

A Breakthrough Concept for Waterparks

Dallas' Bahama Beach Waterpark illustrates the success of inner-city waterparks

By Greg Yost



Having built and managed 16 successful family theme and waterparks over the years, management of HFE-Horizon was reluctant to take on an industry first, a full-fledged waterpark in the inner city of one of the biggest cities in America.

After all, common sense and the management team's 32 years of experience in operating successful parks told them to build family waterparks in upscale, suburban areas where discretionary income is high and the crime rate is low.

But given the commitment of the citizens of Dallas, the elected officials and a Parks and Recreation Department that is known for its innovation and professionalism, HFE-Horizon thought this situation was worth the risk. Fortunately, the risk turned out to be a winner as Bahama Beach Waterpark in south Dallas concluded a very successful first year of operation.

Bahama Beach Waterpark, in the Oak Cliff neighborhood of south Dallas, officially opened on May 27, 2005. Reflecting the ethnic diversity of the community, the grand opening celebration included a steel drum band, mariachi musicians, step dancers and a host of state and local elected officials. Also present were hundreds of excited residents who had been waiting for years for wholesome, family entertainment to come to their neighborhood.

The 6-acre, \$5.5-million facility is a full-fledged waterpark with an 800-foot-long continuous river, 14 waterslides, an aquatics play structure that can accommodate 400 kids at one time, restaurants, picnic areas and shade, shade and more shade.

A Need for Inner-City Recreation

The idea of an inner-city waterpark first took root when Paul Dyer, Dallas Parks Director, commissioned William L. Haralson and Associates to survey and



analyze the aquatic recreation opportunities for the City of Dallas. Even though the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex is the fifth-largest city in the United States, with 5.2 million people, most of the pools serving the citizens of Dallas had been closed due to budget cuts.

Armed with the Haralson study supporting both the need for and the financial viability of a waterpark in the economically challenged south Dallas area, a coalition of neighborhood leaders, elected officials and the Dallas Parks and Recreation Department began their work.

In spring 2003, energized by the concept of having a true waterpark in their neighborhood, the citizens of Dallas overwhelmingly passed a bond to fund the facility.

The Park Had To Stand on its Own

The funding for the construction of the waterpark in south Dallas came with one very important mandate: waterpark operations must be self-funding. In other words, the park had to stand on its own financially and must show a positive cash flow.

Realizing the potential political and financial fallout if the waterpark operation did not meet this critical self-funding mandate, Dyer and the Dallas Parks Board determined that a private management company should be considered.

By Fall 2003, Dyer and his staff prepared a Request for Proposal (RFP) to solicit potential park operators from the private sector. The RFP called for private enterprise to partner with the City of Dallas in the design and operation of the park in partnership with the city. The city awarded the contract to HFE-Horizon in May 2004.

Groundbreaking ceremonies for Bahama Beach took place June 26,

2004, and the park opened about 11 months later.

An Underserved Market

P.Y. Yancy, Park General Manager, says a significant potential for success exists for inner-city waterparks, not just in Dallas but all over the country.

"Within 20 minutes of the park, there are 1.3 million people who are potential waterpark guests. Until Bahama Beach opened, there was no venue in the area for families to experience quality, wholesome entertainment in the form of a waterpark. Because of the forward thinking of the City of Dallas, these families now have their own neighborhood waterpark and do not have to drive an hour or more to the nearest facility."

As far as guest behavior and security incidents, Bahama Beach has had an exceptional record. "We have not had one incident that required outside security. Our employees and guests have been ladies and gentlemen. Our concern about security issues never became a reality," Yancy says.

An Economic Boon for South Dallas

Bahama Beach has proven to be a much-needed catalyst for economic development in the community. In addition to the direct impact of the \$5.5 million spent in the community during the construction phase of the project, the park is the biggest employer of young people in the area providing nearly 200 jobs this

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Bahama Beach Waterpark

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Owners: City of Dallas

Admission prices:

Regular Passport: \$12.99

Junior Passport: \$6.99

2 years and under: Free

Dates open: Memorial Day
Weekend to Labor Day Weekend

Size: 6 acres

Capacity: 3,200

Number of employees: 160

Year-round: 2

Seasonal: 158

Clientele: 90 percent local vs. 10 percent tourist

Future expansion plans: Wave pool, activity pavilion

Unique park programs: Water-safety programs for area youth, numerous private events for area churches.



Within 20 minutes of the park, there are 1.3 million potential guests of the park.

Bahama Beach Suppliers

Development/Design:

Kimley-Horn and Associates

Consultants: HFE-Horizon

Construction: AUI

Waterslides: Whitewater West Industries

Raft/Tubes/Mats: Talburt & Associates

Children's equipment: Whitewater West Industries

Lockers: Lincoln Equipment

Pool/Deck coatings: Tnemec

Chemicals: Sunbelt Pools

Shade system: Sun Ports International

Admission system: Pro-Venue



Bahama Beach is the biggest employer of young people in the area.



summer. Add to that the influx of park visitors from throughout the Dallas/Fort Worth area who are frequenting the restaurants, shopping centers and services in the area, the park is bringing much-needed dollars to the community.

Joel Sontag, President of the Oak Cliff Chamber of Commerce, says Bahama Beach has had a positive economic impact on the area. "People from throughout the Metroplex now have another reason to visit the Oak Cliff area. Bahama Beach not only provides recreation for the community, it provides jobs, enhances the lifestyle for our citizens and ultimately results in making our area a better place to work and live."

The Public-Private Partnership

In commenting on the reason for the success of the public/private partnership, Greg Yost, Horizon-HFE Development Director, says the City of Dallas and private management had a common goal. "From the outset, our two organizations sought to do the right thing for the community. That is, to provide a quality, family waterpark that will serve the needs of the community while still being financially responsible."

Under HFE-Horizon's long-term management agreement, the City of Dallas earns from \$50,000 to \$125,000 per year based on the park's performance. The income will fund park expansion or other aquatic facilities in Dallas.

Yost points to several reasons for the success of Bahama Beach:

- **Public input.** All interested parties listened to what the community wanted: wholesome, family entertainment.
- **A recognized consensus.** The city and HFE-Horizon had clear and agreed-upon expectations.
- **Family appeal.** Bahama Beach was designed to be entertaining for the

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family market with only limited appeal to the teen market.

- **Practical fun.** Bahama Beach is affordable and a good value.
- **Safety and security.** A “Code of Conduct” for guests is posted throughout

the park and is enforced vigorously. And things such as grooming standards for employees are strictly enforced.

- **Equal value.** The park provides a quality experience, one that is equal to other commercial waterparks in the area.

Yost concludes, “HFE-Horizon’s

involvement with the city and Bahama Beach goes well beyond our management agreement. It is the mission of our company to bring families closer together. By helping provide quality, wholesome entertainment to the south Dallas community, we are living out our core values and purpose.” **WWA**

Greg Yost is Director of Development for HFE-Horizon, LLP.



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