

# Tourist Attractions & Parks

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## FAMILY FUN CENTER FEATURE



# Sugar Grove Family Fun Center

## Go-Karts Galore and Much More

by Frank Seninsky

Sugar Grove Family Fun Center is one of the best little outdoor fun parks I have ever visited, regionally famous for the having the most challenging adult slick track in America, The Wrangler.

Located in Sugar Grove, Ill., (west of Aurora), in eastern Kane County on Route 47 four miles south of Interstate 88, Sugar Grove FFC provides a perfect mix of attractions for all age groups. Foundations Entertainment University Class 6 took a field trip to Sugar Grove where the 50 plus attendees got the opportunity to experience the family fun center

and to get a behind the scenes tour by the park owners and the designer of the park, Peter Olesen, who is also one of the five Foundations instructors.

The attractions at Sugar Grove include: Sugar Grove Speedway, 920 feet with 12 Shaller go-karts; The Wrangler Adult Slick Track, 480 feet with eight Shaller cars (driver's license required); Swannies Bumper Boats, eight J & J water squirting bumper boats (seats one or two); Santa Fe Trails Mini Golf, 36 hole animal themed course by Fairway Golf; Sugar Grove Golf Center and Driving Range, 25 stalls; WaterWars waterballoon catapult competition; and the Fun Junction Game and Party Building, which has 20 coin-operated games and 12 party tables.

The owners, Edward L. Parolek, Jr. and his father, Edward A. Parolek, Sr., expanded the park in 1999 after purchasing the 4.4-acre property adjacent to their golf driving range. This family story goes all the way back to 1946 when Ed Sr. was in fifth grade. One day he was walking home from school and walking past the community driving range. He noticed an old man out on the



was designed by Peter F. Olesen & Associates. Shown clockwise is the Fun Junction Game and Party Building, Swannies Bumper Boats, Santa Fe Trails Mini-Golf, The Wrangler Adult Slick Track, and Sugar Grove Speedway.

range picking up golf balls and putting them into a large bag. Ed just went out into the field and starting picking up the golf balls and handing them to the man. The next thing Ed remembers is he is being picked up in the air by the back of his shirt color by a government official who was enforcing the then very strict child labor laws. In those days the authorities didn't want any children working (especially 10 year olds) as jobs were hard to come by. Very scared and shaken, Ed was asked what he doing. His quivering reply was "I am just helping my grandfather pick up golf balls." The young officer then asked, "So this man is your grandfather?" Ed replied "Yes sir" as the older man just stood there nodding his head. The officer then put young Ed down and walked off. The old man was very impressed and told Ed that he gave the official the "right answer" and offered Ed a job for .50 cents a day to pick up golf balls. Ed and mentor Irv developed a fine relationship and Ed ended up buying the golf driving range from Irv several years later after he got his official working papers and had picked

up several million golf balls.

The story rolls forward to 1987 when Ed Jr. started dreaming about putting a Fun Center on the adjacent property. "Now all I had to do was to convince my dad that it was a good idea, because I needed his support," said Ed Jr. "And it took almost 10 years!"

Ed Jr. continues: "We had no idea it would take two years before construction would begin. We had already visited several trade shows and were lucky to find Peter E. Olesen and Associates to help us with the project. The plans were changed several times. We added an Adult Slick Track that was not anticipated at the beginning. Once construction began, our cost to build numbers, thanks to Pete's complete specs, came in as expected."

The Wrangler is billed as Illinois' fist slick road course, but it also has the distinction of being the world's first elevated slick track. This concept was the brainchild of Olesen, who figured out the proper horizontal and vertical grade components, while maintaining complete safety for the riders. Ed Sr. reports: "Many experienced track owners and karters have commented that this slick track is the most challenging track they've driven because of the challenge of driving on a surface that

vidual lap times to the thousandth of a second, finishing position in the race heat, the average lap time (six laps) and also lists track lap record and fastest lap of the day.

A good time is 30 seconds, with most novices taking up to 45 seconds that usually include a couple of 360s and 180s along the way. The track record is 20.097 seconds and one of the FEU Class 6 hit 23.545. To quote Olesen, "You have to drive it to appreciate it. I'm still frustrated and challenged every time I drive it. I'll keep coming back, even though I know I'll never completely master it. It's one of our trophy projects." There is also a Wednesday night go-kart league that has drawn members from Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin. The cost of the Slick Track is \$6 per race and there is a high percentage of repeat business, as riders want to improve their lap times.

The 920-foot Sugar Grove Speedway road track (also designed by Olesen) may take second place as a draw attraction, but generates twice the revenue as the number one draw Slick Track. The reason for this is that you must have a valid driver's license to ride the Slick Track and almost all of the Slick Track riders also enjoy themselves on the Road Track. The price per ride is the same at \$6. After five years there are no cracks on the track surfaces and the barrier rail system looks like new. The Shaller cars are also in great condition, which is testimony to the safety record of this professionally designed track.



*Foundations Instructor Alan Fluke (All Entertainment & Associates) leads the pack at the start of the Sugar Grove Speedway's 920 foot go-kart track.*

equates to driving on ice and the printed results, which show how they did." Each rider is timed for each of seven laps around the track with the first lap being their practice lap. Each race result ticket identifies the indi-

When asked to comment on the success of the bumper boats, Olesen gave a quick assessment: "Swannies bumper boat pond is another jewel in the attraction



*Swannies Bumper Boats was a memorable time for Jerry Merola (Amusement Entertainment Mgmt.), as the FEU group ganged up on him and drenched him using the J & J water squirters.*

mix. The battery power bumper boats were designed using fiberglass walls and a water treatment and filter system to provide clear, clean water. The pond attracts riders of all ages who enjoy squirting each other. It is an impulse attraction that fares far better when teamed with miniature golf and concession go-karts." Even in 40-degree temperatures in February, the Foundations attendees and some of the speakers thoroughly enjoyed this attraction.

The Santa Fe Trails miniature golf course fits in perfectly with the attraction mix. It is a challenging players course themed in the old west style including Boot-Hill gravestones, an old covered wagon, sculptured desert rocks, and animal themes. The 36-hole course was designed by Olesen in cooperation with mini-golf supplier Fairway Golf.

WaterWars was a great choice for a second water-oriented attraction that provides for a friendly acceptable way to have fun soaking friends and/or family members on warm summer days, or even on cold days for the adventurous types.

The 25-stall golf driving range is a major component of the Sugar Grove Golf Center. The Parolek's golf background is evident as the center offers golf lessons, unlimited golf clinics for \$99, one-day club regripping and club repairs. Many visitors to the golf driving range return with their families and friends to enjoy the adjacent family fun center.

The relaxed and friendly atmosphere created by the staff at Sugar Grove Family Fun Center continues to attract return visits from their loyal guests as well as attracting new guests as their reputation grows.

Each year the facility expands its group event and birthday party capabilities. Currently Sugar Grove is averaging 40 birthday parties per week and have accommodated school groups, the largest so far being 375.

Sugar Grove Family Fun Center is a very well designed small outdoor park that caters to the entire family. The Parolek family, including Mrs. Jennifer Parolek and year-old daughter Annabelle (who has just taken her first golf cart ride and is already picking up golf balls) are to be congratulated for operating and maintaining a great family fun park that is an integral part of the community. ♣

*(for more information on Peter F. Olesen and Associates, Inc. email [pfolesen@flash.net](mailto:pfolesen@flash.net))*



*The WaterWars waterballoon catapult competition attraction is the latest addition to Sugar Grove. After a demonstration by Foundations Elite Sponsor WaterWars' owner and designer Tommy Woog and his wife Peggy, others in the FEU Class 6 took their turn even though the outside temperature was only 40 degrees.*



*Sugar Grove Family Fun Park owners Ed Parolek, Sr., (left), and Ed Parolek, Jr. Ed Sr. started working picking up golf balls at the adjacent driving range way back in 1946 at the age of 10.*

Frank Serinsky is president of Alpha-Omega Group of companies, which includes a consulting agency, Amusement Entertainment Management, LLC (AEM) and a nationwide revenue sharing equipment provider, Alpha-BET Entertainment; all are headquartered in East Brunswick, New Jersey. During his 36 years in coin-op, Serinsky has presented nearly 250 seminars and penned more than 1000 articles. He has served as president of the Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA) from 1999-2000, currently sits on the AMOA Board of Directors and is next in line for presidency of the International Association for the Leisure & Entertainment Industry (IALEI). Serinsky can be reached at telephone: (732) 254-3773 or by e-mail: [fserinsky@aol.com](mailto:fserinsky@aol.com) [www.AEMLLC.com](http://www.AEMLLC.com)

