

pro or a regular Joe, you can help us —

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xon spar on ry in debate



T. NAKAGAWA / NEWS-LEADER

General Jay Nixon
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JEROME T. NAKAGAWA / NEWS-LEADER

Congressman Kenny Hulshof
said Jay Nixon is too far steeped
in state politics to be effective.

Missouri Politics Blog: News-Leader.com/MOpolitics
mission: Talk about the debate by clicking on this story online.

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progress that had been made in
Missouri.

The debate, aired on KYTV,
was co-sponsored by the News-
Leader, KYTV, KSMU and

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Celebration City theme park shutting down

By **Cory de Vera**
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After six seasons in opera-
tion, Celebration City in Bran-
son is closing today, Herschend
Family Entertainment an-
nounced Friday.

"What we developed at Cele-
bration City was a good proper-
ty, but it did not meet our finan-
cial expectations," said compa-
ny spokeswoman Lisa Rau.

Today is the last scheduled
operating day of the season.
Employees found out Friday it
was also the last day for the
theme park. The park employs
18 full-time employees and
about 250 seasonal employees.

While Herschend Family En-
tertainment intends to redev-
op the property into some oth-
er kind of attraction, how soon
that could happen depends on
the economy, said Rau. Noth-
ing is scheduled to open in
2009.

Rau said "the majority" of the

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NO INTEREST A VEADEI



A group rides the then-new Roaring Falls at Celebration City in Branson on April 19. The company that owns the theme park said Friday that it would be shut down today.

Celebration/Multi-park passes will cost less in 2009

Continued from Page 1A

18 full-time Celebration City employees will be placed at other Herschend properties in Branson. Those who can't be placed will be given assistance in finding "out-placements," said Rau.

The seasonal employees, whose jobs were scheduled to end with the season, will be given the first opportunity to interview for open spring positions at other Herschend-owned properties: Silver Dollar City, Whitewater and the Branson Showboat Belle.

Historically, there are about 400 open positions at these attractions in the spring.

"It's sad. We're not happy to do this; these are tough economic times," said Rau.

MANY INCARNATIONS

Celebration City is located on 110 acres on the western end of 76 Country Boulevard — the part of Missouri 76 that is inside the city. A smaller theme park, Branson USA, operated there from 1999-2001.

The Herschend family bought the park, expanded it and redeveloped it, positioning it as a nighttime park open from 3 to 10 p.m. It offered 30 rides, a laser show and shows featuring entertainment like mountain boarders or sea lions.

The park drew 300,000 to 400,000 each year, Rau said. A one-day ticket was \$26 for adults, or \$21 for children and seniors.

No passes to Celebration City have been sold for the 2009 season, Rau said.

Next year, instead of offering a pass that will admit an

adult to Silver Dollar City, Whitewater and Celebration City, the multi-park pass will only include Silver Dollar City and White Water. That will drop the price from \$135 for to \$118 for adults, and from \$125 to \$98 for kids.

Rau said the company believes the property could be an anchor for Branson development. While it is now closing, the company has for some time been studying "several ideas" for family destinations including retail, dining and an aquarium.

In December, Herschend Family Entertainment bought a controlling interest in Adventure and Newport Aquariums, companies with aquariums in Camden, N.J., and Newport, Ky.

The Adventure Aquarium on the Camden waterfront features about 200,000 square feet of sea life and waterlife, including sharks, sea turtles and hippopotamuses. The aquariums in the two cities employ nearly 300 full- and part-time employees.

But Rau stressed that the company is continuing to study options for redeveloping the property and nothing is scheduled to open in 2009. How soon anything opens on the site will depend on economic conditions, she said.

Cora Scott, spokeswoman for St. John's Hospital, said St. John's has held employee picnics at Celebration City for three or four years. The last picnic drew 14,000.

"We are sad to see it closing," said Scott. "We picked it not only for its different activities, but for its central location."