

What's new at amusement parks around the country

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Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Thrill-seekers searching for the new biggest, tallest or fastest roller coaster rush may be slightly disappointed.

The 2007 class of coasters at amusement parks across America isn't a record-breaker. In fact, one park is dumping two of its old coasters and another is re-engineering a wooden coaster to make it a little less thrilling.

That means a lot of new shows, water park additions and cartoon-themed features for small children. But there are still some offerings for the boardwalk adrenaline junkie, from new coasters that drop five degrees steeper than straight down to a seven-story swing in Missouri that takes riders 75 feet in the air.

"This year, the parks are really kind of trying to capture the family market, as opposed to the teen market," says Steven Smith, operations manager for the theme-park consulting Baker Leisure Group.

A look at what's new this summer:

Get wet

New water park features are abundant, from water coasters to wave pools.

- Six Flags Kentucky Kingdom opens Deluge, a new hydromagnetic water coaster that takes patrons in four-person rafts through a series of tunnels and turns. The park is also expanding its Splashwater Kingdom with a Buccaneer Beach play area for young children.

- Bakuli debuts at Holiday World in Santa Claus, Ind. The seven-story attraction takes riders in complete darkness through a 9-foot-wide tunnel before a huge drop into a brightly colored bowl, then another tunnel.

- Blue Bayou Waterpark and Dixie Landin' in Baton Rouge, La., is also adding a bowl ride called Voodoo, which is 80 feet tall and enclosed.

- Guests in cloverleaf rafts will wind through tunnels and into a giant funnel on the Tornado at Six Flag's Great Escape and Splashwater Kingdom in Queensbury, N.Y.

- SeaWorld San Antonio adds "Jour-

ney to Atlantis," part coaster and part water ride. Boats hit the water for the finale at 49 mph.

- WaterWorks at King's Dominion in Doswell, Va., expands with a second wave pool, a 65-foot Tornado water ride and new log flume.

- Magic Springs and Crystal Falls in Hot Springs, Ark., becomes the state's largest water slide complex with three new speed slides, four tube slides and a new play pool.

- Hersheypark in Pennsylvania celebrates its 100th anniversary with a new boardwalk. It will include four slides, a kid's play area and wave pool that simulates body surfing.

- Four additions are coming to Boulder Beach at Silverwood in Idaho — a VIP Cabana Island for rent, 40-foot tall raft ride, new wave pool and kids' area.

Go fast

The new coaster class may be small, but it's diverse.

- Maverick is set to open at Cedar Point in Sandusky, Ohio, but construction delays could keep it closed until June or later. When it gets running, the ride will take guests on a 95-degree drop (steeper than straight down) and at 70 mph speeds.

- Mystery Mine at Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., isn't the fastest, but may be the most highly themed new coaster. The ride simulates a spooky, abandoned coal mine and drops 85 feet at 95 degrees. Top speed on the 2-minute, 30-second ride is 60 mph.

- Griffon at Busch Gardens Europe in Williamsburg, Va., is set in a French village, with a 90-degree drop and no floor. The park bills it as the tallest — and first floorless — dive coaster.

- Busch Gardens Africa in Tampa is giving similar treatment to Sheikra, a 2-year-old coaster. The park will close the ride for three weeks to remove its floor this year, providing "an unobstructed view of the 70 mph rush."

- Wicket at Lagoon near Salt Lake City is 110 feet high and goes up to 55 mph.

- Tony Hawk's Big Spin is a relatively tame new coaster at two Six Flags locations — St. Louis and San Antonio. The

ride's cars spin as it goes around the track at 31 mph to simulate the skate star's tricks.

- King's Island in Ohio adds its 14th coaster, a flyer called Firehawk. It takes riders 115 feet high and through five inversions at more than 50 mph. The park is also taking the signature loop out of its Son of Beast wooden coaster after a malfunction last year injured more than 20 riders. It was the first "woodie" with a loop.

Just go ride it

Some new attractions fit more than one category, or don't fit any at all.

- NASA makes its foray into the entertainment business with the new Shuttle Launch Experience at the Kennedy Space Center's visitor area. The \$60 million ride simulates, as its name suggests, a shuttle blastoff and ascent into orbit. Astronauts were consulted to make the ride as realistic as possible.

- Walt Disney World in Orlando opens its new comedy show featuring characters from the popular movie "Monsters Inc." Instead of collecting screams, like in the movie, the characters try to elicit laughs, or "gigglewatts," to power Monstropolis. Guests are invited to text their own jokes, and anyone in the audience is fair game to tease.

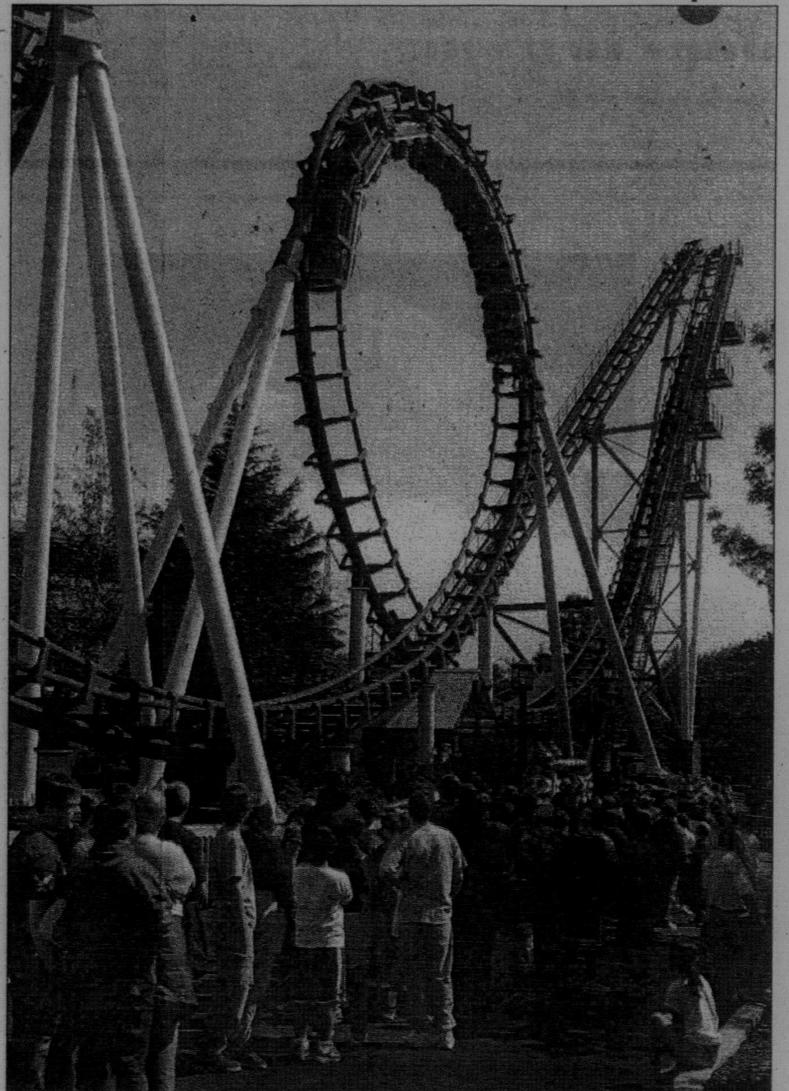
- Disneyland in Anaheim, Calif., relaunches its popular Submarine Voyage ride with "Finding Nemo" movie themes. Patrons take a trip to an active undersea volcano with the cartoon characters in Tomorrowland.

- The Xtreme Frisbee ride opens at Canobie Lake Park in Salem, N.H. Riders sit around an enormous Frisbee (26 feet wide) that spins and swings 63 feet high. There are even moments of weightlessness.

- Silver Dollar City in Branson, Mo., launches its Giant Swing. The ride sends riders up 75 feet in opposite directions and nearly 230 degrees. The park says it produces "back-to-back G-force kicks" and sensations of weightlessness.

Giddy up

Two Western-themed parks are opening up this year.



AP photo

A crowd gathers next to the Sidewinder roller coaster, to wait in line to ride Hershey Park's new roller coaster, the Storm Runner.

- Ghost Town in the Sky at Jacksonville Beach, N.C., reopens after being shuttered since 2002. The park is making over and renaming the Red Devil coaster as the Cliff Hanger. It goes 56 mph.
- Wild West World calls itself Kan-

sa's first Theme Park. Located outside Wichita, the 35-acre park has six thrill rides, nine family rides and nine kids'

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rides. Attractions are split into sections called "Texas," "Oklahoma" and "Kansas."

What's in a name?

- Denver's theme park is changing its name back to Elyse Gardens after it was sold by Six Flags.

- Six Flags Marine World in Vallejo, Calif., will now go by "Six Flags Discovery Kingdom." The park is being split into themed areas: "Land," "Sea" and "Sky."

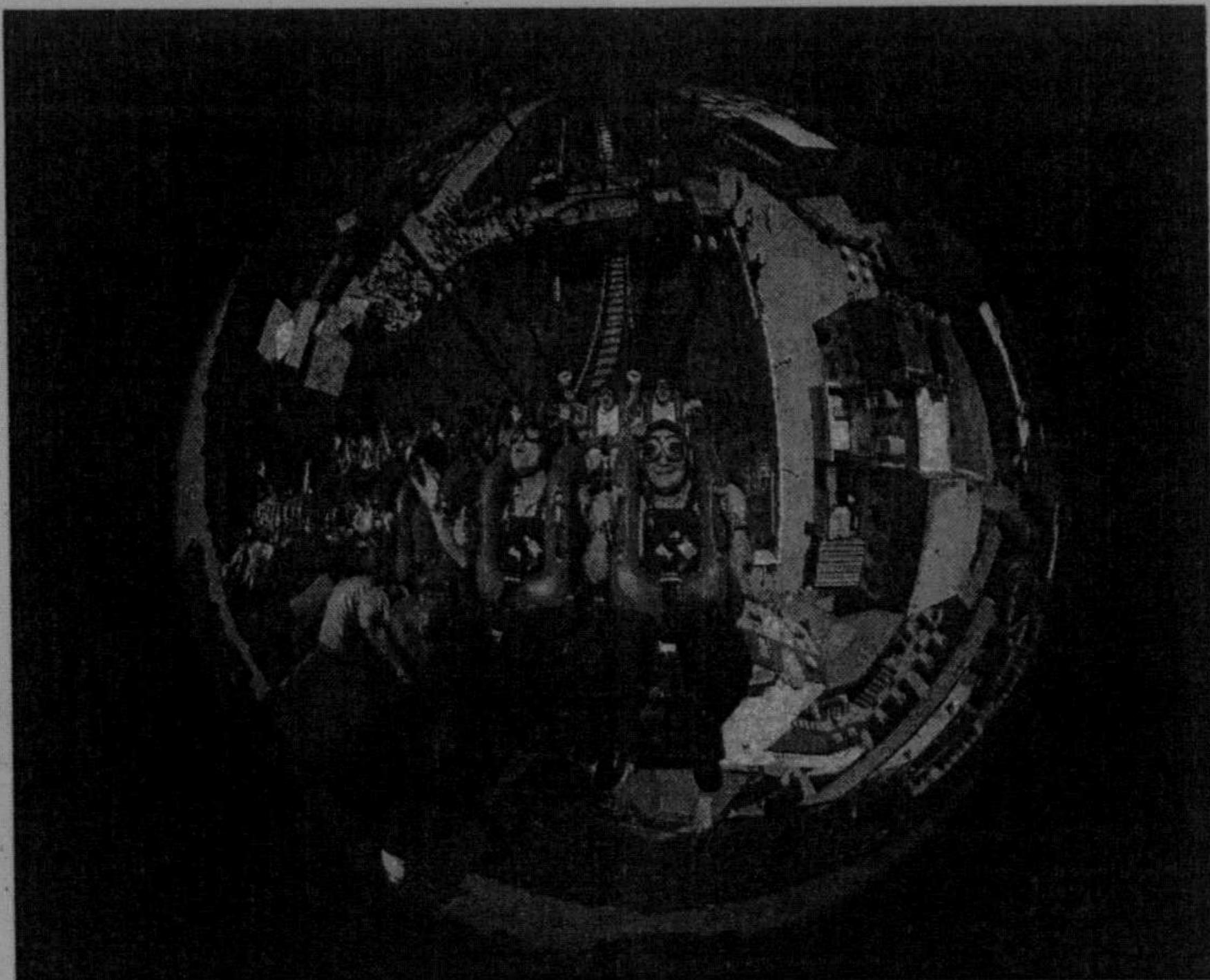
For the kids

The cutest new rides are here.

- SeaWorld Orlando is doubling "Shamu's Happy Harbor" and adding three new rides. The Ocean Commotion is a swinging boat ride, the Flying Fiddler lifts riders 20 feet in the air and jostles them and a new carousel features 65 sea creatures.

- Holiday World is adding a new tilt-a-whirl in its Thanksgiving area.

- New "Wiggles World"



AP photo

Busch Gardens Europe park executives, Larry Giles, left, and Donnie Mills, right, join American Coaster Enthusiasts for the inaugural dive of Griffon, the world's tallest and first floorless dive coaster, May 16 in Williamsburg, Va.

areas are coming to Six Flags parks in Jackson, N.J.; Gurnee, Ill.; and Agawam, Mass. The area features rides themed after the popular children's act and supporting characters from the cable show "The

Wiggles."

- Wild Safari Exploration Station also debuts at Six Flags in New Jersey near the Wiggles attraction, featuring hands-on activities about animals on six continents.