

2006: A year in review-A new sheriff in Maggie's Ghost Town

by BETH PLEMING

MAGGIE VALLEY — When news broke in August of the long-awaited sale of Maggie Valley's longtime claim to fame, Ghost Town in the Sky, a rush of excitement reverberated throughout the valley.

After several failed attempts to sell the property — one of which prompted a law suit which further slowed the process — news that a trio of corporate officers had officially sealed the deal was received with enthusiasm by a community tempted to give up hope of ever seeing the park's return.

That enthusiasm was evident in August when between 4,000 and 5,000 people showed up for a preview of the park to celebrate its long-awaited renovation and reopening in May.

At that time park founder R.B. Coburn handed the keys to Ghost Town over to Hank Woodburn — founder and president of Adventure Landing, which owns and operates nine family entertainment centers in four states. Woodburn is the park's new chief owner. Woodburn is among a group of corporate officers operating under Ghost Town Partners, LLC.

Other key players include Peter Hairston — the venture capitalist who helped put together the financing necessary to purchase and renovate the "mile-high" amusement park and Al Harper, a key player with nearby Smoky Mountain Railroad.

News of the park's comeback brought hope and reassurance to many Maggie Valley residents and local business owners who have weathered the storms of a struggling economy since the park's closing in 2002. The reopening of Ghost Town in the Sky is said to be the token that will "put Maggie Valley back on the map," many stated.

Woodburn shared details at an August Maggie Valley Chamber of Commerce awards dinner about Ghost Town's reopening as a western-theme park on May 25.

Meanwhile, park officials said they are progressing toward the highly-anticipated reopening day one step at a time.

To date, \$750,000 worth of renovations have been completed on the park's exterior, according to Julie Dion, vice president of sales and marketing. A new thrill ride, the "Silver Bullet" has been added to the lineup of rides and key personnel has been hired, including General Manager Bob Cordier. Interior work is being reserved for days of inclement weather that won't accommodate working outdoors.

A welcome center gift shop, located in the A-frame building in the Ghost Town parking lot on Soco Road, is in full operation offering season passes, daily admission tickets and park memorabilia. All rides are currently being refurbished.

Park visitors can expect to find the majority of the park, including most rides, fully operable on opening day, Cordier said. Park officials are still determining when to open the Indian Village portion of the park.

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