



Adding an LED video wall was a big investment for the owners of Twisted Pin, but it was an important part of creating a new identity for the rebranded center.

The Center's Original Name Would Not Do

The changes made at Plainfield Lanes were so radical that the center cried out for a new name. Take a tour of Twisted Pin.

BY MARK MILLER

LIKE SO MANY other bowling proprietors, brothers Jon and Chris Dow knew their facility couldn't remain traditional. So, they completely changed what was a 24-lane establishment, located 45 minutes southwest of Chicago in Plainfield, Illinois.

Originally opened as Pioneer Lanes by a local farmer, the center became Plainfield Lanes when the Dows bought it from a bank in 2014. Back then, Chris lived in Chicago while Jon took over daily

operations after moving from Georgia, where he was managing a military center.

"It's the story of a more traditional center that had a lot of deferred maintenance-type needs and issues but also quite a few opportunities to transition to more of an entertainment concept and better pay the bills by doing that," Jon said. "When we bought this facility, it was a sick child, but nobody probably knew exactly what was wrong with it."

Jon spent the first year learning the local market and determining what needed to be done. First,

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One component of the center's improved revenue stream involved transitioning from a shared-revenue arcade to one owned by the proprietors, complete with high-performing redemption games.

Saturday night leagues were eliminated. Then they dumped their shared-revenue arcade operator and bought a redemption-based arcade, including games and a card system.

"That was kind of our first investment into the entertainment world," Jon said. "And that worked out pretty well for us. We kept making decisions that were going to make more financial sense."

Next went Friday night leagues.

"It kind of had a snowball effect on how we change, what we paint, how we change our floor, how we change our menu — all those things... until [last] September when we transitioned to Twisted Pin," Jon explained.

"The basic intention was we're going to completely remodel this facility inside and outside and we're going to change it so drastically that [the name] Plainfield Lanes probably isn't going to suit it anymore."

The brothers had arranged for a multi-million-dollar loan to expand outside the center and were ready to proceed four days before being shut down during the pandemic in 2020. Fortunately, they were able to scrap those plans.

Once they re-opened and with the costs of their original ideas much higher, they re-focused on the

existing building. They began working with US Design Lab to determine their options, which included buying an LED video wall.

The remodeling took place in phases over 16 months utilizing two general contractors. They removed a wall and a lane to create a six-lane VIP suite. Lanes 1-17 were set aside for traditional bowling.

Repurposing a former escape room and removing a drop ceiling made way for a redemption arcade featuring nearly three dozen games, including pinball, virtual reality, basketball and others.

But the biggest change was switching from traditional free fall pinsetting machines to string pins — a decision that came before the United States Bowling Congress approved them. A major reason was the center had old pinsetters and an older mechanic.

"We started seeing the writing on the wall, and for the longevity of the business and where my future problems are going to come from, I saw a lot of pain

AT A GLANCE

Venue: Twisted Pin

Location: Plainfield, Illinois

Proprietors: Jon Dow and Chris Dow

Architectural Construction Drawings: Cornerstone Architecture

Branding, Concept and Design: US Design Lab

Bowling: Brunswick Bowling (Boost ST String Pinsetters, Sync Center Operations)

LED Wall: Bowling Media

Food and Beverage: GoTab POS

Arcade Distributor: AVS Companies/Betson Enterprises

Card System: Intercard, Inc.

Redemption: BMI Merchandise

Carpeting/Flooring: Flooring First

Furniture: Brunswick Bowling, Fixtur World

Music Source: Bowling Music/Control Play

Beverage Dispenser: Pour My Beer



MODERNIZATION

points with the pinsetters,” Jon said. “We knew when we decided to switch to Twisted Pin that we were going to shake up everything we could shake up, so why not strip the Band-aid?”

Knowing string pins wouldn’t be popular with all customers, two months of free lineage were offered to all leagues, with five staying Mondays through Thursdays.

“We said, ‘We don’t know if you’ll enjoy it or not, but we want to cater to everyone — whether a league or a birthday party or a corporate event — so why not try them for free? If you don’t like it, you can drop out.’”

Added Jon: “String pins were just another way of how do I not necessarily future-proof this house, but how do I set it up for success? We had a very good nine-year run; how do we get the next nine years, 10 or 20 set up for optimal success?”

The venue’s staff has increased from 11 in 2014 to 30 before the updates to 40 today — providing a clear focus on guest service. The Dows also knew



A 28-tap beer wall not only provides lots of options for thirsty customers, but also serves as a visual centerpiece of the venue. It’s shared often on social media.

they also needed to upgrade their food-and-beverage options to promote the facility as a destination. So, they remodeled the bar, added a 28-tap self-serve beer wall, revamped the cocktail offerings to capture a restaurant/bar vibe, and improved the food menu.

“The biggest thing we changed over the years was trying to focus on getting better quality and products, better pizza and also paying a bit more attention to plate presentation,” Jon said. “Before the Twisted



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An enhanced food menu at Twisted Pin includes high-quality ingredients, consistent quality and eye-pleasing plate presentations.

Pin remodel, we had the walk-up, snack bar type of menus. We completely went away from that. Now, most of our customers are ordering from QR codes which are available throughout our facility."

What have the brothers learned from their experience?

"We took a very successful 24-lane center that was Plainfield Lanes, balled it up, threw it in the trash and went kind of crazy," Jon said. "We went back to the drawing board and rethought it. We made a lot of educated guesses — and a lot of them were correct and that's great — but we're still new at operating at this level of business. It has been a fun process."

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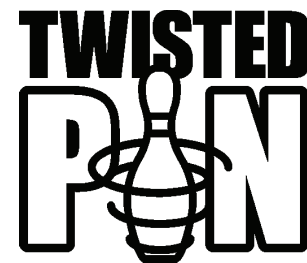


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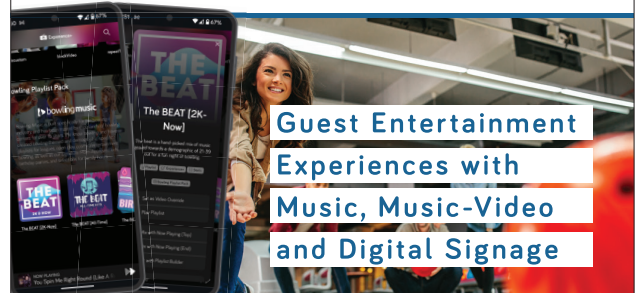
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