



# At Golden Lanes

*Ben Scribner aims to bring new life to Goldendale's vintage bowling alley*

*By Jeanie Senior*

The owner of Goldendale's last—and only—bowling alley is a musician and a self-described terrible bowler who sees Golden Lanes as a piece of art: history worth saving.

Built in 1960, the 12-lane bowling alley is a study in midcentury modern design, with bowling equipment, furnishings, and architectural details that echo the era.

"There's a point in an establishment like this," says Ben Scribner, deploring the number of historic bowling alleys that are being torn down. "They're going the way of the dinosaurs in big cities, when they can make more money with a parking lot."

Flashy new bowling alleys are being built, some with multiple restaurants, billiard parlors and an accent on faux nostalgia.

But Ben says they lack the authenticity of Golden Lanes, with its real wood lanes—instead of laminate used in new alleys—vintage Brunswick scoring machines and ball returns resplendent with chrome and stainless steel.

Ben admits the place was a lot busier in earlier decades. He has heard stories about how seven days a week the place was jam-packed with bowling leagues.

Now the leagues are down to two: a men's league that bowls on Monday night and a women's league on Tuesday night. Ben is trying to boost business with a Thursday night league for mixed two-person teams, featuring cash prizes and drink specials. The cost is \$9 for three games, shoe rental included.

Other regular bowlers include a seniors bowling session every Thursday afternoon and Fridays, when residents of New Hope Farms



*Golden Lanes owner Ben Scribner not only runs Goldendale's only bowling alley, he plays piano and keyboard for a Portland-based band that occasionally entertains at Golden Lanes.*

take to the lanes.

On Saturday nights, Golden Lanes offers Glow Bowl under black light from 7 p.m. to midnight, which Ben calls “a lot of bowling for \$12.”

Ben is promoting live music on weekends, bringing in bands from Portland and the Columbia Gorge to play music that complements the Golden Lanes atmosphere. Ben’s own Portland-based band, Venus and the Linntonites, has made a few appearances. He plays piano with the group, with a repertoire he describes as swing, rockabilly, old blues, and old R&B. He says out-of-town bands love to play at Golden Lanes.



Ben has worked as a professional musician since his college years. A native Californian, he lived in Michigan and graduated from high school in Phoenix.

“My father was an engineer, he moved us around a lot,” he says.

Ben majored in film scoring

and piano at the Berklee College of Music in Boston.

After college, he ended up in Los Angeles trying to become a film composer, playing jazz in bands and training for Yamaha’s musical instrument division. He played gigs, did some low budget film scores and made a big discovery.

“In Hollywood, I quickly found out it’s all about who you know and who you’re related to,” he says.

Ben’s parents retired to Goldendale and bought Golden Lanes in June 2005.

“But they got real sick of it real fast,” says Ben, who moved to Goldendale 2½ years ago from Los Angeles.



The move worked for Ben because his three sons spend the summer with him.

“My folks had the bowling alley and needed help with that, and the kids can spend time with their dad in the summer, instead of sitting in day care,” he says. “Finally, last March, the folks just handed over the keys and said, ‘We’re done, do whatever you want to do.’”

Ben’s parents now live in Texas. His sons love the bowling alley.

“They love to bowl, one of them is going pro, I know it,” he says.

Restoration and refurbishing continues at Golden Lanes, on what Ben says is a nickel and dime budget. There’s fresh paint, inside and out. The “BOWL” letters on the outside sign are lighted for the first time in years. He has a list of planned improvements.

Ben recently bought a quantity of new bowling shoes and threw out two garbage bags full of old shoes.

“Word is, it was really dilapidated,” he says of the place in the old days. “Very few of the lights worked, and it was smoky.”

Ben’s parents made Golden Lanes nonsmoking when they bought the business.

“There’s been no smoking for three years,” Ben says. “But people are still afraid it’s going to be all smoky and gross in here, because that’s how they remember it. It doesn’t smell like smoke anymore.”

The limited budget means Ben-the-musician has expanded his skills to include “keeping a 48-year-old

pin-setter running, mechanic, pin boy, manager, bartender, server, promoter. You name it, I’ve had to learn everything.”

“Slowly, surely, it’s coming together,” Ben says. “I’m trying to keep it vintage. There’s been a lot of complaints that it doesn’t have automatic scoring and we should get it. But in my opinion, it’s another expense, another thing I’ve got to fix when it breaks.”

He likes the idea that the old Brunswick “Tele-scores” require a bit of mathematics knowledge on the bowler’s part.

“I think that is a good thing, and they have a definite retro look,” he says. “I wouldn’t think about ripping those out and replacing them with something newer. There’s just no way that’s going to happen.”

Ben acknowledges the alley “is just a relic,” but a relic worth saving.

“I think the bowling alleys that are going to survive are the ones in small communities. This is the way that bowling was meant to be.” ■



*Above, Ben has plans to renovate the bowling alley and attract more bowlers. Middle, 1960-era signs give a retro look to the alley. Top, advertising card for Ben’s band playing at the alley.*