

Six Flags operator buys neighbor Wet'n Wild - Facilities expected to stay separate

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ARLINGTON - Six Flags Theme Parks has purchased the Wet'n Wild water park that for 12 years has been the neighbor of the amusement park the company operates across Interstate 30, officials announced yesterday.

Wet'n Wild and its companion amusement park, FunSphere, will be run as a separate theme park complex under its new ownership. No major changes in operations, management or employees are planned for the water park's 13th season, which begins May 13. The name will remain the same, said Eileen Harrell, vice president of corporate community for Six Flags Theme Parks.

"Normally, in theme parks, you do all of the planning way before the season," Harrell said in a telephone interview from her office in Parsippany, N.J. "We think they have a great product offering, so we don't plan to make changes for this year."

Terms were not disclosed. Harrell declined to say how long the deal was in the works, and which company first brought up the deal.

Visitors to the 47-acre water park in north Arlington won't notice anything different, at least for this season, said Wet'n Wild spokesman Bill Monty.

"They're going to see the same familiar faces. From a consumer standpoint, for 1995, they're going to find the same familiar location," Monty said.

But Harrell said Six Flags officials are "exploring ways to further enhance Wet'n Wild's entertainment experience." She declined to elaborate.

Six Flags operates a water park in Houston and is building one in Los Angeles, which is scheduled to open this spring, officials said.

Six Flags Theme Parks does not own **Six Flags Over Texas**, but manages the Arlington park for the partnership that owns it.

Monty said he does not know why Wet'n Wild's founder, George Millay, decided to sell the park. Millay has no plans to get out of the water park business and still owns parks in Orlando, Fla., and in Las Vegas, Monty said.

The sale is not related to the recent closing of the Wet'n Wild location in Garland, Monty said.

Six Flags officials don't see the sale as buying out a competitor, Harrell said.

"They've always worked together. They've always been a natural complement to each other," Harrell said of management of both companies. "It's a great complement to what we do already."

Burke Pease, president of the Arlington Convention & Visitors Bureau, said the transaction will benefit the city's tourism industry.

Six Flags' strategy is "outer-market oriented" said Pease, meaning that the park markets to people who stay overnight and travel from more than 250 miles away. Historically, Wet'n Wild has been more "core-market oriented," he said meaning it draws day visitors.

The development of transportation connections between the two theme parks is an "idea worth considering" said David Sampson, president of the Arlington Chamber of Commerce.

Sampson said that he had not discussed the idea with any officials but that "at a conceptual level, it has some merit to it."

Staff writer Jeanne Graham contributed to this report. Amusement parks at a glance

Six Flags over Texas

Employees: 2,500

1994 visitor count: 3 million

Location: Arlington

Wet 'n Wild

Employees: 1,000*

1994 visitor count: Does not disclose attendance

Location: Arlington

*Based on 1994 estimates

SOURCE: The companies