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Longmont, Colorado
 Wednesday, June 17,
 2009

Publish Date: 6/17/2009

Lyons is a mecca for game fanatics

Pinball Wizards

By *Matt Corliss*

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LYONS — Carole Carroll taps, tinkers and smacks the flipper buttons on a blazingly loud Banzai Run pinball machine at Lyons Classic Pinball on a warm Thursday evening in June.

She glances out the window as other pinball players begin to arrive and lean on the front porch.

“Everyone here now wants to do something with pinball,” Carroll said. “Kevin, my husband, told me six years ago, ‘You know? I really like playing pinball,’ and here we are.”

The porch at 339 Main St. creaks with people who trek every week to the mountain town from Denver, Breckenridge, Longmont and other corners of the state.

Basil LeBlanc, who drives from Loveland, rests his bumper fingers on a bench on the porch. “This pinball place had a lot to do with me moving to this area,” he said. “And it’s Colorado. That’s how I escaped New York state.”

And many other players escape in the crashing flashes of Invaders From Mars, the whip cracks of Indiana Jones Pinball Adventure and 35 other new and vintage games, including the largest pinball machine ever made, The Hercules.

Adam Lefkoff tears into the Eldorado machine. He plays here every Thursday night and runs the Lyons Classic Pinball League. And he’s good. His initials sprinkle the high-score board near the rear of the arcade.

Carroll watches a ball fall straight down the middle and backs away as frustration washes over her face.

“Whenever anyone gets mad over pinball, we always tell them, ‘It’s just pinball,’” she said.

But it’s not just pinball to everyone. Lefkoff plans to compete in a tournament in London at the end of July.

Donavan Stepp is currently ranked the No. 24 pinball player in the world, according to the World Pinball Player Rankings Association, and competes in events sanctioned by the International Flipper Pinball Association. Both organizations host tournaments with prizes ranging from \$500 to \$5,000.

Stepp mutilates the Invaders From Mars machine as Carroll, Lefkoff and other league players gather to watch the mayhem of the three-ball playing field.

“I usually set small goals and get what needs to be done, done,” Stepp said.

He added that he plans to compete in the Pinball World Championships in Pittsburgh later this summer.



Zen plays in a pinball league at Lyons Classic Pinball on Thursday.
 Joshua Buck/Times-Call

More Information

Find out more about this topic by visiting:

www.lyonspinball.com

Lyons Pinball League

Requires Flash Player



Pinball arcades are rare, and there are few in the Western United States. There is a museum in Las Vegas and a few dot the West Coast. Then there is Lyons Classic Pinball.

Kevin Carroll, the owner, maintains the machines night and day without formal training. The players like that.

“You can go to a bowling alley, and there might be a pinball machine, but you don’t want to play it because it’s so dirty,” said LeBlanc. “Kevin and his machines make you want to come and play. That’s what makes the place special.”

The league players keep returning. There are always new tricks, tilts and taps to help them pop a ball over the billion-point marker and earn them places on the high-score board. For many, it’s the best place to practice and gain confidence for a competition.

“It’s like any other niche,” said Lefkoff. “It’s a great way to make friends and a good place to hang out, but at the same time, you know you might have a chance to win at something you really enjoy.”

Carole Carroll smiles and claps with the other players as Stepp lets the last ball past his flippers on the Invaders From Mars machine just before topping a couple billion points.

“You can’t get nervous,” said Stepp. “I’ll be nervous when I get to the tournament, but I’ll still have fun. That’s what it’s there for.”

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