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Cover Story:
Muncie Novelty/
Indiana Ticket
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Special Issue:
19th Annual
Family Fun
Edition

**Double
Coinman:**
Chip O'Hara,
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On the cover

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Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel has made his position clear on changing the city's gambling ban to allow video gaming approved by the Video Gaming Act of 2009: "I am absolutely 100 percent against it in every part of the fiber of my body. And it will not happen on my watch." (Chicago Tribune, April 20). He wants to protect children from having gambling on many blocks in the city.

Chicago is one of the cities in Illinois that has opted-out of video gaming. While the Video Gaming Act was passed as part of a larger capital improvement bill, there is a choice to opt-out. Many Illinois cities that do want video gaming have found that they have laws on their books prohibiting gambling, which means those laws would have to be changed.

Emanuel may feel that video gaming is "not right for the city," but he is a proponent of a casino in downtown Chicago near major attractions and the convention center. The idea is to keep Chicagoans close to home instead of traveling to the Horseshoe Casino in nearby Hammond, Ind.

If he manages to get a casino approved for Chicago he may face the same thing that New Orleans encountered when Harrah's came to town. The casino was not satisfied to have a monopoly on Vegas-style gambling in the city (two nearby riverboats failed). Harrah's also wanted its own hotel and restaurants. This raised the ire of local hotels and restaurants that could see this as major competition. Of course the casino got most of what it wanted: a 450-room, 26-story hotel and several restaurants in-house. In fairness, Harrah's does "partner" with nearby restaurants and hotels for referrals.

Why is it common for a major casino to be viewed as an asset to a city but video gaming gets a bad rap? Remember the old phrase that's always trotted out: "Video gaming is the crack cocaine of gambling." Says who? Gambling is gambling. Buying state lottery tickets is gambling, even if the proceeds are often supposed to be earmarked for schools. Is it OK to fund schools with gambling revenue? Obviously, states don't have a problem with this notion. The sure way to gain approval for a proposed lottery is to say the funds raised will go to education. Who could vote against improved education?

When the big gambling boys come to town, they do give a share of revenue to the city and state, which must provide more services and perhaps infrastructure changes to accommodate the casino. Yes, jobs will be created for dealers, waitresses, bartenders, parking garage attendants, and janitors. But upper and mid-level management jobs will go to seasoned gambling executives from out of state. It goes without saying that the lion's share of revenue also goes out of state.

Video gaming, on the other had, is all local. It allows small businesses to stay afloat, improve their physical plants, and reinvest in their businesses. Coin machine companies add staff, including skilled technicians, and make a considerable investment in equipment, license fees, and payroll taxes.

A big-time casino in any downtown is perceived as less threatening because it's "not in my back yard" and therefore permissible. The thinking is to let tourists and visitors lose money in the casinos where there is no end of gambling options with big stakes. But three to five video poker machines in the local age-restricted bar that awards limited payouts, that's a dangerous thing you want to keep out of your neighborhood.

In today's economy it's already difficult to compete for those elusive discretionary dollars. Throw big gambling into the mix and the words "collateral damage" come to mind. With Ohio coming on board with four casinos in the state this year, we'll see what happens. ▲



BONNIE THEARD
Editor

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SAY WHAT?



10

second
interview
with...

Holly Meidl got her start in the industry by interning at Bay Tek Games after deciding to change her major from education to marketing. She has worked at Bay Tek Games for 11 years and is happy she's not overseeing a classroom of kids somewhere. She lives in Green Bay, Wis., where she proudly cheers on the green and gold!

My first job was:

video rental clerk.

My favorite type of music is:

I love music! All genres but Heavy Metal.

I wish I had the nerve to:

get a dog.

One thing I can't live without is:

wine.

The last book I read was:

"When God Winks at You."

One word that describes my personality is:

consistent.

The best advice I ever got was:

Have fun in whatever you do, it won't feel like work then!

My favorite TV show is:

I don't really watch TV.

If I could have dinner with a famous person that person would be:

Paul McCartney.

My most cherished inanimate possession is:

my patio/backyard.

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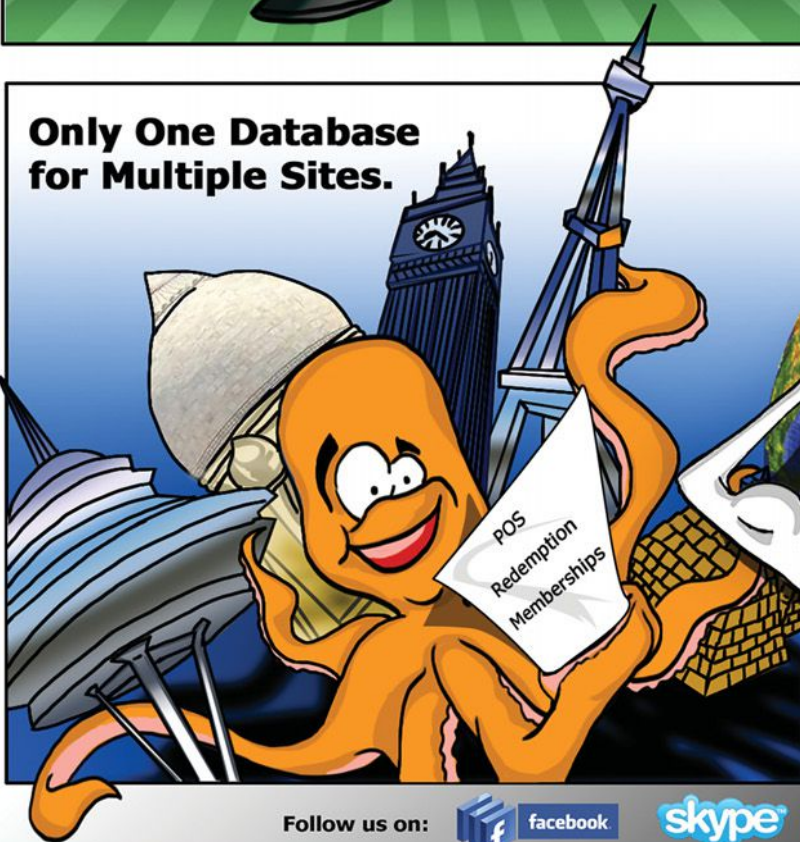


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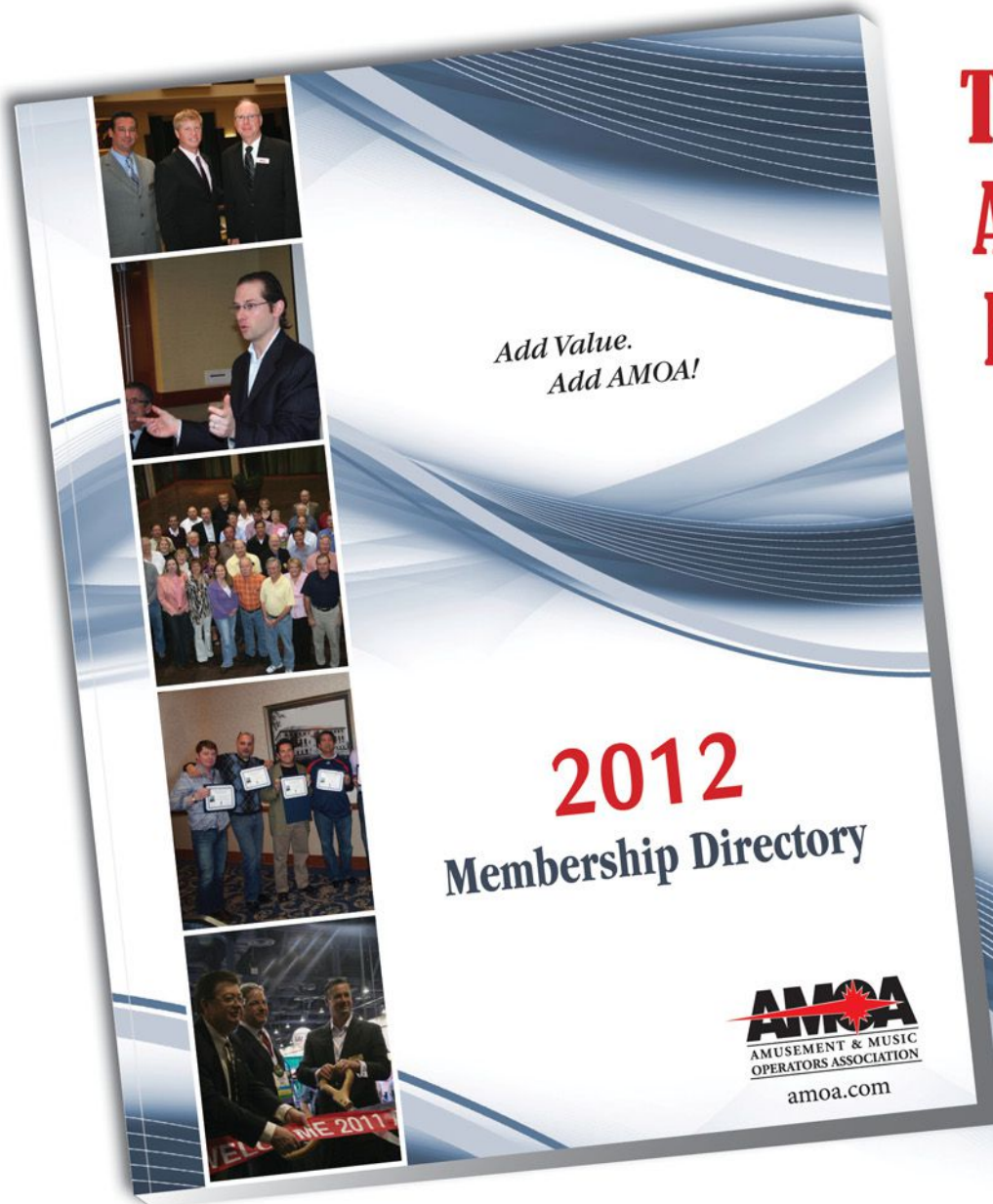


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Coast to Coast Entertainment

Coast to Coast Entertainment recently released a cost effective solution to expensive card swipe systems. This solution is perfect for family entertainment centers (FECs), bowling centers, skating rinks, coin laundries, and car washes. The **Stage 2** crane controller gives locations the option to be monitor data remotely without the high expense of adding a card swipe system.



The release of Stage 2 follows the success of the Stage 1 crane controller board. Stage 1 features AutoClaw™ technology, an advanced function that enables a skill crane machine to automatically adjust itself with no dials, pots, dip-switches, or settings. To adjust, the Stage 1 control board allows operators to program settings on skill cranes with perfect accuracy. This helps operators because it takes the guesswork out of setting up cranes, saving time and money.

The Stage 2 system offers a low cost option to monitor any game in the location. The cloud-based application monitoring system will allow the operator to remotely monitor data from anywhere at anytime through any smart phone device like an iPhone, Android, or Blackberry, or any computer system.

The Stage 2 board uses a wi-fi connection, regular CAT 5 Internet cable, or a cellular connection. The new board can monitor up to eight mechanical or electric meters in any machine, and provides easy to see LEDs to monitor the Stage 2 functions.

This system is capable of monitoring an unlimited number of games per location, using only one system. Since games are all wirelessly connected, it can be moved anywhere in the location. Each game can be placed up to 300 feet apart from another game.

The Stage 2 system features easy installation, as there is no programming or set-up necessary. Only two wires for each meter can be monitored. Each game in the location is wirelessly connected to the system via an HUB. An HUB consists of the Internet connection device and one Stage 1 equipped crane.

Some of the Stage 2 data features “Alarms,” which can be set to monitor a variety of settings, such as when tickets are low, prizes are low, too many coins are in the cash box, there are too many bills in the bills cash box, or the top prize has been won, and so on.

A timer alarm can be set to see if a game is making money during a certain time period. This is an extremely important feature for a route operator because it checks for coin jams and ticket jams.

Notifications can be set up to send messages via text message or e-mail instantly to let the operator know the status of each game. Each game can be set up to send data during every play. Game information is stored and backed up in the Stage 1. The main server runs a check to machines every 10 minutes. If a game cannot be seen, an alert is issued to the operator to check the location for any possible problems.

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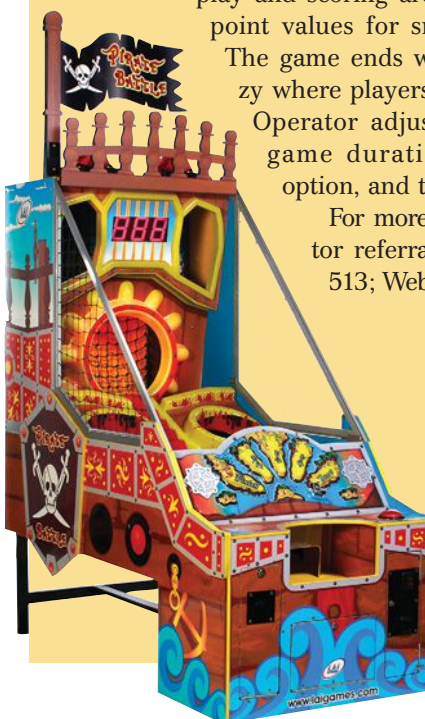
X marks the spot for fun with **Pirate Battle** from LAI Games, the new ball tossing redemption game for kids. Young scallywags hurl lightweight cannon balls into different parts of the ship to earn points. Explosive sound and lighting effects plus an authentic pirate announcer add to the fun.

The pirate theme appeals to young children. Game play and scoring are simple, with different point values for small and large targets.

The game ends with a five second frenzy where players can get double points.

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IT launches Golden Tee Wild! line game



Glen Leonard and George Lange of Gold Rush Amusements compete in a Golden Tee Wild! Hole-n-Win Bonus competition.

Incredible Technologies (IT) recently unveiled its highly anticipated Magic Touch® Illinois Video Gaming Terminal (VGT) collection to the state's prominent route gaming operators. The event was held at TopGolf Chicago, a unique golf-based entertainment complex in Wood Dale, Ill.

Golden Tee Wild! is a 25-line slot game based on the company's iconic Golden Tee® Golf brand. Golden Tee Wild! is one of 10 line games and 32 video poker games offered in IT's innovative multi-game machine designed specifically for the Illinois video gaming market.

The Magic Touch Illinois VGT collection leverages the company's nearly three decades of industry-leading experience in the amusement "street" market coupled with their more recent success as a new developer in Class-III casino gaming.

The company's casino line is comprised of video slot, poker, and keno games. According to IT, these games are among the top earning new product releases and can be found in leading casinos in the 11 states where IT is currently licensed.



Mike Pappas and John Jasernik of Fair Share Gaming with Skip Davis, President of Gary Platt Mfg.

"This event has given an opportunity to showcase our belief in and dedication to the Illinois route market," said Don Pesceone, IT's Senior Vice President of Sales. "We're offering new games specifically for the market, exclusive features, and of course an exciting VGT extension of our treasured Golden Tee brand."

He continued, "We also announced our new dual-monitor cabinet, aggressive pricing, financing, and other important details. This new chapter is an exciting time for Illinois operators and we're energized to be partnering with them once again."

Attendees of the launch party enjoyed a private viewing of the Illinois-based company's VGT line, which included opening remarks from IT's President and CEO Elaine Hodgson as



Eddie Velasquez of Velasquez Gaming takes a swing in the Top Golf competition.

well as presentations from the VGT sales team.

Pesceone demonstrated Golden Tee Wild!, including its interactive Hole-n-Win Challenge™ Bonus Game, in which operators later competed in a closest-to-the-pin style event.

In conjunction, a TopGolf competition was also held, as well as a door prize raffle for a Harley-Davidson office chair sponsored by Gary Platt Mfg. and a Golden Tee home unit from IT. Mike Pappas of Fair Share Gaming won the chair and Eddie Riley of Latner Entertainment Group won the home unit.

Illinois route operators who were unable to attend the event are encouraged to contact the state's VGT Sales Manager Jim Esposito, e-mail (jesposito@itsgames.com), to learn more about the exclusive features IT is offering including poker ProTips™, speed and skill ratings, customizable card backs, customizable backgrounds, and the only line games with max jackpots of \$500 available to players at any bet level. For more information, visit (www.itcasinogames.com). ▲

What's Inside:

- Champions Fun Center
- FEC Report
- Fun Haven
- Funfuzion at New Roc City
- Guest Service
- Modular Play Structures
- Party Time
- Redemption Formula

19th

annual
family
fun
edition

Play time's



The modular playground industry continues to thrive despite tough economic times.

Above: An artist's rendering of a medium-sized unit from International Play Company.

not over

Nine years ago, *Play Meter* published an article on the state of modular playgrounds. In 2003, we reported that the industry had come a long way from the simple tubes, slides, and rope climbs of the indoor playgrounds of the '80s. We contacted several major manufacturers of modular playgrounds to gain historic insight, to learn what customers want in play structures, and to find out about new innovations in this market.

This month we're revisiting the

same topics to find out how the market has changed and evolved, the most popular components of today's modular playgrounds, safety additions, and trends in theming.

THEN AND NOW

In 1993, Scott Forbes, Vice President of Sales for International Play Company, spoke about the evolution of FECs and modular play structures within them: "The business plans now look at how to become a 'unique and



Top: A deluxe, three-tiered playground by International Play Company.

Bottom: An artist's rendering of an International Play installation.

diversified' family entertainment center (FEC) that covers more ways of bringing in new and return guests without losing the interest of your customer after the first year."

This quote came in the wake of a wave of entrepreneurial pursuits in the early '90s that followed a "cookie cutter" approach to designing FECs. Many were modeled after the popular Discovery Zone center and ultimately went out of business. Since then, the FEC market has changed, and with it, the modular playground industry. These days, more owners do their homework including full site evaluations, sponsorship programs, competitor analysis, preliminary conceptual design, and demographics.

Forbes said, "The best suppliers now consider all of the aspects of the customer's situation and help develop a playground that is more than tubes and ball pools." He went on to explain that themed play such as 3D castles and jungles are designed with interactive play components that offer motion, games of skill, and physical and mental challenges.

In 2003 and still today, the range of play is only limited by time and money, as the best playground suppliers are creating new activities every day to help each customer find an edge over their competition while fitting the brand or concept within the FEC or theme park.

The physical and mental challenges in particular seem to have taken off.



MARKET GROWTH

This year, International Play Company (ICP) reported, "Generally the market has grown over the last 10 years, even though companies have faced considerable economic hurdles in recent years. A number of new companies have started and a few have disappeared. The products have continued to evolve in a number of directions including new educational events that are referred to as 'Edutainment' along with a number of fitness and video oriented events that have been developed using new technologies and processes developed in the last 10 years."

IPC continued, "Slides of any type continue to be the most popular elements of most play areas followed by events such as Ballistics arenas that use blown air and soft play media, laser tag, climbing walls, and the new 3D, 4D, and 5D simulators that are now available. Of course the traditional redemption and arcade games are as popular as ever."

The design and fabrication process is continually evolving. Companies are always searching and including newer and more durable materials to increase the lifespan of their equipment in the field while helping to maintain costs at manageable levels.



Above: An All Kids Play installation in Snapperz Family Fun and Sports in Indianapolis, Ind.

MAJOR TRENDS

Dave Wilson, President of All Kids Play, said, "As a consultant in the industry as well as a soft modular playground provider, I have noticed three major trends in the last few years. The customer/client is much more educated coming into our industry; there are various educational opportunities specific to the FEC market that were not there five years ago."

"The lending institutions, the Small Business Administration (SBA), and leasing companies are beginning to finance projects again. Our industry had been at a virtual standstill in the 5,000 to 25,000-square-foot market for close to three years. Finally, the inflatable 'boom' has come and gone!"

"All Kids Play has put nine soft modular play units in bounce places in the last 2.5 years. Operators who had entered the market with the 'low investment/quick build' approach that inflatables presented have found that their staying power is limited; many of these places have now closed."

He added, "We have found that the market for soft modular play has expanded exponentially but on a limited basis because of the economy. Primarily 'city-based' (large populations) in the past, we have found that the market has expanded outward from large cities into smaller suburbs and towns. Customers/clients are willing to be that 'first' FEC in their town with



Top: An All Kids Play unit on location.

Bottom: This All Kids Play unit features a Tarzan Climb Over theme.

much success, if built and operated correctly.”

“Further, in the near future, All Kids Play is expanding into the European, African, and Asian markets. Our consulting division, Wilson Design and Consulting Group, is presently doing consulting projects in Morocco, Nigeria, Spain, and England. All of these projects target the 5,000 to 25,000-square-foot facility that has formed the basis to our mid-sized U.S. market in the past. We have found that the overseas market follows U.S. trends three to five years later.”

PLAY ELEMENTS

All Kids Play has always been extremely dedicated to building the safest play units possible. Over the years, the company has introduced the following custom All Kids Play elements: Tarzan Climb Over, Slant Web Challenge, Tightrope Walk, 16-foot Hump T Tube Climb Thru, Thin Web Bridge, and Long Sweep Slide.

In regards to theming, All Kids Play has a smart approach. The company reported, “All Kids Play has never

focused on theming as a play attraction or draw. We feel a client should invest in as many varied, challenging, and aerobic play attractions as possible. This is what fosters repeat play and continued interest in the play structure.”

However, when asked to provide theming, All Kids Play has developed a unique Panel Facade approach that is economical and visual. More importantly, these panels have substantial open viewing sections that let parents stay in visual contact with their children.

The company feels that any type of theming that blocks visual access to children by their parents can add stress to the soft modular play experience rather than enjoyment. Yes, major theming can draw kids and their parents to a play unit the first time but the company’s goal is to have them return time and time again because of the play experience!”

For more information on All Kids Play, visit (www.allkidsplay.com). For more information on International Play Company, visit (www.iplayco.com). ▲



TARGET: Bowling Options

Design Plus Industries
(800)995-2375

Design Plus manufactures several coin-op bowling games like the Pro Striker, the Cosmic Pro Striker, and the Striker. The games range in size and difficulty level. They all have real balls and pins, interactive sound and display, redemption capability, and all plywood construction.

LAI Games
(817)235-7773 • www.laigames.com

LAI Games' Super Strike brings the fun of real bowling in a small footprint. Up to four players can participate per lane. The game features on/off ticket redemption mode, a motorized pin lifter, adjustable pricing and game play options, 30-inch LCD monitor, detailed audit features, maintenance friendly design, three reward options, and more.

QubicaAMF Worldwide
(866)460-7263 • www.amusement.qubicaamf.com

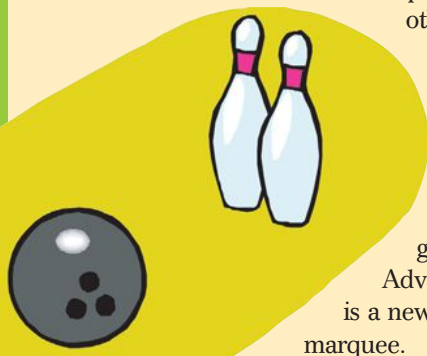
QubicaAMF is known for its Highway66 mini-bowling attraction. Highway66 features a variety of can't miss games, glow in the dark capability, on-lane advertising, multiple payment options, a redemption option, and other exciting extras.

ShuffleAlley.com
(866)323-5225 • www.shufflealley.com

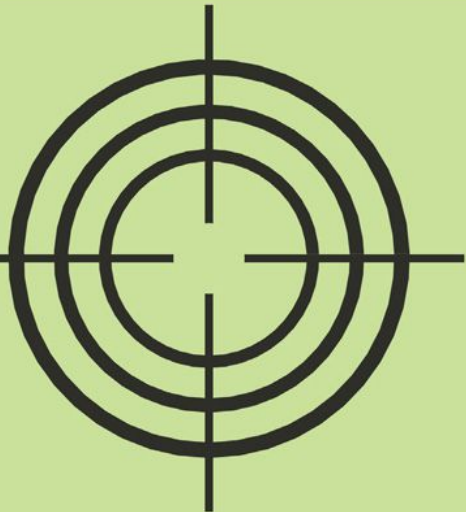
ShuffleAlley.com is the manufacturer of the Parker Bohn III Pro Bowler. This coin-op mini bowling system has all new software with seven games including Regulation, Flash, Strike 90, Advance, Special, Shadow, and 3-6-9. Also available is a new LED flash light board and a new game marquee.

US Bowling Corp.
(877)858-2695 • www.usbowling.com

US Bowling Corp.'s Rollerball mini bowling alley has a host of features including graphics selection, signage kits, audio/video lighting systems, easy maintenance and several operational options. ▲



Editor's Note:
Bowling is a fun, family-oriented American pastime. Now, with portable coin-op versions of the game, it's easier than ever to add this attraction to your family entertainment center (FEC). This month, we're targeting Alley Bowlers to give you a few options when searching for the right game for you.



Fall in love with

Funfuzion

FIVE GREAT ZONES OF FUN!

NEW ROC CITY

By Bonnie Theard

Five distinct amusement areas greet visitors to Funfuzion at New Roc City, a 130,000-square-foot entertainment megaplex in New Rochelle, N.Y.

At first glance it's difficult to decide which way to go: the Fun House, Glow Mini Golf, Rack & Cue, Roc 'n Bowl, or the Speedway.

The slogan: "Get fuzed and fall in love with fun," comes from Michael Getlan of Amusement Consultants Ltd., a third generation amusement facility

operator and author who is also a noted consultant and regular presenter at industry education workshops during events such as the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) Expo and the European Amusement and Gaming (EAG) Expo.

The site of Funfuzion was once a Sports Plus location that New Roc FEC LLC acquired in 2001 and proceeded to build into Westchester County's largest indoor family entertainment

center (FEC) by gradually adding new attractions, many on a grand scale.

ATTRACTIONS

The Fun House alone is 65,000 square feet and contains the latest video and redemption games, rides, laser tag, a prize center, Space Shot rooftop launch (seasonal), two Max Flight virtual reality roller coaster experiences, kiddie rides, full-scale carousel, bumper cars, full service food court, and some of the birthday party areas available to visiting families and groups that can number in the thousands. Yes, the largest group can bring as many as 2,000 guests at one time.

It's easy to see how guests become enthralled at Funfuzion and look forward to their next visit.

Rack & Cue is an upscale billiards hall with 25 Brunswick tournament-size pool tables; a private billiards room; billiard accessories available for purchase; and a snack, beer, and wine bar.

Roc 'n Bowl features 17 AMF glow-in-the-dark bowling lanes, a DJ booth, dance floor, disco lights, air hockey and video games, and a full service bar and dining area for up to 100 guests.

The Glow Mini Golf features a multi-themed 18-hole golf experience. The Speedway offers electric go-karts that accommodate two riders who can travel a 700 linear foot track.

DEBIT CARD SYSTEM

Funfuzion is well established, and like every entertainment venue games change, prizes change, and technology makes a difference.

Getlan said that the biggest change at Funfuzion came "when we went ticket-less and adopted a debit card system from CORECashless. We're in our second year."

Getlan admitted that he had "always been a proponent of tickets," adding, "but I feel that it is important to be open to change. Even though I advocated tickets for years, it was by observation of my own children, and my Uncle Ron's grandchildren, that



Clockwise from top:

Guests check out the well-stocked Prize Center.

The Speedway features electric go-karts.

A guest enjoys Jumpin' Jackpot from Namco in the Fun House.

showed me that kids are able to process the fact that the value of the tickets is on the card and they did not need the visual reinforcement."

He added, "Ticket-less is not necessarily the way to go in every instance, but I believe that the audience we serve is capable of making the connection. My market is 50 percent from New York City, 45 percent from



works for every venue. My advice is to do your own research and see what best matches your requirements.”

Getlan said he would like to see more games that accommodate the new era of debit cards “because debit cards allow you to do so many things: bundle for marketing, communicate with guests, and send e-mail blasts. I was never able to do that before.”

Funfuzion also takes advantage of social media such as Facebook and



Clockwise from top:

The Space Shot rooftop launch.

Enthusiastic members of the management team, (l-r): Oswaldo Gutierrez, Redemption Manager; Ann Jelito, Group Sales Manager; Joe Miller, General Manager; Jaime Cutone, Managing Director and Graphic Designer; and Charles Thomas, Redemption Manager.

\$100 Dollar Deal

Children love the carousel.

Westchester County, and five percent from southern Connecticut. Guests are from affluent homes with computers and game consoles and where children have cell phones. I believe this was the right approach for these guests.”

Getlan said that one of his basic tenets of operating and consulting is “to serve your market and tailor your offerings to your audience.”

Before taking the plunge into this new system, Getlan and his family did extensive research. “I think we are very fortunate in our industry because all the debit card companies do a good job,” said Getlan. “Not every system

redesigned its Web site to be even more user-friendly. Amusement Consultants has always been an early adopter of technology. The company was one of the first in the industry to use computers in the early 1970s.

GOING GREEN

Joe Miller, General Manager at Funfuzion, spoke about the success of the debit card system: “One of the great things about this system is it’s everywhere. It can be used for games, rides, attractions, food and beverages, and purchases at the gift showcase. Players put a selected amount on the card and can spend it anywhere in our facility.”

The only exception is for quick coin

games, which are grouped together in their own zone with signage that explains how to play those games: go to a token machine with a blue light on top to get tokens, play the games using the tokens, and swipe the Funfuzion card after playing each game to have the ticket values placed on the card.

Miller said that he has had some guests tell him a redemption game must be broken because it is not giving out tickets. "When you tell them the tickets are electronically transferred to the card and our facility is 'going green,' a smile comes across their face and they say, 'That's wonderful.'"

Miller has been in the amusement industry for 33 years. He began his coin-op career at age 14 working on the boardwalks of New Jersey. Miller's experiences there have held him in good stead during his career. "The New Jersey boardwalks provide the most unique experiences in the industry because of the range of attractions, arcades, food stands, and nightclubs," said Miller.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

When asked about the most popular attractions at Funfuzion, Miller responded that the Fun House and Roc 'n Bowl

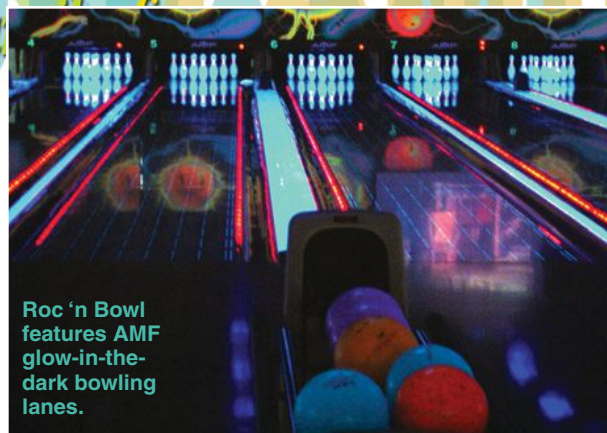
are the mainstays. He added, "Each segment within Funfuzion brings in different sets of customers. That's what makes Funfuzion what it is—we've got something for everyone!"

And everyone comes. Miller said the largest number of guests in the facility at one time was 3,000! Funfuzion is conveniently located between Manhattan, Connecticut, and New Jersey.

A popular value promotion is the \$100 Deal Card that includes not only the \$100 of regular credits on the card but also an extra \$20 worth of bonus credits, plus a soda and popcorn.

Miller said, "People are looking for value today, and this deal is a great value. It's been a successful promotion." He added, "The goal of any business is to increase your customer spending, and this promotion accomplishes that goal."

The \$100 Deal Card is available seven days a week. During the week there are gold, silver, and bronze packages with different levels of savings and attractions, as well as other daily specials such as Wacky Wednesday and the Monday Bowling Block.



Roc 'n Bowl features AMF glow-in-the-dark bowling lanes.

PARTIES AND MORE

Birthday parties and group parties (corporate, church, and private) are big at Funfuzion; the facility hosts 30 to 40 birthday parties every weekend depending on the time of year. A variety of packages are available with a mix of attractions from the five different areas of Funfuzion. Miller said, "We have the flexibility to cover everything a guest might want."

Funfuzion gives back to the community as well. For example, it recently hosted a charity event for the Starlight Foundation, which provides entertainment, education, and activities for seriously ill children in the U.S. and their families.

Miller manages a staff of 145 employees (cast members), counting full-time and part-time. Cast members get to know the guests because 80 percent of business is repeat business, and they pass on comments from guests.

Miller said "We will make changes to enhance the experience of our guests." He added that Getlan "follows the philosophy that we do everything we can to make our guests happy, and we welcome any suggestions from them."

Asked about any unusual happenings at Funfuzion, Miller said a guest asked to make special arrangements for a marriage proposal to his girlfriend. The couple had their first date at Funfuzion, so the guest wanted to get her something from the prize center and put the engagement ring inside. Miller said that when the guest proposed, down on one knee, everyone was taking pictures of the happy occasion.

For more information on Funfuzion, visit (www.funfuziononline.com/). ▲

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PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: HOWARD CHO, MARINO REMULAR, RUSSEL IBALE, CHARLIE SMITH AND WARREN ASING



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Guests enjoy the thrill of the climbing walls.

Funhaven is a welcome

retreat



This new entertainment property brings the latest trends, state-of-the-art attractions, and family fun to Ottawa, Canada.

After three years in the making, Dave Ellis' dream to bring the future of family entertainment to the families of Ottawa, Canada, became reality when the doors of Funhaven opened to the public on Dec. 14, 2011.

Funhaven, owned and operated by Dave and his brother Hugh, is a new 36,000-square-foot family entertainment center (FEC). The Ellis' have committed to make Funhaven "the premiere Ottawa family entertainment

destination by providing a world-class entertainment experience for family members of all ages through a consistent delivery of superior guest relations, an enticing atmosphere, fun, socially interactive attraction elements, and quality food offerings."

Dave and Hugh bring over 40 years of combined experience in ownership and executive operations of private companies to Funhaven. Dave is the President and Founder of Urthgate Sys-

By Tracy Sarris and Frank Seninsky

tems Inc. and Hugh is the former President and Co-owner of Cinnabar Networks Inc. that was acquired by Bell Canada in 2006.

Both men have experienced working within successful, multi-million dollar operations during their careers; however, neither one has ever run an entertainment center and knew they had a lot to learn before diving head-first into this project.

EXTENSIVE RESEARCH

Well before the doors opened, Dave and Hugh traveled extensively across Canada and the U.S. visiting entertainment centers, speaking with industry specialists, attending hundreds of hours of entertainment industry training,

attending trade shows and conferences, and creating relationships with an extensive number of product vendors, professional services firms, financing companies, insurance brokers, franchisors, and other related organizations.

In 2008, they retained the services of Amusement Entertainment Management (AEM) (www.AEM-LLC.com), a worldwide amusement and entertainment consulting firm specializing in the design, layout, installation, and operations of FECs and leisure venues. AEM Managing Partner Jerry Merola provided the project feasibility study and a full range of project development consulting services which, as Dave



The jungle themed laser tag arena allows up to 30 players at a time.



Funhaven's well-stocked redemption counter.



Funhaven's arcade is filled with games.



Funhaven's play area features multi-level platforms and a Ballocity Jungle Gym.

describes it, took them from beginning to end.

"Jerry was the most important person on our development team and through this process," said Dave. "He provided so much more than what was expected. We were looking for business advice on investment opportunities and such, but the result was so much larger when you create that relationship."

Dave continued, "It's a matter of having someone else encouraging you;...a consistent hand next to you saying, 'don't worry, it happens all the time;' as well as someone you can always call when you have a question. That, combined with the business knowledge, is such an important relationship. I am not sure how we would have managed the process without him."

Merola created the original business plan, approached the investors, assisted in space selection and designers, created the layout/design, worked with the vendors to get things delivered and installed, and oversaw every facet of the entire development process.

Dave commented in a 2011 interview, "Lots of people starting out often forego the services of a professional consultant due to the cost of the investment, but we have found that the return is so high that this has to be a mandatory part of the process."

EDUCATION AND ATTRACTIONS

Dave and Hugh also recognized the importance of learning everything possible about creating and running an entertainment experience. In 2008, they attended the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) Expo and signed up for every educational offering for FECs.

Their next stop was Foundations Entertainment University (FEU) (www.foundationsuniversity.com) in February 2009. "I quickly realized that this was the program that provided the 'Foundation' of information we needed to get started," said Dave.

Funhaven's development team enlisted the help of some of the top attraction vendors in the industry to ensure the center provided the most

current trends and thrilling interactive experiences.

Their jungle temple-themed Jungle Gym (Ballocity™) by PrimePlay features multi-level platforms with interactive blasters and vacuum cannons and buckets that propel, throw, raise, vacuum, and dump thousands of foam balls in a shoes-off environment that is laugh-out-loud fun for everyone.

The Jungle Gym is an innovative soft contained play area that is specially designed with fun, interactive play elements to climb, jump on, slide down, and explore to create a one-of-a-kind adventure for all ages.

Funhaven features four lanes of Highway 66 mini-lane bowling by QubicaAMF, 10 electric floor powered bumper cars by RDC, and climbing walls from Extreme Engineering. Guests may find that climbing 20 feet straight up might seem a little frightening, but Funhaven's climbing walls feature the safest, double-redundant auto-relay technology in the industry so that anyone can climb safely without having to worry about how far they've climbed.

Guests can play games to their heart's content, and then have even more fun redeeming their accumulated tickets for great prizes at Funhaven's monster prize giveaway center.

FINAL INSTALLATIONS

Just days before the soft-opening of Funhaven and minutes after the carpet was laid, Alpha-Omega Amusements & Sales (www.AlphaOmegaSales.com) proceeded to deliver, set up, and program 80 redemption, merchandise dispensing games, video games, and related equipment for the grand opening.

At the same time, the Alpha-Omega team designed and packed a redemption center that boasted 32 feet of counter space and 25 feet of slatwall. In less than 48 hours, the team successfully completed a game zone, redemption center set up, programming of all games, and stocked six plush cranes and seven high-end prize dispensing merchandisers.

Creative Works finished out the attraction mix with the 5,000-square-foot jungle-themed laser tag arena, which provides enough room for a state-of-art 30 player NexusFEC laser tag system. Creative Works also added the single maze Lazer Frenzy where players have to weave and crawl their way through a field of lasers to reach the checkpoint.

Dave opted for the adventure theme for this attraction, which coincides with the theme of laser tag, as well as the rest of the facility. Creative Works also built a 12-foot smiley-face FunHaven logo, which hangs on the front of the building. They used a combination of foam, wood, steel, and paint to bring this prop to life.

When guests get hungry, Noble Roman's pizzas are made to order on-site. For dessert, guests can enjoy the California-style self-serve frozen yogurt bar that includes a wide assortment of flavors with a variety of 50 toppings. For an extra treat, Funhaven also offers fair-style fun foods such as mini donuts, popcorn, cotton candy, funnel cakes, churros, and more.

ATTENDANCE GROWS

Since opening, Funhaven has seen attendance steadily climbing with about 12,000 guests coming through the facility each week, estimates Dave. There were over 100 birthday parties planned for the last week in April and they are already booked out months in advance.

Projected revenue has been within 10 percent since opening and, given that they did not start the birthday program right away, Dave feels they are technically right on the mark and are doing very well.

"When you spend so long creating a project like this, once you finally open the doors, you turn your face to the sky and expect a rain of money to wash over you," joked Dave. "The reality is actually that once you open, the real work of getting the word out to generate group and party business begins, as these and other things are

going to help you maintain a consistent income over time."

SOCIAL MEDIA

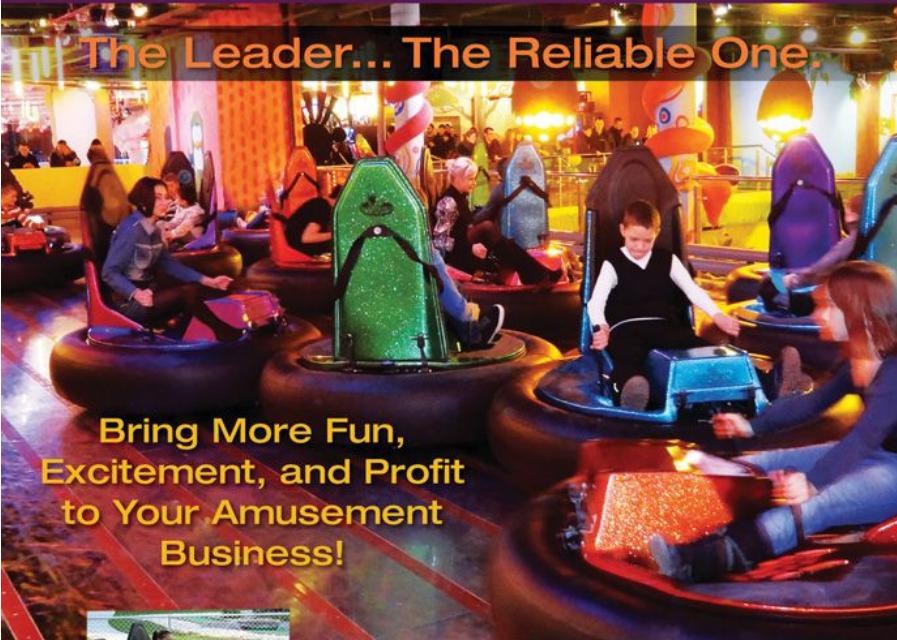
A lot of centers have a marketing budget and will outsource that work. Dave took a portion of their marketing

budget and decided to hire a full time marketing manager. He wanted someone to be responsible for responding directly to social media; getting Facebook, Twitter, and other social formats up and running; arrange for blogs; and serve other departments as needed.


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Dave felt that this was a significant expense but it would result in significant rewards that come in through proper management of the social media market. If it is any measure of success, they have only been open four months, compared to their competitors who have been open over 20 years, and Funhaven already has three times as many “likes” on their Facebook page.

“I find the inbound marketing concept of people coming to find you when they are actually looking for your services are very important and the best use of marketing dollars,” said Dave.

“One of the things about being a new business is that a significant portion of your revenue is going to be used for paying back capital and interest that was borrowed. Whereas your competitors are spending that same money on advertising, so when their advertising budgets are five times larger than yours, you have to be smart about how you spend that money. And the smartest way is through social media.”

Dave also invested in a world class Web site (www.funhaven.com) that was designed and developed by Katie Bruno and her staff at Web Site Design & Development ([wddonline](http://wddonline.com)). Dave felt that the “C4-Creative Content Control Center” from [wddonline](http://wddonline.com) has allowed his staff the ability to easily add, edit, and delete content from their Web site



Mini-lane bowling from QubicaAMF.

at any time with very little technology experience necessary.

CHALLENGES

Some of the challenges they have faced since opening include having a small amount of expenditures come up that they didn’t fully anticipate; simple things like more garbage cans and water fountains, the need for more coat rack space, and a lot of little miscellaneous things that make the capital spending never seem to stop.

After the first quarter, the Ellis’ got a chance to see what areas still needed

attention, but they also could see their successes and realize just what the business is cable of doing.

Due to the current financial market, it was initially difficult to get financing for the project and they ended up with higher interest rates than anticipated. Having these kinds of positive numbers coming out of the gate, and consistently growing, will allow them to go back to the bank in the very near future and apply for conventional financing with lower interest rates.

Funhaven’s management team has made a “Commitment to Fun!” and their vision is to “Captivate our guests with innovative approaches in all that we endeavor, and foster a passion to create personalized experiences for every guest we meet. We are energized by our imagination and charged with the task of elevating the quality of entertainment for our guests.”

Funhaven is a great example of what the new generation of FECs look like and how smart business practices can be used to build a solid foundation for success and growth. We look forward to seeing their progress and accomplishments over the next year. ▲



Frank Seninsky is the President of the Alpha-Omega Group of companies, which includes Amusement Entertainment Management (AEM), Alpha-Omega Amusements & Sales, and Alpha-BET Entertainment. He is Co-regent for Foundations Entertainment University and a Past President of both the Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA) and the International Association for the Leisure Entertainment Industry (IALEI). Seninsky can be reached via e-mail (fseninsky@aol.com).



Tracy Sarris is the Chief Marketing Officer for AEM and Alpha-Omega Amusements & Sales. She is also the President of INOVA, an association and business management consulting company. She previously served as the President/ CEO for IALEI. Sarris can be reached via e-mail ([tracysarris @aol.com](mailto:tracysarris@aol.com)).

Creating a Facebook Business Page in 10 easy steps

Many small businesses are embracing social media as another tool to promote their business and connect with customers. Some are jumping in with both feet while others feel they are being forced into it. For those of you who are the latter, allow me to introduce Facebook (as a business page) to you.

A Facebook business page can be instrumental in a business' success, especially for operators and distributors. This is a new way to connect with your customers and their customers. If done properly, this new way of communicating can help grow your business and make more money for both you and your locations.

Here is a very basic way to set up a Facebook page for your business in 10 easy steps.

Use these instructions while you are in front of your computer monitor:

1 Go to (www.facebook.com) and in the lower right hand corner of the page, click on the "Create a Page" icon. It is important to note, if you already have a personal Facebook login, make sure you logout before creating a business page.

2 Identify your industry. Click on the first button, "Local Business or Place."

3 Enter your local business information. Don't forget to agree to the Facebook Terms before hitting "Get Started."

4 Let's Create an Account. If you already have a Facebook personal page then select "I already have a Facebook account." If you don't have a Facebook personal account, fill out all the fields and click "Sign Up Now."

5 Confirm Your Account. If you just created a Facebook Page, and you have clicked "Sign up Now," Facebook will send a confirmation e-mail to the e-mail address you provided. Log into your e-mail and open the confirmation e-mail from Facebook and follow their instructions. If you already have an existing personal account, click on the button that reads, "I have a Facebook account" and login with your e-mail and password.

6 This is where you will input your information, upload an image for your cover, and your "profile" or main picture. Now you have to get some "likes" for your page. Click "Suggest to Friends" if you already have a Facebook account. You can also click "Import Contacts" to invite your e-mail list to become fans of your page. Having fans is important to your business page. They are the ones who are going to see your posts and you will be able to see theirs as well.

7 Here's a tip! Click on the "Edit Page" button and then go to the "Apps" button. Add the "Events" application to your business page by clicking the "Edit Settings" button under the EVENTS application. Click the "Add" and then the "Okay" to finish. Creating events for your business or knowing how to create events for your customers can come in handy for dart tournaments, special events, etc.

8 Add photos. Pictures are worth 1,000 words, so make sure you upload pictures from your events, your inventory, your business, anything you think others would like to see. You can upload photos from your computer by clicking "Photos" on your Facebook Home Page. You can also create albums on Facebook. Albums can help others find pictures easier.

9 Another great idea is to enable picture uploads from mobile phones. If you have a smart phone, you can easily upload photos right from your phone's camera. From the home screen of your Facebook Page, click on "Manage." Then click on the "Mobile" icon. You will see your own Facebook e-mail address under the "With Mobile E-mail" section. Save this e-mail address in your phone contacts section, for example "XXX Vending Facebook." E-mail pictures taken from your phone to this e-mail address. These pictures will automatically appear on your Facebook page.

10 Enjoy! You have created your own Facebook Business Page.

I will be giving you some tips and pointers in upcoming issues to help you embrace the social media experience. If you have any questions or want additional help, A(Wes)ome Media is here to help. Next month, we'll take on another social media Web site. ▲



Wes Romine is the Owner of A(Wes)ome Media, a company dedicated to helping small businesses use social media to their advantage. Romine has been an industry member for over 11 years. He got his start in the industry working as Director of Social Media Sales for Ecast. He can be reached via e-mail at (wes@awesomemedia.biz).

As the family entertainment center (FEC) industry continues to grow and thrive despite the economy, merchandise suppliers are responding with products specifically made to meet FEC needs. In addition to providing redemption counter ware, many companies are now carrying party supply goods to satisfy this major aspect of the FEC business.

According to Dorothy Lewis, President of Fun Station Entertainment Group and *Play Meter* columnist, some birthday party merchandise suppliers say that the size of their orders has been growing steadily, some as much as five to seven percent annually for the last three years. Numbers as high as 15 percent growth have been reported over previous years in birthday-related sales.

supply companies to find out about their newest party products.

Fun Express offers solutions for all your party needs. The company has a large assortment of party supplies including tablecloth rolls in 100 and 300 feet, tableware, Happy Sacks™, and decorations. Plus, Fun Express can take bulk tableware and customize it for your business.

Rebecca's Novelty Importer has been servicing FECs, redemption centers, skating centers, and bowling centers nationwide since 1987. Birthday party supplies were a natural fit for Rebecca's to add to its product line so that the customers it was

Sureshot has color-your-own placemats. The placemats have different themes with a solid, colorful border. Partygoers can hold on to their balloons with a "hold-on" balloon weight. The fun fist-shaped weights are available in red, blue, and yellow.

Sondra Doyle from SureShot Redemption/Party Supplies said, "Our party supply line has grown to be a major part of our merchandise business. Initially it was

PARTY TIME!

Merchandise supply companies provide everything needed for a memorable celebration.

FECs with parties and now the party market has expanded not only throughout the amusement industry but has found its way to many retail venues as well."

Redemption Plus offers a wide variety of party goods including cups, napkins, plates, table covers, and add-ons such as balloons, pinatas, candles, curling ribbon, and novelties. Items are available in an assortment of colors and patterns and can be customized with your facility's logo and brand colors.

Also available from Redemption Plus is the Bag of Smiles Party Pack, which is designed to generate revenue through up-sells. Each pack includes an assortment of seven pieces including toys, crayons, and candy, plus a fun insert featuring games and puzzles. Packs are gender neutral and the assortment is frequently updated.

Rhode Island Novelty offers party supplies with fun themes to suit any birthday boy or girl. Themes include alien, patriotic, rainbow, western, fiesta, pirates, retro, luau, poker, smile, Mardi Gras, princess, and sports. Items include barware, party favors, lighting, gift bags, noisemakers, balloons, tableware, maracas, party string, and more. ▲

FEC operators agree, birthday parties are big business. Brian Burks, General Manager of HeyDay in Norman, Okla., said, "We've always tried to tweak and enhance party packages. A big part of the facility's business is parties."

Birthday parties are an important offering at Marvelous Marvin's Mechanical Museum in Farmington Hills, Mich. This non-traditional facility, part tourist attraction and part vintage machine museum, schedules parties seven days a week "whether you're eight years old or 80 years old."

Lewis added, "For those that see parties simply as a line item in their daily receipts, think again! Like attractions and games, your party business needs to be analyzed often to make sure you are on top of the latest trends and practices."

Play Meter checked with a number of

already serving could make one phone call for their novelty and party supply needs.

Rebecca's makes birthday parties more attractive with matching paper place settings, colorful table covers, and balloons. Over the years, the company has expanded its line to include more designs and more "party essentials" such as birthday candles, cake knives, and sporks. Rebecca's strives to keep attractive designs in stock at economical prices and to continue to serve the industry as long as it will let them.

Sureshot Redemption has party supplies to give any celebration a special touch. Cupcakes are a trending item in birthday parties. To respond, Sureshot has two styles of cupcake holders to choose from. The party cupcake stand is a metal four-tier stand that holds 19 cupcakes. Another cupcake stand, this one disposable, has three tiers and holds 24 cupcakes.

To keep party guests entertained,

Rebecca's Novelty Importer birthday offerings.



Party goods from Redemption Plus.



Fun Express party supplies.



Sureshot has fun party accessories.



Champions in the business of fun

Located in Lincoln, Neb., Champions Fun Center is defined by a few words uttered by Owner Randy Alby, “We keep improving the things we do.”


No better words can describe the dedication it takes to run a successful family entertainment center (FEC), and Champions has been improving since Alby purchased the location in December 2001.

The enhancements started in 1998 when the previous owners asked Alby, Owner of DaVinci’s pizza franchise and longtime restaurateur, if he would put a DaVinci’s restaurant in their location. Alby designed a smaller version of his restaurant that sold DaVinci’s pizza along with traditional amusement fare like nachos, giant pretzels, funnel cakes, cotton candy, and cheeseburgers.

Since purchasing the entire facility, Alby has added several attractions. Water Wars was one of the first. Water Wars is an outdoor attraction in which players launch water balloons from each side. If a player hits the top, they are splashed with water. “It’s a great participatory thing for the people watching. It makes them laugh,” he said.

Other new features include a four-story free fall ride, an upgraded fleet of go-karts, new golf screens, and automatic bumpers for the facility’s eight-lane bowling alley. “We’re always trying to tweak the things that we have and make them better,” explained Alby.

One avenue the owner employed for making things better: attending Family Entertainment University (FEU). “We attended FEU shortly after we bought our place. We jumped into our situation here without the full knowledge of what we’d be doing. There are so many aspects to the business with insurance, etc., to the selection of each individual piece of your FEC. It isn’t any one thing; it’s each individual piece and you need



Facility:
Champions Fun Center

Location:
Lincoln, Neb.

Attractions:
Go-karts, bowling, Water Wars, batting cage, mini golf, arcade, Adventure Challenge play structure

Contact:
(402)434-7066;
Web (www.championsfuncenter.com)

the right pieces to attract the right age group with repeat visits. If there was any advice I’d give someone getting started, it’s do your research. FEU is a great thing to do before you jump in.”

Alby is also a fan of attending trade shows. He said, “Over the years we’ve been looking at various ways to add to our restaurant. We try to do the Pizza Expo every other year and either the Amusement Expo or the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) Expo every other year. This year it felt like we got a double bang for our buck with the Amusement Expo and the Pizza Expo having a crossover. We know that we always come back home with an idea or two, or three, that more than pays for the cost of the show and the time we’re there.”

In fact, Alby met his vendor, Valley Vending Service (VVS) of Cozad, Neb., at this year’s Amusement Expo. VVS supplies all the games in Champions, which include Big Bass Wheel from Bay Tek Games and Fruit Ninja from Adrenaline Amusement as some of the most popular. They add

five to eight new games annually.

VVS also arranges for all redemption merchandise to be supplied. There are several hot items that kids like to play for in Nebraska. Alby said, “We have some signed sports memorabilia that does well like baseball and football jerseys. We also have a fair amount of plush items that do very well. We occasionally do bigger items like iPods.”

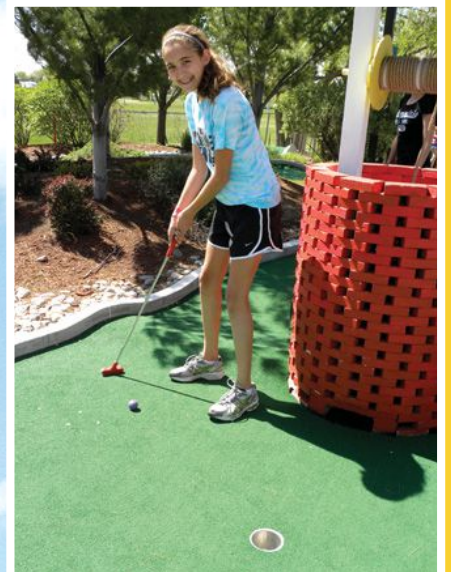
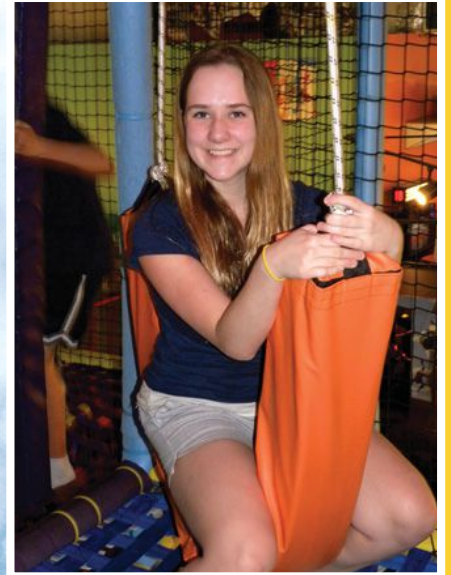
Another attraction in the facility is a golf course themed like a mini-town. The course has various buildings that resemble different places throughout Lincoln. The owners have turned it into a peaceful setting with a great deal of natural landscaping. Other attractions include bowling, a batting cage, and an indoor Adventure Challenge play structure from Playsmart.

The facility also hosts a large number of parties, school functions, post-prom overnight parties, and more. They have several party packages available with different features to meet each family’s needs.

Alby said, “We do a phenomenal job getting to know the child. We get in touch beforehand and find out the child’s favorite color, game, music, etc. The child feels like we really know him and the parents appreciate the personal aspect.”

The ability to book online is available, saving parents some time. Gold level parties (the most popular) feature a theme. Some themes include Iron Man, Hello Kitty, Disney Princess, Toy Story, Angry Birds, and more.

While the facility is currently using Facebook, they do not presently have a presence on Twitter. They do use Facebook as a method of marketing and communication with customers. The facility currently has over 1,000 “likes,” and those users receive automatic updates to their News Feeds each time Champions advertises a special. ▲





COINMAN

Chip O'Hara



Midwest Coin Concepts
Waite Park, Minn.

By Bonnie Theard

O'Hara has adapted to change in the marketplace and widened the scope of the company's operations while adhering to its roots.

Midwest Coin Concepts is a true family enterprise, with no less than five brothers having worked in the company over a span of 42 years.

Tim and Mick O'Hara entered the amusement business in 1970 when they opened T&M Novelty to operate jukeboxes and pinball games, later adding video games.

Through acquisitions and steady growth the company became Midwest Coin Concepts, which has three offices: Waite Park, Minn. (near St. Cloud); Superior, Wis.; and Menomonee, Wis.

Chip O'Hara began working at the company in 1975 when he was 15. Today, Chip and his brothers, Terry and Denny, are partners and lead the company that has grown to include 78 employees (full-time and part-time). Terry came on board in 1987, Denny in 2000.

Chip serves on the Board of Directors of the Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA) and recently participated as a panelist in the "Self-Redemption on the Street" seminar at the Amusement Expo.

DIVERSE EQUIPMENT

Midwest Coin Concepts operates a wide range of equipment: ATMs, bulk vending, darts, flat vending stickers, jukeboxes, pinball games, pool tables, ticket redemption, self-redemption, and more.

Pool and dart leagues are a major component. The company follows a program of winter/spring and fall leagues for darts and continual seasons (including summer) for pool leagues. Every year Midwest Coin Concepts sends teams to the AMOA-National Dart Association (NDA) Team Dart and the Valley National Eight-Ball Associa-

tion (VNEA) International Championships.

Two retail stores cater to the home recreation market with Brunswick and Olhausen pool tables and used equipment that includes jukeboxes, electronic darts, and video games such as the Raw Thrills/Play Mechanix's Big Buck Hunter series.

PROMOTIONS

The company conducts on-premise promotions on equipment that ranges from AMI's Megatouch games to Incredible Technologies' (IT) Golden Tee Golf and PowerPutt (the original and PowerPutt LIVE). O'Hara commented that 50 percent of the players on Power Putt are women.

O'Hara does not miss any opportunities to promote equipment: "Whenever we roll out a new product we have a coming out party; for example, when IT comes out with new Golden Tee courses." In the past the company has given away snowmobiles and four-wheelers during tournaments held in its locations.

Like the rest of the country, the downturn in the economy affected Midwest Coin Concepts. O'Hara said, "Some of our locations closed, bars in particular."

He does see a light at the end of the proverbial tunnel: "In talking to other people in the industry, they are seeing business turn around a little. We're certainly seeing an up-tick this year over last year."

The company operates redemption equipment in five water parks, a half dozen family entertainment centers (FECs), indoor amusement parks, grocery stores, pizza restaurants, ice arenas, and movie theaters.



NEW DISCIPLINE

According to Chip, both ticket redemption and self-redemption requires a totally different discipline from what street operators are accustomed to with other equipment.

“We merchandise our equipment seven days a week,” he said. “Our first group of account representatives starts out at 5 a.m. to visit 24-hour locations, and then proceeds from there to other locations. It’s like stocking store shelves; you have to be sure the merchandise is there and the machines are clean and ready for business.”

Much forethought goes into the redemption segment of the company’s operation. Chip said, “We roll out new merchandise well in advance of a season or special event, just like a department store puts out displays in advance of a holiday.”

Chip not only plans ahead for holidays, but other special events such as The Final Four, World Cup Soccer, the Super Bowl, and the Olympics. Posters are produced in-house for placement in cranes to bring attention to the prize merchandise that corresponds to the occasion.

Local sports teams are also highlighted, especially the Badgers, Brewers, and Packers. When an opposing team is coming to town, cranes at hotel properties where those fans will stay are stocked with merchandise for their team.

Chip emphasized that it is important to know your cost of goods and the cost to deliver those goods, along with the price per play and percentag-ing. “We track fill rates, win rations, and percentages very closely,” he said.

PLAN AHEAD

Chip said he plans eight months in advance and orders in bulk containers.

“We want to make sure we give our customers about eight weeks of shopping time playing games with the appropriate season or event merchandise,” said Chip. “Then we pull that product immediately after the holiday or special event.”

The company has 20 years of experience in bulk vending with capsule, sticker, gum, and candy machines. Chip likens bulk vending to cranes: “As long as you keep them clean and filled with quality products, you build value with your customers. They see you coming in to stock and maintain the machine. Their perception is that you’re on top of your game. As a result, receipts go up.”

Chip is quick to credit his employees with the company’s success. “Our employees have really bought into our merchandising program. Employees from all three offices are included in weekly meetings (via Skype). They have a great deal of input. It’s really a gathering of ideas and strategizing.”

Midwest Coin Concepts believes in investing in quality merchandise, stocking brand name electronics and licensed items. “Revenue is higher when the product is good,” said Chip. “We chart everything to see when an item must be pulled.”

Chip stays current with desirable merchandise by checking out retail stores, TV, and conducting Internet research to see what’s hot and what’s coming down the road. He believes in creative placement of prizes inside cranes, such as putting items at different heights so it’s easy to see them and players feel there is a fair chance of winning them.

For more information on Midwest Coin Concepts, call (320)251-2627; Web (www.mwcoin.com). ▲

“As long as you keep machines clean and filled with quality products, you build value with your customers.”





COINMAN

John Paul Gambacorto



United Vending Service
Syracuse, N.Y.

By Bonnie Theard

Enthusiastic and candid, Gambacorto has diversified his operation to embrace all types of amusement and vending equipment with an emphasis on self-redemption.

A lot has changed for United Vending Service and the industry since John Paul Gambacorto established the company in 1984.

He recalled, "When I started, Donkey Kong, Ms. Pac-Man, and Duck Hunt were popular games. You could buy a few of those games and put them in the warehouse because you were going to need them. Now you think very hard about purchasing machines because the rate of return is different and so is the cost."

United Vending Service has grown from such video-centric times to the present day when redemption represents a larger portion of equipment on location. The company has changed and diversified with customer and market demands and today provides equipment for chain restaurants, a ski center, Yogi Bear campgrounds, toll road rest stops, laser tag facilities, pizza restaurants, and more.

MACHINE MIX

"We do everything from bulk vending to snack food and soda machines—anything and everything in the amusement arena including jukeboxes, darts, ticket redemption, ATMs, and even vibrating massage chairs," said John.

He said he has not bought a new video game in the last year, aside from new countertops. Everything has been cranes and instant redemption.

Cranes have been a mainstay from the start; self-redemption equipment was added in 1994. John said, "For a few years that was not the first thing I thought about every time I got up in the morning, but now it is."

ATMs were added to the product mix four years ago. "ATMs are steady,"

commented John. "I think of them as I do a vending machine. The product is money, or bills. As long as I keep the product in the equipment, customers will use it."

He explained that there are peaks and valleys with ATMs. They are used more frequently at the beginning of the month; as the month progresses the volume goes down as well as the size of the withdrawals.

John was a panelist on the Amusement Expo seminar, "Self-Redemption for the Street." At the seminar he told everyone that if they were not having fun they were doing something wrong.

EXCITEMENT LEVEL

He is the first to say, enthusiastically, "This is the most exciting time in the amusement industry. I am enjoying the hell out of it."

John concedes that this has not always been the case: "I've been doing it long enough that I got to the point that I was just going through the paces and not being very excited. Now I'm excited about what I am doing and what to buy next. I am always asking players why they play one game over another and what types of prizes they like."

That enthusiasm spills over into his everyday operations and creativity when it comes to prizes in his redemption machines.

"In almost every redemption game I have there is a Victoria Secret gift card," said John. "Operators think that mainly we have teenage boys playing our games. But most of the locations have female employees and teenage girls who play the games."

He continued, "I have two daughters, age 22 and 11, and there is noth-



ing more they want to do than shop for themselves. They will play to get a Victoria Secret gift card. They are less interested in electronics. We can draw our female customers in with the correct product mix.”

ATTRACT, KEEP PLAYERS

John’s 28 years of coin-op experience comes to the forefront when he talks about how to attract and keep customers: “We should be more like grocery stores and offer a loss leader. When we put in a new piece of redemption equipment, we need to let the players win more than the payout percentage we want to set.

“I learned this by mistake when a crane paid out to excess and everyone was winning. Over time, little by little, I got it down to the 30 percent payout



John and his daughter Alyssa.

I wanted. The game then had a good reputation as a game you could always win on. My advice is to be more generous at first and players will

always think well of that game.”

He also said, “The biggest mistake I’ve made is setting a game too tight because the first two weeks will tell how the machine will perform. If people don’t win, they will stop playing.”

John added, “I would rather have them win too much than too little. I can always tighten it, but if they don’t play the game I will have to move it to some other location. Then there is no chance of making any money with the game in that spot.”

For more information about United Vending Service, call (315)449-0706; Web (www.unitedvendingservice.com).



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COVER STORY

Muncie Novelty Indiana Ticket

75 years in the
amusement market



President David Broyles and Vice President Megan Broyles-Jones carry the 75-year-old torch of family leadership for the sister companies.

Not many companies reach the 75-year milestone and continue under the leadership of the founding family. A perfect example can be found at Muncie Novelty Co. and Indiana Ticket Co. based in Muncie, Ind.

Muncie Novelty Co. is known for its charitable gaming products such as jar tickets, break-opens, pull-tabs, and bingo raffle tickets while sister company Indiana Ticket Co. makes roll tickets, wristbands, and redemption tickets.

Indiana Ticket and Muncie Novelty share resources and manpower, allowing them to adapt quickly to urgent orders and changing needs.

Play Meter checked in with third-generation leader David Broyles, President, and Megan Broyles-Jones, Vice President, and their staff to find out more about the business philosophy and product offerings from the two companies.

Broyles' grandfather, Ted Broyles, founded Muncie Novelty in 1937. His son, Bob, became more involved in 1960 when the company began to expand the product line, which led to the establishment of sister company Indiana Ticket. David came on board in the 1980s.

What are the basic, sound business principles that have contributed to your success?

To continue growth over this period of time, it takes a sustained commit-

Indiana Ticket's steadily-increasing customer base keeps the office staff busy, (l-r): Connie Mauch, Jennifer Mynett, Amy Benbow, Donna Verona, Gary Hines, Cindy Doherty, and Jill Gasper.



ment to hard work by a lot of very talented people. We are continuously searching for product diversity and improvement to our manufacturing process.

The key, though, is our concentration on customer service and product quality on every order. Because our products are consumable, our clients are in constant need. We want to make their decision to return to our company for replacement product as easy as possible.

How long have you been at your current facility; how often have you expanded?

We moved into our current location in 1970 with the purchase of 46 acres northeast of Muncie. Because of this, we have been able to expand upon our initial structure on seven separate occasions.

How large is your headquarters, and what does it include?

Today, our facility is nearly 90,000 square feet including our offices, production, and warehouse. With this facility setup, we are able to perform all of our production in-house.

Nearly all of our products require multiple production steps, so as we move through the different departments it's important to remain as organized and efficient as possible.

How many employees are currently at Muncie Novelty and Indiana Ticket and how many are long-term?

Customer satisfaction and employee retention are two of the things we value the most. Not surprisingly, since 2003 our companies have increased

employment from about 100 then to over 180 full-time employees today.

Despite the turbulent economy over the past decade, we have not made a single employee layoff. On the contrary, we have added new departments and expanded in others such as graphic design, bindery, domestic/ international sales and support, and digital production. Incredibly, we have

had only one member of our management team retire over this same period.

What's new in the Muncie Novelty line and the Indiana Ticket line?

Other than improvements to the production process, Muncie Novelty's charitable gaming products have not changed a lot. The industry has shifted

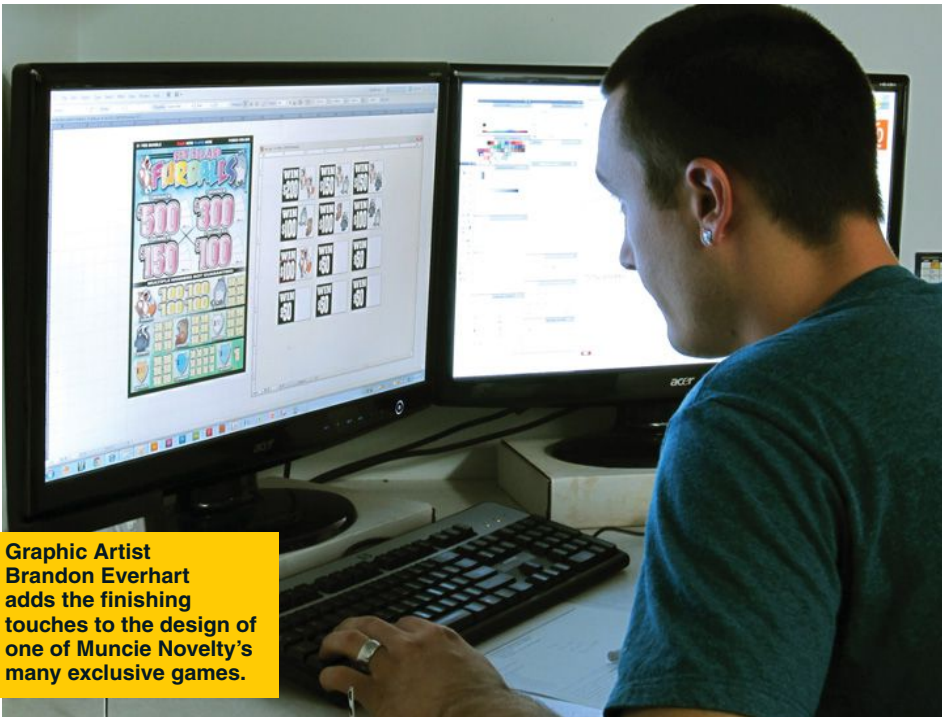
“Customer satisfaction and employee retention are two of the things we value the most.”



COVER STORY



Graphic Artist Kevin Johnson creates illustrations for an upcoming Muncie Novelty game. The sister companies maintain a staff of eight full-time designers.



Graphic Artist Brandon Everhart adds the finishing touches to the design of one of Muncie Novelty's many exclusive games.

towards smaller runs with more specialized payouts.

Indiana Ticket's top product line is still our redemption tickets. A few years ago, we released a new line of *Bonus Play*™ redemption tickets. This patented line features 50 percent more tickets in each deck and offers our customers cost reduction in a few different areas. We are also continuing to see growth in our season and event ticketing sales.

In 2003, we were just emerging

into the point-of-sale and season ticketing market. Since then we have built a client list that includes Major League Baseball (MLB), NASCAR, the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), and major universities. We are working with evolving technology and introducing ourselves to new clients all the time.

Muncie Novelty has been recognized in the amusement industry since we first entered the redemption arena.

Indiana Ticket (ITC) has been the manufacturer at every step, which some may not realize.

As we enter the new markets mentioned, we are reintroducing Indiana Ticket as its own entity. There will be an increasing presence of our ITC branding in our advertising and at industry events.

What are attendees talking about at trade shows when they stop by your booth?

Without question, the economy is on every business person's mind. It doesn't matter whether you are considering an equipment purchase, a building expansion, or a new location; people want as much information as they can get to help them make the right decision.

Trade shows are a perfect setting to exchange ideas and pick up on industry trends. Over the past year or so I have noticed more people looking into the family entertainment center (FEC) industry as a business opportunity. This is encouraging.

Considering the economy, are customers changing their focus and adding more of your products?

To some extent the economy has played a part in our plan to create solutions for the cost-conscious and the environmentally-conscious customer.

We have seen many customers take advantage of our patented *Bonus Play*™ redemption tickets for economy savings. Furthermore, some of our customers are also taking advantage of savings and embracing environmental solutions with our patented *replay*™ redemption tickets that are made from 100 percent recycled material.

We have been fortunate to be able to offer our customers an alternate product with our *Bonus Play*™ and *replay*™ redemption tickets that will achieve some financial relief and make a positive impact on our environment.

In recent years more amusement operators have turned to redemption games. Have you seen a bur-

geoning demand for redemption tickets?

Working through operators adds a different perspective than dealing directly with a location. We view operators as an extension to our ability to provide personalized service.

Some FECs are converting to debit card systems. Has that impacted redemption tickets?

While this is something that we continue to watch closely, many of our clients have been able to take advantage of the benefits of the play systems while maintaining the excitement of dispensing tickets to their customers. Kids love tickets! Just look at their faces when they are carrying them in handfuls, or better yet, over both arms and shoulders!

Are customers ordering more custom tickets than stock tickets, and what is the delivery time?

About 80 percent of our sales stem from custom imprinting, many with barcodes and other security features. We see this as both a challenge and an opportunity.

We typically advise our customers to allow two to three weeks for delivery of custom orders. However, there is almost always an occasion for a rush order or flurry of post-holiday orders that brings our 24/7 production into play.

Do you have anything new on the drawing board you can tell us about?

We feel very strongly that our *Bonus Play™* redemption tickets are a great option for our customers and have recently started promoting their first variation, aptly named *replay™*. This is a 100 percent recycled stock for our environmentally conscious customers.

We have also recently started printing plastic cards for play systems and many other applications. Later this year we are going to expand our online experience with an all new Web site (www.indianaticket.com), which will give users an interface to actually design and create their own wristbands and tickets.



From left: Indiana Ticket Production Managers Chris Poore, Mike Cunningham, Ted Shockley, and Tim Gibbs oversee the daily operations of ITC.



Indiana Ticket's Debbie Harshman puts the finishing touches on a season ticket book for one of the many professional athletic organizations who rely on ITC for all their ticketing needs.

What advice do you give to new customers just getting into redemption games and ordering tickets: when and how much to order, etc.?

In general, keep your eyes and ears open as there are a lot of great people in the amusement industry with many good ideas to share.

When it comes to an initial order of tickets, many times the new location has been through so much heavy lifting and decision making for long-term success that they forget about the

small detail of tickets for their newly installed redemption games.

There is no exact formula for quantity. Our customer service representatives can generally walk through a few questions and make a pretty good assumption to help our customers get through their first month or so of operation.

For more information, call (800)428-8640; e-mail (info@muncienovelty.com); Web (www.muncienovelty.com) and (www.indianaticket.com).



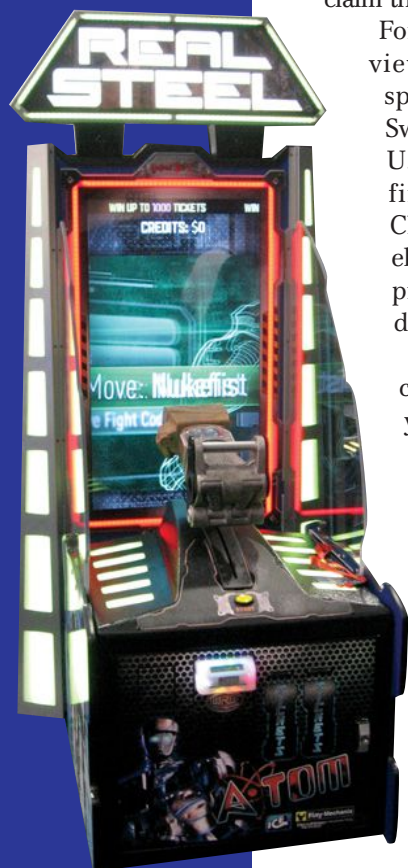


Refreshing redemption



Josh and Zach Sharpe

Two redemption games with straightforward game play, repeat play potential, and just the right amount of skill involved for all ages.



June brings exciting times on the competitive pinball scene with the International Flipper Pinball Association (IFPA)'s Ninth Annual World Pinball Championship taking place just outside of Seattle in Bainbridge Island, Wash., on June 8-10.

The top 64 of the world's most talented pinball wizards from 12 countries across the globe will assemble in a marathon competition that will test not just endurance but the ability to master the nuance of each flipper stroke.

Representing Belgium, Japan, Finland, Canada, Australia, Italy, Germany, France, Switzerland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the U.S., the best of the best will face off.

Will former NBA star Todd MacCulloch have home court advantage? Can Cayle George repeat his sensational IFPA8 victory in Sweden? Or can PAPA Champion, Andrei Massenkoff, claim the crown?

For what has previously been viewed as a male dominated sport, can Helena Walter of Sweden or Julie Gray from the U.S., capture the gold as the first female World Pinball Champion? Or will someone else step up proving his or her prowess over a grueling 2.5 days of non-stop competition?

We'll have more in-depth coverage and results from this year's World Championship in a future column, but we'd like to take this opportunity to thank many of our sponsors that help make this tournament bigger and better each and every year: our very own Play Meter magazine, Stern Pinball, Raw Thrills, Farsight Studios, Betson Enterprises, Jersey Jack Pinball, Marco Spe-

cialties, Planetary Pinball Supply, GameWorks, Zen Studios, Pinball Center, Pinball Life, the Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA), and the American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA).

As for this month's column, we take a deeper look into ICE/Play Mechanix's Real Steel and Family Fun Companies' Reactor.

REAL STEEL/ ICE/PLAY MECHANIX

The collaboration between ICE and Play Mechanix has been phenomenal in recent times, producing hit games Deal or No Deal and its latest smash, pun intended, Ice Age Ice Breaker. This month we take a look at the company's latest physical redemption game based off of the movie, "Real Steel."

Analysis: In the vein of a stop-the-light game function, players must "fight" against four of the main robots from the movie. On the cabinet is a giant robot fist that players pull back and must time their punch accordingly to hit their opponent on the screen.

If the players time their hit successfully, they will knock out their opponent and move onto the next round in hopes of winning more tickets. After knocking out the first three robots successfully, players have the chance at knocking out Zeus to win the big-ticket bonus.

Pros: Real Steel has plenty of great things going for it. The cabinet design is sharp, the graphics are very crisp, and the sounds complement the action perfectly. However, the true toy and hook of this game is easily the robot fist players use to hit the opponent on screen.

We really love the subtle ode to stop-the-light games, although instead of simply pushing a button, players get the satisfaction of ramming the robot fist into the opponent on screen. While normally we would be concerned with



how this interactive toy would hold up on location over time, it feels structurally solid and built for the long haul.

Cons: Ironically, of all the great things going for Real Steel, it should come as no surprise that our biggest con with this game would have to be the license. Not to say that “Real Steel” is completely negative or a financial bomb of a theme, it’s just simply mediocre and brings up the question of why?

We think it would almost work better and probably save ICE/Play Mechanix some money if they did a generic “Robot Boxing” game. We honestly feel if these two games were side by side, the results/earnings would be of minimal difference on location. From a theme perspective, we don’t see the named characters from the film having any lasting impact or recall-ability.

Overall: Thankfully the game is not completely determined by the merits of its license/theme. While we feel a generic “rock-em sock-em-style” robot game would have equally done the trick, players have a fun game nonetheless.

Using a terrible analogy from one of our guilty pleasures, “American Idol,” if you can sing great, it doesn’t matter what you sing, it can be the phone book and it’ll still be good.

The same logic applies to video games, in particular with Real Steel. While this “song”/(license/theme) isn’t great, it almost doesn’t matter because the “vocals”(game play) are simply just that good.

Fortunately, Real Steel wasn’t a complete bust at the box office that would completely steer away players from a first coin drop temptation. And maybe this is just wishful thinking and nostalgia tugging at our heart strings, but we couldn’t help but think this idea of a redemption game would work great in the Rocky universe.

Overall Rating: ★★★ 3/4

REACTOR/ FAMILY FUN COMPANIES

It feels like quite some time since we last reviewed a Family Fun Companies game such as Lucky Streak, but this month we take a look at its latest

“quick coin” game, Reactor.

Analysis: The objective of Reactor is pretty straightforward: by bouncing your coin through the spinning center column, players can work their way up the “Reactor” and win more and more tickets until reaching the jackpot bonus. The value starts at 20 tickets and increases up several levels until the top plateau of reaching the jackpot.

As players successfully bounce their coins through the openings, the column spins faster and faster with each level progression. After a certain amount of time without progression or a lack of playing, the reactor settles back down to the bottom level.

Pros: Easily our biggest pro with Reactor is that it promotes multiple coin-play to achieve the jackpot. Unless a player was hawking or sniping another player’s game, it’s impossible to win the jackpot without successfully making it up the winning levels, which is simply great.

These rules of Reactor really promote and enhance repeat play. Players will soon learn that if they want to be successful at this game, not only will they need the skillful timing of bouncing coins into the spinning column, they’ll also need a handful of coins on hand if they want to have a chance at reaching the jackpot without the game restoring its state to the bottom level.

We’ve chimed in time and time again how much we love being challenged and the feeling that “skill” should win out. Family Fun Companies definitely strikes a nice balance here and it’s simply quick, nice fun dropping coins in the revolving column. It feels very rewarding making it through the openings. Not to mention, the accompanying sounds effects are a very nice touch.

Cons: Our biggest concern with Reactor is the overall footprint it will leave on location, or lack thereof. In the past, we never felt like a game from a Family Fun Companies catalog would ever get lost in the shuffle, either out of sheer height or visual pop.

However, it pains us to say that both of these areas of cabinet design are a bit

underwhelming. While we were fans of the accompanying sounds and lighting during game play with the action taking place, one must be present first-hand to witness the fun/action taking place.

Overall:

We felt Family Fun Companies mixed a nice blend of skill with the caveat of repeat playing needed to achieve the jackpot of Reactor. While it is your typical “quick-coin” game, there’s enough of a twist on it with the bounce pad to feel fresh and unique.

Unfortunately the overall look and design left us feeling a bit underwhelmed and we are worried that it could get lost in the crowd, which would be a shame.

There’s no denying the fun, frustration, and eventual satisfaction of playing the game successfully. The sign of a great redemption game is where you don’t hesitate to reach for that next coin and that it keeps your active interest for the time you are playing. Family Fun Companies has done a solid job yet again of having that hook to keep players coming back, but more importantly, making sure they have plenty of coins on hand if they want to achieve that elusive jackpot!

Overall Rating: ★★★ 1/2



With a father like Roger Sharpe, the original “Cornered Critic,” it is probably no surprise that sons Josh and Zach share a true passion for the coin-op industry. Former pinball champions, both are recognized as being two of the finest players in the world. But their interest and skills have grown far beyond the silver ball to embrace video games and attractions of all types.



George Smith

In search of Babe

One of my favorite films is the story of Babe the pig, an animal with immense heart and courage. Rather than accepting his future life as a pork chop he refuses to accept the notion that “the way things are” is all a creature should accept.

As most people know, he becomes the unlikeliest of herding dogs and stuns the championship crowd at the end of the movie with a jaw dropping display of control and communication, winning honors as the best sheep herder in the land. Along the way he earns the respect of his peers and his erstwhile enemies.

In the past two months I have had the good fortune to travel to the European Amusement and Gaming (EAG) Expo in London, the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) Leadership Conference in Los Angeles, and the American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA)/Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA) Amusement Expo in Las Vegas.

The Amusement Expo was made even better by the co-location with the National Bulk Vendors Association (NBVA) Expo, the crossover with the International Pizza Expo, and the close proximity of the always-enjoyable Nightclub and Bar Show.

Attendance was up a bit at the Amusement Expo and the EAG, and in general I think that the overall mood was improved over the 2011 events.

ON CRUISE CONTROL

Nonetheless, it was apparent that, more than ever, I see the same faces at these events. In talking to many people who didn't attend, they all mentioned being too busy, the cost, and all the other reasons that speak to keeping the amusement industry and,

more specifically, the coin-op business “the way things are.”

At a dinner with a large industry manufacturer, one of the senior executives discussed a sales position that they had and planned to fill with one of the names common to many in the industry. All too often the industry continues to recycle people and the faces move from one factory or operating company to another because, “that's the way things are.”

The fact that overall amusement equipment sales are down significantly over the past 10 years, and that most operators are waiting for gambling to save their bottom line, is emblematic of a business that only wants hits that make it incredibly easy for distributors and salesmen to sell and for operators to avoid risk. This is an age-old problem: Everyone seeks comfort in the extremely familiar.

STUCK IN THE PAST

The amusement business is a fantastic and vibrant environment where customers smile and pay for the privilege of a bit of entertainment. In the late 1970's and early 1980's the business was extremely simple and all you had to do was find a location, plug in a game, and collect the quarters.

Since 1985 most companies have struggled to find a way back to these early golden days. Many of the executives and owners running industry companies remember fondly the immense profits and wonderfully balanced triangular business (manufacturer, distributor, and operator) where everyone knew the boundaries.

Now we are faced with competition from smart phones and a general feeling that the best days are behind the amusement business at large.

My struggle to communicate a message of hope is that we need more mavericks (heaven forbid I should give kudos to Sarah Palin). If you weren't at one of the industry shows you are dead or dying. The successful

Mired in the status quo? Hoping for the next hit? Leave past thinking behind because life and commerce are moving at light speed and you could be left behind.

people in the business take every moment to network and investigate as an absolute necessity.

ONGOING EDUCATION

If you are not reading every industry magazine and general business title, you are falling behind. You may have a Kindle, a smart phone reader, or an outdated piece of printed material, but ongoing learning is of critical importance.

If you are content to believe that the way you conduct your business is the best that can be done, and you haven't left your own country (let alone your state), you are a dinosaur.

If your children are not actively interested in your business or your career, then sell your company or get into a new line of business. The next generation is our customer and without their active involvement or interest we have lost the best litmus test we can honestly find.

My own children regularly regale me with the newest "app" and their facility with new programs and musical trends. Their idea of fun (and indirectly, education) is to make me feel bad about how outdated my information is. I refuse to be totally sidelined by lack of information so I try to listen more and speak less.

GET ON THE BUS

My take away from the last few years of business and life is just as Ferris Bueller said: "Life moves pretty fast," and he said that in the 1980's. Life and commerce are moving at light speed now and even smart phones only have a shelf life of six months or so.

My advice to myself, and the industry, is simple: involve the young; listen; read; and watch common sources of trends (You Tube, CNN, Entertainment Tonight, Rolling Stone, Esquire, The Wall Street Journal, etc.); go to popular movies; surf the Net; GO TO

TRADE SHOWS; join an association (or three or four); train, train, train; and most importantly, don't assume that the way things are is the way they will always be.

Trend spotting is an art and a science; characteristics I like to think apply to the amusement business. The more knowledge and time you put into the amusement industry the more it will profit you, but you can't simply put your head in the sand and assume the herd mentality is correct.

Gambling will help a lot of operators migrate to new and profitable areas of business but general amusements can continue to be very profitable if we make ourselves relevant.

"The next generation is our customer and without their active involvement or interest we have lost our best litmus test."

Great prizes, flat screen monitors, debit card systems and other monitoring devices, phone applications integrated to general game use, and wireless technology have improved the general amusement business measurably. If you think that the sky is falling you haven't been outside lately. ▲

George Smith is the President of Family Entertainment Group LLC. His industry career spans more than 30 years. He has been involved in all facets of entertainment operations and management and is a frequent speaker at industry seminars. Smith can be reached via e-mail (gsmith@familyentertainmentgroup.net).

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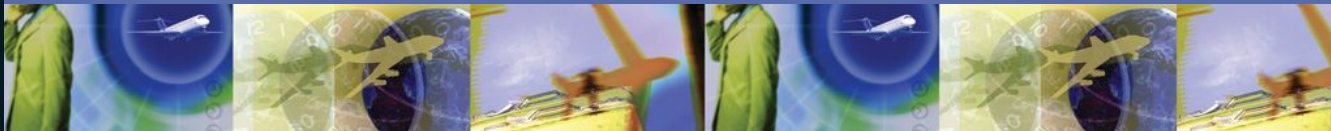
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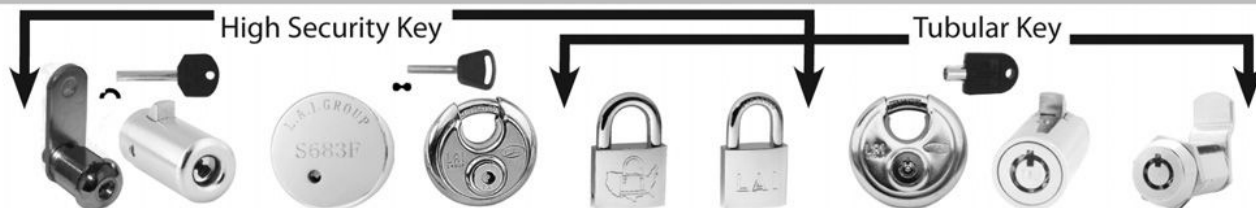
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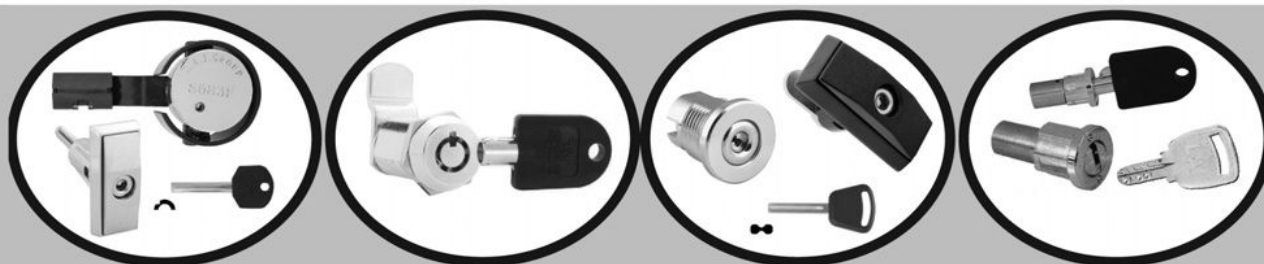
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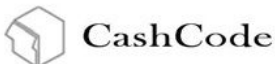
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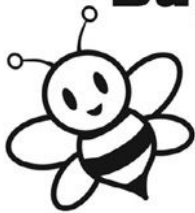
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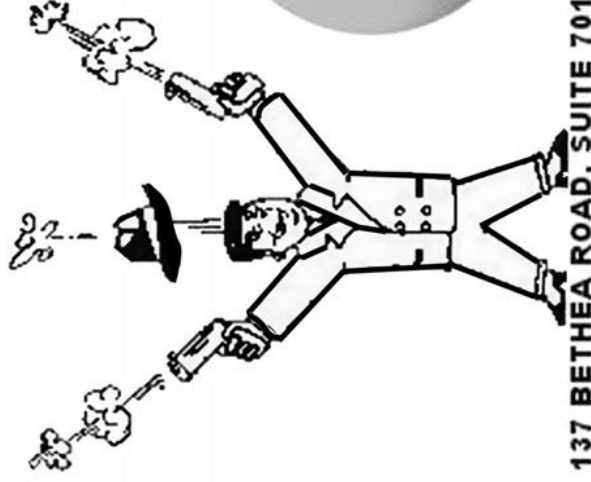
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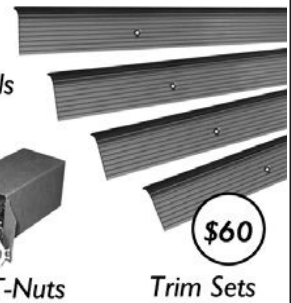
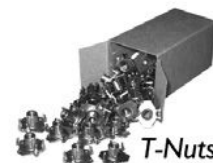
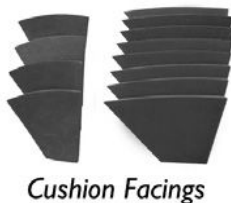
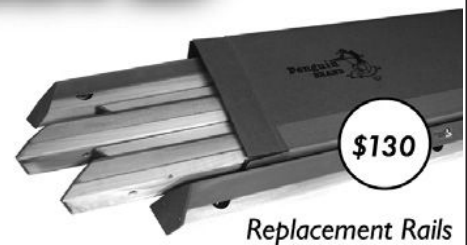
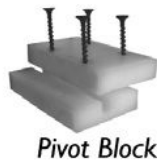
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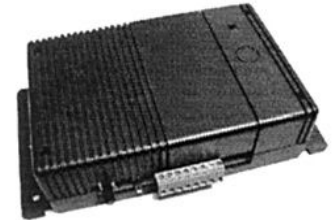
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

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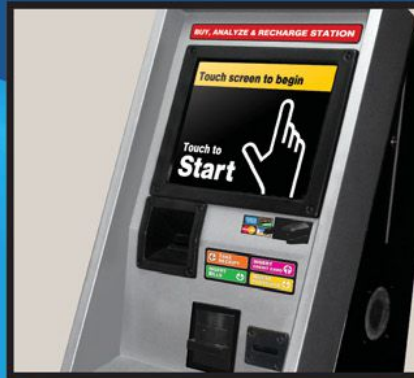
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