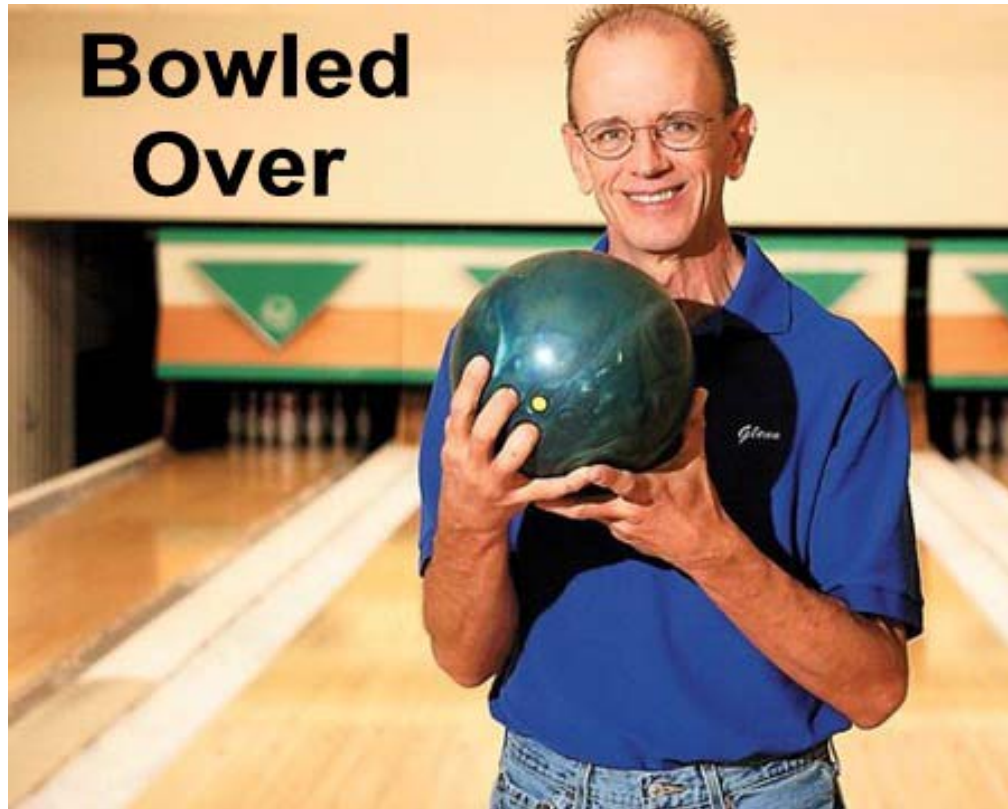


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Section: News – Page 1



Don Alquist/The Ardmoreite

Glenn Hendrix is opening a new retro bowling alley called Ken-Cliff Lanes.

Man's passion for sport leads to revival of lanes

Steve Biehn

steve.biehn@ardmoreite.com

When Glenn Hendrix first set foot inside Ken-Cliff Lanes as a teenager, his goal was to whip one of his buddies in a friendly game of pool. That simple decision changed his life forever.

"No one was bowling, the lights were off, but you could just see it," he said.

The next time he visited, Ken-Cliff was filled with the sounds of bowling balls gliding down the glossy wooden lanes and pins crashing into one another. Hendrix realized he was in his element.

"I was really mesmerized by the whole thing - the leagues, the machines, the people," he said. "It was a whole new world for me. It grabbed me."

Kenneth and Clifford Johnson converted their furniture store at 520 N. Commerce St. into a bowling alley in 1958. They worked closely with equipment manufacturer AMF to make Ken-Cliff Lanes a first-class bowling center. The Johnsons leased the building to Jim and Jackie Meeks in 1966, and it was Jackie who sealed Hendrix' passion for bowling.

"She was the world's best salesperson," he said. "She had me in a league before I knew what happened."

Hendrix turned the tables and literally badgered the couple into hiring him in 1975. As it turned out, he was the last employee they hired.

"It was the most enjoyable job I ever had," he said. "I had great bosses. We worked hard with long hours, but it was a lot of fun. There wasn't a one of us that didn't go down there on their days off."

Ken-Cliff closed on July 31, 1976, and was unceremoniously demolished to make way for a parking lot. Hendrix never forgot his bowling roots and with the blessings of the Johnson and Meeks families, he is reviving Ken-Cliff Lanes, albeit on a much smaller scale, near his Dogwood Road home.

"It's something I've wanted to do since the center closed in 1976," he said Monday inside the metal building that will house the new version of Ken-Cliff Lanes. There are only four lanes, but all of them are outfitted with refurbished, half-century old AMF equipment. Jim Meeks even supplied some of the parts that he'd saved from the original building.

"Having the AMF equipment was critical. It continues the bloodlines," Hendrix said. "I'm trying to duplicate the look and feel of Ken-Cliff."

He hopes to open the bowling center on Jan. 31. The facility will be open most evenings and weekends, and it will feature leagues, tournaments, theme nights and open bowling. It will also be available for private parties and special events. While contractors were completing the final touches, Hendrix made sure the pin-setting machines were working smoothly.

"I've probably bowled 3,000 to 4,000 frames. We had to do machine testing," he said with a sly smile.

Hendrix is referring people to his web site, kenclifflanes.com, where he will announce the final details of his opening.

"I'm beyond amazed at how well the refurbishing and actual construction has gone," he said. "With the exception of the lanes and equipment, none of the contractors had ever worked on a bowling alley."

Steve Biehn
580-221-6546