

Amusement park to reopen

The Associated Press

MAGGIE VALLEY - Locals are hopeful the reopening of an amusement park that closed here in 2001 will boost the economy and generate hundreds of new jobs.

Ghost Town in the Sky, which attracted about 300,000 visitors a season at its peak, featured dancers, music, and staged gunfights for nearly four decades. The park, about 30 miles west of Asheville, was sold Tuesday and is expected to reopen in May.

David Huskins, managing director of Smoky Mountain Host, a tourism marketing and development organization, said the opening would create up to 50 full-time and about 235 part-time jobs. It could also add tourism dollars to the local economy.

Ghost Town Partners bought the nearly 255-acre site from R.B. Coburn for an undisclosed amount of money. Allen and Carol Harper, owners of the Bryson City-based Great Smoky Mountains Railroad, along with two partners in Florida, are the new owners.

The Harpers and Coburn could not immediately be reached for comment Wednesday.

Huskins said the group would make an initial \$12 million to \$13 million investment in the property over the next two years. That includes \$4 million to install a new chairlift and restore the incline railway, among other upgrades.

Plans also call for adding a water park, retail outlets, condominiums and potential home sites on the remaining undeveloped property.

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