



The Real World Foundations Style: Teaching Attendees How to Do It Right the First Time

Featured Locations: Jellystone at Rustic Creek Ranch and Treetop Family Adventure

By Tracy Sarris, Director of Marketing & Communications, Alpha-Omega Amusements

“The Real World” isn’t just a reality TV show on MTV. Sometimes the best way to do something right the first time, is to learn from the mistakes of others and apply real world experience to your educational checklist before ever breaking ground or buying that first attraction.



Jellystone Park at Rustic Creek Ranch, Burleson, Texas

After attending Foundations Entertainment University #22 (FEU) this past April, Ronald ‘Ronnie’ Bowyer (President), Steve Stafford (General Manager) and Scott Tracy (Assistant to the President), of Rustic Creek Ranch in Burleson, Texas, realized very quickly that their initial project plans needed to be reviewed and changes needed to be made that would increase their future income and save potentially lost revenue.

Ronnie Bowyer opened the Rustic Creek Ranch RV Park in 2000, originally named RV Ranch, which provided full site hook-ups, meeting halls, conference halls, a pedal car track, laser tag field, fishing lake, playground and two outdoor pools for their guests. Rustic Creek sits on 69 acres and has a total of 248 RV sites and 37 cottages. Bowyer hired Steve Stafford in 2009 as General Manager and to assist in transforming the park into a “family friendly” destination park. Not long after that, the park changed its name and put up new signs. While looking at other popular RV park destinations, Ronnie and Steve became aware of the Jellystone Parks and liked how these parks met the needs of the whole family. They noticed that those RV parks that had water park attractions and entertainment centers, seemed more attractive and were making more money than those that did not have these attractions. Rustic Creek Ranch has since become part of the Jellystone Park franchise and will be going through renovations this summer to add an outdoor water park and indoor entertainment center.

“After doing the research, we thought we needed a large attraction to get more campers to come to our facility,” said Ronnie. “So we came up with the idea of adding Pirate's Cove Family Fun, our pirate themed water play structure along with a few other amenities. We also felt by adding these attractions, it would help fill our cottages as well. Upon completion of Pirate's Cove, we feel this will put us into the resort type category where families will spend a few days with us and leave with many fun memories.”



“By early 2011, the decision to add a water attraction had already been made and the funding had been approved,” said Steve. “But when it came to considering the games and entertainment portion of the project, we knew we needed to learn a lot more. We had been following Frank Seninsky for a few of years, reading his articles and getting on his e-mailing lists. When we saw that Foundations Entertainment University was coming to Dallas this year and that Frank would be one of the presenters, we knew we had to be there.”

“FEU gave us many more ideas of what we want to add to the facility to make it more of a destination park,” said Ronnie. “It was only after attending Foundations that we realized how much benefit the inside games and attractions could be for us.”

“We also discovered how many loose ends we hadn’t considered (i.e. hours of operations, rates, training, wristbands, food service, how to run a birthday party, and more),” said Steve. “Initially we were not going to use tickets for redemption, but are now convinced that having the tickets in hand is a must for the kids. We wanted an FEC, but didn’t really know what that meant.”

Steve pointed out that prior to taking the position at Rustic Creek Ranch, he had worked in a University for twenty-three years, where they based most of their decisions on research and data presented. He acknowledged that the Foundations presenters were able to provide current and relative data that could be used to make an educated and well-informed decision in their project planning. “The data provided at Foundations is current,” noted Steve. “A lot of ‘experts’ will quote data, but it is often old and of no use. That was not the case here.”

“All the speakers at Foundations were well versed and experts in their fields,” said Steve. “You just took it all in and didn’t want to miss anything. We were able to speak with sponsors as well and are looking to several of them to assist us as we grow and budgeting allows. Our current plans include a Lazer Frenzy by Creative Works and we have spoken to Embed about the benefits of a card reader system and may consider that as a future investment.”



After attending FEU, Ronnie invited Frank Seninsky, FEU presenter and President of Amusement Entertainment Management, to visit Rustic Creek Ranch and provide a Site Visit Report and Action Plan for consideration. Based on Frank’s initial visit, the group very quickly determined that they would need to change the layout of the game room and the placement of the games and attractions, even moving their water park ticket counter, which they had already built into the structure. “We were learning about what worked and what didn’t based on the experiences of others,” said Steve. “When you are talking about investing six figures, you want to make the least amount of mistakes as possible in the process. For every mistake you make it is costing you income.” Steve noted that there were many areas in the site visit report that they had not even considered. From labor needs to local demographics, ticket point formulas to redemption prize centers; it was all very educational and necessary.

The initial plans for the water park had the addition being complete by early fall. Ronnie indicated that they are hoping to have the funds to be able to complete the inside portion of the project as well, but need to consider the budget as they move forward. They are hoping they can continue to work with professionals like Frank and continue to grow the park with additional attractions that will make Pirate's Cove Family Fun a most enjoyable experience for the entire family. By adding the water park attraction and FEC component guests will be able stay and play instead of leaving Rustic Creek to spend their time and money elsewhere. The additions will promote new and repeat business to the RV Park while also drawing new business to the attractions that is separate from the RV Ranch.



To sum things up, Ronnie told us, “I had a remarkable learning experience while attending FEU. I would recommend it to anyone in the family entertainment business. It opened our eyes and made us aware of what to look for while planning our facility. It was a wonderful experience and we came away knowing the best people in the business. We hope to use all of the things we learned from FEU in our construction and development of the FEC part of our facility.”



Tree Top Family Adventure, Birmingham, Alabama

What happens when you bring an entrepreneurial family together with five of the most knowledgeable professionals in the industry and, on top of that, throw in some of the best entertainment product and service providers for entertainment centers? You get a premier family entertainment destination that has far exceeded its first year expectations in attendance and revenue.



Alex Jones, who with his parents, Butch and Alida Jones, and brother-in-law and sister, Richy and Alison Parrish, began looking for a business about two years ago that they could go into as a family. They have always had successful family businesses that they would build up and later sell. When considering this latest venture, the family looked at the current economic conditions and wanted something that was more or less recession resistant. With Richy and Alison being the parents of three young children, they realized that, even in the worst economies, parents will still spend on their children and look for inexpensive ways to entertain them.

They settled on the idea of an indoor/outdoor family entertainment center and shortly thereafter brought in Peter F. Olesen, P.E., President of Entertainment Concepts, Inc. and presenter at FEU, to provide a feasibility study and continued to work with him through the entire process, which included designing an 850-foot concession go-kart track with dual pits (track designed to permit operation in both directions), and an 18-hole handicap accessible miniature golf course with a natural rock waterfall.

The family quickly realized that making the commitment to open an entertainment center was just the beginning. “We had been involved with several businesses before,” said Alex, “but this business is very unique and we really needed to know how to operate an entertainment center successfully.” Alex and Richy went to Foundations Entertainment University to find out what they were getting into. “We needed the knowledge base that FEU gives you to start a business like this,” said Alex. “Anyone can open an FEC, but if you don’t know what you are doing or who your target demographic is, you are not going to do well. We targeted our demographic and we hit it.”

The family was already moving forward with the business plan when they decided they needed to learn more about what they were getting into. In fact, they closed on the property in October of 2009 while Richy and Alex were attending FEU #18. “You don’t know what you don’t know,” said Richy. “Thank goodness we went to Foundations to learn what we didn’t know before it was too late.” As an example, before attending FEU, they had planned on doing very little food service. After FEU they recognized that they really needed to do more in their Café. They learned that people will “come to play, but they eat to stay.” If you provide a variety of good food, instead of leaving your establishment to spend money elsewhere, guests will stay at your facility longer and spend money in your food area.



“Another important thing that Foundations provided for us was the networking,” said Alex. As a result of their experience at FEU, the family hired Frank Seninsky, President of Amusement Entertainment Management and FEU presenter, to handle all the indoor aspects, including design and layout of the indoor floor plan as well as the attraction negotiations and purchases. Alan Fluke, President, Sparians Entertainment Management, LLC, and FEU Presenter, was brought on to help set up the food and beverage design, handle onsite construction and operational training. Much of the equipment, supplies and attractions came from the various sponsors they met while at FEU. They included:

Creative Works - Lazer Frenzy

Bowling Equipment.us - Highway 66 Mini-Bowling (QubicaAMF)

Alpha-Omega Sales - Arcade and Redemption Games and Set Up of Redemption Prize Center

Embed - Debit Card System

Muncie Novelty - Redemption Tickets

Deltronic Labs - Ticket Eaters

Naythons Display Fixtures (now M. Fried) – Redemption Counter

Sureshot Redemption - Redemption and Merchandise Machine Prizes

American Changer - Bill Changers

Lazer Runner - Laser Tag Equipment

Water Wars – Water Wars Outdoor Water Balloon Battle Station.

“The great thing about Foundations was that all of the presenters added a different aspect or experience to the program,” said Alex. “We chose the various consultants and vendors based on what we felt they did best,” added Richy. “Foundations allowed us to use the knowledge and experience of individuals who have been in the business for many years. The best thing we could learn from this group was that our project was feasible.”

“When you meet people like the ones we worked with the closest {Peter Olesen, Alan Fluke and Frank Seninsky}, it created a really great experience. Alan was at the site for a month helping us open up and we still stay in contact for advice as needed; Alpha-Omega Sales continues to review our games/attractions weekly financials and makes recommendations as well as continuing to supply parts and game trade-ins/purchases on a quarterly basis; Peter comes down about twice a year when he is on a trip and will stop by and check the place out. It was a really good experience.”



Butch Jones did not have an opportunity to attend FEU with Alex and Richy since he was busy closing on the property, but he has been an integral part of the process from start to finish. Having not been in the entertainment industry previously, he recognized the value of associating themselves with individuals who had years of knowledge and experience behind them. “This business is fairly complex so the more you can learn on the front end, the less likely you are to make mistakes,” said Butch. “The best thing we could do was to go into this with a structure of operations. From hiring the right employees to knowing the appropriate payout value for a ticket, it was all critical.”

Treetop Family Adventure opened in May 2010 and sits on four acres with go-karts, miniature golf, Water Wars, three outdoor inflatables, and an 18,000 square foot indoor entertainment center that features laser tag, a café, mini-bowling, five party rooms, which are almost always in use, a parents lounge, a toddler softplay area, a Lazer Frenzy and a 70 game arcade. Attendance for the first year has surpassed the initial goals with an estimate that about 100,000 to 115,000 guests have visited their facility since opening. Treetop brought with it 30 new jobs to the area and was awarded the Shelby County 2010 New Business of the Year Award.



To learn more about Jellystone Park at Rustic Creek Ranch, visit www.rv-ranch.com. To learn more about Treetop Family Adventure, visit www.treetopfamilyadventure.com

Foundations is scheduled for two more 3-Day educational sessions in 2011: July 19-21 in Chicago, IL and September 20-22 in Kansas City, MO. Full information and registration is available online at www.foundationsuniversity.com. Please contact Frank Seninsky (fseninsky@aol.com) at 732-254-3773 or Randy White (whiteheg@aol.com) at 816-931-1040 to learn more about Foundations. Scholarships are available – call for more information.

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About Foundations Entertainment University

FOUNDATIONS ENTERTAINMENT UNIVERSITY is a 3-day comprehensive educational workshop and seminar covering all aspects of market & financial feasibility, planning, designing, developing, opening and managing a location-based entertainment business and FEC for long term success.

Foundations Platinum Elite Sponsors: Betson, EMBED, Prime Play, US Bowling.

Foundations Gold Elite Sponsors: American Changer, Creative Works/Theme Factory, Deltronic Labs, DFX Sound Vision, Extreme Engineering, Muncie Novelty, Sterling & Sterling Insurance, Sureshot Redemption, Tokens Direct, Zone Laser Tag/Nexus.

Foundations Gold Endorsement Sponsors: Alpha-BET Entertainment, Birthday University, Comfy Edutainment Centers, GameALERT, ILTA, MUBIG, Tourist Attractions & Parks, US Indoor Sports Association and World Waterpark Association.

Attachments:

FEU Logo

Rustic Creek Ranch – Pirates Cove Logo

Photo 1 – Yogi Bear becomes Rustic Creek’s new mascot after park becomes part of Jellystone Park Camp Resort franchise.

Photo 2 – Rustic Creek Ranch President Ronnie Bowyer (pictured far left) and General Manager Steve Stafford (pictured far right), participating in a team building exercise at Foundations Entertainment University in April 2011.

Photo 3 – Site plans for Pirates Cove water play structure at Rustic Creek Ranch.

Treetop Family Adventure Logo

Photo 4 – Pictured from L to R: Alex Jones, Butch and Alida Jones, and Richy Parrish

Photo 5 – Chelsea Speedway, full-sized car, reversible go-kart track.

Photo 6 and 7 – Treetop Arcade and Redemption Prize Center