

Interesting Characters

Roger Tofte - The Enchanted Forest Story

Roger Tofte, Creator of Enchanted Forest
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About the Creator

Roger Tofte, born in 1930 in Chipawa Falls, Wisconsin, moved to Astoria, Oregon when he was 5 years old. In his junior year in high school, he moved to Silverton, Oregon where he graduated from Silverton High School. Roger then spent time in the Navy during the Korean War. After the war, he married Mavis Bjorke in 1954 and had a little jewelry store for about a

year in Camas, Washington. Making no money in the jewelry business and with the birth of his first child, Roger took a steady job with the Oregon State Highway Department as a draftsman and artist.

The Story — The Beginnings

Ten years later, in the 60's, Roger, now the father of four young children, realized there was very little for a family to see and do together in Salem. He formulated the idea for a theme park where he could use his creative talents and though he had very little time or money to make his dream a reality, he persisted anyway. He purchased the original 20 acres of land off Interstate 5 for four thousand dollars, in monthly payments of fifty dollars and began construction in 1964, one bag of cement at a time. He repaired watches in his spare time to help finance his project and worked on building the park after work and on weekends. The Tofte's own backyard became filled with storybook figures and small buildings as Roger also used every spare second at home to work on his dream.

Everyone but Roger thought it was foolish to think

that this idea could work. Roger's friends and co-workers used to tease him about his work on "Idiot Hill." That also seemed to be the bank's idea. Close to opening, Roger and Mavis needed \$2,000 to put on the last touches to the park in order to be able to open, but had run out of every last dime. Their own bank would not loan them the money, because, of course, the Tofte family didn't have any cash. Only one bank (U.S. Bank) took the chance on them and loaned them the money.

Opening

Roger originally thought it would take only two years to build the Storybook Trail, which was the first section that he needed to complete before the park could open. Finally, after seven years, at 2:00pm on Sunday, August 8, 1971, Roger and his wife Mavis hung up a piece of butcher paper saying "OPEN" on the fence and the first visitors entered the park. Admission was one dollar for adults and fifty cents for children and starting wage was \$1.65 per hour, five cents above minimum wage. There were 75 people the first day and 1,000 people the next Sunday. Roger's dream was finally a reality with Roger as the creative force and Mavis as the business head.

A Success, But The Work Continues

Roger quit his job with the State Highway Department after Enchanted Forest's second season, in 1973, when he was sure it would be able to support himself and his family. Mavis ran the business until diagnosed with cancer and passed the day to day operations of running the business to daughters Susan and Mary when they were young adults. Mavis, though not active in the business anymore, has written several books about the Enchanted Forest and is still a busy writer.



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Through the years, Roger and his family have been adding to his dream with new additions to the park. The Tofteville western town was built the second year and the Haunted House opened in 1974. The Comedy Theatre was built for daughter Susan, who writes and directs the outrageous musical comedies based on fairy-tales. The Ice Mountain Bobsled roller coaster was originally designed in 1983 as a roller coaster that floated along a 24" wide fiberglass track, but was redesigned 2 years later by Ascott Design when the original design proved too difficult to get visitors through fast enough.

Following Ice Mountain, construction began on the Old Europe Village with the Jolly Roger Water-Light show in 1988. The original plan was to create a restaurant with a stage for daughter Susan to hold musical performances, but as the hillside was being excavated, the hillside that the building



was being dug into looked like the perfect place for waterfalls. Two years later, the dazzling water-light show opened with music composed by, and lights and water choreographed by daughter Susan. It was so successful, that no live performances were ever held on the stage. The second phase of the Old Europe Village took several years to create and opened in 1993. Roger's son, Ken, brought the world of animatronics to Enchanted Forest by designing and building all of the animatronics figures in this area. Roger's beautiful hand cement work can be seen in all of the sculpted Old English buildings.

After the completion of the more artistic projects in the Old Europe Village, it was decided that another big ride was needed. Phase III of the Old Europe Village was delayed in favor of going up the hill to build the Big Timber Log Ride. Several years later, and over budget, the Log Ride was finally opened to the public in 1996. Now with several attractions for adults, it was time for the children again and several kiddie rides were added, the Kiddy Bumper Boats, the Kiddy Ferris Wheel and the Frog Hopper. In 2002, attention was put on adult rides again by adding the Crazy Bumper Cars, where riders can spin in all directions and bump into other riders in their inner tube type cars. Now, Roger Tofte, though still the ringleader of

Enchanted Forest, has successfully incorporated three of his children into the business: Susan (co-operations officer and artistic director), Mary (co-operations officer and chief financial officer) and Ken (head of attractions development and ride maintenance). According to Susan, this arrangement has worked out quite well, "We're very lucky...We get along because we're each in charge of different projects and our areas don't overlap much...We work very well together."

Recent Additions

New to Enchanted Forest in 2006 was the Challenge of Mondor, a beautiful, slow moving adventure ride. Mondor the Wizard sends riders on a quest through forests, caves and castles to save the happy little Drumlins. Riders use infra-red guns to fight the creatures of the dark and the dragons of the Black Draco under the control of the Evil King Zardon. Cars keep riders' individual scores and top scorers of the day receive a medallion. Top scorers of all time get their name engraved on a plaque at the Mondor entrance.

Since Roger Tofte and his family do most of the work themselves with their own staff, this huge artistic creation took several years of planning and construction. The ride cars and 'trackless' system were constructed by ETF of the Netherlands and use wire embedded under the cement floor and bar codes to tell the cars what to do, including 360 degree turns. This ride is a great combination of art and technology.

New to the Enchanted Forest for the 2007 season were the indoor Speedway Bumper Cars and the Tiny Tune Train which travels around miniatures villages crafted by Roger's own hands.

The Future

Enchanted Forest has plans for even more future creations. As Roger says, "There is no shortage of ideas, just time and money. We believe in attention to artistic detail. We want to offer our visitors something unique, with a lot of variety. We strive to be the hidden gem that people discover as their own special place."

