

Sandy-Devastated Casino Pier Open for Memorial Day Business

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After months standing among the ocean waves, the well-known Jet Star coaster of Casino Pier in Seaside Heights, N.J has been removed. Video courtesy of Debbie Karu.

With one day remaining before Memorial Day weekend, affectionately known to many as the unofficial start of summer, the Sandy-battered Jersey coastline is hustling to finish last-minute preparations.

From fresh cut boards to restored restaurants and shops, the summer vacation hotspot has undergone a major facelift in the months following the storm.

After weeks of waiting for the right weather conditions and calm seas, the iconic Jet Star roller coaster that once sat at the end of Casino Pier has been removed.

The symbolic coaster dropped into the ocean after the pier collapsed in the midst of Sandy and remained there until mid-May.

"It was devastating to see the dismantling, but it also signified that we have made great process in rebuilding from Sandy," Marketing Manager of Casino Pier Maria Mastoris said.

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The removal of the coaster was emotional for annual park visitors and Seaside Heights residents, but many were happy to see it come down. It reminded residents of what Sandy did to their homes and towns, Mastoris said.

A piece of the Jet Star was kept to form a memorial on the Pier, though plans have not yet been finalized.

"The actual boardwalk has all new boards and ramps and makes Seaside Heights look immaculate," Mastoris said. The storm provided an opportunity for stores and restaurants to remodel and update appearances.

The two piers, however, Casino and Funtown, are still not resembling their look before the storm, according to Mastoris.

The damage to Funtown was so significant that it will not reopen in time for the 2013 season.

Employees at Casino Pier in Seaside Heights, N.J., have worked days, nights, weekends and holidays since November to restore the pier in time for the 2013 summer season.

"I wish we could say we are where we expected to be with restoration," Mastoris said. "We are moving as quickly and efficiently as we can," she said.

Rides will not be open for Memorial Day weekend, but will resume operation in the coming days and weeks.

"We had to start basically from scratch, removing everything Sandy didn't to prep the pier," she said, including "stripping down walls, and [taking] inventories to rebuild buildings."

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Despite the changes, "it still maintains the same Casino Pier feel it has always brought to Seaside Heights," Mastoris said.

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