

Finance



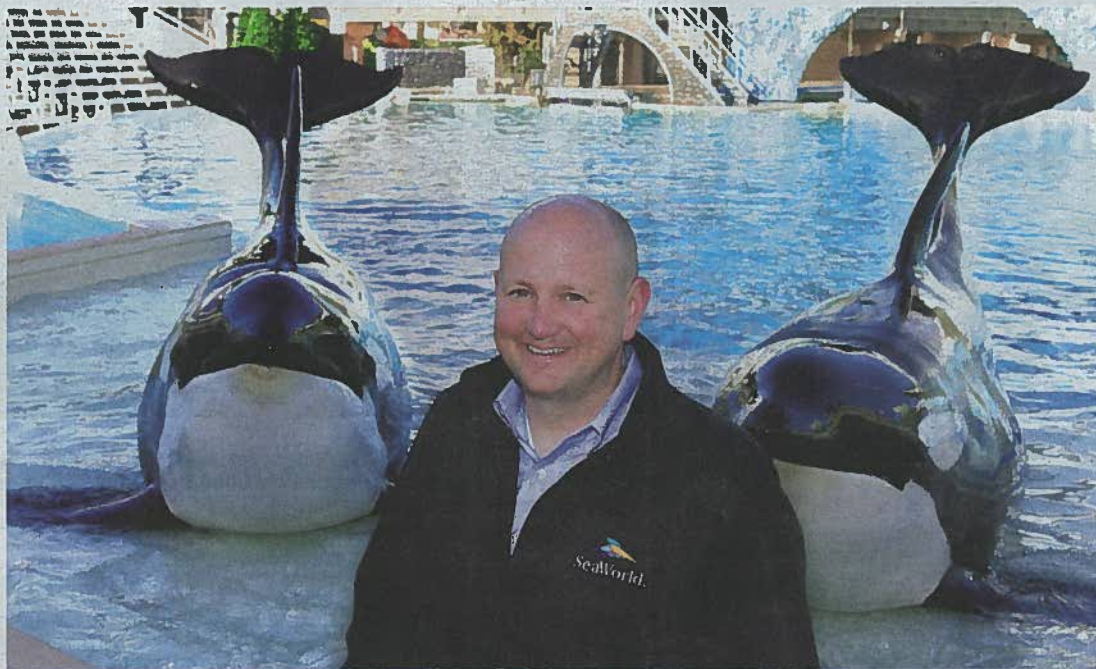
Linda Lang says Jack in the Box's improvements helped offset a dip in profits.
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Law



Attorney Paul Robinson serves on the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority's board.
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Melissa Jacobs

John Reilly took the president's job at SeaWorld San Diego earlier this month. The park has nearly 10,000 animals; its biggest denizens include orcas Kasatka and Orkid.

MAKING A SPLASH

TOURISM: SeaWorld's New President Will Guide The Park Through Changes

■ By LOU HIRSH

When John Reilly took a part-time food-service job at Busch Gardens Williamsburg 25 years ago, little did he know that it would lead to a series of key leadership roles across the country with the theme park operator.

"I was there for the same reason that most teenagers go to work in the summer — to save up some money for a car," recalled the 42-year-old Virginia native, noting that his

first job consisted of selling popcorn and soda near the park's Loch Ness Monster roller coaster.

Reilly took the reins Nov. 18 as president of the company's SeaWorld San Diego, overseeing daily operations at the Mission Bay marine park that employs more than 4,000 people and plays home to an animal population of nearly 10,000.

He replaces Andrew Fichthorn, who retired recently after six years leading the park.

Reilly most recently was president of what is now called Busch Gardens and Water Country USA in Williamsburg, the place where his career started before he went on to

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Connecting With the Past and the Present

TECHNOLOGY: Company Makes It Possible for Public To Join Scientific Expedition

■ By STEVE SINOVIC

San Diego has a long tradition of being a creative hub for digital media, and one local company has profited by contributing technical and artistic expertise to a business venture in which the National Geographic Society and UC San Diego academics play pivotal roles.

The local firm's expertise is an essential component of "Field Expedition: Mongolia — Valley of the Khans Project," which invited Web users around the world to join a field expedition online in real time as "citizen scientists" working from the comfort of their own homes.



Dan Khabie

The collaboration with the venerable educational and scientific organizations tapped into San Diego-based Digitaria Interactive Inc.'s local talent pool, said Dan Khabie, Digitaria's chief executive officer.

"We helped them build the online experience," said Khabie, referring to a six-month process in which Digitaria staffers assisted National Geographic's digital media division — as well as UCSD researchers — to design the "Field Expedition: Mongolia" Web site.

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SPECIAL REPORT:
SAN DIEGO COUNTY AIRPORTS

While work is under way to expand facilities

SeaWorld:

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several park executive posts in culinary and merchandising areas. His appointment in San Diego marked a homecoming of sorts for Reilly, who several years ago served as a vice president of culinary services at the local park.

SeaWorld San Diego, which opened in 1964, is now one of 10 parks nationwide operated by Orlando-based **SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment**, a portfolio company of New York-headquartered investment firm **The Blackstone Group**. Blackstone acquired the parks a year ago from global brewing giant **Anheuser-Busch InBev**.

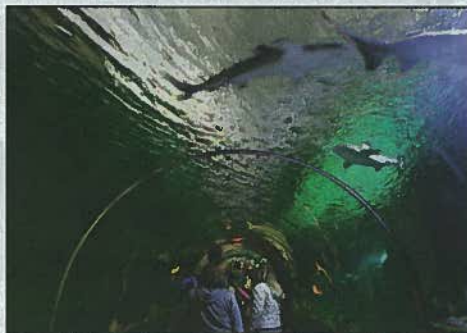
A Time of Transition

Reilly's latest transition comes as SeaWorld San Diego itself is undergoing dramatic changes, adding new shows and attractions set to begin in the coming year as the park looks to rebound from an economy that was not kind to the U.S. theme park and tourism industries.

Earlier this year, it completed an extensive renovation of its Dolphin Stadium, home to its Blue Horizons animal show. By mid-2011, it plans to debut Riptide Rescue, a spinner ride with gondolas arrayed in a rescue boat theme, which Reilly said is aimed at attracting teens and older adults in addition to the park's strong base of families with younger children.

Also by summer 2011, it will open a new exhibit showcasing sea turtles, giving visitors a rare look at animals that most people never see because the creatures spend so much of their lives in the open ocean after hatching.

Another high-profile change in the works, though debut timetables and other details have not been announced, involves a retooling of SeaWorld Parks' performing whale shows which were changed after an



Melissa Jacobs
SeaWorld San Diego visitors get a unique perspective on the theme park's sharks.

employee at the company's Florida park was killed by an orca during a February performance. After a brief hiatus in February, the local park's Shamu "Believe" performances resumed, though trainers are currently not going into the water with the whales during the show.

In August, the company was fined \$75,000 by the U.S. Department of Labor over allegations that it failed to enforce safety measures prior to the Orlando incident.

Reilly said upcoming changes in the San Diego whale show will incorporate companywide safety directives enacted after the Florida death. However, other changes were already in the works long before the incident, following the company's practice of updating shows periodically to maintain visitor interest.

"You really have to update attractions about every five years," Reilly said.

4.2 Million Visitors in 2009

According to a May report, released by the management consulting firm **AECOM** and the trade group **Themed Entertainment Association**, SeaWorld San Diego ranked as North America's 11th most visited theme park and the globe's 22nd most visited park in 2009, registering 4.2

SEAWORLD PARKS & ENTERTAINMENT

Local president: John Reilly.

Revenue and income: Not disclosed by parent The Blackstone Group.

No. of local employees: 4,000.

Headquarters: Orlando, Fla.

Company description: Operates 10 theme parks under banners including SeaWorld, Busch Gardens and Discovery Cove.

million visitors. That was down 12.6 percent from 2008.

Overall visits at the top parks in 2009 were down 0.2 percent globally, and down 1.1 percent in North America.

"Most parks felt the impact of the deepest recession since the Great Depression," said Ray Braun, a senior vice president in **AECOM's** economics practice, in a statement.

However, local hospitality experts say the longtime presence of SeaWorld has helped buffer the impact of tough times, especially for hotels on Mission Bay.

David Hall, general manager of **Paradise Point Resort**, said the hotel sold SeaWorld tickets to guests "in the thousands" during the past year. Promotions with the



David Hall

park enable the hotel to package tickets with certain hotel deals, including VIP packages that let hotel visitors avoid park lines, giving the property a competitive leg up on resorts in other parts of the metro area.

"It's a very important anchor in Mission Bay," Hall said of SeaWorld.

Broader Area Reaps Dividends

Joseph Terzi, president and CEO of the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau,

said SeaWorld has been consistent over the years in investing in the San Diego park, and contributes significantly to regional tourism marketing efforts.

"There are some years when their marketing contribution exceeds \$1 million," Terzi said. "They have been a major contributor to these types of programs."



Joseph Terzi

SeaWorld Parks does not break out attendance or revenue figures for its individual facilities, but says its 10 parks are visited by 23 million guests each year and employ 20,000 people.

Reilly said the San Diego park was cushioned somewhat in recent months because local residents holding season passes are a large portion of its customer base. "In this type of economy, if you've already paid for the season, you're most likely going to use it," he said. He added the park also has several ongoing and effective cross-promotions in effect with other Southern California theme parks.

Reilly said the company is making "multimillion-dollar investments" to uphold the local park's priorities of protecting workers and guests, and also upholding its mission to educate the public on wildlife preservation issues, as well as nursing injured wild animals back to health at its facilities.

Despite witnessing numerous corporate changeovers at SeaWorld during his tenure, and managing through all types of economies, Reilly said he is optimistic about SeaWorld San Diego's future as it approaches its 50th anniversary in 2014.

"We have an owner that's interested in avenues for growth and understands that the way to grow is by making the necessary investments in the park and the guest experience," he said.