



Work begins on Maggie Valley theme park

by BETH PLEMING

Day by day and plank by plank, the dusty roads of Ghost Town theme park are coming back to life.

The process, said general manager Bob Cordier, had to begin from scratch.

“We had to basically start back at ground zero and really get down and evaluate what we had there, pretty much from a beginning level,” he said. “Each ride, building, attraction, etc. had to be inspected. We had engineers in there along with the department of labor, and we’ve gotten their input on all the rides. We felt we needed to get down to the basics, evaluate what we had to determine where we needed to go.”

The evaluation process is complete, he said, and now park officials are reviewing reports and devising a strategic plan of attack.

“We’re getting reports from engineers together,” he said, noting certain codes have changed since the park’s closing.

The reports have been “OK,” Cordier said. “The park has been sitting there for five years. But all that considered, we’ve got really good assets to work with. It could be a lot worse. We are satisfied and happy with what we see...the engineers and manufacturers who do the reconditioning don’t see any major problems, and the state ride inspectors — from the N.D. Department of Labor — will be actively involved with the reconditioning process, reviewing things as we go along.”

So, with the evaluation stage behind them and a well-mapped plan in hand, the next step, Cordier said, was to put that plan into action — much of which is well underway.

Much of the the exterior work has been completed in the main “Western town” portion of the park. Interior work, Cordier said, has been put on hold for weather that doesn’t accommodate outdoor work.

“The buildings have been reconditioned — lots of new roofs, facades, walkways, all have been rebuilt,” Cordier said. “There are a few things outside of the western town that we’re working on now at the top of hill by the bus drop off. So, exterior-wise, we have moved out of Ghost Town for the most part, and we’re saving the interior for bad weather.”

Rides are also next on the “to refurbish” list, he continued. Next, “we’ll start picking up the rides and taking them to the manufacture shop. Every ride we’re going to be putting up will go back to the manufacturer for reconditioning, things like new paint and new seats, to get everything back to top notch operating standards,” said Cordier. “We won’t be able to put up the entire ride package that is there — there a few we’re still debating.”

Visitors to the park on opening day can expect to ride the famed mile-high roller coaster, albeit under a new name. “Red Devil” won’t quite go with the park’s new color scheme, said Julie Dion, Ghost Town’s vice president of sales and marketing, pointing to the park’s new logo which is multi-colored.

Being added to the circuit this year, she continued, is a new thrill ride, the “Silver Bullet” — a 113-foot-high drop tower. Six people at one time are lifted to the top of the tower, strapped into a seat.

“It goes up really fast, then drops really fast,” Dion said, noting the ride reaches speeds more than 60 mph.

To accompany the park’s ride package, Cordier said, park officials are placing a lot of emphasis on entertainment — an aspect of the park that has long earned recognition.

“We’re working on putting a real exciting entertainment package together with a lot of guest interactive scenarios — like gunfighters and dancers in the halls. Guests can expect to see characters out among the people talking among them in character during the day — they won’t do a show then go hide in a breakroom somewhere, she said. They will interact with guests to create that old western atmosphere.”

Park officials are not sure whether the upper portion of the park will be ready for operation on opening day.

“The upper area — an Indian village — we’re unsure about,” Cordier said. “We’re still evaluating it and haven’t decided if we will leave it as the Indian village and open it in May, or close it this year and just focus on the lower part of the park. We’re trying to gauge our need and our ability. We want everything to be first-class. We want everybody to be impressed with what we’ve done. It’s just a matter of how much we can do with how much time we have left.” Working toward a May 25 opening, Cordier said, is very realistic.

“From what I’ve seen, I’ve been through every building, every covey and every walkway and I think we’re on a very workable schedule,” Cordier said. “Our goal is to be done by the beginning of May so we have the month of May to properly train everybody and to evaluate rides. To make sure when we open we have people ready to answer questions like they’ve been there the whole time. We’ve got a lot to do to the train, but our goal is May 1 and I don’t think there’s anything unreasonable about that schedule.”

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