



Golden Ticket Awards 2026 | Vol. 30 • Issue 6.2

Digital Edition

Networking Event of the Year celebrates brand-new territory

COTALand, Kalahari bring industry to the world's newest theme park

AUSTIN and ROUND ROCK, Texas — Since 1998, *Amusement Today* has recognized the Best of the Best in its annual Golden Ticket Awards. As the new millennium began to materialize, the awards were presented at live ceremonies, hosted by parks and facilities around the United States. The ability to meet and mingle proved to be a valuable benefit well beyond the awards. In the past two decades, the Golden Ticket Awards weekend has grown considerably. Now, hundreds of attendees from around the globe enjoy the Networking Event of the Year. In 2026, there's something really special.

In the past, industry professionals have enjoyed revisiting park hosts or finally getting to experience the charms and character of each facility after hearing about them for so long. This year it was new to everybody, even *Amusement Today*. The term *brand-new* was taken to its absolute definition. Host park **COTALand** was two weeks from its grand opening as attendees previewed its quirky Austin vibe before the public.

"It's perfect timing as far as I'm concerned," said **Matt Hughey**, vice president of operations. "Welcoming the industry is a great kickoff."

Hughey, knowing no one had any idea what to expect, was confident that the event would be unique in comparison to the noteworthy events of the past.

"People are going to be surprised with the theming and upscale details they will find," he said.

It has been a long journey for COTALand. Originally conceived as a simple kiddie park, reminiscent of a childhood park **Circuit of the Americas** founder and owner **Bobby Epstein** remembered from his youth in San



The Soggy Logger helps Texans stay refreshed in the hot sun (above). Kalahari Resort in Round Rock (below) opened in 2020, lush with African theming and authentic artwork. COURTESY COTALAND; AT/TIM BALDWIN

Antonio, his dream continued to grow. Eventually, the idea for rides the whole family could ride together was decided upon. Change still happened as the choice to make an entire theme park became the final plan.

Throughout all those changes, challenges were inescapable. Resubmitting plans, frustrations with building infrastructure, and the process of buying more and more rides caused delays. But COTALand arrived.

"I think seeing a fresh park with no idea what to expect is a completely new experience for the event," said Golden Ticket Awards Communications Coordinator **Tim Baldwin**. "Talk about the feeling of discovery! This is an incredible opportunity."

"The entire Circuit of the Americas location is so diverse," said *Amusement Today* Publisher **Gary Slade**. "Attendees are going to find their time in Austin to be something very memorable — great networking in great environments. And race car fans are



going to totally live their dream."

The event kicked off September 11 at host hotel **Kalahari Resort**. The beauty of Africa is stunningly displayed with flair and authenticity throughout. In addition to the resort's massive indoor water park, late-night fun took place at the B Lux Bowling Alley within the resort. A kickoff reception allowed for a full evening of networking and sharing to get things going.

The Kalahari Resort in Round Rock is the fourth location for

the chain and boasts the largest indoor water park among the locations at 223,000 square feet.

Attendees enjoyed both facilities over the two-day event.

The official awards were presented at COTA on the evening of September 12. Full coverage of the Golden Ticket Awards event will appear in the November 1 issue of *Amusement Today*.

*All stories this issue
by Tim Baldwin
unless otherwise noted*



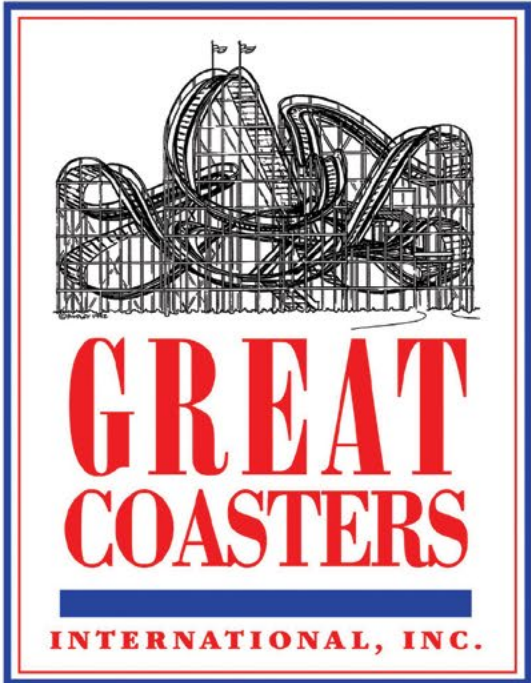
INCREDIBLE BUILDERS OF *THE WORLD'S GREATEST COASTERS*

Unique Experience Worldwide

Your park needs a one-of-a-kind experience for all your visitors. For over 30 years, Great Coasters International, Inc. continues to create the smoothest, most twisted, high-quality roller coaster attractions in the world. Our award-winning coasters combine classic design with modern engineering that offer thrilling experiences as unique as the park they serve.



See what Great Coasters International, Inc. can build for you. Visit greatcoasters.com to learn more.



**WOODEN ROLLER COASTERS:
DESIGN • BUILD • SERVICE**

Website:
greatcoasters.com

Phone:
570.286.9330

Email:
info@greatcoasters.com

Corporate Office:
Great Coasters International
2627 State Route 890
Sunbury, PA 17801



Attractions That Move You Forward

INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS.
DEPENDABLE PERFORMANCE.
LASTING SUPPORT.



CHANCERIDES.COM

©SEPTEMBER 1 2026 Chance Rides, LLC



ELEVATE YOUR BUSINESS:

Explore Total Coverage with McGowan Allied Specialty Insurance.

At McGowan Allied, our experts simplify the process, ensuring you access to cutting-edge coverage and peace of mind. Beyond policies, we guide you through the intricacies of all coverages, ensuring your full understanding. Collaboratively, we equip your team for a safe and enjoyable guest experience.

Unlock enhanced risk management with us:

- Overall cost reduction through use of our advanced loss control services.
- Free educational webinars and employee training.
- Dedicated to the Amusement Industry for over 40 years.



Interested? Let's Talk.
McGowanAllied.com/connect
20595 Lorain Rd
Fairview Park, OH 44126



ELLIS & ASSOCIATES

World Leader in Aquatic Safety Since 1983



CELEBRATING **ALL**

GOLDEN TICKET AWARD **NOMINEES & RECIPIENTS**

A division of

Ellis
INTERNATIONAL

Visit jellis.com or call 407-401-7136



GOLDEN TICKET AWARDS

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

FLINT'S VIEW: Bubba Flint

The Legends never die



Robinson

As much as the annual Golden Ticket Awards are about celebration, it is near impossible to deny the cloud of sadness that hangs over this year's event. In recent weeks, we've lost two icons of our industry, two people who captivated our attention, two leaders who took things to another level ... two genuine legends.

In mid-July, Dick Knoebel of Knoebels Amusement Resort passed away. Just over a month later, the world mourned the sudden loss of Dolly Parton. Even though both of them were under five feet tall, they were both larger-than-life personalities who captured the attention of everyone in the room. They were driving forces behind raising Knoebels and Dollywood to the level of international attention, where they are spoken of in the same conversations as Walt Disney World. In recent years, both have been recognized as a "Legend" by the Golden Ticket Awards. And there is no more appropriate description of the two than that. They were — they ARE — legends.

While they were here, they inspired us to do more, to believe in ourselves, to stay the course. In their parks and at home, they both prioritized family. Their destinations were seen as shaded escapes from the concrete jungle, a true paradise that was away from it all. And they both believed in themselves, accomplishing things many said would never happen ... only to triumph and grin ear-to-ear with pride as they then sought out their next challenge.

Now, in a world without them, their presence is still very much with us. What sets legends apart from others is their impact on those around them. All of us are left with vivid memories of them. How many of us can still hear Dick's voice in our heads? How many put on a song or movie from Dolly in her honor recently? But being a legend is more than opening the door for vivid nostalgia.

A legend makes an impact. A legend leaves an impact. A legend pilots the course of the world long after they've left this mortal coil.

The term "What would Dolly do?" has already made its way into pop culture, and it promises to continue to inspire hope and butterfly dreams. Without a doubt, the courage of Dick Knoebel will inspire generations to keep their priorities straight, to believe in themselves when the world says not to, and have fun while working hard. They will be the light that helps guide this industry in the years ahead.

Legends do not die. They live in our hearts. They inspire. They remind us to live. They light the path for our tomorrow.



AMUSEMENT VOICE: Tim Baldwin, Golden Ticket Awards Communications Coordinator

Best-laid plans

The amusement industry is always evolving. If innovations and boundaries being pushed aim to move things forward, things such as supply chain and global crises can send shockwaves through projects and openings, slowing things down. And how will the economy affect things? The only thing predictable is the unpredictable.

2026 just might go down as a year of delays. With little effort, insiders can come up with several new attractions — and even new parks — that have been snarled with challenges in getting open. Things happen. But there is a notable lineup of attractions that were hoped to open in late spring, premiering weeks, if not months, later. Best-laid plans can take a different direction.

Is this a bad thing? It's frustrating for sure. That Memorial Day target (or before) is always the goal, but as the theme park industry has much longer seasons now, it



Baldwin

isn't as vital as it was in decades past. Sure, getting a big opening buzz prior to the summer season is ideal, but the good news is that people still come. New attractions generate interest, but it is important to remember that the guests want to be in the park, not just come for one ride. Even if it takes time, people will enjoy everything that is new.

Two points to be made here as these delayed attractions and parks come online. With the Golden Ticket Awards voting taking place in July, some new attractions weren't open for consideration, so they will take their place in the spotlight next year. But for the operators, once things open, take a step back. Make sure, in the rush to finally drop the rope, that there still aren't details to focus on and that the grand vision is still realized. People can enjoy the new rides, but making sure they are just as intended will keep what's new a fan favorite in the years to come.

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



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



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

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

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

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

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

Phone: (817) 460-7220
AmusementToday.com, GoldenTicketAwards.com

Founder & Publisher, Advertising

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

Accounting & Classified

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

Advertising

Eric Fluet • (201) 962-6414
efluet@amusementtoday.com
John Robinson • (513) 256-1441
jrobinson@amusementtoday.com

Editor & Production Manager

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

Editorial

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

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

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

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

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

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

Industry Affiliated Charities:

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

Like fries in a milkshake.

UNEXPECTED. UNFORGETTABLE.



Shoot the Chute – Yas Waterworld, Abu Dhabi, UAE

The world's first water ride integrated into a water slide tower

More spectacle per square meter: Introducing a single tower that merges our water slide innovation with our water ride engineering to create the most uniquely refreshing water park experience for guests across all generations. In swimwear or streetwear, as a rider or a spectator, everyone loves to catch the big iconic splash.

See our full range of water rides at
www.whitewaterwest.com/water-rides.



WHITEWATER®

EST. 1980

2026 GOLDEN TICKET AWARD WINNERS



BEST PARK OF 2026		BEST NEW ROLLER COASTER OF 2026	
1) Europa-Park	Rust, Germany	1) Falcons Flight	Six Flags Qiddiya City
2) Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	2) Tormenta Rampaging Run	Six Flags Over Texas
3) Universal Epic Universe	Orlando, Fla.	3) Quantum Accelerator	Six Flags New England
4) Knoebels Amusement Resort	Elysburg, Pa.	4) Colossus	Six Flags Qiddiya City
5) Tokyo DisneySea	Urayasu, Japan	5) GalactiCoaster	Legoland Florida
BEST WATER PARK OF 2026		BEST NEW FAMILY ATTRACTION OF 2026	
1) Splashin' Safari	Santa Claus, Ind.	1) Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare	Kings Island
2) Volcano Bay	Orlando, Fla.	2) Wingz of Wonder	Morgan's Wonderland
3) Schlitterbahn	New Braunfels, Texas	3) The Enchanted Greenhouse	Six Flags Qiddiya City
4) Rulantica	Rust, Germany	4) Bello Bay Cruise	Universal Kids Resort
5) Hyland Hills Water World	Federal Heights, Colo.	5) Expédition Nautibus	Grand Aquarium Saint-Malo
BEST FAMILY PARK OF 2026		BEST NEW WATER PARK ATTRACTION OF 2026	
1) Santa's Village	Jefferson, N.H.	1) Aquaticar	Aquarabia
2) Dutch Wonderland	Lancaster, Pa.	2) Power Rapids	Aquatopia
3) Legoland Florida	Winter Haven, Fla.	3) Presque Isle Plunge	Waldameer & Water World
4) Morgan's Wonderland	San Antonio, Texas	4) Reef Runners	Seabreeze
5) Story Land	Glen, N.H.	5) Nitro Blast	NRH2O
BEST FAMILY COASTER OF 2026		BEST NEW ATTRACTION INSTALLATION OF 2026	
1) Big Bear Mountain	Dollywood	1) Falcons Flight	Six Flags Qiddiya City
2) Hiccup's Wing Gliders	Universal Epic Universe	2) Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare	Kings Island
3) Mecalodon	Walibi Belgium	3) Wingz of Wonder	Morgan's Wonderland
4) The Bobcat	Six Flags Great Escape	4) GalactiCoaster	Legoland (Florida & California)
5) Big Thunder Mountain Railroad	Magic Kingdom	5-TIE) Junoon Drop	Aquarabia
		5-TIE) Reef Runners	Seabreeze
STANDOUT FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTER OF 2026		BEST GUEST EXPERIENCE OF 2026	
1) Level99	Lake Buena Vista, Florida	1) Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.
2) Universal Horror Unleashed	Las Vegas, Nev.	2) Europa-Park	Rust, Germany
3) Atlas9	Kansas City, Mo.	3) Holiday World & Splashin' Safari	Santa Claus, Ind.
4) Thrillz Adventure Park	Doraville, Ga.	4) Knoebels Amusement Resort	Elysburg, Pa.
5) Do The Beach	Northport, Fla.	5) Disneyland	Anaheim, California
MOST BEAUTIFUL PARK OF 2026		BEST DARK RIDE OF 2026	
1) Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	1) Monsters ... Frankenstein Experiment	Universal Epic Universe
2) Busch Gardens Williamsburg	Williamsburg, Va.	2) Harry Potter and the Battle at the Ministry	Universal Epic Universe
3) Efteling	Kaatsheuvel, The Netherlands	3) Star Wars: Rise Of The Resistance	Disney's Hollywood Studios
4) Europa-Park	Rust, Germany	4) Danse Macabre	Efteling
5) Tivoli Gardens	Copenhagen, Denmark	5) Pirates ... Battle for the Sunken Treasure	Shanghai Disneyland
BEST WATER RIDE OF 2026		BEST WATER PARK RIDE OF 2026	
1) Chiapas	Phantasialand	1) Mammoth	Splashin' Safari
2) Mission Bermudes	Futuroscope	2) Wildebeest	Splashin' Safari
3) Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls	Universal's Islands of Adventure	3) Cheetah Chase	Splashin' Safari
4) Valhalla	Blackpool Pleasure Beach	4) Krakatau Aqua Coaster	Volcano Bay
5) Jurassic World - The Ride	Universal Studios Hollywood	5) Junoon Drop	Aquarabia
BEST KIDS' AREA OF 2026		BEST NEW THEME CONCEPT OF 2026	
1) Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	1) GalactiCoaster	Legoland (Florida & California)
2) Kings Island	Mason, Ohio	2) Flying Fox	Kentucky Kingdom
3) Universal Epic Universe	Orlando, Fla.	3) The Enchanted Greenhouse	Six Flags Qiddiya City
4) Knott's Berry Farm	Buena Park, California	4) Expédition Nautibus	Grand Aquarium Saint-Malo
5) Canada's Wonderland	Vaughan, Ontario	5) Kyûbi Unchained	Parc Spirou Provence
BEST NEW SHOW OF 2026		LEADERSHIP AWARD	
1) "Monster Mash Bash"	Six Flags Fiesta Texas	1) Franceen Gonzales	Enchanted Parks
2) "Vinyl to Viral"	Cedar Point	2) Ryan Eldredge	Six Flags
3) "Memories in Motion"	Six Flags Great America	3) James Harhi	Enchanted Parks
4) "Hollywood Hits"	Kings Island		
5) "Twinkling Thru Time"	Hersheypark		

Gateway

TICKETING SYSTEMS®

ONE PLATFORM. ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES.

- ✓ On-Site Ticketing
- ✓ eCommerce Web Sales
- ✓ Digital Ticket Delivery
- ✓ Timed Entry and Capacity Management
- ✓ Retail and Food & Beverage POS
- ✓ Self-Service Kiosks
- ✓ Groups & Bookings
- ✓ Online Travel Agencies
- ✓ Access Control & Admissions
- ✓ Membership / Pass Online Self-Service
- ✓ CRM & Reporting
- ✓ API Connectivity

schedule a demo today at
gatewayticketing.com



**VISIT US &
SEE WHAT'S
POSSIBLE**



IAAPA®
EXPO EUROPE 2026
BOOTH S3019
SEP 22-24, LONDON



IAAPA®
EXPO 2026
BOOTH W1020
NOV 17-20, ORLANDO

Industry shines in "Best New" awards with global wins, varied offerings

Parks like to market what is new, and guests are always clamoring for what's next. Winners in the "New" categories recognize favorites from around the world.

Thrill rides have their place, but attractions the whole family can ride are becoming more and more sought after. **Kings Island**, a winner of many Golden Tickets, snags the prize for the first time in the category of **BEST NEW FAMILY ATTRACTION**. The park's **Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare** scored with fans. Reimagined with **Sally Dark Rides**, the ride is an homage to a beloved lost attraction from Kings Island's past.

"The curtain has never risen higher for Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare! Earning the Golden Ticket Award is a tremendous achievement and a reflection of the passion, innovation and imagination behind every scene," said Park President **Tony Carovillano**. "We're honored by this recognition and grateful to the guests and fans who have made Phantom Theater one of the most talked-about new attractions in the industry. This award belongs to the talented team who honored the ride's history while bringing a completely new experience to life for our guests."

Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare was the clear winner in this category, taking more than half of the votes.

Wingz of Wonder at **Morgan's Wonderland** takes second place with the innovative new type of flat ride from **Zamperla**. By flapping one's arms, riders cause their chair to elevate into the air as the ride goes around. Morgan's Wonderland debuted the first of this new style of ride.

Six Flags Qiddiya City is in the No. 3 spot with **The Enchanted Greenhouse**, a dark ride where guests aim



Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare (above) delighted families and long-time fans of the park as the new attraction was an homage to a beloved favorite. "**Monster Mash Bash**" (right) thrilled thousands of guests at Six Flags Fiesta Texas and won **Best New Show**.
COURTESY KINGS ISLAND;
AT/TIM BALDWIN

their dew sprayers to cause the creatures to emerge.

Universal Kids Resort takes fourth place with **Bello Bay Cruise**, a rapids raft ride that features the Minions. Lots of spinning and a spiraling whirlpool make this a water attraction of note. It was supplied by **Hafema**.

Expédition Nautibus at **Grand Aquarium Saint-Malo** is a project from **BoldMove Nation**. The dark ride where visitors board submarines to explore underwater scenes comes in at No. 5.

No stranger to award winning shows, **Six Flags Fiesta Texas** makes it two years in a row for **BEST NEW SHOW**. Rewritten and reimagined every fall season, "**Monster Mash Bash**" is a full-on rock concert-style production. The latest edition featured 25 performers — singers,



musicians and dancers — belting out powerhouse performances to cheering audiences.

"I've been involved for 21 years," said Director of Entertainment **Ben McTyre**. "We have gone through a lot of different iterations of the show since then. Some have been story-driven and some have just been concert-style shows. None of what we do at Fiesta Texas would be possible without the amazingly talented entertainment and design team and the performers. We also benefit from a wonderful support system across all departments that has been nurtured by

leadership here for years. Fright Fest is the favorite event of most everyone in the department. We spend a sizable portion of the season writing, creating, building and rehearsing for these shows and attractions, so to be recognized for this particular production (also everyone's favorite!) is really special."

The show mixed current hot hits with crowd-pleasing classics, complete with pyro, lighting, gothic costuming and large-scale sets.

Cedar Point's "Vinyl to Viral" (No. 2) also scored big with *Amusement Today's* select panel of

entertainment judges. The performance takes the audience from Woodstock to today — from vinyl records to digital beats. The vibrant staging and costumes made it easy to sing and sway along in one's seat.

"Memories in Motion" (No. 3) celebrated **Six Flags Great America's** 50th anniversary with a captivating blend of musical song-and-dance performance, pyrotechnics and drones. Some of the park's classic anthems were updated and rerecorded to embrace Great America's

► See **NEW**, page 12



**Kings
Island®**

THANK YOU
for voting **Phantom Theater:
Opening Nightmare** as **Best New
Family Attraction** in **2026!**

►NEW

Continued from page 10

history.

"Hollywood Hits Top 40" at **Kings Island** lands in fourth place with its take on Hollywood's influence on popular music. A four-piece live band accompanies energetic singers and dancers, helping guests relive favorite scenes and songs from cherished movies.

"Twinkling Through Time," (No. 5) **Hersheypark's** Christmas show embraced the holidays through yuletide tradition and storytelling. Produced by **RWS Global**, the show celebrates the joy of family, nostalgia and creating new traditions.

BEST

NEW



The monumental accomplishment of Falcons Flight at Six Flags Qiddiya City captured worldwide attention. COURTESY INTAMIN

ATTRACTION INSTALLATION is a category recognizing impact. The nominations received spotlighted attractions that make a significant statement for the park or industry.

One attraction was a clear winner. **Falcons Flight** at **Six Flags Qiddiya City** takes the gold. As the tallest, fastest and longest roller coaster in the world, its sheer statement on what a roller coaster can

do with no limits was earth-shattering. It was supplied by **Intamin**.

"Winning these prestigious awards is a tremendous honor because Falcons Flight was never intended to be just another

roller coaster," said **Lukas Spieldiener**, CCO, Intamin. "The ambition was simple to describe but incredibly challenging to achieve: create the world's tallest,

► See NEW, page 14

Sunkid
we move. you smile.

Loopster action ...
variable cabin rotation!

INTERACTIVE FAMILY RIDES

From individually themed attractions to overall concepts

Sunkid GmbH
Industriezone 39
6460 Imst · Austria

www.sunkidworld.com info@sunkidworld.com +43 5412 68131





// FROM CONCEPT TO CREATION



"Reviving A Classic"
Bringing a fan-favorite back to life with an all-new interactive twist

▶ 3m



"Phantom Production"
Showcasing the artistry and innovation behind every scene

▶ 2m



"It's Showtime"
Experience the next-generation of immersive dark ride entertainment

▶ 1m



✉ info@sallydarkrides.com
🌐 sallydarkrides.com
☎ +1 (904) 355-7100



Congratulations
Kings Island, on your
Best New Family Attraction!

GOLDEN TICKET MARKET PLACE



IRMA
INTERNATIONAL RIDES MANAGEMENT

PROUDLY WORKING WITH THE FOLLOWING
NORTH AMERICAN COMPANIES:

- Premier Rides • Arihant • E&F Miler • PTC •
- Fibrart • Larson International • Swanee River RR •

irmrides.com • Facebook.com/IRMRides



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

ALTITUDE
RIDES AND ATTRACTIONS



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

www.lagotronicsprojects.com

GLOBAL INSPECTION SERVICES

Ride Inspections
Risk Management Services
Administrative Review
Incident Investigation
Training

443-299-7658

LJMsafety.com

rgavel@ljmsafety.com

PROTECTION
THROUGH
INSPECTION



Bee Aware - Bee Ready - Bee Safe

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



Aquatocar at Aquarabia allows guests to drive around underwater, the first ride of its kind. It takes Best New Water Park Ride. COURTESY SUB SEA SYSTEMS

►NEW

Continued from page 12

fastest and longest roller coaster while delivering an experience guests genuinely want to ride again and again. Falcons Flight is the result of decades of experience pushing the boundaries of what is possible in our industry. The project challenged our team to overcome engineering obstacles at a scale never encountered before, and we are immensely proud of the determination, creativity, and expertise that made it a reality."

"Falcons Flight has delivered exactly the kind of guest reaction we hoped for. You can see the excitement build before guests even board, and that energy carries through the entire experience," said **Brian Machamer**, park president of Six Flags Qiddiya City. "It has quickly become a signature of Six Flags Qiddiya City and a ride that people are eager to experience and talk about. Seeing Falcons Flight recognized by *Amusement Today* as both Best New Roller Coaster and Best New Attraction Installation is a testament to the impact it has made, not only with our guests, but across the global attractions industry."

Kings Island's Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare appears again on this list, here at No. 2.

The impact of this installation is connected to the loyal fanbase the park can proudly claim.

Likewise, Wingz of Wonder (No. 3) at Morgan's Wonderland gets a repeat mention in this category, owing to the impact that this new type of ride brings to the industry.

Galacticoaster (No. 4) at both **Legoland California** and **Legoland Florida** brings an indoor roller coaster of high caliber to these parks. The ride system was supplied by **ART Engineering**. These substantial investments helped to solidify the parks as must-do destinations for families with young children.

A tie for fifth place puts two more on the list of finalists. In fact, both are water park attractions. **Junoon Drop** from **WhiteWater Amusement Park** brought a marketable impact to their respective parks.

The Golden Ticket for **BEST NEW WATER PARK ATTRACTION** is awarded to something completely fresh and new. **Aquatocar** at Aquarabia is the first ride of its kind, as guests physically drive cars underwater. For more than four minutes, guests explore the underwater world as they look outside the car's windows in all directions. It was created by **Sub Sea**

Systems of California.

"Aquatocar was an extraordinary engineering challenge and a project we've dedicated a lot of time and resources to for many years," said **Kyle Mayfield**, vice president of production, Sub Sea Systems, Inc. "To see that effort culminate in the grand opening of the world's first Aquatocar ride at Aquarabia, a first-class, world-record-breaking water park, is beyond incredible. We can't wait to introduce more people to their first underwater ride."

The second place spot is also from an international location. **Aquatopia** in Vietnam debuted **Power Rapids**, a high-energy thrill ride supplied by ProSlide. Promising a new kind of water experience using floating channels at multiple sections of the ride, Power Rapids transitions riders from traditional sliding to rushing rivers.

Presque Isle Plunge (No. 3) at **Waldameer** is a five-person thrill slide from ProSlide.

The aforementioned Reef Runners at Seabreeze drops in at No. 4.

Closing out the list of finalists is **Nitro Blast** at **NRH20**. This multi-element racing slide combines side-by-side channels accommodating two-person rafts, challenging riders through airtime drops, flying saucer banked curves, uphill blasts and airtime drops.



MONSTER MASH BASH



THANK YOU
for voting **The Monster Mash Bash**
as **Best New Show** in 2026!

Water attractions — Mammoth and Chiapas — hold tight to their gold

Holiday World & Splashin' Safari pulled off a real coup this year in the voting. For the first time ever, the water park takes the top three spots for **BEST WATER PARK RIDE**, a feat never done before in any category.

For a long stretch of time, **Mammoth** splashed in the shadow of its older sibling, **Wilbebeest**, but for a second year in a row, Mammoth takes the Golden Ticket. For one-third of a mile, Mammoth takes up to six riders through seven stories of elevation change. With five uphill sections and five enclosed tunnels, one of the world's longest water coasters wows water park goers. Owing to the round rafts, each ride can be different depending on which direction a passenger may be facing.

Wilbebeest (No. 2) slides in behind its big brother, with bragging rights of owning the category 14 different times.



Holiday World & Splashin' Safari's Mammoth took the win for Best Water Park Ride. COURTESY HOLIDAY WORLD & SPLASHIN' SAFARI

Recent years have seen these two duke it out in a tug of war.

"The Water Coaster Capital of the World is on fire! Even though Mammoth took the top spot this year, we're like proud parents — we can't choose a favorite, so we're thrilled to have the voters do it for us!" said **Matt**

Eckert, park president.

Entering the mix is **Cheetah Chase** (No. 3), also at Splashin' Safari. This water coaster differs from its brethren at the park by using water blast technology to go uphill. Side-by-side racing adds to the fun, especially with the inclusion of the first head-to-head dueling zone on

a water coaster. Although this is the first time for this attraction to be a finalist, it did claim Best New Water Park Ride in 2021.

All three of Splashin' Safari's water coasters are from **ProSlide Technologies**.

Water coasters are definitely popular with both guests and voters. **Krakatau Aqua Coaster** is **Volcano Bay's** most

popular attraction among thrill seekers. Four friends or family members whip through the park's iconic, rocky volcano on an up-and-down thrill ride. Always a finalist, this year it places fourth.

A newcomer to the chart is **Junoon Drop** (No. 5) at **Aquarabia**. This new attraction lays claim to the world's tallest and longest (1,690 feet) water coaster. Uphill blasts, enclosed sections, directional changes and a mega-drop make this attraction from **WhiteWater** one to watch.

Water rides in theme parks are essential, particularly when open during hot summer months. Only a handful of attractions have taken top prize over the years. For the fourth time, **Chiapas** at **Phantasialand** holds the Golden Ticket for **BEST WATER RIDE** in a park. Built by **Intamin**, the massive log flume serves as a centerpiece of a Mexican village.

"We are excited to see that Chiapas has

► See WATER, page 18

"World Famous" KIDDIE BUMPER BOATS™

ENTERTAINING CHILDREN IN OVER 40 COUNTIES FOR THE PAST 50 YEARS

2026 MODELS

MADE IN THE U.S.A.

WWW.KIDDEBUMPERBOATS.COM

INFLATABLE POOL SYSTEMS
Stock and Custom Sizes Available

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

SCAN ME



Holiday World & Splashin' Safari pull off a first-ever feat. While Mammoth took the top spot, the park's Wilbebeest (above) and Cheetah Chase (below) rounded out the top three slots. COURTESY HOLIDAY WORLD & SPLASHIN' SAFARI



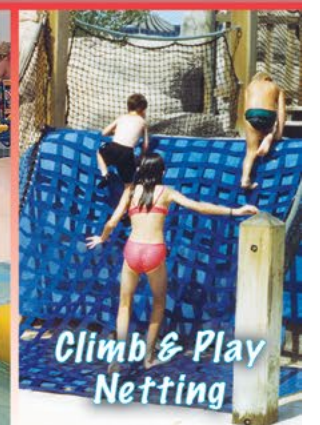
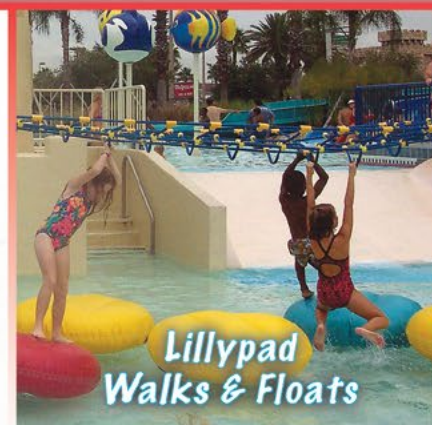
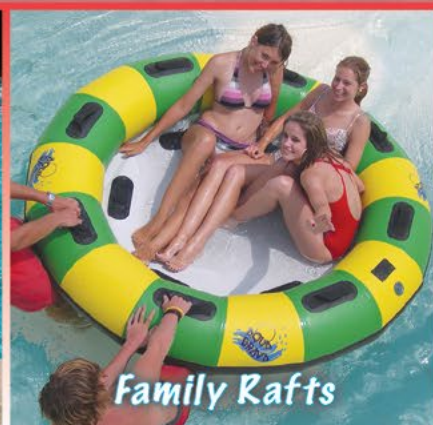


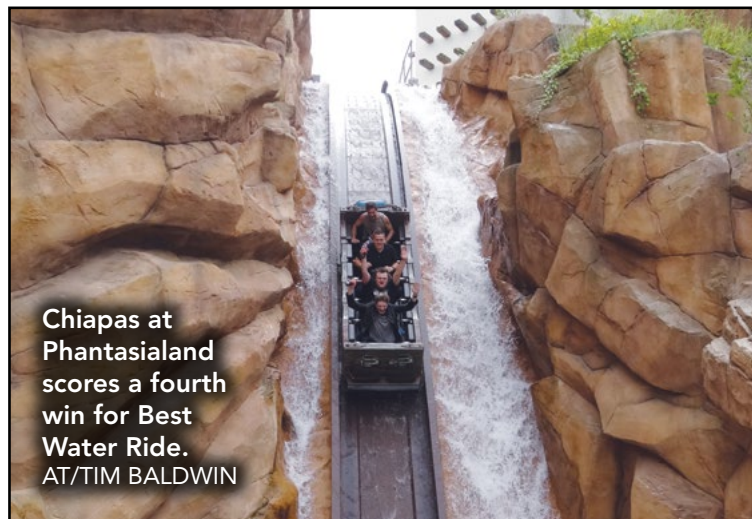
Zebec
Water Sports

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

Splash into quality water sports products!

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





Chiapas at Phantasialand scores a fourth win for Best Water Ride. AT/TIM BALDWIN

► WATER

Continued from page 16



been voted Best Water Ride again," said **Sascha Czibulka**, executive vice president, Intamin. "Chiapas instantly became a classic, and it is an honor and a source of pride for everyone involved that this flume ride received this prestigious recognition after so many years in operation."

The multi-level ride features a grand finale of a 66-foot waterfall drop at a steep 53-degree angle.

The remaining four finalists were on the 2025

chart, but fans have mixed the sequence.

Placing at No. 2 is **Mission Bermudes** at **Futuroscope**. This attraction was the first installation of **Mack Rides'** Rocking Boat concept. Connected to a track below the surface of the water, passengers are thrust through raging rapids, drops and storytelling elements. This is one of the newest ride systems in the industry.

At No. 3 is **Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls** at **Universal's Islands of Adventure**. Also from Mack Rides, this log flume through cartoonish settings drenches its riders in a photo-perfect themed drop. Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls took the Golden Ticket in this category 12 times in awards

history. It debuted with the park in 1999.

Coming in fourth is **Blackpool Pleasure Beach's Valhalla**, another ride guaranteed to soak its riders. With a ride system supplied by Intamin and various dark ride sets, this indoor attraction sports a Viking motif. Valhalla is a nine-time winner in this category.

Jurassic World - The Ride (No. 5) at **Universal Studios Hollywood** takes the delicious terror of dinosaur mayhem from the popular movie franchise and features a finale of a dramatic plunge while escaping a T-rex. Manufactured by **Vekoma**, the spillwater ride received a retheme in 2019 and has been a finalist now for three years in a row.



Mission Bermudes (No. 2) at Futuroscope was the first installation of Mack Rides' Rocking Boat. COURTESY FUTUROSCOPE

GOLDEN TICKET MARKET PLACE

HODGDON

CONSULTING

The destination for building your brand and maintaining its presence

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

hodgdonconsulting@gmail.com
207-536-8192

THE ORIGINAL ALPINE COASTER CREATORS AND STILL THE BEST

www.wiegandsportsusa.com

Committee F24 on Amusement Rides and Devices

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

The #1 Leading Slide Manufacturer in America!

World's Largest 5 Lane, One Trailer Slide — 108 ft.!

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

FREDERIKSEN INDUSTRIES, INC.

5212 St. Paul St. • Tampa, Fla. 33619 • (813) 628-4545 • FAX (813) 621-3679

funslide.com

MACK RIDES PRESENTS

LAUNCHED WATER COASTER



 **MACKRIDES**
mack-rides.com

The **Launched Water Coaster** "Donnervind" at Freizeitpark Plohn is a true world's first by combining the power of coaster launches with the fluid dynamics of water. Driven by precise LIM technology, boats accelerate through two launch sections across a fast, near-ground layout, creating a relentless flow of speed and motion. A standout highlight: the iconic high-five element, bringing riders face-to-face in a high-energy moment of interaction. Low to the water. High on adrenaline. Donnervind sets a new benchmark: where technology meets pure ride energy.



CPI AMUSEMENT
WATER PARK INDUSTRY



★ **Congratulations to the 2026 Golden Ticket Award winners!** ★

*For more than **30 years**, CPI Amusement has delivered innovative, high-quality rafts, tubes and custom solutions that keep waterparks around the world moving.*

BUILT FOR THE WATER PARK INDUSTRY



MADE IN THE USA
100% manufactured in
Kyle, Texas



IN-HOUSE ENGINEERING
Engineered for performance
and safety



CUSTOM DESIGNS
Standard size rafts & tubes
or custom built for your
specific application



30+ YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
Leaders in design and
manufacturing for waterparks

**Master
Blaster
Sled** ▶

▼ **Family Raft**



SEE ALL OUR PRODUCTS AT
CPITX.COM



1098 Windy Hill Road
Kyle, TX 78640, USA



512-295-2683



CPI Cryogenic Plastics Inc



CPI Amusement





HELPING ORGANIZATIONS **OPEN & OPERATE** AQUATIC VENUES



**CALL TODAY FOR YOUR
TAILORED SOLUTION**

BECAUSE YOU **DESERVE** TO FEEL CONFIDENT
YOUR PARK IS READY FOR SUCCESS

✉ info@theosoconsulting.com

☎ 602.334.9934

🌐 theosoconsulting.com

Carnival owner, IISA President Sandy Schmidt is Show Person of the Year

There's no denying that **Sandy Schmidt** knows the carnival business from the ground up.

The daughter of the late **Ivan** and **Agnes Arnold** (**Arnold Amusements**, Traverse City, Michigan), she worked with her family for years and today owns **T.J. Schmidt & Company**, a carnival based in Standish, Michigan.

"Dad became enamored with the business as a youngster, following **John Reid** (former **Happyland Shows**) around on the lot when he played the local fair. Later, dad traveled with the carnival working with **Buster Anderson**, who had games," Schmidt recalled.

In 1970, Ivan and Agnes Arnold moved over to **W.D. Wade Shows**, another Michigan carnival, where they owned and operated a basketball concession.



"Dad also got into the ride business, with his first being a Swinging Gym. Then he got a Tempest, a Scat and kiddie bumper cars," Schmidt said. "I used to stand in the middle of the bumper cars and rescue the kids when the cars got jammed up — paying for it with bruised ankles."

The Arnolds and **Sherman Schmidt** became unit managers for Wade Shows, but departed when the company was sold in 1980.

"My dad started Arnold Amusements and Sherman Schmidt started **Schmidt Amusements**," she added. "I ran the popper for dad, but before then — when we had knock-down ticket boxes — I sold tickets for the



Sandy Schmidt

Tempest and Tom (brother) sold Scat tickets. On my 18th birthday, Dad got mad at the crew, fired everybody, and Tom and I had to tear the show down. Dad did eventually cool down and got everyone back."

She was quick to point out that moving Arnold Amusements to the next location during that era was up to a handful of drivers.

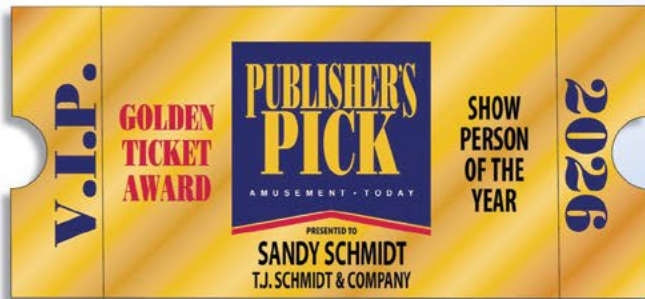
► See **SCHMIDT**, page 24



The T.J. Schmidt & Company midway truly shines at night (above). When Sandy Schmidt became president of the IISA, she staged a western-themed installation party (below). COURTESY T.J. SCHMIDT COMPANY



Congratulations Sandy Schmidt Show Person Of The Year!



Best Wishes From Powers Great American Midways



powersgreatamericanmidways.com
Email: contact@PowersMidways.com

On behalf of the inaugural Showperson of the
Year recipients, Madison & Savannah Kissel:

Congratulations
Sandy Schmidt!



KISSELFUN



► **SCHMIDT**

Continued from page 22

"I drove a semi for years," she asserted. "Dad, Tom and **Steve Saville** were the only other truck drivers then. We moved the whole show."

Schmidt's son, Terry, and Sandy became friends when their families worked together on Wade Shows.

"I met Terry when we were 10," she said of the friendship, which evolved over time. "We were married in '83, and I went over to Schmidt Amusements with him."

As the Schmidt family grew, Terry and Sandy decided to branch out, forming their own carnival in 2007. T.J. Schmidt & Company made its debut for the 2008 season.

Reflecting on the startup of the show, she noted that equipment was acquired from **TNT Midways**, which was a joint venture with her brother,



Sandy (Arnold) Schmidt — flanked by brothers Jon (left) and Tom — grew up enjoying and working in the family carnival, Arnold Amusements. COURTESY T.J. SCHMIDT COMPANY

Tom, and **Tim Bors**.

"Tim was killed in an accident shortly after TNT was started, so the company was short-lived. We also got some equipment from **Jeff Brady** of Playworld Amusements when he sold out," she said. "Arnold Amusements took some of the Brady route, and we got some of the Arnold spots. We actually started our first season with a full

route and were lucky in that respect."

T.J. Schmidt & Company fielded 18 rides as well as popcorn and elephant ear concessions in its inaugural year. Key personnel included the Schmidts' two sons, Josh and Kyle, and long-time employee **Doug Burtch**.

"Doug started with me when he was 15 in my elephant ear trailer. He turns



Above are Sandy's parents, the late Agnes and Ivan Arnold of Arnold Amusements. COURTESY T.J. SCHMIDT COMPANY

50 this year and now manages our office," she pointed out. "Josh left the show a few years ago and lives with his family in Ithaca, Michigan."

Kyle Schmidt and Burtch currently co-own rides and concessions on the show.

► See **SCHMIDT**, page 26

Congratulations Sandy Schmidt

On Being Recognized As Show Person Of The Year!

We Hope You Enjoy Celebrating It!

- The Anderson Family



Anderson Midways, Standish, Michigan
989-846-4406 andersonmidways.com



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



16

Passengers

60

Feet High

360

***Degree
Rotation***



Fire destroyed the T.J. Schmidt & Company maintenance building last March (above left). Two major attractions, tools and other equipment were lost in the blaze. Standing alongside a semi tractor on her carnival (above middle), Sandy Schmidt recounts driving a tractor-trailer for years in helping to move her parents' Arnold Amusements show. The office trailer of T.J. Schmidt & Company's is decked out in honor of America celebrating its 250th anniversary this year (above right). COURTESY T.J. SCHMIDT COMPANY

►SCHMIDT

Continued from page 24

In 2011, Terry Schmidt was diagnosed with leukemia.

"As the leukemia progressed, we had to go for more treatments," she recalled of the difficult time. "The boys kept the show running and Terry and I returned to the lot right after his treatments. Terry passed in July of

2018 and it was a long summer for me. I didn't have time to process it until after the season.

We had just built a beautiful home in Standish with 31 acres, so I was there by myself. I decided to move back to Riverview, Florida, to be closer to family."

Brothers Tom and Jon, who today operate Arnold Amusements, live next door to each other in Riverview,

while Schmidt's son, Kyle, purchased a house around the corner.

"Our parents were nearby as well, so we jokingly called it Arnoldville," she said.

Sandy Schmidt currently serves as president of the **International Independent Showmen's Association** (IISA). The association has a clubhouse and exposition property in Riverview, Florida, where the

International Independent Showmen's Foundation, the fundraising arm of IISA, will present its 59th annual Super Trade Show & Extravaganza in February.

"I became involved with the club when our family moved to Riverview in 1976," she emphasized. "I became a member when I was 18 and I'm the eighth person in our family to be (IISA) president."

Following her hus-

band's death, she became more active with the association and worked her way through the chairs. Brother Tom is currently chair of the trade show and is president of the association's **Carnival World Museum**, which is across the street from the IISA complex. Sandy also sits on the museum board.

"Dad was very instru-

► See SCHMIDT, page 28

Congratulations To Show Person Of The Year Sandy Schmidt



**Thank You For All You Do For
International Independent
Showmen's Association
& Carnival World Museum**



**Sandy Schmidt,
IISA President**



From Everyone At Carnival World Museum
6893 Riverview Drive, Riverview, Florida 33578
carnivalworldmuseum.com (813) 671-3503



THE FUTURE IS HERE FOR MIDWAYS

“

The Impulse Plus has been one of the best investments we've made for our midway,

”

says Marc McDonald, a partner in Paladin Amusements.

Proud Sponsor



iREADER
**IMPULSE
PLUS**



►SCHMIDT

Continued from page 26

mental in starting the Showmen's Museum and was president until his passing," she noted. "Tom and I were both on the board then."

Sandy Schmidt was at the showmen's club in March, near the end of its seasonal schedule, when she got a call from her son Kyle.

"He told me, 'Mom, first of all, nobody got hurt; it's the shop, it's on fire and it's bad.' He was sending video as it was happening," she recalled.

The blaze leveled the large structure and also destroyed two major rides, tools and other maintenance equipment. Several seats on the show's gondola wheel were also lost in the disaster.

"I cried like a baby when I went home and saw the fire scene," she said of the devastation. "The boom on the Tilt-A-Whirl trailer was melted; the



A rainbow shines as a backdrop to the T.J. Schmidt & Company midway (above). When Sandy Schmidt has all of her grandchildren together for a week, she refers to it as Camp Doodah (right). COURTESY T.J. SCHMIDT COMPANY

drop tower the same thing.

The one thing that broke me was the loss of the Tilt-A-Whirl. It was the first ride Terry bought before we were married. When the kids were little, Terry and I took it into the shop and took it apart while the kids slept (in the shop). We refinished the ride in purple and green — the show colors. In retrospect, it's equipment and nobody was hurt. Things happen and you just have to keep rolling."

The carnival did man-

age to get on the road to fulfill its 2026 schedule with a solid arsenal of rides and attractions.

Sandy Schmidt admits, "The company is in very good hands moving forward."

"I managed the food until a couple of years ago. The boys have taken over the day-to-day, but I'm here offering my two cents all summer," she asserted. "It was time for me to start stepping back, but I'll never not be here."

She contends she is



now in a place where she can enjoy a little more of her six grandchildren, saying: "When they are here on the show, I can take them on the merry-go-round and do the things grandmas are supposed to do. I have a week when I have all of them and we call it Camp Doodah."

When asked what word best describes Sandy Schmidt, she quickly responded: "resilient."

For her decades of dedication to the mobile industry and IISA, the **SHOW PERSON OF THE YEAR** award is presented to Sandy Schmidt.

—Ron Gustafson

'Congrats' Sandy Schmidt!



Wadkins Expo Wheel

Builder Of Single-Trailer Gondola Wheels

* Roger Wadkins Jr. * Phone: 443-463-1637

email: wadkinsexpowheel@yahoo.com

P.O. Box 45, Joppa MD 21085

SUPER TRADE SHOW & EXTRAVAGANZA



INTERNATIONAL INDEPENDENT SHOWMEN'S FOUNDATION INC.

SEE YA' IN GIBTOWN

**59th
Annual**



**The Largest Carnival
Trade Show in the USA**

FEBRUARY 9 - 12, 2027

6915 RIVERVIEW DR. - RIVERVIEW - FL 33578

TEL: (813) 677-9377 FAX: (813) 677-1041

Santa's Village takes Best Family Park, Level99 honored with Standout FEC

Amusement Today's **BEST FAMILY PARK** spotlights amusement parks that don't cater to thrill seekers. Instead, attractions are geared toward children, most of which can be ridden with their parents. No rides go upside down or have extreme speed.

A brand-new winner has emerged in this category — **Santa's Village** in Jefferson, New Hampshire. The charming family park captures the spirit and essence of Christmas every day. No matter the month or season, the holiday vibe is enchanting. Buy some gingerbread, pet reindeer, go snow tubing or tickle "humbugs" on the dark ride. In 2024, the park installed Midnight Flyer, a family coaster from **Vekoma**, specifically selected for its 36-inch height requirement and ability to run in cold temperatures.



Over the years, Santa's Village has inched higher and higher on the charts. In 2026, it takes the Golden Ticket for Best Family Park. AT/TIM BALDWIN

No rides exceed a 48-inch height requirement.

"At Santa's Village in New Hampshire, we believe in the goodness of Santa and the Christmas spirit all year round, and our mission is to deliver pure joy, family style, every operating

day," said **Christian Gainer**, who shies away from management titles and goes by Happy Elf. "Also, we believe in providing a good value for every visit and the cost of admission includes parking, stroller use, visits with Santa and his reindeer, a ring from

the blacksmith, the Elfabet scavenger hunt, all rides and shows and the water park in season. Receiving the Golden Ticket Award as Best Family Park brings us joy, knowing that voters recognize our efforts."

Santa's Village was a long-running finalist, and has gradually climbed higher and higher before taking this first win.

Dutch Wonderland (No. 2), a six-year winner in this category, features a castle entrance, three roller coasters, a water park, fun mascots and a mix of rides for the family.

Rising two notches over last year's rankings is **Legoland Florida** (No. 3). Its themed hotels, Lego MiniLand, water park and mix of attractions take a toy-themed direction. This year, the park added a space-themed roller coaster, Galacticoaster from **ART Engineering**.

Morgan's Wonderland (No. 4) returns to the chart. This unique property embraces the philosophy of ultra inclusivity. Everyone is welcome to play, and those with disabilities get in for free. The idea is for friends and family of all abilities to play together. For 2026, the park added Wingz of Wonder, the first ride of its type from **Zamperla**.

Story Land (No. 5) in Glen, New Hampshire, stays on the chart. With much to do with its fairy tales, Moo Lagoon water park, family coasters and train ride, mul-

tiple generations of families have grown up with the park — so much so that they have nostalgic adult nights that have proven very popular.

Family entertainment centers have evolved. While the traditional properties with go-karts and miniature golf still thrive, the expansion of location-based entertainment has broadened the segment of the industry.

The **STANDOUT FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTER** category looks at advancements along this wide spectrum of offerings.

Taking the Golden Ticket in 2026 is **Level99**. Level99 has taken the traditional FEC and recreated a sprawling playground for adults and teens. The facility — located within **Disney Springs** of Lake Buena Vista, Florida — features more than 60 life-sized mini-games and challenges. Guests do everything from physically dodging giant axes, to cracking puzzles to outsmarting real-world challenges. The experience is a "choose your own adventure"-style visit and guests can take part in cooperative Challenge Rooms, competitive Player-vs-Player Duels and an interactive art scavenger hunt.

"Level99 is unlike anything you've experienced before — it is an entirely new category of entertainment," said **Matthew DuPlessie**, founder and CEO. "Here, players don't just watch a game — they are in it. Every visit is social, physical and endlessly replayable, with dozens of challenges that reward teamwork, creativity and persistence. The response to our new opening at Disney Springs has been incredible — the thousands of guests visit each day are already planning their next visit before the first one ends. I think what makes Level99 so powerful is that it meets the desire people have to return to what is real while experiencing shared accomplishment and genuine joy they can't find elsewhere."

While each game is

► See FAMILY, page 32



Santa's Village

Pure Joy. Family Style.®

Thank you, Amusement Today,
for the recognition of a New England family tradition!

Jefferson, New Hampshire santasvillage.com

►FAMILY

Continued from page 30

active, they only last one to four minutes each, giving guests the opportunity to choose to repeat and replay the games they love, or move on to new experiences, so they are not committed to just one type or style of game. Level99's technology allows guests to save their progress across visits so that they can pick up where they left off, providing the opportunity to continue to climb the leaderboard and earn rewards on subsequent visits. Within two weeks of opening, the location had to extend its hours to meet the incredible demand from its guests, demonstrating there is a market for FEC-style experiences aimed at older crowds.

Universal Horror Unleashed (No. 2), Las Vegas, Nevada, may sound less family-friendly than some properties, but many families love scary movies and Halloween chills. Universal Horror Unleashed, an all-new chapter in horror, haunt, (jump) scares and guest fright, began in late summer of 2025. Located at **Area 15**, the immersive entertainment district just off the Las Vegas Strip, Horror Unleashed is Universal's first year-round attraction to

debut outside of a theme park. The 110,000-square-foot warehouse was completely transformed into a fully themed and immersive destination, blending the best of Universal theme parks' rich horror history with the unique live entertainment that Las Vegas is known for.

The main draws and anchors for Horror Unleashed are the haunted houses, which, owing to the success of Halloween Horror Nights, Universal has become masterful at creating. The location features four haunted houses, which include original storytelling and renowned horror IPs. The core difference at Horror Unleashed from Universal's Halloween Horror Nights is the full immersive experience. Guests remain within the realm of horror, even as they emerge from a haunted house.

Atlas9 (No. 3), a narrative-driven immersive art experience, opened its doors in Kansas City, Kansas, in late 2025. Created by award-winning international experience design firm **Dimensional Innovations**, the 46,000-square-foot "containment" building surrounds a transformed 1990s movie theater that shifts into a "living" cinematic uni-



Level99 has short games and challenges to engage friends and family members. The new facility wins Standout Family Entertainment Center. COURTESY LEVEL99

verse — putting visitors at the center of the story. In addition to its engaging box office area, the venue also includes numerous themed rooms and corridors, a 1940s-themed jazz club and a speakeasy, along with a 240-seat auditorium with awe-inducing projection mapping, an arcade, pizza parlor and more.

When visitors enter Atlas9, they are set to discover that as a result of a projection experiment gone

awry, stories from within film reels have come alive. Guests investigate the events and anomalies in the theater, exploring the rooms and corridors as the narrative unfolds.

Thrillz Adventure Park in Doraville, Georgia, places fourth. Thrillz Adventure Park opened its 56,000-square-foot Atlanta location at the end of June 2026. Designed for families, friend groups and thrill seekers alike, the climate-controlled venue

offers a welcome escape from Georgia's notorious summer heat.

Thrillz Atlanta has more than 20 distinct attractions across six categories, including signature amusement rides, multi-story slides, high-flying airbag challenges, active play courts, family zones and entertainment amenities. From rides, including a 40-foot indoor Drop Tower and a Rush 360 pendulum that flips upside down while spinning to Grave Digger VR — one of only four such experiences in North America — "Thrillz Atlanta brings together a lineup with no direct comparison in the domestic indoor entertainment market," according to officials with Thrillz.

Do The Beach (No. 5) in Northport, Florida, is doing something nobody else is doing in the FEC space. It is a highly immersive beach-themed adventure park with incredible attention to detail. From the moment you walk into the facility, visitors are transported into a bright and colorful beach escape for the whole family — originality in a familiar framework.

The core feature is a multi-attraction beach-themed inflatable park that blends slides, obstacle courses, mechanical rides, sports courts, climbing walls and soft play into one safe immersive area.



AMUSEMENT RIDES MANUFACTURERS

100% MADE IN ITALY

IMPACT

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



WWW.FABBRIGROUP.COM

VIDEO





NEW!

**ONE-OF-A-KIND TASTE MEETS
ONE-OF-A-KIND ICE CREAM**



Congratulations Golden Ticket Winners!

J & SNACK FOODS
CORP.

*Your full solutions provider for the world's
most fun snack and beverage products.*



WingZ from Zamperla takes Golden Ticket Award for Best Innovation

At no time has the amusement industry ever stopped innovating. New ways to entertain, new services to offer, new ways to do business — it's progress in many forms.

BEST INNOVATION is a category voted on by industry insiders from nominations that come from within the industry.

Taking the Golden Ticket in 2026 is **Zamperla** for its interactive flat ride **WingZ**.

The first-of-its-kind family ride allows riders control over the elevation of the gondola by flapping their arms. The Zamperla WingZ combines proven technologies from other industries, such as motion capture cameras and computers and brushless DC motors from high-speed elevator applications to provide a responsive change in elevation to the real movements of guests on the attraction. This highly sophisticated movement system performs eloquently with the body movements of riders, which allows total control of their individual experience.

"The Zamperla Blue Sky team is constantly looking for new and exciting ways to entertain the masses," said **Michael Coleman**, North American Sales Manager, Zamperla. "The team behind the scenes and the support of our CEO, **Antonio Zamperla**, allow rides like the WingZ to see the light of day. Innovation is the result of creative minds, countless hours of effort and a strong commitment to R&D."

The first installation of this attraction opened at **Morgan's Wonderland** in San Antonio.

"Everyone who rides Wingz of Wonder gets to have fun and forget about their worries for a little while. And when you're 40 feet up in the air, you can't help but smile!" says **Catherine Lorenzo**, park president, Morgan's Wonderland. "I hear guests say all the time, 'I'm a pretty little butterfly!' And if you're a parent with toddlers, you know exactly what they mean."

The new ride also accommodates wheelchairs directly onboard.

"One of the best parts is seeing parents get so excited



to ride with their child who uses a wheelchair. Hearing their child laugh and seeing their happiness as they go up and down the ride is something truly special," said Lorenzo.

Universal Fan Fest Nights at Universal Studios Hollywood was voted second place.

The theme park developed the all-original concept of Universal Fan Fest Nights, expanding its after-hours entertainment through an immersive celebration of fandom. Created for Universal Studios Hollywood, Universal Fan Fest Nights brings together globally recognized worlds across sci-fi, fantasy, gaming, anime and classic Universal properties into one cohesive nighttime fandom experience.

The event featured original immersive experiences inspired by beloved franchises including Dungeons & Dragons, One Piece, Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, Super Nintendo World, Scooby-Doo and Universal Monsters. The multi-night event welcomed cosplay, inviting guests to further immerse themselves in these fandom worlds.

At No. 3 is **eTram** from **Chance Rides**. The eTram, powered by EVX Mobility technology, represents a new approach to transportation for theme parks, zoos, resorts, campuses and destination venues.

Unlike many electric vehicles that are adapted from existing platforms, the eTram is built on a purpose-designed electric vehicle platform developed from the ground up specifically for low-speed passenger transportation. Every aspect of the vehicle, from energy management and passenger comfort to serviceability and operational efficiency, has been engineered to meet the unique demands of attractions and hospitality environments.

What makes the eTram truly innovative is its combination of electrification, solar-



Zamperla WingZ is a first-of-its-kind family ride allowing riders to control the elevation of their gondola by flapping their arms. COURTESY ZAMPERLA

assisted operation, connected vehicle technology and circular design principles. Integrated rooftop solar panels help reduce energy consumption and charging requirements, while connected fleet capabilities enable remote diagnostics, monitoring and proactive maintenance.

The two innovations tying for fourth place are both from **Guangdong Haisan Amusement Technology Co. Ltd.**

The **High Tower Slide**, is the tallest water slide complex in Asia and the second tallest in the world — standing 80 meters high with a highest departure platform at 56 meters, while housing 11 slides across nine configurations on a single tower structure.

Installed at **Tianmu Future Valley Water World**, the High Tower Slide pushes the boundaries of water-slide engineering in every dimension. Its nine-slide configurations range from fully enclosed high-speed body slides and RTM-crafted spiral descents reaching 460 meters in length, to multi-rider raft slides featuring luminous glowing track effects — delivering an unmatched variety of thrill experiences within one iconic landmark. The structure is designed for a service life of

no less than 15 years.

The High Tower Slide represents a significant advancement in tower slide design complexity, concentrating 11 slides of radically different ride typologies — speed slides, spiral slides, funnel slides, bowl slides and body slides — into a single integrated structure requires an exceptional level of structural engineering, spatial planning and manufacturing precision. This level of density and diversity within one tower has not been achieved at this height anywhere else in the world.

Sky Eye Slide is the world's first waterslide to integrate 3D holographic projection technology with a live water curtain system — creating an entirely new category of water attraction.

Installed at Tianmu Future Valley Water World, the Sky Eye Slide delivers an immersive audio-visual spectacle as riders descend. Holographic imagery is projected onto a live flowing water screen, synchronized with spatial surround sound, producing a dreamlike fusion of physical thrill and digital entertainment. It is a functioning ride experience where the technology is inseparable from the attraction itself.

The innovation addresses

a long-standing challenge in the water park industry: how to differentiate waterslides beyond height and speed.

Honorable mentions

The hybrid **InterCard Impulse Plus iReader** for arcade games doesn't need to be connected to a kiosk. It connects directly to InterCard's cloud-based management system, which includes a payment gateway, via WiFi or cellular at the individual game. It has a rugged, durable design that's great for outdoor use.

Moving to a new location is easy. The operator simply boots up the readers, connects to a cellular network and the games are ready to play. This makes it ideal for arcade operators at fairs and carnivals.

The Impulse Plus accepts more types of payments (including credit cards, play cards and mobile pay), makes more upsells and can increase revenues by as much as 20%. It also allows operators to capture credit card users while continuing to use coin-op games. The Impulse Plus allows them to do both and can deliver reports of cash and credit card revenues on demand via a mobile device.

Theme park operators still rely on manual, imprecise methods to track their most vital operational data. **Nola Technologies'** development of **RideFlow** changes that entirely, driving an inevitable industry shift: the automation of performance data.

Data analysis shows that without precise optimization of flow and capacity, operators leave significant revenue unrealized. The core technical breakthrough behind this platform is a proprietary anonymous body signature matching methodology for tracking wait times, which delivers unprecedented accuracy at a fraction of traditional costs. RideFlow captures the precise key performance indicators that dictate a park's financial health, including ride throughput, queue wait times and dispatch trends, allowing operators to instantly eliminate bottlenecks and maximize hourly capacity.

THE AMUSEMENT GROUP



WingZ of Wonder
Morgan's Wonderland
San Antonio, Texas



Flap. Fly. Repeat.

WingZ, the world's first interactive, fully accessible tower ride, turns every rider into the pilot of their own adventure.

WingZ transforms a simple gesture into an entirely new way to ride.

Through AI-powered interaction, riders control the vertical movement of their gondola by flapping their arms, creating the sensation of real flight.

Combining groundbreaking gameplay, full accessibility, and engineering designed for long-term reliability, WingZ redefines the family ride experience.

Discover more on zamperla.com and follow us on [@zamperlarides](https://twitter.com/zamperlarides)

Dollywood delights, takes both Most Beautiful and Best Guest Experience

Fortunate to be in the wonderful setting of the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee, **Dollywood** adds to the lush surroundings with quaint architecture, vibrant landscaping and colorful park décor. For 2026, Dollywood wins **MOST BEAUTIFUL PARK**.

This is the second win for Dollywood in this category, having taken the prize back in 2024.

"Being recognized as the world's Most Beautiful Park is especially meaningful because of our home here in the Great Smoky Mountains," said **Pete Owens**, Dollywood Parks & Resorts vice president of marketing and public relations. "We're surrounded by a one-of-a-kind, natural landscape that changes beautifully to reflect each individual season. The hard work our hosts do to complement that natural beauty with the care and attention they put into every corner

of the park means there truly is no other theme park experience like the one you find at Dollywood."

The past four years have been a contest of winning by the slimmest of margins. The Tennessee destination just beat out long-running champion **Busch Gardens Williamsburg** (No. 2) by the thinnest differentiation of point totals.

Also graced by beautiful natural surroundings, Busch Gardens has established a reputation for its manicured flower beds, having received accolades within the industry for many decades.

Efteling (No. 3) in the Netherlands moves up a notch in 2026 over last year. A stroll through the fantastical lands of one of Europe's most attended parks lets visitors be captivated by imaginative architecture situated among bright and photogenic landscaping. A beautiful new hotel and



Inching into the top spot, Dollywood (above) reclaims Most Beautiful Park for a second time. At right, Busch Gardens Williamsburg (No. 2) is globally renowned for its colorful flower beds.
AT/TIM BALDWIN

engaging fountain show at the front of the park complement the imaginative atmosphere.

► See GUEST, page 37



THRILL FAMILY PENDULUM KMG RIDES.





Efteling (No. 3) is captivating and beautiful wherever one looks. AT/TIM BALDWIN

►GUEST

Continued from page 36

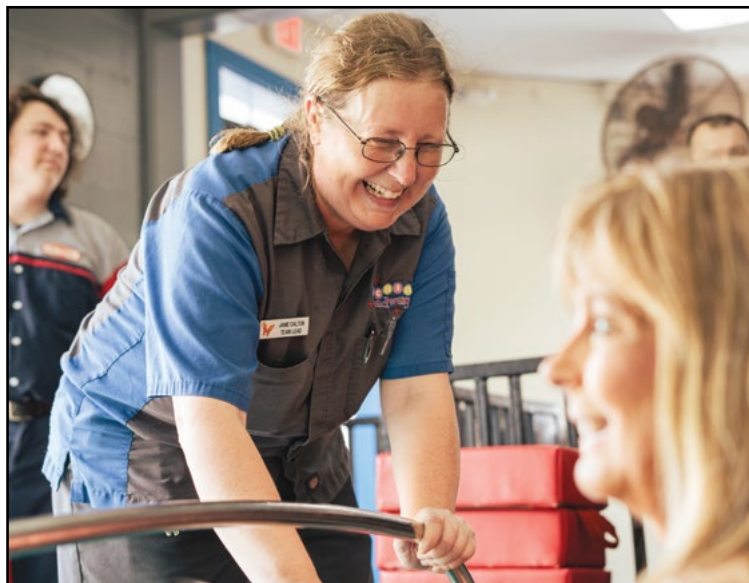
Some of the world's finest gardens in a theme park are found at **Europa-Park** (No. 4), echoed by numerous voters who keep Germany's most-attended theme park on the chart of finalists. No matter the time of year, colorful landscaping inside the parks and around the resort makes it a visual feast for the eyes.

Tivoli Gardens (No. 5) in Denmark makes a return to the charts this year. Dating back to 1843, the Copenhagen park has dazzled guests for ages with its lighted buildings and exotic gardens. Stories are told that a visit from **Walt Disney** helped him envision a similar amusement park in the U.S. Stylized rides and shaded walkways create a pleasing atmosphere at every turn.

Panelists voting on **BEST GUEST EXPERIENCE** are instructed to evaluate cleanliness, friendliness, ride operations and customer value.

Dollywood has had a strong grasp on this category since it was introduced in 2019. Now with seven wins, the park continues its winning formula.

"Winning Best Guest Experience for the seventh-consecutive year is an incredible reflection of the hosts who make Dollywood what it is every day," said **Eugene Naughton**, Dollywood Parks & Resorts president. "Our hosts continue to raise the bar on



Dollywood prides itself on the qualities that earn Best Guest Experience. COURTESY DOLLYWOOD



what the theme park experience should truly be for guests. They create special moments through their genuine hospitality, attention to detail and commitment to creating meaningful memories for each person who comes through our turnstiles. We're honored that *Amusement Today's* Golden Ticket voters continue to recognize that effort."

The following three finalists matched their positions from the previous year.

Europa-Park (No. 2) has been praised for its stellar operations, matched by its impeccable park atmosphere. Those who visit from international locations understand the reputation once they experience what the park has to offer.

Holiday World (No. 3) was the primary winner when this category was once termed Friendliest Park before evolving into a more developed criterion. Instilled from the top down, friendliness is felt throughout the park. A focus on cleanliness is also a primary objective.

Knoebels Amusement Resort (No. 4) boasts numerous attributes with its fantastic food, solid operations, friendly team members and true value. Being a family-owned park, that same care and attention is felt by visitors and the park's many fans.

Disneyland joins the chart this year, closing out the top five. Walt Disney's vision for a welcoming place set the standard and is a goal — or should be — for every park operator globally to follow. Cleanliness and friendliness became hallmarks of the Disney experience, creating a happy place for all who visit.

AERIA

AMUSEMENT ENTERTAINMENT RISK INSURANCE ASSOCIATES

Providing insurance to the amusement industry for over 65 years.

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

www.amusemententertainmentrisk.com

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

Johnson Kendall Johnson

www.kaypark.com



SCAN
NOW TO
EXPLORE
PRODUCTS



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

Bleachers | Benches | Bike Racks | Picnic Tables | Grills

Dollywood®

PARKS & RESORTS

MOST BEAUTIFUL PARK



BEST FAMILY COASTER



Thank you Amusement Today and Golden Ticket voters for choosing Dollywood for these prestigious awards.





BEST GUEST EXPERIENCE



BEST KIDS' AREA



Kentucky Kingdom transformation acknowledged with Turnstile Award

Since 1987, **Kentucky Kingdom** in Louisville has weathered an up-and-down history — suitable for a roller coaster but not for operation as an amusement park. In its early days, it was “The Thrill Park.” Ownership has changed a few times over the past four decades, partly owing to its unique placement adjacent to the **Kentucky State Fair**.

A new direction began when **Herschend Family Entertainment** added the park to its portfolio in 2021. Since then, families in Kentucky and the surrounding states have witnessed a gradual — but committed — transformation of the property.

Festivals were the first investment, bringing a family atmosphere to October’s Pumpkins at Kentucky Kingdom event in 2022. Proving popular, the park expanded its season with Christmas at Kentucky Kingdom in December of 2024, an \$8 million investment. The Herschend magic helped drive attendance even further.

Finding its place — or rather, its “story” — is a new direction that is proving popular. Rides and themes have helped define the park recently, embracing its Kentucky roots and heritage. Discovery Meadow was a transformation of the west area of the park. Floral improvements and thematic overlays made the area more cohesive, with the makeover of existing rides and the addition of new ones supplied by **Zamperla** and **Metalbau**



Adopting an agricultural slant, the new Flying Fox continues to bring distinct elements to Kentucky Kingdom (above). Festivals for fall (below left) and Christmas (below right) brought new reinvigorated seasons for families.

AT/TIM BALDWIN; COURTESY KENTUCKY KINGDOM



Emmeln. It was a crowd-pleaser with guests, giving the park a fresh feel.

“The gardens are really the heartbeat of Discovery Meadow,” said **Carly Uglow**, director of sales and marketing. “We weren’t just adding rides, we were building an environment.”

A 4,800-square-foot shaded playground included both active and accessible

elements so kids of all ages and their caregivers could share the moment. Two new characters, Scout the Squirrel and Robin, made connections with kids as well.

“The guest response to Discovery Meadow has been overwhelmingly positive. Now in its second season, guests can feel the investment we’ve made in this part of the park, with Kentucky theming carried through everything from the rides and dining options to the native plants and entertainment options,” said Uglow. “As our first major park investment in years, and part of an ongoing multiyear transformation, it’s become a charming, vibrant space come alive with our guests.”

This season, that Kentucky hometown love was seen through an agriculture lens with the addition of Flying Fox, a nod to pilots tending to the fields of farmers. A character, Jeb Fox, looks for recruits to take care of the crops and farmland. The story



is told through a new **Vekoma** family coaster, which continues to broaden offerings for more members of the family.

At the ride’s opening, Herschend CEO **Andrew Wexler** stated: “Today is another exciting milestone in Kentucky Kingdom’s story and a reflection of what we believe at Herschend. When we became stewards of this park in 2021, we made a promise to invest in Kentucky Kingdom and in Louisville. Flying Fox is the latest example of that promise in action, as we continue to create new experiences that bring families from Louisville, Northern Kentucky, Southern Indiana, and beyond together.”

“Adding seasonal events like Pumpkins at Kentucky Kingdom in 2022 and Christmas at Kentucky Kingdom in 2024 took us from a summer park to a year-round destination,” said Uglow. “These signature events give families new experiences beyond the sum-

mer season, uniquely themed and put together for the whole family. It’s how we’ve shaped Kentucky Kingdom into a themed experience that delivers all year long.”

“When Herschend acquired Kentucky Kingdom, we saw tremendous potential — not just in the park itself, but in what it could mean for families across Louisville and the region,” added Wexler. “That’s why we invested in stronger storytelling, more immersive experiences and attractions families can enjoy together while staying true to the park’s Kentucky roots.”

With each addition, Herschend Family Entertainment and Kentucky Kingdom help transform the park into one of state pride and establish a new identity. For keeping families coming through the gates, *Amusement Today* recognizes Kentucky Kingdom with the 2026 **PUBLISHER’S PICK TURNSTILE AWARD**.



Discovery Meadow brought new characters, new rides, new theming and new connections to the state’s heritage. COURTESY KENTUCKY KINGDOM



FLYING FOX
SUSPENDED FAMILY COASTER ADDED IN 2026



DISCOVERY MEADOW
KENTUCKY NATURE THEMED LAND ADDED IN 2025

MORE WAYS TO PLAY WITH A KENTUCKY TWIST



CHRISTMAS AT KENTUCKY KINGDOM
ADDED IN 2024



PUMPKINS AT KENTUCKY KINGDOM
ADDED IN 2022

**KENTUCKY
KINGDOM**
THEME & WATER PARK™



THANK YOU

AMUSEMENT TODAY FOR RECOGNIZING OUR RECENT
INVESTMENTS OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS AT KENTUCKY KINGDOM

Industry powerhouse Vekoma the Publisher's Pick for Supplier of the Year

One hundred years ago, **Vekoma** was established in Vlodrop, Netherlands. Today, it is an amusement industry staple. However, most people in the business are unaware that the name was a syllabic abbreviation of sorts, short for Veld Koning Machinefabriek (translated Veld Koning Machine Factory). Originally, the company manufactured farm equipment and later parts for the coal mining industry. That changed in the 1970s.

Roller coaster manufacturer **Arrow Development** brought the company into the amusement industry. Contracting Vekoma to build steel structures for its roller coasters in Europe, Arrow eventually licensed its coaster-building technology when demand increased. Vekoma entered the roller coaster market in 1979. By 1983, the company dropped all other products and focused solely on providing amusement attractions.

The final two decades of the 20th century witnessed Vekoma's impact by supplying rides that were in demand. The parks needed thrill rides, and Vekoma's popular boomerang coaster and suspended looping coaster began populating the globe, as well as roller



skater coasters for families. In addition to the mass production of these roller coasters, the company made various other rides too, including Ferris wheels and mad houses.

The new millennium ushered in a major change for the company. In the 21st century, the "new" Vekoma Rides has found its foothold with customization. Incredible crowd-pleasing coasters have swept Europe, Asia and the United States, with a vast portfolio of genres, including mine trains, launched coasters,



Above right is an image dating back to 1933 and is a far cry from Vekoma's modern-day manufacturing facilities and offices of the 21st century. Vekoma entered the amusement industry in the later decades of the 20th century with this 1979 effort their first foray into roller coasters (above left). COURTESY VEKOMA

motorbike coasters and suspended thrill coasters. Most notably, the company has delivered wildly popular coasters at opposite ends of the thrill spectrum. The family boomerang with no inversions has seen more than 40 installations worldwide, while the company's newest thriller, the tilt coaster, has captivated the globe in the last year.

The manufacturer has long supplied rides across the industry, but each year, exemplary engineering and creative design have brought some of the biggest

crowd pleasers to the largest of companies within the world of attractions, including **Disney**, **Six Flags** and **Dollywood**.

Praised for impressive engineering and smooth track, as well as comfortable restraints, Vekoma has established itself as a powerhouse like never before when it comes to roller coaster installations. Its innovation with flying coasters, suspended dark ride systems, media-based attractions and interactive water rides continue to see the company moving the

amusement industry forward in exciting new ways.

Since 2018, Vekoma has been operating under parent company **Sansei Technologies**, with more than 300 committed professionals. Today, the company prides itself on service, both during installation and after-sales. According to the company, its creative design and high-precision engineering derive from the world's largest in-house expertise center prepared to bring new attractions and storytelling experiences to life.

One hundred years of history is a major milestone for any company. Vekoma is blazing a path by exceeding both standards and expectations, while introducing new ideas and concepts for park operators. For its development of dynamic amusement attractions, combined with exemplary customer service, Vekoma Rides is recognized with *Amusement Today's* **PUBLISHER'S PICK SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR AWARD**.



Disney has partnered with Vekoma for huge projects, such as **TRON: Lightcycle/Run** at the Magic Kingdom (above left). **F.L.Y.** at Phantasialand (above right) is lauded as the best among flying coasters. AT/TIM BALDWIN



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

Entertainment Industry Client



Look closer.
We're different.



HAAS & WILKERSON
INSURANCE

Westchester®
A Chubb Company

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

HWINS.com/partner

**CONGRATULATIONS TO DOLLYWOOD -
WINNER OF THE GOLDEN TICKET AWARD
BEST FAMILY COASTER!**



**CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF VEKOMA
HONORED TO BE AWARDED WITH THE
GOLDEN TICKET AWARD SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR!**



Publisher's Pick Person of the Year recognizes COTALand's Matt Hughey

Square one. It can be daunting.

Several years ago, the idea of an amusement park on the campus of **Circuit of the Americas** in Austin, Texas, was to be a small selection of kiddie rides, similar to what owner **Bobby Epstein** recalled from his youth in San Antonio at **Kiddieland**. Things only became bigger from there.

To make the leap into a full-fledged amusement park, Epstein enlisted **Matt Hughey**. With past industry experience with **Six Flags**, Hughey serves **COTALand** as vice president of operations.

"Opening a new ride is one thing," Hughey said. "But multiply that by 30 plus food and beverage — it's a different story."

And so began the journey.

With the evolution from a kiddie park to a family park to a larger-scale amusement park, things — and delays — became complex and involved. More rides had to be acquired and contracted. Plans had to be submitted and resubmitted, with more people



Matt Hughey



being brought on.

Starting from scratch, even with the site selection within COTA's 1,500 acres, brought its own set of challenges: underground issues, permitting, electrical, fire lanes, city inspections, etc. Hughey was the one to steer the ship, even though he will admit it wasn't always smooth sailing.

Honesty is one of his most admirable traits. Hughey doesn't sugarcoat things. As he says, "Life isn't always gumdrops and rainbows." Demonstrating



Matt Hughey's tenure with Six Flags made him an ideal candidate for steering the ship for COTALand, owing to his knowledge, expertise and passion for the industry. COURTESY SIX FLAGS

the adage: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going," he wanted to make sure that things were right, not simply rushed.

It was his expertise that provided insightful counsel to Epstein when it came time for ride selection. His use of a broad range of suppliers delivered a diverse selection of rides appealing to a wide range of age groups. Hughey orchestrated balance. His experience within the industry led to many of the numerous details, both

thematically and upscale. Throughout the journey, he wanted it to be "the park of Texas."

Guiding his decisions, he traveled the world meeting with numerous suppliers. It would be no secret that he has plans for the many years ahead. Getting COTALand open and ready is simply the first step.

Beginning with the supply-chain frustrations on the heels of COVID to delays with permitting and construction, the stress of envisioning a park required

resilience, believing in the great park that will open one day on the horizon. Along the way, his rapport with team members (who weren't necessarily from the amusement industry) and suppliers, along with his mentorship of younger employees, Hughey feels those connections create an "amusement family." Developing such a culture is a key driver in debuting a new park.

Many young employees who had worked under Hughey in Arlington joined his team in Austin. His industry expertise also taught him how to build bonds.

Things take time, but sometimes the patience from the right person guides a team where it needs to go. Taking COTALand from square one to the final product through experience and foresight, *Amusement Today* honors Matt Hughey with the **PUBLISHER'S PICK PERSON OF THE YEAR AWARD**.



Hughey's enthusiasm for the industry made him a driving force for ride selection. COURTESY COTALAND



**YOUR
TRUSTED
PARTNER
IN SAFETY
NETTING**

FENCING CROWD CONTROL DEBRIS NETS THEMING PLAY STRUCTURES

CONGRATULATIONS

to our friends at  **COTALAND**
on opening Cosmic
Glider!



Experience it for
yourself at the
Golden Ticket Awards!

Website: www.s-s.com
Email: sales@s-s.com
Phone Number: +1-435-752-1987



Celebrating 100 years, Publisher's Pick Park of the Year honors Knoebels

Ask a fan of **Knoebels Amusement Resort** to describe the park in a single word, and you might get answers such as charm, nostalgia, tradition or character. Its legion of followers is a passionate lot. Many traditional amusement parks of the 20th century were lost to the growing rise of theme parks. Those that survived can credit it to local traditions or the experience they provided for the community. In the case of Knoebels, it thrived thanks to one thing: family.

In 1926, games, a restaurant, a carousel and a swimming pool that offered clean water were added to the Elysburg, Pennsylvania, grove owned by the **Knoebel family**. Generation after generation of Knoebel family members helped the property grow. More rides, campsites and many more eateries expanded the offerings for visiting families.

Much of the park's popularity is owed to its uniqueness. Along with the wide mix of rides, the park's setting is special, surrounded by tall trees, Pennsylvania hills and a creek (that has given the park some historic floods). Rare is the ability to just wander into a park for free, grab an ice cream cone and decide to hop on a couple of rides of one's choice, such as a long, old-fashioned train



Knoebels' historic carousel (above) is world-renowned. Guests love reaching for the brass ring. Twister (right) is one of the park's impressive collection of wooden coasters. COURTESY KNOEBELS; AT/TIM BALDWIN

ride into the woods or a sky ride up the mountainside. That relaxed atmosphere is the park's charm. Add to that the park's various cabin rentals and a visit quite atypical from the standard amusement park is experienced.

Autumn brings a special time to the park with Hallo-Fun. All ages can enjoy the cooler nights with spooky chills that come in all shapes and sizes. During COVID-19 protocols, Knoebels



Amusement Resort introduced Joy Through the Grove, a Christmas drive-through that has continued to this day.

One of the main figures in the park's history was **Dick Knoebel**. Those who knew him recall a gruff-sounding teddy bear but

revere him as being dedicated, determined and welcoming. One of the finest examples of roller coaster preservation occurred when he disregarded the numerous industry experts who told him moving a defunct wooden coaster was a foolish endeavor.

Four decades later, the award-winning Phoenix has proved those naysayers wrong time and time again. His determination to build the only operating Flying Turns took several years, and again, he proved those who said it would never open wrong once more.

Dick believed in providing family value and a quality experience. The park features a wonderful complement of both new and older rides, many of which are preserved so that the generation of today can enjoy links to the past. Today, Knoebels stands as America's largest free-admission park. For so many, it is their "happy place." Whether they come to walk their dogs through the tree-filled park, grab something delicious to eat, take a spin on the historic carousel and reach for the brass ring, or take a rollicking ride on the park's Twister, they know Knoebels offers a spectacular day of fun.

Although the amusement industry lost Dick in July of this year, the world celebrates his accomplishments and those of his family, who still carry out all the popular decisions that — with this year — have entertained families for 100 years. *Amusement Today* is honored to recognize Knoebels Amusement Resort as the **PUBLISHER'S PICK PARK OF THE YEAR**.



The Flying Turns (above left) was a project of determination and inspiration. It is the only one in the world. A sky ride up into the mountainside provides scenic views for visitors enjoying Knoebels' attractive location (above middle). Dick, along with his sons Brian and Rick, address an audience of fans. AT/TIM BALDWIN

KNOEBELS

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS



PARK OF THE YEAR

100 YEARS IN THE MAKING



From a small picnic grove in 1926 to Park of the Year in 2026, this honor belongs to generations of guests, team members and industry friends who helped Knoebels grow while staying true to the traditions that brought us here.

Falcons Flight takes Best New Coaster; Dollywood keeps Family Coaster

It has often been said that records are made to be broken.

Well, maybe.

Six Flags Qiddiya City (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia), shooting for the stars with worldwide marketing clout, debuted multiple world records when the park opened at the beginning of the year. Most notable was **Falcons Flight**, the tallest, longest and fastest coaster in the world. Supplied by **Intamin**, the coaster boasts a staggering length of 13,943 feet of track. (Let that sink in — more than two miles.) The highest point is 535 feet, but the ride actually offers an elevation difference of 640 feet.

Falcons Flight takes the Golden Ticket for **BEST NEW ROLLER COASTER**.

"Falcons Flight has a story that immediately captures attention. As the world's tallest, fastest and longest roller coaster, reach-



Big Bear Mountain (above) keeps its paws on the Golden Ticket for Best Family Coaster. **Falcons Flight** (right) broke records for longest, tallest and fastest. It takes the award for Best New Roller Coaster. AT/TIM BALDWIN, COURTESY INTAMIN

ing speeds of 250 kilometers per hour, rising near 193 meters and extending 4.3 kilometers, its statistics speak for themselves," **Brian Machamer**, park president of Six Flags Qiddiya City. "Those record-breaking cre-

dentials make Falcons Flight incredibly marketable, but more importantly, they give guests a clear sense of the extraordinary experience waiting for them at Six Flags

► See **COASTER**, page 50



Park Owners & Risk Managers:

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

It's Our Specialty!

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



AMUSEMENT INDUSTRY PROPERTY INSURANCE "DONE RIGHT"

Dedicated Property Insurance for:

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

Highlights:

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

Managed By:

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

Contact:

David A Chodzko, C.I.P.
davidac@parksplusinsure.com
quotes@parksplusinsure.com
352.737.2698

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

#1

BEST NEW
ROLLER
COASTER

BEST NEW
ATTRACTION
INSTALLATION

SEE YOU AT
IAAPA EXPO ORLANDO
BOOTH #3825



FALCONS FLIGHT
SIX FLAGS QIDDIYA CITY

READ MORE



CONGRATULATIONS
TO ALL WINNERS!

INTAMIN

►COASTER

Continued from page 48

Qiddiya City."

"These awards are a tribute to the extraordinary people behind the project, the trust and collaboration shared with our valued partner, Six Flags Qiddiya City, and everyone who helped transform an ambitious vision into a world first," said **Lukas Spieldiener**, CCO, Intamin. "The greatest reward, however, is seeing guests experience and enjoy something that, until recently, seemed impossible."

At one point, the coaster hits 155 mph. It isn't too surprising that the coaster took this category with ease.

In the No. 2 spot is **Tormenta Rampaging Run** at **Six Flags Over Texas**. Built by **Bolliger & Mabillard**, Tormenta is the world's first giga (over 300 feet) dive coaster. Plunging to the ground at a beyond-vertical 95 degrees, the ride features

North America's tallest inversion, followed by the world's tallest vertical loop.

Quantum Accelerator (No. 3), also from Intamin, is a family launched coaster at **Six Flags New England**. Helping to fill a gap between the park's extreme coasters and smaller offerings, the coaster features straddle seating and two launches.

Six Flags Qiddiya City has a second coaster among its arsenal in the finalists. **Colossus**, a wild wooden roller coaster from **Great Coasters International, Inc.** claimed its fans by delivering one of the most ambitious designs to date from GCII. It roars into fourth place.

Completing the top five is **Galacticoaster** at **Legoland Florida**. A product from **ART Engineering** combined with outer space theming, Galacticoaster allows guests to build their own spacecraft before boarding and then taking

off to save the cosmos.

Dollywood has claimed the Golden Ticket for **BEST FAMILY COASTER** since *Amusement Today* introduced the category in 2023. Maintaining its streak, **Big Bear Mountain**, manufactured by **Vekoma**, is the park's longest coaster, which is a surprising characteristic for a family coaster. The concept proved itself as the steel coaster continues to be among the park's most popular.

"Big Bear Mountain has quickly become a favorite for families, and we're thrilled to see it recognized again as Best Family Coaster," explained **Pete Owens**, Dollywood Parks & Resorts vice president of marketing and public relations. "This ride was designed to bring families together for a great adventure, and the fact that it has won this award every year since it opened is a great

► See COASTER, page 52



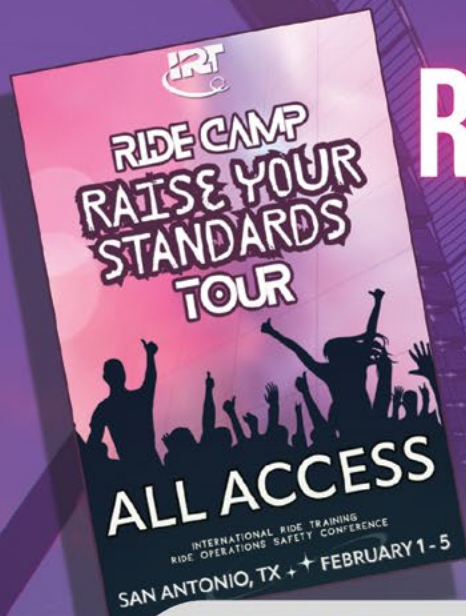
Hiccup's Wing Gliders at Epic Universe ranks as No. 2 for Best Family Coaster. AT/TIM BALDWIN



INTERNATIONAL
RIDE
TRAINING

RIDE CAMP 2027 OPERATIONS SAFETY CONFERENCE

TAPATIO SPRINGS HILL COUNTRY RESORT
SIX FLAGS FIESTA TEXAS | MORGAN'S WONDERLAND
SAN ANTONIO, TX | FEBRUARY 1-5, 2027



Interactive sessions, hands-on learning, esteemed guest speakers, and peer discussions for Operations Teams in the amusement, water park, and attraction industries

Contact Cindee Huddy for more information: cindee@ridetraining.com

FALCONS FLIGHT

RECORD BREAKING AWARD WINNING



THANK YOU



GOLDEN TICKET MARKET PLACE

Locked and Monitored Seatbelt Systems

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

Please contact us for more information or further assistance

www.kumbak.nl

info@kumbak.nl

+31 495 583100

Kumbak
The Amusement Engineers

Controlled Locking Retractor



Single Latch Monitored Lock



motion.
controls.
engineering.
solutions.



let's talk.

on-time.
on-budget.

VALERITY
AUTOMATION

valerity.com/automation

SARTORI
AMUSEMENT RIDES

Where Fun takes Shape

Sartori Rides S.r.l.

+39 0429 800 222 - info@sartorirides.com

www.sartorirides.com

**Amusement
TODAY** Your Amusement
Industry
NEWS Leader

EXTRA! EXTRA!
YOUR DESKTOP EDITION!

All the industry NEWS delivered
to your inbox daily ... for FREE!

Sign-up today at
AmusementToday.com



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



Tormenta Rampaging Run at Six Flags Over Texas sets multiple world records for a dive coaster. AT/TIM BALDWIN

COASTER

Continued from page 50

testament to the experience our operating teams and Vekoma created in Wildwood Grove."

Big Bear Mountain sports a 39-inch height requirement.

Debating last year and keeping its No. 2 spot is **Hiccup's Wing Gliders** at **Universal Epic Universe**. This dual-launched coaster has a scenic setting as it whisks through the Isle of Berk area over water and through canyons. The ride, designed by Intamin, features two launches and numerous scenes.

Climbing a notch is **Mecalodon** (No. 3), also a launched coaster from 2025. Installed at **Walibi Belgium**, the shark-themed ride was created by **Gerstlauer**. Swooping over land and water and through nautical structures, Mecalodon was Gerstlauer's introduction of the airtime coaster.

Coming in at No. 4 is **Bobcat** at **The Great Escape**. This family woodie from **The Gravity Group** debuted in 2024 and has been a finalist in this category for the last two years. It is punctuated with airtime hills and banked curves.

While all the mentioned top finalists have been coasters installed in the last few years, a newcomer on the list dates back to 1980. **Big Thunder Mountain Railroad** (No. 5) at **Magic Kingdom** is a heavily themed mine train suitable for all ages. The ride went through a 16-month rehabilitation recently, coming back to life in May of 2026 to cheering fans.

Best Family Coaster may become one of the most competitive categories in the years ahead as significant new installations continue to be announced.

The Scrambler

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



ELI BRIDGE COMPANY
Building rides people have enjoyed for over a century

217-245-7145 fax 217-479-0103
info@elibridge.com elibridge.com



The most daring ride down the mountain!

New Family Coaster At America's #1 Theme Park

Get ready to climb aboard America's Most Legendary Family Coaster—Miner's Mountain Express™ opening at Silver Dollar City next spring! You'll race across the Ozarks in runaway mine cars chasing a lost cave entrance dug from a true 1880s mining town story. With more than a half of a mile of track, it's the longest family coaster in the Midwest. Come join us for this all-new adventure at America's #1 Theme Park and stay at the brand-new Silver Dollar City Resort also opening in 2027.



The Heart of the Ozarks

Enchanted Parks' Franceen Gonzales recipient of 2026 Leadership Award

Anyone with any length of experience within the amusement industry will recognize the name **Franceen Gonzales**.

For more than 35 years, Gonzales has been a compassionate leader and safety expert and advocate in the global attractions industry. Her career began at a small water park, where her passion for aquatics grew into a lifelong commitment to creating safe, memorable experiences centered around water, people and fun. After attending her first **World Waterpark Association** tradeshow, she saw an opportunity to build a meaningful career in the industry — and she has been leading and inspiring ever since.

Gonzales' career includes leadership roles with **Six Flags** and **Great Wolf Resorts**, followed by a transition to the supplier side as chief experience officer at **WhiteWater**. A change agent and com-



munity builder, she is widely respected as a trailblazer and safety advocate. Seeing an earnest need for safety standards — where none existed — she led the charge. She has also volunteered countless hours to help strengthen the industry and global safety standards by serving on the boards of **IAAPA**, **VWA** and **ASTM International**.

Gonzales' people-first leadership style led her to **Legoland Florida Resort**, where she served as park president, and she guided the team through the opening of **Sea Life Florida Aquarium**. Today, as chief operating officer at **Enchanted Parks**, she is helping shape the company during a critical and pivotal time — building a positive



Franceen Gonzales

culture for team members while ensuring each park delivers safe, clean and fun guest experiences.

Her servant-leader approach sets her apart. She works alongside the park teams, listens to learn, asks thoughtful questions, and seeks to understand operational opportunities and everyday pain points. Her style is grounded in experience, empathy, compassion, direct communication and thoughtful feedback.

Approachable by any-



Franceen Gonzales is seen here as an educator at a lifeguard and water park operator training camp.

COURTESY STARGUARD ELITE

one in the industry — from the most experienced to the newest young professional — Gonzales can be welcoming, knowing that progress can only move forward by sharing with others.

Gonzales' people-first mentality coupled with her focus on industry safety and culture building is helping Enchanted Parks become an employer of

choice. A recognized leader today, she is setting the example for the next generation of park managers and future executives.

In recognition of her continuous commitment to the amusement industry, Franceen Gonzales is the 2026 recipient of the **LEADERSHIP AWARD**.

—Susan Storey
and Tim Baldwin

Leadership Award: Honorable Mentions

Michael Baumann, The Funplex – Mount Laurel

Very few leaders have had the kind of impact that General Manager Michael Baumann has had on both the facility and the people who work at The Funplex. He is noted for reigniting careers when passions began to fade.

His leadership is not about giving directions; it is about developing people. He sees potential in team members that they do not see in themselves and consistently challenges them to grow beyond their comfort zone. Further, Baumann expanded team members' knowledge beyond operations, teaching retail management, financial awareness and how every department contributes to the success of the business to train them to become future leaders.

What makes him exceptional is his ability to balance high expectations with genuine care. He pushes people to achieve more while knowing when to offer support.

Richard Coleman, American Resort Management

As the driving force at American Resort Management, Richard Coleman has consistently demonstrated that operational excellence and guest experience are not competing priorities — they are inseparable. Under his leadership, ARM has become a model for how professional management elevates family entertainment centers, water parks and resorts to their fullest potential, protecting the investments of owners while delivering meaningful experiences to guests.

Coleman has been a reliable voice at trade gatherings, an advocate for professional standards and a mentor to those entering the field. His willingness to share knowledge — whether around safety practices, staff development or revenue strategies — reflects a belief that a stronger industry benefits everyone in it.

His emphasis on training, team culture and leadership development within ARM has produced operators who carry those values into every park and venue they manage.

Ryan Eldredge, Six Flags Great Adventure

Ryan Eldredge consistently demonstrates amazing dedication and leadership. His passion to deliver memorable guest experiences is seen by creating excitement and anticipation around the parks' newest additions. One of his strengths is engaging content creators to take full advantage of publicity gained for each park update on projects, building anticipation and excitement.

Eldredge's interaction with industry insiders and creators, both on-site and remotely, provides opportunities for these people to speak openly about areas in which the park can improve, as well as welcoming new ideas to consider.

James Harhi, Enchanted Parks

James Harhi has been an industry leader, innovator and visionary for over three decades. From a humble beginning as a lifeguard at Walt Disney World, Harhi has become an incredible force throughout the attractions industry, positively impacting theme parks, water parks and

FECs. Not one to seek the spotlight, Harhi will defer to his teams to receive recognition.

Most recently, Harhi founded Enchanted Parks and is leading the company as it acquires facilities across the U.S. to breathe new life into parks that have incredible history and value to their regions. Prior to Enchanted Parks, Harhi was a pivotal figure in the creation and growth of Innovative Attraction Management, StarGuard Elite and JFH Technologies, each serving a major purpose in their respective fields.

Bonnie Weber, Area15

Bonnie Weber, one of the most recognized and respected leaders in the amusement industry, joined Las Vegas's Area15 in 2026 to lead the innovative and immersive destination's next chapter of operational and strategic growth. As president, Weber is responsible for scaling the business, partnerships and future development, while bringing her knack for creating positive experiences for both guests and employees.

Known for her storied career with Six Flags, during her tenure as park president, she led Magic Mountain through eight consecutive years of record-breaking growth and attendance. She later moved into corporate roles with Six Flags before transitioning to Palace Entertainment as chief operating officer.

Weber's passion for the industry drives her to give back. She has served on numerous committees with IAAPA, including the Governance/Nominating, CEO Search Task Force, Finance, Strategic Planning and Education.



Congratulations Franceen Gonzales!

You are an inspirational leader, for Enchanted Parks
and across the Attractions Industry.



Repeat wins for Epic Universe, Dollywood: Best Dark Ride and Kids' Area

The competition between **Disney** parks and **Universal** parks has made the category of **BEST DARK RIDE** an annual battle for more than two decades. With the dramatic opening of **Universal Epic Universe** last year, the exceptionally themed park snagged the win for **Monsters Unchained: The Frankenstein Experiment**. For a second year in a row, the outlandish experience takes the Golden Ticket.

"Monsters Unchained: The Frankenstein Experiment allowed us to bring Universal's classic monsters to life in an entirely new way, supported by some of the most advanced animated figures ever created," said **Jeff Polk**, executive vice president and general manager, Universal Epic Universe. "The intense thrill and excitement we see every day from our guests, more

than a year after opening, is a testament to the creative vision and operational excellence of every team member who has contributed to the attraction."

Just down the midway, Epic Universe scores the No. 2 position with **Harry Potter and the Battle at the Ministry**, another wildly popular dark ride in a different land. An innovative scissor-lift ride system combined with physical sets and media content create a sensory overload for riders.

Owing to Orlando's humidity and hot temperatures, Universal has incredible expertise with indoor attractions.

Disney steps into the No. 3 spot with **Rise of the Resistance** at **Disney's Hollywood Studios**, also in Florida. The E-ticket "must-do" is nothing short of incredible and held the

► See REPEAT, page 58



Universal Epic Universe takes the top two positions for Best Dark Ride, with **Monsters Unchained** (above) keeping the gold. Dollywood's **Wildwood Grove** (right) rides into a seventh year as **Best Kids' Area**.
AT/DAVID FAKE,
TIM BALDWIN



PROVEN STRENGTH. YOUR AMUSEMENT INSURANCE SOLUTION. EXPERIENCED UNDERWRITERS.

Backed by the financial strength of RLI Corp., our Amusement Insurance Program delivers specialized coverage with the expertise you can trust.

With more than 50 years of combined entertainment and amusement underwriting experience, a recognized team and dedicated in-house claims professionals, we provide responsive service and tailored protection for your unique risks.

READY TO GET STARTED?

Have your broker contact us today.



SCAN THE CODE
TO VISIT RLICORP.COM

Rated A++ (Superior) by A.M. Best

RLI
DIFFERENT WORKS

Come along for the
RIDE

info@rideentertainment.com | +1-410-643-9300 | www.rideentertainment.com

GOLDEN TICKET MARKET PLACE

SAFETY, SECURITY, OPERATIONS, RISK MANAGEMENT & INDUSTRY DEFENSE



464 Mississippi Ave.

Palm Harbor, Fla. 34683

(419) 607-0431

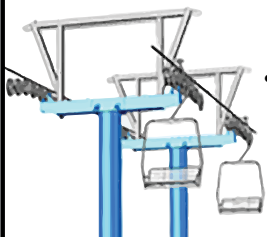
email: pat@thehoffmancg.com

www.thehoffmancg.com



Aerial Tramway Design & Manufacturing

SkyTrans Manufacturing LLC

PO Box 216 106 Burnham Intervale Road • Contoocook, NH 03229
Phone: (603) 746-4446 • Fax: (603) 746-4447

- Specializing in sales of both new and refurbished aerial tramways
- Replacement parts for aerial tramways and amusement rides
- New ride control systems and modifications
- Remanufactured used chairlifts — one year guarantee

Parts and Service

(603) 746-4446
sales@skytrans-mfg.com

With your donations, you make this possible!

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

Universal Epic Universe's Nintendo World (above) placed at No. 2 for Best Kids' Area. The park's Harry Potter and the Battle at the Ministry (below) attraction also took the No. 2 slot for Best Dark Ride. AT/TIM BALDWIN, GARY SLADE

►REPEAT

Continued from page 56

Golden Ticket for four years straight. The immersive experience begins with an elaborate queue and enters a cool pre-show, mind-bending sets, character interactions and a dramatic ride — all lasting close to 15 minutes.

New to the finalists' chart is **Danse Macabre** at **Efteling**. Winner of the Golden Ticket for Best New Family Ride in 2025, the ride system was created by **Intamin**. Orchestrated through a theatrical storyline and dramatic lighting, it is a one-of-a-kind experience.

Completing the list is **Pirates of the Caribbean: Battle for the Sunken Treasure** (No. 5) at **Shanghai Disneyland**. Another former Golden Ticket winner, the eight-and-a-half-minute ride immerses riders in enormous screens and elaborate sets, establishing a worldwide reputation for being one of the industry's greatest rides.

The winner of **BEST KIDS' AREA** is also a repeat win, seven in a row, in fact. **Dollywood** grabbed this category by the paws when Wildwood Grove opened in 2019. Big Bear Mountain added more draw to the area, and just mere weeks ago, NightFlight Expedition debuted for even more attractions for kids to ride with their families.



"Wildwood Grove has always been a special place for families, and adding NightFlight Expedition has created even more excitement for our guests," said **Wes Ramey**, Dollywood Parks & Resorts public relations director. "Seeing Wildwood Grove recognized as the Best Kids' Area for the seventh consecutive year is especially meaningful to me because I see how much my own kids love the area. It is the perfect example of what can happen when a team commits to planning an entire land with experiences the whole family can enjoy together."

Keeping the same spots as 2025 are **Kings Island** (No. 2) and Universal Epic Universe (No. 3). Kings Island took the prize for this category for an impressive 18 years. The Planet Snoopy area combined

with the 2024 addition of Camp Snoopy makes it a perfect space for kids to ride, climb and play. Epic Universe's Nintendo World is an action-packed land filled with interactive elements and rides geared toward what kids like.

Two parks return to the charts. Having been finalists in previous years, **Knott's Berry Farm** (No. 4) and **Canada's Wonderland** (No. 5) were nudged off. Now they return with their kid-friendly sections being spotlighted again. Knott's Camp Snoopy, the original, has long been a favorite area with families for decades. Canada's Wonderland's Planet Snoopy not only features numerous rides for kids — including a whopping four roller coasters — but is also lush with shade and beautiful landscaping.

GOLDEN TICKET AWARDS

Legoland's interactive Galacticoaster wins Best New Theme Concept

Creative ideas don't require enormous budgets, just ... well, creativity. **BEST NEW THEME CONCEPT** recognizes fresh ideas when it comes to storytelling and theming of attractions.

A new take on outer space-themed rides was found at two parks, **Legoland California** and **Legoland Florida**. Both opened **Galacticoaster** less than a week apart in the early months of 2026.

"Galacticoaster was engineered to put kids at the center of the adventure by giving them the power to design their own Lego spacecraft," said **Julie Estrada**, communications director, **Merlin Entertainments**. "That creative, hands-on element makes every ride unique and brings Lego play to life in an innovative new way. The response from families has been fantastic! We've loved seeing kids proudly build and ride their spacecraft and return to experience the mission again with a completely new design. Since there are more than 625 unique combinations, including new ones specifically for the fall season, children and adults alike keep coming back to experience a new adventure."

The indoor space experience features a roller coaster from **ART Engineering** racing through the cosmos with visual effects in the inky darkness in order to save Space Port. Guests

begin in a pre-show area with a larger-than-life animatronic of minifigure Biff Dipper. Prior to blast-off, recruits design their vehicle by customizing nose, tail, wings and special features. RFID wristband technology brings their selections to life so that explorers zip through space in the very spacecraft they designed.

Flying Fox (No. 2) at **Kentucky Kingdom** dives into the state's roots. Legendary crop-dusting pilot Jeb Fox flies over the farmlands of Kentucky on an agricultural endeavor. The station for the **Vekoma** family coaster is an iconic showpiece for the area with its barn structure and silo accompaniment.

The Enchanted Greenhouse at **Six Flags Qiddiya City** places third. Interactive dark rides have often used "guns" or "blasters," but this family attraction features an entirely different approach. Passengers use a "dew sprayer" to wake up mystical creatures and make the garden come alive.

Expédition Nautibus (No. 4) at **Grand Aquarium Saint-Malo** in France allows underwater exploration. The attraction partnered with **BoldMove Nation** for the story-driven experience that includes a pre-show, "underwater base" and submarine voyage. Guests embark on an undersea mission on a quest to find a sunken city that mysteriously vanished.

Just a sliver of a vot-



Embarking on an outer-space mission, visitors enjoying Galacticoaster at Legoland Florida get to design their own spacecraft before embarking on the journey. AT/DAVID FAKE

ing percentage behind is **Kyûbi Unchained** (No. 5) at **Parc Spirou Provence**. As the first use of the animated character Kyûbi from the *Naruto* manga universe, the ride's story is about the nine-tailed fox on which the roller coaster is based. As the name implies, Kyûbi is freed from its chains, and guests are taken on a family-friendly — but thrilling — roller coaster from **Zamperla**.



The agriculture theme of Flying Fox (No. 2) at Kentucky Kingdom embraces the state's heritage. AT/TIM BALDWIN



The legend of Kyûbi of the *Naruto* manga universe breaks loose at Parc Spirou Provence. COURTESY ZAMPERLA

BRING UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCES TO LIFE

RWS GLOBAL

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE NOMINEES!

Wells, Bromilow honored by AIMS International with safety awards

AIMS International, has honored the **International Amusement & Leisure Defense Association (IALDA)** and professional engineer **David Wells** with the 2026 AIMS International Safety Award. In addition, amusement industry veteran and former AIMS International President, **David Bromilow** received the prestigious AIMS International Lifetime Contribution Award.

The recipients were recognized during *Amusement Today's* Golden Ticket Awards ceremony, held September 12 at **COTALand** in Austin, Texas.

The AIMS International Safety Award is presented annually to an individual or organization that demonstrates leadership, innovation and foresight in improving safety within the amusement industry. Contributions to safety take many forms, including the design and implementation of new products and technology, the development

of education and training programs, and exemplary leadership that inspires others to advance safety throughout the industry.

Wells, a mechanical engineer who also studied computer science, began his career as a hydraulic technician. His early work with electrical and electronic controls, programmable logic controllers, and hydraulic automation led to projects ranging from industrial vehicle automation to mechanical land mine clearing and telerobotic nuclear waste handling.

Wells' combined experience in structural and mechanical design, control systems, fluid power and electrical systems eventually led him to specialize in troubleshooting and maintaining amusement devices. For the past 20 years, he has worked closely with



Wells

regulatory authorities to support the safe maintenance, upgrading and continued operation of orphaned and poorly supported amusement devices. He also evaluates incoming devices for regulatory compliance.

"David brings together a rare combination of engineering expertise, practical problem-solving and a deep understanding of regulatory requirements," said **Randy Wilke**, president of the AIMS International Board of Directors. "His work has helped operators safely maintain and upgrade devices that might otherwise lack adequate technical support. His willingness to share that knowledge through AIMS makes him especially deserving of this recognition."

Through **Auton Engineering Ltd.**, Wells continues to apply his multidisciplinary engineering expertise to complex amusement-device challenges. A longtime participant and instructor at the

annual AIMS International Safety Seminar and instructor at the SafeConnect/AIMS Safety Seminar in Canada, he shares his experience and technical knowledge with other safety professionals.

The IALDA is a nonprofit organization of attorneys and other professionals actively engaged in representing the interests of the amusement and leisure industries.

For 40 years, IALDA members have provided legal support, risk-management seminars, and safety education for AIMS International and the broader amusement community. Its members serve on industry safety and standards-setting committees and provide counsel to public and private-sector attraction associations at the state, regional, national and international levels.

Through education, collaboration and the sharing of legal and risk-management expertise, IALDA has helped attraction operators

better understand emerging safety concerns, strengthen operational practices and address the complex legal and regulatory issues affecting the industry.

"IALDA's contributions extend far beyond legal counsel," added Wilke. "For four decades, its members have generously shared their expertise, supported safety education and helped shape standards and best practices throughout the amusement industry. We are proud to recognize IALDA's longstanding commitment to AIMS and the advancement of safety worldwide."

Bromilow, recipient of the Lifetime Contribution Award, has completed 50 continuous years of service to the amusement and leisure industry. During that time, he has become one of the industry's most influential advocates for safety, serving as an educator, consultant,

► See AIMS, page 62



Where does your operation stand today?

Find out with the Attractions Operations Maturity Scorecard

A quick self-assessment that benchmarks your safety, maintenance, and operations practices across five key dimensions.

Mobar report Example

Attractions Operations Maturity Report

62 / 80 · Level 3 · Informed

A	Safety Culture	
B	Maintenance Practice	
C	Operations & Training	
D	Data & Digitisation	
E	Commercial Alignment	

+ improvement plan by email



Take the free Maturity Assessment
mobar.com/maturity-scorecard

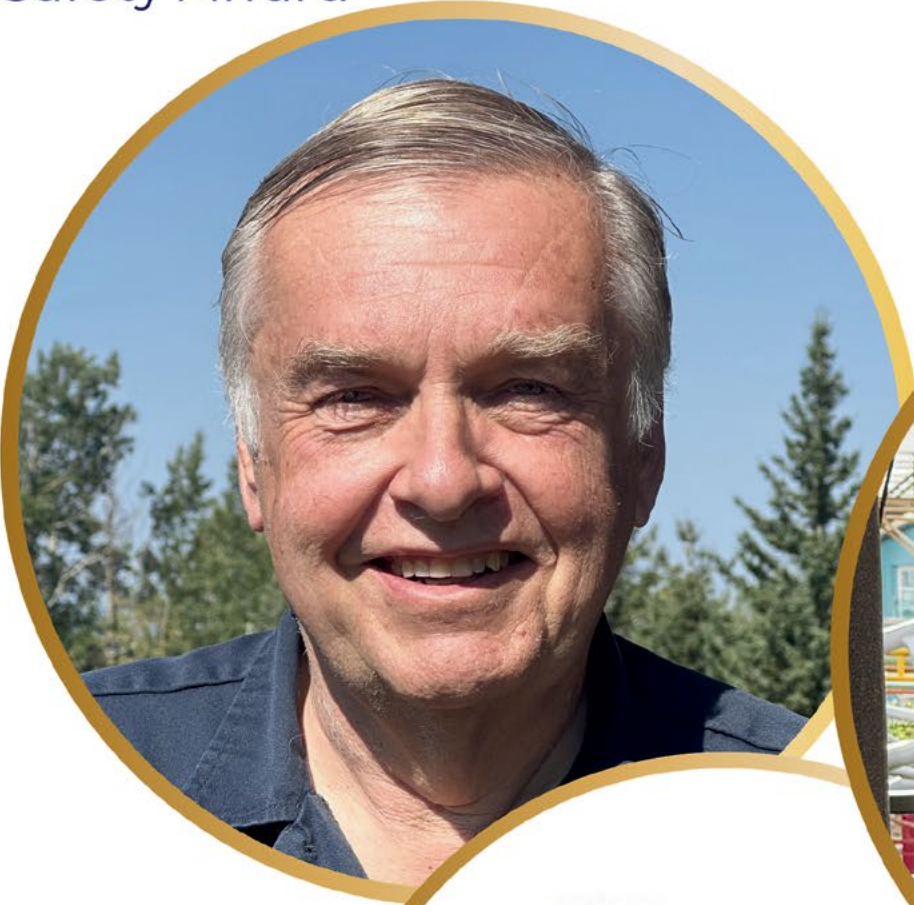


Developed with
David Bromilow
50-year attractions veteran · former Chair, IAAPA Global Safety Committee



Congratulations
**2026 SAFETY
AWARD RECIPIENTS**

DAVID WELLS
Safety Award



DAVID BROMILOW
Lifetime Achievement
Award



IALDA
Organization
Safety Award

►AIMS
Continued from page 60

mentor, and volunteer leader across five continents. Presented for only the sixth time in AIMS International's history, the Lifetime Contribution Award was given to David Bromilow in recognition of his extraordinary dedication and service to AIMS International and the global amusement industry. Since the 1980s, Bromilow has volunteered as a speaker and instructor for AIMS International, formerly known as AREA. During more than 40 years of involvement, he has served as an AIMS



Bromilow

board member, instructor and president. He has helped shape the organization's safety education and training materials while mentoring generations of maintenance technicians, operators, engineers, inspectors and executives. Bromilow has also served the broader attractions industry through more than two decades of involvement with IAAPA safety committees, including service as chair of the IAAPA Global Safety Committee. His contributions to ASTM International and European Norms standards-writing groups have helped strengthen international standards governing the design, maintenance and operation of amusement rides and attractions across the globe. Bromilow has provided health and safety reviews, attraction-installation project management, operational procedure development and engineering-program support to theme parks, water parks, manufacturers and entertainment organizations worldwide. His clients have included Universal Destinations, Six Flags, Cedar Fair, SeaWorld, Warner Bros. and other major attractions and manufacturers. Bromilow, global director of parks and attractions for Mobarro, has worked directly with maintenance, operations and safety teams to create and formally document standard operating procedures for safety-critical work. These procedures help organizations standardize how tasks are performed, strengthen employee training, improve operational consistency and reduce risk. During the COVID-19

pandemic, Bromilow supported parks and attractions around the world as they prepared to resume operations. He also served on the amusement industry's global COVID-19 task force and contributed to IAAPA's ride-reopening guidance. "David's influence on amusement industry safety cannot be measured by a single title or accomplishment," said Tony Claassen, AIMS International past president. "For five decades, he has generously shared his expertise, strengthened international standards and helped safety professionals at every level perform their responsibilities more effectively. The global amusement industry is safer because of his dedication, intellect and servant leadership." —AIMS International

PREVIOUS WINNERS

AIMS International
Safety Award

- Ellis & Associates (2025)
- Patty Beazley (2024)
- Jeff Abendshien (2023)
- ASTM F24 Committee (2023)
- C.W. Craven (2022)
- Hugo Loyola (2021)
- John Riggelman (2020)
- Ronald E. Burbach (2019)
- Patrick Hoffman (2018)
- Har Kupers (2017)
- Harold Hudson (2016)

AIMS International
Lifetime Contribution
Award

- Jerry Adrich (2025)
- Jim Seay (2024)
- Gary Slade (2019)
- Mark Moore (2018)
- Pat Hoffman (2006)

Complete Ride Refresh

Get ahead on making next season the best one yet with our turnkey ride refurbishment solutions.

✓ On-Site Fiberglass Restoration

✓ Restored Theme Painting & Gel Coat Finishes

✓ Replacement Spare Safety & Theming Components

✓ Sculpted Fiberglass Art





SALES@RSALBERTS.COM

WWW.RSALBERTS.COM

(570)368-6653



SALES@HOLLANDFIBERGLASS.COM

WWW.HOLLANDFIBERGLASS.COM

(813) 582-7816

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



40TH ANNUAL NAARSO SAFETY SEMINAR



JANUARY 24 - 29, 2027



COLUMBUS, OHIO

Amusement Rides and Devices Educational Safety Seminar

- Learn from Industry Professionals
- In-Person or Virtual
- Hands-On Education
- Earn CEUs
- Network with Others



**HANDS-ON EDUCATION
CONDUCTED INDOORS AT
THE OHIO EXPO CENTER &
STATE FAIRGROUNDS**

Certifications Available!

- ✓ **Inspector
Level 1 - 3**
- ✓ **Operations
Level 1 - 3**
- ✓ **Aquatic
Operations**

**Additional
certifications and
trainings to be
announced**



**REGISTRATION OPENS
FALL 2026**



**LEARN MORE AT
NAARSO.COM**

The Voyage at Holiday World ascends to the top as Best Wooden Coaster

In the history of the Golden Tickets, six wooden roller coasters have taken the top spot. All of them have held the position for at least two years. The most has been seven. This year, **The Voyage** at **Holiday World** has reclaimed the gold. It had held the No.1 spot for five years (2007 to 2011). Since that time, it has held various positions in the top five, eventually clawing back to No. 2 since 2019. In 2026, The Voyage returned to take the Golden Ticket for **BEST WOODEN COASTER**.

"We're delighted to see The Voyage make its way back to No.1, but this didn't happen by accident," said **Leah Koch-Blumhardt**, director of communications. "In the 20 years since it opened, this ride has seen almost every foot of track worked and reworked into the masterpiece it is today. In the last five years alone, we've invested more than \$2.5 million and performed major work on more than



The Voyage adds to its previous count of five years as Best Wooden Coaster by reclaiming the gold in 2026. AT/TIM BALDWIN

3,000 feet of track. It's running better than it did when it first opened in 2006. Our maintenance team has been singularly focused on putting The Voyage back on top, and we're so proud to see it finally happen."

The Voyage was built by **The Gravity Group**. At

6,442 feet in length, it is much longer than a mile of thrilling track. Only a handful of woodies worldwide can boast this claim, with just three in the U.S.

The seven-year continuous streak (excluding the global pandemic of 2020) of **Phoenix**, **Knoebels'** stel-



Phoenix (No. 2). AT/JEFFREY SEIFERT

lar woodie, has been broken. Phoenix had the longest-running streak in Golden Ticket history for this category. Its strong position at No. 2 sets up a challenge for the years ahead to reclaim the top prize.

The Phoenix was a true act of preservation when **Dick Knoebel** defied the naysay-

ers and relocated the 1947 defunct **Herbert Schmeck/Philadelphia Toboggan Co.** classic from a defunct park in San Antonio in 1985. The dedication to maintenance and operations has made it a beloved favorite among the enthusiast community as well as the park guests.

El Toro (No. 3) at **Six Flags Great Adventure** and **The Beast** (No. 4) at **Kings Island** stay in the same places from the previous year. El Toro, built by **Intamin**, is another example of a coaster that has held the top spot and reclaimed it years later.

Mystic Timbers (No. 5) moves up a notch to its highest position ever, giving Kings Island two woodies in the top five.

The Beast and Phoenix are the only two wooden roller coasters to be listed in the top ten every year in the history of the Golden Ticket Awards.

Thunderhead at

► See WOODEN, page 66

Thank you

FOR HONORING BOULDER DASH
AS ONE OF THE BEST WOODEN
ROLLER COASTERS IN THE WORLD

@LAKECOMPOUNCE
 LAKECOMPOUNCE.COM

★ Lake ★
 COMPOUNCE



Thank you!

Thank you, Golden Ticket voters and
Amusement Today, for sailing The
Voyage back to the top as the
Best Wooden Coaster!



HolidayWorld.com • Santa Claus, Ind.



The Beast (No. 4). AT/GARY SLADE



El Toro (No. 3). AT/GARY SLADE



Mystic Timbers (No. 5). COURTESY KINGS ISLAND

►WOODEN

Continued from page 64

Dollywood ranks No. 6. It and **Mystic Timbers** are products of **Great Coasters International, Inc.**

GCI also worked on **GhostRider** (No. 7) two decades after its opening, bringing the **Custom Coasters** California woodie back into the top ten. It is one of the most popular rides at **Knott's Berry Farm**.

Ravine Flyer II has served **Waldameer** well since opening in 2018. This woodie climbs up a notch

to No. 8 in 2026. It was supplied by The Gravity Group.

Rocky Mountain Construction, better known for its steel coasters, has an entry in the top ten with **Outlaw Run** at **Silver Dollar City** climbing a couple of rungs to No. 9. This ride won Best New Ride when it opened in 2013.

Completing the top ten is **Boulder Dash** at **Lake Compounce**. Built into the hillside of a mountain, this woodie has one of the most notably unique terrains for its site. It was designed by Custom Coasters.

Of the top ten, **Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters Inc.** supplies the rolling stock for five of them, three in the top five.

Making one of the largest leaps on the chart, **Comet** at **The Great Escape** moves from No. 28 last year up to No. 15 in 2026. At the same park, its younger sibling appears on the charts for the first time, **Bobcat** at No. 37.

Three coasters on the charts boast more than a century of thrills. **Rutschebanan** (No. 25) at **Tivoli Gardens** is the oldest, having operated since 1914. **Jack Rabbit** at

Kennywood (No. 20) was built in 1920, and **Giant Dipper** (No. 47) at **Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk** has delighted parkgoers since 1924.

Next year, two more woodies on the charts can add to the century milestone: **Cyclone** (No. 16) at Coney Island's **Luna Park** and **Racer** at **Kennywood**. Both opened in 1927.

In addition to **Comet**, two other wooden coasters have made great climbs. **Colossos** at **Heide Park** moves from No. 30 last year to No. 18 in 2026. **Cú Chulainn** at **Emerald Park** in

Ireland jumps up 10 places (from No. 46 to No. 36).

Along with U.S. favorites, eight international countries have representation on the lists: Canada, Denmark, England, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, South Korea and Sweden.

Having been closed for a couple of years, **Rampage** at **Alabama Adventure** re-enters the charts at No. 49.

Countless parks are envious to have even one wooden coaster on the lists, but **Kennywood**, **Knoebels** and **Holiday World** can boast three each, an impressive feat.

WILLIAM H. ROBINSON, INC. The Big Idea People!

513.737.9012 • www.TheBigIdeaPeople.com

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

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

**BACK
ON
TOP!**

**CONGRATULATIONS,
HOLIDAY WORLD &
SPLASHIN' SAFARI!**



**BEST WOODEN COASTER
THE VOYAGE - HOLIDAY WORLD**



#4 **BEST FAMILY COASTER**
THE BOBCAT - SIX FLAGS GREAT ESCAPE



#8 **BEST WOODEN COASTER**
RAVINE FLYER II - WALDAMEER PARK

THE LIST

2026 TOP 25 WOODEN ROLLER COASTERS



RANK	NAME	PARK	LOCATION	SUPPLIER	YEAR
1	The Voyage	Holiday World	Santa Claus, Ind.	The Gravity Group	2006
2	Phoenix	Knoebels Amusement Resort	Elysburg, Pa.	Dinn/PTC/Schmeck	1985
3	El Toro	Six Flags Great Adventure	Jackson, New Jersey	Intamin	2006
4	The Beast	Kings Island	Mason, Ohio	KECO	1979
5	Mystic Timbers	Kings Island	Mason, Ohio	Great Coasters Int.	2017
6	Thunderhead	Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	Great Coasters Int.	2004
7	GhostRider	Knott's Berry Farm	Buena Park, Calif.	Custom Coasters, GCII	1998
8	Ravine Flyer II	Waldameer	Erie, Pa.	The Gravity Group	2008
9	Outlaw Run	Silver Dollar City	Branson, Mo.	Rocky Mountain Const.	2013
10	Boulder Dash	Lake Compounce	Bristol, Conn.	Custom Coasters Inc.	2000
11	Wodan Timburcoaster	Europa-Park	Rust, Germany	Great Coasters Int.	2012
12	Wildfire	Kolmården	Norrköping, Sweden	Rocky Mountain Const.	2016
13	Balder	Liseberg	Göteborg, Sweden	Intamin	2003
14	The Legend	Holiday World	Santa Claus, Ind.	Custom Coasters Inc.	2000
15	Comet	The Great Escape	Queensbury, N.Y.	PTC/Schmeck	1994
16	Cyclone	Luna Park (Coney Island)	Brooklyn, N.Y.	Baker/Keenan	1927
17	Twister	Knoebels Amusement Resort	Elysburg, Pa.	Fetterman	1999
18	Colossos	Heide Park	Soltau, Germany	Intamin	2001
19	Gold Striker	California's Great America	Santa Clara, Calif.	Great Coasters Int.	2013
20	Jack Rabbit	Kennywood	West Mifflin, Pa.	Miller	1920
21	Boardwalk Bullet	Kemah Boardwalk	Kemah, Texas	The Gravity Group	2007
22	Shivering Timbers	Michigan's Adventure	Muskegon, Mich.	Custom Coasters Inc.	1998
23	Grizzly	Kings Dominion	Doswell, Va.	KECO	1982
24	Troy	Toverland	Sevenum, Netherlands	Great Coasters Int.	2007
25	Rutschebanan	Tivoli Gardens	Copenhagen, Denmark	L.A. Thompson	1914

View the Top 50 wooden roller coasters at www.GoldenTicketAwards.com



**DONATE.
PRESERVE.
PROTECT.**



rollercoastermuseum.org

PHILADELPHIA TOBOGGAN COASTERS, INC.



We don't yield to History
We make it

2



PHOENIX

4



BEAST

8



RAVINE FLYER II

10



BOULDER DASH

PTCI Trains operate on five of the TOP Ten Best Wooden Coasters

Visit us in Orlando at IAAPA Expo 2026 - booth #S2826

3195 PENN AVENUE • HATFIELD, PA 19440 • TEL (215) 799-2155 • FAX (215) 799-2158

www.philadelphiatoboggancoastersinc.com

Carowinds' Fury 325 hits double digits for its Best Steel Coaster streak

Making it 10 years, **Fury 325** at **Carowinds** snags the gold for one more time. The 325-foot giant built by **Bolliger & Mabillard** took Best New Ride in 2015 and began its streak as Best Steel Coaster a year later.

"Ten Golden Ticket Awards and a decade as the world's best steel roller coaster is an amazing milestone for Fury 325, Carowinds and the Carolinas," said Carowinds Park President **Bridgette Bywater**. "Records can be broken, and titles often change hands, but enduring greatness is the ultimate testament of a world-class ride. Since it opened in 2015, guests from across the globe have made the journey to Carowinds to feel the speed, scale and exhilaration that only Fury 325 can deliver. Its reign atop the thrill ride industry reflects the passion of our team, the loyalty of our fans and the enduring power of an attraction that still leaves riders in awe with



Jurassic World Velocicoaster (No. 2). AT/TIM BALDWIN

each lap across the state line. We'll forever be grateful for the loyalty and love from our guests and fans that have helped turn Fury 325 into a true industry icon."

It is surprising that the rankings for the top nine coasters remain unchanged from 2025. Also in the top half are **Jurassic World Velocicoaster (Universal Islands of Adventure)** at No. 2, **Steel Vengeance (Cedar Point)** at No. 3, **Iron Gwazi (Busch Gardens Tampa Bay)** at No. 4, and **The Ride to Happiness (Plopsaland De**

Panne) completing the five. **Millennium Force (No. 6)**, a former Golden Ticket winner, gives Cedar Point two in the top ten. Several in the remaining top ten lean toward international parks. **Zadra** at **Energylandia** keeps its position (No. 7), as does **Taron** (No. 8) at **Phantasialand**. **Europa-Park's Voltron Nevara** stays notched in the list at No. 9 with its hypnotic choreography of seven-train operation.

The newcomer is **Stardust Racers** at **Universal**



Fury 325 has bragging rights for the longest streak as Best Steel Coaster, now upped to 10 years. AT/GARY SLADE

Epic Universe. It debuted on the chart last year, and now it rises to complete the top ten. The intertwined dueling/racing acrobatics are one of the most hypnotically thrilling coaster experiences on Earth, and a ride at night with the full light package is beyond description.

B&M claims the top spot, while **Intamin**, **Rocky Mountain Construction** and

Mack Rides each have three installations in the top ten.

It is interesting to note that 10 years ago, not a single entry in the top ten went upside down. In 2026, seven do!

The highest debut on the chart is **AlpenFury** (No. 13) at **Canada's Wonderland**. Opened in the summer of 2025, this nine-inversion

► See STEEL, page 72

NWC

NORTHWEST COASTERS

CONTACT US FOR YOUR CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE NEEDS!

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

THANK YOU
for voting **Fury 325** the
Best Steel Coaster in 2026!



Carowinds

Six Flags
Entertainment Corporation

► **STEEL**

Continued from page 70

coaster has been lauded for its thrills and fluidity. Supplied by **Premier Rides**, AlpenFury is the fourth roller coaster at Canada's Wonderland to make use of Wonder Mountain, the iconic landmark at the park's front plaza.

Other new additions on the chart include **Falcons Flight** (No. 22), the only new-for-2026 coaster to land in the numbers. With staggering statistics — the world's longest, tallest and fastest coaster — it was a signature piece for **Six Flags Qiddiya City** when the newest Six Flags park wowed worldwide visitors when it opened its gates. It was a massive project for Intamin.

Top Thrill 2 from **Zamperla** spots at No. 23. Not only does it reclaim tallest and fastest coaster in North America, this ranking gives Cedar Point four coasters in the top 25 (along with **Maverick** at No. 12). On the full

**Steel Vengeance (No. 3).**

AT/B. DEREK SHAW

chart of top 50 coasters, the park's newest coaster, **Siren's Curse** from **Vekoma**, appears at No. 49 and **Arrow's Magnum XL-200** sustains its fanbase by being the oldest steel coaster to chart (No. 38). Six chart rankings help justify Cedar Point's claim of being the Roller Coaster Capital of the World.

Two roller coasters that jumped up more than ten spots were **Toutatis** at **Parc Astérix** (No. 34,

**Iron Gwazi (No. 4).**

AT/JACK LATHROP

up from 44 in 2025) from Intamin and **Eejanaika** at **Fuji-Q Highland** (No. 35, all the way up from 49 last year). The latter was a project from **S&S Worldwide**.

One high-ranking steel coaster makes for a bittersweet note. **ArieForce One** at **Fun Spot America Atlanta** gave its final rides shortly after voting ended. Placing at No. 11 for the final season, this RMC crowd-pleaser had many flocking to the park for one last ride.

**The Ride to Happiness (No. 5)** AT/TIM BALDWIN

The wood charts champion long-time attractions. Steel favors the young. Only five of the top 50 are from the 20th century. In addition to **Magnum XL-200**, others are **Apollo's Chariot** at **Busch Gardens Williamsburg** (1999, B&M), the highest ranked at No. 20; **Montu** at **Busch Gardens Tampa Bay** (1996, B&M) at No. 42; **Raging Bull** at **Six Flags Great America** (1999, B&M) at No. 44; and **Alpengeist**

(1997, B&M), also in Williamsburg at No. 46.

Speaking to the expertise of our enthusiast panel, out of the 50 coasters on the charts, four in the top ten are from international countries outside the U.S., and nine foreign countries in total on the list of 50: Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Poland, Saudi Arabia and Sweden. About one-third of the chart rankings are coasters outside the U.S.

Celebrating 50 years in the Industry!



MACLAN.COM • 800.788.3951 • LAKE LAND, FLA.

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





GERSTLAUER
Amusement Rides GmbH

Family Coaster



Discover all our products!

www.gerstlauer-rides.de



Fun for the Whole Family

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

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

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



Airtime Coaster



Family Suspended Coaster



Spinning Coaster



Bobsled Coaster



Bob Coaster

We make the world go round.

THE LIST

2026 TOP 25 STEEL ROLLER COASTERS



RANK	NAME	PARK	LOCATION	SUPPLIER	YEAR
1	Fury 325	Carowinds	Charlotte, N.C.	B&M	2015
2	Jurassic World VelociCoaster	Universal Islands of Adventure	Orlando, Fla.	Intamin	2021
3	Steel Vengeance	Cedar Point	Sandusky, Ohio	Rocky Mountain Const.	2018
4	Iron Gwazi	Busch Gardens Tampa Bay	Tampa, Fla.	Rocky Mountain Const.	2022
5	Ride to Happiness	Plopsaland De Panne	Adinkerke-De Panne, Belgium	Mack	2021
6	Millennium Force	Cedar Point	Sandusky, Ohio	Intamin	2000
7	Zadra	Energylandia	Zator, Poland	Rocky Mountain Const.	2019
8	Taron	Phantasialand	Brühl, Germany	Intamin	2016
9	Voltron Nevera	Europa-Park	Rust, Germany	Mack	2024
10	Stardust Racers	Universal Epic Universe	Orlando, Fla.	Mack	2025
11	ArieForce One	Fun Spot America Atlanta	Fayetteville, Ga.	Rocky Mountain Const.	2023
12	Maverick	Cedar Point	Sandusky, Ohio	Intamin	2007
13	AlpenFury	Canada's Wonderland	Vaughan, Ontario, Canada	Premier Rides	2025
14	Expedition GeForce	Plopsaland Deutschland	Hassloch, Germany	Intamin	2001
15	Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind	EPCOT	Lake Buena Vista, Fla.	Vekoma	2022
16	Phantom's Revenge	Kennywood	West Mifflin, Pa.	Morgan/Arrow	2001
17	Superman: The Ride	Six Flags New England	Agawam, Mass.	Intamin	2000
18	Pantherian	Kings Dominion	Doswell, Va.	Intamin	2010
19	F.L.Y.	Phantasialand	Brühl, Germany	Vekoma	2020
20	Apollo's Chariot	Busch Gardens Williamsburg	Williamsburg, Va.	B&M	1999
21	Leviathan	Canada's Wonderland	Vaughan, Ontario, Canada	B&M	2012
22	Falcons Flight	Six Flags Qiddiya City	Qiddiya City, Saudi Arabia	Intamin	2025
23	Top Thrill 2	Cedar Point	Sandusky, Ohio	Zamperla	2026
24	Hagrid's Magical Creatures Motorbike Adventure	Universal Islands of Adventure	Orlando, Fla.	Intamin	2019
25	Wildcat's Revenge	Hersheypark	Hershey, Pa.	Rocky Mountain Const.	2023

View the Top 50 steel roller coasters at www.GoldenTicketAwards.com

PREMIER SERVICE™
A division of Premier Rides

DEDICATED TO SAFETY 24/7/365

PREMIER RIDES
1007 EAST PRATT STREET,
BALTIMORE, MD 21202
WWW.PREMIER-RIDES.COM
INFO@PREMIER-RIDES.COM
+1.410.923.0414

Salute to Preservation
AMERICAN COASTER ENTHUSIASTS
TRACK REPLACEMENT
PICTURED: LOCH NESS MONSTER, BUSCH GARDENS WILLIAMSBURG

Serving Montgomery Inn Barbecue is as easy as:

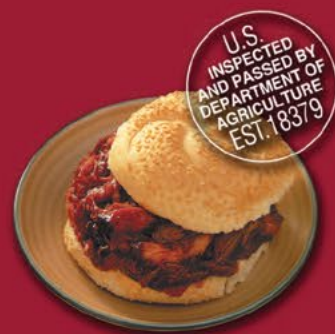


Heck, we even fold the wet naps for you.

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

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

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



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

Europa-Park reigns as Best Park, Splashin' Safari earns Best Water Park

Gaining more popularity each year across Europe (and the globe), **Europa-Park** continues to be spoken of with the highest praise. Opening its seventh hotel this year, the Europa-Park Resort, featuring the water park **Rulantica** and the renowned theme park Europa-Park, now entertains more than 7 million people a year.

For the eleventh time, Europa-Park wins the Golden Ticket Award for **BEST PARK**. It is one of only three parks to ever receive this award.

"Receiving the Golden Ticket Award fills us with great pride," said **Roland Mack**, co-founder. "It is the greatest recognition of the values we stand for for more than 50 years: quality, perfection and a genuine passion for our guests. At the same time, we don't see this award as a reason to rest on our laurels but as an incentive to keep moving forward. As a family business, we think in generations. We will continue to advance Europa-Park with new ideas, new attractions and an unwavering commitment to continuous development. We would like to thank our guests from all over the world. They are our greatest motivation."

The No. 2 and 3 parks switch their 2025 positions. **Dollywood** climbs up a notch into second. The Tennessee Smoky Mountain theme park took this category in 2023. Annually, the park is a finalist in numerous categories, often winning many awards. In a mix of emotions, the park lost its dreamer-in-chief, Dolly



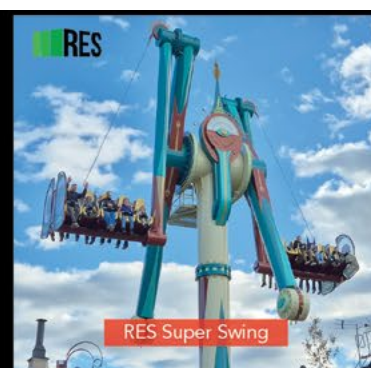
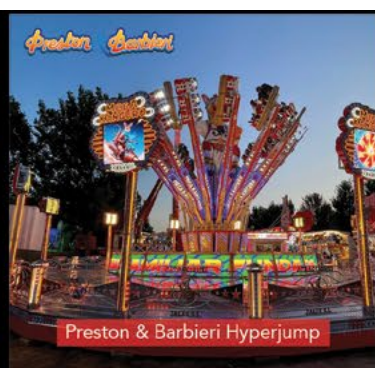
Europa-Park (above) wins Best Park for the eleventh time. Splashin' Safari (below), Holiday World's water park, rises to the top in the quest for Best Water Park. AT/TIM BALDWIN; COURTESY HOLIDAY WORLD

Parton, just days after opening its long-awaited groundbreaking new attraction for 2026.

In third is **Universal Epic Universe**, which is an amazing feat as the park is only a year and a half old. Its many finalist placements are also noteworthy.

The other two finalists in the top five return this year after stepping off for a year. **Knoebels Amusement Resort** (No. 4) is considered by many to be the finest traditional amusement park operating in the United States. The park is famous for its preservation efforts, saving classic rides from the past, as well as coasters. Free parking and free admission, along with its commitment to value, have made it a

► See BEST, page 78





Thank you!

Thanks to the Mack family for their leadership and to all our team members.

What an amazing occasion: 11th Golden Ticket Award as BEST THEME PARK for Europa-Park!

We are a family-owned and operated company and deeply appreciate the support by all our fans around the world!

Congratulations to all this years winners and the runner up's!



GOLDEN TICKET MARKET PLACE

n Naughton Insurance, Inc.

EST. 1947

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

www.naughtoninsurance.com

NORTON AUCTIONEERS

THE INDUSTRY EXPERTS!

Professional Auctioneers & Appraisers

Carnivals • Parks • Carousels

FEC's • Museums • Tourist Attractions

P.O. Box 279, Coldwater, MI 49036

(517) 617-1104

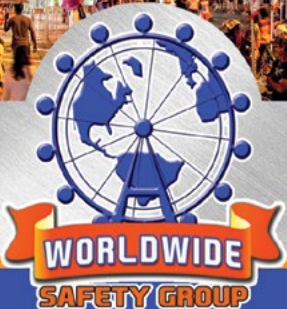
 email: Dan@spiethandsatow.com
www.nortonauctioneers.com

Consulting Services for the Amusement & Entertainment Industries

Specializing in:

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





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

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



Dollywood (No. 2) entertains more than 4 million guests a year. AT/TIM BALDWIN

►BEST

Continued from page 76

summer favorite. It returns to the top five after its most recent appearance in 2024.

Tokyo DisneySea (No. 5) also returns to the top five. Avid enthusiasts have regarded this park as one of the most thematically beautiful parks in the world, with its central volcano and elaborate attractions.

A new winner emerges for **BEST WATER PARK**. **Splashin' Safari, Holiday World's** water park, has continuously rated highly on the charts. This year, it rises to the top spot.

"We spent our childhood going from water park to water park with our parents," said **Lauren Crosby**, third-generation owner of the park. "Our dad, **Will Koch**, would take photos of trash cans, pump houses, landscaping and a few of us kids. He was obsessed with creating the best water park in the world, and now we can finally say he did. We've left our mark with continued additions, but we owe everything to what he started in the middle of a clear-cut field behind the park. We're just lucky enough to see his dream come true."

Universal's Volcano Bay, last year's winner, opened in 2017, with its

iconic volcano jutting skyward, making for endless photo ops. Whether vacationers want thrills or relaxation, both are served up in ample portions. It is a fully themed park.

Schlitterbahn (No. 3) held the Golden Ticket for 26 years, the longest streak of any winner in any category. This massive water park — so big it is divided between two locations with tram service — has been an innovator and creative hotbed for the water recreation industry for decades. The New Braunfels park proclaims it is the "Hottest Coolest Time in Texas."

Rulantica (No. 4), Europa-Park's water park,

nudges up a step from last year's rankings. This magnificently thematic water park has grown considerably from its indoor origins in 2019. Now with numerous activities both inside and out, the property shows no sign of slowing down as much more is planned for the future. The park is open year-round.

Hyland Hills Water World (No. 5) is also a huge water park, so big that a sky ride takes guests from one side to the other. Water coasters and themed rivers among its massive arsenal make this a big hit with Denver locals and a destination for industry fans to discover.



Volcano Bay (No. 2) is a thematic water oasis. AT/GARY SLADE



IT'S ABOUT SPLASHIN' TIME

Thank you!

We are thrilled to win **Best Water Park** for the first time and humbled to win **Best Water Park Ride** yet again. Thank you, voters and Amusement Today!



HolidayWorld.com • Santa Claus, Ind.

Founder and CEO of Kalahari, Todd Nelson, recognized as a Legend

Resorts and indoor water parks are one thing. Doing good is another.

Todd Nelson, the founder and CEO of **Kalahari Resorts & Conventions**, is widely recognized not only for building one of America's most successful indoor water park brands, but also for his strong commitment to philanthropy and community service. Alongside his wife, **Shari Nelson**, and their family, he has established a culture of giving that extends from local communities in the United States to international humanitarian efforts in Africa.

A natural entrepreneur from a young age, Nelson became Wisconsin's youngest auctioneer before going on to operate a variety of small businesses.

Wisconsin born, he saw the growth of indoor water parks. In 2000, inspired by a trip to Africa, Nelson opened the first Kalahari Resort in his hometown. What began as one fami-



Todd and Shari Nelson

ly-owned resort has grown into a nationally recognized hospitality brand, with four large-scale resorts operating in Wisconsin, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas, and a fifth location in Virginia scheduled to open in November 2026.

A major part of Nelson's charitable work is carried out through the **Nelson Family Life Foundation**, an organization founded to improve the lives of individuals and families in the communities where Kalahari Resorts operates. The foundation focuses on areas such as

education, health, economic development, community wellness and humanitarian relief. Through donations, fundraising events and partnerships with non-profit organizations, the foundation has supported numerous causes and community initiatives.

One of Todd Nelson's most ambitious philanthropic efforts is his partnership with **charity: water**, a nonprofit dedicated to providing safe drinking water around the world. In 2023, the Nelson family and Kalahari Resorts announced a \$50 million



Nelson addresses African citizens on one of his visits. COURTESY KALAHARI RESORTS

commitment to help bring clean water to one million people in Africa. This initiative, known as the Water Colors Life Project, reflects Nelson's deep connection to Africa, which inspired the African theme of Kalahari Resorts. The project aims to fund sustainable water systems that improve health, education and economic opportunities for underserved communities.

Nelson has also dem-

onstrated a commitment to supporting the local communities that have welcomed Kalahari Resorts. Through the Nelson Family Life Foundation, significant donations have been directed toward children's health programs, educational initiatives, and community development projects. In Central Texas, for example, the foundation fulfilled a \$1 mil-

► See NELSON, page 82



ELEVATING AQUATIC SAFETY *WORLDWIDE*

Partnering with 400+ organizations in more than 25 countries, StarGuard ELITE sets the global standard for aquatic safety through **cutting-edge training programs** and **customized safety services** designed to empower teams and elevate safety standards. SGE delivers industry leading certifications for lifeguards, attraction attendants, supervisors, non-lifeguard responders, and more.

☒ INNOVATION IN SAFETY

☒ EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE

☒ UNMATCHED EXPERTISE

 info@starguardelite.com

 www.starguardelite.com





**GUEST
MOBILITY**



**SMART
LOCKERS**



ARCADES



**PHOTO
CAPTURE**



**SOUVENIRS
& RETAIL**

YOU DESERVE MORE

No-cost solutions that add
MORE to your guest experience.



MORE CONVENIENCE

Convenience vehicles that make experiences more accessible & enjoyable.



MORE PEACE OF MIND

Guest storage that empowers easy, worry-free experiences.



MORE EXCITEMENT

Arcades that create immersive, entertaining & rewarding experiences.



EPIC MOMENTS

Photos & videos that capture shareworthy moments guests can't get on their own.



MORE MEMORIES

Custom keepsakes & experiential solutions that deliver memories worth collecting.



MORE REVENUE

Revenue-share solutions that increase profit & enhance the guest experience.



Visit our website to find out
how you can **ADD MORE TO
YOUR VENUE WITH VENU+.**

VENU⁺
ADD **MORE** TO YOUR VENUE



An advocate for authentic artwork and support for the artisans of Africa, Nelson makes frequent visits to various locations to purchase their skilled work (above left, middle). Several members of the Nelson family — from left: daughters Natasha and Alissa, wife Shari, Todd Nelson, son Travis and daughter-in-law Megan — are seen on a 2023 trip to Africa outside of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, to source art for the resorts and do philanthropic work around the wells they have drilled (above right). COURTESY KALAHARI RESORTS

►NELSON
Continued from page 80

lion commitment to support local and regional organizations dedicated to improving quality of life for residents. As guests stroll throughout the Kalahari Resorts, the art and décor beautifying the facilities aren't fabricated theming, but an authentic support of Africa-based artists, whose crafts and skills receive support from the resorts to continue to

earn an income by sharing their culture. In addition to community donations, Nelson's charitable philosophy extends to caring for Kalahari employees and their families. Programs associated with the company and the Nelson Family Life Foundation provide assistance to employees facing unexpected hardships, reinforcing a people-first culture that values compassion and support. Throughout his career,



Todd Nelson has emphasized that business success carries a responsibility to help others. His charitable efforts focus on creating long-term, meaningful impact rather than short-term recognition. Whether funding clean water projects

in Africa, supporting local schools and health organizations, or assisting families in times of need, Nelson has used the success of Kalahari Resorts as a platform for philanthropy. His work demonstrates how entrepreneurship and generosity can be combined to improve lives and strengthen communities around the world. At the heart of Nelson's story is a strong work ethic, a family-first philosophy and a passion for creating mem-

orable experiences. Despite building a major national resort brand, he remains deeply involved in the day-to-day operation of his properties and is described as humble, approachable and genuinely passionate about hospitality. For his contributions to the amusement industry and his inspiring charitable contributions, Amusement Today is pleased to recognize Todd Nelson as a **GOLDEN TICKET LEGEND**.



**ONE TEAM. ONE MISSION.
THOUSANDS OF REASONS TO
CELEBRATE!**

Thank you for making every lesson count and helping children around the world build lifesaving skills. Together, we turned one simple truth into action: **Swimming Lessons Save Lives™**.

Save the date! June 24, 2027

WLSL.org

© 2026 World's Largest Swimming Lesson

SEE YOU IN VEGAS!

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

WWA 2026



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

Lifetime of passion, dedication earn Rides 4 U's Len Soled 'Legend' status

Len Soled, president and owner of **Rides 4 U**, Somerville, New Jersey, isn't exaggerating when he contends he is known by "basically everyone in the industry."

During the past four decades, Soled has brokered countless equipment deals — both new and used — worldwide, and today his company is the North American representative for Italian ride manufacturer **SBF/Visa Group**, ride builder **KMG** of the Netherlands and most recently **PWS Rides Ltd.** of Great Britain.

"I came out of school in 1985 with a Master's of Marketing Degree and immediately started looking for a job," he recalled. "I interviewed with **Alberto Zamperla** and accepted an offer to work in sales and marketing in the United States."

The position required working trade shows for the Italian ride manufacturer, where he was introduced to clients throughout the many facets of the amusement industry, including parks, carnivals, family entertainment centers and zoos.

"I enjoyed all different segments, and I felt I could blend in with anybody," he reflected. "The park people were wonderful, and I took on all of that business, then branched out into carnivals."

During his early years with Zamperla, Soled acknowledged it helped him become a worthy road warrior to meet with prospective buyers.

"I was out 24/7 traveling and loved doing it," he said.

While he established a



positive reputation among many industry executives during his time with Zamperla, by 1995 he realized a career change might be in the best interest of his family as his wife, **Alexis**, was expecting their third child.

"People had started to ask me when I would start my own business," he pointed out.

Colleague **Nancy Buckley**, who was also with Zamperla at the time, left the company along with Soled and formed a 50/50 partnership in what was the original start-up of Rides 4 U. They jump-started their new venture by representing **SBF/Visa** and **Majestic Manufacturing Inc.**, a ride builder in New Waterford, Ohio.

"I always believed that we needed to do things



Len Soled smiles as he has a seat in the "hamster wheel" aboard an SBF/Visa Mixed Coaster during IAAPA Expo (above left). The Rides 4 U staff were all "smile-Len" during Soled's 60th birthday bash (above) right). AT/RON GUSTAFSON; COURTESY RIDES 4 U

right, and we did. But after leaving Zamperla I was afraid it would be short-lived and I would find myself out of the industry. I didn't need to make a million dollars — I just wanted to stick it out and make it happen," he said of the venture.

With some coaching and support from industry insiders in New Jersey, the company started to flourish. Len and Alexis took over full ownership of the business in 2012 following Buckley's retirement.

"Len has a massive passion for the industry," said **Eric Anderson**, president of **Quassy Amusement and Waterpark**, Middlebury, Connecticut. "We first dealt with him in 1997 when we got a Paratrooper. Since 2010, we have purchased seven new rides from SBF/Visa, the most recent a spinning figure-eight coaster in 2025. And if we have a problem, we call Len and boom — right away he's working on a solution."

"My family has known Len for many years; he worked with my father years ago, and now he works with my brother, Paul, and me," said **Steven Gentile** of family-owned **Adventureland**, Farmingdale, New York. "He has been a great friend to us over the years and is always someone we know we can rely on. Len's kindness, attentiveness and support have been so impor-

tant. His guidance through the trials and tribulations of this industry is a testament to his strong character."

"Lenny has been a great friend to Dave and me. He and Dave were always dealing on something," said **Debby Helm** of **Helm & Sons Amusements**, Fontana, California. "He has so much energy. We have been friends for over 30 years and always look forward to seeing him. Dave and I were in New York, and we called Len and he stopped what he was doing and gave us a day we will never forget."

Soled's expertise in the amusement ride industry can also be attributed to working in the past with other manufacturers such as **S&S Worldwide**, Logan, Utah; **Chance Rides**, Wichita, Kansas; **Wisdom Rides Of America**, Merino, Colorado; **E&F Miler Industries**, Portland, Oregon, and others.

His company has been extremely busy of late, installing attractions at **COTALand Theme Park** in Austin, Texas, host of *Amusement Today's* 2026 Golden Ticket Awards, as well as host hotel **Kalahari Resorts** in nearby Round Rock.

Rides 4 U also brokered the sale of two new Cyclon steel roller coasters from SBF/Visa, both finding homes in U.S. parks. The company also lists dozens of used rides for sale on its website.

"We need the used ride

market, as dealing with a used piece can parlay into another sale of a new ride," he said of the process. "Sometimes, we do just a listing of a used ride for a client and it is not unusual for us to have up to two dozens rides warehoused, which is a challenge."

Offering used equipment has another plus side as it allows Soled and his family to travel worldwide.

Now in its third decade of operation, Soled said the success of his company revolves around the loyalty of his key personnel. They include his daughter, **Samantha Soled Federman**, vice president of operations; **Stephanie Magnani**, project manager; **Monna Vista**, administrative; **Rich Madden**, controller; **Earl Heller**, sales manager; **Annie Bauer**, parts manager; and **Mark Blumhagen**, sales.

He emphasized the importance of having good people on board, saying: "We have people in-house who have been here for years, a couple of satellite sales staff and around a dozen subcontractors. When I need them (contractors), they drop everything to get on our job."

The company's physical presence in New Jersey has also grown in recent years with the construction of a new building.

"We are set up as strong as a manufacturer," Soled said of the facility. "We have a huge spare parts department and carry in excess of \$1 million in inventory. We don't want to have to tell a customer 'we're sorry, we don't have that part.'"

He continued, saying: "Operators can't afford to have rides down. A lot of times I have to get involved to expedite service, and we are constantly working on better inventory control to that end."

For his incredible passion, dedication to the industry and for coining the phrase "Think Rides!," Len Soled is a **GOLDEN TICKET LEGEND**.

—Ron Gustafson



Soled gleefully celebrates a successful IAAPA Expo with his entire Rides 4 U team. COURTESY RIDES 4 U

You go by so many names...

...but you're always a "LEGEND" to us!

AmusementTODAY

GOLDEN TICKET LEGEND

2026

RIDES 4U

PRESENTED TO LEN SOLED

V.I.P.

Father

"PaPa"

Boss

Len

Friend

Husband

comrade

comrade

RIDES 4U

Supplying Amusements New to Used

(908) 526-8009 • www.Rides4U.com



We are proud to be named among the
BEST OF THE BEST in the **GOLDEN TICKET AWARDS!**

BEST STEEL COASTER

- #1 **Fury 325**® – Carowinds®
- #3 **Steel Vengeance**® – Cedar Point®
- #6 **Millennium Force**® – Cedar Point®

BEST WOOD COASTER

- #4 **The Beast**® – Kings Island®
- #5 **Mystic Timbers**® – Kings Island®
- #8 **GhostRider**® – Knott's Berry Farm®

BEST NEW ROLLER COASTER

- #1 **Falcons Flight** – Six Flags Qiddya City®
- #2 **Tormenta: Rampaging Run** – Six Flags Over Texas®
- #3 **Quantum Accelerator** – Six Flags New England®
- #4 **Colossus** – Six Flags Qiddya City®

BEST NEW ATTRACTION INSTALLATION

- #1 **Falcons Flight** – Six Flags Qiddya City®
- #2 **Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare** – Kings Island®

BEST NEW FAMILY ATTRACTION

- #1 **Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare** – Kings Island®
- #2 **Enchanted Greenhouse** – Six Flags Qiddya City®

BEST NEW SHOW

- #1 **Monster Mash Bash** – Six Flags Fiesta Texas®
- #2 **Vinyl to Viral** – Cedar Point®
- #3 **Memories in Motion** – Six Flags Great America®
- #4 **Hollywood Hits** – Kings Island®

BEST KIDS AREA

- #2 **Kings Island**®
- #4 **Knott's Berry Farm**®
- #5 **Canada's Wonderland**®

BEST WATER PARK

- #3 **Schlitterbahn New Braunfels**®

BEST NEW THEME CONCEPT

- #3 **Enchanted Greenhouse** – Six Flags Qiddya City®

LEADERSHIP AWARD

- #2 **Ryan Eldredge** – Six Flags Great Adventure®

Six Flags™
Entertainment Corporation
sixflags.com



V.I.P.
AmusementTODAY
GOLDEN TICKET AWARDS™
2027
BEST OF THE BEST!

NEW
CANNONBALL!

We'll see you at...

Holiday World
& Splashin' SAFARI®

2027
GOLDEN
TICKET
AWARDS

SEPTEMBER 10 & 11



In Memory of

RICHARD "DICK" KNOEBEL

April 28, 1939 – July 16, 2026

*A life of hard work, faith, service,
leadership and purpose...
spent building a legacy that will outlive him.*

Dick & Barbara Knoebel Person's of the Year (2009)
Golden Ticket Legend Award Winner (2022)

KNOEBELS
CELEBRATING 100 YEARS