

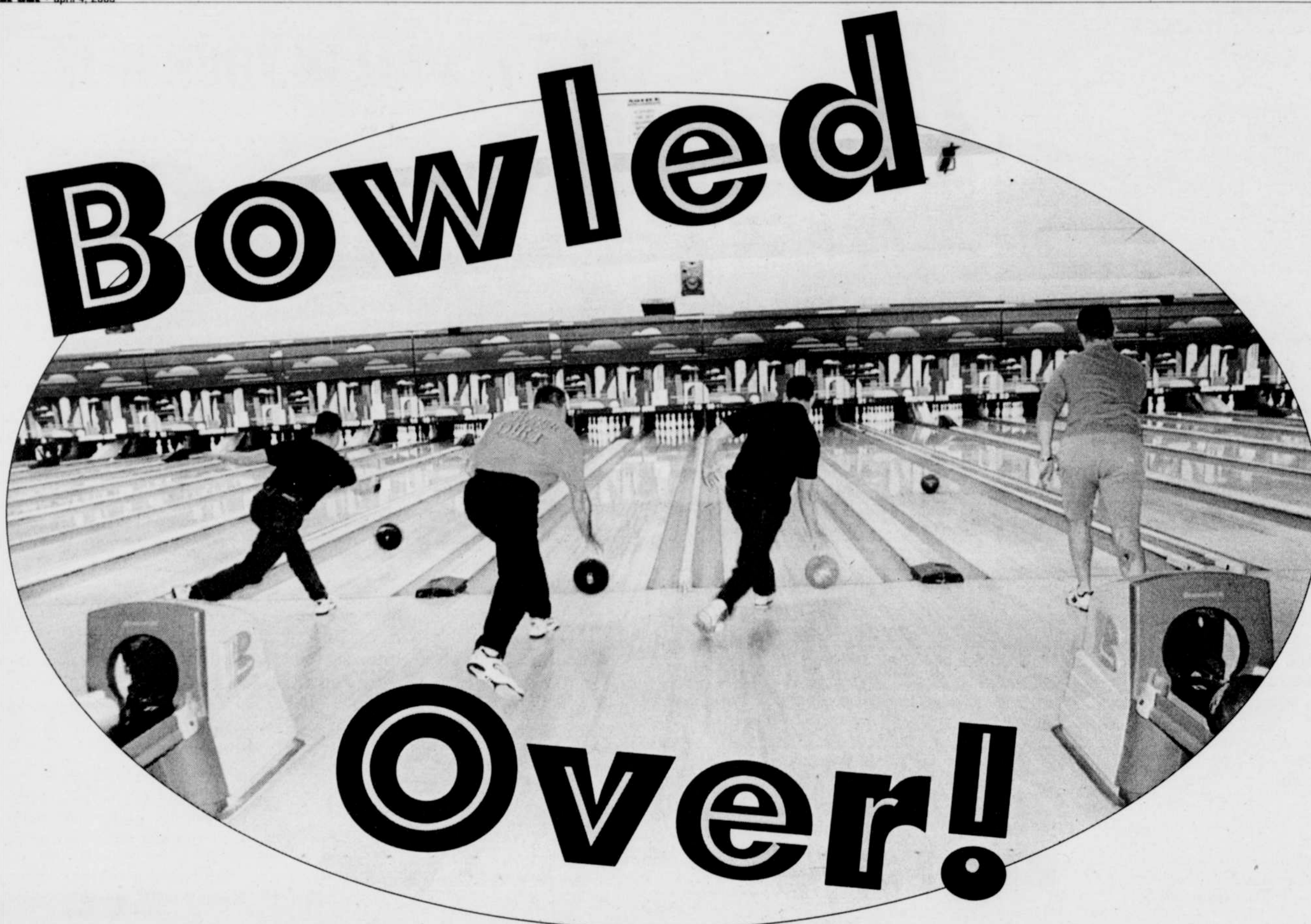


PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Portland Gay and Lesbian Community Bowling Association turns 25—with the history to prove it

by Pat Young

There is a history behind the history," says Tom Geil of the Portland Gay and Lesbian Community Bowling Association. For the history of the league is very much intertwined with the founder's own coming-out story and his vision of what the league could offer the community.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of PCBA. It also marks Tom's 30th anniversary of coming out.

Back in June 1973, Tom went to his first gay bar in downtown Portland with a friend. A little uneasy, he stood as close to the wall as possible and never looked directly at anyone because he'd heard that if he made eye contact

with someone, he'd have to take that person home. (It was months before he realized that was a joke.)

The very next night, Tom returned on his own and was picked up by someone saying, "Do you want to look at my car?" Since he was into drag racing—that's real drag racing, not queens running in high heels—he fell for the line.

"I went along for the ride, and it scared the heck out of me," he shares. The guy threatened to leave him stranded if he didn't follow through with a few things, but somehow Tom managed to talk him out of it and was driven back downtown. "So, the coming-out process was really rough and scary for me. Yet, I kept coming back to the bars," he adds with a laugh.

Tom was concerned that there didn't appear to be many activities available outside the bars and Portland's Imperial Sovereign Rose Court.

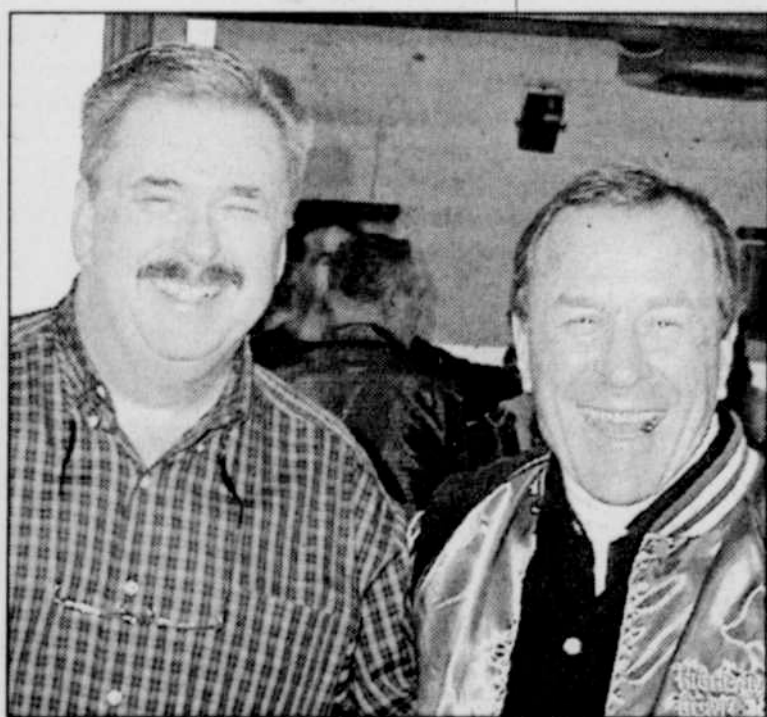
"There was no gay men's chorus, no sports, no nothing. You went to the bar to pick up someone or be picked up," he explains. "And there was very little interaction between men and women.... So I thought, 'What can I do?'"

He came up with the idea of bowling. Perfect. People could bowl and socialize at the same time. You don't have to chase a ball around like in tennis or stand by yourself in left field like in softball. With bowling, you take a few steps, throw the ball and it comes back to you. Then you can chat with friends (not to mention drink beer) while you wait for your next turn.

In 1976 Tom went around to all of the bars—targeting women's spaces as well as men's—and put up posters announcing a bowling event. Then one Sunday in late summer, about 30 bar patrons made their way to Grand Central Bowl for Portland's first-ever gay bowling event.

Everyone had so much fun that Tom arranged gay bowling for once a month. By 1979, they were bowling every other week and officially became PCBA. The league bowled in several alleys through the years before settling on its current location at Hollywood Lanes in Northeast Portland.

1979 was also the year Tom became Emperor of the Imperial Sovereign Rose Court. Each



Left: Back in 1990, then Mayor Bud Clark threw out the first ball of the season—the coveted Rosebowl ball, held by Tom Geil. Right: Tom with Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski, who hung out with PCBA bowlers during their 2002 fall awards party.