



Aerie's Winery Holds Ribbon Cutting For Brand New Alpine Coaster - Ride Is Now Open

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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GRAFTON - After the news broke in December of 2021 that Aerie's Winery and Resort in Grafton was receiving the first-ever alpine coaster in the state of Illinois, anticipation grew wildly about what it was going to be like.

Well now, as of the soft opening on September 29 and the ribbon cutting ceremony on October 11, the ride is officially open for business.

Media was encouraged to take a ride on the brand-new attraction and were encouraged to shoot some pictures of the ride after Tuesday morning's ribbon cutting.



"I can say that when I was in Europe I saw alpine coasters, and this is the best," Grafton Mayor Mike Morrow said during the opening ceremony.

Corey Jobe, President of the Great Rivers and Routes Tourism Bureau, was at the ribbon cutting and was thrilled for Jeff and Sandy Lorton, owners of Aerie's Winery.

"We want to congratulate the Lortons for creating another great product that we can continue to drive tourists from around the Midwest and beyond to the Great River Road and into Grafton," Jobe said. "We're excited to see what this will lead to in the future."

He mentioned that over the course of the past few days Aerie's has sent over 2,000 riders down and back.

Director of Operations at Aerie's Resort J.D. Lorton is Jeff and Sandy's son. He also spoke at the ribbon cutting about how important this ride was for Aerie's, the city of Grafton, and the St. Louis metropolitan area.

"It's been a huge hit," he said. "It's just another piece of the puzzle for the tourism industry here in Grafton and the Rivers and Routes region and also the state of Illinois."

The building of the attraction was helped by a \$500,000 amusement grant since it's the first of its kind in Illinois. The grant was made possible because of Grafton's relationship with the state of Illinois and its tourism.

J.D. thanked everyone that was involved in making that grant happen including Rivers and Routes, MidAmerica Bank, Mayor Morrow, and many more.

He also thanked his parents dearly and also his wife.

"I also want you to know how hard my parents here have worked. You'll never find two people who work harder and I'm not being biased, I see it every day. Sandy Lorton does as much work as fifteen people," J.D. said about his parents.

That was the ribbon cutting, but what about the coaster?

Well, the nearly 4,000-foot attraction has you sitting in a car either by yourself or with one other person. The ride is completely up to the rider on how fast or slow they want to go. The handles on the side can be pushed down to release the braking mechanism and go faster or they can be pulled up to apply the brakes and slow the car down.



Wiegand Sports is the company that manufactures these rides and they've made them all over the world. The German company is based out of Montana and has 270 coasters operational.

"They are the best in the world at doing it," J.D. said.

He mentioned that he had gone out and researched about 20-25 other alpine coasters before coming up with the idea for Aerie's.

He also mentioned that it's only going to get better. The attraction will soon feature lights, sound effects, and on-ride photo ops. He's hoping that come this spring all that work is done and the attraction can begin allowing night rides.

"I think it's unique to our property and our area. I think it's going to be a hit because after the first week it's all that people are talking about."

Through the additions of the Sky Tour, zip line, and now alpine coaster, Aerie's Resort is trying to become more family-friendly. They are giving people more options and having something for all ages.

"We've been moving in that direction for a dozen years," J.D. said.

The coaster will be in operation daily from noon until 6 p.m. according to their website. Tickets are \$18 a person or three rides for \$36. Children are \$10 a rider and must ride with an adult if under the height requirement of 54 inches.

Full rules and regulations as well as pricing can be found on their website at: www.aeriesresort.com/coaster.



