



By Patricia MacKay

When it opened on 1 October 1982 in Central Florida, Epcot Center synthesized years of entertainment tradition while simultaneously setting a course for the future of our industry. Epcot evoked the traditions of world's fairs in a year-round venue combining corporate sponsorship, entertainment and education. Those who thought it an uneasy kluge have been proven wrong.

The national pavilions in Epcot's World Showcase entertain and inform, and introduce visitors to international foods and souvenirs. Today there are 11 nations represented. In the Future World pavilions, corporate-sponsored exhibits tackle history and high concepts. The sponsors and exhibits continue to evolve, and today, Finding Nemo, The Lion King, Soarin', and Mission: Space are all part of contemporary Epcot.

In 1982, Epcot was state of the art, and it was groundbreaking. Today, it is more than a classic: Epcot made our industry what it is today.

This is constantly brought home to me at The Hetteema Group, where I work, and in the attractions industry at large. We are surrounded by Epcot veterans - as well as alums of Disney competitors - who make no secret of the profound and lasting influence Epcot had on them. Creative executive Phil Hetteema points out, "Epcot was a test bed for a whole range of technologies from fountains, to special effects, lighting and show control, ride design, and creative design. It was innovative for its scale and monumental vision - but also for two transformative elements: the nighttime spectacular and the incorporation of high-quality dining experiences. Epcot gave people a reason to come for dinner and stay after dinner."



Patricia MacKay made numerous trips to the construction site at Epcot during early 1982 as editor and publisher planning a special section on Epcot for the November 1982 issue of then Theatre Crafts magazine. Many thanks are due to John Haupt and Tom Craven for what was considered a publishing coup at the time -- Disney was eager to share information with the industry. Today she's honored to work alongside so many Epcot visionaries and alums both on the Thea Awards committee and at The Hetteema Group ([www.thehetteماغroup.com](http://www.thehetteماغroup.com)) where she's currently the director of special projects.

# PIONEERS OF THE WORLD

## •Epcot: Thea Classic

### Epcot veterans remember

Did the creators of Epcot realize at the time that it would transform what we now know as destination- and location-based entertainment? Tony Baxter, Walt Disney Imagineering senior VP, indicates they had an inkling: "The shared passion for what we might be able to accomplish together forged a dynamic hotbed of ideas that served as the forerunner for what is now an industry staple fondly referred to as "Edutainment."

Getting from Walt's dream of the Experimental Prototypical Community Of Tomorrow, to the fact of 3,000 designers and 4,000 construction workers building Epcot, to the official opening in 1982, was the task of WDI executive VP Martin Sklar. "For me personally, Epcot was a 20-year thrill ride. Epcot as a Disney park became my responsibility, in creative leadership, beginning in 1974. We had to figure out everything: where

to locate it on the WDW property, how to connect it to the hotels and Magic Kingdom, what the stories would be, how we would involve sponsors, who the key experts would be for the pavilions about food, energy, transportation, and health care. And of course, how to involve all the countries in World Showcase, and create the Fellowship Program so our guests could actually meet real people from each nation."

Baxter added, "We were working on ideas where the outcomes could make the world a better place. Each pavilion had a board of distinguished educators and business leaders that brought perspective and credibility to Disney's world of entertainment."

### Industry leaders praise

"With Epcot, it was not about frivolous, sometimes mindless, entertainment any more.



EPCOT



Theming and experiential design had arrived!” says Jack Rouse of Jack Rouse Associates.

“I was overwhelmed with the scale, grandeur, and audacity of the park,” remembers Craig Hanna, chief creative officer at Thinkwell Design and Production and past president of TEA. “The use of technology, the innovative ride systems, the giant attractions all cemented in me my goal to

create projects that leave lasting impressions for visitors, the same way they did for me when I first visited Epcot.”

Bob Rogers of BRC Imagination Arts, observes, “You discover that almost nothing of Walt’s spectacular plans survive. The designers worked with Walt’s optimism that the future would be better than today, and that the world’s great

corporations would be leaders in creating a better future. But look at all of the things that are radically different. No castle. No hub-and-spoke master plan. Attractions in Future World based not on intellectual properties, but instead on the great technical challenges of the 20th century which must be solved if we are to survive the 21st. Notions of world peace, as nations gather around a lake in harmony and with the notion that nations, rather than intellectual properties, would-be participants and so much more. That the dare was undertaken is phenomenal. That it was a success and remains so is a tribute to the imagination, not just of Walt Disney, but of a new generation of Imagineers and executives who, together, created something truly new and truly inspirational.”

“The team that worked on the development and production of Epcot was an extremely diverse and creative fraternity of individuals,” recalls Monty Lunde, TEA founder and principal of Technifex. “For many of us, it was our first experience in what was to become the themed entertainment industry, and it truly got into our blood.”

Here’s to the past and future of Epcot! 

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for their role in co-producing this year’s Thea Awards.

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