



INCLUSION MAKES A BIG SPLASH AT INSPIRATION ISLAND

By Bob McCullough
Photography Robin Jerstad

Waves of enthusiasm have greeted San Antonio's newest place to cool off – Morgan's Inspiration Island – since making its splashy debut in mid-June.

But more than providing a refreshing way to deal with summer heat, the newest addition to the unique Morgan's Wonderland theme park has a "cool" mission – inclusion, that is, to bring together those with and without disabilities in a fun atmosphere so they can gain a better understanding of each other. Nonprofit Morgan's

Inspiration Island is the world's first splash park designed with special-needs individuals of all ages in mind and built for everyone's enjoyment.

"Like Morgan's Wonderland, Morgan's Inspiration Island is not a special-needs park; it's a park of inclusion," said Gordon Hartman, founder of the Gordon Hartman Family Foundation, which since 2005 has pursued endeavors benefiting the special-needs community. "Everyone – young and older, with or without special needs – can recreate in a colorful aquatic environment

free of physical or economic barriers. Morgan's Wonderland admits anyone with a special need free of charge, and the same policy is in effect at Morgan's Inspiration Island."

The new splash park is open on weekends in September. Prospective guests are encouraged to go online in advance at www.MorgansWonderland.com to book admissions.

"Our goal is to provide a great guest experience in an inclusive, safe, comfortable, not overly crowded environment," Hartman added. "When Morgan's Wonderland opened in spring 2010, we really didn't know what to expect, but the park's popularity has grown tremendously and encouraged us to add Morgan's Inspiration Island. Now, we have two attractions like none other where everyone – regardless of ability or age – can play."

Morgan's Inspiration Island overlooks the theme park's 8-acre catch-and-release fishing lake. The focal point is a seven-story lighthouse with a rotating beacon on top that can be easily seen from

Interstate 35 a half-mile away. Six major elements comprise the \$17-million, tropically themed island paradise inspired by Hartman and his wife Maggie's 23-year-old daughter with special needs, Morgan. "We decided to call it Morgan's Inspiration Island because Morgan truly has been the catalyst for every project we've pursued to help the special-needs community," Hartman said.

The River Boat Adventure ride presented by HEB twists and turns for more than five minutes through a jungle setting with bird and animal sounds in the background. Five water play areas – Hang 10 Harbor, Rainbow Reef presented by Whataburger, Shipwreck Island, Harvey's Hideaway presented by the Harvey Najim Family Foundation and Calypso Cove – offer a variety of splashy elements such as rain trees, falls, pools, geysers, jets, water cannons and tipping buckets.

Just as is the case with Morgan's Wonderland, every Morgan's Inspiration Island element is wheelchair-accessible, and waterproof wristbands with RFID technology are available so parents can



As Published in

ON THE TOWN Ezine.com

September/October 2017

go to a Location Station and easily ascertain the whereabouts of their children and other members of their party. Other special features include the capability of raising the water temperature at Rainbow Reef so guests with sensitivity to cold can still splash and play.

"In addition, we unveiled with the University of Pittsburgh revolutionary new wheelchairs propelled by compressed air," Hartman said. "Our guests in expensive battery-powered wheelchairs can't afford to get them wet, so we have special Morgan's Inspiration Island PneuChairs™ available first-come, first-served, along with two other waterproof wheelchair models – a push-stroller type for guests needing assistance from a caregiver for mobility and a rigid-frame, manual wheelchair for guests who can push themselves. The first PneuChairs to go into service are prototypes that are already undergoing significant improvements."

Hartman said spacious private areas are available where guests can transfer out of their wheelchairs into Morgan's Inspiration Island waterproof wheelchairs. Other facilities include the Rusty Anchor Galley Grub and Little Italy Bistro food

outlets for snacks and beverages; the Surf Shack Gifts and Gear sundries shop offering items such as sunscreen and souvenirs; a panoramic viewing deck; the Lago Vista air-conditioned party/meeting room; and private cabanas for rent.

"In many ways, creating Morgan's Inspiration Island feels a lot like it did when our team designed and built Morgan's Wonderland with a focus on special-needs individuals – it's never been done before," Hartman said. "Over the past three years, we collaborated with water park consultants from Texas, Arizona, Florida and Canada as well as local doctors, special-needs therapists, special-education teachers, parents and caregivers."

The 25-acre theme park and new splash park are located in Northeast San Antonio a half-mile west of Interstate 35 at the intersection of Wurzbach Parkway and Thousand Oaks Drive. Both embrace inclusion and intend to make "big splashes" for years to come.

Detailed information and updates are available at www.MorgansWonderland.com.