

Parish-based lanes keep rolling along

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER — Tucked away in the basement of two Catholic-school buildings, a pair of four-lane bowling facilities continue to withstand the test of time.

Scores are kept the "old-fashioned way" — paper and pencil — and the machinery is elderly by bowling standards. But the centers at Holy Family and St. Boniface parishes keep rolling along, thanks to consistent use by their parishes. That's no small feat, considering that numerous Rochester-area public bowling establishments have closed in recent years.

The recreation center at St. Boniface dates back to 1923, and there was even bowling in another facility prior to that. Across town, Holy Family's recreation area has been a staple of parish social life since 1932.

"A lot of people say, 'You still got this? I used to set pins here.' This is kind of our hidden jewel," said Louis DeSisti, Holy Family's recreation-hall manager. "This is like a time tun-

Sports

nel. The Smithsonian might want half this stuff."

"It's great. Without the lanes, we'd be like any other parish hall," said Ed Sloan, a longtime member of the St. Boniface Men's Club, which operates the recreation center.

Despite the age of each place, Holy Family and St. Boniface are well-kept and serve as the scene of many gatherings — not only for bowling, but also for graduation parties, showers and meetings. Both recreation centers offer a lounge area that includes a pool table; Holy Family has video games and a Foosball table as well. Beer is available at both spots and carry-in food is allowed, although DeSisti will cook for parties at Holy Family if desired.

The most distinctive features, of course, are the bowling lanes: Holy Family and St. Boniface are the only two parishes in the diocese that offer the sport on-site. Sloan and DeSisti



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Louis DeSisti, Holy Family Parish's recreation-hall manager, sets a ball back on the rack after bowling a few frames July 28. Photos of past league members, employees and recreation-hall party-goers decorate the back wall, along with a sign that recalls a time when only Holy Family parishioners and their friends were allowed to use the facility. Now, DeSisti says, non-parishioners may reserve the hall as well.

attribute this feature to each parish's German heritage: "Germans were very big on bowling," DeSisti said.

Machinery at Holy Family and St. Boniface dates back to the 1960s; in fact, Holy Family's equipment was acquired from the 1966 American Bowling Congress National Tournament which was held on portable lanes at the Rochester Community War Memorial.

"The machines do work, although sometimes they get cranky," DeSisti said. "There's a lot of work behind the scenes to keep them going," said Kevin Ehmann, St. Boniface Men's Club treasurer.

Holy Family and St. Boniface were neighborhood recreational hubs in their heydays, "when you could walk down the street and play some cards, have a beer," said DeSisti, a Holy Family parishioner.

"It used to be, years ago, that it was open seven days a week — early in the morning until late in the evening," Ehmann said of St. Boniface. "It's probably the evolution of the television that's drawn away from people coming out and getting together."

"Up until probably 10 or 12 years ago, they were going every night of

the week. That has petered out as bowling in general has petered out," Sloan added.

DeSisti said Holy Family has been affected by these trends as well as a declining neighborhood, which has especially sapped the amount of leagues operating. However, Holy Family still gets consistent usage from its parishioners as well as from two affiliated parishes, Holy Apostles and St. Anthony of Padua. Meanwhile, St. Boniface continues to operate adult leagues on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays, along with a Saturday-morning junior bowling program.

Whereas both centers are primarily parishioner-based, Ehmann said St. Boniface often rents out to the general public and DeSisti said Holy Family would consider doing the same. Though lacking in the glitz of big bowling centers with computerized scoring, Ehmann noted that the Catholic-parish bowling experience is offset by reasonable prices and full run of the facility (shoes and balls are available at both places as well).

"It's kind of an intimate evening for just your bowling party," Ehmann said.

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