BUSINESS

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Bowling alley rolls out new leagues

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

Harley Droba

Larry Davison

STAFF PHOTO BY SPENSER BICKETT
IHOB co-owner Harley Droba, far right, leads the league meeting for the Wednesday night mixed league.

Going into its third year, the International House of Bowling is offering new leagues, as well as revamped services for bowlers.

An afternoon league, a Sunday youth league, a nine-pin jackpot league and a Canadian/American league are offered for the upcoming season, co-owner Harley Droba said. The leagues are geared towards all levels of bowlers — some set up with a laid-back atmosphere.

The No. 1 reason IHOB chose to expand its league offerings for the coming season is excitement, he said.

"There's a lot of people that are looking to get back into bowling," he said. "Whether it was from the old bowling alley, or they haven't bowled since (Roxie and Randy Little) had it, or whatever it was, people are slowly starting to come back."

Jim Woods, who is bowling in the Monday night men's league for the second year in a row, said he was persuaded by some friends to start bowling again after a long hiatus.

"I used to do youth bowling in Canada, but I hadn't touched a ball in 20 years," he said. "A bunch of my friends wanted to do a men's team."

Local teens who are interested in bowling can join the new high school bowling team starting this year as well. The team is open to seventh through 12th grade students in Indus, Littlefork and International Falls. The youth teams are coached by John Sandberg, Ralph Ruelle and Larry Davison. Droba said one draw for students is the amount of college scholarship money available to bowlers interested in bowling for a college team.

"There's a lot of scholarship money available, specifically for young ladies because of Title IX," Droba said. "The (Minnesota) state high school league said, when we ended up getting certified, if you're a young lady with an average of about 140, which is not difficult at all, you can pretty much get anywhere between $4,000 to a full ride for college."

Jessica Dotzler, a senior at Falls High School, began bowling when Sandberg, a social studies teacher at the school, told her about the bowling team in class.

"It sounded like a good idea, it's definitely something different that we don't have in this town," she said.

Dotzler's previous bowling experience was limited to casual bowling with her friends, she said, adding she looks forward to the new experiences the team can give her.

"I'm looking to have a good time and enjoy myself, maybe make some new friends and meet people along the way," she said. "It's fun learning how to bowl."

Also offered this year is a nine-pin jackpot league. The league is designed to credit bowlers with a strike if nine pins are knocked down on the first roll. Droba said there will also be colored pins in certain locations, which when knocked down, wins the jackpot, which starts at $1,500.

ALLEY HISTORY

When Droba, along with Larry Bement, purchased the alley in 2010, they began fixing up the machines and getting everything updated and in working order. However, he said they lacked the bowling expertise, which is where a new face came in.

"We've had a lot of success getting things going, but we didn't have the expertise on the bowling side, and that's what Larry (Davison) brings to the table now," Droba said.

Davison is IHOB's house pro, and he runs the new pro shop, which offers shoes, balls and other accessories, as well as services like ball drilling. Though he hasn't ran a pro shop before, during his 30 years of experience bowling, he said he's worked with professionals and seen everything that goes into running a pro shop.

"We had somebody come in and work with us, to train two of us to be able to work with the bowling balls and the equipment," Davison said. "I'm used to doing crafts and building, I come from the construction industry and I have a sales background."

Woods owns Stride Fitness and J2M Apparel, and as a fellow business owner, he said he's impressed with how Droba and others have turned the bowling alley around the past few years.

"I can see the buzz they've created, which is a difficult part about getting a business off the ground," he said. "They're creative, interesting businesspeople, with interesting ideas."

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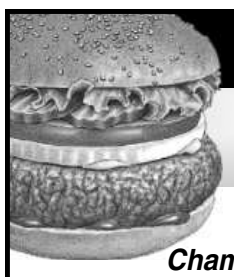
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