

## Coaster Museum Needs Industry Support to Keep Rolling

■ For more than 100 years, amusement parks have been where fun seekers go to romp among attractions whose variety just can't be found anywhere else. Over that time, the parks' most iconic signature attractions have been roller coasters, and to honor those historic rides, there is now a traveling museum exhibit in search of a permanent home.

"The heart of any good amusement park is their carousel; the soul is their roller coasters," says Derek Shaw, board member of the National Roller Coaster Museum of America (NRCMA).

The NRCMA is a nonprofit organization devoted to preserving and protecting the history of the roller coaster and the amusement industry.

Its board of directors has been searching for a place to showcase the items and artifacts in its collection, stored in Plainview, Texas, at Larson International. Until a permanent home for the museum could be found, the board considered having a traveling museum; Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, stepped up and made that a reality.

"A couple of years ago, Pete Owens (public relations manager at Dollywood), who is on the board [of NRCMA], offered up a location at Dollywood," says Shaw. "It's about 1,250 feet of workable space, and what made it desirable is that it was the site for the Dolly Parton museum until 2005."

So, starting in January 2012 Richard Munch, an NRCMA board member who had the original idea for the museum when he co-founded the American Coaster Enthusiasts (ACE) in 1978, began coordinating efforts to



Comparison of old Frederick Church-designed Bobs-style coaster car (left) to a new Great Coasters Millennium Flyer car (right) used on "Thunderhead"

put the exhibition together. Various contributors did layouts, research, and data collection for the exhibit, and then two weeks before it opened an installation crew of volunteers at Dollywood set it up. The exhibition opened a few days later and ran through Sept. 16.

Called "America's Roller Coasters & Amusement Parks," the exhibit tells the history, design, operation, and physics of coasters. Its 20 displays feature images and artifacts from numerous roller coasters over many decades. A highlight of the exhibit was a Prior-and-Church-designed coaster car from the "Giant Dipper" at Belmont Park in San Diego, sitting beside a car that is the "rolling stock" from Dollywood's "Thunderhead."

One favorite display among visitors was the roller coaster enthusiasts' room, which demonstrated the extensive efforts of coaster devotees to collect anything coaster related. Other displays included Hall of Fame coasters, Coasters in Movies, Parks of Tennessee, a roller-coaster-history timeline, and a map of all U.S. parks, whether in operation or defunct.

"Almost every major park in North America is mentioned one place or another in the exhibit," notes Shaw. "NAPHA (National Amusement Park Historical Association) and DAFE (Darkride and Funhouse Enthusiasts) also have things in the display." He says the exhibition averaged nearly 100 visitors an hour—a commendable turnout. It was open five hours daily, and the NRCMA paid for staffing by Dollywood employees.

As for what's next for the traveling exhibit, Shaw says, "It will just sit at Dollywood until we make plans for next season. We'd like for it to stay there, but we're not sure that's possible."

Shaw acknowledges the future of the museum depends on the amusement park industry. He says the museum is on a very lean budget, and the cost to ship the temporary exhibit is significant. "We really need financial resources and a sizable space to house the museum," he says. "The amusement industry has a great history and we all need to support that."

[www.rollercoastermuseum.org](http://www.rollercoastermuseum.org)