

Silver Ball Player

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Inside Story... Las Vegas' Pinball of Fame

THE WHO's Wizard

Exclusive Interview with Pete Townshend

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February 2008 Volume 5 Issue 2

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THE Sopranos



Silver Ball Player

February 2008 Volume 5 Issue 2

PUBLISHER: Markos Kounalakis

EDITOR IN CHIEF: Paul Glastris.

FOUNDING EDITOR: Charles Peters.

MANAGING EDITOR: Amy M. Stackhouse.

EDITORS: T. A. Frank, Christina Larson, Rachel Morris.

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS: Jonathan Alter, Taylor Branch, Matthew Cooper,

Michelle Cottle, Gregg Easterbrook, John Eisendrath, James Fallows, Michael Kinsley, Nicholas

Lemann, Suzannah Lessard, Arthur Levine, Joseph Nocera, Stephen Pomper, Leonard Reed, John

Rothchild, Steven Waldman, Benjamin Wallace-Wells, Robert Worth.

ART DIRECTOR: Kelly Chen.

PRESIDENT: Markos Kounalakis.

VICE PRESIDENT, OPERATIONS & MARKETING: Carl Iseli

VICE PRESIDENT, CIRCULATION & BUSINESS: Claire Iseli.

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNICATIONS: Ryan Anderson.

DIRECTOR OF ADVERTISING & MARKETING: Jeff Cosgrove.

ADVERTISING SALES: Jeff Cosgrove at 702-393-5155

OFFICE MANAGER/EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT: Eve Qureini

Silver Ball Player

P.O.Box 27475 Las Vegas, NV 89126

Fax: (702) 252-0500

www.silverballplayer.com

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THE Sopranos

The SOPRANOS pinball offer the real voices of James Gandolini (Tony Soprano), Edie Falco (Carmela Soprano), Steven Van Zandt (Silvio), Dominic Chianese (Uncle Junior), Lorraine Bracco (Dr. Melfi), and Vincent Pastore (Big Pussy).



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Las Vegas

Pinball Hall of Fame



Vegas and Pinball:

Instant gratification...

Fast response...

and aesthetics...

Runs in the family!

Las Vegas museums go tilt and kaboom!

If you have never been to Las Vegas or perhaps the last time you were in Vegas is when Elvis and the Rat Packed ruled the Strip...The first thing you'll noticed about Vegas is that it has changed quite a bit from the last time. The old Vegas consisted of cheesy hotel casinos, organized crime and \$4.99 all-u-can-eat buffets. The new Vegas consists of Disney-esque resorts, organized slime and \$24.99 buffets

It's safe to say that with all the new card rooms, Vegas is definitely the poker capitol of the world. What can you do in Las Vegas when you need a break from the casinos? How about taking in a museum? That's right, a museum.

Then there are a couple of museums that are indeed rare finds one devot-

ed to the frivolous pursuit of navigating a steel ball against the relentless press of gravity, and another that pays tribute to the most powerful and potentially most dangerous force on the planet

You might want to stop by a little room that is one of the city's greatest hidden treasures, the undisputed capitol of the world of another game: the Las Vegas Pinball Hall of Fame Pinball Museum

This isn't a look-at museum, it's a "play-it museum", admission is free, but the machines still require that they be fed —25 cents for the older ones, 50 and 75 cents for newer models. Machines from 1948 to 1994

So grab a cab and head to a road side mall 30 blocks east of The Strip and not in a casino.

PINBALL HALL OF FAME

Bumper To Bumper

Remember those classic pinball machines from your youth? Well, they're still out there, ready to play and the world's largest pinball collection is right here in Las Vegas, just a few minutes from your youth. The games belong to Tim Arnold, and range from the Strip, 1990's pinball machines, up to not-for-profit corporation was established to further this cause. Since it is a non-profit museum, older games from the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's are the most prevalent, as this is the "heyday" of pinball. The pinball machines are all restored to like-new playing condition by people that love

is not about making money. That 'cheap side' approach gives the Pinball Hall of Fame its disarming, thrift-store feeling. The royal-blue carpet, it's scrap from a Convention Center weekend show. Grabbed from the Golden Nugget's change machines? Grabbed from the trash dock before the garbage men came. But it's not about cutting corners - it's about maintaining an almost obsessive focus on the pinball games themselves. Forget about public relations, marketing, forms, or even a sign outside. 'If the games play, the people will come, quarters at the ready. There's stuff here that hasn't been seen since my mom was a kid. And it's all up here, and it's playable

To pick the right ones to put in the museum, Arnold says he "concentrated on the weirdest or most popular games." The games range from the 1948 *Rondeevoo* and 1952 *Hayburners* to *Doctor Duude* and machines date from 1990. The newest museum also features a few old video games such as *Pac-Man*. The facility is like a traditional museum in many ways. Arnold



"Our goal here is to have fun and hopefully raise a lot of money for charity."

Tim started operating pinball games in the Lansing Michigan area when he was just 16 years old in 1972. This is when Tim bought his first used pinball, and soon realized every kid in the neighborhood wanted to play it. Being the capitalistic punk that we was, Tim decided to charge 10 cents a game in his garage. Though I'm sure that didn't go well with his friend, Tim decided to upscale that and actually put his machine out in the public for coin use. This mushroomed into him buying more used games, learning to fix them, and putting them out in laundry mats and grocery stores for coin play.

By September 1976, Tim opened Pinball Pete's in Lansing (and later in Ann Arbor), as a large pinball arcade. His arcades were hugely popular, partially because of luck. The late 1970's was the hey-day of pinball, partially because of Tim's management, and partially because of video games were soon to make huge money for their owners. By 1982, Tim (and his brother/partner) were showing quarters into five gallon pails, and taking them to the bank. Tim once said, "in the early 1980's you could have a pile of dog crap hooked up to a video monitor, and people would put a quarter in it for play."

But in 1990 Tim made a change. He sold his interest in the Michigan arcades to his younger brother Ted and moved to Las Vegas and saving his money. Tim never "lived like a rock star", always watching the pennies and making his collection of nearly 1000 pinball machines made the move to Las Vegas as 'retirement'. And his collection could go one step further, and make his Las Vegas pinball machines help the less fortunate in his community. "I'm a firm believer in community service." Tim says, "The local bills and still having a bit of profit leftover is not always easy." Arnold said, "Our goal here is to have fun, Tim collected masses of pinball games as a operator for charity." Arnold said, "Our goal here is to have fun, all the old machines he grew up with, operated, and loved. The problem was, this made his pinball collection one of the largest in the world. Where do you store 1000 pinball machines?"

Once in Nevada, over the course of two years, Tim moved his 1000 games from Michigan to Las Vegas. Tim had many games creatively stored in his house and garage. Hundreds of other pinball machines sat on end on Tim's tennis court for about six months. This court was never used for tennis, but just a staging area to store and restore the games. Since the Las Vegas humidity is usually about 15% and rain is minimal, outside storage and rust were not a big problem.

By 1992 all the games were moved into a new 10,000 square foot building Tim built next to the tennis court. The new building is in g

Tim started telling the story of how he wanted to open a pinball museum, and people made fun of him. "Yea sure Tim, you just need a place to store all your pinball machines!" Well to a degree that was true, but it also was a bit unfair. So let's start at the beginning.

Tim Arnold, and one that he made come true. The Pinball Hall of Fame. How did it start? Well it was the dream of Michigan's Tim Arnold, and one that he made come true.

Part 1 of Tim's Pinball Hall of Fame.

known as "the Shed", was 'L' shaped to wrap around the tennis court. Tim moved all the games to the new building and started working on them, restoring them to like-new condition. From 1992 to 2004, Tim got about 400 of the 1000 games he owns restore and set up for play in the Shed. The rest are stacked like firewood in the back and awaiting restoration.

Around 1993 Tim started have pinball parties which he called "Fun Night". At first these were reward parties for those that helped him with games. Twenty or so games set up on his back porch, and 20 or so friends to play them. But as more games were restored, and electricity added to the Shed, Tim expanded the fun night to more people and twice a year, and moved the fun night from the back porch to the larger Shed. By 1995 Tim would time the fun nights to the Vegas AMOA show (an amusement game industry trade show). As word spread, and as the Shed opened, attendance grew. Tim even purchased the empty property right next to his house so it could be used as parking for Fun Night. At its biggest, Fun Night brought in nearly 1000 visitors for its (expanded) 2-night event.



Another goal of "Fun Night" to raise money for local charities (Salvation Army), while also allowing people to enjoy working pinball machines. At the same time Tim started a pinball club called the LVPCC (Las Vegas Pinball Collectors Club). Its mission was to create a "building fund", so some day the public Pinball Hall of Fame could be born. That is, have a building for all the restored games to be stored and set up and played, with the proceeds going to charity.

One thing that Tim always did at Fun Night was to have a raffle and sold "bags of junk." While contributions to the raffle was optional, most people contributed directly to the Salvation Army and/or bought some raffle tickets. Some people even bought 50 or even 100 tickets. Bags of Junk which Tim put together, filled with used pinball parts, where also for sale. Tim has also started making his own pinball video. Though very crude, they were hugely successful and he sold them for \$6. Occasionally a \$5,000+ check would appear made to the Salvation Army. The SA would even send their Las Vegas 'Colonel' to the Fun Night to encourage donations to the cause. People would also donate items for the raffle. Stuff like pinball T-shirts, pinball parts, pinball books, PinGame Journal magazine subscriptions, anything a pinball person might buy. The attendees bought many raffle tickets to support the Salvation Army



and Tim's high emotions about pinball. But the big support for the whole affair was always from Tim.

These Fun Nights were planned, organized and funded by Tim and Charlotte. The games were Tim's. Charlotte provided the snacks. Tim paid for the electricity. This all took place in their back yard. It took a lot of work to put on a party which hundreds of friends and strangers show up to play your games for free. It also took some understanding by Tim's wife, dogs, and neighbors. The twice a year "Fun Nights" went on until about 2005 when they got so big that Tim could no longer handle the number of people coming. (The preparation for the next Fun Night always started right after one just ended!)

Tim also had some help with the Fun Nights. There was a small band of volunteers, some local, and some who traveled, who spent days in prep before each event. Volunteers like Hopper (Seattle), Hippy, Willey, J.Shelberg (Michigan), Smiley Robert, Ugly Mike, Old Harold (Las Vegas), and others who were willing to help. Help keep people under control. Help shuttle people back and forth to the airport/hotels, help with the games, help with the food, help with everything and anything.



Tim also did other things to help local charities. He would buy old pinball games (or reach into his collection for 'doubles'), spend days restoring the game, and then sell the game. The entire proceeds of the game sale went into the LVPCC building fund account. He also operated his own games as on location around the Las Vegas community. The entire proceeds of this went into the fund.

Tim would travel to pinball shows around the country in Chicago and California conducting raffles and selling pinball-related items to raise more money. Also pinball people like Norm and Shaggy and others made pinball videos, donated the masters to Tim, and Tim would sell the videos for money to the LVPCC building fund. All in support of the idea of opening a Pinball Hall of Fame.

Now Tim's dream of using pinball machines to make money for charity has become a reality. (And heck he now has a place to store 200 more games!) You can share the idea that pinball and charity can go together. Come see what Tim and the Las Vegas Pinball Collectors Club has created at the Pinball Hall of Fame. And course you don't have to just look at the games, you can PLAY



them too. Tim and his helper Hippy work everyday at making sure all the games run 100% and are kept clean and attractive. It's a full time job, and one that they are NOT paid to do. As Tim puts it, "it's all about pinball and charity."

MORE ABOUT TIM AND HIS MACHINES

Fixing machines, which isn't as easy as it looks. Each machine is different, and there are no replacement parts to buy because the companies that made them are no longer in business. "It's a real challenge to keep something like this running," Arnold says. "We're using scrapped-out machines. One day there will be no spare parts." Some parts are made and some take a bit of creativity—some parts were adapted from a vacuum cleaner.



He started with a simple pinball arcade, later adding video games as soon as they were invented. After a while, he had an entire chain of We're cheap entertainment for a family and they're cheap entertainment for a family," Tim Arnold said.

Tim Arnold stopped counting when his collection of pinball machines topped 1,000. "It's beyond a hobby," he says. "It's a sickness." A former owner of amusement arcades near Lansing, Michigan, Arnold decided to keep his old pinball machines rather than accept the "insulting" \$50 a piece offered in trade by dealers of the new machines. He bought a building and started stacking--and the machines added up. "The floors were sagging, the back wall was ready to come down," Arnold recalls. "There was stuff back there that I didn't even know I had." It took him about two years during the early 1990's to move his collection from Michigan to a specially built aircraft hangar behind his new home in Las Vegas.

Arnold was born as an entrepreneurial streak and at 16, he was buying gumball machines and installing them in stores. He, his brother and a friend emptied their wallets to buy their first pinball machine, Mayfair, for \$165. The game is based on the movie "My Fair Lady," and its bygone-era artwork depicts ladies in feathers and gentlemen in top hats. Arnold eventually owned so many pinball games that his parents bought him a Dodge van so he could transport and install them in pizza parlors and arcades.

He was so dreading college in the mid-'70's that he and his older brother indulged in what seemed a boyish fantasy: They opened an arcade. His parents weren't thrilled, but they appreciated their sons' money-making bent: Dad was a salesman who peddled miniature replicas of the Statue of Liberty. The arcade was a disaster and in about three months, the arcade closed.

A few months later, in 1976, the brothers heard about a shuttered arcade in East Lansing, Mich. They rented the space, installed 28 machines and named it Pinball Pete's. Near Michigan State University and a bar teeming with college kids, this arcade was far more successful. The brothers opened another Pinball Pete's. And another. They ran seven, all in Michigan.

Arnold eventually grew tired of juggling the businesses, and he loathed the onslaught of graphics-heavy games: He thinks they dumbed down arcade play. He retired in 1990 at age 35 with about \$1 million.

Arnold had long aspired to open a pinball repository. His rationale was similar to that of a kid with the newest video console: What's the use of having cool games if you're playing them alone?

His pinball palace, Arnold figured, would only work in a tourist-packed city. New York and Los Angeles: too expensive. Orlando: too humid. In 1990, bought a house with a tennis court on 2.5 acres in Vegas, whose neon Strip resembles a pinball game's play field.

Pinball has largely disappeared," Arnold notes. "The type of location that used to take a pinball machine—the corner store, the corner bar, the corner candy shop—has been replaced with places like Chili's and Wal-Mart. And they don't take games."

Tim says. "As long as there is a breath and free spirit in me...there will always be a place relive your youth and place for charity".

So as your eyes follow the silver steel ball as it careens around the corner, diving down an alley, ricocheting off a bumper. Voices boom out of the speakers, guiding you as you send the ball up ramps and through gates. Lights flash on, revealing TRIPLE SCORE and EXTRA BALL, and quickly, teasingly flash off again. The score continues to mount as you send the ball back into the game with the smack of a flipper. Extraneous noises and distractions fade into the background. Now there are no deadlines, no bills, no career pressures. It's just you and the game. You're playing pinball.

Thank you Tim!

LETS TALK!

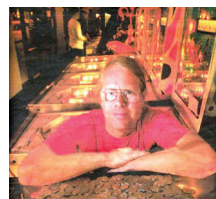
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PINBALL VS VIDEO

While in Vegas for the annual tournament, SBP 1st order of business was to make a short taxi drive 30 blocks east of the strip to meet with Las Vegas' own Pinball Wizard, Tim Arnold. Tim is owner and operator of the Pinball Hall of Fame.



Arnold's arcade is a throwback, with Mike and Ike candy machines, mismatched carpet, change machines rescued from dumpsters, and posters for mid-'90s games such as Congo, whose slogan is: "Hippos, Snakes and Killer Apes. (And that's just the first ball)." The Hall of Fame is open daily for at least 12 hours, and Arnold is there much of the time. There's no phone: He fears pinball fanatics would take up his days with stories

What changed pinball?

The computer revolution was a two-edged sword. While pinball was going high-tech, the greatest threat in its his-

tory was invading arcades in the guise of digital space ships and dot-chomping circles. Video games had arrived. The Pac-Mans, Space Invaders, Asteroids and other video games of the early '80s dealt a staggering blow to the pinball industry. Pinball creators fought back with increasingly innovative game designs, even borrowing concepts from video games, but to no avail. To non-believers, the game seemed doomed to pop culture's scrap heap. "It's just barely hanging on," Arnold says

All along, however, Arnold knew

the boom was part of a larger cycle. But this cycle was different. "The business had always been cyclical," Arnold says, "but the video boom was pushing pinball off to the side." For good.

The truism that video killed pinball is about as well-worn as an easy drop target. But is there any truth to it? It's an issue that raises the eyebrows--and the sometimes the ire--of pinheads everywhere.

We became the buggy whip of the game industry," says Arnold. "Between things like bar top trivia games and the changing social environment--I mean, kids don't hang out at arcades anymore, they go home and talk on the Internet--at the end of the day, pinball turned into a poor entertainment value for the time. And with many operators not servicing the machines as scrupulously as they should, the game became even less attractive."

"When video games came around, the pinball makers suddenly started pandering to the typical male fantasies, flying planes, getting chicks, killing Russians," says Arnold. "And

they killed off half their audience in their process. They killed themselves by trying to follow what the video games were all about."

What is the state today for pinball?

"Pinball has largely disappeared," Arnold notes. "The type of location that used to take a pinball machine--the corner store, the corner bar, the corner candy shop--has been replaced with places like Chili's and Wal-Mart. And they don't take games."

Whats the difference between pinball and video games?

"The difference between video games and pinball is like the difference between ticktacktoe and chess," Arnold continues. "You can play ticktacktoe the first time someone explains it to you. But chess, like pinball, has multiple levels with strategy shifts in the middle of the game. You have to think."

"Pinball is a game of skill, unlike video poker or video games. Here you have control of the outcome because you control the ball. Kids just don't get it. But once they try it, a lot of them get into it. They consider this 'Dad's game.'"

Arnold recognizes that today's young people entertain themselves on PlayStations and Wii games. The difference is that, with pinball, there is a tactile satisfaction that's missing from virtual reality, he says.

"You're shooting a real steel ball, and it's moving in a completely random way -- zigging and zagging -- it's not being controlled by a computer."

"Pinball," he adds, "exists in the real world."

"Every video game comes down to rote memorization of patterns," he says. "But with pinball, no one can predict what the ball can do. It's crazy. It's random. There's

a freedom to it that few other games can offer."

"It involves all of your senses," he states, interviewed in his cluttered Main Street mini-museum. "When you play pinball, you're seeing the game, you're hearing the game, you're feeling the game because it vibrates, and you're pushing against it to manoeuvre the ball. You're doing everything short of tasting the game. And you're also trying to control the almost uncontrollable--a little steel ball."

Pinball...exists in the real world!

Arnold is happy to expand on this idea, arguing that, unlike video games, pinball tables take a long time to master, with no two matches following the same pattern.

What Makes a Good Pinball Game?

"A good pinball game is more than about skill and strategy," Arnold says. "It's a really good trick by a simple mechanical device. It's not like one of those claw machines where they turn down the voltage knob so the claw slips at the last second. That's a bad deception. A good pinball game--with a lot of good shots to line up and clear goals--will take you just up to the point where you think you've got the machine beat, and the next thing you know, you're screwed. That's a good play. No video game can give you that."

Not even, say, a pinball simulator? Arnold shakes his head. "That's like kissing your sister. Pointless."

Who are your customers?

The customers, about 300 daily, are mostly male and middle-aged. Some are recovering gambling addicts who

find the lights and pings a substitute for slot machines.

Any last words?

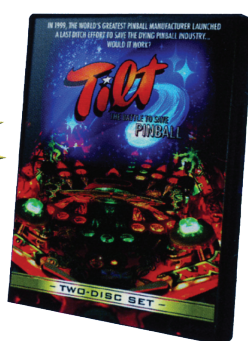
Arnold said he would like to see area residents have a fun night out at the museum. People spend too much time huddled around their home entertainment systems these days, he said. "I think society loses because people need to congregate in the village square, to get together, to have a night out of the house," Arnold said.

Arnold, 50, said he remembers when people had to do more than lift the remote for entertainment. "When I was growing up, you used to eat your meals at home and go out for entertainment. Now you eat your meals out and stay at home for entertainment," Arnold said.

"We're cheap entertainment for a family and they're cheap entertainment for a family," Tim Arnold said. They said they love to see people connect with their past at the Pinball Hall of Fame. "If you grew up watching TV or movies or listening to music, you can relive your childhood in some form digitally -- you can get it off the Net, you can get it at Blockbuster. It can be reproduced and delivered to you," Arnold said. "This can never be reproduced and delivered to you because it only exists in the physical world."

"It makes you feel like a kid for an hour," he says. "Forget work, forget everything for one hour."

Pinball never died in this arcade



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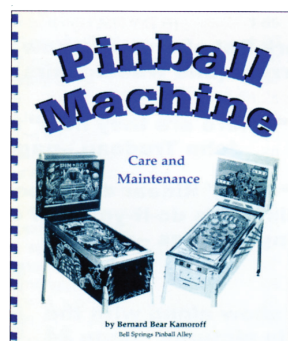
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