

Authentic Machines From Yesteryear Acquired

How Sweet It Is! New Candy Shop With Taffy-Making Coming To Quassy

MIDDLEBURY, Conn. – How sweet it is! Or, in this instance, how sweet it will be.

Quassy Amusement & Waterpark here will open a new candy shop for the 2017 season which, like much of the landmark property, will have a mix of old and new to offer guests.

The highlight inside the new building will be a taffy-making operation complete with historic machinery restored specifically for the park.

“We spent a great deal of time researching the machines needed to produce taffy,” Quassy President Eric Anderson said of the endeavor. “Our vision was to recreate the nostalgia of candy-making from yesteryear – that time when you could stroll the boardwalk and see the taffy being pulled the old-fashioned way on a machine.”

After thoroughly exploring the subject, the park official was led to Ron Krueger in rural Sims, N.C., who has more than 50 years of experience in candy-making as well as the restoration of confectionary machinery.

Touching base with Krueger in the late winter of 2015, Anderson soon discovered Ron’s Candy Equipment had the right recipe for what Quassy was looking for.

“I started repairing candy machines in the 1960s when I couldn’t find anyone to do it,” recalled Krueger, who owned a taffy shop on the Wildwood, N.J., boardwalk for many years. “I stopped making candy in 1999 and have been fixing machines ever since.”

Of particular interest to fulfill Quassy’s quest would be authentic taffy pulling and wrapping machines from that bygone era. Fortunately for the New England park, Krueger had both waiting in the wings and ready for restoration at his machine shop.

A visit to Krueger’s business that winter convinced the park official to have two machines refurbished for the projected project.

Regional Roots

The taffy cutter and packaging machine, dating back to the 1920s, was built by Package Machinery Co., of Springfield, Mass. The puller, which Krueger had to fully rebuild, was from the same era but its original manufacturer was unknown.

With the purchases confirmed, Krueger fabricated parts he was capable of producing in his shop while he sent others out to companies specializing in his needs.

The large packaging machine with its pair of huge wood candy rollers was completely disassembled, cleaned and painted. Two new motors and belts were installed during the process to bring the device back to “like-new” operating condition.

Krueger, who has serviced and sold machines across North America and several other countries overseas, had the equipment ready in the early spring of 2016 and park officials paid him another visit to go over their operation in detail. Both machines were shipped to Quassy shortly thereafter.

“The taffy-making will be an attraction all in itself,” Anderson said of the acquisitions. “It will be freshly-made daily (in season) with a variety of flavors offered. We also anticipate fulfilling online mail orders for the candy once we are fully operational.”

What’s In A Name

Family-owned and operated since 1937, Quassy – having opened in 1908 - is rich in tradition and one of only 11 remaining “trolley parks” in the nation.

Dating back to 1925, the popcorn stand is one of oldest buildings on the 20-acre property. It has gone through a number of changes and updates throughout the years and will be demolished to make way for the new structure.

“The family (owners) really gave it some thought when it came to naming the new building,” Anderson said of the process which started after it was determined the old popcorn stand would be replaced.

Considering the park’s heritage and 80 years of family involvement, the owners decided the new structure would be called Bella & Bessie’s Sweet Shoppe & Pizzeria.

Bella was Vasiliki Bolakaki, who came to the United States in 1927 with her new husband, John Frantzeskakis (Frantzis). They were accompanied by another married couple and close friends, George and Vasilia (Bessie) Terezakis.

The women spent many of their first days in the U.S. at Lake Quassapaug, which had a small amusement facility overlooking the sparkling lake.

That same year John Frantzis and business partner Mike Leon purchased the Chocolate Shoppe in downtown Waterbury, Conn., only a few miles from Lake Quassapaug.

It was in 1937 that John Frantzis, Mike Leon and George Terezakis, who had worked as concessionaries at the summer property, purchased Lake Quassapaug Amusement Park.

Leon remained involved in park operations until his death in 1958. The Terezakis family eventually sold its interest in the park to Eric Anderson and his wife, Emily (Frantzis).

Today, Quassy remains a “family affair” as it is fully owned by the Frantzis and Anderson families with Anderson and George Frantzis II overseeing daily operations.

“It seemed fitting that we honor two of the women who worked incredibly hard to help shape Quassy into a family park in its early days,” Anderson said of the decision. “It took a great deal of courage during that era to leave your homeland, learn another language and really start anew. It’s not only a tribute to Bella and Bessie, but to all of their family members.”

Sweet Treats

The new 1,400-square-foot store will not only feature taffy, but also favorites such as cotton candy, popcorn in a variety of flavors, candy apples, chocolate and hard candy.

In addition, the shop will offer nachos and giant pretzels.

Beverages will include soda, fresh-squeezed lemonade, slush and other bottled soft drinks.

The north end of the structure will be home to the pizzeria, where homemade pizza with a variety of toppings will be offered by the slice or whole pie. Beer and wine will be sold on the pizzeria side of the building as well.

The second story will house business offices and storage space.

Quassy Amusement & Waterpark has introduced many new additions in recent years while meticulously maintaining much of its historic integrity.

As for losing a structure that has been a fixture at the property for nearly a century, Anderson summed it up by saying: “It’s really a great trade-off. The old building was difficult to maintain, so it needed to be replaced. The new shop will allow us to expand our product line and include taffy production – something that is as historic in our industry as Quassy itself.”

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With photos

- Before the Great Depression of 1929 there were more than 1,000 trolley parks in the United States. Most of these amusement properties were built, owned and operated by electrified rails lines and built to generate rail traffic on the weekends. Most of these

properties disappeared during the depression and today only 11 remain – Quassy being one of them.

For more information and photos, contact:
Ron Gustafson, director of marketing and public relations
203-758-2913