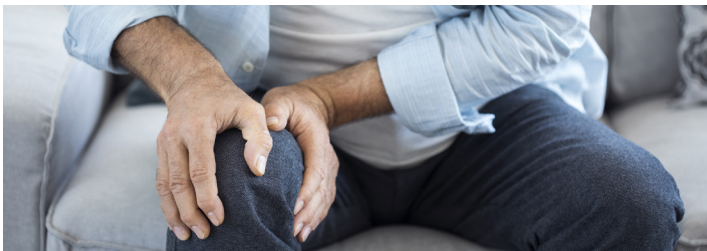


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THRILLS IN LIMBO

Is Pa.’s oldest roller coaster retired? Riders hope not.



A hill on Leap-the-Dips. JEREMY THOMPSON/ FLICKR

By Asha Prihar
SPOTLIGHT PA

Blair County’s Leap-the-Dips roller coaster is one of a kind, say fans of the 123-year-old wooden ride. “I heard it once said that it was like a rolling sofa, and I would have to agree with that,” Pittsburgh-area resident Dave Hahner said. After climbing 41 feet in a two-row car with just metal bars to hold onto, riders coast up and down little hills on a figure-eight-shaped track. The ride travels at about 10 miles per hour, but a now-uncommon type of engineering allows the cars to “pop off the track just a little bit,” said Hahner, who serves as historian for the nonprofit American Coaster Enthusiasts (ACE). Hence the coaster’s name. But for now, riders can only experience those special leaps and dips in retrospect. Leap-the-Dips hasn’t operated since 2023, as Lakemont Park, home of the coaster, decided to keep all its rides closed this year and last due to financial concerns. Fans have no clue if it will come back, as the county-owned and privately operated park is now more focused on offering activities like mini golf over rides. Questions about the coaster’s status sent to Lakemont Park’s front office received no response. Love for the attraction, which was the oldest-operating roller coaster in the world as of 2023 according to the National Amusement Park Historical



A side view of Leap-the Dips. COURTESY OF DAVE HAHNER

Association, remains strong even as it sits in limbo. Roller coaster fan Josh Brown said the one-minute ride is a multisensory event. “You can smell the grease,” Brown, an Ohioan who serves as ACE’s history and preservation director, said. “You can smell the wood.” Many treasure it as both an experience and a piece of Pennsylvania history. “I think there is a certain sense of urgency to come up with a viable plan to keep this as an operating asset and a Blair County treasure,” said Jim Futrell,

historian for the National Amusement Park Historical Association. “It’s been there for over 120 years. I mean, it would be tragic for something to happen to it.”

A SPECIAL DESIGN

The coaster’s charm stems from both its design and its rarity. E. Joy Morris, an engineer for the Philadelphia Toboggan Company, designed and built Leap-the-Dips in 1902 for Lakemont Park, a former picnic area.

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Fighting fires and cancer risks

Fire departments are buying gear that is free of forever chemicals

By Michael Casey
ASSOCIATED PRESS

EAST PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Every time he rushed out on a fire call, East Providence Lt. Thomas Votta knew he put himself at risk for cancer. There are potential carcinogens in the smoke billowing out of a house fire, but also risks from wearing his chemically-treated gear. Last month, the Rhode Island fire department became the nation’s first to give the 11-year veteran and all his 124 fellow firefighters new gear free of PFAS, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances. Known as forever chemicals because of how long they remain in the environment, PFAS have been linked to a host of health problems, including increased risk of certain cancers, cardiovascular disease and babies born with low birth weights. “We are exposed to so many chemicals when we go to fires,” Votta said. “Having it inside our gear, touching or very close to our skin was very, very concerning. Knowing that’s gone now, it gives us a little bit of relief. We’re not getting it from every angle.” Why is PFAS in the gear? The PFAS in the multilayered coats and pants — primarily meant to repel water and contaminants like oil and prevent moisture-related burns — have been a growing concern among firefighters for several years. Cancer has replaced heart disease as the biggest cause of line-of-duty deaths, according to the International Association of Fire

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Awaiting SCOTUS, Pa. lawmakers want to protect same-sex marriage

By Fallon Roth
THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

PHILADELPHIA —For years, Pennsylvania Democratic lawmakers have unsuccessfully tried to enshrine same-sex marriage into state law, but with the U.S. Supreme Court being asked to consider taking on a case that could overturn that right nationally, their efforts have taken on greater urgency. The nation’s high court last month was asked for the first time weigh a case that could overturn Obergefell v. Hodges, the 2015 landmark ruling that legalized same-sex marriage nationwide. This has served as a backdrop to state Democratic lawmakers reintroducing the Marriage Equality Act — which would codify same-sex marriage in Pennsylvania law — in both the state House and Senate. If passed,

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AI Apocalypse? Why language surrounding tech is sounding increasingly religious

By Krysta Fauria
ASSOCIATED PRESS

TORONTO — At 77 years old, Geoffrey Hinton has a new calling in life. Like a modern-day prophet, the Nobel Prize winner is raising alarms about the dangers of uncontrolled and unregulated artificial intelligence. Frequently dubbed the “Godfather of AI,” Hinton is known for his pioneering work on deep learning

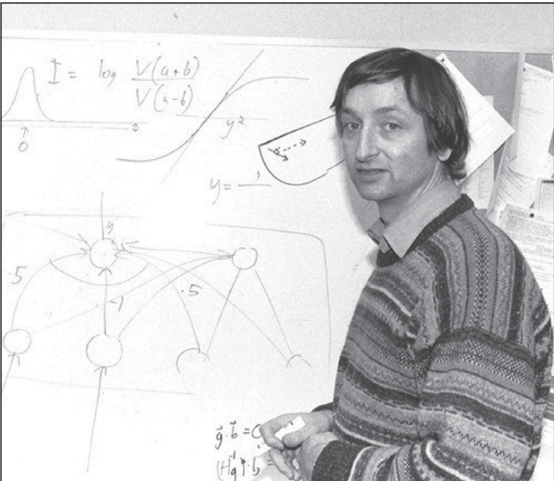
and neural networks which helped lay the foundation for the AI technology often used today. Feeling “somewhat responsible,” he began speaking publicly about his concerns in 2023 after he left his job at Google, where he worked for more than a decade. As the technology — and investment dollars — powering AI have advanced in recent years, so too have the stakes behind it.

“It really is godlike,” Hinton said. Hinton is among a growing number of prominent tech figures who speak of AI using language once reserved for the divine. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman has referred to his company’s technology as a “magic intelligence in the sky,” while Peter Thiel, the co-founder of PayPal and Palantir, has even argued that AI could help bring about the Antichrist.

WILL AI BRING CONDEMNATION OR SALVATION?

There are plenty of skeptics who doubt the technology merits this kind of fear, including Dylan Baker, a former Google employee and lead research engineer at the Distributed AI Research Institute, which studies the harmful impacts of AI. “I think oftentimes they’re

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This late 1980s photo provided by the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research shows computer scientist Geoffrey Hinton in Toronto. **CIFAR VIA AP**

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