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Advancing technology,
and more



ASTRA LUMINA

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ON THE COVER

Astra Lumina opened in the fall of 2022 at Anakeesta in Tennessee, USA. The evening experience, created by Moment Factory, asks "What would happen if the stars reached for us?"

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We'll see you at Licensing Expo and InfoComm

**Judith Rubin,
Editor**



The industry returns to Asia

**Martin Palicki,
Publisher**



Where is the leading edge in themed entertainment today? There are in fact multiple leading edges, depending on your perspective. Licensing and technology represent two of them.

Brands and IPs driving story and immersion in themed entertainment experiences can deliver rewards to the IP holder, the operator and the audience. Recognizing the huge value of these endeavors, licensors today are making attractions an organic part of their game plan, even setting up company verticals to address the LBE sector. We've seen this from the attractions industry angle for a number of years, with brand companies having more and more of a presence at IAAPA. And in the pages of InPark, we've covered this space in detail with IP holders, operators, consultants and creatives. The licensing community, notably Licensing International and its Licensing Expos in the US and Europe, have likewise stepped up to address these markets. Some of the most innovative and influential projects today are in the licensing space. There is great opportunity here, and we hope you'll explore it with us.

The InfoComm show meets alternately in Las Vegas and Orlando, and 2023 is an Orlando year, which gives it more of a themed entertainment spin. It will be a great time to catch up with Orlando-based companies on the floor, exhibiting and attending, as well as in the educational sessions. This coming together of the industry specifically around technology also provides opportunities to gather and meet colleagues at extracurricular events such as the Attractions Technology Lab, hosted at Oceaneering. Technology is a dynamic front with endless challenges and opportunities for creating the Next Big Thing in guest experience, whether in connection to content, operations, integration or another aspect of project creation and delivery. That of course serves the never ending quest of themed entertainment - to remain competitive and fresh. InPark salutes InfoComm for its service to the industry. We look forward to meeting you there.

Judith helps drive content to serve the attractions industry, fostering professional connections, business development and the meaningful exchange of information. She has been contributing to InPark since 2005 and became editor in 2010.

It is hard to argue that the region most impacted by the pandemic, at least from a business development and operations standpoint, is Asia - and in particular, China. As most of the world began the slow process of reopening in 2021 and 2022, China remained steadfast in its travel bans and restrictions.

While China is only one country, its impact on leisure and tourism is large. Attractions normally dependent on Chinese tourists pivoted to attract local and neighboring audiences.

Even as I write this, there remain hurdles and hesitation for travel in and out of China. One can't help but wonder if the attractions market in that part of the world has been affected permanently.

All eyes will be on Singapore this June when industry professionals gather for IAAPA Expo Asia. Without a doubt, the world has changed much since the last event in 2019 (Hong Kong). Even beyond COVID, inter-governmental relationships have shifted (generally not for the better), threats of additional armed conflict loom large, and countries like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have emerged as key players in the attractions market. Nevertheless, both the industry and InPark remain committed to Asia.

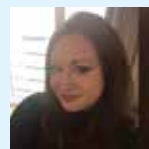
Many questions remain for the future, but now is the time to rely on established relationships and industry associations like IAAPA to help provide paths forward and global perspective on an ever-changing marketplace.

Martin founded InPark Magazine in 2004, combining years of experience working in themed entertainment with a passion for writing and design.



Joe Kleiman, Senior Correspondent

Raised in San Diego on theme parks, zoos, and IMAX films, Joe Kleiman would expand his childhood loves into two decades as a projectionist and theater director within the giant screen industry. In addition to his work in commercial and museum operations, Joe has volunteered his time to animal husbandry at leading facilities in California and Texas and has played a leading management role for a number of performing arts companies. Joe has been news editor at InPark Magazine since 2011, becoming the publication's senior correspondent in 2021. His blog, ThemedReality.com takes an unconventional look at the attractions industry. Follow on twitter @themesrenewed



Becci Knowles, News Editor

Becci Knowles is a U.K.-based writer and editor with 20 years' experience in trade and consumer press. Becci's first taste of the themed attractions industry came in 2015 with a visit to Gothenberg, Sweden, for IAAPA to support the Park World and GlobalAmusements & Play team. She went on to edit Park World from 2018-2022 before deciding to go freelance, making the move into travel and lifestyle before returning to the visitor attractions industry for InPark.

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Up and away

In flying theaters and media-based attractions, Brogent soars

by Kevin Dazey

“The flying theater format has established itself as one of the evergreen experiences in theme parks and as king of the media attractions genre,” says Stefan Rothaug, Marketing and Sales at Brogent Technologies. In fact, chances are good that visitors to flying theaters at theme parks or destination attractions will be riding Brogent. The manufacturer is a leader in the field, with some 35 Brogent i-Ride or m-Ride systems installed and operating around the world since 2010.

A flying theater is a type of motion simulator, combining immersive cinema (often on a dome or curved screen) with programmed motion and special effects. Configurations and seating arrangements will vary by size and type of venue, but a fundamental element is suspended seating, with guests’ feet dangling to reinforce the sense of flight (and fun). With all components well-executed and working in concert, a flying theater delivers, as Rothaug says, “a realistic and believable flight experience that is sure to excite and delight visitors of all ages” – in other words, a hit attraction that tends to attract multiple visits.

From apps to ascent

Founded in 2001 and headquartered in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, Brogent’s roots are in the realm of software engineering for mobile phone app development. An AV-related project for Taiwan’s National Palace Museum provided the company with tools and experience to take into new markets. “The most important things that made Brogent become what it is today are the various experiences it acquired and the spirit of taking new challenges,” says Rothaug. “Over the past 22 years, market changes led us to explore new opportunities. Brogent became a leading manufacturer of not only the flying theater, but also media-based attractions.”

The popularity of the original flying theater (“Soarin’ Over California” at Disney’s California Adventure, which opened in 2001) suggested a promising new direction in attractions. Operators around the world got into the game, and Brogent was spurred to develop and market its own flying ride system. E-DA World theme park, when still in pre-opening development

Above: Brogent offers flying theater systems for all sizes of venues and markets. All photos courtesy of Brogent
Next page: In addition to flying systems, Brogent supports media-based attractions for a wide range of venues and experiences.

stages near Kaohsiung City, Taiwan, wanted a signature flying experience and found a willing partner in Brogent. After recruiting simulation technology professionals to the team and a few years of development, “Feeling Taiwan,” the very first “i-Ride” flying theater, debuted with the opening of E-DA World in 2010. “After the E-DA project, we seized another chance to deliver the first flying theater overseas – FlyOver Canada, a standalone attraction that opened in 2013 in Vancouver to great success and brought Brogent to the international market,” Rothaug says. FlyOver Canada, a Pursuit Collection attraction, brought together an attraction “dream team” including former Disney Imagineer Rick Rothschild of FAR Out! Creative Direction, Moment Factory, Christie, Sherpas Cinema and Six Degrees Music. Brogent had found a business niche wherein it could excel.

The “Rides”

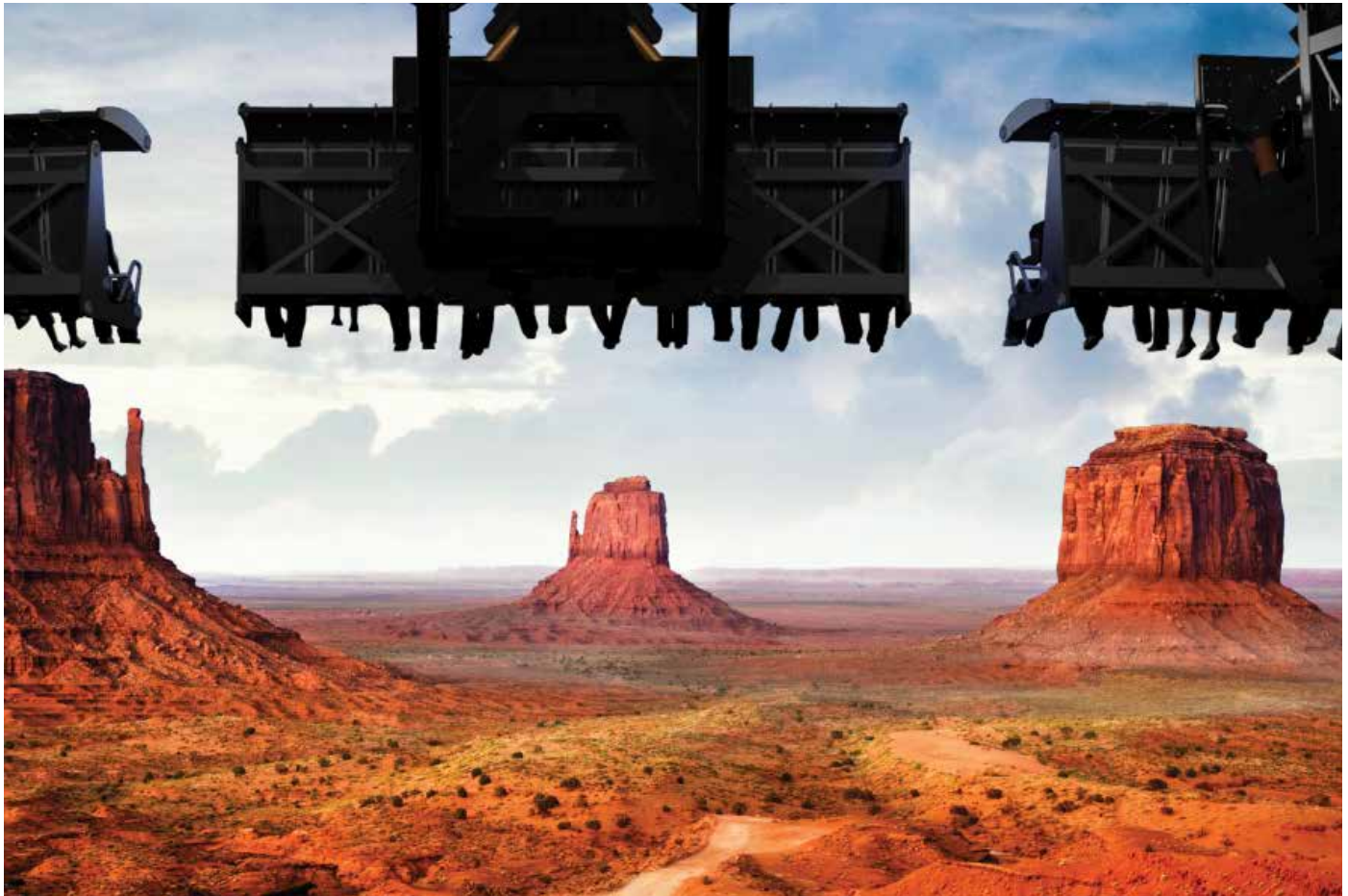
At 24 installations to date, i-Ride, the initial Brogent flying theater design, continues to be adopted into a growing number of theaters at theme parks and standalone sites. The foundations of i-Ride are electric-powered motion bases with gondolas featuring suspended seating. Given that each ride vehicle is capable of six degrees of freedom (heave, surge, sway, roll, pitch, and yaw) it can be programmed to deliver a gentle or more dynamic experience depending on show type and intended audience, while 4D effects complete the package. The boarding operation is simple, directing

guests to gondolas located on different levels of the theater. When the action begins, a railing is retracted and the gondolas slide toward the screen, plunging riders into the action with feet dangling. This modular setup does mean staffing all levels when at full capacity, but on slow days or in case of mechanical issues, individual gondolas can be taken out of service and others can remain operational.

Several years after creating i-Ride, Brogent introduced a second flying theater option, the m-Ride. It is more compact and requires less height than i-Ride, thereby able to serve additional markets and locations where space is more restricted. In comparison to i-Ride, m-Ride focuses on the pitch movement that enhances the thrill of falling actions. It also adds a spectacular reveal moment where riders rotate 180 degrees to face the screen.

Even with two flying theater ride systems to satisfy clients’ needs, Brogent had interest from venues where i-Ride and m-Ride were out of reach. Developing a third ride system has presented another opportunity to build on success and meet additional market demand, with o-Ride. “A flying theater often needs huge space in terms of width, depth, and height while budget is another major barrier. Therefore, the introduction of o-Ride is to overcome those challenges,” Rothaug explains. Announced in late 2022, the o-Ride stands as the company’s most economical flying theater system, while offering unique qualities. Rothaug





FlyOver Las Vegas takes guests over the American West landscape. *Photo courtesy of Pursuit*

adds, “The special design makes it more compact, but with the same capacity and flying experience. The compact design of the motion modules also makes it the ideal choice for locations or existing buildings with limited access during installation. With the introduction of o-Ride and multiple AV and content choices, Brogent is pleased to offer a full product range of flying theater systems.”

Now with three flying theater options in the catalog to suit varying budgets and spaces Brogent is in position to gain more momentum and reinforce its standing in the field. Per Rothaug, their success is due to multiple factors. “Brogent’s patented motion platform is designed to generate the smoothest and most agile movements to fulfill every motion needed from gliding to falling. Another factor is the ride’s storytelling and media elements that are carefully crafted to transport visitors to another world. Brogent’s flying theater systems are designed for maximum content flexibility, keeping audiences engaged with fresh scenes.”

Partnerships

Brogent has built robust partnerships as well as products in the flying theater space. The FlyOver series is an example. Following the original FlyOver Canada (2013) was a second collaboration, FlyOver America at Mall of America (Minneapolis, 2016), then

FlyOver Iceland (Reykjavík, 2019). The next FlyOver launched in one of the entertainment capitals of the world - FlyOver Las Vegas, another standalone location, directly on the heavily foot-trafficked Strip (2021). The partnership continues; in 2024 Chicago’s Navy Pier will receive a FlyOver, and another will open in Canada at the base of the CN Tower in downtown Toronto’s entertainment district.

LEGOLAND Florida Resort was the first to premiere m-Ride in 2019. Three more m-Rides would quickly follow in 2021 at other LEGOLAND properties in Denmark, England, and California. “We are very pleased to have long-term relationships with amazing clients such as FlyOver and LEGOLAND,” says Rothaug. “These close collaborations help us to grow and improve our products. They may have suggestions from an operator perspective for improvement or new ideas that can help us all stay fresh and innovative and keep audiences coming back. The brainstorming can extend to interior design, theming, ride system, and films.”

In regard to films, the proliferation of flying theaters has a side benefit of generating a custom content library that keeps expanding. “The more flying theaters our partners build, the more media content will be generated. It further enhances the movie library that can be shared or licensed,” says Rothaug.

More to explore

When tourism slowed in 2020 and 2021, Brogent ramped up its research and development (R&D) capacity to be in a strong position, ready to meet future demand once the leisure sector regained momentum. “We believed there would be huge growth in the tourism and amusement industry after the pandemic wound down,” says Rothaug. “Hence, the R&D team continued to build momentum and actively developed richer and more diverse high-end products, such as a new form of flying theater featuring an 8K LED dome screen and a hot air balloon simulator.”

Augmenting its leadership in flying theaters, Brogent also boasts a wide product portfolio of other types of media-based attractions. In early 2022 the first i-Ocean aquarium opened at the National Museum of Marine Science and Technology in Keelung, Taiwan. Described as a digital interactive aquarium, i-Ocean pairs marine life and interactive simulation technology. This project also further reinforces Brogent’s abilities in creating media content, and in theming design. Rise Up VR Airship made its debut in 2021, a VR experience utilizing a 6DOF motion base where up to four riders step into a hot air balloon-style basket, for a simulated journey to famous landmarks around the world. v-Ride360 offers a comparable experience, with or without a VR headset: a 360-degree, cylindrical screen that envelops a circular motion base to simulate a hot air balloon ride complete with 4D effects.

Rothaug notes that opportunity is ripe for media-based rides and experiences at all types of locations. “Media-based attractions have become increasingly popular in the entertainment industry and have become a major draw for theme parks, museums, and other entertainment venues. Leveraging the advantages of our motion platforms, advanced AV solutions, media content, and system integration, we developed other media-based rides of higher quality in the market.”

The last three years have also meant an enhanced focus for Brogent on further development of gaming-centric rides,

most notably miRide, based around the company’s established electric-powered, 6DOF motion platform. “miRide is a one-of-a-kind racing simulator utilizing the mini 6DOF platform, steering wheel, and paddle control where gamers feel just as if they are truly driving on a real racetrack,” adds Rothaug. “Thanks to the competitive advantages and the extraordinary gaming experience we are bringing the miRide racing simulator to Hockenheimring, one of the most renowned racing circuits in Germany. This partnership is a huge step for Brogent to enter the world of eSports.” The miRide virtual F1 racing experience for Hockenheimring will be placed at the race track’s new welcome center and features a mini 4K LED dome screen.

Two specialized sales teams help to ensure satisfied Brogent clients around the world, throughout the entire process - from initial contact, to start-up, and beyond. “After the worldwide sales team finishes its duty of connection with clients, our after-sales team steps in to build and maintain the relationship,” says Rothaug. “This helps to foster trust and loyalty.”

While continuing to innovate and explore in new directions, Brogent remains committed to growing the flying theater space and finding new and better ways to serve operators. “Humans have always been fascinated with the idea of flight,” says Rothaug. “It is a dream that roots deeply in every culture and nation. Flying theaters offer a unique and thrilling way for people of all ages and nations to experience the sensation of flight. There remains huge potential for flying theaters as well as other forms of media-based attractions. We’re proud of our track record and stand ready for the next challenge.” •••



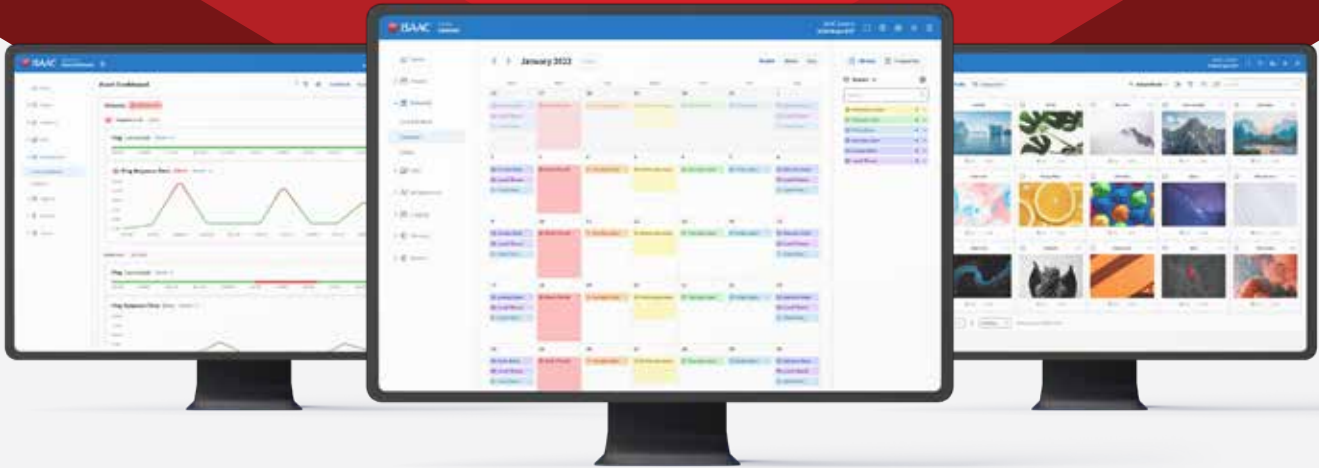
Kevin Dazey (dazey200x@yahoo.com) works in R&D at a manufacturing company and has a Bachelor’s degree in Mechanical Engineering from Wright State University. He writes for InPark about ride engineering and theme park operations. He enjoys hearing the design stories behind the rides along with all the technical details. Kevin is an active member of American Coaster Enthusiasts (ACE) and an avid vehicle hobbyist.



Stefan Rothaug



RiseUP combines a motion base platform with a curved LED screen to simulate a hot air balloon ride.



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Full access to the toybox

Attractions Technology Lab and the power of synchronization

by Joe Kleiman

The Attractions Technology Lab (ATL) was created to give industry members a behind-the-scenes look at the technology behind a full ride experience, with the benefit of showing the intercommunication between different systems in a controlled, curated environment. It is a showcase of leading attractions technologies working together in a single project, in a setting that offers plenty of time for exploration and networking.

Now entering its third year and preparing for its next gatherings in Orlando in June and November 2023, the ATL started as a partnership between founding members Alcorn McBride, Christie, Garner Holt Productions, Oceaneering and Weigl Controls.

“Our events are designed to deliver high value to our collective clients,” says Loren Barrows, Alcorn McBride Chief Operating Officer. “The goals for the partners involved are collaboration

and growth in the interest of building better products and better relationships. With collaboration, we are looking to improve the interoperability of our products between manufacturers and grow the technical talent pool so companies can find the people they need to be successful. With growth, we’re gaining exposure and blazing the trail for a stronger voice for the technical users in our market.”

To keep pace with the market, ATL is evolving, and discussions are underway with new partners (including several key partners from the team that produces Illuminarium) to expand the experience for its November event. We spoke with Devin Flannery at Alcorn McBride to learn more. In his role as a Solutions Architect, Flannery supports clients with their applications and conveys the clients’ needs to the Alcorn McBride engineering team. He also oversees the company’s training programs.

Above: Guests at the November 2022 Attractions Technology Lab enjoy a short dark ride experience, complete with a trackless ride vehicle, synchronized video and audio, lighting effects, and an animatronic character. All photos courtesy of Alcorn McBride

Interview with Devin Flannery

As part of your duties with Alcorn McBride, you play a key role in the development of the Attractions Technology Lab. What is the ATL experience going to be like this year?

We are excited to treat attendees in 2023 to two different ATL showcases, both at Oceaneering's spacious Orlando facility, which has the infrastructure to do a full dark ride. Our June show will conveniently run while the InfoComm Show (taking place June 14-16) is in town. It will be similar to what was presented in 2022. So if you missed our earlier gatherings, June 2023 is a reboot of those, followed in November by a brand-new presentation during IAAPA Expo (November 10 and 13-17). For our November show, we're in discussions to add some exciting new technology from additional leading providers. Event info can be found online at attractionstechnology.com/event-info.

As I've said, the June 2023 show will revisit what was presented last November - but the reboot will have more of an open house feel, welcoming other manufacturers to see what the ATL is about. We are rebooting the Dark Ride Lab which features a large screen from our supporting partner Carbon Black Technologies and animatronics from Garner Holt. The ride takes about five minutes, but then riders stay on the vehicle and go through a second time for a behind-the-scenes guided tour, where they see how everything works together.

Other supporting partners include Theme Park AV (ride vehicle audio system design), thejuice (dark ride media content), 4Wall Entertainment (lighting system design and rigging), Goodtheory Studios (mapping content), InterAmerica Stage, CarbonBlack, QSC, Powersoft, and ETC (lighting fixtures). This group of companies continues to expand.

Some things we can tell you now about the 2023 version in November: It will feature permanent projection surfaces with complex curvature from Strong/MDI. We're in talks with HOLOPLOT to attach their matrixed beam-forming speakers to the Strong MDI screens. (Right now, the audio is a static experience.) One discussion with HOLOPLOT involves steering of the audio beam in real-time. We're also in discussions with Panasonic Connect about showcasing some of their technology. [Editor's Note: Strong/MDI, HOLOPLOT, and Panasonic Connect have contributed to the Illuminarium attractions currently in Atlanta and Las Vegas. See inparkmagazine.com/wild-kingdoms.]

Are there other activities attached to the ATL besides the ride experiences?

The ATL also offers in-depth training sessions where people can see the equipment and interfaces and learn how they're employed. It's a way for them to become more familiar with the product offerings. Each training session is specific to each manufacturer. For example, Weigl has a training session on how to program



Devin Flannery

animatronics. Attendees can come in for the training session before experiencing the showcases and then get a short tour of the lab. It usually lasts about two hours.

There's also a tour of the Oceaneering facility and people will get to ride one of their autonomous shuttles between buildings.

What was the genesis of the Attractions Technology Lab?

It began with Loren Barrows having discussions with other industry leaders about how we could showcase our companies' technologies outside of the more traditional events. Scott Harkless, Alcorn McBride's Chief Innovation Officer [and a contributor to InPark Magazine] was very involved in putting this together. It helps that all of the partners know each other well, because we've all worked on attractions projects together for clients.

What criteria do you have when considering new partners for the ATL?

We look for companies that can fit the bill of theme parks - dark rides, AV control, animatronics and ride control. There is a slight caveat in place that the first rights for showcasing a technology go to the five founding members, but we're very open to other companies showcasing their tech. InterAmerica Stage is a leading rigging company and Carbon Black is a cutting-edge manufacturer of transparent screens, but we look at other companies like Strong/MDI if they have a product that's unique in the market. Our goal is to provide a top-tier experience, and it's important that a company's equipment fit into the overall flow of running an attraction, because that's really what we're showcasing.



A second experience at the November 2022 Attractions Technology Lab featured multiple trackless vehicles in choreographed motion around a projection mapped column.

The ATL is not fixed on dark rides. We've been doing that because the Oceaneering facility manufactures dark ride vehicles. Future iterations of the ATL will be focused around other types of attractions as well.

Audio plays a key role in an attraction. How is that accomplished?

PowerSoft and Q-SYS are our current audio partners. We use our Alcorn McBride V16X show controller and BinloopX AV controller fitted with a BX-16A audio playback module using Dante and a BX-4KU 4K video playback module. Our RidePlayer onboard audio is installed on the Oceaneering vehicles. Powersoft has provided the amp and subwoofer, while we have a Q-SYS Core and amplifier driving the QSC speakers.

What are some of the technology trends you see in the attractions industry or elsewhere that might migrate to attractions?

From my perspective, it's about immersive experiences and using technology to augment the world around us to enhance the experience, as well as to engage with and excite the guests.

I believe the most fundamental trend is the personalization of a shared experience. Growing up in Orlando, I'll never forget the surprise and awe that I felt on the E.T. Adventure ride at Universal Studios Florida when E.T. would say your name as you approached the end of the ride. That's the realization that attractions aren't just canned loops, and can actually be catered toward individuals, while still being an experience that we all share.

I think people are naturally communal, and as such prefer Augmented Reality over Virtual Reality - we don't want to shut out the world around us, but rather augment and enhance it to make it more exciting.

Companies such as HOLOPLOT seem to support this idea as well. The way they utilize beam forming in their products is exceptional, and provides a unique auditory experience for numerous people within the same environment. It's really quite thrilling to experience. And from what I've seen, the team over at Misapplied Sciences is looking to achieve something along the same lines with video using their Parallel Reality product.

How did you get involved with theme park technology?

While in college in 2006, I was offered a job with a family friend, Jeff Bobbin, at his company Show System Integrators (SSI), which he founded after leaving Soundelux Showworks. This is where I got my first taste of working on a theme park design/integration when we were awarded the design-build contract for The Simpsons Ride at Universal Studios parks in Orlando and Hollywood, and also when I first met Scott Harkless and learned about Alcorn McBride products.

Then in late 2010 I was offered a job back at SPL (which had become AVI-SPL by that point) in their Special Projects Group to work on some Universal Studios projects that they had landed. Many of these projects also involved Alcorn McBride products to varying degrees.

Later, I joined some of my friends/colleagues over at Electrosonic. I was hired on as a Design Engineer, but quickly became part of the leadership within the engineering team, eventually becoming the Engineering Manager of North America. This is also where I met Gabe Perry, who joined the engineering team after leaving Universal Studios (prior to him coming aboard at Alcorn McBride).

Then in 2022 I learned of an opening at Alcorn McBride and jumped at the opportunity.

What attracted you to Alcorn McBride?

For me the people were the initial appeal. I've known various people who have worked for Alcorn, and I had a great working relationship with Scott and Gabe. From my years on the integration side, Alcorn has had a reputation for building solid, reliable products. Couple that with a fun, supportive working

environment with some exceptionally talented people, and it's an opportunity that you'd have to be crazy to turn down.

Who should attend the ATL?

We've found that a lot of people adjacent to the attractions industry or who have nothing to do with it come through and enjoy the experience. We find that more tech-inclined people tend to get more involved in exploring the technologies and how they work together and there are lots of students coming through.

Our members do a lot of presentations for university programs. Alcorn-McBride provides training sessions on our platforms once a quarter in Orlando and twice a year at a facility in Burbank. We find that a dozen or so students sign up for each program, and we're impressed. There's lots of engagement with lots of high-level questions. Our partner Christie also partners with UCF's Graduate Program in Themed Experience. UCF last year announced a partnership with Universal Creative, so there's another extension of how we can reach out to students.

What do you want people to come away with after experiencing the ATL?

Technology has to be of value and add to the show and it has to be of value to the guests in attendance. People are coming onboard all the time with new technologies or new products they

try to get in the fold to augment what they're doing. The ATL is a way to show how the process can be streamlined and it's a way our partners can showcase new elements. The show itself is not centered around the show. It's centered around the behind-the-scenes experience.

We're not faking anything or cutting corners. Everything involved is real, it's the same elements that would be used in a real-world application. We build on our previous shows and it takes a lot of coordination, permitting and logistics between partners - about three weeks to install and program the shows. When you come to the Attractions Technology Lab, you're going to see everything that makes the experience happen.

The most exciting part for me in working on the ATL is engaging with the attendees and seeing their eyes light up and the gears start turning in their mind when they see how the systems integrate and communicate to drive the whole experience. It's an "Aha" moment when they see the power of synchronization at work. •••



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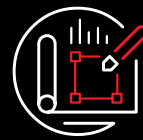
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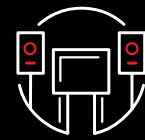
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Lighting up the night

Anakeesta's Astra Lumina Night Walk welcomes visitors from all over, including the sky

photo essay by Martin Palicki



Astra Lumina opened in October, 2022, at Anakeesta, a family theme park located on a mountaintop in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. The park was opened in 2017, after the Great Smoky Mountain wildfires destroyed much of the area. As a separate add-on ticket, Astra Lumina was created to help extend guest visits into the evening.

"Astra Lumina immerses people in this outdoor walk through the forest at night. They are bathed in light, the music is incredible, and the experience is unlike anything you would see at another park," says Anakeesta managing partner Karen Bentz.

Astra Lumina is the latest in a series of immersive outdoor experiences from Moment Factory. Based in Montreal, Canada, Moment Factory designed the experience around the concept of stars in the sky descending to Earth each night to recharge before returning to the heavens. A custom soundtrack is complemented by artistic light installations in eight distinct scenes.

"A lot of people probably wouldn't go hiking at night in the woods," explains Bentz. "Astra Lumina allows them a safe opportunity to do that and to explore our universe while thinking about the planets and the stars."





"At Moment Factory we have a 'forest lab' every year where we go and test new things, which helps to influence our creation," says Thomas Pinal, multimedia director at Moment Factory.

Astra Lumina's technology features an iconic giant glittering star orb (pictured), projection mapping, thousands of colorful LED lights, mediabars, extensive fog and other special effects. The technology is cleverly hidden to allow guests to focus on the experience.

At opening, Astra Lumina was the 15th installation of Moment Factory's Lumina Enchanted Night Walks. Foresta Lumina at Parc de la Gorge de Coaticook (Canada) was the company's first, opening in 2014 and receiving a TEA Thea Award in 2016. A similar version of Astra Lumina is also available in Los Angeles as a seasonal experience.

"This show is different from the other Lumina Night Walks," says Pinal. "Some of our shows are more ambient and contemplative, but Astra Lumina has a good balance of wonder, enchantment and inspirational music that is really quite spectacular."

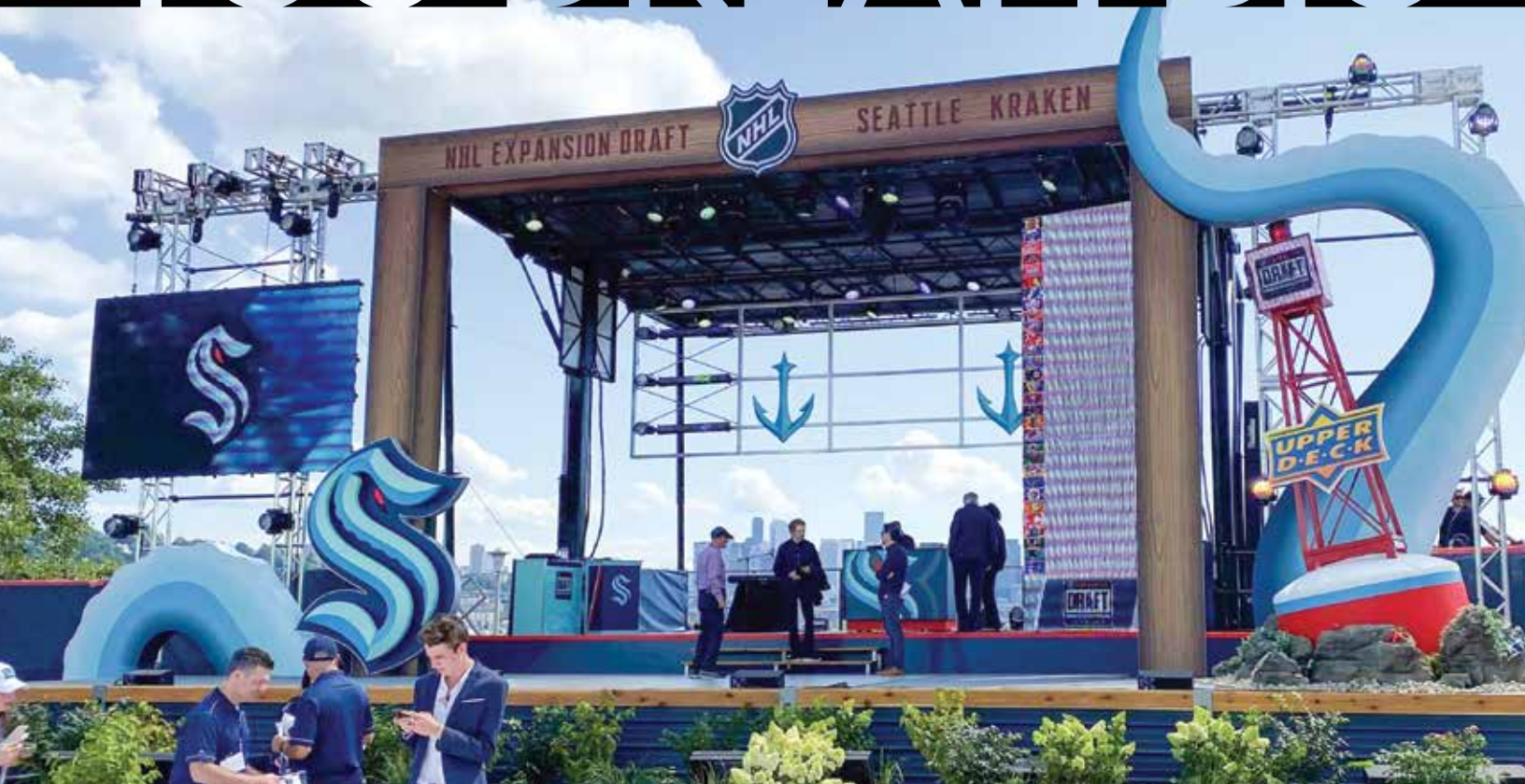


For a video tour of Anakeesta's Astra Lumina, follow InPark's YouTube channel @inparkmagazine

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The Elumenati

Combining powerful technology and simple design for interactive, immersive experiences

by Wendy Grant

Immersive design and engineering firm The Elumenati celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2023. The company's founders, Dr. D'ardo Colucci and Dr. David McConville, worked in virtual and augmented reality in the 1990s, and formed their own company in 2003. The Elumenati's first products were fisheye-based projection systems; early consulting and custom installation projects included the Cambrian Seascape in the Field Museum's Evolving Planet exhibition, which is still running today.

Today The Elumenati can boast having designed and deployed well over 700 systems, big and small. The company has installed its signature, turnkey GeoDome systems in venues around the world, while also providing custom work to clients in a range of education and entertainment markets, from museums and planetariums to location-based entertainment (LBE) and theme parks, and from traveling festivals and brand activations to aquariums and zoos. A sampling of their one-off projects

includes an immersive theater at an amusement park in Qatar, a surf simulator for Richmond Olympic Experience that lets visitors virtually catch waves in the world's best surf spots, and a holiday-themed brand activation for DreamWorks.

To help mark their 20th year, members of The Elumenati leadership team talked with InPark about their work, the design approach that they've honed over two decades, and what's next for the specialized, boutique firm as they continue to forge their path as a pioneer in projection technology and immersive, interactive experiences.

Education and entertainment

From the beginning, The Elumenati has incorporated emerging technologies for interactive and real-time content into their systems. The company's capabilities in systems integration and software development have been fed by the presence of Clayton Hooker and Dr. Clement Shimizu on the leadership team.

Above: The GeoDome Panorama at the IDIA Lab at Ball State University. *Photo courtesy The Elumenati*
Opposite: Migrations Dome at the Wildlife Explorers Basecamp at the San Diego Zoo. *Photo courtesy San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance*

The company puts a special emphasis on creating social, collaborative ways to experience immersive content for clients in entertainment, education, and enterprise. “The entertainment space pushes us to innovate and emphasizes high production values – and fun!” says Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Hilary McVicker. “We bring those engaging experiences into the education world – museums, planetariums, and schools – and make learning dynamic and exciting.”

The team is especially proud of their projects that promote ecological literacy. They’ve worked extensively with both NOAA and NASA to bring content into GeoDomes used by the two agencies as well as Elumenati clients. WorldViewer, the Elumenati content management system (CMS), began as a way to showcase NOAA’s Science on a Sphere® datasets – hundreds of captivating animations of the Earth’s land, oceans, and atmosphere – for domes and other immersive environments. The Elumenati team are also development partners with NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory on the Eyes On platforms, built in the Unity game engine, which lets audiences fly along with satellites.

Simplicity drives The Elumenati’s design philosophy. Their OmniFocus fisheye projectors surround audiences and optimize immersive space with imagery from a single projection channel. Their more complex blended systems are also driven from a single, image-generating computer. For example, in a recent update provided by The Elumenati to the SECU Daily Planet – a three-story theater at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences – four media servers and a show control unit were replaced with just one machine that drives three projectors, manages blending and geometry correction, and supports both content creation and show control.

Support contracts ensure that clients stay up to date with the software, which constantly evolves in response to client feedback. Even as the technology changes, OmniFocus projection systems have an upgrade path that enables clients to continue using their lenses for new-generation projectors. When upgrade time comes, it’s much easier to swap out a single image-generating computer than a cluster of servers.

“It’s our goal to make the technology disappear and to deliver systems that are elegant, efficient, and easy for the operators to run, while the audience experiences complete immersion in the content,” says McVicker. Their goal is to leave clients empowered to run their systems on their own and refresh their own content with WorldViewer. “But we certainly are always here if they need us,” adds McVicker.

GeoDomes tell unique stories around the world

With the GeoDome line of turnkey solutions, customers choose from a variety of options to suit any space or use. There are two distinct configurations: immersive environments and globes. Each GeoDome features a screen or globe, a projection system with an OmniFocus lens, an image-generating computer, and the WorldViewer CMS. GeoDomes can be permanent or portable. The range of designs create different user experiences: from the Portal and Panorama for casual immersion, to fully enclosed Theaters and 360° Cycloramas. The GeoDome Evolver is The Elumenati planetarium solution, and the company supports a network of planetarium clients.

The line launched in 2008, and 15 years later, more than 100 GeoDomes are entertaining and educating audiences around the world. Recent GeoDome Globe installations show the diversity



of applications: exhibits on biodiversity at Skansen in Sweden, on plate tectonics at the Science Museum Oklahoma, and helping tell the story of a company's evolution at the Walmart Museum (Bentonville, Arkansas).

GeoDomes are widely used in museums and science centers, including such prestigious institutions as the American Museum of Natural History in New York City and Smithsonian venues in Washington, D.C. There are also several installations in zoos and aquariums and more expected on the horizon ahead as institutions and the public rally around conservation.

GeoDomes can also be found in more unexpected places, such as at sea. Eleven Princess Cruise Lines ships use GeoDome Theaters for all-ages programming, like onboard planetarium shows. GeoDomes also show up in trade show displays by corporate clients including Siemens, NVIDIA, and Deloitte.

The WorldViewer CMS is based on the Unity game engine, but no programming skills are needed, empowering clients to create and manage media for their GeoDomes while tapping into a huge variety of sources, including the Science on a Sphere library, Google Earth Studio, and the plethora of content created for virtual reality (VR). Audiences can experience that immersive content in docent-led presentations, user-driven interactives, or stand-alone playback mode. Elumenati software plug-ins

support Unity and other real-time content, all driven from the WorldViewer interface.

McVicker says, "It all adds up to a world of new possibilities for clients."

Custom projects provide seamless solutions

"Custom projects give our creative team the opportunity to truly shine," McVicker shares. "We start with the story the client wants to tell and build the user experience from there."

Some projects require fully custom solutions – software, hardware, and user interface. For the Interactive Water Wall at the Children's Pain and Palliative Clinic in Minneapolis, The Elumenati created a movement-driven experience projected onto curved walls that allows patients and families to create patterns in water, in a space that is both dynamic and contemplative.

For other projects, modifying a GeoDome system provides the solution. For ISODESIGN's contribution to the StoryTrails touring experience, the largest immersive storytelling project ever produced in the UK, a GeoDome Panorama was optimized for pop-up and strike as the festival traveled to 15+ locations.

McVicker says, "Often a client comes to us as the technology experts to figure out the best path to execute their vision." To



The SECU Daily Planet Theater at NCMNS. Photo courtesy The Elumenati



One of The Elumenati's successful and unique products, the GeoDome Globe. Photo courtesy The Elumenati

enable audiences to see the world from a bug's-eye-view at the San Diego Zoo Migrations experience at their new Wildlife Explorers Basecamp, a uniquely shaped dome is lit by a blended OmniFocus projection system. The content was built by a third party in the Unity game engine, which The Elumenati ported into WorldViewer and helped to integrate into a comprehensive CMS that powers more than 20 exhibits.

The Monterey Bay Aquarium team developed a hands-on interactive that displays life-sized models of the animals that live at the bottom of the sea and the technology their Research Institute uses to study them. Their "Into the Deep" exhibition needed OmniFocus projection in a customized configuration.

The Elumenati also custom-designed an immersive sleigh ride in branded Santa Houses for DreamWorks. Dozens of these interactive visits to the North Pole engaged mall visitors in the US and the UK over a two-year period.

Customized user interfaces are also an option. The Elumenati added gesture-based interactivity to their GeoDome Portal for the Cosmic Quest exhibit at Morehead Planetarium and Science Center (Chapel Hill, NC), allowing visitors to explore the universe, zoom in, and launch interpretive videos with a wave of the hand.

The creative team also develops exciting interactives such as The Broomstick Trainer, a four-person race. Players ride hand-built broomsticks on spring-loaded bases while audiences cheer them on in the 360° GeoDome Cyclorama. This multi-player technology can be repurposed to create a collaborative experience of any immersive content, for learning, creating, or pure fun.

"Our creative approach to user interface and user experience design brings emerging technologies from the videogame world into domes, panoramas, and globes," notes McVicker. "We really believe interactivity is key to immersion."

What's next: OmniLED

The Elumenati company president Dr. Colucci earned his doctorate in optical science and has been awarded 10 patents. Despite his clear identity as an innovator, he would posit that he's been making the same thing since 1996. "What's changed," he explains, "is the hardware and software for gaming, and projector technology, which has become smaller, brighter, cheaper, and higher resolution."

LED represents the next major evolution in immersive displays, and once The Elumenati found a product that was up to their standards of quality, they launched their OmniLED line. OmniLED features flexible panels that create a smooth surface for compound-curved screens like their domes and globes.



The Cambrian Seascape at Chicago's Field Museum - one of the original Elumenati installations.
Photo courtesy The Field Museum

While projection requires a controlled, dark space, the ultra-high brightness and contrast of LEDs can be used anywhere. “Often clients want to showcase their globe or Panorama as an attractor in bright lobbies or near windows, and now they can,” says McVicker. “As the technology evolves, it will replace projection in many cases.”

But she notes, “We are not just selling LED displays. We’re creating complete solutions using WorldViewer and applying the holistic approach to designing immersive experiences that we’ve honed over 20 years.” The Elumenati has a large globe installation going live early next year, and several more in the pipeline.

A genesis in virtual reality

Colucci and McConville both worked in the first wave of VR in the 1990s as part of the team at Alternate Realities Corporation, later known as Elumens. The team created the VisionDome, which was heralded as the world’s first fully immersive, multi-user, single-projection VR environment without glasses, goggles, or helmets. Its premiere at the 1998 World’s Fair in Lisbon, Portugal, saw 5,000 people visiting the pavilion daily and waiting hours to experience the VisionDome.

That same year, Colucci recalls, “Elumens accepted \$30 million in venture capital – and all the creative handcuffs associated with it.” Colucci felt that VR was most powerful as a shared, group experience. He and McConville wanted to apply that immersive experience to the art and education worlds, so they left Elumens to form The Elumenati. Elumens went bankrupt in 2005. But The Elumenati went on to realize its vision. Colucci was able to purchase the fisheye lenses he’d designed while working at Elumens. He incorporated the lenses into The Elumenati’s first product line, the HAL-1200 projection system.

The revenue generated by that product allowed The Elumenati to design their first patented OmniFocus fisheye lenses, which drive Elumenati installations as well as customer and integrator projects. “I’ve also improved our fisheye lens designs with better image quality, lower cost, and higher versatility,” notes Colucci.

The key to success: client relationships

Looking at The Elumenati’s roster of projects over the years reveals that they’ve worked with many clients multiple times. “We are proud of how many of our clients come back for repeat business,” McVicker says. “We’ve built our reputation on our client relationships.”

What’s key to all of The Elumenati’s work, no matter where on the planet it’s located, is creating group immersive experiences that are social and collaborative. “Sharing an experience with your friends or family creates a reason to visit a venue. You might even connect with new people through that shared experience,” says McVicker. “And you’ll want to return again and again.” •••



Wendy M. Grant has worked in marketing for more than 25 years. She served as Director of Marketing and Communications for San Diego’s Fleet Science Center for 13 years. She served on the Marketing Committee for the Giant Screen Cinema Association and she was a board member for the Giant Dome Theater Consortium. Prior to working in the museum field, she was Director of Marketing at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar. Since 2019, Grant has worked as a communications consultant, writer and editor.



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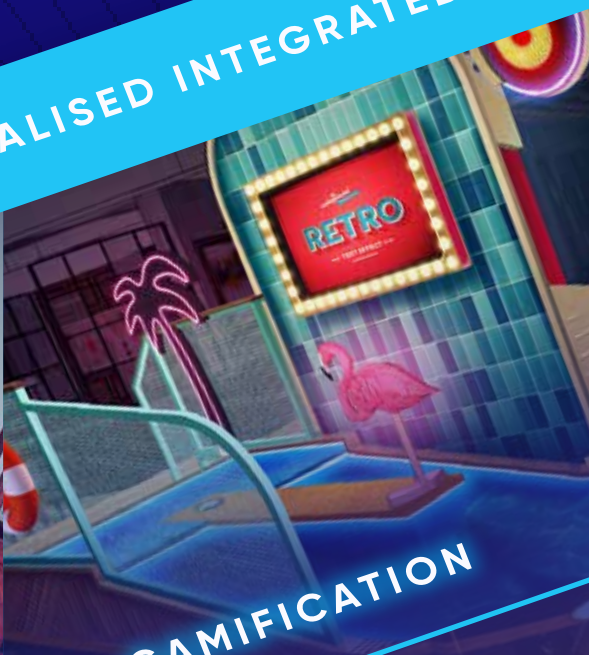
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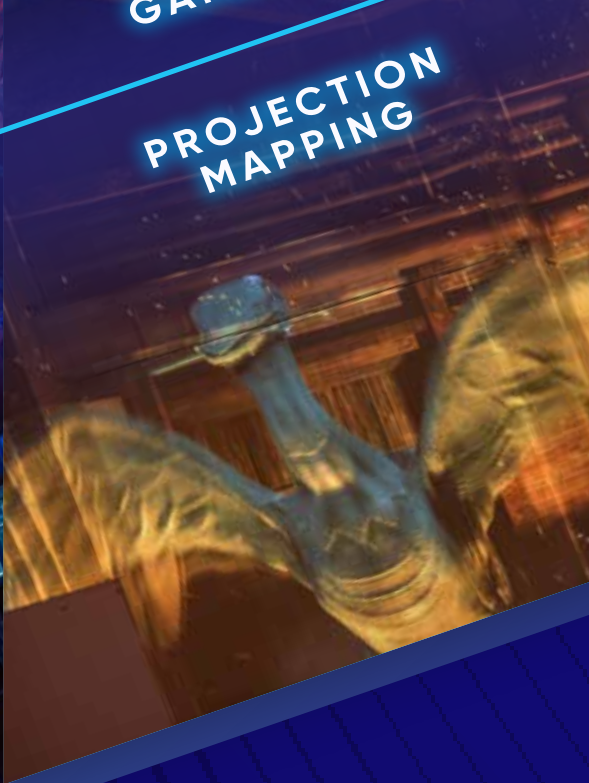
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Fun and games

Hasbro dramatically expands its global LBE portfolio

by Becci Knowles

From theme park attractions to branded hotels and restaurants, interactive life-sized games and more, Hasbro is opening several new experiences for families across an extensive, international portfolio of projects. In this InPark exclusive, Matt Proulx, Hasbro's vice president of Location Based Entertainment explains why 2023 will be the company's biggest year for LBE ever.

With nearly 60 open fixed-location experiences and 500+ annual events globally, Hasbro's immersive environments leverage the company's wide portfolio of brands and characters, from Transformers to NERF, Monopoly, Play-Doh, Peppa Pig, My Little Pony and many more.

Matt Proulx has held various positions in his 15+ years at Hasbro, including managing the Transformers brand through the first three movies and overseeing the marketing and business development functions for Hasbro Studios. He then moved into the licensed consumer products division, where he helped initiate the company's strategic move into location-based entertainment (LBE). Hasbro's earlier, existing projects with Universal Studios parks in Hollywood, Singapore and Orlando revealed the opportunity to further expand Hasbro's LBE offerings. "We asked, 'Hey, is there a bigger role that we can play in this space?'" says Proulx.

The secret to Hasbro's success is pushing the boundaries of experiences to allow guests and fans to experience all the brands

in the portfolio in lots of different ways. "There are so many amazing things coming down the pipe," says Proulx. "It's been a matter of continuing to adapt and expand. We have been fortunate to have great partners since the very beginning and are super excited about what's coming up in 2023."

Hospitality and Hasbro

Opening summer 2023, Playlodge in Shanghai is the first-ever hotel complex spotlighting Transformers and My Little Pony, two major international Hasbro IPs. It will include an indoor entertainment center, themed hotel and retail outlets, along with catering options.

As heritage brands, the My Little Pony and Transformers combo appeals to all genders and generations. Proulx says: "We're not blending the worlds together, but from an experience and from a demographic standpoint, it makes sense. We're focused on creating the best, world-class experiences that also can withstand the test of time and have as wide of a reach as possible."

Playlodge speaks to the rich opportunities for brands and hospitality. Proulx explains, "I think about brand experiences like a knob on a stereo. You turn it way up where you need to turn it up, because you really want to amplify the immersiveness and interactivity of the brand delivering once-in-a-lifetime type moments. But there are also times when you can tone things down; the level of immersiveness can still be appreciated while providing those more subtle moments. There are so

Above: Summer 2023 will see the iconic NERF brand gain its first themed land in its 50+ years of history, with NERF Mania opening at Brazil's Beto Carrero World. All images courtesy of Hasbro



Matt Proulx

many touchpoints. What we're trying to do is create enough engagement within these hotel experiences that guests don't feel the need to leave the campus. We're working to deliver the four-quadrant family experience in which memories are made over time."

Furthering its hospitality offerings, Hasbro is opening the world's first Transformers restaurant in May 2023 in Hong Kong, in partnership with the Food & Beverage division of iFREE GROUP, A La Carte (HK) Limited. The restaurant will give guests unprecedented opportunities to experience Transformers story components such as the Ark (in context of the Transformers storyline, the Ark is the ship on which the Autobots left Cybertron). "We looked for a journey that our fans haven't been on before," says Proulx. "Show elements will immerse people further into the Transformers lore and storytelling, from the food they eat to digital touchpoints and

experiences along the way." This is the first of a planned rollout of Transformers-themed restaurants by A La Carte through the region and will include exclusive retail merchandising.

Bringing board games to life

Also opening in 2023 will be MONOPOLY DREAMS, which at 1,700 square meters will constitute the brand's largest immersive experience in the world. Visitors will plunge into the MONOPOLY universe on the ground level of Melbourne Central shopping center in Australia. This will be twice the size of the original, highly acclaimed MONOPOLY experience in Hong Kong. "With a little more space to play with, we're working through that design and the elements of what our guests expect - and by the way, over-delivering on that, which is what guests really expect," says Proulx.

Location-based entertainment experiences should always be inherently true to a brand's DNA, and this requires much more than a "brand-slap." "We are in the world of selling emotion, and the more emotional connectivity you have, the deeper the affinity is between your brand and that consumer, and so when you're just slapping brands onto a ride or an experience you're not fully delivering upon that emotional connectivity," says Proulx.

NERF keeps on bouncing

Summer 2023 will also see the iconic NERF brand gain its first themed land in its 50+ years of history, with NERF Mania at Brazil's Beto Carrero World. "We are taking the brand and essence of the brand to a whole new level," says Proulx. Guests can expect "a little bit of the unexpected," he says, adding, "I think that's going to be the great part as guests start to have experiences we have created around the brand's heritage, but also leaning into some of the places where the brand is going into the future." The two should resonate, rather than duplicate the experience, he explains.

Such is the popularity of the brand that more NERF projects will open in 2023, starting with the second NERF Action Xperience (NAX) at The Trafford Shopping Centre in Manchester in early



Hasbro is opening the world's first Transformers restaurant in May 2023 in Hong Kong. The restaurant will give guests unprecedented opportunities to experience Transformers story components such as the Ark, the ship on which the Autobots left Cybertron.



The second NERF Action Xperience (NAX) will open at The Trafford Shopping Centre in Manchester in early Q3. Hasbro is taking expertise gained from the success it has in Singapore and modeling it into what fans in the UK want and expect.

Q3. “We’re taking a bunch of learnings from the great experience we have in Singapore and modeling it into what fans in the UK want and expect,” says Proulx. Later in 2023 a third NAX is set to open in the US, at Garden State Plaza in New Jersey. Sitting alongside it at Garden State Plaza will be Hasbro’s Planet Playskool experience, which will open later this year and will be operated by Kingsman.

City Life

Hasbro also has openings anchored by not just one or two, but a variety of its iconic, multi-generational brands. The Gameroom powered by Hasbro, at the American Dream retailtainment complex in East Rutherford, New Jersey will feature Hasbro content for a reimagined arcade platform with curated midway games, and interactive activities like Roller Games, paired with food and beverage offerings. Proulx says: “For our LBE team, we are about creating immersive environments in which people can consume our brands the way they want to and enjoy unique shopping experiences that amplify those shared moments.”

HASBRO CITY in Mexico City will also open its gates in 2023, designed for families and guests of all ages with rides, active play spaces, an arcade, midway games, interactive and VR attractions, food and beverage offerings and the first Hasbro Retail Store in the region. “Working with our partners, the aim again is to deliver a four-quadrant experience that incorporates a wide range of Hasbro brands,” says Proulx. In that vein, HASBRO CITY’s 100,000 square foot FEC is a multi-brand, immersive experience going anywhere from Play-Doh and MONOPOLY to Transformers and My Little Pony - and Mr. Potato Head – designed to engage families and guests of all ages.

Hasbro Blueprint 2.0

Hasbro recently unveiled its new Blueprint 2.0 strategy with a more consumer-centric approach that focuses on fewer, bigger brands, expanded licensing, branded entertainment, and driving growth in games, digital and direct. Blueprint 2.0 is intended to bring Hasbro brands to life in exciting ways that drive long-term, sustainable, and profitable growth - and LBE is key to its activation, according to Proulx. “At the heart of our Blueprint 2.0 is the customer and the consumer,” he says. “There is no other business, no better business that exemplifies having that deep emotional connection and that one-to-one contact with our consumers and customers than location-based entertainment. When you think about it, it is the manifestation of your brands coming to life from people’s imaginations – a magical step into another universe.”

Creativity, consistency, quality – and repeatability

There are many different facets to achieving the ultimate, brand-centric guest experience, but at the heart, says Proulx, “you must fuse the brand and the entertainment environment together and couple it with great operations. According to Proulx, the creative team must be allowed a “blank canvas” approach while being true to the essence of the brand. “Understand the journey you want to have them explore, and make sure you’ve not only met their expectations, but defied and exceeded them,” he says.

Great operations, explains Proulx, encompasses all aspects of how staff interact with guests in the course of the experience. “It’s a magical moment when people are transported from their reality into this other environment. You must make sure that all those things are in a good balance together, so you’re not only

true to the brand, but also pushing the boundaries of a brand to where the guest never expected it to be.”

Staying true to brand while incorporating new elements designed to draw repeat visits was a forefront issue in conceiving MONOPOLY Lifesized, the London incarnation of which was recognized for excellence in the industry with the 2022 Licensing International award for Best LBE. “This kind of experience needed to be unique, highly repeatable and easily understood by guests,” says Proulx. The challenge was about how you moved past the traditional mechanics of the game yet stayed true to the essence of the brand and game. “This is where introducing the ‘challenge’ concept into the game play created a whole new dynamic that allowed guests to play as teams against one another in their quest to ‘own it all,’” says Proulx. “So, we’re still delivering the essence of the brand and the essence of the game - but in a new form and fashion.”

Hasbro’s LBE experiences are about telling a story. As Proulx says, “It’s a theatrical performance - guests want to be swept away from their reality, have a break, laugh, and smile.” And, of course, the experience must surpass expectations. “Our team,” says Proulx, “is driven by the belief that if all we’re doing is delivering the expected moments, we have failed as a team. For us it really is about saying, ‘OK, first, let’s push the boundaries of what people

expect from an experience.’ And to help remain competitive, we’re always keeping an eye on up-and-coming technologies. Part of this is having a great project management and production process from beginning to end. This is the look, this is the feel, this is everything from a standard of operations that we can all agree existed, and then it’s using that as a measuring stick over months and years of its operation to build the brand and the experience. It’s in everyone’s interest to ensure that you have the highest quality standards always operating.”

Working with Hasbro

Describing the qualities he looks for in his team members, Proulx says, “Extremely versatile and multi-skilled people who understand the business and its inherent complexity, and who have the ability to adapt and evolve partnerships for long-term success across the board.” What about partnerships and collaborations? “We are open to everything, to be frank,” says Proulx. “I have been known to say, ‘the crazier the idea, the better.’ But we are open to everything.

“I’m just lucky to be able to do what I get to do every day,” Proulx concludes. “We’re really excited about the future of LBE at Hasbro.”

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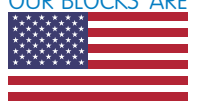


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Navigating LBEs and branding



George Wade

It's a jungle out there, and you need a guide

by Gene Jeffers

Across the globe, people are emerging from lockdowns and isolation and turning to the out-of-home experiences that Location-Based Entertainment (LBE) facilities offer. Industry analysts predict 12%-34% annual growth for the LBE market sector over the next five years [reference inparkmagazine.com/Issue96BayLaurel for links to reports]. But simply jumping into this market is risky business. Consumers, more sophisticated than ever, are demanding higher quality and deeper meaning in their entertainment choices – and making this abundantly clear in where they go (and where they don't) and how they spend their money. Branded LBE experiences, when done well, offer a competitive edge to consumer brands and physical venues that can empower them to stand up to in-home entertainment as well as the brick-and-mortar facility across the street.

What is the Brand's story?

One of the most powerful tools when competing for consumer time and attention is story. “Engaging consumers within a brand's story is where the magic can happen,” says George Wade, Founder of Bay Laurel Advisors (BLA), a full-service consulting firm that helps clients create successful branded installations. “Story captures us, connects us to each other. Immersing people in a brand's story can create opportunities for memorable moments. That is the power of branded locations.”

For more than a decade, Bay Laurel Advisors has been focused on building successful story-based branding partnerships. Wade's path in this industry started early with studies at the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television, followed by years at WED Enterprises (the forerunner of Walt Disney Imagineering) working on the development of EPCOT Center and Tokyo Disneyland, and then Landmark Entertainment on high-profile projects such as the Forum Shops at Caesars Palace and Universal Studios parks in Hollywood and Florida. He then joined Iwerks Entertainment, which was selling simulation theater systems. “There was too much emphasis on hardware, and not enough on selling the sizzle, the experience,” he recalls. Wade suggested uniting an action movie with a simulator experience. “Thirty years ago, that was a novel concept.” Robocop The Ride was the result, a then-revolutionary combination of simulator technology and feature film IP. It launched Iwerks on an entirely new trajectory and awakened an entire industry to the power of branded attractions.

MGM Studios was Wade's next stop, where, as Senior Vice President for Location Based Entertainment, he developed licensing agreements and ways to structure business deals utilizing the vast MGM Studios film library as well as the iconic MGM Studios logo. “Every stage of my career – from theater school to Disney to Iwerks to MGM – every step taught lessons and opened my eyes to what was possible by fusing brand, entertainment and environment.”

Branded facilities today operate as standalone attractions or function as magnets for developers, hospitality, or retail malls, helping to draw consumers to the primary business. The IP stories people consume at home are familiar and trusted, they feed preferences and direct shopping and activity habits. “By tapping into the emotional connections that consumers have with brands, powerful synergies can be harnessed,” says Wade. “But only when done with a strategic focus in mind. Attempting to get into this market without understanding the full range of issues, you will miss opportunities, you will handicap your chances for success.”

It's a jungle out there...

While many major brands, including top theme park operators, have spent years developing brand licensing programs, brands new to the market – or with existing but unstructured programs – are struggling in this competitive and chaotic environment. In the worldwide rush to create more branded attractions, rules and processes are being invented on the fly as licensors and licensees struggle to work through unfamiliar territory. Numerous traps and pitfalls await both parties.

It's a jungle and you do need a guide, emphasizes Wade – and his very experienced team. He explained that first steps include determining what a brand's LBE program should focus on, what outcomes are sought, and whether those results are appropriate or even possible. “Bay Laurel Advisors approaches projects with a holistic view,” says Wade. “Our process is very practical, focusing on core business elements required for long term success.”

Bay Laurel Advisors was founded in 2009 as attraction developers/operators were beginning, on a large scale, to see the value of major entertainment brands. Brands, correspondingly,



Search for Snoopy: A Peanuts Adventure. "Peanuts is dedicated to long-term relationships," says George Wade, President of Bay Laurel Advisors, who helped set initial strategy and implementation for the Peanuts LBE expansion. "This is a brand that brings so much value to its partners. The brand is continuing to grow, while retaining its core values." *Image courtesy Peanuts Worldwide.*

were beginning to recognize the value of and actively seek opportunities in LBE. Over its 13+ year history, Bay Laurel Advisors has worked with both entertainment brand licensors and project developers who desired to create rich guest experiences and leverage brands to build strong emotional connections with consumers. "Many attractions operators were interested in how they could utilize entertainment brands but did not understand the inherent creative and business challenges. BLA became the connective tissue between licensor and licensee to build these meaningful partnerships."

For entertainment clients, the company first focuses on the strategic goals of the brand, and how the brand is best suited to fit within the LBE world. BLA then builds marketing strategies and the tactical sales plan for the client. In some cases, BLA will take on the sales function; in others it remains in an advisory capacity. Another key facet is in the negotiation of license agreements. "Licensing into LBE requires very thoughtful and detailed agreements. In most cases agreements are for terms of anywhere from five to 10 years. It is important that the agreement address a wide range of issues that can arise during a long-term relationship. Part of our initiative is to help both licensor and licensee understand these issues and find equitable solutions," says Wade.

A final, critical element is the execution process. BLA works in close coordination with the client to facilitate design and production to achieve a successful project.

Team approach

To better meet the growing demand and increasing complexity of the market, and to support the increasing number of entertainment brands who are interested in expansion in Location Based Entertainment, BLA built a team of advisors. "Throughout my career I have been fortunate to work with a wide variety of wonderfully talented design and project management professionals. As our business grew, it was important to assemble teams of experts who would assist our clients in creating memorable attractions. Every advisor has in-depth experience with creating amazing, story-based facilities," says Wade. "Each brings a unique set of skills as well as vast industry connections to better meet the challenges facing our clients."

Advisor John Lindsay emphasizes how important it is to address those challenges. "Creating successful branded attractions with firms new to this very dynamic industry requires a disciplined approach. Dialing in the details and specifics for each individual deal requires experience." Several years ago Lindsay was awarded the distinction of TEA Master, recognizing his achievements

over four decades in the discipline of Project Management. Lindsay's experience includes theme parks, world expos, themed retail stores and entertainment centers, including numerous projects for the Walt Disney Company. He notes that today's brand-based projects are more trend-oriented, faster moving and for shorter terms than the more mature projects being built with major theme park brands. "If you are new to this rapidly evolving world, then you need Bay Laurel Advisors to help guide you through the steps."

The entire BLA team understands the need to introduce clients to the world of LBE and its unique characteristics. "We help clients new to the LBE market gain an understanding of all the factors at work," says BLA advisor Chaz McEwan, who also has 40+ years' experience in themed entertainment, theatrical, project and organizational development working with such companies as Walt Disney Imagineering, Universal Creative and others. "The learning curve for a licensor or licensee is incredibly steep. It is not easy to cut through the confusion and chaos, avoid mistakes and false starts, ensure that projects stay on time and budget. You need a guide, a guru. Bay Laurel Advisors is that guru."

It is about relationships

Wade is expanding the firm on a foundation built through successful, long-term relationships with a number of popular brands: Hasbro, Microsoft's Halo franchise, Cartoon Network, Angry Birds, Peanuts and Crayola, just to mention a few. All turned to Bay Laurel Advisors for guidance, direction, project management and more.

"While we can assist with singular projects, one of the company's strengths is to nurture enduring relationships. That's where a client can gain the most benefit working with our team. When

we start to work with a client, we begin with outlining the market, kind of an LBE 101," says BLA advisor Tina Skees, who brings to the table more than 30 years' experience in creative production, brand management and project development with such major partners as Herschend Family Entertainment, Crayola, Nickelodeon, Paramount Pictures and others. "We explore the client's needs and business objectives and then begin to focus on opportunities that would be right for them."

Of late, Skees has been working intensely with the Hershey Licensing Company. "They are very particular and protective of their brands, something we respect and take into consideration when exploring potential partnerships," she says. BLA's assistance to this client has helped them consider possible options to expand beyond their edible foods and general merchandising efforts by licensing Hershey-branded attractions.

"George, Tina and the BLA team have tremendous experience within the brand attractions sphere," says Ernie Savo, President of the Hershey Licensing Company. "They helped us develop a strategic approach to the market, then helped us make connections within the industry, introduced us to who is out there doing great work."

What story is being told? And why?

Everything begins with developing that strategic approach, with identifying the proper value proposition for installations and licenses. "What are the licensor and licensee seeking? Foot traffic? Direct dollars? Marketing impact?" Lindsay asks. "What kind of place needs to be created that will attract people and reinforce the brand's overall story? How does this one attraction fit with the brand's other facilities?"



Iwerks Entertainment's "RoboCop: the Ride" (1993). "Iwerks senior management recognized that our theme park clients desired attractions that would drive attendance. We believed that one key method to achieve this goal was to provide them with ridefilms in which the marketing was built-in. RoboCop: The Ride was a very clean marketing message to the consumer!" – George Wade. Image: ISEA.



Crayola Experience in Orlando. "One of the things I do to stay in tune with the vision and the client culture is to review the 'Crayola Inspire' video, a sort of corporate manifesto that the company created several years ago in the process of an introspective analysis about who Crayola was in the marketplace. I have seen it about 200 times in the past four years and it always gives me inspiration." – George Wade. Image courtesy Crayola.

Matchmakers for the LBE industry, BLA focuses on the value proposition for both licensor and licensee. "Once a pairing is established, a key role for us is finding the middle ground between the parties, that sweet spot where each benefits according to their needs," says Skees. Local, regional and national differences and expectations can all come into play, requiring a careful and diplomatic balancing of the negotiations leading to a final license agreement.

That intermediary role provides enormous benefit for the client. "Working with licensees, Tina continues to help us understand how to frame things for the various partners," says Savo. "What are their needs, what is required to keep everything moving in a seamless fashion. When it works for both parties, that is when it succeeds."

"A critical focus must always be 'Value Creation,' for the brand, for the developer and most importantly for the guest!" says Wade.

Bringing the story to life

Beyond the work of identifying the brand's story and their goals, strategies and partners, beyond negotiating the license, the consultancy is adept at finding and engaging the talent and companies who understand how to tap into the deep feelings

people have for a specific brand. BLA advisors are targeted conduits to these specialties. "One of the most valuable assets we offer is our pipeline to these critical creative industries," says Lindsay. "With so many years of experience developing story-based attractions, our team is perfectly situated to make introductions to all the key players: influencers, operators, developers, design and production companies."

From initial concept design right through opening day, BLA services also include project management. McEwan, for example, served as project director during creative development and other advisors oversaw the installation for all five Crayola Experiences. BLA often serves as the key connection between the licensees and the brand. "Project management is a collaborative art form," he says. "You need to create a shared understanding of how to approach the build. You need to generate emotional buy-in to the project."

Protecting the brand

But what about after opening day? How can brands, especially those with a large number of licensed facilities, ensure their IP is being cared for properly? "Licensors need a dedicated focus to ensure the continued quality of every installation if they are going to protect their brand," says McEwan. "Is the licensee

maintaining the venue? So much can change after the initial opening that might reflect badly on the brand. Bay Laurel has a solution to that challenge as well.”

One client is already relying on Bay Laurel’s new Quality Assurance program to monitor conditions in their many branded LBEs worldwide. The process began before opening day by building a complete photographic and detail inventory of each project. “A Bay Laurel advisor then periodically visits each project over the duration of the license and compares the initial images and inventory to current conditions,” says McEwan. “Does the paint look right? Are branded elements being well maintained? Does the project look as good, or hopefully even better, as it did on opening day? A single worn-out, tattered installation can do major damage to a brand’s image. Fans and parents can be put off, sometimes permanently.”

Once alerted to an issue, the client can quickly address the problem in collaboration with the licensee, a win-win proposition. Having spent years as a leader of Walt Disney Imagineering’s Show Quality Standards program, McEwan knew what was needed to design Bay Laurel’s own QA program. The fieldwork for the program is handled by BLA advisor Michael Sinks. “This work takes professional eyes that have dealt with themed and branded environments,” McEwan notes. “Michael has decades of experience with story-based installations and is perfectly suited for handling our QA inspections on behalf of our clients.”

A specific skillset

Bay Laurel Advisors boasts the people, the projects and a proven track record of helping brands successfully move into the LBE market. “Each of us has decades of experience in the school of hard knocks,” says Lindsay. “We are all geared to listening, to asking questions, to ferreting out issues that may be critical to realizing a successful project.”

The BLA process has been refined and honed, tested in the real world. The process matches licensor and licensee objectives. It requires careful thought, intense planning, and hours of listening coupled with extensive knowledge and expertise about the LBE market and its players. It is a complex process that requires highly specific experience and skillsets. “Every successful IP licensed attraction revolves around how well guests are immersed and integrated into the brand’s story, around how many memorable moments are made,” says Wade. “Bay Laurel Advisors are ready to help tell any brand’s story and to assist attraction developers who seek to tell compelling stories!”

For more information or to arrange a meeting, contact George Wade at GWade@baylaureladvisors.com. •••



Gene Jeffers, former (2001-2013) TEA Executive Director, is currently serving as a Board member for the Greater San Gabriel Pomona Valleys American Red Cross and serves on the Board of the Historical Novel Society. He continues to write in a variety of genres. Gene and his wife Carol (also a writer) are based in Pasadena.



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