

# *Kiddieland*

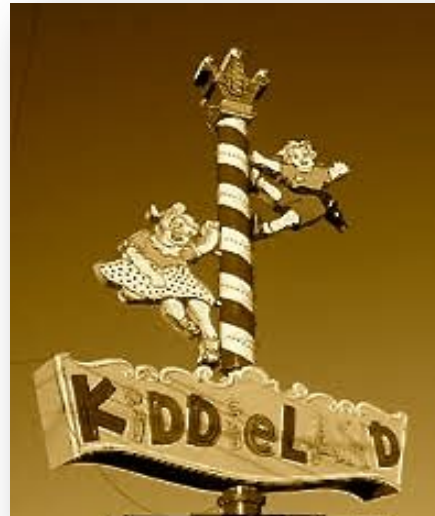
If you are over 16 and grew up in the west suburbs or the west side of Chicago, you probably visited one of Melrose Park's most famous landmarks... Kiddieland.

Credit for the establishment of the first Kiddieland is given to Arthur E. Fritz. Pioneer in the Kiddieland business, he started his career at the age of 10 on a milk route in Chicago. Later he worked in a grocery store for \$1.50 per week. He learned the carpentry trade from his uncle and eventually went into the building/contracting business himself.

However, during the depression, Fritz lost his business because his debtors were unable to fulfill their obligations. He managed to pay all of his creditors and then, with very little to spare, bought six ponies and offered rides to "children only" on the northeast corner of North Avenue and River Road. was 1929.

In 1930, Fritz moved the ponies to the southeast corner of North Avenue and River Road, site of the old Cook County Fairgrounds, now Maywood Park Race Track. By 1931, the fair was in operation at the fairgrounds, and Fritz again moved his ponies to a plot of land behind a gas station on the southwest corner of North Avenue and River Road.

This was before the era of Kiddielands, and the kiddie rides were not being built. However, a newspaper was giving gasoline powered midget cars to children as subscription premiums, Fritz noted the names of the winners and followed up in a few weeks with an offer to buy the cars. This gave him another attraction to pair with his pony rides.



**The Kiddieland sign is now located near the Melrose Park Library.**

In 1932, once again Fritz moved his operation, this time to the northwest corner of North and First avenues. He named his park Kiddieland and tried to register it as a trade name. He failed, but the name stuck as a term for the type of park he originated. Ride manufacturers had gotten into the kiddie field, and Fritz was now well on his way to building his reputation as father of the Kiddieland business.

Each year brought additions and improvements. The adjacent First Avenue was extended and paved, improving Fritz's location further. By the year 1950, the park contained 15 rides including the steam and diesel trains, merry-go-round, little dipper roller coaster and whip, all of which are in operation today.

In 1962, the pony ride was removed from the park to make way for an expansion project which included the scooters, German carousel and tilt-a-whirl. By 1966, the park contained 22 rides as well as an arcade, two refreshment stands and a gift shop.

In 1967, Arthur E. Fritz passed away leaving behind an ideal that he created: a pleasure park with rides with size, speed and action designed exclusively for children and their parents.

The park transferred ownership in 1977, as Arthur Fritz's grandchildren took over the park and its operation. The park continued its expansion and installed several major attractions, including a Log flume, a swinging pirate ship, a 40-foot (12 m) long water coaster, and other attractions.

A dispute developed between family members over lease arrangements and they took their dispute to court. The case was thrown out in a Cook County court and later in an appeals court. The landowners declined to extend the lease on the land in early 2009. In late June 2010, it was announced that Kiddieland would be demolished. A Costco store now occupies the land.

Most of the Kiddieland rides that thrilled generations of kids were sold in an auction. For example, the Little Dipper Roller Coaster is now at Six Flags Amusement Park in Gurnee.

People laughed at Arthur Fritz for buying those ponies in 1929; but Fritz's Kiddieland provided years of laughter for area children, which turned into fond memories when they became adults.

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**Much of the information was provided by: *Melrose Park - 100 Years of Progress, 1882-1982***

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