

Waldameer Park, Inc. ISSUES & INNOVATIONS 5/15/2025

Steve Gorman, President

“Waldameer & Water World is proudly family owned and operated. Waldameer is currently the sixth oldest continuously operating amusement park in the United States...” ... “We are easy to get to on the shores of Lake Erie just before the entrance to beautiful Presque Isle State Park in Erie, Pennsylvania. Waldameer proudly offers FREE Parking, FREE Admission into the amusement park...”

When one speaks with the president of a successful family company that's been in business since 1896, it is apparent they have overcome numerous issues during 129 years and that they have innovated numerous times.

Think of it. A seasonal business that runs early May until Labor Day has 81 days to make enough money to cover an entire year's bills and then bank some for the future. Keep in mind that weather can be a friend or foe.

Steve Gorman has been with Waldameer for 30 years. The park has survived the ups and downs of the economy because of affordability, the Waldameer niche. With free admission, a safe environment, and free parking, people can pay per ride or utilize budget-friendly options including day passes and season passes. This is a terrific way to attract families with kids, mortgages, childcare costs, and other major expenses.

Their 19 picnic pavilions serve patrons well. Waldameer has a steady group business with scouts, churches, family reunions and company gatherings. Advertising helps promote the park for families and groups. Aside from their website they use social media, billboards, TV, and radio marking a move away from the days of mailed flyers.

During Steve's 30 years at Waldameer they have added 18 new rides and tripled the size of the water park. The importance of new rides and attractions cannot be overstated. Ninety per cent of their customers are from Erie, and often repeat customers.

Adding new rides each year introduces another set of problems. Waldameer is land-locked and at times was overcrowded. In 2023 they purchased 13 additional acres to add to the 52-acre grounds. That provides room to grow the crowd and parking capacity for years to come.

Waldameer is family-owned, and family operated. Of the 25 year-round employees, 4 are family. During the off-season, the staff research and constantly look for the next new thing. During the season they employ on average 650 part-time workers. Seasonal workers do not qualify for traditional benefits, but they do receive attractive

perks, to keep them interested, motivated, and eager to return the following season. On average 56% return.

Steve noted there are different shifts available to meet the workers where they are. College students often want lots of hours to help pay school expenses. Some work other jobs and are happy with weekend hours. Flexibility on Waldameer's end is key.

We touched on the pandemic. 2020 was devastating; they were not permitted to open until mid-summer and revenue was down over 70%. Then in 2021, business really rebounded. People had stimulus cash to spend. Sounds good but the park was overwhelmed because they had less staff. As most businesses experienced, people did not want to return to work, especially in face-to-face jobs. Significantly increasing wages attracted more employees the following summer of 2022.

To continue growing they will need more seasonal employees. Workforce is adequate now, however, with an eye to future expansion they will have to address the problem of attracting employees. Workforce will be an issue, and like other businesses it may impact the ability to grow.

In conclusion, President Steve Gorman is a dedicated and empathetic leader, working 80 hours per week in season and 50 hours per week off season. What motivates Steve? What makes it all worth it? He recalls the times when he's hired young 14-year-olds that he learns come from a fragmented household. The kids will work for several years to save up money for post-secondary education. They learn soft skills, responsibility and develop a work ethic. Then twenty years later they return to the park with their kids to say hello to Steve. For Steve that is a very rewarding part of his job - knowing that he provides opportunities for young people to take that first step into the workforce.

Congratulations Waldameer for your years of serving the Erie community and have a wonderful 2025 summer season!