

Awesome. Thank you, uh, so much, Tom for coming on today. For anyone had the pleasure of meeting you. Tell us a little bit about, uh, who you are and, and what you're doing these days. Yeah, well, uh, today I, uh, I own two bowling centers, one in Indianapolis Highway Lanes and another one in South Bend, Chippewa.

And before that I worked for Brunswick for 26 years. I started, um, when I was in college and my last job there was vice president of operations in charge of 110 centers, and I left there in 2000, late 2007, and then bought the two centers. And I also do some consulting on, uh, market studies and, uh, market feasibility studies for new family entertainment centers.

Mm. Awesome. So you said you started in college or, or after college for Brunswick? Yeah, I was, I worked for them full-time when I was at the University of Arizona. Oh, wow. Yep. And I did hourly. How did you know Work desk. What's that? Okay. Did, did you always know that it came along or how did that happen?

Did you, were you a bowler in high school or in college and then you knew you were going to bowling or something that just happened? No, I just started working there part-time, you know, turned into full-time. And then when I got my degree from, from, uh, the University of Arizona, uh, I decided to go to their management program.

Hmm. Okay. Okay. And, you know, at the time, I think my choice is where go to Brunswick. I think it was Woolworth's. You ever heard of the Woolworths department stores? Yeah. Sort of. So, so I guess I picked the right one. One choice, right? Right. Exactly. Yeah. So yeah, so I, those guys, I'm one of those guys that started at Brunswick like working a snack bar in the right.

All the way up. Yep. Yep. So I, I knew okay, how to run a bowling center from the ground. , which helps a lot. Right? Yeah. I'm sure that translates well to, uh, running today and then some of the consulting that you're doing. Yeah, it does. It really does. Mm-hmm. . Mm-hmm. . Yeah. And so, um, tell me a little bit more about, uh, maybe some of the progression or, or some of the things you've seen change over time when you were at Brunswick.

I know you guys tracked a lot of stuff. You've seen, um, a lot change there. Yeah. You know, when I first started, I mean, it was like, 88, I think. And you know, it, it was mostly league bowling, like you've probably heard before. You know, you were 70% league bowling. And then as we, you know, went further and I went into two different jobs inside of Brunswick.

Um, managed a couple bowling centers, opened a new one, and then o opened a brand new family entertainment center in Edmonton, Canada called Reds, which was a hundred thousand square feet. And that was Brunswick's first four A into, uh, family enter. You know, the bowling, the games, the Yeah. Uh, bar, the billiards, uh, entertainment.

And, you know, back then, you know, Brunswick saw that, you know, every year league bowling was declining. And so we knew we had to try to do something different. And so you saw the progression of, you know, going from 70% league. Now a lot of centers are less than, you know, 40, 30% league. And, and so the question.

Becoming marketing, what do you do? I mean, what, how do you combat league bowling going down and Right. You know, um, you know, trying to get open bowling higher mm-hmm. . And so it became a different business to run. Yeah. You know, and, and we figured out at Brunswick back in, like when I was there in 2003 and four, about.

Um, comparing, I think I talked about this, comparing bowling lanes to, uh, seats on an airplane, right? Yeah, we did talk about that a little bit, but yeah. Yeah, go ahead. Same, same fixed costs. You know, you're, you're flying from Los Angeles to New York City and you got 200 seats, and the, the costs are fixed.

You know, you have your payroll costs, your fuel costs, and so if you only sell a hundred of those seats and you've got two weeks to go, what do you do? , right? You discount, discount, you discount, right? Right. Mm-hmm. . And so we looked at bowling lanes the same way, except we used it in in day parts. Okay? We said, you know, you have the slowest day part, which is, you know, Monday through Friday from nine until noon.

And then the the afternoon day part, which is maybe a little busier, and then the highest, the busiest time was Friday at five O'. Until Sunday at five o'clock. So you would never discount from Friday, 5:00 PM to Sunday at 5:00 PM Right. But then you look at opportunities during the middle of the week when nobody's in your bowling center to say, what can you do to drive traffic?

And, and sometimes you do specials like a dollar dollar ammo or family packages or different things like that. Mm-hmm. and, and I don't think you're devaluing the game, but I think you're just trying to fill space. , you didn't have anything there anyway, right? Yeah. And yeah, and then an empty lane is like, it's a marketing, what do you call it?

It's, it's just, it's something that, it's gone meaning, mm-hmm. , it wasn't used during those three hours, you've lost that opportunity. Right? Yeah. And that's kind of, yeah. Yeah. Go ahead. It's, um, you know, like you said, it's, it's just an opportunity of hour that's gone for it. And you're not devaluing it, you're just saying that there's less demand during this time period.

Right. It's all based on supply and demand. Right. Okay. And, and, you know, and I, I, and I said back in, you know, 2000, two or three, you know, I was in an MBA class, economics class, and we did a, we had to do a project and I, and I did the project. We went back to 1970. And looked at the number of bowling centers, the United States and, and the average price per game back then was 50 cents, meaning the average price in a bowling center, meaning that lot prices out might have been higher and some lower, and, and bowling centers are doing about 11,500 games paid per lane.

Then we went, looked up to 2002 in the average price month from 50 cents to \$2 and 60. But the number of games per lane went down to 8,000. Right. . And so we, we said, well, we keep raising the price, raising the price, and, and people keep using our centers a little less and less, right? And, and so that's kind of like the economic picture that we looked at to figure out how do we do specials or do values or family values when we're not that.

And still maintain a healthy price point when we're really busy, you know, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. And that's kinda like an economic way of look looking at your business. Right. And so you're saying, so the, the, the total value was flat. It was just the one side was going up side just as much like Correct.

Right. Price. Your price increases, masked the, the nu the less number of games being bold in. Okay. And so that's what happened. Price went up, number of games went down, but you still did just as well. Okay. And what you'd want to try to do is try to get more people in, you know, at a, at a price point where the, the price is actually saying flat or working on, okay.

And that's just something that mm-hmm. , you know, either you get more customers, you get better pricing, okay. Or you drive to drive more. I think is it, what, what are the three ways to drive business that you told me? Well, the first is the, yeah, the, uh, average ticket is the first, yeah. The second is the, uh, frequency that they come in per year.

And then the third is just new bodies in the door. Those are really the only three ways that I've found, you know, there's more someone telling, but that's it that I found. And I remember a funny story. We, we ran, there was a special that we ran at some of the Brunswick. It was like 2002. It was called Bucking Bowl, and it was like nine o'clock in a weekday.

Okay. It was dollar games, dollar shoes, dollar 12 ounce soft drinks, dollar draft beer. And we had some centers that were like full. They had waiting lists everywhere. And so you saw this, and so we rolled it out nationwide and after about eight weeks, some senator decided, well, you know, I can go to a dollar 20.

and changed the concept from a dollar to a dollar 25, and all of a sudden they only had, instead of 40 lanes full, they only had 30 lanes, and it showed the price sensitivity of the special, right? Mm-hmm. , they'll pay a dollar. Yeah, and it was very interesting that the smart guys that were full all the time just picked another night and did it at nine o'clock on a Monday.

at the same price instead of raising price to see if they could get more. As it just shows, it just shows the price sensitivity of, of open bowlers, right? Yeah. Yeah. Don't pay an offer. That's good point. But they won't pay a dollar 50 or dollar 25, you know? Right. And it was kind of pretty amazing to us actually that that happened.

But it shows that, yeah, well, you know, we kind of learned that, that, you know, there people will pay different prices to bowl at different. You know, and that's something else you have to look at. There's different categories of open bowlers. Some people don't care what they pay. Yeah, okay. Some people just pay whatever the price is on the board.

Some people won't only come in if there's a special. Okay. And so you, you almost try to categorize the groups of open bowlers as to, as to, you know, as to how you market your business, which is a quite a different way of looking at. Right now, um, when you did that, how would you like, uh, price things? Is it, is it all that done at calculated the Po Os or they know that during these time blocks or Yeah.

Certain prices or how do they figure that out? Yeah. It was pos locked in per time. Okay. Like a, a Wednesday at block at night, the Po os was locked in at a dollar per game. That's special. Nice. Okay. And then when was over at 11 or 12, it went back. Nice. And so you, you basically put the, so the, the people at the counter.

That's all they could do is swing that up. Right. Okay. Yeah. Cause that'd be confusing. It would be. It would be. But you know, it's, it's, and, and, you know, and that's, that's one of the things about marketing and Boeing Center, many different opportunities of what you wanted to do. Mm-hmm. ,

you know, and I think, you know, when you went from being 75% full with leagues, you really didn't have to market right Now.

You have to. Yeah. And it's a different. Absolutely, that's our Right, that's our whole existence, right? Correct. Yeah. So, um, what, what, um, actually that's a, we'll jump into that cuz that's a question that's I've been trying to figure out and I feel like you'd be a great person to answer it. Is, what is the average percentage spent that you saw for centers, uh, for marketing?

What's the band or you know, obviously depends on how aggressive they want to grow, but you remember a lot of 'em were spending for marketing. I know what I've seen, but here's what, you know, that end, uh, you know what, I, at Brunswick when we had 110 centers, we spent about 4% of our gross revenue. In market.

Okay. Yeah. Around it. Yeah. Yeah. You know, I mean, and we were doing 250 million in sales and a hundred centers. Right? And so 4% of that. Um, some centers spent less, some centers spent more. Uh, I would say today, uh, you know, anywhere from four to 6%. Mm-hmm. you should spend, but it should be targeted. Meaning, absolutely.

Meaning what's your focus? Are you focusing on families? Are you focusing on adult leagues? Are you focusing on birthday parties? Are you focusing on cosmic bowling? Okay. I mean, and that, you know, that is one thing that, that the message has to be consistent and you have to spend towards that focus. Right?

Yeah. And you know, I mean, and I've seen centers that don't spend hardly anything in marketing in. and they get in trouble because they don't think they have to. Right. You know, and that's, that's not the answer, you know? And so, you know, some people, if they're doing 2 million in revenue and they're saying, well, 4%, that's \$80,000 a year in marketing, that's a lot.

Mm-hmm. And you may say, it may be a lot, but you still want to drive your 2 million business to 2 1 22. So you, it's, it's the right thing to do.

Exactly. Yeah. I mean, and, and there's, you know, the, the other way to look at it is how aggressive you want to be is kind of where you would shift that number up and down. If you're really aggressive, you'd be more like four or five or, you know, six, seven, 8%. The other way I look at it is, it's almost like that old saying, like, dress for the job you want, not the job you have.

Then marketing rate of the size of the revenue you want, not the revenue you have I, same philosophy. Correct. Yeah. That's great. I mean, because your marketing is gonna drive your revenue. Okay. Right, exactly. And you know, and the thing is, is that you've got to be able to have enough guts to spend that money.

You know, especially in the seasonal business of the bowling center in the Midwest, where you know, you, you do all your revenue. September until April and then May, June, July and August. It's so slow. Well, a lot of times in my scenario, we spend on the majority of our marketing in May, June, July, August to drive people in because we have such lane availability.

Right. Okay. And, and people think, well, that people aren't gonna come in cuz the weather's nice, but you can still do it. Mm-hmm. , I mean, you can still, you know, drive people into your sentence through different promotions. Yeah. Okay. And I think that's something. You look back at your lane availability and say, if I'm really busy from December, January, February to March, why would I spend that much money in marketing?

Right. Because my lane ability is so small. But then when you get into May, June, and July and August, and you can blow a cannon through your bowling center, so maybe I should spend a lot more money on marketing. Right? Exactly. Yeah. But a lot of, a lot of centers lose money in the summertime and don't wanna do that.

Right. Because summers are so tough financially. Mm-hmm. , you know, so it's a, it's a catch 20. It is. It really is. Yeah, it is. But then, you know, there's, there's a whole nother factor we haven't talked about yet that changes the dynamics of, of the business is the food and beverage side, because that tends to, to flatten it out and it has a different type of capacity, you know?

Right. You only have so many bowling lanes, but you can sell all the beers you want as long as you have space for them to stand around. It changes it completely. Right. And that's the other thing. It it, we always say people we're, they're a captive audience. Mm-hmm. , they, they're not going anywhere. Okay.

Right. And so when they're a captive audience, food and beverage becomes a huge part of this. I mean it mm-hmm. , you know, in, in a bowling center, they're in there an hour and a half, maybe two hours in a family entertainment center. They're are two or three hours. And so your job is there, is to try to get them, you know, to spend, uh, by pizza or soften drinks for the kids or things like that.

Mm-hmm. , because that, that is a big part of it today. You know, and that's, you know, that's one thing that, that it all goes, going back to driving traffic, it's the more traffic you drive and maybe it's at a lower price of a different day part, you're gonna increase in food and. Yeah. Yeah. And, and that's where you see a lot of it, because you see, it's interesting with people, the, you know, you would do a promotion where bowling is inexpensive.

Okay? They'll have, but they only have 20 to \$25 to. So they get, and they get in, like on Wednesday nights at one of my centers, we have \$8. Li can bowl for two hours of bowling and shoes, it's \$8. Okay. Which we think is pretty good. You get 30, 40 people to show up, but they all spend money buying beer and food.

Mm-hmm. because they had 20 bucks in their pocket and they only had to spend eight to bowl. Right. And so and so that's kind of how you look at that, is you can almost use bowling as a lost leader to drive from. That's exactly what I was thinking. Yeah. Yep. Mm-hmm. . Yeah. And you do, and, and you know, and the thing is, that's a strategy that you try, but, you know, Wednesday night at nine o'clock at night, we're doing it when we're not busy.

Right. And that's the thing, you, you, you, you know, I've seen centers run quarter mania, you know, 25 some bowling act.

The bar does an extra \$500 because they ran, they ran quarter mania. Right. You know, and. . So, you know, you, you're using bowling, which really there's no cost to it cuz your overhead's there to drive a tremendous amount of, of food and beverage in bar sales. Yeah. If, yeah, if you have that food and beverage side, you know, if you don't have it, then see the argument of how you're cheap.

Right. I'll have that to, to, to offset. Right. Yep. And then, you know, and, and it all builds. Yeah. Yeah. It, it, it, um, you know, from the market perspective, I like concentric circles and you get more circles that are grouped around that, you know, uh, different items that you have so that you can draw one person in for bowling or another person in for, uh, the bar.

Another in for laser tag. The more circles have the bigger your pool, but then they end up passing the line and going to the other. . Right. And that and concentric circles are, are why family entertainment centers are, are, are so good nowadays because you have the circles, you have four businesses inside of a one roof.

You know, you've got laser tag, you've got bowling, you've got arcade, you've got bar, you've got a restaurant, you have the five circles which you say are going together. Mm-hmm. . And that's what people want. It's kinda a one stop. Right. And that's why, that's why they're, they're so, they're so popular nowadays.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And they're also, um, what would somebody say? A wallet emptying experience. Oh, oh, because you, it's a what? A wallet Emptying experience. , because you know, the kids that gimme \$20 more for the games, then you gotta pay hundred dollars for bowling and then you gotta go to, you know, get a beer.

And then pretty soon you're like, I just spent two or \$300. Right. Exactly. But that, that's how it works. Right. You know, and that's a good thing for the provider, right? It's an efficient business. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Well let, uh, yeah, let, let's talk about that cuz you know, we talked a little bit about the past.

Let's talk about now what's working. Mm-hmm. , tell me a little bit about what you're seeing work in your centers as far as, you know, f e c or, or what else you're seeing at, at work for you today. You know, and, and just, I have the two traditional centers and what's working today is, um, our focus on families.

Okay. We, we do a lot of family value packages. We do birthday. The birthday party packages, uh, kids Bowl free is a tremendous program, uh, because it, it's all family oriented. And so when you're doing your marketing, if you got a lot of kids bowl free and you have, you know, a good birthday party program, okay, and you're marketing a family package or family values to families, it all kind of ties together.

Okay? And so we. In the two traditional centers. That's a big thing to us because we, you know, when theaters before they close with Covid, you know, you, you go to a movie with two kids and two adults and you couldn't get in there for less than probably 60 bucks, you know, and we can run a, a family special where you get two hours bowling and a pizza and a pitcher of soda for like 59, 90, you know, and, and people appreciate that, especially today.

You know, because your cost in that is the cost of the pizza and the pitcher Soto, which is like, what, six bucks maybe. Right? If you know, and so, but the customer doesn't see that. Okay. But the mm-hmm. . And so, you know, we do a lot of just, you know, marketing to families because, um, it, it, it's a good value to them, okay?

Mm-hmm. , and I think that's important today, especially lately with inflation, one 8%. You know, even when you go to a fast food place, you see the prices and you're like, oh, right. You know? And so you, you make it a little more fast. Yeah. Yeah. And, but we don't, you know, like I said, from, you know, Sunday or from Friday from 5:00 PM till Sunday at four or five, we, we charge full price.

You know, I mean it's, and so, and, and in, in the f e C business, um, I write market studies for that, and we see.

Arcade part of the business keeps growing higher and higher and higher in the, um, how would I say the amount of revenue it's doing is compared to the other categories. Yeah. Used. Mm-hmm. used to be arcade would do, you know, arcade and laser tag do 30, 32%. Maybe bowling would do 25, 20 8%. Well, now we're seeing the arcade close to 40% of the gross.

Wow. And so you see that that's taking a bigger bite. You know, people are going into the FECs and spending more money in the arcade than anywhere else. Mm-hmm. , which is very interesting. Okay. Yeah. Cause you, it's very profitable. . Okay. And I think, right. Yeah. You know, when we're writing these studies, we see these, these numbers like this, you know, balling saying about flat food beverage goes up a little bit, but the games are going up quite a bit.

Mm-hmm. . And it's just interesting to us that people are more interested in going into the arcade and playing those games than maybe b winning those redemption toys than, than anything else inside of the center. Yeah. And that's something, I don't know if you've heard that, but something we've seen when we, when we go to do our market analysis of revenue, Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I, yeah, I do wonder about that. You know, if it's has to do with maybe technology used to playing on their phones and it's something more, uh, closer crossover, I'm not sure. But yeah, it seems like it's growing a lot. Yeah. You know, and, and the family entertainment center business is a great business. I mean, you mm-hmm.

it's, it's, you know, one where you have, they say bowling is usually the driver called the bowling based Family Entertainment Center. Yeah. But you know, I mean, if you have top-notch food and beverage and you have, you know, a great arcade with maybe 60 to 80 to a hundred games, you're doing extremely well.

Mm-hmm. and, and the other big drive.

Okay. Whether, you know, with Covid that killed group events, , you know, I mean it killed birthday parties, Christmas parties, bar Mitzvahs. Now you see it coming back very strongly. Yes. Okay. And big time and the spend. And they're not afraid to spend money. . Okay. The ticket items, they're not afraid to spend on whether, you know, they can go have their meeting in a meeting space and then have some lunch, and then go bowling, go play games.

So you see that part of the business getting, getting stronger too in the uh mm-hmm. entertainment centers. Yeah. Especially as you see people going virtual, you know, you, you wanna bring the team together and there's you, there's still that need. There's no getting around that need for connection in person and that's a great place to.

Yeah. You know, a lot of people still don't go to the office. You like, there's virtual, like this Zoom and so when they have a party that's really connecting cuz they're physically there. Right. Okay. And it's something they can do together. Mm-hmm. . Okay. You know, it's the, the advantage they have there, these Fs is that, you know, you have a Christmas party for a big company.

Well, you know, you go to a ballroom bag with Ron, you eat the dinner and that's it. Mm-hmm. and you have some drinks. Yeah. Or at least with the bowling and entertainment centers, it, it's. And I think that's, that's the big win for them. Mm-hmm. . Yeah. And you know, bowling centers have had a great run the last, from what I've heard, the last 12 or 15 months, whether it's entertainment centers or regular traditional centers mm-hmm.

And I think that has a lot to do with, um, first covid and people being cooped, cooped up. Oh yeah. And second, I think movie theater's not been around much anymore. Give people less choices to go out and do. That's true. Interactive things. Right. And I think that has a lot to do with it. Mm-hmm. , not to say that we haven't done a good job, but there, there's something driving us, you know, and I mean, what do you see driving that increase in the bowling?

Well, I mean, uh, definitely the, the ones you mentioned being cooped up. Um, but one that we, that we don't tend to hear about as much is the survivorship. . So how many centers didn't make it through Covid? And now those people still got a bowl somewhere, right? Yeah. So many And I, and I didn't know the neighboring one is, is went under, right?

What's that? Do, do you know the numbers of that? Uh, I don't, but, but anecdotally it's, it's pretty decent, you know, like a 10, 20% kind of number. Like significant. Yeah, yeah. You know, and that's probably with, I guess you would say the same thing with restaurants and. Exactly. Whoever, whoever survived, you know?

Mm-hmm. survived the, uh, pandemic came back stronger. Exactly. Yeah. And that, that makes a lot of sense. Mm-hmm. that does, yeah. Yeah. Like, um, for instance, in, in our town here, uh, we have, we have a, a bowling center that, uh, my, my good friend Dan Mallory has, and you know, they're, they're one of only one. There's maybe only one other late night place to go.

And before there was four, and now he's, he's, it's him or one other person, or one other se um, bar. And that's it. So where do Yep. Where does everyone go? Right. And, and, and you know, with food and beverage, you take advantage of that. I mean, that's the thing. You, you, you try to take advantage of that as much as possible.

Right. You know, and that's a good thing. You know, I mean, it, anytime, you know, you, when we write market studies, the first thing we. We look at the market as we, you know, draw the five mile, 10 mile, 15 mile ring and see who are the competitors. Mm-hmm. , you know, right. Who, who, how many lane beds are in that market?

And that's the same thing that's happening to him now, whether it's lane bed or whether it's laser tag or whether it's Minigolf, you know? And so if there's less of that, then this, you're gonna do much better, right? Yeah. Yeah. Mm-hmm. . Yeah. And I would definitely include bar stools or seats, you know, booths, whatever in the study.

Cuz that's, that is, you know, your choice. It's not just, you know, bowling, it's, you know, where, where are we gonna roll out tonight? Right? And then, and then, and then they only have so much, uh, disposable income. You know, and so, you know, I mean, and that's, that's a good way to look at it. Mm-hmm. , and you market to that too.

Right. You do it through your, you get expanded hours of operation or different things like that. Mm-hmm. . Yeah. And a lot of it is just, um, at least from what we do, is just painting the picture to the outside person to show them that it's not, you know, the Big Lebowski, it's a nice restaurant and bar where you can with families to go.

Right. And once you pick that picture, you just, you, I call it, you incept that into their mind. It's like, oh, I wanna take my son. To do that for the birthday party. And that's you. That's the process. Yeah, that's exactly right. You know, and it's funny when, you know, we, a long time ago, Brunswick, we, we had customer service surveys.

You know, you survey all the customers and the scores that go to the corporate office and you get the score for your center. And you know, there are maybe 20 questions and one of the questions was the cleanliness of restaurants. Mm-hmm. Now, I didn't know it at the time, but that was rated 10 times. more than any other question in the form.

Hmm. Because like you said, when you take your kids somewhere, you wanna do something with the family, and you check out the restrooms and they're really clean. Well, you, you think it's great, but you go into a place, right. You know, and you see in the restrooms, you're like, oh my God, you're not gonna stay in that place.

Right. You know? But, and it goes to your, it goes to what you just said, the perception of people in the vision they have when they go into the center. Right. Absolutely

what you're talking about, right? Absolutely. And I, I've always, I've had a theory about that, that, um, you know, the, the way that you take care of your restroom, is a, is a good reflection on how you take care of the rest of your center. Like, kind of like the, the bottom, like the least seen place. It's a good indication of how you take care of the rest of it, whether it's the kitchen or you know, the ball returns or whatever it is.

That's a good indicator. Yeah, and you're exactly right because that people equate that in their minds too. Mm-hmm. , they equate it to must be a clean kitchen, you know? Or must be

the parking. Right when you come into a bit, yeah. When you come in, you step outta your car. You don't wanna be walking through trash to get into the building because the first thing you see, you know, besides the restroom, it's always, it's like, you know, you better keep your parking lot clean all the time because it's the first thing a guest is gonna see when they get outta their car.

Right. Yeah. And that, that's enough. Yeah, that's a, that's a great point.

Sorry. So was that a cutout? What's that? It it cut out at that last, yeah, cut out for a second. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Um, okay. Yeah. Um, we can keep going. Since, uh, I did only, uh, ask you, you know, I wanna keep, uh, respectful of your time. We're at that half hour mark. Um, let's talk a little bit about where you see things going.

So, so the future, the next, you know, two, three years or so, what, what do you see on the horizon? Um, matter of fact, From what I've seen just this last three or four months, uh, from people I've talked to in industry, I see league bowling getting stronger. I mean, it's really a weird phenomenon that most of the people I talked to today have more league bowlers than they had last fall.

Interesting. Okay. And I think it, I, people are looking for something to do, you know? Mm-hmm. organization thing. Mm-hmm. . And I think that's gonna continue strong. Okay. Uh, Out once a week and have fun, have some beers, and go bowl. I think people miss that camaraderie and they miss it a lot during Covid and now they're, and so, mm-hmm.

you know, people may, I started this conversation by saying, league Boeing's gone down so much in the last 25 years, and now, and now I started, I see it coming back and I mm-hmm. and it's coming back in forms of not traditional leagues. People who wanna bowl a 12 league fun league, right? Okay. Like we have a beer, we, we have a beer and pizza league where you pay 20 bucks a week and you get a pitch of beer and you get a large pizza and you bowl three games of bowling and league.

Oh, people eat that up, you know's. And, and so you see that. We see that filling up immediately. Because it's short season, it's not gonna take 30 weeks. And, you know, and, and I also see a lot of adult junior programs doing extremely well. People wanna do stuff with their kids, you know, and so, yeah, we ran one last year on a Sunday morning and it was, it's gonna start in January and.

I had like 12 lanes of hill. I had 28 lanes, which just kind of said, well, I figured we'll get 12 teams of two, you know, while we just promoted in center. And we did a little bit of online marketing through, through Facebook and our, uh, in our database. And we ended up with 28 teams of two. They just kept coming in, you know, and, and I'm like, how did this happen?

And we had, we were just shocked by it, you know. People wanna do stuff with their kids. Right. You know, and so we, I see that being big too, you know? Mm-hmm. and, you know, and the other part is, um, getting whether, what other thing you can do for like a Friday or Saturday night Cosmic, you know, people, there's different innovations out there to, to make the show better, to make the lanes glow or flame off or different things like that.

And I see that continuing to draw people. Okay. Because it's just a night out. It makes it more fun, right? Yeah. More of like an event. Yeah. Yeah. And, and you know, some of the, some of the, um, Mike Brunswick sync the new scoring and I'm not sure if am MF Cubica, but now you can order from the lane. Okay. You just can punch in your order and pay for it.

Right. You know, then it's deliver delivered to you. I think that's huge. Okay. Because that's convenience for people. They don't have to go anywhere. They don't have to wait for a server. Okay. Right. I think that's, that's big too. So, you know, it's all about, but you know, the last thing is you still have to provide great service that, that, that always, that never goes away.

So, you know, say what's coming down the road, you still have to provide great service. But I really think that, you know, you're gonna see more people joining. Fun leagues and you're gonna see, you know, adult juniors and you, you might see a youth program pick up too. Mm-hmm. . Yep. And then that's really kinda the way I see it.

Yeah. Yeah, no, that, that's a great observation. I, I totally agree. Especially on the leagues. Um, a little bit less of the competitive focus and fun focus, like you said, the short leagues. Um, they have one street that I always reference cuz it's, you know, it's a good indication. It's uh, they call it Average Joe's, which is a drinking league with the bowling problem.

And they joke, there you go. It's all, it's all base around drinking, having fun. And it's non sanctioned. , they, they pack it out. It's, it's the busiest league of, at the center. Yeah. And, and it's, and you know why? A couple reasons why. Cause it's fun, people like it. And two, I'm, I'm pretty sure I don't know the league format, but there's no restrictions, meaning open, mixed.

We don't cares. Five guys, four guys, we don't care. Mm-hmm. . See, the problem was with all of our structured leagues, there were too many. Right. You know, oh, I gotta have two women. Oh, I gotta have one guy. Oh, I can't do this or I can't do that. Well, you, you do the average Jolie and you open it up and just say, this is gonna be fun.

There's gonna be a few rules here. Mm-hmm. . Okay. But I think that's a lot to do with it. Yeah. Because people feel more comfortable going, well, we're just here to have fun anyway. Yeah, exactly. That's the whole point. Mm-hmm. and that's the banging, you know what I mean? And you can, you can do those leagues year.

That's the other thing. You don't have to stop 'em in the summertime. Yeah, no, I mean, they mm-hmm. , you know, and, and you know, we had our beer in Pizza league, the one in, um, in, uh, Indianapolis, and it was our biggest drinking night in the bar. Wow. , it was Right. We'd have like 14 teams of these guys and they would stayed all clothes and usually that doesn't happen.

Right. You know? Right. Used to during the week. Yeah, during the, it was during, yeah, it was, it was on a Wednesday. Yeah. Same with them. Yeah. It's their busiest night of the. Yeah. And I think that's, it's just that, and so it becomes more of a social thing for, for people, right. It's social, you know, and that's really what they're looking for is just a good two or three hours of having fun.

Right. Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. Mm-hmm. , I love that. Um, okay, so then the only other thing I wanted to ask is, um, what's the biggest challenge you're seeing today at, at the Centers staff? Staffing. Yep. Staffing. It's, it's, it's, uh, it's hard. I mean, it is . That's a good way to put it. It's hard. . Um, the problem is, is that there's not enough applicants.

Okay. And we've raised our wages quite a bit. Okay. I mean, I, no problem. You know, raised a lot of our pricing and what people pay to bowl and food and beverage. So that we can pay our people more, and we do pay our people more, but it's still very difficult to hire. Yeah. And that, that is, that's the hardest thing for owners and managers and proprietors.

Mm-hmm. being shorthanded all the time because it just leads to a tremendous amount of burnout. Right. Be, you know, and it lasts 12 or 15 months. All these polling centers are reporting great numbers and everybody's doing great, but nobody looks at me. I stab you but killed your people, right? No, I mean, cause it's true.

And so, um, down in my center in Indianapolis, we've hired a lot of 16, 17, and 18 year olds toward one or two shifts, or three or four shifts a month. Mm-hmm. . Okay. So, so you, and you've got a 28 lane center with 33 employees on. Wow. Because, because you're doing that just to get through it. Okay. Right. You know, and it's a lot of training and it's a lot of work from the management point of view, but at least you're getting most of your shifts covered.

Yeah. Okay. And that's, and the problem is, is when you don't do that, it, it, it's hard to manage a lot. I've, I've seen a lot of providers cut back hours of operation, which I don't blame them. Yeah. Cause they just can't, they just can't like open at four o'clock instead of 10 in the. Right. Okay. Because he, yeah, and I, and that's the biggest problem is, is just staffing the centers.

And you've probably heard that, but mm-hmm. , it's, and you can pay 'em 12, 13, 40, \$15 an hour, but it's just, it's hard to do. Yeah. You know, and it's hard to keep people, you know, and that's the thing. And you know, I'm hoping that it gets a little better, but right now, I would say that's the biggest challenge going.

Yeah. It is getting good people to run the centers that, that, that's about, you know, 95 or, or higher percent is, is the, what we hear is staffing right now. Right, right. And it's, you just gotta keep working at it. Mm-hmm. , you know, and that, that's just the thing, you know, you, you know, I mean, have your help one signs in the center, um, post some stuff online, you just gotta keep working at it.

Yeah. And a lot of it, a lot of it. You know, people that just like, that don't need a job. Maybe some seniors or some uh, uh, people who stay at home that don't need a job, but just want to go out and work maybe two or three shifts a week. Right. And that, that is good. You know, because they, they like the bowling business, you know, and that's something

whether it's, you know, restaurants or bars or bowling centers in the entertainment. Is facing the same thing. Yeah. Yeah. And hopefully it'll get better going forward. It, it seems to be softening somewhat, uh, as, uh, unemployment rates rise. It, it's definitely better. Yeah. Um, but yeah, it's still the main struggle.

Um, we, we actually have spent a lot of time helping clients with that because mm-hmm. , we, we can't convince them to marketing more people in the door if they can't even handle what they have now. So we've actually spent a lot of time trying to help fix that problem. Yeah. That's a wicked thing. Mm-hmm.

right. It's more traffic in your bowling center, but you better have the staff to take care of it. Yeah, that's usually the first question, that I, right. I mean, but that's, I mean, and, and so they have to decide that they have to get the staff to do it. Otherwise, what you're doing for them is not, wow. Know.

It's not good. Like, makes it worse. One guy.

The back, you know, because you've, once you drive them in, you gotta take care of 'em. Right. . Exactly. You know, it's, it's, you're, you're exactly right about that. Mm-hmm. . Yeah. So, yeah, we, we spent a lot of that. A lot of it comes down to, Um, getting the, the message out in front of more

people. Mm-hmm. . So there's a huge, there's a lot bigger percentage of people who are willing to make a switch than what people realize.

It's actually what, 25% of the people mm-hmm. open to a chain and then it's competing on things that you can win at. wages are not one of them. You know, you can go to warehouse on the street and start at 22 an hour. Um, but that you, you know, compare that work environment to working at a bowling center.

It's, it's night and day, you know, you get your flexibility. It's more fun and laid back. You get some free bowling, maybe discounts on food, uh, and, you know, maybe some more growth opportunities. If you can find people who value that more than just the starting wage, then, then you got some winners. Yeah. And that's, and that's exactly what we do with the uncle people, the 6 80, 17 year olds who, that's exactly what we do.

We provide a, a fun environment for them to work in. Right. You know, you can go to Harvey's and make 1450 an hour mm-hmm. and it won't be very much fun. Exactly. For the warehouse, or you work for us for 11 or \$12 an hour. Mm-hmm. , and we're gonna treat you really well. Mm-hmm. and, you know, You know, the, the environment will be better.

You'll Exactly, you'll enjoy yourself more in your job. Right. And I think that's, that's important. That's very important. I think it was always like that, even before we had a hard time hiring people. Mm-hmm. , it was, it's always been like that. You build your teams on how well you treat people, you know, and, and, you know, and, and how they actually like coming to work, you know?

And I, I think that, that, that's a big. . Yeah. And, and you've just gotta, you know, you just gotta keep working at it, you know? And it has a lot to do with your management team and how well see they brain and treat people. Mm-hmm. . Yeah. You got, you know, Brunswick, you say one of the four things that are our mission vision statement.

The first one is treat people right? Mm-hmm. , whether it's customers or your internal customers, your, your, uh, your, uh, employees. . Yeah, exactly. I mean, if, if you don't have good retention, there's not anything getting us getting even more applications is gonna fix, you know, you're just gonna listen as fast as they come in the door.

Yeah. You know, and that's, you know, and that's the thing, you know, and you know, when you, we talk about marketing, you're helping people with marketing, just like hiring. You have to focus on the

correct. You know, I mean, if you're coming into my center and saying, well, Tom, well you want, we want you to drive more birthday party businesses, more, you know, families and this and this.

Well, that's what the marketing is gonna dive into the center. You know, and, and, and I think that's important when you're talking about marketing, is you have to focus on what your one, two, or three big bullet points are. What do you want to do? What do you wanna try? Because the message has to be heard multiple times like you.

I've heard six times, I don't know, maybe that number's too low, that the message that a customer has to see something, whether it's in print, whether it's in text, whether it's in email, whether it's in social media, they probably gotta see it five or six times before they decide to make the switch, you know?

And that's where I think you can be really strong in marketing if you stay at it and stay focused. Right. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. You, you gotta know, like you said, you gotta know what you're offering, what, what you're offering. Let's, let's to start Yeah. And how to execute on once they're inside the building.

Mm-hmm. . Yeah, absolutely. Well, uh, Tom, I could talk to you about this stuff all day. Um, but, uh, I do wanna respect your time. Um, okay. For, for people who are interested in, you know, your consulting services or wanna get in touch with some questions, what would be the best way to, uh, reach out to you? Um, You know, I, I, my email address, you know, which I have a, my, my bowling center or my personal email address is fine.

It's, it's my, my email address is T Funk 99. 2 0 9 at Gmail. Mm-hmm. . Okay. And, you know, that's just the best way. Usually I answer most of the consulting, I use that, that email address. Perfect. Yeah. And you know, and once I get an email, then I just reach out and, and through an email and, and call the person.

And that's usually through the consulting I do, whether it's in, usually it's market studies, but sometimes I'll do operations consulting. It's the same thing. Mm-hmm. . Yeah. And so, you know, you can go to my websites, but that's just mostly boring. related, you know, highway lane and chip, wall Bowl, so, right.

But yeah, that's the, that's the best way to do it. Okay. Awesome. Yeah, and I, I can vouch that, uh, you know, you do an excellent job. You know, that we got con connected through one of your clients

and couldn't be out there . I might have gotten lucky. No, I'm just kidding. . had the, the DART .
Yeah. How do you know that?

Yeah, so that was funny. He's a good guy. Yeah. No, that's awesome. Great. Well, yeah, thanks again
so much for coming on, Tom. I've, I've really enjoyed it. We'll have to do another one time. Okay.
Thank you for, it was good. All right. Take care. Yep. Bye-Bye.