



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL KIRBY SMITH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

# Thrills, and Hope, On Opening Day

By VIVIAN YEE

Arriving at 8:30 the night before the ride was supposed to reopen for the season, Mr. Cyclone — otherwise known as Eric Knapp, 47 — had claimed the first spot in line to ride the Cyclone, Coney Island's famed wooden roller coaster, and more than 15 hours later, he was still excited.

Very excited. "Wooooo!" he roared on Sunday, leaping atop the Cyclone's first car and flexing his arms, one of which bore a Cyclone tattoo, for the benefit of the crowd. (The letters "CYCLONE" were shaved onto

from local dignitaries, its first go-round in late March means spring is here, and summer is coming.

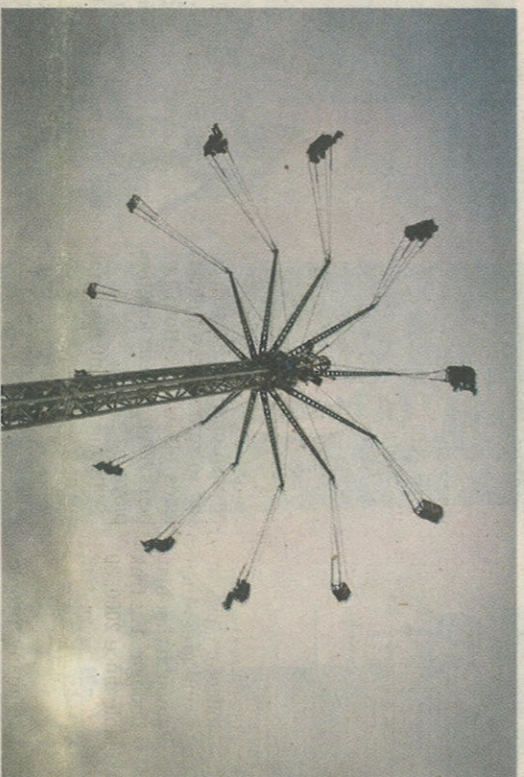
While it is debatable whether spring has arrived in New York — the temperature refused to top the mid-40s on Sunday, and yet another snowstorm threatened to cast gloom over the city on Monday — the grand opening this year nearly had to be delayed. Awash in almost five feet of seawater after Hurricane Sandy struck in October, Coney Island's colorful rides had only just emerged from an extensive rehabilitation. Workers were still finishing the repairs when families began to crowd the entrances on Sunday morning.

"Our commitment after the hurricane, from Day 1, was to be ready on time for this event," said Alberto Zamperla, the chief executive of the international company that operates Luna Park, one of two privately owned amusement parks that opened in Coney Island on Sunday. Though Mr. Zamperla declined to say how much the renovations had cost, he described seemingly endless rounds of repair, from replacing electrical systems to dumping go-carts brined in seawater.

Restaurants across from the Cyclone were still closed, though they were expected to reopen by Easter.

Daniel Cucuzza, 11, of Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, said he was "kind of worried" that the ride would not open in time. Until last year, he was not tall enough to participate in his family's tradition of riding the coaster on opening day.

Reassured that he could ride, Daniel still looked at least as nauseated as he was excited. "I just have a scared feeling," he



Some rides have only just emerged from an extensive rehabilitation.

said. "I feel sick."

But he was more daring than Markowitz, the Brooklyn borough president, who declined a ride on the Cyclone. "I'll do everything for Brooklyn, except go on this ride," he said, donning a cream-colored apron (without bothering to tie the strings) that functioned as a giant name tag.

"Let the season begin!" he said, as if spring awaited only his command to arrive.

Senator Charles E. Schumer, in somewhat more traditional attire, wearing a dark red tie, and a flag pin on his suit, wielded the traditional bottle of egg cream. He dropped it once, but managed to smash it on the Cyclone's first car.

Other landmarks shuttered by the hurricane have begun to show signs of life, too. Officials recently announced that the Statue of Liberty, closed since the hurricane, would reopen by July 4, and the New York Aquarium in Coney Island would partly reopen by late spring.

Such reopenings are symbolic milestones in the city's recovery and

important economic boosters. Luna Park alone employs 450 Coney Island residents, Mr. Zamperla said, and hundreds more work at Coney Island's other attractions. Boardwalk restaurants and nearby shops.

But for some Coney Island residents, the hullabaloo surrounding the amusement park's first day back was just a reminder of how far they still had to go. About a dozen local residents turned out to protest across the street from the Cyclone on Sunday, holding large neon signs that read "Coney Island Is Not Back" and "People Live Here." Many institutions that make up the heart of the residential community there, including the public library, community center and hospital, are still closed or only partly functional, and they said it was premature to celebrate the area's recovery.

Mr. Markowitz said he sympathized with their frustrations, but said the Cyclone was worth the jolliness nonetheless. "It gives them hope that they're not being ignored," he said.

# Study Finds New Trend For Inmates Is a Failure

## Pennsylvania's Doubts On Its Halfway Houses

By SAM DOLNICK

The federal government announces across the country have spent billions of dollars in recent years oversprawling, privately run halfway houses, which are supposed to save money and rehabilitate inmates more effectively than prisons do.

But now, a groundbreaking study by officials in Pennsylvania is casting serious doubt on the halfway house model, concluding that inmates who spent time in these facilities were more likely to return to crime than inmates who were released directly to the street.

The findings startled the administration of Gov. Tom Corbett, which responded last month by drastically overhauling state contracts with the companies that run the 38 private halfway houses in Pennsylvania. The system costs more than \$11 million annually.

Pennsylvania's corrections secretary, John E. Weizel, who oversaw the study, called the system "an abject failure."

"The focus has been on filling up beds," Mr. Weizel said in an interview. "It hasn't been on producing good outcomes."

The state now plans to link payments to the companies to their success at rehabilitating the thousands of inmates who go through halfway houses in Pennsylvania annually. Correctional experts said the move by Mr. Corbett, a Republican, made Pennsylvania a prominent voice in the national debate over whether new correctional strategies, including halfway houses, lowered recidivism rates and cut ballooning prison budgets.

By contrast, New Jersey, which has also been a leader in the halfway-house movement, has moved far more slowly to revamp its sys-

# As in New Jersey, a big role for a company that Chris Christie backed.

tem, even though senior New Jersey lawmakers acknowledge that it is a troubled as Pennsylvania's. The same company, Community Education Centers, is the biggest provider of halfway houses in both New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

The New York Times published a series of articles last year that detailed escapes, violence, drug use and other problems at Community Education halfway houses in New Jersey. Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey, a Republican, has been a vocal supporter of Community Education. Until November, his close friend and political adviser William J. Palatucci was a senior executive at the company.

Mr. Christie's chief spokesman, Michael Drewniak, said it was no proper to compare the systems in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

"I have no interest in assisting The New York Times if it is cherry picking facts and figures, drawing conclusions from a Pennsylvania



Eric Knapp, right, waited in line for hours to be the first on the Cyclone.

his head, his black sleeveless T-shirt said "Cyclone," and he claimed to have ridden the roller coaster nearly 2,000 times.) A few minutes later, he became the first to zoom down the tracks.

Just like that, Coney Island was back.

The opening of the Cyclone is always an occasion: with a christening of Brooklyn egg cream and blessings