



The original Colonial Lanes sign.



The entrance of the new Colonial Bowling & Entertainment.

# Colonial Lanes: Rebirth of a legend

Colonial Bowling & Entertainment, formerly known as Colonial Lanes, reopened its doors in February 2012 after an extensive renovation and modernization. If you were a new customer that happened to be in the area and stopped by for a meal and bowling, you would have believed the facility was built from the ground up.

Colonial Lanes began operations in 1949 in Lawrenceville, N.J. Located 15 minutes from Princeton, N.J., and 45 minutes from Philadelphia, Pa., the 64-lane bowling center attracted millions of customers over the years ranging from local families to out of state tourists.

Colonial thrived for over 50 years and was seen as one of the staples of the Lawrenceville marketplace. However, over time the center started to show its age and the once stable enterprise was steadily losing its customers to newer, more diverse entertainment venues. This is a growing trend with traditional bowling centers across the U.S.

Colonial was owned and operated by the Sheft family (Dr. Stanley Sheft

Sr. and sons Peter, Michael, and Stan). A decision had to be made between two options: Keep the doors open and represent Colonial Lanes as one of the last "classic" bowling alleys and hope for the best, or go back to the drawing table and design a new, state of the art bowling-anchored entertainment center. For the Sheft family, the second option was the unanimous decision.

## NEW DIRECTION

While attending Foundations Entertainment University (FEU), they were quickly consumed by the vast knowledge and wisdom of the experienced and successful speakers. Their dream for a new family entertainment center (FEC) took on a whole new outlook. Not only would they re-establish Colonial Lanes as an upscale bowling

hybrid venue, but they would also position Colonial Lanes as the GO-TO entertainment center for Central Jersey.

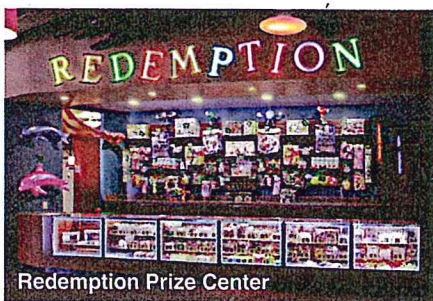
When the Sheft family returned home they knew the road ahead was going to be a long one. For three years they tried to fulfill their dream but the project never got off the drawing table. The Sheft family agreed that they needed additional support. Their next step was contacting Jerry Merola of Amusement Entertainment Management (AEM), whom they had spent time with at FEU. It was a perfect fit.

With the history the Sheft family had in the bowling industry, and the knowledge that Merola and the AEM Team had with repositioning bowling centers, the sky was the limit. The Sheft family and AEM created a strategic plan with a feasibility study, obtained funding, and had the project fully approved in an amazing six months. Construction began in August 2011;

By Joseph Camarota III  
and Frank Seninsky



Doc's Bar & Grille



Redemption Prize Center



Children are ready for a party.

the doors opened six months later.

Sadly, Dr. Sheft Sr. passed away during the construction process and was not able to see the finished project. But he was able to see the dream begin to take shape and the excitement level his family and the community had about the new venue. Peter Sheft said it best, "My dad would be proud of how Colonial is once again at the top of its game."

**THE RIGHT SIZE**

Bigger is better, right? Not in this case. The original layout encompassed more than 60,000 square feet. The new layout, with additional attractions, was downsized (right-sized) to 38,000 square feet and 30 lanes to more closely match market expectations.

The remaining space was used for additional parking. The result is a facility that has proven to be more efficient to operate, more profitable, and more

effective in meeting the needs of area consumers.

Colonial wanted to establish itself as the "one-stop" destination for kids, teenagers, families, and adults, but at the same time stay true to its bowling enthusiasts. What they created was the perfect combination.

Designed by top rated FEC/restaurant/bowling architect Dynamic Designs, the center boasts 30 black-lit bowling lanes (including four separate VIP lanes) supplied by US Bowling; a 65-piece game room with redemption, video, and novelty games provided by Alpha-Omega Amusements & Sales; Rollerball mini-bowling by US Bowling; a well-conceived 3,000-square-foot multi-level laser tag arena by Zone Systems; and three party rooms.

Colonial also added Doc's Bar and Grille, which serves both lunch and dinner with a full-line menu. In keep-

ing with a traditional bowling center, Colonial also features Doc's Cafe, which provides classics such as French fries, pretzels, and pizza.

The entire project represents an investment of nearly \$4 million. One year later Colonial has increased its revenue five times, matching AEM's financial projections to within two percent!

Merola commented, "The newly enhanced Colonial Lanes is a fitting tribute to the late Dr. Stanley Sheft Sr. He was a caring and gentle man who possessed the utmost degree of integrity. His willingness to stand behind his sons during the facility's revitalization is a testament to how strongly he believed in Colonial's future.

"As a team, brothers Stan, Michael, and Peter proved again and again that perseverance and follow-through are the keys to success. I feel that it is essential to recognize Peter in particular, who worked tirelessly to keep the project on track at every juncture, and to uphold his father's standards of excellence. Peter is without question one of the finest operators in the industry today."

**AN ENTIRE EXPERIENCE**

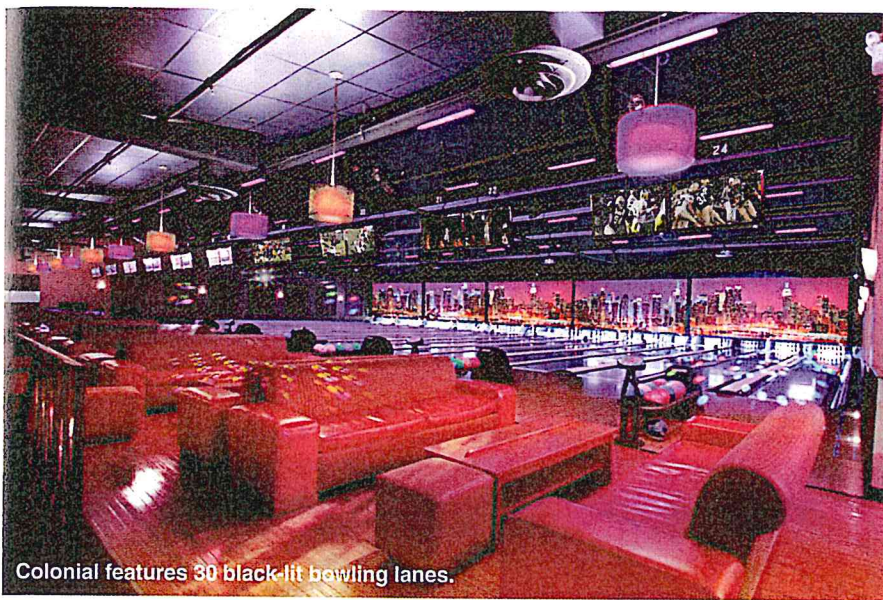
We asked Peter Sheft and General Manager Kevin Mannes about the changes and the community.

**How has the revitalization of Colonial Lanes changed your life? How different is your job description now compared to when it was just Colonial Lanes?**

Sheft said, "It is the same long hours but the tasks are vastly different. Instead of fighting on all fronts just to keep the doors open, we are focused on customer service and improving the experience here at Colonial.

"The FEC and the bowling center models and jobs/businesses are very different. They are barely even related. Bowling is but one facet of the FEC and it has morphed into catering to the everyday casual bowler and families.

"We are an entire experience now with premium food offerings and high



Colonial features 30 black-lit bowling lanes.



VIP lanes



Laser tag arena

tech audio visual capabilities, including the largest array of back to back HD monster size screens in North America, a full service bar, mini bowling, and a custom state of the art laser tag arena.

“To top it off we feature a large private VIP area with four private lanes and the room to accommodate over 110 guests. As with all businesses we are learning every day. We make plenty of mistakes to learn from. That said, it is still fun. No one likes to make mistakes, yet this business model is somewhat forgiving. And as we have fun at our jobs, we are able to shake them off and learn from them.”

**COMMUNITY**

**What was the reaction from the community and long term customers after the re-opening?**

Mannes said, “Lawrenceville and all the surrounding communities have been

very supportive. We employ anywhere from 65-70 people from local areas and as a result we’ve managed to become more than just an entertainment center; we’re a staple of the community.

“Through our Community Marketing Initiative we have managed to provide fundraising opportunities to

dozens of local clubs and groups and many more are in the works. Concerning long term customers, the reaction was mostly good but you take the good with the bad. Some of our league bowlers were not as pleased with the move away from a traditional bowling format to an FEC format, but we more than make up for this with all the families in the area that are blown away.

“This was one of the most ambitious projects the township has seen in recent memory and the vast majority of our customers have expressed their deepest appreciation that Colonial is now a place that caters to everyone. People can now take their kids, their dates, their college buddies, or even their church youth group to Colonial and do it knowing everyone will have a great time.”

One would think that after such a long, grueling process to get where they are today, the Colonial team would sit back and relax. But no, they continue to look to the future by keeping pace within our ever-changing industry. The team is already in the process of looking to upgrade the center in new ways that will continue to enhance the guest experience.

What’s next? Only time will tell, but one thing is for sure: Colonial has officially been reborn and will proudly be serving Lawrenceville, N.J., and its surrounding communities well into the 21st century. ▲

*Photos by Escarpeta PhotoGraphics*



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