

Article Last Updated: 08/24/2006 02:40:10 PM MDT

## Lagoon's roller coaster transcends generations

By Kathryn Jones  
Close-Up Correspondent

Some things are better the second time around.

Take the White Roller Coaster at Lagoon, for example.

Initially dubbed the Giant Coaster and then Lagoon Dipper, the roller coaster and the original Fun House caught fire in 1953. Everything on the midway's west end - including trees, tables, rides and the coaster's front - was destroyed.

From the fire's ashes, the White Roller Coaster arose like the legendary phoenix. It and the midway were rebuilt, and a bevy other rides were installed.

"Lagoon started to surpass the popularity of its chief rival, the Saltair resort," according to Lagoon's Web site.

Saltair was savored for years by Salt Lake City residents, who commuted by rail from Utah's capital to the amusement park on the Great Salt Lake's south shore. As early as 1893, this salty resort was a place where people could have wholesome fun. It featured swimming, dancing, boat rides, a roller coaster and other amusements.

But Saltair's own fire in 1931, some 45 years after Lagoon's 1886 debut, blackened its business prospects. Lower lake levels and other woes made matters worse. It closed following the 1958 season.

Thereafter, Lagoon was the hot spot.

"I have been [coming here] ever since I was this high," says Mark Halladay, who hails from Boise, Idaho.

Halladay says he was a wee boy when he first braved the White Roller Coaster and its raggedy turns that make you feel as if the coaster were going to fall off the track. He still comes to Lagoon every year with his family - and the coaster remains a hit.

Joanna Paddock of St. George is a bit more wary of the ride.

"I used to go [on the ride] over and over as a kid," she recalls. "I can't do that anymore."

Debuted in 1921 and designed by John A. Miller, the coaster rolled out a new look after it was rebuilt. In the 1960s, it sported silver cars with red trim and lights in front.

One thing hasn't changed: Its riders still soar as high as 60 feet, then endure a jaw-dropping, 55-foot plunge at breakneck speed.

The "white" in the White Roller Coaster is beginning to fade, though. Lagoon officials decided last year to stop painting it. As the ride is checked and repaired, unpainted cured wood is used to replace the the white wood. This change is evident as riders approach the coaster's first hill.

Riders' favorite spot to sit is in the first car, which affords occupants with a full view of the tracks. People in the rear of the roller coaster, though, get the wilder ride.

For some, this only adds to the fun.

"I love the back," says 20-year-old Bethany Jones of West Valley City. "It was more fun because [the car] jumped."

For his part, Halladay is glad to carry on the coaster's tradition with his family.

"The ride is awesome," he says.



Riders enjoy the 55-foot drop on the White Roller Coaster at Lagoon. Officials decided to stop painting it this year and instead used cured wood to replace it. (Kathryn Jones/Close-Up Correspondent )