

Left yourself a wicked *hahd* half-Worcester? Then you're bowling candlepin, our game and the greatest bowling of all

The International Candlepin Bowling Association put it best: “Many great things have come out of Worcester, Massachusetts, but surely one of the greatest is Candlepin Bowling.”

Yet unlike the smiley face, Abbie Hoffman and space suits, candlepin bowling didn't make it that far outside of New England—up to the Maritimes in Canada and that was about it. But who cares. We all know candlepin is the best. It's a million times harder than ten pin—to date, no one has bowled a perfect candlepin game—and a zillion times more fun. Candlepin balls roll with a sense of urgency and finesse their larger cousins lack and hit their thin targets with a sharp, satisfying crack instead of the toneless, heavy thud of ten pin. It's got its own set of rules with the lingo to match (ever pick up a Half Worcester or make a Hi-Low-Jackpot?). Thousands of viewers tuned into Channel 5's “Candlepin Bowling” broadcast every week from 1958 to 1996 and the show's popularity made eight-time world

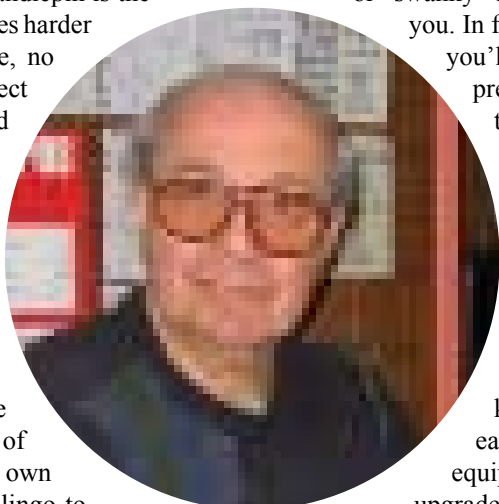
champion Stasia Czernicki of Webster, and Tommy Olszta of Southbridge, “the Larry Bird of Candlepin,” practically household names.

Even though we hold on to this game with a fierce, regional pride, candlepin lanes are not as common as they once were. Because manufacturers don't make the equipment anymore you aren't likely to find any new lanes opening up soon, and the alleys of my youth either don't exist or have gone all ten pin. If you want candlepin, you have

to look for it. And if you want to bowl in candlepin's hometown, there's only one place to look.

“I'm the only one left in Worcester,” said Nick Andresen, the owner of Colonial Bowling Center on Mill Street. “I'm the last of the Mohicans!”

Colonial is the real candlepin deal. This is no retrofitted, hipster hangout thinly disguised as a bowling alley: you won't find any pool tables, video games, or swanky bar to distract you. In fact, once inside



'I'm the only one left in Worcester,' said Nick Andresen, the owner of Colonial Bowling Center on Mill Street. 'I'm the last of the Mohicans!'

you'll find things pretty much as they were on opening day back in March of 1960. Sure, you get a blank scorecard and a pencil to help you keep track of each game, the equipment has been upgraded over the years and the original, rock maple wooden pins were replaced with plastic ones years ago, but the main attraction was and is the 24 spotless lanes stocked with candlepins, just waiting to be knocked down.

Candlepin history ...

A Worcester native, Nick attended Clark University and received his MBA from Cornell in 1953. His family had owned several restaurants in the area and instilled in him the strong desire to own his own business. A few years after graduation he started to set his sights on opening his own business in the form of a new bowling alley for the city.

Before World War II, Worcester's



downtown streets were a living, breathing hub of activity filled with shops, restaurants and movie theaters. There were also a lot of bowling alleys that were built into the pre-existing buildings that dotted the downtown landscape. These alleys were small and cramped—most had just six or eight lanes—and relied on a lot of labor to keep them running. Scoring wasn't the only manual part of the game back then. Bowling alley owners had to rely on pinsetter boys, also called pin boys, to set up the lanes after each player's turn. They stood at the back of the lanes and well, I'll let Nick pick it up from here:



“[The pin boys] were the young kids of the day, a lot of them had grown up in the Depression,” Nick said. “That was backbreaking job: up and down, up and down, send the balls back, set up the pins, then you had to go back down again, do that for two hours. ... If a pin or a ball went flying sometimes it would hit [them], sometimes it wouldn't. You wouldn't get a guy 80 years old setting up pins, he'd never get up!”

Because of the nature of the job, sometimes the pinsetters wouldn't show up for work, which could throw a major wrench in an alley's business.

... and its revolution

After World War II times and

fortunes changed. Families started leaving cities for life in the suburbs, everyone started buying cars, buses and trolleys became less frequent, and downtown Worcester started its slow decline. Even though fewer and fewer people went downtown to fill their leisure time, the area's love of bowling hadn't dwindled. By this time change also came to candlepin by ways of the automatic pinsetter machine, which was introduced to the game in the late forties.

"The automatic pinsetter machine revolutionized the industry," Nick said.

The established downtown lanes that remained open had installed the machines, but they weren't exactly the most welcoming places for family bowling outings. Enter Colonial Bowling Center. Nick realized the city lacked a modern candlepin facility where people from all walks of life would feel comfortable and welcome, so he decided to design and build one. The location he found on Mill Street was easy to get to and had ample parking. The pinsetter machine allowed him to build a large facility with multiple lanes, a lobby, and a lounge area. He also decided to limit his business to candlepin bowling and discouraged people from just hanging around the place at all hours: no pool sharks or video game jocks allowed.

48 Years and Still Going Strong

Fads come and go, but classics such as the Colonial are always in style. Most of the elements inside the facility—the orange, grey and blue chairs, the lounge tables dotted with the gold-crown Brunswick logos, and the simple scorekeeping tables—are originals. Over the years bowling equipment salesmen tried to get him to follow suit with the rest of the country and go ten pin, but Nick never strayed from his hometown roots. Thanks to that decision and the unique formula he invented at Colonial, he's still going strong after 48 years while other alleys that opened around the same time, such as Lincoln Lanes (my old haunt), are no more, ten pin or not.

I recently experienced this winning formula and can attest that Colonial Lanes is for everyone. When I visited an entire cross-section of the city seemed to

be there: kids, grandparents, hard-core league members, casual bowlers like me, and two candlepin bowling novices, professors Joseph Lawrence and Andrea Borghini from Holy Cross's philosophy department. Everyone had a blast and bowled string after string until closing. I'm no great bowler, but I like to think I did my hometown proud.

As for Professor Lawrence, he may be on to a whole new career. While he attributes his natural bowling skill to a phenomenologist's facility for pure eidetic intuition, it might have more to do with all the horseshoes he threw while growing up on a farm in Kentucky. And although Professor Borghini's training in analytic philosophy made him a genius manual scorekeeper, it didn't really help him bowl any strikes. He did, however, have the best description of what it's like to bowl at Colonial:

"It's like being in a movie."

If You Go

Colonial Bowling Center, 248 Mill Street in Worcester, is open seven days a week: Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m., Sundays from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Prices are Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., \$3.00 a string; after 5 and on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, \$3.30 a string. Prices are the same for adults and children and they accept cash only: no credit or debit cards accepted. There's a senior citizen special Mondays through Fridays, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., seniors 65 and older bowl for \$2.40 a string. Bowling shoe rental is \$1.90 per person. For more information, call 508-754-7645. ●

roche@centralmassmedia.com

Here are some of the other candlepin bowling centers in Central Mass. The number of lanes is in parentheses,

ACTON BOWLADROME (16)
257 Main St., Acton
978-263-7638

AMERICAN LANES (16)
123 North St., Southbridge
508-764-6004

BAYBERRY BOWLING CTR. (16)
326 Main St., Spencer
508-885-4876

BRIAN'S BOWLAWAY (14)
123 Main St., Gardner
978-632-9710

HARVARD BOWLING LANES (14)
204 Ayer Road, Harvard
978-456-9631

MASON BOWLING CENTER (24)
640 North Main St., Leominster
978-537-7064

MOHEGAN BOWL-A-DROME (20)
51 Thompson Road, Webster
508-943-2280

PUTNAM STREET LANES (10)
14 Putnam St., Fitchburg
978-343-9664

SAWYER'S BOWLADROME (5)
13 Blake St., Northboro
508-393-8032

SPARETIME LANES (12)
117 Church St., Whitinsville
508-234-2077

WELLINGTON
Mortgage Company

Community Mortgage Specialists

3 Generations of Trusted Local Business

Call about our Best Rate Guarantee

toll-free at 866.WMC.0388

MB 0007