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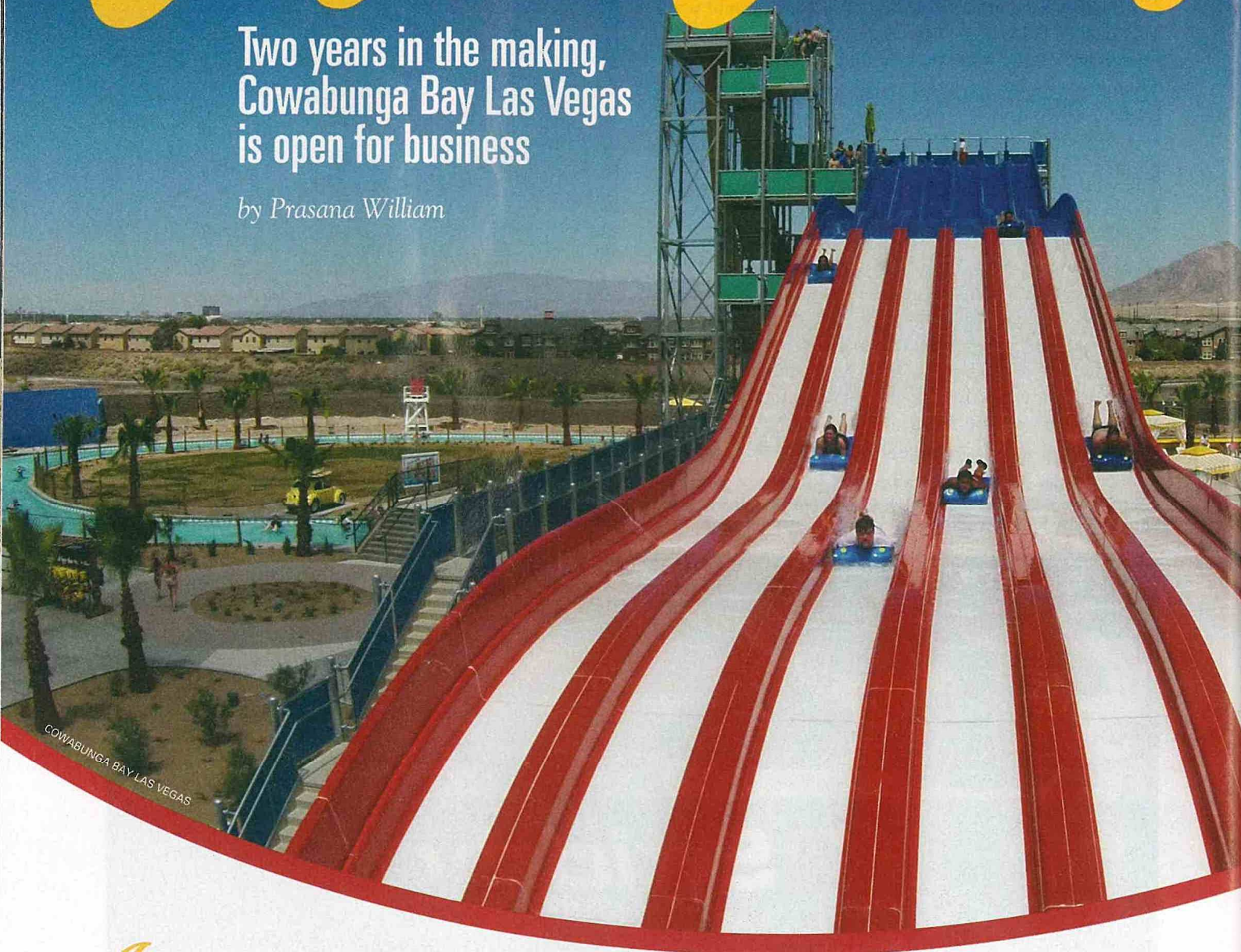
CAUGHT ABOARD THE
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LOCKER RENTALS

Vegas Victory

Two years in the making,
Cowabunga Bay Las Vegas
is open for business

by Prasana William



Lines curved into the parking lot of Cowabunga Bay Las Vegas on July 4, but this wasn't your usual holiday rush. The crowd of Henderson, Nevada, residents was gathered to celebrate the grand opening of a water park two years in the making. "Opening day went like anyone else's typical opening day, except it was the Fourth of July and we had a city that was desperately wanting us," says Shane Huish, general manager of Cowabunga Bay. After numerous delays ranging from financing issues to impenetrable ground below the property, the 23-acre park was finally ready for business.

Cowabunga Bay is the latest attraction from the Huish family, which owns a number of family entertainment centers and has played a large role in the industry for the past 50 years. Lessons learned from the first Cowabunga Bay, opened by Huish in Draper, Utah, shaped the creation of the Las Vegas location.

"We always wanted to expand the brand," says Huish. "Something we learned from building in Utah was that we wanted to have a better weather factor. Las Vegas seemed the natural choice. It's close to where our other parks are and it was in need of a water park at the time. We found a

Water Parks issue

Slide Roundup

Though one slide tower was still under construction, the majority of Cowabunga Bay's slides were able to open in time for July 4. Here's the roundup:

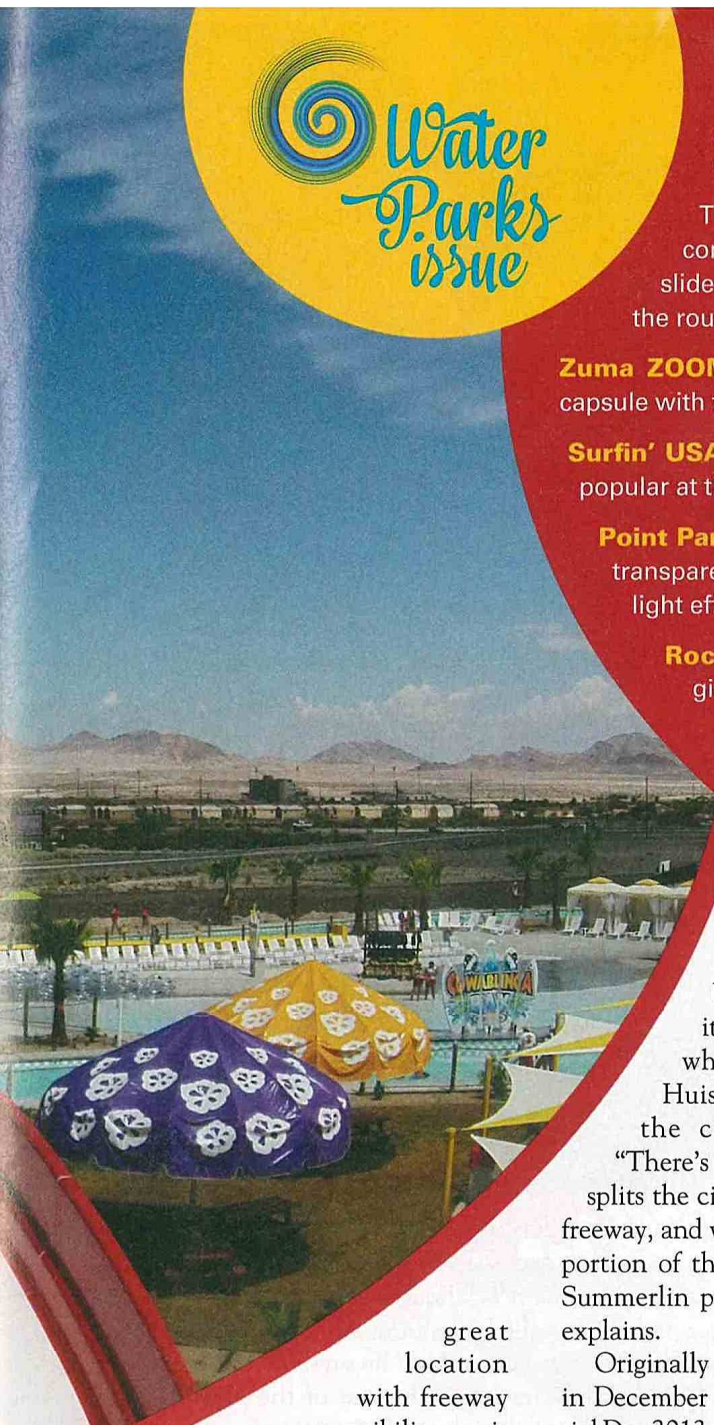
Zuma ZOOMa: A 73-foot-tall slide that uses a launch capsule with trapdoor to release riders into the slide.

Surfin' USA: The six-person racing slide is one of the most popular at the park.

Point Panic: This dark slide features brightly colored transparent strips in the walls that create a strobe-light effect.

Rock-A-Hoola: A 300-foot-long slide with a giant bowl feature.

Good Vibrations: This slide features rebound chambers that send tubes bouncing from side to side.



great location with freeway accessibility, so it was a natural fit."

Located just 20 minutes from the bright lights of the Las Vegas Strip, Henderson is a bedroom community and home to one of the largest school districts in the nation. "We wanted to build a park for the citizens of Las Vegas, not the tourists of Las Vegas," Huish says.

He's not the first to have that thought. Wet 'n' Wild Las Vegas, a Village Roadshow and CNL Lifestyle Properties water park, is located in neighboring Summerlin. Both parks were conceived around the same time, but the numerous factors that pushed Cowabunga Bay's opening

back two years also put it behind its competitor, which opened in 2013. Huish isn't worried about the competition, though. "There's an imaginary line that splits the city in half with the I-15 freeway, and we serve the Henderson portion of the city. They serve the Summerlin portion of the city," he explains.

Originally slated to break ground in December 2012 and open Memorial Day 2013, opening day was pushed back a year when crews hit caliche, a concrete-like layer of sediment, and financial partners could not come up with their share of the money. After finding new partners, including R&O Construction, the general contractor for the project, Cowabunga Bay was further delayed past Memorial Day to July 4, 2014. It opened with about 75 percent of the planned 25 attractions ready for operation.

Open at Last

Beach theming ties together three distinct sections of the water park: Aloha Shores, a Hawaiian-influenced area with kiddie attractions and

cabanas; Surf City U.S.A., themed after classic California beach culture; and The Boardwalk, inspired by the Jersey Shore.

Cowabunga Bay worked exclusively with Polin Waterparks & Pool Systems of Istanbul, Turkey, to create a slide mix for all thrill levels; this was the manufacturer's first turnkey contract and largest project to date in the United States. All slides feature Polin's Magic Shine finish that uses resin transfer molding technology and specifically addresses Huish's concerns about oxidation of the slides' finishes in the desert heat.

The surprise hit of Cowabunga Bay has been "Surfin' USA," a six-lane slide that allows riders to race one another on mats down the 55-foot track. The big winner is the rider who can summit the one-of-a-kind uphill section at the end the fastest. "We see a lot of repeat riders who are learning to strategize how they make it over the hump and how they ride the mats," says Huish. "What I didn't even know would be a unique feature has turned out to be a huge hit."

Next season, he's concentrating on finishing the remaining attractions



The "Surf-A-Rama Wave Pool" has proved popular with guests. Built by Aquatic Development Group, the 33,000-square-foot pool is themed around a '50s-style drive-in and faces a faux movie screen. Vintage cars are parked at the front of the pool and spray water onto guests. Waves can be generated in eight different patterns and reach heights of four feet.

COWABUNGA BAY LAS VEGAS

Flexibility:

The key to staffing a new water park

Cowabunga Bay received more than 3,000 applicants for just 500 positions and retained most hires despite opening a month later than scheduled. Flexibility has been key to managing the park. Training had to take place while the park was still under construction, so crews would come in during the morning to work and new hires would come in the evening to learn their duties.

This arrangement worked well for food and beverage and admission staff, but lifeguards posed their own challenge: how do you train without a functioning pool? Cowabunga Bay relied on community pools and meeting rooms at local casinos to train lifeguards for certification. The delayed opening also gave new lifeguards more time to complete their certification. General Manager Shane Huish brought in his aquatic director from the park's sister location in Utah to run training with the National Aquatic Safety Company. After training began, however, the aquatic director, who is also a member of the military, was relocated. Luckily, Huish was able to promote recently hired supervisors to the position and complete training on time.

Even after opening, flexibility still remains important. Food and beverage (F&B), admission, first aid, retail, and the arcade all operate out of one contiguous building designed to facilitate the shifting of employees to areas where they're most needed. The point-of-sale system works universally, so staff from F&B can move over to admissions during rush times, and vice versa, without having to train on new systems.

"We don't have four employees sitting around waiting for a customer to come, because they're always moving around to where the guests are," says Huish.

from phase one, but his long-term goal is to create something no one has ever seen by using dry ride hardware with water elements. For now, though, Huish is proud of his new water park. "We pulled off almost 99 percent of the vision I had for this Cowabunga Bay," he says.

The "we" in question is the rest of the Huish family. Cowabunga Bay was largely a collaboration between Huish and his brother Scott. Over the course of development, however, three generations of the Huish family became involved with the project. Huish's sons, who work at the location in Utah, came to Nevada to assemble slides, and even patriarch John Huish, an IAAPA Hall of Fame member, pitched in to lay sprinkler lines.

"We're a family business and we all like to work together. It was a good experience building Cowabunga Bay. That's not to say it didn't have its share of trials, because it certainly did, but I guess those trials helped to make it a better product," Huish says. "So much of our heart was put into it. It's really something I'm very proud of because not only did it turn out beautifully, but we were all here working together and helping create it." ■

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