

Belmont Park aims to become major San Diego tourist draw

Mission Beach fun spot gets a needed makeover

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SAN DIEGO, Calif. — Like many seaside amusement spots, Belmont Park in Mission Beach has seen the tides of fortune rise and fall several times in its 89-year history. The recent recession, particularly, had exacted a heavy toll on the historic property — landing its leaseholder in bankruptcy.



But things are looking up in the immediate vicinity of the landmark Giant Dipper roller coaster. A local hospitality company called Eat.Drink.Sleep., in partnership with the Rancho Santa Fe, Calif.-based real estate investment concern Pacifica Enterprises, which acquired the park leasehold in a 2012 trustee sale, has been developing concepts and plans, and making major improvements, at Belmont since last year.

Brett Miller, CEO of Eat.Drink.Sleep., told Amusement Today that the partnership's investment through the end of 2014 alone will total in the "tens of millions" — and it includes several recently opened restaurants, a renovated and expanded arcade, and new zip line and rock-climbing wall attractions, plus an extensive overhaul of the seven-acre park's badly deteriorated indoor pool facility, The Phoenix. "I wouldn't say that we had ever considered an amusement park," said Miller, pointing out that his company's business focus has primarily been restaurants and hotels. "But the underlying discipline of the whole thing is hospitality — taking great care of our guests, providing a good product and something that families can enjoy. "When Pacifica asked us what we thought of Belmont



Among the highlights of Belmont Park's ongoing, multi-million-dollar makeover are new landscaping and lighting, a zip line attraction, refurbished surfing wave machines at the WaveHouse (shown here), a renovated arcade with expanded game and laser tag offerings, and a refreshed mini-golf course. COURTESY EAT.DRINK.SLEEP.

Park two years ago, we said we thought. It was an incredible asset of the community in San Diego. If there was anything we could do to bring it to the forefront of the city's tourism, we wanted to be part of it."

Eat.Drink.Sleep. was brought in to stabilize Belmont's operations after Pacifica pulled the park, which is home to 13 tenants, out of bankruptcy. "The roller coaster and amusement side was not in bankruptcy; those guys were in good health and doing well," Miller said. "The [problem] was more the other two-thirds of the park — the wave-riding attraction, the food and beverage operations and the athletic club."

Miller and his team immediately identified a major problem at the park: obstructed views of the boardwalk and Pacific Ocean.

"Our biggest task has been removing every [visual] obstacle we could along our 700 linear feet of oceanfront. For example, there was a restaurant kitchen that blocked about 100 feet of our footage. We pulled that down and it immediately opened up the views to 300 seats inside."

Another obvious opportunity was a large, flat, unused rooftop with expansive views. Eat.Drink.Sleep., investing \$150,000 to install a needed elevator, has converted the area

into a valuable 5,000-square-foot seaside venue for weddings, parties and other special events hosting up to 400 guests. The space was expected to be ready for its first bookings early this month.

Thus far, Eat.Drink.Sleep.'s efforts are paying off. Per Miller, guest counts are up 20 percent over 2013, with food and beverage revenue up by the same amount and arcade revenue also showing a double-digit increase.

Other improvements include new landscaping and lighting, new and expanded restrooms and, on the horizon, several new rides. Having just opened Draft, a craft brewery / tasting room, and upgraded and expanded the property's other eateries, Miller expected to attract additional, high-profile chain restaurants.

Miller was bullish on his larger partnership with San Diego.

"The city is very pleased with us," he said. "The park had been in such poor repair; the prior ownership went through the recession and it was a difficult time for everyone. We are focused on good family entertainment and making it one of the city's top attractions."

"San Diego is a tourist town, and as far as seaside parks go, Belmont is it. We're very excited."

www.belmontpark.com