

Field of Dreams

Unorthodox Entry into the Park Business Yields Massive – and Continually Evolving & Growing – Fun Park in Northern Michigan

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One can't help but wonder if Arzo Amusement Park creator Mike Arzoumanian (known as Mike Arzo) heard voices like Kevin Costner's character did in the beloved baseball film, *Field of Dreams*. However he found his inspiration, one thing's clear, Arzo definitely had some sort of calling to build such an expansive attraction in Alpena, Mich.

When Arzo opened his facility nearly a decade ago, the amusements novice really hadn't had the idea to open an "amusement park" at all. (Mike runs Arzo Electronics, an IT company in the Detroit suburb of Southfield, that he's helmed for more than 25 years.)

Arzo purchased a six-acre property in the tourist town of Alpena, Mich., with a dilapidated mini-golf course and driving range. He intended to update the driving range, but that was it.

"For me, it was just to be a place for taking a break and enjoying the golf range," Arzo said, noting that he'd been



Mike Arzo and his wife Mary at Arzo Park.

drawn to northern Michigan's beauty.

However, it wasn't long before Arzo started conjuring up images of a full-blown amusement park for his new property complete with rides, games and centerpieces like a Ferris wheel, carousel and roller coaster. Today, Arzo Amusement Park has over 100 acres!

With those ideas came the work —

and lots of it — which began with restoring the golf range and building a completely new mini-golf course, after scrapping the old one.

"I ended up designing something new and everyone loved what I did," Arzo said.

From there, it continued. Arzo purchased more property and put in a



Racers wave as they hit the starting line at Arzo Park's 1,250-foot go-kart track.



Updating the mini-golf course at Arzo Park was one of the first things the new owner did after purchasing the property.



Arzo's carousel is a centerpiece of his amusement park.

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added, "I didn't open Arzo Park to make money." Interestingly, he runs it as a "free entry" park and employs a pay-per-ride system. And even though making money wasn't his dream, the business does do that, too.

"The heart of the money making is always the go-karts," said Arzo, adding that

his bumper cars and mini-golf would be a distant second and third. He said go-karts make up about 45 percent of revenue while bumper cars and mini-golf equate for about 20 percent of the business together. The remaining 35 percent is divided among the other attractions.

Those include some space-themed attractions like a spaceship simulator, along with *Gravitron* and *Orbitron* rides. There is also Arzo's prized carousel which he bought at a Las Vegas trade show in 2013 for \$280,000. It's a hand-painted, Venetian-inspired ride crafted in Argentina and for Arzo, it was a dream come true. Growing up poor in Armenia, he recalled how important it was to him as a child when he was offered a free carousel ride.

On the amusement game side, Arzo Park has a mix of old and new titles (over 70 video games and two pins), but hasn't gone the way of redemption just yet. Mike Arzo is putting his technical

background to use, working to implement a new (and patent-pending) mobile redemption system of his own that would track redemption points and such from a cellphone.

While Arzo's own dreams have fueled his passion, it's the interest in his business from others that also help to keep things new and exciting at the park, which is open from Memorial Day to Labor Day and employs about 30 people.

"With all the demands and inquiries, people have pushed us to bring back a drive-in movie theater," he said, which should be ready to go by next summer. "When I am making you happy, I am happier than you are," he said.

Also new next season will be soccer fields to go along with a baseball field added last year, Arzo said. The space for the soccer fields will be capable of holding about six professional sized pitches or about 16 small ones. That area of the park will then be called Arzo Sports & Fun Park, while the rides and amusements section will still be called Arzo Amusement Park.

And if you thought there's nothing else that could possibly be added, Mike Arzo would tell you he's in the works to prove you wrong. He has plans for a cottage-style resort with a water park. He's started negotiations to bring restaurants to the site as well.

Whatever makes people happy, Arzo's probably thinking about adding it to his dream park.

More information about the ever-expanding site is available at www.arzopark.com.



Calling all future engineers! Take a ride on the spaceship simulator at Arzo Park. At right, the inside of the spaceship, one of many space-themed attractions at the park.