



INSPIRATION IN OHIO

A bike trip across Ohio led the owners of Monsoon Lagoon to create a new vision for their mini golf facility

Monsoon Lagoon Water Park and Family Fun Center—the newest outdoor waterpark in northern Ohio—began after a married couple, John and Patty Heilmann, were on a vacation trip several years ago. Biking across the state as part of the Great Ohio Bike Adventure, the couple passed by the City of Coshocton, Ohio, where a municipal waterpark had recently opened. The couple operated a miniature golf facility back in their hometown of Port Clinton, Ohio, but seeing the waterpark gave them some ideas. After several years of discussion, they finally decided to sell their medical practices and expand their Goofy Golf into a waterpark.

The decision was easy—and logical—considering their area, Ottawa County, draws 2.5 million tourists during the summer season. By offering a much needed and affordable family entertainment center (FEC) to the area, tourists with interests in the areas of fishing, boating and camping now would have a recreational facility in addition to local lake activities.

The couple designed the FEC entirely on its own, keeping families, area residents and tourists in mind.

Once the loan was approved, the colorful, Caribbean-themed park began to take shape. Construction began immediately and continued throughout the brutal, wintry months. The winter was so harsh, in fact, that meteorologists across the country marked that season as one of the worst ever. As a result, it was uncertain if the waterpark would open on schedule. The Heilmanns slowed their marketing efforts due to delays with permits

and consistent construction delays caused by the bitter weather. Even so, much to park management's surprise and despite the severe conditions, construction persisted and the waterpark opened in late June 2003.

The outdoor park covers more than 300,000 square feet and includes an "Adventure Island Tree House" with a 1,000-gallon drenching bucket, 105 water play stations on 17 different levels and four connecting slides. In addition, the park offers the "Typhoon Rush Slide Tower," two larger slides, a "Li'l Squirrels Play Pool," the "Coral Reef River Ride" and an adult swim-up Tiki bar that serves fresh tropical drinks. The park also continues to offer the dry-land rides that include an 18-hole miniature golf course, water bumper boats and a go-cart track.

A sluggish opening—and a resourceful solution

June and July proved to be cold and rainy months causing financial loss for the new park and all surrounding businesses, including the roller-coaster capital of the world, Cedar Point. All these factors—construction delays and the weather—played a dramatic role in whether Monsoon Lagoon Water Park would have a successful first season.

In an effort to save the park from severe financial loss that first season, the park accelerated marketing efforts. It offered a two-for-one coupon to every store and business that would accept it. The mass distribution included department stores, grocery stores, charter boats, beauty and barber shops, county fairs, restaurants, marinas, craft shows and hotels. Flooding the market with brochures and coupons, the waterpark ended up attracting a swarm of new guests. Ultimately, the 2003 season was a greater success than anticipated.

Initially, park management expected most guests to be a mix of area residents and out-of-town tourists visiting the local lake attractions. It came as a surprise, then, when an examination of attendees showed the park was attracting many repeat guests from within a 1-hour radius. The marketing department decided to take advantage of this trend and drive its efforts for the 2004 season into these markets, concentrating on

offering local businesses discounted tickets to their employees and customers. In addition, marketing focused on booking group outings for businesses, churches, day cares, youth centers, 4H groups, scout troops and schools.

Marketing used a variety of communication techniques, such as direct calling, to discover whether businesses and groups would be interested in receiving information about group outings and discounted consignment tickets. The response was overwhelming. In fact, group bookings and discounted ticket consignments continue to blossom for the park. Consignment businesses now include Ohio AAA Motorist Association offices from within a 2-hour radius and many larger companies that employ more than 1,500 people.

Since then, the park has continued to gear marketing efforts toward keeping the public informed. It offered huge discounts for the first month of its season to assure a profitable outcome. It designed TV, radio and print media to attract families, companies and groups of all ages. Marketing staff joined forces with Pizza Hut and attached deep-discount coupons to pizza box tops and partnered with schools to deliver discounted coupons to every student. The park offered coupons in the form of paycheck stuffers to any business that would accept them. It reached out to 4H members, little league teams, scouts and day camps offering them the best entertainment deals around. In addition to the group packages—which are aimed at 15 or more guests—the park also offers special, deep discounts to groups who book in June, while offering different discounts to those who book for July and August.

Group contracts are flexible. The park allows businesses to change the number of guests in a group and reschedule their booked event on another day if the park experiences inclement weather. This policy has allowed the park to bring in additional revenue. Not only do groups get rain checks, though—so do individuals who visit the waterpark.

The more marketing, the better

Monsoon Lagoon expends all efforts to ensure everyone's heard of the waterpark. Weekly, park staff delivers coupons and brochures to area businesses. In addition, the park's balloon-sculpting mascots,

“Marketing staff joined forces with Pizza Hut and attached deep-discount coupons to pizza box tops.”

“Jamaica Joe & Jane,” visit area festivals to pass out coupons and brochures.

The park also has implemented special events that carry discounted pricing, including Christian Day, Government Day, Best Benefits Day, T.I.R.E.S. (employee benefit companies) Day and Scout Day. To promote each event, the park expends special marketing efforts. For example, for Christian Day, the park offers discounted tickets at area Christian book stores and promotes the event via the local Christian radio station. Other special-event days include:

- *“Mom & Pops” Day.* Mondays, between the hours of 11 a.m. and 1 p.m., a parent who purchases a regular waterpark admission gets free admission for a child aged 14 years or younger.
- *Tiki Tuesday.* Guests who enjoy tropical drinks get a dis-

A future of growth

For 2005, Monsoon Lagoon is raising funds through a private placement of stocks with a goal of \$15 million dollars. If all goes as planned, guests can look forward to a family wave pool, a larger coral reef river, four more waterslides, a Flow Rider, a shallow play pool, a floatable obstacle course, themed water cannons and a vortex pool. Also planned will be a new party area and shooting gallery.

By Patty Snow

“Park revenue increased more than 80 percent from the 2003 season.”

count on their libations on Tuesdays.

In addition to the discounts, special scheduled events such as these often include live entertainment, such as a Jamaican steel drummer, a classic rock acoustic soloist or area Christian bands. The park plans to expand entertainment offerings in the future.



Monsoon Lagoon Water Park & Family Fun Center

Port Clinton, Ohio

www.monsoonlagoonwaterpark.com

Owners: John and Patricia Heilman

Admission prices: \$14.95 daily (waterpark only)
\$9.95 for the “3 p.m. Plunge”
\$4.95 for spectators

Dates open: Dry rides: May 22-Labor Day
Waterpark: May 29-Labor Day

Size/Acres: 9 acres developed; 25 additional available for development

Capacity: 1,500 (waterpark and hardpark)

Number of Employees:

Year-round: 6

Seasonal: 74

Clientele (local vs. tourist): Guests come from within a 2-hour radius in addition to further distances.

Future expansion plans: For the 2005 season, a family wave action pool, a larger coral reef river, four more waterslides, a Flow Rider, a shallow play pool, a floatable obstacle course, themed water cannons and a vortex pool.

Unique park programs: Mascots “Jamaica Joe” and “Jamaica Jane,” catering events, Government Day, Christian Day, Scout Day, special school programs including day cares and day camps. Plus special fund-raising programs.

Staff retention programs or in-service programs: End of year bonus for those employees who stay for the entire season. Appreciation Party.

Racing, lazing and eating

The 2004 season brought the park’s newest addition: the “Montego Bay” raceway. One of the largest and most unique go-cart tracks in the country, this raceway offers 10 high-bank turns and a covered bridge with a thatched roof. Eleven palm trees adorn the challenging quarter-mile raceway, which takes drivers 5 minutes to complete.

Another enhancement to the park has been the addition of “Thunder Falls” to the leisure river and mammoth palm trees and flowers to the entire park.

“Gilligan’s Arcade” has been renovated with a Caribbean theme and more challenging arcade and video games. Redemption-prize choices literally adorn the walls and add intriguing color and appeal.

In addition to the waterpark, guests can enjoy the Caribbean Grill serving grilled chicken sandwiches, hamburgers, hot dogs, Coney dogs, pizza, tacos, salads, Dippin’ Dots ice cream, Coca Cola beverages, bottled water, fruit drinks, nacho cheese and a variety of snack items at reasonable prices. Special food offerings include a “Paradise Pizza” and four 20-ounce sodas for \$14.95. A covered pavilion nearby allows guests to enjoy their refreshments in shaded comfort.

Food isn’t just reserved for serving individual guests. Catering to groups has become a necessary way of life. The park now offers catering specials for groups of 30 or

more guests. Food choices range from all-you-can eat taco or pizza parties with sodas to all-you-can-eat barbeque chicken complete with potato and macaroni salads, coleslaw, rolls and unlimited sodas for groups of 50 or more. The group pavilion seats about 200 guests.

Like its opening season, this past summer’s season proved to be a success despite the unusual summer temperatures and rainfall. Park revenue increased more than 80 percent from the 2003 season. Group outings quadrupled with many returning for a second outing, and season passes increased tremendously. Consignment tickets proved to be powerful selling tools, as did coupon/brochure offers and the use of various media advertising. New television and radio commercials enticed guests to the park, and affordable prices were the icing on the cake in attracting clientele. **WWA**

Patty Snow, Marketing Director, began her career with Monsoon Lagoon Water Park months prior to its opening in 2003 after marketing a premier shopping center for 7 years. She has created and developed the marketing department for the waterpark and handles all phases of advertising, group sales for companies, youth and adult groups, as well as schools. Snow also handles all consignment tickets.

Suppliers

Development/Design: Ramaker & Associates/Cornerstone Architects

Construction: Dippen Construction & Development

Waterslides: Badger Swimpools

Furniture: Lynkris Patio Furniture

Lockers: Best Lockers, LLC

Filtration equipment: Miami Filter, LLC

Chemical controller: Chemtrol, Division of Santa Barbara Control Systems

Shade system: Anchor Industries Inc.

Admission system: Quantix

Merchandise: Redemption Plus

Food/Equipment: Sysco, Sofo, Gordon Foods

Uniforms: Screen Printing Unltd.

Pumps: Marlor Engineering Inc.