-Jolliffe**, executive director of the State Fair of Virginia and vice president of operations at **The Meadow Event Park**.

Andy Deggeller, CEO of **Deggeller Attractions**, echoed the same sentiment. He felt the hurricane remnants kept a lot of folks away. "It was fairly good up to that point."

Final attendance came in at 200,000, down from 215,000 during the previous run of the 10-day fair. The theme this year was "Virginia's Best of Show."

The midway operator brought in 50 rides, of which less than half were kiddie rides that were located in the designated Kiddieland area. It also had numerous games and food stands on the midway to complement the ride equipment.

New to this fair were the Sandstorm roller coaster (**Cavazza Diego**) as well as Buccaneer, a mini pirate ship (**Mulligan**). The most popular rides were Sandstorm, Hydra (**KMG** Fireball), Wave Swinger (**Zierer**) and a carousel (**Chance Rides**).

Deggeller enjoyed his experience with the fair. "Excellent. They are great people. Marlene is great to work with. The fair is always looking for ways to improve. They are always receptive to new ideas and their implementation. It's great when you have a partner that is willing to help with promotions on getting more people through the gates and on the rides."

Pierson-Jolliffe was pleased with the carnival. "Exceptional. Deggeller Attractions has been a partner for over 50 years. We challenge each other to look for improvements every day!"

What sets this fair apart from others is its beautiful location in Doswell. It has a "country feel" with grass and trees while being within an hour of Washington, D.C. and 20 minutes north of downtown Richmond.

"We created a State Fair Cares program three years ago and encourage early visits to the event (10 a.m. to 1 p.m.) with the donation of a canned food item or school supplies. We are owned by the **Virginia Farm Bureau**, and members get a gate discount and food discounts. There are intentional efforts to help grow Farm Bureau memberships within a two-hour drive time of the fair," explained Pierson-Jolliffe.



Nighttime was ablaze with lights and colors on the ride midway. Deggeller brought in 50 rides for the fair this year. COURTESY STATE FAIR OF VIRGINIA

The fair relies heavily on digital content and strategies. Of the $50,000

▸ **See VIRGINIA, page 97**





MIDWAYSCENE

AT: B. Derek Shaw
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The **Kentucky State Fair** in Louisville saw its largest attendance in more than two decades this year.

Across 11 days of operation, 642,240 guests visited the fairgrounds. This is the most in over two decades. Organizers said the fair welcomed Kentuckians from all 120 counties, celebrating the state's agriculture and America's 250th anniversary.

"For 122 years this fair has been a place where people from all 120 counties come together, and that tradition is worth protecting," said **Michael Berry**, interim president and CEO of **Kentucky Venues**, in a release. "Setting our best attendance mark in more than two decades, with nearly 40,000 entries and record sponsorship support, shows how Kentuckians connect with our mission. Our partners, sponsors, volunteers and Team Kentucky made it happen, and they deserve every bit of the credit."

The theme for the 2027 fair was also announced: "All the Fair You Can Bear." It pays tribute to the fair's mascot, Fair Bear.

The next edition of the fair will run from August 19 to 29, 2027.

•

The **Outdoor Amusement Business Association** (OABA) is launching a new history book, *The Great American Midway: Stories of Carnivals and the Families Behind Them*. The OABA has partnered with author/editor **John Thurston** to preserve stories of 26 carnival industry businesses in the first volume of the book.

Those in this edition include **Amusements of America**, **Bates Brothers Amusement Company**, **Berk Concessions Supply**, **Blomsness - Thebault Enterprises**, **Bob's Space Racers**, **Butler Amusements**,

Conklin Shows, **Deggeller Attractions**, **Doolan Amusements**, **James H. Drew Expositions**, **Elliott's Amusements**, **Fantasy Amusements Company**, **Farrow Shows**, **Frazier Shows**, **Gold Medal Products**, **Luehrs' Ideal Rides**, **North American Midway Entertainment**, **The Otterbacher Family**, **Powers Great American Midways**, **Pugh Shows & Mid-America Shows**, **Ray Cammack Shows**, **Reithoffer Shows**, **Skerbeck Family Carnival**, **James E. Strates Shows**, **Thomas Carnival** and **West Coast Amusements**.

The book will debut at the 135th **International Association of Fairs & Expositions** (IAFE) **c**onvention and trade show November 29 to December 3, at the **Kentucky International Convention Center** in Louisville.

•

The IAFE recently shared detailed information on the overall global community impact of fairs and fairgrounds, including their critical role in emergency planning and preparedness during crises. The results of the 2026 IAFE Community Impact Survey, the first industry-wide data initiative to quantify the services these facilities provide, underscore the vital civic services fairgrounds provide year-round.

"Fairgrounds across North America are known for fun and entertainment, but they are year-round community assets that serve as hubs for emergency preparedness, community events and countless other activities long after fair week has passed," said **David Grindle**, president and CEO of IAFE, in a release. "IAFE is honored to show the impact our fairs and fairgrounds have on non-profits, youth development, education and communities' emergency management infrastructure. Fairgrounds are assets supporting their communities through the best and worst of times."

Industry estimates were calculated using responses from 501 fairs. The sample size and distribution of respondents by fair size provided a statistically representative basis for estimating industry-wide impact across approximately 5,000 fairs in the United States, Canada and Australia. After collecting data, the next step was analysis and compilation conducted by IAFE. The survey results offer valuable insight into how fairs strengthen communities.

Estimated impact based on responses from fairs and fairgrounds regarding emergency planning and preparedness shows the following: 82.10% house livestock during emergencies; 60.28% are used for first responder training; 133,450 hours reported in first responder training; 74.24% serve as evacuation shelters and 79% serve as emergency staging areas.

•

It takes a lot of moving parts to operate a carnival business. Behind the fun, there are real costs that carnival and fairgoers may not think about. These items include staffing, fuel costs, daily ride maintenance, transportation, insurance, power and generators, parts and supplies, inspections and permits, along with setup and teardown.

Other costs also include office expenses, utilities, training, marketing, lodging, uniforms and numerous daily expenses. When it is all added up, there is a great deal of upkeep before the first attendees arrive.



Many of the evenings had spectacular sunsets this year. The Virginia Farm Bureau was encouraging shutterbugs to send theirs in to share with others. COURTESY STATE FAIR OF VIRGINIA

VIRGINIA

Continued from page 96

spent on traditional media, it breaks down as television 40%, radio 37%, print 13% and outdoor 10%.

"We have a long-standing partnership with the **Richmond Times Dispatch** where they print our daily thrill guide and we barter tickets for print ads," said Pierson-Jolliffe.

Food sales hit nearly 3.5 million dollars even with rain on the final weekend. The largest food concessions included **Hog Wild BBQ**, **Lauther's Fine Foods** (with cheeses and chicken), **My Fav. Candy Store**, **Ford's Foods**, **Phat Boyz Catering**, **Demetri's Fine Greek Foods**, **Big G's Food Service** and **Fun Time Foods - The Tot Spot**. Corn dogs and curly fries were also big sellers during the fair.

Entertainment offerings didn't necessarily run smoothly this year. "We had three different cancellations with entertainment this year and all very close to the fair, so that was a challenge," said Pierson-Jolliffe. "Our strolling Abe Lincoln had an injury, **Sammy Kershaw** cancelled, **Colt Ford** cancelled. Highlights included the largest crowd for any concert of the week for **Leanna Crawford**. We have a strong marketing partnership with a Christian radio station from the Fredericksburg market. Also, we replaced Sammy Kershaw with an up-and-coming artist who grew up in Harrisonburg, **Spencer Hatcher**. He did a phenomenal job and pivoted very quickly to perform on opening night."

The fair relies heavily on a local events firm for parking and basic grounds staff because they do not have the resources to hire at that volume. There is a ton of competition in their area for part-time employment, and wage pressures from the northern Virginia markets definitely made it difficult.

Deggeller talked about their hiring challenges. "It is never easy to get employees; we are fighting an uphill battle. It's hard to plan out more than one season with a constantly difficult situation to overcome. The **Outdoor Amusement Business Association** (OABA) is helping on multiple fronts."

Since 2009, the fair has operated at **Meadow Event Park**, a 360-acre multi-purpose venue in Doswell. Deggeller enjoys playing that spot. "It is always great to show up at a beautiful facility that is well taken care of. They do a great job of maintaining it. Kudos to the State Fair of Virginia."

The 2027 edition comes around October 1 to 10.



The Zierer Wave Swinger was one of the more popular rides at the fair. COURTESY STATE FAIR OF VIRGINIA

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