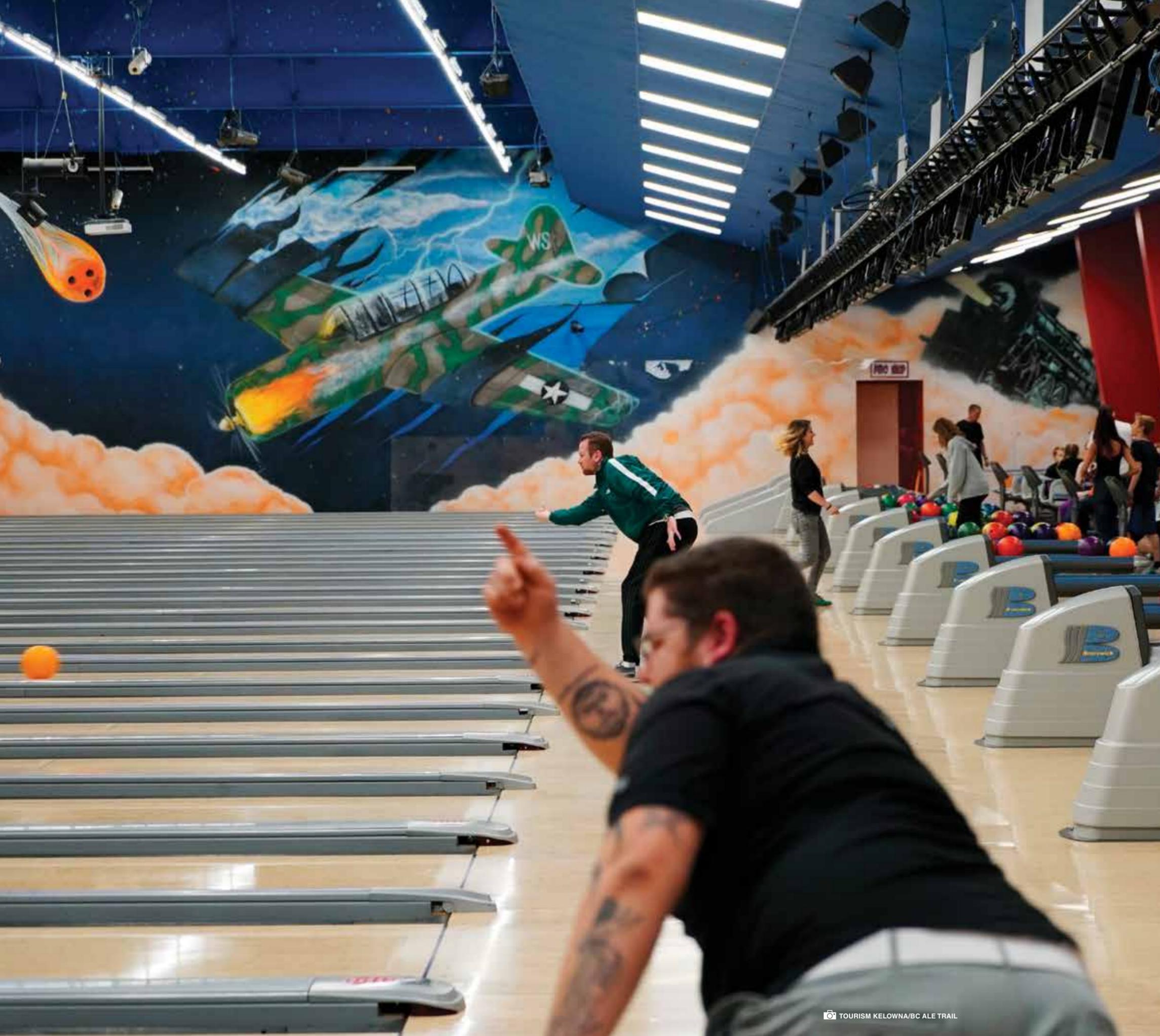


A photograph of a bowling alley. In the foreground, a rack of colorful bowling balls (green, red, orange, yellow) is visible. In the background, a person is bowling a purple ball down the lane. The scene is brightly lit with blue and white lights in the background.

Bowling is Back

BOWLING IS ABOUT AS OLD-SCHOOL AS IT GETS, BUT IT'S AS POPULAR NOW AS IT'S BEEN IN DECADES. HERE IS AN INSIDE LOOK AT SOME OF THE HISTORIC BOWLING ALLEYS FROM AROUND THE PROVINCE

BY JANE MUNDY



“ I’ve seen a lot of famous people bowl,” said Claude Chenier with a toothy grin. He has been working from janitor to manager at Vancouver’s Commodore Lanes for more than 25 years. “Roy Rogers even came by and tied up Trigger on Granville Street, and it’s still a great place for a good time.”

I don’t know whether Claude or Roy Rogers knew that the Commodore Ballroom upstairs is famous for its sprung dance floor made with horsehair lining, but that’s another story. I met Claude a few minutes after time-warping down the stairs from 838 Granville Street. On a recent Saturday afternoon, we laced up (Clark Gable and Jack Benny have rented bowling shoes here too), grabbed a few beers and settled in at Lane 4. About a dozen millennials were whooping it up on Lanes 1 and 2 and a few families were high-fiving to our right.

Don’t be deterred by the Commodore’s shady-looking exterior. Inside it’s an old school vibe filled with whacky paraphernalia. “What else can you play right along with your kids? It’s one of the best activities for families,” said Terry McEvoy, my bowling buddy. “It’s not like golf or another sport where your ability affects others. And everyone gets a thrill when you get a strike.”

After all, who doesn’t like knocking stuff down?

When I was a kid my parents explained that a thunderstorm occurred ▶

Left: Bowling and brews at the McCurdy Bowling Centre in Kelowna.

when God and his chums in heaven were bowling. (We had never gone bowling.) By 6:00 p.m., the Commodore was filled with 3.5-pound thunder.

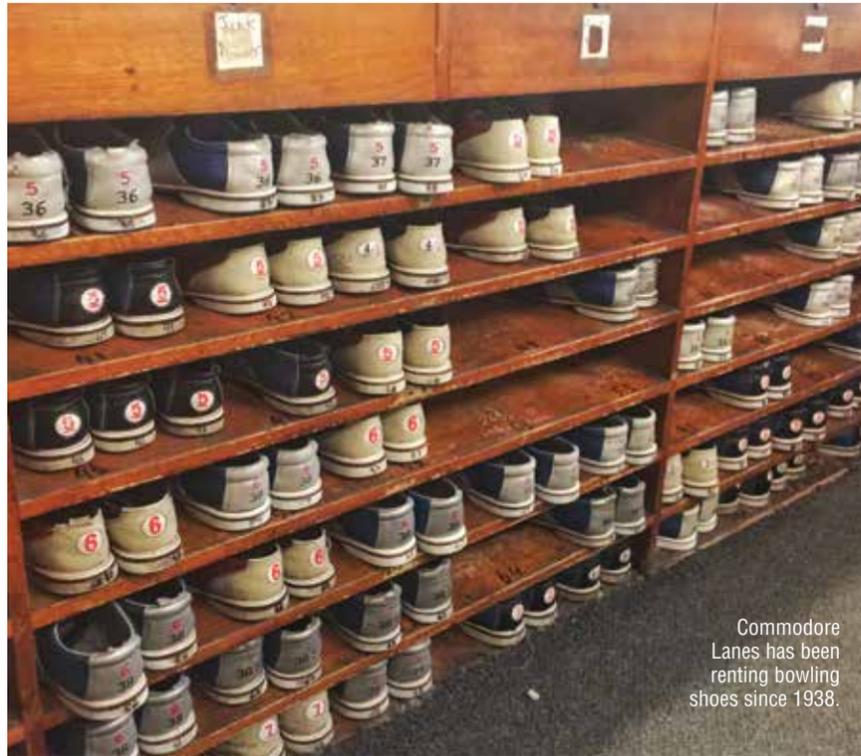
Commodore Bowling & Billiards opened in 1930 as a place where “Pleasant Days May Be Spent.” The game hasn’t changed much in 88 years, but how it’s played has changed. It took us a few minutes to figure out the scoring system—guess it’s been some time. Instead of pencils and score sheets there’s a computer program that adds scores. Some programs recommend the bowler where best to stand and release to knock over remaining pins. No doubt the league players (the walls are lined with plaques and awards) don’t opt for that. It also doesn’t let you get a few practice rolls in first—much to my dismay. My balls careened down the gutter rather than the shiny wooden lane.

AFTER ATTEMPTING A few games of five-pin, I decided that 10-pin is easier. I even got a few strikes at Langford Lanes, near Victoria. Cosmic bowling starts at 6:00 p.m., but the overhead TV caters to an older crowd—advertising Dr. Ho’s treatment for back pain. (Note to self: stretch before bowling.)

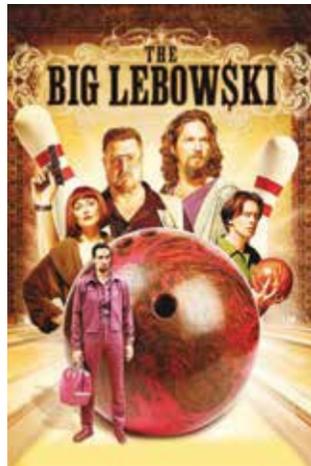
“Yesterday afternoon 80 people were bowling, and we saw a lot of bowling shirts,” said manager Bob Urner, laughing. But after 6:00 p.m., Cosmic Bowling takes over. It’s like a Saturday night disco with a glow-in-the-dark ambience, more socializing than sport. “It’s a nightclub for millennials, but we also have a lot of corporate events, birthdays, any occasion is reason to bowl.” And they aren’t called alleys anymore. They are bowling entertainment centres.

We peruse the menu. I order “The Dude” (White Russian) and my friend opts for a Paralyzer—vodka, Kahlua, Pepsi and milk—with “The Big Lebowski Burger.” If you haven’t seen the Coen brothers’ 1998 movie *The Big Lebowski* starring Jeff Bridges as “The Dude,” his laid-back bowling has been celebrated with an annual festival and has sprung a new religion—the Church of the Latter-Day Dude. The Dude spends his days sipping White Russians and nights at the bowling alley, along with fellow bowler and hated rival Jesus Quintana, played brilliantly by John Turturro.

Vancouver’s Rio Theatre celebrated its successful #SavetheRio campaign in



Commodore Lanes has been renting bowling shoes since 1938.



September by offering free screenings of the Coens’ cult classic. “And every New Year’s Day *The Big Lebowski* is our hang-over movie,” said Tyson Storozinski, Rio programmer and bar manager. “People dress in housecoats like The Dude and a few wear Jesus’s purple jumpsuit.” Of course, Tyson stocks the bar with vodka, Kahlua and milk—the Dude’s beverage. “As well, the Rio was built in 1938 but in the 1960s—with the advent of TV—it closed as a theatre and re-opened as a bowling alley. It returned as a theatre in the late 1970s.” The Dude abides.



BOWLING HASN’T CHANGED much. It’s affordable and equipment is provided; there’s the satisfying crash of the Maplewood pins and rolling thunder of balls; and it still has simple rules—where else are you going to get 10 second-chances?

Former Youbou Lanes manager, Tara Daly, said that when first timers of all ages find Youbou Lanes (located in the small town of Youbou on Vancouver Island) they invariably say, “Why didn’t I know about this before?” or “What took me so long?” For those over a certain age, some BC Bowling alleys are a bowl

down memory lane.

Despite the extensive variety of recreational activities available (including electronic games) alley owners said the sport is on the resurgence. In 2007, five-pin bowling was ranked #4 during the CBC miniseries *The Great Canadian Invention*. “Bowling is making a comeback,” said Langford Lanes manager Bob Urner. “There was a boom from the late ‘50s to most of the ‘70s, and league bowling was probably 90 percent of that business.”

The 1980s took its toll on bowling, but increasingly new bowling entertainment centres are cropping up, offering more services. Social media helps in promoting bowling—tournaments are posted on Facebook pages and leagues are bowling every night of the week, Urner said.

Bowling is popular the world over, but British Columbians have the best of the bowling world: some alleys have nostalgia thrown in and others with cosmic lights. What’s not to like?

BOWLING BENEFITS

- **Exercise:** Bowling helps build up your leg muscles and holding the ball helps to develop arm muscles. Swinging your arm as you roll the bowl down the lane exercises your joints, tendons and ligaments. But if you haven’t bowled in a while, it’s important to stretch beforehand. And the average bowler walks over half-a-mile over three games.
- **Lose Weight:** Bowling can burn anywhere from 170 to 300 calories per game. An adult who weighs 200 pounds can burn up to 275 calories per hour while bowling, according to the MayoClinic.com, unless you eat a pizza, nachos, popcorn and drink a few beers during the game.
- **Socialize:** An instructional book written in 1987 said that, “one of the greatest benefits of bowling is the development of friendships.” How about joining a league? Team spirit helps build relationships and friendships by introducing new players to people who share a common interest, whether in a competitive league atmosphere or just a fun/social league.
- **Stress Buster:** The combination of all the above help make bowling a stress reliever for many.

BOWLING ETIQUETTE

“Wear your bowling shoes. Keep your food and drinks off the lane. Stay behind the line and try not to throw the ball up in the air,” says Langford Lanes manager Bob Unger.



The hand-dressed lanes at Youbou Lanes on Vancouver Island.

ALLEYS ACROSS BC

ELKS CLUB

Kimberley

“Two kids sit at the back on a little bench and jump down to set the pins and roll the ball back,” said Elks manager Lorne McIntosh. There are only two 10-pin lanes at the 70-year-old Elks Club, but a pin-setting machine would cost \$100,000 and put about 10 kids out of work. The kids have to be nimble and have stamina: often they set up pins for three hours. “A bowler warns the pinsetter ahead of time if he’s really gonna throw the ball, but occasionally a kid gets whacked—that’s just the way the pins fly,” added McIntosh with a chuckle. “You have to pay them \$1 but most guys pay them \$5.” And everyone likes it that way.

YOUBOU LANES

Youbou

Bowling in Youbou hasn’t changed much since it was built in 1951 for about \$15,000. Its walls are covered with artifacts and pictures dating back to the ‘50s, it has the only sanctioned, hand-set lanes in Canada and they are still “hand dressed” (dusted, stripped and oiled).

“Locals and tourists say it’s awesome and cool and sometimes they’ll bowl a game before realizing someone is setting the pins,” said former Youbou Lanes manager Tara

Daly. And their pinsetters will still pose for photo ops.

Tara was also a pinsetter, but she was 50 years old at the time. “Rather than making my usual encouraging remarks to get a strike, I just wanted the bowlers to put their ball in the gutter—it was intense and I only lasted a few hours,” said Daly, laughing. “But some pinsetters are faster than the machine, and they work hard for minimum wage plus tips.”

MCCURDY BOWLING CENTRE

Kelowna

McCurdy is a family outing. “All 24 10-pin and six five-pin lanes have bumpers that are great for kids under six years old learning how to bowl,” said Chris Bunnage. “When the gutters pop up, the bowling ball will always stay on the lane so kids can knock down more pins.”

The centre also attracts craft beer aficionados. “We brew our beer onsite, including *Lebowski Lager*, an IPA called *Channel Cat*, which means gutterball, and *Sandbagger Brown Ale*.” Bunnage said a sandbagger is a really good bowler who intentionally bowls badly to keep their average low so when it comes to tournament season they have a very high handicap—and that’s cheating, kind

of. Their *Harkrider Red Lager* is dedicated to those who throw the bowling ball double bouncing down the lane.

As for attire, Chris said that bowling shirts have been a “hit and miss” trend since McCurdy opened 18 years ago, “but beer and bowling never goes out of style.”

THE CABIN

Revelstoke

Good times roll at the Cabin. After a day of skiing, families flock to this quaint little bowling alley for a few games of five-pin—it is the perfect après-ski sport and within walking distance of downtown restaurants. It has eight lanes with “full drink service” and bartender Amy makes a mean Manhattan. Her Moscow Mule is also a big hit.

BLACK DIAMOND LANES

Prince George

Roll down 18 memory lanes at Black Diamond Bowl & Billiards. Originally the 5th Avenue Bowldrome back in 1958, the five-pin lanes now come with cosmic lighting systems and if you want to splurge (maybe date night?), upstairs is a swanky VIP lounge on the newly renovated adult floor with comfy couches, eight lanes and a bar.

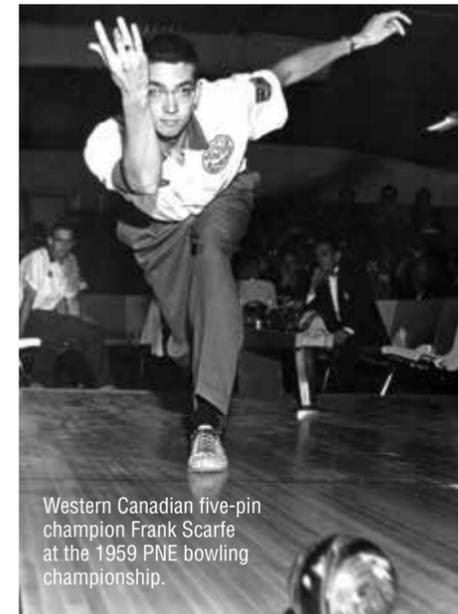


The bowling alley at Pacific Mills Pulp Mill in 1944.

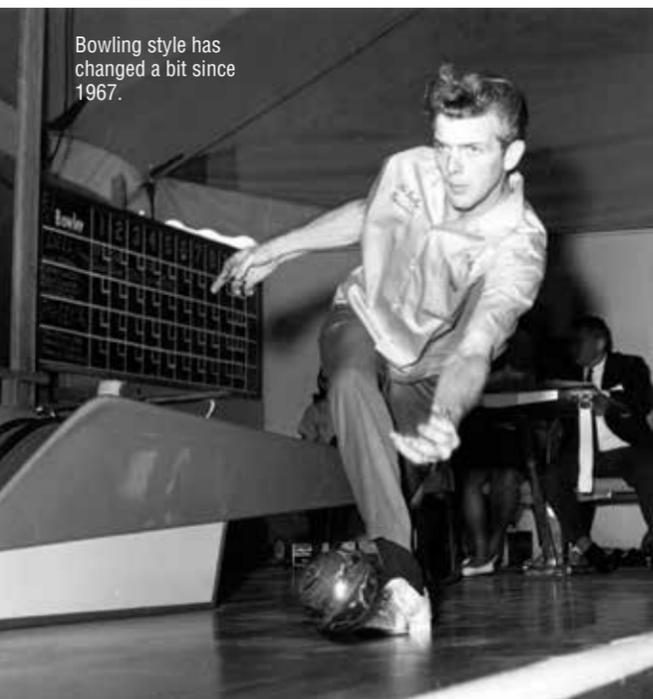


The Commodore Lanes International Girls bowling team in 1931.

A look back at the golden age of bowling in BC, when nearly every community around the province had its own lanes.



Western Canadian five-pin champion Frank Scarfe at the 1959 PNE bowling championship.



Bowling style has changed a bit since 1967.



The PNE Manufacturers Building in 1959.

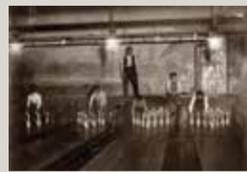


The elegant Commodore Lanes in 1931.

BOWLING FACTOIDS



American bowling derives mainly from the German game of *Kegelspiel*, or kegeling, which used nine pins set in a diamond formation. Kegeling, enjoyed by German peasants, was known as a common-man's sport.



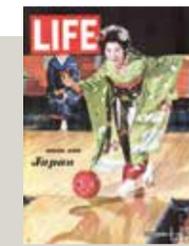
By the 1800s, New York was the country's "bowling capital." The first indoor alley, Knickerbocker's, in New York City, was built in 1840.



During the 1936 Berlin Olympics, bowling was as a kind of unofficial adjunct to the games.



In 1938, the Commodore Lanes claims to be the first place to rent bowling shoes.



A 1959 issue of Life magazine described the modern bowling alley as an "all-purpose pleasure palace." Some alleys offered childcare and beauty parlors, along with carpeted lobbies, restaurants, cocktail lounges and billiard tables.



By 1960 league play was at its peak, affording regular and organized opportunities for various groups to form teams and bowl in "friendly competition."



Bowling was accepted as a medal sport in the Asian Games, and made its first appearance in the Pan American Games in 1991.