

# 40-Year Cast Members Reflect on Opening Day Oct. 1, 1971

**To celebrate the 40th anniversary of Walt Disney World Resort, cast members who were on hand for the Oct. 1, 1971 opening look back on the resort's debut. (Several interview excerpts are provided by Disney's *Eyes & Ears* cast-member newspaper.)**

**Phil Holmes, Vice President of Magic Kingdom** (Hometown: Dearborn, Michigan) – He wore the costume and countenance of a grim Haunted Mansion greeter in Liberty Square when the Magic Kingdom opened in 1971. Today, Phil Holmes is the park's vice president, and he still recalls the wonder in those first guests' voices when they entered the cobweb-laced house of spooks for a doom-buggy ride. "Forty years ago, the attraction's special effects were things that people couldn't figure out and didn't think were possible . . . you could audibly hear people gasping in surprise," he says.

**Forrest Bahruth, Epcot Show Director** (Hometown: Burbank, California)– A veteran singer, dancer and actor, Forrest Bahruth joined Walt Disney World Resort as choreographer of a three-day grand-opening entertainment spectacle for the Magic Kingdom debut. His role expanded when he began recruiting performers for the opening-day parade and training dancers and singers for the big event. "In those days, there were no rehearsal facilities," recalls Bahruth, now an Epcot show director. "We had been rehearsing in parking lots, gyms, schools, church parking lots – wherever we could go. We traveled all over Central Florida getting performers for the parades."

**Charles Ridgway, former Director of Walt Disney World Public Relations and Disney Legend for four decades of service to "the Mouse"** (Hometown: Chicago) – Before moving from California to head the Walt Disney World publicity staff, Charlie Ridgway worked for Walt Disney himself at Disneyland in Anaheim, where he hosted media interviews and set up photo shoots with Walt and Mickey. When the Magic Kingdom first opened, Ridgway says, there was still some tweaking and problem solving to do. The parking lot trams "didn't have enough power to go up the hill to the Ticket and Transportation Center arrival area," he recalls. "There was lots of construction yet to go, wires hanging, walls not finished." And he remembers the Flag Retreat ceremony brought to the Magic Kingdom from Disneyland: each evening a flock of pigeons flew in a white cloud from Town Square to Cinderella Castle and back. "Walt liked to say at Disneyland, 'If you have pigeons and balloons, you can't go wrong.' Park officials eventually ended the tradition out of concern for the birds and the environment.

**Kevin Myers, Vice President of Resort Operations** (Hometown: Laguna Hills, California)- On opening day, Kevin Myers was a custodial host at Adventureland Veranda restaurant in the Magic Kingdom. Today, he oversees all Walt Disney World resort hotels and water park operations. "None of us realized just how much Orlando was going to change with the arrival of Disney and a lot of other businesses that would eventually call Central Florida home," Myers says. "One of the huge memories I have from opening day was watching the rope drop on Main Street, U.S.A. and watching thousands of people stream into the various lands of the park and occupy this place for the very first time ever. You could imagine the fulfillment of Walt's dream that he never got to see come to fruition."

**Donna Dudley, Senior Corporate and Crew Agent, Disney Cruise Line** (Hometown: North Andover, Massachusetts just north of Boston) – When the Magic Kingdom turnstiles began to rotate Oct. 1, 1971, Donna Dudley was standing by in her yellow Evan Picone suit and black pumps to take tickets from the very first park guests. "It was amazing – such a celebration and so many guests. It was quite fun!" The fun was just beginning.

Dudley worked a mix of Disney roles before traveling the globe as a Walt Disney Travel Company cast member. Now a senior agent with Disney Cruise line, Dudley and her team handle travel arrangements for 3,500 cruise ship leaders and crew members. "I feel very honored and fortunate for all the wonderful opportunities and memories . . . all my dreams have come true working for this amazing company of ours."

**Darlene Kennedy, Manager, Creative Costuming, Walt Disney World Resort** – (Hometown: St. Cloud, Florida) Darlene Kennedy wore a red polyester pantsuit with a Coca Cola hat to serve guests at Tomorrowland Terrace on opening day in the Magic Kingdom. Kennedy was able to watch Walt Disney's brother, Roy O. Disney, take part in the pageantry along Main Street, U.S.A. "We could see all the balloons going up and could hear some of the opening ceremony." Since then, Kennedy spent many years in Disney Entertainment coordinating parades, shows and Disney character activities. "I just love the magic of the Disney characters and seeing the effect and impact they have on guests," Kennedy says. "Over my years, I have had multiple families write to me year after year to say when they were coming and to send me pictures of their last visit with the characters." Today Kennedy leads the team that creates the colorful costumes for theme-park shows and parades.

**Heather Will-Browne, Horticulture Area Manager, Walt Disney World Resort** (Hometown: Orlando, Fla.) – When the Magic Kingdom first opened, Heather Will-Brown was 17 and eager to make change for the first park guests seeking a treat at Coke Corner (now Casey's Corner) on Main Street, U.S.A. During the park's grand-opening pageantry, Heather remembers the release of balloons to the tune of "When You Wish Upon a Star." "When I think of it, I still get goosebumps," she says. Soon, Heather's own wish came true when she parlayed her passion for gardening into a role on Disney's horticulture team. She was, in fact, the first female gardener on staff. "It was like a miracle," Will-Browne says. "This company has given me so much experience." During her career, Will-Browne has run forklifts, led a landscaping crew, co-managed greenhouses and managed test gardens. She oversees ordering and transporting of hundreds of thousands of plants each year for the Epcot International Flower & Garden Festival. And she even appeared on TV with home and garden guru Martha Stewart "Where else could you have a job like this?"

**Kent Phillips, Educator Relations Specialist, New Market Development — Disney Internships and Programs** (Hometown: Dunedin, Florida) – A founding father of the Disney College Program, Kent Phillips began his Walt Disney World career 40 years ago delivering puns on the Jungle Cruise ride in the Magic Kingdom. "There's Smiley the alligator, he's always looking for a hand out," Phillips still spiels with ease. It wasn't long before Phillips, a University of Alabama graduate, was traveling around the world – China, France, Germany and more — recruiting college students as Epcot cast members. Phillips met his wife, Kitty, at the Disney Casting Center, and they married in 1983. Today, Phillips continues to manage recruiting relationships with colleges across the country.

**Mark Enman, Security Manager, Disney's Hollywood Studios** (Hometown: Motley, Minnesota close to St. Cloud)- A "military brat" who later served in the U.S. Navy, Mark Enman thought a job in security at Walt Disney World Resort would be a perfect fit. Less than two months before the Magic Kingdom opened, Enman was on the job patrolling areas surrounding Magic Kingdom park. Just before opening day, Enman was dispatched to make a mail delivery to an office inside the Magic Kingdom. "I had never been inside the park before . . . . When I opened that gate (onto Main Street, U.S.A.) all the lights were on, the music was playing. I walked around the corner and there's the castle all lit up. . . . That was my first glimpse of Magic Kingdom, and I was just in love with it," he recalls. Since then, Enman has worked at every park and resort on Disney property and was on the opening team for Euro Disney (now Disneyland Paris.)

**Steve Ainsworth, Food & Beverage Manager, Disney's Polynesian Resort** (Hometown: Flint, Michigan) – Steve Ainsworth was ready to graduate from Michigan State University 40 years ago when Disney recruiters showed up on campus. A job in Florida sounded exotic to Ainsworth and, by August 1971, he had joined the team assigned to open Tomorrowland Terrace Restaurant in the Magic Kingdom. "Everyone had a real great work ethic," Ainsworth says of his first encounter with Disney culture. "And the spirit of Walt seemed to be everywhere." He believes the thrill of being part of opening day strengthened his interest in a Disney career, and he feels "lucky to work with a company that has such a great business and such a powerful place in people's hearts."

**Bobbi Ferrilli, Server, Cap'n Jack's Restaurant, Downtown Disney Marketplace** -(Hometown: Philadelphia). Bobbi Ferrilli was an opening-day cocktail waitress at Disney's Contemporary Resort. During one of her first days on the job, she found herself serving a beverage to Walt Disney's brother, Roy O. Disney. "Roy talked a lot with his

hands and, as I was serving him, his hand came up and knocked the glass. I spilled tea all over his lap." After Ferrilli escaped the dining room for a cry, "Roy came to the back and said to me, 'I shouldn't talk with my hands. You dry your tears and come back here.'" The warm Disney family atmosphere convinced Ferrilli she had found her home. For the past 32 years, she has been a server at Cap'n Jack's Restaurant, where she sees many of the same guests return year after year. One night years ago, she ran into pop icon Michael Jackson in a Marketplace jewelry store. She also met her husband, Paul, when he took a vacation at Walt Disney World. Both had grown up in Philadelphia, and it turned out they had lived within two blocks of one another as children. The couple recently celebrated their 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

**Scott Welder, Golf Superintendent, Walt Disney World Resort** (Hometown: Rockledge, Florida)- On the Fourth of July 1971, Scott Welder was celebrating more than his country's independence. He was hired that day as a Disney horticulture cast member to mow the grass on the new Palm and Magnolia golf courses in preparation for the debut of Walt Disney World. "We'd find all kinds of surprises in that tall grass — everything from roots to rocks and critters," Welder remembers. Welder now leads the maintenance of 45 holes on 310 acres between Disney's Palm, Magnolia and Oak Trail golf courses. "Real golf turf is a living, breathing thing, so there are built-in challenges with keeping it perfect all the time, but I love what I do — I've found my niche," says Welder, who has been present for each of the 40 annual PGA Golf Classics. His favorite thing about the golf courses is the abundance of protected and preserved wildlife that includes birds, mammals and reptiles.

**Irene Masse, Accounting Associate, Reedy Creek Improvement District** (Hometown: Winter Haven, Fla.) – Irene Masse was in Lake Wales, Fla., selling tickets and giving tours at Masterpiece Gardens when Walt Disney himself told her and other members of the attractions industry his plans for Walt Disney World. "I knew of Disneyland Park . . . but I didn't comprehend what he had planned for here. Everyone was excited, absolutely amazed. I think a lot of people thought it would never come to pass." When the Magic Kingdom opened, she jumped on board to sell tickets at the park's main entrance. Eleven days later, she married Leo J. Masse. The couple's children, grandchildren, and even a great-grandchild were born during her time with Disney. "My fondest Disney memory still has to be my first day at work . . .," she recalls. "When they called and I decided to go, I thought, 'OK, this is the place for me.'"

**Myles Jones, Ticket Associate, Walt Disney World Ticket Fulfillment Administration** (Hometown: Dawson, Georgia) – He was a third-shift custodial cast member in the Magic Kingdom when it first opened, and Myles Jones thought the park was magical even after hours. "It was really exciting because I was coming to work at midnight. Magic Kingdom Park had all the energy from the guests (even) at midnight. It was amazing," he recalls. A Vietnam vet who served with the U.S. Marine Corps, Jones moved from Custodial to Disney Admissions about 35 years ago and stayed. A father of five, Jones met his wife, Doreen, while she was on a Disney vacation from her London hometown.