

Alley Owners Remember 50 Years of Bowling Bliss, by Mary Frances Hill Westender - August 28, 1997

George Marino is the no-nonsense sort, the last person in the world you'd think would get nostalgic. He doesn't smile readily. But there are a few cracks in that stern, Danny Thomas-like face betraying all the fun he's had in the last years.

On a dull Monday morning, the far side of Grandview Bowling Lanes is full of seniors league bowlers, mostly women in stretch polyester pants and cardigans buttoned up to the neck.

Marino points to the far lane. "One of these ladies, she's bowling using two canes," he says, and suddenly beams with pride. "She just got both her knees replaced," his wife, Lorraine Marino, chimes in.

This year marks the 50th bowling season for Grandview Lanes, on Commercial Drive. Though it's old in business-years, five decades is only a mid-life mark for the Marino family legacy.

For George Marino, it's as much a business as a lifestyle, like a clubhouse, where his family has made lifetime friendships, witnessed that rare perfect game, and watched the neighborhood change almost overnight.

George Marino was born in 1942. When he was five, his father, Louie Marino, an avid bowler, bought Grandview Recreation Centre, and George's career as a pin-setter began. After school each day, George would stand behind the lane backboards, wait for a bowler to knock down a pin or two, and set it back up again.

Young George was part of a motley crew then. Kids who needed after-school earnings worked alongside senior fellows who had hit the skids.

"You gotta remember, pin-setters were of a different mentality. They're not like lawyers or accountants," he says vaguely. "You'd have 40 women bowling during the day (in the 1950s), and only two pin-setters, because the others wouldn't show up. So we'd run around like crazy."

One pin-setter named Elmer, Marino recalls, began work in his 80s. Another, Jimmy Hunter, grew up to be an executive with the Detroit Red Wings.

Marino fondly remembers Red, a pin-setter he describes as "slightly slow", but a fine caricature artist. Marino walks to the private room behind the lanes, where loud machinery adjust bowling pins to upright positions. There, on a backboard wall, Red had created a line of three-foot high caricatures: beatniks with beret and cigarettes, happy young women with long hair, sketched in charcoal pencil. As if in fond remembrance, Marino dares not mark the portraits.

There were the milestones, too. The death of Louis Marino in 1969, and George's takeover of the family business; a year later, the first perfect game ever bowled at Grandview, and event George regrets his father did not see; the birth 24 years ago of George and Lorraine's daughter Tammy, who's being groomed to run Grandview when her parents retire.

There will be hoopla to celebrate Grandview's 50th year, the couple says. But the Marinos won't fess up on the details. "Oh, that's a secret. Even to us," Lorraine Marino chuckles. They do have one trophy to

commemorate the anniversary: George holds up a tall shot glass with a turkey etched in red ink on one side.

If a building can reverberate with the confident innocence of the 1950s era, Grandview Lanes does it. Walls have been torn down and lanes have expanded over the last five decades but there remains a stubbornness in its design. There's the black clip-art figure of a bowler and "Grandview Recreation" sign above the lanes, and the modest lunch counter, where Marino's mother served hot dogs and sandwiches for years.

Not everything in the world has to change, says Marino.

One Friday night league, for instance, has existed since 1947. Not with the same bowlers, of course. "Some of them die off, then new ones come in."

Which is not to say the Marinos haven't kept up with the times. Grandview Lanes' accoutrements are as modern as they come, with electronic scoreboards, an upstairs billiards room, and glow-in-the-dark bowling nights, packaged with 80s disco music, dry ice and black lights.

Until the late 70s or so, bowling leagues offered a clean, fun social spot to meet people. These days the time and season-long commitment are much more difficult to come by, and bowling has become a casual pastime. That's a loss for the social scene, he says.

"We know couples who met here, and they're still together today," he says. "You'd find a different sort of people here than you would at the nightclubs."