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- News
- Sports
- Opinion
- Business
- Features
- Entertainment
- Obituaries
- Viewfinder
- Special Sections
- In-Depth Reports
- National News
- Photo Reprints
- Tribune Awards
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- Greality Boards
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- eNewsletter

- News Tip
- Write the Editor
- Announcement Forms

- RSS Feeds

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- Real Estate
- Classifieds
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- Coupon Book
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- Your Neighborhood

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- Archives
- Weather & Alerts
- Subscriber Services

- Public Notices
- Movie Listings
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- NEXTnc
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- Avon
- Carbondale
- The Fencepost

A trip down memory lane

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Kevin Carroll didn't just want a dark room where 30-something drinkers could throw quarters into Q-Bert while throwing back a beer.

He wanted, in essence, a time machine for his new video arcade.

So he added neon paint and installed some black lights, the kind that used to turn your Ocean Pacific T-shirt into a glowing, nuclear-power-plant green, pink or yellow. Of course he installed drink holders. But he also put in refurbished editions of Dig Dug, Tron, GyruSS, Donkey Kong, Jr., Elevator Action and almost two dozen other classics from the early '80s. And not only do they look great, the fire buttons, jump buttons and joysticks all work, meaning they're probably in better shape than they were when you got five tokens for a dollar and begged your parents to take you there every weekend or else the calluses on your index finger would go away.

And yes, all games still cost a quarter.

"Now that's an arcade," Carroll said.

Finally, Carroll couldn't have picked a better place than the Oskar Blues Brewery in Lyons. Not only was it practically next door to his Lyons Classic Pinball, Oskar is almost a time machine in its own right.

Motown classics like "Chain of Fools" swirl through your ears when you walk in the door, and a full-size statue of Elvis acts as the maitre d'. Autographed photos of blues legends wallpaper the place, along with crazy photos of customers. The bar staff also plays old-style practical jokes: One recent night, a worker had a little too much to drink, did the prudent thing and left her car there, and was rewarded by finding it covered in toilet paper when she returned to work the next day.

The arcade used to be the office of owner Dale Katechis, until three months ago, when Carroll came to Katechis with a plan and a bit of a plea. Carroll is a game nut, a guy who can't resist the siren song of old pinball machines and classic video game machines. Carroll, in fact, bought too many, and his wife, Carole, who at this point suspected she had married a nut, told him to clear some space.

Carroll's pinball place offers fans a chance to play many pinball machines, including one monster affectionately named "Hercules" that uses a cue ball instead of the small silver ball. And according to Carroll, there are two types of people, pinball people and video people. He's probably right.

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Pinball machines would probably court those who wore bell bottoms, thought the Bee Gees were super cool and played Pong on their TV. Video people probably wore Izods, listened to A Flock of Seagulls and played with Atari 2600s on their TV.

Carroll still has his pinball place, but now he's got a place where video people can relive the glory days of ignoring their partners during the romantic snowball roller skate and chasing a high score because their best friend just entered his initials for the fifth time that night.

He found many of the machines through his contacts, and though he's a pinball guy, he knew enough, based on his customers' reactions, on what to get. He established certain classics based on how excited his customers got when they saw the machine in his place before he moved them to the new arcade. Defender! Ms. Pac-Man! Donkey Kong! That was all he needed.

He realizes that the games are available for many consoles and computers in today's world -- if you look hard enough, you may even be able to download them on the Internet -- but the controllers are different, the screen usually isn't as big, and the game isn't housed in a way-cool cabinet.

"People want the game itself and the controllers," Carroll said. "I've had some upset at me because one of my games has many in them, like Robotron and Joust, and they're not by themselves in their own cabinet."

The thirst to play a little cartoon Mario jumping over barrels, when home game consoles offer a 3-D Mario jumping his way through dozens of different worlds, does amaze Carroll, but only a little bit.

"You would think that with all the amazing things you can do today on your own TV, that no one would want to play these anymore," Carroll said. "But they do. They want to play these games."

In fact, many of the older, simpler games are the ones that get the most play, Carroll said. It's easy to see why: It's a trip down memory lane.

That, in fact, is why Katechis jumped at the chance to host the arcade.

"This gets me back to the first grade," Katechis said. "I mean, when was the last time you played Tron?"

Katechis pauses as the black light turns his teeth into shiny pearls of blue lights.

"I would not have moved my office for a normal arcade," he said.

THE GAMES AT OSKAR:

Frogger, Asteroids, Missile Command, Centipede, Tempest, Dig Dug, Ms. Pac Man, Q-Bert, Gorf, Galaga, Paperboy, Super Mario Bros., Donkey Kong, Elevator Action, Outrun, Battlezone, Joust, Defender, Robotron, Stargate, Bubbles, Splat, Moon Patrol and Gyruss.

Special note: The author of this story, Dan England, scored 116,000 points on Gyruss, the high score at the time. Just try to beat that.

HOURS

Oskar Blues Brewery is open 11 a.m. until 2 a.m. seven days a week and is located at 303 Main Street in Lyons. Take Interstate 25 the Colo. 66 exit and turn right. The same road takes you to Rocky Mountain National Park.

If your kids don't think you are lame and actually want to play the games you played as a kid, they can stay until 9 p.m. before getting booted.

For more information on Oskar Blues, visit www.oskarblues.com or call (303) 823-6685.

Lyons Classic Pinball is located right by the brewery and is open 5-10 p.m. Thursday, 3-11 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 3-9 p.m. Sunday. The place is also available by appointment and will sell or trade games.

For more information, call (303) 823-6100 or visit www.lyonspinball.com.

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