

Lucky Strike bowling brings back residents' memories

There was a keen response to the article on the Lucky Strikes bowling alley, featured two weeks ago. It bought back many memories, particularly for one lady who bowled in a women's league at the alley in the late 1950s.



Tom Beardsley

In the early 1960s, she bowled on a women's team that toured the state that included players such as Cathy Dyak, Helen Noel, Alice Jacobs and Lorena 'Bunny' Lombardo. The correspondent also met her future husband at the alley late in 1959.

The most informative and interesting response came from Tony Barber, the nephew of the founder of the Lucky Strikes alley, Frank Barber, who commenced duckpin bowling in 1907. Barber established a four-lane alley and a pool and billiards hall, the Casino Alleys, in Danielson in 1917.

He formed a five-man team, called the Connecticut All Stars, which included Barber, Fred Dugas, Bill Tato, Jack White and Roy Fillmore. They took on all comers for large sums of money, and attracted a large gathering wherever they performed.

Following his success in the Killingly area, Barber opened an 8-bowling alley establishment in Willimantic in a building former-

ly occupied by the Leonard Brother's Garage, located on the corner of Walnut and Main Streets. It opened for business on June 18, 1931, and was managed by Frank Barber, Fred Dugas and Charles Harding. At this time, Barber and Dugas also operated a bowling alley in Taftville.

Barber was also responsible for organizing a team known as the Connecticut Blue Ribbons, which laid the foundation for many intersectional match-games and sweepstakes at Willimantic. This team consisted of Jack White, Bill Tato, Carl Frisk, Joe Gacek and Nick Tronsky and performed in competitive match-games up and down the Eastern seaboard.

According to Tony, his uncle was always thinking about ways he could promote duckpin bowling and in 1931 he established the Eastern Classic Tournament and invited bowlers to put up an entry fee and bowl a 15-game competition with a guarantee three place money prize.

Better known today as the Frank Barber Memorial Eastern Duckpin Bowling Tournament, it is the oldest men's open duckpin bowling tournament in the country. This February, the competition celebrates its 75th anniversary — an event always staged at the Lucky Strike lanes.

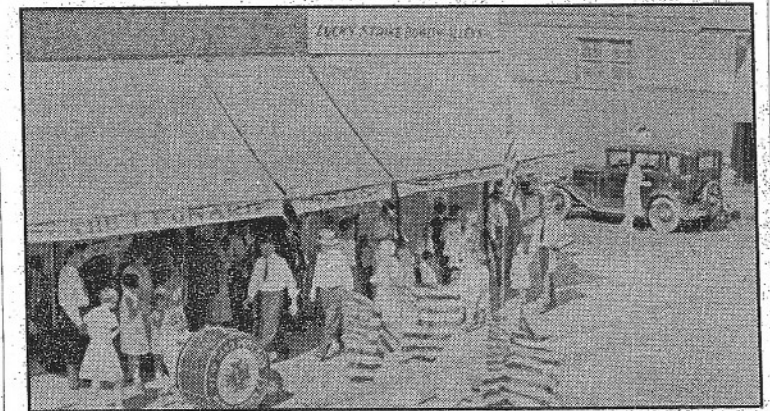
During the summer of 1937, Barber moved his eight-lane bowling alley across the road to 872 Main St. and installed 10 more lanes.

On Sept. 11, 1937, the 18-alley establishment was open for business with Frank Barber and Florimond 'Mondi' Normandin as managers. They remained part-

ners until Norman-din's death in 1952. The lanes were moved again in 1967 to the current location in Mansfield. Tony has a lot more history and memories to report on this subject and they will be featured in this column in future months.

The Willimantic Library has supplied the accompanying picture of the original Lucky Strike lanes, pictured in the early 1930s. When it appeared on the Threadcity.com web site several readers tried to interpret the banner over the front of the building. Tony Barber conformed that it says "Brunswick-Balke Colender," which was a Chicago-based company, which built and equipped alleys across the nation.

The Lucky Strikes bowling alley opened for business on the night of June 18, 1931, and featured a game between the Connecticut Blue Ribbons and the Connecticut All Stars. The Lucky Strike lanes then continued to operate, in two Main Street locations for the next 36 years.



The Lucky Strike Lanes shown in the original Main Street location in the 1930s.

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