

## Waco and water park officials marvel at new Hawaiian Falls

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WACO, Texas (AP) — The Hawaiian Falls Waco water park that had its grand opening May 25 is something new, both for Central Texas and for the water entertainment chain that built it.

The 14-acre Polynesian-themed park had a soft opening May 25, with city and community leaders and children on field trips from local elementary schools. They checked out the 800-foot-long lazy river, the football-field-sized wave pool and the new 65-foot slides.

During a dedication ceremony, Waco Mayor Malcolm Duncan Jr. and City Manager Larry Groth raced each other down the slides.

Hawaiian Falls officials expect about 2,000 people a day during Memorial Day weekend and more than 150,000 by the time the season ends on Labor Day. The park will offer concerts, special events and swimming lessons through the summer.

Daily tickets are \$25 for those 4 feet and taller, \$20 for those under 4 feet and free for those younger than 3. Season passes are \$90, but Waco residents can get a season pass for \$65 until June 1.

Visitors said Friday the park was unlike anything in the Central Texas area, and blew away the old city water park it replaced.

In a deal last year, the company agreed to expand and take over operations of the park, investing \$3 million, in addition to \$2.5 million from the city.

Park officials said they expect the new park will draw from a 100-mile radius, offering a full day of thrills and relaxation in a family-friendly atmosphere.

"This is nothing but positive for Waco," said Sam Brown, a banker and Greater Waco Chamber of Commerce ambassador who attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony. "It took me about 10 seconds to know this was going to be a good deal for Waco."

Brown, father of children ages 8 and 10, has been driving them to the Dallas Metroplex in recent summers to go to Hawaiian Falls.

He said he prefers Hawaiian Falls to the larger water parks because it's less expensive and smaller, making it easier to keep up with his kids.

This is the fifth Hawaiian Falls and the first outside of the Dallas Fort-Worth metroplex.

Hawaiian Falls president David Busch said the Waco park will draw from a geographically larger area and will be the largest of the parks.

He said the park staff, including lifeguards, will carefully cultivate a family-friendly environment, barring inappropriate attire, horseplay and profanity and ensuring that teens travel in groups of no more than three. The days will be filled with programmed activities, including a daily parade in which children will be invited to participate.

"Our job is to bring families closer together and entertain them," Busch said.

Busch said he was impressed with the beauty of the water park site at 900 Lake Shore Drive.

"I love the environment, how it carves back into the trees," he said.

The park backs up into city-owned woods, and the lazy river ride meanders through a grove of tall cedar elms. Other parks have begun with clearcut sites, but in Waco, Hawaiian Falls developers kept about 150 trees on the site for shade and beauty.

The site also includes a "Tempest Tower" slide complex with covered and uncovered slides that plunge six stories, and a "Pineapple Express" that is a hybrid of tube slide and speed slide. The Pineapple Express is expected to open as early as Monday.

The wave pool, the first of its kind in Central Texas, is expected to be one of the biggest draws, along with the lazy river inner tube ride, park spokesman David Alvey said.

The heart of the city water park has been preserved and enhanced, with a renovated toddler-friendly water playground and a four-story tube slide. The competition pool remains, but

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with pool toys and a floating bridge that can be removed during competitions.

The park will offer swim lessons at 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. Mondays through Thursdays this summer, costing \$70 for a two-week course. For more information on the lessons, visit [www.hfallswaco.com/waco](http://www.hfallswaco.com/waco).

Some on the city parks board last fall voiced concern that basic swimming skills might be lost as the city closed its last public pool, Oscar DuConge, and privatized its water park.

But parks board chairman Steve May said the water park's swim lessons should allay those concerns. He said seeing the water park confirms that turning it over to Hawaiian Falls was a step forward.

"It's amazing," said May, father of two small children. "It's a good example of the city working with private business. The cool thing I liked is, having been to the old water park, I could still see the old pool. Everything was built around it. I think this is going to be tremendous for Waco."