

BIO

Name: Kevin Cruz
Age: 35
Occupation:
Engineer and ride
mechanic at Chil-
dren's Fairyland

ENGINEER OF FUN

ODD JOBS

Attractions at 65-year-old Children's Fairyland in Oakland—from Happy Dragon's moving eyes to Willie the Whale's waterspout—are coming back to life, thanks to mechanically minded dad Kevin Cruz.

LEGACY CONNECTION

Growing up in Pittsburg, Cruz never visited Fairyland as a kid. But his uncle attended a ribbon-cutting ceremony for one of the park's grand-opening parties.

EARLY APTITUDE

A love of building model cars and fixing his own ride ("I didn't like paying for repairs") led Cruz to the NASCAR Technical Institute in North Carolina, then a job making custom trailers in Martinez, before seeing Fairyland's job ad a year ago. He brought his two-year-old son to the interview.

NECESSARY TRAINING

Cruz's NASCAR background does apply: electrical work, physics (for the Jolly Trolley track, understanding banking on a curve), and fabrication ("putting things together that aren't designed to go together").

For example, the lights on the old carousel hadn't worked in a decade. The contacts were worn down and the parts too old to replace. Cruz stacked three pressed pennies and anchored them with a leaf spring. "That's what's running the lights right now—and has been for about a year."

OFFICE SPACE

Cruz works in a 35-foot shipping container in the back corner of the park, with a phone, computer, workbench, welding station, and storage for spare parts and historical items.

SAFETY HAZARDS

While he has to work carefully around live power, Cruz mostly looks out for the safety of young guests, from picking up litter to making sure the metal reins on the carousel horses aren't fraying. "I walk around the place and think, What would my kid get into?"

ONGOING PROJECT

Cruz has been trying to get the hands on the clock tower slide to spin fast, but new technology isn't working well with old parts. "It's been a challenge," he says. "But I'm good at puzzles, so I'm having a blast. There's something different every day."

fairyland.org. —LeeAnne Jones