



Paul Nickell (top right) and his first-place team. "We're not this good. Why are we still in first place? Is everyone else bowling bad?"

titleholder usually picks something they want to work on in the community. Tom picked (guess what?) bowling.

He sent letters to every organization inviting people to join. His goals were to make a safe, nonthreatening place for people who were coming out and to create an environment that would bring men and women together.

In the early years, some of the bars were a bit concerned that the league would take away business. But those fears quickly disappeared as

those same bars jumped on the bandwagon and even sponsored some teams.

Also, in the beginning, the league was like "bowling for dollars" with different colored pins instead of the standard white. Money was paid out to bowlers striking on various colors. Money Honeys or Money Hunks worked the lanes handing out the rewards. Many of them were running for Emperor or Empress.

"They always came down in full drag," remembers Tom. "They would sing songs up and down the lanes. It was a blast to watch."

By the mid-'80s, PCBA was the largest league in the state with more than 300 bowlers. They had two sessions on Sundays and one on Thursday nights. It was a place where social skills were stressed over bowling skills.

Tom credits Renee Cherry, who joined the league in 1983,

with bringing in a lot of women. He put her name on the ads and fliers so there would be a female contact as well as himself. Women make up 30 percent to 40 percent of the league, according to Renee.

"I come here to have fun, but what I realized is that it's a great way for me to stay in contact with gay men," she notes. Almost all of her gay male friends come from the bowling league.

Mike Bodine is one of those friends. "Renee and I are partners," he jokes. We've been

friends for years." Mike joined the league about 15 years ago. It was the first gay thing he did when he came out, and he has made many long-lasting friendships.

A fond memory for both Tom and Renee was the Slumber Bowl event when the league rented the lanes overnight at AMF Pro 300. It was a wild night with the lights turned down, loud music, dancing, a brass band for photos—oh, and some bowling.

"Everyone came in their pajamas...the women came in baby dolls. I had never seen a lesbian in a baby doll before. And they had to go out and buy them," laughs Tom.

Sad memories are also part of their history, as the AIDS epidemic hit the league hard. It lost more than 100 bowlers.

"I lost three team members to



The PCBA's ceremonial morning-after ball. Good for "after a Rosebowl," says Tom Geil, "or any night of bowling."

AIDS over the years," recalls Renee. "And it is very, very tough. We used to bowl from January to May, and lots of times we wouldn't see each other until the following January. And for a while it was like, 'Oh, God, who is sick now?' It was really tough going back to bowling."

She adds, "The league got quite small, but we are bouncing back." PCBA has 32 teams with an assortment of creative names such as Four of a Kind; 3 Queens and Their Lipstick; Gutter Girls; Two Fags and Their Hags; One Time at Band Camp; Strike a Pose; and Out, Proud and Well Endowed.

And in those teams are more stories.

Jeff and Brian met through the bowling league, fell in love and bought a house together. It all started when Jeff found himself single after a long-term relationship. After a while, his friends encouraged him to meet some new people by joining PCBA.

He went to the lanes and found himself being placed on a team with three other new folks who needed a fourth. Thanks to some coaxing from a co-worker, Brian arrived the next week. He was also interested in meeting new people and enlarging his social circle, as he puts it.

The couple no longer bowl in the league, but whenever they visit, they still get plenty of hugs. "Our team was so fun, and we just had a really good time," says Brian. "We were the most popular team and won the Best Spirit Award."

That's good, 'cause they weren't known for their bowling skills.

"I never came as a serious bowler," remembers Brian, whose scores were often in the 50s. "In fact, I think I coined the term 'single-pin bowling' because that's how much I usually knocked down," he laughs. "Everyone is pretty much accepting and open and here to have a good time."

In fact, the atmosphere was so welcoming that Jeff often brought his 7-year-old son, who loved to play with the other kids and watch Dad bowl.

Kacy Cederquist and Kimberly Churchill also joined to meet people. They enjoy the league so much, they drive all the way from Canby every Sunday. "You know, Canby is not the hotbed of cultural diversity, although we do

have a bowling alley with 12 whole lanes," smiles Kacy.

When they needed a fourth bowler, Kacy bribed her younger sister, Nancy Bowers, into joining by saying she'd pay for her bowling. Not only that, but they bought her a ball, shoes and a bag. Nancy has been on the team now for four years. She brings her daughter and contributes to the straight mix of people.

Paul Nickell's team is in first place and has held that position for most of the season. He and his teammates are as surprised as the rest of the league.

"We hadn't bowled together as a team and had never bowled on this league. We keep saying to ourselves: 'We're not this good. Why are we still in first place? Is everyone else bowling bad?'" he laughs.

"Bowling was for my parents," he continues. "So how I got into it, I have no idea. I started out with scores around 106 or 108, then I bought my own bowling ball and I'm doing better."

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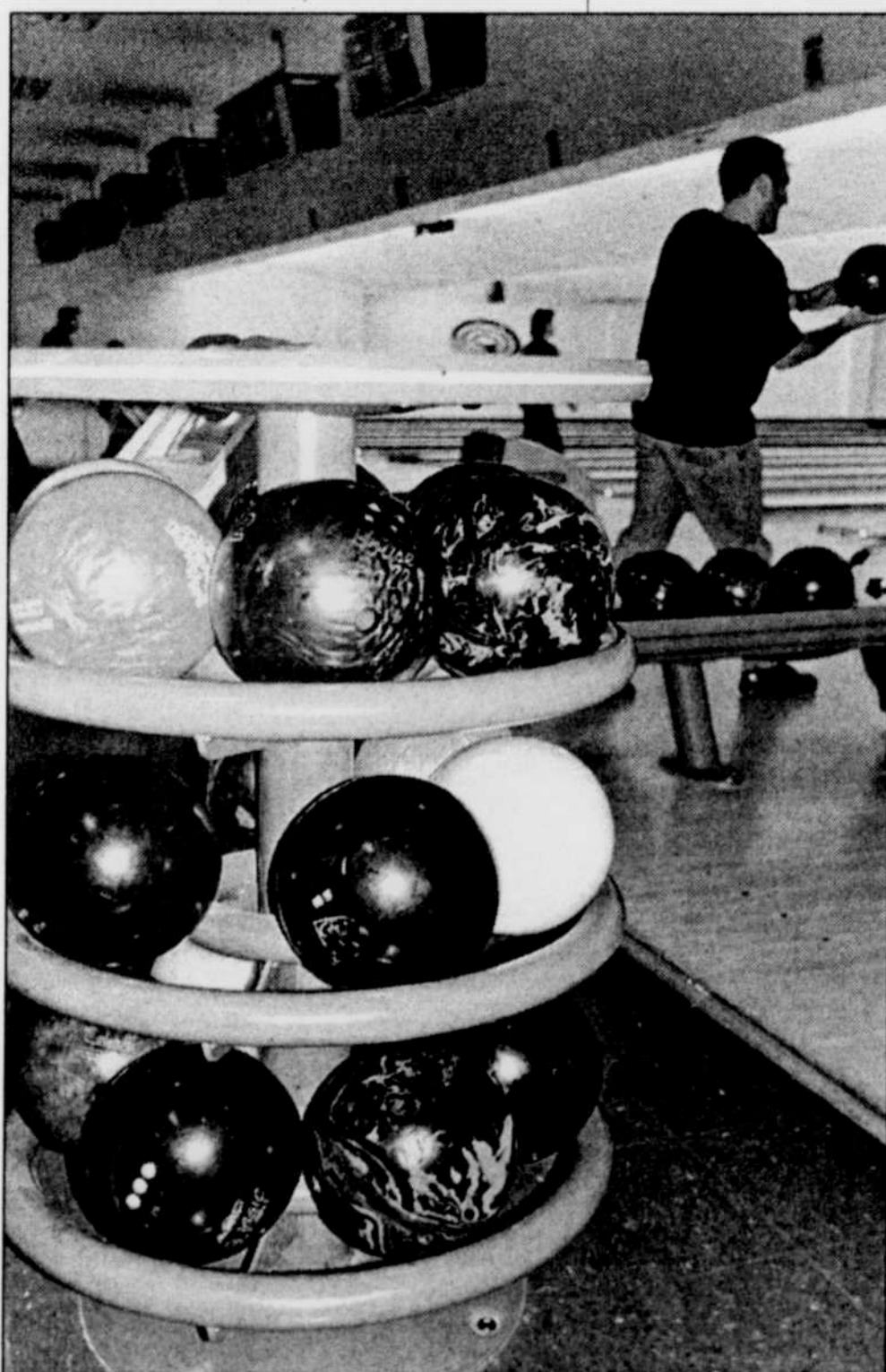


PHOTO BY MARY DAVIS

Tourney in your undies

Adding to the Portland Gay and Lesbian Community Bowling Association's fun is the annual Rosebowl Classic and Boxer Bowling. Tom Geil scheduled the tournament to coincide with Portland's Rose Festival.

The Rose Festival folks don't seem to mind. Tom once thought about approaching them and making it an official festival event, but he let the idea pass, noting, "They have their own controversies."

The tournament draws bowlers from around the country and overseas and includes the popular Boxer Bowling Night where boxer shorts come out of the closet. **J**