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Introduction

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POSTSCRIPT

DEDICATION

Guest Editor

Dr. Bob Lee

Tim O'Brien is an entertainment journalist with many articles and books about theme parks. He has documented the history of theme parks, and has been intimately involved in commenting on important issues. He is the only journalist in the IAAPA Hall of Fame. His accomplishments have been well-recognized, but the primary reason for this dedication is because of his passion. It is not very often that you meet a professional with his enthusiasm toward themed events. He is truly a treasure to the theme park industry.

Source of information about Tim O'Brien:

<https://www.thewgmagazine.com/2016/12/08/interview-with-tim-o-39-brien-iaapa-hall-of-famer/>

THEME: THEME EVENTS

The purpose of this issue is to review some of the important concepts dealing with the future of theme parks and events. Obviously, COVID-19 has had a tremendous impact upon the travel industry and associated businesses. Theme parks have lost significant amounts of money because of the need to fight the virus through closure. The larger operations obviously have greater diverse revenues and are able to weather the pandemic better than smaller operations. When gate revenues are the primary source, the influence of the virus has been devastating. The important question is what the future of parks and theme events is and how they are going to be able to compete effectively.

It is important to recognize that this Journal is dedicated to Tim O'Brien. The reason he was chosen for this dedication is because of his insight and perception. He is a bridge between the old and the new. He is an individual who has always had a futuristic perspective.

This issue is composed of seven presentations. The first of the presentations is an article from an interview with Tim O'Brien that involves a stream of consciousness approach about important concerns. His interview was developed into a position statement.

The second article was an interview with Bob Blundred that was completed for an earlier issue. A member of the editorial staff went through this previous interview to determine some of the elements that would have potential application today. Bob was Executive Director of the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions during one of its golden eras. He was an individual like Tim O'Brien, a visionary that knew how to accomplish change.

These first two articles give a perspective on traditional methods and some of the major principles that can be applied to operations today. The third article is by Dr. Jack Samuels. Since COVID-19 is such an issue, this is an essential perspective because of the pre-, pandemic, and post-pandemic periods. Each of these different time frames have taken a different perspective, but the most important is the post-pandemic time frame and the recovery. This article provides an overview of potential strategies to help operators and suppliers understand possible actions.

The fourth article is by Dr. Bob Lee and Lei Jin. The primary emphasis is the examination of the structure and function of family-based theme parks, especially in the small and medium operations. It is recognized that the larger operations like Disney and Universal Studios have a great diversity, which extends beyond families. In the earlier history of theme parks, these small- and medium-sized operations were the backbone of entertainment. This article provides a new perspective of how family entertainment may be developed in the future. It is recognized that these small and medium parks will still have an important role in family entertainment. This also represents a regional perspective, which probably will be the initial visitation pattern during pandemic recovery. Families will be more likely to visit where they have a high degree of familiarity.

The fifth article by Dr. Liu and associates is a continuation of a new perspective for theme events. One common thread through the old and new approaches is a psychographic and cultural perspective. This particular study analyzes Las Vegas and Orlando to identify differences. The history and culture of an area must be developed or understood in order to create an effective theme park in a particular region or country. This is not a definitive study, but only suggests that there are basic elements that must be comprehended for future planning. Themed cultural events, to be successful, have to incorporate psychographic factors that influence the individual. This is going to be an essential ingredient in the design and implementation of parks. New technologies are the frontier of the future, but it is the insight into individual behavior that will allow for success.

The sixth article by Dr. Freitag is an example of how communication should be provided pedagogically. The nature of communication with the visitor is very important and tied to how a park is used on a personal level. It is this type of interactional structure that will help the park develop a personal approach to achieving greater satisfaction. This does not suggest the traditional approaches have not been effective, but it illustrates the importance of communication effectiveness in the future.

The seventh article is based upon an interview with Emma Jones on technological approach and how a park can be managed so that the resources within the park can be more effectively utilized. The basic nature of the interaction is one of information dissemination to achieve greater client satisfaction and park effectiveness. Whereas in the sixth article, the approach is more on an interactional, personal communication and a non-technical approach, this article brings into focus how digital technology, such as smartphones and apps, can be used to personalize the experience. It is obvious that in the future both types of approaches will need to be used to achieve effective park design and operations.

The traditional approaches are still effective, but it is important to develop new methods involving personal communications and interactions to make parks more effective. This type of approach must be based upon a consistent psychographic and cultural environment. There must be integration in order to achieve greater effectiveness, given the sophistication of the visitor. A complete traditional approach has to be modified using methods similar to the ones identified in the Journal articles.

Historical Resource:

<https://www.bobvila.com/slideshow/14-abandoned-amusement-parks-and-what-they-look-like-now-404519>