Workers install some of the 19 rides that will make up the new Luna Park amusement area rising in the shadow of the Wonder Wheel in Coney Island. Photo by Todd Maisel/Daily News

Bucklin' up for a wild ride

Coney businesses hope to cash in on Luna Park

BY ERIN DURKIN
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LUNA PARK IS rising – and taking the hopes of other Coney Island businesses with it.

As the new 19-ride amusement park takes shape, business owners and Coney boosters are pinning their hopes on Zamperla's glitzy Luna Park to spark a revival across the faded seaside mecca.

"A rising tide raises all ships," said Ken Hochman, a publicist for Coney attractions, including the Wonder Wheel, Brooklyn Cyclones and New York Aquarium.

The optimism brimming as Luna Park is erected stands in stark contrast to the dismal outlook last summer, when an ad campaign was launched to convince New Yorkers the park hadn't shut its gates.

"People believed that Coney Island was closed and shuttered and that there was no reason for them to come," Hochman said. "This year, [there's] a tremendous amount of excitement and enthusiasm."

But despite the optimism, there's lingering uncertainty over whether the new park, and another one with big thrill rides planned for next summer, will be enough to resuscitate the landmark.

"This is a great first step, [but] it is not big enough," said Save Coney Island spokesman Juan Rivero, whose group and other advocates think more amusements and fewer stores and hotels will be needed to make Coney a true destination again.

"If you expect this to be a draw, if you expect people to come see Coney Island, the historic playground of the world, you can't have them come in and see a little park," he said.

Farther down the Boardwalk, business owners said they were thrilled about Luna Park and the crowds it will bring – but wondered if they'll get to take part in the revival or get the boot.

It's up to amusement-park operator Zamperla to say if they can stay after this summer, and officials say no decision has been made.

"There's such a positive energy in Coney Island that I haven't felt in years," said Dianna Carlin, owner of the Lola Star boutique. "I think it's just going to be tremendous, the number of people who come out and finally come back to Coney Island. We deserve to be a part of it."

Ruby's owner Michael Sarrel said he's holding off on giving his bar a much-needed makeover because he doesn't know what the future holds.

"It's difficult to operate a business . . . when you are going from year to year. You can't do improvements," he said.

He believes the new park will bring in hordes of customers.

"It's a Kevin Costner line – 'Build it and they will come,' " he said, referring to the line in the movie "Field of Dreams."

VIDEO: Animated plan gives peek at the NEW Coney Island.
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