

Bowler Journal

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36TH ANNUAL

2020 BJI ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN AWARDS

COVID met its match in the ingenuity, imagination and daring of designers, architects and owners in a difficult environment.

Exterior Solution: COVID ensured the importance of chic exterior spaces to any center's bottom line, such as this one at the modernized Sun Valley Lanes.

It may be a tired saying, but 2020 has given it new life: From great challenge comes great opportunity. Possibly no event in our industry's history has demanded more ingenuity, imagination, and grit from architects, designers and proprietors than COVID-19.

Resulting from that resourcefulness may be permanent changes in customer behavior, daring design and architectural flourishes that exceed previously accepted limitations on ways a given building can appeal to those new behaviors, and revolutionizing concepts in HVAC and air filtration systems that will be with us long after COVID becomes a distant memory.

Some of the behavioral changes COVID has inspired in customers, says principal architect Howard Ellman of Dynamic Design, already were in their incipient stages before the pandemic struck.

"Guest-controlled, hands-free interaction was something that was beginning before COVID," says Ellman of one way bowling centers in the 2020s are uniquely positioned to facilitate social distancing, "and it will probably continue after COVID. You don't have to walk up to a customer service counter. You can do everything from an app. You don't have to even speak to anybody when you come in. You have a reservation, you go to your spot, you know where to go. Everything's worked out with an app or some sort of hands-free, guest-controlled application."

That hardly is the only way guest interaction with a given entertainment facility might change for good.

"People are going to want their own little space," Ellman predicts of the post-COVID world. And the ways designers satisfy that craving for privacy and smaller, more intimate socialization spaces do not begin and end with plexiglass and curtains. A little imagination makes the possibilities seemingly endless.

"You create pods where people are separate from each other, where you have a walkway, and off to the right you have pods that are spaced six feet apart, and you're in your own little area," Ellman says. "Everything is put together or placed so that all the attention is focused toward the middle of your pod. You're talking into your pod rather than talking out from your pod. It's like a circle, or it could be a square or an octagon. The important thing is that everything is oriented toward the center of your space."

At Thunder Road in Sioux Falls, S.D., co-owner and general manager Ryan Friez also is exploring ways to facilitate distancing that go beyond the obvious options of plexiglass or other hard-and-fast means of dividing people and spaces.

"We've got more than 30,000 square feet of space, so what we've tried to do is just sometimes face games in different directions, encouraging customers to not get inside a game together



Curtain Call: HeyDay Entertainment in Denison, Texas, adopted a mix of temporary and permanent curtains to facilitate distancing and accommodate smaller groups amid COVID.

but rather wait until one person is done,” Friez says. “From a medical standpoint, those barriers [such as plexiglass] can themselves be an issue because people touch them, so they can be an additional contact point.”

Contact points were a topic of such concern at Thunder Road that the decision was made to bring in axe throwing as an entertainment option specifically because of the ease with which that kind of attraction can be sanitized.

“You’re just sanitizing the axes, because that’s your main touch point,” he says. “We have four axe-throwing lanes, and every lane is a separate lane so that you’re not touching the person next to you or coming into that close contact. Those are things you can still participate in and have that separation so everybody feels comfortable.”

Adding axe-throwing “was a really important decision,” Friez says, “just to say, ‘We can’t have that many things people are going to be touching and sharing.’ Especially with the kids, who wouldn’t necessarily know to not participate in those kinds of activities, and we wouldn’t want to have to shut down any of our attractions.”

For centers that are not willing to venture into a still relatively burgeoning entertainment option such as axe-throwing, even a detail a customer might take for granted, such as an establishment’s furniture, is something designers are looking at in a different way thanks to COVID.

“With all the couches that we have in the bowler seating area, a lot of the time we’ll build those couches together, like in a booth,” says principal architect Shane Labeth of Cornerstone Architecture. “It’s one piece, whereas now we’ll probably build those couches as two pieces so that we can separate them and provide that curtain.”

Like Ellman, Friez believes some of the expectations and behaviors generated by COVID will outlast the virus.

“We’re a part of creating memories for families and for friends and for day couples, and I think there will be more of that mentality of, ‘If I’m going to go out, I’m going to make that intentional time to be with family and friends.’ Sometimes, people used to show up and say, ‘I’m just here to hang out and meet people.’ But I think pre-arranged groups and maybe some much smaller groups might become behaviors, just because

it’s something we’ve been living with for months now, as well as enjoying more of that outdoor experience. So these things might change the amount of revenue you’re doing outside of the building versus inside.”

Just as COVID has driven people more to the relative comfort an outdoor experience provides at a time when closer contact indoors is discouraged, profit centers, too, are expanding their horizons beyond a building’s immediate physical boundaries.

“We went ahead and finished out the patio,” says Friez. “We wanted an outdoor space for dining in case this is still going on next spring. We will be prepared with that outdoor experience.”

“We also moved a picnic shelter pretty close to our building as well, something that we previously might have destroyed but we said, ‘Let’s save this space and use this,’ just because outdoors really has been where things have pivoted to. Even though we’re building an indoor center, we need to have that ability to have that outdoor space as well to try to pivot around restrictions with COVID.”

That pivot to the outdoors does not have to be a deal-stopper for centers in colder climates such as Sioux Falls, however. Ellman suggests that, “We can do it the way we do it in restaurants, where we put plastic that comes down and use heaters. We’re doing that in restaurants. They’re essentially creating these indoor-outdoor spaces, but they’re flexible. In the summer, they can roll it up, and in the winter, you just bring it down, zip up the plastic, put it together and have heaters and, boom, you’ve got it.”

For those who still find themselves captured by memories of the quaint old days when people could congregate without any fear of encountering someone else’s “droplets,” one of the least sexy aspects of running an entertainment center is coming through: HVAC and air filtration technology.

“We put in a more advanced HVAC system that had additional filtration features,” Friez says. “We spent a little more money to try to get systems that could keep the air as clean as possible, because obviously that’s a huge issue right now, just to make sure you’re giving your customers as clean an experience as you can.”

For Ellman, who marvels at the advanced nature of today’s air-filtration solutions, that technology is like something out of

a Star Trek episode.

“We have some clients ask us, ‘How can I change the air conditioning in my facility so that viruses can’t come through?’ So we took a look at that. We found a custom company that put together air conditioning systems with UV lights, and all the air that goes through it has to go through the UV light, and what comes out then is free of viruses. That’s something I never imagined I would have to get into.”

Implicit in Ellman’s anecdote is the fact that, in a year in which it might have been easy simply to hit the pause button on a project or cancel it altogether as COVID tightened budgets — and closed customers’ wallets — enough projects still forged ahead that 46 entries poured into the 2020 BJI Architecture & Design Awards. To Gary Smith, co-owner of US Design Lab, that is not surprising.

Speaking of a modernization project called The Fun Factor in Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada, Smith recalls that, “What was impressive was the proprietor’s commitment, as he didn’t hit the brakes with COVID, but pressed on with the project knowing it was the right thing to do for his business long-term.”

That said, Smith concedes that, “He owns the property, so some people who may be leasing may not look at it the same way.”

Smith, like Ellman, committed himself to helping centers open in the face of a pandemic’s headwinds as prepared as possible to meet the unique customer demands those headwinds brought with them.

“We made some tweaks, that’s for sure,” he says of projects of his that already were underway when COVID hit. “When you look at the facility, if you were to walk into it today, it’s

designed in a way that is not intended to be long-term.” he says, alluding to Generations Adventureplex in Mishawaka, Ind. “Right now, there are fewer games out of the box, which no one in their right mind would have done before. There is less seating out in the dining area, there’s bocce in it that’s got a little bit more space allocated to it that wasn’t there before. And it’s the same way with the upstairs area. The bowling seating is pretty much the same, but some of the layout is meant for, hopefully, the short term — you know, six to nine months, with the intention of growing to what it’s supposed to be.”

As short-term as those with any stake in the business may hope COVID’s impact will be, Smith believes some of the design implications of that impact may become permanent.

“We’ve done a Stars and Strikes in North Carolina, an FEC overseas, and [The Fun Factor], and with all those projects, the whole look and feel — the cleanliness, the signage — I think all of that will remain a permanent part of this business moving forward,” he says. “Even though, eventually, people will no longer adhere to the social distancing, people are still going to have the decals and the signage. People might not think that they absolutely need it, but I think they’re going to continue to have all the cleaning practices and all the sanitization stations and things like that.

“Back when this first started, we put out a PDF that quite a few people grabbed onto about commitments to cleanliness and things like that,” he adds. “That’s all going to be top-of-mind for years to come.”

Even amid a year as fraught with challenge as this one, designers, architects, proprietors and manufacturers all speak with varying degrees of bullishness about the future of the entertainment center in a post-COVID world.





**GENERATIONS
ADVENTUREPLEX
MISHAWAKA, IND.**

Space Race: COVID-19 has sent designers and proprietors alike racing to maximize a building's space to facilitate distancing while still providing a memorable experience (Generations Adventureplex, Mishawaka, Ind.)

For Labeth, it's as simple as this: "If you can be careful in a restaurant, then you can be careful in a bowling entertainment center," he says. "I do believe the business will come back. I think people are waiting on COVID, I think they were waiting on the election, I think they're waiting to see how things are going to go, but at some point, I still think it's a great model, a great business to be in, and it will bounce back."

For Shawn Butler, VP of construction and service at Brunswick, "COVID has thrown us a curve ball, and we think there's probably going to be some fallout with mom-and-pop centers that are closing up, but we firmly believe that in about a year to two years from now, there probably will be an even bigger uptick in new construction because of the appeal of the whole family entertainment center concept. We're really upbeat."

For a promising prologue to that point, Butler looks to the not-too-distant past.

"I've been with Brunswick for 33 years now, so I've seen the whole history of what's occurred with regard to the reinvention of bowling [particularly with its trend toward the FEC model], and in the past six, seven years, we have built more new centers in the U.S. than we have probably going back into the 1970s."

Ellman's bullishness is a bit more tempered than Butler's, but he is bullish nonetheless.

"Talking to my clients, they think it's going to be some time

before it goes back to where it was before," he says. "And they know. We have great clients who are doing multiple units around the country. I think it's going to come back a little faster once there's a vaccine. My clients were thinking three years; I'm thinking one to two years after a vaccine, it will come back."

Friez believes that centers that went into this year with a loyal following will bounce back more easily, but that, "It's going to take some time to build this up, and it's going to take some encouragement from the public showing their support of existing venues before you see developers jump back in and start building new places."

It is an interesting term, "new places." The places our industry will put up in the future will, in many ways, be familiar — the sport at the heart of their establishments still will be the one loved by readers of this magazine, but what might be "new" is an attention to cleanliness that is more heightened than ever before, and design elements geared toward satisfying that need more completely than at any time in our industry's history.

No doubt, 2020 has been a tough year for our business. But if those are among the outcomes this year yields, well, the sport and business of bowling only will stand to benefit on the other side.

Here is a look at the honorees in the 2020 BJI Architecture & Design Awards. . .



UP2PLAY
LES SABLES D'OLONNE, FRANCE

BEST NEW CENTER

UP2PLAY **LES SABLES D'OLONNE, FRANCE**

If you experience a second of boredom here, check your pulse. Artificial wave surfing, Hyper Bowling, a trampoline park, escape rooms and, oh yeah, bowling, comprise a mere portion of the entertainment options available at this sprawling fun hub.

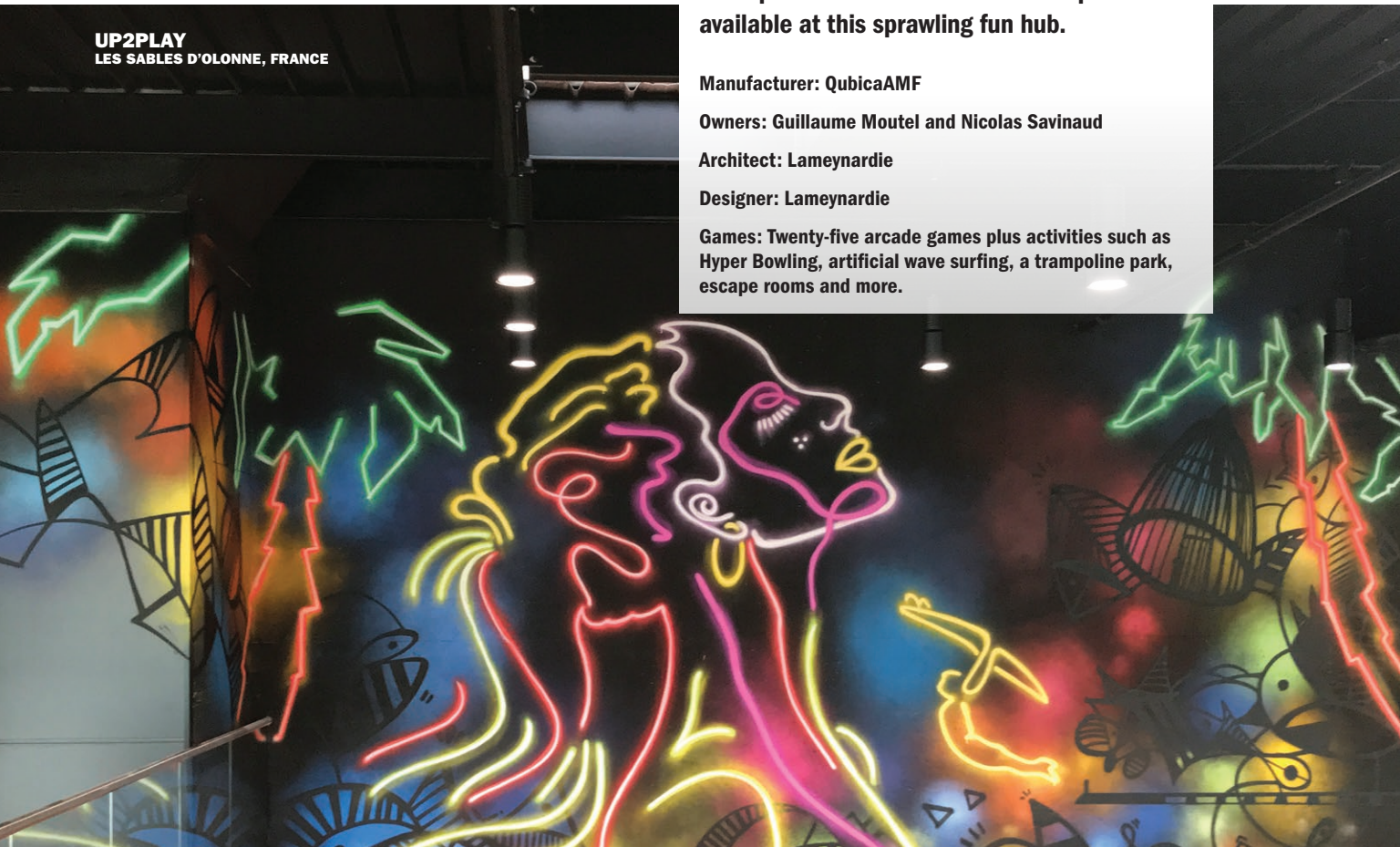
Manufacturer: QubicaAMF

Owners: Guillaume Moutel and Nicolas Savinaud

Architect: Lameynardie

Designer: Lameynardie

Games: Twenty-five arcade games plus activities such as Hyper Bowling, artificial wave surfing, a trampoline park, escape rooms and more.



UP2PLAY
LES SABLES D'OLONNE, FRANCE

BEST NEW CENTER
FEC HONORABLE MENTION

OZONE X
MADRID, SPAIN

The vast spaces this throbbing FEC provides perfectly responds to the strange moment COVID-19 presents to the industry. But whether times are strange or normal, this facility's 89 redemption games, bumper cars, virtual reality offerings and more ensure good times are in the offing.

Manufacturer: QubicaAMF

Owners: Ozone and Orenes Bowling S.L.

Designer: Oscar Vidal Studio

Games: 25 Hyper Bowling Lanes, Bumper Cars, Virtual



BEST NEW CENTER
ANCILLARY PROFIT

THUNDER ROAD
SIOUX FALLS, S.D.

Co-owner Ryan Friez had to pivot a bit as COVID struck while this project was underway, but patrons can rest assured that its more than 30,000 square feet enable ample room to spread out and safely distance from one another while still having a blast among its 38 game stations and 63 games altogether. Mini golf, axe throwing, go karts and laser tag complement the bowling for a full-scale blitz of entertainment options.

Manufacturer: QubicaAMF

Owners: Ryan Friez, Al Novstrup, Scott Sperry, John Sperry, Annette Wolfe

Architects: Cornerstone Architecture

Designers: Cornerstone Architecture/Brand New Designs (Betsy McClanahan)

Games: Bowling, Go Karts, Mini Golf, Axe Throwing, 38 game stations, 63 games overall.





**BEST NEW CENTER
BEST NEW LOUNGE
/RESTAURANT, INTERNATIONAL**

**RECREATIE PARK
HET WINKLE**

**WINTERSWIJK, GELDERLAND,
NETHERLANDS**

If flamingos are not the first thing that come to mind when you think of the Netherlands, you are yet to visit this swanky establishment in Gelderland, where their dashing pink likeness glows against obsidian sidewall treatment as guests drink and dine in a tony lounge.

Manufacturer: QubicaAMF/Bowltech

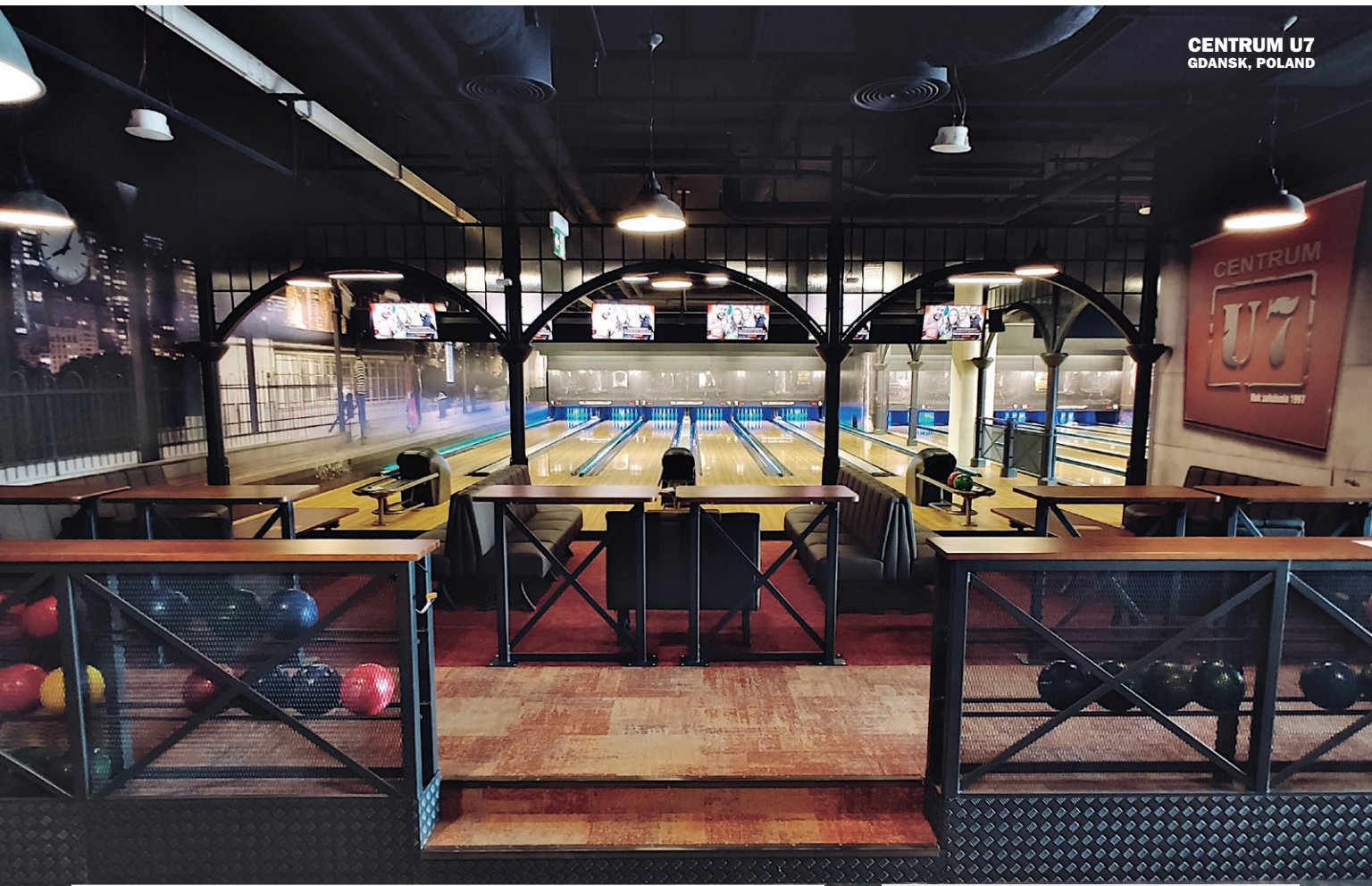
Owner: Bertie Reuselink

Specialty Lighting: Light 4 Bowling

Games: Bowling



CENTRUM U7
GDANSK, POLAND



**BEST NEW CENTER
INTERIOR, INTERNATIONAL**

CENTRUM U7
GDANSK, POLAND

The industrial-chic environs of this new hangout in Gdansk, Poland add a dose of urban grit with graffiti-laden sidewall treatment by Dariusz Rybinski at Magic ART.

Manufacturer: QubicaAMF

Owner: Anderzej Krzywicki

Architect: Bernatek Architekci

Designer: Bernatek Architekci/Magic ART

Games: Bowling, Billiards, Darts

**BEST MODERNIZED CENTER
LOUNGE/RESTAURANT, U.S.**

**PARADISE ISLAND
BOWL AND BEACH
PITTSBURGH, PA.**

No one dreamed of hitting the beach in Pittsburgh until this 60-year-old center transformed into Paradise Bowl and Beach, where guests can get in their volleyball kicks on a sandy beach and enjoy an outdoor dining experience along the Ohio River. Additional entertainment options include 35 arcade games, axe throwing, Hyper Bowling, horseshoes and bocce.

Manufacturer: QubicaAMF

Owner: Brian Saunier

Architects: Sullivan Design

Designer: Sullivan Design

Game: 35 Arcade Games, Axe Throwing, Hyper Bowling, Horseshoes and Bocce.



**BEST MODERNIZED CENTER
INTERIOR, U.S.**

**GAMETIME LANES
& ENTERTAINMENT
AMESBURY, MASS.**

Among the latest achievements by industry veteran Dynamic Design, this dashing makeover ensured the more than 30-year-old center would be unrecognizable to patrons of its prior incarnation. Classy, modern, sleek and roomy, Gametime Lanes & Entertainment brings to its community a new vibe for a new moment in an industry focused on an elevated experience.

Manufacturer: QubicaAMF

Owners: Fursey Keleghan, Jeff Lajoie, Tony Sorrentino, Anthony DeCotis

Architects: Dynamic Designs

Designer: Dynamic Designs

Games: Forty Games, Bowling, Redemption



**GAMETIME LANES & ENTERTAINMENT
AMESBURY, MASS.**

SUN VALLEY LANES
LINCOLN, NEB.

BEST MODERNIZED CENTER
FEC

SUN VALLEY LANES
LINCOLN, NEB.

Though owner John Losito was a little weary about his decision to start this expansive renovation project at this 43-year-old center once COVID struck just as it had gotten underway, he stayed the course and ended up with a spectacularly reimagined exterior to complement a host of FEC offerings inside, including bowling, laser tag, volleyball, mini golf and a 27-game arcade.

Manufacturer: QubicaAMF

Designer: US Design Lab

Owner: John Losito

Games: Bowling, Laser Tag, Mini Golf, Volleyball, 27-Game Arcade

Architects: Architectural Design Associates



EURO-CITY
PARTYCENTER
LIEVGEN, BELGIUM

BEST MODERNIZED CENTER
INTERIOR, INTERNATIONAL

EURO-CITY
PARTYCENTER
LIEVGEN, BELGIUM

Fifteen of this 20-year-old center's original 21 lanes were replaced with string-pin machines as owner Dimitri Willie sought to "bring his business completely up to date according to the latest standards in bowling equipment." Willie "also opted for a BES X Ultimate upgrade and Hyper Bowling on eight lanes for the ultimate customer experience." A playground and glow mini golf ensure an FEC experience that hits the spot for kids and adults alike.

Manufacturer: QubicaAMF/Bowltech

Owner: Dimitri Willie

Games: Mini Golf, Bowling

