

FUNWORLD COLLECTIONS

Family Entertainment Centers

VOLUME 6: GAMES



Michael Manougian
is FUNWORLD's regular
games contributor.

FECs

VOLUME 6: GAMES

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Game Report

Expert Michael Manougian covers highlights from this year's Amusement Showcase International in Las Vegas

This year's Amusement Showcase International in Las Vegas revealed many new and promising games.

One of the highlights was "Deal or No Deal" (available now) from ICE. The game is the licensed version of the hit TV game show. Instead of playing for cash, players try to win tickets in this redemption version. The object of the game is similar to that of the TV game show: Players select one of 16 briefcases and go through multiple rounds, eliminating cases by pressing the number of the case in front of them. At the end of each round, players receive a deal from the banker. Players can press the "deal" button to accept the tickets offered, or they can press the "no deal" button to risk the tickets and advance to the next round. The game is not only fun to play, but bystanders can enjoy watching players to see what they win. It also comes with a built-in stool.

Betson showed a new game, "The Fast and Furious Drift" (available now). The game is similar to its predecessor, "The Fast and the Furious," but with some new extra features. The game has more cars, more tracks, and the drift feature, and players can buy upgrades. The new drift feature allows players to force the car into a drift by braking and turning the car. When players drift, time is taken off their race time, allowing them to receive overall faster times. Also, players can buy upgrades for their cars, which means players can simply purchase the upgrades they want and save time from having to race to get an upgrade.

Global VR showcased its new game "Paradise Lost" (available now). This is a sit-down shooter with two

mounted machine guns for co-op action. The triggers fire automatic bullets while the buttons fire rockets and grenades. Players can use the rockets and grenades to kill multiple enemies at once and destroy enemy vehicles such as helicopters. Throughout the game icons appear that allow players to receive extra health, body armor,

rockets, or grenades.

Global VR also showed "Desert Gunner" (available now), which is a kit available for this new "V3 vortex system." In this game players try to protect a convoy from insurgents using a variety of combat vehicles and weaponry. Now there are up to seven games for players to choose from in the V3 vortex system.

Sega had some new games at the show such as "GHOST Squad Evolution" (available now). The game is similar to "GHOST Squad," but with 12 more levels, 10 new outfits, and 21 new weapons. The addition of the new weapons is the best feature because players can select one of a

total 25 weapons that best fit their styles. Sega also showed "Initial D-4" (available now).

Finally, Namco had "Mario Kart 2" (available now), which has more characters, tracks, items, and secrets, and Family Fun Companies showed "Soccer Fortune" (available now) which is similar to "Basketball Fortune," but with a soccer theme and two jackpots on the wheel. 🎮

For information on the companies featured here, visit www.icegames.com, www.betson.com, www.globalvr.com, <http://sau.sega.com>, and www.namcoarcade.com.





by Christina
MacDonald

Increase Game Usage and Income

It seems the old adage “location, location, location” applies to everything—not just real estate—including game placement at family entertainment centers and amusement parks, where competing against thrill rides is always a tough win. To keep visitors from passing up the arcade, Fantasy Island Amusement Park in Beach Haven, New Jersey, ensures guests absolutely can’t miss the games by strategically placing their arcade and redemption games at the entrance of the park. And if by some strange occurrence guests do not play a round upon arrival, they are sure to spot the arcade from its second entrance. Margaret White, owner of Papio Fun Park in Papillion, Nebraska, finds it’s profitable to move her games around periodically. “Moving games to new places within the arcade makes guests think there is a new game in the building and that stirs up excitement,” says White.

White and Diane Vera, marketing director of Fantasy Island Amusement Park, share their secrets on strategic game placement and sought-after prizes for maximum game usage and revenue.

STEP 1 Offer Innovative Prizes

Vera says Fantasy Island offers guests more than 6,000 different prizes that are a far cry from the plush toy. Because the facility caters to families, winners of arcade and boardwalk games can choose prizes targeted to their interests. For example, middle-aged winners can bring home a selection of Lenox pieces whereas tweens or teenagers have their choice of sports paraphernalia, the latest video games, etc. Fantasy Island also capitalizes on its clever “Tiki Wheel,” which follows the same gameplay rules and objective as the popular “Wheel of Fortune.” However, prizes are island themed and guests have the chance to win beach chairs, coolers, or Boogie Boards—perfect for Beach Haven, a popular tourist spot known for its water activities. Fantasy Island also taps into the younger demographic by offering prizes that prompt kids to go onto an educational web site where they can adopt their own stuffed animals.

STEP 2 Pay Attention to Presentation

White believes presentation is key in attracting guests. She often clusters redemption and video games together at the end of the building so guests look in one direction and see the concentration of options in one spot. She also says

game size plays a part in where they are placed; games intended to be played on many sides of the unit go in the middle of the floor (the “Cyclone,” for example). She warns never to place tall games in the middle of the floor, as they distract guests and hide smaller games.

STEP 3 Incorporate Interaction

Vera says the facility’s redemption games are among guests’ favorites because they feel they are getting something back. With close to 200 redemption games and 11 boardwalk games, she says the top sellers include “Dance Dance Revolution,” “The Crain,” “Balloon Water Race,” and “The Cat Rack.” She says the park introduced a basketball game she envisions to be extremely cost-effective because of its interactive nature and the newfound interest in sports-themed games. Vera also says the park’s nostalgic redemption games are a great draw. “Grandparents and children alike love games like the ‘Tiki Wheel’ and ‘Frog Bog’ because they are both attractive and entertaining,” she says.

STEP 4 Analyze the Video Games

So we know video killed the radio star, but is the arcade at risk of extinction now that potential customers have more options than ever in home entertainment? White believes it is. “Kids aren’t drawn to video games anymore simply for the reason that they can play them at home,” she says. “Our redemption games are much more popular because they are something you can only play at a park.” Vera, on the other hand, says her park’s video games are still a major draw. “Our video games give players great prizes, and the redemption factor is something you can’t get at home as are the widescreen monitors that guests get to play them on.”

If you have a question for How To, e-mail funworld@iaapa.org, and we’ll publish the answer in a future issue.

The Dobson brothers, from left: John, Steve, and Mike





The Game Within

by Tricia Vita

"Everybody's got a game within them," says Steve Dobson, president of Erin, Ontario-based game manufacturer Dobco Enterprises Limited. "But to bring it from your mind into an actual prototype design is a whole different thing. There are very few people who actually do that."

Among the few, however, are the Dobson brothers—Steve, Mike, and John—who have a knack for creating amusement games people like to play. Their hit parade includes Dobco's "Wacky Wire," "Blockbuster," and "Skatterball," as well as Bob's Space Racers' "Rising Waters," "Gunball," and "Dog Pounder."

The brothers work with one another, "but not exclusively from each other," adds Steve, whose forte is sales, theming, and research and development.

John, who builds the prototypes in his shop, also has a thriving business refurbishing games. He is the mastermind of the now classic "Wacky Wire," in which players have to maneuver a looped wand from one end of a vertically spiraling wire to the other end without touching it. The 1985 game is Dobco's all-time best seller and remains a consistent moneymaker on midways around the world.

**THE DOBSON BROTHERS
HAVE A TALENT FOR
INVENTING WINNING
MIDWAY GAMES**

“The ‘Wacky Wire’ was very intriguing because it looked so simple, but it was very difficult,” John says of the game that put a new spin on “Skin the Wire,” which used an inert horizontal wire.

While the old game wasn’t successful because it looked too difficult, the “Wacky Wire’s” spiraling movement caught people’s attention. “Players had to have a little bit of manual dexterity. They had to have patience. And they came so close to winning every time that you got the replay,” says John. “It was a runaway success.”

Mike is a prolific game designer whose latest creations include Dobco’s “Mouse Trap” and Bob’s Space Racers’ (BSR) “Fish R’ Jumpin’” and “Dog Pounder.” At IAAPA Attractions Expo 2005, the “Dog Pounder” redemption model was awarded first prize as Best New Product in the coin-op category. According to Jack Mendes, president of BSR, the company receives game ideas from a lot of different sources, including customers, employees, and game designers. “But we’ve probably done more of Mike’s games than anybody else’s,” says Mendes. “He’ll typically develop a prototype, get a feel for how well it will do, and send it down to us. Our staff develops the electronics and mechanical parts. Then we get our artistic people involved and build a finished product.” In the case of “Dog Pounder,” BSR staff re-themed Mike’s alligator with a big mouth as a more kid-friendly dog.

Boys at Play

The Dobson brothers, all in their 50s, got their start in the amusement industry as teenagers operating their cousin’s games at Toronto’s Canadian National Exhibition, also known as “The Ex.” “This was our first job. To get paid to work a game was a novel thing,” says Steve, whose first-ever paycheck of \$320, or \$1 per hour and no overtime, seemed like a fortune to the 15-year-old. “It was a social thing, too—the girls,” he laughs. The boys were in charge of the slot car racing game in which 16 players “drove” the cars around a figure-8 track from playing stations equipped with steering wheel, throttle, and gas pedal. “We’d sit up on the podium and call the race over the

The idea for Bob’s Space Racers’ “Dog Pounder” came from Mike Dobson; he also developed “Fish R’ Jumpin’” below.



What Makes a Great Game?

Answers from the Experts

The Psychology of the Game

“The whole key in this business is designing a simple and skillful game that people think they can win. They want to win a big toy, and they want to get to that end by the simplest way possible. In the beginning they want the prize, and then along the way they enjoy the game, but part of the fun is [the players] getting better. They get so excited because they get closer to winning and now it becomes a challenge as well.”

—Mike Dobson, game designer,
Keltie-Dobson Limited

A Winning Appeal

“What you’re trying to do is build a game that looks very easy to win. I’m not talking about the technical aspect of the game, how it works, or anything like that. I’m talking about the appeal. The first time you put the game out, do people walk in and try it? Are they intrigued by what you have to do with the game? Does it have the appeal—I can spend \$2 and win that prize?”

—Steve Dobson, president,
Dobco Enterprises Limited

Knowing How to Play

“We find that being able to recognize how you play the game as soon as you walk up is one of the key factors. They have to be able to understand what you have to do versus not having any idea of what’s going on. People have to be able to have a feel that they can win. The reverse, if a game looks hard and it is easy, is usually the kiss of death for a game.”

—Jack Mendes, president,
Bob’s Space Racers

mic,” Steve says of this unique game that got them hooked on the business. After high school, Mike and Steve worked the Ontario fairs with Conklin Shows through October and found off-season employment as a curling desk manager and a merchandise buyer for Conklin’s bingo operation at Crystal Beach Park. In 1976, their summer jobs grew into careers as game owners/operators when Conklin Shows won the contract for Canada’s circuit of fairs, which stretches from Toronto to Vancouver.

Mike and Steve scraped together the funds to buy four used water race games and headed west, while the younger John found his niche servicing games. Before long, the brothers were looking for new equipment to fill the canvas and lumber stands they’d added to their lineup. “We started designing two games every winter and prototyping them in the summer to see if they worked or not,” Mike recalls.

Expo Regulars

The Dobsons have been familiar faces at IAAPA Attractions Expo since 1984, when Dobco’s “Leap Frog” won an award for best new game. The brothers’ creative association with Bob’s Space Racers began with BSR’s purchase of the rights to Steve’s prototype for the water game “Rising Waters.” Since then, Mike’s BSR credits include such classics as “Monkey Drop,” “Crossbow Shoot,” and “Sidewinder.” Mike says he tries to keep the simpler and less-expensive tabletop games over on the Dobco side of town, while the bulkier games with more complex electronics go to BSR. “Both areas are good because you’re servicing different aspects of the business,” he notes.

At IAAPA Attractions Expo 2006, Mike was in BSR’s booth demonstrating his “Fish R’ Jumpin’,” which captured attention because of its small footprint, good looks, and great sound effects. As soon as players touch the metal fish with a pole, the fish jumps up from the rotat-

Midway Games at IAAPA Attractions Expo 2007

Be sure to attend the following midway games sessions this year:

- Tuesday, Nov. 13, 4:30 p.m., “Merchandising Midway Games Areas”
- Thursday, Nov. 15, 8:30 a.m., “A Penny Saved: 10 Great Money and Time Savers for Your Midway Games”
- Thursday, Nov. 15, 4:30 p.m., “Hired Hands: How to Motivate and Retain Midway Games Employees”

ing table (i.e., the “fishin’ hole”), and there’s a splash. “It’s appealing because it looks so simple,” says Rich Kimak, games and retail director at Kennywood Park in West Mifflin, Pennsylvania, who bought three units and has recommended the game to colleagues at other parks. “It’s a neat game that keeps its own crowd.”

Meanwhile at Dobco’s booth, the featured game was the “Bash a Bully,” a knock ‘em down game wherein players use leather deadballs to knock down the bully’s teeth. The original concept—tossing a beanbag at a 3-D fiberglass face—has evolved into hurling a ball at a three-foot-high decal on a flat surface that can take plenty of whacks. “People like to throw a baseball—that’s what they’re familiar with,” Steve explains. “Anytime you move away from that as your object of throwing, [e.g.] a beanbag, they’ll try it just once or twice.” Since IAAPA Attractions Expo 2005, Steve has continued fine-tuning the game by adjusting the depth of the target and taking it up to basketball height. “We already had a test run with it, and the results so far are excellent,” says Steve, who plans to show the revamped “Bash a Bully” at IAAPA Attractions Expo 2007.

Simplicity = Success

According to Mike, it’s easy to build a game that will offer a \$1.50 or \$3 prize. Since concessionaires generally give out about 30 percent of their gross income toward merchandise, the challenge is to design a game that will accommodate giving out a \$30 prize. The game has to look easy but be fairly hard to win.


If a game looks too difficult, people won’t play. Says Steve: “We’ve had other games where they’ve actually been easier to do than the ‘Wacky Wire,’ but for some reason—and nobody really knows why—the public looks at it, and says, ‘Oh, I can’t do it.’ You don’t know until

you actually put it in the field. The batting average is maybe one out of 10 games that are successful.”

Mike and John left the operations side to focus on design and production, but Steve maintained a games operation with Conklin Shows, now part of North American Midway Entertainment. “We do a wide geographical run, so if the game is consistently good for us as an operator, then, generally speaking, it will work for everybody,” notes Steve, who field-tests new games at Calgary Stampede and the Canadian National Exhibition, which attract more than 2.5 million visitors a year. “Volume alone is a great test of endurance as well as productivity,” he adds.

Concession managers at parks and attractions think so, too. Circus Circus in Las Vegas, which runs a year-round operation, is one of Dobco’s best customers. “Supporting their games has always paid huge dividends for us,” says Brian Chilton, midway director at the casino/theme park. “Because they’re operators, they understand what goes on from the operations side. They’re always looking to improve, and they have the creativity to create new games, test them, and bring them to the market.”

The simplicity of Dobco’s games is an advantage since the casino welcomes visitors from all over the world. “The ‘Blockbuster’ has been fantastic for us,” says Chilton, who has three of these games. Chilton compares “Blockbuster’s” kiddie-like alphabet blocks piled three high on a pedestal to a knock-’em-over milk bottle game brought to a straightforward level.

At the same time, Circus Circus has a 30-year association with Bob’s Space Racers, and after testing both the redemption and six-unit “Dog Pounder,” Chilton purchased both models. “It’s the next step up from a ‘Whac-A-Mole,’” he says. 





Game On

In changing times, FECs have to adapt their game rooms to compete

by Mike Bederka

Years ago, Richard Oltmann had one video game room that raked in \$900,000 a year in business. The figure today barely scratches \$100,000. Thank the rapid expansion and evolution of home video games for that cliff dive, says the owner of five family entertainment centers, including the Enchanted Castle in Lombard and Aurora, Illinois.

Stiff competition has forced FECs around the country to alter their look and offerings. But with some careful calculations and creativity, operators still can make a tidy profit with their game rooms.

Something Unusual

Most FECs have dramatically shifted away from “Pac-Man’s” grandkids. In his Enchanted Castle locations, Oltmann estimates video only makes up 5 percent of his games.

“Upright video games are just fillers to a large extent to satisfy that segment of the market that is in the FEC for other events,” notes Harold Skripsky, president of the Scottsdale, Arizona-based consulting firm Entertainment

Management Services Inc. “As with anything, there are exceptions, but not many.”

These days, an FEC’s video games need to have something unusual about them to grab people’s attention, says Michael Getlan, director of enthusiasm and opportunity for Amusement Consultants Ltd. in New Rochelle, New York. For example, the game must have a huge video screen or allow customers to sit in a full-size car.

Many FECs, however, opt not to buy such lavish equipment, Getlan says: “They’re very expensive. That’s the trade-off.”

Ramping Up Redemption

The trend now is redemption, says Oltmann, about the other 95 percent of his games. But for them to be successful, operators need to find the correct percentage to pay out to guests.

Skripsky urges operators to track and collect every game at the same time and day each week. Take meter readings for both the tokens in and tickets out, and account for any jackpots hit. Next, convert tickets and tokens into money with this formula: Each token equals a quarter; every ticket is worth a penny. Divide the total cash into the total tickets paid out. So, if in a week a game collected \$280 and paid out 10,000 tickets, the payout is 35.7 percent. FECs should aim for a facility-wide payout of 28 percent, Skripsky suggests.

As for percentages on each type of game, Getlan uses a fundamental rule: “Payout is inversely proportional to fun and time.” Competitive games like “Skee-Ball” take roughly 70 seconds to play, so they should only pay out a small amount. Quick coin games, such as “Cyclone,” take a short amount of



FEC experts agree: Good prizes drive success for redemption games.

time, so they need to pay out more. (For these, Skripsky recommends payouts of 15 percent to 20 percent and 30 percent to 35 percent, respectively.)

“You must resist not skewing your payout percentages by adding too many quick coin games,” Skripsky says. “On the other hand, you do not want to load up the floor with low payout games, either. You need a balance of all types.”

Low payout on the wrong kinds of games can hurt business, says Oltmann, who’s also owner of Family Fun Companies, a redemption game manufacturer in Burbank, Illinois.

Fruits of Labor

While the exact math behind payout is important, the prizes truly drive redemption games’ success.

Skripsky says FECs need to have it all in their redemption centers: the low-end “bottom-feeding junk,” to the middle-end plush, toys, and CDs, to the high-end electronics and bikes. “I am a huge fan of overdoing the redemption center,” he notes. “This is the heart and soul of the entire redemption program.” He wants guests to walk through the door and be instantly drawn to the prizes available.

To further enhance the redemption center, operators must present the prizes well. Keep some merchandise in neat, well-lit containers; other items can be laid out in cabinets behind the counter and cases throughout the facility. Have pricing professionally printed, not handwritten. Also, make sure everything is well stocked; no one wants to see a case holding two magnets when it should have 200. Promote new items with flyers or by showing them to guests. Finally, rotate the displays often, Oltmann says. Just by simply moving something from the left to the right counter might catch a regular customer’s eye for the first time.

“Be creative,” Getlan says. “The only restraint on the display is your own imagination. Let your excitement and enthusiasm come through.”

Keeping Track

Getlan also recommends thorough merchandise tracking to ensure profits don’t slip through the front door with sticky-fingered employees. He uses a computer software system that provides bar codes for items that can be zapped with a handheld scanner. “It’s the way to go,” Getlan says. At his facilities, all inventory is tracked to some degree. “You don’t put a bar code on a spider ring,” he says. “You put a bar code on a box of spider rings.”

In addition, Skripsky says managers must do weekly checks of big-ticket items, which always should be under lock and key with limited access.

The idea of bar coding doesn’t have everyone sold, though. Oltmann only tracks merchandise from the warehouse to the FEC. “That’s as far as we go,” he says. Swiping bar codes at the redemption counter slows down the whole process, he reasons, and moms may get discouraged while waiting in a long line with a fussy child. Oltmann believes they would lose more money from disgruntled customers not returning than from employee theft.

Game Room Layout Is Key

Regardless of the particular games available, the room’s layout is crucial to its success. FEC experts offer some tips:

- Getlan says use the natural flow of the space—don’t put a game where guests throw balls near any windows, for instance.
- Set games of the same height in groups. You don’t want a short game next to a tall one, Oltmann says.
- Make sure everyone has enough room to play, Getlan says. Can four people fit comfortably at the same time? Do they interrupt someone else at another game? Do they block the aisle?
- Most teens don’t want to be around younger children, Skripsky says, so place the video, simulators, and sports in an area somewhat segregated from the kids’ and family games.
- Finally, check that you don’t have any hidden corners, Oltmann says. Guests should be able to see the games. Plus, it helps to keep parents at ease. “They don’t want to chase their little kids around and not be able to find them,” he says.


Pinball Wizards

FEC operators generally agree to disagree about a lot of things in the industry. Like pinball.

While Oltmann does have a couple machines at one venue, he says he’s not a huge fan. Pinball requires a lot of service and brings in the wrong crowd: older teens. They don’t mix well with the younger kids and families, he says.

Getlan, however, believes pinball machines are terrific for FECs. The only problem is many people don’t know how to play. With prizes, tournaments, and promotions, that can change. “They just don’t make a lot of money at the moment,” he says.

Pinball revenue can vary widely, Skripsky says, but on average, FECs make \$25 to \$75 per week on older, popular games; they can expect about \$100 a week for a hot, new one.

In addition, pinball has a “fabulous” resale value in the home market, Getlan says: “It’s a good investment in that respect.” 

Look for extensive coverage on POS systems in the October issue of FUNWORLD.

Game Report

Expert Michael Manougian covers highlights from this year's AMOA/Fun Expo convention

The AMOA/Fun Expo convention, held in Las Vegas Sept. 27-29, revealed many new and innovative games to its audience.

Global VR unveiled "NASCAR Racing" (available now). The game is officially licensed by NASCAR and includes real tracks, cars, and drivers. One of the best features of the game is the boost function, accomplished by gaining drafting points when they follow behind an opponent. Once players receive enough draft points, they initiate the boost and slingshot by their opponents. Also, the gameplay is enhanced with the ability to ram and crash opponents. The game is also linkable up to four players. "NASCAR Racing" is available in a standard (32-inch monitor), deluxe (42-inch monitor), and motion (57-inch monitor) cabinets.

Global VR also offered up "America's Army" (available now). The game is a green label shooter, and players can complete eight levels by performing specific tasks such as sniping targets or clearing a house of enemies. Players are able to use handguns, grenade launchers, shotguns, and sniper rifles to complete the levels.

Namco showed "Maximum Tune Midnight 3" (available now), which is faster and more realistic than its predecessor. The game has new cars, tracks, and characters. The best feature of the game is the Ghost Battle Mode, which allows players to race another player even when they are not present. Players select the opponent they want to race, and the game will simulate that person's driving style. Players earn visual upgrades for their cars as

their gameplay improves.

Another new driving game at the show was Sega's "Initial D4" (available now), featuring a 32-inch display and new features such as a new saving card. The game uses an IC chip card able to store three cars, and it is good for 150 games before players will have to purchase a new card. However, players can transfer all their data to the new card. Data cannot be transferred from the other Initial D versions, however. Also, throughout the game players earn points for their races, and after every race players are able to customize their cars by purchasing upgrades for the engine/drivetrain, intake/exhaust, cooling, suspension, body, and electrical components. Sega also came out with a standard "Let's Go Jungle" (available now).

Andamiro showcased "Circlerama" (available now), which is a four-sided redemption game. Players insert their tokens at the top of the game, and the tokens roll down a shoot and knock over targets on

a spinning wheel at the bottom of the game. The values of the targets range from 2 to 50, and there is a progressive jackpot. Multiple jackpots are up for grabs on the playing field, but the jackpot is the same value for all four sides, and once someone wins the jackpot it will reset.

ICE has also come up with a smaller version of its hit redemption game "Deal or No Deal" that prints receipts instead of giving out tickets. The game allows you to play for millions of points, and players can save their receipts for a grand prize. 🎰



Game Time!

Michael Manougian highlights a few new games from IAAPA Attractions Expo 2007


IAAPA Attractions Expo 2007, held in Orlando from Nov. 13-16, revealed many new and promising redemption games.

In Coastal Amusements' "Sea Wolf" (available now), players attempt to sink ships traveling across the screen by skillfully firing torpedoes out of five different tubes. There are different ships that vary in speed, number of hits to sink, and points awarded for sinking the ship. Also, players can score twice as many points by hitting a ship in the center and sinking the ship in one shot. Players can win the progressive bonus by sinking the PT-boat that appears randomly once each game. There is a limited amount of time and number of torpedoes that can be controlled by the operator (factory settings are 25 torpedoes in 45 seconds). The game has incredible 3-D animation, full-stereo sound, realistic action, and woofers in the seat so players are able to feel when they fire torpedoes, hit enemy ships, and sink them. This game allows for an extremely entertaining and enjoyable experience for players who also want to play a redemption game. www.coastalamusements.com

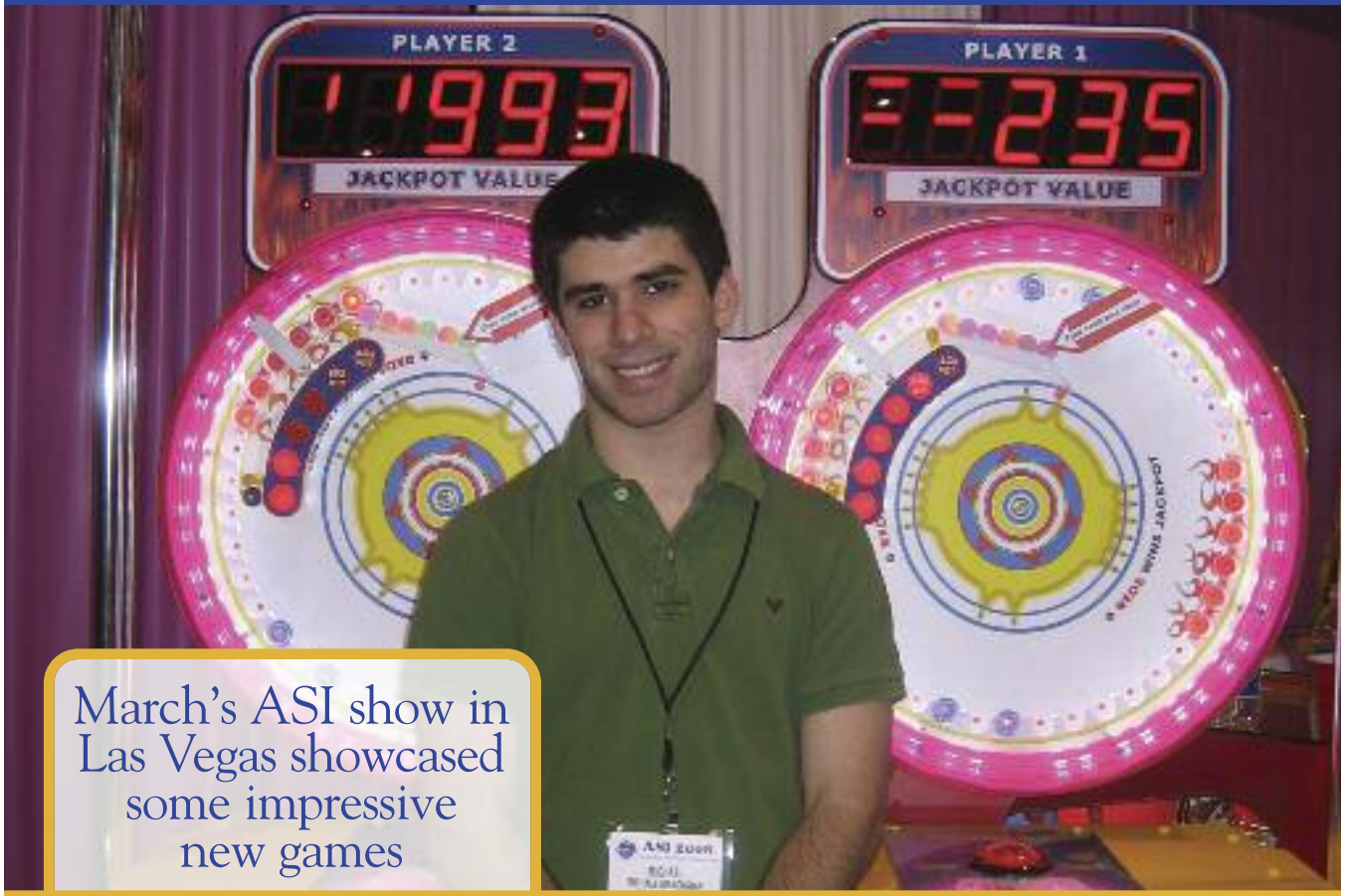
Bay Tek displayed "Smokin' Token Extreme" (available now). The game is an addictive, quick-coin game similar to the hit "Smokin' Token." Unlike its predecessor, "Smokin' Token Extreme" is for two players and features a wheel with inner and outer targets. When players release a token down a slope and hit any inner target, the wheel moves up, and players are able to score double points on the outer targets for a set time. This new feature entices players to rapidly insert tokens while they can win the higher values on the outer wheel. Players who hit two bonus targets on the outer wheel during the allotted time

will win the extreme bonus that can be a set value or progressive. Also, the game can hold four bricks of tickets, which means the game will not have to be filled as frequently. The motors in the game are also made to last longer than the original. www.baytekgames.com

Triotech presented "UFO Stomper" (available now), an interactive game where players can select to play any of 10 games using their feet. The game uses an interactive floor, and the images are projected from a nine-foot-in-diameter UFO model above the game using a patent-pending, shadow-free floor projection system. Players can enjoy many games, and some versions are available for two players. The game uses a surround-sound system with four speakers and subwoofers. In addition to an interactive and amusing gameplay style, spectators are able to observe the game from all four sides and take part in the fun. www.trio-tech.com

Family Fun Companies showed a four-player pusher, "Pharaoh's Treasure" (available now), which has a similar cabinet to "Basketball Fortune." During the course of the game, players can win in five different ways, which adds a creative and interesting twist to the pusher. Players can have a coin fall off the edge, push the pharaoh's tomb past the bonus line for the jackpot, or have a wheel with values of 4, 5, 8, 10, and 25 spin randomly, once to the left, or once to the right. Visit www.familyfuncompanies.com. 

Michael Manougian is FUNWORLD'S regular games reporter. He is currently a junior in high school who has been responsible for game purchases at his family's New Hampshire FEC, Fun World, for more than six years.



March's ASI show in Las Vegas showcased some impressive new games

BENCHMARK'S "RED HOT" IS AN EXCITING AND impressively designed two-player redemption game with a progressive jackpot. Players try to drop six balls into "flaming" targets on a spinning wheel, and targets award tickets. There are progressive jackpot signs for each player's side of the game that can be programmed according to a facility's needs. Operators have the option of having both jackpots go up with each play or just the side being played. Customers tend to wait to use the side with the higher jackpot so this feature would make both sides equally appealing. Benchmark has also included the triple-ticket dispenser on both sides.

Bay Tek showed its new "Smokin Token Extreme" with improvements made so the coins cannot bounce back into the chute. The game was also displayed with the GCE Universal Hopper Kit, which is ideal for locations that use a card swipe system but also have games that require tokens. Players can swipe their cards on the game, and there is an internal hopper that will dispense tokens for the player. This is much more convenient than having to get tokens from a token machine elsewhere. The hopper can hold about 800 tokens, and most games will run out of tickets before tokens. This means employees will have to be trained to fill the hoppers when they fill tickets. The GCE Universal Hopper Kit is available for pushers, such as "Goldzone," "Wheel Deal," "Wonder Wheel," "Big Rig Truckin," and many other games.

Bay Tek also showed "Big Bass Wheel," which is a huge redemption game in the shape of a large bass head with a large wheel in its mouth. Players must pump a handle to spin the wheel to win tickets (jackpot is 1,000 tickets). An added feature is a monitor that plays bloopers of Bill Dance from the television show "Bass Fishing."

ICE debuted its new "The Price is Right" two-player pusher, which is themed after the TV show. The game has a bonus feature whereby players spell out "plinko" and activate the bonus wheel on top of the game to win more tickets.

Global VR showed its new game "Blazing Angels" in a very impressive cabinet designed so players feel like they are in a cockpit of a plane. It has a 42-inch LCD HD monitor, and the graphics were spectacular, with scenes from London, Pearl Harbor, and Berlin. Players fly realistic-looking World War II planes and fight in a full 360-degree battlefield.

Betson had its new two-player game "Big Buck Safari" in a well-designed cabinet similar to "Big Buck Pro." The game has 15 new bonus games, and players are able to hunt exotic lions, panthers, giraffes, sable, Cape buffalo, and more. The game will also be available in a larger deluxe cabinet. Betson will also offer a kit for its popular driving game "Fast and the Furious Drift" to update previous driving games such as "Cruis'n USA," "Cruis'n World," "Cruis'n Exotica," "California Speed," and "Off Road Challenge." ■

Flipping Out

by Jeremy Schoolfield

Is the table set for a pinball comeback?

At one time, pinball was so popular, one of the biggest rock bands in the world wrote a song about the game.

But it's been nearly 40 years since The Who sang about Tommy the "Pinball Wizard"—and that might as well be cons in the world of amusement gaming. Where once pinball was the undisputed champion of the industry, video games long ago captured the crown. First it was Pac-Man and his stand-up brethren of the early 1980s. Later that decade came Super Mario and his home-console cohorts that changed the world forever. "Street Fighter II" gave way to "Mortal Kombat" in the early '90s, which gave way to ... well, you get the idea. Today video gamers have more intricate, immersive options both in the home and the arcade than anyone listening to "Tommy" four decades ago could have ever dreamed. So through all of this advancement, the old pinball warhorse got pushed farther and farther into the corner, nearly to the brink of extinction.

Though not quite. Those who still keep the pinball torch aflame aren't ready to proclaim a comeback, but if the game has a chance, now might be the time.

The Cycle of (Pinball) Life

The word pinball experts keep coming back to is "cycle"—as in, everything has one. Pinball's been on a downward track for so long, it might finally be time for an upswing, they say.

According to Roger Sharpe, co-director of





Boston's Bowen Kerins, center, celebrates his IFPA 5 championship March 30 in Las Vegas.

the International Flipper Pinball Association, during its heyday in the 1970s pinball made up 90 percent of the \$6 billion amusement gaming business; by the end of the '80s, video arcade games had taken pinball's place almost entirely. In the late 1990s, Chicago-based Williams (now WMS Industries)—a longtime pinball manufacturer—made a valiant attempt to reenergize the business with its “Pinball 2000” concept, but the game didn't catch on and WMS gave up pinball altogether (for more, see “Going on ‘TILT’” on p. 26).

So now the industry is down to just one manufacturer: Stern Pinball Inc. in Melrose Place, Illinois, which produces about four different titles each year. “It's difficult—there's a reason there aren't a bunch of us doing this,” says Gary Stern, owner of the company that bears his name. “The coin-op business as a whole is not what it was a decade and a half ago, so we're all affected,” Stern says. “It's a difficult business with so many other entertainments to compete with that didn't exist before. Fifteen years ago you didn't have games on cell phones that everybody has in their pockets.”

“It's investment intensive.” Michael Getlan, FEC operator, consultant, and pinball collector, describes Stern, a close friend, as “a pinball fanatic” who is essentially keeping the game alive

through sheer will.

But even as video games become more and more prevalent, these pinball aficionados are starting to feel a change in the atmosphere, a subtle shift away

This Pinball Game's Really Interactive

If one of pinball's key attributes is its interactivity, then what better way to capitalize on that trait than actually putting players *inside* the game?

That's what “Airballs Pinball: The Ride” is attempting to do with its human version of the game, where players sit in vehicles similar to a bumper boat and are launched into a life-size playfield.

The game, invented by Skytrack of the Netherlands, debuted at IAAPA Attractions Expo 2006 in Atlanta as “Airballs.” Last summer, Skytrack partnered with 3DBA and Falcon's Treehouse to relaunch the game in three versions: the aforementioned “Pinball”; “Air Racer,” which puts the Airballs vehicles into a drag-racing scenario; and a version adapted to the Japanese game Pachinko.

“There is a lot of interest from family entertainment centers, as ‘Pinball’ will work as a magnet to draw customers, and it will be spectacular to watch,” says 3DBA's Roger Houben. “It is truly interactive, which is a major requirement nowadays.”

At press time, 3DBA was close to making its first “Pinball” deal with a location in the Middle East, while “Air Racer” is set to debut this fall in the same region. The company is marketing the Pachinko version in Japan.

For more information, visit www.3dba.com.

—Jeremy Schoolfield



The field of competitors for March's IFPA 5 at the Pinball Hall of Fame in Las Vegas

PHOTO COURTESY ZACHARY SHARPE

from traditional experiences that have dominated the industry for so long.

"I think the kids are burning out on the video thing. They come into my store and a lot of these kids have never seen a pinball machine before," says Garry Foreman, owner of The Pinball Shoppe in Ohio, which refurbishes and resells pinball machines and other amusement games. "It might be getting ready to turn the corner. Everything has a cycle to it, and we've come to the point where [pinball machines] are almost looking new again."

What's more, one of pinball's core appeals is its basis in reality—there's nothing virtual or preprogrammed about a 2.8-ounce steel ball, a few flippers, and a plunger. It's an interactive game in a market where interactive, tactile experiences are the hottest things going. For proof, look no further than two of the most popular video game franchises of the moment: "Guitar Hero" allows wannabe rock-and-rollers to "play" a guitar-shaped controller, while Nintendo's Wii utilizes a revolutionary new control system that works in concert with the player's physical movements.

"With video games it's very cerebral, whereas with pinball you have an interaction unlike anything else that's never duplicated," says Zachary Sharpe, Roger Sharpe's 26-year-old son, who serves as vice president of the IFPA. "It's much more random. You never get the same game twice."

George McAuliffe, president of Pinnacle Entertainment and longtime FEC operator, says pinball can have a value for FECS as part of the mix.

"There's a lot of entertainment value in pinball," he says. "It's a high play value type game. Some games take three seconds and other games you can keep it rolling like a pinball."

"This is a very cyclical industry—things come and things go," says Steve Epstein, co-director of the IFPA. "I believe pinball is unique in that it's the only mechanical form of entertainment; you can put your hands on it and play something that's actually real—that's physically in front of you. You see the kinetics and the energy involved, and you direct it from your hands."

Pinball Maintenance: Mystery or Myth?

A mechanical game, however, means mechanical parts requir-

ing regular mechanical maintenance. The knock on pinball machines for decades has been the work it takes to keep them in playable shape, which, the experts agree, contributed to its downfall; the most you have to do to a stand-up video game is wipe the glass off now and then.

"It's no different than an automobile," Roger Sharpe says. "We'll do routine maintenance just to keep it functioning."

Sharpe's son Zachary calls maintenance "a huge, huge barrier" for most location operators, but this scenario, too, has changed and improved with time. "This is not the pinball of yesterday. Today's pinballs are very, very reliable," Foreman confirms. "Electronics have improved, and we don't see nearly the problems you used to see. If you have a problem it's usually a minor thing, and nothing that's going to stop it from earning money."

Trouble is, pinball has a long history of efficiency problems to overcome—perception being reality, and all. For his part, Stern says service requirements for pinball "are much less today. Engineering changes over the years have made parts much more reliable." Software built into the games keeps a better eye on things, he says, lightbulbs last longer, and the machines are made with stronger metal (for Stern's pinball maintenance checklist, see p. 26).

"You're going to have lights and switches from time to time, but nothing major," says Foreman, who also owns a handful of leisure locations where he's installed pinball machines. "I don't see a service issue, and I don't hesitate to put pinballs out anymore. You go back 10, 15 years ago, and you were holding your breath."

Competition Is Key: Searching for the Next Pinball Wizard

During the last weekend of March, 64 players from 12 different countries convened at the Pinball Hall of Fame in Las Vegas for IFPA 5, the biggest pinball competition in years—maybe ever. It was also the culmination of a goal Epstein, Sharpe, and his two sons established three years ago when they revived the association after a decade of dormancy.

"A key part of pinball making any type of mainstream comeback is through competition," says Zachary Sharpe. "I have friends who've played in pinball competitions, and it really

makes a difference versus just playing for fun.”

When they reopened the IFPA, the organizers set about reconnecting with players from around the world to establish a fair scoring system agreeable to all. The association now has more than 2,000 players from around the world in its standings. At IFPA 5, Boston’s Bowen Kerins—second in the world heading into the tournament—was crowned the best of the best after a grueling three-day throwdown; the competition received a good amount of media coverage, including Fox and CBS.

“Competitions and tournaments have been going on around the world for several years,” the younger Sharpe says. “What we’re trying to do is have them under one umbrella and give it a broad perspective. It helps create excitement, and there’s a big goal at the end of the year trying to become the best player in the world.”

IFPA officials believe family entertainment centers and arcades can leverage this new ranking system to help promote their own tournaments. By tapping into the hidden-until-now pinball community they know is out there, creative operators can reap the financial benefits by filling their establishments with players eager to show their skills.

PHOTO COURTESY STERN PINBALL INC.

Monthly Pinball Maintenance Checklist

- Remove the playfield glass.
- Clean and wax the playfield, checking for any burned-out light bulbs, loose parts, cracked plastics, or worn rubber bumpers.
- Test all switches using the machine’s diagnostics program.
- Lift the playfield and check for loose parts, broken wires, or excessive wear.
- Check the coin door for proper operation.
- Play a game to ensure all features are working properly.
- Check the playfield to ensure it’s level and set to the proper pitch using the level on the right-side rail.
- Clean and re-install playfield glass.

—Provided by Stern Pinball Inc.



“That’s why we’re doing what we’re doing, to slowly bring the idea back that you can operate pinball and you can be profitable,” Epstein says. “But the way to do it is through promotion and tournaments and leagues, a type of play where it’s a competitive sport.”

So Can We Expect a Comeback?

When it comes to predicting the future, obviously there are no certainties. The pinball experts couch their predictions primarily as “hope”; pinball’s been down for so long, it has a long way to climb.

“I think we’re going to see a resurgence,” says The Pinball Shoppe’s Foreman. “We need something that’s going to set the industry on its end again, something that’s maybe radically different. We need something that’s going to have people stand up and take notice.”

“What we want to do is demonstrate to location owners and operators that there is still a vibrancy, vitality, interest, and appeal in pinball machines,” says Roger Sharpe. “There is a hunger out there. Is there still an audience with numbers in the millions? Yes, I absolutely believe there is.” **EW**

Going on ‘TILT’

Documentary traces pinball’s near-death experience

A new documentary released this spring offers a look at a turn-of-the-century pinball phenomenon that nearly saved—then nearly killed—the entire business.

“TILT: The Battle to Save Pinball,” is an hour-long examination of a game called “Pinball 2000” from first-time filmmaker Greg Maletic, a game developer from California. He originally released the movie back in 2006, but most screenings have been for the pinball crowd. On April 8 “TILT” was released on DVD, and Maletic is hopeful the new format will spur more mainstream interest in the film.

Pinball 2000 was created in the late 1990s by former pinball-making powerhouse Williams (now WMS Industries) of Chicago. The company had hopes Pinball 2000 would revolutionize and revitalize the pinball industry by seamlessly integrating video game tech-

nology with the traditional pinball playfield. Although it debuted in January 1999 to rave reviews, Williams management nevertheless deemed the game too cost-intensive for the amount of profit it generated; by the end of the year, Williams shut down its pinball division entirely to focus exclusively on slot machines.

“What Greg has done is assemble an oral history of Pinball 2000—what was great and remarkable about it, and what, unfortunately, became of it,” says Roger Sharpe, co-director of the International Flipper Pinball Association and WMS employee, who was who for the film. “Those of us that lived the dream—and the nightmare—retell the story.”

For more information about “TILT,” visit www.tilt-movie.com.

—Jeremy Schoolfield



FEC: Q&A

In His Blood

Third-generation FEC owner/operator Michael C. Getlan writes the book on redemption—literally

by Mike Bederka

MOST PEOPLE DON'T HAVE AN EXCLAMATION POINT IN THEIR JOB TITLES. Then again, most people probably don't love their work as much Michael C. Getlan does. He's the director of enthusiasm and opportunity! at Amusement Consultants Ltd., which operates nine family entertainment centers in New York, Connecticut, and Nevada. His passion and excitement, noted by an ever-crescendoing voice and animated conference lectures, come from decades of experience in the industry.

Getlan, 51, began working at his grandparents' arcade at age 7, and through high school and college he continued to learn the trade from his uncle and father. In addition to being a speaker, consultant, and third-generation owner/operator, Getlan can now add author to his impressive resume. He recently penned "How Much is that Doggie in the Showcase? An Amusement Redemption Operations Primer for Training Staff in the Family Entertainment Industry" (Trafford Publishing), and has another tome planned.

IAAPA BOOKSTORE:
Michael Getlan's new book, "How Much is that Doggie in the Showcase?" will be available at the IAAPA Bookstore during IAAPA Attractions Expo 2008.
Member price \$22.95

Getlan's current work takes readers through the ins and outs of redemption games, covering topics such as prize selection, perceived value, purchasing, game selection and layout, equipment maintenance, and percentage calculation.

The 113-page book is an easy but comprehensive read. Each chapter includes a quick story to illustrate his main points, further explanation of key concepts, training exercises, and "tips from the trade." For the latter, he asked many notable names in the FEC industry to contribute their opinions. "Doggie" concludes with an appendix of industry experts, merchandise vendors, and equipment manufacturers.

Recently FUNWORLD chatted with Getlan to find out more about his new book.

FUNWORLD: What inspired you to write this book?

Michael Getlan: I was constantly retraining people the same things, and there were no books out there that covered this material. The book is designed to be used by all staff members. It's just not for management. That's an important concept.

FW: Can you take me through the writing process?

MG: I wrote it in my head for a year, and it took me three months to put it on paper. It was basically 1,500 words a day, five or six nights a week from midnight to 2 a.m. It wasn't as much work as it was fun.

FW: A lot of industry leaders contributed to the book. Was it important to have those other voices in there?

MG: We had some people in our industry pass away recently. They were terrific, and you could always go to them for advice. As others in the industry are getting older, I thought it would make a lot of sense to interview them and get their opinions. One of the basic premises of the book is that every location is different and every market is different. No one has the only right answer.

FW: What is your first memory of the FEC business?

MG: When I started working in my grandparents' arcade, the dimes were silver. I was making change, sweeping the floor, filling cigarette machines, and collecting money. I did what was I told, and that's how I learned.

FW: Growing up, did you always think you would be in the FEC industry?

MG: I was going to be a teacher, and in some

respects I am. I handle almost all the training that goes on in the company, and I lecture frequently at conventions.

FW: What is the best piece of job advice you ever received?

MG: Do more than you're expected to do, and trust your experience. Also, it's the intangibles of business that make a difference. They are far more difficult to work with. You need things like loyalty and perseverance. You need to find people who care. It's not how many hours they worked; it's what they did during that time.

FW: Is the FEC industry growing the way it should?

MG: It's evolving. Is it evolving the way it should, however, is a very, very difficult question. There's a Darwinian aspect to all business. You either evolve in such a way that you serve the customer and the market better or you die.

FW: What is the biggest mistake FECs make with their redemption?

MG: Complacency. They buy the same stuff over and over again and don't change procedures. Change is inevitable. It's far wiser to go with change than stand against it. Sometimes fighting against it is simply ignoring it. That happens a lot.

FW: Multitasking seems to be your strong suit. How do you keep everything together?

MG: If you enjoy what you do, it's relatively simple. I enjoy the people I work with. I enjoy the business I'm in. I think

Five Redemption Tips from 'How Much is that Doggie in the Showcase?'

- Guests are understandably protective of their tickets. Offering a computerized-savings program where your customers can accumulate their tickets can greatly increase return visitation to your facility.
- Only display merchandise that is available immediately—never bait and switch.
- Be careful accepting recommendations from vendors. Most don't want to steer you wrong, but asking noncompeting operators will give you a perspective undistorted by inventory considerations.
- Balancing your game selection is an art, not a science, and certainly not formula based. While maximizing net revenue is a prime objective, increasing the length of stay of your guests should be a concern as well.
- Display arrangements are highly influenced by the size and shape of your actual redemption center or your remote display cases and areas. The important issue is always how the merchandise looks from the guest's perspective. Is it easy to identify? Is the price correct and legibly labeled? Does the prize look appealing?

we're in a fabulous industry. There's nothing better than being in a situation where you can create or operate a facility where people have an opportunity to have fun. For me, that's a rush. ■

To buy "How Much is that Doggie in the Showcase?" e-mail Michael C. Getlan at michaelgetlan@amusementconsultants.com and put "Book" in the subject line. The book costs \$24.95 plus \$3 for shipping and handling in the U.S.; international shipping will vary. Discounts available if purchasing multiple copies.

Mike Bederka is a contributing editor for FUNWORLD. He can be reached at mbederka@iaapa.org.



VIRTUAL BOWLING
by Brunswick

FEC: BOWLING

Virtual bowling's appeal stems from its small footprint and low maintenance requirements.

The Perfect Game

Family entertainment centers look to virtual and mini-bowling

by Mike Bederka

ACTION CITY HAD STRIKES IN ITS SIGHTS when it opened with four lanes of mini-bowling in November 2005. So far, a perfect game looks realistic.

The family entertainment center in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, saw a return on investment within a year, and mini-bowling continues to be a steady earner, says Karen Kraus, the facility's marketing director. In the winter, it's the third most popular attraction behind indoor go-karts and laser tag.

Many FECs have turned to mini-bowling for just that reason, says Bill Merrick, manager of North American sales for amusements for QubicaAMF, the Mechanicsville, Virginia-based maker of the Highway 66 system.

"It's certainly hot right now because of the revenue it can produce and the small amount of square footage it requires," he says.

A pair of lanes costs \$50,000, Merrick notes. The average payback is 10 months, with some places hitting the mark in just half a year. (It can be used as a redemption game.)

Standard dimensions are 39 feet, 9.5 inches by 9 feet, 2.5 inches by 8 feet, 2 3/8 inches.

The smaller size made it a great fit for Action City, Kraus explains. They wanted to capture the younger kids who may get frustrated by the vastness of traditional bowling.

With mini-bowling, the ball weighs only a couple pounds, making it easier to hold and maneuver. "And we can still put the bumpers up so they don't get the gutter balls," she says.

Other Advantages

Scott Agajanian, group sales manager for Mulligan Family Fun Center, had other reasons for purchasing a mini-bowling system in April.

The FEC in Murrieta, California, wanted to slim down its traditional arcade pieces because of the cost and lack of revenue. Unlike a standard video game, though, mini-bowling won't find its way into most people's living rooms, Agajanian reasons.

At the current rate, he expects to make the money back by the end of the year. "It's one of our busiest attractions in the arcade," Agajanian says. "I really couldn't advocate highly enough for it."

Mini-bowling draws in young kids, families, and high school students. Mulligan hosted a grad night recently, and "they were all over it," he says.

Merrick lists wide audience interest as well as versatility among mini-bowling's attributes. Customers have their choice of gaming options. With "Turkey Shoot," for example, people throw three or five balls at full sets of pins. (On average, a mini-bowling game takes about half the amount of time as a traditional game.)

Also, FEC owners and operators have less to worry about with mini-bowling maintenance compared to its larger counterpart, Merrick says. There's no oil on the lanes or special shoes, and it has fewer moving parts and requires less electricity consumption.

"You don't need a highly skilled mechanic to take care of it," says Wendy Smith, manager of new business development for QubicaAMF.

Virtual Bowling

Mini-bowling is not the only alternative in the alley. Virtual Bowling has popped up in FECs around the world, says Gary Smith, director of amusement sales for Brunswick Bowling, headquartered in Lake Forest, Illinois.

With his system, guests roll a ball—which can be regulation

size or mini—down a shortened lane. Sensors detect the speed and direction of the ball, and the reaction and impact on the pins or other targets are simulated (with sound) on a large down-lane screen.

Like mini-bowling, Virtual Bowling can go into facilities with space constraints. The system is less than half the size of traditional bowling, Gary Smith says.

It also has low maintenance with no pin-setting machine, broad appeal, and options for different games.

“Payback has been less than a year at some facilities,” he says, “but of course will vary based on location as well as the total investment in equipment.” In the U.S., the system can range from \$62,000 to \$75,000 per lane pair; internationally, prices differ.

“Bowling has the ability to drive a lot of traffic,” he concludes. “People love the game. It’s a tremendous revenue generator.”

Traditional Bowling Remains Strong

Traditional bowling still can score points with a wide variety of guests. Galaxy Entertainment Corp. Ltd., which operates seven FECs across India, mainly sees adolescents in the day and working men and some women in the evening, says Debanjan Roy, the company’s chief operating officer. On Saturday evenings and Sundays, mostly families lace up.

One popular trend with traditional bowling is a hybrid-type business model, explains Gary Smith, of Brunswick Bowling.

For example, facilities have 24 lanes in one section for families, leagues, and typical open play.

The other section features eight lanes in more of an upscale, boutique setting. Here, the target audience is young adults and the corporate crowd to create a bar/nightclub atmosphere.

Insurance Considerations

With traditional bowling, the biggest insurance consideration on the liability side is liquor sales, details David A. Harris, executive vice president of insurance services for American Specialty Insurance & Risk Services in Roanoke, Indiana.

“Just about every bowling alley will sell alcohol as part of its operation,” he says. “Along with that comes the matter of security and ensuring that intoxicated guests do not participate in other FEC activities such as go-karts and climbing walls.

“Generally speaking,” Harris adds, “we don’t have the same concerns with Virtual Bowling or mini-bowling as we do with true bowling facilities where there is a bar/tavern-type exposure.”

Beyond liability, issues on the property side also exist, including roof design, composition of the lanes, fire protection systems and the impact of potential sprinkler leakage, and cooking surfaces, he says.

For more information on FIRST!, an IAAPA-sponsored insurance program for FEC members, contact American Specialty Insurance & Risk Services at +1 800/245-2744 or visit www.amerspec.com/first. ■

ASI Reveals Exciting New Redemption and Two-player Models

by Peter and Michael Manougian

THE RECENT AMUSEMENT SHOWCASE INTERNATIONAL (ASI) IN LAS VEGAS showcased creativity and innovation with several new games available now or in the coming months.

Skee-Ball debuted **“Super 21”** (available May 1), a quick-coin redemption game themed after the popular card game Blackjack. Players are challenged to drop coins onto a rotating playfield, which has slots for all of the cards in a deck. After each coin, players have the choice to either cash out with their initial win or risk it all to try and get 21. The cards that are needed to add up to 21 stay lit so players know which cards to aim for. Players able to get 21 with two cards win the progressive jackpot, but if they bust, they get no tickets.

Ice brought a new and attractive six-player **“The Price Is Right”** pusher (available May). There are three different playfields; two of each. The games, “Cliffhanger,” “Safe Cracker,” and “Plinko,” are all based on the television show’s popular games. In all six sides, the players try and light up certain targets to spin the bonus wheel at the top for more tickets.

Family Fun Companies showed its new two-player coin pusher **“Flip to Win”** (available now) and a prize game, **“Time to Win”** (available now). “Flip to Win” has an upper and lower playfield that players launch coins onto from three different launchers. Three dice at the top correspond to each launcher, which has a club, diamond, heart, spade, wild, and question mark on each die. The players are challenged to get three of a kind to win bonus tickets.

“Time to Win” challenges players to stop the hands of a clock to land in a green zone and advance to the next level clock. If players can advance to the third clock, they win a small prize or risk it and progress to the fifth clock to win a large prize.

Betson revealed a new boat racing game, **“H2 Overdrive”** (available late May), which has excellent graphics, an attractive cabinet, and multiple boats and tracks. **“H2 Overdrive”** has a keypad saving system, which keeps players coming back to your location to upgrade their boats. The game also has a booster for speed and forced feedback and is linkable up to eight cabinets.

Bay Tek introduced **“Big Bass Wheel Pro”** (available

now), which is a slightly smaller version of the hit redemption game “Big Bass Wheel” designed for locations that could not fit the original. The game is also available in a prize coupon version.

Global VR introduced the new superhero two-player fighting game **“Justice League Heroes United”** (available now). Players can play as their favorite members of the Justice League and use their super powers to take down enemies. This game is available in a dedicated or conversion kit.

Sega introduced **“Bass Fishing Challenge”** (available now), a fishing game that utilizes a trackball that players use to try to catch bass. ■

Peter Manougian is a junior at Gordon College in Massachusetts, and **Michael** is a senior in high school, preparing to enter West Point in the fall. They are responsible for new game purchases for Fun World, a family-owned FEC in New Hampshire.



Peter (left) and Michael Manougian

Taking It All Online

Redemption Plus' new online redemption system keeps customers connected to FECs long after their visit

by Marion Hixon

WHAT IF FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTERS (FECs) could reinforce brand loyalty and reach their visitors after they've gone home for the evening—not through traditional advertising, direct mail, or even phone calls, but by the customer voluntarily logging online at home?

Redemption Plus (RP) realizes this possibility with its most recent service, Planet Prize Online Redemption (PPOR), which allows FEC visitors to bypass the line at the redemption counter, take their ticket counts home, and redeem them for merchandise online. Once customers register a game card at the facility, they're free to log on to the facility's web site, where they have access to a multitude of prizes—even more than what's



Ron Hill

offered behind the counter.

"I feel this is where redemption is going in the future," says Ron Hill, CEO of Redemption Plus. "The idea is just in its infancy right now, but it will give family entertainment centers a way to not only increase items, but to reach out to customers long after they leave the store."

Since its launch in February, PPOR has been used in demo mode at Alley Cats in Arlington, Texas. In the future, Redemption Plus hopes to allow customers to log in directly at home and bypass the on-site facility registration.

RP created and trademarked another industry innovation—the digital packing list (DPL), which eliminates rigorous data entry for merchandise on the customer's side and is now extensively used in the industry. To develop concepts like PPOR and DPL, Hill uses his background experience in computer software training and applies that knowledge to the redemption and attractions industry. He says putting his technological perspective on practical solutions for the business has taught him a lot about FEC management and operation.

"Facilities have so many areas to focus on, so redemption may not be what they're paying attention to, but it is where they can get a lot of profitability," Hill says. "When you're running a redemption center, it's important to be focused on the big picture—goals, total revenue, total expenses—so FECs can run their business instead of focusing on certain products."

On Redemption Plus' philosophy, Hill says the company can only grow if its clients are doing the same: "We provide the merchandise, but if we're not also providing the solutions for our customers to be more successful, we're not going to be more successful."

Redemption Plus is seeing interest from both facilities and software companies willing to integrate the system; often the former fuels the latter. By the end of the year, Hill says he hopes to have one or two software companies and around a dozen customers. ■

How It Works

1. FEC customers can register their game cards on-site (the AlleyCats location currently uses a kiosk to do so). They receive a login and password after redeeming their tickets and their information is saved electronically.
2. Visitors log on to the individual (or chain) facility web site (i.e., www.AlleyCatsBowl.com) and find the link to the online redemption store. Note: It may be helpful for facilities to create take-home instructions to send with first-time users on how to redeem online.
3. Users are taken to a new page (i.e., <http://alleycatsbowl.planetprize.com>) and enter their card number and password. If they have a newer version of the card, they will not have to log in on-site and can use a Card Verification Code (CVC) that came with their ticket. Any users experiencing difficulty with their codes are given a customer service contact at Redemption Plus.
4. Guests get to shop away. Planet Prize Online Redemption users can search redemption products by prize category or use the search function to look at items by ticket amount. Hundreds of items are available in categories like cars and electronics, toys, candy, and plush. During the checkout process, the customers enter their mailing addresses, and prizes arrive within 10 business days.