

Nineteen steps: Remembering bowling at T & M Center Lanes

By Rusty Huggins

I still remember the feeling of excitement as I sauntered down the steps to the basement of the Newton Shopping Center. I was five years old and my mom was taking my brother Randy and me bowling for the first time. Until that day, all bowling meant to me was giving a kiss on the cheek to my mom or dad as they left the house on their respective league nights.

Of course I didn't know it then, but the day I first took those 19 steps would change my life forever.

The score of that first game is long forgotten, but not the thrill of watching the ball go down the lane and hit the pins. That day started the ball rolling on my lifelong interest in bowling.

It wasn't long after that first trip when I began bugging Mom and Dad to take me bowling all the time.

They were good coaches, and my scores soon began to improve. But there's something about learning from your parents as opposed to other adults. Kids seem to have an inherent skepticism toward advice offered by mom or dad, and I was no exception.

Sometimes it takes an outside "expert" to get through to kids, even though their message may be exactly the same as that offered by the parents. For me that expert was Lee Troen.

Lee was the rock-solid foundation during a time when managers changed frequently at Brunswick Center Lanes, as T & M was known at the time. She worked as program director for years, teaching many Newton youngsters to bowl. Hundreds of local kids learned fundamentals from Lee, and I dare say even those who no longer bowl still remember her. By age 8, I was bowling in an afternoon league for kids, of course organized by Lee.

I soon "graduated" to a Saturday league, and I remember getting more and more excited as each weekday passed because I couldn't wait to bowl again.

As the years passed, I continued bowling at Center Lanes.

Lee was there every week, she and those nineteen steps, which I regularly raced down in eager anticipa-

tion of my bowling session.

I honed my skills and improved my game at Center Lanes until graduating from high school and moving away to go to college.

When I returned to Newton in 1982, I again found myself returning to Center Lanes for league play.

Around that time, Brunswick pulled out of most of its corporately-owned bowling centers in the 1980s, including Brunswick Center Lanes in Newton in 1984.

Still, Center Lanes endured.

Myron "Butch" Townsend, a long-time employee, and Hal Murphy assumed proprietorship of the center. Butch's familiarity with the patrons as well as the lane equipment, coupled with the determination of the league bowlers to keep Center Lanes open, was more than enough to handle the transition from corporate to private bowling center.

In 1985, work pulled me away from Newton, but I returned in 1993 to discover Center Lanes still going strong. I reunited with old friends and found those 19 steps right where I left them.

Since then, I've participated in many leagues and tournaments at T & M Center Lanes, just as I did when I was younger.

Inevitably, though, time brings change and now T & M is closing forever.

This Friday night T & M will conduct a "9-Pin No Tap" tournament, giving bowlers one last chance to say good-bye. I've entered the tournament and nothing short of a death in the family could keep me away.

When I was a kid, I used to take the steps up and down two or even three at a time. Those steps have had my feet on them thousands of times over the last 37 years and I couldn't begin to recall one specific trip.

This Friday will be different. I'm going to savor each and every pace down and up, knowing it will be the last time I'll interact with those beloved 19 steps.

Newton resident Rusty Huggins is an avid bowler and member of the Professional Bowlers Association. He's played in numerous leagues and tournaments all over the country and has several perfect games to his credit.