

The Bounty of Fun at Lake Rhoda

By Dennis Payton Knight

Thousands have visited Lake Rhoda, though they never knew her by that name, just to soar above her banks and plunge back to the ground, only to rise and do it again. Lake Rhoda covers twenty percent of the municipality in which it is based, a statutory town that as of the 2010 census had a population of 8 – not 8,000, not 800 – just 8, and that’s down from the 20 folks who lived there in 2000.

It was incorporated as a town in the year 1907 as Lakeside, Colorado by the brewing magnate, Adolph Zang, on the edge of Denver, but beyond its liquor laws. In 1908 he built there, under a hundred thousand lights, a grand amusement park he called the Great White City, anchored by its landmark, the Tower of Jewels. Officially, though, it has always been Lakeside Amusement Park.

In the 1930’s a period of renovations incorporated many Art Deco features, with a bounty of colorful, not-so-white neon lighting, leaving the “white city” label behind. Interestingly, the park has undergone only one ownership change in its history, when Zang sold it in 1935 to Benjamin Krasner, whose daughter, Rhoda, still owns it.

Rhoda has turned away real estate speculators offering millions for the land because she still has her father’s love and vision for the old park and how it serves the community as a fairly-priced option. Well into its second century, it is one of the oldest amusement parks in the United States, and the oldest in the same location in Colorado.

The nominal fee to enter the park includes parking. They offer an unlimited ride pass under \$20, a bargain compared to what is charged at Elitch’s downtown. While the pass goes up some on weekends, you can instead buy coupons for individual rides. There is a picnic area and you can bring your own food. Try *that* at Elitch’s.

Our family of seven kids when I was a child made an annual excursion to Denver that packed into one day the zoo, the natural history museum, and many hours at Elitch Gardens and Lakeside, too. Of all, I remember most the childhood fun at Lakeside, progressing over the years from kiddy land to the big boy rides.

An animated, loud, “Laffing Sal” was at the entrance to the fun house, featuring moving floors, slides, spinning discs, rolling barrels and catwalks inside. It is gone now, likely because it was a firetrap.

After 110 years, Lakeside still has a bounty of rides, including the historically-designated Cyclone, one of the world’s top-rated wooden roller coasters. Next year, a thrilling Pinfari Zyklon roller coaster is moving from Omaha to Lakeside. It is the first major acquisition for the park in decades.

Lakeside for our big family always included spins on the carousel and the train that circumnavigates the lake and to all corners of that wonderful place known as Lakeside. The bounty is still there.