

Creating community through bowling

By Zach Silva
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While the Cottage Bowl, the only bowling alley in the city, is home to avid bowlers it has also hosted a proposal, a wedding and even a funeral. To many it is just as much a bowling alley as it is a central living room for the bowling population. A welcoming place where life happens and also some bowling.

"I love being here. I would rather be here than at home," said Butch Cardoza who has owned the bowling center since 2009. "I laugh because at night you have people... at home and they say let's go to the bowling alley. They come down and sit down just to say hi."

This warm acceptance and togetherness is not just strangers but is rooted in a family tie. While Butch is the owner, you can not go far without seeing his daughter Natalie who also works there seven days a week with her dad. Together the pair have created an atmosphere at the bowling center that is more reminiscent of a living room than an athletic venue.

"You are here experiencing everything. You're

here watching the news because a bad event happened or an earthquake or some sort of crazy thing. Everyone is here and talking about it and gathering," said Natalie.

For countless big events, the Cardoza family is at the bowling alley when it happens and they take in the event and share the experience with those around them. From their favorite team the San Francisco Giants winning the World Series to the 2016 election and everything in between, they are there for it all.

"When bad things or good things have happened you're sitting here with a group of people that come together as a community to relate to things," said Natalie.

But at the core of it all is bowling. And before the Cardozas had created a vibrant bowling community, it started with their family. Butch's parents bowled. He bowled. He met his wife bowling. Natalie bowled nearly as soon as she could walk. She bowled on scholarship in college. She met her husband bowling. Everything seems to revolve around bowling.

It was because of this deep passion for the sport that compelled Butch to follow his life long

dream of owning a bowling center. With the help of some family friends he was put in a position to become the owner of this 12-lane center that first opened its doors in 1959.

What started as a familial bond, grew to something that now encompasses all who enter the door. Another member of this bowling community is Vince Fiattarone who coached bowling at Cottage Grove High School.

"It is a big family here," said Fiattarone. "Everybody knows everybody and it's a safe place to be; to bowl."

Hailing from New York and then California, Fiattarone has seen bowling all around the country but this is where he has become most comfortable. It is not just playing that makes it this way but being able to coach bowlers of all ages and abilities. There was a six year old who grew fond of him and once they got past the "tears and frustration" they were able to get to a positive place. And with the high schoolers, he was able to find the key to unlocking their full potential.

"We found ice cream is a big encourager," said Fiattarone. "We will devote a whole hour and a half of practice to picking up the seven and the

ten pins in the same frame to get an ice cream, without knocking over other pins. But at the end of it they all get ice cream anyway."

The high school students and those younger than them represent not just a fun time at the bowling alley but the future of the sport. With more options in both sports and entertainment than ever available to kids, bowling centers across the country are grappling with how to make sure that the sport continues to grow and thrive.

"There are so many activities for those kids to do nowadays, you've got so many other things that they are involved in and so they can't just focus on bowling," said Butch Cardoza.

As youth numbers are down 25% at this bowling center, they still have a core of bowlers young and old that comes back time and time again that make things work. What gives the Cardoza's hope for the future is in the quality of the product they are serving. Because at the end of the day, bowling is what they love.

"We have families who come into bowl and they are hootin and hollerin and laughing," said Butch. "And we are watching them and having just as much fun as they are."

The Bowlers of Cottage Grove

A look at some the different bowlers who occupy the bowling lanes in Cottage Grove



Name: Sandra Hanie
Age: 76
Years Bowling: 55 years
Best Game: 206
Why do you bowl?

"Because I love it and it keeps me moving and going and that kind of stuff."



Name: Bryan Varela
Age: 27
Years Bowling: 3 years
Best Game: 259
Why do you bowl?

"A buddy of mine, a brother from another mother, got me into it and it keeps me out of trouble."



Name: Meagan McNary
Age: 21 years
Years Bowling: 8 years
Best Game: 279
Why do you bowl?

"I was kind of forced into it to help my cousin finish out her senior year. Then I fell in love with it."



Name: Zach Thomason
Age: 20
Years Bowling: 6 years
Best Game: 289
Why do you bowl?

"It is a challenge that you get to do over and over; it's something to keep striving for."



Name: Pat Fitting
Age: 84
Years Bowling: 67 years
Best Game: 222
Why do you bowl?

"The people and the competition and the anxiety when you are close. And then you get a little money back when you win."



Name: Jeff Williams
Age: 50
Years Bowling: 20 years
Best Game: 298
Why do you bowl?

"The people. It's more about fun and just hanging out with people and having a good time."

*Scores out of 300

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