



Commonwealth of Kentucky Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet

Andy Beshear, Governor

Mike Berry, Secretary

For Immediate Release

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Kentucky Kingdom and Herschend Family Entertainment Announce New Partnership

Herschend operates Dollywood, Silver Dollar City, Newport Aquarium and more

FRANKFORT, Ky. (February 23, 2021) – Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear joined Herschend Enterprises Chief Executive Officer Andrew Wexler, state officials and community leaders to announce that Herschend Enterprises has become a majority partner and operator of [Kentucky Kingdom and Hurricane Bay](#) amusement and water park located in Louisville, Kentucky.

Georgia-based Herschend is the nation's largest family-owned theme attractions and entertainment company. Herschend operates popular tourism attractions such as the Dollywood® Parks & Resorts in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee and the Newport Aquarium® in Northern Kentucky.

As a national competitor in the tourism industry, Herschend has a history of delivering world-class entertainment experiences to its guests. Through a collaborative effort between [Kentucky Kingdom, LLLP](#), the [Kentucky State Fair Board](#), the [Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet](#), and the [Finance and Administration Cabinet](#), Herschend will now expand its business operations to Louisville as the new majority partner of Kentucky Kingdom Theme Park, LLC. This expansion will bring enhanced entertainment and amusement park management experience that will benefit the operations at Kentucky Kingdom and Hurricane Bay.

“After opening Newport Aquarium in 2008, we’ve been actively seeking an opportunity to bring even more entertainment to the great state of Kentucky and that dream begins today,” said Herschend Chief Executive Officer Andrew Wexler. “We’re honored to be welcomed into the beautiful and historic city of Louisville, and thrilled to build upon the exceptional 25-year legacy of Kentucky Kingdom.”

Kentucky Kingdom and Hurricane Bay cover a 65-acre entertainment complex that enjoys a solid reputation of being a safe and fun amusement and water park, offering visitors the convenience and value of two parks in one. The park opened to the public in 1987 following an announcement by the Kentucky State Fair Board that a theme park would be built on the grounds of the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center. Negotiations with Herschend Enterprises began last year for the sale of ownership interest in Kentucky Kingdom, LLLP.

“We are pleased to turn the park over to a new generation of leadership. Herschend is an outstanding operator, who will undoubtedly take Kentucky Kingdom & Hurricane Bay to the next level. We expect their involvement will add greatly to the Commonwealth’s thriving tourism industry,” said Kentucky Kingdom’s founder, President and CEO Ed Hart.

As part of its commitment to the park, Herschend Enterprises is bringing Craig Ross, Dollywood’s President for the past 10 years, to serve as Kentucky Kingdom’s interim General Manager. Ross plans to further develop Kentucky Kingdom’s exceptional 25-year legacy by tapping into his decades of family entertainment experience at one of the nation’s top theme parks. Under Ross’ leadership, Dollywood surpassed Disneyland and was named among TripAdvisor and USA Today’s best theme parks in the world.

“This is an exciting moment, and I am so honored to work alongside the community, our season pass holders, and our valued guests in building a bright future for this beloved park,” said Ross. “We strongly believe in using guest and community input to create amazing experiences and will be reaching out to the Louisville community for input on enhancements they’d like to see at the park, including attractions, shows and events. This feedback will be critical in creating a long-term plan for success and growth.”

Herschend will implement a strategic plan to expand the operation of Kentucky Kingdom Theme Park, LLC to be consistent with the guest experiences offered at other Herschend owned and managed locations. Future plans for the Louisville amusement and water park include:

- Building the appeal for multi-generational families;
- Hosting family-friendly seasonal and themed events and festivals;
- Enhancing product and guest experiences through rebranding and the addition of Herschend-owned programming, such as costume character appearances;
- Expanding of the season to provide entertainment to more park guests; and
- Building relationships with state and local tourism partners to increase awareness and entice travel to Kentucky Kingdom, Louisville and the Commonwealth.

Kentucky tourism is an [\\$11.8 billion industry](#) in the Commonwealth and is the third largest industry in Louisville, generating an annual economic impact of \$3.5 billion. Herschend entertains more than 14 million guests per year at 25 properties located in eight states.

“Herschend’s decision to expand its operations in the Commonwealth is a reflection of the state’s reputable tourism industry and the commitment by this Administration to move Kentucky forward by investing in tourism and economic development,” said Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet Secretary Mike Berry. “We look forward to being a partner with Herschend to promote their vision for a newly reimagined attraction that will create a multi-generational experience that visitors across the nation will travel to Kentucky to enjoy.”

Situated at the intersection of Interstate 65 and Interstate 264, Kentucky Kingdom shares a parking lot with the Kentucky Exposition Center. The park’s location is easily accessible to visitors from Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Lexington, Nashville and St. Louis with more than 12 million people within 120-mile drive of Louisville. Further, Nashville, Indianapolis and Lexington do not have a local amusement or theme park, making the potential for attracting visitors from those areas promising.

“The financial strength and stability of any long-term tenant is of the utmost importance in protecting the Commonwealth’s financial interests,” said Finance and Administration Cabinet Secretary Holly M. Johnson. “Herschend has an outstanding reputation in the theme and amusement park industry, an established financial performance, and a demonstrated ability to meet short-term and long-term obligations. Under Herschend’s leadership, the Newport Aquarium® has been ranked by USA Today as one of the top 10 aquariums in the nation, and we welcome their expanded presence in Kentucky.”

Operated by the Kentucky State Fair Board, the Kentucky Exposition Center is the sixth largest facility of its kind in the United States. Home to the Kentucky State Fair, National Farm Machinery Show, the National Archery in Schools State Tournament, and the Danny Wimmer Presents Louder than Life Festival, as well a variety of concerts, sporting events and some of the top tradeshow in the country, this state-owned venue has a national reputation for hosting an assortment of premiere events. The Kentucky Expo Center’s recognition combined with Herschend’s highly recognizable brand will create an opportunity for Kentucky to continue to expand our business and leisure travel market to generate increased travel dollars to foster the economy.

“The Kentucky State Fair Board looks forward to working with Herschend to ensure the new vision for the park is successful in Kentucky,” said Kentucky State Fair Board Chair Steve Wilson. “The Board understands the long-term value of having a nationally recognized company like Herschend in Louisville and believes that a positive economic future for Kentucky is ahead.”

Known as the home of the Muhammad Ali, the Kentucky Derby, Louisville Slugger baseball, Maker’s Mark and more, Louisville is largest city in America to be designated an international compassionate city. The city prides itself on southern hospitality, and strives to be a city that is welcoming and inclusive to all guests. Louisville is known internationally for world-class tourism

attractions and events. The expansion of Herschend will continue to elevate the city's reputation as being a top travel destination for all families to enjoy.

Kentucky Kingdom is currently accepting applications to fill 1,200 job openings for the upcoming season. For more information, visit kentuckykingdom.com.

To learn more about Herschend Enterprises national entertainment and tourism attractions, visit herschendenterprises.com.

About Kentucky Kingdom: Opened in 1987, Kentucky Kingdom and Hurricane Bay is the number one paid family attraction in the state of Kentucky, with hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. Kentucky Kingdom and Hurricane Bay has more than 70 thrilling rides – including six world-class coasters, two wave pools, one of the tallest body slides in the world (Skybox Launch) and one of the largest selections of children's rides in the region (King Louie's Playland).

About Herschend Enterprises: Launched in 1960, Herschend Enterprises is a family of companies that focus on family entertainment. Its operating companies include Herschend Family Entertainment (Dollywood® Parks & Resorts, Silver Dollar City®, Adventure Aquarium®, Newport Aquarium®, and Wild Adventures®), Herschend Live (Harlem Globetrotters®), Herschend Entertainment Studios (Splash & Bubbles® and Chuggington®) and Herschend Adventure Holdings, LLC (Pink Adventure Tours®).

Herschend entertains more than 14 million guests annually at 25 properties in eight states. For six decades, Herschend has operated with the purpose of bringing families closer together by Creating Memories Worth Repeating®. For more information, visit www.herschendenterprises.com.