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The Constellation Carousel and Universal Helios Grand Hotel are part of Celestial Park inside Universal Epic Universe.

COVER PHOTO: UNIVERSAL ORLANDO



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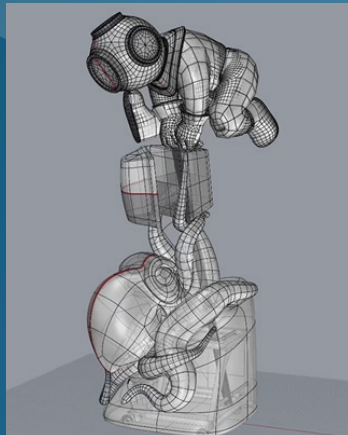
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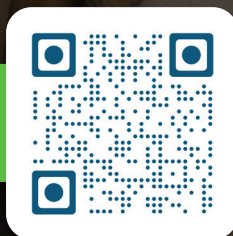
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- Uniqueness of design
- Level of detail & textures
- Storytelling & vibrance



ABOUT SPACE/CRAFT

They are a design and fabrication company based out of New York that specializes in the creation of custom-built environments & architectural feature elements.

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Rope Drop

One Sweet FEC Opens in Dubai

Ground Control Entertainment opened the UAE's Haribo Happy World FEC in late November. Located at Dubai Festival City Mall, the attraction includes multi-sensory exhibits, retail space, and a café. "Our strategy with Haribo is to be everywhere in the Middle East and then go to Europe," says Mohamed Mahmoud, CEO of Ground Control Entertainment.



PHOTOS: HANI HARATY

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Kamiya Woodard, Director of Recreation
Orlando World Center Marriott, Orlando, FL



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MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM & LIBERTY GRAPHICS

This retired shirt made a comeback thanks to Taylor Swift and fueled \$2.3 million in donations.

ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS

Monterey Bay Aquarium Triumphs from Taylor Swift Tee

How fast thinking and fan engagement turned a fleeting cameo into a fundraising sensation

by Juliana Gilling

WHEN SUPERSTAR TAYLOR SWIFT sported a vintage Monterey Bay Aquarium sea otter T-shirt in the release party movie for her new album, “The Life of a Showgirl,” the attraction didn’t just make a cameo in her wardrobe—it made a tidal wave in fundraising.

“The reaction on social media was immediate. Fans spotted the shirt and started tagging and DMing us, asking for the shirt right away,” says Liz MacDonald, director of content strategy at the Monterey Bay Aquarium in Monterey, California. “We’ve heard that in local movie theaters, audiences cheered when they saw it.”

The shirt inspired nostalgic memories of visiting the aquarium when they were children, while some even remember owning the same T-shirt.

“It quickly became clear this wasn’t just a pop culture moment. It was an opportunity to elevate our Sea Otter Program to a global audience and engage new supporters in our conservation work in a big and fun way,” Liz MacDonald shares with Funworld.

Leaping Into Action

The Monterey Bay Aquarium swiftly (pun intended) turned those thoughts into action. “It was an all-hands-on-deck effort,” MacDonald says. Thanks to

some impressive sleuthing by Swifties and the aquarium team, the attraction moved fast.

“We felt that re-issuing the shirts as a limited-time fundraiser made the most sense,” MacDonald explains. The aquarium’s team traced the T-shirt’s original artwork to Harborside Graphics, which first printed the T-shirt in the 1990s. Today, the company is part of Maine-based Liberty Graphics—located more than 3,400 miles across the U.S. from Monterey Bay. The Aquarium worked directly with Liberty to reproduce the T-shirt sustainably. Liberty Graphics uses PVC-free, water-based ink that places less strain on oceans and 100% cotton that doesn’t shed microplastics in the wash.

Power in Numbers

The aquarium’s strategic partnership team also reached out to representatives of Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce after hearing the couple discuss Kelce’s love of sea otters on his “New Heights” podcast.

“We haven’t heard back yet, but they are kind of busy with their jobs!” MacDonald says.


The aquarium’s social media content played on Swifties’ enthusiasm for finding possible Easter egg references.

After going viral, the aquarium received a wave of \$13 donations, reportedly Swift’s favorite number. In keeping with the 13 theme, the facility set out to raise \$1.3 million—a goal that was surpassed in less than two days.

“We’ve paused it at \$2.3 million,” MacDonald says. The nonprofit organization plans to use the funds to support its Sea Otter Program and ocean conservation work.

Leveraging Valuable Fanbases

The Monterey Bay Aquarium hopes to stay connected with the Swiftie community by creating pathways for them to learn more about the aquarium’s mission. “We have so much gratitude for the folks who participated in this campaign,” MacDonald says. “We have some social media plans to highlight audience members with their shirts when they get them, and we’ll continue telling stories about our sea otter work—just as we have for the past 40 years.”

Attractions can harness the power of communities and fandoms to great effect, MacDonald believes. “If there’s a moment connected to a strong fanbase and aligned with your mission, engage directly with that community.” 

montereybayaquarium.org/stories



MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM



Juliana Gilling, Funworld’s contributing editor, began covering the global attractions industry in 1994. She reports on innovative people, projects, and additions for Funworld and the IAAPA News Hub. Juliana lives in the U.K., where she is a freelance writer. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#):



1

ACCESSIBILITY

PORTAVENTURA WORLD'S PICTURE OF INCLUSION

The SésamoAventura section of **PortAventura World** in Tarragona, Spain, features signage with line art that visually describes each experience for those guests with cognitive diversity. The pictograms bypass language barriers to help orient guests with autism and their caregivers as to the nature of each ride, show, and experience.

"We think a step towards accessibility is a step towards equality," says Francesco Spadavecchia at PortAventura World, who played a role in developing



the signage in collaboration with **Todos en Azul** (a Spanish non-profit association for families with children with autism spectrum disorder) and the **Aragonese Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication**, offering graphic resources that foster cognitive accessibility.

The park has also introduced Julia—a Sesame Street character with autism—as an ambassador to raise awareness about neurodiversity.

arasaac.org/aac/en

2

NEW AND NOTABLE

DOPE IN DUBAI

Media and technology (along with a lot of color) form the multisensory **Dopamine Land**. The interactive museum empowers guests to explore emotions created by color. "We want people to reconnect with their youth and the pure sense of play," says Alejandro Ubach de Pablo. Dopamine Land includes a cushion-filled battleground (think pillow fights), glowing ball pits, and tranquil spaces.

WILD FEC IN SINGAPORE

Mandai Wildlife Reserve is now in the FEC business. The renowned zoological facility's new indoor **Curiosity Cove** allows kids ages 3-12 to run wild inside the nature-inspired playscape. Hands-on, tactile, sensory, and digital play provides opportunities to learn about wildlife inhabiting wetlands, reefs, grasslands, and drylands. Families may visit during two-hour sessions, offered three times a day.

CRUSIN' THROUGH BRAZIL

Beto Carrero World's new ride puts guests behind the wheel of a slot car track. **Hot Wheels Turbo Drive** features ride units modeled after the Mattel toy brand's famed cars. Kids .95 meters—and kids at heart who are much taller—can drive around an oversized track. The route features colorful tunnels, animated scenes, and fog effects.



DOPAMINE LAND



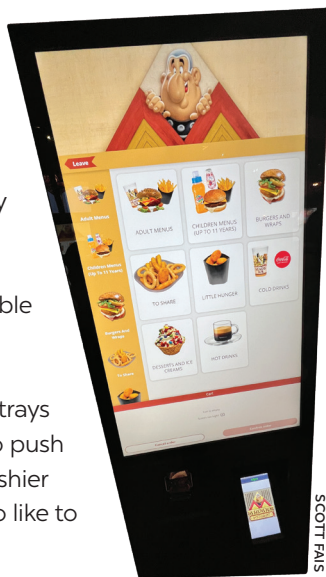
MANDAI WILDLIFE RESERVE



BETO CARRERO WORLD

3 REVENUE GENERATION ÉCRAN TACTILE

The new Egyptian-themed **Les Fastes du Nil** quick service restaurant at **Parc Astérix** features technology on the menu. Touchscreens allow guests to order and pay on a kiosk. The self-ordering panels empower employees behind the counter to assemble items quickly, allowing for greater capacity and service: frontline staff often carry full trays to tables, enabling parents to push their strollers. A traditional cashier is also available for those who like to order the old-fashioned way.



SCOTT FAIS

4 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS SCARY RECOGNITION



KINGS ISLAND

Any season is appropriate for supervisors to share their appreciation with their frontline staff. Entertainment managers at **Kings Island** reward Halloween Haunt scare actors with “kill bills” when caught in the act of performing exceptionally well. The bucks can be converted into a ticket and entered into raffle for video game systems and TVs given away during the annual end-of-season banquet.

5 MARKETING CINEMA SURPRISE

Imagine going to the movies and NOT knowing what film will play inside the theater. That’s the promotion Canadian cinema operator **Cineplex** launched in November at 35 locations. **Monday Surprise Premieres** shows an advance screening of an unreleased movie at a discounted ticket rate. The catch? Guests don’t know the film until it starts playing. An ad for the promotion reads: “No title. No trailer. No spoilers.”



CINEPLEX

6 ACQUISITIONS ROYAL FLUSH

Ripley’s Believe It or Not! struck literal gold with its most expensive acquisition: Maurizio Cattelan’s solid gold—and working—toilet titled, **America**. Ripley’s purchased the commode at auction for \$12.1 million. The throne will be displayed in all its gleaming glory. Meanwhile, Ripley’s is still exploring whether guests may be allowed to use the bowl.



SOOTHEY'S



HAVE A DISPATCH FROM THE FIELD?

Have a Dispatch from the field for Funworld in 2026? Sure you do! Share your successes, wins, and innovations with IAAPA News. Send news, photos, and advancements to FunworldWorks@IAAPA.org

BEHIND THE SCREAMS of joy and the tempting aroma of french fries, there's technology at work. Funworld's new Tech Turnstile feature spins with innovation: showcasing the new inventions, applied technology, and ingenuity found across the attractions landscape—and the manufacturers behind the breakthroughs.

(1)

Accessibility for All

WHO: MACK Rides

PRODUCT: Lifting Device for Riders with Limited Mobility

HOW: Mack's innovation marks a step forward in ride accessibility. The new ergonomic lifting device transforms the boarding process for guests with limited mobility. Installed on a ride platform and operated by trained staff, the device ensures quick, secure, and comfortable transfers. The device can be built into new rides or retrofitted into existing attractions.

mack-rides.com



MACK RIDES

1

(2)

Bowling's Glow Up

WHO: QubicaAMF

PRODUCT: BES NV

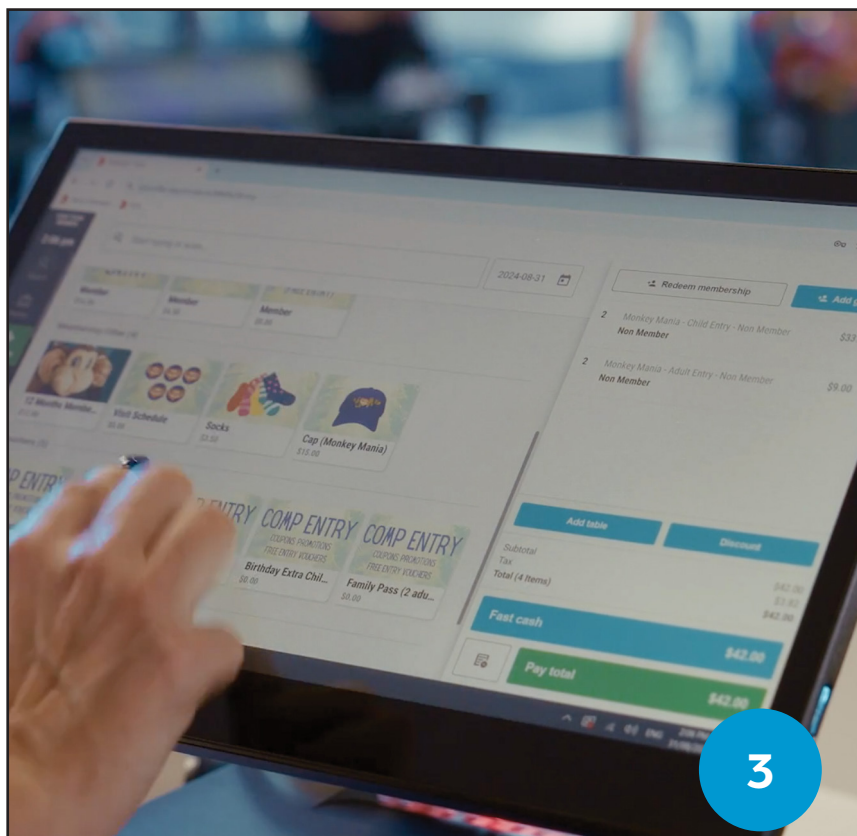
HOW: The new BES NV scoring and entertainment system delivers twice: first, with guest-facing immersive engagement controls, and again by providing operational insights for proprietors. BES NV allows guests to create personalized bowling games, themes, colored environments, and content to share on social media. The system also has point-of-sale capabilities to generate incremental revenue.

qubicaamfbowling.com



QUBICAMF

2



3

(3)

Intelligent Insights

WHO: ROLLER

PRODUCT: ROLLER iQ

HOW: The new AI assistant uses benchmarking data to display how a venue's performance compares to industry averages. "Operators ... want clarity and confidence around how they're performing," says CEO Luke Finn. Powered by anonymized, aggregated data from the ROLLER ecosystem, operators see how they're faring with online booking conversions, return visitation, and spend per head.

roller.software

(4)

Into the Fog

WHO: Master FX

PRODUCT: Genesis

HOW: Perfect for haunted houses, dark rides, and science center exhibits, Master FX's Genesis is a low-lying fog generator eliminating the need for CO₂, dry ice, or water. The secret is its patent pending FrostFlow technology. By cooling the fog output, Genesis creates a dense blanket of low-lying fog that clings tightly to the ground.

masterfx.com

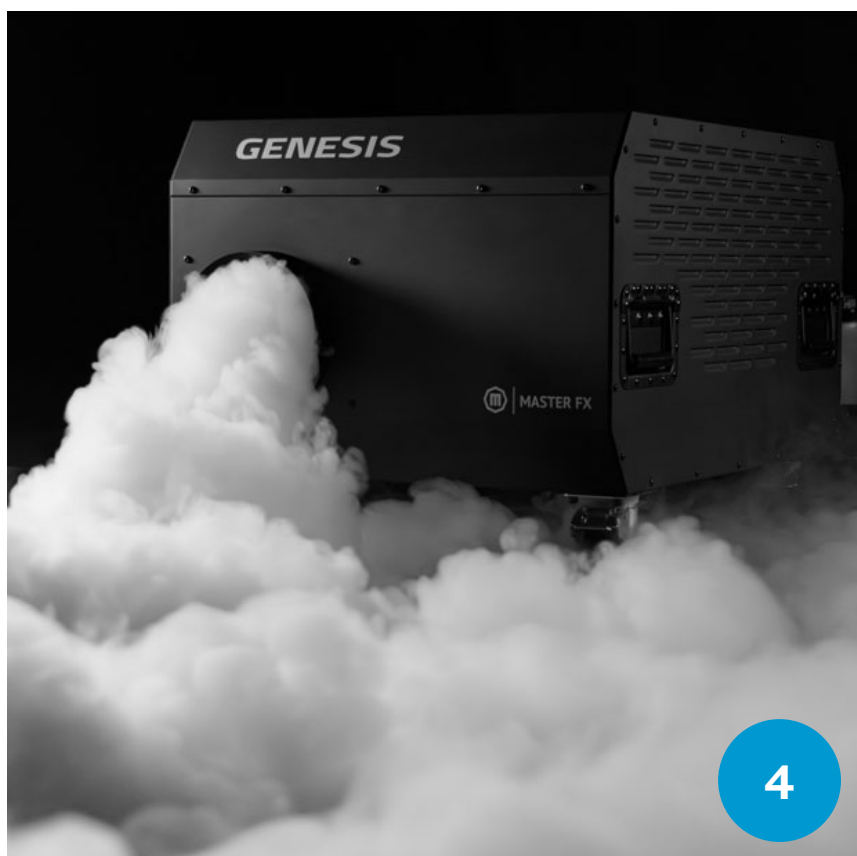
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4



SENTOSA



Singapore Oceanarium Relaunches Overnight Glamping Experience

Resorts World Sentosa temporarily relaunched Ocean Dreams, an overnight experience hosted inside the Singapore Oceanarium. Across select weekends from November to December 2025, the program invited families and marine enthusiasts to sleep beside the Oceanarium's Open Ocean Habitat after they explored exclusive behind-the-scenes areas.

Each stay featured a luxury tent set within the Ocean Gallery or Ocean Dome, guided tours through new zones—such as Ancient Waters and Singapore's Coast—and access to working spaces, including the Aquarist Lab and Coral Fragment Room. Guests also enjoy curated animal encounters, gourmet dining, and take-home mementos.

"Ocean Dreams has always been a guest favorite, and we're excited to reintroduce it as an elevated staycation experience with even more unique and educational experiences included," says Lam Xue Ying, acting senior vice president of the Singapore Oceanarium. At press time, the facility was looking to implement more dates in 2026.

The reimagined program supports Singapore Oceanarium's mission to inspire ocean stewardship through meaningful, firsthand encounters with marine life.

singaporeoceanarium.com/en/visit/immersive-programmes/ocean-dreams.html

Japan's Huis Ten Bosch Spans Continents with New Flying Theater

Huis Ten Bosch, a Dutch-themed attraction in Sasebo, Nagasaki Prefecture, Japan, has debuted Air Cruise The Ride, a flying theater that takes guests on a journey across Africa's skies.

The attraction invites visitors to glide above 17 African countries, from the plains of the Serengeti to waterfalls and wildlife-filled landscapes. Advanced technology enhances the experience, with 8K LED visuals, synchronized motion, and sensory effects simulating the sensation of flight.

Developed in partnership with Taiwan-based Brogent Technologies, Air Cruise The Ride represents Huis Ten Bosch's latest investment in technology-driven storytelling. "The combination of the 8K high-resolution LED screen and the ride's motion creates an extraordinary level of immersion," says Yuta Jitozono, communication strategy manager at Huis Ten Bosch.

english.huistenbosch.co.jp/enjoy/aircruisetheride/



BROGENT



France's Parc Astérix Launches Bold Development Plan through 2028

Riding high after welcoming almost 3 million visitors in 2025, Parc Astérix launched a €250 million development plan. The upgrades will increase capacity at the Compagnie des Alpes-owned park by 20% and introduce indoor additions to improve weather resilience.

In the park's Egypt area, WhiteWater's Oxygénarium rafting attraction will be reimaged in 2026 as The Descent of the Nile, while the Zierer Wave Swinger will become The Flight of Ibis. These changes extend to a restaurant as well—the circus themed Le Cirque restaurant is set to become the Egyptian themed Le Comptoir d'Epidemaïs.

In 2027, the park's Greek zone will install two new family attractions, a playground, and a 450-seat restaurant named La Table de Dyonisos. The 300-room, four-star Odysée Hotel will also open in 2027.

Londonium, an indoor zone inspired by the "Astérix in Britain" comic, debuts in 2028 with a roller coaster, an interactive family dark ride, a playground, pub, and shops.

Parc Astérix CEO Delphine Pons believes the projects will help Parc Astérix "consolidate its position as a leading theme park."

parcaterix.fr

Momentum Leisure Expands Polish Portfolio

Park operator Momentum Leisure continues to make strides toward developing its fourth theme park in Poland—securing land, a building permit, and €50 million in new financing.

The park will be built in the southern Polish city of Gliwice, next to the Europa Centralna retail park and within a two-hour drive of more than seven million people.

Leaning into Momentum's partnerships with Nickelodeon and Paramount, the Gliwice park's attractions will feature characters from SpongeBob SquarePants, Paw Patrol, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and The Smurfs, developed with Leisure Expert Group.

"The park will combine the fun of a classic amusement park with the comfort of an all-weather family destination,



open year-round," he adds. Focusing on families with children aged 3 to 12, the park will offer themed zones, family rides, interactive play experiences, and shows. Manufacturers Zierer and Gerstlauer will provide two roller coasters. One will have "a custom layout offering a seamless indoor-outdoor ride experience—a first for our Polish parks," Dekkers says.

"By 2027, our goal is to have all four parks in Poland operating under one new unified, reimaged brand that reflects the creativity and diversity of our IP portfolio," he explains. The park aims to welcome 400,000-500,000 annual visitors initially, and Momentum Leisure plans to launch the new park's first phase in mid-2027.

momentumleisure.com



DUBAI PARKS AND RESORTS

Dubai Parks and Resorts' Roar-some Retreat

Move over, luxury safaris—the latest wild sleepover stars T. rex, triceratops, and raptors. Dubai Parks and Resorts' new prehistoric-themed glamping retreat invites families to sleep, dine, and dream among life-sized animatronic dinosaurs.

The concept caters to the growing global demand for immersive story-inspired stays. The experience combines the thrill of a dinosaur-themed environment with the comfort of a premium retreat, appealing to both residents and international travelers.

The boutique "glampsite" offers 57 tents, from two-bedroom Jurassic Signature Tents to three-bedroom Triassic Megapods and Permian Gigaden VIP Tents. Families can dig for fossils at an excavation site and take a dip in the dinosaur footprint-shaped pool. There's an outdoor cinema, themed play zones, and a lively entertainment program, including dinosaur encounters. The Roaring Dinosaur Café and Splashing Raptor pool bar provide refreshments.

dubaiparksandresorts.com/en/t-rex_glamping

Miral's Surging Visitor Numbers Spur Regional Confidence

Miral's record-breaking summer in 2025 highlights the growing momentum in Abu Dhabi's leisure and entertainment market. The results bode well for the forthcoming Disney theme park on Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, a collaboration between Disney and Miral.

Miral reports that Yas Island saw a 15% increase in visitation, while Saadiyat Island recorded a 14% rise across its cultural attractions and hotels. Yas Theme Parks posted its best summer yet, up 9% on the previous year, with a 16% surge in August, and international visitors up 50%. The Yas Island parks include Ferrari World, Abu Dhabi; Yas Waterworld, Abu Dhabi; Warner Bros. World Abu Dhabi; and SeaWorld

Yas Island, Abu Dhabi.

Dr. Mohamed Abdalla Al Zaabi, group CEO at Miral, calls it a milestone season. "The growth across Yas Island's world-class attractions and Saadiyat Island's cultural landmarks, combined with the exceptional debut of teamLab Phenomena Abu Dhabi, reflects the strength of Abu Dhabi's diverse leisure and cultural offerings," he says.

miral.ae



IAAPA
EXPO MIDDLE EAST



The inaugural IAAPA Expo Middle East will bring together attractions leaders in Abu Dhabi and showcase the region's developments from March 30 to April 2.



TABACÓN

Tabacón Reinvents Thermal Spa Experience in Costa Rica

Home to Costa Rica's most celebrated thermal springs, Tabacón Thermal Resort & Spa redefines wellness with its new arrival experience and a pioneering concierge. Designed with local artists using reclaimed native wood, the project reflects Costa Rica's creative heritage and commitment to sustainability.

Opened in late 2025, the new reception area embodies Tabacón's philosophy of harmony with nature. Created by Costa Rican firm Taller Ken, the open-air design combines

volcanic stone and reclaimed wood for a seamless transition from arrival to immersion.

Continuing this wave of innovation, the Balneotherapy Concierge introduces a digital layer to the experience, guiding guests through every stage of their spa journey. Featuring an interactive map of 17 ponds and seven pools, the platform offers curated thermal journeys based on duration and wellness goals.

tabacon.com

Mexico's Copper Canyon Cableway Receives Overhaul

The Barrancas del Cobre Aerial Tramway, a notable attraction in northern Mexico, is once again in motion following an extensive maintenance and modernization program.

Capable of carrying up to 60 passengers at a time, the gondola glides across three kilometers of the vast Copper Canyon, offering sweeping views of its dramatic terrain. The tramway forms part of Parque Barrancas, a flagship site for adventure tourism in the region.

The gondola reopened to the public last year and underwent a comprehensive structural upgrade involving an investment of 25 million Mexican pesos. The renovations included the installation of a new six-kilometer traction cable, along with a

complete inspection and refurbishment of the cabins.

As part of its modernization efforts and commitment to sustainability, the lower station now runs on eight lithium batteries, replacing its former diesel system and significantly reducing the attraction's environmental footprint.

Positioned by the attraction as the world's third-longest cableway without intermediate towers, the Barrancas del Cobre tramway anchors a broader adventure complex featuring seven zip lines and a via ferrata climbing route. Located near the Divisadero train station along the Chepe Railway, the park remains a cornerstone of tourism development in the Copper Canyon region.

parquebarrancas.com





LEITNER-POMA

South Carolina Zoo Visitors Soar Over Nature with New Gondolas

Visitors of the Riverbanks Zoo and Garden in Columbia, South Carolina, can now soar above the landmark river that divides the facility's attractions. The zoo has debuted the Saluda Skyride—a gondola system connecting its zoo and botanical garden across the Saluda River. The new aerial transport option marks a key milestone in the zoo's Bridge to the Wild expansion, designed to enhance visitor flow and integrate the river more fully into the guest experience. Built by Leitner-Poma, the system features 19

detachable cabins that can carry up to 2,000 passengers per hour, replacing the park's diesel-powered trams with a more sustainable alternative. Funded through an \$80 million county bond, the Skyride also sets the stage for additional riverfront developments, including new habitats, dining, and event spaces—all part of Riverbanks' long-term strategy to elevate operational efficiency and visitor engagement.

riverbanks.org

Aquatica Orlando Debuts Nighttime Lantern Festival

Aquatica Orlando expanded its guest experience beyond daylight hours with the debut of Illuminate: A Nighttime Lantern Festival, running select evenings from November through January. The event transforms the water park into a multisensory attraction featuring five themed realms filled with illuminated installations, ambient soundscapes, and festive cuisine. While rides and slides pause for the evening, the park shifts focus to immersive storytelling and atmosphere, creating a new seasonal draw that expands Aquatica's brand identity beyond its daytime offerings. The festival's Lantern Lanyard sampling program and pass member discounts offer flexible pricing options that encourage repeat visitation and in-park spending. The park aims to diversify guest engagement through unique, after-hours experiences that drive stronger attendance in cooler months.

aquatica.com/orlando/events/illuminate/



AQUATICA



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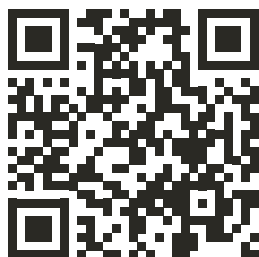
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Dreamscape Opens Two New Melbourne Venues

Australian digital entertainment brand Dreamscape has expanded with the launch of two new locations—Dreamscape Knox at Westfield Knox and Dreamrace Docklands next to the District Docklands center.

Together, Dreamscape Knox and Dreamrace Docklands provide more than 1,600 square meters of digital entertainment space in Melbourne. Both venues feature the company's signature blend of motion simulators, augmented and virtual reality experiences, and interactive challenge zones designed

for family audiences. At Dreamrace Docklands, the line-up includes Hurricane 360 VR, a four-seat, seven-degrees-of-freedom motion ride supplied by DOF Robotics.

Dreamscape says the new Melbourne locations are part of its broader expansion strategy across Australia and New Zealand. The company plans to invest AU\$30 million over the next five to eight years to develop 20 Dreamscape complexes in key cities across both countries. Its next location, Dreamscape Southland, is already under construction.

dreamscape.com.au

New Zealand's West Coast Wildlife Centre Opens New Penguin Encounter

The West Coast Wildlife Centre in Franz Josef / Waiau, New Zealand, opened its new Penguin Encounter, marking a major milestone in the expansion of the South Island's only all-weather wildlife attraction. The NZ\$2.5 million development officially opened on Oct. 18, 2025, adding a 250-square-meter extension to the facility—including a 173-square-meter enclosure with more than 50,000 liters of seawater.

At opening, the new Penguin Encounter will house seven ambassador little blue penguins (kororā) that cannot return to the wild, with capacity for up to 22 birds. The purpose-built habitat includes under- and over-water

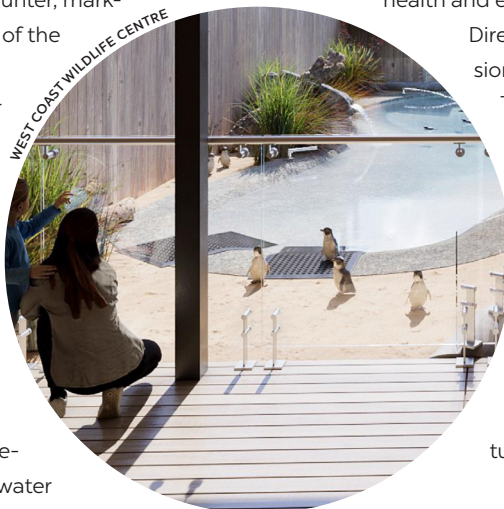
jets, nesting areas, and a flowing stream to support penguin health and enrichment.

Director Richard Benton says, "Our mission has always been conservation first.

The Penguin Encounter builds on our proud track record of working with the Department of Conservation and our mana whenua partners, Ngāti Māhaki, to protect and celebrate New Zealand's taonga species."

The new habitat makes the West Coast Wildlife Centre the only attraction in the country where visitors can see live kiwi, little blue penguins, and tuatara together under one roof.

westcoast.co.nz





MCPM

New Seaside Park to Rise Along Durban, South Africa's Golden Mile

In mid-December, developers in South Africa announced plans to build a new seaside amusement park on the site of a former facility with an iconic name: Fun World (no relation to the magazine you're reading now).

The City of Durban, South Africa, partnered with Durban-based Masithu Consulting and Project Managers (MCPM) to create the new attraction. Currently named The Durban Amusement Park, the new R1 billion park will feature 13 rides, offering a balance of thrills and inclusive experiences for guests

of every age—all with the view of the Indian Ocean.

MCPM turned to two Italian suppliers for the park's design and ride package. Team Park Project aided with the design of the new park, while Zamperla will supply several rides. The new park will also feature an extended reality arena for virtual-reality gaming, interactive digital environments, and technology-driven exhibitions.

The Durban Amusement Park is slated to open in 2027.

Historic Rhino Translocation Strengthens Rwanda's Akagera National Park

African Parks, in partnership with the Rwanda Development Board, has completed the translocation of 70 southern white rhinos to Akagera National Park, marking the first cross-continental move under African Parks' Rhino Rewild Initiative. The operation, funded by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, aims to bolster Akagera's rhino population and reinforce Rwanda's growing role in global wildlife conservation.

Executed in two phases of 35 animals each, the translocation spanned 3,400 kilometers from South Africa's Mynywana Conservancy to Akagera. The complex journey involved transport by

truck and a Boeing 747, with veterinary teams monitoring the rhinos throughout the two-day journey. The rhinos were first relocated within South Africa to the Mynywana Conservancy—a collaboration of community and private landowners—where they acclimated to conditions similar to those in Rwanda.

The move expands on the 2021 introduction of 30 rhinos to Akagera, which has since grown to 41. Together, these populations form part of the Rhino Rewild Initiative's goal to rewild more than 2,000 rhinos into secure, well-managed habitats across Africa.

africanparks.org





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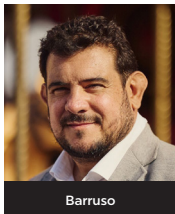


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Alejandro Del Barrio Barruso Promoted

The Looping Group has appointed **Alejandro del Barrio Barruso** as general manager of **Isla Mágica** in Seville, Spain, succeeding Guillermo Cruz García. Del Barrio brings more than 14 years of industry experience from Parque de Atracciones de Madrid, Parque Warner Madrid, and Parques Reunidos. “I’m beginning an exciting new chapter with Isla Mágica,” says del Barrio. “After 15 years of growth and joy at Parques Reunidos, I’m grateful for everything I’ve learned and shared.” He will oversee modernization, guest experience, and continued investment in Isla Mágica and Agua Mágica.

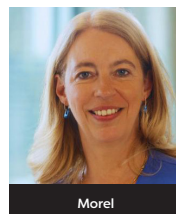


Barruso

ISLA MÁGICA

Valerie Morel Leads Vintia

Vintia has appointed **Valerie Morel** as chief executive officer, succeeding Edwin Hemkes. Morel brings over two decades of leadership experience from international technology firms. “This is a pivotal moment for Vintia, and I’m truly excited to take on this new challenge,” says Morel. “As part of Salto Wecosystem, we can transform how venues manage ticketing and visitor experiences.” Salto CEO Marc Gómez calls the move “an exciting new chapter” for Vintia’s growth and innovation.



Morel

VINTIA

Michael Moriarty Advances at Disney Experiences

The Walt Disney Company has named **Michael Moriarty**, former president and managing director of **Hong Kong Disneyland Resort**, as the new executive vice president and chief financial officer of Disney Experiences. “Michael Moriarty brings a deep understanding of our long-term strategy to broaden the reach and impact of Disney Experiences,” says Josh D’Amaro, chairman of Disney Experiences. Moriarty guided Hong Kong Disneyland through record 2024 results and the opening of World of Frozen. **Tim Sytko** succeeds him as the resort’s new managing director.



Moriarty

DISNEY EXPERIENCES

Josh Silverman Joins Paramount

Paramount has named **Josh Silverman** president of global products and experiences. Silverman previously served as executive vice president and chief franchise officer at Mattel, where he led global consumer-product partnerships for the *Barbie* movie and Mattel Adventure Parks. “I’m incredibly energized by the entrepreneurial spirit across Paramount,” says Silverman. “There’s an extraordinary opportunity to unlock new value by leveraging renowned IP (intellectual property).” He will oversee consumer products, live experiences, publishing, partnerships, and e-commerce.

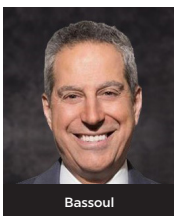


Silverman

PARAMOUNT

Six Flags Announces Key Transitions and Appointments

Six Flags Entertainment Corporation announced executive chairman **Selim Bassoul** and lead independent director **Daniel J. Hanrahan** stepped down from the board in December 2025.



Bassoul



Hanrahan

SIX FLAGS

SIX FLAGS

Marilyn Spiegel became non-executive chair in January. Bassoul will remain as a consultant, supporting the completion of Six Flags Qiddiya City. “Looking



Spiegel



Reilly

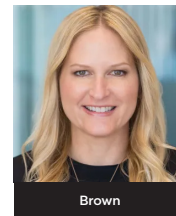
SIX FLAGS

JOHN REILLY

ahead, I’m excited to continue supporting the company through this landmark project,” says Bassoul. Jonathan Brudnick, of Sachem Head Capital, has joined the board as a Class III director. Six Flags also named **John Reilly** as President and CEO, effective Dec. 8, 2025. Reilly, a 30-year attractions industry veteran with leadership roles at SeaWorld and Palace Entertainment, will also join the board. His appointment signals a change in direction following the merger of legacy companies Six Flags and Cedar Fair.

Jenefer Brown Promoted at Lionsgate

Lionsgate has promoted **Jenefer Brown** to president of global products and experiences, leading consumer products, live experiences, and location-based entertainment. Brown first joined Lionsgate 11 years ago and helped develop *The Hunger Games: On Stage*. “I am grateful to everyone who has played a part in my journey,” says Brown. Her appointment underscores Lionsgate’s focus on extending its franchises across new markets and formats.



Brown

LIONSGATE

Vicente Bosque Advances at Parques Reunidos

Parques Reunidos has appointed **Vicente Bosque** as chief commercial officer, overseeing ticketing, marketing, sales, e-commerce, and revenue management. Bosque joined the company in 2021 and has since held senior leadership roles across Europe. “With this appointment, Parques Reunidos reinforces its commitment to customer-centric growth, innovation, and sustainability,” the company says.



Bosque

PARQUES REUNIDOS

Sega Amusements International Strengthens Team

Sega Amusements International has promoted **Siraj Elkhawad** to CEO, **Justin Burke** to COO, and **Nigel Allison** to manufacturing

and research and development (R&D) director. Elkhawad will lead global growth and innovation; Burke will oversee operations and product launches; and Allison will advance R&D and design. “These leadership changes reflect Sega Amusements International’s ongoing commitment to growth and delivering unparalleled value to customers worldwide,” the company says.



SEGA

Elkhawad



SEGA

Burke



SEGA

Allison

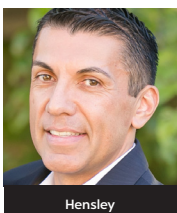
Sky Zone Announces Appointments

Sky Zone has announced several leadership appointments as it expands globally. **Sherin Sakr** becomes president of international, and **Josh Rathweg** is brand president of Cloudbound, its new play concept for children up to age six. Three new vice presidents of operations—**Mandra Langford**, **Brian DeCato**, and **Ed Hensley**—will oversee U.S. regions. **Michael Healy** joins as CFO. “These appointments underscore Sky Zone’s commitment to innovation and growth,” the company says.



SKY ZONE

DeCato



SKY ZONE

Hensley

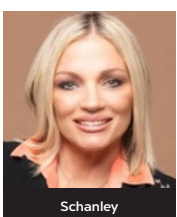


SKY ZONE

Healy

Lisa Jey Schanley Joins Mad Systems

Mad Systems has named **Lisa Jey Schanley** senior business development and strategic accounts director. Schanley brings extensive experience in themed entertainment and public relations, with past leadership in the Themed Entertainment Association’s Western Division. “Lisa’s blend of relationship-driven business development and sharp marketing instincts is a perfect fit,” says CEO Tricia Ensing. Mad Systems designs and integrates audiovisual and interactive solutions for attractions and museums worldwide.

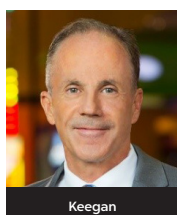


MAD SYSTEMS

Schanley

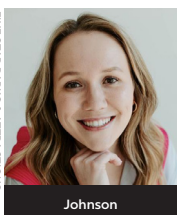
Five Star Parks & Attractions Promotes Two

Five Star Parks & Attractions has appointed **Charlie Keegan** as CEO and **Natalie Johnson** as vice president of marketing. Keegan brings more than 30 years of experience in hospitality and leisure. “I’m honored to serve Five Star Parks &



FIVE STAR PARKS & ATTRACTIONS

Keegan



FIVE STAR PARKS & ATTRACTIONS

Johnson

Attractions at such an exciting time,” says Keegan. Johnson will lead marketing and brand strategy. “Her ability to connect data with emotion makes her ideal to shape guest experiences,” says Keegan.

Damien Touboulc Accepts New Role at Terra Botanica

Terra Botanica has appointed **Damien Touboulc** as general manager, succeeding Pierre Watrelot. Touboulc joined the park in 2012 and most recently served as marketing, communications, and sales director. “His in-depth knowledge of Terra Botanica’s ecosystem and teams is a real asset,” the Looping Group says. Touboulc describes the position as “a wonderful challenge,” aiming to build on success while preserving the park’s botanical identity and focus on biodiversity.



TERRA BOTANICA

Touboulc

Sean McChesney Promoted at Electrosonic

Electrosonic has promoted **Sean McChesney** to senior vice president, North America. McChesney joined the company in 2013 through its apprenticeship program and has held roles in technical and business leadership. “I am truly honored to step into this role,” says McChesney. “I’m proud of our culture, our team, and the experiences we deliver.” His promotion reflects Electrosonic’s success in developing internal talent and delivering world-class audiovisual solutions globally.

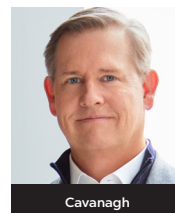


ELECTROSONIC

McChesney

Michael J. Cavanagh Rises at Comcast

Comcast has named **Michael J. Cavanagh** co-chief executive officer, effective this January. He will serve alongside chairman and CEO Brian L. Roberts. Cavanagh joined Comcast in 2015 and has held multiple roles, including CFO and president. “Mike is the ideal person to help lead Comcast as we drive growth across the company,” says Roberts. His appointment supports Comcast’s evolution across media, communications, and entertainment.



COMCAST

Cavanagh

Ken Mathison Promoted at AVS Companies

AVS Companies has promoted **Ken Mathison** to branch manager of its Wisconsin office. Known for his technical expertise, Mathison proved instrumental in expanding the company’s cooler business. “Ken has done a fantastic job as we adapt with the industry,” says Jeff Yoder, vice president and general manager. Tom Vogt adds that Mathison will remain deeply involved in AI cooler solutions while leading operations.



AVS COMPANIES

Mathison

Nicolas Mack Grows at Europa-Park Resort

Europa-Park Resort has appointed **Nicolas Mack** as director of marketing and communications. "This new role fills me with both pride and humility," says Mack. He joined Europa-Park in 2018 and has held positions like vice director of marketing, sales and digital, and head of partnerships.



EUROPA-PARK RESORT

Falcon's Beyond Appoints Two

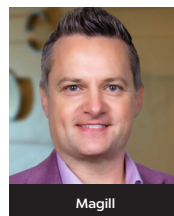
Falcon's Beyond Global has announced two leadership appointments.

Jason Ambler joins as chief content officer,

shaping global storytelling strategy. "Jason brings a rare blend of creative vision and operational excellence," says CEO Cecil D. Maggiori. **Mitchell Magill** was promoted to president of Falcon's Creative Group, where he will guide cross-functional teams and expand the company's portfolio.



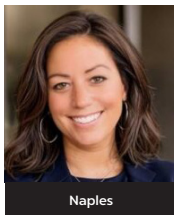
FALCON'S BEYOND GLOBAL



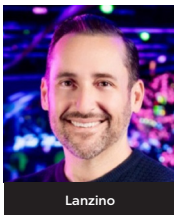
FALCON'S BEYOND GLOBAL

Amy Naples and Andrew Lanzino III Appointed to Executive Roles at Area15

Area15 has named **Amy Naples** chief marketing officer and **Andrew Lanzino III** chief growth officer. Naples will lead brand development and global communications, while Lanzino oversees partnerships and new ventures. "Area15 has entered an exciting new chapter," says CEO Winston Fisher. "Amy and Andrew bring the leadership and vision to make this our biggest and most ambitious phase yet."



AREA15



AREA15

Ray Smegal Takes on New Responsibilities at ProSlide

ProSlide Technology has promoted **Ray Smegal** to president. Smegal joined ProSlide in 2007 as an electrical engineer and has held leadership roles in product development, sales, and strategy. "ProSlide's legacy is built on collaboration, creativity, and performance," says Smegal. Founder and CEO Rick Hunter continues to oversee strategic direction as Smegal leads day-to-day operations.

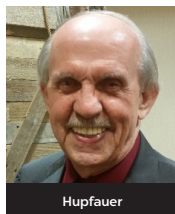


PROSLIDE

LAUNCH **In Memoriam** by Jim Futrell

Neil Hupfauer

Neil Hupfauer, 83, began a successful career in the restaurant industry. After serving in the United States Marine Corps. In 1987, he changed fields, co-founding Triangle Bowl and, in 1997, Main Event Entertainment, which now has more than 60 locations around the United States. More recently, he operated Cinergy Entertainment Group and started Corky's Gaming Bistro. An inductee into the Bowling Proprietors' Association of America (BPAA) Hall of Fame, he is survived by two daughters and their families.



HUPFAUER

role in developing many of the projects that positioned the brand as a global leader in cashless technology before retiring in 2019.

Paul Williams

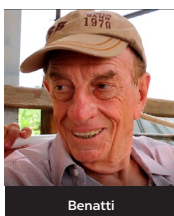
Following a successful career at First Leisure in the United Kingdom, Paul Williams, 61, joined Sega in 1997 as a general manager of marketing at SegaWorld London. In 2015, he was named CEO of Sega Amusements International and led Sega Amusements' management buyout in 2021. Williams was instrumental in establishing the company's manufacturing, research and development, and software capabilities before resigning shortly before his passing in October.



WILLIAMS

Benito Benatti

Benito Benatti passed away on June 19 at the age of 93. Known for his role in developing the tourism industry in Olímpia, Brazil, Benatti founded Thermas dos Laranjais in 1987. With over 50 attractions, the attraction has grown into the most visited water park in Latin America, drawing more than two million visitors annually.



BENATTI

Jay Stein

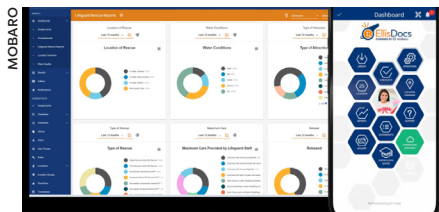
IAAPA Hall of Fame recipient Jay Stein passed away on Nov. 5, at the age of 88. Stein started his career in the mailroom at MCA (Musical Corporation of America) in 1959, and in 1967, he was named manager of the company's Universal Studios Tour. He later became chairman and CEO of the MCA Recreation Services Group/Universal Parks and Resorts, expanding Universal Studios Hollywood, acquiring the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, and spearheading the development of Universal Orlando Resort before retiring in 1993. Stein was inducted into the IAAPA Hall of Fame in 1999.



STEIN

Tomás 'Tomi' Hofmann

Tomás "Tomi" Hofmann, 76, passed away in Buenos Aires on Oct. 29. Serving as director of research and development at Sacoa Cashless System, he played a critical role in developing the company's cashless technology that is now used in more than 70 countries. He joined Sacoa in the 1990s and played an essential



Ellis & Associates and Mobarro Launch EllisDocs

Ellis & Associates and Mobarro have launched **EllisDocs**, a new digital operations app tailored for aquatic facilities. The platform integrates task management, inspections, chemical tracking, and rescue-report logging into one secure interface. Facilities can digitize checklists, add photos, and generate trend reports. "We're excited to collaborate on user-focused innovation built on deep safety and operations expertise," says Mobarro co-CEO Christoffer Weiss Borup.

mobarro.com



Vekoma Rides and Efteling Collaborate on Seat-on-Wheels Concept

Vekoma Rides and Efteling have unveiled the new **Seat-on-Wheels** concept, a wheelchair-accessible ride seat that allows guests using wheelchairs to experience attractions alongside friends and family. Developed with Dutch association de Zonnebloem, the system aims to make inclusive design a new industry standard. "Our goal is to help make every theme park visit possible for everyone," says Anne-Mart Agerbeek, CEO of Vekoma Rides.

vekoma.com



Eager to learn more about Vekoma CEO Anne-Mart Agerbeek's leadership approach and inclusive priorities? Read Funworld's March/April 2025 feature story on the seasoned professional here.



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Industry Insights



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by **Jeremy Hoyum**

Family Entertainment Centers: A Chance to Refocus and Build Strength

FOR OPERATORS WHO HAVE OPERATED their family entertainment centers (FECs) for a while, the last couple of years have posed new challenges. Revenue is tighter, families are more deliberate in how they spend, and a growing number of entertainment options compete for their attention. These factors can feel frustrating, especially for those working hard to create a place that brings purpose and joy to their communities.

Yet, this season is more than just a challenge—it's an opportunity. It's a chance to focus on what you can control, streamline operations in the areas that matter most, and emerge even stronger.

Many in the industry have seen similar circumstances before. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when FECs faced shutdowns, capacity limits, and uncertainty, many owners learned to sharpen their operations in a way they'd never needed to before. They gained experience in managing labor efficiently, adjusting purchasing, training staff more intentionally, and creating meaningful guest experiences under difficult conditions. Those lessons remain relevant today.

Here are the key areas that make the biggest difference.

Guest Experience

Families are more attentive to value than ever. They want their time and money to feel well spent. This doesn't require perfection; it requires consistency: a warm welcome, clean spaces, functioning attractions, and parties that feel special. When guests feel genuinely cared for, they return—even in a tighter economy.

Smart Product Cost Awareness

Taking a closer look at food and beverage costs, attraction margins, and inventory isn't about cutting quality. It's about making sure what's offered still supports the



JEREMY HOYUM

desired guest experience. Even small menu adjustments or vendor changes can protect the bottom line without diminishing the experience for guests.

Labor That Supports, Not Strains

Labor is one of the largest expenses for any center. Effective labor management goes beyond reducing hours. It involves scheduling based on real guest demand, cross-training staff, and giving front-line leaders the tools to lead, not just supervise. A well-trained, empowered team performs better and delivers a stronger guest experience.

Marketing That Feels Local and Real

People support businesses they feel connected to. A massive advertising budget isn't required—authenticity is. Highlight the team, the guests, and community involvement. Share real moments and let the FEC's personality show. Authentic messaging matters more than polished perfection.

The family entertainment center industry isn't shrinking—it's evolving. These transitional seasons are when stronger, more resilient businesses are built. Operators don't need to overhaul everything or chase trends; they simply need to refocus on what they do best.

A new year marks a moment to steady operations, strengthen the team, and remind the community why the facility matters. Operators have overcome difficult challenges before. This is just the next chapter in building something lasting. **FW**



Jeremy Hoyum is an FEC owner who has spent his career in the family entertainment center industry. Jeremy now helps business owners and leaders positively impact their teams and their communities. He serves on the IAAPA Global Board of Directors and is the 2026 IAAPA North American FEC Committee Chair. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#):





Cooking Up Safety

ServSafe empowers F&B operations to sizzle safely

FROM LIMITED-TIME FOOD FESTIVALS to holiday celebrations, specialty culinary offerings can increase footfall and drive additional revenue for attractions. As quality food and beverage programs continue to advance, food handling and safe preparation practices need to remain paramount for operators.


The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in the United States reports more than half of U.S. foodborne illness outbreaks are linked to restaurants and foodservice businesses. The CDC estimates that roughly 48 million people get sick from contaminated food each year. For attractions operators, this not only poses health risks, but also potential legal, financial, and reputational damage for those held responsible for an outbreak.

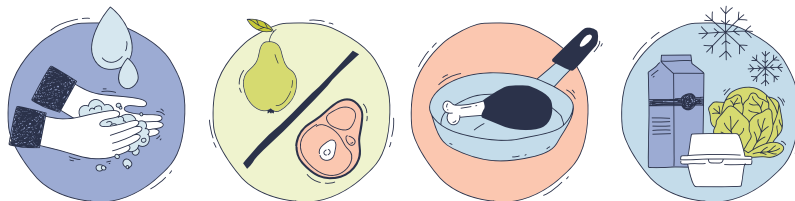
Fortunately for IAAPA members, a partnership with the National Restaurant Association can help prevent foodborne illness. Named ServSafe, the program's curriculum is developed by experienced food safety thought leaders, academic experts, and governing bodies.

"ServSafe is the most credible and widely used food safety training and certification product suite in the restaurant and foodservices industry," says Elisa Cain, senior sales manager at the National Restaurant Association. "Widely adopted by the largest restaurant and foodservice companies in the U.S., ServSafe has issued more than 18 million restaurant and foodservice credentials."

ServSafe products can help managers and attractions of all sizes not only comply with regulatory requirements, but also build and promote an internal food safety culture that mitigates risk and cultivates an environment of shared responsibility for keeping guests safe.

"IAAPA members can have the confidence that ServSafe material reflects the latest science and research," Cain tells Funworld.

Online delivery of ServSafe training products can be delivered anywhere and across multiple sittings, perfect for scheduling frontline employees now or as a new operating season begins. Curriculum includes safe handling methods, serving alcohol, and allergens. 



Quick Tips to Safe Preparation

The CDC in the United States offers these suggestions for preventing foodborne illness outbreaks.

Hygiene and Sanitation

- Employees should wash hands frequently.
- Provide hand sanitizer stations with sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol readily available for both employees and customers.
- Regularly clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces, like door handles, menus, and counters.
- Ensure staff are trained on the correct and safe use of disinfectants and follow Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) safety guidelines.

Food Preparation

- Cook food to its minimum safe internal temperature and use a calibrated food thermometer to verify.
- Hold cooked, hot food at 135°F (57°C) or higher.
- Keep cold food at 41°F (5°C) or lower.
- Prevent cross-contamination by separating raw meats from other foods.
- Use different cutting boards, utensils, and surfaces for raw and ready-to-eat items.
- Do not leave perishable food out for more than two hours.
- Store raw meat below other foods in a cooler to prevent drips.

Employee Empowerment

- Invest in comprehensive training for all employees on proper procedures and emergency responses.
- Foster a work environment where safety is a priority and employees feel empowered to follow and maintain safety protocols.



IAAPA members can receive a 20% discount on all ServSafe products. Enter the ServSafe website through the member portal found when scanning this QR code:



Scott Fais is the senior director of global editorial at IAAPA. The six-time Emmy Award-winning journalist enjoys visiting creative attractions of all kinds—and meeting the professionals behind them. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#):





Solar Six: How Six Flags Harnesses the Sun

Operator creates a win-win strategy for generating renewable energy

THE MAJORITY OF FUNWORLD READERS will “get a charge” from the following prose during a time when many Six Flags properties hibernate for winter. What’s not on hiatus? The sun—and vast acreage of solar arrays installed atop Six Flags’ parking lots across that continue to generate power even when the gates are closed.

“We are actually the largest carport solar energy supplier in the United States of any private company,” says Jason Freeman, senior vice president of corporate operations at Six Flags.

The regional operator first began the process of capturing the sun’s rays in 2014; Six Flags Great Adventure in Jackson, New Jersey, came online in June 2019.

“The energy goes out to the grid—it doesn’t feed the park. But, we produce enough energy to offset 80-90% of what we’re using,” Freeman explains. The installation is known as a behind-the-meter (BTM) project, meaning the solar panels are interconnected into the regional utility provider’s electrical grid. Beyond the sustainable strides, the benefits are vast: Six Flags achieves “millions of dollars in savings” in their annual power bill according to Freeman; guests who park under solar canopies return to a car shaded from the blistering sun; a network of security cameras can be installed under the solar arrays; and the needed infrastructure requires each parking lot to be freshly repaved—often at no cost to Six Flags. How does Six Flags do it? Research.

“It is the wild west out there and you really have to align yourselves with the right companies,” Freeman recommends.

Dawn of a New Idea

Freeman hired clean energy consultant Kyle Goehring in 2016 to navigate the solar installation process—from government regulations and public utility partnerships to the evaluation and selection of



SIX FLAGS

the solar PV (photovoltaic) developers to complete installation and activation.


“A portfolio approach began in 2016. Various iterations of the number of parks and the bundling of projects occurred as Six Flags’ senior leadership evolved, underscoring the importance of clean energy and the beneficial economics associated with these solutions,” Goehring explains. “Ultimately, we progressed with the parks that offered the greatest financial benefits at the time.”

Six Flags Discovery Kingdom located northwest of San Francisco came online in 2019; Six Flags Magic Mountain north of Los Angeles flipped the switch in 2025; and Six Flags Great America north of Chicago is now under contract. Freeman says Six Flags with its many properties (including the legacy Cedar Fair parks) has the capacity to become the No. 1 for-profit producer of on-site solar energy in the United States.

Illuminating the Future

With the cost of power expected to rise in the next two years, investing in solar can produce “millions of dollars in energy savings for each park,” according to Freeman.

The projects are under a power purchase agreement (PPA) model structure, according to Goehring. “Six Flags has not directly invested any money [\$0 spent] on the solar projects initially or over the term of the agreement [20+ years] for the ongoing maintenance and operations,” he says. “These savings can be allocated toward additional park enhancements, improvements, or applied to previously underinvested areas.”

Goehring recommends those attractions interested in investing in solar commission a study evaluating future utility pricing, needed leadership approvals (park and senior-level), and identify available areas for onsite clean energy technologies. 

Solar panels now have a place on the skyline at Six Flags Magic Mountain adjacent to the park’s famed collection of roller coasters.



by Kurtis Boekenbauer, Technical Manager for Merlin Entertainment's Chicago gateway attractions

Recruiting for Technical Roles in Smaller Facilities

How to balance talent acquisition with job satisfaction

PLUMBING, CARPENTRY, welding, electrical work, painting, engineering and HVAC expertise are just some of the technical skills required to successfully maintain an attraction. Small-scale family entertainment centers (FECs) may not have the resources of larger parks and destinations that have separate teams, leaders, or entire departments devoted to these responsibilities. We work for local attractions where small teams oversee multiple areas of expertise. So how do we manage staff recruitment under these factors?

Finding and investing in the right candidate is the key to success. Seeking candidates who are proficient in every single trade skill is unrealistic.

While tradespersons who are experts in one area, such as the fields of hydraulics, HVAC, low voltage electronics, or mechanical engineering, may be readily available, they will find more robust opportunities in a trade union or staying field-specific. Asking a prospective candidate to wear hats other than the one they are proficient in is often a struggle.

So, what are we looking for? One of the more ideal candidates is a student or recent graduate of a trade program. Especially if the trade program is broad enough to cover multiple trade skills. Pros of this type of candidate include fresh ideas, a willingness to learn, and enthusiasm for starting a new career. Cons include more time investing in training and higher turnover rates. These candidates are typically younger, new to the workforce, and follow more of a ground-up training path. While they may have completed trade school, transitioning them to real-world practices and conditions can be challenging. Turnover at this stage can also be high if candidates are not properly vetted or if the nature of the role and the industry is not clearly communicated.


Another strong type of candidate is the pre-retirement professional. These are individuals who, due to union rules or the



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stage of their trade career, have retired but are still of working age. Pros of this candidate type include a deep well of knowledge, refined skills, and a willingness to share their expertise. Aside from site-specific tasks, onboarding and training can be relatively seamless. Cons are primarily centered on one factor: these are not long-term employees and will soon enter full retirement. In my experience, a team comprised of these two types—newer technicians and seasoned professionals—is most effective. The newer techs benefit greatly from working alongside professionals eager to pass on their experience.

Another important consideration when recruiting is the strengths of the existing team. Maybe team members already have experience in a particular trade. Look for new candidates with complementary skills to help balance the team. Once this team is built, identify opportunities for improvement—with strong third-party support. Find a trustworthy general contractor to work closely with and to help supply the expertise the team may lack.

It's great to have a low-voltage technician, a controls specialist, or a plumbing expert, but be sure to balance that team and build it on one core foundation: an eagerness to work in this incredibly fun industry. Anyone who has the drive to deliver fun and safe experiences to our guests can be taught the other skills. Here's to finding these ideal candidates who will keep our attractions running safely. 



Kurtis Boekenbauer is the technical manager for Merlin Entertainment's Chicago gateway attractions, overseeing technical operation of Legoland Discovery Center, Peppa Pig World of Play, and Wondra. In his free time, Kurtis enjoys visiting local attractions with his family. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#):



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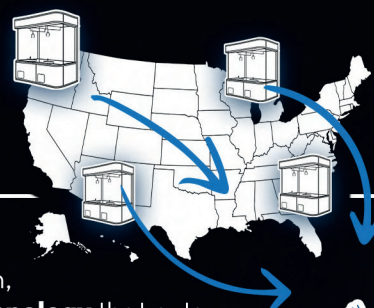
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**IAAPA EXPO
RECAP p. 32**

IAAPA Expo 2025 Delivers Innovation, Momentum, and Fun




IAAPA EXPO RETURNED to the Orange County Convention Center in 2025 with a high-energy show floor and a full suite of education programs. This year's event featured the largest number of attendees yet—welcoming 38,520 verified attendees.

"IAAPA Expo continues to be where our industry comes together to experience what's next," shares Michael Shelton, IAAPA's chief operating officer. "From education and networking to discovering new products and meeting with buyers, this is the week where professionals advance both their businesses and their careers."

Member Reflections

IAAPA members shared the value of the event with Funworld. "You just get to meet so many people, and see behind the curtain of how amazing this industry is ... How the art is done, how the lights are done, how the maintenance is done. You get to learn so much so fast," says Joshua Hughes of Montana-based Add-A-Tudez Entertainment. Dylan George of Battle Party Events shares a similar sentiment and adds that attending IAAPA Expo had a direct impact on increasing his company's revenue. "Last year, the very first time I was here, it completely changed my business. I upgraded my services and increased my revenue by 50%. It's awesome—I'm going to come every single year."

Looking Ahead

Attendees can look forward to an even more robust experience across two halls next year at IAAPA Expo 2026. IAAPA President and CEO Jakob Wahl thanks all involved with this year's event and looks forward to the growth to come. "To all exhibitors, attendees, sponsors, speakers, volunteers, and ambassadors—thank you so much for making this week here in Orlando at IAAPA Expo very special," he says. "We felt the energy and the passion that you all brought forward. We look forward to welcoming you to IAAPA Expo 2026 in two halls." 

Make plans to attend IAAPA Expo 2026 at the Orange County Convention Center and tap into even more opportunities for business connections. Learn more at IAAPA.org/Expos



IAAPA EXPO 2025 BY THE NUMBERS



565,520
square meters of
exhibition space



38,520
Verified Attendees



28,598
Verified Buyers



20,316
Buying Companies



\$170,000+
raised for IAAPA Foundation



\$100,000+
raised for Give Kids The World



1,146
Exhibiting Companies



323
Speakers



285
Exhibitors taking the
Sustainability Pledge



221
Learning Opportunities



102
Countries Represented



119
EDUSessions



44
Show Ambassadors



42
EDUTalks



12
Learning Lunches & Breakfasts



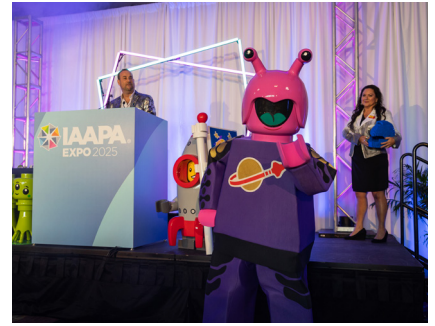
10
Street Market Education
Sessions



5
EDUTours



3
Haunting Ground Education
Sessions



Exploring What's New at IAAPA Expo

by Avery Matteo, Mike Costello, and Scott Fais

IAAPA EXPO IS WHERE NEWS IS MADE. From the debut of ride vehicles to manufacturers and suppliers positioning themselves for growth, the Funworld team covers the IAAPA Expo 2025 trade show floor in a new way: with video reports posted directly to YouTube. Thousands have watched as industry professionals share their innovations in their own voice. Here's a sample of the product announcements and conversations available on IAAPA's YouTube channel: youtube.com/@IAAPAHQ

Subscribe to IAAPA's YouTube Channel.



1. THIS will Leave a Mark: Foam Party on the IAAPA Expo Trade Show Floor with SurgeFX

This one is wild: foam parties have never been this thrilling. The Funworld team loses the professional dress pants and climbs into the SurgeFX foam pit to learn how the supplier is adding color and scents to their foam products. Note: You'll want to try this at home!



2. Cycling to the Ceiling: Vertical Reality at IAAPA Expo 2025

It's all about pedal power when racing to the sky. Vertical Reality produces a bike that needs no road. Rather, attractions operators can offer guests a game that takes might and speed. Go for a ride at IAAPA Expo 2025.



3. Get Scooped by the Human Crane: Family Entertainment Group

It's a crane game starring: YOU! Family Entertainment Group lifts up the Funworld team (literally) and takes them for a ride. Watch as Global Content Director Scott Fais is plopped down in a pit "of alien bad guys" (IYKYK). Family Entertainment Group says this is one addition that can grow revenue by \$800,000 a year. See it in action at IAAPA Expo 2025.



4. See the New Slide Concepts from WhiteWater

WhiteWater debuted new water slides and aquatic concepts at IAAPA Expo 2025. Listen as Una de Boer also shares the company's strides in sustainability.



5. Doha's Quest for a Compact Dark Ride: Sally Creates Opportunities for Attractions of all Kinds

Coming to Doha Quest in Doha, Qatar, Sally's "Mini" dark ride concept that blends technologies, paves the way for attractions looking to diversify their offerings.



6. Flying Underwater: Sub Sea Systems Partners With Rixen Cableway and MI Concept

Skorkel Drift, the world's first snorkel ride system, debuts at IAAPA Expo 2025—offering guests the thrill of underwater flight without scuba gear or a submarine.



7. A Chocolately Partnership: New Brazil Theme Park Will Launch Flying Theater Attraction From Brogent

37 years after founding his chocolate company Cacau Show, Alexandre Costa is developing a 50+ attraction park in Itzu, Brazil, named Cacau Park that will provide an authentic, historically-inspired, and tasty experience for visitors.



8. A Triotech Trio: New Creative Products Offer Competitive Fun for Attractions

Competitive fun with friends will soon level up thanks to Triotech. Triotech shares three new announcements--Energize, a dynamic multi-room competition game; a social playground named Electric Funfair; and Crazy Karts, an interactive go-karting experience.



9. Brick Building in Space: See the New Legoland Roller Coasters Heading to U.S. Legoland Theme Parks

Space cadets and brick builders alike will launch into space at Legoland California and Legoland Florida aboard the Galacticoaster. Riders will have the opportunity to build with Legos before boarding the attraction.



10. Zamperla Launches into Lotte World with a "Double Heart" Triple Launch Roller Coaster

A roller coaster with heart is launching into Lotte World. Antonio Zamperla and Adam Sandy, both with Zamperla, share what to expect from their newest creation that is headed to Seoul, Korea.



11. A River in the Air? ProSlide Shares New Concept

At IAAPA Expo 2025, ProSlide debuted a new concept: the river in the air. Named Power Rapids, the water slide features segments and flumes that are designed to be enjoyed by the entire family. With straightaways, hives, and enclosed sections with media on the ceiling, the slide can also tell one wet story.



12. Ready to Bounce: Magic Jump and Sega connect

Sonic the Hedgehog is jumping with excitement at IAAPA Expo 2025. Magic Jump and Sega have partnered to create a new Bounce House that's fun for kids ... and kids at heart.



13. Wiegand and Norwegian Cruise Line Team Up for 2nd Slide Coaster

At IAAPA Expo 2025, Norwegian Cruise Line and Wiegand announced a second Slide Coaster will be built atop the new Luna cruise ship. Following the success of the first Slide Coaster placed atop the Aqua cruise ship, Norwegian is confident the water slide serves as an attraction unique to their brand.



14. Making a Splash: Polin Waterparks Introduces Two New Slide Concepts

They're all wet and for good reason! Sohret Pakis with Polin Waterparks shares the new Xaya and Orbix models of water slides with the Funworld team.



15. Back From The Dead: Watch the Return of Kings Island's Phantom Theater

BOO! They're back and ready to haunt again, thanks to Sally Dark Rides. Kings Island teamed up with the legendary dark ride maker to create a new ride. Funworld shares new details of how the old favorite will return in 2026.



16. Zamperla Partners with Morgan's Wonderland on a new Uplifting Ride

Wave your arms and fly. Zamperla and Morgan's Wonderland debuted a new swing ride at IAAPA Expo 2025. The new circular ride requires riders to wave their arms—similar to how a butterfly flutters its wings. Antonio Zamperla shares with Funworld the design behind the new ride.



17. Rail Rider From S&S Debuts Modern Twist On A Timeless Roller Coaster

Sometimes looking to the past can spark new innovation. Funworld world speaks with Trevor Dyer of S&S Worldwide to learn all about the new "rail-rider" model. Rail Rider takes the idea of steeplechase, and improves upon it. Learn new details and see a ride unit's debut at IAAPA Expo 2025.



18. A First Look at Six Flags Over Texas' new B&M Drive Coaster

Set to rise high over the skies in Arlington, Texas, Tormenta Rampaging Run is set to break six world records in 2026. Jonathan Smith of B&M speaks to Funworld about the recoding breaking giga dive coaster. Learn new details and see the ride unit's debut at IAAPA Expo 2025.



19. RMC and Family Kingdom Announce Partnership For 2026

Single-Rail Roller Coaster
News is made at IAAPA Expo. A modern thrill is coming to a classic park. Dean Corl of Family Kingdom speaks with Funworld to discuss the upcoming attraction and partnership with RMC, Rocky Mountain Construction. Learn new details about the rides announcement at IAAPA Expo 2025.



CHRIS DUARTE



20. The Story Behind SeaWorld's SeaQuest: Legends of the Deep

from Vekoma

Every great ride concept features a great story of how the attraction came to be. Vekoma's Vice President of Sales Ricardo Tonding Etges and SeaWorld's Corporate Vice President Connor Carr speaks to Funworld about the origins of SeaQuest: Legends of the Deep, the park's first-of-its-kind suspended dark ride from Vekoma. Learn new details and see the ride unit's debut at IAAPA Expo 2025.




21. DOF Robotics Introduces a New Dark Ride Vehicle

It spins. It pivots. It's DOF Robotics newest ride vehicle. Funworld has the first-look at how DOF is expanding their product line from IAAPA Expo 2025.



22. The Backstory of how Dollywood and Mack Rides Created Expedition Nightflight

Behind every great ride concept is a great story of how the attraction came to be. Dollywood President Eugene Naughton speaks to Funworld about the origins of Expedition Nightflight, the park's new "flying boat" from Mack Rides. Learn new details and see the ride unit's debut at IAAPA Expo 2025. 

Ahoy! The Strategic Value of IAAPA Summit Latin America, Caribbean 2026

In an era where guest experience, operational efficiency, and sustainability define leadership excellence in the attractions industry, IAAPA Summit: Latin America, Caribbean 2026—aboard Royal Caribbean's Wonder of the Seas cruise ship—offers a unique and high-level gathering designed for professionals who aim to drive strategic growth, innovation, and differentiation. Here are some of the key learnings and benefits attendees can expect to gather from the summit.

Immersive Learning

Far from a standard seminar, the IAAPA Latin America, Caribbean Summit 2026 delivers an immersive educational experience at sea and across premier resort destinations. Taking place April 20–24, the event departs Miami and visits the private island of CocoCay, the luxury water park Baha Bay at Baha Mar, and the renowned Atlantis Paradise Island resort complex.

Executives won't just hear about operational excellence—they'll experience it firsthand. Participants will explore attraction ecosystems, observe hybrid operational models, and study how design, entertainment, and hospitality intersect in real-world environments. For senior leaders, this means gaining a deeper understanding of what world-class experiences look like, how they're delivered, and how to adapt those insights to their own facilities.

Lessons from the Cruise Industry

The attractions industry can draw significant inspiration from the cruise sector, which is known for its mastery of all-inclusive, guest-centered experiences. Cruise lines excel at blending entertainment, dining, and accommodations into a cohesive environment, where every detail contributes to the guest journey.

By adopting similar principles—such as themed lodging, personalized services, and integrated programming—parks and attractions can elevate guest engagement and extend the experience beyond rides

and shows. Cruise operators also leverage data to anticipate preferences, enhance satisfaction, and strengthen loyalty. This summit provides a rare opportunity to explore these strategies firsthand and discover how they can boost retention, revenue, and brand differentiation.

Building Strategic Connections

For executives at the top of their fields, peer networks are a critical resource—places to benchmark success, exchange insights, and forge alliances. The Latin America, Caribbean Summit fosters exactly that environment, bringing together senior leaders from regional attractions, resorts, and entertainment companies in an intimate, collaborative setting.

The cruise-based format and on-site visits encourage organic conversations and meaningful connections that go beyond formal meetings. Attendees gain direct access to decision-makers, innovators, and potential partners in settings designed for strategic exchange and long-term collaboration.

Tackling Pressing Industry Priorities

The summit's program will feature keynote sessions and presentations addressing core leadership challenges, including talent development, operational efficiency, sustainability, and guest experience. These are the strategic levers that drive profitability, strengthen brands, and shape organizational direction.

For senior executives across Latin America and the Caribbean—regions marked by rapid growth and shifting guest expectations—these discussions offer timely insights and actionable strategies to guide future planning and innovation.

Key Learnings from EDUTours at Iconic Destinations

Participants will gain rare access to three of the Bahamas' most renowned attractions—CocoCay, Baha Bay, and Atlantis Paradise Island—through exclusive IAAPA EDUTours. These tours provide behind-the-scenes views of operations that combine water parks, resort hospitality, and immersive entertainment into cohesive guest experiences.

For attendees, the tours deliver tangible takeaways: real-world benchmarks, operational insights, and inspiration for adapting world-class models to their own facilities. For executives responsible for strategic planning, growth, and guest experience differentiation, this hands-on exposure is an invaluable advantage. **FW**



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Roberto Baez is the marketing manager in IAAPA's Latin America, Caribbean region. With more than 25 years of experience working in the entertainment industry, he is passionate about communications, marketing, and roller coasters. Roberto's mantra, "Life is about experiences," is perfect for the attractions industry. Connect with him on **LinkedIn**:



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Todd Andrus Joins IAAPA to Lead North America Region

Industry veteran named IAAPA North America vice president and executive director

WITH MORE THAN 25 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE in the attractions industry, Todd Andrus is well positioned to lead IAAPA's North America operation. His passion for attractions began early, working as a costume character at SeaWorld Ohio. As a teenager, Andrus found the value in relationship building. Through professional positions at the Busch Entertainment Corporation, Merlin Entertainments, and Premier Parks, that characteristic hasn't changed. During the recent IAAPA Expo 2025, Andrus visited the Orange County Convention Center daily, looking to forge new connections and meet with established contacts from decades working with zoological facilities, FECs, amusement parks, ski resorts, and water parks.

Today, Andrus stands ready to support IAAPA members of all sizes and advocate for the industry he loves as new IAAPA North America vice president and executive director.

From inside Funworld's newsroom at the Orange County Convention Center, the IAAPA News Team sat down with Andrus at IAAPA Expo to discuss his vision on growth, support, and trust as he steps into his new role.

When did you first get bit by the "bug" and want to make working in the attractions industry a career?

I was born and raised in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. I think back to those days fondly—spending time with my family at SeaWorld Ohio, Geauga Lake, Cedar Point, and our yearly trip down to Kings Island. My parents were hard-working people, but we would separate from the grind and really spend good, quality time at parks and attractions. After I went to college, I said, 'Man, I could go sell copy machines, or I could get into the attractions industry.'




What's your vision and goal for your first year working with IAAPA?

IAAPA is a great organization doing amazing work. Having spent time as a member and serving on committees for so many years, I am coming in to listen to the members and understanding how the association can help members grow in the future. From an advocacy standpoint, there are issues that can support both attractions and the vendor side of the business. My focus is on all members. There is a collective brain trust in our industry that all members can benefit from.

What's the best way for attractions, suppliers, members, and staff to engage with you?

My personality is very collaborative. While I bring a certain expertise with my experience within the industry, my goal is to work with the membership to improve and take this association and industry forward. I look forward to working with (IAAPA Chief Operating Officer) Michael Shelton and working with Team IAAPA. I understand coming into this role that there's trust to be built. I look forward to earning the trust of the membership and my team. I'm absolutely cognizant of that and poised to connect with everyone on their level.

How will IAAPA Expo 2026 look different, yet retain the same goals, as the show grows?

There's such demand with people wanting to be a part of IAAPA Expo—they understand the value of connections made. Expanding into two halls in 2026 allows us to bring more people, more thought leaders, and a greater diversity of ideas and voices to the table. Everybody's going to benefit. Is it going to be a challenge? Yes. But, there's such an incredible team at IAAPA—not only internally, but also externally—that can lend insight into how to hold the convention in two halls that we can make the expansion successful. 

Connect with Todd Andrus on [LinkedIn](#):





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Chimelong Group Strengthens Global Talent Development with IAAPA Foundation Donation

CHIMELONG GROUP HAS PLEDGED \$150,000 OVER FIVE YEARS—from 2025 to 2029—to the IAAPA Foundation, marking a significant investment in cultivating the next generation of leaders in the global attractions industry. The IAAPA Foundation, a U.S.-based 501(c)(3) charity, provides scholarships, education, and career development opportunities, with IAAPA matching scholarship donations through 2026.

For Chimelong, the commitment is both professional and personal. Company founder Su Zhigang's story illuminates the importance of education and opportunity. Born into an under-resourced rural family in southern China, financial constraints forced him to leave school at 14 to support his family. Despite this setback, "his burning desire for knowledge never wavered—it remained deeply rooted in his heart," shares a Chimelong representative.


That determination guided him toward founding Chimelong Group in 1989. Over the last 36 years, the enterprise has grown into an operation employing 20,000 people that welcomes 40

million annual visitors across its three destination resorts. However, the success has come with challenges. "The biggest challenge throughout its development was the shortage of experienced manpower and talent ... We have collaborated closely and consistently with top professionals from every sector of the theme park industry, both domestic and international," the company explains. That collaborative spirit aligns with the mission of the IAAPA Foundation.

"The IAAPA Foundation's commitment of encouraging and supporting young talent for higher education in our industry aligns perfectly with Chimelong's philosophy of valuing and nurturing human resources," shares the company.

Beyond this global partnership, Chimelong has long invested in education close to home. The company established Chimelong Hongzhi School in rural Qingyuan City and supported funds at Peking University and Sun Yat-sen University. "From a child who could not afford schooling to someone now empowering youngsters' education and nurturing industry professionals, this journey has been profoundly meaningful," says Su.

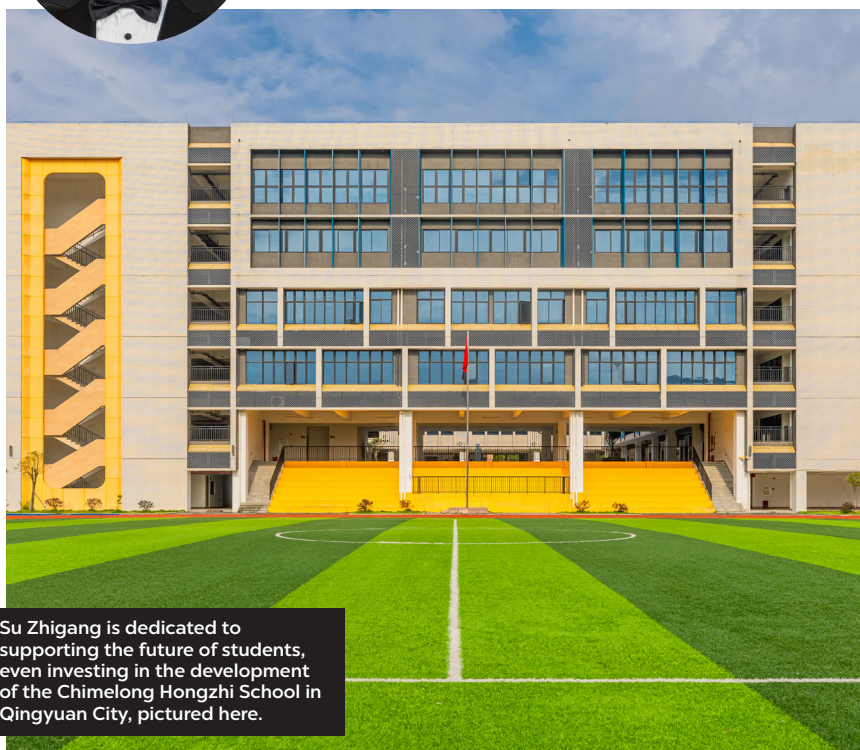
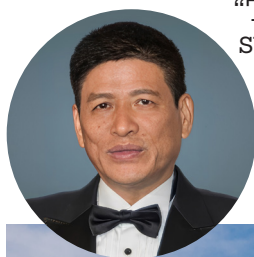
The IAAPA Foundation donation carries a regional focus as well. "Chimelong Group's donation aims to extend its funding programs to institutions in Asia. This will allow continued injection of young talents into our industry and to ensure sustainable growth globally and in the region," says Chimelong.

Chimelong's support of the IAAPA Foundation highlights the vital role of education, collaboration, and investment in people as drivers of long-term industry growth. Su encourages his industry peers to consider similar action. "The IAAPA Foundation is dedicated to the systematic cultivation of professionals in our industry, having established itself as a vital platform for advancing high-quality development on a global basis." 

Learn more at [IAAPA.org/ChimelongDonates](https://iaapa.org/ChimelongDonates)

"The IAAPA Foundation is dedicated to the systematic cultivation of professionals in our industry, having established itself as a vital platform for advancing high-quality development on a global basis."

— Su Zhigang



Su Zhigang is dedicated to supporting the future of students, even investing in the development of the Chimelong Hongzhi School in Qingyuan City, pictured here.

Beyond the Fun: How the IAAPA Public Affairs Conference Protects the Attractions Industry

MICHELLE CHASE



Industry professionals don't have to wait until next year to become advocates. Engagement can begin today by joining more than 56,000 attractions advocates making a difference. Scan the QR code to learn more and sign up.



IN THE FAST-PACED POLITICAL LANDSCAPE of Washington, D.C., industry voices matter—but only if decision-makers hear them. In September 2025, the IAAPA Public Affairs Conference equipped attractions industry leaders with the skills and insights needed to shape the future of the sector.

The three-day event opened with an intensive advocacy bootcamp, designed to transform first-time participants into effective advocates. Attendees learned the fundamentals of engagement, from understanding the legislative process to crafting persuasive advocacy messages.

Day two featured insider insights from Washington power players who influence policy daily. Headlining the day was Punchbowl News cofounder Jake Sherman, who shared expert analysis of

congressional leadership and White House dynamics. Additional sessions covered cybersecurity, workforce development, tourism, and economic policy, all providing attendees with a clearer understanding of the issues shaping the political landscape and the attractions industry.

The conference concluded on the final day with in-person Capitol Hill meetings, where participants put their training into action by meeting directly with legislators responsible for laws affecting attractions nationwide. The day ended with exclusive networking events at some of Washington's most iconic venues—a fitting finale to a week focused on advocacy, connection, and impact.

The influence of the conference extends well beyond the Beltway. As President of Holiday World & Splashin' Safari and Chair of IAAPA's North America Government Relations Committee Matt Eckert explains, "When attractions industry professionals actively engage in advocacy, we shape smart policy, strengthen safety, enhance guest experiences, and ensure our industry remains innovative, vibrant, and valued. Active engagement in public affairs isn't optional—it's a strategic necessity." 



Zach Stokes is IAAPA North America's public affairs manager, guiding attraction professionals through multistate legislative challenges while overseeing advocacy efforts that empower passionate industry leaders to champion the industry's future. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#).



Leverage the Value of Networking with

As many active IAAPA members know, the association's global network thrives on collaboration, innovation, and shared experiences. Through year-round in-person events, online opportunities, and networking initiatives, IAAPA connects members across regions and disciplines—creating opportunities to exchange ideas and form partnerships.



SIGNATURE EVENTS

- **IAAPA Expos:** The association's flagship global gatherings—IAAPA Expo, IAAPA Expo Europe, and IAAPA Expo Asia—serve as premier destinations for networking, education, and discovery. Members enjoy exclusive access, discounted rates, and special programming.
- **IAAPA FEC Summit:** Dedicated to family entertainment center operators, this annual event combines education, peer learning, and on-site facility tours to inspire operational excellence and innovation.
- **IAAPA Honors:** This annual event celebrates the best of the attractions industry with IAAPA awards, inspiring lectures, and opportunities to network with thought leaders. The May 2026 event will be held in one of the world's most breathtaking destinations, Xcaret, Mexico.
- **IAAPA Latin America, Caribbean, and EMEA Forums:** Regional gatherings that highlight local success stories, emerging trends, and networking opportunities within distinct market contexts.

IAAPA Connect+ and Marketplace


- **IAAPA Connect+:** A digital event tool designed to enrich the attendee experience with interactive floor plans, personalized agendas, and year-round access to session content.
- **IAAPA Connect+ Marketplace:** A virtual platform connecting buyers and suppliers worldwide, enabling continuous engagement beyond physical events.

Networking Programs

- **Hosted Buyer Program:** Exclusive to the IAAPA Expos, this program pairs qualified buyers with leading exhibitors for scheduled, high-value meetings that drive business connections.
- **Young Professionals and Emerging Leaders Mixers:** Curated networking sessions designed to support early-career professionals through mentorship and peer connection.

Community Building

- **IAAPA Expo Show Ambassadors:** Students and emerging professionals are invited to volunteer as show ambassadors to assist with Expo operations in Orlando, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.
- **Volunteer Opportunities:** Members can contribute to IAAPA's mission by serving on committees, supporting events, and advancing industry initiatives such as the IAAPA Foundation.
- **IAAPA Meetups:** Informal gatherings designed to cultivate relationships and strengthen community ties within local markets.

IAAPA's connections portfolio empowers professionals to grow their networks and build partnerships that last well beyond the conclusion of each event. Every encounter—whether virtual or in-person—strengthens IAAPA's shared mission to create joy and connection within the global attractions industry. Visit www.IAAPA.org/Connections to explore upcoming events and opportunities. 

This is a partial listing of upcoming IAAPA events. Event details are as of December 10, 2025, and subject to change. For the most up-to-date information, visit [IAAPA.org/Events](https://iaapa.org/Events)

JANUARY 2026

Webinar: Exceeding Expectations: Creating Inclusive Museums, Zoos, and Aquariums

14 | Online

IAAPA Morocco Summit

19-21 | Morocco

Live Chat: Thriving in the Middle – A Survival Guide for Middle Managers

21 | Online

Webinar: Experiential Learning Opportunities on Board a Cruise Ship

27 | Online

FEBRUARY

IAAPA

FEC SUMMIT 2026

1-3 | Glendale, Arizona

Inspiring new generations: Live Chat with Luciana Periales

9 | Online

IAAPA Bootcamp: Punta Cana

18-19 | Punta Cana, Dominican Republic

IAAPA Explores Food and Beverage Trends: Houston, TX

23-25 | Houston

MARCH



30-April 2 | Abu Dhabi

APRIL

IAAPA Institute for Attractions Professionals: Abu Dhabi

3 | Abu Dhabi

IAAPA Safety Institute – Abu Dhabi

3 | Abu Dhabi

IAAPA Institute for Indoor Professionals – Abu Dhabi

3-4 | Abu Dhabi

IAAPA SUMMIT:

LATIN AMERICA, CARIBBEAN 2026

20-24 | Nassau, Bahamas

MAY

IAAPA Honors

12-14 | Xcaret, Mexico

JUNE



9-12 | Hong Kong SAR

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FLY EXTREME SPORTS BAR

The Concept Elevating the Global Entertainment Experience

Located in Metepec, Mexico, Fly Extreme Sports Bar is reshaping the vision of what a modern Family Entertainment Center can be. Developed by Grupo Dcrejart, the project integrates high-impact attractions with contemporary dining, signature mixology, and the Fly Extreme Sports Bar—creating a dynamic destination designed for all ages.

For more than 30 years, Grupo Dcrejart has been a global reference in engineering, safety, and creative entertainment design. Fly Extreme is a natural evolution of that legacy, merging proven expertise with a forward-looking approach that delivers immersive, memorable, and guest-focused experiences.



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INTERNATIONAL ADVENTURE & TRAMPOLINE PARK ASSOCIATION

DESIGNING THE FUTURE

Covering 2,900 m², Fly Extreme Sports Bar features trampolines, a rope course, climbing walls, a digital speed challenge wall, VALO Jump, over 80 arcade games, bowling lanes, a large-format playground, and a robust redemption zone. It's an All-in-One Experience model allowing guests unlimited access to most attractions, enhancing value while simplifying operations.

One of Fly Extreme's strongest pillars is its culinary, mixology, and bar program. Guests enjoy chef-driven dishes, contemporary flavors, signature cocktails, and the energy of the Fly Extreme Sports

Bar—turning food and beverage into a standout, integral attraction.

Supported by 11 years of operational expertise and eight successful locations under the Fly Trampoline brand, the Fly Extreme team combines specialists in safety, operations, gastronomy, maintenance, and entertainment to ensure a truly comprehensive guest experience.

Fly Extreme represents a fresh direction for the industry—where attractions, technology, great food, and elevated hospitality come together to shape the future of family entertainment.



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EPIC BY DESIGN



THE PARTNERSHIPS, PROCESSES, AND PEOPLE POWERING UNIVERSAL EPIC UNIVERSE

story by Avery Matteo and Michael Costello

photos provided by Universal Orlando, video content by Scott Fais

TRANSPORTING AUDIENCES TO OTHER

WORLDS and weaving fantasy adventures filled with magic, horror, romance, and heroic journeys stands as Universal Studios' legacy. Since 1912, Universal's storytelling has transported audiences from enchanted realms to kingdoms far away, blending myth with imagination and infusing cutting-edge technology.

In the mid-1960s, that special brand of storytelling leaped off the silver screen and formed tangible worlds that inspire wonder, shape culture, spark fandoms, and remind us of how dreams can feel real.

From the opening of the Hollywood studio tour in 1964 and Universal Studios Florida in 1990, to the debut of the immersive Islands of Adventure theme park in 1999 and the tropical villages found at Universal Volcano Bay water theme park in 2017, Universal's latest take on a theme park—one that transports guests through portals to imaginative worlds—lives up to its name: Epic. Six decades of expert design and storytelling have led to Universal Epic Universe at Universal Orlando Resort.

Funworld received an all-access pass to take readers behind-the-scenes and share how Universal Destinations & Experiences crafted the attractions, retail, and food and beverage that defines its next adventure.



1 Storytelling and Placemaking of a Celestial Apex

Upon arrival to Universal Epic Universe, guests immediately step through the Kronos—a sparkling, kinetic beacon and towering edifice situated as the park’s central gate and entrance portal.

Inscribed at the top of the Kronos’ portal are the words “Beyond this gate find gardens green and epic worlds to fill your dreams.” This first portal transports guests to Celestial Park, the park’s central hub. In a “world between worlds,” guests encounter a vista of gently cascading lagoons and vast green spaces of manicured gardens, a buffet of flora.

“I tell people that Celestial Park is a little bit of the sorbet between your courses. I like to think that this is the place where you can kind of decompress from the different worlds and reset your palate before you go into the next one,” Adam Rivest, vice president of creative management

for Universal Creative tells Funworld. The Kronos, positioned at the front of the park, and the Universal Helios Grand Hotel, located at the rear, serve as bookends for Celestial Park—iconic landmarks framing the entire space—anchoring the guest experience while guiding visitors through portals to Epic’s four additional worlds. Shopping, dining, and entertainment complement a visit.

The buildings and statuary found throughout Celestial Park evoke the grandeur of the great world’s fairs held in American cities over a century ago. Meanwhile, the blending of Beaux-Arts, neoclassical, classical revival, and Art Nouveau architecture inspire thoughts of timeless prosperity, as seen in the unique structures, Constellation Carousel, and Stardust Racers roller coaster.



SCOTT FAIS



MICHAEL COSTELLO



Tour Celestial Park and Universal Helios Grand Hotel in Funworld’s YouTube video from inside the park by scanning this QR code:



2

Responsibilities and Animation Adaptations

Universal Epic Universe's How to Train Your Dragon — Isle of Berk world is a love letter to DreamWorks' beloved dragon saga, scaled and translated into the physical realm. It's a rugged Viking village where humans and dragons coexist.

"When you take an IP, it's a big responsibility, especially an IP that is as loved as the How To Train Your Dragon films are," says executive producer Katy Pacitti. She emphasizes the delicate balancing act necessary for practicality—staying true to an IP, while ensuring the best guest experience. "You want to fulfill guest expectations—and luckily for us—the film team left us with this beautiful design," Pacitti says, describing the process of bringing the Isle of Berk from

the films into the physical realm, where guests can experience it with all five senses.

Another result of bringing the Isle of Berk into the real world is the introduction of shopping and retail into a setting that is void of such elements in the fictional narrative. Pacitti explains that while DreamWorks knew shops would be an alteration, her duty was to add windows—since shops need windows—and she did it in a way that enhances the land while staying true to the fiction as much as possible. "It is just sort of about realizing things and being a little bit forgiving, because you actually have to, you have to create a real world, and people have to practically operate the world, and guests have to be able to come through the world," she explains.



Venture inside How to Train Your Dragon – Isle of Berk and meet the next-generation Toothless animated figure in Funworld's YouTube video by scanning this QR code:



3

The Wizardry and Spellbinding Details

Scott Verble, executive producer for Universal Creative, emphasizes the extraordinary detail found throughout The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Ministry of Magic and it comes with high expectations. “The amount of detail that is baked into all of these buildings and experiences ... it just all has story at heart—and that level of detail the guests have come to know and love from the Wizard.”

The latest Potter world recreates full-scale Paris, not relying on forced perspective, to immerse guests in the 1920s Parisian wizarding shopping district of Place

Cachée. Verble tells Funworld that every shop entrance features custom mosaics, adding layers of authenticity.

Innovation shines within the Le Cirque Arcanus show, the first fully immersive indoor live performance in the Wizarding World. Verble explains, “The heart of the story takes guests on a very unexpected journey that I cannot wait for them to see.” This mix of artistry, technology, and storytelling ensures the Ministry of Magic feels both fanciful and real.



Fall under the spell of The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Ministry of Magic in Funworld's YouTube video:



4

Frightfully Honoring Intellectual Properties

The Dark Universe realm celebrates Universal's century-long legacy of monsters, all in one world. Executive Producer Chris Frisella felt deep responsibility to get the story right. "What an honor ... to work with these characters, these IPs that in the Universal family are approaching 100 years old."

To unify the previous standalone stories of *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and *the Mummy*, the creative team built the village of Darkmoor, a place where mad scientists and monsters coexist. This setting allows for both faithful representation and new storytelling opportunities sautéed in lore.

Haggard-looking, mature, yet healthy trees were planted among the village's old-world, timber-frame and stone buildings—each with crooked rooftops—and cobblestone streets, and lantern-lit pathways. Elements of a sinister laboratory are found outside and inside a gothic mansion towering over the world while housing its marquee attraction, *Monsters Unchained: The Frankenstein Experiment*.

Frisella stresses the importance of respect. "You have to be careful and respectful of those original stories. We want to make sure that we treat them respectfully, represent them correctly, and then we can kind of launch the storytelling."



Funworld sheds light on Dark Universe on YouTube:





Scoring Points Tangibly

In stark contrast to Dark Universe, the neighboring Super Nintendo World offers guests a vibrant, interactive environment where play and immersion are inseparable.

Susan Cummings, executive producer of Super Nintendo World worked closely with designers, engineers, and Nintendo itself, calling her creative oversight as the “the icing on the cake.”

The creative team’s partnership with Nintendo proved

long and deeply collaborative. “They’ve been with us every step of the way,” Cummings says.

This close relationship ensures that the material world authentically captures the imaginative video game world of Mario, Luigi, and Princess Peach in the park’s Mushroom Kingdom realm, while Donkey Kong’s home in the tropical Donkey Kong Island adapts gameplay into a real-world attraction.



Funworld “powers up” in this YouTube video showcasing Super Nintendo World:



Crafting Immersive Wonders



Designing an attraction with the scale and sophistication of Harry Potter and the Battle at the Ministry required an extraordinary amount of collaboration. For Universal Creative's Anisha Vyas Burgos, who served as assistant director of projects, the process was both technically demanding and deeply rewarding. "It's such a big culmination of so many years of hard work," she says.

The attraction's design required contributions from nearly every discipline within Universal Creative—from engineers and architects to scenic artists, technologists, and storytellers. "Not one set piece, not one area of the ride, is one specific discipline," Vyas Burgos explains. "There's probably 10 to 15 different disciplines all working together in each of these areas to bring it to life. The collaboration that the team has shown, I think, is evident in how immersive and unique these environments are."

That sense of cohesion was particularly important for an attraction rooted in two distinct settings: the Ministry of Magic set indoors and rooted in 1990s London, and the outdoor wizarding world set in 1920s Paris (guests travel between space and time via the Métro-Floo Network).

Translating those environments into physical spaces required artistic interpretation and technical precision. "We perfected magical architecture," she says. Inside, hundreds of thousands of colored tiles—green, purple, pink, black, and red—help create that layered sense of history for the interiors. Each hue and texture serves a

purpose within the visual storytelling.

While the craftsmanship is visible throughout, much of the innovation lies behind the scenes. Vyas Burgos says she and her team needed to become experts in disciplines far outside their comfort zones. "There's a lot of different engineering principles that I've learned more about than I ever wanted to—and a lot of design principles, too," she notes. "Bringing this to life was such a collaboration among architecture, creative design, and creative intent. To build something at this scale—in and of itself—is challenging, and there's a lot we've learned."

For Gary Blumenstein, senior director of creative direction, the project's foundation was always the story. "We knew we had to tell a lot of big stories—epic stories, so to speak. When it came to the Ministry, the story of the attraction had to live up to what you're experiencing as you get clued into this lobby," Blumenstein says. His team looked for narrative spaces that expanded on what audiences already knew, finding opportunities to imagine moments that could exist within the Harry Potter universe while standing on their own.

Designing a world of magic within the constraints of real-world architecture presented constant challenges. "You're dealing with an IP that is all about magic, and we have real-world things we have to deal with," Blumenstein says. "It's overcoming all of that and still keeping you in the immersive attention to detail—that's the stuff we overcome on a daily basis."

The result, according to Vyas Burgos, is an experience that leaves guests wondering how it was achieved. "One of my favorite scenes is where there's a Death Eater battle right in front of you," she says. "It is so layered with technology, and it's so fluid and so beautiful. I love that people say, 'How did they do that?'"

For the teams behind Battle at the Ministry, that question is the ultimate measure of success—proof that design, story, and innovation can merge so seamlessly that the magic feels real.



Across Universal Epic Universe, food and beverage design is a storytelling medium.

At the Burning Blade Tavern, with its windmill set ablaze, the lore is as rich as the flavors. “The Burning Blade is kind of the lodge and the hangout for the monster hunters after a long day of hunting,” explains Josh Frank, beverage program manager at Universal Orlando Resort. Within the dark setting, Frank and his team developed an inventive beverage lineup that draws directly from the Universal Classic Monsters legacy. “We’ve built in a lot of deep cuts referencing specific movies,” he says. “The Pure of Heart—one who knows The Wolf Man may know that even one who is pure of heart may be stricken by the curse. We have our Mono Cane, the secret ingredient in The Invisible Man’s potion, which made him invisible—and also quite insane.”

The drinks themselves double as visual storytelling. “In the Lagunita, we actually try to build the visual of the Black Lagoon,” Frank says, describing the cocktail where “little bits of blackberry and lime pith come up and look like algae.” The result is a beverage program that satisfies both thematic and sensory expectations. “Even when we’re sourcing something from the outside world,” he adds, “we want something that looks like it could exist in this universe.”

Frank emphasizes that creativity doesn’t end with alcoholic options. “Mocktails are an important category as well,” he says. “We try to have at least one signature mocktail at every major venue.” He notes that glittery cocktails and edible pearlescent pigments are among the current industry trends. “There are a lot of things happening all at once right now in the beverage world,” he says, pointing to an environment where innovation and guest demand constantly evolve.

In Super Nintendo World, that same imaginative ethos drives the food program. Robert Martinez Jr., culinary director and executive chef at Universal Orlando Resort, says the F&B process took seven years of development. “To be able to go from the video games we’ve seen and played to get to create food is an amazing result,” he says. Items like the Super Mario



EVERY MATTEO





EVERY MATTEO



MICHAEL COSTELLO



Burger—complete with a mustache-shaped garnish and red Mario cap skewer—translate digital nostalgia into tangible, flavorful design. “It has these mushrooms inside this delicious sauce,” he adds.

That creativity is balanced with logistical discipline. “Product demand and product supply are challenges,” Martinez acknowledges. “Making sure we’ve picked products that are going to be here all the time for our guests has been key. It takes a lot of talented people to get to where we are today.”

His advice for aspiring culinary developers? “No idea is a bad idea. It might not make sense for what you’re creating in the moment, but it might make sense later on,” Martinez tells Funworld.

Meanwhile, in the Isle of Berk realm, research and development began with the source material itself. “The fun part is the beginning,” says Christopher Colón, executive sous chef, research & development at Universal Orlando Resort. “We get to watch the movies, hear the lore, pick out moments.”

That inspiration translated into a diverse menu with Viking-sized ambition. “We have something for everybody,” he shares.

Just as importantly, the menus reflect Universal’s commitment to inclusivity. “We have vegan and gluten-free options that are clearly marked and don’t require heavy modification,” Colón notes. “If it does, it’s a simple change—remove one item here, one there. We definitely have great options across the board.”

Across every land at Epic Universe, Universal’s food and beverage teams are proving that dining is not an afterthought—it’s an extension of the story itself.

Developing Merchandise Magic



Avery Matteo is the associate editor of Funworld at IAAPA. She is an Orlando-based writer and editor with more than five years of experience supporting educational institutions, nonprofits, and associations. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#):



Developing merchandise for five themed worlds is a process that requires close collaboration with creative partners and licensors. As Don Davis director of merchandise product development at Universal Orlando Resort explains, “Our biggest partner is really Universal Creative, because ... we really want to understand what is the land, (and ask) what is the guest going to experience? And we really want to make sure that merchandise really tied back to that experience.” This philosophy ensures that every item feels authentic to the environment, such as the dragon Loungefly bag, which directly reflects a structure guests encounter in the Isle of Berk.

Similar to the teams constructing the park’s physical environments, the merchandise team understands that balancing creative ambition with brand integrity is a constant part of the journey. The process also involves DreamWorks, since “Dragons is a DreamWorks property, so of course we do work with them as well to make sure clearly we’re respectful of the brand guidelines and get the approval,” says Davis.

The team’s focus was clear: “We just really wanted to get it right. We really want to make sure we took the product to a different level,” says Davis.

That same drive led to innovative items like the Toothless mask. Toothless, the fiction’s protagonist, is of a species of dragon known as the rarest, fastest,



and most intelligent. “We knew we had to do something where we could bring Toothless to life, where you could actually become Toothless,” explains Davis. The result was a mask that lights up, makes sounds, and puts the character into the physical form in the most accurate way possible.

Product designers also created a backpack featuring wings, claws, and a tail—just another example of immersive products that allow guests to take home a piece of the character’s world. A plush toy sold inside an egg invites guests to participate in a ceremony with Epic’s team members where they “take a pledge, and you have to promise to kind of raise it in the Viking tradition,” says Davis. This ritual transforms a simple purchase into a memorable, interactive experience, deepening the connection between guests and the land. RW



Michael Costello is the managing editor of Funworld at IAAPA. With 20 years working in the attractions industry, he has also volunteered in his free time with the National Amusement Park Historical Association. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#):





THE CALL OF THE WILD

THE EVOLUTION OF ZOOS ACROSS THE GLOBE

by Juliana Gilling

IN A TWIST CHARLES DARWIN MIGHT APPRECIATE, zoos and wildlife attractions are themselves evolving. Around the world, they are shifting from exhibits to experiences and bringing their missions center stage. Their conservation messages matter more than ever, as rising global temperatures—spurred by climate change—have increasingly profound effects on nature, people, and the planet.

Audiences continue to change as well. Gen Z and Gen Alpha gravitate toward causes that embody activism, authenticity, and a connection to nature. Visitors now expect ethical, transparent, and sustainable operations. For zoos and wildlife attractions, success depends not only on visitor numbers, but on measurable conservation impact, strong welfare standards, meaningful community engagement, and a reduced carbon footprint. Also, as costs rise, many institutions are adapting their business models and diversifying their revenue streams.



More Than a Day Out

West Midlands Safari Park in England is expanding its offerings, by encouraging visitors to stay longer. “West Midlands Safari Park has transitioned from being primarily a day-visit attraction into a short-break destination,” managing director Joanne Hammick explains. “Introducing our on-site luxury accommodation, Safari Lodges, has been a game-changer, broadening our appeal to new audiences, driving people from outside our catchment area, and extending dwell time. Alongside this, we’ve invested heavily in upgrading our animal facilities, our ‘on-foot’ day events and VIP experiences, plus our food and beverage outlets, ensuring the park offers not just animal encounters but a complete leisure experience.”

The Safari Lodges cater to the growing interest in premium leisure experiences and short breaks. “Our accommodation has consistently sold out, underlining the appetite for unique, wildlife-inspired stays,” Hammick says. In 2026, the park begins the next phase of its short-break expansion.

“Accommodation must be an extension of the visitor

experience, not just a bolt-on,” Hammick says. “Our lodges immerse guests in the safari environment, with sightlines, storytelling, and service levels all reinforcing the uniqueness of the stay. Operationally, it’s vital to align teams early, from animal care to housekeeping, to ensure smooth delivery. And strong demand means pricing should reflect the premium nature of the offer.”

To increase its audience and drive repeat visits, the safari park is developing its seasonal events program, exclusive behind-the-scenes experiences, and corporate business.

“Digital innovation has been central to our growth,” Hammick adds. “We’ve rolled out a new booking platform and website, which has delivered higher spend per visitor and improved conversion rates. We’re also looking into an on-site app that will allow us to personalize offers and communications to enhance the guest experience.”

Up-close encounters from the comfort of guest rooms are a benefit of staying on site at West Midlands Safari Park.

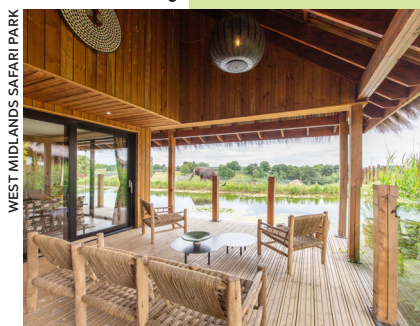
Playful Learning

New visitor experiences strengthen the bond between people and animals. Ahead of its 200th birthday in 2026, London Zoo has unveiled ZooTown—a role-play attraction for children ages three to eight and designed to inspire future conservationists. The facility meets the rising need for family-friendly, indoor, all-weather spaces.

“It’s a playful, immersive space where our youngest visitors can step into some of the different jobs essential to running a modern zoo. It’s designed to inspire curiosity and creativity through imaginative play, while gently weaving in themes of conservation and animal care,” says Emma Edwards, head of the London Zoo design team behind ZooTown.

Children played an integral roll in the design process. “They told us they loved hands-on, imaginative play combined with tasks like scanning animals,” Edwards says. “They also gave us more direct demands, like ‘more plasters in the vets’ or that the zebra crossing should be authentically zebra-print. We were delighted to accommodate these.”

London Zoo uses digital tools thoughtfully to enhance, not replace, real-world connections with animals. “We’ve introduced a VR experience at our sister zoo recently and plan to bring that to London



WEST MIDLANDS SAFARI PARK



WEST MIDLANDS SAFARI PARK



WEST MIDLANDS SAFARI PARK



Zoo this summer," Edwards says. "We've been improving ticketing journeys and also building richer digital content that extends the impact of a zoo visit well beyond the day itself."

Habitats Up Close

La Aurora Zoo in Guatemala completed two major projects in 2025—the African Savannah renovation and a new mixed aviary—each advancing the zoo's push toward more participatory, experience-driven spaces. Both "allow visitors to discover biodiversity from a closer, more engaging, and memorable perspective," says director Claudia Salazar.

La Aurora Zoo's African Savannah is one of many projects globally creating more naturalistic animal habitats. In December, the Congo Falls gorilla habitat was set to debut at San Antonio Zoo in Texas, United States. This world-class, two-acre habitat sets a new standard for wildlife conservation, education, and animal care. The gorillas can explore lush landscapes, experience water features, and climb the 70-foot-tall Mays Family Silverback Peak tower for panoramic views. Guests can watch the gorillas from numerous vantage points.

Salazar says La Aurora Zoo's team understands that "learning is strengthened when it is lived, which is why we continue to create spaces that inspire curiosity and a commitment to wildlife care."



She points to a surging interest in outdoor educational activities that combine excitement and learning. Last year, La Aurora Zoo's first Night Camp, which invited families to explore the zoo after dark, was "a great success." The attraction has also expanded its hands-on encounters, such as giraffe and camel feeding.

Investments in technology and digital communications have improved visit planning, reduced waiting times, and increased public interaction, Salazar adds. La Aurora Zoo is building a digital community that shares its passion for wildlife through active social media. The facility is modernizing exhibits and adding new interactive experiences for visitors. "We have ambitious plans for the future," Salazar says.

Imaginations run wild in children's creative endeavors at the London Zoo.



Chester Zoo's youngest guests engage with a habitat.

Remaining Relevant

The nearly century-old Chester Zoo in Cheshire, England, has seen a remarkable transformation. Recent developments include the Heart of Africa project, the zoo's newest and most immersive experience, where African landscapes, species, and culture come

to life across a 22-acre habitat.

Chester Zoo fueled excitement for the launch with regular updates, keeping the public and its 187,000 members in the loop throughout. It's all part of a broader



Panda Power at Ocean Park Hong Kong

To celebrate its growing giant panda family, Ocean Park Hong Kong launched the Panda Friends IP (intellectual property) in September 2024. The six animated characters, inspired by the six giant pandas living in Ocean Park Hong Kong, have captured the public's imagination.

"Using animated characters gives us creative flexibility, allowing the pandas to appear in imaginative scenarios beyond reality. This opens broader opportunities for storytelling, content creation and commercial collaborations, while fostering a stronger emotional bond between the public and Hong Kong's giant pandas," says Ivan Wong, chief executive of Ocean Park Corporation.

Panda Friends has become a strategic brand asset for the park. "We have integrated the characters into our themed events, attractions, merchandise, and F&B offerings to boost attendance and in-park revenues. The success has been remarkable," Wong says.

Ocean Park Hong Kong has extended the Panda Friends IP's visibility beyond the park by partnering with brands offering everything from plush toys to clothing, food, jewelry, mobile accessories, and home decor. A cross-over event with the Line Friends global IP was a highlight in summer 2025.

"Ocean Park Hong Kong has developed exciting new animal attractions and experiences, particularly for panda enthusiasts," Wong says. The Panda Twins Fan Club, which has thousands of members, offers exclusive experiences, such as special moments with the cubs and their caretakers.

"We have also launched 'A Treasured Moment with the Giant Panda Twins'—a dedicated morning session allowing visitors to enjoy time with the adorable giant panda twins without crowds or queues," Wong says. All program fees support giant panda conservation efforts, and Ocean Park Hong Kong hosts panda-themed educational programs and workshops for people who want to learn more.



PHOTOS: OCEAN PARK

message, says Gemma Wright, head of guest experience. “There’s always something new at Chester Zoo.”

Besides new habitats, the zoo hosts an exciting calendar of activities, from the Afterglow summer event to the Lanterns and Light festive light experience in winter. In addition, the zoo opened The Square, a lavish wedding and events venue in the historic stable block.

Chester Zoo has also invested in The Reserve, where guests can wake up in one of 51 luxury lodges and watch giraffes and other animals roaming the savannah-inspired landscape. The development includes the Amboseli Restaurant and Tsavo Lounge. This overnight experience has diversified the zoo’s audiences, expanded its income, and enhanced guests’ connection with the wildlife.

Chester Zoo has learned a key lesson—that mission and commercial success are not in conflict. “They need each other,” says chief operating officer Dominic Strange. “Guests reward authenticity, transparency, and impact. When people see their visit directly



CHESTER ZOO

supports conservation, education, and species recovery, they engage more deeply and return more often. Also, we’ve learned the importance of never standing still. Our sector thrives when we continue to create new ways to connect guests with wildlife, nature, and conservation. Expectations evolve quickly, and if we don’t keep refreshing and reimagining what we offer, we risk losing relevance.” ^{FW}

Mid-construction, Chester Zoo’s The Reserve starts to take shape.



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A Kingdom of Fun RISES



Seven's entertainment ecosystem built from scratch

by Juliana Gilling
All photos courtesy of Seven

ACROSS SAUDI ARABIA, HARD HATS AND HI-VIS VESTS HAVE BECOME THE NEW UNIFORM of ambition. Meanwhile, fresh recruits line up for group photos, while teaser trailers light up social media—heralding entertainment projects rising so fast they're making seasoned developers' heads spin.

Born out of the ambitious Vision 2030 roadmap to diversify Saudi Arabia's economy, Saudi Entertainment Ventures (Seven), part of Qiddiya Investment Company, a Public Investment Fund (PIF) entity, is spearheading change. Seven Chief Entertainment Operations Officer Damien Latham opens up to Funworld about the thrills and pressures of leading through change. For Latham, the task is both exhilarating and daunting.



A Serious Business

Seven simultaneously oversees the development and operation of 14 entertainment projects, representing an investment of more than SAR 50 billion. Seven's bold place-making program will bring entertainment to cities throughout the kingdom, including Riyadh, Kharj, Makkah, Jeddah, Taif, Dammam, Khobar, Al Ahsa, Madinah, Yanbu, Abha, Jazan, Buraydah, and Tabuk. The goal is to create an integrated, interrelated, and sustainable leisure ecosystem across the country, including in cities that historically had few entertainment options.

"We are a community-based project that is excited about bringing new genres of entertainment to an emerging market," Latham says. He explains the priority is to create destinations that connect authentically with Saudi families, deliver lasting value, and stand the test of time.

"We have a massive responsibility at Seven to spend wisely and to be sustainable," he says. That sense of responsibility extends beyond budgets—it's about earning the trust of a sophisticated audience. Saudi consumers are discerning and well-traveled, with an appetite for quality and innovation, which sets a high bar for any new venture, let alone a national network of venues. "Meeting those expectations is one of the things that keeps me up at night and keeps the team on their toes," Latham says.

After years of planning, 2026 marks a crucial delivery phase. Seven aims to open five entertainment destinations this year. These entertainment hubs will be in Abha in the south, Tabuk in the north, Yanbu just north of Jeddah in the west, Madinah, and Al Hamra in Riyadh. The next wave of major openings will begin in 2027.

Championing a Diverse Attraction Mix

Latham, with three decades in leisure, including at Majid Al Futtaim and Center Parcs, joined Seven's team of "Fungeiners" six years ago at the project's start. He recalls the intense "soul searching" and copious research that went into identifying what Saudi audiences might want from a new generation of entertainment experiences.

"You can look at the latest and greatest in attractions across the world, and that's a great starting point," he says. "But how do you know that's going to resonate with the Saudi public, who are incredibly young, digitally savvy, and entertainment-hungry?"



Seven's team recognized that success would depend on creating attractions that were unique, distinctive, and open to all, much like premier shopping malls. "We wanted to make our public spaces very entertainment-centric," Latham says. The company conducted extensive market research across Saudi Arabia, gathering data and surveying public opinion. The team aimed to discover what facilities future guests would want—and how often they would visit. This in-depth study of more than 25,000 people of their consumer preferences led Seven to map out a list

BELOW LEFT: Seven & Mattel bring Hot Wheels electric kiting experience to Saudi Arabia.

BELOW RIGHT: Seven has partnered with Warner Bros. Discovery to create indoor Discovery Adventures centers.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Yanbu entertainment destination.





of attraction categories as a blueprint for projects. “We ended up with almost 25 different typologies, from karting centers to family entertainment centers, indoor ski slopes, water parks, aquariums, and everything in between,” Latham explains.

Family experiences were the foundation of each decision. Seven then began “carefully curating each of those attractions around the public realm to provide something for everyone,” Latham says. Food and beverage (F&B) facilities were also a key component, designed to encourage families to stay longer. Latham believes third-party leasing for F&B facilities will reduce the risk.

The business model scales depending on the location and population density. “You could end up with eight or nine different types of attractions in some of the smaller cities, and as many as 11 or 12 attractions in the larger cities,” he explains.

Investing in IPs

Seven is adding intellectual properties (IP) to the diverse attraction mix, combining big-name and original brands. The company has secured strategic partnerships

with Hasbro, Mattel, Warner Bros. Discovery, and Formula E, with further IP collaborations likely. These agreements will deliver world firsts, including Transformers indoor entertainment centers, Play-Doh attractions, Formula E-branded indoor karting facilities, and Hot Wheels e-karting racing tracks.

The Al Hamra entertainment destination in Riyadh, opening this year, shows the power of Seven’s planning in action. The SAR 3.6 billion, 168,000-square-meter entertainment cluster caters to a population near 9 million. Guests can expect to see 19 home-grown attractions and five global IPs. Attractions will include a Transformers experience, an indoor Discovery Adventures center inspired by Warner Bros. Discovery content, Formula E simulators, rides, a Flow House flow boarding venue from FlowRider, indoor skydiving, and experiential retail. There is also a cinema and an outdoor public space for events. Annual visits are projected to reach 15.6 million.

“You can look at the latest and greatest in attractions across the world, and that’s a great starting point. But how do you know that’s going to resonate with the Saudi public, who are incredibly young, digitally savvy, and entertainment-hungry?”

— Damien Latham,
Seven Chief Entertainment Operations Officer





Seven will also introduce homegrown IPs. At Abha, a new family entertainment center brand will take its place alongside a Play-Doh Imagination Center, Formula E karting, a Discovery Adventures center, golf and bowling concepts, a cinema, a multi-purpose venue, F&B outlets, and an outdoor public realm.

Latham calls the FEC a “cool environment” where “kids can come and play with a group of enchanted monsters in a fantasy forest.” Combining “fantastic-themed overlays” with story-driven attractions, the venue is more like “a miniature theme park” than a conventional FEC, he says.

Seven has shaped its attractions to appeal to Saudi sensibilities. Its surf-themed restaurants are a case in point. The project team looked at different surfing cultures from around the world before settling on a Hawaiian-style theme. “We said, ‘Well, how, how do we put a Saudi twist on that?’” Latham recalls. The answer lay within Jeddah’s architecture. The team incorporated the



patterns, colors, and forms they had seen in Jeddah's old town. "We fused the two genres beautifully," he says.

Seven's team is adopting the latest technologies to innovate, including artificial intelligence (AI). "We are using it, but we are using it carefully," Latham says. "We've certainly used it in the ideation phase, but you can't let a concept be driven totally by AI. The team views AI-powered pitches critically, ensuring the narratives—and promises—are genuinely deliverable. Hard-won experience and on-the-ground knowledge remain essential to optimize operations and the guest experience," he believes.

Seven tracks global trends in entertainment, including the rise in immersive, gaming-based experiences. "Universal's done a great job at recreating Super Mario Land [at Epic Universe]. I love what they've done there—you feel immersed in the game," Latham says.

He sees more opportunities to bring themed attractions and gaming together to get players out of their bedrooms and basements. "It's not just about recreating the land," he explains, it's about integrating technology, interactivity, and storytelling to bring those worlds to life.

"There are so many stories to tell and so many great ways to tell them," he continues. Crafting experiences that resonate

with audiences is an ongoing challenge. The key, he says, is to "convert those into repeatable businesses." Companies must balance creative ambition with commercial pragmatism.

Laying the Groundwork for Lasting Growth

Seven strives to strike a balance between entertainment destinations that are distinctly Saudi while also appealing to international tourists. Given the incredibly fast pace of developments in Saudi Arabia, "we are constantly thinking about evolving what we've already designed," he says.

Currently, the team is working through the huge logistical and operational challenges involved in opening locations throughout Saudi Arabia. Recruiting and training staff across multiple regions presents its own challenges. Seven is completing a comprehensive learning and development program to prepare team members fully. "We'll continue iterating as we move forward," he says.

Latham remembers the buzz of starting out in the leisure industry as a lifeguard at the launch of England's Center Parcs Longleat Forest in 1994. He wants others to experience the same kind of excitement by helping to build an attractions industry that Saudis will aspire to work in. "That's what success would look like," he says.

Creating an entire entertainment ecosystem is a massive undertaking, and the team is approaching it with humility. "We're not arrogant enough to think that everything's going to hit a home run," Latham says. "When you are breaking new ground, when you are testing new attractions, there will be a degree of learning."

He outlines an ambitious target—within the next three to four years—once most of its curated destinations are open. Seven aims for an 80-85% success rate across its attractions. "That would be an amazing achievement," he says. For now, Seven is focusing on bringing to life entertainment experiences that set a new benchmark for entertainment in Saudi Arabia and the world beyond. 

An upcoming entertainment hub being developed in Abha.

seven.sa



RPM RACEWAY



Indoor Go-Kart Experiences Level Up at RPM Raceway

How RPM Raceway's owners capture visitor interest with new offerings and attractions

by Dawn Allcot

THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN ESPORTS AND REAL-WORLD ATTRACTIONS continues to shrink. RPM Raceway, a multi-location, “go-kart-forward” family entertainment center, continues to leverage the interest in friendly competition and adrenaline-fueled play with upgrades across their brand, from new go-karts to a fresh game format.

Combining live racing with game-style strategy, holographic projections, and real-time LED race monitoring, Kart Klash attracts thrill-seekers and video game enthusiasts alike. Meanwhile, the upgrade to industry-leading Sodi go-karts opens RPM Raceway to a new market of serious racers.

For father-and-son entrepreneurs Eyal and Andrew Farage, it's all the next phase in a shared passion that began with a cross-country road trip. Funworld spoke with Andrew Farage to discuss the evolution of their endeavor and future expansion plans.

From Passion to Profits

“We went go-karting in Los Angeles, and that's where I had the idea to build a next-generation electric go-kart experience back home—as close to New York City as we could get,” says founder and COO Andrew Farage.

At the same time, Farage says, his father Eyal was looking to diversify beyond the construction industry. Drawing on Eyal's experience as a business owner, the pair worked together—just as they had building Lego kits when Andrew was younger.

“My earliest memories are being on the job site

Gamification is the next level of experience offered by the 'go-kart forward' RPM brand.

with him and seeing things being built in real-time,” he says. “Then we'd go home and build Lego sets or get on the computer and build homes in The Sims together.”

Just as with Lego bricks, all the components for an indoor electric go-kart venue had to fit together perfectly.

“We are not a family entertainment center that has a bunch of attractions mixed together, trying to hit every age and demographic,” Farage says. “We are very much a go-karting-forward family entertainment center. You see that in our branding and identity and in the way we talk about ourselves, in our mission and our values, and especially in our spaces.”

Immersive Entertainment Offerings

The Farmingdale, New York, location boasts what the Farages share is the world's longest go-kart track, a 3,600-foot MegaTrack that earned a Guinness World Records title in 2025. Even so, it can only accommodate 35 racers at a time. Because of this, Andrew explains, “We have a fly-wheel of other immersive entertainment offerings.”

These include AAA games, a redemption center, a Hyperdeck VR arena, Gel Blasters, racing simulators, and mini bowling to keep visitors occupied for longer than a few races.

With every addition, the founders seek out activities that complement the thrill of racing. “People are coming into RPM ...

for that immersive, thrill-seeking experience,” he says.

For instance, Gel Blaster games—which Farage describes as “laser tag meets paintball in a co-operative multiplayer shooting experience”—give visitors an added dose of adrenaline at the Stamford, Connecticut,



location. If Kart Klash missiles miss opponents on the racetrack, visitors have a second chance at bragging rights in a game of strategy, speed, and aim on foot.

Expansion Considerations

Since launching the New Jersey location in 2010, RPM Raceway has grown to four locations: the Farmingdale (Long Island) and Stamford locations along with standalone facilities in Jersey City, New Jersey and inside the Destiny USA mall in Syracuse, New York where it enjoys a steady stream of walk-in customers.

Farage acknowledges that opening and running multiple locations posed a new set of challenges. “You have to have a consistent product offering so that your guests can have a similar experience no matter which location they go to,” he shares.

This philosophy led to a series of upgrades, with Stamford leading the charge. “Stamford is pretty set with all the bells and whistles,” Farage says.

Long Island is the second location to offer Kart Klash and the team is in the process of building out its food and beverage offerings, along with space for Gel Blaster games. Jersey City is poised for a major renovation this year, which will bring it up to speed with Long Island and Stamford.

Managing multiple locations was a big jump for the Farages as the brand grew. They had to build teams that could deliver the same level of service they committed to offering as a family-owned business.

“You need consistency in operations, policies, procedures, and SOPs [standard operating procedures],” Farage says.

Industry-Leading Technology

While the add-ons keep crowds at RPM long after the last go-kart lap and stellar service keeps them coming back, the FEC has built its success by hyper-focusing on its core offering: go-kart racing.

Since RPM caters to both family entertainment consumers and professionally oriented go-kart racers, the facility is in the process of upgrading all four venues to Sodi karts, which Farage describes as “the global leader” in the field.

The Sodi RSX2 models used are easily adjustable, comfortable to drive, and



RPM RACEWAY

feature a virtually noiseless engine. Because they are electric, they are also eco-friendly.

The karts are equipped with RPM’s proprietary racing technology platform R-Tech, delivering real-time race analytics and performance tracking to a steering –wheel-mounted LED.

Bringing Competition to the Track

The new technology also enables another format of racing, the first-of-its-kind Kart Klash. The game encourages friendly competition as racers aim to collect power-ups—displayed as LED holograms on the track—toss TNT to slow down opponents, and, ultimately, finish first.

The competition keeps enthusiasts and families coming back for racing and retribution.

Once racers are hooked on the format, RPM Raceway generates customer loyalty through money-saving memberships and racing bundles.

Building a New Generation of Racers

A segment of RPM’s customer base takes racing very seriously, and the company caters to that market as well.

The upgrade to Sodi karts enabled RPM to tap into the manufacturer’s network of mobile events, leagues, and standings. “When you race, you get your times to the millisecond,” Farage says. “Anyone who cares about progression can link their account to the Sodi World Series.”

For the upper echelon of racers, the Sodi World Series is held live in Europe in the spring and summer, attracting enthusiasts, pro racers, and Formula One scouts.

RPM also offers league racing, clinics, camps, and lessons, forging a path to professional racing. “Formula One continues to dominate in the U.S.,” Farage says. “The common denominator across Formula One race drivers and all motocross drivers is that they start in a go-kart. If we can be that outlet in a recreational setting that sparks the excitement or interest to take racing a little bit more competitively, then we have done our job.” 



Dawn Allcot is a seasoned freelance writer with more than 20 years experience. Her work has been featured in outlets including GoBankingRates, TheStreet, CNET, MSN, and Nifty50Plus. A theme park and roller coaster enthusiast, Dawn also shares her favorite travel tips at GeekTravelGuide. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#).



SILVER DOLLAR CITY



Two dedicated citizens (the name Silver Dollar City bestows upon their employees) serve up plates of their renowned food offerings.

The Value of Testing Food During Seasonal Events

by Dalton Fischer

SINCE SILVER DOLLAR CITY'S FOUNDING, "heritage foods" have been central to its 1880s-themed park experience, according to Terry Riddle, vice-president of food and beverage.

Reflecting on his half-century at the Branson, Missouri, park, Riddle recalls the vision from his predecessors. "We always needed our food to be different," he explains. "Our food needs to reflect our Ozark Mountains heritage with presentations that have that hand-crafted personal touch."

A Homespun Formula of Authenticity

That same spirit resides in the park's daily craft demonstrations, from glassblowing and pottery to blacksmithing and candy-making. Staying true to these Ozarkian methods and showman-style presentations presented a new challenge to the food and beverage team in 1972 with the addition of the park's first seasonal event.

SILVER DOLLAR CITY



A new company standard was set in 1992 with an interactive cooking presence taking center stage at the park's An Old Time Christmas festival. An overwhelming guest response that season led the team to expand food offerings for every festival.

Demonstrating seasonal food items from highly themed temporary food locations added an up-close-and-personal element that Silver Dollar City has become known for, thanks to dedicated team members sharing real stories working each demo—ultimately leading to rave guest reviews.

To keep up with ever-evolving guest expectations, the parks' food and beverage team visits renaissance and state fairs, pop-up markets, and famous culinary regions to research and benchmark popular items and trends.

Applying Internal Successes

Adopting the success of "craft shacks"—small huts, all moveable by forklift—adds additional capacity to serve seasonal food and beverage offerings. The park and events are enhanced with spaces that have ample power, appropriate protection from the elements, and POS connection to be self-sufficient.

"Now, there's no festival without food," proclaims Riddle. "We know if we can put quality ingredients in food that reflects our brand, and if we have our aces in their places, we'll have a successful food festival."

Gulf-caught shrimp is paired with grits for a Southern staple during the park's Spring Expo. Hand-stuffed apple dumplings are served hot and fresh with home-made cinnamon ice cream during An Old Time Christmas. Even funnel cake flavors swap throughout the year.

"Christmas always sees us bringing back the guest-favorite red velvet funnel cake with cream cheese icing," Hedrick explains. "We jump to wild berry for the spring, followed by our red, white, and

blue mix for the summer, along with apple. Of course, pumpkin makes an appearance during Harvest Festival.”

Guidance from Guest Feedback

The park’s Velvet Funnel Cake received IAAPA’s 2013 Brass Ring Award before serving as a reminder that some items are best being seasonal. Hedrick recounts the dessert’s demand led to a year-long run before its popularity eroded, leading to its temporary removal. “We knew we had to bring it back, but it would remain only available during the holidays,” Hedrick continues.

Seasonality allows the team to take smaller risks in the hopes of bigger rewards. While ice cream flavors like Tabasco, avocado, sweet corn, and onion never quite stuck, black walnut (an Ozarks flavor all its own) returned in summer 2025.

“We’re always trying to be ahead of trends, and we’re constantly watching to see what’s taking hold with our



SILVER DOLLAR CITY




SILVER DOLLAR CITY

guests,” says Riddle. In 2025, Silver Dollar City saw popularity of spicy foods mixed with a sweet counterpart and somewhat of a resurgence with pork belly.

Opportunities in Seasonality

Hedrick focuses on allergy awareness and dietary restrictions and choices. During the Bluegrass & BBQ festival, the park had an opportunity to test jackfruit barbecue as an answer to guest demand for vegetarian or vegan fare. “It’s a perfect fit for our festival because we can test the waters; we can see if this is an item we might be able to offer all year,” Riddle says.

While seasonality drives success, Riddle and Hedrick are mindful of the importance of staff-guest connections. “It goes back to the people,” teaches Riddle. “You put the right people in the right place, and that’s what makes that connection with the guest.” 



Dalton Fischer is a strategic communications professional who has served IAAPA twice as an IAAPA Expo Show Ambassador and a volunteer for various “Career Slam” sessions and webinars. He is co-producer of the Corkscrew Convos podcast. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#):



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Beyond Organic Social Media

How first-party data, AI, and AEO have evolved marketing

by Dawn Allcot

IF A FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTER, amusement park, zoo, aquarium or museum has relied on organic social media marketing in recent years, many now face increased challenges with reaching target audiences.

In 2025, Facebook's organic reach dropped to 1.37%, a decline from 16% in 2012, according to internet marketing and analytics firm Sandyriev. Instagram fell to a 4% organic reach, representing a year-over-year decline as high as 18%.

In a blog post, Sandyriev attributed the decline in organic traffic across social platforms to algorithm changes and content saturation—not paid social. Researchers for the firm discovered that reach is down across the board, regardless of ad spend. The algorithms for paid and organic reach operate independently of each other.

Meanwhile, TikTok continues to battle problems with user privacy and, at press time, the deal that would make U.S. investors, including Oracle, majority owners of the platform still had not been finalized as of press time in late Dec. 2025.

Paid Social and Diminishing Returns

For many brands, paid social seems to be an obvious solution to address diminishing organic reach. However, this tactic also comes with drawbacks.

"Social media advertising ... has gotten pickier and less predictable," says Amandine Servain, vice president of marketing at the AI-supported marketing platform Wunderkind. "Algorithms shift, tracking gets throttled, and you often end up paying to reach the same guest multiple times with limited clarity on ROI. For attractions, that can mean big budgets with diminishing returns, while platforms keep most of the data and control."

The Shift to First-Party Data and Owned Channels

Servain emphasizes the importance of relying on first-party data—information guests have willingly shared—to reach a target customer base.

"Attraction brands are increasingly shifting toward owned and direct channels that build long-term guest relationships," Servain says. "Email, SMS, and on-site personalization are leading the charge."

For instance, Wunderkind implemented its agentic AI technology for United Parks & Resorts' SeaWorld Orlando to capture website visitor data and trigger one-to-one messages relevant to the audience at that exact moment.

"Before partnering with Wunderkind," Servain says, "SeaWorld relied heavily on generic email and digital campaigns that weren't personalized enough to drive action. They had plenty of site traffic, but most of those visitors left before purchasing—meaning before SeaWorld had any way of identifying them."

Campaigns included personalized email remarketing, browser abandonment



follow-ups, and cart recovery messages aligned with visitor behavior and the park's offers.

After seeing fast results, the parent company implemented the technology across all its parks, which include Sesame Place, SeaWorld San Antonio, SeaWorld San Diego, Busch Gardens Williamsburg, Busch Gardens Tampa, and Aquatica. Bookings increased by five times, according to a case study published by Wunderkind.

"Each park benefits from the same underlying identity and personalization engine, but with localized campaigns tailored to its audience and brand tone," Servain tells Funworld.

Similar strategies can work for smaller parks and attractions, as well. "Instead of generic blasts, a local park can automatically remind someone who viewed birthday party packages, but didn't book or nudge frequent visitors toward a season pass renewal at just the right moment," she says.

Local Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

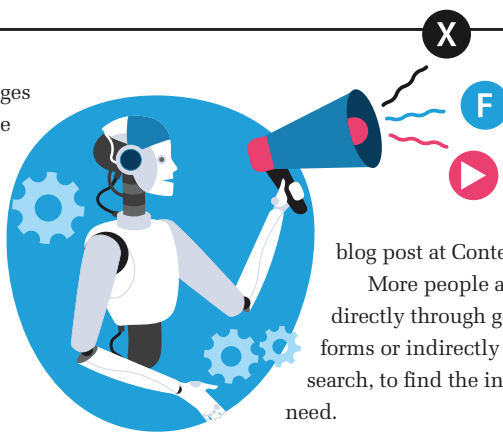
Of course, to capture first-party data, it's important to drive new traffic to a company's website, app, or other owned channels. Local SEO is a good place to start, since Google still dominates search traffic.

Ethan Collins, senior marketing and tech manager at Houston-based IT and marketing firm Esclatech, emphasizes the importance of making sure a business' branding is consistent across directories and review sites.

"AI agents pull from Google data," he says. "They look at reviews, local citations, and mentions. They look at the schema markup on your website, the structured data, and if your brand has consistent name, address, and phone number information. If you have good reviews and consistent information, you'll be the first link people will find."

SEO and Answer Engine Optimization (AEO)

Google may dominate search, but its power is shrinking. In 2025, Google's



market share dropped under 90% for the first time since 2015, according to a

blog post at ContentGrip.com.

More people are using AI, either directly through generative AI platforms or indirectly through AI-powered search, to find the information they need.

"Right now, in terms of visibility, AI engines are No. 1," Collins says.

Additionally, an Adobe Express survey reported by ContentGrip.com found that 77% of people are using ChatGPT as a search engine. AEO and SEO can—and should—work together as a multi-layered marketing approach.

"AEO is the next generation and evolution of SEO, designed to make your content more discoverable for AI [platforms, such as] ChatGPT, Gemini, or Perplexity," Collins says. "In traditional SEO, the user clicks the link to read more. AI actually provides a direct answer. In terms of user behavior, it's easier for them to access something through an AEO."

As we enter the age of "no-click" search, where users are finding the information they need without going directly to a company website, AEO can't be ignored.

Revisiting the Case for Paid Social

Despite the other channels available today, paid social, done properly, can complement other marketing tactics. But it's crucial to pinpoint lookalike audiences accurately without duplicating current customers.


Lookalike audiences are people who exhibit similar characteristics and behaviors as current clients. But overlap leads to wasted spending and reduced ROI.

Noting that marketers need paid social that "works smarter, not harder," Servain shares that Wunderkind's Audiences for Meta, a service of their platform, suppresses guests already in an email or SMS database and refreshes daily for the most up-to-date information.

"Ads target the same precise audiences that perform in email and SMS directly and repeatedly, without paying to retarget the same guest over and over again," she explains.

A Powerful Story

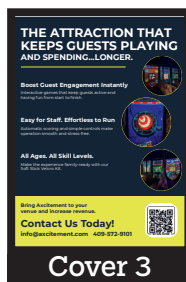
Marketers have more channels than ever before to reach clients, but the brand's message and story must remain at the core of every campaign.

Whether refining SEO strategy to include AEO or retargeting audiences using first-party data, the most effective campaigns come back to storytelling and the guest experience. "Automated messaging still needs the creativity and empathy of a real marketer to ensure it feels authentic and on-brand," Servain concludes. 

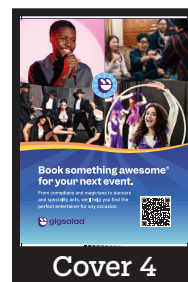
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Letter from 2026 IAAPA Chair of the Global Board of Directors

We Are All IAAPA

I ASSUME THE IAAPA CHAIRMANSHIP with one clear conviction: success in our industry is never individual. I stand here today thanks to my family's legacy and the vision of my uncle, Marcelo Periales, who taught me that the most meaningful work is always accomplished as a team. My purpose, however, is not to look back—it is to inspire movement forward.

During my year as your IAAPA chair, I want to strengthen the very qualities that define a truly great team—forging the strong, united, and forward-thinking IAAPA we all deserve.

Cooperation

IAAPA has taught me one of the most valuable lessons of my career: how to turn competitors into friends and colleagues into collaborators. My personal motto, “It’s not about me—it’s about us,” captures the spirit of that lesson. A strong team disarms ego and recognizes that when one market succeeds, we all advance. Our diversity in cultures, experiences, and perspectives is not a challenge—it is our greatest strength.

Inspiration

A great team never stops asking questions. Innovation is not an expense—it is the ongoing search for where tomorrow’s magic will emerge. We must share knowledge freely, nurture curiosity, and look for the next breakthrough in every corner of the world—from the smallest park to the largest destination. Our future depends on being bold futurists who not only observe change but act decisively upon it.

Dynamism

Operating in unpredictable markets has taught us to become dynamos—an unstoppable source of energy and adaptability. True strength is not defined by the absence of challenges but by the integrity and perseverance with which we overcome them. Our shared passion for creating “wow”




Luciana Periales marches to her own beat while simultaneously aligning herself with IAAPA's strategic priorities as 2026 chair of the IAAPA Global Board of Directors.

“Together—not divided—we will become the most powerful global team in IAAPA’s history.”

moments fuels our industry, turning obstacles into opportunities and uncertainty into momentum.

The time to lead with these attributes is now. Together—not divided—we will become the most powerful global team in IAAPA’s history. Together, we will continue building an industry that is bigger, stronger, and safer for generations to come.

Strength does not reside in one person alone. The dynamo is not just me—it is every IAAPA member who contributes energy, vision, and unwavering commitment to our shared mission. 

Luciana Periales is the CEO of Neverland, a chain of family entertainment centers in Argentina and 2026 IAAPA Chair of the Global Board of Directors. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#):



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