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JNELC

EMEA Spring Summit Journal

Issue 5 - June 2021 Editors: Jeroen Nijpels, Mika Nur Faezah & Georgia Vitkute Belgium - IAAPA EMEA Spring Summit

Exclusive interview with Steve Van den Kerkhof p. 12

Finally, we meet again!

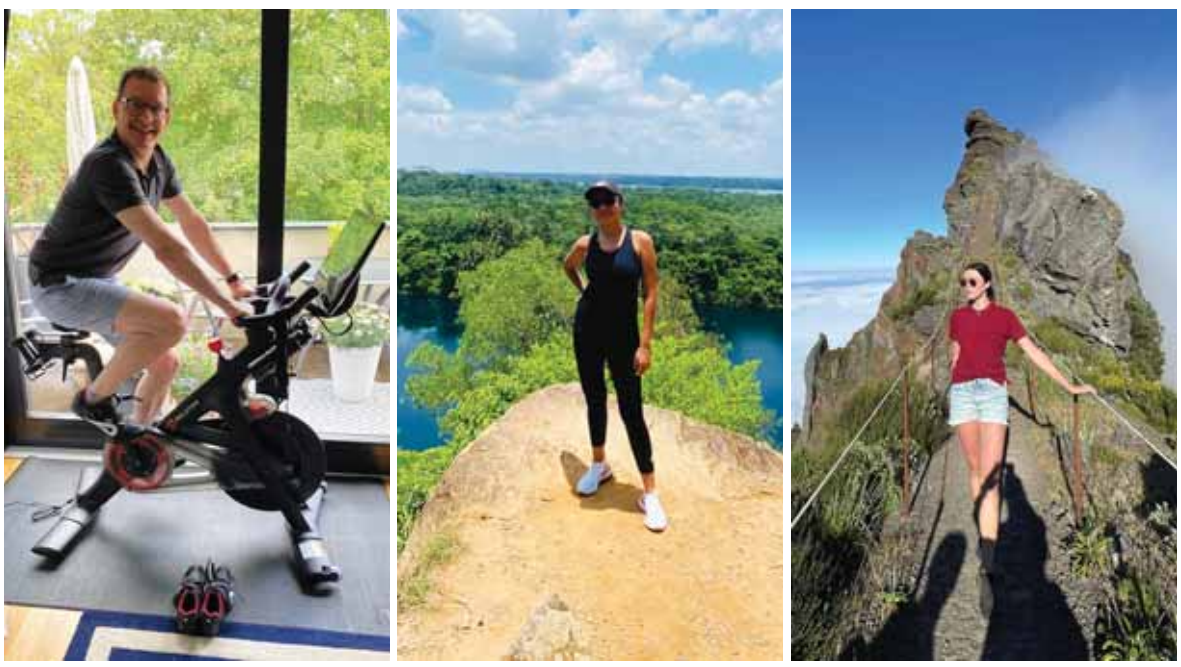
This is the moment many of us have been waiting for for a very long time. To meet with industry colleagues and friends in real, and to visit attractions together. Finally our patience is rewarded and with all the necessary precautions, JNELC is looking forward to spend three days with you here in Belgium. And we owe a large amount of gratitude to the IAAPA EMEA team for putting this together, in the wake of so many other events that have been prepared and then had to be cancelled. To show our support, JNELC is also very happy to be a sponsor for this event. So if you would like to know something more about any of the topics in the articles in this Journal, you can speak to us here in Belgium.

One of the main reasons for that is of course that JNELC, together with our long term partner ZIERER, have supplied great attractions to all three theme parks that are part of the Spring Summit.

Most recently, we opened a Force 190 Family Roller Coaster. ZIERER's Force series of coasters continue to prove very popular with parks across the globe.

Also Bellewaerde opted for a ZIERER Force Coaster back in 2013 when it was looking for a new attraction for an existing building. ZIERER developed here a complete custom layout, whereby it starts with a dark ride, then a lift that actually comes out of the building and then returns indoor in a high speed section to finish with the final scene of the dark ride. This also required adapting the standard train to include on-board audio. The end result, Huracan, has been a popular attraction in the park ever since.

And lastly Plopsaland has quite a number of ZIERER attractions in the park. Read more about this on page 12 of this Journal, in our interview with Steve Van den Kerkhof.



#teamJNELC remains active in the pandemic: Jeroen at home on his new Peloton bike, Mika on a short hike in Singapore and Georgia hiking in Madeira (Photos: JNELC)

ZIERER and Leisure Expert Group cooperate

A few months ago, two leading companies in the industry decided to join forces and work together on the development of advanced dark rides.

Recognizing that dark rides often present challenges for parks, because of the many different disciplines involved in such attractions, creative company Leisure Expert Group from The Netherlands and German attraction manufacturer ZIERER thought it was a good idea if they worked together to develop a series of dark ride concepts that could be implemented turn-key by amusement parks, and that included everything from story line, media content, to an (interactive) ride system that is more dynamic than most other systems available in the market. And at the same time they agreed to keep these concepts within strict budget restraints, to make sure many parks would have access to them.



Image courtesy of and copyright by the Leisure Expert Group

So in September, at the IAAPA Expo Europe in Barcelona, six concepts will be introduced to the market, two in a small layout, two for a medium layout and two for a large layout. Each size will have one concept aimed at smaller children, and another one aimed at a bit older audience. One of these will be "Ragnarok".

We cannot wait to see all these concepts! And you?

More HBL news page 11 | More Mobaro news page 3 | More nWave news page 4 | More TPG news page 2 | More ZIERER news p. 2, 5 & 16

TPG bounces back with IWC Visitor Centre in Switzerland

Despite a challenging year, The Producers Group (TPG) continued to successfully install and developed the construction of the new Next-Gen Luxury Guest Experience at the new IWC Flagship Boutique in Zurich.

The all-new flagship boutique experience, IWC Racing Works will take visitors on a high-tech, high-touch immersive journey into IWC's racing heritage.



A centrepiece of the exhibit, a 1955 Mercedes-Benz 300SL Gullwing (picture: IWC)

This themed retail experience uses a mixture of memorabilia and unique timepieces to showcase the long-standing connection between IWC and the world of automotive engineering and motorsport. Interactivity and virtual reality are integrated to elevate guests' experience in the next level retail design.

Pascal Sbrzesney, IWC Head of Architectural Concepts & Store Planning proudly said, "We knew going into this location was going to be a challenge, creatively we were attempting something we really hadn't done before, and we knew we were pushing the envelope. So, finding the right development and production partners like The Producers Group was paramount."

Lauren Olivarez, Director of Design for The Producers Group stated, "By adding a level of story and customised exploration into the design activation and craftsman moments where the customer is actively integrated into the space and its history along with the personal engagement of selecting a luxury watch. The interior is seamlessly blended with a vintage garage loft design with opulent finishes to create a unique contemporary themed environment".

Contact JNELC as TPG's European partners if you would like to know more.

TPG starts Buyer Financing Program

TPG recently introduced its Buyer Financing Program aimed at potential clients that either procure TPG's design and production services or acquire equipment. Financing tenors of up to 5 years are offered and the approval process for the program may require 3 – 6 months according to The Producers Group. TPG partners with Atrafin, a US-based specialized lender focused on equipment, inventory, and project finance.

ZIERER Spin 'n Play: Round and round and round it goes

With "Spin 'n Play" ZIERER combines the concepts of themed playgrounds with that of carousels creating a new ride for the whole family.

"Children just love carousels. Even more so if they can sit high up on top of the ride," says Martin Weichselgartner, managing director of ZIERER. Early this summer, the expert manufacturing company is introducing "Spin 'n Play", a new park and playground product for the amusement ride industry. "It is going to make children's dreams come true. Colourful, safe and with loads of rotating fun", Martin Weichselgartner is convinced.

Spin 'n Play is going to be fun for more than 30 children and adults at a time. Up to ten figures will be equipped with four individually fitted seats making the landscape of Spin 'n Play a veritable jungle of colours and forms. Impressions that, given the altitude in which the young beholders ride, can even help to improve their depth perception. Seated at an elevation of roughly 1.5 meters above the main platform's surface, passengers will be able to enjoy continuous rotation.


ZIERER's new Spin 'n Play attraction in an Underwater World theme... (image © ZIERER)

Safe & Sound

The main components of ZIERER's Spin 'n Play are made out of painted and galvanized steel. The cover of the rotating platform is made out of high-grade aluminium. For maximum safety, the platform is laid out with protective mats. Additionally, safety brushes are secure the boarding area. This way Spin 'n Play doesn't have to stop whenever passengers of all ages enter or exit.

With Spin 'n Play ZIERER proves that the highest safety standards and maximum fun actually can go hand in hand.

Whatever pleases

Spin 'n Play can be freely customized. Be it a busy construction site, an underwater world, a jungle scene full of exotic animals, or a picturesque village, ZIERER can make it happen.

Everything can be adjusted to fit the chosen theme, even the seats. For a surcharge, the ride can be outfitted with additional chill-areas lining the central play area. The grown-ups will have the opportunity of taking a leisurely rest on these customizable benches while their little ones are enjoying themselves on the central platform.

All of this makes Spin 'n Play the perfect addition for every amusement park.

For more information contact JNELC's Jeroen Nijpels at the Spring Summit here in Belgium or visit www.zierer.com.


...or in a Construction Site theme (image © ZIERER)

Bromilow: RideOps and Mobaro could be the next revolution

With the new release of their ridership app, Mobaro is embarking on a mission to support on-ride workflows but also eventually bring together even more information between the core teams of amusement facilities.

The digitization of attractions management is in full bloom. Maintenance, safety and operations has been a key focus for Mobaro since the beginning, offering a suite of tools to firmly support the often heavy workflows and documentation needed to run a site in an efficient, cost-effective and safe way.

From conversations with many of their customers, what has emerged alongside this movement is the need for a tool that supports the ride operators in their everyday endeavours.



The Mobaro RideOps app free this year (image: Mobaro)

In my 45 years in the industry, I've only ever seen a gamechanger like this once. What we aim to do with RideOps is to both facilitate the on-ride workflows like documenting ride cycle count, number of riders, queue time and more, but that is just part one. While it will work alone, RideOps could potentially revolutionize things when used in conjunction with Mobaro, says David Bromilow, Director of Parks & Attractions at Mobaro.

Roadmap to an integrated solution

RideOps is acquirable as a standalone app that focuses on the on-ride workflows, and, later this year, Mobaro will add more connections to the main platform.

We are truly excited about the app and we can hint that it will integrate with some of the key features of the Mobaro system later this year. This means that the first iteration of the app will offer ridership and more. While the update will involve both ride operator training, notes, integrated checks from the Mobaro CMMS and more powerful features to connect operations, maintenance and safety to a higher degree, says David Bromilow.

In essence, what customers have in store is an appendix to their Mobaro solution that will serve as a full-circle solution – from creating maintenance, safety, and operations inspections, to documenting rider data, to training operators, keeping track of competency and last but not least: Collecting, monitoring and acting all that data in one clear and understandable place.

FREE of charge for the 2021 season

Parks jumping on the RideOps train this year will get it free of charge for the rest of 2021. The first parks started using the RideOps app at the end of April 2021 and the second iteration of the system is forecasted to be ready later this year.



nWave – the "Belgian Pixar"

Over the 25 years of its existence, nWave has become a household name in the field of entertainment. Known for its top-shelf animated attractions and rides, its catalogue has entertained theme park visitors for decades. Its offer also includes an impressive array of critically-acclaimed 3D documentaries that make the joy of museums and other institutional sites around the world.

But nWave also gained fame for its animated feature films, earning its place among the most prestigious international studios. Labelled as the "Belgian Pixar", nWave strives to create state-of-the-art 3D animation. Its latest film, Bigfoot Family, enjoyed a successful theatrical release whose course was unfortunately interrupted by the pandemic. Audiences were still able to enjoy this wonderful family adventure thanks to a distribution deal signed with Netflix. The film did wonders on the streaming platform, reaching the top of its classification, all categories combined, for several consecutive days.

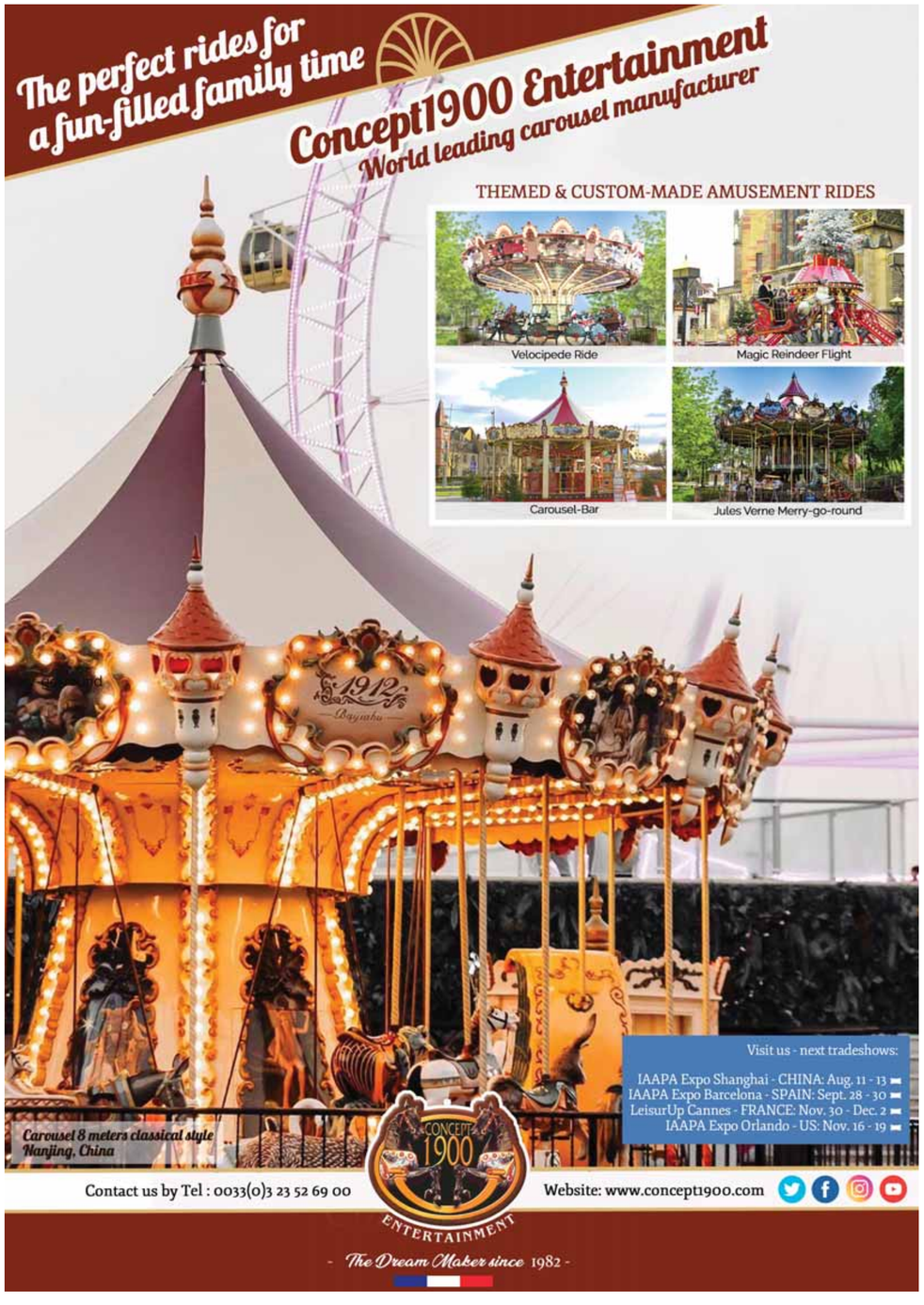


The nWave Studios in Brussels, Belgium (image: nWave)

The nWave studio is currently working on a brand new film, scheduled to hit theatres in 2022. Chickenhare and the Hamster of Darkness will follow Chickenhare, an endearing character who's… Well… Half chicken, half hare.

nWave is excited to welcome a MEET IAAPA event this October offering a unique behind the scenes tour of its animation studio. More details will be revealed on the IAAPA website soon.

This is just the tip of the iceberg: nWave is developing many exciting projects. Stay tuned for more thrilling attractions, rides, documentaries, and feature films. The best is indeed yet to come!



Here is where you can find JNELC's partners at IAAPA EXPO EUROPE 2021:

ZIERER:
Booth Nr. 2-1252

nWave:
Booth Nr. 2-681

HB Leisure:
Booth Nr. 1-410

Mobaro:
Booth Nr. 1-1516

The Producers Group: Contact us

We look forward to see you in Barcelona, Spain September 28-30!

Tornado Springs is open!

For many years, Paultons Park in the United Kingdom has been a very loyal ZIERER customer. Every couple of years, the Mancey family is adding a new attraction from the German ride manufacturer.

So when the park started to plan back in 2017 for a complete new area in the park, it was only natural that they reached out to ZIERER's representative in the UK, JNELC's Jeroen Nijpels, to discuss which attraction in the ZIERER portfolio would fit best. That wasn't an easy task at all, considering that Paultons Park has already numerous attractions from the same supplier.

After careful consideration, they selected the best-selling Family Freefall Tower as the most suitable. And because the park has been growing significantly over the last decade, and they want to avoid disappointment with their guests when it comes to waiting times, the choice was made for a double version of these towers, similar to other larger parks around Europe, including Liseberg in Sweden as well as Europa-Park and Phantasialand in Germany.



2 towers is double the fun!

Originally, the new section, which was named 'Tornado Springs', was scheduled to open in 2020. For obvious reasons, the decision was made to postpone this to 2021. So since April 12 of this year, guests are finally able to enjoy all of the new rides in Tornado Springs. Besides the Double Family Freefall Towers (named 'Windmill Towers') from ZIERER, these rides include the spinning coaster 'Storm Chaser', swing ride 'Cyclonator', driving school 'Al's Auto Academy', slides 'Buffalo Falls', farm ride 'Trekking Tractors' and two playgrounds 'Junkyard Junction' and 'Parking Lot Tots'.

And a new attraction is also already in the works. Next year, the new area will be expanded by a Force Family Roller Coaster. It will be the 10th ZIERER attraction in the park!

JNELC wishes to congratulates Paultons Park on the opening of Tornado Springs and the trust in ZIERER.



ZIERER's Family Freefall Tower (photos: Paultons Park)



Concept 1900 celebrates expansion in China & Russia

Concept 1900 continues to perform their contract with the government of Moscow, which has seen 20 double-storey carousels springing up across the Russian cities. Upholding its tradition, carousels are themed to offer a more differentiated range of rides to the local citizens with various themes: Russian, Indian, French "Normandie", Japanese. Even some figures were especially custom-made for one futuristic style carousel, with black sleek design and neon lights. Another carousel with classical style has been purchased by the city of Cheboksary and will be installed this summer.



The carousel in Yerevan Park (photo: Park Group LLC)

Continuing its growth momentum, Concept 1900 is also expanding in China with the upcoming installation in 2022 of a carousel of 12 meters. The double-storey ride will take place in the theme park of the city of Haiying. In October 2020, the city of Nanjing have chosen a carousel from Concept 1900 classical range to bring joy in a shopping area to families.

Recently, the company had the joy to share the opening of the only theme park in Armenia called "Yerevan Park". The park requested unique choice of figures & custom paintings to fully adapt the design of the carousel with the theme of the park: "All of these have been done by hand and to a high standard corresponding to the pictures we have provided. Moreover, they have a great variety of characters to be chosen from - this has helped to cater for needs for as many children & adults as possible, considering everyone has different tastes", said Gagik Nushikyan, the Director of the Yerevan park.

The carousel manufacturer is leading in its own country too, France, and is working with city councils & shopping malls.

Our strength lies in the customization of each carousel, the high quality of produced products with a high value-added from historic elements, and the great price point. Concept 1900 is able to manufacture light weight carousels that can be used by people of any age from babies to seniors with a smart system for maintenance that does not require much attention gives us advantage among other producers.

At last but not least, the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, has selected Concept 1900 to showcase their carousel at the Élysée Palace in Paris. Only a hundred French companies will be honoured to demonstrate the craftsmanship excellence 100% made in France during the two days, the 3rd and 4th of July 2021.



The First Theme Park in Yerevan

Garegin Nushikyan has a goal to always bring something new and interesting from around the world that is not yet available in Armenia. And this time his goal was to open the first Theme Park in Armenia and to bring happiness, joy, and unforgettable memories to the Armenian people.

More than five years ago Mr. Nushikyan and his son Gagik approached Jeroen Nijpels at the DEAL show in Dubai. At that time nothing was certain but Jeroen knew that something spectacular will happen in Armenia.

The years have passed and on the 15th of May, 2021 Yerevan Park officially opened to the public. Jeroen had the pleasure to go to Armenia and congratulate Gagik and his dad on this special day. Jeroen said: "I always plan to go to park openings, especially when there was such a high involvement. It is spectacular to see where the client has started and where the whole project has come to. The Nushikyan family have done an astonishing job in creating this beautiful Theme Park for the Armenian people and I wish them a fine success."



Gagik and Jeroen on the eve of the Park opening.

Yerevan park has chosen five family rides from the ZIERER portfolio. Starting with a most iconic and classic ride, the Wave Swinger. Flying Flowers are controlled by riders with a joystick that directs the hydraulically operated gondolas up and down. ESC 535, the biggest roller coaster in Armenia. The coaster accelerates to 65 km/h, it is definitely a ride that will bring many great memories for families.

The other two rides were installed at the indoor part of the park. ZIERER best-selling Family Freefall Tower and Kontiki that offers small children and adult audiences a tingling experience. Regardless of age, the Kontiki will make riders all scream with excitement. These rides are bringing fun experiences for the whole family.

The rides are not the only thing that made this Theme Park special. The Nushikyan family had to create park characters and a story. The city of Amoria has a princess Ana and her childhood friend Yan who play a big part in the story.

In the park families can meet four other characters. Zor is the guardian of braveness. He is fearless and powerful - he likes challenging games. He teaches kids how to confront their fears and come out of their comfort zones to discover new things.

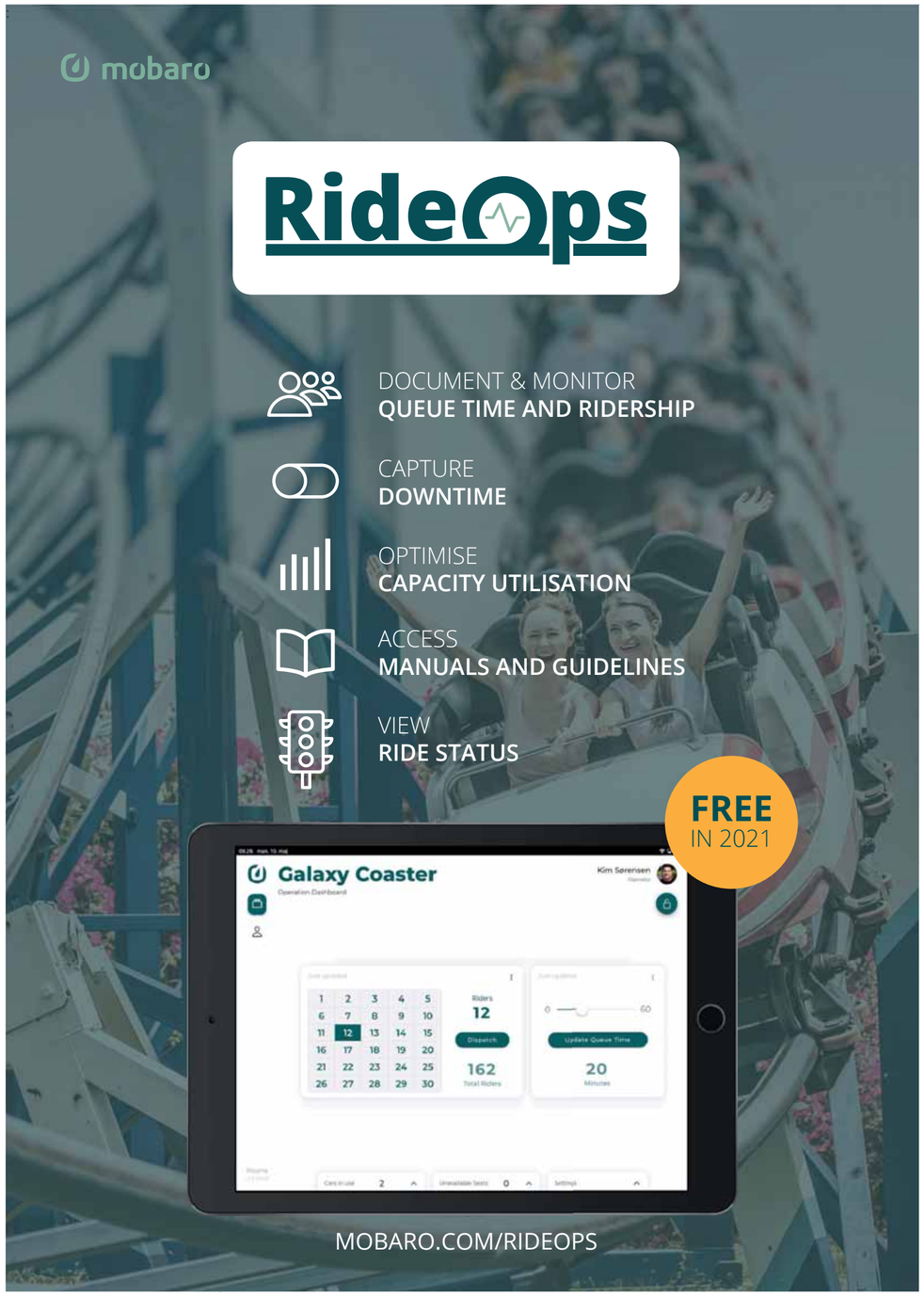
Pinchu is the guardian of curiosity – she questions everything and anything. Her favourite activity is to solve tricky puzzles and learn about new things. She teaches children to pay attention to detail and to study the world around them.

Noonj is the guardian of calmness. He is very sweet, caring, and wise. Noonj teaches kids not to panic in situations and calmly think about all options before making a decision.

Looys is the guardian of joy. She is very sweet and active; she jumps and laughs a lot. Looys loves to organize lively games and tell funny stories to better everyone's mood. Looys is a ray of sunlight – it's impossible to be sad when you hear her contagious laughter.

To know more about Yerevan Park visit their website www.yerevanpark.am.

(See pictures on p. 8&9)





The Family Freefall Tower



The Elevated Seating Coaster 535



The Flying Flowers



The Elevated Seating Coaster 535

Yerevan Park Opening Day



May 15, 2021



Jeroen Nijpels, Gagik & Garegin Nushikyan at the Opening



The Wave Swinger



The Kontiki

(All pictures: Park Group LLC & JNELC)

AMUSEMENT PARK

YEREVAN PARK

JNELC offers social media management service

JNELC provides project, sales and marketing consultancy to businesses in the entertainment and leisure sectors. Partly prompted by a change in business due to the pandemic, we decided to diversify the business.

As a result, we have expanded our marketing consultancy service and offer social media marketing to our partners and other companies. Social media marketing is the use of social media platforms that help companies to increase their sales, build their brand, connect with the right audience, hire the right candidates and increase company website traffic. To achieve that it is important to create engaging content on your social media profiles, analyse the results and run social media adverts.

We were lucky when we hired Georgia in 2018 as she came to us with social media experience and one of her first tasks was to update JNELC social media. Her expertise also came in handy when our partner ZIERER was looking for their social media manager. She has been managing the ZIERER social media accounts for more than 2 years and this is what Marina, Marketing and Sales for ZIERER said: "For some time now, our social media have been successfully and continuously managed by JNELC. With you we have a reliable and experienced partner in our industry to be presented not only successfully but also up to date at any times. ZIERER means fun for families and all ages, thus we have to continuously show rides with happy faces as well as stories to tell, which JNELC assists us to do so. A positive feedback from our customers and riders all over the world is the goal we could reach with your support – thanx for all your work and efforts and the great partnership we share."

Since then, we have started to handle the social media also for Mobaro, and recently we added French quality carousel manufacturer Concept 1900 to the client list as well. With our expertise we can manage and grow your social media accounts too, so your company can focus on more important things like sales.

We are here to share our knowledge with you, feel free to speak to JNELC's Jeroen Nijpels at the Spring Summit or email us if you would like to know more at info@jnelc.com.





Screenshots of JNELC Social Media posts (image: JNELC)

HB Leisure at IAAPA Spring Summit

The whole team at HB Leisure (HBL) is really looking forward to catching up with their leisure colleagues at the IAAPA Belgium Conference this spring. Eddie Lehart, Operations Director said: "It will be great, finally, to see you in person and not on Zoom."

He also wanted to share a few thoughts in advance. Lehart: "To all our LEISURE PARTNERS can I extend a very warm THANK YOU for all your support in these testing times. You have made it possible for us to bring our HBL skill games and arcades offer to your customers in nearly all our 90+ worldwide locations in both 2020 and 2021 - swiftly adapting to the new conditions - which is no mean feat."

HBL would also like to extend a special thanks to their new partners over that period including six SeaWorld Parks and the newly opened Legoland Resort New York in the USA. In Malaysia , the company is expanding into new sites at Resorts World Genting, and in Vietnam they will be working with the Sun World Ba Na Hills Resort this year. The focus on Europe continues with numerous contract extensions with existing partners and new FEC opportunities. "Thank you all, we promise to bring all our HBL passion and expertise to bear to fully justify your confidence in us" says Eddie.

The Covid-19 period has been tough but it hasn't all been doom and gloom at HBL. The company has implemented two major changes to the skill games operations – first and foremost, making the games fully compliant with the new safety requirements. The second change they have made has had some quite surprising results. In many parks, HBL has significantly reduced the number of games on offer. The result has been a notable increase in sales and spends per head. As Eddie notes: "With less games to manage, we have focused even more on the quality of the customer experience….hence the jump in sales."

Once again, HBL is looking forward to seeing you in Belgium, and to have a great season together across Europe over the coming months.

Exclusive interview with IMG Events' Suzy Griffiths

Suzy Griffiths is a Vice President at the Arts & Entertainment division of IMG Events, and is specifically responsible for the design and production of Hyde Park Winter Wonderland in London, UK. Since joining the Winter Wonderland team in 2008 she has become instrumental the event's phenomenal success, transforming it from a small Christmas market to Europe's largest and most popular festive celebration.

You achieved quite a lot in your career, how did you get into entertainment industry?

Like many others I think – in a kind of a round-a-bout way! I did English Literature at University with an idea of working as a journalist, but I realised halfway through that I was much more interested in the creative world, so moved to London and worked in the photography industry for a while. One of the jobs was working as a Photographer's Assistant at the New York, London, Paris & Milan fashion weeks which was pretty gruelling and badly paid, but I got to see some amazing shows. The Alexander McQueen show particularly blew me away – and I knew then that I wanted to be involved in creating emotive and immersive events. From there I worked my way around a wide range of events including flower shows and music festivals, before finally finding myself to a very wintery and magical Hyde Park!

Winter Wonderland is an event which starts in November and finishes in January, what makes you busy the rest of the months?



Suzy Griffiths at Winter Wonderland (photo: Matt Writtle)

It's a question I get asked a lot but honestly – I wish I had 18 months to prepare for each event! The scale, size and high attendance at Hyde Park Winter Wonderland makes it pretty unique and completely different from anything else. We approach it more as a pop-up theme park rather than a temporary event. The 9 months between each one includes sourcing new content, liaising with key stakeholders, renegotiating supplier and operator contracts, refreshing marketing material, updating a lot of procedures and redesigning the site plan. This year has thrown some extra hurdles in the way including COVID mitigation procedures and Brexit implications – it's never a dull moment!

The visitors are expecting something new for Winter Wonderland every year, so it is likely that you have to make some tough decisions when it comes to choosing. What do you do to avoid second-guessing such decisions?

Trying to get that balance between fresh and familiar is pretty tricky. The festive season is all about nostalgia, so many people come and do a certain ride or activity that has become part of their family's annual tradition. That means there are certain 'hero' pieces that I know I couldn't remove without causing an uproar! When assessing any new or established content we ask questions like – Is this beautiful enough to stand on its own as an individual piece? Is it festive themed or can it be adapted to be so? Does it look dated? Is it commercially viable? Is it appropriate for a Royal Park? Does it physically fit? If we're still struggling after answering all those questions, then I'm a big believer in gut-instinct!

You are a Vice President of one of the best events in Europe – Winter Wonderland, what advice would you give to another woman who aspires to be as successful as you?

Although it's great to be open minded to other perspectives, don't second-guess yourself too much. There will be plenty of other people around to do that for you, so consider carefully and stick to your guns. Indecisiveness is the fastest way down!

Also, remember that you've got a seat at the table for a reason. Your opinion is just as valid as any others in the room so don't be afraid of speaking up against apparent received wisdom – even if at first it can be pretty daunting, you will ultimately gain more respect for it.

Finally – roll with the punches! There will be times when things don't go to plan or people don't like what you produce. Learn from all of it and remember that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger!

What is the best work-related advice you have ever received?

'It's nice to be important, but it's important to be nice' is something that my old boss had as a sign in his loo and has never left me! I always try and remember that no matter how high you climb up the ladder you should never let egos or insecurities stop you from being polite and supportive to everyone. There will always be challenging times, but how you treat your peers – especially during periods of high stress or difficulties - will be something that people will always remember you for.

What is the greatest risk you have taken as a professional?

Any time I've done something that I've never tried before was a risk – including convincing an old boss that I could run events despite never doing one before! Also, one of the advantages of running an event compared to a permanent attraction does allow you to test and try out new things each year with various degrees of success – taking risks has helped the event grow and develop, even when things were perhaps not as successful as hoped! Its always good to push the boundaries of your own comfort zone as you never know what new adventures it can take you on.

Could you name a woman who inspired you the most?

No – there are too many to name just one! The event industry is full of amazing women that are nailing it every day, so I'm continually inspired by my team and industry peers. As far as a list of women who have inspired me personally, it would always include Lee Miller, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Zaha Hadid, Es Devlin and my wonderful mum, of course.

Do you have a story for us which till today makes you smile?

I have so many memories that make me smile – the brilliant team and camaraderie on site means that although it can be a bit of a slog working outside for 45 days during a drizzly British winter, there is always some shenanigans going on! I remember for one of my birthdays the team arranged a Winter Wonderland treasure hunt for me – I had to find mini bottles of Jack Daniels dotted all around the event including one frozen in ice at the Magical Ice Kingdom, and another in the Circus where I had to be lifted by the Strong Man to get it – it was hilarious!

Exclusive interview with Steve Van den Kerkhof

During this Spring Summit, we are visiting Plopsaland De Panne. JNELC sat down with keynote speaker and CEO of Plopsaland, Steve Van den Kerkhof to ask him some questions.

Steve, you have joined Plopsa group in 1999, what made you choose entertainment and leisure industry? Also, we are curious to know what did you do before joining Plopsa Group?

At school I was asked by the CLB (Student Guidance Centre) what I wanted to do when I grew up. My answer was clear: I wanted to work in a theme park. I asked them what I had to study for that. But, at time there weren't real leisure orientated studies at school. During an exercise at school, we needed to talk with someone of that specific business. As it was difficult to find someone who was working in the theme park sector, they put me in contact with a hotel owner.



Steve Van den Kerkhof in Majaland (photo: Plopsa)

Later, I decided to study economics. I worked several years as an auditor before I got in contact with Studio 100 and started to work for Plopsaland.

You have achieved quite a lot in the past 20 years, what inspired you to keep on growing the company?

My shareholders have always said that they wanted to grow in an organic and qualitative way.

We always try to push the boundaries and try to set up the bigger picture for the next 3 to 5 years. When we started in 2000, we only had one outdoor park, Plopsaland De Panne. Today, our business model counts 4 activities - outdoor theme parks, indoor theme parks, water parks and overnight stay – in 4 countries.

In 2005, we opened our first indoor park, only two hours driving from De Panne: Plopsa Indoor Hasselt. Then, we went to the French speaking part of Belgium where we took over Télécoo, which is now Plopsa Coo. Due to the popularity of the characters outside of Belgium, we thought it would also be nice to go international, so the Netherlands was, with Plopsa Indoor Coevorden, a logical step. After Coevorden, we had Germany on our map, where we took over Holiday Park. As our business plan was growing, we went in 2015 in another direction and decided to open our first water park: Plopsaqua De Panne, next to our first and biggest park Plopsaland.

In the meantime, we got in contact with Martijn Van Rheenen and Tomas Novak. That is how Poland and the Czech Republic came into the picture. When you see that your first water park is a bit on the small side and that there is a lot of potential on other places in Belgium, we decided to build a separate water park on the border of the Dutch speaking city of Landen and the French speaking city of Hannut; Plopsaqua Hannut-Landen.

Then, we got to opportunity to buy the campsite that bordered Plopsaland De Panne; Camping Ter Hoeve. The campsite is currently converted into a holiday resort. The touristic area for tents and mobile homes has been renewed completely, and within a few years we are going to open decorated holiday houses over there. We also recently opened our first Plopsa Hotel, next to the entrance of Plopsaland De Panne. With its nostalgic theatre theme, we have managed to create one of the most unique hotels in Belgium!

Looking further into the future, we are going to build a hotel in one of the nicest places in Wallonia, next to the famous waterfalls of Coo. And we are also expanding the model of Plopsaland De Panne to Holiday Park, with a water park and hotel. In Poland we go from 1 park to 4 parks, with the construction of the park in Warsaw well on its way.

What I think is very important is that we follow the tempo of the company and that the company follows the tempo of Plopsa.

Do you have a role model which instrumented your success?

I still look up with great admiration to what Bobbejaan Schoepen and his wife Josée have realized at Bobbejaanland. On a large scale, you can see the same thing at Europa Park. I am very impressed by the achievements by Roland and Michael Mack. I think these are two parties who have put their heart and soul into their product, and you can see and feel that at their parks. And with Plopsa, of course, I'm trying to do the same.

What makes / keeps you motivated for running Plopsa Group?

Every day is different. We have only positive problems, growth problems. We don't really have any negative problems. I think it would be much less fun if you were faced with cuts, having to take something away, etc.

You seem very goal orientated and passionate in your career, what is your motto?

I compare the theme park sector to a café, where the owner must put the right persons on its right place. It is a puzzle that you have to make. The wrong person on the wrong place can make a big difference.

What is your morning ritual before starting your working day?

Every morning I put on my jukebox from the 50s and drink a Coke Zero. There are also two newspapers that I read every morning. Het Laatste Nieuws, always a bit more fun and then you also know a bit more about the showbiz, and De Tijd, for more economical topics.

When choosing a supplier for your park, what is important for you?

For us, trust remains the basis of good cooperation as it always concerns about a lot of money. In our first years, until 2003, we weren't quite aware of the quality of and differences between suppliers. However, you notice very quickly who are the best suppliers in terms of price, quality and after sales support. Also here, you have to find the right person on the right place, someone who will make you happy the first time and will do its best to do that the next times as well.

Plopsa Group have purchased more than 25 ZIERER rides, what made you choose ZIERER?

We have a very good relationship with Jeroen Nijpels, which is based on mutual trust. We feel that Jeroen is backed up by the complete team of ZIERER. He knows

(continued on page 14)

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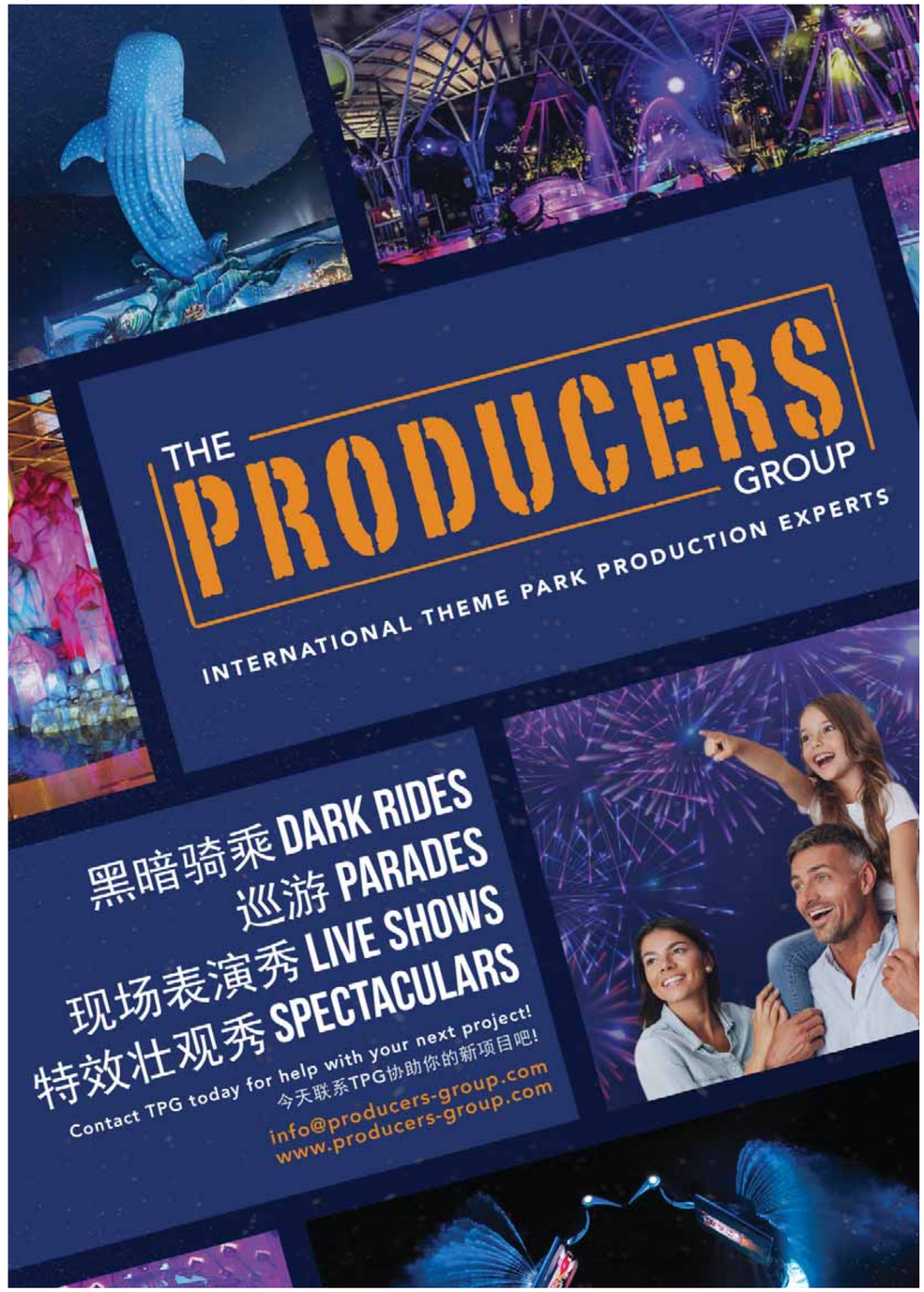
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(continued from page 13)

his products and is very flexible, as he always tries to find the balance between the customer and supplier. In case of problems, Jeroen tries to solve everything in a correct way. He does much more than selling an attraction, he looks for solutions.

I think that he is just as passionate about what he does as what we do at Plopsa.

You are opening two new Plopsa parks, another one in Poland and a new location in Czech Republic. Why have you chosen these locations?

There are a lot of opportunities and possibilities in Eastern Europe. In the past, most of the theme parks in central Europe started as family businesses. Nowadays, theme parks are much more capital intensive, and so it is very difficult to start up new parks. We have done the calculation for ourselves: in Belgium and the Netherlands the average inhabitant visits an amusement park 0,6 times per year. In Poland, this is 0,06 times per year. This is mainly because there are almost no amusement parks over there. The difference with big private equity groups is that we also build new parks, and not only buy existing parks. This makes us a little bit unique.

What advice would you give to others when planning a Theme Park?

The best advice I can give is that you have to start with a realistic business plan. You can't build the things that you dream of at night. You have to translate this dream into a realistic project and you have to translate a realistic business plan into a beautiful dream that you can show to other people. The two have to be in balance.

Can you share some future plans of Plopsa group? Something that would be very exciting for the public to hear?

We are currently planning a 27th and 28th ZIERER attraction, but that Jeroen is not yet aware of which ones these will be… ☺

Clubhouse, the new kid in social media land

Have you heard about the new kid on the social media network, Clubhouse? The audio chatroom Clubhouse launched one year ago, and we called it a truly pandemic era app. The app exploded in popularity because of celebrities like Oprah, tech personalities like Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg who hosted chat and help promote the social network.

The defying features of exclusivity and invite-only were keeping those invitations to VCs, founders, and people who knew one another for quite a while. The app that we can't get on to, is a bit easier now – you just need to download the app and wait for a friend in your contact list who is already a member to approve you in.

Upon opening up the app you will see the variety of rooms, where discussions are ongoing, that set it apart from other social media experiences. While you have a range of conversations that are going on, what we like about the platform is that it encourages you to put your CV in to your profile, seeing other users where they work and what they are interested in. The best part of the audio content is being able to listen in while you are doing other things.



One user who has benefitted from the Clubhouse app is our very own Managing Director, Jeroen Nijpels who hosted a room together with Gagik Nushikyan of Yerevan Park in Armenia. The room gained traction from the Armenian community as everyone was excited and overjoyed over the news of the first amusement park to open in Armenia. Since then, Jeroen DM's has been flooded with enquiries and connections from like-minded individuals. This is a powerful tool for brand marketing on social media network.

To date, Clubhouse has 10 million weekly active users, up from 600,000 in December 2020 and it is now available to Android users too. Jump on the bandwagon, approach us for an invitation to Clubhouse!



(picture: Unsplash)

JNELC in Covid times in 7 pictures



Mika during a pit stop at the Marina Barrage during a round island loop cycling in Singapore.



Jeroen and his daughter Emily visiting Europa-Park with the appropriate safety measures in place.



Georgia (top right) in one of many Zoom calls, here catching up with her TEA NextGen friends.



Georgia still made it to the USA during the pandemic and is seen here trying out ZIERER's Vebolten coaster.



Jeroen found a new place to conduct his industry-related Zoom calls: The Upside Down in Amsterdam.



Mika while exploring the rainforest trail that she enjoys during her weekly runs to remain active.



Georgia visiting industry friend Lexi Liu during her travels to the USA, a challenging trip in pandemic times.

JNELC Project Consultancy focus on Wheels

Besides being the sales agent for various suppliers in the industry, JNELC has also been involved in various consultancy projects over the years. Some of them focus on stand-alone giant observation wheels.

Since October 2020, JNELC has been retained by a client in the United Kingdom to be the project consultant on the supply and installation of a 35 meter observation wheel, which will be the centre piece in a highly visible urban regeneration project. If all goes well in terms of planning permission, this project should be open in the second half of 2022. More news will be announced by the end of this year or early 2022.



The Eye On Malaysia during installation (pictures: JNELC)

One of the bigger projects in the past was the sourcing, financing, installation and putting into operation of a 60 meter observation wheel in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. After initially being asked by the client, a creative agency hired by the Ministry of Tourism of Malaysia just to source a semi-portable observation wheel (since it was a temporary project), JNELC also arranged for the funding of the project.

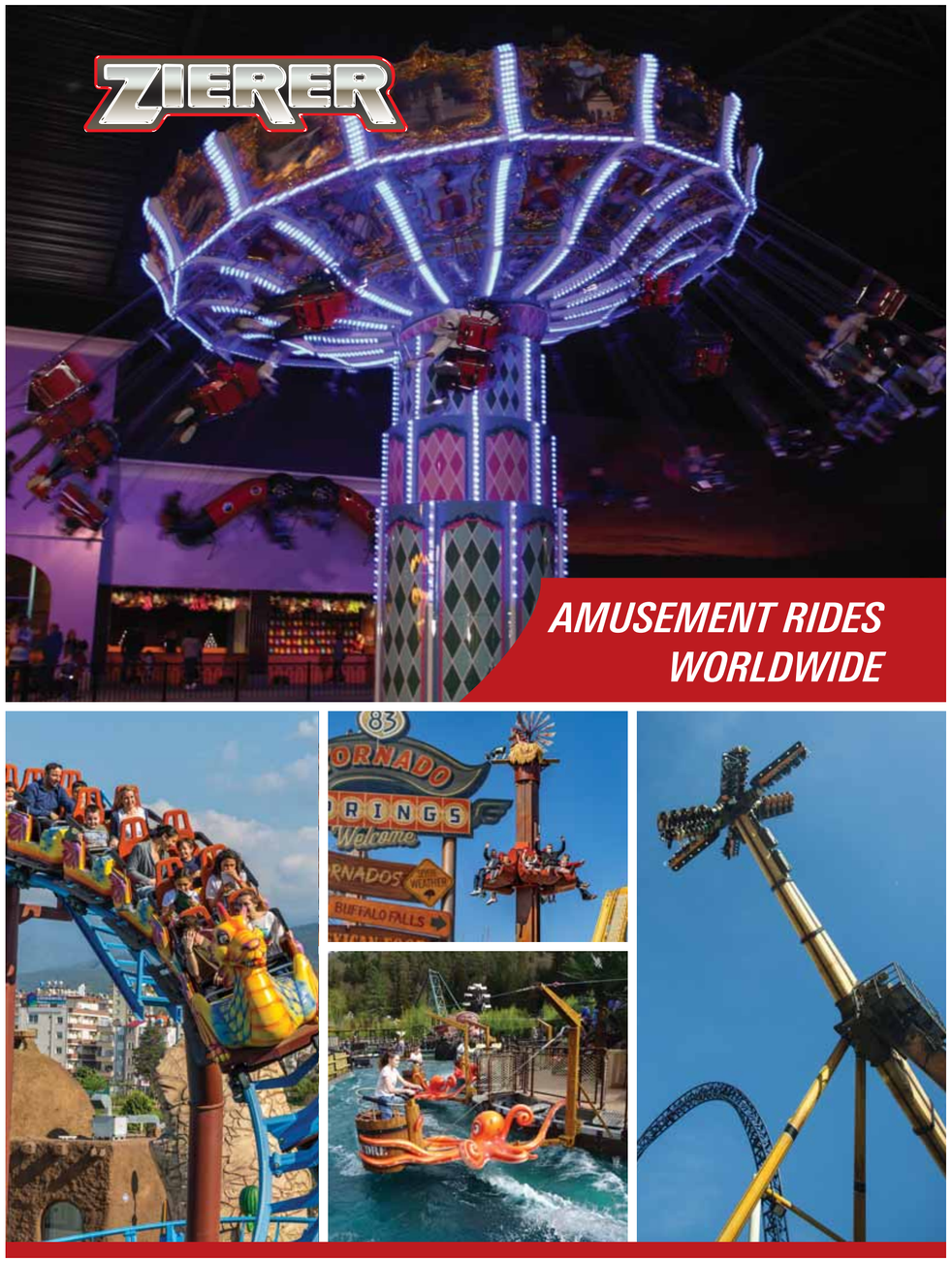
And once the sourcing and financing of the wheel was in place, the scope of work for JNELC was then expanded to the actual installation of the attraction as well as setting up the operations, including hiring staff, preparing the marketing and ticket sales activities, et cetera.

Initially, the project that became known as the 'Eye On Malaysia' was planned to run only for 12 months. In those 12 months, the wheel generated over 100,000 visitors a month, on average, and so the client decided to add another 8 months, the longest extension possible due to restrictions in the lease. In total, about 2 million guests enjoyed the views over the skyline of Kuala Lumpur and beyond.



The Wheel at opening night

As part of the project, JNELC in collaboration with the manufacturer of the wheel (Ronald Bussink) also helped the Malaysian authorities in improving their knowledge on safety inspections and approvals, by introducing the TÜV inspection body to the approval process. This ultimately led to a significant increase in safety in amusement rides in Malaysia.



Two ZIERER ride packages for Majaland Warsaw & Prague

Two ride packages consisting of three ZIERER rides: Force Two Family Coaster, Family Freefall Tower and Kontiki, were signed by the Plopsa Group in cooperation with JNELC who brokered the deal for two Plopsa Group's new projects in Warsaw and Prague.

Majaland Kownaty in Poland was no doubt a huge success that led to the Plopsa Group and Dutch investor Momentum Capital to continue their expansion in opening the second Majaland amusement park in Warsaw. All three ZIERER rides themed after Vic the Viking will be delivered and



ZIERER's Family Freefall Tower in Sunflower theme

installed in Majaland Warsaw in the indoor area of the park with the same setup as in the indoor in Majaland Kownaty. The new amusement park is located in a mixed-use shopping complex called Projekt Góeazka and is expected to be open in the first half of 2022.

Another city that is going to welcome the popular Majaland amusement park is in Prague, Czech Republic. Known as the largest indoor amusement park in Czech, the Plopsa Group has teamed up with Kaprain Group and TNI Group to bring the attractions loved by kids and their parents. The Family Freefall Tower will be themed in sunflower decoration and the Kontiki is themed in a wooden log style similar to the Maja the Bee theme in Majaland Plopsaland de Panne, Belgium, whereas the Force Two Family Coaster will have the same Vic the Viking theme as in the Majaland parks in Poland. The amusement park will be connected to a Premium Outlet Mall which is located next to the Prague Airport. Construction is moving ahead of time and with an ambitious schedule to open around November 2021 just in time for this season's Xmas shopping.



Plopsa's Steve Van den Kerkhof & Momentum's Martijn van Rheenen at project start in Warsaw (photos: Plopsa)

JNELC would like to thank its partners & clients for a great cooperation.
We look forward to our continued mutual success in the future!

Please visit our partners at the IAAPA EXPO EUROPE from September 28 to 30, 2021 in Fira Barcelona Gran Via:

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