

Adults relive their youth, rinks draw return customers with retro arcade and video games

By Kathy Bergstrom

Whether it's their kid-friendly simplicity or nostalgic appeal for adults, retro games like Ms. Pacman, air hockey and pinball continue as mainstays at many roller skating rinks.

Some of the games are good money makers while others keep their places at the rinks to provide activities for adults while their kids skate or attend birthday parties. Some rink owners see games like Ms. Pacman and Galaga as a part of their history and say they'll remain as long as they work.

They say some adults will stop in simply to relive their youth for a few minutes and drop a few quarters in machines like Donkey Kong or Asteroids.

The arcade at Funland Skate Castle in Decatur, Ala., includes two air hockey tables, skee-ball style games and the original Ms. Pacman and Galaga video games. The rink also has three pool tables. "That's as retro as it gets," said owner J.A. Phillips. Skate Castle has about 40 games in total, including some newer video games and redemption games.

The pool tables mostly attract adult men, while women enjoy skee-ball, Phillips said. Everyone plays air hockey. Phillips has not seen a resurgence in the popularity of Ms. Pacman or Galaga, estimating that each game takes in \$25 per week. "I can tell if I've had a lot of birthday parties by the amount of money in those two machines because you know you've had a lot of adults," he said. "When the take is low, you know there weren't that many adults in here."

The throwback video games are played mostly by customers 25 and older, he said. Still Phillips hangs onto the games for several reasons.

He could probably find a game that makes more money but wants to keep parents happy. He also considers the air hockey and Ms. Pacman/Galaga games collectors items. "They are the originals. They're just sort of a mainstay to me in the arcade," Phillips said.

Lori McClain, co-owner of Corban's Temple Skating Rink and Family Fun Center in Kane, Pa., felt the same way about Donkey Kong when she bought it for the rink. Another local business owner in Kane had the machine, and McClain bought it from him.

The game was more popular when it came to the rink, which McClain and her husband, Ivan, bought in 2007. Corban's Temple also has two pool tables, California Speed driving game, Teed Off pinball game and Street Fighter video game in the arcade. The rink also has an old crane game and a water game

for dropping coins into.

McClain sees some adult customers playing pool or other arcade games while their kids participate in birthday parties. Another customer has started throwing regular parties at the rink and arcade. The idea is "let's relive the past and be kids again, so the games are a part of that attraction," she said.

McClain would like to get a Pacman game, too. "I think Pacman would probably draw a crowd," she said.

While some of the retro video

that goes back there and loves to play (Ms. Pacman)."

Kids like the simplicity of games like Pacman and Galaga, said Vicki Clay, manager of Franklin Skate Club in Franklin, Ind. "It's still a challenge, but yet it's not like some of the newer games that you have all the graphics and there's just so much going on," she said.

The Indiana rink doesn't have a dedicated game room, but scattered throughout the rink are a Ms. Pac-

man/Galaga video game, foosball, air hockey, two pinball machines and some newer games like a hunting game and basketball.

The rink leases most of its games. Ms. Pacman and Galaga seem to do the best, she said. "The other games, they kind of come and go, but Pacman and Galaga and pinball we've had for years," she said.

"The more things change the more things stay the same," she said. The kids are mostly attracted to the video games while she sees adults playing air hockey with their kids, and foosball and pinball on their own.

She said she also likes the family friendly nature of the older games. "We deal with a lot of schools, so we try to keep things clean and on a good level," she said.

Maintaining older games is an issue to consider.

Phillips said pool tables are practically maintenance free other than replacing balls and cues, so that's an added bonus. He suggests anyone who owns older games should have a reliable maintenance person.

McClain said her husband has been able to fix their games himself and found some parts for the old games online.



A mom and her son play Ms. Pacman at Franklin Skate Club in Franklin, Ind.

games make little money, billiards, air hockey and skee-ball are solid revenue generators for Skate Castle. The popularity of new redemption games wears off after time, but those games stay popular, Phillips said.

"I guarantee all three of those make as much money now as they did five years ago," he said.

The pool tables generate as much as \$300 in revenue weekly during busy winter months, and they're easy to maintain, Phillips said. Air hockey probably generates about \$150 per week.

Air hockey and skee-ball also are the most popular games at Rollerland in Choctaw, Okla. The rink's arcade has seven games including Asteroids, Ms. Pacman, Centipede and Cruisin' USA driving game. The video games are the original machines from decades ago.

Regina Anderson, who owns the rink with her husband, Jeff, is considering adding a pinball machine because she likes to play it herself.

"The kids do love to play the skee-ball and they still love to play Ms. Pacman. I still see them playing Centipede," she said.

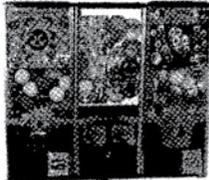
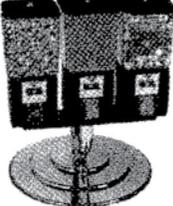
In the last two or three months, Anderson has seen some adults come in to play Ms. Pacman and the other older games. "I have a lot of adults come in and say, 'I haven't seen Asteroids in forever, and I'm going to play this game,'" she said. "I have a 74-year-old woman

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