



ACE *New York* MetroLINE

Serving the ACE New York City Region

Spring 2010



"YES, WE ARE OPEN!"

Opening Day at Coney Island – 2010

If you're one of the original founders of A.C.E. and you're only six subway stops from Coney Island, is there anywhere else to be on opening day except on line to ride the Cyclone?

The day began with overcast skies threatening rain, a perfect metaphor for the larger shadows over Coney Island. With Astroland closed, no B and B Carousell on Surf Avenue, and a long history of deals and promises made and broken, one cannot be sure what the future will bring. Many years ago—pre-A.C.E., but we'll leave it at that—I began doing roller coaster research because I heard the news that the Cyclone was going to be torn down. Yet here it was, still rising defiantly over the boardwalk.

I hopped on the F train and got out at Coney Island. But instead of walking over to the Cyclone right away I got on the Q train and went up to Brighton Beach, home of New York's largest Russian community. The heritage of roller coasters begins with Russian ice slides, so I thought I would pay homage by starting my day in Little Russia and journeying from there to Coney Island, just as coasters had done.

When I reached the Cyclone the pre-opening festivities were in full swing. Miss Cyclone, Angie Pontani, was posing for pictures and giving interviews; the Hungry March Band was performing raucously; and Borough President Marty Markowitz was on hand to play politics as always by acknowledging the Cyclone's place in Brooklyn history. A.C.E. regional director Colleen Whyte was there, of course, along with other NYC area enthusiasts.

When the opening hour arrived, Colleen, Miss Cyclone, and the other dignitaries went up to the platform for music, speeches, and Marty's ceremonial breaking of an egg cream over the front car of the Cy-



clone. The first one hundred patrons with their free tickets waited anxiously in line.

I walked to the far end of the Cyclone. Having ridden and photographed it many times I know where to get the best pictures, and I wanted a shot of the first train of the year descending the first drop.

Finally the chain started and the platform participants cheered as the train rolled out. Coney Island was officially open for 2010. I have seen the Cyclone against a bright blue, clear summer sky and I've seen it in fog so thick you could not make out riders' faces. This opening day's gray, cold sky was in between. But weather does not matter! The Cyclone is magnificent whatever the conditions and had proven so once again.

The riders threw their hands up, yelling and screaming as only people who truly enjoy roller coasters can, as they dropped down the hill into Coney Island history as the first riders of another year. The Cyclone seemed to be running well, but when it reached the turn over the station it slowed to a crawl and some of us wondered if it would make it around at all. On such a cold day the grease was thick, the ride had not been fully broken in yet. But we weren't really worried: if the corner is a bit slow it only builds anticipation for the riders, and the car finally made it around without anyone having to get out and push, although I am sure any of the enthusiasts on board would have been happy to.

After photographing a few rides I queued up to get my first coaster ride of the season. It's always fun to talk to the people in line and we traded Cyclone stories as we worked our way forward, watching the train each time it went around above us. On the plat-



form I decided not to wait for a front seat ride. I love the front seat view, but since you're not allowed to bring a camera I settled for a second seat.

The ride was all it should be: smooth (at least for the Cyclone) after its winter maintenance, fast except for the one corner, and exciting. It should run fine this season. Looking right from the top of the lift hill I could see the work going on behind the fences surrounding the old Astroland site. Rides are being installed for a Memorial Day opening of the new temporary Luna Park; what develops in the long run is still unpredictable.

I finally said goodbye to the Cyclone and the other enthusiasts and headed to the Coney Island Sideshow Museum to say hello to the Tornado coaster car in the lobby. I love the Cyclone, but the

Tornado was always my favorite. On my way I looked over and saw the Wonder Wheel making its inevitable graceful revolutions, cars swinging wildly once again, and the Parachute Jump, landmarked, stabilized, and painted nicely, standing silently over the Boardwalk in the distance. These symbols of past greatness hang over the present vacant lots like taunting spirits, but perhaps they will finally inspire a true Coney Island revival.

Fittingly, as I left to get back on the F train a light rain began to fall, enough to stop the Cyclone for a bit. The present may be stormy, but with any luck there will be bright sunny days for both the Cyclone and Coney Island this summer and for many seasons beyond.

Joe Barna

My first ride on the classic coaster on the Island of Coney

On March 28, 2010, the opening day for Coney Island for the 2010 season, I saw Coney Island for the first time in person. That day I also had my first ride on the famous Cyclone. The fact that I was even there for opening day was thanks to Bill Galvin, an active ACE member and close family friend. Bill, his son Daniel and I arrived at Coney Island on opening day at 11:40 a.m. after a four hour car ride from Baltimore, Maryland. When we arrived we were greeted by an enthusiastic crowd of ACE members, families, couples, and many others all in line for the Cyclone. The street adjacent to the coaster was filled with a lively band playing,



dancers, news reporters, and the crowd as they eagerly awaited the first ride. As the gate to the Cyclone was opened, people started cheering and filling into the lines for seats. During the ride's first run of the day the clatter of the cars against the wooden tracks filled the air with anticipation. After about ten minutes I found it was my turn to experience the thriving coaster myself, after having waited patiently for the last seat with Daniel. After squeezing into the well padded seat, having made sure the seat bar was down, and being cleared for dispatch, the thrill began. Throughout the whole ride I found myself screaming, my stomach dropping, being rattled with impressive force, or all of the above while having a huge grin on my face. The Cyclone's successful design left for no dull moments. It's hard to exactly describe riding a roller coaster, especially one you haven't ridden before, but there's a common consensus contributing to what makes a great roller coaster great. It's that feeling like your falling out of your seat, sitting with people excited to be there, rushing around turns swaying to one side and then another, being battered around while enjoying every moment of it; this is what makes the Cyclone and so many other coasters great. My first ride on the Cyclone was simply a blast and I'm hoping to return as soon as possible.

Laura Bruns

A Moment in Time – My Coney Island Story

For me, Palm Sunday is the start of summer, because that is when the Coney Island Cyclone opens. Every year, Palm Sunday falls on a different date. In fact, one year I had my first official winter coaster ride when the Cyclone opened on March 16th, almost one week before the spring solstice! We ACERS have had a very long, dark, and snowy winter, so by once again attending the ACE

event at Coney Island I feel like I got a head start on summer and my “riding season.” After all, summer is our time to ride!

My first trip to Coney Island was with my friend Ralph, my next-door neighbor whose dad just happened to be a New York City subway conductor on the Coney Island line. I was about 14 and had rarely been out of Valley Stream, Long Island without my parents. We took the train into Brooklyn where I rode not only the Cyclone for the first time but the Thunderbolt as well. Coney Island was quite seedy in the 70's, with bums and drunks approaching you on the street for loose change. This was years before I became a “coaster enthusiast” and before I knew the history of this area. Things have changed quite a bit since then.

Last year on opening day, I saw the beginning of the major changes to come to Astroland, the park that contained the rides across the street from the Cyclone. The park was fenced in, and most of the rides were dismantled. But this year there was almost nothing left. The entire area was boarded up with high, wooden walls built around the park. The whole area has been cleaned up, maybe a bit too much, as the only rides I saw opened were the Cyclone, Deno's Wonder Wheel and kiddie park. Gone are Tilt-a-Whirl and the Bumper Cars. The Astro-tower is closed, (although it is still standing) and no “Devil's Den” dark ride.

Each year as I approach the Cyclone on opening day, I see the usual ACERS standing on line in the hope of being among the first 100 riders who get a free ticket from “Miss Cyclone” herself. I chat with a different Miss Cyclone, Coleen “Cyclone” Whyte my



Rich Stirrat with Paul Ruben

local New York area ACE representative, and we catch up on “coaster things” and upcoming trips. This year she introduced me to Mrs. Carol Albert - the woman responsible for keeping Astroland open for the past several years, and who is a strong part of what will be the future of Coney Island. I tell Coleen every year that I would love to go back in time to the 1920's Coney Island for at

least one day, just to see what this place must have been like in all its glory.

The line is starting to move now, and the first train-load has just roared by me. If I close my eyes and concentrate hard enough, I can almost “see” into the past. I picture hundreds of onlookers as they gaze in amazement at the elaborate minarets and towering statues all lit up by a million electric light bulbs. The men, all in their Sunday best, are wearing straw hats and bowlers, jackets and ties. For some strange reason they all have mustaches! The ladies wear long skirts and the latest in headwear and carry parasols for shade.

I can imagine all different kinds of rides from the past, like the Human Roulette Wheel or the Tickler, rides that haven't been open for years, I'm sure, because of the high insurance premiums that would be needed to operate these wild rides. I see live animals and midway performers bringing the entertainment right up close to me. The laughter from the crowd is infectious. The soundtrack playing in my head throughout my short daydream is my favorite Fats Waller tune, “Lenox Avenue Blues,” which really takes me back. But to go back in time for a day to ride classic coasters like The Zip, the Flying Turns, or the wonderful Mile Sky Chaser, would be a dream come true for me. The only thing I can compare this to is the excitement I felt when I finally got to ride the world's oldest operating roller coaster, Leap the Dips (1902) at Lakemont Park in Altoona, PA.

It is back to reality and time for my first coaster ride for the 2010 season. It is well worth the wait! The Cyclone seems much smoother to me this year, and I see lots of replaced wood; however, the lap

bars get tighter and tighter every year because of more padding (on me as well, as I have put on weight)!

The old Astroland is wiped clean down to its cement foundations with a promise of a few rides by Memorial Day. It would be great to see this area turned into half of what the old Luna Park or Dreamland were in the 20's, or what the recent "artist's rendering" looked like in the papers when the City of New York announced the plan for a major renova-

tion to this area that will include a huge, steel looping coaster, a multiplex movie theater, and more new rides.

I will never forget my first visit to Coney Island (I still have the ticket stub from my very first Cyclone ride), but as I walk along the boardwalk, I feel sad to see merely the shell of what once was the amusement and entertainment capital of the world.

Rich Stirrat

Coasters, Candy and the Crack of the Bat: Forty Years of Coney Island Memories

I've never lived anywhere other than Brooklyn. I have fond and fantastic memories of Coney Island through the decades, from age five onward. I remember all the delight, exhilaration and entrancement it brought and the changes it has gone through.

When I was a child and through my teenage years the Cyclone always loomed as the scary ride I would never try. As a very young child I was fearful of ALL roller coasters. At six or so I went on a "baby" coaster at another park that scared me terribly at the time. I screamed, pleading to get off.

Nevertheless, my enthrallment with amusement parks started when I first visited Coney at age five and has continued ever since. The rides were always my favorite part, and I never tired of them. Coney was much larger then than today. After Steeplechase Park closed in 1964 (before my time), a lesser park also called Steeplechase arose on its former site. This "new" Steeplechase Park, Deno's Wonder Wheel Park, Astroland, and other rides were on the scene while I was growing up. Four roller coasters operated then -- the Jumbo Jet (in Steeplechase), the Tornado, the Thunderbolt and the Cyclone -- acknowledged universally as the "scariest" with its dreaded "first drop".

In my second decade, a wonderful thing came to Coney Island - P.O.P! P.O.P stood for Pay One Price, and it meant that I could ride all the rides all day. In later years the P.O.P program was severely restricted -- it no longer ran on weekends and did not run all day. But in the beginning and for some years afterwards it ran Saturday and Sunday from

noon to midnight. Eagerly and unendingly from noon till midnight I maneuvered from ride to ride, blessedly enchanted by this endless bounty. I knew even then that at \$6 for 12 hours of amusement park rides in glorious Coney, this would remain the bargain of a lifetime.

Of course I came to Coney initially with my parents, but as I grew to be a teenager I would visit with friends. The price of the P.O.P. tickets inched up year by year, but it was always a fantastic bargain (until they did away with weekend riding). As a teenager I had the coasters in my sites. They would be conquered one by one.

The first was the Jumbo Jet, which at that time was part of the "new" Steeplechase Park. It was not a wooden coaster. The train rode on two cylindrical tubes, one on each side of the track. The first drop, while steep, did not seem to be terribly severe. The absence of the clacking sound of gears and the apparent smoothness of the ride told me this was the one to start on.

I loved the Jumbo Jet from my first ride. The first drop was thrilling and steep, but I could handle it and I loved it. The subsequent twists and turns looked scarier than they turned out to be. I remained a constant fan and enthusiastic rider from then on. When the "new" Steeplechase Park was closed as Coney Island was shrinking, the Jumbo Jet was moved closer to the other remaining rides. Eventually it closed.

After riding the Jumbo Jet, the Tornado was next in my sights. It was a wooden coaster and had that clack-clack sound that rattled me -- but no scary first

drop. On I went -- and it was easy! If anything, the Jumbo Jet was more challenging. Still, an accomplishment. Two coasters down, two to go.

It was a while before I was ready to attempt the Thunderbolt. A wooden coaster with a big first drop, I considered it to be the Cyclone "Lite". Lite though it may have been, it was still too much like the Cyclone and still very intimidating.

In a couple years I was ready. The Thunderbolt WAS wild -- and immensely thrilling and fun. I could handle it! But the Cyclone still loomed in the distance, and I had not the courage to attempt it.

Years passed. I turned twenty and it was time. I was not a teenager anymore. I was going to ride this thing. On I went.

It turned out to be even more fun than the Thunderbolt, even more thrilling. I could handle the "first drop". I LOVED the first drop. I graduated that day into the ranks of he-men who are not afraid of mere roller coasters. (He-men and she-women -- many of whom rode as preadolescents.) In any case, my day had come.

In Coney many things have of course changed through the years, but apart from the rides, I and many others were under the spell of one particular man. A man who in all ways appeared to be the embodiment of the kinder, gentler, sweeter age that Coney originally sprung from.

His name was John Dorman, proprietor of Philip's Candy. He own and ran a candy shop built into the Stillwell Avenue train station, with frontage on Surf Avenue. Everything about the shop spoke of an earlier time, as if it had been transported through a time machine.

The candy was incredibly inexpensive. He made much of his own candy, and you'd see him through the window laying out fudge, or mixing ingredients in vats. John even made and sold "lime rickey" soda drinks. He sweetly assembled his own candy combinations in his own packaging. He thought Debby Boone's "You Light Up My Life" album would be a great deal for his customers, so he must have ordered a bunch of copies at bargain price, and he sold them to his customers for \$1 each.

John was a gracious, kind, courtly man. It was as fun to speak with him as to indulge in his lovingly-produced candy.

Sadly for me I have never visited the new store that John opened when he was forced to close his old one (due to the reconstruction of the Stillwell Av-

enue subway station). But here is the address and phone number of his new shop, which still operates to rave reviews: Philip's Candy, 8 Barrett Avenue, Staten Island, NY, (718) 981-0062.

As a native and lifelong Brooklynite, I grew up aware that in one American city, there was a singular sense of loss and a singular yearning. And that city was my city, my borough. No American city that lost a team had missed its team more, felt more betrayed, yearned more for some type of redress. No American city loved its team more than Brooklyn loved its Dodgers. I wasn't born when the Dodgers played in Brooklyn, but the stories, the passion, the disappointment, and the desire for redress were all passed to me.

So in 1999 when it was announced that professional baseball was returning to Brooklyn, I did feel thrilled and vindicated. Yes, the team would be minor league, not major league. But a wrong would still be partly righted, for me and for future generations.

At first no name was announced for the team. When the name CYCLONES was chosen for the team, it was vindication even further.

While the new stadium was being built, my friends and I sent in a letter expressing an interest in purchasing season tickets for the new team. We were rewarded with: front row seats behind home plate. From opening day onward, for nine seasons and from this vantage point, I've had the satisfaction of seeing something wonderful restored to Brooklyn.

As I tell anyone who hasn't attended a Cyclones game, a day at the ballpark is like a day in the country. You feel like you are out of New York City. The stadium's architecture seems to be of another era, and is beautiful to behold. The sight (and smell) of the Atlantic Ocean is just beyond the outfield. And noticeable to the right, especially when day turns to night, are the lights of Coney Island, reminding you in the best way that you are still in Brooklyn.

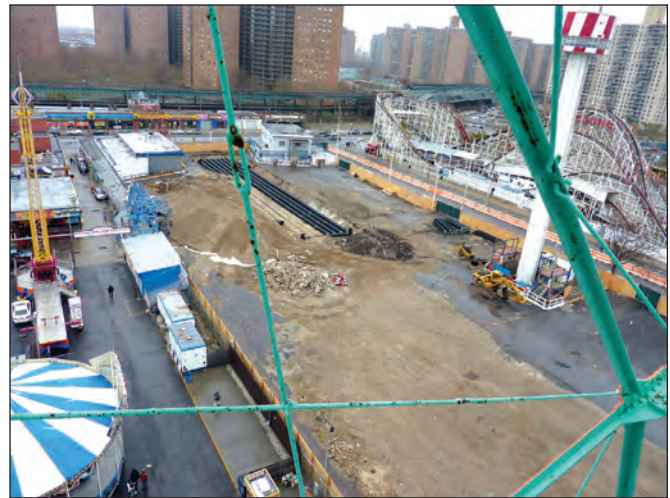
All of my Cyclone rides these days are with arms raised and hands pointing to the sky. I like the front car best, and as we approach the first drop, I turn my head and instruct those behind me: "Hands up!" Most people follow my lead, but in the middle of that first drop almost all the arms come down. Except mine.

David Greene

Coney Island: The return of Luna Park

Astroland's former site at Coney Island will soon be home to amusement rides once again. At a press conference at the New York Aquarium on February 16, New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg and other city officials put to rest the ongoing fears that Coney Island and its historic amusement zone would be lost to condos or a Las Vegas-style resort. Astroland was closed in 2008 and the land sold. Thor Equities and developer Joe Sitt were the major players who wanted to develop Coney Island, but in a way that almost no one wanted. At Mayor Bloomberg's insistence, the city repurchased nearly seven acres of that land in November for \$96 million. Bids were solicited from amusement operators who could populate the property with thrilling rides before summer. Italy-based Antonio Zamperla SPA, who has a conveniently located office in Parsippany, New Jersey, was chosen to supply 19 rides for the 2010 season and beyond. A ten-year lease was signed with Central Amusement International LLC (CAI), the parks operations division of Zamperla, to run the amusement park. CAI has done this successfully at two other locations, including Victorian Gardens in New York City's Central Park and L'olandia Amusement Park near Milan, Italy.

At least one of the new rides, Air Race, will be making its world debut at Coney Island. It's been suggested that other prototype rides will first appear there as well. A new family roller coaster named Speedy Coaster will be included in the initial ride lineup of what will be called Luna Park at Coney Island, which takes its name from the original Luna Park, which existed at Coney Island from 1903 until

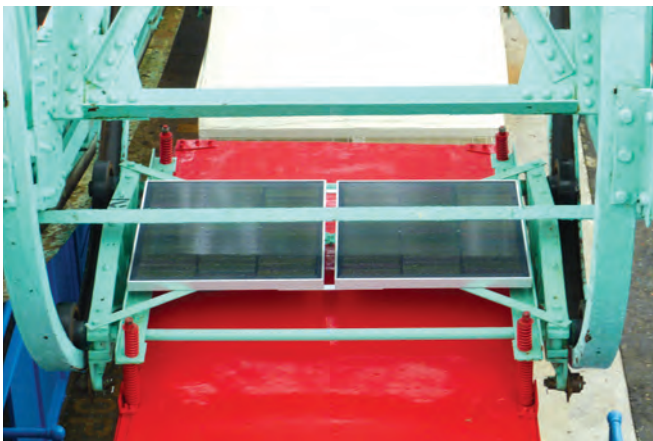


Former site of Astroland Park. Preparations have begun for the new Luna Park

it was destroyed by fire in 1944. The plan is for two custom roller coaster, go-carts and slingshot ride to be added to a three-acre area called Scream Zone at Coney Island in 2011. Zamperla has just six weeks (mid-April to Memorial Day weekend) to set up the rides at Luna Park, so it's a race against the clock to get it ready. At least \$24 million will be invested in the park by Zamperla/CAI over the next three years. The City is investing an additional \$6.6 million for site preparation and infrastructure upgrades. The investment could pay off tremendously for the ride company since Coney Island will become a showcase for their wide variety of thrill and family rides. Any prospective ride buyer will be able to visit Coney Island and check out nearly two dozen of Zamperla's rides in action.

The 1927 Cyclone roller coaster and Deno's Wonder Wheel, which remained open after Astroland's closure, will continue to be operated by their previous management. The Wonder Wheel is expected to receive solar panels and a new lighting configuration. The iconic Astrotower will be preserved as signage for the park. The historic B&B Carousel, currently under restoration, will be reinstalled near the nonoperational Parachute Drop as a centerpiece for the new Steeplechase Plaza. Luna Park's 2010 season is scheduled to run from May 29 until Labor Day; then weekends only through October 11. Coney Island's revitalization is expected to generate 330 new jobs by 2011.

David Finkelstein



Wonder Wheel has received solar panels and a new lighting configuration

Arts & Crafts

Making ride models



John Hunt is a model builder from Boston, Massachusetts, now a local to Coney Island living on Long Island. He has been constructing models of rides since the age of 12. Back then they were made of cardboard and tooth picks, but today, he uses more architectural materials, and has turned his hobby into a serious business. He has constructed hundreds of models, including the Coney Island parachute drop as well as multiple models of the Wonder Wheel for the Vourderis family, owners of Deno's Wonder Wheel park.

On Palm Sunday, March 28, 2010, John presented Colleen Whyte, ACE New York regional representative, with this model of Coney Island Cyclone roller coaster.

Visit John's web site www.rollercoastermodels.com if you would like to see more of his work, or if you would like him to reproduce your favorite ride.



Regional Website:
www.ACEonlineNY.org

National Website:
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