

# ipm in park MAGAZINE

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## Megna and Chen are bridging the Silk Road of the Entertainment World



### Dubai

Wärtsilä Funa Solutions integrates  
MOTIONGATE and more

### SeaWorld

Exclusive: IPM talks to  
COO Anthony Esparza

### Innovation

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new ideas for the industry



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# The theatrical haunting of themed entertainment

*This issue's bonus distribution diversity reflects our industry*



**Martin Palicki,**  
**Publisher**



**Judith Rubin,**  
**Editor**



**Joe Kleiman,**  
**News Editor**

If you are reading this magazine in St. Louis you are likely at the annual conference and trade show of USITT (US Institute of Theater Technology) or the TransWorld Halloween & Attractions Show. If you're reading it in Dubai, you're probably attending DEAL.

We're very pleased to be media partners with USITT, TransWorld, and DEAL. Each of these organizations has a unique and important relationship to the industry. Themed entertainment is essentially a specialized form of theater, and to this day a huge number of industry professionals have a foundation of theatrical training. Several articles in this issue reinforce the connection (see Thomas Megna's cover story, Ringling Bros., Ken Saba, Gary Goddard). "At our conference, you're as likely to run into an Imagineer as someone from a regional Shakespeare festival," said USITT executive director David Grindle.

Haunted attractions are also a form of specialized theater, right down to the zombie makeup, props, lighting and effects – and their sister industry, escape rooms, might be seen as a form of improv. This industry has blossomed internationally over the past decade or so and TransWorld has been there to bring it together. Be sure to check out Rick West's overview of the state of the industry in Southern California.

DEAL is the foremost industry trade show in the Middle East, an important, growing leisure

market like no other, in just about every way you can imagine. In the last year, Dubai Parks and Resorts opened along with IMG Worlds of Adventure. In Abu Dhabi, a Warner Brothers themed park began construction near Ferrari World, which itself is in the midst of opening a steady stream of new attractions. In this issue we look at how Wärtsilä Funa Solutions took their decades of experience with AV integration in theaters and applied it to almost 50 of the venues in the new Dubai Parks and Resorts property.

And those are just some of the bigger players in the United Arab Emirates. The unique theme parks, cultural attractions, resorts and retail developed in the UAE have few counterparts elsewhere in the world. In 2020, Dubai will host a major world's fair and that too, is proceeding on a unique model. (Check out the InPark website for our coverage of Dubai Expo 2020.)

This convergence of theater, technology and storytelling isn't new, but it's getting expanded recognition in larger circles, both geographically and in different market segments. InPark continues to be on the forefront of covering these growing markets not only in our partnerships with leading industry associations, but also in covering the stories and projects wherever they are happening. •••

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- 6** Valley ghouls  
Los Angeles' influential haunts industry • *by Rick West*
- 9** Journey to the top  
The Gateway Arch tram modernization helps preserve a national icon • *by Kevin Dazey*
- 12** Building a better attractions industry in Asia  
The international adventures of Thomas Megna • *by Judith Rubin*
- 16** Enter Esparza  
The new SeaWorld is rebranding and reaching out • *by Judith Rubin*
- 22** Greetings Programs  
Dave Cobb on the TRON legacy • *interview by Joe Kleiman*
- 27** Lorelei Owens at the circus  
Ringling's "Out of this World" theater technology • *interview by Joe Kleiman*
- 30** From sawmills to Smurfs  
Wärtsilä Funa Solutions builds on company's legacy of innovation and technology • *by Martin Palicki*
- 34** Ford and the Robot  
Manufacturing Innovation introduces guests to the concept of a breakthrough car model • *by Judith Rubin*
- 37** The whats, whys and hows  
Ken Saba's life in media production • *interview by Judith Rubin*
- 41** Of racks and rigs  
USITT's commitment to theater technology is evident in their annual conference and trade show • *by Joe Kleiman*
- 43** Fireside chat  
Martin Palicki visits with Gary Goddard and Taylor Jeffs
- 44** All the world's a stage  
Gary Goddard's theatrical roots govern his creative process • *by Martin Palicki*

## staff & contributors

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## advertiser index

Alcorn McBride	8
Alterface	33
Asia Amusement and Attractions Expo	29
Christie	4
DEAL	26
Haunted Attractions Network	32
IAAPA Asian Attractions Expo	40
TechFulcrum	20
TransWorld	21
WhiteWater	2

**COVER:** The team at Silkroading Entertainment are building their presence in China from their home base in Beijing. **Full story on p 12.**



**Fright Fest at Six Flags Magic Mountain**  
*Photo credit: Theme Park Adventure*

# Valley ghouls

Los Angeles' influential haunts industry

*by Rick West*

Halloween in Southern California is a unique animal. The season that has become a \$10 billion worldwide industry as it has expanded throughout Europe and Asia over the last decade or so has significant roots in the greater Los Angeles area. Here's how:

## **From cinema to theme parks**

Hollywood: Universal unleashed pop culture's classic movie monsters from the 1920s to the '50s. Then in the '70s and '80s, the horror genre experienced a popularity revolution by way of Michael Myers, Jason Voorhees, and Freddy Krueger.

The stories moved across platforms to spawn intense video games and themed entertainment experiences. In 1973, a group of Knott's Berry Farm employees pitched the idea to management for a "Halloween Haunt" overlay for the theme park in Buena Park; nothing crazy - just a fun nod to the holiday. Forty-five seasons later, Knott's Scary Farm is one of the largest

major theme park haunts in the world, spanning more than 30 nights each year between September and November.

We consider Knott's as the birthplace of theme park Halloween events. Decades later, it is still at the top of its game, nightly entertaining thousands of dedicated fans when the season rolls around. Following in the footsteps of Knott's, theme parks in Southern California and across the US have gotten into the act, from Disneyland Resort to Universal Orlando, each with its own unique flavor and fan base.

## **Haunted houses**

In the '70s and '80s, when October rolled around haunted houses in SoCal were often organized by community organizations such as the March of Dimes, or boys and girls clubs - even churches.

At the same time, the home haunt genre began to mature: yard displays started to outgrow the colored-light-on-the-

porch-and-scratchy-record-playing-spooky-sound-effects era. A good example from 1973 was the Hallowed Haunting Grounds, created by a group of friends in Studio City. This was an elaborate collection of home-made sets, optical illusions, and animated props inspired by Disneyland's Haunted Mansion. The Hallowed Haunting Grounds took the art of home haunts to an entirely new level, and it remained a local champion until 2005, when it faded into the history books. Today, it is not uncommon to see heartfelt homages to the Hallowed Haunting Grounds at other home haunts and Halloween yard displays throughout Southern California.

Standalone haunted attractions are another category. They can be found in all shapes and sizes around SoCal, from unused warehouses to fairgrounds and even vacant residences. The Queen Mary puts on an event – Dark Harbor – each Halloween that absolutely rivals the scale of anything Universal or Knott's does. Dark Harbor's situation of actually having mazes and monsters on the famous ocean liner makes it arguably one of the most unique haunted attractions anywhere in the world.

### **New levels of immersion and interaction**

In recent years, the trend has been for haunts to include or feature immersive, theatrical experiences and interaction. One of the first organizations on the cutting edge of really expanding the classic haunted house experience to something familiar-yet-new was Jon Braver's Delusion, which made waves in the US haunt community. Delusion is more of a haunted play in that guests assume the roles of various characters as they work their way through a usually-frightening and always complex tale. Tickets for Delusion sell out literally minutes after they go on sale, indicating there's a market for beautifully-executed, interactive horror theater. Other extremely personal theatrical events that we've seen explode onto the SoCal scene include CREEP, Alone, and The Tension Experience. These highly-interactive, boundary-breaking types of attractions are drawing great interest, with participants often paying two or three times what they would to attend any of the large-scale theme park events.

More direct theater/haunt fusion is also easily accessible in the Los Angeles area: Zombie Joe's Underground Theater group currently leads the charge with its annual Tour of Terror spectacle that combines a traditional, haunt-type maze with a live theater production. Another notable production is Unbound Productions' Wicked Lit, which creates stunning, engaging live theater performances in and around a cemetery and mausoleum near Pasadena.

### **LA's potent mix**

From major theme park events to standalone haunted attractions, gloriously elaborate home displays to immersive



## **Rick West, TPA and Midsummer Scream**

In some 22 years editing Theme Park Adventure (TPA) and based in SoCal, haunted attractions have grown from a nice side focus for us to become at least 50% of all content we publish online. We made more than 45 stops at haunts alone in SoCal for Halloween 2016 and still did not see everything that was offered.

Being surrounded by top haunt productions in the "Southland" naturally instigates a drive and desire to create and experience haunts that are even bigger, scarier, and more fantastic. That's a tall order, but one that is met head-on year after year in the area.

The sense of excitement and general curiosity of the incredible amount and type of haunts in the area has the rest of the world intrigued, and has supported the creation of successful industry events such as Midsummer Scream, a Halloween, haunt and horror convention held each summer at the Long Beach Convention Center.

The 2017 Midsummer Scream expects to welcome upward of 15,000 fans and haunters. The program includes panel presentations by all of the major theme parks and attractions, a show floor filled with artisans selling their spooky wares, a football field-sized dark zone packed with mini haunted attractions and roaming monsters, plus a weekend of live entertainment. We feel Midsummer Scream exemplifies the spirit of the Southern California Halloween and haunt community - proud of what we do and welcoming to other fans, organizations and haunters from around the world.



**Rick West (left) hosts a Midsummer Scream panel in 2016, focused on creating frightening attractions for theme parks. Panelists included Susan Bonds, Phil Hetteema, Gary Goddard, and Tony Baxter.** *Photo credit Midsummer Scream*

theatrical events, when it comes to Halloween attractions Southern California stands out for its wide array and staggering level of quality across the board. There's a veritable showcase of incredibly polished haunts and attractions, from San Diego to the Central Valley, the likes of which at such a dense availability are unprecedented anywhere else.

them are entertainment professionals of one kind or another who put on their haunter hats at the end of the day. When you're an artist, creative director, scenic fabricator, sculptor, engineer, writer, lighting designer, or actor, the quality of any haunt you help create will inevitably be an extension of what you do for a living. ...

The reason? Los Angeles is a hotbed of entertainment, where movie studios, television production, video game developers, and theme park design firms all thrive in abundance. That creativity, professional edge and sophistication are reflected in SoCal's great haunts, because many of the people who create



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# Journey to the top

The Gateway Arch tram modernization helps preserve a national icon

*by Kevin Dazey*

*The famous tram ride to the top of the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, Missouri, USA is currently undergoing improvements, along with the extensive revamping of many other features making up the visitor experience in and around this destination attraction. We looked into the engineering details.*

The Gateway Arch is ranked as the tallest man-made monument in the United States at 630 feet high, and it is also one of the most recognizable. This icon and international tourist destination was designed by the famous, visionary modernist architect Eero Saarinen. For the half-century it has existed, the Arch has also offered one of the most famous rides in the world. This is no standard elevator: the monument's shape called for a unique, custom tram system to bring visitors to the observation deck at the top.

Upwards of 926,500 tickets are sold annually for the tram ride. After decades of service, major components vital to this system are being updated or replaced to ensure continued safe operation for years to come.

The Arch resides on a National Park Service (NPS) site known as the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial along the Mississippi River in downtown St. Louis. Accompanying the trams are other attractions residing either below the Arch or within a short walk nearby. These include a museum with exhibits about the historic westward expansion, a riverboat cruise and the Old Courthouse - an historic landmark best known as the site of the first two trials of the Dred Scott case.

The tram upgrades are independent of a continuing transformation of the grounds and facilities, known as the CityArchRiver project, but are occurring on a partially overlapping timeframe. Major changes to the grounds include a park spanning from the Old Courthouse to the Arch and a new, more inviting visitor center entrance that leads to the trams, museum, theater, and Arch Store. The park is significant as it covers a highway that had formed a barrier between downtown and its icon. Other highlights include new and refreshed museum exhibits, landscape improvements and accessible pedestrian pathways.

While October 2015 marked 50 years since the completion of the Arch structure, another related milestone will occur in 2017. July 1967 marked the opening of the tram within the north leg (the south leg tram would open later in 1968). The tram system, designed by Richard B. Bowser, is an engineering marvel, all the more impressive considering the short time within which it was conceived and the constraints involved. (No less fascinating - and worth the reader's further investigation - is the story that took Bowser from concept to contract.)

### The unique tram ride

Each five-passenger cylindrical cabin or capsule starts out hanging below an overhead track and eventually rides above the same track, due to traveling along the curvature of the Arch leg. Similar to a Ferris wheel, leveling is constantly needed to keep passengers upright during their trip. The capsule rotation to remain level is handled by mechanical and electrical sensors with gravity assist. This motion is probably one of the more memorable aspects of the ride, together with the novelty of the original passenger capsules.

A peek out the tram door windows while in motion will reveal a set of stairs that lets you know you are moving, but no outside reference points are visible to help indicate height at any moment until arriving at the top. The journey is mild and gradual. Ascent time is approximately four minutes while the return trip is slightly shorter, although distance traveled is the same. Visitors can take in the views from the observation deck for as long as they like. At full capacity with both trams operating, throughput is more than 400 passengers per hour.

While the improvements to the museum exhibits, grounds and guest services are highly visible, the upgraded Gateway Arch tram ride will not seem any different in the spring of 2017 from

the riders' perspective. It was a goal to maintain the experience. New hoisting components and controls are out of sight of the visitor. Project construction like this is an intense effort and has required many hours by all, especially NPS support staff.

### Upgrade details

Scheduled for replacement or upgrade were portions of the trams' electrical system and mechanical equipment responsible for hoisting tram capsules to the apex. Chance Baragary P.E., PMP, Project Director, Gateway Arch Construction at Bi-State Development (BSD) described how replacing aging equipment in such a confined location is easier said than done. "The space constraints have been the biggest challenge since the beginning of design: finding and designing suitable equipment and controls to fit into the tight spaces along with moving new components up and removing demo materials from the top," said Baragary.

The main components for which functionality was being replaced resided at the top either near or under the observation deck, itself being the narrowest part of the structure. The existing motor-generator (MG) sets, DC motors, and controls that set the trams in motion were removed for a more modern set-up. The old system was swapped out for smaller AC motors, an additional 2:1 gear box, and variable-frequency drives (VFD). Additional programmable logic controllers (PLCs) and an existing PLC will integrate with these new components. "These upgrades will make use of modern technologies and reduce difficulties of sourcing replacement parts, since replacement parts for the original equipment were often difficult to find," said Baragary. "A project goal was to have as many off-the-shelf parts as possible, but due to the unique applications necessary many components are still somewhat custom in nature."

**The Arch under construction (left).** *Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri.*  
**The tram cabins near the bottom of the track in the Arch (right).** *Photo by Jack Boucher, courtesy of the Library of Congress.*  
*Photo on previous page by Daniel Schwen.*



Much of the new equipment is housed in a more accessible location than before. Newly constructed platforms in each leg are the home for the VFDs and PLC equipment, but the AC motors remain at the top in the same location as the retired DC motors. The new platforms are accessed via existing traditional service elevators that rise approximately 300 feet in both legs.

Additional new elements will enhance functionality. "Another feature we added as part of this MG project is a separate 7.5hp "inching motor," said Bargary. This is not for use in normal operation, but allows for a very slow creep of the tram if necessary for maintenance or emergency operation. The inching motor does not rely on the VFD or PLC to enable function, but is rather hardwired in and has a supplemental drive system (the additional mechanical advantage enables movement with such a small motor). "Unrelated to our current MG project there were also new egress platforms recently constructed within the legs," said Bargary. "Safety of both visitors and employees has always been priority one, and these recent changes supplement the systems that already provided a very safe operation."

Last but not least is the implementation of a new brake. Under normal operation the PLC/VFD/motor combination stops the tram's motion, followed by brake sets to lock down the tram while loading and unloading. Unlike the previous brake which actually stopped motion, the new brake does not set until tram movement has ceased. The new braking system is fully integrated with the existing tram and counterweight speed governors, numerous tram position sensors, and door and leveling safeties from an on-board PLC.

### **The team, safety and ticketing**

The NPS and BSD teamed with Maida Engineering, Inc. (Philadelphia) for the new design and equipment specifications; The Harlan Company (St. Louis) was general contractor for the project. Maida is no stranger to the Arch tram system as its engineers performed a thorough evaluation in 2005 and were also involved in a previous PLC implementation.

Maida and the NPS Tram Mechanics spent months figuring out how to best accomplish the project goals. An established relationship had already existed between BSD and the NPS as BSD was responsible for issuing bonds used for the design and construction of the trams. BSD serves both Missouri and neighboring Illinois with multiple enterprises such as local public transportation, a nearby airport, as well as the Gateway Arch trams and riverboats. Per Baragary, "Maintenance and operation of the Gateway Arch trams are a service of one of the Enterprises within BSD. BSD has a long-standing partnership with the National Park Service, with BSD running the trams since commissioned."

Established parameters are followed operation-wise. Daily inspections are performed, several system interlocks are present to maintain proper operational speed, and E-stop protocols remain in place. Emergency generators are employed to assist during a power outage to prevent a tram from stalling anywhere between load areas.

An upgrade to ticketing and new exhibits in the load zones will complement tram-related changes. New ticketing software by the coincidentally aptly-named Gateway Ticketing Solutions offers same-day online sales and other features not previously available. Sarah Clarke, Acting Director of Operations, Gateway Arch at Bi-State Development said, "Visitors have already responded very positively to our new ticketing system, as online sales have increased from 12% in 2014 to 32% in 2016. We're also in the process of implementing a brand new, responsive web store which will offer visitors user-friendly access from their computer or mobile device."

Clarke touched on other aspects of what guests can expect in the new experience, which seems likely to help drive up future visitation numbers. "A top priority for the new tram tour is for visitors to feel a part of an immersive experience prior to boarding the tram. For example, each visitor must be assigned a boarding pass designating their tram car, but during that process, we don't want visitors to simply feel like they're waiting in line. Visitors will be greeted by their tour guide and led through a guided audiovisual experience for the first 20-30 minutes of their tour. Animations and an interactive quiz show have been developed to tie 1960s events and technology together with the building of the Gateway Arch."

On an international scale, the refresh of the Gateway Arch monument and surrounding features comes at a time when observation attractions of various kinds are rising fast and altering city skylines around the world. On the local scale, it is complemented by numerous improvements and new attractions in downtown St. Louis over the past few years, such as the recently opened National Blues Museum, Ballpark Village, CityGarden and Peabody Opera House. The Arch has stood the test of time as a unique, innovative structure, icon and destination attraction and augurs well for the future of its city and region. . . .

*Kevin Dazey has a mechanical engineering background and works in R&D at a manufacturing company in St. Louis. He writes about ride engineering, roller coasters and related topics for InPark. Kevin's passion for roller coasters and amusement parks began early, while growing up in northeast Ohio near Sea World, Geauga Lake, Cedar Point, and Kennywood. To date, he has visited 41 parks and ridden 235 roller coasters.*



*Besides a fondness for the attractions industry Kevin enjoys maintaining a collection of vintage motorcycles and ATVs. Email: dazey200x@yahoo.com*

# Building a better attractions industry in Asia

The international adventures of Thomas Megna

by Judith Rubin

The place is Beijing, China. It is nearly 30 years since Thomas Megna first left Los Angeles to work on a theme park in Asia. When that project finished, he continued to work overseas, mostly in the Asia Pacific region. Four years ago, he established his base in Beijing to serve the rapidly growing leisure attractions industry in China.

Mr. Megna is a man on a mission. As an experienced themed entertainment professional with many projects to his credit, he sees business opportunities in China. He also sees an industry that needs education, tools and resources to catch up with itself. As the Board President of the Asia Pacific Division of the Themed Entertainment Association (TEA), he's enthusiastic about helping to make that happen.

There is a new urgency to the mission, prompted by the success of Shanghai Disneyland, which opened in June 2016. Shanghai Disneyland has raised the bar. Universal Studios Beijing can be

expected to uphold that bar when it opens in 2020. China is fast becoming the world's largest themed entertainment market. Local developers are stepping up activity. The global travel and financial sectors are watching closely.

"Everyone said the bar would be raised after the opening of Shanghai Disneyland," said Megna. "Well it's open now, and the bar *has* been raised. Currently there are about 100 new projects in the development pipeline. Owners, operators and suppliers need professional development, better standards and an understanding of the process to ensure more successful results and higher quality when those projects open."

The interest is not just in first-tier cities but in second- and third-tier markets as well, Megna points out. And audiences are more technologically sophisticated, with high expectations of quality. The question is how to go forward. "There's a knowledge gap, and the developers and owners and operators realize it," he said.

**Back Row: Hongtao (Chuck) Weng, Wei Feng, Qing (Jasmine) Zhang, Minqi (Martin) Zhao, Chen Kun**  
**Front Row: Jianjun Chen, Thomas Megna** *Courtesy of Silkroading Entertainment*





**Thomas Megna greets guests and speaks at a recent TEA Mixer in China.** *Courtesy of Thomas Megna*

“Creating a theme park or integrated resort is different from creating a retail center or shopping mall. The project process is very specialized, especially with today’s immersive, media-based, high-tech attractions.”

**Looking ahead**

If you’re active in the region, you may have met Thomas Megna in a professional capacity. His company Megna Entertainment recently teamed with Silkroading Ltd. to form Silkroading Entertainment as a one-stop shop for the leisure industry in China. You may also have heard Megna and/or some of his TEA colleagues speak at a conference, or met them at a TEA mixer – perhaps in Shanghai, Beijing, Sanya or Singapore.

Megna’s own storyline seems inevitably to have led to this moment. Before he crossed the Pacific Rim, he founded a successful theater company (while still in his 20s) and spent 12 years teaching, five of them at CalArts (California Institute of the Arts – a private college of the visual and performing arts, established by Walt Disney). He jumped into hands-on theme park development in 1989, joining Landmark Entertainment to work on Sanrio Puroland in Japan. Megna continued to live and work overseas in eight different countries, mostly Asia Pacific. In 2009-2012, his company worked on Adlabs Imagic.

With expertise in immersive technology, facility operations and project management, Megna can look back on a distinguished career of pioneering entertainment projects around the world.

But Megna isn’t looking back – he’s looking ahead. Megna the teacher, Megna the businessman, Megna the specialist/consultant and Megna the industry champion are all coming together, to help the professional development of Asia’s leisure

attractions industry catch up with its explosive pace of growth and customer demand.

**Thirst for knowledge**

Megna was installed as TEA Asia Pacific Division President in November 2016, and has been active in the Division and within the association for many years. “I think our mission right now - for TEA and for myself as a teacher - and as a business professional - is to help,” he said. “The industry here needs more quality vendors, and higher standards.”

Shanghai Disneyland, he explains, supplied a new benchmark for owners and developers, and for many local vendors, a learning curve. “The vendors here that worked on Disney Shanghai started to see and understand the process and the requirements. They now need our guidance and leadership to see how they can take that experience and help create the future of this industry.” He observes that developers, in turn, need to support better quality by paying more. “The passion to do better is there.”

Since the TEA Asia Pacific Division was set up five years ago, relationships have been built with trade organizations such as IAAPA, CAAPA, AAA and TPASA. Support has come from Chimelong Group, Wanda Group and Guoyan Culture and Media Inc., among others.

The members of the TEA Asia Pacific Board of Directors are helping stimulate activity throughout the region while Megna builds up the association’s presence in Beijing. There are upcoming TEA events and presentations in Taiwan, Singapore and Guangzhou, as well as Beijing and Shanghai. “There is a thirst for knowledge,” said Megna, who is a popular speaker at conferences, especially

his talks about project process and intellectual property (IP). A TEA panel discussion at CAAPA in Beijing chaired by Megna will bring together an international group of experts all active in the region, representing Universal Creative, Wanda, YAOX5D, Thinkwell and JBA. "We'll be talking about the key ingredients of developing an award winning attraction, and how to integrate with Chinese culture," said Megna.

In addition to helping Asian companies develop, Megna and TEA are helping companies from North America and Europe find their way in Asia. "Western companies should not be afraid of coming to China and working in China," he said. "The challenge is that clients want to see local examples of your work. You may have projects in Las Vegas or Los Angeles or Florida, but what have you done in China that a potential client can go and see, who have you worked with in China that can talk to us about you? We explain to Western companies how they can ally with a local company that has complementary strengths in a win-win for both."

If these efforts pay off, by the time Universal Studios Beijing opens in 2020, some of the knowledge gaps will be filled, or more nearly filled, and the Asian attractions industry will be moving forward – more professional and polished, more experienced, more consistent. Megna's vision will be taking shape in ways even he may not yet anticipate.

Whatever happens, he's ready to embrace it. "I feel so thankful for all the opportunities and support from colleagues that have allowed me to be in this place at this time - a time that is not only the most exciting for me but the entire themed entertainment industry. I invite all entertainment professionals and aspiring professionals to join the fun – to take part in the most creative, challenging and exciting industry on our planet."

### **Silkroading: Born on both sides of the Pacific**

The Silkroading Entertainment venture is designed to be the kind of East-West win-win Megna advocates. As a Beijing-based subsidiary of Silkroading, the new company will deliver a comprehensive suite of services and solutions for the creation of world-class leisure and entertainment projects. The alliance brings together people and entities having complementary skills, strengths and professional connections, deep industry knowledge, regional expertise, an understanding of the Asian markets and a common purpose.

Megna sees Silkroading Entertainment as addressing one of the critical gaps in Asia – a lack of full-service themed entertainment companies. "Themed entertainment projects in Asia often lack continuity from one stage to the next, and suffer as a result," he said. "We look forward to showing owners and developers the advantages of having a suite of services available all from one source. In addition to creating a better process and ensuring success, it enables owners to maintain their own company structure – they don't have to expand, add or train staff of their own to get into the leisure attractions business."

The list of services offered by Silkroading Entertainment includes masterplanning, concept development, business development, operations consulting, entertainment development, story development, film production, interactive media development and production; technical design, implementation and operations; and research and development of innovative entertainment solutions.

Today's visitor attractions are media rich, and Silkroading brings extensive media resources. A native understanding of Chinese traditional culture and heritage and the ability to

express that culture and heritage on modern, digital platforms such as immersive cinema, television and film are seen as a good fit with industry needs. "The core concept of new destination tourism is the combination of Chinese traditional culture with contemporary, cutting edge technology," said Mr. Jianjun Chen, Chairman of Silkroading Entertainment, and CEO of Silkroading Ltd.





**Concept design of a corporate visitor center attraction for Changyu Pioneer Wine Co. Inc.** Artwork by INI and Bruce D Robinson Design.  
**Opposite: Artwork by Greg Damron and Silkroading for upcoming project.** Courtesy of Silkroading Entertainment

Mr. Chen is a professional adviser of the national modern service industry for China's "12th Five-Year" program planning concerning the integration of science, technology and culture. He is also former deputy director of the Ministry of Culture Chinese social education center of CCTV, and Secretary of the China "Book of Changes" Association. Mr. Chen is also an acclaimed film director: His documentary "The Herdsmen" (2000) received 20 awards including honors from the American International Film Festival; "Bronze Glory" received top honors at the Chinese Government Film Awards. He was responsible for many celebrated programs during his time at CCTV, including "Reading Time," "Art Star," "Witness During Tenth," and "Green Space."

The structure of the new Silkroading Entertainment reflects a global outlook and understanding of what East and West bring to the table – with alliances and team members born, schooled and experienced on both sides of the Pacific Ocean. They include storyteller/master planner/designer Greg Damron, Thelma & Boom, Inc. providing Project Management and Facility Design, business and operations planner/ designer Lawrence Wittenberg, and media producer/tourism specialist/production manager "Jasmine" Zhang Qing.

Ms. Zhang has a Master's in media management from the University of Southern California, and more than 10 years of Chinese and American film and television industry experience. For CCTV she worked on tourism programming and as an executive producer and program director. She presided over financial forums, press conferences, awards ceremonies and literary evenings. Her professional honors include the "Beijing Influence" award and the Chinese radio and Television Association 2 Award for "Outstanding Financial channel" on Beijing TV. She

produced corporate videos for Lenovo, IGRS, Beijing Automotive Group and Porsche. Her domestic and foreign film and TV titles include "Chinese World," "Face to Face," "Afternoon Tea," and Cross-Strait Influence."

Silkroading Entertainment has formed strategic alliances with Min-Max and JBA Artistic Engineering, and has membership in several industry organizations including TEA, IAAPA, IMERSA, Giant Screen Cinema Association and International Planetarium Association. The company recently also announced seeking additional subcontractors in the following areas: media production (especially 3D), creative/interactive design, landscape design and technical specialists.

Some past projects for which Silkroading Ltd. provided planning, design and implementation, include tourism elements of the Thousand Buddha Grottoes at the Mogao Caves, and the Silk Road in Yulin Guazhou Cave (both near Dunhuang in northwestern China), Changyu International Wine City amusement park, and the Huarun Pharmaceutical Group Dong-E E-Jiao Co., Ltd. health tourism experience.

The company name Silkroading refers of course to the The Silk Road – the historic cultural and commercial meeting of East and West. In that spirit, Jianjun Chen and Thomas Megna's formation of Silkroading Entertainment aspires to bring the creative and cultural best of China and Asia together with the best of design experience and talent in entertainment planning and execution of the West. •••



# Enter Esparza

The new SeaWorld is rebranding and reaching out

by Judith Rubin

“There’s a new SeaWorld coming. It doesn’t walk away from the strengths of its heritage, but it’s supercharged and focused,” said Anthony Esparza, Chief Creative Officer, SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment.

Esparza is a key member of the management team headed by CEO Joel Manby, a charismatic figure who during his former role as CEO of Herschend Family Entertainment appeared on the CBS show “Undercover Boss” and penned the popular management treatise “Love Works.” Manby took the helm in April 2015, and Esparza joined him from Herschend a few months later.

This is no quiet rebranding. The issues with which SeaWorld must grapple are issues for all zoos and aquariums, as well as theme parks. As we reported in “A Tough Year,” (InPark issue #54, Oct 2014) industry leaders at AZA (Association of Zoos & Aquariums) have been outspoken in the need to take active steps and change the conversation. It was time to rethink the ways animals and the public are brought together – but also time to defend best practices and clarify organizations’ true positions and actions – in the case of SeaWorld, to stand on the strength and passion of everything good about the company and how it pursues its mission of conservation, rescue, research and education.

Enter Manby. SeaWorld had already made attempts to change the conversation prior to Manby’s arrival, with mixed results. Erika Fry wrote in a Sept 2016 article in Fortune magazine, “Manby was beginning to understand that changing the company’s reputation would take more than an ad campaign.” Fry went on to detail Manby’s rebounding perseverance and incremental successes – shifts of company culture, dialogs opened and re-opened, partnerships that previously had seemed unlikely.

## Beyond orcas

In March 2016, SeaWorld made the historic decision to end its orca whale breeding program and end theatrical orca performances. SeaWorld’s existing population of orcas will be its last. The company also announced a broad partnership with the Humane Society of the United States - to cooperate on marine conservation and to advocate for an end to commercial



## Anthony Esparza

Anthony Esparza is a familiar face in the themed entertainment industry, having worked on either the supplier or the operator side for several decades. Some of his favorite, pioneering past projects include Star Trek: The Experience, Caesars Forum Shops, master planning for Islands of Adventure, Dollywood’s DreamMore Resort, and Nickelodeon lands at Paramount Parks.

From his official company bio: Anthony Esparza Chief Creative Officer, SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, has spent his career creating fun by orchestrating all aspects of a great guest experience. From theme parks, attractions, live entertainment, restaurants, retail environments, digital media, television, film, and licensed products, his expertise and award-winning creative teams have touched every demographic for companies such as Nickelodeon, Paramount Pictures, Harlem Globetrotters, Dollywood, and now SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment. At SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, Anthony oversees the quest to develop “experiences that matter” by creating fun & meaningful attractions, resorts, and television shows for SeaWorld’s parks and new business enterprises.



**SeaWorld's legacy of animal rescue spans more than 50 years. In that time, the SeaWorld Rescue Team has come to the aid of more than 29,000 ill, injured and orphaned animals in need.**

*Photo credit:  
2017 ©SeaWorld Parks*

killing of whales and seals and an end to shark finning. That partnership is backed by a \$50 million commitment over the next five years that is said to make SeaWorld the world's leading marine animal rescue organization.

The new SeaWorld is honoring its commitments with actions as well as funds:

SeaWorld San Diego recently held its final "One Ocean" theatrical orca show, transitioning to a more educational and documentary style "Orca Encounter" to debut this summer. The orca performances at SeaWorld Orlando and San Antonio will follow suit by 2019. SeaWorld spokespersons are confident these and other changes will allow them to "get back to our roots as a company focused on fun and meaningful experiences and move SeaWorld beyond concerns people have expressed about large animals such as orcas under human care."

Recent new attractions to the parks, like Mako at SeaWorld Orlando, and new attractions opening soon such as Wave Breaker: The Rescue Coaster™ at SeaWorld San Antonio and Ocean Explorer at SeaWorld San Diego are designed to blend advocacy, education and family-oriented fun. This summer, the company will introduce its first virtual reality experience at SeaWorld Orlando in Kraken® VR, using technology to acquaint guests with endangered and extinct animals. SeaWorld's evolution includes plans for a brand-new, state-of-the-art integrated resort called

## Building the next SeaWorld in the UAE

Announced in December 2016, SeaWorld has entered into a partnership to build a new park on Yas Island in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, with Miral, the developer of Yas Island. This will be the first new SeaWorld park in decades, and the first without orca whales. "We're hiring new talent and smart companies for this, and it will feed ideas into the rest of the system," said Esparza. He sees the area's growing mix of entertainment and cultural attractions – including the Louvre, the Guggenheim and Ferrari World - as desirable neighbors.

SeaWorld Abu Dhabi is projected to open by 2022. One of the pillars of its development is what the company refers to as an "R4 center": the first dedicated marine life research, rescue, rehabilitation and return center in the UAE, with world-class facilities and resources for the care and conservation of local marine life. SeaWorld Abu Dhabi will integrate up-close animal experiences, mega attractions and a world class aquarium, bringing the latest technology in visitor engagement.

The R4 facility is planned to open ahead of the park. It is intended to provide an important resource for UAE nationals and residents looking to develop or enhance expertise in marine life sciences and will serve as a hub for collaboration with local and international environmental organizations and projects.

SeaWorld Abu Dhabi, and the company is making the most of this opportunity to develop the property along a different format than the existing parks [see sidebar on page 17].

### **A purpose-driven theme park, and industry collaboration**

Enter Esparza. He has revved up the company's creative arm, now dubbed Deep Blue Creative.

He said, "The new SeaWorld reflects true changes and big decisions. We've reorganized internally to get it done. This 50-year-old company is evolving with a fresh, new branding direction, a new team in place, a new culture and vision, and an inclusive approach, open to feedback."

Esparza said, "I joined this company because I saw opportunity. SeaWorld has a great heritage as a company doing something with a purpose. There were challenges, but Joel and I and others in the management team saw the jewel underneath - not just thrills or family closeness, but a place where we

can bring meaning and cause behind the fun. That's cool. A purpose-driven theme park is interesting. Our purpose can be interpreted in a lot of interesting ways. It can be an up-close animal experience, a big ride that is wild and wonderful, or a digital environment, or a different kind of undersea experience. We will interpret SeaWorld a little bit more broadly now."

Part of the new approach is reaching out to the industry to help realize SeaWorld's goals. The outreach is manifesting in alliances with trade groups such as the Themed Entertainment Association (TEA), which recently collaborated on a Deep Blue Creative recruitment event for its members; the Urban Land Institute (ULI), where Esparza is part of the Entertainment Council; the US Institute of Theater Technology (USITT), where SeaWorld has a recruitment booth; and the VR Summit, where Esparza recently gave a talk.

The new, inclusive culture also includes SeaWorld partnering with organizations that will help further its research, rescue and conservation goals, like world-renowned artist and marine

## **Deep Blue Creative**

SeaWorld describes Deep Blue Creative as a new team designed to harness and drive innovation and creativity within the company, and bring together talent from both inside and outside the organization.

Deep Blue Creative includes six dedicated teams:

- **Theme Park Development, U.S.A.** encompasses two teams - Project Management and Guest Experiences - closely collaborating to inspire guests through innovative attractions, culinary experiences and retail environments. *Headed by Brian Morrow, Vice President Theme Park Experience Design, and Mike Denninger, Vice President, Theme Park Development*
- **Theme Park Development, Global** leads the development of all theme park growth initiatives beyond the company's existing parks, including international expansion, exploration of new business models, feasibility and site evaluation. *Headed by John Linn, PE, Vice President, Theme Park Development, Global*
- **Resort Development** is responsible for the business and creative development of resorts and hotels, unique hospitality experiences and land planning. *Headed by Steve Iandolo, Vice President, Resort Development*
- **Events and Entertainment** supports all park entertainment teams in staging live experiences for theatrical settings, as well as culinary and retail environments. This team explores and develops new event concepts to encourage repeat visitation. *Headed by Nancy Hutson, Vice President of Events and Entertainment, SeaWorld Parks and Entertainment*
- **Media Enterprises** leads the company's film, television, and music business, maximizing distribution opportunities for SeaWorld brands. This team will collaborate with content creators and develop production partnerships.
- **Expedition X** seeks to identify trends, innovative technology and unique partners who can boost SeaWorld's creative firepower. Prototype development will help envision new tools to enhance the guest experience. *Headed by Crystal O'Hea, Senior Director, Expedition X Innovation + Business Development*

## New attractions and projects opening in 2017

The new vision integrates SeaWorld's mission more emphatically into the guest experience. It also broadens the focus to include the wonders of animals on land as well as in the sea.

### SeaWorld San Antonio

#### **Wave Breaker: The Rescue Coaster™ - Summer 2017**

Designed to simulate the experience of jet skiing alongside SeaWorld's animal care team and veterinarians on a mission to help ill, injured, orphaned and abandoned animals such as dolphins and sea turtles. The car design engages riders in a straddled seating position, allowing them to lean into a series of banked and serpentine turns, and grip the handle bars as they race over hills, reaching heights of up to 61 feet and traveling over 2,600 feet of track, mostly over water. Inspired by the Emmy® award-winning program, Sea Rescue®.



wooded terrain and underground through a tunnel. The attraction's theme will invite riders to choose their ride, in a battle between a band of invading Vikings and the villagers. In an unusual industry move, fans will help decide the ride elements including opportunities to vote on attraction details and theming.

### SeaWorld San Diego

#### **Ocean Explorer - Summer 2017**

New, 3-acre realm combines multiple aquariums, rides and digital technologies. The area is designed to engage park guests in an experience centered on exploration and adventure, inspiring them to protect the wonders of our oceans. The 3-minute, signature attraction, Submarine Quest, simulates a global expedition to view and study remarkable undersea animals and enhance riders' understanding of the fragile ecosystem of the oceans. The main experience of Ocean Explorer is a series of undersea research bases housing specially-designed aquariums and interactive displays that showcase unique and elusive ocean animals such as giant octopuses and dozens of moray eels, as well as huge spider crabs and spiny king crabs. The new realm will feature five new family-friendly rides in total, including a wave swing ride to fly guests through thousands of real bubbles in chairs suspended from the tentacles of a giant jellyfish.

### SeaWorld Orlando

#### **Kraken® Virtual Reality (VR) Roller Coaster - Summer 2017**

This marks a SeaWorld first, transforming its Kraken roller coaster into a virtual reality (VR) coaster experience. The virtual journey is a deep sea mission alongside sea creatures inspired by extinct and legendary animals of the past, including the mighty Kraken.

#### **Dolphin Nursery - Summer 2017**

SeaWorld Orlando's Dolphin Nursery is being made more interactive for 2017, giving guests more opportunity to see mother and baby dolphins up close. Large-scale acrylic windows will enhance guest viewing, and multiple levels will help children get a better vantage point on the baby dolphins. State-of-the-art, interactive digital displays will allow SeaWorld educators to share information about dolphin behavior, biology and conservation.

### SeaWorld Orlando and SeaWorld San Diego

#### **Electric Ocean - Summer 2017**

This new, ocean-themed multimedia spectacular is designed to entertain park guests at sunset.

### Busch Gardens® Williamsburg

#### **InvadR™ - Spring 2017**

This family thriller will be the park's first wooden coaster and eighth roller coaster in total. Ride elements include a drop of 70+ feet, and nine airtime hills. Located in the New France village of Busch Gardens, guests will travel more than 2,100 feet through a



#### **New Orca Encounter - Summer 2017**

Orca Encounter will introduce SeaWorld's new approach to presenting the orca whale, in a live documentary format rather than a theatrical show. Orca Encounter will focus on orca enrichment, exercise, and overall health. The Orlando and San Antonio parks will follow suit by 2019.



Images are Artist Concept Only 2017 ©SeaWorld Parks

conservationist Guy Harvey, and with innovation and technology companies that will help it create great new guest experiences.

"We're telling the world we're not going to do it alone by ourselves," said Esparza. "We're flinging the doors open and inviting experts and innovators from creative companies and individuals to work with us, collaborate with us and inspire us."

### Telling the Story

Changing the conversation at SeaWorld has meant asking questions. "How do we align around being protectors of animals and the wonders of our world?" said Esparza. "How do we proceed in exploring this unique, blue planet, and help others to join us and motivate them to take action? Why does a theme park company do that, how does a theme park company do that? My part is the great guest experience: we have to be super creative and innovative. Deep Blue Creative is the internal effort around that. We're trying to ignite a world class innovation group."

The difference to other creative divisions such as Universal Creative and Walt Disney Imagineering, in Esparza's view, goes to mission. "Deep Blue Creative is a movement within the whole company to be working to bring that mission to life - a new

internal network to talk creatively, to share ideas; inspire our team to understand our new brand and identity."

Esparza is making sure that the creatives are imbued with the same mission and dedication as the "guest facing ambassadors." He advocates that SeaWorld has the edge in authenticity – the company's animal ambassadors walk the talk. "These are not people being cast in a role – it's truly their life passion and work. They are communicators, educators, explorers and rescuers who have just come back from an animal rescue, conservation project, or school visit, sharing their passion with the world."

Esparza points to the company's Emmy winning and Emmy nominated programs, Sea Rescue and The Wildlife Docs, as examples of SeaWorld showcasing its ambassadors and their real-life experiences. "Team members who appear on these national broadcasts are the very same ambassadors you'll meet in the parks," he said. "The SeaWorld animal rescue team is a real working team. They go out 24/7 assisting animals in need, rescuing more than 29,000 animals in our 50-year history. When inspired kids write notes to us after they've had a memorable experience at SeaWorld... that's what we can magnify, that's doing what a good, purpose-driven company does. We're building the brand around these people - not just the animals. Those are our superheroes."

The real-life SeaWorld superhero's lifestyle is filled with elements and adventures for Deep Blue Creative to draw upon. "There are multiple IPs being built here," said Esparza, "and the first is about rescue. The word 'Entertainment' in our company title needs to mean something different – we are taking the understanding from traditional entertainment to meaningful kind of wonder and excitement. We can tell this story."

In the course of conversation Esparza referred more than once to space exploration. In his quest to reimagine the new SeaWorld and help propel the company into the future, he's spent a lot of time listening to futurists. "For us to be part of the future, we have to understand what everyone else is doing, and the best models of inspiration," he said. "One of the best comments I heard was from Graham Hawkes in a TED talk about how billionaires are investing in space. Hawkes observed that the rockets are turned the wrong way – that we have a wild frontier right here – our own world - still largely unexplored. There are untold wonders still left, on land and in the sea; let's go find them."•••

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# Greetings Programs

Dave Cobb on the TRON legacy

*interview by Joe Kleiman*

2017 marks the 35th anniversary of Disney's groundbreaking 1982 science fiction film TRON. The movie became a cult phenomenon but never attained much theme park presence. However, that could change. The new Disneyland Shanghai park features a TRON roller coaster - it was well received, and the studio is reportedly considering more films.

TRON tells the story of Kevin Flynn, a computer programmer who is physically transported into the computer world and forced to fight programs for his survival. Noted for being one of the early films to feature computer animation (around 15 minutes total), the film was considered a financial flop, though it later became a cult classic. In 2010, it spawned a sequel, TRON Legacy, which featured Flynn's son Sam entering the computer grid in search of his missing father. Legacy was tied in with an animated television show and the attraction at Shanghai Disneyland.

InPark news editor Joe Kleiman took the opportunity to discuss the TRON legacy with a fellow TRON fanatic, Dave Cobb of Thinkwell Group. In addition to his work on such attractions as Men in Black: Alien Attack, Star Trek: The Experience, and The Hunger Games: The Exhibition, Cobb is a renowned expert on gamification.

**Let's start with your memories of the original TRON - how you found out about it and how you reacted to the film.**

I'm going to borrow from a previous online review of the original that I wrote a few years ago...

When TRON came out in 1982, I was 12 and saw it three times on opening day, in between bouts of dropping quarters into the TRON game at the nearby arcade.

Even though I'd been inducted into my love of sci-fi film by the likes of Lucas and Roddenberry and Kubrick, it was actually Lisberger [creator and director of the original TRON] and Bridges and Boxleitner [the actors portraying the characters of Flynn and TRON, respectively] who conjured up for me a new world that, for the first time, really felt like mine, like it was meant for my generation specifically. In addition to the arcade a block from my house, I had an Atari 2600 at home, and a school filled with TRS-80 computers that we were all trying to figure out and program. So, seeing these glowing, videogame worlds that my nascent digital generation were heretofore exploring solely on tiny TV monitors suddenly expanded to epic movie-screen-size, populated by living, breathing characters, absolutely blew my adolescent little mind. I took TRON as my own and imprinted on it \*hard\*.

TRON hit me square between the eyes, and was the first time I really felt a movie had been made specifically for me.

**Why didn't TRON become more of a franchise in Disney parks? In 1982, there was a "TRON-esque" trailer for Epcot attached to the theatrical run of the film. Plans for distinct TRON attractions and arcades never came to be; there was only the overlay of the Superspeed Tunnel, at the Anaheim and Orlando parks.**

First of all, TRON the movie wasn't the "Star Wars"-sized hit that the studio wanted. This, added to the disappointing performance of "The Black Hole" a few years earlier, reflected Disney in a post-1970s period, trying to figure out what its product was, both in movies and in the parks. This is well before "Splash" and Touchstone Pictures and Disney realizing they could succeed with more upscale, adult-oriented stories as well as family and kids' fare.

But let's not forget how absolutely experimental the making of TRON really was. Save for a few high-budget commercials, no one had made a film like this before. And, truthfully, no one has since. It was pioneering in a way that no film has ever been before - and not just because of CGI.

**I remember in the 1980s seeing TRON included as a segment of Feld Entertainment's Magic Kingdom on Ice. Do you recall any TRON tie-ins from this period?**

I remember a TV special filmed on Main Street [Disneyland in Anaheim] filled with musical numbers - one in particular was the Pointer Sisters performing the Neutron Dance with TRON dancers. Get it - New TRON Dance? Yeah, it was the '80s.

**TRON has influenced TV and film over the years from Automan to The Last Starfighter. What are some of your favorite TRON-ish productions?**

Well those are two good ones, of course. I managed to inherit an Automan action figure from a collector friend a few years ago - and even had it signed by star Chuck Wagner!

But I think you can see TRON's influence in a ton of other sci-fi. Avatar even lends itself to a similar glowing aesthetic. Many video games are described as TRON-esque in their aesthetic. Any film that builds a world so complete that years later you can still look at something else and say "it's kinda TRON like" shows how original and important it was. It's become part of our design vernacular.

**As a kid growing up in the coin-op age, I can recall TRON and Discs of TRON being the hot games in Disneyland's Starcade for a couple of years until everyone became entranced with Dragon's Lair. After that, things got a bit stagnant with TRON as a game franchise until 2003, when Disney released a PC game called TRON 2.0. What were your thoughts playing this game?**

I thought it was really cool that they were basically creating the sequel to the film (which we never thought we'd get, and was announced five short years after this game's release). It was awesome that it was sanctioned by Lisberger and made official canon (until Legacy erased it). Making it a game (versus a movie or TV show) gave it a more interesting platform to explore that story world.

Having said that, the story was pretty basic, and it was really the awesome combat/LightCycle game modes that made it worth playing. The multiplayer modes were really fantastic, and totally tapped into that fan impulse to want to interact "on the grid." Alas, the PC version (like its film predecessor) didn't really sell well, so the popularity of the online multiplayer never really caught on.

I played the XBOX version of the game too (called "TRON 2.0: Killer App"), which modified the PC version slightly. It also had some good multiplayer, but came towards the end of the original XBOX's lifecycle -- and didn't have an emulation mode on its successor, the XBOX360, so it sort of died on the vine.

**How would you compare the main character of TRON 2.0, Jet Bradley, who is the son of Alan Bradley (alias TRON) with Sam Flynn from TRON Legacy?**

I thought the Jet Bradley story was fine, and worked in the game, but was personally not strong enough for a movie. Not that Sam Flynn was necessarily better - Legacy obviously has its flaws - but the anti-hero beginning for Sam, the sort of digital Robin Hood stealing from the tech-haves in honor of his dad, was, to me, a far more interesting opening for a character.

But honestly, Legacy does borrow a bit from 2.0, and there are a lot of parallels - the megalomaniacal takeover of Encom (Dillinger Jr. in Legacy, fCon in 2.0), the virtual kidnapping of his dad, the call to action by a digital entity (CLU in Legacy, Ma3a in 2.0), the bad guy trying to inflict computer virus-style warfare onto the real world (Clu's army in Legacy, the "Datawraiths" in 2.0), are all sort of the same song in a different key. I mean the actual sequel's title, TRON Legacy, was a plot point in 2.0 anyway.

So for me, it was all about how to reinvent the story and the worldbuilding for a modern audience in 2010, and not just continue what the cult film and cult videogame had established. I have problems with the scripts for the original, and 2.0, and Legacy - but I still love them, warts and all.

**Watching TRON Legacy in IMAX, I was quite pleased to see Steve Lisberger's brief cameo, which was a very Stan Lee type role. Speaking of which, as Disney purchased Marvel and Lucasfilm and continued its Pirates franchise, has Legacy been overshadowed?**

Yeah, that's the simple answer. They're in the Star Wars and Marvel business now. I actually was working on the development of an action-based animated series [for Disney - nothing to do with TRON] the year before Marvel was purchased - and when that deal happened, our show dissolved, because they simply didn't need original action shows anymore, they had the Marvel canon [and now Star Wars].

I'm a huge champion for original, hard sci-fi - so TRON: Legacy, even though it was a sequel, was also doubling-down on that thinking. A serious story in a fully-realized world that wasn't based on a universally known IP.

It's easy to see why Star Wars and Marvel would take precedence from a business sense - and so far, creatively, both of those worlds are being handled in fun ways. But I don't think we can expect a studio today to dabble in the kind of experimentation that happened on the original TRON. Or even TRON: Legacy, for that matter, which was at the forefront of making a live-action movie that was really more like an animated movie in terms of CGI and world-building. Say what you will about the creepiness of certain scenes of youth-ified Bridges as Clu - it was done in stereo, modeled in 3D, which was a huge accomplishment. Digital aging *a la* Benjamin Button had only been done in 2D films before that, so Legacy was much, much harder, and it was pretty great in spots.

I believe the reason the original TRON was overlooked for a special-effects Oscar was that the Academy at the time thought "computers make it easier" and didn't consider it. But the lack of a nomination for TRON: Legacy simply floors me. They got nothing for free in making that movie, and had to create everything from scratch. Yet, it feels real, down to the rain spatter on the lens and atmospheric effects. TRON: Legacy should not have been overlooked in terms of FX awards.

And for all the talk about how the first film was at the forefront of CGI, in truth, there's only about 15 minutes of actual computer-



**Left: A TRON wrapped monorail at EPCOT.** *Photo courtesy The Walt Disney Company.*  
**Right: Dave Cobb excited about his ride on TRON at Shanghai Disneyland** *Photo courtesy Dave Cobb.*  
**Opposite: Riders enjoy the TRON LightCycle coaster at Shanghai Disneyland.** *Photo courtesy Shanghai Disneyland.*

generated imagery in the film. Most of TRON's world (the glowing costumes, the sets of the computer world behind the actors) was created through painstakingly hand-painted backgrounds and back-lit cel animation - all made even more difficult by the fact that it was done in 70mm. Seemingly waved-off by modern audiences, it's a technique that was both first of its kind and also hasn't been used since - they basically produced the film twice, once on sound stages with cameras, and a second time on animation stands... all in 70mm. There are myriad production techniques that were mind-bogglingly difficult in the production of TRON, and computer-generated imagery is only one of them.

I fully admit that this is one of the biggest reasons I still adore the original film - it's staggering that a major studio would have funded such a wacky, experimental effort. It's like seeing a Unicorn: sometimes corny and campy, for sure, but a rare marvel and beautiful to look at nonetheless...

...not to mention that the original TRON's computer-generated visuals were animated via hand calculations - no graphical WYSIWYG interfaces in 1982, so each frame was figured out through numbers on graph paper!

**What are some of your favorite TRON inspired attractions? I personally will never forget the preshow for Rocket Rods at Disneyland, Anaheim with the grid-ish overlays given to classic ride vehicles.**

**I think you and I agree that in the lead-up to Legacy's release, we saw some really cool TRON park promotions, including the LightCycle wrapping of the Disney World monorails and the TRON addition to World of Color and ElecTRONica, both at Disney's California Adventure. Then there are those attractions at Disney and other parks that borrow something from TRON, such as Terminator 2:3D and Test Track 2.0.**

I loved the opening scenes of Horizons with the blacklight abstract cityscape of the future, that always struck me as TRON-like. And the superspeed tunnel on the Peoplemover through the world of TRON was always my favorite thing at Disneyland.

One thing that TRON really taught me, as a designer, is that abstraction can be a compelling way to tell a visual story. How many blacklight dark rides have we seen that use those kind of techniques that Horizons did? TRON relied on negative space (black) as much as it did color to define its shapes and environments, which has had a huge influence on me in dark rides that I've designed.

**As a TRON fanatic, what were your impressions experiencing the coaster at Shanghai Disneyland? Did it do an effective job in creating a suspension of disbelief?**

Well, I rode it eight times, if that's any indication. It's really wonderful. The reveal of the launch in the preshow is one of the best gags I've ever seen. The vehicles are gorgeous, and respond to your touch as you pull down the handles, "rezzing" from dark blue to white as you "activate" the safety restraint. The outside portion is so gorgeous at night. The onboard soundtrack brings the ride vehicle to life. And the indoor "game grid" section is so visually stunning. My only complaint is that it's a little short!

I've heard fans complain about the outdoor segment. Look, I'm the ultimate TRON fan, and I had my doubts. But, how they treat it - as an energy grid that keeps the vehicles rezzed while they're outside - is gorgeous and clever, even without an on-the-nose narrative story explanation. Plus, there's actually precedence for it in Legacy, because Quorra is rezzed outside of the grid into the physical world at the end of the film. It's a bit like complaining that there wasn't a 14-passenger LightCycle train in the movies - you have to make certain allowances for a high-capacity theme park attraction. Having it go outside is cool, and that's good enough for me. Your mileage may vary.

I was really blown away by the minimalism of the load station - it really felt like I'd stepped onto the virtual set of the movie's game grid.

**With VR finding its way into home consoles and theme parks, do you think Disney will adopt the TRON franchise for commercial uses of this evolving technology?**

It would be a natural, wouldn't it? Might be a compelling (and less expensive than feature-film) way to bring the world of TRON to life. I was a huge fan of the animated series, which was not only gorgeous but also had a really well-crafted story arc, it's a shame it got lost in the post-Marvel, post-Star Wars development craze.

**Many Blue Man Group props bear a striking similarity to props and costumes in the original TRON. Do you think they are a spiritual successor to TRON?**

Definitely kessin' cousins for sure, even down to the electronic music. I'm not sure if they were directly influenced, but it would make sense. And the humor that BMG creates with that aesthetic is unique - and something that the original film certainly didn't lack. It had goofy existentialism, the breezy chemistry between the leads, a silly-yet-earnest script that's embedded with nerdy dialogue and puns ("oh, my user!")

Legacy tried a few moments of levity (especially Flynn/Dude stuff), and it probably could have used a bit more. Imagine if BMG had showed up as an "act" at the End of Line Club along with Daft Punk! Shanghai Disney should have the End of Line club as a bar. I would hang out there as much as Trader Sam's. ...



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Photo courtesy of Feld Entertainment

# Lorelei Owens at the circus

Ringling's "Out of this World" theater technology

*interview by Joe Kleiman*

On 14 January 2017, Feld Entertainment announced the end of an iconic American tradition: Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Circus will perform its final shows in May in New York City. Attendance has continued to decline even though Ringling had ended elephant performances in light of changing public sentiment and stricter local legislation.

We bid farewell with regret - and encourage you to catch one of the final Ringling Bros. shows if you can. When Ringling made the decision in 2014 to retire its elephants, work began on "Out of This World," a new show that is story driven and embraces new technologies. InPark's Joe Kleiman saw "Out of This World" in Sacramento in October 2016, and reported, "It conveys very adult themes of friendship, betrayal, and redemption, while being true to the legacy of the American circus. Make no qualms about it, this is still very much a Ringling Bros show."

Following the performance, Kleiman interviewed Ringling Bros.' Lorelei Owens, electrician for Ringling Bros. Presents Out of This World. Owens started as a performer and in 2014 joined the crew of Ringling Bros. Presents. From start to finish, Owens is one of those responsible for over 15 miles of cabling, 250 light fixtures and the setup and load-out of the space-themed show, including the lighting cues and pyrotechnics.

**Central to the show is the Grid, the 50-foot wide, 120-foot long truss network suspended from the ceiling that houses everything from projectors to trapeze to pyrotechnics. Since not every arena is the same, does the Grid need to be modified when you travel?**

The Grid does not change. The head rigger works with local riggers on hanging it. There are 32 points where it's held up by two ton motors. Where it's hung, we might adjust just a bit, but it really depends on the building steel. We do send someone

out in advance to make sure everything will work perfectly, but ultimately, it's all marked for the same place. Our new automation system uses six or seven grid winches and two floor winches, which provide for better aerials. As a result, this show has more aerials than before.

**Ringling Bros. used to travel the country by train. Does that still happen and does the Grid move separately?**

The majority of the show still travels by train. We have the longest private trains in operation, each one is 1.5 miles long. Most of the props and the grid travel in wagons on flat cars with the train. Some of the more delicate elements, such as projectors, motors, and some lights, are transported by semi.

**Some of the technical innovations with the show include an ice floor, projection mapping, and the automated spotlights. How did the ice floor come about?**

No elephants means we can have ice. The amount of floor space itself doesn't change. It's based in part on the Grid. Animals perform on grey rubber flooring and for some acts, we'll put out big carpets. The lighter surface for the floor is also perfect for projection mapping, which our parent company Feld Entertainment used extensively on Marvel Universe Live.

There are seven projectors in the Grid. Four are used for ground mapping, using d3 software. Two project onto the portal at the back of the stage. The seventh is a 360 degree projection Puffersphere from Pufferfish.

**Tell us about the lighting system and how it changes things.**

Before the new system, we would need a spot caller, which was usually the ring master. We'd hire local spot operators in each city and provide them cues for each scene.

The new system is completely automated. We have a wireless DMX with an LED attached installed into props, floats, costumes, and even the ringmaster's hat. The spots, along with tracking cameras, are not on the Grid itself. They're on beams surrounding the Grid and located above the audience.

We triangulate the positions of the LED lights through at least two cameras. Beforehand, we create a map in the computer using infrared light so the cameras know what they'll be looking for. Everything is mapped out in the system, the entire floor. We calibrate light and collect points.

**Since the show includes animals, including dogs, horses, and big cats, how does the spotlight system work with them?**

Animals don't get spotlighted. Typically, an animal is close enough to a human being spotlighted, but we do a general lighting of the area, so it's not necessary. Generally, spotlighting an animal is not beneficial to a live performance.

**Did you have any problems with the new tech?**

Our wireless DMX was getting interference from wi-fi networks. Fortunately, it had been used previously on Marvel and also on Frozen [Disney on Ice], so we were able to get in touch with our co-workers in the Marvel unit and learn how to fix it.

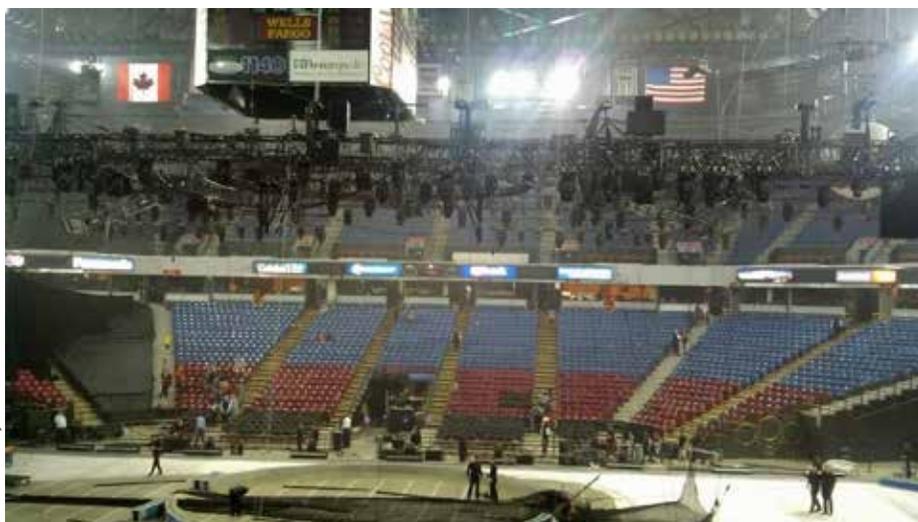
**What are some of the control systems you have?**

Martin M1 for lighting, d3 is playing DXV video, pyro is through FireOne, our LEDs for the DXV and M1 are Pax Blackjack, and we also have an audio console and an automation system for the front of the house.

**You studied Political Science and International Conflict Studies in college. How did you end up an electrician in the circus?**

I had previously been floor crew for another circus and then a performer and ring master. I went to visit my brother, who was with Ringling Bros. in Florida during their winter break and I fell in love with the way they were set up. I joined them as part of the crew moving props, then became part of the six-person electrical crew. It's very much like a family. . . .

Photo courtesy of Joe Kleiman





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# From sawmills to Smurfs

Wärtsilä Funa Solutions builds on company's  
legacy of innovation and technology

*by Martin Palicki*

Approximately every 20 seconds in Dubai, Papa Smurf waves at people and promises he'll see them "in the movies." It's hard to imagine, in the mid 1830s when Nils Ludvig Arppe purchased a small sawmill in Wärtsilä, Finland, that one day his company would help develop the systems that bring Papa Smurf to life.

That company is Wärtsilä and they integrated the AV systems that shine a light on and play back the voice of Papa Smurf, along with dozens of other characters inside the Smurfs Studio Tour dark ride at MOTIONGATE™ Dubai, within Dubai Parks & Resorts.

## **Innovation and Relationships**

In the 1850s Arppe saw an opportunity to grow the company and converted the Wärtsilä sawmill into an iron works. As a result, the company expanded through the turn of the century to provide a wide array of metal products. By the 1950s, the company was building engines, and on its way to becoming a leading provider of marine engines and power plants. Soon, Wärtsilä was able to provide a ship's entire engine room, and their dominance in that market expanded.

Since its early days, the company had been committed to letting innovation guide its growth and business directions. As the shipping industry began to move to Asia, Wärtsilä noticed this trend early on and established partnerships in China that continue to prove fruitful today.

Similarly, when the company saw the importance of conservation and the environment, they took steps to innovate in the area of fuel efficiency and clean emissions.

"We invest in advanced technology," says Paul Weber, Wärtsilä Funa Solutions President. "We focus on lifecycle performance, build products that last and try to be a good steward of the environment at the same time."

In recent years, the company has strategically acquired organizations to further enhance the services they provide for the marine industry. "We are here to provide integration services

to the guest areas of the cruise ship - the entertainment and communication areas such as theaters, restaurants, bars, atriums, and around the pool deck," explains Rusty Rustad, Manager for Wärtsilä Funa Solutions.

In 2015 Wärtsilä acquired Funa as part of a group of companies it bought from L3, a technology and communications provider. Wärtsilä found the Funa team attractive because they were already an established market leader in the marine AV sector with over 40 years of experience. Although their expertise in providing design, engineering, integration and consulting services to the cruise ship industry was of primary interest to the company, they also recognized the value Funa brought in their land-based projects like airports, hotels, museums, specialty attractions and, particularly, theme parks.

"Our interest in theme parks is a natural progression of our business line offering. Theme park development is strong throughout the world and we rely on theme park innovations to drive entertainment concepts for our core business line of cruise ships," explains Paul Weber, Wärtsilä Funa Solutions President.

An opportunity for Wärtsilä Funa Solutions to showcase its skills in the theme park market came with Dubai Parks and Resorts. Developed by DXB Entertainments, Dubai Parks and Resorts is an integrated resort comprised of hotels, theme parks, shopping and entertainment. The project is in a continual state of development, with new attractions, parks and components being announced regularly. It is the first multi-park resort development to open in the UAE. As part of the project, Wärtsilä Funa Solutions was the primary AV contractor for all the AV components (including projection, audio, cinematic projection, projection AV systems and AV controls for attractions) in nearly 50 venues and major attractions (including the Smurfs ride) across the park's Motiongate, Bollywood and Riverland parks.

One reason Wärtsilä Funa Solutions was chosen for the Dubai project was because of the resources the larger company provided.

"Wärtsilä is a large company, with a presence in over 70 countries and over 200 cities around the world," said Wärtsilä Funa Solutions



**Left: Inside the Dubai Wärtsilä warehouse, equipment waits to be shipped to Dubai Parks and Resorts**



**Right: The smurfs say goodbye to guests at the end of the Smurfs Studio Tour MOTIONGATE™ Dubai, within Dubai Parks & Resorts.**

*Photos courtesy Adam Bien*

Vice-President of Sales Sean Reish. “Wärtsilä already had a 35,000 square foot facility in Dubai that would be the local office and production home for the two-year project.”

The plant was home to one of Wärtsilä’s global marine service facilities, fully staffed with clerical and HR staff, ready to assist with the shipping, assembly and programming required for the huge theme park project.

“Our ability to be nimble and be ready to start work almost instantly in nearly every corner of the planet is a huge asset,” said project manager Kevin Cartier. “This was an extraordinarily large-scale project that required a substantial amount of resources both locally and internationally. The fact that Wärtsilä had an established presence both there and abroad made achieving our technical integration goals for the resort simple and easily manageable.”

There are other benefits to having a major corporation supporting an AV services company, including financial strength and security and currency flexibility. “We can use our various offices around the world to purchase products in their home country and native currency, passing on that value to our clients as well,” said Reish.

The company also operates entertainment engineering services out of both Europe and the US, providing longer workday exposure for time-critical projects.

### **Expanding in Orlando**

The company’s commitment to the theme park market is strong. In mid-2016 Wärtsilä Funa Solutions opened a new 10,000 square foot production facility in Orlando to handle entertainment engineering and worldwide project management.

“We’ve been in Orlando for over seven years, but we needed to expand into a larger space,” explained Rustad. The company is committed to the new office, and they are looking for additional talent. Currently about 25 staff operate out of that office, but more project managers and technicians with lighting, audio and projection skills are needed in short order.

### **Moving the relationship forward**

The success of the Dubai project has inspired the corporate office to invest in its entertainment service offerings. In addition to helping the company diversify its project portfolio, Wärtsilä is looking at ways to take the technology utilized in the entertainment sector and apply it to their commercial business in other sectors.

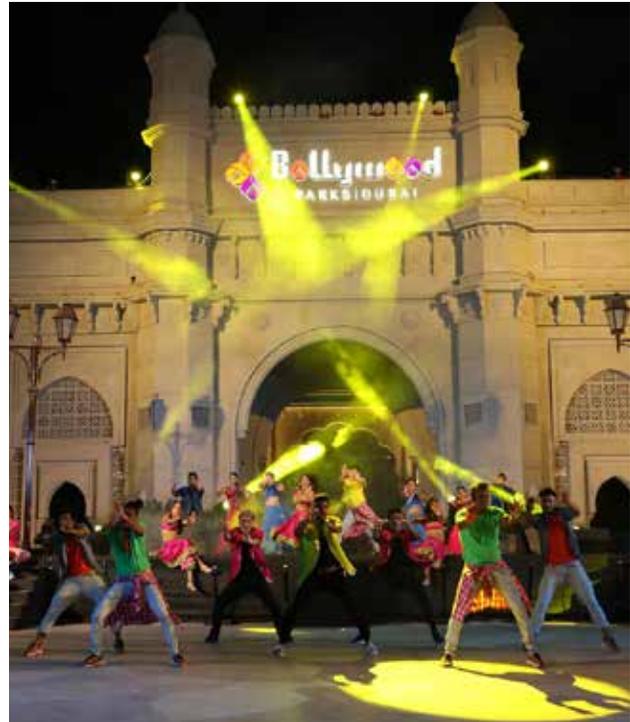
The way the team has applied operating and control systems in theme parks is also informing how those systems are utilized in airports, marine ports, and other industrial spaces where paging and alarm systems are required.

"In addition to AV, our command and control experience is portable to military applications," said Reish. "The expansive variety of applications for our services has ensured that this is an important element to Wartsilä's future growth."

Reish's team is currently working on projects in Europe, the US and Asia and bidding on multiple projects in China.

"Even though everyone is pleased with the success of our work on the Dubai project, we are not content with the status quo," said Rustad. "We are a progressive company, but we are only as good as our last delivered project."•••

*More information on Wartsilä Funa Solutions is available online at <http://www.wartsila.com/funa>. Professionals interested in applying for the open positions should forward their interest letter, resume/cv to: Wartsilä Funa Solutions, 7101 Presidents Drive, Suite 100, Orlando, FL 32809.*



**Performers celebrate at the grand opening of Bollywood Parks Dubai, part of Dubai Parks and Resorts** *Photo courtesy of Dubai Parks and Resorts*



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# Ford and the Robot

Manufacturing Innovation introduces guests to the concept of a breakthrough car model

by Judith Rubin

“The Ford Motor Company had just announced the new F-150 truck and we had an experience we needed to turn over in about nine months,” said John Neilson, senior director, museum and attractions, The Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation, at the 2016 Thea Awards in Anaheim. Manufacturing Innovation—which opened in February 2015 as the new key attraction of the Ford Rouge Factory Tour at The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan—was being honored by the Themed Entertainment Association for Outstanding Achievement.

The Ford Rouge Factory Tour is a joint partnership between The Henry Ford and Ford Motor Company. Visitors learn the history of the factory that engendered a long line of famous vehicles, and get to know the modern Rouge facility, where robots and people collaborate to turn out the breakthrough F-150 pickup, the star of Manufacturing Innovation. “This is the truck that is going to change the industry, and we needed to have a theater that would match,” says Cynthia Jones, general manager.

Manufacturing Innovation rehabbed a space originally created in 2004. Facing a warp-speed time line, Neilson, with colleagues Christian Overland (executive VP, The Henry Ford) and Jones, decided things would move most smoothly using BRC Imagination Arts, the same experience design agency that had done the earlier project. BRC’s revamp team was headed by Marci Carlin (executive producer) and Christian Lachel (creative director), who had both worked on the earlier version, and also included Edward Hodge (creative technical director), Philipp Edelmann (project manager), and Chris Pavlica (media director). Others on the external design and production team, brought in by BRC, were NYXdesign (lighting design), TechMD Inc. (AV and control systems), AES (fabrication), Gantom Lighting & Controls (lighting systems) and David Kneupper (composer).

## Guest experience

Manufacturing Innovation is a two-theater experience. Each theater has 100 seats. The preshow in Theater 1 is a 12-minute, narrated documentary-style movie, on three screens, of Ford

and auto manufacturing history through the years. The score was recorded by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. It culminates with a message from Bill Ford Jr. (executive chairman, Ford Motor Co.), after which visitors are pulsed into Theater 2.

Ford’s F-150 pickup trucks are its top product line, and the nine-minute show in Theater 2 is a powerful showcase. It unfolds mostly sans spoken word, but begins, in slice-of-life style, with a company innovation rep asking various truck owners for input about the qualities of a dream pickup—for example, the aluminum body that is a hallmark of the new F-150. This transitions to scenes of the vehicle being designed and engineered, and then manufactured in the modernized factory. Next comes the signature sequence Lachel described as “3-D printing the car in the theater.” The prop truck rises up from the stage, the circular space comes alive all around the guests with multimedia effects and techno-style music, and the two industrial robots flanking the stage swing into action. The truck passes through the phases of manufacturing and assembly and then goes for a spin. The show ends with a bang and a flash, after which visitors are free to explore the rest of the Ford Rouge facility, which includes a real factory tour and a display of vintage automobiles, including the iconic Mustang and Thunderbird.

Theater 1 underwent some updates, primarily in terms of media editing, audio retrofitting, and updated, automatic control of visitor flow. But Theater 2 is where the big changes took place; its new show depends on a tightly integrated blend of custom media, projection mapping, music, lighting, special effects, moving set pieces, and choreographed industrial robots. Existing projectors and screens were kept, but reconfigured and updated with new equipment and control systems.

The design envisioned a physical rendition of gaming to connect viscerally with young audiences. “We wanted to meet the audience where they are at, so they’d feel ‘This is my generation’s story,’” Lachel says. “We did that with the media, using a visual language in the film to evoke the wire frames of gaming, and to speak to maker culture, 3-D printing, and coding.”

*This article is adapted from the original version published by Lighting&Sound America magazine, and is reprinted here with permission.*

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**Theater 2 with both robots in position ready to “build” the truck.** Photo courtesy The Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation

“The innovation, robotics, lighting, science, and technology of the truck and what’s happening at the plant became our design language for the show,” Lachel says. “Whether you build a show or build a vehicle, today we’re using the same technologies. It’s exciting for all of us—so much change, so much access to tools. It’s like being in Tony Stark’s Iron Man lab.”

### **Take the truck and stretch it into the room**

As is usual in a 4-D theater, lighting design takes place in an environment where the chief element is video. Manny Treeson, of NYX Design, says, “The film is the principal form of storytelling, along with the projection-mapped truck. There was not a big need for lighting in the absolute sense, but it involved cars, robots, and big ideas. They were looking for ways for lighting to take the truck and stretch it into the room. We were to use light as part of that extended canvas that whips around the room and surrounds the audience. I tried to pull colors of the film into the theater, using one major color saturation tone and one highlight tone.”

Because the robots were constantly moving, it was decided to create attachment points enabling them to carry their own lights. “Due to the robots’ nature, there are lots of places you can bolt, and weight is not an issue,” Treeson says. “Each one of those lights is intelligent, and can articulate, so the light could grow in a sequence. We could use the lights to mimic the laser effects, and the flicker of blue-white welding and all those things robots do in manufacturing the vehicle.” Each robot arm ends in a claw, with three lights attached. These can read as a face—and, as such, are key to a final moment of the show, when, having

finished “building” the truck, the robots turn these “faces” to the audience and seem to wink.

The Theater 2 lighting system was a complete retrofit using the existing grid from 2004, integrated with the existing ETC Paradigm system and adding an ETC Eos control console. “This allowed me to leave all the programming in place that already existed for the rest of the building,” Treeson says.

Once the illusory truck has progressed through stamping, welding, and painting stages all the way to quality control, it goes for a ride on-screen through a range of environments. “We had to help the theater take that journey with the truck,” Treeson says.

### **Robot breakthrough**

BRC’s role as creative producer included, according to Hodge, master planning, design, writing, editing, media production, project management, overall creative direction, and close coordination with the architectural firm (Harley Ellis Devereaux) and general contractor (Baum Construction). The process began with a two-day charrette, and production kicked off about five months prior to opening. “Normally, it would be closer to a year,” says Hodge, “but we were able to compress it by having the idea very solid walking in, with storyboards and concepts, bringing in strong tech partners to help determine what could be done within time and budget, and treating the manufacturers like partners. For everything, we had to have a Plan B; there would be no time to scramble and design down the path.”

The robots, built by FANUC, were hard to get quickly. "Robots want a six-month delivery window," said Hodge. "They are made to order, usually not in the US." From a list of Ford factory-bound units, "we found the tallest, fastest robots with the largest arm reach we could fit in the building, and asked to have them diverted to us."

The robots being huge, heavy, and potentially dangerous, audience safeguards include barriers, touch mats inside the barriers, motion detection, and 25,000 individual fault safes. A PLC computer backstage monitors all life safety systems and can override the show action.

### **Gear-agnostic**

TechMD handled the retrofit of the audio and control systems, added projectors and players for projection-mapping the vehicle, and ensured that the original video system was brought up to current standards.

Dave Revel, president of TechMD, reports that, because media is playing a larger and larger role on projects, project heads are bringing AV integrators into the process sooner, as BRC did here. "Coming in early lets us lay groundwork, minimizes conflict with other disciplines, and ensures we will have the tools to do the job. There's a place for our gear and it fits the big picture. These days, you've got to be talking about the tech and the content at the same time. We try to be gear-agnostic."

BRC and Ford asked the team to re-use as much gear as possible. "It was a challenge to match up and document its condition, and, as it had been running several years, to make it work as a system with the new gear." In both theaters, TechMD upgraded playback and control electronics, and added new audio playback, processing (QSC), and video servers (7th Sense).

Reusing the existing seven screens took some effort. "We spent two days swapping them around to change the focal point in the room," Hodge says. "The GC were heroes—the screens couldn't touch the ground in the course of moving them. It was a nail-biter."

Of the dozen projectors in Theater 2, seven are existing, four-year-old Christies (DS+750), mounted around the room. Five new Panasonic (four PT-DZ870ULK units and one PT-DX100) are positioned in the truss work above the prop car.

The building's existing cable infrastructure needed to support the new, higher-resolution video. "We had to test all cables to all projectors for their ability to pass increased bandwidth," Revel says. Using new 7th Sense video servers with the older Christies presented its own challenge. The Christies have a 4 x 3 aspect ratio, while the newer projectors are 16 x 9 and 16 x 10. "We had to make sure that the pixels were square, not stretched or

squashed," Revel says. "Sometimes, projectors will try to fit an image in. It was a matter of cropping the image and then making sure the Christies didn't try to do anything on their own—a case when a smart projector can be too smart. Christie helped us find the hidden menus."

### **On the map**

In its Burbank shop, TechMD mocked up the projection mapping at roughly 10%. "We mounted projectors in the scale model and were able to give a preview demo to BRC and Ford for approval," Revel says. "By reducing throw distance in scale, you can make your projector behave down to about 1/8 scale and scale brightness, lensing, and image size."

In charge of the building is an advanced Medialon show control program, customized by TechMD. "It constantly monitors the status of all systems, the position of the truck and doors, the robots, and all facility doors," Hodge says. All theaters have custom touch panels employing what Hodge describes as a "really beautiful custom-designed user interface by us and TechMD."

### **Amazing times**

In the words of Christian Lachel, "We live in an amazing moment in history. What we're doing in manufacturing and the way we tell stories is coming together."

A viewer from The Detroit News called the theater experience a "wild ride" reminiscent of a Fast and Furious action film. Afterward, guests understand much better what goes into the conception and making of a Ford car and if Manufacturing Innovation has really done its job, feel a reinforced kinship with the brand. •••

### **Author's note:**

*I was pleased to have the opportunity to write this story. As a public school student in Detroit in the 1960s, I went on school trips to Greenfield Village, an extensive campus of historical exhibits within the Henry Ford complex. Since then, I've had the opportunity to be impressed, as an adult, by what The Henry Ford offers. Readers might be surprised at the many authentic treasures of industry and history showcased across its 250 acres. A few: the bus on which Rosa Parks took her famous stand, workshops of Thomas Edison and the Wright Brothers, and presidential limos from Teddy Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan (including JFK).*



*This article is dedicated to my late father, Irving Rubin, who spent most of his career as a Ford executive. Irv counted among his greatest achievements that he'd played a role in national seat belt legislation.*

# The whats, whys and hows

Ken Saba's life in media production

*interview by Judith Rubin*

Ken Saba has just joined the media department at Universal Creative in a fulltime capacity, after many years of serial, freelance contracting as a film/TV editor and media producer. As this was being written, he was in the process of relocating from Los Angeles to live in Orlando with his wife, Michelle. His most recent accomplishments include being the media editor on Soarin' Around the World, for Walt Disney Imagineering, and on a new attraction for Ferrari Land at Port Aventura (Spain), produced by Mousetrappe.

## **First, tell us about Soarin' Around the World.**

There's an ironic backstory. In 1998 at Walt Disney Imagineering, during a semester off while I was working as an assistant editor, the late Tom Wright, who was in charge of film distribution, told me about this great project coming up and encouraged me to stick around for it. However, I was partway through getting my degree at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, and had to go back so as not to lose my placement. It was a tough decision. I remember telling Tom, "I'm going to kick myself for this." The project was Soarin' Over California. I would have been assistant editor. But there I was, 18 years later, the editor on Soarin' Around the World. If it doesn't happen now, it's gonna happen later! Life is a funny thing. I'm glad I did it this way – I'm a different person now than I was then, and came in with the experience and ability to be the one and only editor on the project, working with the highest caliber people. It was a humbling experience. There are days when I'm in awe, and can't believe I get to do this.

## **What does a media editor do?**

Editing is a lot more than slicing and dicing. It is a creative job, a technical job and a managerial job. Regarding the creative and technical: You connect pieces of a puzzle into a cohesive story. In themed entertainment, you're working on a one-off project where those pieces fit into a non-standard format. You ask: How do we get this to work within this scope, within this medium? How do we tell the story in a way that immerses the audience, the guest, into the story?

Regarding the managerial aspect, on a media-centric project – where the attraction or show has media as a huge part of the experience – the editor is at the center of the storm. Managerially you have to work with all the different groups to get it to work: ride programmers, show programmers, lighting



designers, audio people. You are all pursuing a common goal: to give the best possible show or adventure.

As an editor, your job is to make everybody's life easier. Experience gives you the ability to see problems before they happen. Your job is to correct that problem you see down the road, before it becomes a problem - get the hurdles out of the way so the process is coordinated and it becomes effortless.

## **How does that compare to being a media producer?**

There is overlap, of course. The media producer's role is about making sure everything from pre-production to post production is done as it should be. The media producer is there for the whats and the whys; everyone else is there for the hows. What I do as an editor is all three: the whats, whys and hows.

## **Tell us more about the whats, whys and hows.**

What you bring to the job depends on your experience. I started out doing videography for NASA. Television was changing very fast at that time, and you had to be on top of stuff. It helped me learn to foresee things – not to second-guess, but to foresee, to be that future teller – to know what we can and can't do, how we can push the limits. For me, being an editor is being hands-on and being methodical.



**Ken worked on Ghost of the Castle (left) for BRC Imagination Arts and Soarin' Around the World for Walt Disney Imagineering (right).** Photo courtesy BRC Imagination Arts (left) and The Walt Disney Company (right)

When I work on something, I need to know what kind of experience the media is supposed to be providing. What happens when the button is pressed? What can this vehicle do and not do? I am looking beyond the media, thinking from the guest perspective. I don't come up with the vision but there are times when I ask "Why is it like that?"

I was media editor for BRC Imagination Arts working on "Ghost of the Castle," [2010] a media overlay for the Louisiana Old State Capital in Baton Rouge. It helps to probe for the intention - not challenging, but needing to understand the vision. On "Ghost," we were looking at the first cut. Bob Rogers wanted something changed, and when asked, he explained to me that he needed a particular, dramatic moment. He wanted the audience to understand how powerful this moment was, wanted them to feel how the people love their old state capital. He was being true to the way the project had been pitched.

#### **When are you typically brought onto a project?**

Sometimes I'm engaged during the development stage to work on the story reel or animatic when they are trying to get the timing of the story down and have that to show to the client. At other times, for various reasons, I am brought in at mid-production - in which case it becomes a sprint for me to catch up with everybody.

#### **Tell us about the hands-on part of editing.**

The media is coming in and I'm piecing it together, making sure it flows within the content. I'm still asking questions: about cycle times, guest capacity, operations stuff, throughput. Yes, all that is part of my job too! As an editor in TV, working on episodes, every network has requirements on total run time and various other

things such as the number and length of acts within an episode to allow commercial breaks. I have to know and implement that, from one draft to another refining the time to fit within those logistics and technical requirements. In themed entertainment, the same thing applies in terms of knowing how to get to the desired end result.

Equipment wise, it's different from project to project. On The Soul of Nashville, produced by BRC [2015] for the Ryman Auditorium, I used my own equipment to punch out scenes that would be projected on the wall to work with other media.

More recently, working with Walt Disney Imagineering as the editor on Soarin' Around the World, I was working with their edit bay. The media was coming from several sources. It started with WDI's own camera team; while they were on location, we were being fed footage, and the director and producer were communicating with the camera team. The process for Soarin' was almost like a documentary; you did not know just what you were going to get because of how local conditions would affect the shoot. But this was a production team at the top of their game, we would get the footage back, and artistry would come into play.

In themed entertainment, the editor is very much at the center of the storm, providing material to everybody but also getting material in, and working closely with the producers. It's a very synergistic, collaborative position. As you are getting feedback you emulate the wants and desires.

#### **Do you do special effects?**

Sometimes I am the one doing the effects, and other times it is other companies. If it is being handled by other companies,

I provide information to them as soon as I have the editing figured out: from what frame to what frame, speed, etc. – like handing a musician sheet music so they understand the notes they have to play. To get this information, I talk to the producer, directors, whomever has the vision.

### **Where did you get your training?**

I started off in college as a film animation student, fell in love with the tech side of film and TV. I got out of animation because I didn't have the mindset to be that kind of illustrator, and the tech side became my focus. I interned at the NASA Ames Research Center in Moffett Field – and through that year-long internship had amazing mentors who showed me how to use the camera, the artistry of lighting and sound, how you make it all come together within a shot. It was very hands on from day one. That just fueled my interest in the tech aspect.

The internship led to a five-year contract position as a videographer for NASA when I graduated from DeAnza College. During that time, I decided I wanted to learn more, and that's when I quit and enrolled at Art Center to focus on the creative and business side of film. At Art Center, I came across mentors who influenced me greatly: Tom Thordarson and Bryan Jowers (Illustration/Entertainment Design) and Brad Saunders and Jim Engelhardt (Screenwriting). They encouraged my experimental side – I liked to play in film and TV but utilize it in places not normally thought of – somehow, all my stuff went back to theme parks! I was offered scholarship for "9th term honors" which is an extra semester after you graduate in which you can take any class in any department. It was a chance to really experiment. This was in 1998, and I was advised to apply myself in themed entertainment. I had already dipped in, of course, with the assistant editor work at WDI.

I went back to Art Center for a Master's in Film Entertainment Design. Graduation was followed by years of working on reality shows, documentary series, and one independent feature. I loved telling these unique stories to audiences and playing with the media, and got back to themed entertainment with Ghost of the Castle for BRC.

### **What are some changes you have seen in the technology and process?**

Frame rates are one. When I was studying TV in the late 1980s, frame rates were based on is-it-film or is-it-TV, and where-is-it-screening. Countries had different standards. Now it is about what you want people to experience. Companies are striving for more realism, and the flickering image on the wall has transformed. Now it's not just how many frames per second, but is it going to work with my edit bay and the playback systems, and if not, how is it going to? It always comes back to what you want people to feel at that moment – and the tech limitations.

The technology itself, of course, is more and more accessible than in earlier days when you had to go to a studio or company and use their edit bay. Now anyone can go buy a workstation and the software to do it. The question is: rendering time! Also, owning the equipment doesn't make you into a filmmaker.

I love what Avid, Apple and Adobe have to offer. To me while the hotkeys are different they kind of all do the same thing, so I just go with what the company is using. They're just different flavors. You have to be adaptable to whatever is at your disposal.

### **Final thoughts?**

The industry is very intoxicating and inspiring, and I have had the opportunity to work with some great people. Two that stand out in my mind are Scott Sohan and Marie Colabelli. Scott is an editor and tech guy but does a lot more than that. I learned from him that you follow a process, but at the same time you have to be ready to improvise and think fast, to be adaptable when something just doesn't work. Scott taught me to always be about solving the problem. Marie, as a producer was given a daunting task: to be the media producer for Soarin' Around the World. She was able to take what she had professionally accomplished with film and TV and apply it to this medium – and, once again, improvise when it was needed, get it to work and make sense. She was always calm and collected and in sync with the logistics of things; always about what's best for the project.

I also recently had the pleasure of working with media producer Don MacBain on the project for Mousetrappe. He is a consummate pro. People like Don who are the best at what they do know how to leave their ego at the door, to be all about what's best for the project. That's a mantra I keep as best I can.

...



**Ken and his wife Michelle point out their commemorative brick at Disneyland**

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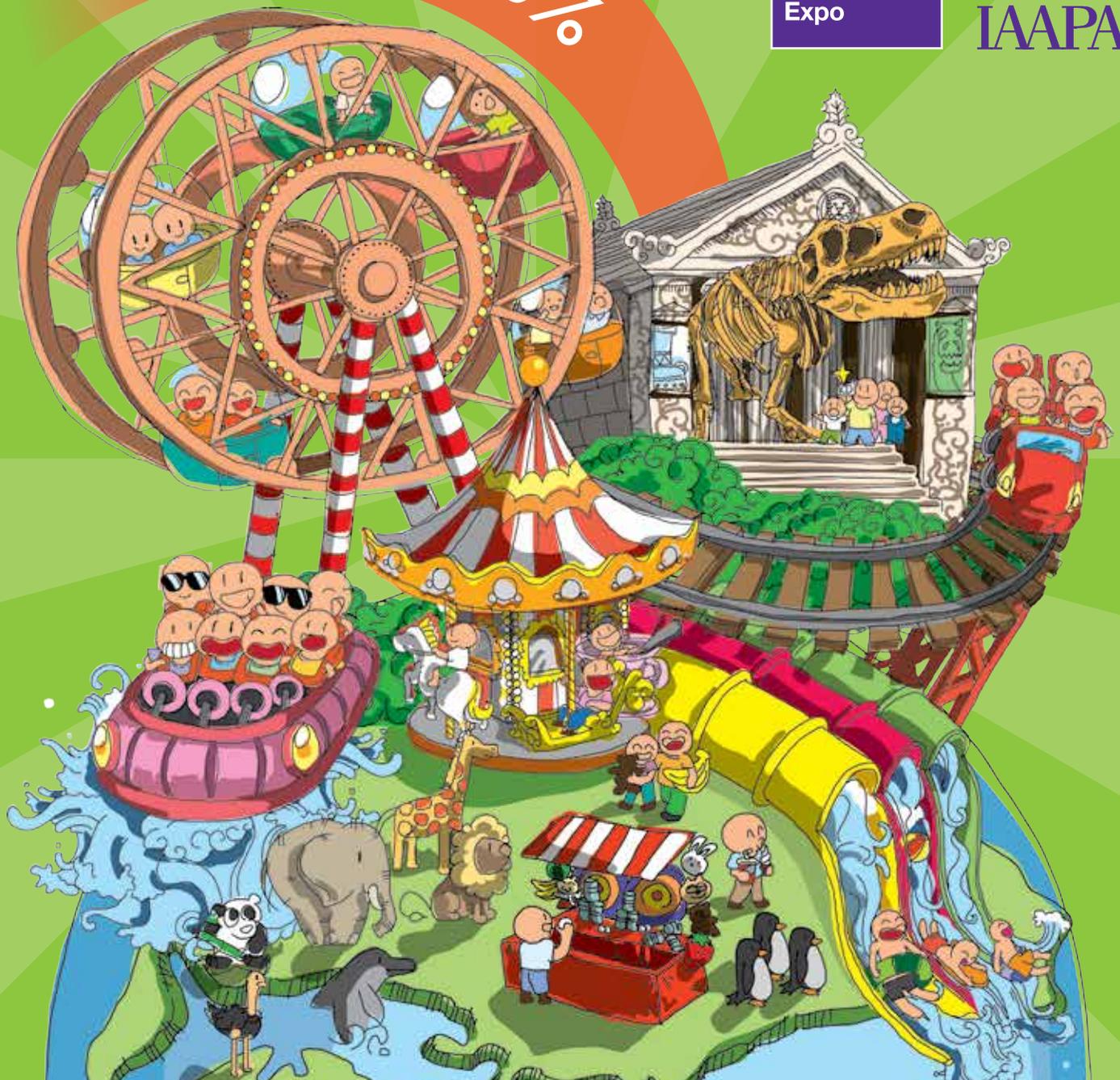
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On the show floor at the 2016 USITT Expo (left). USITT Executive Director David Grindle (right). Photos courtesy of USITT

# Of racks and rigs

USITT's longstanding commitment to theater technology is evident in their annual conference and trade show

*by Joe Kleiman*

In 1960, the United States Institute of Theater Technology was founded to promote dialog and research in the field. USITT has grown into a leading association for performing arts and theater professionals, but its programming also reflects how much sharing there is between theater and themed entertainment design. Disney, Universal, SeaWorld, Cirque du Soleil, and Feld Entertainment all participate in one way or another at USITT: as attendees, as speakers, as exhibitors. SeaWorld, covered in this issue, regularly has a recruitment booth there.

David Grindle spent more than 20 years as a stage manager, where he discovered that an opera has quite a bit in common with the circus. He shared an amusing anecdote. While at Opera Grand Rapids, he oversaw a production of Aida performed in a sports arena which featured 24 horses and 18 elephants. "The horses didn't want to follow their cues, they just wanted to play with the elephants," he says. "I learned quite a bit on the production."

Grindle describes technology as "a contemporary artist's brush" and talked to us about some prevalent technologies familiar to themed entertainment professionals and how they are employed in theater.

Projection mapping is having such a huge influence on the entertainment industry that an entire day-long workshop is planned around the technology at USITT 2017, culminating in

a visit to St. Louis Union Station and the immersive display in its Great Hall.

"Projection mapping becomes an amazing tool to create environments," says Grindle. "It gives the ability to paint multiple things. We can start turning things into other things and performers can interact with the technology. As it continues to grow as an entertainment possibility, people will adapt and it will take more of the front space when creating performances."

Virtual reality, which we see popping up on roller coasters, simulators and in museum exhibits, is also poised to change live performance venues. Grindle explains a scenario in which - with audiences in two different theaters wearing VR headsets - performers in each theater can interact with one another, giving the illusion that they're physically onstage together. "Dance has embraced this," he adds, "since it's a complete visual experience. We're not fully there, but the concept is being worked on. The thing holding this back is that the data does not yet transfer at speeds that are quick enough."

Grindle also called attention to the current well developed state of wire work. "Take a look at Mary Martin being pushed into the air as Peter Pan 60 years ago," he said, "and compare that to Spider-Man on Broadway or Gaga at the Superbowl. That was in a football stadium. The harness and flying design have progressed by leaps and bounds."

As new technologies enter the entertainment field, new engineering fields are being embraced – entertainment engineering, materials processing and software coding among them. According to Grindle, scenery and lighting are now being asked to provide more movement and motion than ever before.

While technology advances the industry, the standards remain. “Sound design sets the mood. It begins in the darkened environment,” Grindle said, “then the lights come on and they show the audience where to look.” The same sound and lighting principles used on stage are also utilized in attraction and museum exhibit design.

USITT also has a commitment to mentorship, with eight different mentorship programs. “It’s fascinating for young people to listen to industry professionals willing to take risk and vice versa,” says Grindle. “One of our mentors is Gordon Pearlman, who invented the first computerized lighting board. I’ve watched him learn from the students that he’s mentoring just as much as he’s taught them. It’s a two way street – the Socratic method, and it opens doors for everyone involved.”

In 2016, USITT launched its Gateway Program, with the initiative to bring diversity into the entertainment design and technology field. The organization defines “diversity” rather broadly and asks applicants what makes them diverse and underrepresented.

Answers are not always limited to race, gender, or religion. Once in the program, participants are paired with an industry mentor with a similar background and career path. When a wheelchair-bound sound engineer with cerebral palsy was admitted to the program, he was paired with Michael Maag, Resident Lighting Director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, who also uses a wheelchair.

USITT’s diversity initiative also partners with a high school program in an economically hard part of the conference host city and brings those students to the conference. “We show kids that there are jobs for them, not just in traditional theaters,” says Grindle. A large portion of the membership commitment to USITT’s diversity programs comes from the themed entertainment field. Serving as Vice Chair for Diversity is Nicole Queenan of Walt Disney Parks & Resorts.

In all its initiatives, USITT encourages risk. “With new technologies and new ideas,” says Grindle, “the number one thing we’re fostering is the importance of taking a chance. We’re becoming risk adverse as a business society. We’re a broad group with members in lighting, costume, scenery, sound, management, architecture, technical production, design and technology. We don’t represent just one segment. For us, the joy of collaboration is bringing all of these disciplines together and seeing what we can learn from each other.”...

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# Fireside chat

InPark's Martin Palicki visits with Gary Goddard and Taylor Jeffs

Through a variety of companies and countless projects, Gary Goddard has left an indelible and innovative mark on the industry. [For more on Gary's role in the industry, see the supporting article below.] InPark's Martin Palicki (MP) spoke with Goddard (GG) and Taylor Jeffs (TJ), Director of Design at Goddard Group, on recent and upcoming projects along with their take on paths for industry growth.

**MP: From where did your interest in the industry originate? What motivates you?**

**TJ:** I won the lottery to have been born and raised in Orange County, California, nearby Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm. Having essentially grown up in these parks, the medium was ingrained in my DNA before I could even speak, and from the time I was three the ultimate goal was clear- I wanted to design theme parks.

**GG:** In terms of attractions, I continue to look to be inspired by others' work. I am known to be very critical, but there is nothing I like more than a new ride or show that delivers. The Pirates ride at Shanghai Disneyland is spectacular. I went on the ride, then rode it again right away, and then scheduled another visit to the park to ride it a third time. It's an excellently designed attraction. The big beats of that whole park are great and well thought out.

Back in the States, after visiting Diagon Alley at Universal Studios I sent a letter to Mark Woodbury (Vice Chairman of Universal Parks & Resorts) congratulating them on designing a land that

really created a total experience and made me say "Wow, that was fantastic." These types of experiences are what drive me and I think it's what drives the best folks in the industry.

**MP: One of the major projects you're working on now is the Cirque du Soleil park under construction in Neuvo Vallarta, Mexico. Can you give us an update?**

**TJ:** Construction is racing along in Mexico while we continue to develop and innovate both here at our headquarters in Los Angeles, and at Cirque's home base in Quebec. We conducted a mock-up of one attraction this past fall near Quebec City, inviting both industry colleagues and members of the public to attend, and the result was truly electric- I felt I was looking into the future.

**GG:** I call it an experience park instead of a theme park because it is filled with immersive experiences. It has theme park elements, rides and shows, etc. But the way we have configured things and the way it will be consumed is very different. The waterpark is conceived as a rainforest. There will be no red, blue and yellow slides. It will appear that things are built by tribes in a way only Cirque can do. There is an entire nighttime waterpark experience but it will revolutionize the evening experience for waterparks. We are working with Cirque to create something truly original and revolutionary.

**TJ:** I really believe our Cirque du Soleil waterpark will dramatically shake things up when the first phase debuts (scheduled for

2019). We've creating an entirely new creative approach that could fundamentally change waterparks, and I really can't wait to share that with the world.

**MP: How do you keep a fresh approach when developing projects?**

**GG:** Whenever we are traveling we make sure to take time to find out what other interesting projects and locations are nearby so we can experience them and learn from them. And it isn't only theme parks but also cultural events, local happenings, unique dining experiences, and festivals. You have to always keep recharging the batteries. You have to stay curious and look to learn from the world around you.

**TJ:** Exactly. The best theme park designers are those who are curious and passionate about as many topics and mediums as possible, which then informs their work in theme parks.

We actually just announced a new venture that is based on this philosophy. We're partnering with Neil Patrick Harris to bring a new kind of magic show called "In & Of Itself" to New York this spring. I had caught a performance of the show during its initial run in Los Angeles this past summer, and was so knocked-out that not only did we take many of our staff members and clients to see it, but we also approached the show's creators about a New York transfer, which is now becoming a reality. This is the kind of project that I like to think Goddard Group embodies.

**MP: What makes for good theme park design?**

**GG:** If every park was about theming, then every theme park would be successful. If it was just about the rides, then you could

buy the rides and have a successful park. But it's something more than those individual components and ideas. It's creating an experience that understands what each unique market needs and then providing something that will be fun, inspire guests, and to do it in a manner that allows them to escape the real world. It's what I call "The Big Idea"—the right concept, at the time, in the right place, for the right audience.

**MP: What is your take on the future of the industry?**

**GG:** I am very optimistic for the industry, subject to the geopolitical landscape not going crazy. I fundamentally believe that the economies of China and America are too tied together for the government to allow any one leader to screw it up too badly. I am assuming that the rhetoric of division will go away as cooler heads prevail.

Look, I think China is just getting to the point now where they want to get IPs and originate. There is a chance now that China is a place where we can originate things and the Western designers will say "wow you have to go over there to see this ride or project – it's pretty cool." Creating original work is where the emerging markets, including China and Dubai, need to focus.

**TJ:** From the standpoint of "what's next," we are moving towards total immersion—fully-realized story worlds where all five senses are "in character." That said, it will still take a while to achieve that, requiring further investment and buy-in from developers. The team here is always looking for what our industry can offer audiences that no other can, and our ability to place people in the middle of physical stories is something that no other medium can come close to replicating. •••

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## All the world's a stage

Gary Goddard's theatrical roots govern his creative process

by *Martin Palicki*

It's clear that while Goddard's shrewd business sense has served him well through the years, he is really a performer at heart, guided by his love for theater and film from an early age.

"I had always wanted to be an actor, a director, a writer and an animator," says Goddard. As a teenager, Goddard learned that one of Disney's "Nine Old Men," animator Les Clark, had a home near him in Santa Barbara. Gary reached out and soon Les had arranged a tour of the Disney Studio. During the tour, Gary noticed two trailers nearby that were the beginnings of the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) – a college envisioned

by Walt Disney where young artists would live and work with professional mentors.

"Honestly, before this moment I did not plan on attending college. My intention was to get cast in a touring musical and see the world while being paid as a performer," says Goddard. "But I decided there and then that if I could get in to CalArts, I would go."

While at CalArts, Goddard produced Musical Theater Workshops during the summers with college friend Tony Christopher.

## LOOKING AT MODELS

*Clockwise, from top left:*  
**Gary modeling 1970s fashion while working for Imagineering; Gary and Al Bertino review a large model for Monster Plantation; Gary inspects a model for the Galaxy Macau resort; Gary (second from left) and Taylor (third from right) show clients a model of the Cirque theme park under construction in Mexico.**



One summer show the duo put together was dedicated to "50 Happy Years with Walt Disney Productions." The show alternated between live scenes and clips of Disney films Goddard had solicited from contacts at the Disney studios.

Several Disney legends came to see the production and news of the show and workshops eventually made their way to Robert Jani, then Vice President for Entertainment at Disney, who invited Gary and Tony to participate in a free workshop one night a week about the business part of "show business."

That workshop led to Gary and Tony both being offered entertainment management positions at Walt Disney World, and subsequently Walt Disney Imagineering.

Goddard reports that while at WDI, he was offered a job in Marketing directly by Card Walker, the Chairman and CEO of the Walt Disney Company at the time, but he turned it down. "At that point I saw myself as a writer and director and producer, but I wasn't a marketing guy," claims Goddard. Seeing the course that was charted out for him at Disney, Goddard decided to strike out on his own.

Gary initially formed Gary Goddard Productions to work on film and television production. He also partnered with Phil Mendez on Goddard Mendez Animation and eventually started The Director's Company with Tony Christopher to direct live entertainment. Within a couple years, they all decided to combine the companies into one entity called Gary Goddard Productions (GDP).

"Within the first year of starting GDP, we got a call from Peter Alexander who had just started at MCA Recreation Services (Universal Studios Tour) as head of Shows & Special Effects. The studio was considering adapting the Conan movie into a new live show attraction," says Goddard. Goddard credits Rolly Crump for referring him. Within weeks Goddard's team was creating, and then designing, producing and directing the popular show at Universal.

The early 1980s were a busy time for Goddard and GDP. The team was soon working on projects for not only Universal, but Six Flags and Busch Gardens as well.

Al Bertino approached GGP to back a project opportunity he had with Six Flags. The deal came together and the team launched their first major theme park project: Monster Plantation for Six Flags Over Georgia.

Projects outside of theme parks also materialized. They first worked for Sanrio in 1982 on a Hello Kitty concept for American audiences. In 1983, they sold the concept for SnuggleBumms to Milton Bradley, who then asked Landmark to design characters for their popular CandyLand game in 1984.

By 1986 Goddard was directing the motion picture Masters of the Universe, and work started with Mattel Toys on the crossover television show and topline Captian Power. That year they changed the name from Gary Goddard Productions to Landmark Entertainment Group and expanded their portfolio to resorts by working with Caesars Palace (The Forum Shops at Caesars).

In the 1990s Gary and Landmark were firmly entrenched in theme parks, resorts, movies, television, licensing. The company's achievements included creating the concepts and doing show design for industry changing attractions that

included Terminator 2: 3D, The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man, Caesars Magical Empire and Jurassic Park: The Ride.

Gary and Tony parted ways in 1998, with Tony keeping the Landmark company name and Gary forming Gary Goddard Entertainment in 2002 (renamed The Goddard Group in 2012).

Through the years, Goddard has persevered. Through his work he shows innovation and versatility – whether in business models, applying new technologies, or expanding in the Asian market.

"I've learned that you have to think on your feet and be ready to shift as parameters begin to change, whether it's a challenging client, or budget or schedule or all of the above," says Goddard. "This is the arena I thrive in – where my theatrical and entrepreneurial backgrounds meet. As with any great movie or live show or concert, it's all about the content, and more than that, it's about how you bring it all together – how you pace it for maximum impact."...



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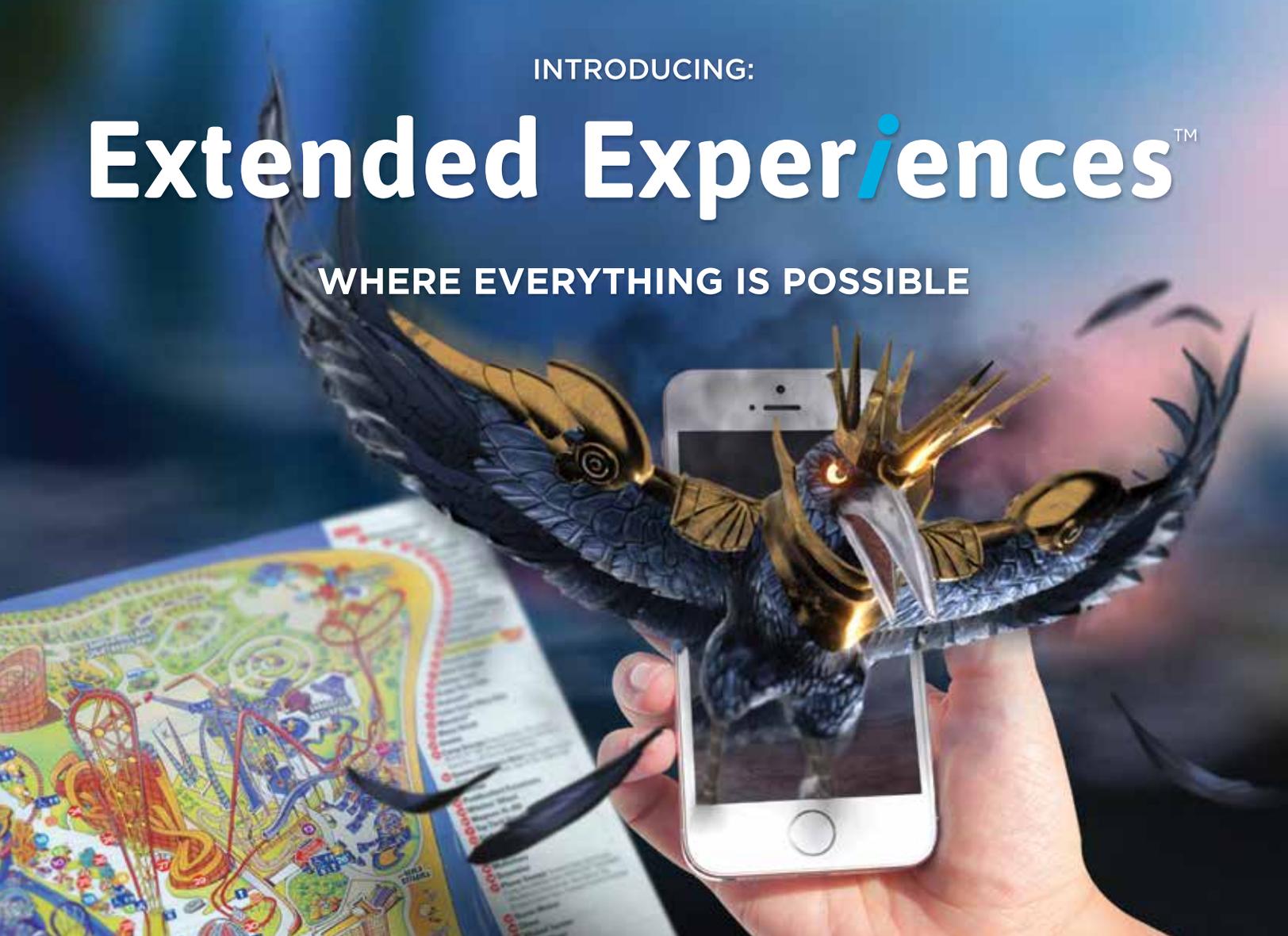
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