

New team pledges more fun

WILD RIDE BRINGS OLD NAME, FRESH DELIGHTS TO ELITCH'S

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Article Last Updated: 04/11/2007 01:23:02 AM MDT

Elitch Gardens is once again just Elitch Gardens.

PARC Management, the new operator of the historic Denver amusement park, unveiled the new name Tuesday, dropping the Six Flags moniker and returning to the 117-year-old park's original name.

PARC said it plans to invest \$1.7 million in Elitch Gardens this season. Planned improvements include a new extreme tube slide, called RipQurl, in the Island Kingdom Water Park.

The park will also offer increased entertainment options, such as a new Cirque du Soleil-style performance called Bailamos and an urban acrobatic production called X-City!

"As we seek to honor the past, we seek to establish for Elitch Gardens an even richer future," said Randal Drew, chief executive of Florida-based PARC. "We will invest in the future, which begins today."

Another change to the park's lineup will be the elimination of the costumed Looney Tunes characters, which have wandered the grounds and greeted patrons since Six Flags bought the park in 1998.

Elitch Gardens - which was originally located at West 38th Avenue and Tennyson Street and moved to the Central Platte Valley in 1995 - was the fifth-most-visited paid Denver attraction in 2005, with 1.16 million visitors. That was up 10 percent over 2004 but still down from its peak visitation of 1.6 million in 1999.

Attendance figures from last season were not released, but Drew said he plans to increase park traffic by emphasizing its family-friendly nature.

He stressed that the price of admission to Elitch Gardens, which opens for the season April 28, will remain the same as it was last year - \$44.99.

"We will grow attendance this year because we have a better package, a higher quality overall experience," he said. "We know that we need to focus on entertaining the entire family."

Paul Ruben, editor for industry trade magazine Park World, said he expects the new management to have a positive impact on Elitch Gardens.

"The No. 1 rule in attracting repeat visitors is you have to reinvest in the park. Six Flags had been so saddled with debt, it was difficult for them to do that," he said. "Here is a new company with some fresh money. It's exactly what is needed to give people a new reason to visit."

Elitch Gardens and six other amusement parks were officially acquired last week from the financially troubled Six Flags Inc. by PARC 7F Operations Corp. for \$312 million.

PARC promptly resold the properties to CNL Income Properties Inc., a Florida-based real estate investment trust. CNL leased the seven parks back to PARC under long-term operating agreements.

U.S. amusement park industry revenues grew from \$5.7 billion in 1990 to \$11.2 billion in 2005, according to the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions.

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What's new at Elitch's

The new operators of Elitch Gardens plan to invest \$1.7 million into the Denver amusement park this season:

RipQurl: Tube slide coming to Island Kingdom Water Park in June

Bailamos: Cirque du Soleil-style performance featuring acrobats, contortionists and aerialists from Cirque Innosta

X-City!: Urban acrobatic production featuring BMX and skateboard stunts

Carnaval de Fuego II: Nightly pyrotechnic and laser performance

Food: Park will no longer serve trans fat and will use more local vendors

Source: Elitch Gardens