

Painter reaches new heights with Six Flags deal

It's better to ride a roller coaster than to paint it.

Chris Baynum has devoted more than 20 years to both pursuits. But that's a lesson he learned in 1987 when he climbed The BEast at Kings Island, brush in hand, and then resolved to spend more time in the office.

"Yes, it's scary," said Baynum, whose Covington-based company recently landed the largest contract its history, a two-year deal that makes Baynum Painting Inc. the official ride painter of Six Flags Inc.

"We've already worked at seven of their 12 parks," said Baynum. "This makes us the preferred contractor at all of their parks."

Baynum expects the contract will produce a 30 percent increase in revenue for his 15-employee firm, which will finish 2007 with sales of roughly \$6 million. The company has been doing amusement park work since the late 1980s, when Baynum was working as a house painter and a friend told him Coney Island's Sunlite Pool needed a paint job. Amusement parks now account for half of the commercial contractor's total revenue.

In a Nov. 12 press release, Six Flags cited "competitive pricing" as a key factor in its decision to go with a sole-source painting contractor. Spokeswoman Sandra Daniels said the deal covers more than 100 coasters, which have to be painted every five to eight years.

"There's nothing more exciting than to see a coaster get a brand new coat of paint. When you change the colors it just gives you a whole new look and feel," she said.

Coasters are tricky for painters, usually requiring scaffolds and hanging work cages. With so many nooks and crannies, they're tough to spray paint.

"For the most part, we brush and roll," Baynum said. "I think our biggest selling point was that we have given them a consistent quality standard."

Not a factor was Baynum's growing reputation as a coaster aficionado. Since his company frequently wins amusement park work, Baynum has been able to ride more than 60 of America's best coasters.

"The best wooden coaster, hands down, is The Beast at Kings Island," he said. "My favorite steel coaster is the one we're painting now, which is 'X' at Magic Mountain in Los Angeles."

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