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Luna Park, Zamperla hosts 2015 Golden Ticket Awards

Amusement Today presents awards in 29 categories

NEW YORK CITY, N.Y. — "New York, New York...a wonderful town!" Or so the lyrics go from "On the Town." Or perhaps it is the voice of **Frank Sinatra** singing, "Start spreading the news..." that helped get attendees energized. Make no mistake, The 2015 Golden Ticket Awards weekend has hit The Big Apple. Hosted by **Zamperla**, this celebratory and industry-networking event featured the best of New York, including a stop to the revamped and re-electrified **Luna Park** at **Coney Island**. Visiting **Victorian Gardens** in Central Park and taking guided tours on double-decker buses made for an authentic New York experience.

One of the focal points of the weekend was time spent at Coney Island. This area has seen as many ups and downs as a true roller coaster. In the beginning back in the mid 1880s, there was a public outcry to maintain the beach and preserve a natural setting by not building any structures. However, the amusement demand kept afloat the various vendors, barkers, ride operators and amusement facilities.

Those origins continued to evolve. The four miles of real estate took on a life of its own. Coney Island is forever draped in New York history, often noted by the dotted landmark icons that still stand along the peninsula. **LaMarcus Thompson** solidified his claim to fame by opening the Switch Back Railway in 1884, the first documented successful roller coaster.

The early half of the 20th century found Coney Island in its heyday. Electric lights set the park aglow. Newer, bigger roller coasters were built and all the pleasures of a modern Americana could be found at Coney Island.

Following the wars, times changed and the Coney Island area took on a different character. No longer the playground of the affluent, the famed stretch of shoreline that once housed **Dreamland**, **Luna Park**, **Steeplechase Park** and **Astroland** survived in its

own way. Most of the older parks shuttered their gates due to fires, neglect or changing times. No one would deny that the area needed sprucing up, to put it mildly.

While the city of Brooklyn debated what to do with the area and if the amusement concept even had a future, the minds behind Zamperla had fresh ideas. In an extremely short time frame, efforts were made in mere weeks to open what would be the new Luna Park. Located adjacent to **Deno's Wonder Wheel Park**, Coney Island's makeover had begun. Today, the Coney Island area has seen a new life and vibrant atmosphere creating the latest chapter for this Brooklyn legend.

It is only fitting that a ceremony that acknowledges the achievements and success of such a famed industry is held in one of America's most treasured sites. The Golden Ticket Awards and New York City — a great fit.

AT asked Zamperla their thoughts on hosting the Golden Ticket Awards. "We are honored!" says **Ramon Rasario**, self-appointed "super galactic hero" at Zamperla. "We love the fact we were able to breathe life into an icon that was needing resuscitation."

Looking toward to the future, Rosario adds, "Going forward, it's making us better manufacturers. The Operations side is making us think beyond the factory. We continue to improve."

When asked what attendees can expect, he says, "We are introducing five new rides at the event. We are looking forward to the response of the audience. It goes back to a time where Coney Island used to be a place to introduce new rides. This landmark event lets us do it again."

*All stories this issue
AT/Tim Baldwin
unless otherwise noted*



Zamperla will welcome 2015 Golden Ticket Awards attendees to New York City amusements: Luna Park (above), B&B Carousel (left) and Victorian Gardens (below).
AT FILE/GARY SLADE



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NEWSTALK

EDITORIAL: Gary Slade, gslade@amusementtoday.com

Crunch time



Slade

To all the amusement industry professionals who attend the **Golden Ticket Awards** each year, we say "Thank You" for your continued support of what we believe has become a great networking event.

Just as any park has its crunch time in the month, week and days that lead up to the new season opening day, the staff of *Amusement Today* feels the same crunch with the short timeframes involved in both the Golden Ticket print issue and all the details that go into the GTA event and awards ceremony.

The parks have just concluded their 90-day summer season and now have a chance to breath a bit. *Amusement Today's* 90-day crunch season begins with the Golden Ticket Awards. The staff returns from the fun event in New York to face a very short deadline before our October water parks issue is due at the printer.

Next up are three issues (November Pre-IAAPA, November Convention issue and December) that must all complete production and printing prior to our arrival in Orlando for the annual IAAPA Attractions Expo.

So if you catch one of the AT staff members in the next 90 days and we seem a little winded, you will know why. It's our version of your park's daily summer operation.

I would like to give a special thank you to **Alberto Zamperla**, **Valerio Ferrari** and **Ramon Rosario** and their staffs for all their hard work to make the 2015 Golden Ticket Awards weekend a reality in New York. Team **Zamperla** showcased their hard work in fine fashion. I hope the amusement industry is as proud of the Coney rebirth as we are. Additional thanks goes to **Ryan Stana**, **RWS Associates** for their help with the show entertainment during the GTA ceremony, and to **Deno's Wonder Wheel Park**.

CARTOON: Bubba Flint



EDITORIAL: Tim Baldwin, tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

Nail biters



Baldwin

Although tabulation has progressed from the manual hand-written calculations of the early years of the **Golden Ticket Awards** to electronic surveys, a random look here and there lets me keep in touch with how the vote is progressing.

This year I didn't get a peek until midday on the last day of voting. I was shocked at the number of absolutely down-to-the-wire races. If any voters happen to be reading this column, please know, your vote is *indeed* very important. It wasn't until about 18 hours later that I learned the final results. While I don't own a park that had bragging rights at stake, still, I was riveted. Who would win?

Amusement Today has never utilized the exact same panel each year. Experienced veterans are mixed with new travelers to make up a collection of hundred and hundreds of voices. The sheer number of countries that appear in our lists of finalists is astonishing.

Two races in particular — **Best Seaside Park** and **Best Children's Park** — were the most down-to-the-wire this year. Talk about nail biters. The numbers were so close, it was anyone's game as to what final votes would tip the scales.

But being one who sees the results in their entirety, I get to be the one behind the scenes that silently champions that park that has risen to sixth place, hoping they can nudge their way onto the list in the years ahead.

And for all the parks and rides that are new faces on our lists of finalists, I celebrate you the most. Obviously taking the Golden Ticket is like an Olympian reaching that gold medal. But I find the finalists even more rewarding. These are the parks and attractions trying hard to be better, hoping that their quality of work continues to be noticed. Thankfully it has. Keep up the good work. Over time AT has seen just such parks climb from relative obscurity to world renowned prominence. What can possibly be more rewarding?

A little nail biting keeps everyone on their toes.

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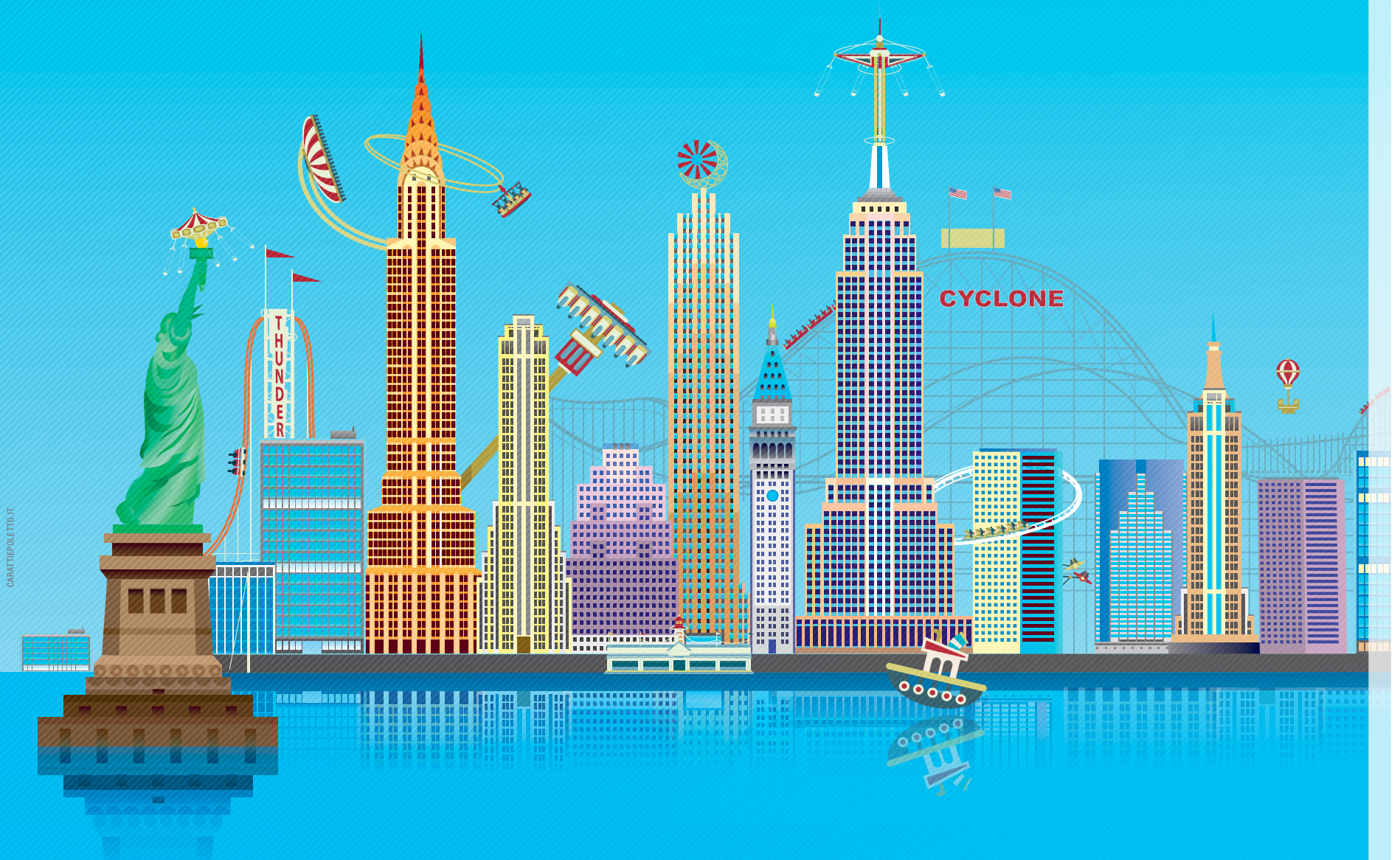
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Tight races bring a new win for Morey's Piers

Last year, **Europa-Park** astonished the industry by rising to the top of the charts. Climbing a rung at a time during the past decade, the most attended theme park in all of Germany took the Golden Ticket for **BEST PARK**. Europa-Park's grasp is strong as it holds the award for a second year.

Long-running champ **Cedar Point** continues to boast top-rated park in America at the No. 2 spot. The park is known for its spectacular collection of roller coasters and resort facilities. It held the prize for an amazing 16 years.

Knoebels and **Dollywood** duke it out (as those two parks have been known to do) with a reversal of positions this year. Knoebels slots in at No. 3 with its traditional park atmosphere; Dollywood's showmanship and extraordinary environment is No. 4.

Completing the top five is the benchmark measurement to all theme parks, Walt Disney's Anaheim original, **Disneyland**.

The strongest battle for taking the Ticket for **BEST SEA-**



SIDE PARK was seen this year. The top three parks were separated by a very minor percentage of ballots — the competition was that fierce.

Morey's Piers sees a first-time win in this category, eeking out the top prize from long-running winner **Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk** (placing at a close No. 2). **Blackpool Pleasure Beach** also upped its game and made for a three-way photo finish. The England seaside property comes in at No. 3.

"We dedicate and celebrate this honor with all of our staff, designers, and guests whom appreciate unique environments, genuine service and the fine art of taking 'tacky' to new heights," smiles Jack Morey, second generation co-partner (along with brother Will). "We dedicate the honor to our founders, whom initially had the wisdom and gumption to start something



BEST SEASIDE PARK: Morey's Piers
COURTESY MOREY'S PIERS

from nothing with nearly zero experience and in doing so proved that experience can be a negative in rapidly changing environments." He laughs, "And be sure to watch out for the tram car between piers!"

The only other seaside venue to amount a substantial vote was Sweden's **Gröna Lund**. This park is full of character and charm, often witnessed by ferry boats that arrive throughout the day right alongside the park.

Our park categories see yet another stiff competition. **BEST CHILDREN'S PARK** is a category in which contenders are not only putting forth a better product and value for families, but are finding more and more exposure to our voters.

Idlewild & SoakZone holds the Golden Ticket once again, for a sixth time. However, another tight race has newcomer **Storybook Land** making an outside run and coming in at a close second place. Events that brought a spotlight to this facility have helped Storybook Land share its strengths.

"That's fantastic!" exclaims Park Manager Jessica Fricano. "We've been pushing to get on the list for years. That's great."

When *AT* asked Fricano what people take with them after a visit to the charming facility, she says, "It's traditional. We have a lot of people that came as kids. Now they bring their own kids. It takes them back." She adds, "But we're a modern park. We have that charm and we're personal. I think that's something people notice."



No. 2: Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk
AT/JEFFREY SEIFERT

Story Land (not to be confused with Storybook Land) stays strong on the charts at the No. 3 spot. In 2014, it was the park that shot up to second place.

Legoland Windsor is also a newcomer that has found favor with our voters. Within clear view of Windsor Castle, one of the residences of Queen Elizabeth, this Legoland park features an impressive Mini-land of so many worldwide monuments constructed from Legos, but a wide range of fun and unique attractions geared to the younger set. It comes in at No. 4.

In a tie for fifth, we see two other Legoland properties: **Legoland California** (once the Golden Ticket holder) and **Legoland Florida**.

On the watery side of things, **BEST WATER PARK** goes to **Schlitterbahn** in New Braunfels. The proven formula of producing attractions that are outside the box of any other

park continues to perform. Even among its sister properties, this water park makes for a tough one to beat.

Placing at No. 2 is **Splashin' Safari**, **Holiday World's** water park. From its humble beginnings in 1993, the water park has grown in gargantuan proportions, building not only huge rides, but cutting-edge rides. Even the park agrees that Splashin' Safari is a primary attendance driver.

Dollywood's Splash Country places No. 3. Nestled into its Smoky Mountain setting, the water park combines beauty with family fun.

Differentiating from last year's finalists, **Aquatica** in Orlando jumps onto the chart, landing at 4th place. Adjacent to SeaWorld, this facility shares its philosophy of combining the love and preservation of animals



BEST CHILDREN'S PARK: Idlewild & SoakZone
COURTESY IDLEWILD & SOAKZONE



No. 2: STORYBOOK LAND
AT/TIM BALDWIN

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Thank you Amusement Today, all the voters, fans, and all our colleagues for making this industry so wonderful!
We salute all the Golden Ticket nominees in this category. You're all winners!



We hope to see you soon again at Europa-Park!

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► **PARKS**

Continued from page 4

into its ride attractions.

Keeping its No. 5 spot is **Typhoon Lagoon**. One of two highly-themed water parks at **Walt Disney World**.

BEST INDOOR WATER PARK showcases the five finalists as last year, with **Schlitterbahn Galveston Island** still taking top prize. Its adjustable roof can be retracted to bring in the sunshine in a matter of minutes, or it can be used for shade and keeping unsuitable weather at bay.

The No. 2 spot is still held by **Kalahari Resort** in **Sandusky, Ohio**. It is the sister property, **Kalahari Wisconsin Dells**, that jumps up a notch to overtake



BEST PARK: Europa-Park
COURTESY EUROPA-PARK

the No. 3 position. Both of these facilities offer an African-themed experience, complete with authentic art and artifacts through the resort.

Slipping a notch to No. 4, **World Waterpark** in West Edmonton Mall still delivers the goods on an impressive scale.

It's visual impact is unmistakable.

Splash Landing at **Alton Towers** retains its No. 5 position.

In the category of **BEST MARINE LIFE PARK**, **SeaWorld Orlando** maintains its heavy lead taking the No. 1 spot. **SeaWorld**



BEST MARINE LIFE PARK: SeaWorld Orlando
AT/TIM BALDWIN

San Diego, last year's Golden Ticket Awards host, stays in the No. 2 spot.

The interaction with the marine life plays an important role at **Discovery Cove**, making for a notably unique experience. Located in Orlando, with limited attendance, this swim-with-the-

dolphins park comes in at No. 3. Rounding out our finalists is a flip flop of our last two spots. This year, **SeaWorld San Antonio** comes in at the No. 4 spot. **Six Flags Discovery Kingdom**, with its mix of rides and marine life close out the park categories at No. 5.

PARK AND RIDE WINNERS

Ranked by percentage of votes cast



BEST NEW RIDE FOR 2015 (Amusement Park)

| | | |
|------------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Fury 325 | Carowinds | 27% |
| Wicked Cyclone | Six Flags New England | 14% |
| Twisted Colossus | Six Flags Magic Mountain | 13% |
| Cú Chulainn | Tayto Park | 10% |
| Thunderbird | Holiday World | 9.5% |

BEST NEW RIDE FOR 2015 (Water Park)

| | | |
|--------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Dive Bomber | Six Flags White Water | 15% |
| Slidezilla | Elitch Gardens | 14% |
| Aqua Rocket | Raging Water San Dimas | 13% (tie) |
| Slideboarding | Wet 'n' Wild Las Vegas | 13% (tie) |
| Anaconda | Kalahari Resort - Poconos | 10% |

BEST PARK

| | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|------------|
| Europa-Park | Rust, Germany | 24% |
| Cedar Point | Sandusky, Ohio | 14% |
| Knoebels Amusement Resort | Elysburg, Pa. | 11% |
| Dollywood | Pigeon Forge, Tenn. | 9% |
| Disneyland | Anaheim, Calif. | 7% |
| Blackpool Pleasure Beach | Blackpool, England | 5% (tie) |
| Busch Gardens Williamsburg | Williamsburg, Va. | 5% (tie) |
| Universal's Islands of Adventure | Orlando, Fla. | 4.5% |
| Alton Towers | Staffordshire, England | 4% (tie) |
| Holiday World | Santa Claus, Ind. | 4% (tie) |
| Magic Kingdom | Orlando, Fla. | 4% (tie) |
| Tokyo Disney Sea | Tokyo, Japan | 4% (tie) |

BEST SEASIDE PARK

| | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Morey's Piers | Wildwood, N.J. | 27% |
| Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk | Santa Cruz, Calif. | 26.5% |
| Blackpool Pleasure Beach | Blackpool, England | 26% |
| Gröna Lund | Stockholm, Sweden | 12% |

BEST INDOOR WATER PARK

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| Schlitterbahn Galveston Island | Galveston, Texas | 28% |
| Kalahari Resort | Sandusky, Ohio | 17% |
| Kalahari Resort | Wisconsin Dells, Wis. | 12% |
| World Waterpark | West Edmonton, Alb., Canada | 11% |
| Splash Landings | Staffordshire, England | 6% |

BEST WATER PARK

| | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| Schlitterbahn | New Braunfels, Texas | 52% |
| Splashin' Safari | Santa Claus, Ind. | 19% |
| Dollywood's Splash Country | Pigeon Forge, Tenn. | 6% |
| Aquatica | Orlando, Fla. | 5% |
| Typhoon Lagoon | Orlando, Fla. | 4% |

BEST KIDS' AREA

| | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Kings Island | Mason, Ohio | 27% |
| Efteling | Kaatsheuvel, the Netherlands | 10% |
| Universal's Islands of Adventure | Orlando, Fla. | 9.5% |
| Kings Dominion | Doswell, Va. | 8% |
| Blackpool Pleasure Beach | Blackpool, England | 6% (tie) |
| Nickelodeon Universe | Bloomington, Minn. | 6% (tie) |

BEST CHILDREN'S PARK

| | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Idlewild & SoakZone | Ligonier, Pa. | 21% |
| Storybook Land | Egg Harbor Twp., N.J. | 20% |
| Story Land | Glen, N.H. | 9% |
| Legoland Windsor | Windsor, England | 8% |
| Legoland California | Carlsbad, Calif. | 7% (tie) |
| Legoland Florida | Winterhaven, Fla. | 7% (tie) |

CLEANEST PARK

| | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Holiday World | Santa Claus, Ind. | 25% |
| Dollywood | Pigeon Forge, Tenn. | 14% |
| Busch Gardens Williamsburg | Williamsburg, Va. | 11% |
| Europa-Park | Rust, Germany | 9% |
| Disneyland | Anaheim, Calif. | 8% |

BEST MARINE LIFE PARK

| | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| SeaWorld Orlando | Orlando, Fla. | 55% |
| SeaWorld San Diego | San Diego, Calif. | 10% |
| Discovery Cove | Orlando, Fla. | 9% |
| SeaWorld San Antonio | San Antonio, Texas | 8% |
| Six Flags Discovery Kingdom | Vallejo, Calif. | 7% |

BEST SHOWS

| | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|------------|
| Dollywood | Pigeon Forge, Tenn. | 42% |
| Six Flags Fiesta Texas | San Antonio, Texas | 11% |
| Silver Dollar City | Branson, Mo. | 8% |
| Europa-Park | Rust, Germany | 7% |
| Disney California Adventure | Anaheim, Calif. | 6% |



BEST WATER PARK: Schlitterbahn
COURTESY SCHLITTERBAHN

BEST INDOOR WATER PARK: Schlitterbahn Galveston Island
COURTESY SCHLITTERBAHN

PARK AND RIDE WINNERS

Ranked by percentage of votes cast



BEST FOOD

| | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| Knoebels Amusement Resort | Elysburg, Pa. | 23% |
| Dollywood | Pigeon Forge, Tenn. | 20% |
| Epcot | Orlando, Fla. | 16% |
| Silver Dollar City | Branson, Mo. | 9% |
| Europa-Park | Rust, Germany | 7% |

BEST WATER RIDE (PARK)

| | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------|
| Valhalla | Blackpool Pleasure Beach | 28% |
| Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls | Universal's Islands of Adventure | 19% |
| Splash Mountain | Magic Kingdom | 9% |
| Mountain Slidewinder | Dollywood | 7% |
| Timber Mountain Log Ride | Knott's Berry Farm | 6% |

BEST WATER PARK RIDE

| | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|------------|
| Wildebeest | Splashin' Safari | 25% |
| Mammoth | Splashin' Safari | 18% |
| Master Blaster | Schlitterbahn | 14% |
| The Falls | Schlitterbahn | 9% |
| Verrückt | Schlitterbahn Kansas City | 8% |

BEST INDOOR COASTER

| | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------|
| Revenge of the Mummy | Universal Studios Orlando | 23% |
| Space Mountain | Disneyland | 12% |
| Winjas | Phantasialand | 11% |
| Black Diamond | Knoebels Amusement Resort | 10% |
| Mindbender | Galaxyland | 7% (tie) |
| Rock 'n' Roller Coaster | Disney's Hollywood Studios | 7% (tie) |

BEST DARK RIDE

| | | |
|---|---|------------|
| Harry Potter & the Forbidden Journey | Universal's Islands of Adventure | 13% |
| Twilight Zone Tower of Terror | Disney's Hollywood Studios | 12% |
| Harry Potter / Escape from Gringotts | Universal Studios Orlando | 9% |
| Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man | Universal's Islands of Adventure | 8.5% |
| Haunted Mansion | Knoebels Amusement Resort | 7% |

BEST OUTDOOR SHOW PRODUCTION

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| IllumiNations | Epcot | 24% |
| World of Color | Disney California Adventure | 15% |
| Fantasmic! | Disney's Hollywood Studios | 12% |
| Fantasmic! | Disneyland | 11% |
| Lone Star Nights | Six Flags Fiesta Texas | 9% |

BEST LANDSCAPING

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Busch Gardens Williamsburg | Williamsburg, Va. | 29% |
| Gilroy Gardens | Gilroy, Calif. | 17% |
| Efteling | Kaatsheuvel, the Netherlands | 11% |
| Alton Towers | Staffordshire, England | 9% |
| Dollywood | Pigeon Forge, Tenn. | 7% |

BEST HALLOWEEN EVENT

| | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| Universal Orlando Resort | Orlando, Fla. | 28% |
| Knott's Berry Farm | Buena Park, Calif. | 18% |
| Knoebels Amusement Resort | Elysburg, Pa. | 11% |
| Kennywood | West Mifflin, Pa. | 8% |
| Busch Gardens Tampa | Tampa, Fla. | 5% |

BEST CHRISTMAS EVENT

| | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------|------------|
| Dollywood | Pigeon Forge, Tenn. | 40% |
| Disneyland | Anaheim, Calif. | 10% |
| Silver Dollar City | Branson, Mo. | 9% |
| Magic Kingdom | Orlando, Fla. | 6% |
| Europa-Park | Rust, Germany | 5.5% |

BEST CAROUSEL

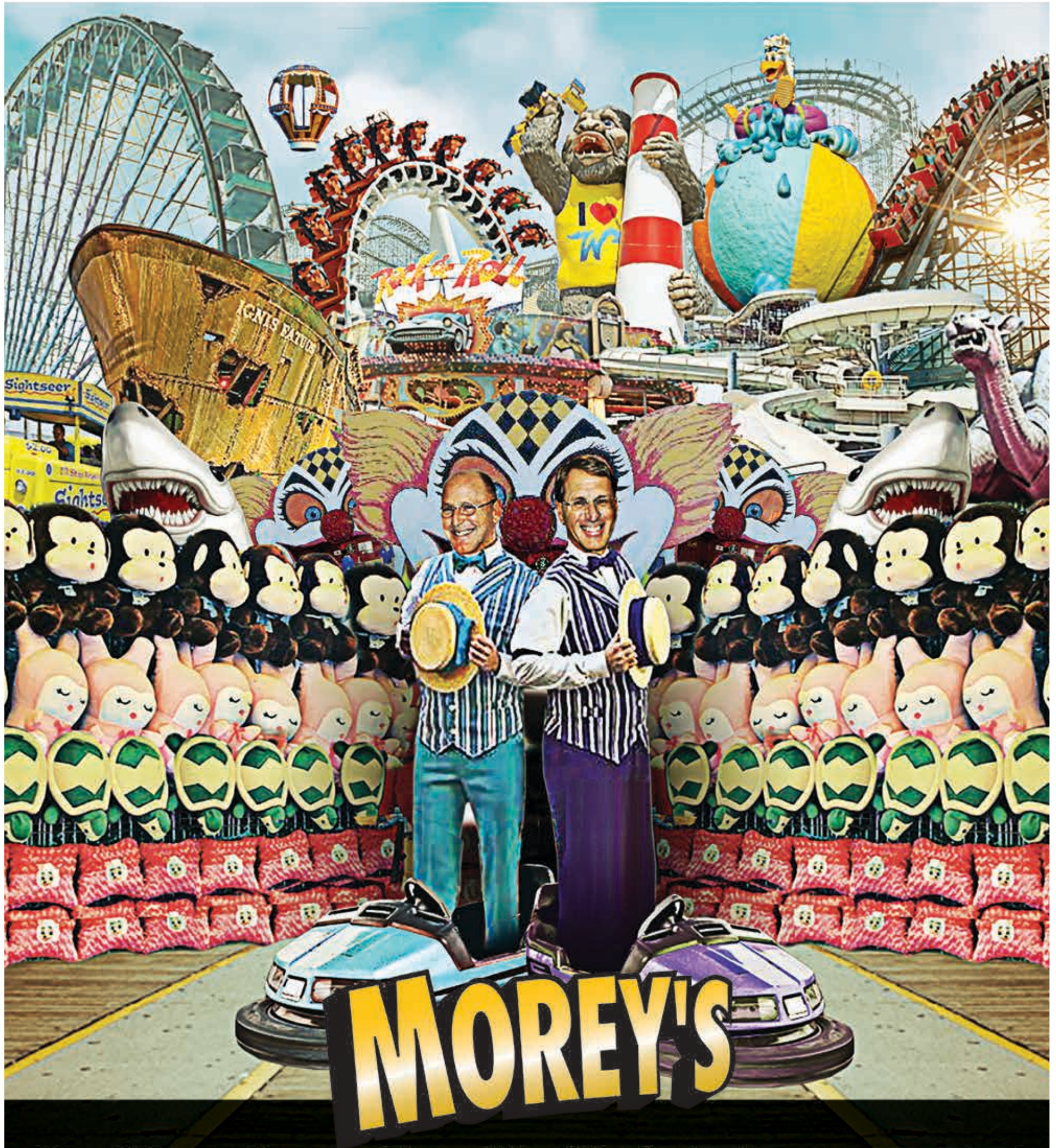
| | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Knoebels Amusement Resort | Elysburg, Pa. | 42% |
| Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk | Santa Cruz, Calif. | 23% |
| Six Flags Great America | Gurnee, Ill. | 6% |
| Efteling | Kaatsheuvel, the Netherlands | 5% (tie) |
| Six Flags Over Georgia | Austell, Ga. | 5% (tie) |

FRIENDLIEST PARK

| | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|------------|
| Dollywood | Pigeon Forge, Tenn. | 35% |
| Holiday World | Santa Claus, Ind. | 18% |
| Knoebels Amusement Resort | Elysburg, Pa. | 12% |
| Adventure Island | Southend-on-Sea, England | 9% |
| Silver Dollar City | Branson, Mo. | 8% |

BEST FUNHOUSE/WALK-THROUGH ATTRACTION

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|------------|
| Noah's Ark | Kennywood | 27% |
| Ghost Ship | Morey's Piers | 23% |
| Gasten Ghost Hotel | Liseberg | 12% |
| Frankenstein's Castle | Indiana Beach | 10% |
| Lustiga Huset | Gröna Lund | 8% |



Good Things Come to Those Who Wait!

Morey's Piers would like to congratulate and share this award with all of our dedicated team members and guests. Congratulations to all of the 2015 Golden Ticket Award winners!

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CONGRATULATIONS to the Nominees and Winners of the Golden Ticket Awards 2015!



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TOP Steel Roller Coasters

- #1 Millennium Force® • Cedar Point
- #4 Fury 325® • Carowinds
- #7 Intimidator™ • Carowinds
- #8 Leviathan® • Canada's Wonderland
- #11 Diamondback • Kings Island
- #13 Top Thrill Dragster® • Cedar Point
- #15 Magnum XL-200 • Cedar Point
- #16 Intimidator™ 305 • Kings Dominion
- #18 Behemoth® • Canada's Wonderland
- #20 Banshee® • Kings Island
- #22 Maverick® • Cedar Point

TOP Wooden Roller Coasters

- #6 The Beast® • Kings Island
- #9 Gold Striker® • California's Great America
- #17 Prowler® • Worlds of Fun
- #20 Shivering Timbers® • Michigan's Adventure

BEST Park

- #2 Cedar Point

BEST New Ride

- #1 Fury 325® • Carowinds

BEST Halloween Event

- #2 Knott's Berry Farm

BEST Landscaping

- #2 Gilroy Gardens

BEST Kids' Area

- #1 Kings Island
- #4 Kings Dominion

BEST Water Ride

- #5 Timber Mountain Log Ride
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Knoebels and Dollywood play tug-of-war for Best Food

It's on! The fight for winning **BEST FOOD** is the latest tug-of-war battle in recent Golden Ticket Awards history.

For years, **Knoebels** was the perennial favorite in this category. In 2012, **Dollywood** snagged it. The following year, **AT** saw its first tie ever for a Golden Ticket with a tie between the two parks. Last year, Dollywood reigned victorious again. This year Knoebels steals it back.

"How lucky are we to have Dollywood in the industry to push us to improve our food?" says Dick Knoebel, president. "When voters informed us that another park had better satisfied their appetites, this was clear indication that we needed to step up our game."

Aside from the scuffle for the top rung, the other three places on our finalists remain unchanged. **Epcot**, with its international cuisine remains in the No. 3 spot, **Silver Dollar City's** fine home cookin' takes No. 4,



and **Europa-Park's** diverse collection of restaurants holds at No. 5.

Among the repeat win for **Dollywood** in the **FRIENDLIEST PARK** category, we find familiar faces. **Holiday World** (No. 2) and **Knoebels** (No. 3) know their way around this category.

New, however, is **Adventure Island** at England's Southend-On-Sea. Numerous voters commented on the tremendous enthusiasm for their job displayed by the staff to all the guests at this seaside facility.

Silver Dollar City's amazing citizens and town-folk complete the top five.

BEST LANDSCAPING had a close finish in 2014, but **Busch Gardens Williamsburg** regained a comfortable lead once again to take the Golden Ticket.

Gilroy Gardens, the big challenger last year, keeps



BEST FOOD: Knoebels
COURTESY KNOEBELS

its No. 2 spot. Known for a wide variety of plants and the incredible Circus Trees, **Gilroy Gardens** is a paradise for horticulture lovers.

Efteling in the Netherlands has long been firmly planted on **AT's** charts in this category. The beautiful park takes third place.

A new park to surface for their landscaping is **Alton Towers**. The manicured bushes and sunken gardens of the massive estate captured many voters. The park takes the No. 4 position.

No stranger to this category, Dollywood keeps its ground lush and beautiful for its guests year round. The Tennessee themed closes out the five finalists.

Of all categories, this next one may be the toughest of all. **CLEANEST PARK** is something every amusement facility strives to provide each and every day. Most parks do a good job, so to get particular attention by our voters is certainly high praise.

Holiday World & Splashin' Safari add another Golden Ticket to their collection.

Bragging rights land on Dollywood for being a finalist in all four categories presented on this page. This is a major achievement for a park and one that hopefully every park manager strives to attain. Dollywood rests at the No. 2 spot.

Busch Gardens Williamsburg moves up a notch



FRIENDLIEST PARK: Dollywood
COURTESY DOLLYWOOD



BEST LANDSCAPING: Busch Gardens Williamsburg
COURTESY BUSCH GARDENS

to take the No. 3 place this year. The Cleanest Park category is regular territory for the beautiful Virginia theme park.

Closing out the category are true originals in their own right. **Europa-Park** is such a driving force in Germany and continues to grow and evolve by focus-

ing on the industry cornerstones and leading the way in customer service. It holds the No. 4 spot. **Disneyland** (No. 5) celebrates its Diamond Jubilee this year. For 60 years, it has served as a blueprint of how all parks should be operated and the level of quality each guest deserves.



CLEANEST PARK: Holiday World & Splashin' Safari
AT/GARY SLADE

Nature with a Thrilling Twist



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Carowinds, Six Flags White Water win Best New Rides



Perhaps the most eagerly awaited categories are the Best New Rides. This category champions those parks who push boundaries, reach new heights, or just delight with sheer thrills. Never in the history of this Golden Ticket category has the competition been this fierce...and it's always tough.

Innovations this year saw major new dark ride attractions at the regional theme park level, transformed hybrid coasters (one with an amazing interaction between trains), never-before-done attributes applied to coaster genres and other indoor attractions. It was a great year to be in a theme park.

Taking the Golden Ticket for **BEST NEW RIDE** in the **PARK** category is **Fury 325** at **Carowinds**. This is the second time **B&M** has reached beyond the 300-foot mark and this time around it soared even higher.



BEST NEW RIDE (WATER PARK):
Dive Bomber, Six Flags White Water
COURTESY SIX FLAGS WHITE WATER

The 325-foot mega-coaster graced the Carolina theme park's new entrance making for a stupendous moment of "wow" on arrival.

"I've logged more than 100 rides on this thrill machine, and I'm hoping to ride with my son for the first time if he's tall enough by the end of the season. Fingers crossed," jokes Mike Fehnel, vice president and general manager of Carowinds. "Fury 325 is a signature coaster

that will forever define the skyline at Carowinds and Charlotte. We're very proud of what we have achieved together."

Two hybrid transformations followed to take the No. 2 spot and No. 3 spot: **Wicked Cyclone** and **Twisted Colossus** respectively.

Of the two, Wicked Cyclone delivers the out-of-control wilder ride with stunning aerobic maneuvers on all levels. It's nonstop action. **Six Flags New**



No. 2:
SlideZilla, Elitch Gardens
COURTESY ELITCH GARDENS

England now offers a one-two steel punch with the pairing of this new thriller with top rated Bizarro.

Twisted Colossus at **Six Flags Magic Mountain** boasts the fact that it is the longest hybrid coaster on the planet. With this transformation, **Rocky Mountain Construction** has taken a dual track coaster and created a single track masterpiece that laps the coaster's layout twice. If taking the first drop

a second time wasn't ingenious enough, when timed correctly two trains of riders interact with each other, inverting upside down on two occasions. When it comes to "wow" factors, this one ranks among the best.

Cú Chulainn at **Tayto Park** makes a remarkable showing by drawing numerous voters to check out this new wooden coaster, despite the ride being located in Ireland. Tremendous
▶ See **NEW RIDES**, page 21

►NEW RIDES**Continued from page 20**

speed, heavy banking and ample airtime have helped this newest wooden installation by **Gravity Group** receive rave reviews.

Completing the top five finalists — and keeping at bay numerous other worthy contenders — **Thunderbird** at **Holiday World** sees a new twist on the most recent product in the B&M catalog. It is the first time that B&M has used an LSM launch on one of their coasters; even more amazing, it is a wing coaster.

On the water park flip side of this category, **Six Flags White Water** near Atlanta unveiled **Dive Bomber**, which takes the Golden Ticket for **BEST NEW RIDE** in the **WATER PARK** sector.

Here, Six Flags has taken the popular trap door style attraction, provided by **ProSlide**, and created the tallest attraction the park has ever built. Standing at more than 100 feet tall, Dive Bomber drops riders close to 90 degrees straight down allowing them to reach speeds of 44 mph.

"We're delighted with the reaction from guests who have experienced Dive Bomber," says



BEST NEW RIDE (PARK):
Fury 325, Carowinds
AT/GARY SLADE

Dale Kaetzel, park president. "Its massive drop has provided riders with hours of summertime fun and we look forward to more of those moments for years to come. It's an honor to have the tallest slide at Six Flags White Water as Best New Ride in a Water Park."

SlideZilla at **Elitch Gardens** in Denver takes the No. 2 spot.

Also supplied by ProSlide, this six-story tower combines a Behemoth Bowl with a Tornado Wave element that swallows four riders in cloverleaf tubes at a time. This design won an IAA-PA award last year.

At No. 3, the finalists have a tie: **Aqua Rocket** at **Raging Waters** in San Dimas, California and **Slideboarding** at **Wet 'n' Wild**



No. 2: Wicked Cyclone,
Six Flags New England
AT/TIM BALDWIN
Las Vegas.

Aqua Rocket is the newest hydromagnetic uphill water coaster, and the first in California.

Slideboarding is the latest venture by **WhiteWater West** in which the concept of gaming is introduced as riders are challenged to push buttons on their handgrips that correspond with

lighted rings in the tubes. The thrill here is to be top score and for season pass holders to try to improve their game over the course of the year.

Completing the five finalists is **Anaconda** at the new **Kalahari Resort** in the Pocomo of Pennsylvania. This uphill water coaster is one of numerous attractions provided by ProSlide.

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Our panel of experts

Since *Amusement Today* introduced the **Golden Ticket Awards** in 1998, we continue to seek out the most experienced park enthusiasts to participate in our survey. *AT* follows a fair and balanced protocol of dividing our ballots between four geographical regions (see color map at right) of the United States. In addition to the hundreds of surveys sent to American enthusiasts, international fans are also sought out and we invite such fans to contact us for participation in future years. *Amusement Today* thanks the hundreds of voters who helped form this year's panel of experts and make the 2015 Golden Ticket Awards a reality.

Are you a qualified candidate? Contact Golden Ticket Awards Communications Coordinator Tim Baldwin at tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com and we'll see if you would make a good representative for your region on next year's new panel.

Of note, park employees, manufacturers, and *Amusement Today* staff are not eligible to be on the panel.



5 – International Surveys



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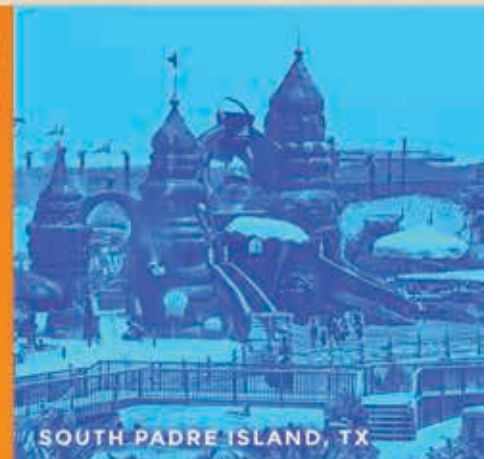
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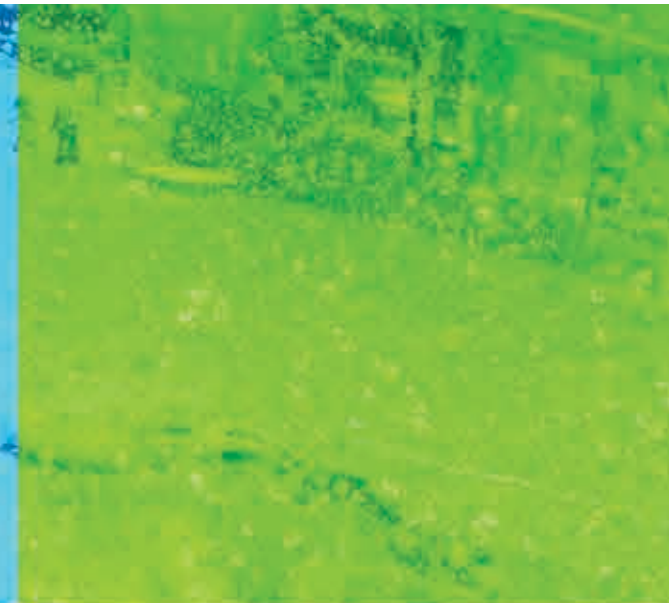
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2015 Publisher's Picks: Park, Renaissance

Lagoon makes amusement a true family affair

In 1886, initially on the shores of Utah's Great Salt Lake and — 10 years later — a few miles away at its present site in Farmington, north of Salt Lake City, **Lagoon** established itself as a place for family fun.

Activities such as bowling, dancing and swimming preceded the opening of the amusement park's first ride, Shoot-the-Chutes, in 1899. A Victorian-era **Herschell-Spillman** carousel arrived in 1906. And after its still-operating, **John Miller**-designed roller coaster was built in 1921, Lagoon became a magnet for thrill-seekers.

Hard times befell the park during World War II. To its rescue came brothers **David, Dan, Robert** and **Peter Freed**, who, just home from the war, saw potential in the property and signed a long-term lease on it. Led by ride enthusiast **Robert Freed**, the clan spruced up and reopened Lagoon in 1946 and added nine new attractions for 1947. The Freeds' enterprise was on a roll.

Disaster struck in 1953, when a fire devastated half the park. **Bob Freed** personally trained water on the carousel to save it. With renewed determination, the Freeds rebuilt Lagoon rapidly for the 1954 season — commencing several decades of growth and success leading to the family's 1983 purchase of the property and the richly landscaped, attraction-packed park we know today.

Immortalized by **The Beach Boys** in their 1965 tune "Salt Lake City," Lagoon has maintained its family-driven tradition through second and third Freed generations — including Peter's children **David Freed**, now in his 22nd year as park president, and **Kristen Freed-O'Bagy**, vice president. **Peter Freed** himself, at age 94 the last surviving original brother and Bob's immediate successor as Lagoon's president, still reports to work as chairman.

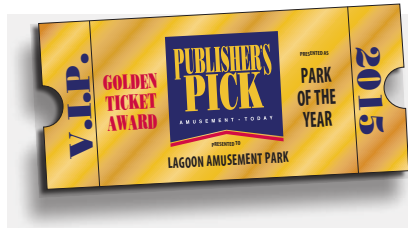
This season, Lagoon's 130th year, the Freeds again demonstrated their commitment to one of America's oldest amusement parks by introducing Cannibal, a stunning, state-of-the-art steel diving coaster designed largely in-house and costing in excess \$26 million.

"Our philosophy has always been that we try and improve Lagoon," Dave Freed told *AT* earlier this summer. "We always felt like we were the keeper of the asset."

For the longtime dedication of the Freed family and its staff in preserving Utah history and a national treasure, *Amusement Today* honors **Lagoon** with its **2015 Park of the Year** award.



Continuing the Freed family's long history of Lagoon operation and ownership, which began in the mid-1940s, are park president David Freed (center), his sister Kristen Freed-O'Bagy, park vice president, and his daughter Julie Freed, director of special events. COURTESY LAGOON



Huck Finn's Playland wins Renaissance Award

Barely more than 60 days. That's all two brothers had to give new life to a multi-generational keepsake. By definition, Renaissance means a rebirth or revival. In finding a fitting candidate for this new Publisher's Pick designation, none is more worthy than **Huck Finn's Playland** outside Albany, N.Y. After 62 years of operating **Hoffman's Playland**, **Dave** and **Ruth Hoffman** deservedly retired last September. Talk and proposals from interested parties helped address the community's desire to keep the property going, but it was the bid of **Jeffrey Sperber**, along with his brother **Reid Sperber**, that brought the next chapter of this park into a reality. It was clear that it wasn't a matter of "someone should do it," but rather "someone could do it."

Being owners of **Huck Finn's Warehouse**, a well-known family-friendly furniture store six miles away in North Albany, the pair of gentlemen acquired neighboring land. **Sperber** acknowledges that it was not only the support of the local government, but actually the sheer appreciation from them that made it all click. It was the announcement that the Hoffmans had found no acceptable solution that caused the Sperbers to act, keeping the rides from going to auction. It was important to keep this part of the local community alive and well.

Starting on April 17, they amazingly re-located everything adjacent to their furniture warehouse. But it wasn't just a matter of setting up rides. A brick mid-way, landscaping, shade structures and other bits of attention to detail are what truly spoke to the revival of the former Hoffman's facility. Over the fall and winter, the rides had been lovingly restored, piece by piece, and stored for their new home. Restoring the integrity of the rides was a large hurdle, according to Jeffrey Sperber, along with the difficulty involved in the physical move. Each week presented a new challenge, each one taken on. But in that two-month time period, it all came together.

In addition to saving this family tradition, the park has brought new jobs to the area and has rehired many staff from the original location. Huck's also continues to push redevelopment of what was once a gritty warehouse district into more of a vibrant community. Their website and Facebook pages are testimony to this inspirational work. Bricks can be purchased to line the midway with messages. These funds support Ronald McDonald House and Albany Police Athletic League charities.

Huck Finn's has always been a business that caters to families. "For over 50 years, we have been filling people's homes with great values on home furnishings," says Jeffrey Sperber. "Now we are filling their hearts." To this, *Amusement Today* is honored to select **Huck Finn's Playland** as the first ever Golden Ticket **Renaissance Award**.



Jeff and Reid Sperber



The former Hoffman's Playland reopened on June 18, 2015, as the \$1.8 million Huck Finn's Playland. The new four-acre park is just six miles from its previous location. All of the 17 rides were relocated in just 60 days from Hoffman's to Huck Finn's and are surrounded by beautiful landscaping and bricked walkways. COURTESY HUCK FINN'S PLAYLAND

2015 Publisher's Picks: Turnstile, Person(s)

Quassy mixes tradition with the new

George Frantzis II and **Eric Anderson** have both spent most of their lives at **Quassy Amusement Park** located in Middlebury, Conn. Frantzis grew up at the lakeside facility as a third-generation member of his family-owned business – his grandfather purchasing the park in 1937.

Anderson came to work at the park at age 11 and learned the arcade and games business under the mentorship of Quassy owner **John Frantzis**.

Today, both George Frantzis II and Anderson oversee daily operations of the park and have been credited with the rebirth of the property and development of its new **Splash Away Bay** water park.

The two seasoned park owners set the stage in 2002 to rebuild itself as the property was looking old and tired. It needed more than paint, it needed a fresh look and new, modern rides. A \$6 million multi-year re-development plan was outlined that would include yearly enhancements as well as two major anchor attractions that the park desperately needed.

In 2003 the park built the first phase of a new water park, Saturation Station with the Tunnel Twisters waterslide complex making its splash in 2006. The two owners have admitted the immediate success of the water park not only helped save the park, it generated all new interest in the facility and added to park's bottom line that allowed for the re-development to continue.

The plans included the addition of many new flat rides to keep the guests coming back for repeat visits. Not overlooking their long history, the rebuilding of their 50-foot, four-abreast Grand Carousel became a priority, new trolley themed ticketing and a park entrance was built and an all new train station now greets train riders — successfully mixing the new with the old.

Then in 2011 the park introduced Wooden Warrior, the first junior coaster from The Gravity Group (Cincinnati, Ohio) and the first coaster in North America to run a Timberliner train from Gravitykraft – sister company of The Gravity Group. As a junior coaster, Wooden Warrior appears annually in the Golden Ticket rankings. Attendance and revenues continue to climb.

This season, Quassy added eight new slides to the water park kicking off the second \$6 million multi-year reinvestment plan.

Without their vision, Quassy – in operation since 1908 – could have met the fate of many New England parks of yesteryear and ceased to exist. But George Frantzis II and Eric Anderson did not let that happen. They reinvested and rebuilt to bring record revenues to Quassy, thus keeping the turnstile turning. For their vision and dedication, **Quassy Amusement & Waterpark** takes the Publisher's Pick for the **2015 Turnstile Award**.



Quassy Amusement & Waterpark owners George Frantzis II (left) and Eric Anderson committed to a long range plan in 2002 to rebuild and re-invest in the Middlebury, Conn facility that dates back to 1908. That plan has led to renewed success and record attendance. COURTESY QUASSY



Zamperla, Ferrari save historic Coney Island

Coney Island, the birthplace of American amusements. For decades, Americans flocked to Coney Island, not only for the beach, but for the thrills found at the various parks. But those thrills began to shrink in numbers when the parks and area fell in disrepair during the last several decades.

When **Astroland** closed on Sept. 7, 2008, **New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg** knew it was time for Coney Island to reinvent itself. It was then, at the 2008 IAAPA Attractions Expo that the NYC Economic Development Corp. (EDC) exhibited to promote a revitalized Coney Island. Enter the team of **Alberto Zamperla** and **Valerio Ferrari** who met with the EDC to gather information.

Mayor Bloomberg sends a letter on May 14, 2009 to the Coney Island Amusement Advisory Panel, and it sparks the interest of Ferrari — who is serving on the panel. That letter made him believe that Zamperla could make a park a reality. With Alberto's blessing, a business plan was created and would be ready once the city's RFP went public.

Tuesday, February 16, 2010 was the date Mayor Bloomberg officially announced that Zamperla's **Central Amusement International** (already operators of the highly successful summer-only Victorian Gardens in Central Park) had been selected to lead the Coney Island redevelopment. CAI and Zamperla swiftly pulled together all of their expert resources, from both sides of the ocean, to make the new Luna Park a reality, opening to the public May 29, 2010. In that 100 day span, these two men, and their dedicated teams installed 19 new rides, built a restaurant, staff office, five food outlets and trained 230 new employees that would host guests on this new 3.3-acre site.

The planned Luna Park, with supporting parks and attractions that have followed, didn't come without risk and investment. To date, more than \$45 million has been pumped into these facilities managed by CAI. To ensure that original ride deliveries could be made, Alberto Zamperla committed to ride production, long before Mayor Bloomberg made it official. It was a huge risk for Zamperla the company, but one that did pay off.

At the close of the 2010 opening year, Mayor Bloomberg announced that Luna Park drew more than 450,000 visitors, who took more than 2.5 million rides for what was deemed a highly successful summer. Today, with the operation of the Cyclone, B&B Carousel, Place to Beach and the newly-built Thunderbolt, visitation to the boardwalk is at an all time high with 3.5 million visitors taking the subway to Coney Island each year.

The vision, strength and dedication of Alberto Zamperla and Valerio Ferrari started the rebirth of Coney Island, and for that, AT is honored to name these two titans of the industry our **2015 Persons of the Year**.



New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg (left) takes a ride with Zamperla owner Alberto Zamperla on Luna Park's opening day, May 29, 2010. Central Amusement International opened the park 100 days after being awarded the development contract by the mayor. COURTESY ZAMPERLA

Blackpool's Valhalla takes Best Water Ride

A great mix of rides creates a full day of fun and variety. Here's what our voters found to be outstanding in this year's balloting.

The category of **BEST WATER RIDE** sees a new winner for 2015. Actually, this consistent finalist took home the gold in 2003 once before. **Valhalla** at **Blackpool Pleasure Beach** is an extraordinary water ride (as in drenching) that mixes the wet component with a dark ride setting featuring an audio soundtrack, fire, waterfalls and dramatic theming. Its one-of-a-kind sensory overload rates it at No. 1 this year. The Pleasure Beach worked with **Intamin** on this attraction.

Dudley Do-Right's Rip-saw Falls at **Universal's Islands of Adventure**, our long-running winner in this category, splashes in to the No. 2 spot in 2015. The water ride, whimsically themed by Universal, was supplied by **Mack Rides**.

Three perennial favorites round out the top five: **Splash Mountain**, **Magic Kingdom** (No. 3); **Mountain Slidewinder**, **Dollywood**



BEST WATER RIDE:
Valhalla, Blackpool Pleasure Beach
COURTESY CHERI ARMSTRONG

(No. 4); and **Timber Mountain Log Flume, Knott's Berry Farm** (No. 5).

In the **BEST WATER PARK RIDE** category, **Splashin' Safari** has bragging rights to the top two water park rides. Taking the Golden Ticket for the sixth year, **Wildebeest** has fans from all over. Its cousin, the six-person **Mammoth** moves up to the No. 2 spot. Both

were supplied by **ProSlide**. **Schlitterbahn** in New Braunfels controls the next two places. **Master Blaster**, a former Golden Ticket winner, comes in at No. 3, while the extremely long rapids ride, **The Falls**, is at the No. 4 position.

Sister park **Schlitterbahn Kansas City** and its record-setting water slide, **Verrückt**, close out the five

finalists.

BEST INDOOR COASTER stays relatively unchanged from last year, except that loyal fans have voted enough to bring previous Golden Ticket winner **Rock 'n' Roller Coaster at Disney's Hollywood Studios** to tie for the No. 5 spot.

Taking the gold this year is the long-running **Revenge**



of the **Mummy** at **Universal Studios Orlando**. Finalists are: **Space Mountain, Disneyland** (No. 2); **Winjas, Phantasialand** (No. 3); **Black Diamond, Knoebels** (No. 4); and **Mindbender** at **Galaxyland** ties **Rock 'n' Roller Coaster** for the fifth position.

The players remain the same, but the order does not for **BEST FUNHOUSE/WALK-THROUGH**. Taking the top spot is Kennywood's **Noah's Ark**. This attraction has delighted guests since 1935.

Moving up to the No. 2 position is **Ghost Ship** at **Morey's Piers**. The eerie, marooned ship on the Mariner's Landing pier is inhabited by various souls just waiting to give you the willies.

Also moving up a notch is **Liseberg's** chilling **Gasten Ghost Hotel**. This elaborate walk-through has a reputation for being superbly done.

Once a Golden Ticket winner, **Frankenstein's Castle** at **Indiana Beach** keeps the old-school thrills still popular among our voters at the No. 4 spot.

Of all the finalists, **Gröna Lund's Lustiga Huset** keeps the laughs coming with one interactive physical stunt after the other. It takes fifth place.

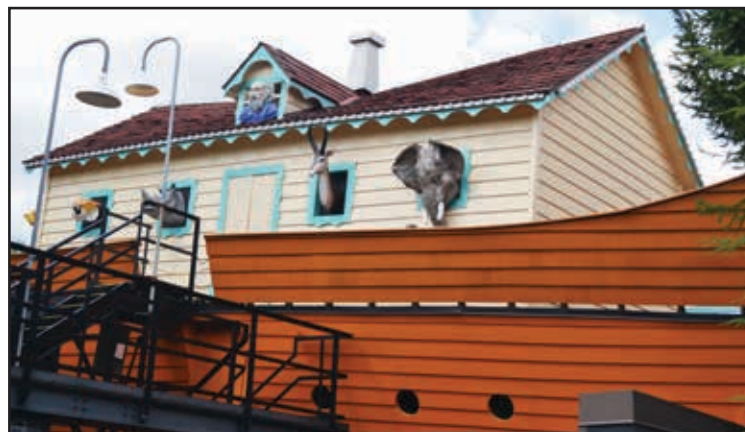
BEST DARK RIDE gives **Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey** a Golden Ticket for the fifth year in a row. Its younger sibling, **Harry Potter and the Escape from Gringotts** places at No. 3. Both are at the **Universal** resort in Orlando.

Sandwiched between those two is the **Twilight Zone Tower of Terror** at **Disney's Hollywood Studios** in second place, also in the Orlando Mecca of theme parks.

Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man at Universal's Island of Adventure and **Knoebels' Haunted Mansion** take the No. 4 and 5 spots, respectively.



BEST WATER PARK RIDE:
Wildebeest, Holiday World & Splashin' Safari
COURTESY HOLIDAY WORLD



BEST FUNHOUSE/WALK-THROUGH:
Noah's Ark, Kennywood
COURTESY KENNYWOOD



BEST DARK RIDE:
Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey, Universal's Islands of Adventure AT/RICHARD MUNCH



BEST INDOOR COASTER:
Revenge of the Mummy, Universal Studios Orlando
COURTESY UNIVERSAL ORLANDO



**Best Funhouse/Walk-Through Attraction
Noah's Ark, Kennywood**

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▶RIDES
Continued from page 30

Lightening things up, **BEST CAROUSEL** finds its brass ring favorite at Knoebels in the No. 1 spot once again. This carousel has never been defeated in this category. In addition to the ring dispenser, it is also adorned with classic band organs giving the entire attraction a nostalgic authenticity.

Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk's carousel continues to hold its No. 2 position. It also features a ring dispenser and multiple band organs.

Six Flags Great America has a hold on the No. 3 spot. Its double-decker stature at the park's entrance is beautifully displayed with a reflecting pool.

The final slots of the category see some change. Tying for the No. 4 spot, **Efteling** in The Netherlands makes an appearance as a



BEST KIDS' AREA
Planet Snoopy, Kings Island
AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON

first-time finalist, while **Six Flags Over Georgia's** historic grand **Riverview Carousel** makes a return to the charts after temporarily slipping off.

A great collection of children's attractions clustered in one area makes for a convenient and sought-after location for both kids and parents. **Kings Island** keeps its undefeated grasp on **BEST KIDS' AREA**.

Efteling stays at the No. 2 spot. Universal's Islands of Adventure moves back to No. 3 and **Kings Dominion** resurfaces on the list at No. 4. A tie for the No. 5 position locks newcomer **Blackpool Pleasure Beach** with regular finalist **Nickelodeon Universe** at Mall of America. In an ironic twist, Blackpool's kids' area is also themed to Nickelodeon characters.

BEST CAROUSEL
Grand Carousel, Knoebels Amusement Resort
AT/SCOTT RUTHERFORD

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BEST SHOWS: Dollywood has kept high quality performances as a top priority. COURTESY DOLLYWOOD



BEST CHRISTMAS EVENT: Dollywood's Christmas event rings in the holidays in spectacular fashion. COURTESY DOLLYWOOD

Festivals and shows keep the audiences entertained

Spooks and snowflakes give great extended operating days to a park's season, but they also provide guests with fresh park experiences in comparison to the summer season.

Universal Studios Orlando, one of only two parks to ever take the Golden Ticket, snatches it once again for **BEST HALLOWEEN EVENT**. Halloween Horror Nights has become a hugely attended event many scream-seekers do year after year.

Knott's Berry Farm, a previous winner, comes in at the No. 2 spot. Californians make annual pilgrimages to attend this fall event.

Knoebels Amusement Resort keeps its No. 3 position and **Kennywood** stays at No. 4, as well.

New "blood," if you will, is **Busch Gardens Tampa** at the No. 5 finalist position.

In most instances, parks are finding the Halloween mystique as a bankable way to significantly increase revenues. Many parks use this festival to close out their seasons. For others...

BEST CHRISTMAS EVENT goes to **Dollywood**, the only park to find this Golden Ticket in Santa's stocking.

The next three parks keep their respective positions from 2014: **Disneyland** at No. 2, **Silver**



Dollar City at No. 3 and **Magic Kingdom** at No. 4.

A newcomer to the category is **Europa-Park**. Its winter celebration finds it at the No. 5 ranking.

Many parks around the globe continue to explore the magic of the holidays to bring in more and more people. The winter holidays also let parks creatively explore new imaginative directions for their venues.

It's show time!

For a seventh year in a row, Dollywood takes the category of **BEST SHOWS**. With Dolly Parton as the park's namesake, it is no surprise that quality entertainment comes naturally.

Six Flags Fiesta Texas, a ten-year winner of this category, still rates highly in the No. 2 spot.

Silver Dollar City (No. 3) and **Europa-Park** (No. 4) switch positions in comparison to last year's charts.

Completing our five finalists is **Disney California Adventure**.

In the category of **BEST OUTDOOR PRODUCTION**, the two Disney juggernauts still rule the top two spots. To the surprise of many industry insiders, **Epcot** still keeps **Disney California Adventure** at bay from taking the Golden Ticket from Orlando. **IllumiNations** (No. 1) has enthralled guests for more than 15 seasons, while **World of Color** (No. 2) has mesmerized young and old alike, magically transforming the sister park to Disneyland at the California resort.

Fantasmic! is a hit on both coasts. This year, the Florida version at **Disney Hollywood Studios** (No. 3) has surpassed the votes for the original at Disneyland (No. 4).

Six Flags Fiesta Texas boldly stands as the only non-Disney park to rise to the charted lists in this category. Since the park opened in 1992, the multi-media shows including lasers, fireworks and projections on the park's quarry walls has entertained for more than two decades. **Lone Star Nights** continues that tradition.



BEST OUTDOOR NIGHT PRODUCTION: Epcot's long running "IllumiNations" still boasts multitudes of fans since it was introduced around the turn of the millennium." COURTESY CREATIVE COMMONS/KATIE ROMMEL-ESHAM



BEST HALLOWEEN EVENT: Universal's Halloween Horror Nights has reached legendary proportions among park goers. COURTESY UNIVERSAL



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BEST CHRISTMAS EVENT

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Wooden coasters stand the test of time

With coasters on the charts dating back to the 1920s, wooden coasters still have the power to thrill. A different type of animal in comparison to the steel genre, a good wooden coaster requires tender care to remain viable on this list of the elite. It is common to see new stars rise, only to see their popularity fade over the years. Usually this is due to lack of maintenance instead of a rush of flashier, newer kids on the block.

This has some coaster fans a bit concerned. In the past few years, theme parks have been retiring wooden coasters at an eyebrow-raising rate, or converting them into glitzier new steel track hybrids. Business is business, but the whispers concerning the future of wood is palpable.

This chart celebrates wooden hits that continue to be stars at their respective parks.



Boulder Dash at **Lake Compounce** takes **BEST WOODEN COASTER** for a third year in a row. Of the top five, four of them have held the No. 1 spot at some point. Ironically, **Phoenix** at **Knoebels** has been one of two coasters that has been on every top ten list *Amusement Today* has printed since the inception of the Golden Ticket Awards in 1998. (**Kings Island's The Beast** at No. 6 is the other.) However, Phoenix has yet to snare that No. 1 spot. Spot on loving care keeps the beloved woodie high on the charts, this year rising a notch to No. 3.

The remaining top five are **El Toro** at **Six Flags Great Adventure** (No. 2), which snared the



BEST WOODEN COASTER: Boulder Dash, Lake Compounce
COURTESY LAKE COMPOUNCE

Golden Ticket in 2012; **The Voyage** at **Holiday World** (No. 4) had a five year run from 2007-2011; and **Thunderhead** at **Dollywood**

(No. 5) which held the title in 2005 and 2006. With the announcement of 2016's **Lightning Rod**, **Dollywood** seems to be giving its

sibling some challenging competition. Stay tuned for that drag race.

Other woodies in the top ten are **Ravine Flyer II** at **Waldameer** (No. 7); **Silver Dollar City's Outlaw Run**, rising a notch to No. 8; and **Gold Striker** at **California's Great America** at No. 9. A returning favorite is **Hersheypark's Lightning Racer**, bringing the highest ranking racing coaster back to complete the top ten.

Compared to steel, newer wooden coasters are much more sparse. Still, **Cú Chulainn**, particularly given its isolated Ireland location, makes a tremendously impressive debut at No. 18. Coaster fanatics that have made it to Tayto Park have given the new-for-2015 woodie rave reviews.

A joyous return to the chart is **Rampage** at **Alabama's Splash Adventure**. Re-opening last fall, this rejuvenated park has brought a well-respected wooden coaster back from the great beyond. Enthusiasts and preservationists both celebrate this valiant effort. **Rampage's** return is found on the chart at No. 28.

Five coasters not listed last year sneak on the tail end of the charts for 2015: **Twister** at **Gröna Lund** returns to the charts at No. 44. In a tie for the No. 45 spot, **Zippin Pippin**



No. 2: El Toro, Six Flags Great Adventure
AT/TIM BALDWIN



No. 3: Phoenix, Knoebels Amusement Resort
AT/TIM BALDWIN



No. 4: The Voyage, Holiday World
AT/DAN FEICHT



No. 5: Thunderhead, Dollywood
COURTESY JOEL STYER

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►WOOD

Continued from page 40

at **Bay Beach** returns again, this time alongside Hersheypark's **Comet**, a first time appearance (ever) on AT's charts. **T-Express** at **Everland** in South Korea also makes a return (No. 47). **Blackpool Pleasure Beach** features three woodies this year; **Big Dipper** lands on the charts for a first time at No. 48.

The biggest climber



this year also happens to be another Blackpool favorite. **Wild Mouse**, one of the handful of wooden wild mouse coasters on the planet continues to receive newfound love from coaster fans, virtually doubling its points from last year which pushes it up to No. 26.



Above, since winning the management contract for the Coney Island Cyclone, Zamperla has continued numerous improvements for the ride and it has moved up the charts. Left, the re-opened Rampage at Alabama Splash Adventure leaps back onto the charts. Right, Blackpool's Wild Mouse is a fan favorite. CYCLONE AT/GARY SLADE; RAMPAGE COURTESY ALEX DICKEY; WILD MOUSE COURTESY CHERI ARMSTRONG



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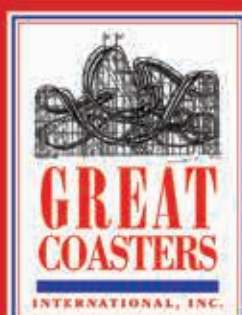
Lightning Racer at Hershey Park 2000



Thunderhead at Dollywood 2004



Gold Striker at California's Great America 2013



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THE LIST

2015 TOP 50 WOOD ROLLER COASTERS



| RANK | NAME | PARK | LOCATION | YEAR | SUPPLIER | POINTS |
|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|------|----------------------|--------|
| 1 | Boulder Dash | Lake Compounce | Bristol, Conn. | 2000 | Custom Coasters | 1625 |
| 2 | El Toro | Six Flags Great Adventure | Jackson, N.J. | 2006 | Intamin | 1464 |
| 3 | Phoenix | Knoebels Amusement Resort | Elysburg, Pa. | 1985 | Dinn - PTC/Schmeck | 1301 |
| 4 | The Voyage | Holiday World | Santa Claus, Ind. | 2006 | Gravity Group | 1184 |
| 5 | Thunderhead | Dollywood | Pigeon Forge, Tenn. | 2004 | Great Coasters Int. | 904 |
| 6 | The Beast | Kings Island | Mason, Ohio | 1979 | KECO | 740 |
| 7 | Ravine Flyer II | Waldameer | Erie, Pa. | 2008 | Gravity Group | 722 |
| 8 | Outlaw Run | Silver Dollar City | Branson, Mo. | 2013 | Rocky Mountain | 637 |
| 9 | Gold Striker | California's Great America | Santa Clara, Calif. | 2013 | Great Coasters Int. | 560 |
| 10 | Lightning Racer | Hersheypark | Hershey, Pa. | 2000 | Great Coasters Int. | 421 |
| 11 | Balder | Liseberg | Gothenburg, Sweden | 2003 | Intamin | 391 |
| 12 | The Raven | Holiday World | Santa Claus, Ind. | 1995 | Custom Coasters | 286 |
| 13 | Giant Dipper | Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk | Santa Cruz, Calif. | 1924 | Prior & Church/Looff | 278 |
| 14 | Goliath | Six Flags Great America | Gurnee, Ill. | 2014 | Rocky Mountain | 269 |
| 15 | Thunderbolt | Kennywood | West Mifflin, Pa. | 1927 | Vettel/Miller | 265 |
| 16 | Cyclone | Luna Park/Coney Island | Brooklyn, N.Y. | 1927 | Keenan/Baker | 242 |
| 17 | Prowler | Worlds of Fun | Kansas City, Mo. | 2009 | Great Coasters Int. | 231 |
| 18 | Troy | Toverland | Sevenum, the Netherlands | 2007 | Great Coasters Int. | 229 |
| 19 | Cú Chulainn | Tayto Park | Ashbourne, Ireland | 2015 | Gravity Group | 228 |
| 20 | Shivering Timbers | Michigan's Adventure | Muskegon, Mich. | 1998 | Custom Coasters | 219 |
| 21 (tie) | Flying Turns | Knoebels Amusement Resort | Elysburg, Pa. | 2013 | Knoebels | 211 |
| 21 (tie) | Jack Rabbit | Kennywood | West Mifflin, Pa. | 1920 | PTC/Miller | 211 |
| 23 | Colossos | Heide Park | Soltau, Germany | 2001 | Intamin | 207 |
| 24 | Comet | The Great Escape | Lake George, N.Y. | 1994 | PTC/Schmeck | 198 |
| 25 | The Legend | Holiday World | Santa Claus, Ind. | 2000 | Custom Coasters | 193 |



THE LIST

2015 TOP 50 WOOD ROLLER COASTERS



| RANK | NAME | PARK | LOCATION | YEAR | SUPPLIER | POINTS |
|----------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|------|---------------------|--------|
| 26 | Wild Mouse | Blackpool Pleasure Beach | Blackpool, England | 1958 | Wright, Blackpool | 185 |
| 27 | Megaferia | Oakwood | Pembrokeshire, Wales | 1996 | Custom Coasters | 171 |
| 28 | Rampage | Alabama's Splash Adventure | Bessemer, Ala. | 1998 | Custom Coasters | 167 |
| 29 | Wodan Timbur Coaster | Europa-Park | Rust, Germany | 2012 | Great Coasters Int. | 158 |
| 30 | Playland Wooden Coaster | Playland at the PNE | Vancouver, B.C., Canada | 1959 | Phare | 157 |
| 31 | Hades 360 | Mount Olympus | Wisconsin Dells, Wis. | 2005 | Gravity Group | 156 |
| 32 | Tremors | Silverwood | Athol, Idaho | 1999 | Custom Coasters | 152 |
| 33 | Kentucky Rumbler | Beech Bend | Bowling Green, Ky. | 2006 | Great Coasters Int. | 149 |
| 34 | Grand National | Blackpool Pleasure Beach | Blackpool, England | 1935 | Paige | 140 |
| 35 (tie) | Blue Streak | Cedar Point | Sandusky, Ohio | 1964 | PTC/Hoover | 133 |
| 35 (tie) | Blue Streak | Conneaut Lake Park | Conneaut Lake, Pa. | 1938 | Vettel | 133 |
| 37 | El Toro | Freizeitpark Plohn | Lengenfeld, Germany | 2009 | Great Coasters Int. | 132 |
| 38 | Wooden Warrior | Quassy Amusement Park | Middlebury, Conn. | 2011 | Gravity Group | 130 |
| 39 | American Thunder | Six Flags St. Louis | Eureka, Mo. | 2009 | Great Coasters Int. | 123 |
| 40 | White Lightning | Fun Spot America | Orlando, Fla. | 2013 | Great Coasters Int. | 115 |
| 41 | Twister | Knoebels Amusement Resort | Elysburg, Pa. | 1999 | Fetterman/Knoebels | 98 |
| 42 | The Boss | Six Flags St. Louis | Eureka, Mo. | 2000 | Custom Coasters | 91 |
| 43 | Boardwalk Bullet | Kemah Boardwalk | Kemah, Texas | 2007 | M&V/Gravity Group | 88 |
| 44 | Twister | Gröna Lund | Stockholm, Sweden | 2011 | Gravity Group | 83 |
| 45 (tie) | Comet | Hersheypark | Hershey, Pa. | 1946 | PTC/Schmeck | 78 |
| 45 (tie) | Zippin Pippin | Bay Beach | Green Bay, Wis. | 2011 | M&V | 78 |
| 47 | T Express | Everland | Yongin-si, South Korea | 2008 | Intamin | 74 |
| 48 (tie) | Big Dipper | Blackpool Pleasure Beach | Blackpool, England | 1923 | PTC/Miller | 70 |
| 48 (tie) | Tonnerre de Zeus | Parc Asterix | Plailly, France | 1997 | Custom Coasters | 70 |
| 50 | Racer | Kennywood | West Mifflin, Pa. | 1927 | PTC/Miller | 69 |

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Steel Coaster chart sees lots of up and downs

The importance of good roller coasters cannot be stressed enough in being a viable theme park destination. With more than 3,000 steel coasters in the world, making it onto the Golden Ticket Chart is a major accomplishment.

"Hotel Breakers and our Lake Erie beach represent Cedar Point's historical legacy; but world class roller coasters represent modern day Cedar Point," says Jason McClure, vice president and general manager for Cedar Point. "Coasters are integral to the Cedar Point experience. While there are too many renowned experiences to list them all, Millennium Force remains our crown jewel. But we won't rest upon our laurels. Cedar Point will build upon our legacy in 2016. Valravn will not just be another jewel for the crown, but a new crown all unto itself."

Millennium Force snags the Golden Ticket for **BEST STEEL COASTER** for a sixth consecutive year. Overall, Cedar Point has five roller coasters on AT's charts.

The top three remain unchanged with **Six Flags New England's** venerable **Bizarro** (No. 2) still claiming legions of fans, and **Holiday Park's Expedition GeForce** (No. 3) holding as Europe's highest ranking coaster.



Everything changes there as **Carowinds' Fury 325** makes an astonishing debut at No. 4, the highest debut of any coaster in nine years. Even with that powerful premiere, **Six Flags Great Adventure's Nitro** holds strong to its No. 5 position.

The remainder of the top ten is a jumble in comparison to last year's chart. No. 6 is **Apollo's Chariot** at **Busch Gardens Williamsburg** (up a spot); **Intimidator**, Carowinds' other mega-coaster (No. 7, giving the park two coasters in the top ten); **Leviathan** at **Canada's Wonderland** (No. 8) and **New Texas Giant** at **Six Flags Over Texas** at No. 10.

But, something fascinating happens. For the first time since 2003, **Alton Tower's Nemesis** breaks back into the top ten at No. 9. Not only is the creatively-themed **B&M** inverted coaster making a wildly popular comeback, but it is also the first time that any steel coaster that travels upside down has graced the top ten in the Golden Ticket Awards in seven years.



BEST STEEL COASTER: Millennium Force, Cedar Point
AT/TIM BALDWIN

Other than Fury 325, two other new-for-2015 steel coasters grace the charts. **Wicked Cyclone** at Six Flags New England places at No. 23 and **Six Flags Magic Mountain's Twisted Colossus** lands at No. 28. Both are by **Rocky Mountain Construction**.

Other steel coasters not on the list in 2014 to land on the 2015 charts: **The Swarm** at England's **Thorpe Park** impressively places at No. 30 (which features two rows of backward facing seats), Alton Tower's **Air** (No. 39), Six Flags Great Adventure's **Bi-**

zarro (No. 44) makes a dramatic return after years off the list, and **Six Flags Mexico's Medusa Steel Coaster's** jump on the charts (No. 49) places all of RMC's projects on the boards.

In contrast to wooden coasters, where numbers of installations are rather flat or barely decreasing due to the removal of a few wooden coasters or the transformation of wood over to steel track, steel coasters are thriving with big numbers of new installations each year. This makes the steel chart even more challenging to

stay viable as points are spread among a much larger herd.

Thirteen roller coasters on the steel lists are found in parks outside the United States.

Intamin claims the top three coasters on the charts, as well as a total of 9 in the list. **B&M** boasts a total of 23 in the mix, and Rocky Mountain now has all their coaster projects on the charts, both on wood and steel.

Arrow, Chance, Mack, Morgan, Schwarzkopf and **Vekoma** also find their products on the steel list.



No. 2: Bizarro,
Six Flags New England
AT/JEFF SEIFERT



No. 3: Expedition GeForce,
Holiday Park
COURTESY ALEX DICKEY



No. 4: Fury 325,
Carowinds
AT/SCOTT RUTHERFORD



No 5: Nitro,
Six Flags Great Adventure
AT/TIM BALDWIN



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THE LIST

2015 TOP 50 STEEL ROLLER COASTERS



| RANK | NAME | PARK | LOCATION | YEAR | SUPPLIER | POINTS |
|----------|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|------|----------------|--------|
| 1 | Millennium Force | Cedar Point | Sandusky, Ohio | 2000 | Intamin | 1205 |
| 2 | Bizarro | Six Flags New England | Agawam, Mass. | 2000 | Intamin | 929 |
| 3 | Expedition GeForce | Holiday Park | Hassloch, Germany | 2001 | Intamin | 714 |
| 4 | Fury 325 | Carowinds | Charlotte, N.C. | 2015 | B&M | 671 |
| 5 | Nitro | Six Flags Great Adventure | Jackson, N.J. | 2001 | B&M | 650 |
| 6 | Apollo's Chariot | Busch Gardens Williamsburg | Williamsburg, Va. | 1999 | B&M | 597 |
| 7 | Intimidator | Carowinds | Charlotte, N.C. | 2010 | B&M | 499 |
| 8 | Leviathan | Canada's Wonderland | Vaughan, Ontario, Canada | 2012 | B&M | 491 |
| 9 | Nemesis | Alton Towers | Staffordshire, England | 1994 | B&M | 462 |
| 10 | New Texas Giant | Six Flags Over Texas | Arlington, Texas | 2011 | Rocky Mountain | 450 |
| 11 | Diamondback | Kings Island | Mason, Ohio | 2009 | B&M | 440 |
| 12 | Goliath | Six Flags Over Georgia | Austell, Ga. | 2006 | B&M | 427 |
| 13 | Top Thrill Dragster | Cedar Point | Sandusky, Ohio | 2003 | Intamin | 408 |
| 14 | Phantom's Revenge | Kennywood | West Mifflin, Pa. | 2001 | Morgan | 405 |
| 15 | Magnum XL-200 | Cedar Point | Sandusky, Ohio | 1999 | Arrow | 355 |
| 16 | Intimidator 305 | Kings Dominion | Doswell, Va. | 2010 | Intamin | 315 |
| 17 | Blue Fire Megacoaster | Europa-Park | Rust, Germany | 2009 | Mack | 302 |
| 18 | Behemoth | Canada's Wonderland | Vaughan, Ontario, Canada | 2008 | B&M | 301 |
| 19 | Iron Rattler | Six Flags Fiesta Texas | San Antonio, Texas | 2013 | Rocky Mountain | 294 |
| 20 (tie) | Banshee | Kings Island | Mason, Ohio | 2014 | B&M | 275 |
| 20 (tie) | X2 | Six Flags Magic Mountain | Valencia, Calif. | 2002 | Arrow | 275 |
| 22 | Maverick | Cedar Point | Sandusky, Ohio | 2007 | Intamin | 257 |
| 23 | Wicked Cyclone | Six Flags New England | Agawam, Mass. | 2015 | Rocky Mountain | 251 |
| 24 | Montu | Busch Gardens Tampa | Tampa, Fla. | 1996 | B&M | 238 |
| 25 | Skyrush | Hersheypark | Hershey, Pa. | 2012 | Intamin | 219 |

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THE LIST

2015 TOP 50 STEEL ROLLER COASTERS



| RANK | NAME | PARK | LOCATION | YEAR | SUPPLIER | POINTS |
|----------|----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|------|----------------|--------|
| 26 | Alpengeist | Busch Gardens Williamsburg | Williamsburg, Va. | 1997 | B&M | 207 |
| 27 | Mind Bender | Six Flags Over Georgia | Austell, Ga. | 1978 | Schwarzkopf | 200 |
| 28 | Twisted Colossus | Six Flags Magic Mountain | Valencia, Calif. | 2015 | Rocky Mountain | 193 |
| 29 | Black Mamba | Phantasialand | Brühl, Germany | 2006 | B&M | 183 |
| 30 | The Swarm | Thorpe Park | Churtsey, England | 2012 | B&M | 154 |
| 31 (tie) | Raging Bull | Six Flags Great America | Gurnee, Ill. | 1999 | B&M | 138 |
| 31 (tie) | Wild Eagle | Dollywood | Pigeon Forge, Tenn. | 2012 | B&M | 138 |
| 33 | Griffon | Busch Gardens Williamsburg | Williamsburg, Va. | 2007 | B&M | 136 |
| 34 | Helix | Liseberg | Gothenburg, Sweden | 2014 | Mack | 127 |
| 35 | Lisebergbanan | Liseberg | Gothenburg, Sweden | 1987 | Schwarzkopf | 114 |
| 36 | Goliath | La Ronde | Montreal, Quebec, Canada | 2006 | B&M | 110 |
| 37 | Cheetah Hunt | Busch Gardens Tampa | Tampa, Fla. | 2011 | Intamin | 109 |
| 38 (tie) | Air | Alton Towers | Staffordshire, England | 2002 | B&M | 108 |
| 38 (tie) | Kumba | Busch Gardens Tampa | Tampa, Fla. | 1993 | B&M | 108 |
| 38 (tie) | Lightning Run | Kentucky Kingdom | Louisville, Ky. | 2014 | Chance | 108 |
| 41 | Shock Wave | Six Flags Over Texas | Arlington, Texas | 1978 | Schwarzkopf | 107 |
| 42 | SheiKra | Busch Gardens Tampa | Tampa, Fla. | 2005 | B&M | 105 |
| 43 | Manta | SeaWorld Orlando | Orlando, Fla. | 2009 | B&M | 101 |
| 44 | Bizarro | Six Flags Great Adventure | Jackson, N.J. | 1999 | B&M | 96 |
| 45 | Steel Force | Dorney Park | Allentown, Pa. | 1998 | Morgan | 92 |
| 46 | Whizzer | Six Flags Great America | Gurnee, Ill. | 1976 | Schwarzkopf | 90 |
| 47 | Expedition Everest | Disney's Animal Kingdom | Orlando, Fla. | 2006 | Vekoma | 89 |
| 48 | Olympia Looping | owner: R. Barth & Sohn KB | (traveling) | 1989 | Schwarzkopf | 86 |
| 49 (tie) | Kingda Ka | Six Flags Great Adventure | Jackson, N.J. | 2005 | Intamin | 83 |
| 49 (tie) | Medusa Steel Coaster | Six Flags Mexico | Mexico City, Mexico | 2014 | Rocky Mountain | 83 |



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