

# Branson wants to be new mecca for young families

The tourist town is working to lure a wider variety of people to the area.

**By Mark Marymont**  
News-Leader

BRANSON — George and Doris Talick have been coming to Branson for more than 30 years.

"I can remember seeing the Baldknobbers in a tent down by the lake for 2¼ dollars," says George, as he and Doris wander downtown on a recent afternoon. "The traffic got a little bad here, but we still like to come. It's fun."

At one time, the Talicks, from Edwardsville, Ill., were the dream Branson visitors — they kept coming back. Though repeat business has always been critical for this tourist town, many businesses are now hoping to reach another dream clientele.

This season, families are the name of the game.

Although the Branson area drew an estimated 6.8 million visitors in 1998, there's always room for more.

A spectacular new ride at Silver Dollar City, a brand-new amusement park, shows that appeal to younger fans and shopping opportunities for all ages are now part of the mix in Branson, all an attempt to lure families and younger people to town.

It's a strategy designed to help the town survive in the next millennium.

And as Branson grows, the impact is being felt beyond the town of 3,000. Springfield and the northern tier of Arkansas counties gain visitors and dollars from the Taney County tourist trap.

One investor betting big on families is Springfield businessman Bob Wehr, who has invested millions of dollars in his new Branson USA.

The family amusement park is on the site of the old Mutton Hollow Entertainment Park and Craft Village, which Wehr bought out of bankruptcy after 28 years of operation.

Wehr says his 112-acre operation will have 20 shops, each with a different theme.

He also plans a host of rides: a 92-foot-tall Ferris wheel from Italy, a roller coaster from Belgium and an elevated go-cart track.

Admission to the grounds will be free, and visitors can either buy tickets for

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