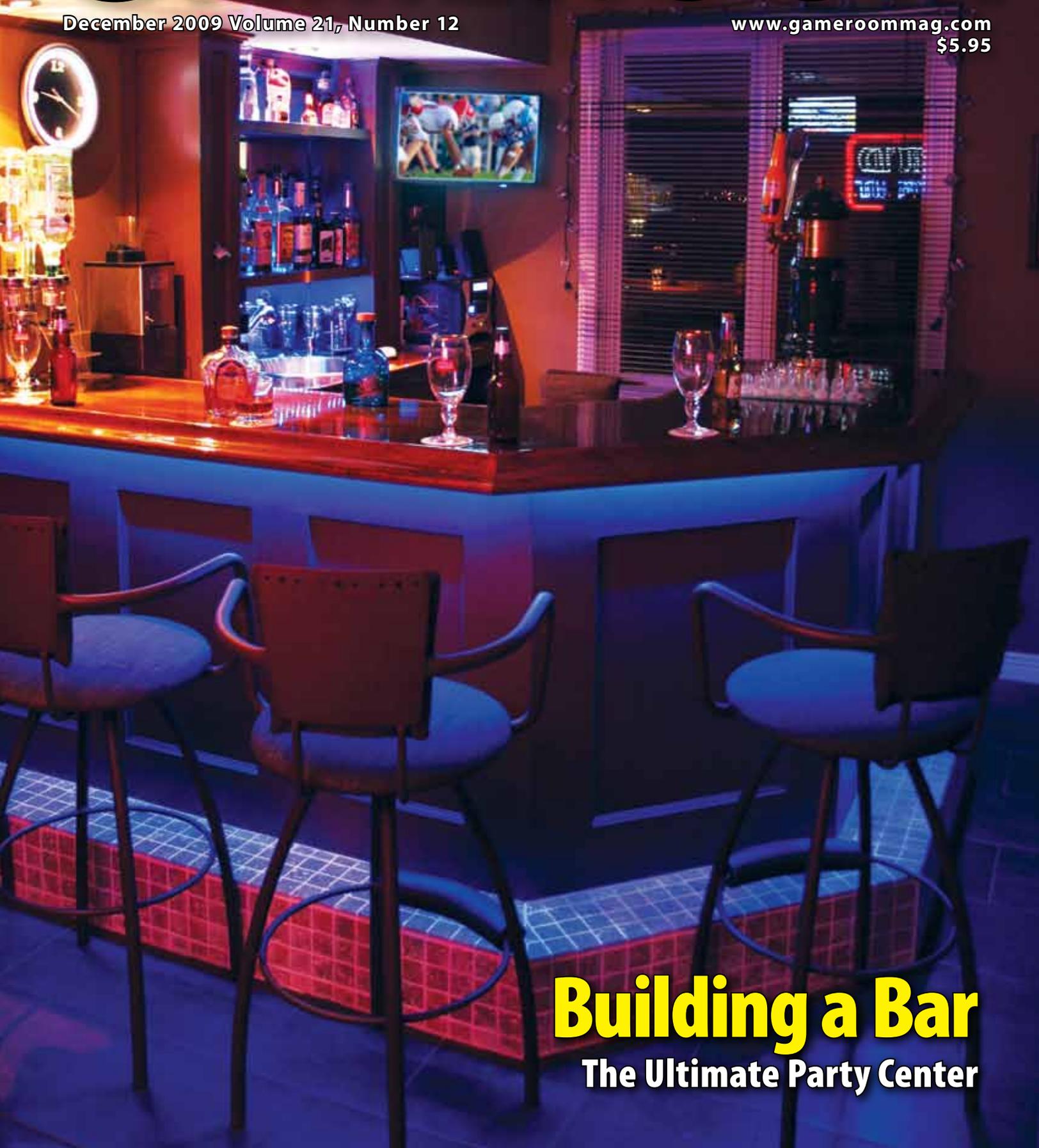


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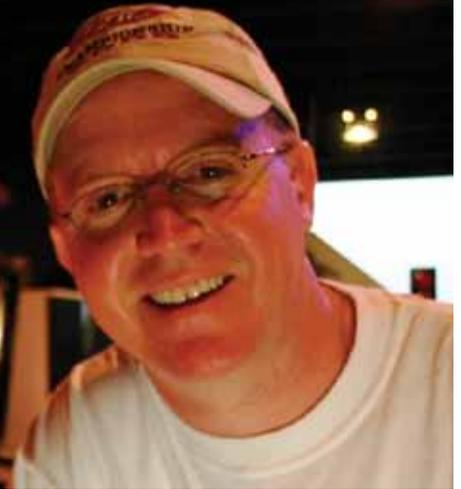


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Let's Go to the Show!

For me, it seems that the end of Summer marks a turn in the road towards pinball shows. I start to get excited about this when the temperatures start dropping and that mid-West humidity begins to fade away. Over the past five years, my Fall show experience leads with the Heartland Pinball and Arcade Supershow in Herrin, IL (September), and then Pinball Expo in Chicago a handful of weeks later. For 2009, this would bring on a new level of work and enjoyment. Hang around while I walk you through my experience at these two fantastic shows.

Heartland Pinball and Arcade Supershow – September 18th and 19th, 2009

As an organizer, you can expect to get a little different insight from me, as opposed to the casual player that pays a few bucks and plays pinball until their fingers bleed. Still, the excitement over the show is much the same for me as it would be for any attendee, if not more. In fact, all the fun has organizers and volunteers alike forgetting about the loss of sleep and back aches that come with loading and unloading 100 machines in record time. Our fifth year marked a significant milestone; that of a successfully running show, and a testament towards our willingness to work together as a team throughout the years. For this year's show, we added a couple of new ideas that seemed to address what attendees wanted in a show. These included an expanded kid-focused tournament for the 6 to 12 year old crowd, and a Guitar Hero Tournament in hopes to win some cross-over console to pinball folks.

The halls were once again packed with rows of machines. From woodrails to late Stern models, key game donors were being



creative in choosing which machines would make the transport. Taking a step back to our first year, I put together dual rare *The Grid* machines for network head to head brutality, and staying with the theme, added two War: Final Assault machines. Of course I brought pinball, along with Mini-Pin and Mini-MAME. Other core donors/organizers Brian Saunders, Ken Hall, & Steve Rothschild mixed things up as well. With an additional 14 pinheads bringing machines, we kicked off the 5th Supershow with a lineup as good as any year before.

Friday's opening usually has dedicated traveling pin-heads waiting to pinch in and get started exercising those fresh machines. This year was no different. And once the clock hit 5pm, the people came en masse, breaking a Friday attendance record. Saturday also proved to be a busy one too. For the 5th consecutive year, our overall attendance record was broken.

My favorite thing about any show is meeting people. Being a part of the Supershow has allowed me the special opportunity to meet a

lot of people. Over the years, those friendships are strengthened, making any pinball show that they attend a reunion of sorts. Beyond and sometimes within those wonderful dedicated pinheads are children. From the beginning, we've continually looked for ways to get kids involved and make a lasting impression. This year, our Future Pinball Wizards tournament (kids 5 and under) yielded only three. Besides my two sons who have never known a home without a pinball machine, the third youngling didn't stand a chance. To remind us all why we should never gloat over our greatness, my 5 year old almost lost to his 2 year old brother during a game where he was "trying to do ball tricks." While our 5 and under group was largely a quiet group, the newly formed 6 to 12 tournament had 15 entries. In that extensive matchup, Pinball Life's oldest son Levi Dezwarte inked out everyone for the 1st place trophy, including the upcoming pinball wizard Joshua Henderson.

The Showdown at Sundown Tournament was full of the usual top gun players in the



US. It was also a record breaker of sorts, with the longest “Final Showdown” playoff in Supershow history. The entire facility was nearly broken down and dismantled by the time a winner was declared. Names like Adam McKinnie, Josh Sharpe, Zach Sharpe, John Miller, Don Brownback, Steve Walker, Tina Curtis, Carol Walker, and Derek Fugate were among those in the frenzy of final competition. When the dust cleared, Trent Augenstein was holding the 1st place trophy with Zach Sharpe and Jason Werdrick close by in second and third respectively.

As brief as this coverage has to be, it would pain me to not drop one selfish remark. I managed to walk away from the show with a trophy too. This is very difficult to do for an organizer, since Steve Rothschild bans us from entering his Showdown tournament. I can’t really pose as a child either. So in my few seconds of spare time, I entered the Guitar Hero Tournament. Understand that I’m more involved in the game industry as a researcher and conceptual designer, and not a very good console video game player. But I do know how to rock! As the real players wrapped up the sincere part of tournament play, I was called back as a special nominee to compete for “Best Rocker Award”. You can imagine what you must do to win this piece of plastic. It was a dual-off between me and Saluki Pinballer Randy Campion. With guitar moves like you haven’t seen since the days of 80’s spandex, I whipped up the young axe-man and captured my 4 minutes of embarrassing fame. Word has it that the entire event was caught on video. Thankfully, it hasn’t found its way to YouTube... yet!

25 Years of Pinball Expo

What an accomplishment for any event to last 10 years, let alone 25! I was more than excited over the opportunity to make the trip to Chicagoland for another historic Pinball Expo. To make this year even more exciting, I accepted the invitation to speak on the topic of Pinball Simulation, bringing Mini-Pin and an all new game, Pin-Sim-U-Lator to the exhibition hall.

Just entering the hotel, I realized I was walking into a special place. Not the physical structure mind you, but the atmosphere that comes along with hundreds of like-minded pinball fans and industry professionals. Within moments, I had bumped into friends that commuted only minutes from the event, and Silverball Podcast fans from halfway around the globe.

Every time you attend a seminar, you get this feeling like the potential for something groundbreaking could occur. You couldn’t help but feel this when discussions from Nu-Core are later quoted by industry guru Larry DeMar. Or when Greg Freres and Dennis Nordman unveil a completely new approach to cabinet, playfield, and backglass re-design. Even hearing Gary Stern change his typical cadence on how operators dominate the market, and take a step in admitting that home buyers dominate the market share is something we didn’t expect just a few years ago. Sometimes we get fooled into thinking that there is nothing new under the sun in pinball. What a relief to know that this is not yet true in this wonderful hobby.

Some random e-mails came to me through the Summer months, asking me what one can

expect in attending their first Pinball Expo. I usually tell them that Expo is unique to all shows, and can bring some excitement to just about anyone interested in the hobby. Besides rows of pinball machines, there are so many vendors pitching new ideas. I recall a discussion about how things have really changed over the years. Looking across the vendor tables are new circuit boards, flashy high end replacement playfields with glossy clear coats, home made add-ons for the most popular machines, even gourmet soda bottles from beverage manufacturers you’ve probably never heard of. Yes, there was plenty of pinball to play. Some were rare pieces you almost never get to see, while duplicates and triplicates of popular titles could be found around the rooms. Never before had there been so many seminar speakers at Expo. I imagine that it would be difficult for someone to not find something interesting among the 35 or more speaking events. And through it all, the most memorable moment might be found in the hallway or elevator, when small discussions are generated with some of the most interesting people.

Not matter how special a show like this can be, there are some that just don’t get it. As I was preparing to checkout Saturday morning, I recall an elevator ride with my friend Darren, an attractive younger woman in business attire, and a hotel employee. This overly made-up beauty had called for hotel assistance to move her bags to the lobby, and probably onward to her car. She asked the employee why the hotel seemed so busy this morning. He explained that a pinball show was going on, and there were several people in for the event. She looked over at Darren and me, wearing our pinball T-shirts from some past event, and in a snobby gesture puffed, “Good luck with that.” I laughed a bit, realizing just how lucky we are. We aren’t aimlessly chasing after something to find enjoyment over. We have a cool hobby, with so much to explore within it. **GR**

