



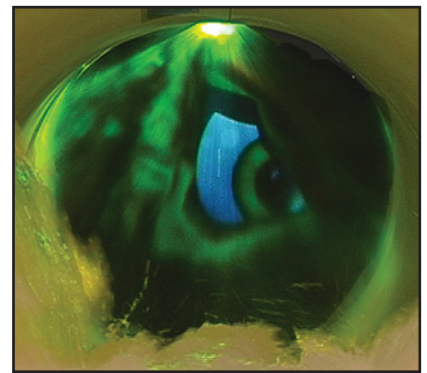
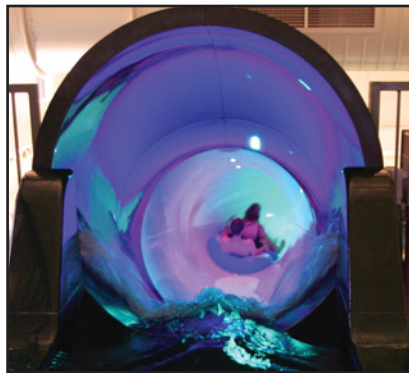
Virtual Ride— Real Slide

Special-effects technology brings water slide to life

Ever wonder what it would feel like to slide into the jaws of a shark? Although it sounds daring and dangerous, it is now possible thanks to technology created by Mike Werner's Chicago area-based Lasertech Productions Inc.

"There's nothing new about themed rides, but there's never been one before that you can change," says Werner.

King's Pointe Waterpark Resort in Storm Lake, Iowa, is home to the first interactive water slides. The waterpark—part of a larger, \$39-million lakefront revitalization project called Project Awaysis—is in its second summer season. The resort boasts a 20,000-square-foot indoor waterpark and an outdoor one featuring a family pool with six lap lanes, lily pad walk, splash pad, spray island and water slides. It features two interactive slides—the Electric Eel, a 291-foot indoor slide,



Depending on the kind of thrill riders are seeking, themes range from scary to fun to accommodate everyone.

and the Discovery Plunge, a 420-foot enclosed raft ride for two in the outdoor park.

"The whole effort here is to create a destination when we haven't been one in the past. We thought if we're going to be successful in doing that, we have to create something that's different, something that's unique," explains Mike

Wilson, Project Manager/Community Development Director for the City of Storm Lake. "The slides fit into that process."

Industrial Revolution

What exactly is an interactive water slide? Werner says his product is the brainchild of many years in the special-effects industry. "[We] felt it was the right time to miniaturize our ideas for the waterpark industry," he says.

Riders simply choose from one of eight themes on a touch screen mounted at the top of the slide or platform. The themes are divided into two main categories—fun or scary. Around every twist and turn, riders are greeted by flashing lights, sound and fog effects, music, video and water screens before plummeting into a pool at the bottom of the ride. Special effects used in the themes range from sea creatures, storms and dinosaurs to hot air balloon rides and butterflies.

"Our signature slides are definitely



PHOTOS COURTESY LASERTECH PRODUCTIONS, INC.

Of all the attractions at King's Pointe Waterpark Resort in Storm Lake, Iowa, the virtual reality water slides draw the biggest crowds.



Flush surface mount system.



Weatherproof UL Enclosure



Speaker Installation

our virtual reality slides,” says Nick Edwards, assistant general manager/waterpark director. “There is always a line and kids will wait and wait. Every time they go down the slide, their mouths are wide open. That just sums it up right there.”

While riders enjoy the thrill of the ride, operators can catch a glimpse of the most popular features of the slide through a tracking device that can be viewed online. Edwards says the most

compelling data are the number of users per day and the number of times each theme is selected per day.

What are the most popular choices? “Definitely the shark and dance mania,” Edwards relates. “There are a lot of lights and music in the dance mania choice.”

Edwards says other themes can be added for special events, such as Halloween, Christmas and the Fourth of July. Custom themes also are available.

“People like a little scarier ride,”

Edwards notes. “Depending on our clientele that day—whether there’s a lot of teenagers—the shark is usually one of the most popular choices.”

Edwards said he couldn’t resist the temptation and had to see what all the fuss was about, so he took a plunge down the slide himself:

“It’s amazing. Really, it’s a good ride,” he says. “I’ve been in the aquatics and waterpark industry for eight years, and I’ve never seen anything like it.”



Adding It All Up

Besides lights and music, Werner says another attractive feature of the slides is that it can be phased in over time. Designed to fit new or existing 54-inch water slides, the technology allows those on a fixed budget to add components here and there until the ensemble is complete.

For example, skylights, rainbow lights, black lights and music all can be purchased in separate packages.

“The one thing I’m proud of is that I’m trying to give the little guy the ability to compete with a multi-million dollar park,” Werner says.

He notes the technology that can spruce up any city pool or resort slide is only a fraction of the price of the attractions at nationwide franchise parks.

Wilson says the cost of the Electric Eel slide was \$281,000 and \$433,000 for the Discovery Plunge. The costs reflect the price of the slide, lights, video screens, skylights and hardware to install the virtual technology.

These costs do not include the slide towers, related equipment, rafts, etc. “The reaction of customers is terrific. Kids love it, adults like it,” Wilson asserts. “It’s hard to know what you’ll experience, but when you hear the reaction [from patrons] you know it’s a hit.” **PRB**