

Bowlarama open again in NP

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Come In: A new entrance off Devon St West and a completely refurbished interior, with all new tenpin bowling equipment is finding immediate favour with city bowlers.

Photos: ANDY JACKSON

Mini-golf to complement tenpin bowls

Mike Shaw

Strikes and spares are going up on the scoreboard screens again as tenpin bowlers return to the lanes at a fully refurbished Bowlarama in New Plymouth.

A new type of scoring will also start up early next month. Work is almost complete on an innovative pirate-and-sea-themed, glow-in-the-dark mini-putt golf course as part of the \$1.5 million Bowlarama makeover.

The re-opening has been eagerly anticipated. Bowlers did a starve early this year as the tenpin facility closed down at the end of January for a complete upgrade with new lanes and equipment. "We were closed for more than three months," says manager Shelly Hawke, acknowledging the effect that had on regular bowlers. "On the first day we re-opened, one of our league bowlers came in and bowled 13 games." That's an impressive effort, Shelly notes, considering regulars usually bowl



Ahoj, me hearties! This pirate figure is part of a themed decor for a new mini-golf facility opening at Bowlarama in early June.

between three and 15 games each week. "I think a few people felt a bit sore that first week," she says with a smile.

After the weeks off the lanes, the bowlers quickly appreciated the new equipment and improvements that have been done at Bowlarama. "The work carried out during the

refurbishment is extensive. It includes 16 new synthetic-surface lanes, new pin-spotting equipment, new bowls and new hire shoes.

And it's a lot more comfortable with the installation of an air-conditioning system for the facility - keeping it cool in summer and warm in winter.

The action also takes place in a different area of the facility.

Shelly's parents Frank and June Szedlak have owned Bowlarama since they established the facility in the city in June, 1991. It wasn't their first foray into tenpin bowling centres - they had previously started centres in Christchurch, Wellington, Palmerston North and Wanganui.

They came to New Plymouth from Wanganui, liked what they found here and have lived here since. In the more than 20 years that followed, Bowlarama has been a good sustainable business for them here, but that time has also taken its toll on the equipment and major replacement and refurbishment was eventually needed.

The Devon St building included a portion that opened on to Devon St West, that had previously been rented to the IHC. The decision was made to expand Bowlarama into the extra space and create a new main entrance on Devon St West, Shelly explains.

The extra space gained allowed

creation of the mini-putt golf course. "There are not a lot of winter activities available in New Plymouth, so we decided to put in mini golf here."

The spaces for the golf action are being painted-black throughout and UV lighting will provide the glow-in-the-dark features.

A specialist installation team from Canada is presently finishing a mini-putt course in Europe and will be heading straight here when that is completed in the next few days. Shelly expects the New Plymouth mini-golf facility to be ready early next month.

It will provide a challenging experience as well as an entertaining time, she says, with the 18 holes spread over two levels.

The reinvestment at Bowlarama is part of a long-term view for the city facility, says Frank Szedlak. "We want to provide the best experience possible - to deliver quality entertainment. The mini golf here will be one of the

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See Bowlarama's refurbishment includes new bowls and hire shoes, says manager Shelly Hawke, pictured right.



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Bowlarama

A TARANA NEWS ADVERTISING FEATURE



Best gear: The new pin-spotting equipment is top-of-the-range and quicker in operation.

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best available... like a set-up you This is now one of the best complexes in New Zealand," he adds. "We have had that comment from top bowlers who travel to other centres for competition."

The new pin-spotting equipment is the best available, according to Frank. "It's top of the range... you can't buy anything better."

The synthetic surfaces that replaced timber on the lanes are a little faster and bowls travel slightly differently on it. "It's more accurate," says Frank. "Everything goes where it should go."

Bowlarama in New Plymouth has also been sanctioned for top-level competition, he notes. "We will be seeing at least two national tournaments each year, bringing in 200-300 people."

As well as competitive appeal, Bowlarama offers safe family entertainment, Shelly adds. Soft drinks and other



refreshments and snacks are available from the central bar and reception area, and there are beer and wine choices for adults, she says.

"We are very conscious that this is a family environment, so we are very diligent in how we sell alcohol."

A variety of tempin league competitions involving about 150 bowlers are held on the Bowlarama lanes, drawing some bowlers in every week. Business house competitions have followers who play from weekly to once a month and there are also community organisations using the lanes

occasionally - including disabled bowlers, Special Olympics groups and residents from city retirement facilities.

Evenings and weekends are the busiest times for Bowlarama. "But we do have groups that pop in during the day for a quiet game," says Shelly.

Video games and pool tables provide an alternative to bowling or a fill-in if waiting for friends, she adds. "A lot of families come in just to play pool and video games."

There's also a party room for birthday and other celebrations that is very popular.



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