

4A April 20, 2003

FROM PAGE ONE

SUNDAY NEWS-LEADER • OzarksNow.com

Park a ride through time and place

Victorian architecture, '50s and '60s motif give Celebration City an edge in fantasy.

By Kathryn Buckstaff
NEWS-LEADER

BRANSON — Entering Celebration City for the first time is like visiting a 45-acre movie set that perfectly re-creates another time and place.

The \$40 million creation of the Herschend Family Entertainment Corp. is designed to continue the story where the Herschends' 1880s-themed Silver Dollar City ends. Victorian architecture is represented by flamboyant colors, porch spindles and rooftop cupolas, while bright chrome and neon pay tribute to the '50s and '60s.

Recognizing the need to help ensure Branson's economic future, park officials looked for ways to woo younger travelers, appeal to first-time visitors and satisfy repeat customers.

"This has been a concentrated, absolute strategy to the price tag of tens of millions of dollars," said Lisa Rau, Herschend corporation spokeswoman.

"We saw the trend and the need to address it, and took on the challenge to turn it around."

DETAILS TELL THE STORY

Entering the park through stone gates onto Celebration Street starts the fantasy, with period lampposts, wide verandas in front of the shops filled with ornate Victorian-era gifts, and fountains that dance to music.

Turning the corner from Celebration Street, visitors will find themselves on Electric Boardwalk. On either side of block-long malls are old-time carnival booths with games like Ring Toss and Baseball Pitch. Prizes such as stuffed animals will be handed out to the winners by barkers ready to take the extra fees charged for the games.

Then comes the realm of Route 66, where vintage cars are the decor, from a sleek 1960s Thunderbird convertible with red leather interior to a classic two-tone Chevy with chrome pipes.

The 700-seat Celebration Theatre features the all-male cappella group Chapter 6, which will perform music ranging from gospel to rock during four to five shows daily.

Rides are spread throughout the park, including the 60-foot-

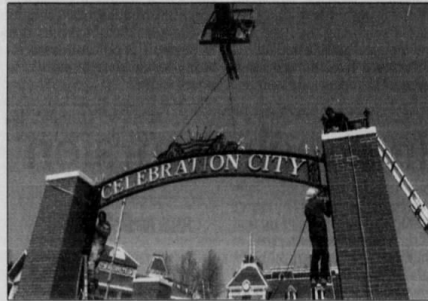


CHRISTINA DICKEN / NEWS-LEADER

Celebration City's "downtown" area is full of Victorian-era architecture. The area is filled with gift shops, fountains that dance to music and a carousel at the end of Celebration Street.

Celebration City

- May 1 opening date.
- Located on the western edge of Branson at Green Mountain Drive and Missouri 376.
- Features 30 themed rides, attractions and activities.



CHRISTINA DICKEN / NEWS-LEADER

Workers attach an iron sign at the entrance of Celebration City in Branson. The theme park "screams in capital letters 'new and different,'" says Lisa Rau, spokeswoman for the Herschend corporation.

offering a spectacular view of the Ozarks. Then it descends through a 310-degree double spiral on its minute-and-a-half ride.

"The fun is the combination of twists and turns and bunny hops that give you a little air time out of your seat," Mast said. "They're just the old classic."

During the week, Jim Wolgast is a cartographer for Greene County. But on weekends, he'll be closer to the coaster. The 35-year-old pleaded with park officials to let him work weekends on the WildCat.

He's already been on the coaster several times. "It's great," he said. "It's just the forces of being tossed around and lifted out of your seat."

Celebration City general man-

ager Steve Honeycutt said the WildCat ride is smoother than some steel coasters he's been on. Wooden coasters used to be rough because the cars had fixed axles, causing wheels to bump in the curves. WildCat's cars have articulated axles, providing a softer ride.

Beginning in mid-May, technology also will provide the park's grand finale each night.

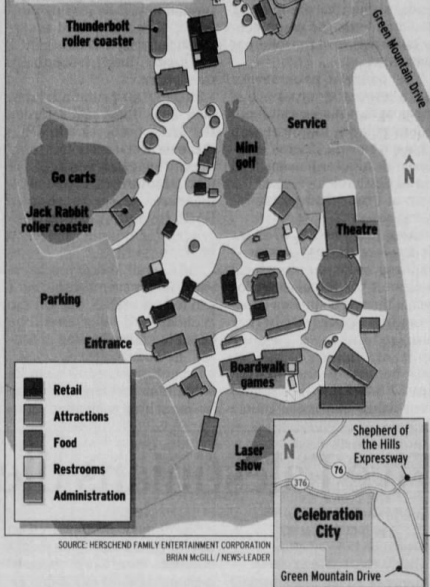
About an hour before the park's 11 p.m. closing, visitors will be invited to sit on a grassy field in front of what looks like a five-story gray granite mountainside. On the front of the mountainside appears a 4-story-tall, 13-story-wide wall of water. At a cost of \$2.5 million, laser images produced by Kodak will take guests



Honeycutt

Celebration City

Herschend Family Entertainment Corp. has spent \$40 million on its latest amusement park, Celebration City, which is scheduled to open May 1. Among the features: three roller coasters, a nightly laser show and a 95-foot Ferris wheel.



SOURCE: HERSCHEID FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CORPORATION
BRIAN MCGILL / NEWS-LEADER

through historical highlights of 20th century set to popular music of the various eras.

NOT JUST FLASH

The park is not all high-tech glitz. Lighted water features and fountains are plentiful, and more than 2,000 trees have been planted on the site.

Planting trees is a tradition of the Herschend family. There is a policy of putting in two trees for each one cut down.

Silver Dollar City founder Mary Herschend — the mother of current co-owners Peter and Jack Herschend — was a devoted tree lover. Visitors to Silver Dollar City may notice trees growing through porches and paths winding around giant oaks.

Jack Herschend grows trees on his tree farm north of Branson and is known for founding the Gift of Green program, which has encouraged business owners throughout the Ozarks to plant more than 130,000 trees. In addition to Herschend-



One of the several places to eat at Celebration City. Part of the city follows a theme of the '50s and '60s.

CHRISTINA DICKEN / NEWS-LEADER

raised trees, topiary creatures, and gnarled and grafted specialty trees arrived on 40 tractor-trailers from the Gilroy, Calif., nursery of landscape artist Michael Bonfante. He is the creator of Bonfante Gardens, a horticultural theme park in California.

"The trees are important because they create that extra atmosphere and ambience of the park," said Brad Thomas, general manager of Silver Dollar City.