



Holly O'Brien holding son, Riley and Jason O'Brien with nephew Mathew Stoner, enjoy a family fun day.

Family Fun at Deep Creek Lake

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At Deep Creek Lake, family vacations are all about having fun and creating happy memories. In McHenry, located along the Lake's shore, two family fun parks – the **Funland Family Fun Center** and **Smiley's FunZone** – offer children of all ages a wealth of activities, available rain or shine. Both parks are family-owned businesses, created by local entrepreneurs with a passion to please.

The Funland Family Fun Center

At Funland, Tom and Sara Kuhn have been “**creating smiles**” for many years, and are proud to be Deep Creek Lake's oldest business operated by its original owners. Funland represents the fruition of the Kuhns' dream of owning and operating their own business. Tom, a native of Mt. Storm, West Virginia, grew up in a family of entrepreneurs; his father and grandfather both operated their own businesses. After graduating from West Virginia University with a degree in Physical Education and Recreation, Tom began teaching at Southern High School in Garrett County. With summers off, Tom had some free time on his hands. He started thinking about setting up a seasonal business that could be open in summer during

the primary tourism season, but closed in the winter. He decided that a family fun center would be ideal.

Now he needed a good location. “I used to drive around Deep Creek Lake and try to figure out where the growth of Deep Creek would take place,” he recalls. After a stretch of U.S. Route 219 was renovated from the Deep Creek Bridge through McHenry and on up the hill, he settled on McHenry. Tom and Sara purchased four acres on the west side of Route 219. In 1971, the couple opened the Funland Arcade, featuring a tar and chip go-kart track lined with straw bales, an open-air arcade building and a Sani-pot. They added a miniature golf course the following year. For the next 20 years, Funland operated as a summer resort without air conditioning.

During the 1990s, the Kuhns revamped Funland. In 1992, the old arcade building was replaced with a larger, enclosed arcade building set up for pizza and ice cream sales, with heating, air conditioning and restrooms. In 1994, the Kuhns added Super Collider bumper cars and improved go kart track.



Tom and Sara Kuhn, owners of Funland, on the outdoor carousel. The remodeled Funland miniature golf course, showcasing Garrett County's natural beauty, is shown in the photo at right.

The same year, they finally found the carousel they had long wanted, from a classified ad listing in *Amusement Business* magazine. This carousel was constructed during the early 1950s by a company in upstate New York at a time when carousel builders began replacing the traditional wooden horses with new models made of aluminum and fiberglass. Consequently, the Funland carousel features hybrid horses, with wooden bodies and cast aluminum heads, legs and tails.

“One of the things I love the most is to see grandparents take their grandchildren or great-grandchildren for a ride on the carousel,” says Tom. “All generations can relate to their ride on the ponies. Many grandparents tell me about their first ride many years ago on the carousel.”

A new century brought more changes to Funland. In 2001, a climbing wall went up. By 2003, the original miniature golf course was deemed outdated. It was replaced by a



more sophisticated course highlighting local attractions showcasing Garrett County's natural beauty, with waterfalls, streams and waterways, plus a cave. The Kuhns added a water balloon game called Water Wars. New go karts were added in 2012. “New popular games are added each year to our arcade. Kids love to play the games that give them the most tickets, so they can turn in the tickets for some nice prizes,” Sara says.

Over the years, Funland has employed local high school and college students, many of whom are now doctors, nurses, pharmacists and electrical engineers. “We have raised many kids at Funland during the summer,” Tom says. “One of the things we enjoy the most is seeing our employees succeed in life and become great citizens. Many are now married and bring their kids and grandkids. They often come back and tell us how much they enjoyed working at Funland.”

One “grad” is now a NASA scientist. Another, a pilot, met his future wife at Funland. The Kuhns' nephew Doug Knotts started working at Funland while in high school.

After earning a master's degree from West Virginia University, he came back to work at Funland.

Summer jobs at Funland remain popular with the younger generation. "They're excited to be here," Tom says. "They can make some money to help with college and have some fun."

The Kuhns have noticed a new trend, with more families renting newer, larger houses at Deep Creek Lake that can comfortably accommodate the kids, parents and grandparents for some quality time together. "They still come to Funland," says Tom. "The mini-golf course is our most popular activity, where the entire family can have fun."

Michelle Gibson of Annapolis, who grew up near Deep Creek Lake, remembers playing miniature golf at Funland years ago with her family during summer evenings. "It was a special treat to go when Grandma came," she recalls.



Top: Muddy Creek Falls replica at Funland's mini-golf course.

Above: Ribbon cutting for Funland's new miniature golf course, 2003. Sara Kuhn (left), Tom Kuhn (4th from left) and nephew, Doug Knotts (2nd from right).

Below: Camryn Brakeall and Allan Stevenson planning their strategy with water balloons at Funland's Water Wars game.



Michelle Gibson and daughter, Sophie create memories while enjoying time together at Funland.

"We'd pretend to be tourists and have ice cream cones afterwards."

Now Michelle's daughter Sophie is a Funland fan. "She has loved going there," Michelle says. "She calls Funland 'Swallow Falls' after the mini-version of Muddy Falls in the mini-golf course. She tells me she wants to go play golf at 'Swallow Falls.'

Sophie also enjoys indoor activities at Funland. "When she first saw the arcade, there was magic in her eyes," Michelle recalls. The Fighter Jet game is a favorite. "Daddy



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is a pilot,” Michelle explains. “She also loves the carousel. There aren’t many others that she can enjoy, so it’s a special treat.”

For the Kuhns, Funland is all about family. “We have enjoyed seeing how much fun families have together,” Sara says. Tom adds, “Nothing pleases us more than seeing the kids wave good-bye and tell us they had a good time and will be back.”



Top: Happy Funland patrons with their prizes from collected arcade tickets.

Above: Holly O'Brien at Funland's go kart track; 2014.

Left photos (top to bottom): Sara and Tom Kuhn's nephews, Doug and Danny Knotts at the go kart track in the mid-1970s.

Tearing down the old Funland Arcade building; 1994-95.

Beginning the moat for the new miniature golf course; 2003.

More construction on the new miniature golf course.



Jonathan "Smiley" Kessler and wife Kathy, are owners of Smiley's FunZone and an active part of the community. At right is part of Smiley's Frontier Adventure miniature golf course.

Smiley's FunZone

In 1981, when new college grad Jonathan Kessler first laid eyes on Deep Creek Lake, he saw business opportunity. Nine years later, after launching a successful career in real estate, he decided to develop the Fort, a commercial property he owned in McHenry alongside Deep Creek Lake, across from the Wisp Resort.

"In 1991, I decided to add the Frontier Adventure miniature golf course, and Smiley's was born," he says. His new family entertainment center also featured arcade games, plus pizza and ice cream.

Jonathan says his "constant grin" earned him the nickname Smiley while he was attending the State University of New York in Alfred. When he first arrived in Oakland to work as a surveyor, his college roommate Pete introduced him as Smiley, and the name stuck.

Smiley's gradually added attractions as the business took off. First came batting cages, Lazer Runner laser tag and Smiley's Pizzeria. Go carts and bumper boats were added in 1999. While expanding the Pizzeria in 2003, Smiley's expanded the arcades and laser tag space. In 2011, he redesigned the indoor attractions, adding more arcade games and the Spin Zone bumper cars. The Pizzeria became Smiley's Bar & Grill with the addition of a sports bar, while retaining a family atmosphere.

There's something for everyone at Smiley's. The Kiddie Carts offer children ages 4 - 10 a chance to zip around a racetrack, while the Slick Track and Road Track Carts are suited to older drivers going for speed and distance. Smiley's Frontier Adventure miniature golf features greens with rises and dips, a cave, the 32-foot Mt. McHenry waterfall and



Above: Some of the Baltimore Raven Cheerleaders test their racing skills with Smiley's Road Track Carts. Inset: Brady O'Brien enjoys the indoor Spin Zone bumper cars.

bridges, plus a terrific view of the Lake. There's more. Kids can climb aboard the SS Smiley and slide off the plank or fight pirates from inside the cabin. Batting cages allow hitters to select from fast-pitch or slow-pitch baseball, or slow-pitch softball to sharpen their skills. Kids 4 and up (including adults) can hone their marksmanship skills with Lazer Runner laser tag. Four mini-bowling lanes with duckpin balls and more than 50 games in the Arcade offer lots of options for fun in any kind of weather.

Smiley's arcade games rotate periodically to keep things fresh. Typhoon Lagoon, a motion simulating ride, is a favorite. A new addition, Fish Bowl Frenzy, is also a hit.

New landscaping now gives the miniature golf course a lush mountain look evoking its Deep Creek Lake setting, and several holes are refurbished each year.

Food options are plentiful. Smiley's Bar & Grill features a full bar, with Happy Hour from 11 a.m. - 6 p.m., including drink and food specials. The extensive menu offers everything from kiddie meals to traditional dinner selections. Handmade pizza, cheese fries, 16 flavors of wings, Fire Cracker Shrimp and Baked Italian Sandwich are especially popular. For dessert, the Lakeside Creamery at Smiley's offers ice cream, sundaes and milkshakes.

Smiley's has been part of the McHenry scene for almost 25 years, now employing 30 staff members and 40 to 50 seasonal workers. Every year, 125,000 to 150,000 fun-seekers visit

Smiley's. The busiest months are July and August. "We get 75 percent of our business during the 75 busiest days of the year," Smiley says. "We live through it and live to it!"

Megan Redinger, the operations manager, has lived through 21 years at Smiley's. "When I was 14, I came to Smiley's with my parents for what I thought was a day trip," she says. "They said goodbye, took off, and I started work that day. Since then I've been in the trenches and filled every position."

Smiley (aka Jonathan) enjoys being active in community activities. "Smiley," the mascot, is a familiar sight at area parties, parks and local events. Smiley's Fun Zone has hosted the Baltimore Ravens Cheerleaders several times during their annual cheerleading camp sessions at Deep Creek Lake. "They're great with the kids," Jonathan says. "They enjoy the rides and are happy to give autographs."





Top left: Construction of the bumper boat pool at Smiley's FunZone.

Above: Jonathan "Smiley" Kessler with some of the Baltimore Raven Cheerleaders during one of their annual cheerleading camps at Deep Creek Lake.

Top right: Smiley and friend on the bumper boats.

Middle right: Kiddie carts for children aged 4 – 10.

Bottom right: Fun for all ages at Smiley's FunZone.

Keeping up with current trends and technology has helped Smiley's continue to attract clientele. The new sports bar has been around long enough to bring in "regulars." Smiley's Fun Value Card debit card system has helped to streamline service while allowing customers to earn extra cash and bonus points to use at FunZone. Customers can place online orders from the menu for delivery, to go, or dine in. Smiley's web site offers a blog, and fans can check out Smiley's via Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest.

At Deep Creek Lake, family fun never goes out of style.

