



## Great Wolf Lodge Swimming in Success: Resort Completes Major Renovation, Wins York County Business Award

By Melissa James, York County Contributor



In a year that's been devastating to the hospitality and tourism industries, Great Wolf Lodge has something to howl about. Two somethings, actually—completing extensive renovations to its rooms, lobby and water park, and being named the 2021 “Poor Potter Award” winner for business investment in York County.

Turning proverbial lemons into lemonade, Great Wolf took advantage of the downtime when it was forced to close from March through Labor Day due to COVID-19. It was able to more rapidly and easily finish the renovations begun two years earlier, with no inconvenience to guests (because there weren't any). Though the shutdown left them with significant revenue loss, Great Wolf's leaders are more focused on what was gained.



“We had to reimagine our business in ways to keep our employees and guests safe, and we were able to meet or exceed all the CDC requirements,” said Nick Licastro, general manager for Great Wolf Lodge. “I’m proud of how our team rose to the challenge so we could open in time for Labor Day weekend. From the [County’s] building department and fire department to other community and business leaders, we all came together



in 2020 to help each other and support each other.”

*Nick Licastro  
General Manager, Great Wolf Lodge*

Great Wolf Lodge, a hotel chain known for its large indoor/outdoor waterparks, is a popular destination for both locals and tourists alike. Headquartered in Chicago, the company has 17 locations nationwide and one more underway. Each resort features an arcade, restaurant, ropes course, “MagiQuest” live-action game, and other children's activities. The York County/Williamsburg location is one of just three with the “Flow Rider” experience—a surf simulator that creates a large wave guests can ride on a surfboard (often with the assistance of a lifeguard). But otherwise, Licastro said, his location strives to offer an experience consistent with the other properties, knowing that families sometimes go from one to another.

So what specifically was overhauled at the local Great Wolf Lodge?

- A full 405-room refresh, with all new beds, mattresses, couches, tables, chairs, fixtures, carpet, paint and wall art
- New paint and carpet in the hallways
- New paint, carpet and fixtures in the lobby
- Updated technology and new TVs in each room, which feature several exclusive Great Wolf channels where people can see stats on current MagiQuest players, special programming, and virtual versions of the resort's daily storytime and dance party (which normally would take place in lobby).
- Makeover to the restaurant area and space outside the waterpark
- New conveyor system for the River Canyon Run slide that carries the large tubes
- Full refurbishment of the water park's tornado tube conveyor
- Full refurbishment of Fort Mackenzie (the four-story water climber topped with a tipping bucket that dumps 1,000 gallons of water onto laughing kids every five minutes)
- New fire and life safety systems (majority is finished)



This remarkable investment funneled work to many other local businesses, from painters and plumbers to engineers and other contractors. Add that to the constant pull of Great Wolf Lodge in bringing tourists to York County stores and restaurants since 2005, and it's unsurprising that the company was selected as the 2021 "Poor Potter" Award recipient.

The award—named after William Rogers, a successful 18th-century entrepreneur who was known as the "poor potter" of Yorktown—is given to growing businesses that make significant investments in the County. The winner is selected by York County's Economic Development Authority and Office of Economic Development.



"They are a big employer and a key player in our local economy," said economic development director Jim Noel. "In addition to being a great corporate citizen, they are a unique hospitality business in that they are both an excellent hotel and a tourist attraction"

This latest honor follows several Ellis Platinum International Aquatic Safety Awards for Great Wolf's lifeguard training program.

"Our property has always been an industry leader in aquatic and waterpark safety," said Licastro. "We facilitate unannounced operational audits, with plainclothes auditors to observe and evaluate our lifeguards while on stand. I'm proud of our team's commitment to maintain such a high standard of care, especially with our enhanced safety guidelines."

This is the fourth Great Wolf location where Licastro has worked over the past eight years. He said his wife and two children, ages 5 and 7, have particularly enjoyed living here.

"It's a great place to raise a family. We hope to continue to experience all the great things in this area. I'd like to think Great Wolf Lodge is a great complement to other family tourist destinations here, as a place to stay when visiting Colonial Williamsburg or Busch Gardens," he said.

"It's really exciting to bring joy to families. Some families can't travel like they normally would, but we provide a regional destination... you don't need to get on a plane, your family can come to Great Wolf and take a break from the routine," he said. "We're extremely grateful to the County for their support, and we strive to be good partners in the community."



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