

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

## With two boardwalk icons celebrating anniversaries in the Wildwoods, a new ride honors the past

by Oren Oppenheim, Updated: 1 minute ago



TOM GRALISH / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

It's not a smooth ride. The seats bump up and down when the yellow Sightseer tram car travels along the paved track, and one can hear the whine and *whirr* of the motor that almost drowns out the clamor of the boardwalk.

Then the train slows and another family boards — moms, dads, kids in bathing suits and T-shirts. Over the din, bits of recorded announcements rise: “Everything, \$5!” and “Cherry, bluuuuue raspberry.”

This summer, the Wildwoods' iconic boardwalk tram celebrates its 70th anniversary. Its neighbor, the Morey's Piers & Beachfront Waterparks, marks a more modest half-century. To honor both anniversaries, Morey's is introducing a new ride, a slightly delayed \$4 million homage to the 1949 Sightseer called the Runaway Tram, a smiling yellow roller coaster train that travels a 922-foot twisting, soaring, and plunging track.

Residents and longtime visitors alike talk about how the two institutions both symbolize summer and are inseparable from the identities of Wildwood and North Wildwood.

“Everyone needs to [ride] if they visit Wildwood,” Taylor Henry, a Cape May County Herald writer and boardwalk store employee, said of the tram, which debuted on June 11, 1949. On board, she once got to meet “my favorite person”: Bruce Springsteen.

Colleen Kendrick of Mullica Hill said she's been going to Morey's "since I was born. ... I rode, probably, this exact ride. ... It's cool to bring our own kids back." Her children, 4 and 6, had just hopped off a kiddie boat ride, the oldest attraction running on the piers.

Her aunt, Peg Adams of Cape May, brought Kendrick to Wildwood when she was younger. "[It's] fun to have been here with [Kendrick] when she was a little girl, and now with her kids," she said.



**TOM GRALISH / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**  
Colleen Kendrick (second from right) of Mullica Hill watches her children Cara, 6, and Ryan, 4, ride the kiddie boats on Morey's Piers Surfside Pier. The boats are the company's oldest ride. Kendrick remembers coming to the pier with her aunt Peg Adams (right, of Cape May) as a child. Their husbands, Ryan Kendrick and Joe Gidjunis, are at left.

The tram cars were built by the Greyhound Bus Co. for the 1939 New York World's Fair. Businessman Gilbert Ramagosa bought them and changed their diesel engines to electric motors before launching the fleet 70 summers ago in the Wildwoods.



**TOM GRALISH / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**  
The Runaway Tram coaster on Surfside Pier. Its planned opening to inaugurate Morey's Piers' 50th season has been delayed. The ride is themed after the recognizable Wildwood Sightseer Tramcar, an icon of the boardwalk.

The original fare: a dime. (It's now \$3.50.)

Eight trams run today, including Ramagosa's five electric motors. Henry, a Wildwood Historical Society board member, said the tram's appearance barely changed throughout the decades. In the 1960s, fringe dangled from passenger car canopies; a 2015 model had a controversial forklift-like engine.

The tram's "Watch the Tram Car, Please" plays if people get in the way. These words also appear on T-shirts and other Boardwalk memorabilia.



One of the most recognizable sights and sounds of the Jersey Shore, the Sightseer Tram Cars have been carrying passengers on the Wildwoods Boardwalk since 1949.

That's Floss Stingel's voice. "I was dating a man that worked for Ramagosa," said Stingel, a North Wildwood resident who spoke the phrase into a microphone in 1971. She's never been paid for the recording, but sometimes gets to ride the tram free.

"Most people can identify the Wildwood Boardwalk even if they [only] hear the tram car," she said.



ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER  
Patrick Rosenello, North Wildwood's mayor, with Floss Stingel, the "Voice of the Tram Car" in 2011 file photo.

There was a chance the trams would never make their 70-year anniversary.

In 2003, for-profit operator Trams LLC announced it would end operations, citing a lack of profit. “There was a very real possibility that the trams were done,” said Patrick Rosenello, mayor of North Wildwood and executive director of the nonprofit Wildwood Special Improvement District (WSID). “The trams were being sold to different parks around the country.”

But the district saved the fleet the next year. “We actually had a caravan of tram cars, with a police escort” return them to Wildwood, Rosenello said.

The trams are iconic, he said, because they’re “a connection to the past ... [people’s] parents, grandparents, great-grandparents literally rode on the same cars.”

North Wildwood resident John “Gigi” Gigliotti, a former train conductor, has been driving those cars for 26 years and patrols the Boardwalk to ensure they are moving safely.

Gigliotti has also driven high-profile passengers, including Springsteen and the Harlem Globetrotters. He also helped when [the tram appeared](#) in the 2012 film *Virginia*.



TOM GRALISH / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER  
Patrick Rosenello (right) and 27-year tram driver John "Gigi" Gigliotti (left) pose with a giant replica of a DOO WW car magnet. They produce a new design every summer and this year they celebrate the 70th anniversary of the tram car.

Morey’s Piers, meanwhile, debuted on the Boardwalk.

Brothers Bill and Will Sr. Morey, local businessmen and developers, opened a 12-lane giant slide, the Wipe Out, on a pier [in 1969](#) after seeing one in Florida.

According to Will’s son, Jack Morey, they had “no experience,” which once led to a guest breaking his leg on the slide, but “a whole lot of gumption.”



TOM GRALISH / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

In a photo hanging in one of the Morey's restaurants, brothers and founders Bill Morey (left) and Will Morey (right) are strapped into the Great Nor'Easter, cutting the ribbon on its inaugural run in 1995. Will Sr. is the father of current partners, Jack and Will Jr.

After installing the slide, the brothers built up what became Morey's Surfside Pier and expanded the park over the years, opening more piers and two waterparks. The slide lasted until 2010.

Jack and his brother, Will Jr., joined the business by operating pier-based games.



TOM GRALISH / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The second generation Morey brothers, Will (left) and Jack (right) of Morey's Piers, near the carnival midway games they worked at as youngsters on Mariner's Pier.

"I remember selling balloons as a teenager on that pier," Jack Morey said, "and some smart aleck started throwing cigarettes at my balloon, and I ran upstairs and cried to my mother."

They also paid rent. Back then, the piers' attractions were operated by their own tenants, including Morey family members. This didn't work too well: "If one pier had a ride ... the other pier wanted the same ride," Morey said. The operations became one company in 1997.

“One of [Jack’s] responsibilities,” said Will Morey Jr., company CEO, “is to think of 10 things. ... My job is to keep him from doing nine of them.”

The piers span Wildwood and North Wildwood. Mostly, Jack Morey said, “There’s been positive relationships [between the cities and Morey’s] ... there’s [also] been some potholes in the road,” like a former mayor of North Wildwood, whom he wouldn’t identify, who “just didn’t like my parents.”

But Morey praised the Wildwoods for helping with permits for serving alcohol, in 2006, and approvals five years later for a since-postponed mega-coaster that would have extended between two piers.

Wildwood Mayor Ernie Troiano praised the Morey family for “an outstanding job” helping visitors.

Rosenello praised Morey’s Piers as a Boardwalk “anchor.”

Jack Morey declined to speculate what the future holds other than predicting “a lot more roller coasters.”

But Morey said every new ride should evoke “the first amusement ride” — when a father throws his baby in the air: a combination of fear and love.



TOM GRALISH / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER  
The Sea Serpent roller coaster (opened in 1984) at Morey's Pier's Mariner's Pier on July 8, 2019.

<https://www.inquirer.com/news/sightseer-tram-moreys-pier-wildwood-history-20190716.html#loaded>