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ROCKY SPRINGS BOARD HEARS PROPOSAL TO BRING CAROUSEL TO LEBANON COUNTY



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A Lebanon County businessman is interested in bringing the Rocky Springs carousel out of retirement.

Scott Sechler, owner of Fredericksburg-based poultry company Bell & Evans, presented plans in August to the nonprofit carousel board Rocky Springs Carousel Association to open the carousel outside of Lancaster County. The ride would be a key feature of Sechler's concept for a European-inspired park called Sechler Village in Fredericksburg.

"This is a vision. They're not breaking ground tomorrow," Tracy Artus, Rocky Springs Carousel Association board president, said. "This is just something that came to us, and we're doing our diligence and reviewing it and seeing if it's an option or not."

The carousel was a major feature of the Rocky Springs amusement park in West Lampeter Township, which closed permanently in 1981. The ride ended up at Dollywood Amusement Park in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, soon afterward, but went up for auction in 1999.

A group of Lancaster County residents brought the carousel back home in the early 2000s. The pieces have been in private storage for about 20 years.

Artus said Sechler Village would include an array of shops and a national chain grocery store along with a hotel and restaurant. The park is expected to be walkable and would include a train ride and an amphitheater.

Sechler did not respond to requests for comment, and Artus declined to provide

Animals and other items from the Rocky Springs carousel are in storage inside a building in Lancaster city.

details about Sechler's plans for restoration of the carousel.

The association, formed in 1999, is working to preserve and protect the historic 1924 carousel, created by famed Philadelphia manufacturer Gustav Dentzel. It was a centerpiece of Rocky Springs Park, south of Lancaster city, until the park's 1981 closing.

The carousel, with its 48 animals and Gavioli Wurlitzer band organ, has been resting in a publicly undisclosed location for more than 20 years. Binns Park was targeted as the home for a renovated carousel, though lack of a developer and a change in civic plans scrapped that idea nearly two decades ago. The nonprofit carousel association lapsed into inactivity.

The Rocky Springs Carousel Association board has reformed and is undergoing a rebranding process. The association is looking for volunteers and is asking those interested to visit www.rockyspringscarousel.org or email manager@rockyspringscarousel.org.

Several carousel board members toured the proposed site in September, though Artus said there have been no agreements reached with the Sechler family. She emphasized the project is in preliminary stages, and the board continues to consider any ideas for restoring the carousel.

Artus acknowledged some people might be disappointed if the carousel were to leave Lancaster County, but she said the goal is to ensure the carousel is running.

"If we can't get it up in Lancaster and it sits in trailers for 25 more years, what good

is that going to do?" Artus said. "If we have an amazing opportunity and we do our diligence and they do their diligence and we come to an agreement down the road and we think this is the best opportunity for our carousel, it's 60 minutes away. In my book, that's a win."

Staying put

The carousel could still end up staying in Lancaster. Artus said a proposal to house the carousel at Strasburg Rail Road remains on the table. Those plans have stalled as the nonprofit board looks for warehouse space to assess the carousel pieces, which Artus said is being done at the request of Strasburg Rail Road leadership.

Eric Hoerner, board chair and interim president of Strasburg Rail Road, declined to comment.

In the meantime, the Rocky Springs board has ruled out a proposal to bring the carousel to Penn Square on North Queen Street. After recent construction of Ewell Plaza, Artus said the carousel simply wouldn't fit.

Lancaster Mayor Danene Sorace, whose term ends next year, had previously opposed the carousel operating in the city, citing racist practices at Rocky Springs. The Rocky Springs pool was segregated in the 1960s, though the carousel and the park itself were not.

Artus is encouraging people to attend the board's monthly meetings in Manheim Township to become involved in finding the carousel a permanent home. The board's next meeting is at 7 p.m. Oct. 15.