

Time to spare?

The Portland Gay and Lesbian Bowling Association rolls out its new season

BY ORIANA GREEN

Are you looking for a fun way to meet people? Need an excuse to get out of the house on a rainy winter day? Want some exercise that won't really seem like exercise?

Have I got a bowling league for you! And best of all, you don't even have to be good—just dedicated to having a good time and meeting new friends. The nonthreatening atmosphere is ideal for people who are new in town or newly single.

The Portland Gay and Lesbian Bowling Association got off to a colorful start 24 years ago on an August afternoon, when 29 skeptical bar patrons stumbled out of Dahl & Penne's Show Bar after some serious partying and waltzed across the Morrison Bridge. Some folks were still in heels from the night before, and some even carried their cocktail glasses as they made their way to Grand Central Bowl for Portland's very first gay bowling event.

In 1979, when the association was founded, it was the only social event organized to bring both men and women of the community together in friendly competition. Executive director Tom Geil, who plans to turn the reins over to someone else after his 25th year in charge, says he wanted to create a "fun, casual league where people could have a good time without a lot of pressure."

Today, the format still offers a relaxed atmosphere for beginners and skilled bowlers alike. They occupy a total of 26 lanes, room for 104 bowlers.

Although some members average 80 to 90 points a game, others are certifiable hotshots. "One of our best bowlers is Lauren Pike, who can average 209 and who's also president of the Friday night league," Geil says.

Ten years after the association got rolling, a second league for more serious bowlers began on Friday nights. Now composed of 144 bowlers, the aptly named FITS League (Fuck



Gay and lesbian bowlers have made an impact on the dress code

It, Tomorrow's Saturday) is all full, and there is a waiting list to join.

But for fun seekers, the more family-oriented association offers a casual format of two season halves to lessen the commitment of participants. The first half consists of 14 sessions from September to December, and the second half goes from January to May. Participants can bowl in either one or both halves.

"We kept our season short since we figured most relationships didn't last longer than 14 weeks," Geil jokes. "With our league you can bring friends on a drop-in basis or your family members. Some of the members are parents, and they sometimes bring their kids."

Geil explains the logistics: "Our league is a mixed league of men and women from 20 to 60 in age, with about 60 percent being guys. Teams are either all men, all women or mixed, but they compete evenly with a handicapping system."

Which means using a complicated mathematical formula understood only by Geil, you'll be given a handicap based on your average scores, how many margaritas you plan to down each session and the number of letters in your mother's maiden name. (Just kidding about the name part, but the Hollywood Lanes does sport a full-service bar, so much merriment is ensured.)

"I just have a rule that you act responsibly," Geil adds, noting that alcohol never has been a problem. And thanks to a new city ordinance, smoking no longer is allowed at the alley.

Geil says the league is heartily welcomed at the facility. "One of the women who runs the alley said, 'Our people look forward to your group because you have more fun than all the other leagues put together, and we like that.'"

Julia Davis exemplifies the kind of person the league attracts. She has bowled for two seasons with her partner of 14 years, Jodi Walker.

"We came from Iowa, and the first thing we did was get a *Just Out*, and that's where we found bowling. We were so happy to find something else to do besides go to bars, and the people in the league are good people," Davis



When the lights go down during a Boxer Bowl there's no telling what other apparel will be shed

says, displaying the legendary enthusiasm that won her the Sportsmanship Award last season. "One woman says I'm everybody's 'clappy bitch,' and I do cheer everyone on because I want everyone to have a good time."

But then Davis turns serious. "I am competitive; don't get me wrong. Our team has won second place two years in a row," she says proudly.

Davis and Walker also enjoy attending tournaments. "One of the best times was at the International Gay Bowling Organization tournament in Vancouver, B.C.," she recalls. "Vancouver has its own gay district with rainbow flags up and down the street. And we're going to an IGBO tournament in Hawaii this winter, like we need an excuse!"

Geil also runs the 19-year-old Rose Bowl Classic, which attracts 250 to 300 gay bowlers from throughout the country. "Portland is known for having the largest percentage of women bowlers in the country at national tournaments," he says. Davis thinks the annual competition is so well attended "because it has a great payback scale."

But a big part of the appeal is the inclusion of Boxer Bowls, "during which both men and women strip to their boxer shorts and come to party with each other," Geil explains. "The group takes over the entire alley, the lights are turned down low, and the music blasts so people can dance behind the lanes." According to Geil, a woman once offered free shots of booze to all topless bowlers—and she wasn't disappointed.

Davis says she had a riotous time at the event. "I was personally depantsed, and I was wearing a thong!" (The guy whose boxers she whipped off wasn't as lucky.) The next Boxer Bowl, slated for Oct. 20, will be a costume affair. So if you think bowling is just for beer-bellied, middle-aged straight guys, think again! **JM**

THE PORTLAND GAY AND LESBIAN BOWLING ASSOCIATION fall season begins Sept. 9 at Hollywood Lanes, 4030 N.E. Halsey St. Sessions run from 3:30 to 6 p.m., and registration is at 2:30 p.m. If space is available, you still can join as late as Sept. 23. The cost is \$9 a session. Teams consist of four members, and you can come in as a single, with your partner or with three friends. Drop-ins welcomed as substitutes anytime. Contact the league at bowlpdx@aol.com or www.pdxbowling.com.

In the middle part of the past century, ORIANA GREEN bowled in a kids league and was a proud member of the Gutter Dusters. She is also the Entertainment Editor of *Just Out*; send your strikes to oriana@justout.com.

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