

Chance Rides remains busy in 2020 making, maintaining attractions

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WICHITA, Kan. — Having survived — and thrived — as an attractions supplier for nearly 60 years, **Chance Rides, Inc.**, has found itself in a relatively strong position to face the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic. While adhering to COVID-19 safety protocols for its workers in the factory and in the field, the company has continued taking new ride orders and handling maintenance requests from its varied client base during a difficult spring/summer period for the industry.

“The theme park business is pretty slow right now,” acknowledged **Dick Chance**, owner and CEO, in a chat with *Amusement Today*. “Fortunately, we have a variety of products and are in very diversified markets. We’ve branched out into the zoo, city park, location-based entertainment and stand-alone attraction markets. Operations able to get the budgets and make capital purchases are still going forward.”

The fun-seeking public’s willingness to follow coronavirus safety protocols, he added, has been key to keeping the business going at some level. “People are glad to be out. As long as they take precautions, things will be all right. I think masks are a small price to pay for staying open.”

But even for parks that, because of state and/or local mandates, have not yet been able to reopen, the company has found opportunities to enhance customers’ offerings as they await the green light. In some cases, operators commissioned work before the coronavirus emerged.

Pacific Park on the **Santa Monica Pier** in Southern California contacted Chance Rides last fall to replace the 30-seat train on its 55-foot-tall, 35-mph West Coaster, a family-style steel installation originally built in 1996 by **D.H. Morgan Mfg.**, which Chance acquired in 2001. The world-famous destination, which sits at the westernmost terminus of old U.S. Route 66, wanted to retheme the ride to take promotional advantage of its historical location.

“We talked to them about classic cars and came up with the ‘57 Chevy,” Chance said. “We own the original Morgan train engineering, which was proven for 24 years at that location, so we could build them a brand-new chassis. We did the artist’s concepts and they went for it.”

The new train design, sporting a ‘57 Chevy-shaped front



Steve Gladow, mechanical engineering manager for Chance, and **Dana Wyatt**, director of operations for Pacific Park, test the new train on the Santa Monica, Calif., park’s Route 66 West Coaster (right). Chance recently delivered an Electric C.P. Huntington train to Lincoln Children’s Zoo (above left) and a gas-powered C.P. Huntington train to Canada’s Santa’s Village (above right).

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car, bright-red paint, headlights, stylish side panels, four mock rubber-look spoked wheels and tail fins on the back car, was based on a 3D computer model of the real thing and physically produced by Chance’s in-house CNC (computer numerically controlled) molding machine. The job, which included upgrading the ride with magnetic braking and a variable-speed control system for smoother chain-lift engagement and station reentry, took about six months from the time the order was placed.

“COVID slowed us down about a month, but we got the train delivered by Memorial Day weekend,” Chance said. “Unfortunately, they weren’t able to open the park, but we were able to get in and do all the testing. It’s ready to go as soon as the state gives them the okay to reopen.”

Pacific Park, Chance noted, expects the coaster’s annual ridership of about 1 million to increase by 20-30% with marketing tied to the \$1 million retheming project, which includes a redecoration of the station and queue and a new name: Route 66 West Coaster.

Chance Rides’ has fulfilled several orders for its C.P. Huntington trains recently. Since it went into full production at the start of this year, the company’s all-electric, lithium battery-powered, emission-free model — introduced at **Landry’s Downtown Aquarium** in Houston two years ago — has been shipped to the **Lincoln Children’s Zoo** in Lincoln, Nebraska. Units for the **Brevard Zoo** in Melbourne, Florida, and the multiuse, city-owned **Kennedy Park** in



Hayward, California, are shipping in September.

“It’s been called the **Tesla** of trains,” Chance said of the throttle-free, fully automated product, which incorporates speed, dynamic-braking and wheel wear-reducing traction controls. “When the operator pushes the start button and the train is supposed to go five miles an hour on one area of the track, that’s what it goes. If it’s got to slow down before going into a curve, it automatically does that. It’s a big safety advantage.”

Additionally, the company recently supplied an Electric C.P. Huntington to the **Montgomery Zoo and Mann Wildlife Learning Museum** in Alabama and its last gas-powered C.P. Huntington to **Santa’s Village** in Bracebridge, Ontario, Canada.

Chance Rides has enjoyed success with two newly introduced pandemic-related safety products for its trains and trams. It has sold plexiglass seat dividers that allow its C.P. Huntington models to operate at 100% capacity to the **St. Louis Zoo**

in Missouri (AT, July 2020). For Chance’s Tramstar trams, which have wider seats, the company has created dividers of clear, cut-and-sewn vinyl that attach easily with adjustable brackets and tighteners. The **North Carolina Zoo** in Asheboro and **Grant’s Farm** in St. Louis are among the locations that have ordered sets.

On the carousel manufacturing and refurbishment front, Chance Rides has been plenty busy. The company recently supplied 28-foot units to **501 Ranch** in Uvalde, Texas, and the Municipality of Cayey in Puerto Rico, while it delivered a custom 20-footer with all-white horses to **Pacific Amusement International Co.**, a mall developer in Seoul, South Korea. Horse-refurbishment jobs have been completed for **Hersheypark** in Hershey, Pennsylvania, and the **Milwaukee County Zoo** in Wisconsin.

In early August, **Gillian’s Wonderland Pier** in Ocean City, New Jersey, looking ahead to the 2021 season, sent its 1992 Wipeout to the company’s Wichita factory

for a complete rebuild.

Said Chance: “We’re helping our customers by refurbishing some of their older rides so that when they’re open next year, the rides are reliable, safe and ready to operate.”

The slower-but-steady work has taken some of the sting out of 2020 for Chance Rides, which, along with several other major companies, made the difficult decision to bow out of the annual November trade show held in Orlando by the **International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions**. (IAAPA was still weighing whether to move forward with this year’s gathering as AT went to press.) The company has exhibited at every show since Chance’s founding in 1961.

Chance admitted the call was “very tough” and made it only after consulting with his customers and fellow manufacturers **Great Coasters International, Inc.**, **Larson International, Inc.** and **Premier Rides**.

“I’ve been going since I was 14 years old, and I’ve never missed a show in 58 years,” he said. “But most of the member parks are operating on a very limited basis, and a lot of them are completely closed. Most of the ride manufacturers have zero business. We’re one of the lucky ones that have at least some business coming in.”

The executive is hopeful the industry, and the world, will recover and rebound from the pandemic next year.

“I think 2021 is going to be a boom year for the industry because there will be a vaccine,” Chance said. “As soon as we get the vaccine, people are going to start feeling comfortable about getting out in crowds and doing things — there’s going to be a lot of pent-up demand for entertainment. And after next year, parks are going to start ordering new equipment again, so 2022 is going to be a boom year for the manufacturing business.”

“We’re coming back. And we’re coming back strong.”

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Chance has continued turning out new and refurbished carousels, building a 20-foot custom unit for Pacific Amusement International Co. of Seoul, South Korea, and 28-foot unit for the Municipality of Cayey in Puerto Rico. COURTESY CHANCE RIDES

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