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More big plans on the horizon

MagiQuest enchants The Funplex in New Jersey

Joel Cliff

Amusement Today

"This is the most emotionally-connected I've ever been to an attraction," enthused Brian Williams, general manager of The Funplex in East Hanover, New Jersey, as he stood amidst the bustling family entertainment center in mid-January, about 20 miles west of New York City.

Williams was describing the recent addition of an interactive, walk-through MagiQuest attraction to his 100,000-square foot facility – the first FEC installation of the immersive fantasy adventure game from Creative Kingdoms.

But in speaking of his own specific experience, he also captured a core appeal of the MagiQuest concept and why it's poised for even more break-out success in the near future: the power of connection.

"We realize we're competing with the home environment today, and how to pull folks away from the compelling video and audio content they can get in their own living room," said Creative Kingdoms President Denise Weston.



Funplex General Manager Brian Williams (left) and owner Randy Lahn show off the entrance to their new MagiQuest attraction.

"The customization and engagement that's inherent in MagiQuest is perfect for doing this. Your wand contains your MagiQuest identity and your history of playing the game, so when it's recognized by the technology at any MagiQuest location, it allows the QuestMaster to establish an immediate connection and essentially say 'Glad you're back. Now what do you want to do?'"

For those unfamiliar with the MagiQuest concept, each player (or "magi") purchases a magic wand and an amount of gameplay time when they arrive at the attraction, and then aligns his or herself with

one of five clans, each of which has specific character traits. Magi can also buy add-ons for the wand, costumes, and much more. The wand stores a player's identity and gaming history, and with a simple wave, utilizes patented technology to "magically" open interactive elements during the game.

Once magi are instructed in the basic aims of the game and the layout of the enchanted world they're about to enter, they step into the highly-themed and fully immersive MagiQuest Kingdom, armed with The Ancient Book of Wisdom, which pro-

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AT PHOTOS/JOEL CLIFF

The courtyard welcomes players to the MagiQuest Kingdom (top), while young Magi seek their next quest.

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►MAGIQUEST

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vides detailed clues about the quests and adventures they'll face throughout the different realms.

After completing each quest, a player earns a certain power (or "rune") and moves up the rank of experience, beginning as an Apprentice and ending as a Master Magi. Upon attaining this top rank, players then embark on specific adventures, where they duel against the kingdom's more dangerous inhabitants, such as a goblin or dragon, and use their accumulated runes to ultimately subdue them.

Of course, the real magic of MagiQuest lies in its flexibility. The concept is incredibly adaptable when it comes to theming, installation size, price points, a variable quest/adventure mix, and its utilization as a stand alone attraction or as an integrated feature throughout an entire facility. Combine this with the ability to link a player's wand (and its powers) across locations and the fact that certain elements will be unique to specific types of locations (thus providing a host of different experiences), and one quickly realizes that the possibilities are endless.

Despite all this potential, however, Weston realized that the completely new category of entertainment she and part-



Princess Candice (left) welcomes Creative Kingdoms President Denise Weston to her latest MagiQuest realm, at The Funplex in East Hanover, New Jersey.

ner Rick Briggs were creating might take a little while to catch on.

"After the initial splash of opening our flagship attraction in Myrtle Beach in June 2005, followed by winning an IAAPA Impact Award later that year, the industry hung back a bit, waiting to see if we truly had a product with lasting appeal and a good team in place to execute our vision," she noted from the company's headquarters in Wakefield, Rhode Island.

"But now, with a number of successful installations – each of which is adding to, rather than cannibalizing, the host facility's attendance and retail market – the industry feedback we're getting is 'You've made it; let's talk.' So the wave is building, and

more folks are joining us for the ride before it passes them by."

Great Wolf Resorts has been one of the early "wave riders," having incorporated MagiQuest into its existing Great Wolf Lodge properties in the Poconos and Williamsburg in 2006 by installing interactive features throughout each complex.

This new guest amenity was so well-received that the company has added the game to three more of its resorts – in Kansas City; Mason, Ohio; and Traverse City, Michigan – as well as opening a dedicated MagiQuest space from day one at its latest property in Grapevine, Texas, this past December, featuring new characters, quests, and adventures themed to blend in with the lodge's signature northwoods setting. The game will also be included in Great Wolf Lodge resorts opening this year in Grand Mound, Washington, and next year in Concord, North Carolina.

"MagiQuest is perfect for Great Wolf Lodge because of the unique and interactive experience it provides for guests. Our resorts cater to families looking for year-round family entertainment, and MagiQuest fits that model perfectly," says Kim Schaefer, chief operating officer for Great Wolf Resorts.

Brian Williams at The Funplex is equally enthusiastic about the magic of MagiQuest.

"This is like Disneyland for our market area, a very high-end guest experience. We've been open 10 years, building the business steadily, but this is a step beyond anything we've ever done before, and the response has been just phenomenal."



AT PHOTOS/JOEL CLIFF

Players purchase their magic wands, along with add-ons for the wand and costumes, from the MagiQuest marketplace before embarking on their immersive adventure.

After nine months of discussions – to determine the best mix of theming, interactive, and open space for the available footprint – construction began in June 2007, and the facility launched a soft opening of the attraction right before Christmas. The gameplay area and retail space encompass a total of 8,000 square feet, and the cost of \$2-plus million includes a number of extra touches and details.

"As the first FEC installation of MagiQuest, we wanted to set a good example of the possibilities, so we put a lot of effort into each aspect of the project," Williams stated. "But with the game's track record of attracting entire families and a 50/50 mix of males and females, as well as lots of repeat visits, we're very excited about the future and anticipate a 10 percent bump in our annual attendance, which ranges from 400,000 to 500,000 right now."

Weston is also expecting big things for Creative Kingdoms in the next few months and years.

"The first international MagiQuest location is slated to open at the Lagunasia theme park in central Japan this spring," she said, "and we are currently developing partnerships with a major children's entertainment brand and with toy and gaming companies. Not surprisingly, in light of my and Rick's roots in water play, we have also developed AquaQuest, to bring the MagiQuest experience to existing and new waterparks through an amazing waterproof interaction device."

In addition, the company plans to introduce an online game in the near future, to draw in new players with some of the signature MagiQuest

elements but ultimately drive them to one of the live attractions for the complete experience.

As Weston noted, "We understand the ingredients that pull folks online, which is a great way to introduce MagiQuest to an even broader audience, but the game will be designed to only take you so far. Once players get a taste of the MagiQuest adventure, we're confident they'll seek out one of our live-action sites to get the full payoff."

Judging by the animated reactions of the kids and families at The Funplex on this mid-January day, her confidence seems well-placed.

FAST FACTS

MagiQuest at The Funplex

The Funplex

182 Route 10 West
East Hanover, N.J. 07936
(973) 428-1166
Brian Williams, GM
www.thefunplex.com

Cost: \$2-plus million

Size: 8,000 sq. ft.

Features: Immersive gameplay area, divided into five realms and consisting of 10 quests and three adventures; retail space with wands, add-ons, costumes, etc.

Opened: December 2007

Supplier: Creative Kingdoms; Wakefield, RI

More information:
MagiQuest /
Creative Kingdoms
Denise Weston, President
(401) 782-4803
www.magiquest.com

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