

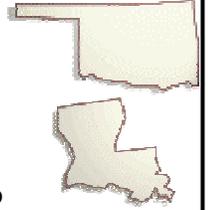


The Queue Line Chronicle



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ACE South Central Region—Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana—Winter/Spring 2006

Bad Weather Fails to Dampen Spirits at Winterfest 2006

Attendees look over the door prize tables as they arrive.



Photo by Jason Knutson

ACE seems to have some of the worst luck with the weather when it comes to events at Six Flags Over Texas, and sure enough, attendees arrived to a cold, drizzly Saturday morning at the park. Thankfully, this was Winterfest, with 100% of the activities planned for indoors. With 100 people on the attendee list representing no less than 9 states, the event planners knew they had so many surprises in store it was guaranteed everyone was going to walk away at the end of the day with a smile on their faces.

It's no secret that the South Central Region is rewarded with not just great parks, but great people. As part of the recognition of members, our Regional Rep team created the Golden Track award. The award is presented to long-time regional members who have provided outstanding service to ACE at the regional level for extended periods of time. This year the recipient was Gary Slade, a man famous for his contributions to the theme park community. From event planning to museum

contributions, Gary's tireless efforts to preserve and promote the art of the roller coaster are unparalleled.

Speaking of the regional rep team, our region has added one more to the family. It was announced at Winterfest 2006 that Jeremy Murphy has accepted the position of Assistant Regional Rep. While false rumors exist that David Lipnicky simply wanted someone on the team that made him look taller, Jeremy contributes a vast plethora of services to ACE. From hosting the regional website, acesouthcentral.org, his numerous articles for the Queue Line Chronicle, to his amazing eye for capturing the grace of a roller coaster on film, Jeremy's addition to the team brings a wealth of resources, and well yes, makes David look taller.

With the West Texas Round-Up right around the corner, we were visited by Paul Borchardt, Owner and General Manager of Wonderland Amusement Park in Amarillo. He dropped by to personally invite everyone out to Amarillo this May and to talk a little about the park. If you've only visited the big chains and never a family run operation, this is a great place to start. With an abundance of Texas hospitality, y'all will feel right at home.

One of the perks of our region is that it seems each of the parks continually try to out-do one another with the cuisine they serve to ACE members at events. Six Flags offered up your choice of pit-smoked steak or chicken, enormous baked Titan Taters, salad and all the fixins! And what event held at Six Flags Over Texas would be complete without Pink Things? Hopefully we'll never have to find out. But one has to wonder, just what can they possibly do to continue to top themselves? Time will tell.

And speaking of perks, what a fantastic deal Six Flags over Texas offered members in attendance. Who would have imagined a Six Flags over Texas season pass for just \$29.99?! Nearly all in attendance took advantage of this special deal.

If there was any one focal point of the entire day, it was Ron Toomer, former head of Arrow Development/Dynamics during most of the 1980s. Ron's work in Texas is most known for the *Runaway Mine Train* at Six Flags Over Texas, and *Excalibur / Dexter Frebush's Electric Roller Ride, XLR-8*, and the Alpine Sleighs at the now closed Six Flags AstroWorld in Houston, Texas. Mr. Toomer delighted those in attendance as he reminisced about the early days working on those rides, among other stories. He even took time to answer a few questions from those in attendance. Before Mr. Toomer left, he was presented with a photo of *Magnum* at Cedar Point signed by all those in attendance with their favorite Arrow coaster noted on the mat.

Paul Borchardt from Wonderland Park

Photo:David Lipnicky





The Curly Seat

A view from the South Central Regional Rep seat

David Lipnicky—ACE South Central Regional Rep
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Reflections of My All Too Brief Relationship with AstroWorld – Part II

[In Part I of this Curly Seat from the Fall 2005 edition, I briefly discussed some of my initial feelings regarding the announcement of AstroWorld's closure and some of the various efforts to save the park.]

Let us slide back 30 years from AstroWorld's last days. I was about to turn 12-years old when I had my first *near-experience* with AstroWorld in 1974. On a family vacation to the Texas Gulf coast and central Texas, we were to spend two days in the Houston area. As we drove by (I repeat "by") the Astrodome and AstroWorld, my dad started to speed up – as he usually did when we were coming up by on an amusement park – and said once again "Don't even ask" before I could open my mouth. (While my mom is an amusement park fan, my dad is *not*.) I had to settle on a 70mph drive by as I swiveled my head back and forth between the 8th wonder of the world (as the Astrodome was known back then) and the sixth amusement park that I knew existed. I was sitting in the front passenger seat as we cruised west along I-610 in a driving rain, so I did not get to see much of the park. I never thought I would get to AstroWorld again.

Launch ahead 20 years. It was my third year in ACE back in 1995, and I had only been to a very small number of parks. Possibly prompted by the TV commercials airing all the way in Dallas/Fort Worth for the new *Mayan Mindbender* roller coaster, my son, Kevin shocks his mom and dad by saying he wants a trip to AstroWorld with his old man as his present for his 10th birthday. I still had never been to AstroWorld, so I am game, and his mom does not object so we schedule a three-day trip for Houston. On our father-son drive down to the park, I try to tell Kevin that I did not expect the *Mayan Mindbender* to be the ultra-thrill-extreme coaster he was expecting from the park's ominously mysterious commercials. I tell him that we may expect that type of experience from *Viper*, *Ultra Twister*, and *Greezed Lightnin'*. I add that despite what I heard about the coffin-esque headrests for the *Texas Cyclone* and the lack of fly-by scenery for *XLR8*, I am very excited to ride my third Bill Cobb woodie and my very first suspended coaster.

While my son learned firsthand that the *Mayan Mindbender* was actually a family coaster in the dark and it rained all three days we were at AstroWorld, *Viper*, *Ultra Twister*, *Greezed Lightnin'* and *Excalibur* delivered every bit of fun and thrills we hoped. The rain also kept the

usually Hades-like August temperatures under 80 degrees and the park almost completely empty all three days. We got our first rides on *Texas Cyclone* and *XLR8*, *Serpent* packed more fun delight than its kiddie coaster height telegraphed, and non-existent crowds prompted the ride ops at *Greezed Lightnin'* to give us multiple triple and quadruple-launches on our first and last days at the park -- truly heavenly, as this was our favorite ride in the park. Kevin and I will always remember this truly special trip quite fondly. Our infatuation with AstroWorld had become something more.

In 1998, when my activity in ACE was not much more than going to local events and Coaster Con, the park hosted a coaster event celebrating their 30th Anniversary. I missed most of the Friday activities, as I had to fly back home from a business trip, before driving from DFW airport to Houston and the park. While I arrived in time for the night's ERT, heavy thunderstorms cancelled the ride session. I did not care, many will recall, as I was quite excited just to be back in Texas with my best friends at AstroWorld. My enthusiasm did not subside by the next morning as I was so amped for my first ERT ride of the celebration I forgot to take my Texas Rangers ball cap off as I boarded the train for *Batman: The Escape* with Mike Robinson, Scott Connor, and Robert Reagan. As we hit the little float-hill, my red Rangers cap went sailing and landed somewhere near the base of the loop! I was so embarrassed to make such an obviously stupid riding mistake. I was also sad that my very favorite cap was lost – maybe forever, which may not be a big thing to most, but when your hairline matches the surface of a cue ball, there is nothing to keep the sweat and sunscreen from burning your eyes (and sleeping with a sunburnt scalp is next to IMPOSSIBLE!). Robert mentioned that maybe losing my Rangers cap was a sign that I should not be wearing sports themed caps to an amusement park, and Mike immediately upped the ante by proudly saying I got what I deserved by wearing a Rangers cap to Astros country.

I reported my lost cap to Guest Relations, but I already resigned myself to the fact that I would probably never see the ball cap that had accompanied me to over two dozen amusement parks in only three years. Luckily, I had a back-up hat -- and although my cap was not found by event's end, I still went home happy with that *great event* feeling. Eight weeks later, I received a package from AstroWorld's Security Department. I was puzzled at first, but when the sight of red fabric hit my eyes, I could not believe AstroWorld found and sent back my

wayward hat! No, wait ... this was not my hat, but a brand new – yet identical Rangers cap! I no longer cared that this was not the cap I lost, the absolute class AstroWorld exhibited to this ordinary event attendee that this was not an ordinary park and cemented my love for AstroWorld and its staff.

Now I will not lie and say every experience I have had at AstroWorld was perfect between 1998 and 2001, but my family and I normally had very good times on most visits. However, I began to see some very positive changes happen to the park starting in 2002 despite the lack of capital infusions from the chain's corporate office. I noticed some changes with park management, then its staff, which resulted in subtle, but pervasive improvements in the park despite a net loss of coasters since 1999. Caring management; significant improvements in staff courtesy, friendliness, and efficiency; new park infrastructure repairs; increased visibility of park Security; better rider throughput; some backwards facing cars on *XLR8*; and removal of the infernal head-restraints on the *Texas Cyclone* were just some of the changes I noticed over the past few years. (One constant was the park might have had the best maintenance crew in the industry year after year.) Despite small budgets, AstroWorld was bettering the park, and having fun doing it! ACEers with an attention to detail (and there are a lot of us) noticed these subtle (and not so subtle), but important improvements.

My time as Tim Baldwin's assistant regional rep and then my last three-plus years as regional rep have given me some wonderful opportunities to work with AstroWorld's management and staff. From my interactions with the park starting with Winterfest 2002, and continuing with various media days, the ACE Spring Con in 2003, 2004's Coaster Masquerade, advance planning started for a potential 2005 event, and finally with the park's closing, I noticed AstroWorld's people continuously impressed me by increasing measures each and every time. I know it in my gut that this park was on the cusp of some great accomplishments if just given the chance and even a fraction of the support that parks like Great Adventure and Magic Mountain have constantly received. While some old-time Houstonians reminisce about the "way back when" days of AstroWorld, these last four years have simply been nothing but golden for me.

AstroWorld, we agree the ride was too short, but what a ride it was ... thank you. And that my friends is my view from The Curly Seat.

Assistant Regional Rep Corner with Jeremy Murphy



The new Six Flags Management has been off to what appears an excellent start. Having the privilege of visiting three of the Six Flags parks already in this new 2006 season, I have seen vast improvements, but also some lingering problems in certain parks.

Six Flags Over Texas and Six Flags Over Georgia are two of my favorite parks anywhere and two of the Six Flags parks I felt needed NO changes. Both SFOT and SFOG have always been excellent in staffing, guest courtesy, cleanliness, and all around decent experiences. I've never had what I would consider a bad day at these two parks. Visiting SFOT on opening day with David and his daughter, I was shocked at how much better the park was. The park was cleaner, staff was more friendly and visible, and the ride operations were again top notch. The same can be said with SFOG. Although I visited on a non-operating day, the media event was good and the park looks outstanding as well as the operations for having a third of the park open for roughly 8,000 people.

I've also had the chance to visit Magic Mountain in California. Many will agree that Magic Mountain has had some noticeable problems in recent years. My visit was in conjunction with the RideWorld event after Winter Coaster Solace at Knott's Berry Farm. SFMM started out as a good experience. Even with X down for the morning ERT, the ride operations were superb in running three trains on *Viper* and two with *Goliath*. I was amazed at the park's turn-around in less than one year.

However, some of the old problems cropped up. After enduring a one-hour wait for *Riddler's Revenge* in which they were running only one train, I started to experience the Magic Mountain many people have grown to know over the last few years. A one-train operation is acceptable in my book when attendance is low and conditions warrant. However, Magic Mountain was hosting "Physics Day" for area high schools that day and attendance was above 15,000 when I checked. After a frustrating issue with the *Riddler's Revenge* lockers, I had a very discouraging encounter with Guest Relations who told me that they could not answer any of my questions regarding their policies and why instructions as to what you need to do with a certain problem are not posted. After that less than desirable exchange, things turned for the better and I again experienced something I thought I would never see at a Six Flags park.

After indicating that my burger had mold on the bun, the waiter and manager replaced my burger *and* actually dropped the charges for my meal. That was in addition to the Operations Manager walking us directly up to X and placing us on the ride without waiting as a compensating gesture due to the ride's downtime at morning ERT.

Six Flags has come a long way and should continue on the path it's taking, however, I think they should focus more on some of their other parks in the chain, instead of trying to improve their already outstanding parks like SFOG, SFOT, and SFFT.

Two AstroWorld Steel Coasters to Stay in Texas

By Gary Slade (courtesy of *Amusement Today*)

Two steel roller coasters have been saved from certain doom, thanks to two family-owned Texas amusement parks stepping to the plate and securing them for future generations to enjoy.



In need of a mid-size family coaster, Wonderland Amusement Park in Amarillo, Texas purchased AstroWorld's *Mayan Mindbender*, a

compact Mark 700 system from Vekoma, and the *Gunslinger*, a Chance Yo-Yo. Chance Morgan Inc. has already performed a cylinder inspection on the Yo-Yo for the park. The 1988-built Vekoma coaster stands 27 feet tall, has 1,250 feet of track and features one train of 12, two-seat cars. Both rides are expected to make their debut in the 2007 season, but could open sooner.

New for this season, Wonderland Park purchased a 15-meter Moser Spring Ride from Len Soled's Rides-4-U during the

recently held Gibtown show.

Wonderland Park's President Paul Borchardt told *Amusement Today*, "We just wanted to maintain some of the family elements people were accustomed to having in Houston, and these two rides allow us to do that. The Yo-Yo is new for our market, we felt like the *Mindbender* would be the perfect family coaster to compliment our other three coasters. Both rides are a perfect fit for our park and it lets us keep a little of AstroWorld alive and well in the Lone Star State!"



A few days after Wonderland purchased their AstroWorld rides, David Dean, co-owner of Joyland Park in Lubbock, Texas

secured one of the two most loved coasters at AstroWorld, the *Greezed Lightnin'*. Opened in 1978, the Schwarzkopf - built shuttle loop coaster is considered by many experts to be the best of all the Schwarzkopf shuttle loops ever built.

The coaster is expected to make a spring 2007 debut. When it does, not only will the coaster's two reverse points be the tallest

points in the park (148 feet), the ride will also be the fastest, launching riders 0-60 mph in less than four seconds.



"We are all excited about what this size of ride can do for us," Dean told *AT*. "It will take our attendance and tourism presence to a whole new level. The best part was AstroWorld operated the ride with a 42-inch height requirement. That makes this coaster a family thrill ride."

The Lundy Group and Sid Truitt both assisted with the removal and shipping of the rides to West Texas. Larson International in Plainview, Texas will also be assisting Joyland in getting the coaster ready, with rebuilding of some mechanical parts as well as the coaster train.

[Editor's Note: It is possible that West Texas Coaster Round-up attendees will be able to see at least one, maybe more, of these AstroWorld rides in the rebuild process during the Larson factory tour portion of the event.]

Winterfest (Continued from Page 1)

Survey Says! On your mark, it's time to play The Family Feud! Tim Baldwin and Jeffrey Seifert used their technical wizardry to again bring a classic game show to life, this time resurrecting Richard Dawson's classic from the early 80s. The Griswold and Cyclops families competed for a prize provided by Six Flags Over Texas. As is common in these games some easy questions were missed due to stage fright, but in the end the Cyclops family came away winners. Although kissing the contestants was a Richard Dawson trademark, Tim disappointed the crowd by not upholding the tradition.

Scott Price, full time operations manager, from the park presented a slide show of the 10 new attractions for 2006 and detailed exactly where they were going and where the rides were coming from. Jerry Griffith, director of maintenance, also took time to answer some questions from the crowd.

Regional Rep David Lipnicky and Assistant Regional Rep Scott Connor did their best to fill in for the effervescent Jeffery Siebert of Schlitterbahn. Hoping to make it to the event right up until the very last moment, Mr. Siebert unfortunately had other obligations arise that he needed to fulfill. While David and Scott could not quite match the charm and wit of Mr. Siebert, the Schlitterbahn Waterparks' "Passport to Summer Fun" prepared exclusively for ACE with a coupon for a half-off Admission, Master Blaster First Ride of the Day, and an invitation to the grand opening of Schlitterbahn Galveston along with a custom made "Schlitterbahn Salutes ACE" wristband put huge smiles on the faces of the many ACEers.

David Blazer, Director of Entertainment for Fiesta Texas, spilled the beans about Fiesta Texas' waterpark upgrade. The newly re-christened "White Water Bay" will feature 4 new slides plus new attractions for the kids. Xceleration, winner for Best Sports Show at the IAAPA convention, will be returning for the 2006 season. David Blazer was awarded the region's Industry Appreciation Award, which is presented to an individual at a park or a member in the industry in our region who has provided consistent outstanding service to ACE at the regional level. We all send our congratulations out to David, who always makes us feel welcome at Fiesta Texas.

Jay Wilson, of Kemah Boardwalk located near Houston, discussed what is in store for this growing gulf area dynamo of family fun. Look forward to live bands, two months of fantastic fireworks this summer, as well as the return of Boo-on-the-Boardwalk during Halloween time!

Yvonne Janik, ACE's National Event's Coordinator, reviewed the upcoming Spring Con as well as the 2006 CoasterCon which is being held in Florida.

With Winterfest being the first official gathering since the closing of AstroWorld, Assistant Regional Rep Jason Knutson debuted his AstroWorld tribute video, a work in progress. The video contains footage of AstroWorld spanning the decades, and a heartfelt musical tribute with footage from closing weekend. Unfortunately, Jason left the footage in of the ACE members dancing with the park employees on the final day just before opening, proving that coaster enthusiasm and dancing do not go well together.

At the end of the day, between the park's ultra generous donation, Mr. Connor's winning auction bid for the Universal Resorts pin and card collector set, plus proceeds from other auction items, the raffle, and spontaneous member donations, Winterfest 2006 raised exactly \$1,750.00 for the National Roller Coaster Museum Fund!

At just under 7 and one-half hours, and possibly the longest Winterfest to date, everyone in attendance walked away with a new record of 11 items. A great event, and great goodies were had by all.

Many thanks must go to Jane Houser, Sandra Daniels, and Steve Calloway for opening your park up to us and letting us have a little fun in the dreary off-season. We'll see you in September for Lone Star Coasterthon!

Jason McMillon



Ron Toomer speaks to the group

Photo: David Lipnicky



The Griswold Family

Photo: David Lipnicky



Jay Wilson, David Blazer, Scott Price, Jerry Griffith, Yvonne Janik, Gary Slade, Tim Baldwin
Photos: Jeremy Murphy, David Lipnicky, Jason Knutson

David Lipnicky presents payment to Jane Houser who promptly tears up the check and gives the money to the Museum Fund.





In 1972, Judge Hofheinz decided AstroWorld needed a new ride, a coaster the likes that had not been seen in Houston. The Judge contacted Arrow and Ron Toomer to design a steel roller coaster unlike anything they had built before based on technology that had created *The Run Away Mine Train* at Six Flags Over Texas and various other mine train coasters they had built.

So plans were drawn up for a much taller coaster, nearly twice the height of any previous coaster Arrow had built. This roller coaster would be built entirely of steel instead of using wooden supports and would climb over 80 feet into the sky



The result was *Dexter Frebish Electric Roller Ride* which opened to the public in the spring of 1972. *Dexter* was a work of advanced technology for the time, able to run three trains at the same time and able to put over 2,000 guests per hour on the ride.

The ride started out being dispatched from the station with a slight dip to give it momentum to navigate a 180 degree turn into the transfer building. After passing through this cavernous building (which had the capability of storing five trains) the train started the climb up the lift. At the top of the lift the train would dip about seven feet and start a long unbanked 180 turn to the left and enter the first (and only) drop. From there the trains made a left turn to the first safety brake, Brake 2. The train then entered a downward spiral and entered Brake 3. A sharp right turn followed a long straightway that led to a gradual turn around the lift structure to the pit curve, a sharp 360 turn that led back to the station. The ride was a three element coaster with the dip, the spiral and the pit curve.



Originally the plans were to build a tunnel around the pit curve but money ran out and the idea was put off until later. But the foundation for the tunnel was built as evidenced by the huge concrete blocks that made up the footings for the lift structure. These concrete footers were

adjacent to the pit curve. One “feature” that came along later was a piece of trick track. This was caused by a piece of construction equipment hitting the track during the construction of *Thunder River*. The track was repaired, but there was a gentle reminder to the riders along that long straight track that led to the pit curve.

The safety system was simple and elegant. *Excalibur* had four blocks to keep the trains separated. The “brain” was an electrical relay panel that sat next to the driver. The trains had two sets of striker pads on the bottom of the train, one on the front left and the rear right. These pads would strike the limit switches on the track causing them to make a contact that would open or close a relay in the electrical panel with a loud click. The panel would indicate whether the block was clear or not, though when driving the coaster, operators would not need to look at the panel unless there was a shutdown. Operators could listen to the panel clicking and watch the trains, and with enough experience and practice, knowing where each train was at any moment became second nature. The trains

were built solidly as well. The train would ride on road wheels on top of the track, guide wheels on the inside of the track steered the train and up stop pads kept the train from leaving the track.

All the brakes were skid brakes which worked fine until they got a little wet. Even then, operators were experienced in sliding trains into the station and stopping them perfectly. The brakes were reversed at one point to help with this and that's why riders would experience a little backwards motion when the brakes were released.

When *Dexter Frebish* opened, AstroWorld opened its first new themed area since the park opened. This area was the County Fair and contained the first skill games the park had offered. The area also contained the Nickelodeon and Horseless Carriage Pavilion museum which was a museum containing many of Judge Hofheinz personal antiques. The tour of the museum ended with a short Laurel and Hardy film containing a classic pie fight scene. Later, Der Fender opened a Bumper car ride. The County Fair area also contained a Carousel, which was removed in 1977 so the Boogie Fog Disco could be installed.

1981 brought changes as *Dexter Frebish* was renamed to *Excalibur* and the area was rethemed to Nottingham Village. The huge *Dexter Frebish* sign was removed and the queue house was made to look like a castle.

Driving three trains was the goal of the crew and took concentration and communication. Unlike modern coasters, stacking was not only unheard of in those days, but it would cause a shutdown. Only two trains could be in the station at any time so if the trains stacked, a shutdown would occur. Driving three trains was a juggling act that was as much art as skill. A shutdown would stop the ride until a crew member made the run to the block brake that the train was stuck on. There the train would have to be manually released with a key that would open the block. Since this would take anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes, it was avoided at all costs so operators could keep the lines moving. When driving, there were three sets of brakes in the station, the trim brakes, the ready brakes and the dispatch brakes. If everything was timed properly, a train would be hitting the trim brakes as another train was leaving the station.

I was fortunate to work on *Excalibur* in 1982 and 1983. It was a fun coaster to work. The morning would start with a safety check that involved crew members climbing to the top of the lift, Brake 2 and Brake 3. The ride had several blocks built into it, and only one train could occupy one block at any time. So we would test the system by letting the trains set up on each block brake. The crewmember would then turn a key on the block brake to release the train. The safety check consisted of letting a train stop on the trim brakes outside of the station and then letting a train set up on Brake 3. Then the train outside of the station would be brought in and dispatched to set up on Brake 2. This process continued until trains were set up on the lift, the transfer station and the dispatch brakes. We saw some glorious mornings in Houston from the top of the ride structure.



(Continued on next page)

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Working on *Excalibur* was interesting to say the least. We had a great crew that worked well together. This of course led to some interesting times. We had crew parties with picnics under the spiral. We would pull pranks on other crews by inviting them to ride the coaster after hours and douse them with water in the transfer building. We worked hard and we played hard. Normally there would be 5 people working on the ride, the driver, one person on the unloading dock and 3 people loading. The loaders would give thumbs up when each car was secured and the person loading the front car would wait until they saw thumbs up from the crew. That person would then signal the driver to dispatch the trains. As the train left the station, the employee in front would watch for lap bars being out of position as a final check. One employee was so intent on his job he walked right out of the station falling about ten feet into the bushes below.

In its later years *Excalibur* suffered. A new safety system was installed that allowed only two trains to be run. Despite its age and the number of coasters that were installed at AstroWorld, *Excalibur* was a favorite of park guests. There were long lines for this ride until it was closed.

In 1999, *Excalibur* was removed. The intention was to operate the

ride at Frontier City but removing the ride caused so much damage, it was never re-assembled. The trains were sent to SFOT to be used on *RunAway Mine Train*. The legacy of *Excalibur* can be seen across the country. Building *Excalibur* gave Arrow confidence in building these types of coasters higher than they had ever imagined. As a result, the first coaster to break the 200 foot barrier opened at Cedar Point as *Magnum XL-200* and started the hyper coaster boom.



Excalibur was missed. 1999 also marked the closing of the Astroneedle leaving a void at the park for family rides. Alpine Sleighs and The River of No Return were already removed for other attractions so losing *Excalibur* was a real blow not only to coaster enthusiasts, but families who had grown up riding it. *Excalibur* was a family ride and with a 42 inch height restriction, all but the smallest of children could ride it. *Excalibur* was many Houstonians' introduction to roller coasters. Not only was it my first big coaster, but my son's as well. They might make coasters bigger and faster now, but I don't think they are as much fun!



Nuts & Bolts (Items in Brief)

family needs (in Texas and St. Louis) was the sole driver in David's decision. David says this was the hardest decision he has ever made. David has nothing but extremely positive complements for the great new management at Six Flags Inc. In fact, he has told the Regional Rep Team on several occasions that they are the best management team in his tenure with Six Flags and he gives them the very highest praise for their leadership and vision. David says he will keep in touch with ACE, his new job will have him at Fiesta Texas at points during this summer, and he may now have the time to join ACE and hit a few events! The Regional Rep Team wishes David the best of luck in his new position and hopes we will see him at future ACE events.

Six Flags New Orleans To Stay Closed in 2006 — While it was something just about everyone expected to hear, Six Flags Inc. announced on March 15 that Six Flags New Orleans would stay closed for the 2006 season. This is due to the sizeable damage

caused by Hurricane Katrina. Six Flags has not given any estimate as to when the park will re-open, but it is working with an insurance company to assess the full extent of the damage and the eventual size of the insurance coverage estimates. The park's general manager, the great Terry Prather, is now heading Six Flags America in Largo, Maryland. While the chain has kept its 55 full-time employees employed since the storm, those employees will no longer remain on the payroll, but the company is working to place employees willing to relocate to other Six Flags locations.

Lone Star Coasterthon Dates Announced — The Regional Rep Team received word from Six Flags Over Texas that Lone Star Coasterthon 2006 will be September 9 & 10. On a related matter, the Regional Rep Team now has tentative plans to hold the LSCT Pre-Event Welcome Party on Friday, September 8, although we have not made a decision on the time or location.

The Region Loses One of Its Greatest ACE Supporters — The Regional Rep Team received the bittersweet news that after 13 years at Six Flags David Blazer (Fiesta Texas' entertainment director) left the company in late March. David had been the park's lead for Fiesta Fest and he won the ACE South Central Industry Appreciation award this past January. (No, we did not know back then that he was leaving.) While ACE is losing one of its biggest supporters from an amusement park, the good news is that David will not be leaving central Texas or the entertainment industry. David will become the Vice President of Business Development and Production for SRO Associates. They are a full production company that just happens to produce many theme park shows and special events including Xcelleration (showing again at Fiesta Texas in 2006). Changing

SCHLITTERBAHN GALVESTON GRAND OPENING CELEBRATION ANNOUNCED!

Schlitterbahn has notified the Regional Rep Team that the Grand Opening Celebration for Schlitterbahn Galveston will be Saturday, May 13! Schlitterbahn was gracious enough to give each Winterfest 2006 attendee a "Schlitterbahn Waterparks' Passport to Summer Fun" prepared exclusively for ACE. The Regional Rep Team mentions this, because this special gift includes a special ACE Invitation to the Grand Opening Celebration for up to four people! PLEASE REMEMBER that you MUST call the special phone number on the special ACE coupon to RSVP by Monday, May 1, 2006. In addition, Do NOT forget to bring your invitation with you!



The Opportunity of a Lifetime—Reviving a Coaster Classic

by Charlotte and Steven Schroeder

It was a cold and brisk 9 a.m. on Saturday, March 25th in Wichita, Kansas, for the anticipated beginning a long-term project for Joyland Amusement Park, and their quest to open the park to the public for the Easter weekend in April. The new co-owner Robert Barnard, ride maintenance workers, and ACE members from the Heart of America and South Central Regions were on hand to revitalize a park that hadn't been in operation since 2004. All were ready to start the morning activities in reviving the 1949 classic built by coaster designer, Herbert Schmeck. Former park owner, Stan Nelson was also on hand to make sure everything went smoothly. Originally, twenty-five ACE members had signed up for the previous weekend, but because of the cold wet weather, it was re-scheduled, and only ten of us were able to make the trip this time around.

After we enjoyed our coffee and donuts over introductions, Robert gave the group the nickel tour of the entire park and how they're planning to utilize the space inside. Discussions focused on how they could best use the old western town located towards the back of the park, and how it could support the entertainment section of the midway. He also stated he wanted to hold the Easter egg hunt in the midway opening weekend for the younger guests. For the most part, all the flat rides were in the process of having their seats/cars re-installed. The Wacky House dark ride seemed to be in good condition and we had a chance to walk into it for a quick peek, which was very cool. The Log Flume ride had been previously restored, and with the addition of water and staff, would be ready for operation next month. We then made our way to the roller coaster. There, we had a chance to inspect the coaster's braking system, looked at the PTC trains which were in the process of having the seats re-covered, looked for improvements for the loading station, and a few of us had the golden opportunity to venture out on the coaster track to inspect the chain on the lift hill. It was very exciting!



Photo by Jeff Mast

After the sun came out and temperatures started to warm up to the mid fifties, we were ready to work on the classic woodie. After much thought and vision from the new owners, they felt the coaster should be restored back to its original wood instead of the current faded and peeling paint job that had aged from years of sun and weather. We were provided the use of power sprayers and scrapers to take off the paint as a lot of work and hard labor went into trying return the coaster back to its original look. Others worked on the loading station, replacing missing boards and old wood. Later in the afternoon, more volunteers joined us to help out, which was a happy sight. After a few hours of hard work, we were all treated to sandwiches, chips, and drinks, supplied by the park. We worked throughout the afternoon until the temperature started to drop around dusk, and some of the workers went back to hotels while a few stayed around to do more work.



Photo by Steven Schroeder

The next morning, everyone arrived at the park once more and went back to the tedious task of power spraying and scraping the coaster, working at what they could reach. During our break, a group photo was taken to mark the special occasion, and shortly afterwards, we headed back home to Texas. When we left Sunday afternoon, we could see that we had made a small start to the project to return *Roller Coaster* to the Operating Classics list. It was an incredible weekend for all those who were there to help. Meeting new friends and establishing a life long relationship with the people of Joyland Amusement Park was a wonderful moment...one not to be forgotten.

We are most grateful to Robert Barnard, and his partner, Michael Moodenbaugh for the vision of returning a small regional park to the open and operating status. We would also like to thank ACE Events Director Yvonne Janik and Regional Representative Jeffrey Mast, for bringing this project to the forefront. A special thanks to all the volunteers who signed up to participate, and to the South Central Regional Rep Team for getting the word out to us so we could take part in this extraordinary event.

The new owners of Joyland would be most appreciative of any further volunteer help in cleaning of the coaster. Jeff Mast is currently in the process of planning a second weekend with the park management. More on this as it develops...

THE CROSSOVER—News From Neighboring Regions

ACE DAY AT CLIFF'S (ACE Southwest) – Sunday, May 28 in Albuquerque, NM -- The event flyer is now on-line (www.acesouthcentral.org/flyers/Cliffs2006.pdf). Cliff's is the home to the amazing *New Mexico Rattler* (currently in your Regional Rep's Top 10 wood coaster list). Go to www.acesouthcentral.org/videos/WestTexas06Promo.wmv to learn more about this great companion event to our Wild West Coaster Round-up in our new regional video promoting both events.

Regional Profile: Results from the Region's 2005 Member Survey

Last Summer, the Regional Rep Team (RRT) mailed each household in the region the 2005 ACE South Central Member Survey. Three key contributing factors were behind our decision to attempt this. First, whether you are talking business, politics, or any organization, it is easy for the people in representative or leadership positions to become complacent or disconnected from the very people they are supposed to represent. The RRT knows that no matter how well we think we are doing, or how many kind words we receive from the ACEers in our and other regions, we may be off in our own assessment of how we are doing, and there is always room for improvement. Second, while the majority of what ACE's regional (and assistant) regional reps do are regional events, communications, and services, the key word of our titles in ACE is "representative". While just about everyone knows that means we are a key source of relaying national ACE information to our members, inherent in the word representative means the flow of communication is two-way as we are our member's voice to ACE's Executive Committee. Third, while some of our more active members will contact various RRT members on many regional and national ACE matters by phone, E-mail, instant messaging, and in person on a fairly regular basis, the vast majority do not. Whether it is because they are perfectly happy with all aspects of ACE, feel uncomfortable contacting us, or ACE matters are not that high of a priority in their lives, the RRT usually hears from a just small minority of our members.

Now, we must be honest, we did not invent the idea of a regional ACE survey. We stole, er ... borrowed the concept from ACE's Southeast region -- and expanded it along a few dimensions including just about every aspect the RRT serves our members. While the RRT makes no claims that the survey or results meet any generally recognized degree of statistical validity, they do represent the ACE members who responded to the survey late last year. Without much further ado, here are the key highlights of the survey results.

Of the ACE South Central Members who responded to the 2005 Regional Member Survey:

- 60% have been in ACE 6 years or longer
- 46% live in a household of 1 (the largest response by 11 percentage points)
- 89% have attended at least 1 park-sponsored event in our region
- 77% have attended at least 1 regional ACE event (in our region)
- 45% who have attended any regional ACE or park-sponsored events in our region have attended 10 or more
- 97% completely or mostly agreed that ACE & park-sponsored events in our region are reasonably priced
- 97% completely or mostly agreed that ACE & park-sponsored events in our region are a good value
- 70% said the event distance from home or lack of vacation time as the reason why they did not attend an event

- 94% said they like the way the RRT is currently mixing and scheduling annual, bi-annual, and occasional events
- Six Flags Over Texas was the region's highest rated park w/ an average score of 9.2 (on a 10-point rating scale)
- Six Flags Fiesta Texas was rated #2 in the region with an average of score of 8.9 (on a 10-point scale)
- Wonderland Park in Amarillo was rated #3 in the region with an average of score of 7.4 (on a 10-point scale)
- The region's E-Blasts were our members' highest rated news source w/ an average score of 8.6 (10-point scale)
- The *Queue Line Chronicle* was rated the region's #2 coaster news source w/ a score of 8.5 (on a 10-point scale)
- *ACE News* was the #3 news source with an average score of 8.4 (on a 10-point rating scale)
- *RollerCoaster!* was rated #4 w/ a score of 7.8, while www.ACESouthcentral.org was #5 (7.5)
- The *Queue Line Chronicle* received stellar scores from our members
- The Curly Seat, Dave's Top 10, and Nuts & Bolts receiving the most mention as our readers' favorite newsletter items
- Dave's Top 10 was the only item mentioned more than once as the least favorite newsletter item (3 mentions total)
- More Member Profiles and News about Louisiana tied for the most requested things to include in our newsletter
- 75% subscribe to the region's free E-Blast (E-mail) news service
- 58% love the E-Blast service, while 35% rate it as quite useful
- 43% of the members who do not subscribe to the regional E-Blast service did not know it existed
- 29% visit www.ACESouthcentral.org at least once or twice a week, while 35% visit it once or twice a month
- Of those who said they never/hardly ever visit the regional website, 100% hate the Internet or do not have web access at home.
- 97% of our members are Extremely (68%) or Mostly (29%) satisfied with their regional services and benefits
- 41 out of 46 (89%) member added comments about regional services and events were positive
- 66% of respondents completely or mostly agreed that ACE's *national* events are reasonably priced
- 63% of respondents completely or mostly agreed that ACE's *national* events are a good value
- 17% of the members added comments said the prices of *national* ACE event were too high
- 9% of the members added comments said *national* events should have fewer included meals and more ERT
- 9% of the members added comments said *national* events should be shorter
- 14% of the members added comments said ACE is doing a very good job with *national* events

Thank You!

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