

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Idora Park

Personal Experience

O. H. 1394

LEONARD CAVALIER

Interviewed

by

Scott Smith

on

November 24, 1990

LEONARD CAVALIER

Mr. Leonard Cavalier was born in Youngstown, Ohio, on December 8, 1938. His parents, Leonard Cavalier and Olga Centofonti Cavalier had been life long Youngstown residents. Lenny (as he is more commonly referred to) attended Saint Edward's Elementary School and Ursuline High School, where he graduated from in 1956. Lenny then pursued a degree at Youngstown State University. Mr. Cavalier graduated in 1964 with a B.A. in Business Administration.

Lenny Cavalier began working at the Idora Park as a child. His father, Leonard Cavalier, was a part owner of the Park along with Max Rindin and Patrick Duffy. Mr. Lenny Cavalier began his full time employment at the park upon his graduation from college. Mr. Cavalier held various positions throughout his tenure at the park. He was a past supervisor of rides and the ballroom. Mr. Cavalier was greatly involved with the booking of bands and special events for the park. Among these events were the Spring Thing and the many company picnics that were so important to the park financially. At the time of the park's closing in 1984, Mr. Cavalier held the position of Vice President of Idora Park. When the park closed, Lenny supervised the auction of the park's rides and concessions. Mr. Cavalier also continued to supervise the various activities that took place in the park's ballroom.

When the park finally closed for good at the end of 1984, Mr. Cavalier was hired by the state of Ohio's Department of Amusement Park Ride Safety. Lenny began this job in February of

1985, and in just a few months, he moved up to the position of head of the department. Today Leonard Cavalier still retains this position.

Mr. Cavalier has been married to his wife Mary since September 12, 1959. The two had met while attending Ursuline High School together. The Cavaliers' children's names are Kathleen, Constance, Sharon, Suzanne, Leonard, and Jennifer. The Cavaliers are members of Saint Christine's Church and currently reside on 1458 Doncaster in Youngstown, Ohio. Mr. Cavalier lists among his hobbies relaxing, reading watching sports, fishing, hunting and boating.

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Idora Park

INTERVIEWEE: LEONARD CAVALIER
INTERVIEWER: Scott Smith
SUBJECT: Idora Park
DATE: November 24, 1990

S: This is an interview with Leonard Cavalier for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Idora Park, by Scott Smith, at 1458 Doncaster, Youngstown, Ohio, on November 24, 1990, at 5:10 p.m.

Would you please tell me about your past life, growing up, and everything else.

C: I was born in Youngstown. I went to St. Edward's Elementary School on the Northside. From there, I went to St. Edward's Jr. High and Ursuline High School. I graduated from Ursuline in 1956 and started Youngstown College at that time. After high school graduation, I started to work at Idora Park, so I attended Youngstown College on a part-time basis. I graduated in 1964 with a B. S. in Business Administration. I played football for Ursuline in 1954 and 1955 and I got married in 1959. Shortly after we were married, we moved to the south west side of town on Loma Vista Drive. I think we lived at that home on Loma Vista Drive for six or seven years. Then we moved out here where we're at now on Doncaster Drive.

I worked at the park until 1984 when the park closed. At that point, I went to work in February 1985 for the state of Ohio for the Amusement Ride Safety Division as an inspector.

S: What type of work did you do with that?

C: License and inspect all the amusement rides in the state of Ohio. Prior to parks' openings, we do an inspection, issue them an operating permit, and continue to inspect them throughout the season.

S: So you probably do a lot of traveling with that job?

C: Yes, throughout the state. After I was there for two or three months, I got a promotion to head of the division. At the present time, I am the chief inspector for the division.

S: What are your youngest memories of Idora Park? We can slowly work our way up from your first memories and then move on from there to 1984.

C: I can't tell you exactly when it was. Possibly working at the ballpark, when they had the minor league ball teams, I used to sell cokes and peanuts and so forth. I can't remember what year that was. I think it was when the St. Louis Minor League team was there.

S: They were playing a Youngstown team?

C: They were the local minor league team.

S: Do you remember what their name was?

C: St. Louis Athletics, probably.

S: That was in the 1950's?

C: Yes. I had to be twelve or thirteen years old.

S: What did you do, just sell peanuts and things like that?

C: Yes.

S: What did the park look like at that time?

C: It wasn't much different. The coasters were all there. I don't think there was a Kiddie Land at that time. Kiddie Land went in around 1950, I think.

S: That was where the swimming pool was?

C: Right. The ballroom hadn't been remodeled as yet. So it was like the old style facade. A lot of the flat rides, the Iron rides were different, but the major rides, the Lost River Ride, the two coasters, the carousel, I think the train ride went in after that.

There may have been an earlier train. There was an outdoor skating rink I believe which was removed when they later put in the hot rod ride. There was a hot rod car ride put on top on the terazz floor, where the outdoor skating rink was. That was on the north end of the park by Parkview Avenue.

S: Did they have gasoline engines?

C: The hot rod cars, yes.

S: Did they have the monkey cages at that time?

C: Yes. They probably did.

S: So you were working on a part-time basis?

C: I was going to school and I was working in the Summer. My dad got involved in the park in 1948 so this had to be...When they put the Kiddie Land in after they closed the swimming pool, then I started working Kiddie Land at that time. I might have been fourteen or fifteen years of age, when I was working Kiddie Land.

S: Did you work every Summer at the park?

C: Yes.

S: Did you work different jobs?

C: Yes. I starting in Kiddie Land operating rides and then I know I drove the Kiddie firetruck and ran the rides and I got to be sort of the foreman of Kiddie Land. All the time I was going to school. From there I think I operated some major rides and then I became the assistant ride superintendent and did the hiring and so forth and directed a lot of the maintenance on the major rides.

S: What type of work had to be done for maintenance on the rides? What did you have to do?

C: Well, during the season, just the general repairs to keep everything running. In the off-season, we'd tear things down and bring them into the shop and work on them and rebuild them. There was always a crew that would work on the coasters rides. From the time we shut down in the Fall, until the weather got too bad for work, we came back in the Spring to complete the coaster work.

S: Did you ever have a major accident at the park that you remember when you were there?

C: There was a death on the rollercoaster prior to the war or during the war that I recall them talking about on the Wildcat. A serviceman was killed on the Wildcat. He came out of a car.

S: Did he go out into the park?

C: I don't remember what the deal was. There was another death that I recall on the Jackrabbit Coaster. That one was in the 1950's.

S: Would it be the same type of deal where somebody was thrown out of a car or they were trying to stand up or something?

C: As I recall it was something like that. I think I was working at the park at that time when that happened on the Jackrabbit. I can't recall anything else.

S: So basically, as far as the rides, everything worked pretty smoothly?

C: Right.

S: At that time, did the park do a really a brisk business?

C: In what time?

S: As far as when you were growing up, when you were working there, when you were fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen?

C: Yes. The ownership changed in 1948. I think at that time, the three families that got involved were the Rindins, the Duffys, and my father. My father's interest prior to that was promoting some dances at the ballroom in the summertime. He also had the ballroom on Elm Street which used to sit where the YSU Stadium sits right now--The Elms Ballroom. He used to operate that and he also used to operate a place called the Mansion, the Wick Mansion out on Logan Avenue Ext. It was also a Summer dance pavilion. The Mansion was taken over by the Ursuline Nuns. They turned it into a convent. I think at that time, he then went out to the park and tried to operate dances out there.

S: Was he greatly involved with the bands then that were coming into the park?

C: Yes. My dad was primarily in the ballroom business before he was in the park business. Prior to being in the ballroom business, he was a builder. He was a contractor. He built homes.

S: I know you worked at the park and everything but did you still go to the park socially, yourself, with friends?

C: When I was in high school?

S: Yes.

C: We used to go to the dances.

S: What were the dances like?

C: I think that was the time when they had the record hops and in the 1950's, in addition to ballroom dancing they had record hops.

S: Was that with Dan Ryan?

C: Yes.

S: Did they ever bring bands in?

C: For the young kids?

S: Yes. Did anybody ever come in and play?

C: Well, when the records went out of vogue, then most of the...What happened was we went from disk jockeys...We always had to keep a band in there because of the union. The Musician's Union required that we have a five piece band be there at all times even though the D.J.'s were playing. That's when there were disc jockeys when W-HOT first came on the air. I believe that WBBW, which is one of the local stations, was one of the first ones to do records. I think Dan Ryan was the D.J. Then, W-HOT came in. W-HOT brought in Dick Bondi and some other D.J.s that turned out to be quite popular.

S: Those were pretty well attended?

C: Yes. What happened then was the D.J.'s fell out of favor and the bands started to become more popular. Kids would want to see more of the bands than they would the records.

S: Would there be popular national bands coming in?

C: We did, but more of the local bands were real popular too. There were quite a few local bands that used to play quite a bit at the park for the kids.

S: What other social activities besides dances did you have at the park. I know that you had baseball. Anything like boxing or anything like that?

C: They used to run boxing. They used to run wrestling.

S: Would it be the professional type wrestling?

C: Right.

S: Were those fairly well attended?

C: Yes. As I recall back then, there were some pretty good matches. Some of the names, back when wrestling was real popular back whenever that year was. I'm trying to recall some of the wrestling people. Gorgeous George.

S: Yes. As you got older and you progressed up the ladder as far as the jobs of the park, what type of different jobs and duties did you have to do?

C: After I left the mid-way, when I was doing ride operations, maintenance, what have you, I went into the office and I worked in the offices as far as managing the office, the cash control, the tickets, the sales, that whole thing. I helped my father, because my father at that time was treasurer of the corporation. So he was working and I was working along with him. Then about the same time, I must have been twenty, or twenty-one years old, I started taking over the advertising and the marketing and the promotion, the booking of the ballroom and that type of thing.

S: I was talking to another person, George Nelson about when he used to work at Idora Park in the early 1980's, just before it closed. He said that there was a family-type atmosphere. Somebody I interviewed just the other day and they worked there when they were thirteen, it had to have been the 1950's, they even said then it was like a family type atmosphere. Did you work to stimulate that type of atmosphere?

C: I think it was just automatic because everybody would come back every year. You'd see a lot of people that worked there and their children would work there. There would be two or three generations. Not just in management but...

S: In working the rides and the concessions and everything.

C: Right.

S: I know that George said something, that sometimes at night when the park closed they'd turn on the lights and let them play baseball?

C: Right. The last few years there was a lot of that going on probably because we got the ball park back in shape for slow pitch leagues, so we had lights. There was a time that we really didn't have enough lights to play ball. There was a time when the minor leagues went out and there was a period of time when they had pony leagues and little leagues and some other type leagues in that field but they didn't utilize the lights. Then slow pitch league came back in and then I think they were playing some night ball. The kids would be able to play after work. Then also, we shut the park down earlier too.

S: As it advanced into the 1970's and 1980's, was there a let down as far as park attendance?

C: There was a period of time when there was a lot of racial tension. We had problems in the park where there were a lot of neighborhood kids coming out to the park, causing problems. At that time there were riots going on around cities throughout the United States...

S: What type of problems did you have?

C: Gangs.

S: Walking around looking for trouble, those types of situations?

C: Yes. That sort of led to what it did all over the country causing the entertainment places to put gates up around the facilities.

S: Is that when you put the gate around the part?

C: Yes. Right.

S: So before that there was no gate? Somebody could have walked through the park at 4:00 a.m. if they wanted to?

C: Right.

S: I didn't know that.

C: There were no fences or gates at all in any of the parks around the country. The parks were just wide open and they had watchmen there to keep people from trying to steal something, but I don't remember it being a real problem. It was an open door policy and tickets were sold for each ride so you'd come into the park and you would buy tickets for whatever you wanted to ride. I think we were reluctant to go with a full gate policy. We would have to check back into the newspapers to see when we put the gate on. Originally we started on the holidays. Then from the holidays, we

went to weekends. We had open gate during the week. There was a time even back then when we wouldn't operate during the day. We'd open at 6:00 or 7:00 at night to midnight.

S: To catch the people after they'd get off work?

C: Yes. On the weekends, Saturdays and Sundays, we would operate 12:00 until closing. Over the years, the times that you operated varied too. We used to open a lot earlier years ago back in the early days and maybe close later. I remember staying open until midnight and working Kiddie Land until 11:00. Then the trend got to be that we'd close at 10:00 p.m. I think the reason that all this happened was the major parks started to be formed. Disney opened down in Florida and then the major theme parks opened around the country. They pretty much set the trend on what was going on. That was another reason for going to a gate. Because they all went to pay one price. Disney was the last one to go to a pay one price policy but up until six or seven years ago, Disney was still on coupons. So you were paying per ride. However, most of the major theme parks, Six Flags, and Cedar Point, and King's Island, they all went to pay one price and people were looking for that so the smaller parks like ours pretty much had to follow the lead and pay one price. There again, we ran pay one price with open gate too, for a while where they'd stamp your hand and put a wrist band on it and only those people could ride and it got so that we went to the full gate policy.

S: Did that have a positive or a negative effect, business-wise on the park?

C: Well, originally, it knocked your attendance figures down but in the long run, your gross dollars went up, because you weren't having people walking around in there spending a dollar. Every person that was going to come in was going to spend so many dollars. It varied over the years. We'd run a gate admission or pay one price, take your pick, a dollar to get in the gate or three dollars or four dollars to ride all the rides so the parents would bring their kids in. If they didn't want to ride, they wouldn't have to pay. I think we may have still kept the gate admission to the day we closed, where we didn't actually make everybody pay to ride.

S: Throughout the 1960's and 1970's, did you still continue to bring bands in and athletic events?

C: Yes. We were always doing promotions. There would be car shows and ball games, the King and His Court-- anything that would generate people on weekends and so

forth. The picnic business was the most important thing for the park too. Industrial picnics and unions and all those types of things, we did a lot of that. That probably represented about sixty per cent of the business.

S: In the area, would it be U.S. Steel Day or something?

C: Right, but we also drew from the Beaver Valley, from the Akron area, from Western Pennsylvania, Westview used to do a lot of picnic business and when they closed in the late 1970's or early 1980's and we got a lot of their business. When Geauga Lake went to the theme park format and started fixing up their park, we got some of the business that used to go there also because some folks couldn't afford the new facility.

S: When did you begin to do things like the W-HOT Spring Thing?

C: We used to always do a W-HOT day and from the time we started working with W-HOT, we had a real good relationship with the record hops and the whole thing. We used to run the record hops and the dances all Summer long and we'd bring in some main rock attractions and they would come over and we would do that throughout the season and it got so that we tied the rides into that and we made it into a day long event with all the rides and all the bands and so forth. It got real popular. We'd usually do it in August. It went real well and we thought we'd do another one in the Spring. It turned out that the Spring promotion did better than the Summer promotion because there was just nothing else going on. It was the first weekend the park opened and you would be able to use local bands rather than the national acts. We'd bring the national acts in the Summer but in the Spring, we could do local bands. A lot of the local bands were very popular anyway because we'd use them in our record hops and so forth.

S: I remember seeing K.C. and the Sunshine Band at Idora Park.

C: Yes. We had a time there when the bubblegum thing was hot, when we brought in C. C., David Cassidy and Bobby Sherman, those types. That used to draw quite a bit at that time. Then the whole music scene changed from that to the FM type of stuff so we tried to do both and tried to stay on top of what was going on in the music industry. A lot of the bands that we promoted for our record hops used to do real well too. The Human Beings started playing there when they first started. We used them for years. They used to always draw. The same way with Left End. Same situation. That would work too.

S: You were always able to have a successful business as far as with the bands and dances and everything?

C: Seemed to be. We'd use one thing to promote the other. We'd use the park to promote the ballroom or we'd use the ballroom to promote the park. If we were able to generate people...For example, we'd do a show in the ballroom, an international exhibit or something or a polka festival and try to break even on that and bring people out to the park. That type of thing. We'd cross-promote the things.

S: I understand. When did you have a point where it seemed as if the park was starting to do poorly? Was there a point that you could look at when the park was doing poorly that you didn't think you were going to make a profit?

C: As far as we were concerned, the era when we went into the pay-gate thing, the same time, let's say in the early 1950's, we went into a big remodeling program to sort of upgrade the facility (to keep Idora current). That was about the same time that these other parks were opening. When my father first went into the business, when he got involved with the park, the first thing he did was remodel the midway. The whole midway where all the buildings were located, used to be all cream and green. They used the same color combination throughout. It was an old style lattice work architecture style. They went in and they put a world's fair look on the midway predicated upon that the world's fair was going on in Chicago or New York at that time, when they had some very modern looking facades. In the mid 1950's, they remodeled the ballroom. The ballroom became a year round complex. They dropped the ceiling, they moved the bandstand to the center, they did all the pillars, hung drapes, plastered, the business and opened that one whole end up over the parking lot too. So that was a major project. From that time on, we started adding a lot of different rides and so forth. I don't know the time table but I knew when I was involved in the office end of it, the management end. I know in the 1970's we put a lot of different rides in the park. We changed a lot of rides. We moved our entrance down to what was formerly the back end of the ballroom and we added three rides down there. I think we put in a spider ride and a Yo-Yo ride and a Rock-O-Plane. We changed the front when we went to the full pay one price, we made a place for our picnics, and a place to register the people. It was all done to sort of upgrade the facility with the times.

S: In 1982, you put the park up for sale. What motivated you to put the park up for sale?

C: We just felt that it was time to get out. The owners were old, my father was old, the Rindins and the Duffys were still there, I believe. I don't know if Mr. Duffy was still there or not. It was just a matter of wanting to get out of it and the facility needed to be sold in order to get any money out of it.

S: In 1984 when the Wildcat burned down, what were your thoughts?

C: My thoughts?

S: Some people, I've talked to, almost everybody I've interviewed, their replies were, "I've lost a best friend." It was a sad moment in town for Youngstown because they lost something that was so significant across the whole United States.

C: Yes. It was pretty dramatic. It was a great loss. I sort of felt that we might be able to continue to operate. I knew that the two rides that were gone were our most popular rides and that our picnics and so forth depended on those two rides to generate a crowd. I think that what happened was that there was a lot of press coverage on that fire from all over this area. Cleveland was down, they had helicopters, Pittsburgh television was down. They showed that fire and it was pretty awesome. I think what happened, the people saw that and figured that the park was completely destroyed. We reopened in two weeks and we were ready for opening. Of course we didn't have the two rides but we brought our office in, we got our office back in shape. Both sides of the midway were gone. The one side that our office was on was completely burned but the other side was burned just from the head radiation. Of course, we lost the Lost River Ride and we lost the major coaster. We didn't lose any picnic business. All our picnics stayed. We made some adjustments because a lot of the groups came in on a price per hour basis. So instead of getting whatever we were getting per hour, we said, well, okay, we understand that two of our rides were gone, and you still have your group coming, we will be here, everything else will be in operation...So we did that but the attendance was way down in their groups and the attendance was way down in the ballroom. The ballroom was never mentioned in any of this media coverage. I think what happened was that it couldn't have been the loss of the two rides. I think what happened was that people got the impression that the park was not going to reopen. Then the advertising that we did afterward when we did get opened we put on a big push to try to get people thinking that, but it never did come back to the way it was. It never came back in our picnics. I'd say our picnic attendance had

to be off 40%. I would say our ballroom attendance was off 40%. We were doing ballroom dancing Wednesday nights and Saturday nights then, the last year, and whatever we were doing, the attendance dropped off. We would draw dancers from the Pittsburgh area, Cleveland area, as well as the Youngstown area and we lost all of that. I think it really was the fact that they saw the whole place burning.

S: Negative publicity?

C: Well, I think they felt that because in the video it looked like the whole place was engulfed in flames when the coaster was burning. But I thought, if it wasn't for that, we could probably rebuild the coaster, not the water ride. We did rebuild one side of the midway and get the thing up and running again but it was such a disaster business-wise. At the end of the season, we had to pull back all our advertising and I'd say around mid July, we just took a look at things and said, "Well, that's that."

S: Was it the burning down of the Wildcat that promoted you to have the Jackrabbit?

C: No. I think we were going to do that anyway. In fact, we were going to do that that season. Then, again, based on a couple other parks in the country. They were doing that. King's Island did it. They had the racer coaster. It was real popular. Of course, it was like three to one they wanted to ride the backward track rather than the forward track. We just thought it would be something to do. It was real easy to do. Turn the cars around.

S: When you made your decision to close the park, could you have left the ballroom open at that time?

C: We did.

S: You did? Was that when you went to doing half off sales for W-HOT? Was it about that time?

C: I can't say. We may have been doing those even before the park closed. Because there were a lot of winter-time events going on in the ballroom. The Homeshow, we had a Car Show going on every Spring, the half-off thing went on, the International Festival, some polka festivals, also craft and antique shows.

S: So the ballroom was used pretty much all year round?

C: Right. After the park closed we continued to operate the ballroom and when the park was sold, I continued to operate it myself until we finished up all the commit-

ments that we had, the different groups to run the dances on an annual basis. We used to have most of the stuff done in the ballroom in the winter season. We operated our dances in the Summer because it wasn't much called for to have group organizations to have dances in the Summer time. But in the Fall, from September on, there were all different groups and different clubs, the Policeman's Ball, booster clubs, Boardman Band, that was all the stuff that went on in the ballroom.

S: Do you think that the park would have remained open if the Wildcat would have not burned down and the Lost River? Do you still think the park would have remained open today and be successful?

C: I don't know. Most of the parks of that size around the country have closed. Most of them that have closed years ago. They closed in the 1950's. So I think we weathered all that. Now whether or not the neighborhood would have encroached on the facility to the point where we couldn't control that, whether or not we would have purchased ground around it, there was a lot of interest in taking the thing and going back to a turn of the century trolley park- a historical type thing because a lot of the buildings still were there underneath the fronts we put up back in the 1950's and 1960's and taking those buildings and going back into an historical thing and making it that type of an attraction. In fact, at one time, there was a guy who was looking at it quite seriously to do that to.

S: He wanted to convert it back to the old fashioned style park?

C: Exactly. We had pictures and I had drawings and we planned a lot of it. Those buildings were built in the early 1920's and 1930's.

S: What do you think the social importance of that park was to the Youngstown community?

C: I think back then, there was nothing else going on. That was the place to meet your friends. That was the entertainment facility of the community. I think there were a lot of things that changed that whole...After the second World War, of course, people all wanted things to do and the ballrooms and the dance business was really hot at that time. The park business was very good at that time too. The theme parks, the Disney type parks, played an important role in taking away from the neighborhood style park or trolley park. After the war, they started building malls. Malls became pretty much gathering places. So that all changed. People were able to go wherever they wanted

to go with cars, too. Even the highway system had an impact. Everything had an impact on that type of facility.

S: How would you compare Idora Park (this is how I like to draw a comparison) to Cedar Point, your "anti-septic" park and that Idora Park was your "down home" family park. What are your comparisons?

C: I think the theme parks have given people what they wanted. I really do. I think the people that went to the parks were all looking for that. We tried to pattern our operation after those, because as I said before, the pay one price, then also we never used to clean up the midway. Now at these other parks, there are people out there picking up your cigarette butts and papers. That was apparently what people wanted. The amusement parks of the past sort of had the atmosphere of rowdiness, it was unkempt, it was not a nice place to go and they sort of went out of favor because some of the movies they did back then played up the amusement park as a seedy place to be. A lot of them were. A lot of them were because, why not, they were open, anyone who wanted to go in there could go in there. It was the same situation as you had in any other facility. If they were old and allowed to be run down, you could attract a clientele that is going to lend itself to that. People that you want to attract are not going to be there.

S: What do you think made Idora Park so special?

C: I think there were a couple things. The quality of rides. I think a park of that size in a community of this size or a metropolitan area of this size is unique. When you look back in the earlier days at the number of parks that were around, every community had a park. Even New Castle had a park.

S: Lake Milton had a park.

C: So I think the fact that Idora had the quality of rides, the Lost River, the Wildcat the Rocket Ship the Jackrabbit coaster, back in 1929 when they built...I guess they built the Lost River Ride and the Wildcat coaster in the same year. I think it was the year before or during the Depression. I don't know how whoever was doing that were able to build two of those rides with such quality back then when there was supposed to be no business or no money around. That was always interesting how that occurred. I think that was probably the thing that kept that park ahead of the others was the quality of the rides that they did have. Then as the other parks fell by the wayside, Idora stayed.

S: Do you think the Wildcat was the star of the park?

C: Yes.

S: I met with Dr. Shale of the university and he said he was an ACE (American Coaster Enthusiast) and he said wherever he would go in the United States, people would ask him about the Wildcat.

C: Yes. That was real popular. Very popular. In fact, when they opened the Magnum at Cedar Point, I had to laugh. I wasn't up there for their opening because I had some back surgery, but I know the article in our paper or the Plain Dealer, they interviewed some of the riders because they invited some of them up there for opening day and they said "Oh, it's a great coaster." But some of the people from Ohio said "We like the Wildcat at Idora better." They had spent eight million dollars to build this coaster and it is a fantastic coaster, people were coming from all over the world and for them to mention the coaster at Idora, it was pretty impressive.

S: Are there any other rollercoasters in the United States that are the same design of the Wildcat that you know of?

C: I think there is. I've never seen it. I've heard Mr. Twister, I think it's at Elich Gardens, I think in Utah has a similar coaster. John Allen was the designer of that coaster. I don't know if he designed any more like that I think he did. I think it was a double or triple figure eight I guess they called it. But originally I guess that coaster was different than it is now. It didn't have that horseshoe on the top. It came right off the hill and banked right down. It was too violent so they had to tear it up and that season and the next season, put that gradual horseshoe so they anticipated the drop. Some of the footers were still under there. In fact I think I have some plans of where that first drop was. It was a bank drop. It came right off the top. It took you right down. I guess people were fainting on the ride.

S: What did you do with the carousel and the other rides that were left? Did you sell them after you decided to close the park?

C: The carousel was sold off in November of that year.

S: Do you know what has happened to any of the rides? Do you know where they're at?

C: Some of them. I see some of them when I'm out doing inspections around the state. The rocket ship ride was an old piece from the early 1900's. I think that went to the historical amusement park foundation in Indianapolis, Indiana. They bought that. We gave them a lot of stuff too. I think they took a lot of the stuff out of the fun house, old stuff out of the fun house that was behind some of the newer stuff that we put in front of it. The person that bought the carousel was going to put it into a development in New York City and I think it is still in storage in New York City. I haven't heard anything about it. I spoke to someone from the National Carousel Association down in Washington last week when I was at a trade show there. They said they didn't know anything more about it. The iron rides went to different carnivals and parks. The train, I guess, is up in Hubbard, Mckenzie's Gift Shop up there. She's running it, I guess. Basically I don't think there is much around the area. I think some people bought some of the facades and tried to use them for bars and stuff.

S: Do you think the city of Youngstown should have worked to try to keep the park open?

C: Who knows. At that time, there wasn't a whole lot of interest. There were a whole lot of people out there saying let's save the park and this and that but there wasn't really a whole lot of people putting any money out for it.

S: Do you think a lot of that was due to the steel mills closing down?

C: Well, we weathered that mill thing too. That was another set back. When was that in 1972? We went through that whole thing. We lost the picnic business from Youngstown. We still had some business from further out. Probably today if the park was still there and threatening to close, I think there would be more people out there trying to preserve it. There is more of that going on now, I guess. People are trying to save some of the buildings around town like the railroad station. But who knows. There have been a lot of other parks around the country that have closed. I think that today there would probably be more of an interest in saving the carousel. I've seen that happening in different communities, smaller communities than Youngstown would have had a park and keep the carousel in the community, get money together and put it in a buildings and so on.

S: Before we close up the interview, are there any other comments that you'd like to make about Idora park?

C: I think it was just a nice facility. It served the community well for as long as it did and brought a lot of memories to a lot of people. You see, I get around the state but I also do a lot of national meetings and so forth down in other states and there is still a lot of interest. You run into people that have had a lot of experiences there and memories and so forth. I think you could find that in any of those type facilities where people grew up and that was the only place to go. I think it served the community well. I guess there is a book coming out on the park. I ran into the president of the National Carousel Association at the park trade show in Washington last week. Charles Jaques is his name. He told me that he is still writing the book on Idora and it's supposed to come out pretty soon. It will be interesting to see what it looks like. I guess he's done Westview Park, which is down in the Pittsburgh area, and he did a book on Kenneywood. I don't have it here but I have copies of it. I don't know if he's written a Euclid Beach Park book or not. When you look back, talking to people, I think they are a lot larger in their minds than they really were. Some of the experiences that they had each year they get better and better. The park closing didn't affect me as it did a lot of the older people in the business. I was a little more realistic about that. Although I tried very hard to do a good job and to promote the thing and bring the thing up to what we thought would be a good facility in the community, this had to happen. It wasn't that sentimental to me as it was to a lot of the other people. I was really surprised at the amount of people that came out to that park on the last few days that we were open. It was going to be the last Sunday ever. Many people came out and talked to Mr. Duffy, the manager. There were a lot of people my age and younger that came out to take their last look around the park because they had a real feeling for it. I knew these people but I had never seen them out there. I never knew about how much they thought of the place. It was strange. That was a strange thing for me to see these people coming out there and reminiscing. It was a decent facility and I think it served its purpose.

S: So do you think there could be a chance that somebody could open Idora Park?

C: I don't think Idora Park but I think probably you'll see in the next few years, you'll see rides in malls, you'll see more of those little Kiddie Lands coming back in where people don't have to travel to Cedar Point and spend that kind of money. They might do that once a year. They might promote the park as a big convention center. The fair business and the festival business is real big also. You see a lot more well run

festivals and well run fairs, the Oktoberfest type event. Perhaps the park could be used for those types of events. It's pretty hard to open a small regional park playing to 200,000 to 300,000 people. I would not have any more rides than a carnival would have. The carnival would have quality rides, more expensive rides. You've got these very large theme parks out there and people will drive an hour or an hour and a half or a couple hours to and they can see the best of everything. So I don't know, other than the things that keep the little kids happy, for the young children and the parents that don't want to take their little five, six, eight, nine year old kids, I can see a lot more of these places happening, a facility where they can go and spend the day, pay one price and enjoy themselves.

S: Well, thank you very much for the interview.

C: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW