Time To Spare? Spend It Here

ROBERT BURKE/Tampa Tribune
By LOIS KINDLE
The Tampa Tribune
Published: April 16, 2008

RIVERVIEW - The Alley at Southshore is much more than a new bowling center - it's a family destination.

And that's by design, said co-owner Jeff Boje, BSAC '85; MBA '87.

To be sure, the 42,000-square-foot facility features 32 lanes for bowling, the usual snack bar, pro shop and game room. But this place takes that model and stretches it way beyond the traditional bowling center, where guests joined leagues or took their kids for Saturday morning entertainment.

"This center is built around the concept of family, youth, corporate team building and community," Boje said.

The cavernous building has something for everyone, he said.

Alley Kat's is a large sports bar and restaurant situated away from the main bowling area. For now, the menu primarily features breakfast items, snack-type foods, burgers, salads and sandwiches, but it will soon offer lunch and dinner entrees, Boje said. There are numerous large-screen TVs, a full-liquor bar, billiards tables and a darts area.

There is also a private, 100-seat community room for gatherings and business meetings.

For kids and adults who enjoy games, there's a game room rivaling any pizza parlor in town. The center offers a debit-style card for guests to swipe as they play their way through the maze of flashing machines and earn tickets to turn in for prizes.

Off the main bowling area, there's an eight-lane boutique area that will eventually offer private bowling, videos, buffet service and private bar for businesses wanting to host corporate team-building events and parties.

"It's not quite ready yet," Boje said. "I get calls on it daily. But I am moving at a pace where we can do it right. I believe in getting things right from the beginning."

Boje, 44, has been in the business since he was a kid. His father, Bill, built Marlborough Lanes in St. Louis in 1958 and operated it until 1979, during the heyday of league
bowling. His competitors were Dick Webber, Nelson Burton Sr. and Stan Musial, who owned and operated centers in town.

In 1979, Bill Boje retired, moved to Florida and soon got bored with having nothing to do. His wife, Gloria, told him to go back to work.

The following year, he became part owner and operator of a string of bowling alleys throughout the state that had been purchased by a group of physicians as an investment.

By 1988, Jeff Boje had earned a master's in business administration from the University of Florida and was planning to go into corporate accounting or to work for the FBI as a certified public accountant. But his dad asked him to join him in a family operation, first taking back the Marlborough Lanes and then buying the alleys that the doctors no longer wanted when tax laws changed under President Reagan.

The two became partners and sold off all but five centers in St. Petersburg. In 1990, they built Brandon Crossroads Bowl. Eight years later, when Jeff and his wife, Sherrie, had triplets - their third, fourth and fifth children - a change of plans was called for.

"We needed to simplify," he said. "We sold the centers in St. Pete and kept the ones in Brandon and St. Louis."

Boje said he and his dad, now 80, began planning The Alley at Southshore several years ago, after purchasing land at Lincoln and Big Bend roads. Construction started in mid-2007, and the Bojes had their soft opening in mid-March.

"We're still not officially open," Jeff Boje said. "We're continuing to make things just the way we want them. Every day it's an ever-evolving process."

In the meantime, more and more people are discovering The Alley. Summer leagues are forming for June in all age groups, and the sign-ups have begun.

THE ALLEY AT SOUTHSOURE

WHAT: Bowling and family entertainment center
WHERE: 10221 Big Bend Road, Riverview
OWNERS: Jeff and Bill Boje
EMPLOYS: 75
HOURS: 9 a.m. to midnight Sunday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 2:30 a.m. Friday and Saturday
INFORMATION: (813) 672-8353

Reporter Lois Kindle can be reached at (813) 865-1553 or lkindle@tampatrib.com.