

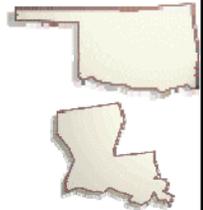


The Queue Line Chronicle



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ACE South Central Region—Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana—Spring 2008

Winterfest Welcomes 2008 with a Reach for the Sky – By David Lipnicky

While generally not as large attendance-wise as ACE’s national off-season affairs, the region’s annual Winterfest event is most likely the most quirky. Part of the reason may be this “little regional ACE event that could” has evolved into something akin to a vagabond happening, as it rotates its location all over the Lone Star State. Maybe it is that both planned and unplanned happenings always seem to be part of the mix - with maybe the most memorable being 2004’s infamous “Coaster Jenga” marathon. In part, it may be that it was ACE’s first off-season event to ever include ERT (although

for 2008 - and beyond, as well as sharing some rather humorous stories about the history of the nation’s largest State Fair.

some locations recently have made it necessary for a factory tour instead) which again may itself be part of that quirky charm. Nevertheless, whether the event is held at more known venues (Six Flags Over Texas, Sea World San Antonio, Fiesta Texas, or AstroWorld), or more off the beaten path locals (NBGS International, Kemah Boardwalk, or Schlitterbahn Galveston), it is always very different, yet always very, very fun. Still, as the event has evolved the last five to six



S. Madonna Horcher

years, something new has slowly taken place. More and more parks are sending presenters to our little Wintertime “hold us over until the new park season starts” event.

This year’s Winterfest on January 25 was no different. A new, great 2008 location – the State Fair of Texas; more door prizes, raffle, and action items than attendees; surprises; more parks sending great presenters to tell us about their 2008 plans and attractions; ERT – but not on a coaster; unexpected experiences; and a lot of fun.

The RRT gave a preview of some regional 2008 happenings. This included an overview of the new 140-ft. Super Shot thrill ride debuting in 2008 at Joyland Amusement Park in Lubbock – and built by Texas’ Larson International and A.R.M. of Ohio, as well as an update on the coaster formerly known as the *Mayan Mindbender* debuting this year at Wonderland Amusement Park in Amarillo now

named the *Hornet*. Also included was an update on the region’s bi-annual West Texas Coaster Round-up this July 4-5 at Joyland Amusement Park, Larson International (factory & ACE museum piece tour), and Wonderland Amusement Park. The final portion of the regional overview was a RRT-provided presentation created by Six Flags Fiesta Texas outlining their 2008 plans including new shows and *Go-liath*, the B&M inverted coaster coming to the park this year. Lastly,

the RRT happily announced that October 18-19 as the dates for Fiesta Fest 2008, and that region’s 2nd Annual Exclusive Culvers Time (ECT) Party will take place on Friday, October 17! Kemah Boardwalk’s Amusements Manager – and ACE member – Jay Wilson was unable to provide his presentation in person, so Jay and Kemah did the next best thing. As a result, the RRT presented a video created by Kemah Boardwalk with Jay Wilson giving a great overview highlighting the many unique features of the park’s new for 2007 *Boardwalk Bullet*.

Continued on Page 3

Sixty-three participants (56 attendees, 5 guest presenters, and 2 park hosts/presenters) took part on this cool and partially sunny day at the first Winterfest held at the State Fair of Texas. After the (now standard) slightly delayed start, registration proceeded quickly and the event kicked-off with the Regional Rep Team (RRT) produced “Welcome to the World” video celebrating the 2007 arrivals of two roller coasters and one watercoaster/flume hybrid to our region. After a brief welcome by regional rep Curly and the State Fair’s Rusty Fitzgerald, Rusty gave an overview of the State Fair’s plans

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The Curly Seat

A Point of View on Coasters, Parks, and ACE from Your Regional Rep

David Lipnicky—ACE South Central Regional Rep
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Back in the March-April 2006 edition of *ACE news*, I mentioned that one of the reasons we added Jeremy Murphy as an assistant rep to the Regional Rep Team (RRT) was succession planning for a smooth transition, if I – or another member of the RRT – decided to step down. Despite my clarifying introductory statement that I did not have any immediate plans of stepping down, this did prompt a number of ACEers to ask me if I was really stepping down as regional rep – or when I was stepping down. For better or worse, I will be stepping down ... someday, but I *still do not* have immediate plans to do so.

Forgive me for the cheap trick to get your attention, but I wanted to use a little motivational psychology to heighten your attention when I share my realization that Winterfest 2008 marked a full five years that your RRT has been serving the South Central region! It is true that I became regional rep four months earlier when Tim Baldwin and I switched positions at 2002's Lone Star Coasterthon. However, it was during Winterfest 2003 when we announced Tim was stepping down as my assistant rep to concentrate on his new duties on ACE's Executive Committee and happily debuted Scott Connor and Jason Knutson as the region's new assistant regional reps, which marked the birth of the RRT.

I have stated during past times on this soapbox – yes, I am standing – that my primary goal when I took over from Tim was to get a website presence for the region. Assistant rep and regional webmaster Jason Knutson was instrumental in making this goal a reality. When others would ask me if I had any other goals, I would say, “not to mess up anything Tim has already built.” While a true statement, I was holding back a bit. During my eight months as Tim's assistant

rep, I developed a list of ten things I wanted to accomplish during my time as regional rep. Some I knew were obtainable, some were challenging, and one was a little out there.

While I will not go into every goal here – see Dave's Top 10 List on page 5 for that, two goals dealt with the regional newsletter. The first was for a complete overhaul of the format and layout, while constantly working to improve the overall look. The second was a catchy and unique sounding name. While I came up with the *South Central Dispatch* when I was Tim's assistant, I soon learned that several other regions used the word “Dispatch” in their newsletter moniker. However, it took a year and a half as regional rep before my brain - with the help of Kari Lipnicky - engaged and came up with our current name. (I will leave it up to y'all if I am either mentally tenacious or just plain slow.) On the event side, I wanted to enhance the attendee experience with our larger park-sponsored and regional ACE events, which contained two goals. First was to offer ACE hotel blocks for Lone Star Coasterthon and Fiesta Fest, (and now SchlitterCon). The second was to tie in an ACE South Central warm-up event to Six Flags Over Texas' Lone Star Coasterthon, which we now know as our annual LSCT Pre-event Welcome Party. Scott extended that goal by coming up with our new Exclusive Culver's Time (ECT) Party that we debuted the Friday evening before Fiesta Fest 2007 and we plan to have as an annual kickoff for ACE's October event at Fiesta Texas.

I am very pleased that we have just about accomplished all the goals on my list and that my assistant reps over the years have created and helped us accomplish several new goals along the way. Thanks to Jason K., Scott, Jeremy, Jason M., our wonderful parks, our fantastic volunteers, and our members, we have accomplished and enjoyed far, far more than the ten items I had on my list five years ago. Boy, it has been fun – and it still is!

Before this ride in The Curly Seat hits the brake run, I think one of the reasons I am typing this is because I cannot believe that we have been around for a half a decade already. In other words, we have been running this thing for five years and I cannot believe everyone is still letting us drive this well-oiled machine! To those who are still bound to ask me when I plan to step down let me tell you the truth -- I do not know. While I do feel I am closer to the end than the beginning, I still do not have plans to step down soon.

Now that we are entering the station, I want to reiterate that the reasons why we added Jeremy in 2006 and Jason M. in 2007 were a lot more than just succession planning. While many - if not most - of their contributions cannot be seen to the average ACEer over these last two years, the bulk of their work has been more behind the scenes, which has made everyone's job on the RRT easier, more enjoyable, and far more effective. I do not have enough fingers and toes to count the times the feedback from Jeremy or Jason M. have played a significant role in better decisions made by me and by the RRT as a whole. And that my friends is my view from The Curly Seat.

THIS JUST IN...

NEW COASTER FOR FRONTIER CITY!

Frontier City officials announced on April 4 that Oklahoma's first suspended roller coaster – named *Steel Lasso* - is the new ride to highlight the park's celebration of 50 years of frontier fun. The custom-built coaster will be 49 feet tall and 965 feet long, with an estimated top speed of about 30mph. The suspended roller coaster's train will hang from the track, which will allow riders legs to dangle freely. The park says the ride will go up over during April and May with guest being able to ride by possibly early Summer.

NEW RIDE FOR SCHLITTERBAHN NEW BRAUNFELS!

Schlitterbahn New Braunfels is adding a new family thrill ride called Dragon's Revenge. For more information please visit:

<http://www.schlitterbahn.com/dragonsrevenge/>

While we would have loved for Jay to present at Winterfest once again, Winterfest attendees had their pupils fixated on images of the region's newest - and the world's most tangled - woodie.

As the morning wound down, the RRT proudly announced S. Madonna Horcher as the winner of the ACE South Central Golden Track Award. Madonna's years of documenting ACE's regional and national events plus her abundant times she has been a volunteer for both regional and nation activities is a shining example of the spirit of ACE's South Central region.

Rusty Fitzgerald and Melanie Linnear - our gracious State Fair of Texas hosts - arranged for a great BBQ lunch catered by Dallas' popular Baker's Ribs. After the flavorsome lunch, it was outside for the group photo in front of the Texas Skyway station. Attendees were able to stay outside a little longer as Rusty and his ride crew fired up the impressive Texas Skyway for maybe the most unique Winterfest ERT session to date. The Texas Skyway is the ultra-modern gondola ride from Doppelmayr with art-deco-style gondola graphics that made its debut at the Fair in 2007. In addition, Rusty and his crew surprised ACE with the bonus treat of two tours - one of the Skyway's super-cool station house and another of the ride's gondola storage house. One tour was the back-up plan in case ERT was not possible, but for Rusty and his crew to throw in *both* tours on top of the ERT was a huge - but very welcomed - surprise to even the RRT!

SeaWorld San Antonio sent not one, but two park officials - Fran Stephenson and Toni Davila - to Winterfest to tell us eager ACEers about the park's 2008 plans. Their upbeat presentation started with the announcement that that the Texas Adventure Park will celebrate its 20th birthday on Thursday, April 10 and hopes to invite ACE to help celebrate the occasion. The park is also working on a responsibility awareness program to promote a safe park experience at SeaWorld and there may be a roll for ACE in promoting this program. Their SeaWorldCoasters.com website will re-launch this spring. Lastly, the Fran and Toni announced the possibility of a "Coaster Challenge" promotion, which may include ACE. The park will coordinate information on all three activities with the RRT as they develop.

"Mystery Video #1" kept the laughs coming as the RRT screened a coaster-related cartoon found by Kari Lipnicky, "Roller Cowards," where SpongeBob Squarepants and his friend Patrick try *not* to ride the Fist 'O Pain coaster at Glove World. In keeping with Winterfest lore, next up was one of those things that may be one for the ages. The RRT unleashed their version of Super Password Plus -- its first game show creation by assistant regional reps Jason "Sajak" McMillon and Scott "Convey" Connor. The RRT has joked for years they "are a well-oiled machine" when things do not go quite as planned. While this one may not quite live up to the notorious Coaster Jenga, this game had enough oil to give it a good run for the money. The RRT was quite disappointed that the game did not go as smoothly as we had hoped, especially considering the great amount of work Jason and Scott put into the game with help from assistant regional rep Jeremy Murphy. However, the goal of our coaster games are to be fun and entertaining, and Regional Rep Curly received numerous comments that that audio and technical glitches were both entertaining and humorous, so "mission accomplished." That's our story and we're sticking to it! Not to be outdone by SeaWorld, Six Flags Over Texas also sent not one, but two park officials - Kendell Kelton and Olivia Litchfield.

(Continued on page 4)

Krystal Olexey



The Regional Rep Team presents S. Madonna Horcher with the Golden Track Award.

Jason Knutson



The Texas Star and the Texas Skyway.

Photo: Krystal Olexey



Photo: Jason Knutson



Photo: Krystal Olexey



Photo: Jason Knutson

Winterfest Presenters from SeaWorld San Antonio, State Fair of Texas, Six Flags Over Texas and Schlitterbahn Waterparks

Their spirited presentation kicked off with a preview of the new *Tony Hawk Big Spin* coaster and the announcement that the park plans to invite ACE to their Media Day event for the coaster tentatively scheduled for sometime in May!

The European Coaster Club will be visiting the park on June 2 and 3, which may give the region an opportunity to share some Texas hospitality to our kindred across the pond. Kendell - who was on crutches and had a leg in a cast while recovering from a recent snowboarding accident - was a trouper as she previewed the array of *Shock Wave*, *Texas Giant*, and *Wildcatter* parts (actually used on the rides) that the park was donating to Winterfest as door prizes and auction items. Kendell and Olivia also announced that Lone Star Coasterthon 2008 would take place September 13-14! (To tie in with this legendary coaster event, the region's 5th Annual LSCT Pre-event Welcome Party will take place at Humperdinks on Friday, September 12.) Lastly, the park talked a little about its plans for 2011 (their 50th Anniversary) including some potential activities that may involve ACE in a significant way.

The RRT debuted its second video production, "Awesome Year", which recapped all the regional ACE and park-sponsored 2007 events with its light-hearted surprise ending. (Forgive me Scott, I could not resist!) It was time for the RRT to step aside and let Schlitterbahn's engaging, energetic, and effervescent Director of Corporate Communications, Mr. Jeffery Siebert, take the microphone. Jeffrey showed a video of Schlitterbahn's milestones of waterpark innovations. He also gave brief updates about the goings-on at all their waterpark resorts including the construction status at the new Kansas City development and a few hints about the new attraction going into the New Braunfels Resort this year. Jeffrey proceeded to blow the audience away with his big-budget production promoting "SchlitterCon V ... An ACE Event". Then ACEers were instructed to open their super-secret Schlitterbahn prize packs that included a custom Schlitterbahn ACE viewer, a Master Blaster First Ride ticket, a Complementary Schlitterbahn Ticket, and the announcement that SchlitterCon V - now an annual regional ACE event - is expanding to a TWO-DAY event on May 24-25, 2008!

Billed as "Mystery Video #2", the RRT played the humorous, animated short featuring Strongbad's Mount Rides Place USA and its Bowels of Trogdor coaster. (Somebody should tell Strongbad that his Bowels of Trogdor coaster actually looks more like a Larson Ring of Fire than a roller coaster!)

Winterfest normally concludes with a prize-package raffle and our always-animated auction. This year, the RRT changed things up - a wee bit - by having these festive activities as the next to last items on the agenda. The amazing park donations from The Gravity Group, Martin & Vlemminckx, Six Flags Over Texas, Six Flags Over Georgia, Knott's Berry Farm, and Holiday World and donations by ACEers for the raffle and auction guaranteed the proceeding to be outrageous once again. Maybe the fiercest bidding that went on was between former ACE Events Director Yvonne Janik, regional rep Curly, and Louisiana's Judi Allen for the mounted M&V rendering of their new coaster going up in China - Yvonne won this hotly contested bidding battle. The raffle brought in \$203, and the eight auction items raised \$935 for a grand total of \$1,138 going to ACE's Museum and Archives fund!

Curly gave a few "thanks you" to our hosts, park presenters, his assistant regional reps, and the region's volunteers. In what may have been the earliest Winterfest location announcement in history, the

RRT proudly revealed that Kemah Boardwalk would be the location of Winterfest 2009 on January 31, 2009. While the event is sure to include ERT on the *Boardwalk Bullet*, the RRT thinks the chances are now excellent that Jay will be a Winterfest presenter next year! ACE thanks Rusty, Melanie, the State Fair ride crew, the more than a dozen parks who donated items, and all our presenters for continuing to keep Winterfest the uniquely raucous off-season event we all love.



Stacy Bernal

Attendees waiting in line for a tour of the mechanical room.



Jason Knutson

This year's game was Coaster Password



Jason Knutson

Waiting for ERT after a delicious BBQ lunch.



Nuts & Bolts (Items in Brief)

2008 Events in the South Central Region

[All events are regional ACE events, except where park-sponsored events are noted]:

- **MAY TBA** – *Tony Hawk's Big Spin* Media Day – Six Flags Over Texas (Arlington, TX)
Note: This is a Six Flags Over Texas event that *may* include ACE; if so, the park will provide details to the RRT
- **MAY 24-25** – SchlitterCon V – Schlitterbahn Waterpark Resort (New Braunfels, TX)
- **JULY 3** – Six Flags Over Texas's ACE Coobriila Nite (Arlington, TX)
Note: This is an SFOT event for ACE members; the park is providing details to the RRT
- **JULY 4-5** – West Texas Coaster Round-up – Joyland Amusement Park (Lubbock, TX), Larson International (Plainview, TX), and Wonderland Amusement Park (Amarillo, TX)
- **SEPTEMBER 12** – LSCT Pre-Event Welcome Party – Humperdink's (Arlington, TX)
Note: *Amusement Today* will once again sponsor this ACE South Central regional event
- **SEPTEMBER 13-14** – Six Flags Over Texas' Lone Star Coasterthon 2007 (Arlington, TX)
Note: This is an annual SFOT event for ACE members and their friends
- **SEPTEMBER TBD** – ACE Day at the State Fair of Texas (Dallas, TX)
- **SEPTEMBER TBA** – SeaWorld San Antonio Coaster Challenge.
Note: This is a SeaWorld San Antonio event that was rescheduled from April 10 that may include ACE; the park will provide details to the RRT
- **OCTOBER 17** – Exclusive Culver's Time (ETC) Party – Culvers (San Antonio, TX)
- **OCTOBER 18-19** – Fiesta Fest 2007 – Six Flags Fiesta Texas (San Antonio, TX)
- **JANUARY 31, 2009** – Winterfest 2009 – Kemah Boardwalk (Kemah, TX)

Dave's Top 10 Regional Rep Goals (2003)

10. Mystery Goal - Not yet accomplished, the RRT hopes to make this come to fruition in 2009

9. New Newsletter Title - After a year and half with a big bag of nothing, *The Queue Line Chronicle* immediately sprung to mind after Kari Lipnicky suggested the term "Queue Line" might sound nice in a title.

8. Strengthen Existing and Cultivate New Park Relationships - My predecessor, Tim Baldwin already built great relationships with most of our parks, but Kemah Boardwalk, The State Fair of Texas, and AstroWorld are the three best examples of these new park relationships. Assistant reps Jason Knutson, Scott Connor, Jeremy Murphy, & Jason McMillon, plus Mike Robinson were each instrumental with one (or more) of these three parks.

7. Improve the Event Development Process - Scott has been instrumental in this continual improvement process.

6. Create a New Promotional Tool - Sammy Piccola came up with the idea of a regional T-Shirt, which fit perfectly with goal, and Scott took the lead and made this goal a reality — twice! Thanks to Terry Lind for designing the shirts.

5. Provide Hotel Lodging at the Largest Events in our Region - Scott has assisted with LSCT lodging numerous times, while Jason M has assisted with Fiesta Fest lodging in 2006 and 2007. The RRT added SchlitterCon Lodging to the mix.

4. Increase the Lone Star Coasterthon experience with a Regional Flavor - Came to fruition as the LSCT Pre-event Welcome Party. Gary Slade of *Amusement Today* – and Honorary ACE Member – has been either the co-sponsor or sole sponsor all four years. Gary; assistant reps Scott, Jason K. Jeremy, & Jason M.; plus Kari Lipnicky have all had important rolls of making this region lead-in to SFOT's LSCT an annual success. Scott extended this concept for Fiesta Fest by creating the region's annual Exclusive Culver's Time (ECT) Party. NOTE: Gary and Amusement Today will once again be the sponsor of the LSCT Pre-event Welcome Party in 2008.

3. Completely Overhaul the Layout and Format of the Regional Newsletter - Could not have been completed without the technical & creative expertise of assistant reps Jason K. and Scott.

2. Ensure Our Region Has a Rock Solid Financial Base - While normal newsletter and website costs are reimbursed by ACE's Executive Committee, the RRT has positioned itself to operate without worrying the timing of reimbursements. NOTE: Recent Executive Committee actions and decisions provide very expedient reimbursements to the regions.

1. Creation of One of ACE's First Regional Websites - Jason K. being the Webmaster and co-designer had the instrumental roll, but Scott, Mike, Jason M., Tim, and Jeffrey Seifert all helped in some way with the creation of version 1.0. The current version won ACE's first-ever regional website competition in 2007. (Jeremy is now working on version 2.0.)

Thank You! The Regional Rep Team would like to thank the following people: Rusty Fitzgerald, Melanie Linnear, Errol McKoy, and the rest of the State Fair of Texas staff; Jeffrey Siebert & Terri Adams of Schlitterbahn; Sharon Parker, Kendell Kelton, Olivia Litchfield, Steve Martindale, Sean Lynch, & Xander Lee of Six Flags Over Texas; Ben McTyre, Crystal Evans, Ryan Gardner, Darren Dalton, & Steve Skains of Fiesta Texas; Tim Anderson & Jay Wilson of Kemah Boardwalk; Fran Stephenson & Toni Davila of SeaWorld San Antonio; Paul Borchardt of Wonderland Park; David & Kristi Dean of Joyland Amusement Park; Robbie & Sally Bell of Bell's Amusement Park; John Odum of Six Flags Parks; Gary Slade, Sammy Piccola, Paul McDonald, & Janice Witherow of Amusement Today; Jeff Novotny of Larson International; Corey Kiepert, Larry Bill, Michael Graham, & Chad Miller of The Gravity Group; Alain Vleminckx, Chuck Bingham, and the rest of the Martin & Vleminckx *Boardwalk Bullet* crew; Melinda Ashcraft of Six Flags Over Georgia and all the other parks from outside our region who made Winterfest 2008 donations; Tim Baldwin; Jeffrey Seifert; S. Madonna Horcher; Mike, Dawn, & Zach Robinson; Kari Lipnicky; Krystal Olexey; Russell Rakowitz; Stacy & Robert Bernal; Charlotte & Steven Schroeder; Polly & Alan Nichols; Sean & Cheryl Shaver; Robby Austin; Paul McKinney; Dan McPartland; Kevin Lipnicky & Sarah Simmons; Phil Pan; Jeff Braziel; Mark Davidson; Bill Linkenheimer III; Jerry Willard; Barry Maness of ACE's Southwest region; Robert Ulrich of ACE's Southeast region; ACE President Mark Cole; and ACE Immediate Past President Carole Sanderson.



In the spring of 1984, AstroWorld took a chance with Arrow to design and build a suspended roller coaster. The only previous modern attempt to build such a coaster had ended in failure when “*The Bat*” at Kings Island was removed due to structural problems. With these problems solved, mostly due to added banking of the turns, AstroWorld commissioned Arrow to build *XLR-8*. *XLR-8* would be the last brand new coaster for AstroWorld until 1999 when *Serial Thriller* was installed.



XLR-8 was 3000 feet long, with a maximum height of 81 feet. Containing two lifts, the ride had a maximum speed of 35 mph. This coaster was built as a family ride and proof that the concept could

work. At the same time, Arrow was commissioned to take over the *Big Bad Wolf* coaster after Anton Schwarzkopf’s company went out of business. The concrete was already poured in Williamsburg, so Arrow had no choice in the lay-out; they just built the coaster using lessons learned from designing *XLR-8*.

XLR-8 promotional campaigns and novelties such as XLR8tion, - a group of break dancers — helped make the coaster very popular with families, even if it did leave thrill seekers wanting. The ride was fun, but not extreme. Arrow saw this and learned and most (if not all) future suspended projects were terrain coasters. This was an effective tool to make the suspended coaster seem more extreme and thrilling rides as seen with *Ninja* and *Top Gun*.



Originally designed to rotate out of Houston after a few years as part of the “Ride Relocation Program”, *XLR-8* never had a permanent queue house or sta-

tion built. A tent like structure was built over the station that almost burned down by fireworks, prompting the practice of soaking it down before each show. The ride was painted blue and grey until the 2004 season when it was changed to a vibrant orange and blue.



XLR-8 had another huge, but not so great effect on the park. In building the coaster, the River Of No Return was modified with much of its theming destroyed.

Welder’s torches caused a fire that destroyed the beloved King Kong bust that was a huge part of the rides theming. The course was cut in half and much of the ride simply rode underneath the coaster. With all the columns of *XLR-8* in the river, clearances were tight to say the least. *XLR-8* Plaza was created where Children’s World was located. This removed the Barnyard petting zoo and such rides as Rub a Dub Dub. Children’s World was moved to the European Village where the Alpine Sleighs were closed to make room. No other coaster in AstroWorld history changed the park (or some would say destroy the park) as much as *XLR-8*.

In 2002, the last 4 cars of the train were turned backwards (8-RLX) for Fright Fest. The park ran the ride in that configuration full time in 2004 and 2005.



XLR-8 became a coaster that AstroWorld was “stuck” with. The “temporary” station lasted for over 20 years. No other park wanted it as part of the relocation

efforts. There was talk of replacing the ride with a wooden coaster, but time ran out on that project. So the first successful suspended coaster in modern times was left at AstroWorld until the end, and even when the park closed, no other park wanted it and the ride was sold for scrap.

While we might remember *XLR-8* for the wrong reasons, we need to remember that it was a monumental achievement, proving that the concept could work. And how it could work better, as seen in other parks spotted across the United States.

For Mike’s personal experience with *XLR-8*, turn the page.

Photos by Jason Knutson

I was working on *Excalibur* the summer *XLR-8* opened. We all excitedly watched the construction and testing. When we finally got to ride the coaster, most of us were a little underwhelmed. The park had traded a lot for *XLR-8*, *Children's World*, *Alpine Sleighs*, and *River of No Return* would never be the same. I was made Foreman of *The River Ride*. I was thrilled at first, but soon realized that *The River Ride* was NOT the *River of No Return*. It was a silly replacement.

Running *The River Ride* was made more fun when it was discovered that anything thrown from the first lift of *XLR-8* would pelt the dock. So we spent most of the summer ducking for cover.

I almost hate to say it, but I think *XLR-8* marked a point in our park's history when things started to change. It seems as if *AstroWorld* never recovered from the installation of the ride.



Mike Robinson at *The River Ride* in the Summer of 1984



SplashTown Houston Plans to *Rip the Qurl* in 2008!

Photos and Article By Mike Robinson

When SplashTown waterpark located in Spring Texas opened along with its sister park in San Antonio, no one could imagine the growth the park would go through. In the 90's, the park received its first and second Proslide "Probowls" with one covered and the one uncovered, the "Big Spin" was a big hit.

A few years later a Proslide "Pipeline" called *Thunder Run* opened to rave reviews. This racing course featured 2-man and 3-man tubes through a maze of pipe.

Six Flags purchased SplashTown during the opening of this ride and continued with the introduction of the Proslide "Tornado." More recently, PARC Management, LLC purchased SplashTown from Six Flags.

In 2008, the new owner is giving SplashTown its biggest capital package to date - a 2 million dollar package. The centerpiece will be the new *RipQurl*, a Proslide Cannonbowl that will sit in the northeast section of the park.

The park is also getting some major infrastructure improvements this year with new paint, fences, bridges, and landscaping. The *Lazy River* will be resurfaced along with the bottom of several of the pools. Replacement of stairs and platforms will be part of the improvement package including new stairs for *Zoom Flume*, *Space Rapids*, and *Texas Freefall*, plus the replacement of the platform for *Zoom Flume*.



New paint, new lockers, and new merchandise will be greeting guests this year. No more superhero garb in the gift shop! SplashTown specific merchandise will now be available after being missing for many years.

Season passes are now on sale and patrons can already process their passes at the park. (Please call park for hours.) The new owners have also approved a new advertising budget, so look for intensive media blitz throughout the summer.

As always, the beautiful landscaping will grace this park. SplashTown, nestled in a forest of trees, is one of the most shaded waterparks in the country.

RipQurl will be the fifth Proslide attraction in the park, following the two slides making up the *Big Spin*, *Thunder Run*, and *Tornado*.

The 2008 season looks to be another great Summer for SplashTown!





Feature Member: Jay Wilson

What are some of your favorite roller coasters and amusement/theme parks?

The Universal Parks, Busch Gardens Africa (BGA), Six Flags Magic Mountain, Six Flags Over Texas, Kings Dominion, and Kennywood. *Goliath* at Six Flags Magic Mountain and *Titan* at Six Flags Over Texas, two of the best coasters in the world, *Mr. Freeze* at Six Flags Over Texas, I love launch coasters, All B&M's at BGA, *Millennium Force*, *Lightning Racer*, and *The Beast*.

What hobbies or interests do you have besides roller coasters?

Watching movies in the theater (125+ in a year), going to concerts ('80's hard rock and heavy metal), watching Denver Bronco Games (especially the cheerleaders)! snow skiing and scuba diving.

When did you first become interested in roller coasters?

I've always loved going to amusement parks (and especially coasters) since I was very young. I remember my parents taking me to a small park in Illinois and riding my first coaster (a *Galaxy*). Our family also took a trip to Walt Disney World in the Spring of 1972 -- mere months after the resort had opened. When I got separated from my parents (who were frantic about the situation), I knew I wasn't lost -- just walking around loving the park!

What is your favorite regional event and why?

I've been to Lone Star Coasterthon, Fiesta Fest, and Winterfest just once and have enjoyed all of them immensely (it's often difficult for me to get away from work). I especially liked Winterfest at Six Flags Over Texas however. It's great to get everyone together in the off season to talk about coasters and hear the guest speakers as well as having fun with the games and prizes. We're really looking forward to hosting the event for a second time in 2009 where we will once again get to ride a coaster at the event!

How did you find out about ACE and how long have you been a member?

I was working *The Wild Cat* at Elitch's when an ACE Member started talking to me about the club. He gave me a business card and I joined right away. I've been a member since 1987.

What is your favorite non-coaster ride or attraction?

I especially love theme parks so I particularly like any ride or attraction that's heavily themed. I would certainly have to say my favorites are drop rides and dark rides.

Working at Kemah Boardwalk, what was it like watching *Boardwalk Bullet* slowly rise day by day?

It was exciting, fascinating, and informative. I have seen many steel coasters erected at the other parks I have worked at but never a wooden coaster. It is a very different construction process. The *Bullet* had so much convoluted track that had to be pieced together in such a particular way that I couldn't even follow the layout! I could relate to the hard work they were doing out there as well because I did a contracting job for 4 months refurbishing the *Rampage* at Visionland getting ready for that park's reopening in 2003.

You've been in the theme park industry for several years, what are some of the other parks you've worked at?

This is my 28th year in the amusement industry (I can't believe it myself!) My first job was operating *Mister Twister* at Elitch's in 1981. I've also worked at Busch Gardens Williamsburg, Kentucky Kingdom, and Visionland.

Now for the tough question...Wood or Steel?

Definitely Steel. I love going upside-down, great heights and speeds, and launch coasters. I also like the re-rideability of a steel coaster, provided they are comfortable and smooth.

Which park(s) and roller coaster(s) would you most like to visit/ride?

There's a few of the major parks in the United States I haven't visited and those are the ones I'm desperately trying to get to. Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, Bonfante Gardens, Lagoon, Silver Dollar City and Celebration City, and the parks in the New York and New England areas. The most anticipated trip that I will make at some point will be an extensive coaster tour of Europe (especially the UK, German, and Scandinavian parks).

Free question...say anything!

I love the amusement park industry -- especially attending the IAAPA Attractions Expo every year (since 1989). It's the best time to see all of my friends and business associates from both the operational side as well as the manufacturing side. I have a unique passion for the industry because it's not only my career, but my hobby. I'm very involved in the industry and enjoy reading all the publications associated with it. I really enjoy representing the industry at events as well as just spending time with friends in attendance. Say anything? I'm still single so if there's any lovely ladies out there with similar interests as me ... come visit me at The Kemah Boardwalk!