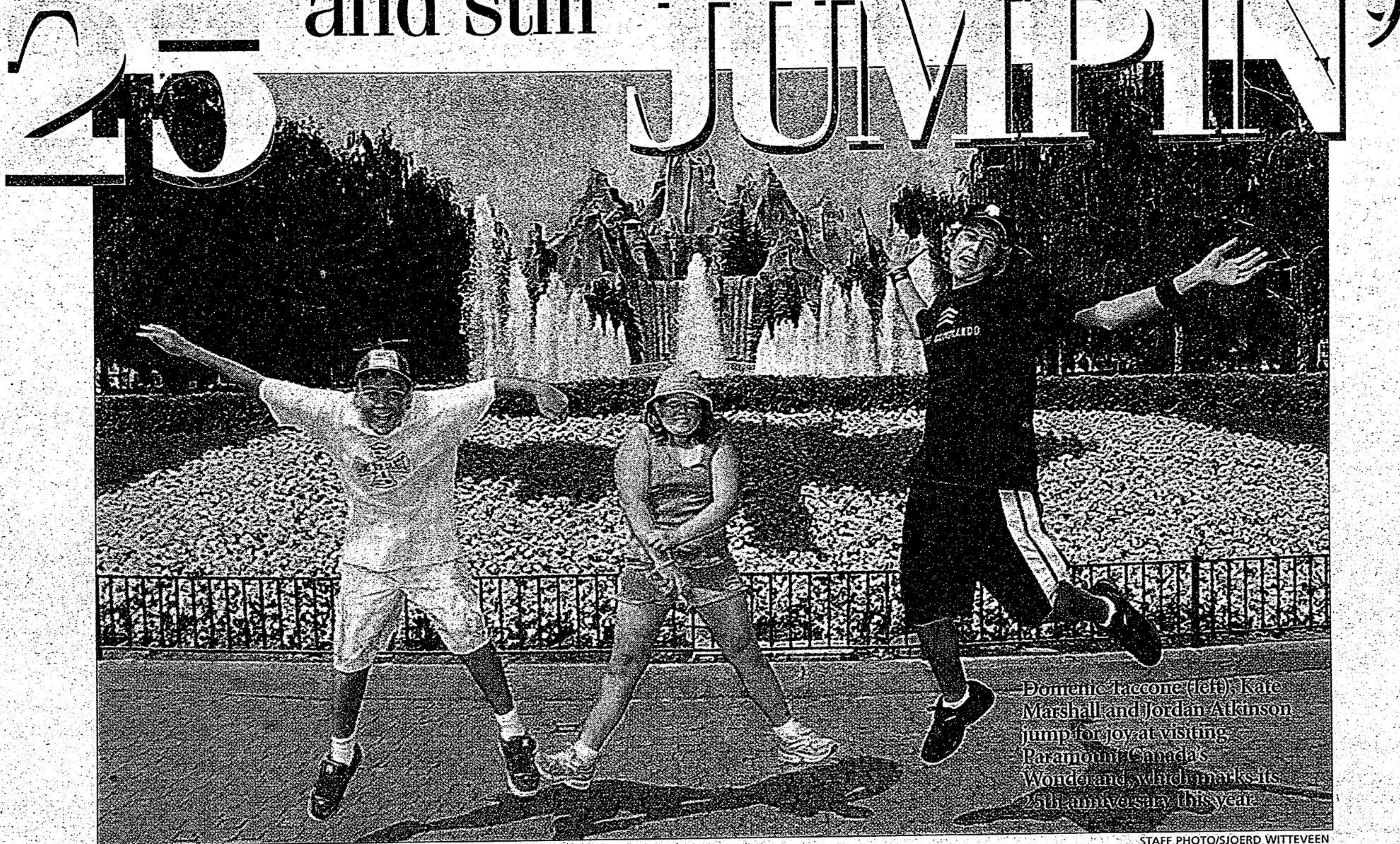


Paramount Canada's Wonderland and still



Domenic Taccone (left), Kate Marshall and Jordan Atkinson jump for joy at visiting Paramount Canada's Wonderland, which marks its 25th anniversary this year.

STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Veteran theme park visitors know value of staying ahead of crowd

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

Jordan Atkinson and Domenic Taccone have visited Paramount Canada's Wonderland down to a fine art.

As veteran season's pass holders with thrill-seeker appetites, their game plan is to hit the big rides first before lines develop, then grab a burger early before the crowds get hungry and hurry back to the rides while everyone else is chowing down.

"We try to hit the big rides first so we miss the big line-ups. We hate line-ups," Jordan said.

But these days, their top priority is to get to the front of the line of Wonderland's newest ride, Italian Job Stunt Track.

With their season's passes, Jordan, 14, and Domenic, 11, take advantage of early admission, snaking their way to the front of a roped-off area that contains a

growing crowd barred from accessing most rides until 10 a.m.

When a park employee lowers the rope, the Newmarket boys dart, arriving at the front of Italian Job's line in seconds.

Their friend, 11-year-old Kate Marshall, takes advantage of the boys' speed, walking up the ride's exit route to join them at the front of the line.

"It's awesome," Domenic says as he emerges a few minutes later. Kate agrees.

"It's so much fun. I would ride it forever if the line was not so long. You'll be screaming your head off, I'm not kidding."

Turns out the kids were right to make their way to Italian Job first.

It's only 10:10 a.m. as they leave the ride in search of other attractions but the line is already about 90 minutes long.

"Oh my God, not already," a woman mutters as she spies the crowd.

Italian Job was a perfect addition to mark the park's 25th anniversary this year, spokesperson Kris Williams said.

Based on the 2003 movie, the roller-coaster capitalizes on Wonderland's recent theme of pairing rides with hit films.

"It really is the perfect combination of Hollywood special effects and the coaster experience. Right down to the Mini Cooper cars stamped with BMW," said Ms Williams, who, although she refused to disclose the actual cost, said the multi-million-dollar coaster represents the largest investment in the park's history.

By no means is Italian Job Wonderland's only attraction.

Kate likes the fact the park appeals to all ages, including those like her who enjoy a tamer experience than daredevils Jordan and Domenic.

"They have stuff for older people, like more thrillers. And for lit-

tle kids, they have kiddy land. They have in-between stuff, too," she said.

"It's good for all ages, like grandmas and stuff and you see little kids."

For Domenic, it's all about the thrills.

"I think the best part of the park is the rides. And the games. There is no bad part about this park but they need more scary rides because the rides get very old after a while."

Much has changed at Wonderland during its first 25 years, said Ms Williams, who has worked at the park 11 years.

She pointed to beefed up security measures in the wake of a shooting in May 2003 and to more brand name food such as Pizza Pizza, whose outlet on International Street is Ontario's top store for sales, despite being open only

See NO PLANS, page 17.

BEST OF WONDERLAND

Looking to make your trip to Wonderland more than just another visit to a theme park? Here are some of the park's best:

- Best rides for kids under six — Taxi Jam, Chopper Chase, Scooby-Doo's Haunted Mansion, Ghoster Coaster, Candy Factory playground;
- Best rides for kids up to 11 — The Fly, Mighty Canadian Mine Buster, Italian Job Stunt Track, White Water Canyon, Ghoster Coaster;
- Best rides for teenagers — Cliffhanger, Drop Zone Stunt Tower, Top Gun, Italian Job;
- Best way to cool off — Splash Works, being hit by a monsoon of water standing on the bridge of Timberwolf Falls, enjoying the mist of Cool Zone near SkyRider, ducking into the air-conditioning of the School of Rock show;
- Best food treat — funnel cakes;
- Best way of letting your stomach settle after a tumultuous ride — going to a show: School of Rock, Franklin the Turtle and La Casa de Dorá to XFR/Carnevil reality show, Paramount Director's Cut and Victoria Falls High Divers;
- Best picnic spot — the grassy hill near Vortex;
- Best fishing hole — buying a handful of pellets for the huge goldfish in the stream near Sledge Hammer.

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