



An Insider's Look at the Amusement Park

I VISITED CEDAR POINT AMUSEMENT PARK in Sandusky, Ohio, for the first time on July 4, 1964, when I was a high school junior living in Columbus, about 120 miles away. It quickly became my beloved "home" park, and I made numerous treks north each year until I left Ohio seeking fame and fortune in 1979.

When it came time to create a documentary film for my master's thesis at The Ohio State University in 1971, producing one on Cedar Point was a no-brainer. The spinning colors, the french fries, and the roller coasters were all calling to me. I shot "Spinning Colors" over a four-day period that year with a hand-held Bolex 16mm camera.

As a poor college student, I couldn't afford to add a permanent, proper soundtrack to the film at the time, but in 1975, I had a few extra bucks and a desire to finish the film. I headed to Cedar Point along with a tape recorder in hopes of grabbing some sound for my film, which, by the way, was good enough to acquire my degree, even with a fake soundtrack. In the 1970s, telling a story on real film, not video, was so much more complicated (and expensive) than it is now.

I met John Hildebrandt in 1975, then a public relations writer for the park, as I gathered sound that I never did anything with. Through the years I would visit John, and when I started working as an industry journalist, John became a source for a lot of great information. He was (and is) a straight shooter who knows Cedar Point/Cedar Fair and the industry inside and out. He is now retired, and I was delighted when I received a phone call from him last year inquiring if I would be willing to help him write his story.

It was an honor to edit and publish John's memoir. "Always Cedar Point: A Memoir of the Midway" is the name of the 444-page tome that in my estimation is the best "insider" book ever written about




During his 40 years at Cedar Point, John Hildebrandt (right) worked closely with Dick Kinzel (left), Cedar Fair CEO and IAAPA Hall of Fame member.

the amusement park industry. Its pages are filled with 40 years of stories, drama, and humor. It is not a history of the park; it is the colorful story of a dedicated man who committed his adult life to that park. It was fun working with him and hearing his firsthand stories about his countless experiences and adventures.

For 30 of his 40 years with Cedar Point, John was a marketer, and for the last 10, he was general manager (GM), one of the few GMs in the industry to have ascended to the top through marketing. During those years, John and his team created marketing programs for some of the greatest roller coasters ever created.

"To me, advertising comes down to the message: what you say is ultimately more important than who you say it to or where and when you say it," John writes. "You need to nail the whole package to be consistently successful, but the thing you absolutely must get right is the message." His book is full of tips and lessons every marketing pro can benefit from.

"The Holy Grail was a TV spot, and a campaign that serves all groups," John shares, adding the best television spots are broad and appeal to families, roller coaster lovers, and small children. "[It's] very hard to pull off."

One has to believe John Hildebrandt is quite proud of the four decades of his professional life. 



More about John Hildebrandt and his book and career can be found at www.alwayscedarpoint.com.

Tim O'Brien is a veteran outdoor entertainment journalist and is a longtime Funworld contributor. He has authored many books chronicling the industry's attractions and personalities and is the only journalist in the IAAPA Hall of Fame.