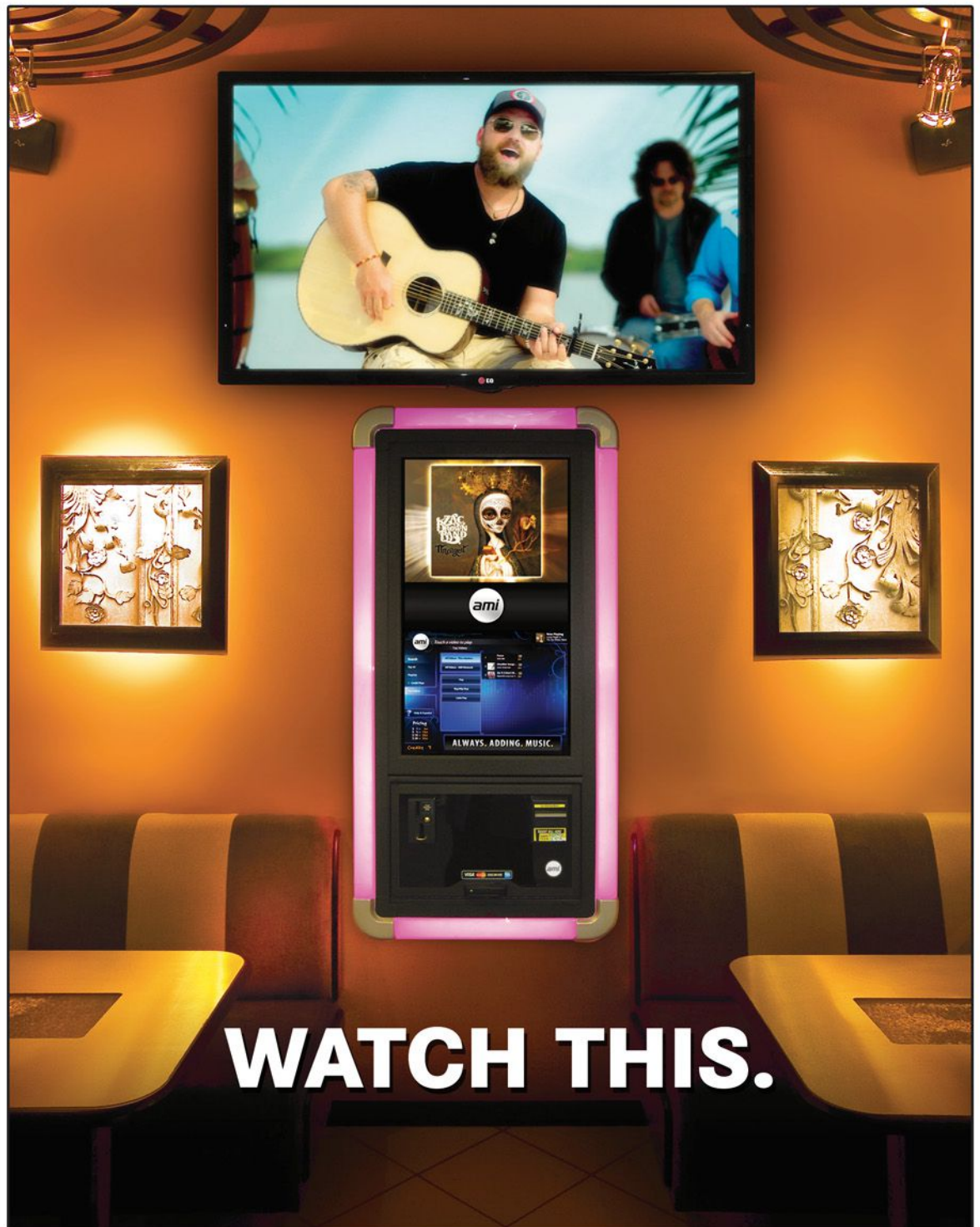


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the key  
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## On the Cover

Music videos have been an elusive entertainment component that the coin-op world has not been able to monetize, until now. Thanks to AMI Entertainment Network, music videos will soon be available for AMI's popular NGX digital downloading jukebox. *Play Meter* spoke with Mike Maas, President and CEO of AMI, for an update and more details.

## 35 AMOA Mid-Year

The Mid-Year Meeting was held Sept. 6-9 at the Hyatt Regency Jersey City on the Hudson in Jersey City, N.J., across from New York City. *Play Meter* has coverage of committee meetings, officer elections, and entertainment at this annual event.

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The International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) Expo 2013, which takes place Nov. 18-22 at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Fla., features a wide variety of networking opportunities and special events designed to connect peers, inspire minds, and spur innovation.

## 44 Family Fun: Laser Tag

Laser tag is firmly entrenched as a staple in family entertainment centers (FECs) across the country. We checked in with several companies that provide laser tag systems to find out more about their history, what they offer, and how their systems work. Companies appear in alphabetical order.

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**BONNIE THEARD**  
Editor

**We want to hear from you about any of the articles in this issue or topics you'd like to see.**

**E-mail:**  
**([editorial@playmeter.net](mailto:editorial@playmeter.net))**

In case anyone is wondering, the operating community is in good hands if the Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA) Mid-Year Board Meeting is any indication. The Principal Officers and Board of Directors have a firm commitment to the preservation and growth of the industry. They are working together to explore all opportunities for the education and advancement of AMOA members and the good of the industry overall.

This year the AMOA Mid-Year took place at the Hyatt Regency Jersey City on the Hudson in Jersey City, N.J., across from Manhattan. This was the first time this meeting has taken place on the East Coast. Guests included representatives from the American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA). The two groups work closely together in joint sponsorship of the Amusement Expo in the spring.

Both organizations share common concerns and are dedicated to doing what's right for the industry. AMOA has joined with AAMA in its quarterly travels to Capitol Hill, most recently Sept. 17-18. Those visits help develop relationships with legislators who become more aware of our industry and understand the impact of legislation on the small businesses that make up our industry.

Members of the AMOA Board of Directors make a commitment of time and energy, as well as a financial commitment since they travel on their own nickel to events such as the Mid-Year. While committee conference calls are regularly scheduled, the Board also meets face to face twice a year: at the Mid-Year and before the Amusement Expo.

Increasing the general membership is always a focus, as well as new faces on the Board of Directors. Tracy Ferris of A&M Amusement said, "We need to replenish the class of new directors. This is the lifeblood of our association."

The list of AMOA benefits is formidable: Notre Dame Management Program; new Road Scholar Program; Coin-Op Cares Charitable Foundation; Wayne Hesch Scholarship Program, which has given more than \$1 million in scholarships to deserving students since its inception in 1983; annual Council of Affiliated States Meeting; Off the Top newsletter; Coupon Program; Innovator Awards that highlight outstanding new products for the marketplace; assistance for operators wishing to form a state association; and co-sponsorship of the Amusement Expo.

No organization can continue to do its work without the support of its members, both in association dues but also in active participation. Anyone who has even mildly considered throwing their hat in the ring for a spot on the Board of Directors should come forward. The camaraderie and benefits of peer networking and accomplishing goals cannot be measured. Friendships continue for a lifetime. You always have a friend in another state that shares common ground and can share solutions to common problems.

This quote from Kenny Vaccaro, Safety on the New Orleans Saints NFL team, fits perfectly: "We are all in competition but we're all still trying to help each other get better each and every day."

If you have not visited the AMOA Web site lately, now is the time ([www.amoa.com](http://www.amoa.com)); (800)937-2662. Every call and inquiry is met with a friendly response and every effort is made to help or point you in the right direction. ▲



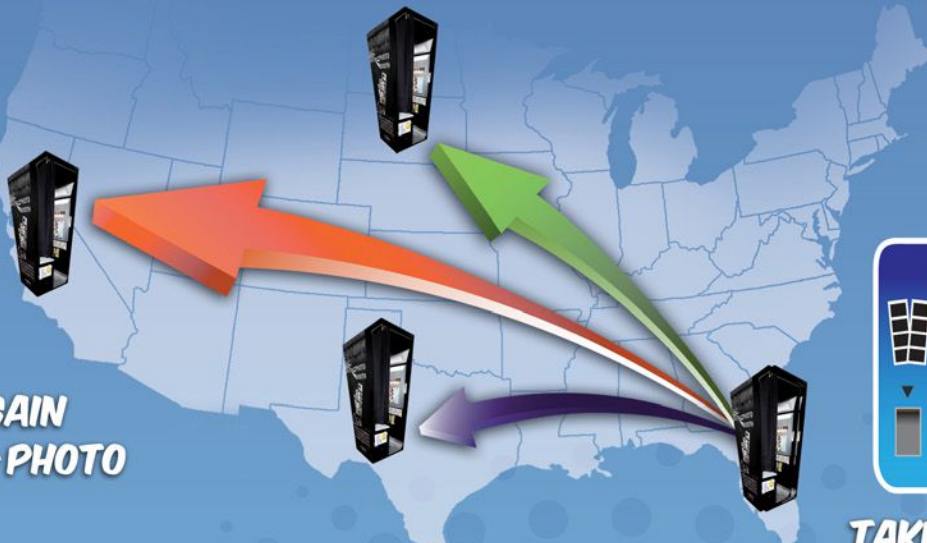
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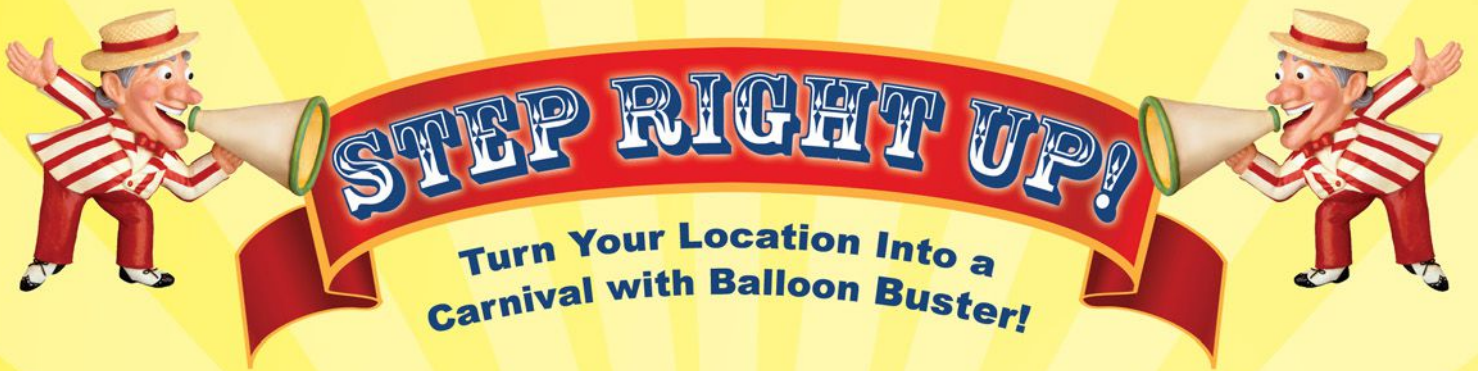
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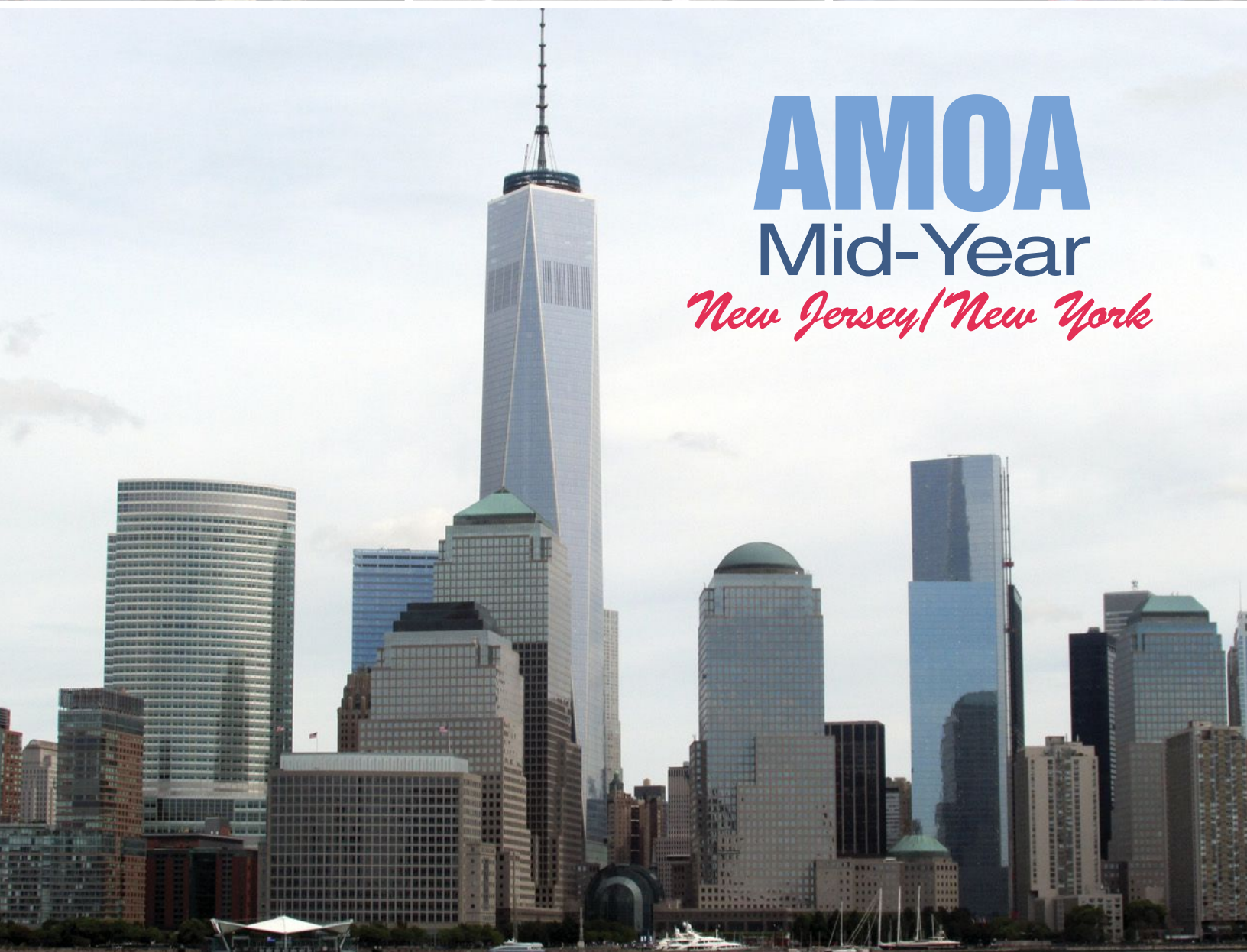
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# AMOA

## Mid-Year

*New Jersey/New York*



Principals Officers for 2014, (l-r): Rick LaFleur of I.F. LaFleur & Son, Gaines Butler of Metro Distributors, Jerry Johnston of Amusement Unlimited, and Bobby Hogin of Hogin Amusement. Photo by AMOA



Vice President Class of 2017, (l-r): Chip O'Hara of Midwest Coin Concepts, Mary Lavine of Bullseye Games, and Tracy Ferris of A&M Amusement. Photo by AMOA



AMOA President John Pascaretti (l) and Andy Shaffer, Immediate Past President of AMOA.



Rick and Shirley LaFleur (l) of I.F. LaFleur & Son and Linda and John Schultz of AAMA.

## The tip-off was a **red apple**

**T**he first inkling that the Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA) Mid-Year Board Meeting would take place on the East Coast came at the association's Spring Board Meeting before the Amusement Expo in March. An apple had been placed at the seat of each board member. It did not take long for the group to make the connection.

The Mid-Year Meeting was held Sept. 6-9 at the Hyatt Regency Jersey City on the Hudson in Jersey City, N.J., across from New York City. The hotel provided sweeping views of the Manhattan skyline including the new Freedom Tower and the Empire State

Building. This is the first time this meeting has been held on the East Coast.

AMOA President John Pascaretti and his wife Shirley welcomed members of the AMOA Board of Directors and their spouses. Guests included representatives from the American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA): John and Linda Schultz, Pete and Erin Gustafson, and John and Julie Margold. AAMA and AMOA co-sponsor the Amusement Expo in the spring.

Additional guests included Amusement Expo Show Manager Brian Glasgow of W.T. Glasgow Inc., Legislative Counsel Mike Zolandz of Denton, Mike

Maas of AMI Entertainment and Julie Schieni, Joe Ingui of Betson Enterprises, Phil and Jill Cohn of TouchTunes, and John Maurer of Coast to Coast Entertainment.

Maurer accepted a check for \$5,000 from AMOA's Coin-Op Cares Charitable Foundation to the New Jersey Amusement Association (NJAA) to support its partnership with the RAINE (Reaching All In Need Everyday) Foundation that helps fund school supplies for children whose families, homes, and schools were affected by Superstorm Sandy.

Members of the Board of Directors traveled to Jersey City for three days of

# AMOA MID-YEAR BOARD MEETING



From left: John Margold of AMI Entertainment, Randy Bergman of Daart Amusement, Pete Gustafson of AAMA, and Jerry Johnston of Amusement unlimited.



From left: Gaines Butler of Metro Distributors, Russell Minter of Stick With Us Amusements, Vince Gumma of AVS, Mary Lavine of Bullseye Games, and Bobby Hogin of Hogin Amusement.



From left: Gaines and Sue Butler of Metro Distributors, Randy Bergman of Daart Amusement, and Mary Lavine of Bullseye Games.



Seated: Reeda and Jeff George of Wyoming Amusement; standing, Mary Ann and Ed Wilson of Wilson's Amusement.

committee meetings and social events that provided ample time for networking as well as enjoying visits to Manhattan and the surrounding areas.

A spouse program offered a variety of activities, such as a visit to the 9/11 Memorial at the World Trade Center, the Statue of Liberty, and time for shopping. Golfers managed to find a course nearby in their free time.

Many attendees took advantage of the opportunity to take in a Broadway play, "Newsies," which had the distinction of being named the play with the best score and best choreography. It lived up to the honor.

Attendees enjoyed the atmosphere in Manhattan's neighborhoods and enjoyed delicacies such as Peking Duck at Peking Duck House in Chinatown, cannoli and gelato at Ferrara Bakery and Cafe (since 1892) in Little

Italy where a festival was under way, and hot corned beef and pastrami sandwiches at Katz's Delicatessen (since 1888) downtown. The finale was a dinner cruise on the Atlantica on Sept. 9.

## FUTURE LEADERSHIP

The slate of Principal Officers to take office next March at the Amusement Expo was announced: President, Bobby Hogin of Hogin Amusement; First Vice President, Jerry Johnston of Amusement Unlimited; Treasurer, Gaines Butler of Metro Distributors; and Secretary, Rick LaFleur of I.F. LaFleur & Son.

In addition, three new Vice Presidents, Class of 2017, were selected: Mary Lavine of Bullseye Games, Chip O'Hara of Midwest Coin Concepts, and Tracy Ferris of A&M Amusement.

## DOWN TO BUSINESS

There were 20 committee meetings covering such areas as: Innovator Awards, promotions, membership, Hesch Scholarship promotions, new director task force, state associations, the Notre Dame and continuing education programs, PAC fundraising, and plans for the education program for the Amusement Expo 2014.

Pascaretti said, "The meetings have been lively and productive." Jerry Johnston of Amusement Unlimited said, "It's good to see all of the Board members and their spouses and to catch up on what they're doing. Everyone seems more positive about the economy."

Regarding the education program for Amusement Expo 2014, which will be a full day before the two days of exhibits in the new show format, Rick LaFleur of I.F. LaFleur & Son said,

## AMOA MID-YEAR BOARD MEETING



Seated: Vickie and Chip O'Hara; standing: Laura and Marty Murin of Rainbow Falls Video Service.



Seated: Brian and Holly Lee of Automatic Coin Vending and Vince Gumma of AVS; standing: Lou and Nicole Miele of Miele Inc.



Mike and Mary Beth Leonard (l) of Coin-Op Specialists and Russ Mawdsley of Russell-Hall, a Past President of AMOA.



From left: Catherine and Chris Asher of Chris Amusements and Erin and Pete Gustafson of AAMA.

"Education makes you stronger."

LaFleur, Chair of the Hesch Promotion Committee, also said, "There are several ways you can make a difference: by attending seminars at the Amusement Expo and by donating to the Hesch Scholarship program."

**Hesch Promotion Committee:** At the start of the Hesch Committee meeting LaFleur said, "This committee does things to make other people's lives better."

LaFleur reported that advance ticket sales for the Hesch Raffle at the Amusement Expo 2014 is ahead of last year. In addition to a wide range of prizes, from games and parts to prize merchandise and gift certificates, the prize pool is topped off by the Grand Prize of a red 2014 Chevy Camaro.

As in the past, industry members who purchase Hesch raffle tickets will

be recognized with heart stickers for their badges. Purchases of \$100, \$200, and \$500 will receive a gift as well.

To encourage participation, two \$500 cash drawings will be held for early ticket purchases. All funds derived from ticket sales go to scholarships, minus the cost of the grand prize and the pre-show drawings. All other prizes are donated by industry members.

LaFleur said, "This is not just a raffle for a shiny new car. There are twice as many prizes as money taken in, and you are helping fund scholarships."

**New Director Task Force:** Tracy Ferris of A&M Amusement is Chair of the committee. Ferris said, "We need to replenish the class of new directors. This is the lifeblood of our association."

Discussion centered on ways to reach out to the membership at AMOA

events as well as at the state level. One suggestion: have state associations set aside time at their quarterly board meetings to update their members on AMOA benefits and activities.

Vince Gumma of American Vending Sales (AVS) said he believed more operators may be interested in being on the board if they had a better understanding of what AMOA does.

Tim Carson of Amusement Services said the Montana association always has a space at its meetings for AMOA information. "Make sure you have captured everyone's e-mail so they may receive the AMOA newsletter *Off the Top*," said Carson.

**Amusement Expo Education/Seminars:** Chair Chip O'Hara of Midwest Coin Concepts went over a tentative list of seminars planned for March 25, the full day of education at the Amusement Expo.

# AMOA MID-YEAR BOARD MEETING



Seated, (l-r): Alan Chaffee of A.A. Amusement and Steve Miller of Miller Amusement & Vending; standing, (l-r): Donovan Molitor of Donovan's Vending Service, Hal Williamson of Gardner's Up North, and Chris Asher of Chris Amusements.



Chi Babich of Game Exchange of Colorado, Britt Bruner of D&E Music & Vending, and Hal Williamson of Gardner's Up North.



From left: Bandon Hedley of Rich & Junnies Coin, Tim Carson of Amusement Services, and Lori Schneider of AMOA.



At Katz's Deli (circa 1888), (l-r): Laura and Marty Murin, Sue Butler, and Randy Bergman.

ment Expo 2014. The day will follow a baseball theme: "Amusement Expo 2014: It's a Whole New Ballgame."

The day will lead off with a keynote speaker and follow with sessions on three tracks: management, operator rescue, and family entertainment centers (FECs)/technical. Proposed topics include prize merchandisers, coin-op Hall of Famers, bulk vending, how to increase jukebox earnings, card swipe systems, industry promotions, and coaching tips on cranes.

John Margold of AMI said, "Everyone who goes in early for education understands and respects that the more knowledge you have the better it is for your business."

**Notre Dame and Continuing Education:** Tim Carson of Amusement Services chairs this committee. Carson

noted a shift in the demographics of attendees at the Notre Dame Management Program. He said, "We want to tailor the class to suit the base of attendees. We want them to be able to apply what they learn."

He added, "If you are grooming someone in your company, it's time to invest in their future and the future of your company by registering them for Notre Dame. The sooner you can get younger employees into the Notre Dame Program the better."

AMOA is sponsoring a new education program Nov. 9-10 in Chicago: the Road Scholar Program. Plans for the event were discussed, from a keynote speaker to moderators for the sessions. The keynote speaker is Gregg Fraley, a Creativity and Innovation Consultant.

"This is a big step," said Carson, "to

see if there is a desire for a program with a shorter time commitment that still affords an opportunity to gather with like-minded operators, to brainstorm, and to take advantage of content helpful to operators in their business every day."

The theme of the program is "Take Charge of Change." Timely topics will fall under three main categories: technology, the ever-changing landscape, and maximizing profit/managing costs."

Within those categories look for sessions on social media and other marketing channels, apps, redemption, taxes and regulations, other sources of income, all forms of gaming, and how to distinguish yourself from your competition.

When the topic of gaming was mentioned, Carson said, "Never lose sight

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## COIN-OP NEWS



# Video game history exhibited in Iowa



At the ICON Gallery, award winners by a cake honoring Star Base Arcade in California. The Wall of Trading Cards is at the back. (Photo by Mark Petrick)

Video game celebrities gathered at the Iowa Contemporary Art Gallery (ICON) in Fairfield, Iowa, in early August for an exhibit titled, **"The Video Game Trading Cards & Posters of Twin Galaxies."** The exhibit featured more than 600 trading cards that commemorate the history of the video game culture.

The Twin Galaxies Video Game Trading Card Set was created by Walter Day to honor industry pioneers, video game personalities, world record holders and tournament champions, pinball designers, classic games, and landmark inventions and historic events.

Day said, "It is my hope that history teachers in the future can use these cards to teach their students about the people and games who launched the video game culture." One highlight of the exhibit was a 10-foot by 15-foot Wall of Trading Cards (approximately 2,500 cards), which took Day two days to assemble, a true labor of love.

Twin Galaxies produced its first poster on Aug. 6, 1982, so the August date for the exhibit was significant. Most of the posters were issued as limited editions commissioned by Day and video game champion Billy Mitchell; the collection grew over the years. For more information, visit ([www.twingalaxies.com](http://www.twingalaxies.com)).



**The Wall of Trading Cards.**  
(Photo by Mark Petrick)



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# Laser Tag

## for today's player

**W**e often hear the phrases, “give players something they can’t get at home,” and “interactive experiences will attract and retain players.” Laser tag delivers on both counts.

Laser tag has a long history of providing entertainment and social interactions for individuals and groups in a wholesome setting. Players are challenged to think on their feet and respond quickly and accurately as they participate in friendly competition.

*Play Meter* checked in with several companies that provide laser tag systems to find out more about their history, what they offer, and how their systems work. Companies appear in alphabetical order.

**Courtney McDuff**

***Laser tag continues to engage, entertain, and innovate.***

### CREATIVE WORKS

Creative Works (CW) started over 15 years ago, with a simple vision to bring the “wow effect” to FECs across the globe by designing and building laser tag arenas. It is a family owned business started by Jeff Schilling in 1997 and he and his wife, Kimberly, have grown CW into a well respected and widely known company that has provided over 300 laser tag arenas across the globe.

Creative Works can bring ideas to life with a talented team of 20 people: designers, sculptors, craftsmen, and artisans, known throughout the industry as the “Theme Team.” Today the 33,000-square-foot production facility

in the Indianapolis area, combined with its talented team, enable Creative Works to handle any size project.

Because of its many years of experience in the laser tag industry, Creative Works saw a need to develop an educational event called Laser TAG 360 ([www.lasertag360.com](http://www.lasertag360.com)). This is a great educational event for the entire laser tag industry. This two-day event focuses on several important aspects for both new operators as well as existing operators: industry stats, design and development, the future of game play, operations, and marketing.

There are multiple equipment vendors that attend this program so attendees get a well rounded perspective on the advanced equipment that is currently available in the industry. Creative Works also brings in guest speakers to educate and share experiences so that attendees not only learn, but also network and create relationships with others.

Creative Works is always improving and changing and the company is excited to show a renewed and refreshed arena style. Taking into account the graphics and visual effects within the latest and greatest video games, it has created some diverse looks within the arena that create a truly immersive experience for the players.

Creative Works focuses the design of each theme and arena to appeal to both the adult as well as kids of all ages. With various wall shapes and sizes as well as intricate and over-the-top props in the arena, each player catches the “wow effect” while playing this fun game of laser tag.

Creative Works has worked on hundreds of projects around the world and the company’s goal is to always deliver the highest quality products and services to its clients.

Alley Cats Bowling Center in Arlington, Texas, has used Creative Works for several attractions. Brian Smith of Alley Cats Bowling Center said, “We get

comments all the time from people who say our laser tag arena is the best they’ve ever played and we have a lot of competition in our market.” ([www.thewoweffect.com](http://www.thewoweffect.com))

**Creative Works:**

Top: The company’s showroom.  
Bottom: The Urban Earth design.



**LaserBlast:**

Right: A LaserBlast arena.

Below: The company's Charging Racks.



**LASERBLAST**

Initially formed to manufacture altimeters and other electronics for the model avionics industry, LaserBlast installed its first laser tag system in 1997. To date LaserBlast has installed over 250 systems worldwide, with over 90 percent still in operation. The company employs a staff of 15 based in Plymouth, Mich. LaserBlast equipment is made in the U.S., with sub-assemblies manufactured locally.

LaserBlast's Wireless Charging Racks have proven to be a popular addition. Available for the FunBlast, HyperBlast, and ZetaBlast systems, they simplify routine laser tag operations and add an incredible lighting effect to the vesting room.

The ability to open and close your laser tag attraction without having to count on staff members to remember to connect each battery cable every night has proven especially popular with large multi-attraction family entertainment centers (FECs). Wireless Charging Racks also extend the calendar life of batteries by switching to AC power in between games.

Action City in Eau Claire, Wis. recently installed a 30-player Hyper-

Blast system with Wireless Charging Racks.

Kelly Armstrong, Senior Game Tech at Action City, said, "I wish I had the rack in the beginning. It takes a lot of the worry and trouble away. It turns off when

you're charged. A majority of the problems with my old system were overcharging or not charging enough and this just takes one of those things out of the picture."

He added, "The company went above and beyond to make sure everything was right for us. It was a new system for us; we also changed out insides so it's like having a brand new attraction because everything was different and refreshing."

"Another thing that's cool about the charging racks is the color, the lights. They're nice and brightly lit." ([www.laser-blast.com](http://www.laser-blast.com))

**LASERFORCE**

Laserforce was established in 1987 and has since become a laser tag pioneer in terms of manufacturing and operations. The first Laserforce center is still the world's longest running site. And it is now a truly international product, with Laserforce sites operating around the world. Decades of experience means that the company can offer a high-quality product that has well and truly stood the test of time.

With Technical Support bases in America, England, and Australia, each

with a large quantity of spare parts and technical know-how, customers can be assured that they are well supported at any time of the day. Each Support Base is regularly updated with spare parts and reserves to ensure that parts and support are there when customers want it.

Every laser tag system has vests and lasers. What makes Laserforce players return to the game?

Laserforce is an interactive experience. Players don't just play the game; they literally become part of it. Laserforce promises interactivity, realism, and excitement.

The Laserforce system features superior player feedback, full color rainbow LEDs, combined force, fair play, and is rugged and safe. ([www.laserforcetag.com](http://www.laserforcetag.com))

**LASERTRON**

Lasertron has been manufacturing its high-end laser tag game system and arenas for over 25 years. The company is based in Buffalo, N.Y. and all of its products are built in the U.S. Lasertron also operates its own successful entertainment center in Buffalo.

The facility offers guests multiple attractions to enjoy including a large 9,200-square-foot multi-level Lasertron arena, an outdoor go-kart track, two Cyber Sport courts, 27-holes of outdoor mini-golf, outdoor patio, comfortable seating, arcade, VIP party room, and a full bar. Total annual revenue for the 21,000-square-foot Lasertron entertainment center exceeds \$2.5 million in sales.

# 25 Years

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*"Bumper to Bumper"*

All laser tag suppliers tell you that their laser tag equipment and arenas are reliable and durable, but only LASERTRON provides you with a 3 year bumper to bumper warranty, the proof that fully validates the dependability of their laser tag equipment and arenas, at no additional cost.

## **LASERTRON's** New LT-12

LASERTRON operates the longest running Laser Tag in the United States at almost 25 years. In the last 3 years, their laser tag attraction has averaged \$1,395,984 per year in revenue.

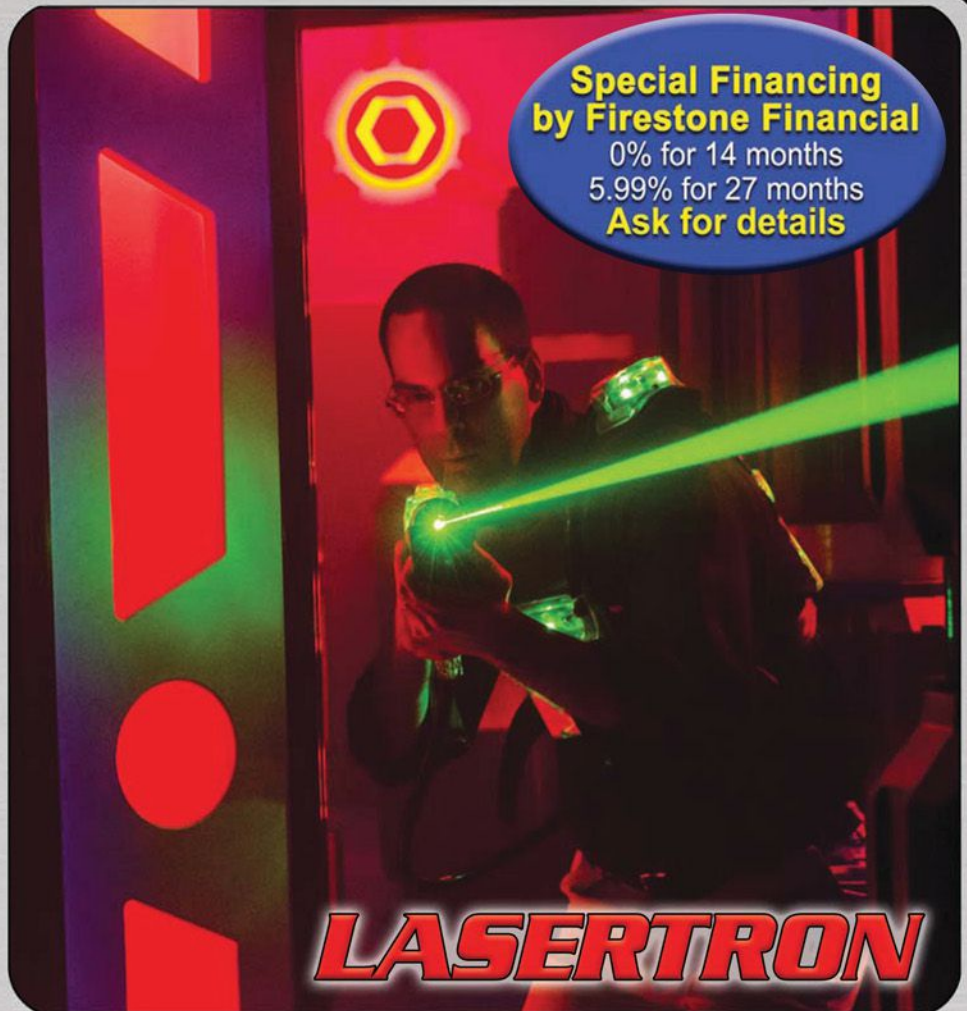
After generating millions in sales using their reliable and durable LT-11 laser tag system, they introduced their new LT-12 laser tag system in May 2012.

Their new LT-12 is even more reliable and durable with cool new lighting effects and many new features.

LASERTRON has spent over 25 years methodically developing new generations of laser tag equipment and arenas.

Each new generation has been rigorously tested in their location.

Their laser tag equipment and arenas will provide you with the lowest operating costs per dollar of revenue when compared to all other systems.



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# LASERTRON

*"One of the things I tell people when they are shopping for a laser tag system, is reliability is the most important factor and certainly LASERTRON is the leader in that respect. The second most important factor is frequently overlooked: how are the people you will be constantly dealing with for years to come? When a prospective owner calls around asking existing owners how they like their gear, they should also ask how they like dealing with the manufacturer and the people there. Lasertron people are top notch."*

**- Peter Murphy**  
**Laser Flash, Carmel, IN**

Want to see the best laser tag system and arena in action?

Visit their entertainment center and see why everyone who plays the new LT-12 laser tag system and new LED arena decide to own both.

## **What's New**

Be sure to visit LASERTRON at IAAPA Booth #2806 to see what's new.

1. New LT-12 Game System
2. New LED Illuminated Arena and LED Wall Medallions
3. New LED Vesting Racks
4. New LED Arena Scoreboard
5. New LED Recharger Display
6. New LED Lobby Display
7. New 3-Hour Battery Charger
8. Lifetime Warranty on Phaser Cords
9. New Arena Components
10. New On-Line Player Stats
11. New 'Cloud' Kiosk (Data Collection)
12. New Automatic Email Score Card Link

Phone: 1-800-897-8766

Website: [www.laser-tron.com](http://www.laser-tron.com)

Email: [info@lasertron.us](mailto:info@lasertron.us)

Ann Kessler ext. 314

Greg Watches ext. 330

The New Lasertron LT-12 Game System is proving to be the most durable and reliable system that Lasertron has built to date. Features on the LT-12 Game System include a new full-color LED display on the back of the phaser, new brilliant LED light patterns, five standard vibrators, super bright white hit indicators, MP3 high quality sound, faster radio communication, green and red lasers, and much more.

Lasertron's New LED Illuminated Arena and LED Wall Medallions are a dramatic improvement over the limitations of black light arenas. Air brushed

black light arenas look fake, cartoonish, and old when compared to a new LED arena.

"We have finally converted 100 percent of our arena, vesting, and briefing room to LEDs," said Jim Kessler, CEO of Lasertron. "The black lights have all been turned off and we will never go back. We have replaced all our black light wall murals with large pulsing LED wall medallions and illuminated our obstacles internally and externally with LED lighting. Our arena finally has that very edgy look we were looking for and it fits with our core focus, which is attracting the older teen and adult market."

To see it for yourself the Lasertron team invites you to visit its entertainment center at any time. "The reason it's so important to visit our center is that our arena is the best example of what our look and style of laser tag is all about," said Kessler.

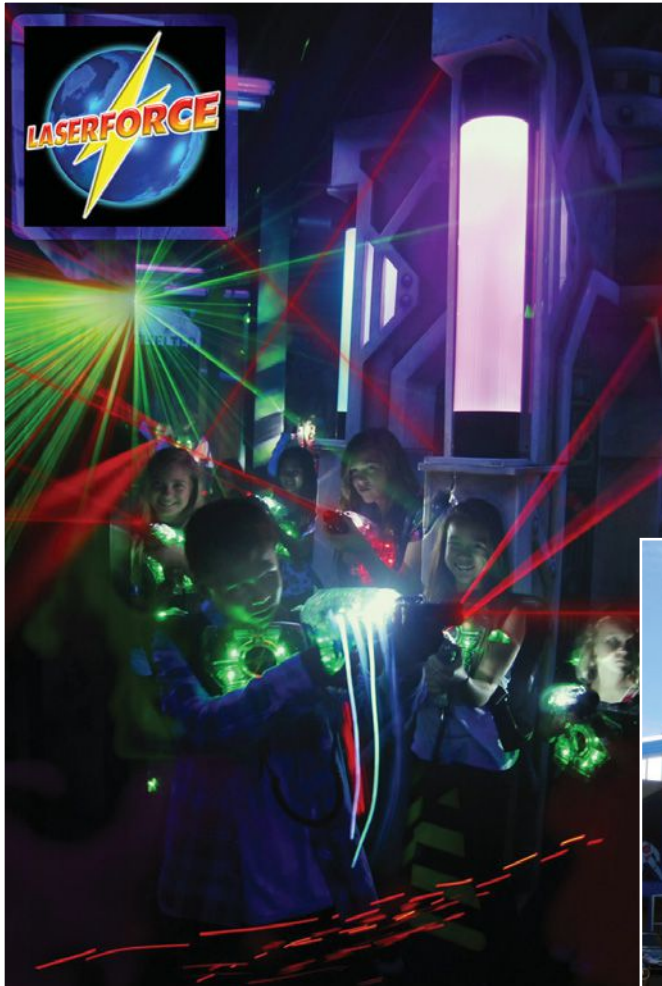
Lasertron also introduced its New LED Illuminated Vesting Racks. Lasertron provides cus-

tom molded vesting racks that come in a variety of colors, can be black-light reactive or not, and have the option of being lit internally with Lasertron's LED lighting system. The LED lighting system for the racks is available to match your team colors in red, green, blue, and yellow.

A scoreboard shows the team scores for two team, three team, and four team games along with the time remaining in each game. Lasertron has developed a management and operational software system for entertainment centers that specialize in multi-player interactive attractions such as laser tag, go-karts, and miniature golf. The Lasertron Center Manager Pro 4.0 software is available for existing entertainment facilities and new Lasertron operators.

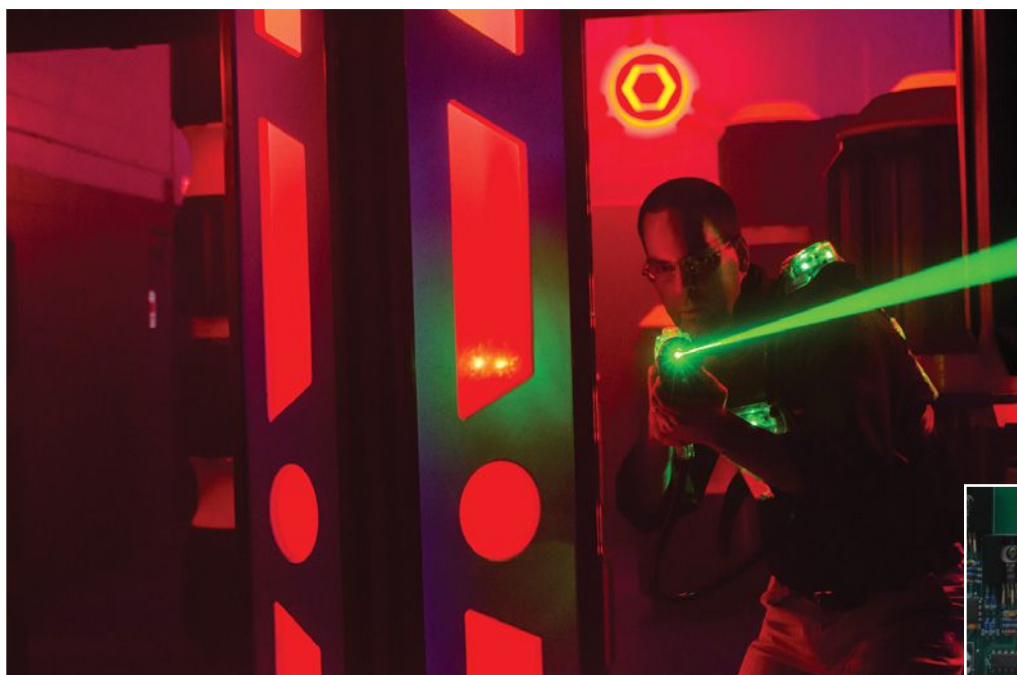
One of the unique features of the Lasertron Center Manager Pro 4.0 system is its ability to collect guest data while simultaneously maximizing each guest's entertainment experience and maximizing the utilization and profitability of each attraction.

The company has fully integrated its point of sale, reservation system, guest/member database, registration, data entry, and guest information



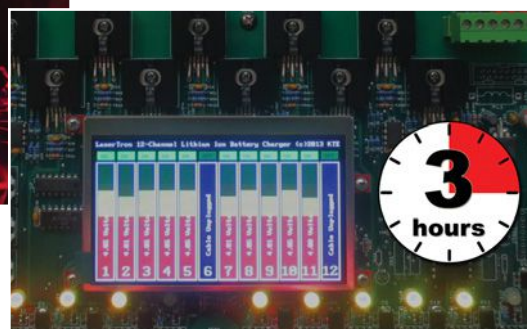
**Laserforce:**  
 Left: Players enjoy a game of laser tag.  
 Right: Laserforce center.





**Lasertron: :**

Left: A player enjoys a game of laser tag.  
Below: Lithium Ion Battery Charger.



kiosk, and the preprogramming, game selection, and team creation for the Lasertron Game System.

The new Lasertron Arena Display displays all the player scores, top scoring players and their photos, which are captured when players sign up at kiosks. New Lobby Displays can be set up in the lobby, arcade, or anywhere else to show daily, weekly, and monthly high scores.

Lasertron is also introducing its new Battery Charging Technology that allows operators to fully charge the vest batteries in three hours. Busy sites with lock-ins, late hours, etc., will appreciate the speed of Lasertron's new charging system.

Lasertron guarantees its batteries will last for 16 hours of continuous play for the term of the warranty. Batteries will last for 30 plus hours when playing a standard shields style game format.

Lasertron is the only company that offers a Lifetime warranty on its Phaser Cords. It is extremely frustrating for multiple laser tag players to experience the same malfunctioning phaser due to a curly cord that is beginning to short-out.

"Lasertron understands the value of a great laser tag experience. We worked for many years to develop a phaser cord that was as close to indestructible as possible. We operate a very high volume laser tag arena and during a 10-year period we only replaced about 20 phaser cords. Since we operate with 96 vests, that means over 75 percent of our vests never had a phaser cord short during 10+ years of operation," said Kessler.

Since Lasertron phaser cord failure is so rare, the company decided to provide its LT-12 customers with a Lifetime Phaser Cord Warranty.

By the end of 2013 Lasertron will have close to 150 locations that it supports. Lasertron's clients include 30 plus bowling operators, multiple skating facilities, stand alone laser tag centers, and many FECs. Lasertron offers free quarterly operator conferences at its entertainment center, which are free to attend. ([www.laser-tron.com](http://www.laser-tron.com))

**LAZER MAZERS**

LazerMazers started 30 years ago with a single, portable go-kart track and grew into a profitable portable entertainment business that is still open

today. For the last 15 years the company has also owned and operated The Oasis Fun Center, its own FEC in northern California.

Lazer Mazers was started when company founders felt that a new attraction was needed for the FEC market and nothing on the market was meeting the need. The company designed, manufactured, and tested its laser maze at the center and then started marketing it to others. When you purchase a maze from Lazer Mazer, you are buying straight from the manufacturer. The company offers several maze packages and options to meet your needs.

Lazer Mazers also offers Mobile Mazes. Installed in a 24-foot trailer, these portable units allow you to bring the thrill of a laser maze to fairs, carnivals, birthday parties, graduation nights, etc., and provide all the fun of a permanent installation, with the added flexibility of going mobile. ([www.lazer-mazers.com](http://www.lazer-mazers.com)) ▲

# 20 years of fun

**O**n its 20th anniversary, The Castle Fun Center in Chester, N.Y., is enjoying a good year. Up five percent over last year, the facility is reaping the benefits of a solid strategy long employed in the family entertainment center (FEC) business: offering an "event" experience for the entire family.

What started as a mini golf course, go-karts, and batting cages when it opened has expanded to include three go-kart tracks, the original mini golf course and batting cages, an arcade, mini bowling lanes, laser tag, a bar, rock climbing, a roller skating ring, Ballocity, a restaurant, inflatables, indoor and outdoor event space, and more.

The sprawling center is a destination for area families and easily caters to large groups. But the success didn't come without struggle.

Brian Leentjes and his wife Alison opened The Castle together in 1993. Brian was a mason contractor and was looking for another avenue to express his talents. The couple purchased several acres and Brian liked the idea of having a space he could sculpt and build with the skills he had.

He said, "We struggled for the first four years. We didn't have the go-kart track, just mini golf, batting cages, the arcade, and a small jeep track. After four years we got the

financing to build the track. Once I had the three main elements it was like an event for people to come to. We were getting three times the expenditure per guest."

The couple later added the 50,000-square-foot building, which houses the indoor attractions. The main attraction? Go-karts.

space is used for inflatables. At night, it's sometimes used for indoor events and concerts. The facility also hosts roller derby games.

The arcade, which features around 65 games, brings in about 15 percent of the facility's gross revenue. The company uses Betson Distributing to supply its games. The redemption counter is supplied mainly by Rhode Island Novelty. The best performing game is the Price is Right coin pusher from Innovative Concepts in Entertainment, followed by Big Bass Wheel from Bay Tek Games and Sega's Key Master.

The bar hosts a comedy club every Saturday night in the fall. The facility has hosted Colin Quinn of "Saturday Night Live" and Jermaine Paul, one of the winners of "The Voice."

The Castle is on an Embed card system and has recently begun a loyalty program with tiered member levels. Gold level members got a \$5 discount. Higher level members could come in for a dinner for four people. "We made it to where it was attractive enough for them to get their gold card," said Brian.

When asked about tips for someone getting started, Brian said, "Location is everything. And make it into an event. It needs to be complete. There needs to be enough activities to satisfy the entire family."



## vital statistics

**Facility:**

The Castle Fun Center

**Location:**

Chester, N.Y.

**Attractions:**

Go-karts, bowling lanes, roller skating rink, laser tag, arcade, restaurant, rock climbing, Ballocity, mini golf

**Contact:**

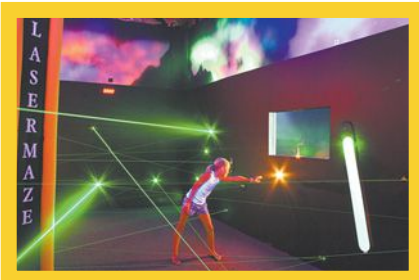
(845)469-2116

[www.thecastlefuncenter.com](http://www.thecastlefuncenter.com)

"We plan to add a slick track soon, and once we do that it's definitely going to be the main performer, but all the attractions seem to work extremely well together," said Brian. "Mini golf is great as a seasonal attraction. The laser tag does great. The skating rink is great. I don't know if people realize this but many elements of a fun center don't have a lot of time value. The roller skating, mini golf, and Ballocity allow guests to stay for a while."

The roller skating rink also works as flex space. In the mornings, the







# Top 20 on your fall checklist

It's that time of the year. The kids are back to school and you have time to re-evaluate your business. Here is a checklist of actions you can take to maximize your income during the fall season.

**1) Find six to 10 new prizes for your redemption counter.**

**2) Look over your game revenue report and get rid of the last five games.** Replace them with three new ones. Do you have enough cranes and merchandisers? Add two new redemption games or think about adding a new kiddie game.

**3) Update the look of your Web site.** An old one makes you look dated. Share your new additions and show your customers what they are missing

**4) Update your Facebook page.** Take a look at Starlite Family Fun Center. Michael and Clint make the most of this marketing tool. From videos to coupons to just sharing photos of customers having fun, this is what your Facebook page should look like.

**5) Rearrange your game room.** This will give your room a new look. You will be very pleased with the responses you get from your customers.

**6) What promotion will you use this Halloween?** Call me and I will share a few ideas and pictures.

**7) Are you doing anything special for the winning football teams in your area?** Give them a reason to come in after the game or weekend with specials on pizza or laser tag. Those kids have money to spend, so get them into your location to celebrate their victory!

**8) Are you working with any of the local tennis clubs, dance locations, or gymnastics locations?** They are all primed with kids that want to come to your location. Offer new members half off their next pizza purchase, their next laser tag game, or their bumper car attraction. Work with those locations as they need help marketing their product as you do with yours.

**9) Add a couple of new food items to the menu.** Go healthy with one and over the top with others.

**10) Time to clean out your freezers and make them work for you.** Pre-package your fries, your wings, and your chicken nuggets. Use Ziplock™ bags to create the right portions. This way you control your costs, make it easier for your kitchen



A healthy snack cup includes carrots, celery, and broccoli with or without ranch or blue cheese dressing.



Large, over-the-top cookies or brownies bring in more revenue and can be shared with mom and siblings.

to run smoothly, and you make more money!

**11) Add trivia questions on Saturday and Sunday.** This gets everyone excited. Every half hour ask a question for all to answer. Make it fun and educational. Give tickets and/or tokens to the winners.

**12) Play contests on your basketball and alley games.** High score on your basketball games wins a new basketball; high score on your alleys wins 500 tickets. Make it fun and interactive. You will get to know your customers better and they will have fun.

**13) Make sure everyone gets a Bounce Back coupon when they leave.** Every customer needs to walk out of your place with something with your logo on it that brings them back in. Do not miss this opportunity.

**14) Use a two-for-one promotion with the free product or service good for the following month.** For example, buy one laser tag admission and get one free for next month. Have next month's free admission good only during the week.

**15) Set up some trivia questions on your Facebook page.** Announce the winner on your Facebook page.

**16) Are you working with bus drivers?** Get them to hand out your coupons. Have them put their names on the back and the bus driver with the most returns wins pizza and soda for their family.

**17) Add capsules to your candy cranes.** You will see a nice surprise in your cashbox.

**18) Do a charity event.** Let your customers know that half of the proceeds goes to St. Jude's Hospital. You can do this for your laser tag or playground or bumper cars. The more you give back, the more your customers will give. Did you know it takes \$1.8 million a day to run St. Jude's Hospital?

**19) Do you have the right parts to keep your games running during the weekend when you make the most money?** Take the time to find out so you keep your games providing the fun they are supposed to.

**20) Send your tech to a training class.** This is always money well spent. If everything is working properly you will maximize your income. ▲

Jim Chapman has been a part of the coin-op industry for over 25 years. His experience ranges from manufacturing cranes, merchandisers, redemption, and video games to operational experience in FECs. You can find him at trade shows sharing his passion and experience when giving redemption seminars. He can be reached via e-mail (jimmychaps@aol.com).



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# AMI unlocks the key to music videos



Above: NGX Music Video

Above right: The Zac Brown band is one of the many artists whose music videos will be available on AMI's NGX Music Video.

Music videos have been an elusive entertainment component that the coin-op world has not been able to monetize, until now. Thanks to AMI Entertainment Network, music videos will soon be available for AMI's popular NGX digital downloading jukebox.

The industry got its first preview of the NGX Music Video at the Amusement Expo in Las Vegas in March. Availability was projected for the fourth quarter of this year. AMI is now

## PATH TO SUCCESS

What's the key to finally making music videos work in coin-op environments? Maas said, "The key to making this work is three-fold. First, the economics are critical. Those who tried to bring this to the market in the past did not offer an affordable solution at the patron level. We solved that problem because it makes sense to make music videos available for only a small up-charge.



By Bonnie Theard

ahead of schedule on this highly anticipated jukebox feature.

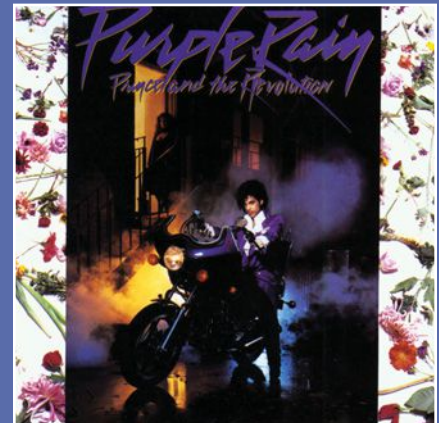
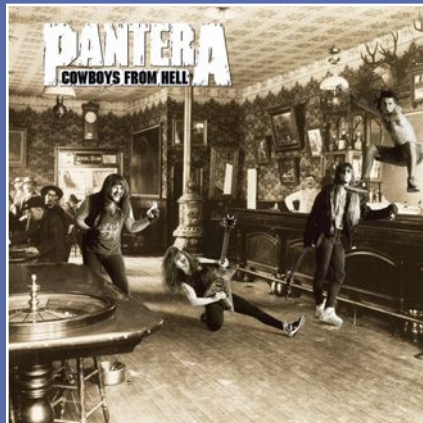
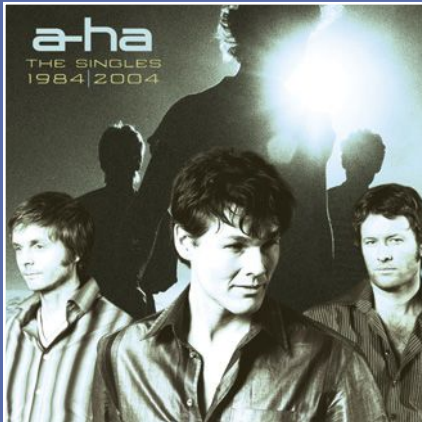
*Play Meter* spoke with Mike Maas, President and CEO of AMI, for an update, more details, and reaction from the industry.

"In the quest to provide the latest technology, we've added music videos to the NGX," said Maas. "The positive feedback has been off the charts. People are very excited. Every day I hear from our sales team how much our customers are looking forward to it. We accelerated our plans and allocated more resources to the project due to demand."

"Second, we solved the economics for the operator. Previous efforts involved large upfront costs to the operator. Our current model is a small hardware kit added to the NGX. The business model for digital downloading music for the operator does not change at all."

He added, "Our view is that we are partners with operators; we want them to be able to deploy fast and make more money quickly. The third element is it's very easy and seamless to use. We worked hard to make sure music videos are a full part of the system, and we will continue to do that.

***“Our view is that we are partners with operators; we want them to be able to deploy fast and make more money quickly.”***



We want it to be a seamless part of the experience for patrons, a fundamental element to our jukebox.”

Lastly,” he said, “the content is critical. We have deals in place with all the major content providers. We will launch with thousands of music videos available and in a year I expect tens of thousands of videos. There will be a great deal of content.”

Maas said that AMI currently has over a million songs available in its music catalog, a testament to the company’s commitment to valuable content.

Formal testing is starting this month. Looking at the development process, Maas said there have been few changes, relatively minor, from what was shown in March.

#### **HOW IT WORKS**

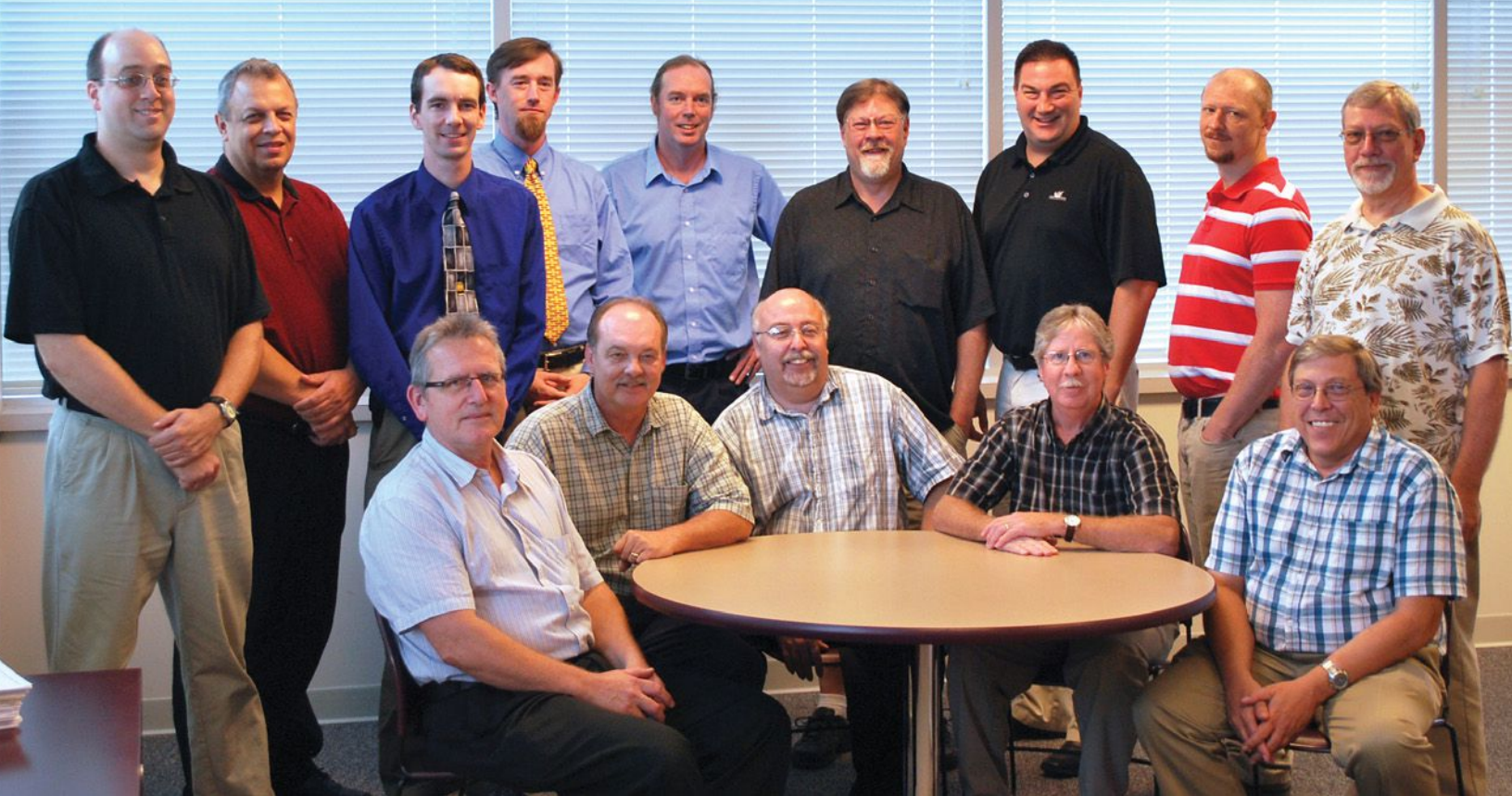
With the music video feature, patrons can not only search for a song by artist, title, or album, but are also given the option to purchase the music video of that song.

Local songs are one credit each, remote songs are two credits, music videos are offered for one additional

credit each. Operators can designate up to 300 albums (roughly 3,000 songs) as local. Patrons can also take advantage of My Song First and play their selection next for another credit.

“What’s cool,” said Maas, “is how integrated the concept is with the jukebox. The flexible platform of the NGX makes it possible. The NGX has been the most successful jukebox we have ever built and adapts well for video.”

Company officials usually demur when asked what’s next on the drawing board, but in this case Maas said, “Our next jukebox is going to be



The AMI Customer Service Department, standing, (l-r): Mike Chase, Phil Olson, Fred Bergman, David Vander Naald, Mark Schmitt, Dave Kloostra, Gary Whiteman, Jonathon Peters, and Jim Francisco; seated, (l-r); Hank Dewall, David Kibbe, John Teeter, Gil Scott, and Joe Thran.

designed specifically for music videos. Operator feedback has been so strong that we are going to lean into music videos. The hardware will take it to another level; it will be an alternative to the NGX but not replace the NGX.”

This move is fitting since the company has so many diverse music products in its line: Grand, NGX Mini, NGX Face Place, all using the NGX core.

Maas added, “We are committed to this project, our design direction is centered on video. I envision a few years from now that patrons won’t even feel like they are doing something different; the video will just be there. That’s how seamless I view it and how we are designing it.”

### PRODUCT ROI

Maas is proud of the return on investment (ROI) operators experience with AMI products. “If it will make more money for the jukebox and therefore make more money for the operator, we will do it. That’s the criteria. It’s as simple as that. Our North Star is operator earnings from our products.”

Jukeboxes have been a bright spot for operators. How does Maas assess the current market for jukeboxes? He said, “Jukeboxes are providing by far the best ROI in bars today. I don’t anticipate that changing for a long time. Our jukebox sales remain steady.

“The digital jukebox is not a new invention. We’ve been doing this for a while and so have other companies. There are a fair number of old jukeboxes in the field. It’s amazing how much of an earnings boost there could be from an eight-year-old jukebox to today’s NGX.

“Smart operators are not only expanding their routes but they are also reinvesting in products and keeping them fresh. They know the capabilities of new products to entice customers. Every year we are working to make the earnings from our products better.”

### ATTRACTIVE OFFER

Earlier in the year AMI made an attractive offer to operators: For every NGX purchased in the second quarter of 2013, AMI would give a free music

video kit when it became available. As a result, there are a large number of NGX units ready to receive the kit when the music video feature is launched. These will automatically be sent without any action needed from the operator.

In April, AMI began shipping the high-performance core for the NGX, an upgrade that enables the music video feature. Because of this, the music video kit for new NGXs will be economically priced. A second music video kit will be available which includes the high performance core for any NGX purchased prior to April 2013.

AMI will exhibit the NGX Music Video at the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) Expo in November.

As with anything new, there is a learning curve. AMI’s Customer Service Department is ready to assist operators with questions or service issues on all AMI products at (877)ROC-N-ROLL (762-6764). For more information, visit ([www.amientertainment.com](http://www.amientertainment.com)). ▲

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## COMING SOON



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Operators crowd around for a closer look at recovering techniques.

## Pioneer Sales hosts service school

**P**ioneer Sales & Service lived up to its name when it hosted the first-ever, coin-op-focused service school on billiard table cloth on Aug. 6 at its headquarters in Menomonee Falls, Wis.

The service school was presented by Championship Billiard Fabrics LLC of Elk Grove, Ill. Championship staff on hand to cover all the bases included Fred Cohen, President; Mike Serra, Vice President; and John Beecher, Master Installer.

The idea originated with Dave Courington of Valley-Dynamo LP, who spoke to Jon Kleiman, Owner of Pioneer Sales & Service, about how Championship does presentations for all categories of pool settings and how beneficial it would be for operators.

The timing was perfect since Valley-Dynamo recently introduced its new Top Cat pool table with new Worsted Ultra Cloth, which plays fast, lasts a long time, and requires extra care in stretching the cloth.

Kleiman embraced the idea. He said that over 20 operating companies brought staff to the program for a total of 38 attendees. "We got very favorable comments," Kleiman said. "Many said it was one of the best seminars they had ever attended."

Kleiman added, "It's so important how you wrap the rails. There are a lot of good ways to cover a table but there are some bad ways. Everyone was comparing notes; they learned from each other."

### OPERATOR COMMENTS

Scott Dougherty of D&D Amusement Games in Waupaca, Wis., was among the attendees. Dougherty said, "I've been recovering pool tables since 1968 and I learned a lot. When you think you might know everything about pool cloth and pool tables, maybe you don't."

"Championship was definitely hands-on during the presentation. It intrigued me enough to consider taking some of my technicians with me to the Championship office to see the pool cloth process from start to finish and learn more."

Kleiman and Dougherty both mentioned that the Wisconsin Amusement and Music Operators (WAMO) associa-





**Dave Courington of Valley-Dynamo gets an overview of the presentation on a forklift.**

tion is considering including this presentation as part of its annual conference program next summer.

Dougherty said, “WAMO looks for workshops to include in the conference, which has proven successful in bringing attendees to the event. This would be a good draw.”

Attendee Mike Eppler of Suburban Vending in Sussex, Wis., commented, “It was a really good presentation, very informative, and came at the right time before league season. Our leagues start the week after Labor Day and we work for weeks in advance recovering tables (30-40) for our locations.

“The seminar took most of the day and there were no slow spots. It was nice to get everyone in one room. We had an opportunity to get hands-on experience and talk with other operators about different techniques. We also got an education on how each type of cloth is made. It was a well rounded presentation.”

Bruce Dentice of Sam’s Amusement Co. in Kenosha, Wis., said, “I sent two people for this pool table cloth seminar and thought it was a great opportunity to get my people working knowledge in our industry.

“The day was jam packed with information and a great exchange of different techniques for recovering pool tables, which is a huge part of my business. This was a ‘meat and potatoes’



**A display of cloth and different types and ages of rails and cushion rubber used over the years.**



**Master Installer John Beecher at work.**

event. Thanks to everyone at Pioneer Sales, Valley, and Championship for an outstanding experience.”

### VALUE OF EDUCATION

Courington of Valley-Dynamo said, “Operators went out of their way to say they appreciated the presentation, calling it the best they had ever attended. The fact that they devoted most of a day to the presentation is a strong statement in itself. Personally, it was very satisfying.

“I believe operators came away with an understanding of the different types of cloth and how that affects the playing experience. We plan to do more of these presentations. Knowledge is the key to success. The more we can help our customers understand how to make the most from their tables the better.”

In conclusion, Courington said, “Playability equals profitability. We believe in that. Properly recovering a pool table is all part of providing the best entertainment value.”



**Fred Cohen of Championship Billiard Fabrics conducts an informative morning session.**

Fred Cohen of Championship said, “It was a great opportunity for us to help standardize the coin-op installation of cloth. It also allowed us as the manufacturer to educate the installers on how the cloth is made and therefore how it should be installed and handled.

“There has not been a class yet that we’ve held, that hasn’t taught even the most veteran guys a thing or two to help improve the way they install cloth or how they replace the cushion rubber, not to mention what they can learn from each other.”

Cohen added, “Remember, no one here got a college education on how to install pool cloth. They all learned it from a mentor who learned it from another mentor and not all mentors were created equally. We just want to dispel the bad rumors or habits. We fully intend to continue this education caravan at Valley’s request.”

For more information, visit ([www.champbilliards.com](http://www.champbilliards.com)) and ([www.valley-dynamo.com](http://www.valley-dynamo.com)). ▲



Josh and Zach Sharpe

*Two new redemption titles feature on-your-toes suspense, great sound and visual effects, and potential in the marketplace.*

With a father like Roger Sharpe, the original "Cornered Critic," it is probably no surprise that sons Josh and Zach share a true passion for the coin-op industry. Former pinball champions, both are recognized as being two of the finest players in the world. But their interest and skills have grown far beyond the silver ball to embrace video games and attractions of all types.

## Lights, challenges, action

**A**s you are all accustomed to, we always like to share and spread as much pinball news as possible and this intro section is no exception.

The International Flipper Pinball Association (IFPA) hit quite the milestone recently by crossing over the 20,000th player threshold in the ranking system. The continuous growth of competitive pinball is astounding.

With these 20,000+ players coming from 40 different countries, competitive pinball truly is a global sport that continues to grow at a rapid pace. We're always excited to see what is in store and thank everyone in both the coin-op and pinball community for continuing to support everything the IFPA does to spread the word about our sport to the masses.

While we're not touching on anything pinball related from a review perspective, we'll be checking out the following games for your entertainment: Toccata Gaming International's Balance Ball and Adrenaline Amusements' Black Out.

### BALANCE BALL/TOCCATA GAMING INTERNATIONAL

**Analysis:** Balance Ball's title should definitely help players understand the gist of game play. On the main part of the cabinet is a pivoting platform, which allows players to steer the ball on screen similar to a physical version of Sega's Monkey Ball. On the handles are buttons that allow players to either jump or "power up."

**Pros:** We're all about games that offer a challenge and actually take skill to complete and Balance Ball is just that. The action is tough and literally keeps you on your toes at all times.

With the ticking down of the game clock, you can't take your sweet time either, which only enhances the excitement. The graphics and sounds are done quite nicely to create an overall positive game experience, not to mention a custom LED display above the monitor that can display prizes/tickets won and player messages.

**Cons:** While we are all about a game that offers a challenge, Balance Ball definitely walks a fine line between challenging and aggravatingly mean in terms of its harshness. Normally on a game of this nature, if you fell off at the middle of the course, you would continue where you fell off but with some kind of penalty (either a lost "life" or losing 10 seconds on the clock, etc.). With Balance Ball, it doesn't matter how far you've gotten into the course. If you fall off there's no "gimmies," it's back to the start of the course, no exceptions.



**Overall:** We have been thoroughly impressed by Toccata Gaming International since we saw them for the first time at a previous International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) Expo. Perhaps it was love at first beer pong sighting when we got to play their Pong 180 Degrees game, but there's no reason why their other game Balance Ball can't receive the same level of attention and adoration.

If there was anything we would hope Toccata would take away it's that they might want to consider adding game difficulty settings to their software.

While we certainly enjoyed the difficulty and pressure of knowing you pretty much had to clear a course without falling off once, it should really be up to an operator to set the difficulty of a game.

We could easily see some players getting frustrated and essentially giving up after falling off because if there's enough time that ticks off, it's an impossibility to finish the entire course in say five or 10 seconds unless it saved progress. Other than that, this game would be perfect at an adult oriented arcade/location like a Dave & Buster's or GameWorks.

**Overall Rating:** HHH 1/2

## BLACK OUT/ADRENALINE AMUSEMENTS

**Analysis:** The goal of Black Out is pretty straightforward and easy to grasp for any player, try to "black out" the sun. What's a bit different is the implementation used by Adrenaline Amusements.

By integrating transparent screen technology with multi-touch technology, players will not only see "through" the screen (where they will see either ticket information or prizes depending on the cabinet), but also see the action taking place on this screen.



The game play is simple: By using a touch, swipe, and fling motion, players get five tries to flick "Googabongas" to try and black out the sun. If you're successful in covering the entire surface of the sun, you win!

**Pros:** If you can't already tell by our analysis section, it should come as no surprise that the technology used in Black Out is extremely impressive. We can't think of another game that has utilized this slick, touch-screen transparency before. Not to mention from a game play perspective, it has a ton of personality and some great sound and visual effects.

From an operator perspective we feel Black Out offers the best of both worlds by being available as a

merchandise or ticket redemption game. The fact that you can see both the game play and the prizes/tickets behind the magic curtain is simply a showstopper.

**Cons:** Easily our biggest gripe with Black Out is in terms of the touch technology. This rings true for a lot of "touch" technology games, but we often found it quite frustrating to get dialed in on how to swipe and toss these Googabongas on the screen.

Sometimes it felt like there was no rhyme or reason in terms of strength/speed of a swipe, the Googabongas would fly without much control of our own. The only other concern on our part is while yes, the transparent screen and graphics are a showstopper, it truly only shines from a front facing perspective.

From an angle or possibly in a very dark room (disclaimer, but we only played in a well-lit trade show), the screen can be hard to see very clearly in terms of grabbing your attention.

**Overall:** We think Adrenaline Amusements is definitely on to something with Black Out. It is the first redemption game we can think of to successfully utilize the transparent screen/touch process and feel they are only touching the tip of the iceberg in terms of its potential.

While there are a few minor gripes in terms of responsiveness within game play, we have no doubt that any future iteration of this technology, whether by Adrenaline Amusements or by other companies, that these kinks will be far in the past and the possibilities are truly endless. Nevertheless, any operator who puts a Black Out on location should have no worries being in the black for its earning potential. ▲

**Overall Rating:** ★★★ 1/2

The reality show "Hell's Kitchen" featured an introduction with contestants on a pinball playfield.



# Pinball: *The Medium AND the Message*

When Marshall McLuhan coined his famous phrase, "The medium is the message," he was pointing out that the way information was presented is often just as, or more important than, the message itself.

Media such as cinema, television, and a wide variety of public displays have used the medium of pinball to convey their message since pinball began. Surprisingly, while pinball has had its extreme ups and downs over the decades, virtually all types of media have had a steady love affair with the silverball.

Since pin games first appeared in arcades, they began playing a starring role in the media and have kept that top billing to the present day. Whether in movies, television, commercials, or a dozen other variations, pinball is the overwhelming choice for creative minds across the board.

Not even the onslaught of the video revolution, which nearly wiped pinball out, could supplant it as the game of

choice for media producers hoping to get their message across or to simply show characters having a good time.

Since the first *PinGame Journal* (PGJ) arrived on doorsteps in 1991, I have been fascinated by how prevalent pinball was in the media, especially visually. However, it began with audio and it's all David Marston's fault.

For many years the PGJ featured his "Pinball on Record" column in which David, an avid collector of recordings as well as a pinball fan, never seemed to run out of audio examples featuring pinball in one way or another. While I liked Red Foley's 1954 "Pin Ball Boogie," my favorite is the song "Amarillo" by Emmylou Harris:

*"Oh, that pinball machine's in the corner.*

*"Well, he saw the lights and he had to hear 'em ring.*

*"And he never was the same after he won his first free game,*

*"Oh, I lost him to a jukebox and pinball machine."*

Audio continues to be of interest as I'm currently involved with a group of vintage pinball lovers who form the double secret society called The Thing Ring. We are exploring the basis for the Chicago Coin Machine (CCM) 1950 pinball called simply THING. The Roy Parker art illustrates the lyrics from a popular song of the day, "The Thing," as recorded by Phil Harris (and an interesting variety of others). It was performed by Harris in the 1951 film, "Wild Blue Yonder."

While there is no pinball actually IN the film, the CCM game was actually based on this song. The game makes a cameo appearance in a number of early television shows including episodes of "Alfred Hitchcock Presents" and "Peter Gunn." Stay tuned for the full story of this game and the song that inspired it when our investigation is complete.

The film "Sensations of 1945" surprised me. Fellow pinball videophile David Volansky sent a clip showing



A promotional ad for MLB's All Star Game takes place in a giant pinball machine featuring All Star players.



A pinball playfield runway for a Victoria's Secret Special Fashion Show included music by Justin Bieber.



Pinball is featured in the new film "The American Side" to be released in 2014.

band leader Woody Herman singing a song with the lyrics, "Spin little pinball spin," while standing by a game along with a number of attractive pinball fans. Then, as the camera moves in for a closer look at the playfield, we soon realize that the scene is now a giant pinball machine with Woody and his whole band in the backbox.

As if that was not enough, none other than the queen of tap dance, Eleanor Powell, soon appears and performs a cool tap number on the playfield of the game. The Internet Movie Database (IMDB) adds, "Billboard magazine (March 25, 1944, pg. 87, col. 1) states that Eleanor Powell and studio electrician Phil Braun dreamed up one of the dance numbers based on a pinball machine and worked on it for six weeks. When she would hit one of the pins, it would light up."

This is not, by far, the last time we find famous performers on the playfield of giant pinball machines. In the 1980 film "Xanadu," dancer Gene Kelly appears in a short homage to Powell as he taps a pinball bumper and releases a burst of light and color.

That theme is continued in a Chips Ahoy commercial featuring exclamation marks, assuming the Powell role on a cookie themed playfield. Cartoon's "Danger Mouse" finds himself in quite a predicament as he's trapped in a giant pinball by his arch nemesis Baronie and flipped around a playfield. Cinemark movie theater chain patrons are told about the theater rules by Matinee Joe and Popcorn Penny from the playfield of a large pinball machine.

Fast forward to 2005 and consider the Fox Sports promotional ad for Major League Baseball's All Star

Game held in my city, Detroit, at the then recently built Comerica Park. The entire ad takes place in a giant pinball machine featuring All Star players catching pinballs, jumping through spinners, falling in gobble holes, and having a good old time with the game. It ends as the ball crashes through the playfield glass, goes careening through the streets of Detroit, and winds up dropping in the middle of the stadium.

This one minute video reportedly carried a one million dollar price tag and featured detail down to scratches on the ball. The level of realism they were after is exemplified by the fact that Fox hired a real, live pinball designer, John "Dr. Flash" Trudeau, to create the layout of this game, which only exists in a computer.

In 2012, the hit television reality show "Hell's Kitchen" featured an introduction sequence where the contestants all appeared on a pinball playfield. And last year the Victoria's Secret Special Fashion Show contained a segment on a pinball playfield as the "runway" to showcase the fashions and models. As if that wasn't enough, the producers decided to add a little music to the mix with Justin Bieber providing the vocals.

From across the pond came the 2013 Red Nose Day BBC production to benefit Comic Relief. The group One Direction was the group, "One Way or the Other" was the song, and a giant colorful pinball machine was the set. Even a recent "Dancing with the Stars" featured a number performed

on a projection created pinball playfield dance floor.

There are members of the Manchester United football (soccer) team taking kicking practice on a giant Samsung field, and Club Cadet riding mowers tooling around a massive playfield to show off their versatility. I could go on but there's no room. Keep in mind these are merely examples of people on big playfields. There are many other ways pinball is used and readers can expect to learn more in future installments of Pinball Curious.

The take away here is that the media will go to great lengths to feature pinball. We don't see Victoria Secret models strutting across a giant Pac-Man screen being chased by ghosts. In fact, we don't see any other form of coin-op games filling that role except pinball.

And the hits keep on coming. Just as I was about to hit "save" and send this off to *Play Meter*, I received a photo from David Fix, who has been acting as pinball advisor to the film "The American Side" starring Matthew Broderick and Janeane Garofalo that is in production and due to be released in 2014. The game (apparently re-arted for the film) will be used in the opening credits and key scenes because the hero likes pinball. Pinball, not some other form of game, but PINBALL.

It's always been pinball, from Eleanor Powell to "Dancing with the Stars" and from "Danger Mouse" to "Hell's Kitchen," the message is that pinball is the wise choice to make. ▲

Jim Schelberg, always curious about pinball, has been publishing the *PinGame Journal* for more than 20 years. Jim has about 40 games of his own but spends most of his pinball time attending events, snapping photos, and talking to people about pinball. He can be reached at (jims@pingamejournal.com); Web (www.pingamejournal.com).



## Growth and new conversations

**A**fter a busy Annual Meeting in Lisle, Ill., in August, newly elected American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA) President Pete Gustafson of Sega Amusements USA is embarking on his two-year term with enthusiasm and optimism.

Each president comes to the job with certain goals. For Gustafson those goals are growing the membership and growing the Amusement Expo. "I would like to leave my post with an engaged and energized association comprising more members than we have now and a bigger trade show that resonates with a wider audience," said Gustafson.

He added, "For this to occur, we have to create relevance and raise the excitement level of what we do. I want people to see what we're up to and say, 'I want to be a part of that!' That's the same sentiment from everyone else on the AAMA board. We are razor-focused on that key objective; it underlies all the choices we make. If something contributes to the overall goal, we will move in that direction. We want to make people feel good about the association and see value in participation."

**Capitol Hill:** To that end, AAMA is continuing its quarterly visits to Capitol Hill to create awareness of the industry and the fact that the industry is composed of hard working, tax paying small business owners who provide wholesome entertainment and operate in open, public spaces not something done hidden away in a basement.

The next visit to Washington, D.C., was set for Sept. 18. Members of the Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA) again joined with AAMA delegates (three representatives from each association). It was Gustafson's first time on Capitol Hill as part of this new format.

Before the journey, Gustafson said, "I appreciate being invited; it's an exciting opportunity. I've heard nothing but positives from others who have made the trip. They've all shared with me that it was a valuable experience."

"Every day things happen in Washington, D.C., that impact us, often without our even being aware. My objective is twofold: to gain insight into the legislative process and to educate legislators about the positive nature of our business. We've come a long way since violent fighting games were all the rage and I want to ensure that legislators are aware of this fact."

He added, "We need friends in Washington. We foster these friendships by getting in front of legislators to let them know who we are and what we do. We benefit from these relationships by having 'someone' in power that's educated about our industry and can speak on our behalf if and when we find ourselves unjustly attacked."

At the Annual Meeting AAMA announced the formation of a defense fund to fight legislation that would have an adverse effect on the industry. Gustafson said, "We are sensitive to being transparent in how funds would be directed."

Gustafson referenced recent actions taken in California

related to redemption games that he said "showed us that we are exposed."

He added, "When confronted with a common challenge it's best to enlist as many people and affiliated associations as possible; many hands make the load lighter. In order to achieve these alliances, we need to present a defined message, goal, and objective that occurs to others as an opportunity they want to participate in."

**Operating community:** Speaking about the first visit to Capitol Hill reminded him of his first time attending the AMOA Council of Affiliated States Meeting.

Gustafson said, "I was in a room with 30 operators. Every single one ran his own business. They did not have a safety net; they had to get up every day and make it happen. I have enormous respect for the 'can do' attitude."

"My respect for operators deepened at that event. I appreciated the passion and energy they bring to their businesses. It's a characteristic of the entrepreneurial spirit that every operator possesses."

**Associations:** "I often hear the question 'What's the value of membership?'" said Gustafson. "What frequently goes unrecognized is the intrinsic value of membership, knowing there are others who share your concerns—that

we're all part of a community facing common challenges and that we're all participants in a larger, common conversation. Associations provide the space that facilitates these connections.

"There is a tremendous value in the interaction with other members, a commonality that leads to conversations about issues such as we're having now about redemption games. That connectivity is the breeding ground for new conversations and I'm all for starting new conversations."

**Amusement Expo:** Gustafson said the show committee has "done an excellent job of listening to the membership, being progressive, and shaking up the schedule."

He added, "There are some exciting things going forward for the show in terms of theming, marketing, and education. Our board is comprised of a younger and more diverse group of spirited individuals and that's a good thing."

"There's a higher level of understanding of new technologies and social networks. This understanding provides us with the resources we need to communicate in a more relevant and contemporary way, creating an experience that people want to participate in."

Gustafson complimented AAMA Immediate Past President John Margold on a successful term: "John generated an atmosphere with a great sense of urgency and purpose; that we need to get things done now, not push it off for tomorrow. He instilled in all of us a sense of ownership, empowering us with the realization that 'we' can make a difference and challenged us to do just that. It's my goal to keep that spirit and energy present in all my AAMA activities." ▲



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# State meetings and new programs

**A**musement and Music Operators Association (AMOA) President John Pascaretti recently traveled to the Missouri Amusement and Music Operators Association (MoAMOA) Annual Meeting in Columbia, Mo., and the Michigan Coin Machine Operators Association (MCMOA) Annual Meeting in Plymouth, Mich.

“MoAMOA followed a good format,” said Pascaretti, “with a first evening meet and greet reception, a legislative update from the association’s lobbyist Kathy Harness, committee meetings, and a live auction conducted by an operator who also is an auctioneer. It was a lot of fun and they raised over \$15,000.”

Michigan is Pascaretti’s home state. “We are not fighting some of the battles that other states are experiencing, particularly in relation to merchandisers,” he said.

The MCMOA meeting was a casual event with time to connect with peers, elect officers, discuss membership, and enjoy golf. This year attendance was light.

Pascaretti said, “In every state you have a core of people who keep things moving. It’s nice to have more people participate to give a different perspective.

“Those who don’t attend don’t realize what they are missing, especially the opportunity to network. They can put aside any competition, get together for the common good, and walk out the door and be competitive again.”

**Washington, D.C.:** AMOA again joined the American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA) for a quarterly visit to Capitol Hill in September. Each association sent three representatives.

“This was our third time with AAMA in its ongoing program to make our lawmakers aware of industry-specific issues as well as the broader scope of general business-specific issues,” said Pascaretti.

“Everyone who is running a business has concerns; from health care to taxes, there is a lot of uncertainty out there. These visits to Washington, D.C., serve the purpose of letting legislators know our feelings on a number of issues.”

**Road Scholar Program:** AMOA recently announced a new education initiative, the Road Scholar Program, under the direction of the Notre Dame and Continuing Education Committee. The intense day-and-a-half program will cover topics from technology to gaming and from managing costs to maximizing profits. Dates are Nov. 9-10 at the Hyatt Regency Chicago O’Hare in Chicago.

Pascaretti commented, “We are really looking forward to this program. The Notre Dame Management Program is wonderful, and I encourage anyone thinking about attending to go forward. However, not everyone can make the time commitment.

“The Road Scholar Program does not replace the Notre Dame Program by any stretch. It’s a special education opportunity that AMOA offers to its members. We hope that those who attend the Road Scholar Program will see the value of the Notre Dame Program.”

**Amusement Expo:** Thoughts naturally turn to the Amusement Expo 2014, which will have a new format in 2014: one day of seminars and two days of exhibits. Pascaretti said, “We have received a good response to the change. Everyone is in agreement with the new format.”

He added, “AMOA and AAMA are working hard to put together a show and a program that will appeal to everyone, whether they are running jukeboxes or photo booths and everything in between. We are in the process of nailing down the framework for the education portion of the expo.”

**Recent activities:** Pascaretti also referenced the success of the recent Webinar on health care and the two-part Webinar series presented by the AMOA National Dart Association (NDA).

As President of AMOA, Pascaretti has the privilege of making a donation from the Coin-Op Cares Foundation to a charity or organization. AMOA contacted the New Jersey Amusement Association (NJAA), mindful of the ongoing struggles of businesses and individuals still recovering from the devastation of Hurricane Sandy last fall.

This year a \$5,000 donation is being presented to NJAA to support its partnership with the Reaching All in Need Every Day (RAINE) Foundation whose mission is to help people still needing assistance. Specifically, RAINE is raising funds to purchase school supplies for children whose homes and schools were affected by the storm.

“We wanted to donate where it would be meaningful,” said Pascaretti. “The director of RAINE was pleasantly surprised and we are excited about that. The funds will help provide basic tools for school children.” The check was presented at the AMOA Mid-Year Meeting in Jersey City, N.J., in September. ▲



**John Pascaretti  
AMOA  
President**

*“The Road Scholar Program is a special education opportunity.”*



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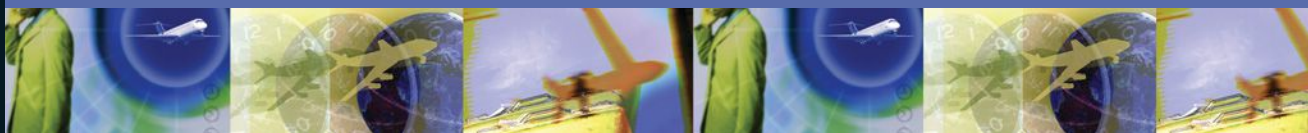
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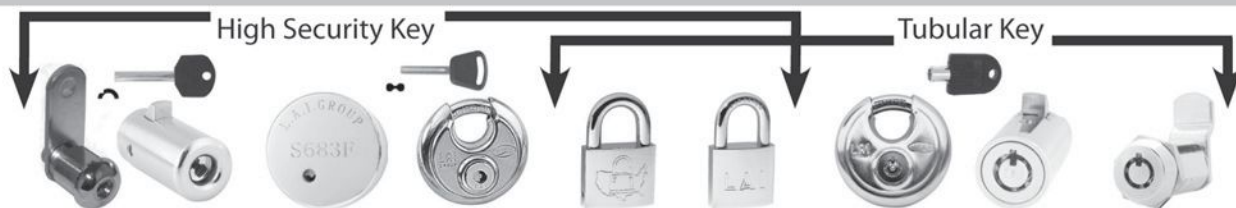
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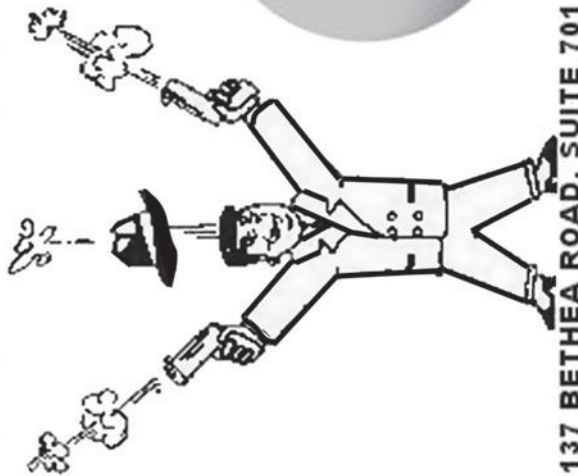
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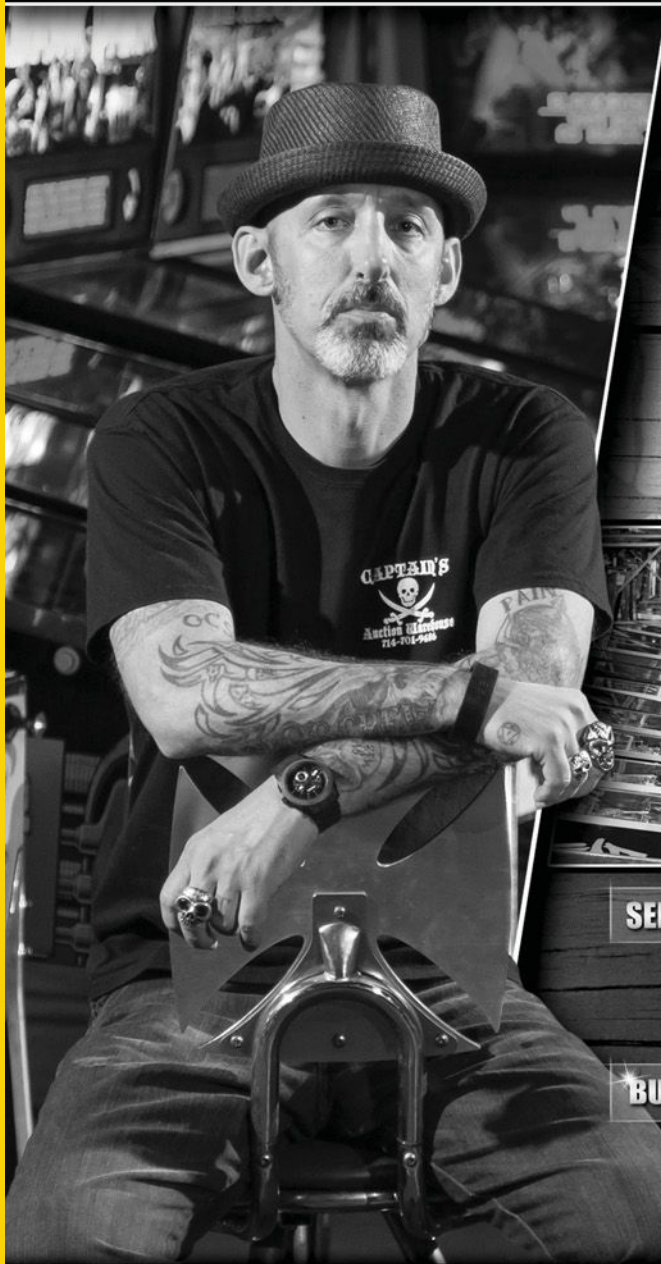
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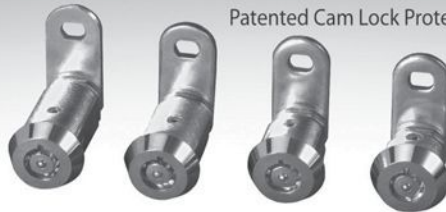
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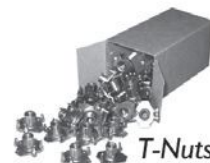
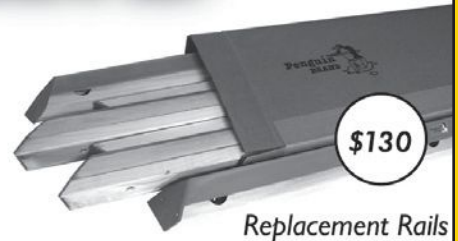
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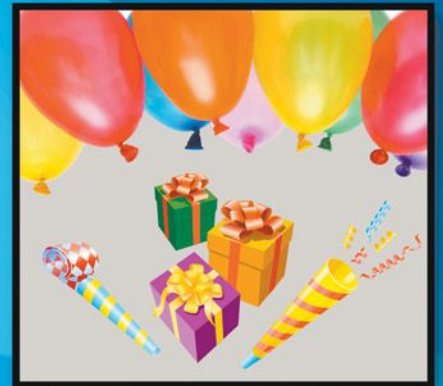
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