

National Roller Coaster Museum and Archives completes new 2,600-sq.-ft. Texas building

History preserved.

A 2,600-square-foot building stands in an empty field in Plainview, Texas. It is filled with memories. Glee-filled screams and afternoons of smiles sit on its shelves. In its new building, the National Roller Coaster Museum and Archives houses tens of thousands of artifacts, papers and archives, but among the most exciting items in their collection is the assortment of ride vehicles that span the age of the amusement park.

"While it might not be the Smithsonian, it can easily compare to the proverbial candy store for the thousands who have enjoyed what the industry has had to offer in the last century. There is a little bit of everything there and certainly something for everyone, even if you had never stepped foot in an amusement park," Richard Munch, NRCMA historian said. "It seems like almost every day something shows up, whether cars, track, photographs, brochures or coffee mugs."

Two major acquisitions recently have taken their rightful place in this archive warehouse adjacent to ride manufacturer Larson International's Plainview offices. A section of track, lead car and attraction signage from Busch Entertainment's (now SeaWorld Parks) Big Bad Wolf formerly located at Busch Gardens in Williamsburg, Virginia. The classic red and black paint scheme on the suspended cars and track manufactured by Arrow sparkles inside the newly constructed NRCMA building.

"Having a full train from



Sections of Texas Giant track, including this piece from the top of the ride's lift hill, await shipment to the NRCMA.

the ride, with genuine track structure, there is no doubt that this will be another signature piece in our collection for some time because of its importance in the development of the suspended coaster. It was a well known and beloved ride, with one of the most unique designs ever conceived integrated into a hillside along a waterfront," Munch said.

The NRCMA also acquired artifacts from the original Texas Giant, which was one of the highest rated coasters in the 1990s, in as much as it was a local and fan favorite following in the heels of the ever popular Texas Cyclone in Houston. Ironically the NRCMA now has parts from both historic Texas coasters for future generations to enjoy. Six Flags management

in Arlington was gracious in allowing museum personnel the opportunity to visit the site, select items like cars, track and signage, all for potential exhibits.

"We felt that this will be an important piece in our collection because of its timely significance in the more recent race to build (or maintain) larger wood coasters, as well as some of the changing technologies in track construction," Munch said.

While the NRCMA building is not open to public tours, it is a first step in the evolution of a dream more than 30 years old. Invited key industry, key vendor and enthusiast groups have toured the facility and more is planned in the future. Several items from the collection are currently on loan for anniversary displays at parks around the country including Dollywood. Rehabilitated Blazing Fury, Thunder Express and Flooded Mine cars are all on display at the park's Hall of Memories display created to celebrate the park's 25th anniversary season.

"It is a great partnership for the museum," Gary Slade, NRCMA board chairman said. "Historically significant parts of the museum's collection are out on loan for display at the originating park, and in return the park rehabs the ride vehicles and returns them to the museum collection."

To make donations or to contact the NRCMA, go to www.rollercoastermuseum.org or contact the NRCMA at P.O. Box 5424, Arlington, Texas 76005 or call (817) 460-7220.



PHOTOS COURTESY NRCMA

The National Roller Coaster Museum and Archives recently completed a 2,600-square-foot building on donated property located next to Larson International in Plainview, Texas. In January, the NRCMA and Larson hosted a barbecue lunch for members of the small parks group, who were having their winter meetings in Amarillo. The facility also recently created a display that pays tribute to the Big Bad Wolf suspended coaster, formally at Busch Gardens Williamsburg (Va.).