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## Ghost Town In The Sky

### Popular theme park with local ties reopens May 25

By *SONJA GLEATON*  
T&D Staff Writer  
Saturday, May 19, 2007

MAGGIE VALLEY, N.C. -- It was a trip to Oklahoma's Frontier City more than 50 years ago that planted the seed in former Orangeburg resident R.B. Coburn's mind for a mile-high Western town amusement park.

Fascinated by the Old West culture, the businessman traveled from his home in Orangeburg to Maggie Valley, N.C., purchased 250 acres of land and commissioned Russell Pearson of Oklahoma City to design the western town of his dreams. The result was Ghost Town In The Sky, an authentic western locale located on top of Buck Mountain on the edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The park opened in June 1961, and it's popularity often attracted 300,000 visitors annually prior to closing five years ago.

On Friday, May 25, the 99-acre Maggie Valley theme park, now under new ownership, will open its doors once again, offering attendees the opportunity to visit many of the original attractions, amusements and live-action shows that made Ghost Town a success for 40 years.

#### Building the Old West

With Pearson's blueprints and a scaled model of the "town" in hand, Coburn said it didn't take long for bulldozers to begin leveling the top of Buck Mountain.

"We began bulldozing the property on September 1, 1960," he said. "The first thing we did was take about 50 feet off the top of the mountain for construction of the main Western town, which featured 40 replica buildings. Smaller knolls were leveled for construction of the Indian village, mining town and mountain town."

Construction began in November 1960, and Coburn said Ghost Town quickly became a "million dollar" investment. A work force of 200 men were hired for construction of the theme park, which opened to the public on June 11, 1961.

"For 40 years, Ghost Town In The Sky employed hundreds of people and attracted thousands of visitors to Maggie Valley," Coburn said. "Maggie Valley literally came to life as new motels, restaurants and gift shops opened for business."

Over the years, a number of Hollywood celebrities made guest appearances at Ghost Town, Coburn said. He said he hopes to see those glorious days return.

"I have many wonderful memories associated with the development of Ghost Town," he said. "Burt Reynolds, who was a star on 'Gunsmoke,' made a celebrity appearance at Ghost Town and took part in the gunfights. Dan Blocker, who played Hoss Cartwright on 'Bonanza,' visited in 1963. I understand traffic was backed up all the way to Clyde, (N.C.) and a reported 16,000 people came to Ghost Town on one day because of the celebrities."

Although progress has transformed the days of cheap land, horse-driven stagecoaches, rub boards, wash pots and outhouses, Coburn said the beauty of North Carolina remains the same.

"People greatly enjoy hiking, camping and skiing in the mountains," he said. "And now that Ghost Town is reopening, people will have another reason to come and stay a while."

'Something for everyone'

Ghost Town Partners LLC purchased the park in August 2006 for \$7.5 million, and Ghost Town In The Sky's general manager Bob Cordier said his crews are working diligently to set the stage for the grand reopening.

Extensive renovations have brought the park back to life, updating many of the original attractions, amusements and live-action shows that made the 99-acre theme park a success for 40 years.

"The renovated, modernized Ghost Town is better than it was originally," Cordier said. "From the musical shows and dancing to the exciting rides, amusements and great food, Ghost Town offers something for everyone."

Visitors to Ghost Town can expect to see pistol-toting cowboys and trigger-happy villains settling their disputes



The "Cliff Hanger" roller coaster at the Ghost Town In The Sky theme park is a one-of-a-kind ride located on the side of Buck Mountain. The "Cliff Hanger" reaches a top speed of 56 mph, and an exciting loop generates g-force pressure as riders travel the 2,063 foot roller coaster.

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with "gunfights" in the streets. There will be jail breaks, bank robberies and lively dance performances by the Can-Can girls of the Silver Dollar Saloon.

As a special feature, the actors and dancers will mingle with the crowd between stints for autographs and photo sessions.

Additionally, as part of the renovation process, Ghost Town's original "Red Devil" roller coaster has been renovated and renamed "Cliff Hanger."

"The roller coaster has been completely sandblasted, and every joint has been tested and inspected," Cordier said. He said the attraction was also painted to match park's new color scheme -- "corn husk" yellow, "chili" red and navy blue.

"This is a breath-taking, 2,063-foot ride, and as riders leave the terminal and go around the loop, they will have the thrilling sensation of falling off the face of the mountain," Cordier said.

A new drop tower ride, the "Silver Bullet," will welcome thrill seekers, and a new museum has been added to the attraction line-up. Entertainment and live shows will have a new format as well.

Cordier has previously managed seven other theme parks but admits that Ghost Town is his most unique venture.

"Ghost Town In The Sky is the only amusement park constructed on top of a mountain," he said. "The ride up Buck Mountain by chair lift or incline railway is an awesome adventure.

"And when you reach the top at an elevation of 4,600 feet, the views of the surrounding mountains and the valley below are truly spectacular."

The reopening of Ghost Town will create 285 full- and part-time park-related jobs, most of which have been filled locally, and is expected to improve the regional economy through increased tourism.

"Maggie Valley is fired up about the grand reopening, and community support has been tremendous," said Hank Woodburn, one of the new owners of Ghost Town. "Everyone is invited to spend some time with us at Ghost Town and relive the thrills of life in the Old West."

For more information, visit Ghost Town's website at [www.ghosttowninthesky.com](http://www.ghosttowninthesky.com).

Times and Democrat Staff Writer [Sonja Gleaton](#) can be reached by e-mail at [sgleaton@timesanddemocrat.com](mailto:sgleaton@timesanddemocrat.com) and by telephone at 803-533-5540. Discuss this and other stories online at [TheT&D.com](http://TheT&D.com).

Is Ghost Town haunted?

There are many stories about ghostly apparitions at Ghost Town In The Sky, but people can't say for sure which legends are true and which stories are longings of the heart.

Ghost Town In The Sky's general manager Bob Cordier says the mysteries surrounding Ghost Town add to the intrigue of the true Western setting.

"One particular ghostly tale involves Ghost Town's Silver Dollar Saloon and a bartender's picture," he said. "There was once a plaque hanging on a wall in the saloon that featured a bartender with a huge mustache. Old pictures taken from that time period show the plaque on the wall behind the saloon bar. The plaque has been lost for a number of years, but it mysteriously appeared in behind the scenes photos taken during the filming of the Ghost Town movie that was made in 2006.

"The actual plaque has never been found, and there is no explanation for this mystery."

Following the closing of Ghost Town five years ago, some feared that the theme park would remain closed, while others prayed that R.B. Coburn's vision would live on.

During that time, people reported hearing gunshots echo across Buck Mountain during the days that Ghost Town would normally have been in operation. And many months before Ghost Town was purchased by its new owners, there were reports of ghostly lights making their way up-and-down the incline and back-and-forth across the mountain during the midnight hours.

Cordier said perhaps the ghostly sights and sounds were the heartfelt wishes of those who wanted to see Ghost Town restored.

"The spooky happenings remain a mystery," he said. "I can't say for sure that folks will experience ghostly apparitions if they come to Ghost Town In The Sky, but I can promise this -- there are many surprises awaiting."

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## Comments (2 comment(s)):

Michaela wrote on May 23, 2007 4:31 PM:

" My dad, Larry Moyers is opening all of the rides at Ghost Town and he sold to Ghost Town the "Silver Bullet" it is one of the best rides I've ever ridden! "

Nick wrote on May 22, 2007 8:45 PM:

" I am so glad that Ghost Town is back. I went there when I was young, took my own boys when they were

small. Now I will get to take my grandson and granddaughter. We are sure to check it out this summer. I am an educator that has worked at another amusement park for several years, but Ghost Town has its own special attraction, especially for children and those who love to see joy on their children's faces. "

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