

Millions of Smiles Later, Walt Disney World Marks its 40th Anniversary, Primed for an Exciting Future

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. (Oct. 1, 2011) – Anchored by the Mouse “who started it all,” Walt Disney World Resort marked its 40th anniversary Saturday with a gala procession fronted by characters parading up Main Street, U.S.A. to a colorful celebration in front of Cinderella Castle.

Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, Goofy, Donald, Pluto and all their pals waved to cheering crowds. Onstage, they were joined by Disney executives, singers and 40-year cast members in a colorful celebration.

It was 40 years ago – Oct. 1, 1971 — when Walt Disney World officially opened, rising from the marshy landscape southwest of Orlando, Florida. The much ballyhooed “Florida project” was the dream of visionary Walt Disney.

“We’ve grown by leaps and bounds since then,” Walt Disney World President Meg Crofton told guests assembled in front of the Castle Saturday. “But the fact remains that this place, as it appeared on October 1, 1971 was the last great vision of one of the world’s greatest dreamers.”

The Dapper Dans, a barbershop quartet, led park guests in a chorus of “When You Wish Upon a Star” and daytime fireworks and streamers shot into bright blue skies. A special edition of the “Wishes” nighttime spectacular was planned for after sundown.

Though he never lived to see opening day, Walt Disney’s legacy of family entertainment lives on — millions of smiles later — in four theme parks (including Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Disney’s Hollywood Studios, Disney’s Animal Kingdom), two water parks, more than two dozen resort hotels, the Downtown Disney retail-dining-entertainment complex, ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex and other venues.

In 2012, Disney World will open a family suites value resort, as well as the first in a series of attractions that will double the size of Fantasyland – the largest-ever expansion of the Magic Kingdom.

MKAnniversary: rev: 10-1-11: GG

Related News:



[Walt Disney World Resort Celebrates 40 Years](#)



[Walt Disney World Resort History Digest](#)



[40-Year Cast Members Reflect on Opening Day Oct. 1, 1971](#)



[Largest Expansion in Magic Kingdom History](#)