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Sunday
March 16, 2008
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1C
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Summer thrills

Missouri amusement parks offer families ample opportunity for excitement.

SILVER DOLLAR CITY
Silver Dollar City features two dozen rides such as the roller coaster Wildfire.

WORLDS OF FUN FILE PHOTO
A young guest explores the attractions of Crocodile Isle, a play area at Oceans of Fun.

SILVER DOLLAR CITY
The special effects show Ignite the Night! is featured each evening at Celebration City with lasers and pyrotechnics.

By Gail Reynolds
FOR THE NEWS-LEADERS

The warm-weather months are upon us and summer's on its way.

Time to let the good times roll.

Whether it's coaster thrills or good old-fashioned family festivities you're looking for, Missouri's major theme and water parks have it all.

While Celebration City and Six Flags-St. Louis are debuting new rides, Silver Dollar City, Six Flags, Celebration City and Worlds of Fun are all boosting their entertainment offerings.

For the Hamilton family of Republic — Tim, Cheri and their children Clayton, 12, Katie, 8, and Kendall, 6 — theme park visits are part of the family's summertime recreation.

"We go to Silver Dollar City often and visit Celebration City, too," says Cheri Hamilton. "And we've not gone yet to Worlds of Fun or Six Flags — mainly because Kendall has just this year reached the 48-inch height requirement necessary to be able to enjoy many of the rides at those places."

While Tim doesn't particularly like rides, the entire family enjoys Silver Dollar City's Lost River of the Ozarks ride, she says.

"We all like riding that together and it's fun, because you're all looking at each other and then, when one of us gets drenched, everybody gets to see it."

At Celebration City, Kendall enjoys the kids area.

"He loves the ride that takes you up and lets you free-fall down. And one day ... I bet he rode that ride 15 or 20 times all in a row," Hamilton says.

In addition to the established favorites, each of the parks has some new perks or attractions this season.

Celebration City

Look for the Branson park's biggest expansion as Celebration City unveils its new $2 million water adventure Roaring Falls, which takes riders on a journey through fast-moving rapids and features a five-story, 55-degree drop.

The park, which opens April 18, has more than 30 rides and attractions including the original eight-story classic wooden coaster, the tower drop ride the Accelerator, the Electric Star Wheel, the Ozark WildCat, a Route 66 area and a kids section with two new summer entertainment features.

These include "JUMP! The Ultimate Dog Show" (with Lou Mack and his Frisbee-catching dogs) and "Extreme Parrots," featuring exotic birds that sing, fly and talk.

The finale each evening is "Ignite The Night," a $3 million special-effects-laden show celebrating America's inspiring moments through pyrotechnics, water cannons, giant video projections and other special effects.

Silver Dollar City

Two dozen themed rides at Silver Dollar City in Branson, including coaster PowderKeg and the American Plunge, will be embellished this year with new entertainment.

The park opens Thursday for Family Spring Break Days.

Festivals this year include World-Fest (with Ireland's Feet of Fire and the Watoto Children's Choir featuring African rhythms and ethnic dances); Bluegrass & BBQ, featuring a host of bluegrass headliners; the National Kids Fest showcasing a new Veggie Tales production and an Ice Circus; the Southern Gospel Picnic; the National Harvest Festival, featuring more than 125 crafters, hundreds of musicians, a Salute to the American Cowboy and the new Tribute to the American Farmer.

In autumn, the park plans to unveil its Silver Dollar City Culinary and Craft School with interactive demonstration by master craftsmen and top chefs.

The season culminates with the annual An Old Time Christmas festival, which features more than 4 million lights, a five-story special effects Christmas Tree, a parade, productions "A Dickens' Christmas Carol" and "The Living Nativity" plus the new "Frosty," an interactive musical where kids can help bring the snowman to life.

Six Flags-St. Louis, Hurricane Harbor

There's lots going on at Six Flags in St. Louis and its companion water park, Hurricane Harbor. But the big buzz is Evel Knievel, a new wooden roller coaster named for the famed late stuntman.

See **Parks**, Page 3C

Tony Hawk's Big Spin (right) is shown, with Colossus and Xcalibur in the background, at Six Flags St. Louis.

SIX FLAGS ST. LOUIS

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