

# Bowl Haven recognized as Business of the Month

June 21, 2010

By [FRED POLLARD](#)

The Telegraph

ALTON - Since opening in October 1958, Bowl Haven has remained an Alton landmark.

Proving it is just as viable and committed to its customers as ever, the bowling center has been recognized as the River Bend Growth Association Business of the Month for June.

"We really appreciate being honored and we are glad to be a part of the River Bend community," general manager Bill Netzhammer said.

Offering a full restaurant menu, equipment shop and private rooms for birthday parties and meetings, Netzhammer said Bowl Haven always has adapted to appeal to all ages and groups.

"We have tried to make this more than just bowling," he said. "Through the years, we have introduced a restaurant, a lounge, even live entertainment. We wanted to make this more of a destination for all ages. Diversification has really helped us, I think. Other places cater to just the bowler, but we try to cater to everyone."

Following the trends of sports bars and night clubs, the alley boasts a large outdoor patio.

"That has been a huge success for us," Netzhammer said. "The smoking ban pushed all us businesses to do something, and it seems to have ended up working out great for us. The smokers have somewhere nice to go, and the inside is (smoke-free)."

Another draw for the center is its extensive food menu, including full breakfast, snacks, pizza, sandwiches, salads and more.

"We have everything from chef salads to burgers to appetizers," Netzhammer said. "Our menu is more extensive than what you would find at other bowling alleys."

Over the years, Netzhammer said he often sees bowlers from years past come back with their children, introducing the next generation to the sport he loves so well.

"I guess I'm a fixture here," he said. "My family was involved with the group that built the alley. I went away to Iowa State, graduated in 1982, and then came back here and I have been here since."

His track record proves Netzhammer feels passionately about working with youths as well as showcasing bowling as a sport. He has served as a volunteer bowling coach at Alton High School for more than six years, and he also sits on the board for the Illinois State Bowling Proprietors.

"As a state, we have pushed hard to make bowling a varsity-level sport," he said.

Jim Saffo purchased Bowl Haven in 2003, adding the family-friendly center to its existing bowling alleys Riverboat Lanes in Godfrey and Nu Bowl Lanes in Mount Vernon.

Netzhammer stayed on and remains general manager of the Alton location. He said both of his sons, 15-year-old Cody and 19-year-old Bill, grew up with the business and are avid bowlers, with Bill attending McKendree on a bowling scholarship.

At age 84, his mother, Eleanor "Babe" Netzhammer, still bowls two nights a week.

Adding to its bowling alley family, Saffo acquired Airport Plaza Bowl in Bethalto last January. Netzhammer and manager Tom White have been instrumental in the extensive renovations there.

"We actually had to clean up a lot," he said. "The gaming area had more or less just turned into a storage area. We cleaned it out, painted and added more games. We also added a party room, replaced lighting and drywall, put in a new ceiling, replaced kitchen equipment, and added fixtures. Tom White and I work together quite a bit on running things and we jump back and forth some, but he is taking care of a lot of the daily duties (at the Bethalto location) now.

"We are getting the Bethalto location up to the standards of what we have here. We want to make the experience there as close as possible to what it is at Bowl Haven."

Netzhammer said his staff, including assistant manager Keri Jun, goes a long way toward making that Bowl Haven experience a good one.

"I love my staff, from one person to the next," he said. "I have a great bunch and I couldn't do this without them."

Summer specials include 1 1/2 hours of bowling, shoe rental, soda and pizza (ideal for a group of four) for \$24.95, as well as free bowling with lunch purchase weekdays from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m.

"It is a great place to bowl," said Alton resident Danny Copeland, who often bowls at Bowl Haven as part of a league. "They have really made it a nice place, and they take pride in their building."

Bowl Haven is open seven days a week. Summer hours are 11 a.m. until 11 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 11 a.m. until 1 a.m. on Friday and Saturday, and 4 p.m. until 10 p.m. on Sunday. For more information, call (618) 465-6626 or visit the Web site at [www.bowlhavenlanes.com](http://www.bowlhavenlanes.com).