

* 4 Weekend May 30-June 1, 2003

Nights get brighter in Branson

Nighttime theme park, Celebration City, opens this evening with a show by Jake Simpson.

By Gail Reynolds
FOR THE NEWS-LEADER

As many area schools are closing for summer break, officials at Branson's newest theme park are throwing a grand opening party.

And Crocker's own Jake Simpson, recent Star Search winner and member of the Springfield band 4 Jax, is performing at tonight's gala at Celebration City, Herschend Family Entertainment's new nighttime park. He'll open the production of the laser/fireworks show "Celebrate!" at 9 p.m.

With top events and entertainment of the 20th century providing its setting, the \$40 million Celebration City was designed to be the "night place" for families visiting Branson, says Bob Montgomery, vice president of Branson attractions for the entertainment corporation that also owns Silver Dollar City and White Water.

The new venture features 30 themed rides, and attractions and activities that appeal to all age groups — particularly families, he says.

"Celebration City gives us a wonderful new package to offer our visitors," says Ross Summers,

executive vice president of the Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce.

"It's a nighttime venue. For many years we have had music shows with wonderful nighttime entertainment, and we'll still have those. But up until now we've not been able to offer a nighttime venue for families, and this enhances the Branson experience."

Some of the attractions:

- On Celebration Street, visitors will find the vibrant activity of the early 1900s complete with Victorian-era sculptures, dancing fountains and a vintage-style carousel.

- The Electric Boardwalk is filled with amusement rides, games, food and arcade adventures of the 1920s and '30s.

- The park's historic Route 66 area celebrates the 1950s and '60s amid drive-in diners, shiny autos, shops, restaurants and rides, including the Ozark WildCat, a wooden roller coaster that reaches speeds of 45 miles per hour and drops eight stories.

It's one of eight thrill rides, five family rides and seven kiddie rides.

- The star of the show, Montgomery says, is the nightly outdoor multimedia laser production "Celebrate!" which premieres this evening.

Through a dramatic series of effects, water screen projection, lasers, fireworks and music, guests can watch the 20th century unfold each night at park closing time.

"This laser spectacular is really

Want to go?

What: Grand opening for Celebration City theme park

When: 3 to 11 p.m. today. Hours this season — 3 to 11 p.m. through Aug. 17; Aug. 20-24 and Aug. 28-Sept. 1; then 3 to 10 p.m. Friday through Sunday Sept. 5-November.

Where: 1383 Missouri 376, Branson (turn south off Missouri 376 onto Mutton Hollow Drive, just west of Missouri highways 376 and 76)

Tickets: One-day admission plus tax is \$27 for ages 12 and older, \$22 for kids 4 to 11 and free for children 3 years and younger; season passes and combination packages available

Information: 1-800-831-4386, 1-800-888-7277 (season passes) or visit www.silverdollarcity.com

the big gorilla for us in terms of appeal," he says. "It sets the whole atmosphere."

Brad Schroeder, director of entertainment and events for Herschend Family Entertainment's Branson attractions, agrees.

"Branson has never seen something like this before," he says of the \$3 million attraction designed for Celebration City by the London company Laser Creations International.

"The best way I can describe it is take the best fireworks show you've ever seen and the best laser show you've ever seen, and then double it."



The Fireball is one of the many rides at Celebration City. The nighttime theme park, owned by Herschend Family Entertainment, opens tonight in Branson.

Early Warning
Watercolor tradition

dren 2-12; free for kids younger than 2. Discount adult tickets are available at Price Cutter in Ozark, Village Inn, Ozark Farm Supply and PFI. Call 485-2535.

Pair of events at park

SPRINGFIELD

The East/West All-Star High School Football Game, 7:30 p.m. June 6, JFK Stadium, Grant Avenue at

Woodland Heights Home & Garden Tour featuring five homes is from noon to 5 p.m. June 7 and 8. Tickets — \$8 in advance, \$10 on tour days — are available at Nellie Dunn's.

tional Trails Day, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. June 7, South Creek Greenway, Close Memorial Park in Nathanael Greene Park, 2400 S. Scenic Ave. Call 864-2015 or visit www.ozarkgreen

sion is \$5-\$6, \$20 for the week; free for ages 6 and younger. Call 683-2468 or visit MFTHBA.com.

nett Spring State Park (from Lebanon, take Missouri 64 right into the park). Free. Call 588-3256.

BRANSON

ST. LOUIS