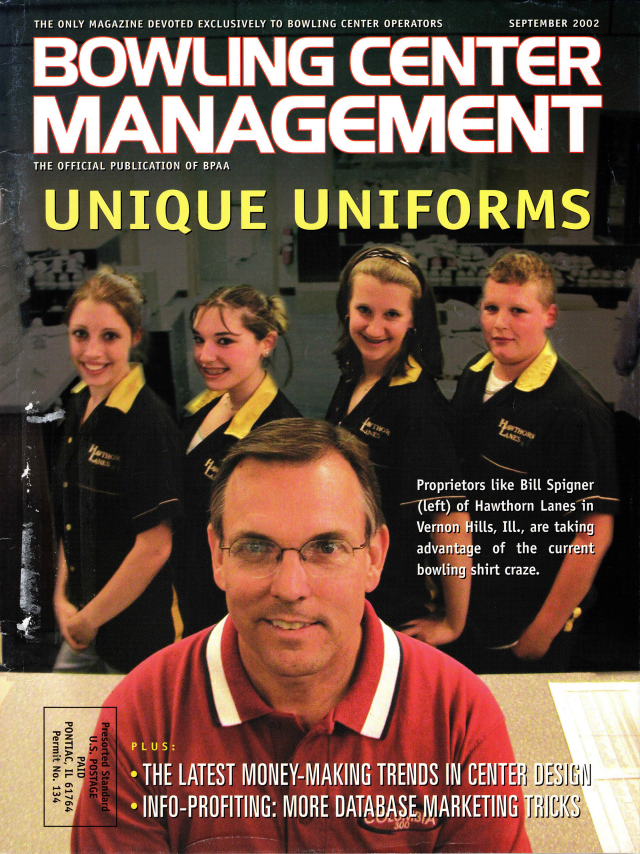


BOWLING CENTER MANAGEMENT

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF BPAA

UNIQUE UNIFORMS



Proprietors like Bill Spigner (left) of Hawthorn Lanes in Vernon Hills, Ill., are taking advantage of the current bowling shirt craze.

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The Uniform They'll Want To Wear

FORMERLY PREFERRED ATTIRE OF LEAGUE BOWLERS, TRENDY BOWLING SHIRTS ARE RAPIDLY BECOMING THE UNIFORM OF CHOICE IN BOWLING CENTERS

American Bowling Congress Hall-of-Famer Bill Spigner is preparing for a mid-August senior bowling tournament hosted by his very own center, Hawthorn Lanes in Vernon Hills, Ill. Only his preparation involves sporadic practices, since he's not only the host of this event, he's also a participant.

And while Spigner bowls, fans crowd around the bowlers and watch the tournament develop. But behind all of the action on the lanes is a flurry of employee activity, like Spigner's son Robby Spigner zipping around the center's interior, updating scores and handling pinsetter troubles. In the meantime, Caryn Evitts monitors the front desk, where fans and bowlers huddle around to ask questions.

With so many of the center's managers occupied by the demands of hosting such an event, an even greater premium is placed on the customers' ability to recognize all of the center's employees. At Hawthorn Lanes, however, this isn't a problem for the customers, since Spigner has uniformed his employees in Hilton bowling shirt uniforms, embroidered with the Hawthorn Lanes logo, for the last seven years. The employees' shirts, black with bright yellow collars and accents, easily distinguish the porters and food service personnel from the sea of patrons. Without them, says Spigner, the customers would simply overwork Spigner and his managers.

"It's easier for the customers to I.D. who they have to talk

DESIGNER
NXT Bowler

COST PER ORDER OF 10 SHIRTS

\$320

COST PER ORDER OF 10 SHIRTS W/ EMBROIDERY

Call for information.

ORDERING INFO

(650) 553-8050

Counterperson Rachel McIntyre wears an NXT Bowler CB-2 Stripe Black Retro shirt (100% rayon gabardine), \$54.95 suggested retail. Photos by Jon Resh and Michael M. Mazek.

to,” says Spigner, who recently added the uniforms for all of his counterpeople and bartenders as well. The result for Spigner has been less stress for the managers, and more camaraderie between employees and customers.

Hawthorn Lanes is one of many bowling centers uniforming employees in bowling shirts. It seems like a logical fit, but one that many proprietors avoid or have avoided due to the costs involved. But the spike in bowl-



Bill Spigner (top, with employees (l. to. r.) Sarah Weller, Stephanie Olsen and Brittany Walker) has discovered that his customers have no trouble at all tracking down employees like Jacob Markson (above) thanks to his center's uniform policy.

AIN'T LIKE THEY USED TO BE

Sure, these bowling shirts might be all the rage now, but they're nothing compared to the shirts of yore, according to Minnesota vintage clothing store owner Marc Luers.

He should know. Luers' collection of 110 rare, hand-embroidered bowling shirts is one of the country's largest. And with the help of fellow bowling shirt expert and collectibles market consultant Joe Tonelli, he co-authored the foremost book on the subject, *Bowling Shirts*. The 160-page book displays the rarest bowling shirts around, and their hefty values on the secondary market. Many of the designs displayed in the book were inspirations for the current wave of fashionably-kitschy retro-wear, and can provide further inspiration for designing your center's own custom bowling shirts.

"We sell a lot of bowling shirts in the store right now," says Luers, who has owned Tatters, Inc., a vintage clothing store, specializing in rare bowling shirts in Minneapolis, Minn., since 1980. "But I tend to pick off the nicer ones and add them to my personal collection."

Luers says the intricacy of the embroidery, type of fabric, artistic design or logo and condition are all factors that contribute to determining the value of the bowling shirt on the secondary market. And although the economy indicates that buyers are less willing to splurge on collectible items, the vintage bowling shirt market is flourishing. A "bowling shirt" search on eBay brings up hundreds of matches, most of which demand from \$35-100 for authentic bowling shirts.

"And they're probably as collectible in the U.S. as they are in Japan right now," adds Luers, who does a significant amount of sales and purchases with the Asian market. "They like American nostalgia: old Levi's and Ralph Lauren jeans. Anything classic American is selling well overseas."

But in order to be considered a valuable collectible these days, the bowling shirts must meet strict criteria, according to Luers. "It was art before," he says. "Now I see an awful lot of cotton-poly bowling shirts around. The old Gabardine shirts with the old embroidery and fabric that no one would even think about wearing now because it's so heavy — those are the keepers for me. Now it's all computer- and machine-generated so it's not as valuable."

Bowling Shirts (ISBN: 0-7643-0117-9), by Joe Tonelli and Marc Luers, is available at most bookstores, through Schiffer Publishing Ltd. at (610) 593-1777 or Tatters, Inc. at (612) 823-5285. The book retails for \$29.95.



DESIGNER

King Louie

COST PER ORDER OF 10 SHIRTS

\$207.50

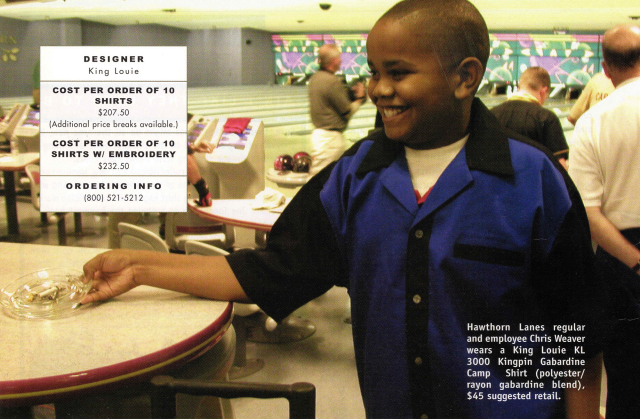
(Additional price breaks available.)

COST PER ORDER OF 10 SHIRTS W/ EMBROIDERY

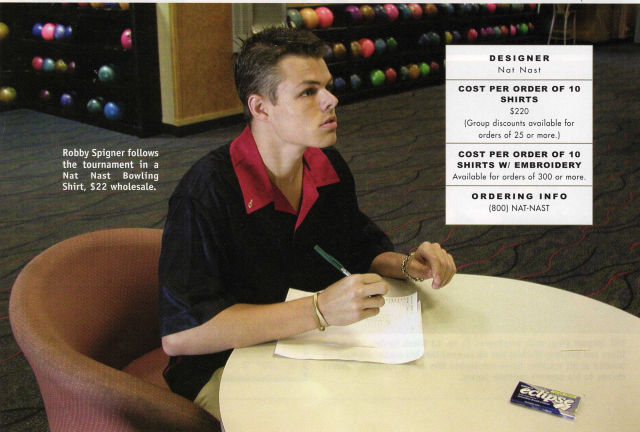
\$232.50

ORDERING INFO

(800) 521-5212



Hawthorn Lanes regular and employee Chris Weaver wears a King Louie KL 3000 Kingpin Gabardine Camp Shirt (polyester/ rayon gabardine blend), \$45 suggested retail.



Robby Spigner follows the tournament in a Nat Nast Bowling Shirt, \$22 wholesale.

DESIGNER

Nat Nast

COST PER ORDER OF 10 SHIRTS

\$220

(Group discounts available for orders of 25 or more.)

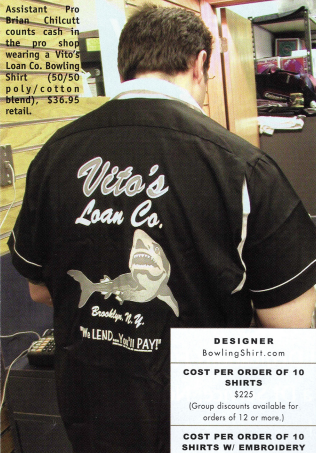
COST PER ORDER OF 10 SHIRTS W/ EMBROIDERY

Available for orders of 300 or more.

ORDERING INFO

(800) NAT-NAST

Assistant Pro Brian Chilcutt counts cash in the pro shop wearing a Vito's Loan Co. Bowling Shirt (50/50 poly/cotton blend), \$36.95 retail.



DESIGNER BowlingShirt.com
COST PER ORDER OF 10 SHIRTS \$225 (Group discounts available for orders of 12 or more.)
COST PER ORDER OF 10 SHIRTS W/ EMBROIDERY \$295 (2 words, chain-stitched)
ORDERING INFO (800) 444-1685

ing shirt uniform sales and technological advances in production have dropped prices. Another factor helping cut costs is the success the shirts are enjoying in the non-bowling market, promoting bowling shirt sales overall.

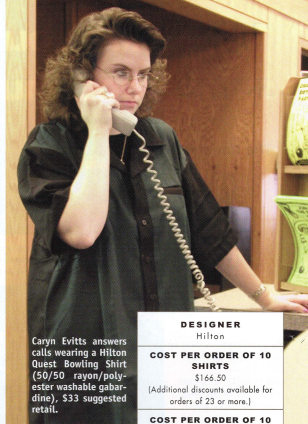
"The styles have been getting popular," says Anthony Palomares of NXT Bowler, which has rapidly expanded its bowling shirt line to meet the demand. "A lot of kids wear them during night bowl. And I see a lot of people wearing them out to night clubs. It just keeps growing"

Spigner concurs, "You see more casual bowlers wearing them, mainly the younger guys."

HOW IT BECAME HIP AGAIN

Most of the bowling shirt manufacturers point to the mid-to-late 1990s as the origin of the latest surge in sales. Swing culture caught on, and 1950s nostalgia gained mainstream fashion appeal, bringing along with it bowling shirts.

But many bowling centers, the original homes for bowling shirts, haven't caught on until recently. Retro-style bowling shirts, supplied by modern companies such as BowlingShirt.com and Daddy-O's, have appeared in



Caryn Evitts answers calls wearing a Hilton Quest Bowling Shirt (50/50 rayon/polyester washable gabardine), \$33 suggested retail.

DESIGNER Hilton
COST PER ORDER OF 10 SHIRTS \$166.50 (Additional discounts available for orders of 23 or more.)
COST PER ORDER OF 10 SHIRTS W/ EMBROIDERY \$191.50 + \$50 set-up fee
ORDERING INFO (800) 323-5590

themed bowling centers and bars for several years, however, traditional bowling shirt companies such as King

Louie, Nat Nast and Hilton, are also reporting increases in sales, including more bowling center uniform orders.

"The rebirth of our retro-style shirts was 1997-98," says King Louie's Roger Carroll. "We were working on a deal with Strike Ten Entertainment and NASCAR to produce some bowling shirts about four years ago. At that time we didn't have any retro shirts, so we custom-made a batch for this agreement. We had a lot leftover so we integrated them into our catalog and they sold really well. They've been selling strong since."

Nat Nast, which made popular bowling shirts in the 1940s, came back into the bowling shirt market looking to capitalize on the increased interest around the same time. "Six years ago, Patty [Nast-Canton, daughter of Nat Nast] looked at the old designs and began introducing the retro look into the luxury clothing market," says Melodie Lane of Nat Nast. "We've had a good response in the last few years. A lot of the clients we have are corporate, and they're getting into buying bowling shirts for company events."

Daddy-Os, an on-line retailer (www.daddyos.com) of retro-wear that started in 1996, has experienced the same rise in corporate interest. "The corporate parties are

enormous," says Bob Barry of Daddy-Os, which has provided bowling shirts for Starbucks, Microsoft and Sun Microsystems company events. "They all do Christmas bowling parties now. It just grows every year."

DURABILITY AND WEAR-ABILITY

"Uniforms, in general, should be fun to wear and easy to care," says Tim Coggeshall of BowlingShirt.com. "Plus, people want something cool and retro. And in bowling centers, they scream bowling."

Bowling shirts as uniforms are catching on for these reasons. While many bowling centers and family entertainment centers outfit employees with logoed polo shirts, the latest trend seems to be toward modern bowling shirts. Especially in locations that feature younger employees.

"In the 1970s, everything was knit polyester," recalls Coggeshall. "Then in the 1980s, it switched to the polos, but the care on those is tougher. With the bowling shirts, people want something different these days. Plus, it leans toward their atmosphere."

"The retro shirts are hot now," confirms Palomares. "It can change the look of your center. We want to get back to the tradition of bowling. Our polos didn't move, so we discontinued most of them, except for the retro polo that wicks sweat away. But generally, we're trying to get people back into wearing bowling shirts instead of golf shirts."

Though some of the bowling shirts of higher quality might require dry cleaning, bowling shirt suppliers are creating lines specifically for uniform purposes. "We have several styles, but there are some that work well for counter personnel," says Carroll, who helps handle King Louie's employee uniform account with the Brunswick Zone locations. "Generally, the blends, like the 60 percent cotton-40 percent polyester Universal-style shirt [from King Louie], have less shrinkage and is more wrinkle-free. They're more suitable for personnel."

Since the change to bowling shirts,

Spigner hasn't heard any complaints from his employees. "Not being tucked in, the kids are more comfortable with them," he says. "Plus, you always know how the employees will be dressed."

ARE THEY RIGHT FOR YOUR CENTER?

For some bowling centers, the switch to bowling shirt uniforms is an easy one because it accents a theme of the

the shirts

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\$9.95

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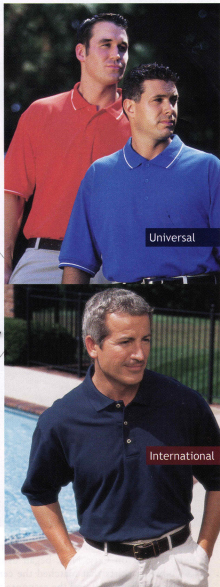
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embroidery

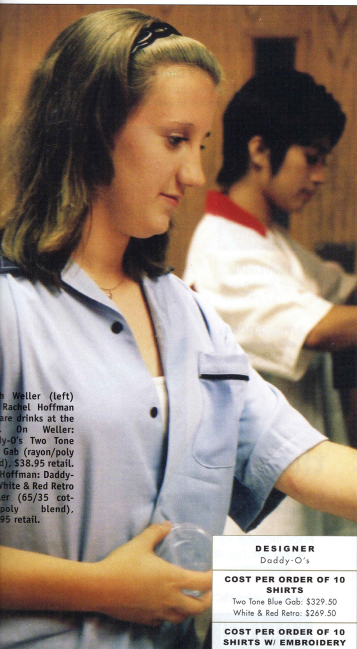
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y-O's Two Tone
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d), \$38.95 retail.
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White & Red Retro
er (65/35 cot-
poly blend),
95 retail.

center. The Piñon Plaza Resort Bowling
center in Carson City, Nev., began using
KT bowling shirts that matched the cen-
ter's decor in February, and the response to

manager Bill Baker has been tremendous.

"The employees love it," he says. "And all the customers love it. A lot of our leagues might pick out the shirts for their teams too. Even the other departments in the resort wanted to wear them."

And although the cost is more than the former uniforms, Baker believes it was a worthwhile investment. "It's probably double of what a polo runs," he admits. "But in the long run it'll out wear the polos. The other shirts don't hold up as well."

Whether the shirts are used to uniform employees or to sell to customers (or both), Barry suggests analyzing your customer base and theme to determine what type of bowling shirts to purchase. "It depends on the market," he says. "If they're going for the retro feel, it would certainly benefit them. But [non-bowlers] want to wear this stuff too. There might be a market for those people if you don't have the retro feel."

Many of the bowling shirt suppliers are eager to offer discounts for bowling centers and their employees, regardless of the size of the order. "It can be another profit center for the proprietor," says Coggeshall. "When the employees are walking around wearing the shirts, and the customers see how great they look, they'll probably want to go to the pro shop and buy one for themselves. We've found that it's really more than just a uniform."

The exposure for the shirt manufacturer and proprietor are often beneficial for both parties. And the benefits for the bowling center could reach far into the future. "It's a great idea," adds Lane. "It's a good way to brand your center. It adds to the brand identity, and that's very important in marketing your business."

"A lot of bowling proprietors are doing the same things their dads did," says Coggeshall. "This is a new way of increasing business." **BCM**

DESIGNER

Daddy-O's

COST PER ORDER OF 10 SHIRTS

Two Tone Blue Gab: \$329.50
White & Red Retro: \$269.50

COST PER ORDER OF 10 SHIRTS W/ EMBROIDERY

Two Tone Blue Gab: \$374.50
White & Red Retro: \$314.50

ORDERING INFO

(800) 900-1950