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By David Lombardo

Outdoor fun coming to Howe Caverns in June

HOWES CAVE – If Lester Howe were alive, he would warmly embrace the slew of upgrades and additions at the popular Schoharie County cavern that bears his name, Howe Caverns General Manager Robert Holt contends.

“Lester was a showman ... he was game to try unique things,” he says.

In addition to a recently installed animatronic version of Lester Howe, changes include four zip lines, a rope course, a gemstone jewelry boutique, a rock shop, an animatronic version of a gemstone mining facility and a picnic pavilion.

“These are the first major attractions outside the cave,” he said.

The new additions to the cave are a response to what guests want and represent similar moves by caves across the country, according to Holt. He said that guests like the cave, but they want more to do during their visit. Holt predicts that the current projects will bring back past guests and attract new patrons, while not spoiling the mystique of the cavern.

“The things we’re putting in fit that original motif,” he said.

The four zip lines they’re adding include a series of towers that allow people to slide in the air for distances of about 200 to 300 feet. In the middle of that area will be the rope course, which Holt said would accommodate climbers of different ages.

The two attractions are scheduled to open sometime in June and can be enjoyed as a joint package or separately. As the result of the zip lines and rope course opening, Howe Caverns will employ an additional 40 people. Holt said a majority of those positions were filled last month during a job fair.

Additional changes will include a 6,000-square-foot gemstone mining facility. According to Holt, this expansion will allow for mining to be done indoors, and it is expected to come on line during the summer.

Another new element will be a Patty Tobin jewelry boutique, which Holt said would offer merchandise across a wide spectrum of costs and be available in the main lodge until the new facility is ready. Tobin’s new Howe Caverns collections were unveiled last week at the Alzheimer’s Association spring gala and fundraiser at the Hall of Springs in Saratoga Springs.

Howe Caverns will also be a possible destination for outdoor events, with their three-season pavilion open for booking and able to seat 250 guests.

As these projects are being completed, the cavern is still open for routine visits from tourists, which include a greeting from the animatronic Howe.

“He gets great reviews from our visitors,” Holt said.

He added that some of the younger visitors think he is alive and try to engage in conversations with him.

More information about Lester Howe’s history and the caverns he discovered can be found at www.howecaverns.com/history.