

# Rotobowling never quite caught on in Greece

Since the beginning of time, people have enjoyed various forms of bowling. In fact, archeologists believe they have discovered a set of stone bowling pins dating back to the fourth or fifth century. Bowling has always been a part of American life, but it really began to take off after World War II. With all those returning veterans, the popularity of the game on the new invention called television, the introduction of automatic pin setters, and the construction of modern air-conditioned facilities, bowling would become the number one participation sport in the nation.

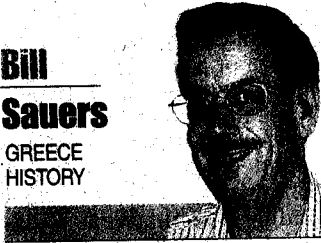
The residents of the town of Greece had several bowling choices during those post-war years, including Boem's on Edgemere Drive and the Charlotte bowling hall on Stutson Street. Along the Ridge there was the Lyon's Den, Domm Brothers and Sam Mink's Ridge Bowling, but they were not what anyone would call truly modern. The first 'modern' bowling hall in the town of Greece was proposed by the Fasano family. Their plan would not only bring a modern bowling hall to the town, but at the same time introduce a new game that might revolutionize the bowling industry.

In 1946 Michael Fasano and his sons, Ernest and Donato, purchased the Lee property at the intersection of Dewey Avenue, Maiden Lane and Stone Road and within a year proposed building a shopping plaza which would include a 24-alley bowling hall. The facility would not be the standard bowling game, however, but a new revolutionary game called Rotobowling.

The game had been patented in the early 1940s by Orville F. Whittle of Florida and he was just beginning to franchise his game. In 1947 Rotobowling was being played in Florida and a building was being converted for the game in Buffalo when the Fasanos announced their project, which would be the very first facility anywhere built especially for the game.

## Bill Sauers

GREECE HISTORY



Rotobowling was described as a game of science, skill, power and speed, combining the recreation of noiseless bowling with the elements of billiards and pinball games. It would be governed by the Rotobowling Congress, an organization similar to the American Bowling Congress.

Unlike regulation bowling, the game used a 94-foot carpeted alley with lights along the edge, rubber cushion banks on each side and hazard pins suspended over the courts. The balls were propelled down the alley with a device that looked similar to an upright vacuum cleaner. The game was dependent upon a player's ability to bank shots rather than on physical ability. Scoring combined the total number of pins downed and the number of times the ball was banked.

A 1947 ad in "Bowlers Journal" stated that we were standing on the threshold of a Rotobowling age and millions will soon be playing the game."

It seems the Fasanos had some trouble explaining the game to the town leaders who had the mistaken impression that it was a gambling game with an elaborate pay-off device. Gambling of any kind, including even bingo, was illegal in New York state at the time.

There was also the fear that the bar in the facility would be too close to Barnard School. By the time things were worked out with the town, the Fasanos began to realize there was no future in the game. They probably discovered that people were not amused with a noiseless game that took no physical effort.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

A 1947 advertisement for rotobowling.

The Fasanos then looked for other opportunities, and on Feb. 4, 1954 opened their plaza, not with bowling lanes but with a Loblaw's grocery, Cramer's drugstore and several other stores, including a restaurant with a bar. We can wonder today if the Fasanos realized that as they opened their plaza, bowling was, in fact, being revolutionized. Down the road a mile and a half, Sam Mink at his Ridge Bowling Hall, was introducing the Rochester area public to the AMF pinspotter, the first automatic pin setting machine, the single most revolutionary item in bowling history.

Modern bowling halls would eventually come to Greece, but not without a struggle. In 1956 Schantz Construction proposed a bowling hall opposite the new Northgate Plaza and in 1957 a hall was proposed at McCall and Stone Roads on the Frear Estate. They were both opposed by neighbors and the town. But soon Dewey Gardens and nearby Terrace Gardens were opened, followed by Maiden Lanes in 1960.

History has all but forgotten Orville Whittle's Rotobowling game, and the Fasanos' proposed plan that would revolutionize bowling. Luckily for the Fasanos, they realized the public didn't want to play their game and gave up their idea before construction began. They did build a plaza and, although the tenants changed throughout the years, the plaza itself lasted nearly a half century.

For a fleeting moment in 1947 the town of Greece almost had the world's first rotobowling building, but the developers saw the handwriting on the wall and changed their plan. Today an empty drugstore stands on that site, a victim of its developers not seeing, or not wanting to see, what the public wanted.

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