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No Easter opening this year for the carousel

A project replacing the ride's 115-year-old drive shaft is currently underway

By
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EAST



Christine Hochkeppel

The Loeff Carousel's drive gears were removed so that replicas can be made. Brass Ring Entertainment workers estimate there was 100 years of grease built up on the gears.



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Daniel Horenberger measures the circumference bearing of the Loeff Carousel Friday morning.

PROVIDENCE - In recent years the Charles I.D. Loeff Carousel in Riverside has seen the installation of a new roof, the rehabilitation of a few dozen horses and the re-silvering of some 100 mirrors.

None
of
these



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Greg "Deuce" Hruby cleans the grease out of a cable puller after removing the old gears from the Looff Carousel on Friday morning.

projects, however, are said to be as important as the one currently underway at Crescent Park's oldest and sole surviving structure. Last week, workers from California-based Brass Ring Entertainment (BRE) spent a few days inside the carousel measuring more than a dozen gears that make up the ride's main drive shaft.

Originally built with the ride in 1895, the drive shaft is now 115 years old.

"The last 10 years or so it's become a problem, as anything that gets old and keeps running has to wear out," said Ed Serowik senior, whose tenure with the carousel and Crescent Park as a whole totals more than 60 years.

"Nothing lasts forever."

Altogether, the drive shaft consists of two, five-foot wide main gears and 14 smaller pinion gears. Were the drive shaft to go, the ride would shut down completely

"It hasn't broken down yet but the teeth are getting so worn out that we're at the point now where we're anticipating we might lose timing on the gears," Mr. Serowik said. "So we decided to change the gears now before we have a major problem."

But getting new gears for a ride as old as the carousel isn't as easy as picking them out of a catalog. Built before the days of assembly lines, every gear in the Looff Carousel was custom built for that particular ride. To make sure the new gears fit properly, BRE workers had to make the trip from California to measure each piece one-by-one before making the cross country trip back to their shop. From here, each gear will be individually re-built before making yet another cross country trip for installation in Riverside.

"I've been here for 60 years and this is probably the most important job I've ever handled," Mr. Serowik said.

If such a project seems time consuming and costly, that's because it is. Replacing all of the gears is set to cost slightly more than \$100,000. Funds to cover this project will be taken from a 2002 Save

America's Treasures grant given to the city's carousel park commission. This project is set to use up the remainder of these funds.

Measuring and then re-fitting the gears, Mr. Serowik said, is estimated to take about six months. While this means the ride won't be ready for its traditional Easter opening, it does mean the carousel should stay functional for decades to come.

Said Mr Serowik: "Hopefully it adds another 100 years to it."