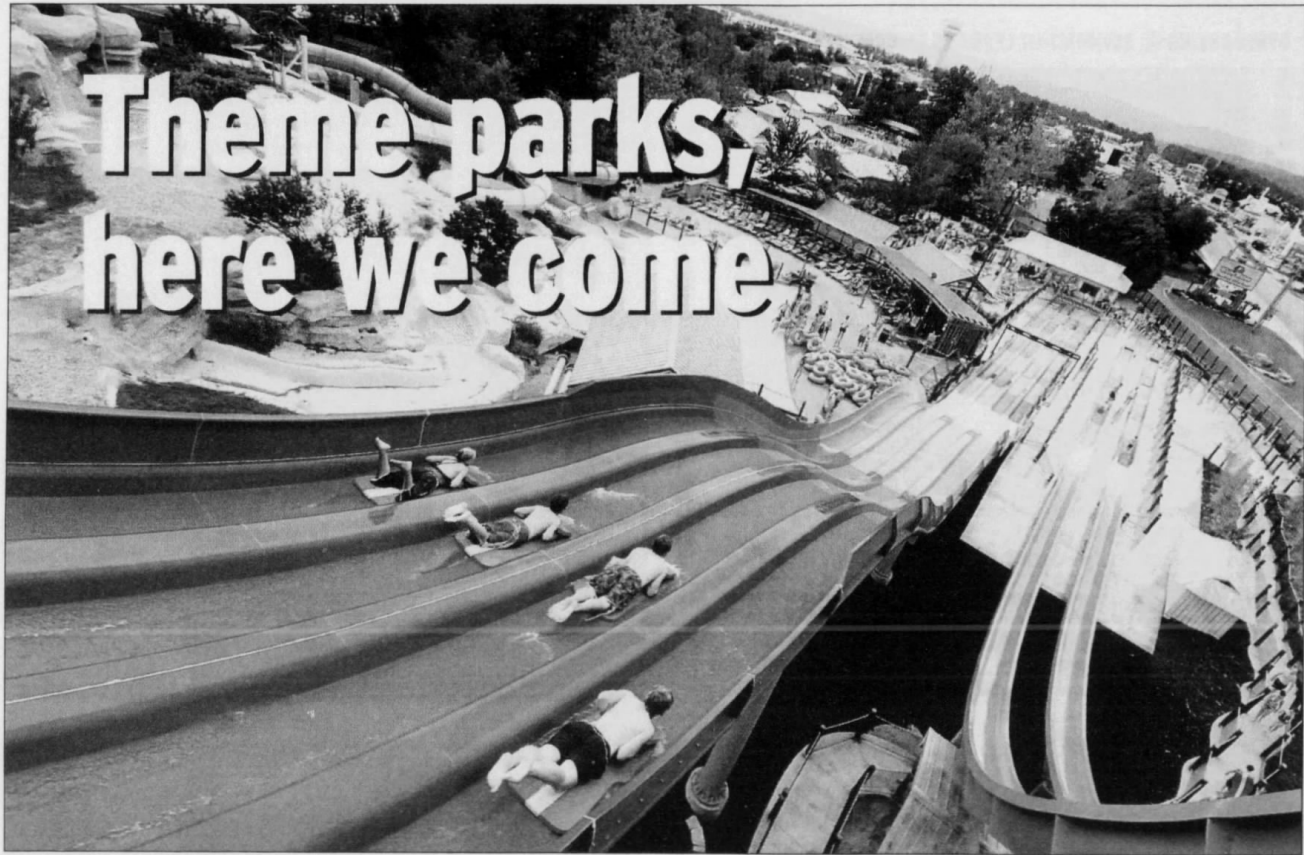




White Water's Kalani Towers provides a slippery slide for the daring. The park features a Little Squirts Waterworks area for younger kids and family-friendly RainTree Island. WHITE WATER

By Gail Reynolds
FOR OZARKS PARENT & FAMILY

School's out and summer vacation is here! 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

Kids, families can ride, splash, take in shows and play in Branson, St. Louis and Kansas City

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 look-

ing 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 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 Amer-

ica'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, are embellished this year with new entertainment.

Remaining festivals this year include the National Kids Fest showcasing a new VeggieTales 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 demonstrations 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 — and lower prices for adult tickets (\$34.99; \$29.99 if purchased online).

"We have the new roller coaster, Evel Knievel, and it will open mid-summer," says promotions manager Elizabeth Gotway. "This new roller coaster is close to the size of the Screamin' Eagle, but it's much more exciting."

The Evel Knievel, Gotway explains, is a compact twister. It will cross over itself 14 times, so you go through the tracks, she says. It also has a lot of high-banked turns.

"This will be our third wooden coaster, making Six Flags the only park in Missouri that has three wooden coasters."

What else?

"Obviously, this coaster takes us

up to seven roller coasters, but of course, we have a variety of rides that range anywhere from family rides to thrill rides," Gotway says. "Plus, we have our new kids area that we put in in 2006 — it's Bugs Bunny National Park, where kids can ride the amusements on their own while their parents relax or the parents can ride with the kids."

"We're also adding more concerts this year," Gotway says. "Last year ... we had the Thursday night concerts. This summer, we will have Thursday night concerts again and have added Sunday night concerts. Music is going to vary so that we have something for everyone's musical tastes."

Gotway says the park also continues its traditional Christian concert events on specified dates.

"We still have the Hurricane Harbor water park and it is still free with the theme park admission," explains Gotway. "It's a 12-acre water park with speed slides, tube slides, a lazy river, wave pool and two rafting water thrill rides. We also have an interactive kids complex with its own small slides and other interactive water gadgets."

WHITE WATER

While summer sizzles, you can chill out at Branson's White Water. The water park has nearly 7,000 feet of slides and 12 rides and at-

tractions, including the Kalani Towers slide thrill ride, the Caribbean Plunge, Tropical Twister, Lazy River, Rain Tree Island, Splash Island and Little Squirts' Waterworks.

WORLDS OF FUN AND OCEANS OF FUN

At Worlds of Fun in Kansas City, guests can expect landscaping improvements and enhancements throughout the park, plus loads of new concerts and entertainment in the summer and, come fall, a new attraction for the park's annual Halloween Haunt.

"This year, actually, is a big year of festivals and celebrations for us," says Brandon Stanley, public relations manager.

"Highlighting that all, we're celebrating 35 years at the park. We're having what we call the Celebrating America festivals."

The themed festivals will be every weekend in July and will feature shows, park discounts and kids entertainment. The park has more than 100 rides and attractions including six roller coasters.

"Our Halloween Haunt (scare-free fun during the day, spooky at night) has become really, really popular here," Stanley says.

"And we will be expanding — adding another Halloween attraction — for fans to look forward to."



Classic rides like the Le Taxi Tour at Worlds of Fun provide thrills for the kids and enjoyment for the whole family.

Show Me State theme parks

CELEBRATION CITY

When: Open daily through Aug. 17 and Fridays and Saturdays Aug. 22-Oct. 25 (except for Sept. 27 and Oct. 4); hours are 3-10 p.m.

Shows include Extreme Parrots (three shows per day except Tuesday); Jump! The Ultimate Dog Show (two shows per day except Wednesday); The Skinny Improv (Friday and Saturday and Aug. 22-Oct. 25 except for Sept. 27 and Oct. 4); Ignite the Night (9:30 nightly weather permitting)

Where: 1383 Missouri 376, Branson

Cost: Single-day admission (including tax) is \$29.02, \$23.44 for children ages 4 to 11 and adults 62 and older; free for children 3 and younger. Group rates available. Free parking. Season passes are \$61.38 for adults, \$50.22 for children and \$55.80 for seniors. All-City season passes for Silver Dollar City, Celebration City and White Water are \$136.92 and \$125.97.

Information: 800-831-4386, www.celebrationcity.com

SILVER DOLLAR CITY

When: Open through Dec. 30. Hours and days of operation vary throughout the year. Open daily 9:30 a.m.-7 p.m. through Aug. 17; from Aug. 18-27, open Thursday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; Aug. 28-Sept. 7, open daily, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. all days except Aug. 30 and 31 (9 a.m.-8 p.m.); Sept. 8-Oct. 25, closed Mondays and Tuesdays, Sept. 8-10 and Oct. 27-31, open 10 a.m.-6 p.m. on all days except Saturday (9 a.m.-7 p.m.); hours and days vary from Nov. 1 to Dec. 30: open Wednesday-Sunday through Nov. 30, Thursday-Sunday Dec. 4-14, and daily Dec. 18-23 and 26-30, 1 p.m. to 9 p.m. all days except Nov. 27 (Thanksgiving, 4-10 p.m.) and Nov. 28 and all Saturdays (11:30 a.m.-11 p.m.). Closed Dec. 24 and 25.

Where: 399 Indian Point Road, Branson
Cost: Single-day admission is \$51.59, \$40.84 for children ages 4-11, \$49.44 for seniors 62 and older, free for children 3 and younger. Group rates available. Free parking. Season passes are \$80.61, \$69.86 for kids and \$74.16 for seniors. All-City season passes for Silver Dollar City, Celebration City and White Water are \$136.92

See **Theme parks**, Page 32