

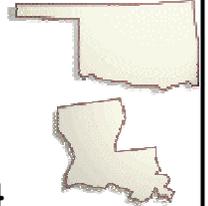


The Queue Line Chronicle



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ACE South Central Region—Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana—Summer 2004

Sea World San Antonio and Six Flags Fiesta Texas Gives the South Central Region a Double Shot of Holiday Fun

By Jason Knutson, Mike Miller, Bill Lentsch and David Lipnicky with photos by Jason Knutson (unless noted)

And now for something (almost) completely different ... In an attempt to ensure our regional newsletter does not become the Jason, Scott, and Curly show, the Regional Rep Team has occasionally asked various members to contribute articles over the past year. In an attempt to take this endeavor one-step further, we asked members from outside



Shark Bash group photo by S. Madonna Horcher

The next day brought us to Sea World for Shark Bash, and Mike has a point about those Texas enthusiasts ... they're not even "on time", they're EARLY for everything. -- Bill "Gator" Lentsch

Walking into the Shark Bash at Sea World San Antonio it was nice to run into David Lipnicky ... David walked us back to Steel Eel and we got our first taste of how Texas

our region who attended their very first Shark Bash and Fiesta Fest events this past May to contribute Trip Reports on these two simply stellar shindigs to augment this year's article. The base article comes from Assistant Regional Rep Jason Knutson, while Mike "BaSSiStiSt" Miller of California and Bill "Gator" Lentsch of Florida provides the first-timer perspectives from the west and east coasts. Curly was fool enough to volunteer to weave all the material into some type of funky tapestry of thoughts and feelings. Whether we did this to incorporate fresh perspectives, spice-up the format of an event article, just because we were a little bored, or Regional Rep Curly has ridden too many Boomerang coasters, is something we may not divulge, so have some fun reading this article (and selecting your reason why we decided to trick things up a bit)!

enthusiasts embrace events. -- Mike Miller

As ERT ended and the entire park was now open to all guests, many members took the opportunity to go check out the first and only new coaster in Texas since Titan opened in 2001, *Shamu Express*. A nice little family Zierer coaster with cars shaped like killer whales.

Steel Eel is clearly a great mini-hyper, and my favorite "all Morgan" coaster. Good air throughout and a VERY solid ride ... Great White has the best theming, and I love the fog/misters -- intense and fun ... Shamu Express, very photogenic ride, nice-looking trains (but as noted, watch the crotch!). -- "Gator"

For the 4th year in a row, parks in the San Antonio area hosted multiple coaster events over Memorial Day weekend. This year saw the return of Shark Bash, hosted by Sea World San Antonio and the 4th year of Fiesta Fest, hosted by Fiesta Texas.

Steel Eel is a fun mini-hyper with some great air in spots. The mid-course brake is a bit of a party-killer, but the ride is still a kick. Great White runs acceptably well ... Shamu Express was the last coaster in the park and is a fun little mini, but beware the crotch crushing bump on the seat. The log ride was fun with a great double down, and the raft ride got us pretty wet, which was good considering the 90-degree weather and high humidity. (Good lord, do people actually LIVE in humidity like this?)

The weekend got off to a start on Saturday morning at Sea World with David Lipnicky, Jason Knutson, and Jeremy Murphy handling registration at the front gate. After registration, it was off to 2 hours of ERT on *Steel Eel* and *Great White*, which were both running two trains and gave attendees the opportunity for dozens of rides during the 2-hour session.



-- Mike



The Curly Seat

A view from the South Central Regional Rep seat

David Lipnicky—ACE South Central Regional Rep
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Although it has taken years of hard work, I am somewhat fortunate to have a career that entails a large amount of travel. While business travels outside of ACE make for an exhausting life, it currently provides me tremendous opportunities to visit amusement parks all over the country. This spring and summer gave the ability to ride new coasters -- and old favorites -- from Atlanta, to Denver, to Ohio, to Minnesota, and almost every place in between. During my travels it dawned on me that I have experienced some of the very best and very worst of coaster train comfort this year. Whether I am just more experienced riding coasters as I have grown older, or my aging body has grown more sensitive to the ride characteristics and coaster car comfort, I have discovered that I have grown far more discriminating in what I like and do not like in coaster trains -- both wood and steel.

The focus of this commentary will be on woodies because steel coasters generally provide a smoother ride overall and (despite *Millennium Force* at Cedar Point being my current #1 overall coaster) I generally have a preference of wood over steel. Some of the more 'comfy' (and quite enjoyable) rides I experienced most recently were on the *Big Dipper* at Geauga Lake during Coaster Con and the *High Roller* at Valleyfair! in Minnesota. Big, thick, cushy padding cradled riders while delivering an exciting ride on *Dipper* and a fun ride for the entire family in the case of *Roller*. Maybe the biggest surprise was the noticeably soft padding now used on *Shivering Timbers* (still my #1 woodie) and *Wolverine Wildcat* at Michigan's Adventure. The replacement of the harder rubber seats with a vastly more patron-friendly materials earns a huge "two arms up" from this very appreciative rider.

A couple coasters I really enjoyed this summer were the new spinning coasters at Mall of America's Camp Snoopy (*Timberline Twister*) and Worlds of Fun (*Spinning Dragons*). Overall these twisting twins are exciting and very fun.

However, the fairly hard (and arguably

unnecessary) headrests were the one feature of the coaster cars that on a few occasions suddenly interrupted my enjoyment. There were more than a few coasters this summer that contained unpleasant headrests. One other unpleasant element I find quite prevalent on many wood coasters are the lapbars. I have always disliked individually ratcheting lapbars, but I never really thought about why. I now know why. Many actually do not situate on the lap, but right up at many rider's ribs. This particular lapbar placement can actually make even a family coaster possess some unpleasant ride characteristics.

At the extremely unpleasant end of the spectrum, was a woodie - a twister - at a major theme park in the southeast. This particular coaster had been a thrilling ride I often enjoyed many times between 1997 and 2000. However, this spring it let me know in specific terms that it sports the hardest seat and padding materials I have ever experienced on a coaster. While I am used to many coasters having a rather hard rubber-type material for the seats, this coaster contained materials almost as hard as what you would find on a Goodyear steel-belted tire for not just for the seat, but the side padding too. (This one also had the rib-riding lapbars.) Sadly, the current materials transfer every vibration into the riders' back and ribs. When it comes to extremely powerful twisters - like this coaster - side padding is a crucial element for the rolling stock. It was not surprising that virtually nobody stayed for a re-ride on this coaster during ERT at a coaster event this spring.

I know that many parks decided to move to

materials that require less maintenance or are more vandalism-proof for their coasters. However, I ask parks and ride manufacturers to reconsider this way of thinking for three reasons. First, key goals for any park are to provide enjoyable and safe experiences. When you think about it, rock-hard seats/padding (and very unpleasant lapbars) on many coasters - especially woodies - flies right in the face of both "enjoyability" and to a lesser extent safety. It does not take a rocket scientist to know that padding reduces the effects of G-forces on the body. Second, it is undeniable that coasters are generally the biggest drawing force for most amusement parks. Adding unpleasant features to a coaster train will lessen the demand for the ride. As a result, sooner or later that coaster's drawing power for the park will be noticeably diminished and that eventually equates to less revenue for the park. Last, the legendary *Coney Island Cyclone* resides in New York City and is situated in an area of the city my former in-laws - lifetime New Yorkers - considered rather rough, but guess what? This masterpiece of mayhem had proudly retained its sofa-like seats and padding to this day. Turning the cliché "If you can make it in New York City, you can make it anywhere", I put forth that if comfortable padding can make it in New York City (for decades on the arguably best known coaster in history), it can make it anywhere.

I respectfully ask our parks and coaster manufacturers to jointly place rider comfort in seats, padding, headrests, and lapbars higher up in their coaster train design and selection decisions. And that my friends is my view from The Curly Seat.

Dave's Top 10 Comfy Coach Coasters

10. *Phantom's Revenge* - Kennywood (West Mifflin, PA)
9. *Texas Tornado* - Wonderland Park (Amarillo, TX)
8. *Thunderbolt* - Kennywood (West Mifflin, PA)
7. *Zippin Pippin* - Libertyland (Memphis, TN)
6. *Jack Rabbit* - Kennywood (West Mifflin, PA)
5. *Coney Island Cyclone* - Astroland Park (Astoria, NY)
4. *Roar!* - Six Flags Marine World (Vallejo, CA)
3. *Lighting Racers* - Hershey Park (Hershey, PA)
2. *Ozark Wildcat* - Celebration City (Branson, MO)
1. *Lakeside Cyclone* - Lakeside Park (Denver, CO)

Shark Bash / Fiesta Fest (continued from page 1)

Sea World provided a very delicious fajita lunch at the Grand Pavilion where a few park staff members stopped by to say hello and answer a few questions. After lunch, Sea World staff escorted the attendees over to Shamu Stadium for early seating at the Shamu show and the group photo.

After FINDING our lunch area, we met up with Shamu (in costume, the REAL Shamu was busy), and got some pictures with him (or is it her?). Anyway, the food was delicious and plentiful ... not TOO surprising for a Busch park, but really good Tex-Mex fare, which had already started to become a trend. After lunch, we went to the Shamu show, where a section was set aside for event attendees ... thankfully a few rows beyond the Splash Zone. Really good show, I thought it was considerably better, and more energetic, than the one at Orlando's Sea World. -- "Gator"

I've seen the Shamu show in California before, but Texas' was bigger and better. Shamu has a GREAT stadium at this park and they put on a very fun show. -- Mike

As the afternoon progressed, members took time to see the other shows Sea World offered and even spend some time in the park's Lost Lagoon waterpark before it was time to head down the road to Fiesta Texas for the evening ERT session.

We headed off to Six Flags Fiesta Texas. I thought I had been to some good Six Flags properties before (SFA, SFMW) but this place easily outclassed any other I had visited. The funny thing about SFFT is that it just doesn't seem like much before you visit ... All three of us commented on how sneaky this park was at infiltrating your sensibilities and impressing the HELL out of you! Driving up to the park one is really struck first by the location; dramatic quarry walls with beautiful natural color, and strategically placed waterfalls dropping down here and there. The park was much more spread out and larger than I thought it would be. The Rattler is flat-out awesome looking, just dominating it's corner of the park, and dwarfing the nearby Roadrunner Express mine train coaster. -- Mike

Upon entry to the park, I couldn't help but notice the OUTSTANDING theming at Fiesta Texas ... the buildings in the entranceway just give an amazing Southwestern flavor to the park. -- "Gator"

*FIESTA TEXAS HOSPITALITY SIDE NOTE: Figuring that the locals working at the park might be able to track down "the road of many names", I stopped by Guest Relations. First thing, when I asked them for a pay phone to make my call (I left my cell in the car since I wasn't expecting any calls), they offer the use of THEIR phone. Hmm, that's weird, but NICE. When I get the hotel on the phone, the lady at GR is looking over the map with me, and tracing my route to the hotel. Sure enough, I needed to be on one of those *access roads*, wouldn't have found the place without the help. I don't expect THAT level of assistance from my family and friends, and here I am getting it from a total stranger? Six Flags parks just aren't supposed to be THIS friendly. -- "Gator"*

Attendees arriving at Fiesta Texas were greeted by park employees Ryan and Joy who were handing out the registration materials which included a nifty laminated badge and lanyard which had the event schedule on the back and a event t-shirt. Director of Entertainment, David Blazer, escorted arriving members into the park to catch a few rides while the park was still open to the public. As the park closed, everyone gathered in Sangerfest Halle for some snacks and drinks and a private viewing of one of the park's award-winning shows, 'Heatwave – The Sounds of Motown'.



Casey, Steven and Daniel enjoy some Great White ERT



This is what happens when you attend events as a non-member!



Lore Barnes takes a spin on the new Shamu Express

Photo by: S. Madonna Horcher



Diane and Judi Allen of Louisiana enjoy Poltergeist.



The park showed its true hospitality and love for enthusiasts immediately, providing drinks and snacks as we waited. It was announced that one of the park's musical acts would put on a show while we waited ... grumble ... I'm just not a "show" person. After witnessing some REALLY bad shows at parks over the years

(patriotic mime troupe, anyone?), I was just dreading it. Surprise, surprise ... the 6 singers put on a GREAT show, running through some great material with real talent and involving the crowd in some special ways. This was my first clue that SFFT is not what we normally expect from a park. I actually found myself a little bummed that the show was over and we had to go ride some rides! -- Mike

While the park was being cleared, we had snacks and waited in the air conditioning ... and were served more of that awesome San Antonio hospitality. I had seen the signs proclaiming that the park had received MANY Golden Ticket awards for Best Shows, and now we were to find out why. Fiesta Fest is a big deal for the park, and "best foot forward" would have to be an understatement. The Motown Revue show apparently out-volunteered a couple other shows for the dubious privilege of entertaining a bunch of sweaty ACEers. David L. told them we were "out-of-towners" so we were selected to have the (VERY pretty and equally talented) female singers serenade us with some classic Motown music. Mike opted out, but Tony and I were "willing participants" (I was probably more EAGER than willing, but you get my drift). I am partial to Motown to begin with, so this was RIGHT up my alley. WHEN you go to Fiesta Texas, be sure to catch some of the shows, they won those Golden Ticket awards with GOOD reason as the production was VERY professional. Did I mention how talented the cast was? Wow, WAY more than just good looks, although those were in abundance as well.

-- "Gator"

Once Security cleared the park, it was time for ERT on *Poltergeist* and *Scream*.

Almost sadly, we had to say goodbye to the performers, and head out for ERT. Seeing the first shot/drop of *Scream!* reminded us that we WERE there for the rides. -- "Gator"

Scream! was first for us, and it's now one of my favorite S & S towers ... certainly THE favorite when it comes to the really tall ones. I love the combo program as it makes for a bit longer ride and it shows off both tricks the towers can do. Add in the cool vistas of the quarry walls, and San Antonio off in the distance, and you have a winner. -- Mike

It was at *Poltergeist*, which has been a favorite of many since the modification to lapbars, that members experienced one of the most enthusiastic ride ops many had ever seen, Gina. She seemed to have more energy than all those in attendance combined and made for a very fun evening ERT session.

We went over to *Poltergeist*. I knew Mike wasn't a big fan of these rides, but I hoped this one would be different for him ... and was it ever! Fantastic crew, the best lead op I've ever run across in Gina (Gina ROCKS!), and an amazingly good spaghetti bowl ... we rode and rode until

the park staff had to go home.

-- "Gator"

We then went over to *Poltergeist*. Honestly, I didn't "get" these coasters before this night. I enjoyed my first (PKI's FoF) but thought that both Joker's Jinx and PKD's FoF were extremely bad when I rode them last



year. For some reason, I really GOT *Poltergeist* this night. I think it was partly the ride, which was running VERY well. I had never noticed before the steadily building intensity at the end of the ride and *Poltergeist* had this in spades. It seemed to be a few MPH faster than any others I had ridden, with no braking, and that made a huge difference. Add in a fun group to ride with, and especially add in a GREAT ride operator ("Gi-na! Gi-na!") and it turned into a magical night. I rode over and over until they kicked me off ... sweating, screaming, and just having a grand old time. Didn't expect that at all. -- Mike

Sunday morning started out with ERT on *Superman Krypton Coaster*.

The next morning's ERT on *Superman Krypton Coaster* was fantastic, and that stealie doesn't take time to warm up ... while some went out to the "cliff top tour", I rode and rode and rode. *Krypton* is the highlight stealie in San Antonio. Normally, I'm not that big of a B&M fan, or a floorless fan either, but this ride shows how well they work with "constraints" (in this case, the cliff wall directly in front of the lift). The drop off the lift, RIGHT alongside the cliff wall, and into that BIGGEST loop imaginable ... more hang time than anyone could possibly need ...



which isn't to say I don't CRAVE it. Back up on top of the cliff wall, and all kinds of craziness kicks in. SKC is clearly my favorite floorless coaster, and even my favorite B&M overall, an AWESOME steel coaster.

-- "Gator"

The park did good, running three trains for the ERT ... The first drop is intense and the vertical loop is one of my favorites anywhere, with some great hangtime. However, my absolute favorite part of the ride was the little helix on top of the cliff. I loved how the element started by racing next to the cliff wall, thus causing the dominant visual to be the rock face running vertically next to you. As the train hops up and over the quarry wall, the visual changes to the horizontal plane in a dramatic fashion.

I do have to say that Superman Krypton Coaster is easily my favorite floorless.

-- Mike



Tornado photo by Tim Baldwin

Members not wanting to spend the entire ERT session riding were able to get a head start on the ever-popular cliff tour, which included a stop at the waterfalls and fireworks launching area this year. Next, it was time for some ERT on the newest addition to the park,

Tornado, a Proslide Tornado ride located in the park's waterpark.

My first Tornado ride and I was vastly looking forward to it. This is one of the shorter-length ones, with basically a 180-turn, a severe drop, and right into the funnel. That drop was O.O.C. (Officially Out of Control) and I got to ride it backwards on the first run ... holy @\$%, I almost soiled the water! These rides are great, a little different every time. SFFT really needs the raft conveyor up to the top, but after I heard how much they cost, I can understand going without. I had my personal raft valet Gator lug the raft up for penny tips, the only way to go. We managed about 6 trips on this great ride before a quick break in the park's immense, Texas-shaped wave pool. Good times!

-- Mike

I loved their Tornado, and it was really REALLY fast going down the hill after the 180-degree turn. We went HIGH into the funnel, and had several great rides. I understand now HOW expensive those conveyor systems for the rafts are, but I have to say I consider them a WISE investment (hint hint). -- "Gator"

As the ERT ended and the waterpark opened to the public there was still time to check out the other rides before it was time for lunch. As always, Fiesta Texas provided a wonderful lunch in the Mi Pueblito restaurant. Temptingly tasty Taco Salads were on the menu this year with the choice of beef, chicken, or both. As everyone enjoyed their lunch, various park officials stopped by to visit and talk for a bit including the park's new General Manager, Martin Bozer.

After changing into dry clothes, we made it to lunch (arriving late again!) and were treated to a warm reception and a very healthy taco salad luncheon. Very tasty and it showed off another area SFFT excels in,



Fiesta Fest 2004 group photo by S. Madonna Horcher

catering. -- Mike

After lunch, it was time for a quick group photo and then everyone was free to enjoy the rest of the park. Many took advantage of the early seating offered at the Reflections at Rockville show as well as the opportunity to watch the final show of the day, the always fun Lone Star Spectacular. Once Security cleared the park one final time, it was once again time for ERT -- this time on *Rattler* and *Roadrunner Express*.

The first two drops were absolutely outstanding, and the tunnel drop of the cliff is better than that. I really kind of liked the Rattler ... Roadrunner Express had some very cool theming and a severe drop (for a mine train, anyways).

-- Mike

Couldn't help but notice that Roadrunner Express was the MOST elaborately-themed coaster in the chain, and an absolute HOOT to ride. The beauty, both natural and man-made, takes Fiesta Texas to a new level, and when combined with the employees, makes SFFT one of my absolute favorites within the chain. -- "Gator"



As everyone exited the park for the evening, the fantastic Fiesta staff handed attendees this year's surprise gift, which was a 'Tornado' drink mixer that was a promotional item for the new ride. As everyone picked up their gift and said their goodbyes, another exciting Memorial Day weekend in San Antonio had come to a very pleasant and exciting end. The South Central Region gives a huge "Thank You" to all the staff at Sea World and Fiesta Texas for making this another great holiday weekend!

ACE South Central Says Goodbye To A Valued Partner And Friend



Daryl at the Texas Cyclone 25th Anniversary Celebration

Saying goodbye is never an easy task, and it seems once again ACE is unfortunately having to say “Good luck and farewell” to yet another of our close friends within the Six Flags community. It’s with a heavy heart that we all learned last month that Ms. Daryl Freedman, Public Relations Manager for Six Flags AstroWorld, had decided to move on.

Having recently expanded the Freedman family via the birth of her son Will, Daryl made the difficult decision of leaving Six Flags and taking a position with an outside marketing firm that will allow for her to spend more time with her family. While we in ACE will greatly miss her wonderfully generous hospitality, we will continue to revel in her accomplishments during her tenure, especially with the upcoming “Coaster Masquerade” event this October.

One of the most significant rewards from Daryl’s efforts would have to be the renewed relationship between ACE and AstroWorld. Somewhat tarnished from earlier years, Daryl decided it was time to change all that. AstroWorld was host to Winterfest 2002 and Spring Con 2003, and with a little help from her fellow partners in crime, Daryl was able to handcraft two great memorable events that helped change a few opinions about our humble little park.

While AstroWorld has not officially named a new public relations manager as of the time of this writing, we’re currently working with Ms. Joyce Ballenger who is helping ensure that enthusiasts are always welcome within the gates of the Six Flags Houston complex. Joyce and Daryl had worked closely during the years, so she’s pretty used to our wonderfully bizarre love of theme parks.

We have been very fortunate to have had Daryl as a friend of ACE for the past 5 years, and I’m sure all of you will join me in wishing her the very best of luck in her future endeavors.

—Jason McMillon

Photo by Jason McMillon



Nuts & Bolts (Items in Brief)

Flooding and Shock Wave—Flooding this past June has shut down *Shock Wave* until September. However, the ride should be operational by Lone Star Coasterthon. Torrential rains and flooding in late June eroded the soil around the 26-year-old coaster legend. The Texas double-looper has been closed since June 29 while the soil is

shored up, the ride is checked by a team of inspectors, and repairs are made. Six Flags decided to perform the ground repairs after Aug. 22, when its daily season ends. Crews will then be able to perform the needed ground maintenance on the weekdays as the park operates during weekends.

ACE Volunteer Coordinator—For many years, the ACE Volunteer Coordinator position has been in our Region with Mike Robinson. Judy Curtis, who was recently announced as ACE’s new Volunteer

Coordinator, suffered sudden illness and will not be able to take this position as she goes through a rather long recuperation period. In an effort to help the organization in a time of need, our own Scott Connor has agreed to take on the position of Interim Volunteer Coordinator. Despite his new national duties, Scott will remain as one of our South Central Regional Reps. While we congratulate Scott for his new position (and his willingness to help), please remember to keep Judy in our thoughts and prayers.

Thank You!

The David, Scott, & Jason Regional Rep Team would like to thank the following people for help with this newsletter and offering assistance at events: Tim Baldwin, Jeffery Seifert, Mike Miller, Bill Lentszch, Jason McMillon, S. Madonna Horcher, Jeremy Murphy, Mike Robinson, Dawn Robinson, and Stacey Glaeser

The South Central Dispatch is now The Queue Line Chronicle!

We hope you like the new name and look of your regional newsletter as we try to pack in more features and information. Keep an eye out for more changes in future editions!

THE CROSSOVER—News From Neighboring Regions

Southeast (Region 14) - Upcoming Events

- Carolina Coaster Classic – August 21 at Paramount’s Carowinds (www.acesoutheast.org/C32004.pdf)
- Ace Day at Lake Winnie – August 29 at Lake Winnepesaukah (www.acesoutheast.org)
- Miracle Strip Goodbye – September 4 at Miracle Strip Amusement Park (www.acesoutheast.org)

Southwest (Region 20) - Upcoming Events

- ACE Day in Vegas – October 23-24
 - Stratosphere Tower (3 rides)
 - Sahara (*Speed*)
 - NASCAR Café (Lunch)
 - Circus Circus/Adventuredome
 - Buffalo Bills (*Desperado*)

(More details will be posted on the regional website)

Have you visited <http://www.acesouthcentral.org> lately?

Things you can do at the ACE South Central web site:

- Sign up for e-mail updates
- Sign up for the members only section to download current and past newsletters
- View photos from regional events held since 1998
- View photos and information about parks in our region
- View event information and download event flyers
- Find links to other ACE regional web sites
- ...and much, much more!