



Luna City Arcade

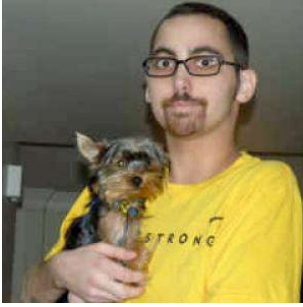
“The Moment That Could Not Last”

Peter Hirschberg

Edited by Catherine DeSpira

The story of how I built one of the largest home arcades in the world, “Luna City Arcade”. How it came to be, the rise, the success, and the catastrophic fall.

This book is dedicated to the memories of:



Shawn Haines



Mike Musgrove

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PREFACE



Tracing the path from small beginnings, fateful moments, and leading to the massively grand and final gesture that was “Luna City Arcade”, this is the story of how I came to build one of the world’s largest home arcades. It is the story of how I, an extremely introverted and shy kid of 7, was so influenced by seeing my first arcade game that I grew into somewhat of a figurehead for retro arcade game collecting. I received international acclaim and notoriety, even gave interviews on television, radio, and newsprint. At the peak of the arcade, I was hosting public “Game Days” for hundreds of people I didn’t even know. Quite a stretch from the shy, introverted kid of 7 years old.

But there was to be a very dear price to pay. The figurehead eventually became a cautionary and tragic tale of obsession and excess. Yet for all the tragedy, it is also an inspirational story of how much of an impact the arcade had on so many people’s lives. 10 years after shuttering the doors people are still talking about it and how much it truly influenced so many people in such a profound way.

For those who never got a chance to visit the arcade, my sincere hope is that this book will serve as a “virtual visit” back in time to Luna City Arcade in its prime. Luna City shined very, very bright for only a brief moment in time. I feel it deserves to be remembered.

The question I get asked the most when talking about Luna City Arcade is, “What happened?”. The answer is not simple and in fact there is no solitary answer. My hope is that in reading this book you will see things as they unfolded and understand the many things that went right and wrong, ultimately leading to the tragic fall.

THE DREAM OF LUNA CITY ARCADE

THE PARTY - PART 1



Me and my mother in 1984

It was one of those weird and fateful types of moments in your life that could have gone either way. It was 1986 and I was 20 years old at the time.

My mother approached me one night about a party at her friend Dave Whittaker's house that she wanted to take me to. Of course, being me – I didn't want to go. I hated going to parties. Encouraging me, she said that Dave had arcade games in his basement that I'd probably enjoy playing.

She had my attention. Being a completely awkward, introverted, and geeky teenager growing up in the late 1970s and early 1980s, fascinated with science-fiction, computers, gaming and technology, I was of course filled with utter wonder every time I visited an arcade. They were so absolutely magical to me in the purest sense of the word. I think my most formative years were around 1977 (when Star Wars came out) to around 1983 – the height of the arcade scene. Arcades were a perfect storm for me because they incorporated everything that I thought was cool into a product that was perfectly marketed towards people like me. In every way they could, arcades MATTERED to me, *deeply*.

Still skeptical about the party, I reluctantly agreed to go since my interest had now been piqued.

It ended up being a night I would never forget and would change my life forever. And it almost didn't happen.

THE ARCADE SCENE

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS PONG



This story goes even farther back to the first time I saw a “Pong” machine (Atari, 1972) on-location at a hotel where me and my parents were staying in 1973. I was 7 years old. I had never seen an arcade game before – no one had, really, with Pong being one of the very first (preceded only by the entirely unsuccessful release of “Computer Space”). I remember my father coming up to the hotel room and saying, “Hey, there’s a cool game in the lobby” which he then described to me. “Your mom and I have been playing. Would you like to play a game with me?”

So we went down to the lobby and what I saw there was a thing of total wonder. My father plopped a quarter in the machine and I couldn’t believe what I was experiencing. He pointed out to me that you could deflect the ball on the edge of the paddle and flick it off at a crazy angle. Unbelievable, I thought. I wanted to play forever.

On the car ride home I remarked to my parents that they should make a tiny version of that game so you could hold it in your hands and play in the car. “But you wouldn’t be able to see the screen. It would be so small.” My mother said. Probably true, I realized.

The seed had been planted and my fascinated 7 year old self had no idea what was about to come.

THE CRAZE

After seeing Pong, it was like pouring gasoline on a smoldering fire for me when the arcade scene hit in the mid/late 1970s. By that time my parents had divorced and I was living with my mother. Being divorced, we didn't have much money. But every trip to a mall would be another precious chance for me to visit the dark and smoky arcades and simply watch people playing these wondrous games. By the time the arcade craze was in full force I no longer necessarily needed to go to the mall to visit an arcade. They were everywhere and I spent every chance I could there. In fact, you didn't even need to go to an arcade at that time. Arcade games were so popular and ubiquitous it would be fair to say that every store, location, or other establishment of any type had at least a small collection of games to play.



A typical scene - a K-Mart with a section of arcade games in the front of the store.



A representation of an arcade in the '80s.





Photo credits: Catherine DeSpira



Photo credits: Ira Nowinski



Photo credit: Peter Hirschberg

SHAKEY'S PIZZA

After my parents divorced in the mid 70s, my mom and siblings relocated to Woodbridge, Virginia. Every month or so my mother would treat all of us kids to the local Shakey's Pizza. They had pizza there, yes. But you could get pizza anywhere. More importantly to me, they had arcade games lined up all along one wall plus a small enclosed section in the back with even more games. It was always dark and always smelled like pizza, the shadowy atmosphere further reenforcing the appeal to me of video games belonging in dimly lit areas. Plus you simply cannot beat pizza AND video games together. I remember that place very fondly.









Photo credits: Peter Hirschberg



A typical Shakey's back gameroom.



When Shakey's abruptly ended their East Coast presence, the Shakey's I visited as a child in Woodbridge, VA closed and was for a while host to an outdoor pool store. Their door sign however still held the unique shape of the Shakey's logo. I visited it at some point in the early 2000s and found some solace in that. But sadly I later learned that the building had burned to the ground due to arson. The sense of loss was real for me and would become a recurring theme with all things arcade.



Former location of the Shakey's Pizza I visited as a kid

SPRINGFIELD MALL, TIME-OUT AND SPACEWAY RACEWAY

It was always a special treat whenever my mother drove us up to the nearby Springfield Mall in Springfield, Virginia. It was like our own personal Disneyland.



Springfield Mall circa 1978. Photo credit: Lisa Shipp Emrico

This particular mall uniquely had two arcades back then - a place called Spaceway Raceway downstairs, and a Time-Out Tunnel upstairs. Time-Out was a rather large chain of arcades that existed mostly on the East Coast at the time.

The Time-Out was dark and smoky. This was back when you could still smoke inside stores and people would smoke while they played the games. The arcade was L-shaped with an entrance on each end which made it uniquely more "tunnel-ish" than other Time-Out Tunnels. I remember seeing Starship I (Atari, 1976), Star Hawk (Cinematronics, 1977) and a Super Shifter (Allied Leisure, 1974). This was truly back in the day.



"Time-Out Tunnel" at Springfield Mall, circa 1976 Annandale High School yearbook photo



"Time-Out 2" entrance at Springfield Mall. Photo credit: Jim Miller

Spaceway Raceway had a gorgeous mirrored glass grand entrance complete with neon lighting. In the front of the place was a very large collection of video games and pinball machines, and in the rear of the place they had an area with actual bumper cars going on. After a few years they changed the bumper cars to an area with a small pond that had coin operated radio controlled boats you could pilot around.

The downstairs arcade, Spaceway Raceway, became "Time-Out 2" after a few years, and for a long time there were, oddly enough, two Time-Outs in that mall. Time-Out 2 moved to the food-court area sometime in the very late 90s and eventually closed entirely around 2004. The upstairs Time-Out existed for a while after but looked nothing like the arcade I knew as a child. The Starship I and Star Hawk games were long gone as was the wonderfully dark atmosphere - replaced by sterile white walls and bright lighting. It eventually closed for good when they remodeled Springfield Mall into "Springfield Town Center". Another loss.

In their glory days the upstairs Time-Out was approximately 3,000 square feet in size with an average of 85 games. It was one of Time-Out's earliest stores. Time-Out 2 (downstairs) was a whopping 5,000 square feet with an average of 115 games.



John Baker, 1981 yearbook photo

My friend since middle school, John Baker, and I would eventually start making the trek to Springfield Mall ourselves. First on our bikes, then on mopeds and eventually, when John got a truck, we were able to go to the mall pretty much any time we wanted which was basically all the time.

I interviewed John for this book and asked what he remembered about the video game craze: *"Well, it started with Lunar Lander, Springfield Mall. I thought that was the greatest thing I'd ever seen. And then Asteroids, and it was like vector games were like, god darn I'd never seen anything like that. And, then of course, Dragon's Lair, for instance, it was like, man, what in the world? You know, it can't get any better than that. It was unbelievable. It was a great time to be alive back then. You went in there, you had your quarters and you played. I mean, it was a lifestyle, you know, going to the mall and playing games was a lifestyle."*

John continued on to reminisce about Spaceway Raceway's bumper car area: *"They had a really dark black-lit area and then you got in the car and then the little rockets would start, there was like a disco ball with rockets on it, and the little rockets would go round and round on the wall while you drove the car. The cars would glow while you sat there and raced around. But I'd never understood, am I supposed to race with the people or am I supposed to bump into people? I would just try to just get around there as fast as I could whenever I drove them. It was kinda square when you went in, it didn't look big at all until you went all the way to the back and then it opened up. It opened up and it was like, wow, they got bumper cars back here. And they had the little radio control boats."*

John recalled that Spaceway Raceway had blacklight carpeting, too, complete with planets and stars on it. I don't personally remember that, but perhaps that subliminally set the tone for what I would later do with Luna City Arcade.

"The very first game I ever dropped a coin in was actually in Denver. It was at a 7-Eleven. Asteroids. It was Asteroids. And then when I got back to Virginia, I ran up to the mall. Because I knew that there were games there. I was like, they better have Asteroids. And then all of a sudden I saw Lunar Lander. I go, what in the

world's this? I'm not sure if Space Wars was there, but I know that they had that. I was like, oh, I'll try this Lunar Lander out thing. And I got hooked on that. And then of course I played pinball machines, you know, but it was really seeing that Asteroids machine in that 7-Eleven. And then Lunar Lander is right there, number two."

I asked John what made Asteroids his favorite machine: *"It was a game that gave you control of the ship. You could move around, you had your hyperspace, it just was cool. And it was challenging, you know, it was just a lot of fun. It wasn't like Pong where you just could go only go up and down. And that's what I loved about Asteroids is that it felt like you could go anywhere. You could go up and down all around and like, you know, back then, that was the '70s. To be able to do something like that - it was like, this is cool."*

Both the Time-Out and Spaceway Raceway / Time Out 2 will always hold my deepest and most cherished memories of what an arcade WAS and COULD BE. Every time you went there it was a new experience and I couldn't wait to see what the newest games were. I would carefully study them and just...*take them in...*for lack of better words. The sights, the sounds, the dark and smoky atmospheres glowing with the colorful phosphor of dozens of CRT monitors. Even the smell of the arcade would leave an everlasting impression on me.

John agreed. *"The best time to be alive was right there in 1980; right there in the late seventies, early eighties."*

THE BIRTH OF TIME-OUT

Time-Out Amusement Center was started by an entrepreneur named Tico Bonomo. Tico was a candy manufacturer and the owner of Bonomo's Turkish Taffy fame, one of the largest hard candy manufacturers on the East Coast. In 1970 Tico sold the upstate New York taffy company to Tootsie Roll, and he began looking for another commercial venture to start up.

In the late 1960s the idea of a mall arcade as we know it today didn't exist yet. Video games didn't exist either. Primitive coin-operated electro mechanical games were just beginning to creep into retail stores on the eastern seaboard. These primitive games were purely mechanical machines that worked via motors, relays, and projectors. But seeing the nascent electromechanical games beginning to accumulate in various retail stores, Tico excitedly realized that an entire store full of coin-operated games in a shopping mall could perhaps be a successful business and something that hadn't been done before.

In 1970, Tico opened the first Time-Out Family Amusement Center in the Northway Mall in Colonie, New York. The arcade was a large success. In fact, to Tico's surprise, the arcade was an even larger success than the Taffy company he had just sold. Encouraged by the good fortune, Tico opened a few more of his Amusement Centers.

Nobody could predict what was to happen next, but Tico's timing was perfect, and he and his small arcade chain were perfectly positioned for the explosion that was about to happen. In 1972, Pong hit the scene, and customers flooded into Tico's Time-Out Amusement Centers and unleashed a tidal wave of quarters that nobody could have foreseen. Tico was in the exactly right place at exactly the right time.

A PERFECT STORM

Riding the overwhelming popularity of Pong and the numerous copycat games that followed, by the year 1975 Tico had expanded his coin-op empire to a dozen locations. By 1978, there were twenty locations, and it wasn't over yet. 1978 was the year Space Invaders hit the US, and Tico and his quickly growing chain of arcades rode a second huge wave of expansion and growth triggered by the popularity of Space Invaders.

Not only was the video game industry exploding, shopping mall construction was also going through a huge period of expansion. For Tico and his Time-Out chain, this created nothing less than a Perfect Storm of opportunity. The "Mall Arcade" was a sensation. New malls were opening everywhere, and each new mall would open another chance for Tico to install one of his successful arcade centers. The explosion of growth on several fronts drove the video game manufacturers, all competing for the customer's quarters, to create more sophisticated and fancier video games, which in turn created a vicious cycle driving the growth of the Mall Arcade.

Working at the Sunrise Mall Time-Out in 1981 in Massapequa, NY, Geoffrey Kovar remembers the employee uniform. "Blue buttoned-down shirt, black slacks, 6-slot coin dispenser on the belt with not one but two quick-release slots to dispense 4 quarters

with a single press, faux cloth badge, the works.” He describes a typical early 80s working environment: “The usual layout of the Time Outs I saw had two rear doors, one in each back corner, opening inward, and which generally had a small window or even a peephole (like a front door). In the one I worked at the one on the right led to the setup/repair room. Lots of arcade machines open, in various states of repair, or in crates, and it took up probably 2/3 of the back area. The one on the left led to a short hallway. Two doors from there, one a fire door to the mall hallway, and one to the right, leading to the office/vault. There was a big safe in there with tons of money, and also several secure drawers for each of the people on shift. Usual work drawer was \$500, in quarters, except for a bit of paper to make change. First job I ever had to get bonded to work at, and had to take a polygraph test. Oh, and none of this stuff about tokens. We used quarters, baby! And to track the usage of slugs and free games we gave out, there was a bin of quarters painted red (red nail polish, actually) in the office that we dipped into when necessary.”

Over the next few years, the machines got better and flashier, the audience for video games ballooned, and new arcade locations were opening at a furious pace. Every mall had an arcade - sometimes more than one. The industry was at its peak at this point, producing its seminal games like Asteroids, Pacman, Defender, Galaga, Battlezone, Tempest, and other machines that sucked video game players into arcades like a giant ever-expanding whirlpool. Video games and arcades were everywhere, and Time-Out Amusement Center was at the forefront of the industry.

THE DEATH OF THE ARCADE

When the arcade bubble finally burst, it burst big. Arcades across the country either boarded up and went out of business, or they merged to stay alive. Time-Out took the opportunity to buy out Sega's West Coast chain of 13 arcades. Time-Out rose from the ashes of the devastated arcade business to ride the wave of popularity in a new type of arcade machine - the redemption game. Redemption games, such as crane machines that hand out toy prizes, allowed Time-Out to stay afloat. By 1987, they had 70 stores.

Around 1992, the Time-Out chain was purchased by Edison Brothers' Mall Entertainment Division. Edison Brothers Inc was a large clothing and shoe giant based out of St. Louis. John Beck, a former employee, recalls: “Edison had bought another arcade company before Time-Out, and tried to change the way Time-Out did business. Edison used the company as a cash cow, robbing all of the profits to offset their weak sales, as I understand it”. Edison owned several arcade chains at the peak of their amusement center days, which included Space Port, Station Break, and of course Time-Out. They filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 1995. The subsequent restructuring saw them dissolving their Mall Entertainment division and Time-Out was sold again, this time to Namco LTD. Namco already owned a popular chain of arcades called Cyberstation when they acquired Time-Out. Jim Miller, who worked for Cyberstation at the time, remembers when Time-Out was taken over by Namco. “Time-Out corporate all got pink slips I believe”, Jim says. “All I ever knew of the Time Outs were the boxes of stuff that ended up in the warehouse. Eventually they pulled in a couple dumpsters from the street and filled them up. I grabbed what I could. Probably a lot of history ended up in a landfill but it was just receipts and accounting stuff I bet.”

These days many people have never heard of Time-Out, and I suspect they primarily existed on the East Coast. Their corporate headquarters were based in Fairfax Virginia before they were bought out, which explains the East Coast focus of the chain. Still I am led to believe that there were, at their peak, one of the largest arcade chains in the USA, with locations extending to Puerto Rico and St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands. Some locations still exist today as a Namco-operated / Time-Out branded Cyberstations.

Tico ultimately retired in Northern Virginia with his family. I was hoping to meet him in person to thank him for his contributions and perhaps to interview him but learned that, sadly, he passed away in 1999. I'm sorry I never got to meet you Tico.





Photo credits: Jim Miller



Springfield Mall Time-Out circa 2003. A hollow shell of its former glory days.



The former location of my childhood Time-Out at Springfield Mall, now gone. Circa 2017

THE DOWNTOWN MALL ARCADE

In 1981 I went to live with my father for a year. My grades in school were suffering as I was constantly distracted by various geeky projects I was working on, like writing computer games. So my mother and father had worked it out that I would go to live with my father to get me “back on track”. I didn’t want to go and live on a farm, far from the malls and arcades I had grown accustomed to, but I had no say in the decision.

Ironically 1981 also ended up being the biggest year for the arcade scene with the release of so many seminal games - Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, Tempest, Frogger, etc.

Still, once a week after school I would walk to a small open mall a few blocks away where they had a tiny little arcade. Housing only around 10 games total, they had such great titles. Yet oddly I was almost always the only one there! I played Pac-Man over and over there until I was out of quarters.

I also remember them having a Donkey Kong, Eliminator (this being the only arcade where I ever saw one), and a Tail Gunner.

They had cool arcade artwork painted in the window display areas. If I ever bought this building I would immediately try and see if that artwork still existed under all the layers of paint.

I don’t know when they closed, but at some point they were just - gone - as was the case with most arcades.



Former location of the small arcade I visited regularly in high school. Picture taken in 2018.

THE CRASH

The arcade scene ultimately would peak in 1981 then begin a slow decline over the next two years until the sudden Video Game Crash of 1983 which decimated the industry. Arcades began to rapidly vanish and it was the end of an era.

Every arcade I visited in my youth would eventually disappear into oblivion, leaving behind just memories.

To be clear, you could still find an arcade in, say 1986, but they were dead to me. I would always walk through and, finding nothing of interest to me, walk out in disappointment with a small amount of bitterness. Arcades in 1986 had been taken over by “fighting” and “driving” games. No longer were the games about fantasy or science fiction spaceships. It felt to me like all the creativity and beauty was lost.

But many years later my memories of Time-Out, Spaceway Raceway, Shakey’s Pizza and the tiny arcade near my high school would set the stage for what was to come later in my life.



Remains of a former Time-Out arcade found in an abandoned mall. Photo credit: Catherine DeSpira



Photo credit: Seph Lawless

THE PARTY - PART 2

Back at Dave Whittaker's 1986 party there were a lot of parents and kids milling around. I made my way to the basement which was at the end of a long dark stairway. What I saw down there forever changed my life. He had a huge row of full-sized pinball machines and scattered all around the rest of the basement were the things of my childhood dreams - actual real-life working arcade games- and not just a bunch of random games that I couldn't identify with. The games in that basement were all among my favorites that I remembered playing at Time-Out and other arcades I went to as a young kid. I never even realized that it was possible to buy a bunch of used arcade machines and – seriously – put them all in your house?! My mind was blown. It was amazing what Dave had put together in his basement. All the games were set on Free Play. It was a lost part of my childhood captured and recreated on a small scale in his house. The arcades of my youth had deteriorated away with the video game crash. There was no place to go to play the games that I loved so much as a child. Yet here they all were in front of me in Dave's basement.



Pictures of Dave Whittaker's basement arcade. Photo credit, Dave Whittaker.

Rather stunned after playing some games in the basement I made my way upstairs to the kitchen and sitting there all alone in the corner was a tabletop Atari Asteroids machine!

Released in 1979 by Atari, Asteroids was one of my early favorite games. My friend John Baker and I would go to the local department store and play and play and play, with John graciously donating the quarters to me so I could play since I had no money. I sucked at Asteroids, but the visceral feeling of that game was beyond description and I loved every minute of sucking at Asteroids.

So there in the kitchen of Dave's house was a real-life tabletop Asteroids machine. I had heard of but never seen the tabletop version of the game. Dave had thoughtfully left a chair in front of the machine so you could sit and play, which I did, for a long time. It was so cute and small compared to the large normal-sized arcade games. This was something I could put in my bedroom! And then I noticed that there was a small price-tag taped to the glass on the top of the machine. I turned it over. It said "\$400". My already blown mind could not believe what I was seeing. This machine was actually for sale!? "IT SHALL BE MINE" my racing mind thought as I approached Dave. "Sure!" he said when I anxiously asked if I could buy it. "I've got another one in my garage that doesn't work that I'll sell you for only \$200". Again, I couldn't believe it.



An Asteroids cocktail table

We agreed I would buy the broken one as soon as I could scrounge up the money for it. After a few impatient weeks I purchased the machine and brought it home. I set it up next to my bed in my small bedroom and plugged it in. The screen stayed dark – definitely a monitor problem. But the glorious sounds of Asteroids once again filled my ears and I was transported back to 1979 when the game first was released.



Me and Dave Whittaker a few years ago

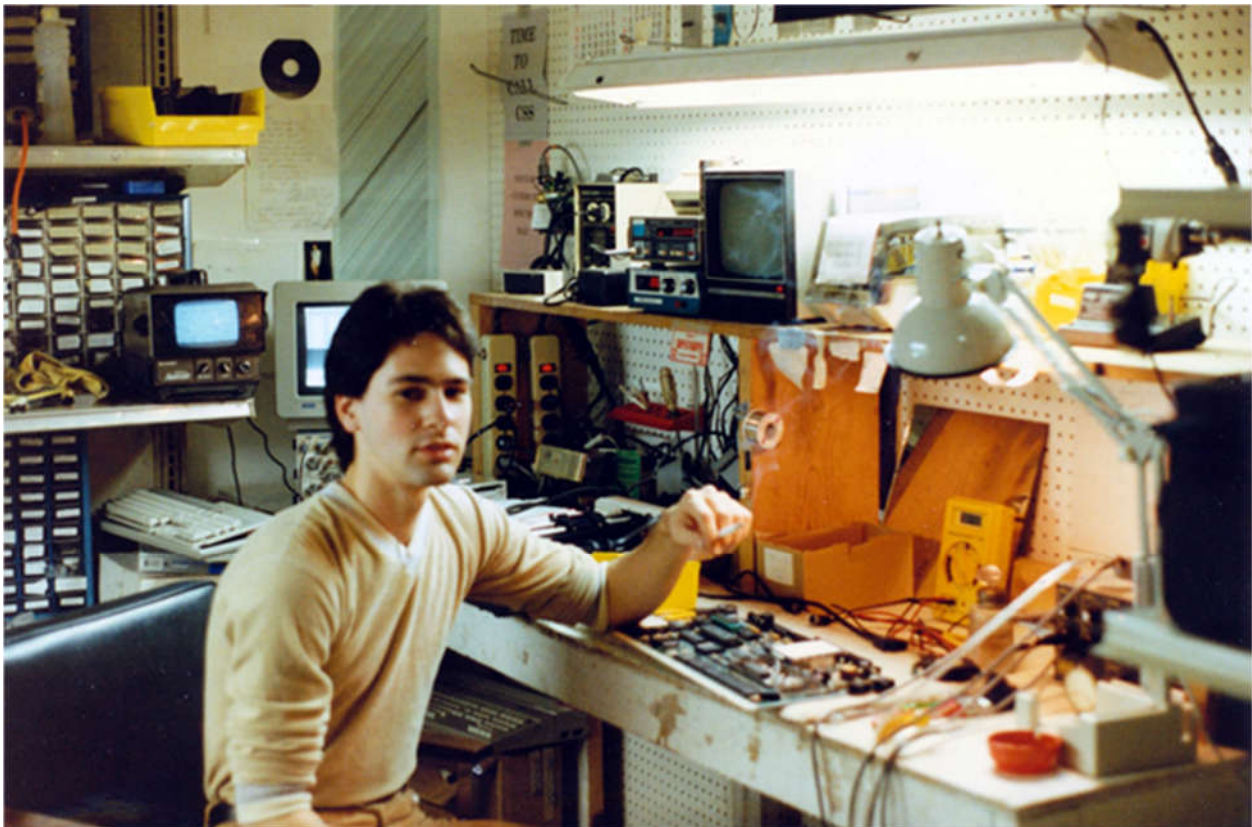
L&Y ELECTRONICS

After getting out of high school I wanted to get into computers. My mother drove me to a local pseudo-college called "Computer Learning Center". I tried to get into their programming classes but after taking their entrance exam my math scores were a bit too low they said. They suggested I take another course they offered – computer electronics. I had always been fascinated with electronics but the classes in high school were always full. Here was my chance to finally do something really cool with my life.

After graduating at the top of my class I began working at a small computer store in Woodbridge Virginia near where I lived called "L&Y Electronics". They had a computer repair section in the rear of the store and I would work tirelessly away fixing computers, hard drives and all manner of computer peripherals.

I loved it and it put me in a position to be able to repair electronics with confidence. This would be CRUCIAL later in my life and became another ingredient that allowed me to be able to one day build and maintain my own home arcade.

Making conversation with my boss the day after I found out about the Asteroids machine for sale, I remember saying to him I was going to buy an arcade game. With my December coming - my birthday month - I might get some money to be able to pay it off. "Are you going to give people quarters for Christmas?" he said sardonically. Non-believer.



Me fixing an Atari ST computer at L&Y Computers in 1986.



The staff of L&Y Electronics with me on the far right. Circa 1986

MY FIRST ARCADE GAMES

After buying the tabletop Asteroids machine at last, I quickly diagnosed the problem and ordered a few parts. I impatiently waited for them to arrive, but soon after my game was fully working! I spent a lot of time getting all the various adjustments just right and I meticulously restored it – sanding and repainting rusted metal trim pieces, cleaning everything off, touching up the cabinet and carefully scrubbing the buttons and control panels. My first arcade game, I swooned.

Dave Whittaker was so impressed by how quickly I fixed up my game that he asked me if I could come take a look at another broken machine he had in his garage. It was a Tempest.



Released by Atari in 1981, I remember seeing the game at Time-Out when it was first released. It was the world's first color "vector" game. I remember being completely mesmerized by the insane graphics.

Although it was never a game I had played, I went over to Dave's house one night to work on it. It was dark in his garage and he wasn't home at the time. After taking a look it seemed to have a monitor problem similar to my Asteroids machine. So I ordered more parts - waited - and then was rather amazed that it actually worked perfectly after that. I played the game to make sure everything was working. I was literally the first time I had ever actually played the game. I fell in love with it right then and there.

Dave wanted to know how much to pay me after fixing the game for him. "How much money do you want for it?" I countered.

Soon after that it was sitting in my bedroom buzzing happily away in my little bedroom at my mother's house, right next to my Asteroids machine.

And I wanted more.

That fateful visit to Dave Whittaker's home gameroom had opened my eyes to a world that I never knew existed. I had a real-life Asteroids and Tempest game in my bedroom. The elusive games that I could never quite get the hang of in the arcade and didn't have money to play were now standing next to my bed, with me lordling over them.

I asked Dave Whittaker how he came to have a basement arcade: *"When I was growing up, I couldn't afford to go to play pinballs. Didn't even know what they were at the time, I suppose. There was no place where I saw anything like that. And even 5 or 10 cents was just too much for me. As I got older, I found out that I could play one and have fun. So I started collecting a couple here and there and started working on them as much as I could do at the time. When I built my house in 1985 we were putting walls up and wiring it up and stuff like that. I got those up and put plenty of receptacles around the wall, I knew what I wanted to do at that time".* Dave knew what he wanted. And now so did I.

Real arcade machines have a palpable and visceral physical PRESENCE to them that you simply cannot get from any home console or emulator. They have a pedigree that comes with having been in a real arcade, or even several arcades. They are the genuine article. The real, actual things I played in my teens in real arcades. You had to actually put a quarter in them to make them work. It all added up to not just a game, but a full-body **experience**.

Dave had achieved something profound to me. He had given me a glimpse into what could be done to bring back all the old arcade games I loved. Everyone had taken the arcades of the '70s and '80s for granted, thinking they would always be there. And when they went away that was the end. But for people like Dave and me, it didn't have to be the end. You just had to be willing to recreate it yourself. And boy was I willing.

HOME AMUSEMENT COMPANY

Dave Whittaker told me I seemed to have a knack for fixing arcade games. Still working on Atari computers at L&Y Electronics at the time I wondered if I could find a job repairing them for a living. It didn't seem like it would be that much of a transition, especially since a lot of my favorite arcade games at the time were made by Atari anyway.

I remember watching technicians repairing video games at Time-Out and imagined at the time that it must certainly be one of the coolest jobs ever.

Late 1986 had become early 1987 as I thumbed through the Yellow Pages for local amusement companies where I might be able to find a job. After a successful interview with an Arcade Operator company near my house I thought I had it made, but after some weird conversations with the secretary I wrote them off as probably being a rather joyless place to work. I expanded my search and found a place called "Home Amusement Company" in Rockville MD - about 35 miles from my house. Kind of far, I thought, but I grabbed the address, plotted a course there using a map, and drove up there on my day off.

Walking through the front door with my eyes still adjusting to the darkness from the bright sun outside, I saw endless rows and rows of pinball machines, video games, jukeboxes, gumball machines, and more in room after room. It seemed to go on forever. Adorning the walls were all sorts of decorations, neon signs, and posters. The atmosphere was dark like the arcades I remembered ever so fondly. The sound all the machines powered on and making their various "attract mode" sounds also sparked strong memories.



Row of pinball machines for sale at Home Amusement Company. Photo Credit: Bruce Jenkins



"Backstage" at Home Amusement Company. Photo Credit: Bruce Jenkins



The people of Home Amusement Company, circa 1985. From a "Loose Change" newsletter article. Photo credit: Bruce Jenkins

After making the rounds several times I found a door at the rear of the store. "Service Entrance" it said. I nervously knocked on the door. Shortly after I met Bruce Jenkins, the service manager. After the usual interviewing process and a tour "backstage" I was amazed to hear that Bruce wanted to hire me on the spot. I accepted. After giving my 2 weeks notice at L&Y Electronics and saying some bittersweet goodbyes, I was officially working at Home Amusements. It definitely took some acclimating. My first day working there was an intimidating blur. I remember diagnosing a power supply problem with a Donkey Kong and being tasked with fixing a Haunted House pinball machine - an extremely complex and notoriously unreliable machine. I had never worked on a pinball machine before. In fact, I had only even played pinball once before.

Back in 1981 I was scoping out all the latest games at Spaceway Raceway which by then had been renamed "Time-Out 2" - complimenting the upstairs' "Time-Out". Placed strategically in the center of the arcade near the entrance sat a "Black Hole" pinball machine. It looked stunningly more beautiful and impressive than any pinball machine I had seen before. Most notably, it had two playfields! In the center of the main playfield it had a clear plexiglass window where you could view the "lower level" playfield. If you were able to successfully launch the ball down to the lower level, the main playfield would go dark, and the lower level would light up. The lower flippers were at the far end of the machine and the lower playfield's angle was reversed from the upper playfield - effectively forcing you to play "backwards" when on the lower level. I was fascinated. I only played a couple weak games on it as it was 50 cents to play - twice the price of every other game I had ever played before. But it left a lasting impression on me and showed me that **pinball machines could be cool too.**

DISCOVER THE MAGNETIC ATTRACTION OF BLACK HOLE.

Black Hole features a hidden playfield inside the cabinet, visible to the player through the upper playfield window.

Multiple-ball play is achieved when both captive holes are filled and player enters Black Hole.

B-L-A-C-K H-O-L-E sequencing drop targets light g-force accelerators to increase lower level scoring values.

Re-entry tube transports ball back to upper playfield for continuing play.

Gottlieb
**BLACK
HOLE**

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Black Hole pinball machine. Photo credit ipdb.org

So there I was on my first day at Home Amusements staring at a dead Haunted House pinball machine. Produced shortly after Black Hole, Haunted House actually had not just two but three levels. The lower level being very similar to Black Hole's, with the cool addition of an upper "attic" level and an insane total of 8 flippers. It ran on the same hardware as Black Hole, which Bruce told me was a bad thing (due to the reliability problems). After struggling with the machine for several hours using my oscilloscope, Bruce intervened. It was nearing the end of my first day. "Probably not fair to have you work on something like this on your first day", he said. I didn't disagree.



Haunted House pinball machine. Photo credit ipdb.org

As the days turned to weeks, and months, and years - I slowly learned how both video games and pinball machines worked; the tricks of the trade, common problems, easy fixes and I got electrocuted more than a few times.



Me fixing a pinball machine at Home Amusement Company circa 1987-1988

The job entailed repairing arcade machines as quickly as possible including “shopping” them (replacing all the burned out light bulbs, worn out rubbers, and cleaning everything). There was a telephone in the shop whose ring I learned to dread. A customer calling. My memory of the calls are uniformly negative. For starters, I don’t like talking on the phone. Let’s just put that out there. But all the customers on the phone were almost always angry, impatient, outraged that things cost money.

But worse things were to come. The dreaded “service call” to someone’s house. These sucked every way you could possibly look at them. You were in a stranger’s inevitably mansion-like house with them staring over your shoulder while you struggled to repair a game quickly, knowing they were aware they were getting charged by the hour.

My favorite times at Home Amusements were to come later as I moved up the ranks. Eventually I was given almost free reign to work on whatever machine I fancied. The store had multiple storage rooms packed wall to wall with broken rare and vintage arcade machines that previous attempts to fix had proven unprofitable or just not possible. Having a proper electronics education gave me a definite advantage here. I would go to those back rooms and just dig around through the hundreds of machines until I found something I thought needed the most love or was simply something I wanted to play. I specialized in fixing games with what’s called a “vector” monitor - a monitor that draws its graphics using lines. Asteroids, Tempest, Battlezone,

Star Castle, Space War, Rip Off, Tail Gunner - the list goes on. Those were always my favorites in the arcades because of the unique display and super detailed graphics.

So I would pull machines out of the storage rooms and fix them, they'd go out on the floor and get sold and the company made money. Everyone was happy and it was a good arrangement.

"Whenever I talk about Home Amusements I always tell everybody you were probably the best electronics tech I ever had there", Bruce told me when I spoke with him about writing this book.



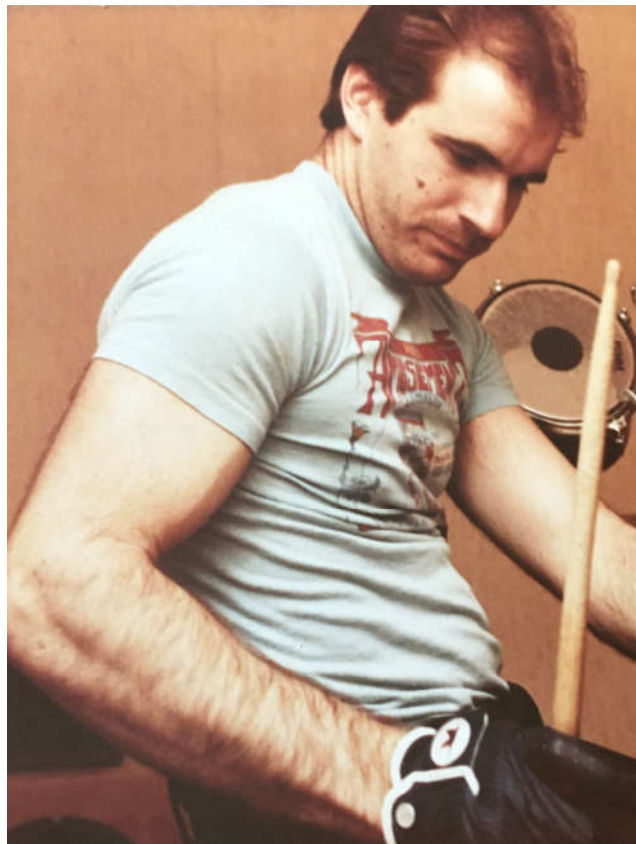
Bruce Jenkins working on a pinball machine in 1983 at Home Amusement Company. Photo credit: Bruce Jenkins

I met a lot of really great people in my time at Home Amusements, some of whom I am still friends with to this day. One of the other people I worked with, Ron Duane, took over as Service Manager after a couple months of me starting when Bruce took a sabbatical. I had been working with Ron for a couple months

already when he took the reins. To say Ron was good at playing pinball is an understatement. I consider both Ron and Bruce both to be amazing pinball repair technicians and pinball players. But I think Ron took things to an insane level of skill when it came to playing pinball. The Washington Post arrived to do an interview on Home Amusements one day and I remember them going around asking everyone “Who is the best pinball player here?” and unanimously everyone said, “Ron”.

Watching Ron play pinball was an almost transcendent experience. From him I learned that you could actually aim the ball, yes, but more; you could flip the ball from one flipper to another at will, and nudge a machine hard enough to change the ball’s trajectory but not enough to “tilt” the machine. It was sheer joy watching both Ron and Bruce play and again reinforced my understanding that pinball really was cool.

I caught up with Ron recently. *“Your name actually comes up a lot in Home Amusement conversation. We always say, oh there was this guy named Pete, and we would say he would stick his head in the back of a machine, putz around for a bit, stick his head out and go “oh, 5 volts”, and we were like “holy crap”. I am definitely mechanical and slightly electrical, and Bruce (Jenkins) is mechanical and more electrical, and you were like, all electrical. You were bringing stuff back from, I don’t wanna say the dead, but you were doing stuff where we would normally just send the boards out and have someone else do. And then that of course goes on to talking about your arcade. I talk about it a lot, not as much as I used to, but I talk about it a lot and then if you remember I brought some neighbors and friends out who were just in awe and had just the most fantastic time, and just couldn’t believe.”*



Ron Duane, circa 1980-1981. Photo credit: Ron Duane

Bruce Jenkins, Ron and Lori Duane, I love you guys.

Later as I continued buying, fixing, selling, and collecting video games and eventually pinball machines (the first pinball machine I bought was - of course - a "Black Hole"), all that experience I had built up at Home Amusements set me up to be able to one day build what was to become Luna City Arcade.



Home Amusement Company shirt. Photo credit: Ron Duane.

THE BIRTH OF LUNA CITY

10 years after leaving my job at Home Amusements, I was married and had kids. It was 1997 and I had just gotten a job at AOL during the height of their incredible success during the Dot Com bubble. I was making a lot of money. *A LOT*. More than I had ever made before. Over the years since Home Amusements, money had always been a limiting factor for me, so I bought, sold, and traded machines around for a long time. I had only a single video game at the time. A full-size Asteroids machine.

But I now had money, and I slowly started buying video games and actually keeping them which was a wonderful new concept to me. I slowly worked my way up to seven machines in my tiny basement decorated with a few scattered posters. It didn't feel much like an arcade to me, but rather more of a very cool "rec-room". Still, it was a little piece of my youth recaptured.



The birth of Luna City Arcade

In 2001 I somehow stumbled on Dave Dries' incredible "Arcade 84", a very inspiring and ambitious video celebrating the arcades of the 1980s. I can't remember where I got the video - YouTube would not be created for another 5 years, but I found it somewhere online. It was just known to me as the file "arcade84.avi". The video was set to Journey's "Stone In Love" and was crude (by today's standards). But the beauty was in all the details Dave worked into the video. Every notable video game from the '80s got some love in the video, and the nostalgia it oozed was infectious. It centered around a fictional mall arcade and incorporated every possible minutiae imaginable from the 80s arcade scene; neon blacklights, rows of games, a snackbar area, music videos playing on the walls, lighting effects, blaring 80s music, and - most notably - what looked to me like blacklight carpeting.



Dave Dries' pivotal animation "Arcade 84"

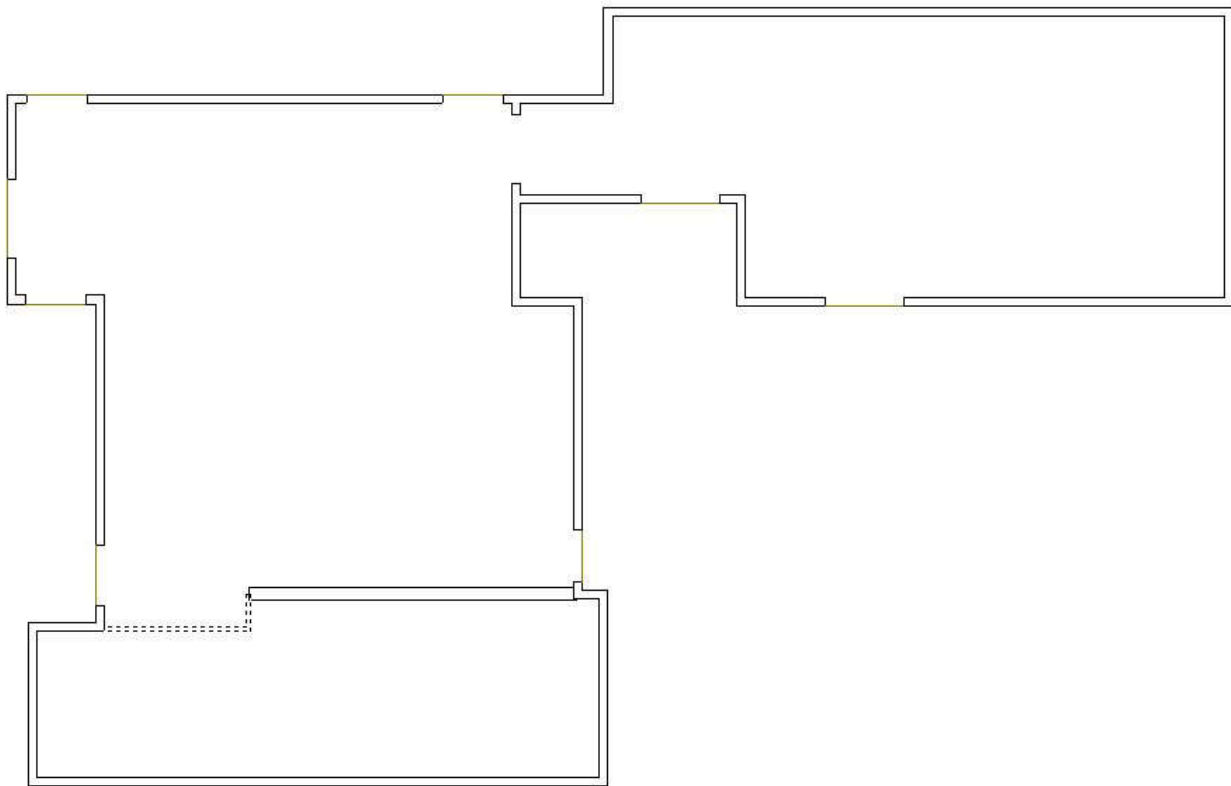
***"Those crazy nights, I do remember in my youth
I do recall, those were the best times, most of all" - Journey - "Stone In Love"***

"This was IT!", I thought. I remember telling one of my AOL coworkers "Man, if I could ever get the money to afford something like this, I am totally doing exactly this!". The video was only 3 minutes and 10 seconds long, but it was another HUGE and fateful moment in the history of Luna City that would heavily influence and shape what Luna City would eventually become.

LUNA CITY 1.0

By 2002 we had outgrown our tiny house and decided to buy a house still under construction just down the road from us. It was much larger and, significantly for me, had a completely unfinished ground-level entrance basement that the builder was willing to finish to my specifications.

I drew up some detailed plans for my first dedicated home arcade in the basement. I added some cool little features like a raised area with railing in one section of the room to sort of “showcase” some of the games and break up the room a bit.

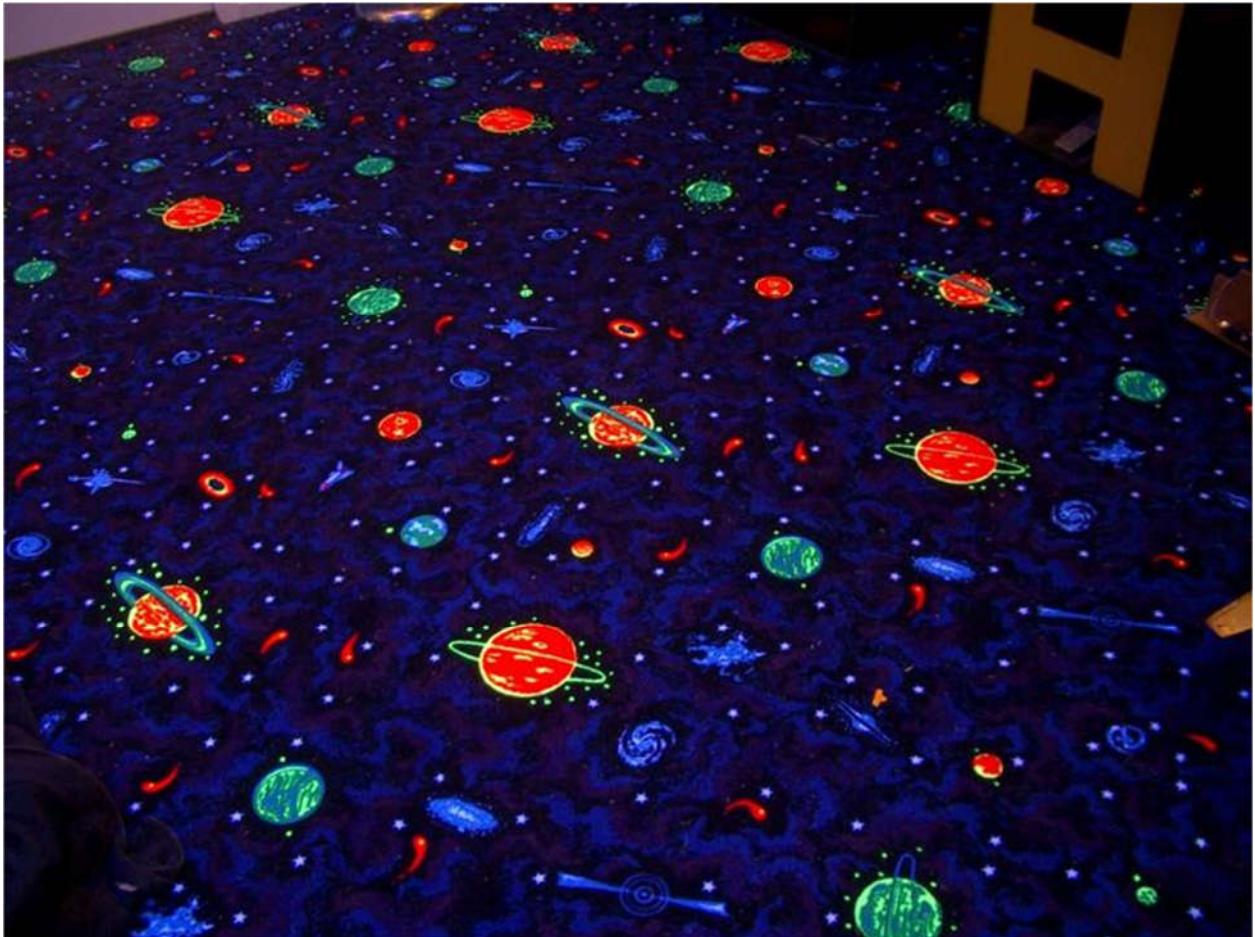


Floorplans I created for Luna City Arcade 1.0



Construction of Luna City 1.0

Remembering the “Arcade 84” video I had seen the year earlier, I carefully researched dozens of blacklight carpet designs before settling on a design called “Space Voyage”. I had the builders wire up 6 fluorescent light fixtures in the ceiling so I could install black lights and as many electrical outlets as I could get them to install.



“Space Voyage” blacklight carpeting



Completed construction of Luna City 1.0

Although we still only had our 7 machines from the old house, I was delighted. I spaced the machines out and I had plenty of room to expand. I adorned the walls with as much '80s memorabilia as I could scrounge up.

I remember reading something online about home arcades needing a name. I wanted something "spacey" to match the carpet. After some thought I decided on "Luna City Arcade".

Luna City was a BBS (Bulletin Board System) from back in the early days of modems long before the internet that I used to use back in the late '70s. I always thought the name was awesome. Thus "Luna City Arcade" was officially christened.

I was one step closer to fulfilling my promise to build what I saw in the Arcade 84 video.

But our new bigger house payment meant curbing the purchase of new games for the most part. Still I somehow managed the occasional new game purchase. One of my close friends sold me his Zaxxon for cheap.

Most significantly during this time period though was the purchase of my "Environmental Cabinet Discs of Tron" machine, one of the holy grails of arcade collecting. It was located only five miles from my house and was affordable although just barely. I went for it. Of course I did. And it didn't work when I got it. Of course it didn't.



Discs of Tron, with its absolutely MASSIVE cabinet that you actually stood inside of, was a beast of a machine. Weighing in at over 700 pounds and being the size of two refrigerators, moving it into our house required 4 people. I remembered playing it at Springfield Mall's Time-Out when it was first released. The machine had every bell and whistle you could possibly think of. Multiple blacklights that actually flashed with the gameplay, surround sound, speech, incredible artwork, and a beautiful black-lit background that the gameplay appeared to "float" in front of. It was pure and wonderful sensory overload.

Bally Games Company actually released two "TRON" themed arcade games based on the 1982 movie. "TRON", followed by "Discs of Tron" - released later in 1983. I remember back when I was working at Home Amusements, when I was asked to hack a Discs of Tron to play the regular Tron game. I am still ashamed to this day that I did it.

So I needed a LOT more machines to fill my basement arcade, but money was a nagging problem. Our finances had taken a huge hit buying our new house, thus the splurging on games had definitely slowed.

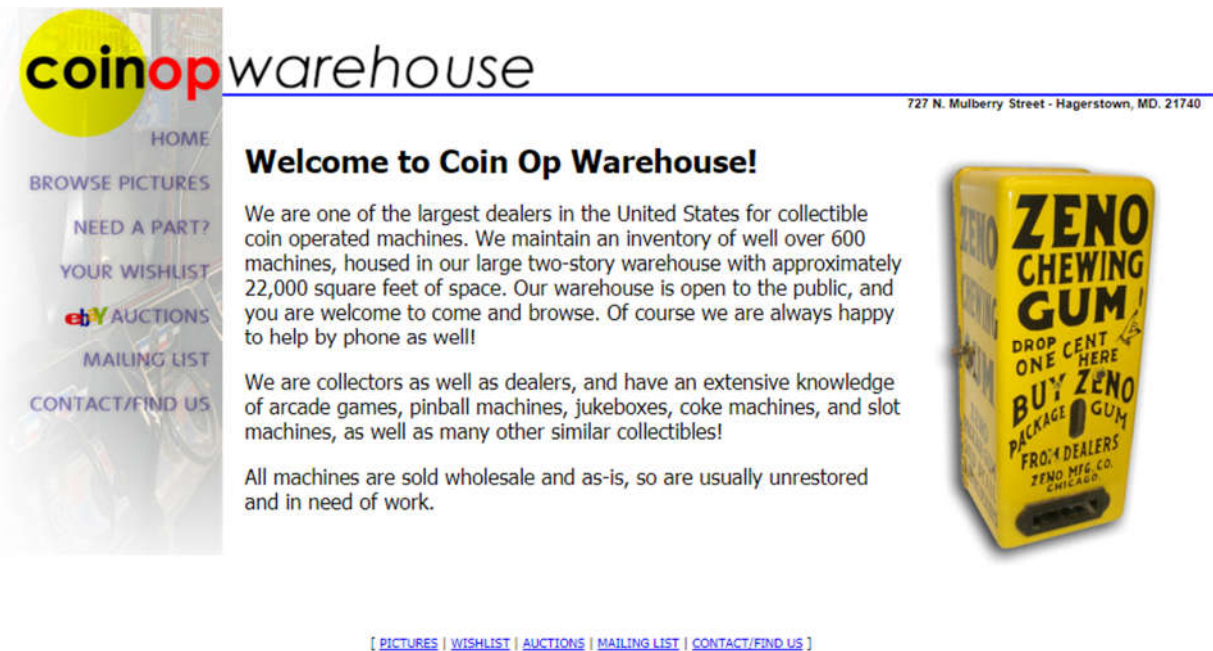
A year went by. If only I could get more machines, I thought. I was making a lot of money, but I wasn't able to build my vision of what I wanted Luna City to be and what I thought it could be.

I decided to get creative...

COIN-OP WAREHOUSE

In late summer of 2003 I approached Lloyd Thoburn, owner of a semi-local wholesale coin-op machine resale business called "Coin Op Warehouse". I had actually purchased my Environmental Disc of Tron from him the year before. He was moving his shop from where it was near my house up to Hagerstown, Maryland, into a massive old warehouse (16,000 square feet). It was definitely a huge step up for him and on a much larger scale than his previous locations. I thought maybe we could help each other.

I proposed that I could volunteer for him on Saturdays in exchange for credit towards games I would get from him. He offered \$10 per hour in "game credit". He also needed a new website created and maintained which I agreed to do for him. That paid \$30 per hour.



The website I created for Lloyd, circa 2004

I remember it being hot, late that summer on my first day volunteering at CoinOp Warehouse. I didn't know what to expect aside from I'd be working really hard, and I'd trade that labor for games that I wanted for my arcade.

I hopped in the truck with Ben, Lloyd's son - with a huge trailer in-tow- and we traveled out to a place called McMahon's Mill in Downsville, Maryland, about 20 minutes from the warehouse. It was the site of an old mill that flooded in 1922 and was restored by the National Park Service into a sort of museum/campground kind of thing open to the public.



Ben and I parked and walked into the dimly-lit bottom of one of the old buildings. There were dozens and dozens of old "Shoot the Bear" games, released by Seeburg in 1950. I'd never heard of it. They were bulky and they were heavy and they were filthy. Honestly it just looked like a bunch of garbage to me but Ben and I eagerly (Ben being the most eager one) carried them one at a time out of the building and loaded them into the trailer and the back of the pickup truck. It was back-breaking work for someone like me who had never done anything like this before. And it got worse. After unloading the first building Ben walked us over to one of the abandoned buildings - a sort of barn-like structure that was partially caving in. More bear games. Except this time they weren't lined up in neat rows like before. It was hot and there were bees everywhere. We teetered our way across the broken uneven floor to get access to the games, which were in what I can only remember as sort of a hole in the floor. One at a time Ben would pull a game out and I would carry it out to the truck. These were even dirtier and smelled of rat feces and urine.



A "picking" site very similar looking to where I spent my first day. Photo Credit: Lloyd Thoburn

The sun was getting low by the time we got back to the warehouse where we had to unload them . Again, one at a time, with me and Ben working together. Lloyd was pleased with the haul and said I was done for the day. I slumped behind the wheel of my bright yellow Chevy S10 pickup truck and drove home, stopping only for food as I hadn't eaten anything all day and it had been a long one. *"Welcome to a day in the life of us"*, Ben had joked after we had completed loading the games.



Ben Thoburn standing on a landfill of ruined video games. Photo credit: Ben Thoburn

"You stuck through it and actually came back the next week!", Ben joked to me recently when talking about that first day.

Things got better, though. My usual job at the warehouse was unloading/loading machines and moving them around the warehouse. It had an old, open freight elevator in the middle of the building that always made me feel like it was going to come crashing to the ground at any minute, but I was grateful for it as it meant I didn't have to carry machines up and down steps. And as my body grew more used to the physical work things became easier.

The building had no heat or air conditioning, which meant in the summer temperatures would soar, and in the winters it was so cold my drinks would freeze solid as I worked. But I tried to be a trooper, as I was in this for the arcade games and I wasn't going to back down until I had as many machines as I could get.

The warehouse opened at 10am on Saturdays and there'd be a line of people waiting to go in. Lloyd's wife Sheree would sometimes mercifully run out to KFC or similar to get us lunch, and we all got to go home at 4pm.



Lloyd's old warehouse building today

Working for Lloyd had advantages. I could get first pick at the new arrivals as they came in. The games I got from Lloyd always needed restoring and repairing. Some were worse than others. But that meant I'd get them cheap. A few of the games I got were just the wooden cabinet - literally. I would track down all the missing pieces on eBay and rebuild the machine back to a fully complete and working game.

My small collection of games was growing at an explosive pace. I rarely drove home from the warehouse without at least one machine in the back of my truck. My tab with Lloyd was always in the negative. Sometimes deeply negative, and I would kick in some cash to settle up. The web work for him I did really helped due to it paying more and me being able to work on it at my own pace.

My arrangement with Lloyd lasted almost 2 years and was absolutely CRUCIAL to the formation of my eventual large collection. I cannot stress enough that I would never have been able to amass such a large collection if I had purchased them all outright and restored/working. The hard labor I put into the part time job and the huge amount of ensuing labor I put into meticulously restoring and repairing each game I got from Lloyd is what made Luna City "happen". I would estimate that ultimately about 80% of the games in Luna City at its peak came by Lloyd and me working them off.

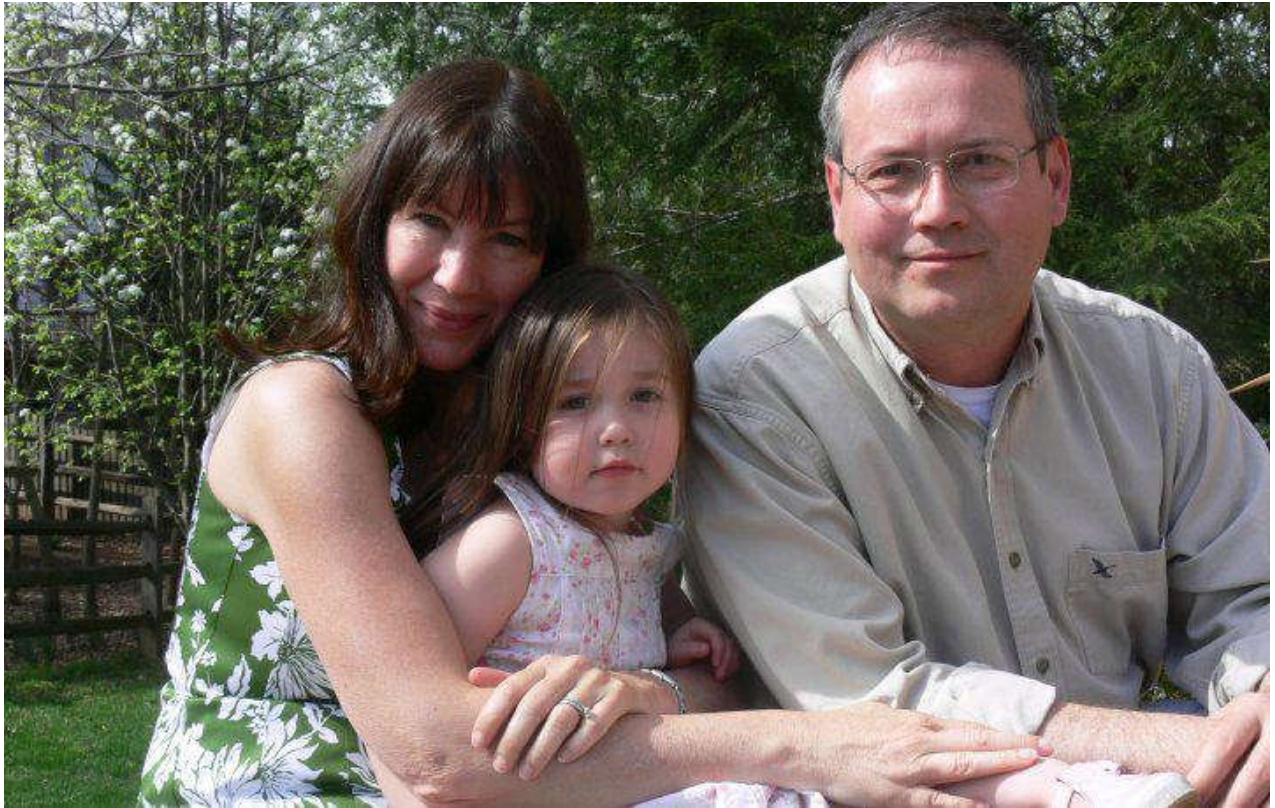
"When I think of you, I think of Tail Gunner. I think of AmericaCoin Junkyard. I think of color X/Y games.", Lloyd told me recently.

"I was always on a much tighter budget than anyone ever saw. You know, I had just gone through a divorce, had to pay for a house, a wedding, that building. And I started putting the kids through college. That was painful. That's why I started flipping stuff. I had to keep the money flowing to survive. And then I got lucky selling that building and that put the kids through college, the rest of it. If I hadn't done that, I couldn't afford it. But then we started doing Facebook. That's what really exploded. We've been on Facebook for 11 years now."

Lloyd's wife Sheree commented on her blog "Married to a Coin Op Picker" - *"We loved Peter! He was always so cheerful and worked so hard, even when he was freezing!"*

Lloyd has bought, restored, and sold several warehouses since my time working for him. He currently has 75,509 followers on Facebook and business is booming. He is most definitely a survivor and I respect him a great deal.

Lloyd and Sheree Thoburn, I cannot thank you enough!



GAME DAYS AND MEDIA ATTENTION



My license plate at the time

By 2006, Luna City Arcade had exploded from 7 games to about 30. Working for Lloyd at CoinOp Warehouse was paying off.

Machines now filled every square inch of the gameroom and had overflowed into the adjacent room, which was originally my kids' playroom that I commandeered. Project machines filled the two car garage.

I was constantly working to fix up the machines I got from Lloyd to get them working and, not insignificantly, KEEP them working. It was a constant job, but my years of training at Computer Learning Center, L&Y Electronics and Home Amusement Company were serving me well.







GAME DAYS

I began having what I called private “Game Days” for friends and family. Birthday parties were also a popular event in the arcade.

With Game Days, I wanted other people to enjoy what I had built - just as I had been introduced into the hobby by Dave Whittaker’s basement arcade.

Selfishly I also enjoyed having people around to play the games as it led to a more authentic arcade experience. Crowds of people huddled around machines, the chatter of conversations rising above the noise of the games. But unselfishly I really, truly enjoyed sharing the arcade with my friends, family and anyone else I could get to come visit.

GOING VIRAL

Word started to spread about my gameroom.

Then, on May 17, 2006, someone posted a link to my arcade website on the mother of all websites at the time, Digg.com. The post was titled "An Arcade Lover's Dream Basement". It was a flashpoint. Things went completely viral almost instantly. I remember my web hosting company contacting me that day telling me that they had to temporarily shut down my website as their servers were getting killed. Later in the day I found out why.

Soon after, The Washington Post newspaper wanted to do an article on the gameroom. They sent a photographer out who took some amazing photos of me and the gameroom. I met the late technology columnist Mike Musgrove, who did the interview. Mike was so gentle and down to earth. I remember buying about 20 copies of the paper when the article hit the newsstands, I was so excited. "*People tell me I'm reliving my childhood. I never left; everybody else just moved on.*", Mike would quote me as saying in the article. (Mike would later interview me again in 2008 before sadly passing away suddenly on March 20, 2017. He was 45.)

.game
Mike Musgrove



Peter Hirschberg of Linden, Va., never made the leap with the video game industry to violent, complicated games. He's accumulated dozens of early '80s arcade classics in his basement.

A One-Man '80s Arcade Revival

Peter Hirschberg caught Pac-Man fever a couple of decades ago and never fully recovered. He also caught fevers related to Dig Dug, Asteroids, Frogger, Defender, Q-Bert — and just about every quarter-eating game that used to occupy the afternoons of his childhood in the early '80s, the golden age of the arcade. It's not unusual for aging Gen-Xers to work through some nostalgia for the old days by playing the occasional round of Pac-Man on their cellphone or Joust on the Xbox 360. The retro stuff has never really gone away; it just gets periodically repackaged on new gadgets or products such as the Atari Flashback, a game console designed to look like and to play games from the old Atari 2600. But for Hirschberg, 40, who says he spent most of his childhood in arcades, that sort of experience isn't enough. No game-console controller could ever match the sensation of rolling that Missile Command trackball, for example. And that's why he's got an original copy of that Reagan-era arcade hit, along with a few dozen other vintage arcade games, fully restored and renovated and lined up in the meticulously maintained collection in his basement, which he calls Luna City Arcade.

"In my opinion, this is the arcade that should still be around," he said. My friend Luke and I cruised out to Hirschberg's Linden, Va., home Friday to check out the collection and, dang, but the old games are still fun. By today's standards, of course, they are laughably simple: Where are the storylines, the

See .GAME, D6, Col. 1

 FOR AN ONLINE PHOTO AND VIDEO GALLERY, GO TO WASHINGTONPOST.COM/TECHNOLOGY.

Washington Post article circa 2006

Before I knew it, the local radio station morning show was having me live on the air, TV stations were coming out. Radio stations from other parts of the country started doing interviews with me on-air. Podcasts and tech blogs were doing articles and interviews.

I wasn't sure what to make of all of it, but I desperately wanted to talk to anyone and everyone about the glory days of the arcades and how the old arcade games were still, well, **cool**. My arcade was exciting to me and I wanted to share that excitement with the rest of the world. I guess my inner child was trying to single-handedly bring back the '80s.



Photo Credit: Michel du Cille / Washington Post circa 2006



Photo Credit: Michel du Cille / Washington Post circa 2006

LUNA CITY 2.0

Even before all arcade went viral I had been seriously looking into the concept of creating another building next to the house to allow me to expand the arcade. The basement had reached its limits. During my Game Days it was almost impossible to walk around due to lack of space. Things were definitely cramped in there. Even our large 2-car garage was packed wall to wall with project machines. The electrical situation in the basement was getting untenable. While building the house, I had the builder place electrical outlets every few feet to allow me to plug in a lot of games, but what I didn't consider was how much power an arcade game takes. I was tripping circuit breakers left and right, and had extension cords running everywhere and into different rooms to get the games on as many breakers as I could. I had an electrician come out and assess the situation and he found that we had actually been overheating our main breaker to the point that it was discolored from the heat. *Oops.*

I searched the internet for building plans of various types for a long time. Eventually I found a set of plans for sale for a VERY large garage. It was 60' x 40' with 12' ceilings and had a finished second floor. I specifically wanted the 12' ceiling so I would have room to hang up as many posters and artwork above the games as I could. It had 3 huge bay doors, and claimed to hold 12 cars. That might work, I thought, and ordered the plans.

After the plans arrived I remember spending an entire day making phone calls to banks, construction companies, etc. We needed a construction estimate for the loan. I eventually had a builder recommended to me. He came out and looked over the plans. We talked logistics and I told him all the crazy modifications I wanted to make to the plans.

Logistics: The building needed to go somewhere. My house sat on a large lot, but the house was way at the very back of the lot almost to the property line. I wanted the arcade located to the right of the house, on the other side of my driveway. But county regulations said that any building above a certain size (and that was DEFINITELY the case here) had to be "behind" the house. So I plotted out a place diagonally behind the house where the building could go. Cool there. Except when talking with the neighbor, he didn't want the building blocking his view of the mountains. That was a problem we would have to solve.

Crazy modifications: The plans were for a garage. Not exactly what I wanted. I wanted a fully drywalled, insulated and painted interior. Wall to wall blacklight carpeting, built-in custom lighting everywhere, a huge number of ceiling fans, a restroom, full air conditioning and heating. I wanted the garage doors sealed-over. But I wanted them sealed over in a way that a future owner of the house could convert them into working doors. I needed HUGE amounts of power going into the building.

The builder thought it was possible to have my plans modified to meet all of my requirements. So I started trying to figure out how to solve the problem of where to put the building. As I said, the county I lived in required that a building that size go behind the house - not an option for me.

I first had the contractor try and petition the County to obtain a waiver so that I could locate the building where I originally wanted it - across the driveway. After weeks and weeks of trying, the final answer was 'no'. Crud.

Rethinking things, I discovered that the County's restriction on having outbuildings behind the house didn't apply if the structure was within 4' of the house. It was considered part of the house. Aha! - a loophole. There actually was a space within 4' of the house where the building would fit and also not interfere with the neighbor's view.

Since the building would be so close to the house there would be nowhere for the steps into the house to go, so I further modified the plans to include a little "cutout" area that would serve as a sort of breezeway / walkway to the steps to the house.

Next problem - where the building had to go was where the septic field was located. Estimated cost to relocate the septic field: \$10k (it ultimately ended up running me around \$12k). I hadn't budgeted for that but had little choice but to proceed.

Months and months ensued of having an engineer design the changes to the septic system, paperwork back and forth between the Health Dept, the builder, the County Planning Office and me. I remember thinking, "This is my dream arcade! This should be fun!". It was the opposite of fun but, determined, I pressed forward. I finally got the septic system changes approved.

I remember sitting down to sign the financing paperwork with the bank for the construction loan. It was going to stretch my finances VERY thin. I remember thinking how it was CRAZY to do this, but I also figured nobody else in the world could possibly be crazy enough to do it besides me. So I nervously signed the paperwork and the last obstacle had been removed.

The official groundbreaking day was January 16, 2007.



Groundbreaking on the new building



Construction photo showing the breezeway cutout I designed into the modified plans to allow the building to be within 4' of the house, and thereby sidestepping county regulations. You can see how close the building really is to the house.

I kept an almost daily blog of the construction as things slowly progressed. Construction ended up taking over a year.

The construction was an excruciating process and I fretted over every little detail. Every day it seemed there was another problem or delay of some sort. One that usually required me putting even MORE money into the project. We even had money problems with the builder.

Eventually I was forced to take out yet another final loan to complete the building, stretching my finances even further.

The county regulations said this, the electrical regulations said that, the septic regulations said another thing. It was a never-ending juggling act with me trying to “beat the system” and complete the building.



The new blacklight carpet being installed!

I calculated the amount of power each game used and multiplied that by the number of games I thought I could fit in the building. I ended having two 400 amp breakers installed which is insane. A standard house has one 200 amp breaker. I remember one of the county inspectors asking what the hell we were doing in there that required that much power. It was so much, in fact, that we maxed out the transformer that my house was hooked up to.



Two 400 amp breaker panels being installed

LIVING THE DREAM

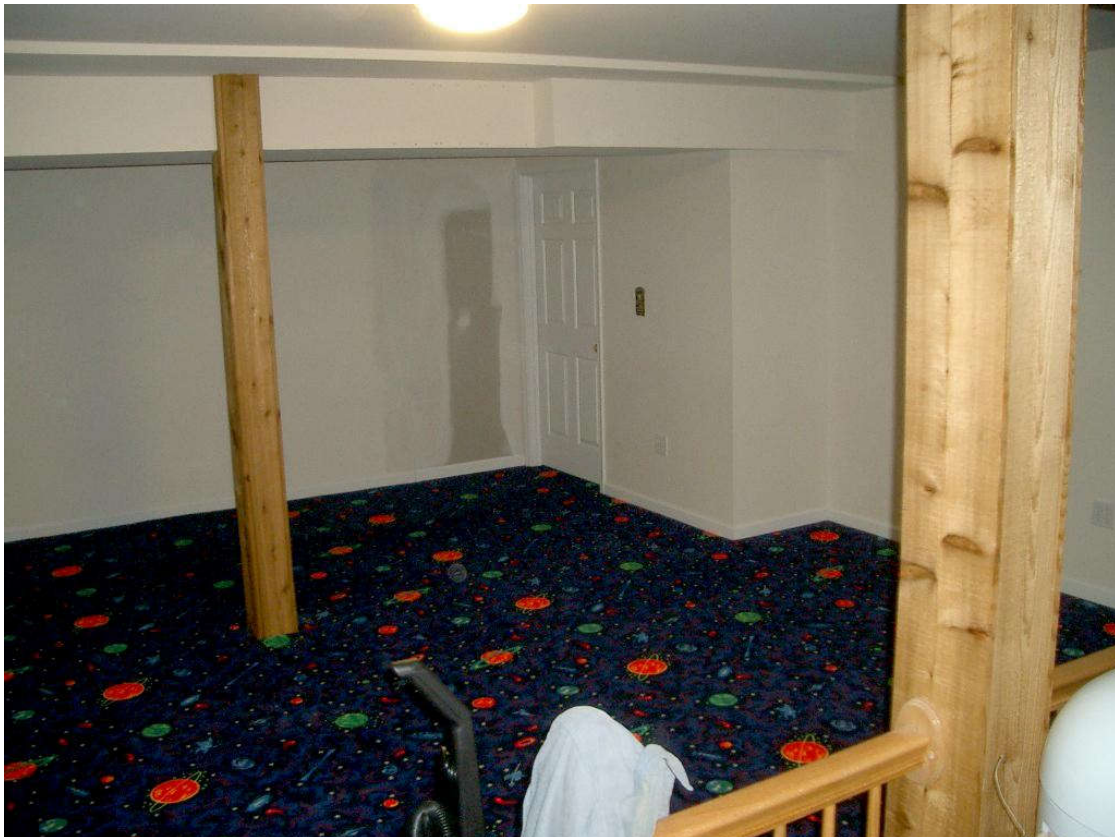
In early January 2008 the building was finally completed. My dream of recreating what I saw in the “Arcade 84” video had become a reality.

But the journey to get there had taken a toll. Construction of the building, which took a year to complete, had gone way over budget to the point where I had been forced to take out yet another loan to finish the project. I now had 3 mortgages on the house and a huge monthly payment.

In spite of all that, I began excitedly moving my games over from the basement and garage to the new building one at a time.

I remember when I finally got all the games in the new building and turned them all on at once. That SOUND...it was just as I remembered it from the old arcades of my youth. And this, mind you, was just with the games running in “attract mode” with nobody in the arcade but me. There was something about the concert hall-like acoustics of the huge room and all the games gathered together in that space that sounded completely different than it did in my basement.

The old basement gameroom was now completely barren of games and decorations and I remember feeling a bit sad, looking at it all empty. But time marches on and it was all about the new arcade at that point.



Luna City 1.0 was completely empty of all games and decorations which had been moved to the new building.



The completed arcade building

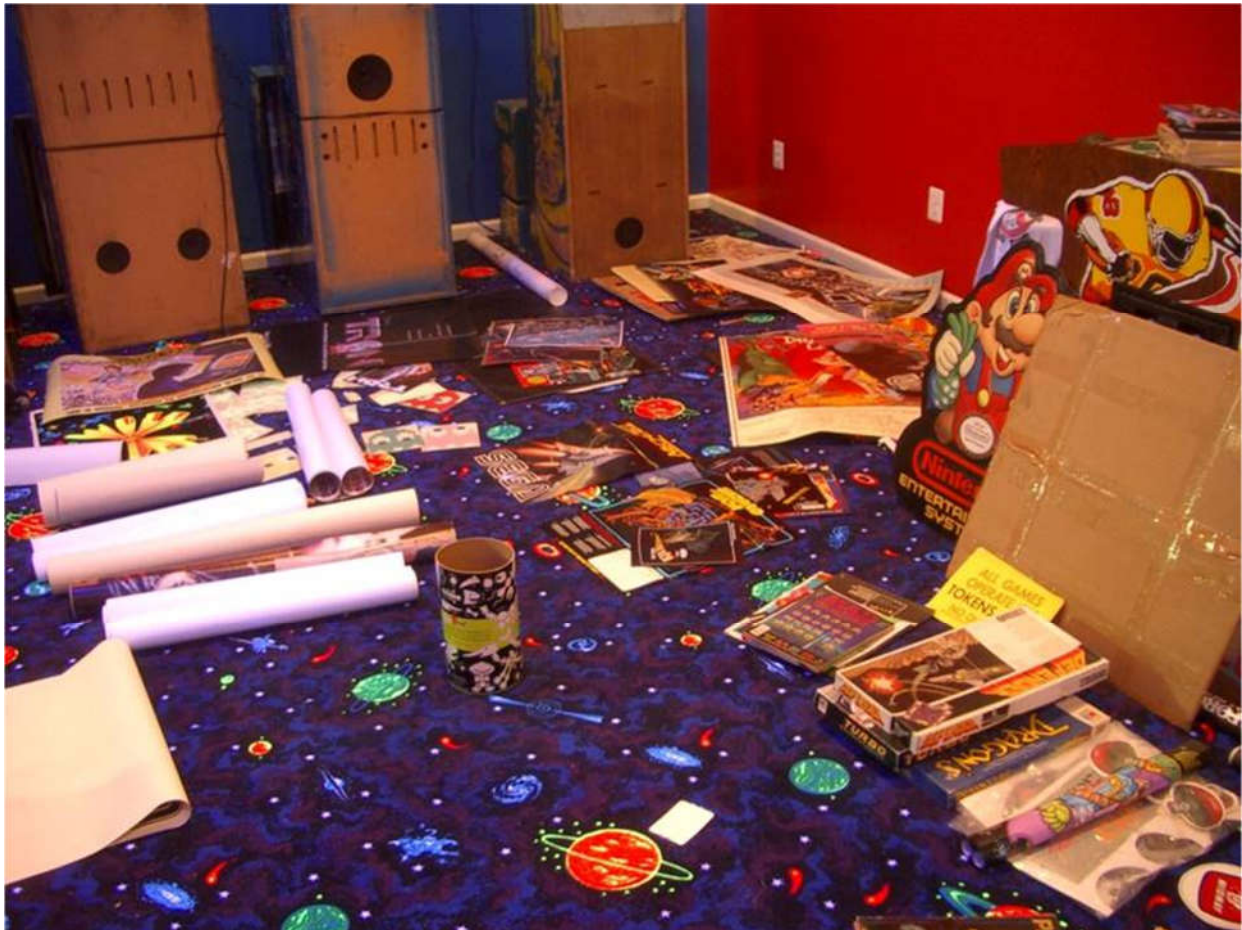


All the games moved into the new building

I almost immediately announced a public "Game Day". It would be held on Martin Luther King Day - only a few short weeks away! It was to be the first Game Day in the new building. I worked myself to death getting the place ready.

I began to fully decorate the walls with literally hundreds of posters, artwork - basically anything 80s or arcade-related that I could get to stick to the wall. Having 12' ceilings meant LOTS of room for decorations

and that was intentional. I'd been collecting all this stuff for years but never had a place to put it all until now.

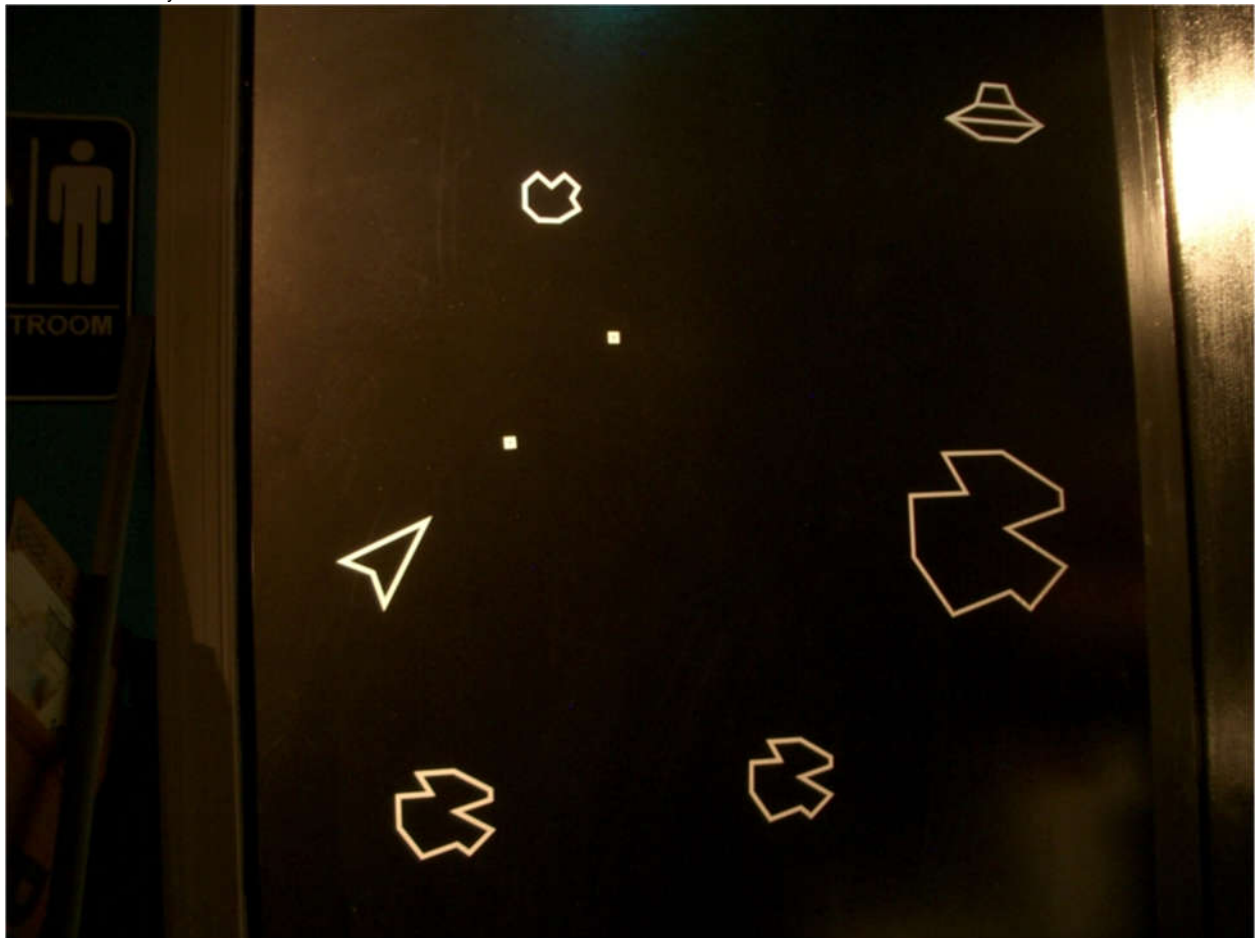


Posters waiting to be hung on the walls

No detail went unattended - I even fully decked out the arcade's bathroom with "Asteroids" graphics (fitting since that was my first game), and I created a vanity mirror using a used arcade game monitor bezel which was essentially a piece of plexiglass with artwork on it that you'd look through to play a game. Except in this case you'd look through it and see yourself. I made the faucet light up when you turned the water on. I was that into it.



The bathroom vanity mirror. Photo credit: Blake Patterson



Asteroids decals applied to the bathroom walls.

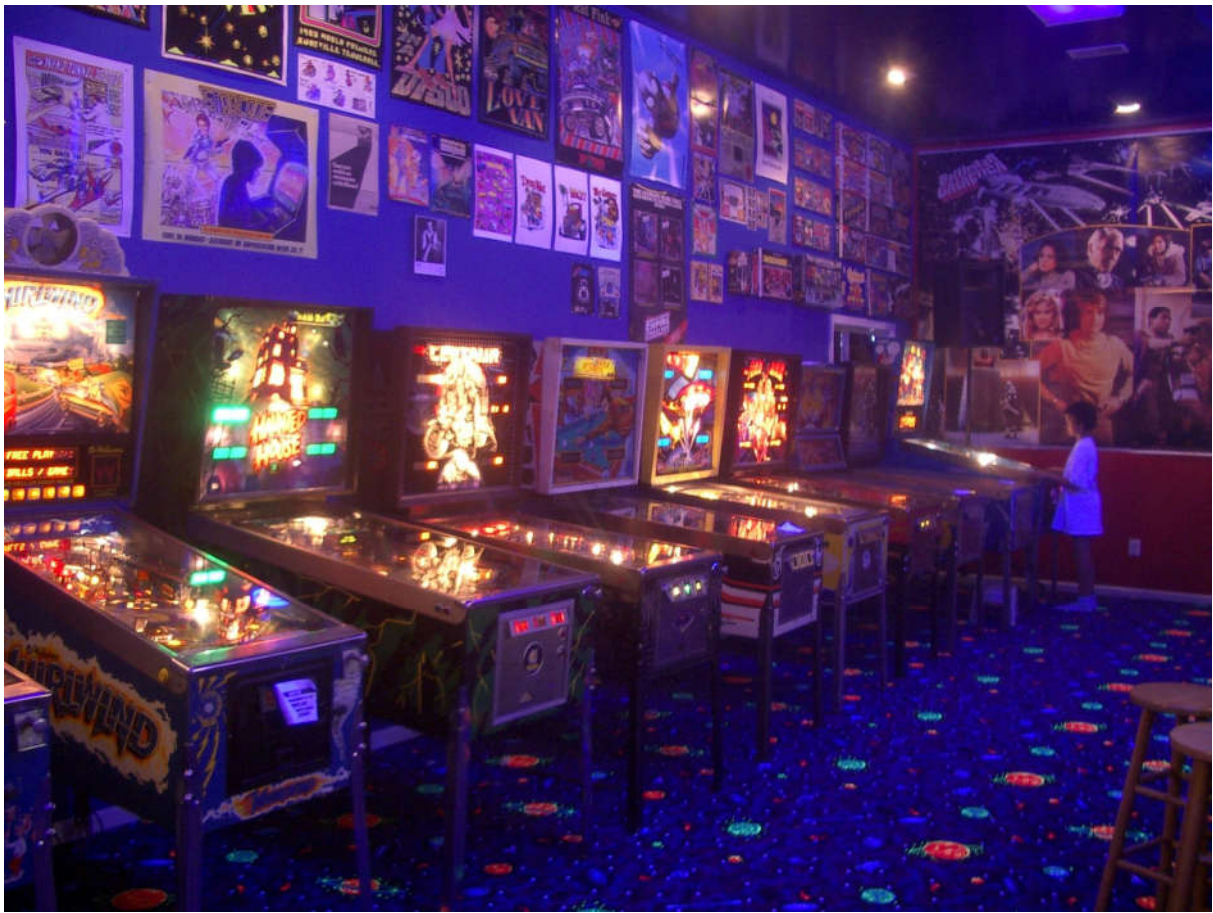
I finally completed all my decorating and set-up just in time for the upcoming Game Day.

Just for a moment, allow yourself to bask in the glory that was Luna City...













January 21st, 2008 saw the first Game Day in the new arcade. About 40-50 people showed up and played the machines for hours. It was so amazing with all those people milling around playing the games - the sound of the crowd mixed with the sounds of all the games being played at once brought on a sort of "roar" that I can't fully describe. It was exactly as I remembered the arcades sounding back in the 80s. I had somehow recreated the soundtrack of my youth without even realizing I was doing it. There were even games I had put in the arcade, not just because I liked the games, but because the sounds they made while being played or while in attract mode seemed to create a more authentic acoustic experience.

I had a revelation back when the arcade was still in my basement. I was looking at vintage photos of arcades and realized what my arcade was missing was *the people*. Without the people the arcade just felt empty. That was another reason I started having Game Days back in the basement arcade. With this latest Game Day, it felt as though I had finally recreated something from the past that had been sadly lost to time.

Another unique thing I did with my arcade was instead of putting all the games on "free play" I had two vintage change machines that I would fill with real quarters. Pushing the coin return button on the change machine would dispense 4 quarters. I had a stack of Chuck-E-Cheese coin cups that visitors could use to carry around their change with. It added another touch of authenticity to the arcade.



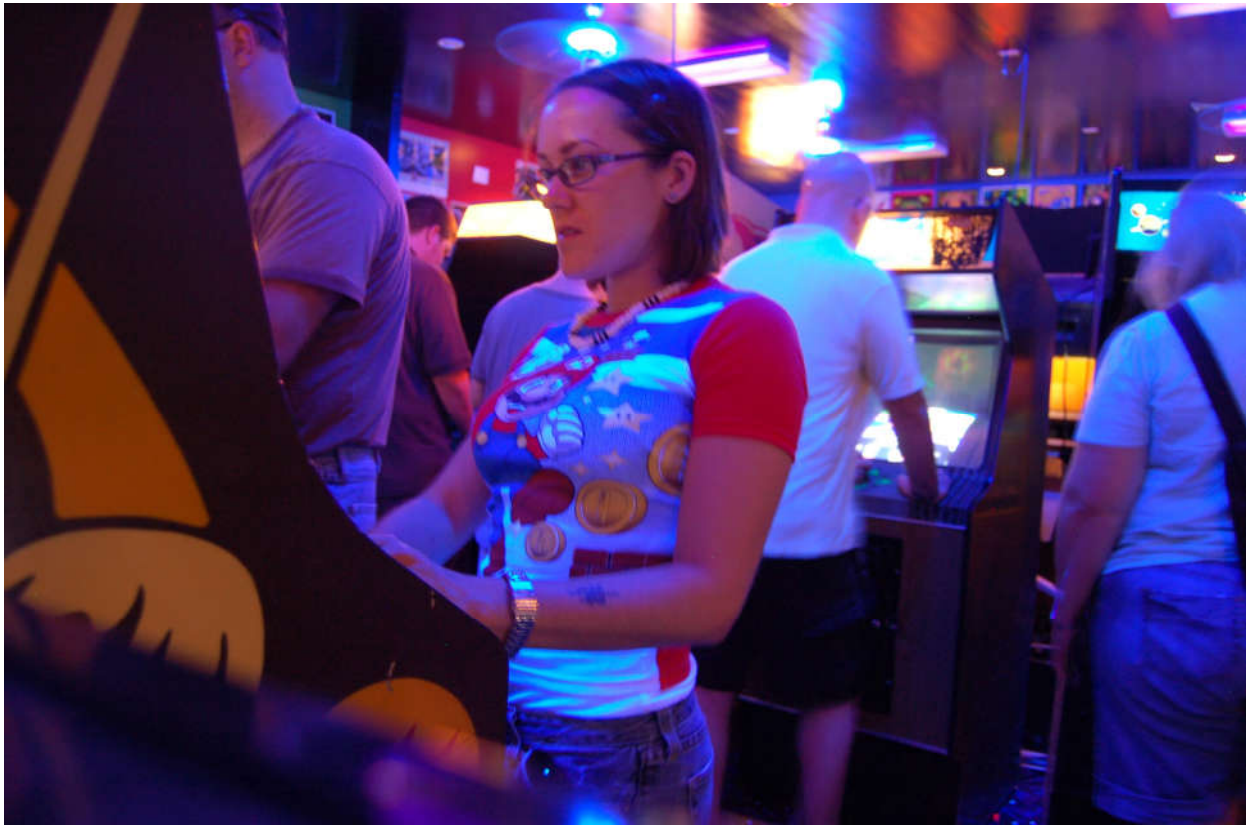
A typical Game Day at Luna City. Photo Credit: Blake Patterson

Bask once more...









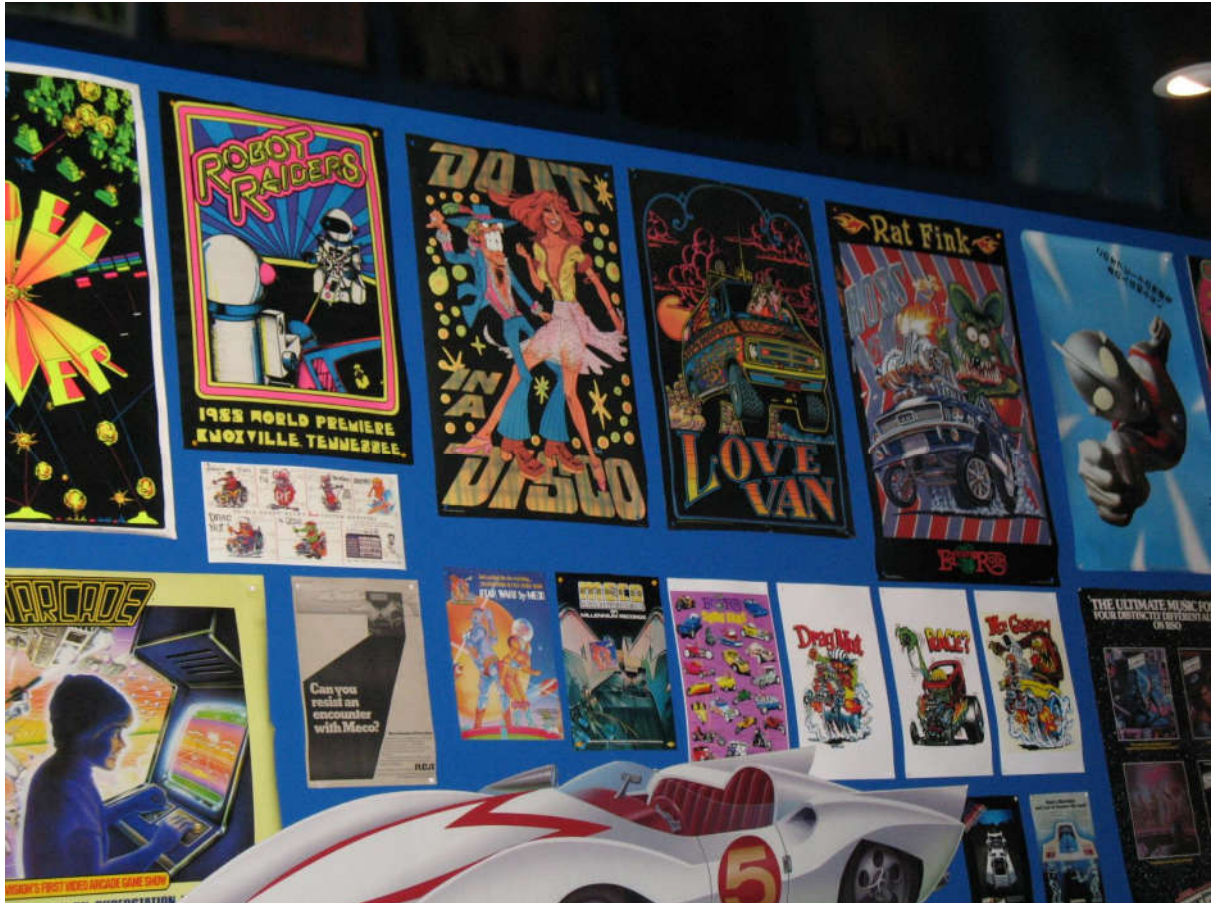


Photos by Zachary Weddington













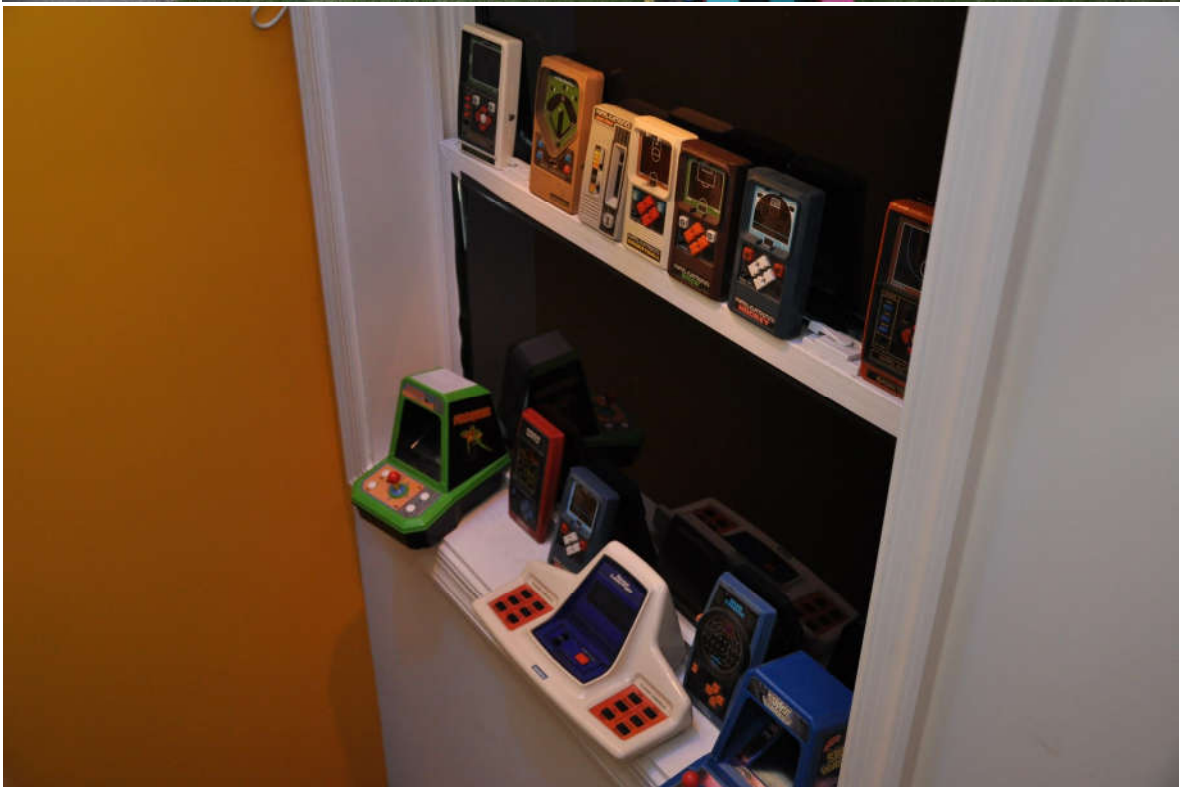




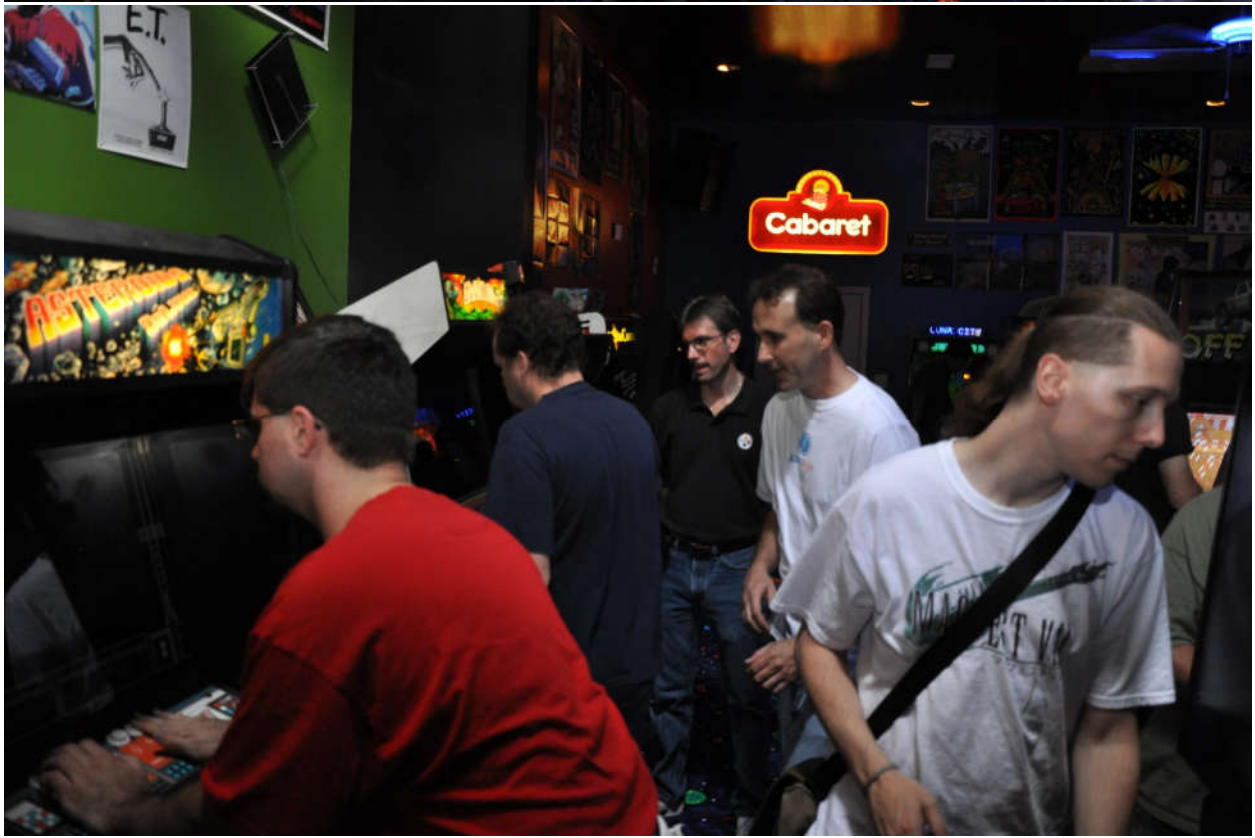




Photos by Adam DeSantis









Photos by Blake Patterson





Photos by Jeff Kinder

Things began to rapidly expand exponentially. A few months later, in March, my arcade was featured on the cover of "GamerRoom Magazine".



The Washington Post did a second article on me. Columnist Mike Musgrove again covered the story.

"Well, he did it. Last time I wrote about Peter Hirschberg, a guy with a passion for restoring vintage, '80s-era arcade games, he was toying with the notion of building a full-blown arcade next to his Linden home to store his growing collection. And here it is. Finally, after a couple of years, a pile of money, and a struggle or two with contractors and local building regulations, Luna City Arcade is complete".

"This is what heaven looks like" he quoted me as saying. Indeed.

Shortly after, National Public Radio (NPR) contacted me about doing an interview. I needed to hold a Game Day immediately. I quickly blogged:

Sharon Pettigrew, a journalist for NPR, will be there on the 30th to interview me for a documentary that will air on The Canadian Broadcasting Corp as well as affiliated NPR stations. They have requested that I get as many people there that I can so they could also be interviewed for the documentary. Here's your chance to be on the air and explain why you love the classic arcade machines!

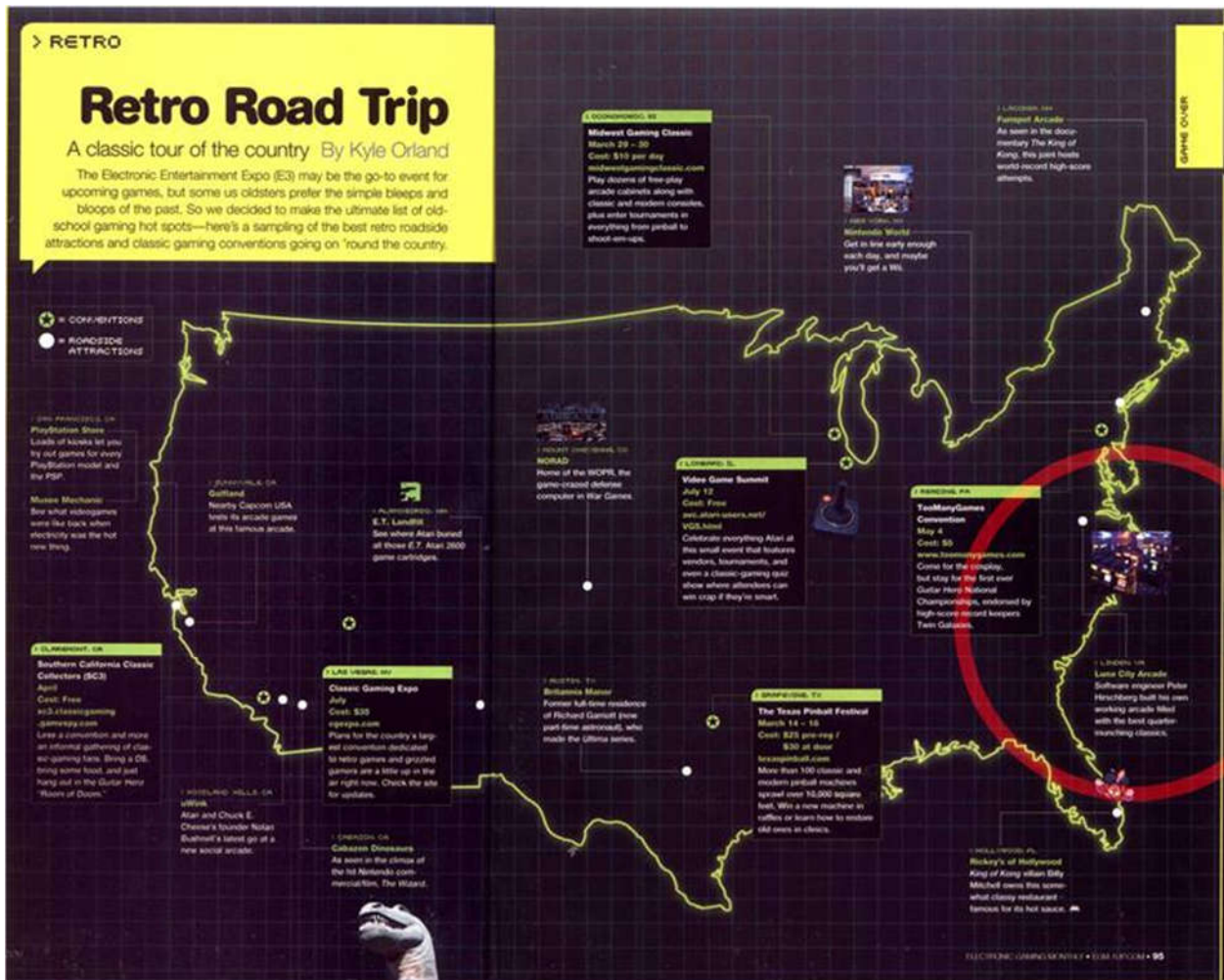
It was an even bigger success than the first Game Day, with about 60 people in attendance. The last of the guests left at around 10:30pm. Visitors were for the most part people I hadn't met before. It was pretty cool seeing so many people showing up in T-shirts with Atari, Pacman, Space Invaders on them. It almost felt like a convention. I even had people flying in from other countries to visit!

A typical Game Day for me would be coaching people on how to play the various games, emptying quarters from the games and refilling the change machine. Un-jamming quarters from machines, etc. And in between that, trying my best to be a good host and socialize with everyone.

Game Days were exhilarating and at the same time absolutely exhausting for me, but I liked making people happy. And that's really what it all came down to. I was trying to make people happy and get to relive their childhood dreams. I had successfully recreated my childhood dreams and wanted to pass that along to others.

The arcade continued to expand. I was still buying games even though I no longer worked at Coin-Op Warehouse. I even bought several games here and there that I didn't even like, but kept getting requests for - Galaga for example. And all the games required constant maintenance and replacement parts, especially after a long Game Day. I was spending a lot of money. At its peak the arcade had about 80 machines total.

Popularity continued to grow as well. The April 2008 issue of EGM magazine had a "Retro Road Trip" graphic of the United States featuring Luna City as a "destination".



In addition to my public Game Days, it seemed every few weeks I was having a non-public Game Day for friends, family, coworkers.

Actor Wil Wheaton (Star Trek: The Next Generation, Big Bang Theory) even blogged about my arcade and reached out to me via email.

 **the luna city arcade: gamer heaven**

My dream is to open a classic 80s arcade, complete with *well-maintained* minigolf, pizza, and waffle cones.

Luna City was running on all cylinders and so was I. **This was Luna City Arcade at its greatest.**



Book cover featuring a picture of Luna City Arcade.

During this time, the son of a very close friend of mine, Carl Haines and his wife Gloria - their son Shawn Haines was battling Hodgkin's Disease Lymphoma. The doctor's bills were piling up. Things were bad. I'd known Shawn since he was an infant.

I had an epiphany one day - **what could I do to help?** I have this massively popular arcade and I have these regular Game Days - let me do a BENEFIT Game Day for Shawn and try and raise money to help both him and his parents. I felt it was the least I could do.

On June 10, 2008, I blogged:

This Game Day is going to hopefully be something extra special. First, I am planning on having this Game Day be a "benefit" Game Day. I am going to *suggest* that people donate something. Donating will of course not be mandatory. Those who know me or have been to previous Game Days know that I have never asked for *anything* in return. Here is a chance for me to do something good with the arcade. All donation proceeds will go to a Trust Fund for Shawn Haines, the son of some close friends of mine. He is currently undergoing treatment for Hodgkin's Disease Lymphoma. I am trying to set it up so that donations can be made directly into the Trust Fund.

Snacks will be provided for free, and food will be for sale. We are doing a BBQ cookout at the event with all proceeds for the food sales going towards the local Young Marines organization.

Finally, we are investigating getting a Moon Bounce for the event.

And of course there will be arcade games! There have been some new additions to the collection since the last Game Day. I will also have a Vectrex console and an Atari 2600 console in operation in the party area for a change of pace.

I have settled on Saturday, August 23rd as the final date. I apologize to those who can't make this date!

The response has been, literally, overwhelming. Thank you to all who have replied. So far it looks like 200 people may be in attendance

This Game Day is shaping up to be a big one! I've had many offers from people to help out during the event (THANK YOU!). I will definitely be taking you up on your offers. I'll need people to tend to the Moon Bounce, help out crediting machines, quarter collectors to empty the machines out, etc. If you want to help, I can definitely find something for you to do!

I put EVERYTHING I had into making that game day a success for Shawn and his family.

This particular Game Day even garnered the support of renowned video game historian Walter Day and his Twin Galaxies Arcade.

If you have not yet heard of Walter Day, I suggest you hop on Google right now and rectify that immediately. He is sometimes known as "The Patron Saint of Video Games".

I remember him contacting me about the Game Day and mailing me a huge pile of posters which he had individually autographed.

Twin Galaxies, Billy Mitchell, and Peter Hirschberg Announce

LUNA CITY ARCADE GAME DAY

August 23, 2008

12:00 Noon until 10:00 PM

Over 60 Vintage
Arcade Games
Playable for Free

Featuring
the Arcade Premier
of *Chasing Ghosts:
Beyond the Arcade*

Shawn Haines
Benefit
Donations Welcome

Moon Bounce

All-day free screenings of *Chasing Ghosts: Beyond the Arcade*
BBQ, Burgers, and Hot Dogs will be for sale, with food sales benefiting Young Marines Organization
Donations will be invited to benefit the medical expense fund of Shawn Haines (more info below)
-No donations will be accepted on-site for insurance reasons-

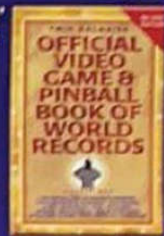
Shawn's Battle Against Hodgkin's Disease
<http://mysite.verizon.net/cshaines/shawn.htm>
-Donating is invited but completely optional-

www.lunacityarcade.com

Peter Hirschberg, *Luna City Arcade* | Michael Venezia, *Chasing Ghosts* Producer
Walter Day | Billy Mitchell, Video Game Player of the Century

TWIN GALAXIES
The Official Electronic Games Scoreboard
www.twingalaxies.com
600 North Third Street, Fairfield, Iowa 52506 USA
641-472-1949 walter@twingalaxies.com

Twin Galaxies'
Official Video Game
& Pinball Book of
World Records
100 pp. 647 pages with
more than 1000 photos & 134
100% illustrations
by Walt Disney, Austin, TX



The difficulty settings and game playing rules involved
in all Contests and High Score performances monitored
by Twin Galaxies have been approved by Walter Day
and the Twin Galaxies Board of Referees.



Caroline Flores | Greg House | Jonathan Flores

Walter Day's autographed Twin Galaxies poster created to help promote my Benefit Game Day for Shawn Haines. Photo credit: David Hernly

A week following the Game Day I would blog:

Last weekend's Game Day was a MASSIVE success. I hope everyone had fun. I estimate that over 150 people were in attendance. It was definitely the biggest Game Day yet.

Thank you to all who donated. Thanks to you, over \$3000 was raised to help with Shawn's medical expenses!







My first Benefit Game Day was a huge success. But Shawn continued to decline in health.

Money problems mounted and then marital problems began to compound.

Meanwhile a neighbor of mine who ran a local chapter of an organization called the "Young Marines" wanted to hold another benefit Game Day in my arcade.

I REALLY wasn't into it. I was worried sick about Shawn, going through horrible job stress, domestic stress, and financial stress. However, my neighbor was insistent.

"You won't have to do anything! I'll take care of everything!" he assured me. So I relented. In reality, of course, I did have to do a LOT to pull off what ended up being the FINAL Game Day at Luna City Arcade.

I announced the upcoming Game Day on my blog:

Luna City Benefit Game Day - Sat, April 25, 2009

Just a reminder of the upcoming Game Day Sat, April 25 from 11:00am to 8pm. This particular Game Day is open to ALL. Family, friends, coworkers - you're all welcome to come.

As with the last Game Day, this Game Day is a benefit event. This event will be a benefit for the Young Marines, a youth group to promote a drug free lifestyle. Donations to be accepted (and as always will be completely optional).

Food will be available for a nominal fee. Made to order Hot dogs, Hamburgers, Pork BBQ sandwiches, chips & soda.

I believe we are working on getting a Moon Bounce again for this event, as well as a couple port-a-potties (sorry about last time)

Just like always, ALL the games are FREE to play for as long as you like. Adults and children of all ages are welcome. All I ask is that children treat the machines gently as they are old, and all part of my personal collection. Please remember that Luna City Arcade is my residence. Also realize that by 8pm I am going to be completely exhausted, so please remember that the event ends at 8pm. You are totally welcome to come at 11am and stay until 8pm but at 8pm I shut off all the breakers and I go crash. :-)

I will also have console games (Atari 2600, maybe a Wii, etc) set up in the upstairs of the arcade for those who are looking for a slightly different diversion.

I hope everyone is looking forward to it! It's probably going to be another huge event like last time! Please plan on coming out and having a great time, as well as helping out the Young Marines!

If you are an old-timer like me and want to assist some of the younger players with 'how to play' type coaching, that is always welcome as well. Let's teach these kids how video games used to be and preserve the classic gaming era into the next generation and generations to come. This is how it happens people - with us. Otherwise it will be lost forever.

Tragically, Shawn Haines passed away on Thursday, April 9th, 2009. He was 22 years old. I went to his funeral just three days before the final Game Day.

I remember just going through the motions on that last Game Day Sat, April 25, just trying to put on a happy face and let everyone have a great time. But inside I was devastated.

It was definitely the largest Game Day I had EVER had with probably 300+ people in attendance. And for the first time, I didn't even want to be there...

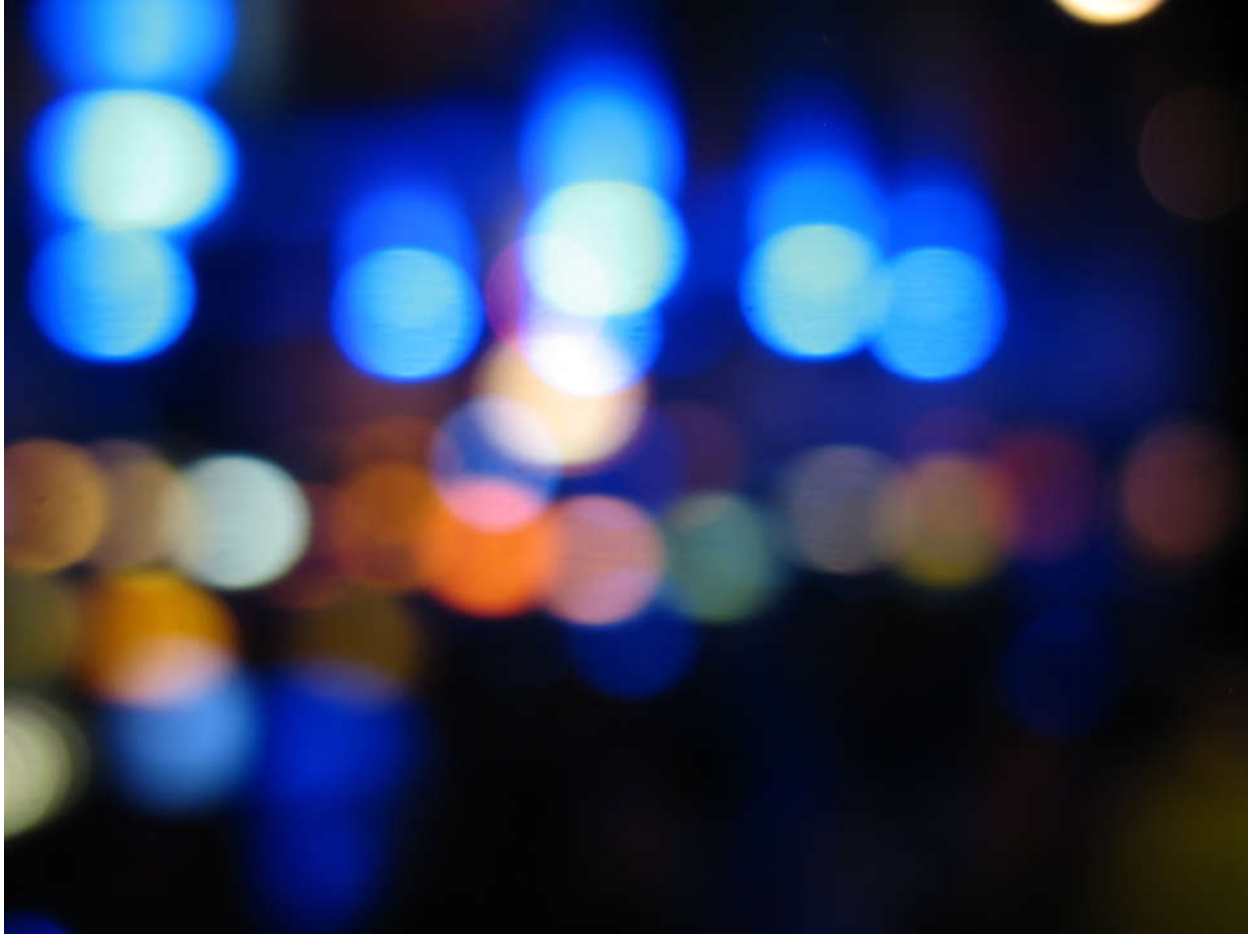


Photo credit: Jeff Kinder

RUINS

Shawn Haines' death hit me hard. All this time everything had always gone my way. Whatever I wanted I could make happen if I just set my mind to it. But not this time. It broke me. I became sullen and insular. I was depressed.

The arcade I worked so hard to build now seemed like a dark place to me.

I began trying to find ways to get out of the hobby and keep the collection together. On 03-05-2010, I posted on KLOV (a website for arcade collectors), basically making a classified ad for the entire building, house and all the games. I desperately wanted to keep everything together. When my wife found out I was trying to sell the house and games, she was livid. In hindsight, that was probably the beginning of the end of my marriage.

Even though I wanted out of the hobby, it was VERY important to me that the collection stay together: the games, artwork, the house - *everything*.

In my post on KLOV I wrote, "*I'm ready to move on and I need somebody else to run the Chocolate Factory*" - a reference of course to the book "Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory". I think me making that analogy is particularly telling about my state of mind at the time. I had gotten to the point with my arcade where it had become unsustainable for me, both financially and most importantly, emotionally. After that last Game Day that I had been essentially forced by my neighbor to hold, I felt like the arcade was now a burden I was being forced to carry.

I explored ways to donate the collection to the Smithsonian Museum, but it never panned out.

A few months went by after my KLOV post, and my marital problems had become very large problems when divorce entered the picture as my wife and I separated. We fought over custody of the kids, who began to have emotional and behavioral problems dealing with the separation and divorce situation. I ended up getting custody of my oldest, but it meant dropping her off at the bus stop in the morning and then picking her up at after-school-care before the cut-off time. With my one hour commute each way, I wasn't making my hours at work. My job began to suffer.

Then in December 2010, things got even worse for me as I was laid off from my job of 13 years at AOL.

It would be two years of bitter and expensive legal battles before the divorce was finalized and a property settlement agreed upon. I was to keep around 20 games from the collection. Everything else would be sold off.

In 2012 my wife and I did an initial round of "come and get everything without a blue piece of tape on it" (the games I was keeping). It was heartbreaking. I had so wanted to keep the entire collection together and there it was - being carted out the door one machine at a time.

It was shortly after that I was approached by Paul Good, who was involved with MAGFest, an annual "music and gaming" convention. He offered to store all the games I was keeping and buy out everything that remained in exchange for putting the games on the floor at the MAGFest events. Paul's offer was a godsend. People would be able to play my games again and the remainder of the collection would be kept together.

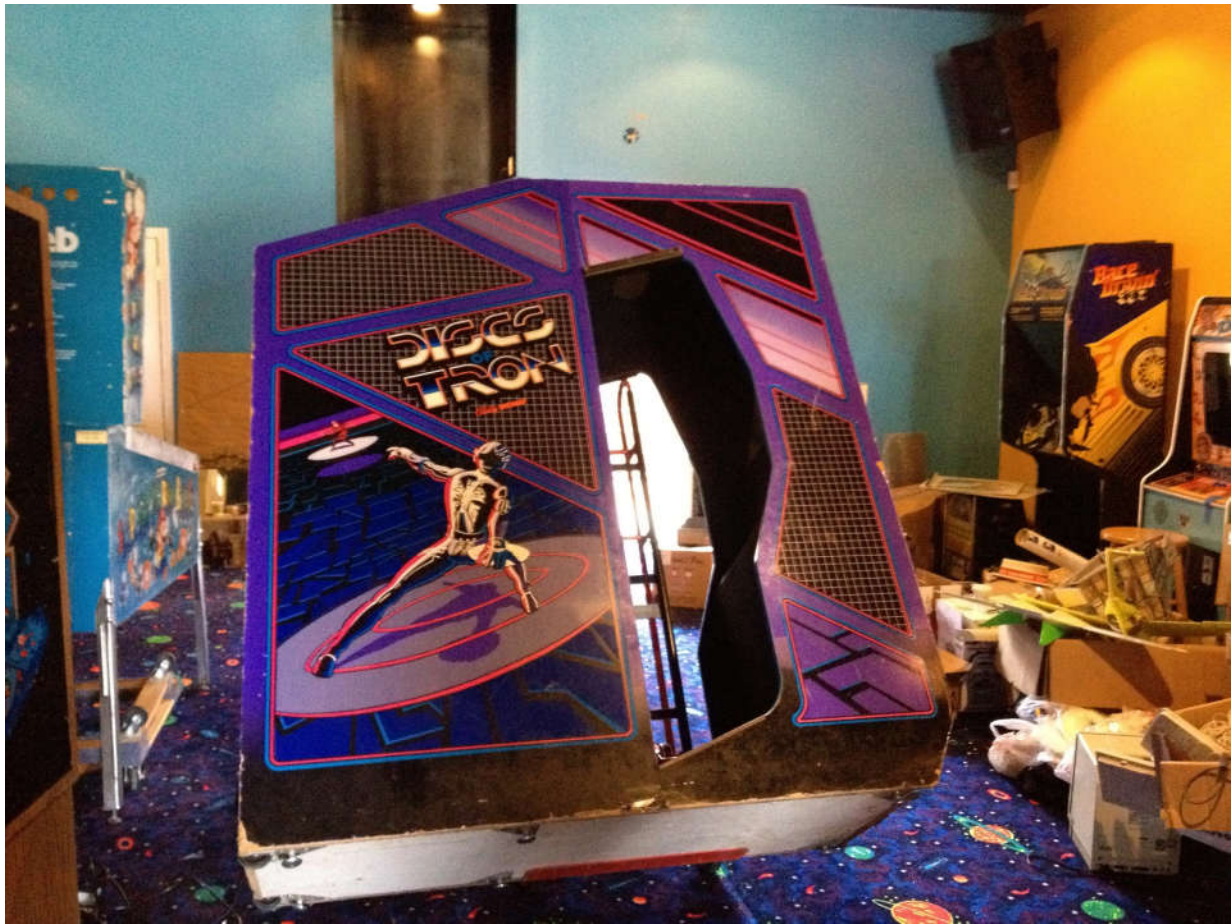
Paul had come out to one of my Game Days in 2008 and had been completely blown away. I actually remember the look on his face as he walked through the door.

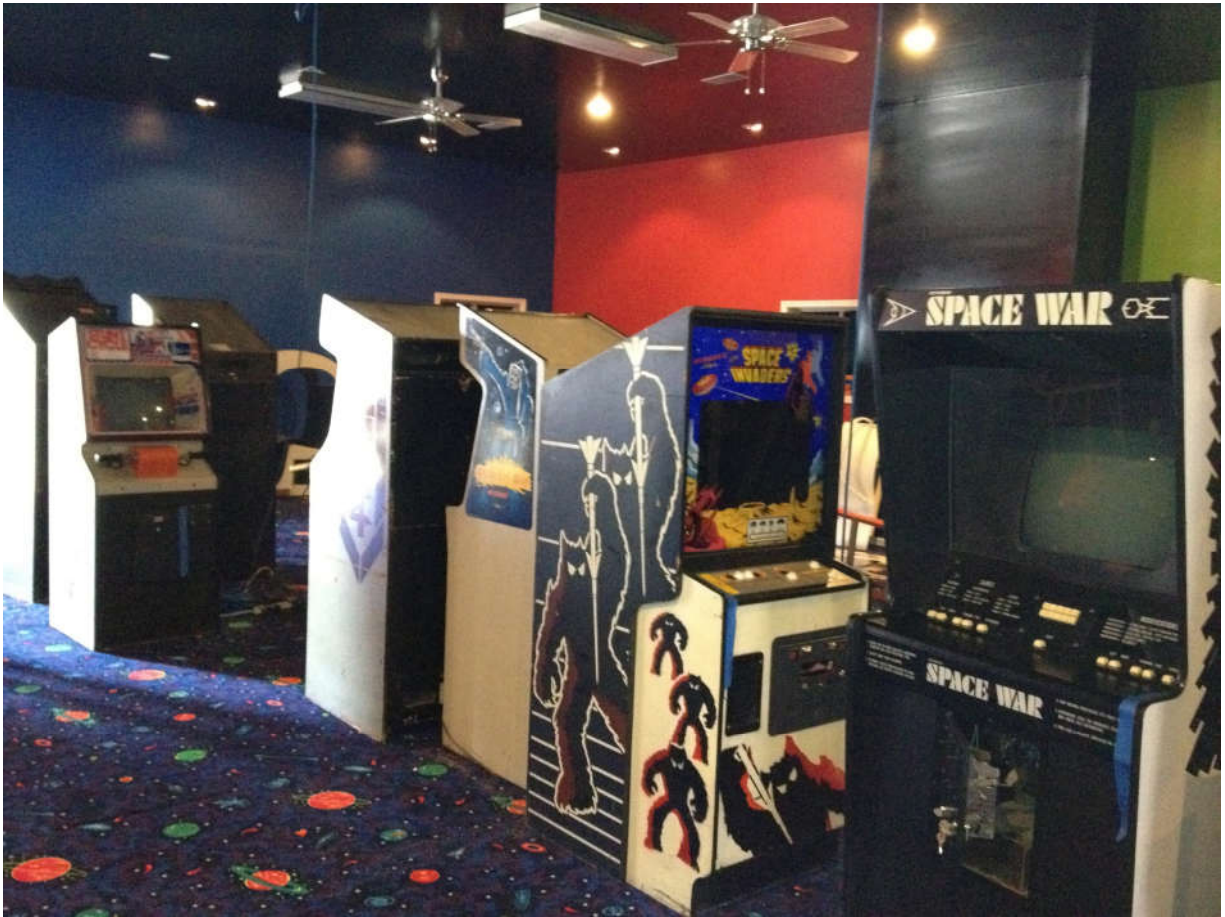
“With Luna city, you created pure magic, dude. You created the shit that Disney dreams of doing. Because arcades are like an active participatory thing. They really have to be physical and real. You have to be in the arcade to really experience it. But it was like a time capsule. You built a fucking time capsule. You built, like, the best arcade ever from '85.”

It was an emotional and somber day for me as the MAGFest crew unloaded what was left of the arcade building one machine at a time and loaded them into a large truck.

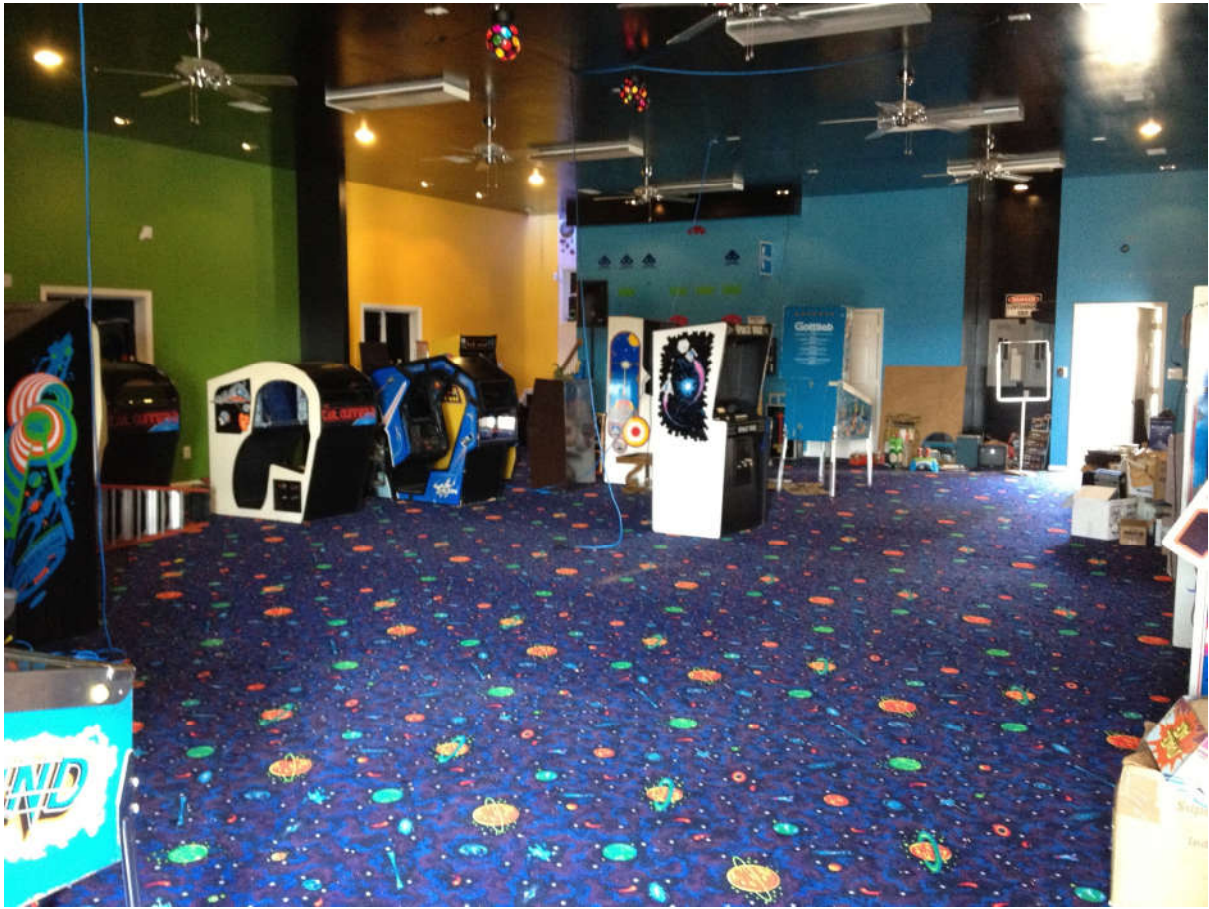


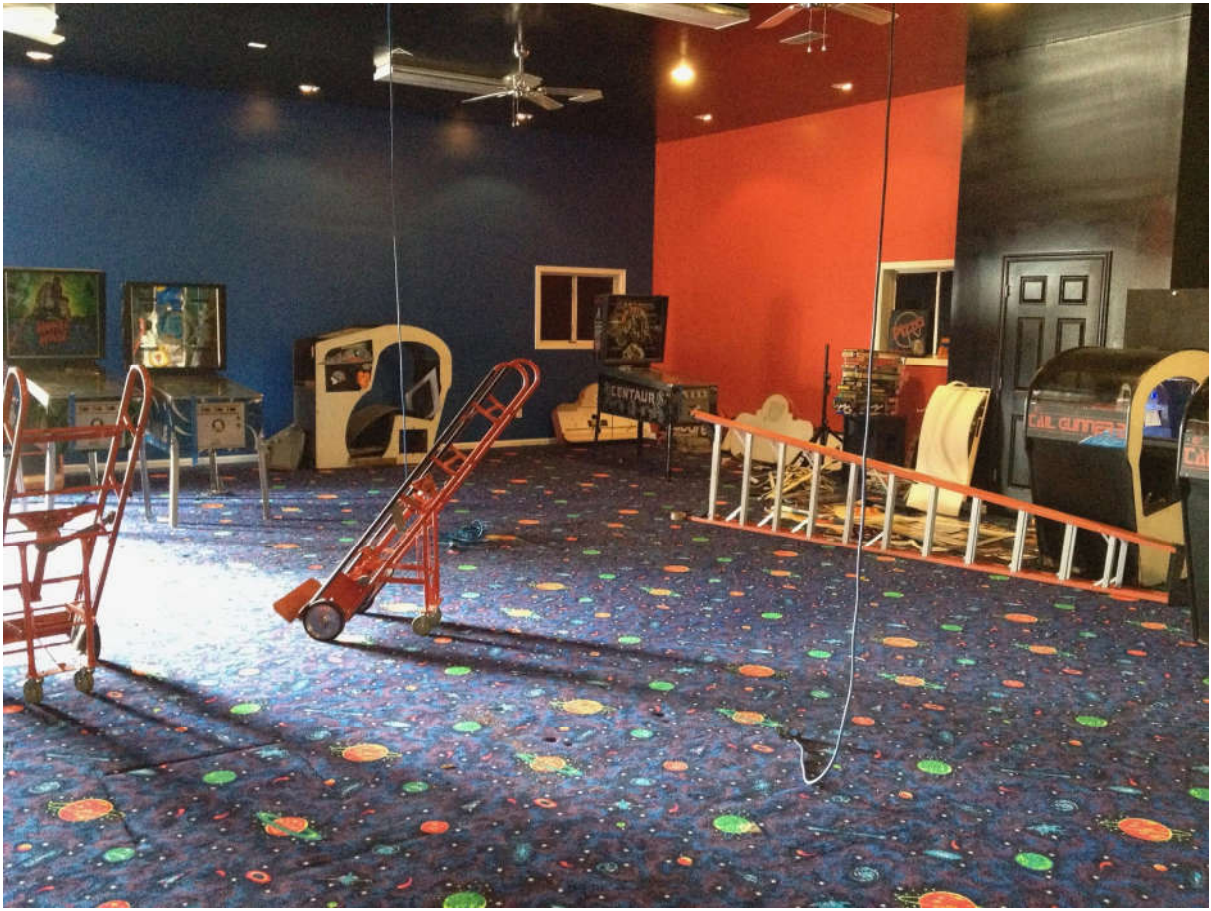
Me sitting on a trailer watching the arcade being unloaded. Photo credit: David Hernly.

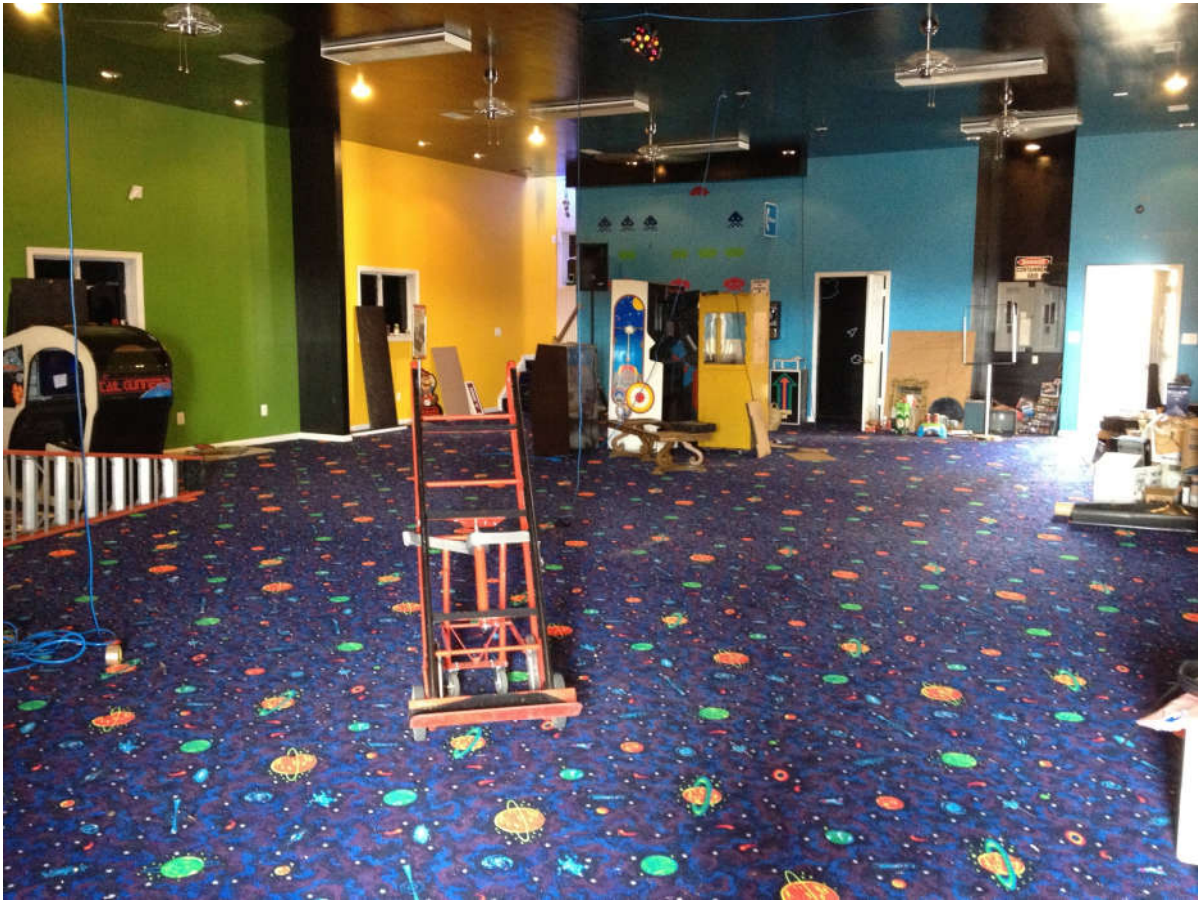


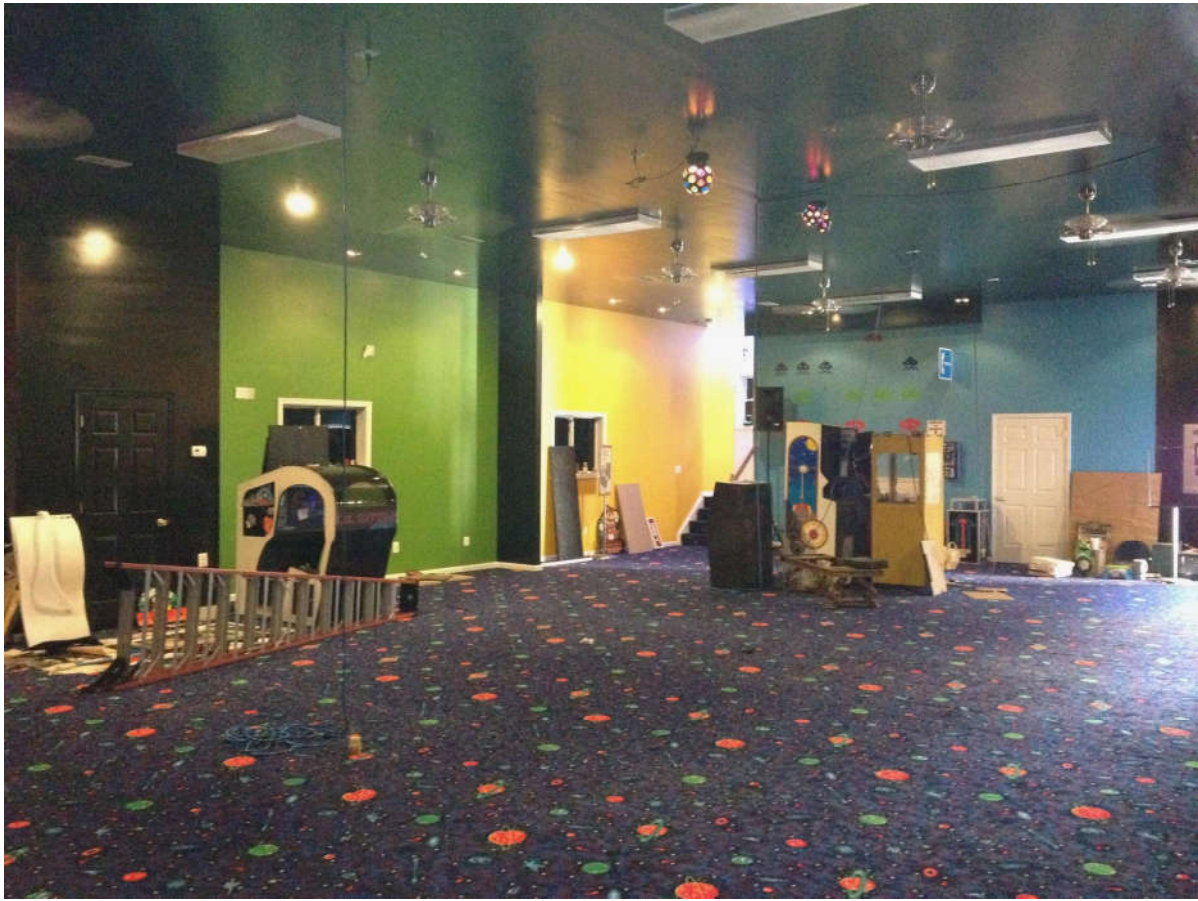














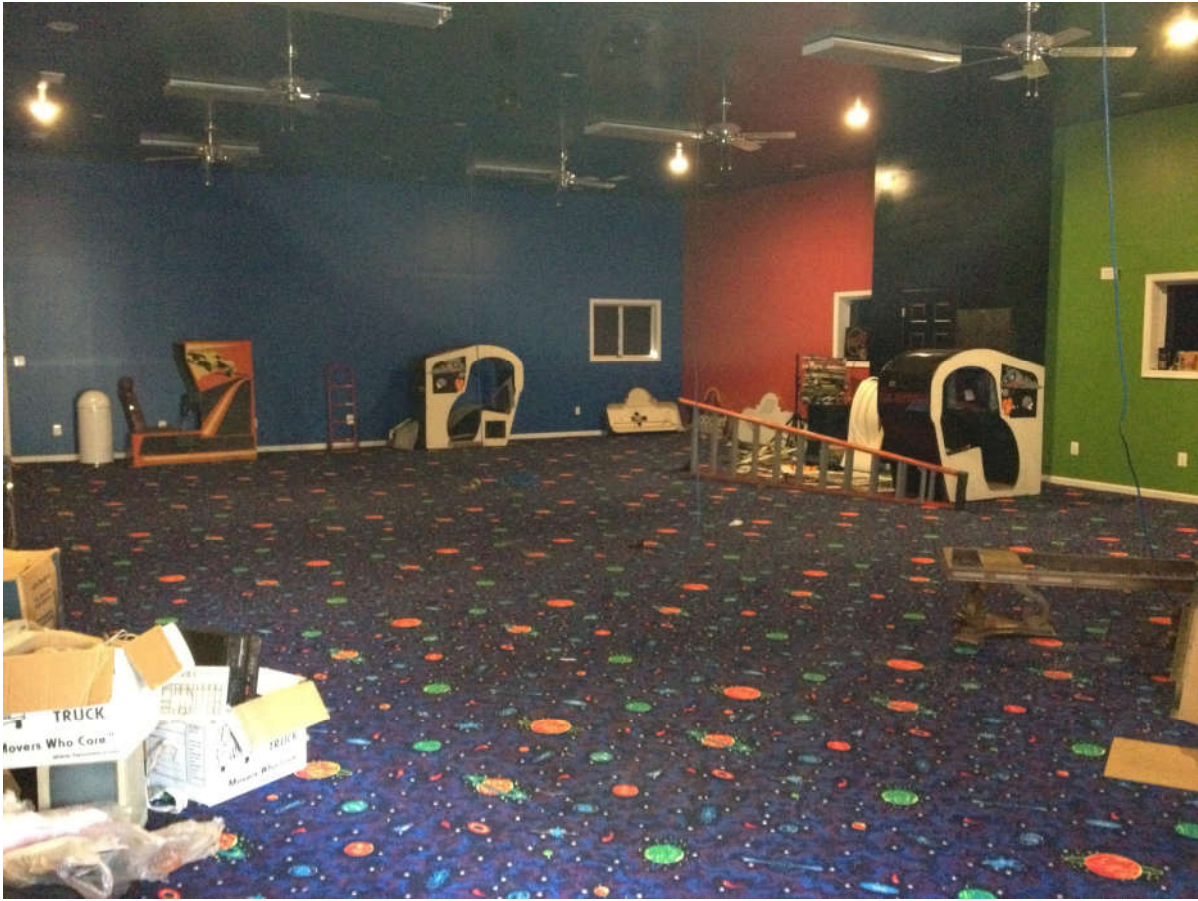


Photo credits: David Hernley

Jason Scott, an American archivist, historian of technology and filmmaker, had visited Luna City several times for Game Days and other events. He made a trek out to say his final goodbyes.



@textfiles
Jason Scott

Goodbye Luna City Arcade; you were truly a legend. #notears
pic.twitter.com/AYrszftQ



powered by  Photobucket

So the remaining Luna City games made the circuit at MAGFest for a few years and various other MAGFest-sponsored events.



My Discs of Tron and Tron games at MAGFest. Photo Credit: Bill Winters

In 2014 the Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC held a special event and many of my games were there and available for play by anyone and everyone. It was entitled the "Indie Arcade" at the Smithsonian American Art Museum



My games at the Smithsonian exhibit



My games at the Smithsonian exhibit



A few of my games at Intervention Con in 2012

In 2015 I was suddenly and unexpectedly under the gun to buy a house again. I was forced to sell off all remaining games from the collection to help finance the house. But I kept only three machines - an upright Asteroids machine (my first arcade game title), my "home use only" Haunted House pinball machine, and my Whirlwind pinball machine. I would rebuild when circumstances were better, I reasoned.

And just like that, Luna City Arcade was basically no more.

THE LEGACY - REMEMBERING LUNA CITY

I have always wondered what my 12-year old self would have thought of Luna City Arcade. I think my head would have exploded. Never could I have envisioned the incredible journey my life would take.

Dear Mr. Hirschburg thank you
very much for inviting me to
the arcade. I loved the arcade and
the games it was so fun, All the
games were great but to bad not
all them are working but it was
still so fun and thanks again
for inviting me.

SCOTT

What astonishes me most is that even to this day, 10 years after Luna City shuttered its doors, people are still talking about it and saying how if it weren't for Luna City they never would have started collecting arcade games or building their own game rooms. Luna City influenced so many people in a positive way. That's just so incredible to me and extremely humbling. I also often wonder how many kids who came to those various Game Days are, today, into classic video games and pinball because of Luna City.

I see photos of Luna City Arcade all over the Internet. Ironically they've become somewhat of a replacement for the absentee photos of arcades from back in the day.

There's even a Luna City meme which, sadly, could not be more true.



Believe in something. Even if it
means sacrificing everything.



 Just do it.

MEMORIES OF LUNA CITY

The staff of ThinkGeek came out for a private Game Day in 2008. They absolutely loved it and they were so gracious to me! Great group of people (ThinkGeek would later be purchased by GameStop and the kind folks who came out to my arcade would go their separate ways).



The staff of ThinkGeek - July 20, 2008

ThinkGeek co-founder Jen Frazier:

"I just remember being transported back to my childhood. The sights and sounds were exactly as I remembered them. That carpet was perfection! I also remember having so much fun and forgetting that there were problems and work and chores and real life outside that building. I'm so glad we were able to visit."

ThinkGeek designer Alan Szymkowiak:

"He did a remarkable job of creating a space that instantly transported you back to the heyday of arcades, all the way down to the random 80s ephemera like the Pizza Hut tray I found laying around the side room. It remains fascinating to me how being in an environment that lovingly crafted can immediately take you to another time and place."

ThinkGeek "Senior Code Monkey" Jacob Rose:

"When we were kids the arcade was a huge destination for us. That was a big deal to go to the arcade and take whatever quarters you could get and you would just spend as much time as you could there, even if it was just watching other people play because you didn't have enough quarters to play as much as you

wanted. So to be able to be thrown back into that space but with no restrictions, it was like a glimpse of some form of heaven in a way. And it just like going back to your childhood and having whatever experience you could have had except, in real life not just imagination. You really showed how many other adjacent things were important to that experience. Because it wasn't just the games. It was like all the paraphernalia."

Around that time I also had a private Game Day for my AOL colleagues. Todd Brannam, a close AOL coworker and friend of mine, brought his son Alex, 8, along. Todd recalls:

"One of the things we do when we go on vacation is, you know, arcade opportunities. And one of the things that we do is I think Alex and I are mentally kind of always saying is, does stand up to what Peter would do. I think you really kind of set the high watermark on what it is. And I think one of the things, when I think about Luna City is, if I kind of reflect on all the arcades I want to as a teenager, I think they were all like aspiring to be what you built. I think you've built the ideal model of what an arcade should be. And then those '80s, retro posters. And your collection of pinball machines, kind of reflecting the entire gamut of what it was to be an arcade back in the day."

I asked his son Alex, now 19, if Luna City influenced him in any way.

"As a kid you think, oh the graphics aren't as good, the games are not as fun, but for me it was definitely an inspiration to play those kinds of games, and it definitely piqued my interest. This is cool, this is what they used to play. And I think a lot of that mindset comes from going to your arcade."



Alex Brannam, 8, amidst my massive Simon collection on the upper floor of the arcade. Photo credit: Todd Brannam

Paul Good of MAGFest:

“The whole physicality of it. Like what you did with the carpet and the posters in the giant Battlestar Galactica wallpaper and the coin machine and everything like you just, you just created a time capsule. That room was a fantasy arcade. It was, it was fucking Flynn’s Arcade is exactly what it was like. And it’s exactly what you set out to do. Walking into Luna City felt like walking into a movie about the fantasy of how amazing arcades could be, but never quite were.”

More from Paul Good of MAGFest:

“What Peter did with Luna City Arcade was nothing short of a spiritual experience for me, and many others.”

David Hernly:

"You were in the middle of it; you built it and maybe you didn't see it. Maybe you understood its impact. Maybe you didn't. But as a private arcade, you were unrivaled. Bringing back the concept that it's not just playing the old arcade games - that's just one piece of it. It was bringing back the environment and the feel of an arcade. And when you had your Game Days it was a hundred plus people right there. It felt like the old days, you know, and you went to the arcade not just to play, but to watch people play and get the excitement out of seeing skilled people kick a game's ass and learn from it."

David Hernly also recalls the reaction when Luna City shut down:

"There were so many people that were like, wait, what? No, I haven't been yet. No, this can't happen. That's a testament to you, man, and what you built. People were depressed that they never got to go visit the shrine, but that's a testament to the quality of work you did. And I think that's important to share."

Adam DeSantis, who is currently building his own arcade inspired by Luna City:

"We used your pictures of Luna City and totally based what everything is going to be inside on those. Your arcade really meant the world to me."

Bruce Jenkins, who hired me at Home Amusements that fateful day:

"Ron, Lori and I made it out to Luna city arcade a couple of times. The dedication to the games, the environment, the period of time of its heyday, obvious, meticulous, compulsive. The place was an awesome altar to the coin fueled expansion of technology of the 80's."

I asked Ben Thoburn what he remembered about Luna City:

"How authentic it looked. The way '80s arcades looked. How you decorated it perfectly. All the way from the floor, to the trashcan. Your attention to detail was above and beyond what most people do for their arcades. It wasn't just a basement arcade, it was a full recreation. I usually see everything broken and looking like total crap, and to see that many working machines all lined up just the way they were back in the '80s. The way they looked in their glory days."

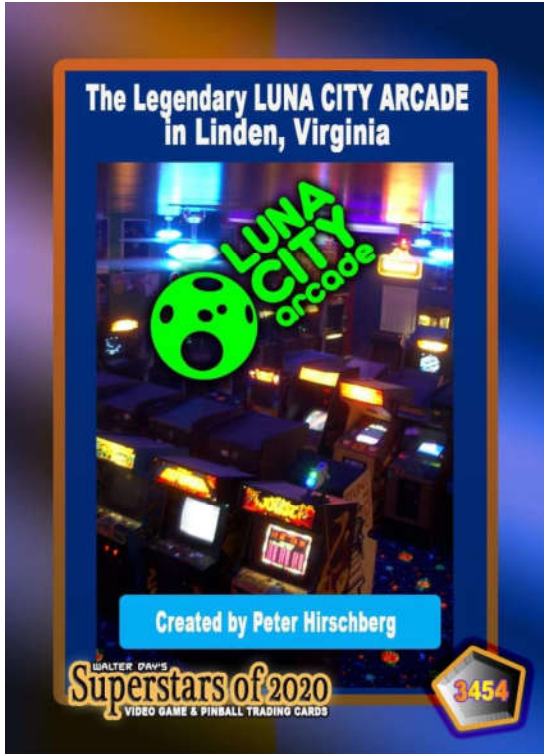
My friend since middle school, John Baker, who sadly never was able to make it to any of my Game Days:

"That's one of my big regrets in life. Never coming to see that."

ElectricDreamz (KLOV):

"Luna City has a mythical distinction in the hobby that will never be matched again. The collection was insane (and unheard of for the time) and Peter was very generous to habitually open it up to the public again and again, only requesting donations for local charities. The light that burns twice as bright burns half as long. :-("

In July 2020, Luna City finally got an official “Walter Day Trading Card”:



Walter Day's
Superstars of 2020
VIDEO GAME & PINBALL TRADING CARDS

LUNA CITY ARCADE

Created by Peter Hirschberg
Linden, Virginia

Luna City Arcade was a 2400-square-foot home arcade created by Peter Hirschberg. At its peak it was home to over 80 vintage video games and pinball machines ranging primarily from the mid 70s to mid-80s. Construction, which took over a year, was completed in 2008. Detached from the house, the building had 12' ceilings and was two stories. One of its most distinctive features was the rows of black light fixtures mounted on the ceiling and glowing, space-themed blacklight carpeting. The walls were adorned with hundreds of posters and 80s memorabilia, etc. Hirschberg would host both private and public "Game Days" where the general public would be invited to play games all day free of charge. There were also a couple "Benefit" Game Days which were arranged to help raise money for important causes. Sadly, Luna City closed its doors in early 2010, but its legacy lives on in all the home gamerooms it inspired among other collectors. *The production of this trading card was made possible through a financial grant generously donated by Color Switch of Simi Valley, California.*

The Walter Day Collection of Video Game & Pinball Trading Cards was created to commemorate the history of the global video game & pinball culture, honoring the people, the games, the technology, and the historic milestones.

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THE “LUNA CITY EFFECT”

INFLUENCE ON OTHER COLLECTORS



Ed Beeler curates a massive pinball museum/arcade called “Pinball PA” in Pittsburgh, PA

When I fell completely into the endless black hole (Gottlieb?) of arcade collecting in the early 1990's, I wasn't sure what the end goal was. A great hobby, a few extra dollars selling stuff, the picking was the most fun. But then I stumbled upon (via dial up internet) this site Luna City Arcade. Black lights, cool carpet, nicely organized, perfectly restored collection of the most important and relevant games ever. So amazing. I knew I had to try myself to create something as cool as this Hirschberg character! After many years Peter sneaks into my creation, Pinball PA. No fanfare, no hooplah, just sneaks in unannounced. I finally met the original author of the “build your own amazing arcade” blueprints. Thanks for bringing us down this road of arcade preservation, Peter!



OZONE: Home Arcade

Catherine DeSpira's "OZONE"

Whenever you see an "80s arcade" on TV these days, the number one thing most producers and set designers get wrong is the lighting.

There were two kinds of arcade styles in The 80s with very different subcultures -the street locations and the mall arcades. Street locations were rarely lit with secondary overhead-lighting, and since most street locations had limited power options anyway, oftentimes the only light in the arcade was from the games themselves. This produced a very hazy, blue-lit atmospheric glow that gave you the sensory perception of being in a place that held elements of danger which only added to the arcade's appeal.

Some mall arcades, like Time Out, had lighting which produced a form of this sensory lighting effect, but not many mall arcade chains did due to security reasons and the fact that they were tied in with high-end retail businesses who expected an arcade's atmosphere to reflect a wholesome image. So dim-lit blue-light dens of video game escapism were dominated by private street locations almost exclusively.

Since I first discovered arcade games with Space Invaders in 1978, the down-lit design pathos of "the street location arcade" is what a real arcade feels like to me. It's what I know. *The dim-blue lighting.* This is what made Luna City jump out at me when I first saw the pictures online in 2007. *The ambiance.* I knew right then and there that whoever built that home arcade wasn't following a visual off of TV or a movie, but had actually lived through the video craze era...*like me.* That home arcade I saw was Peter Hirschberg's "Luna City".

I refer to the kind of lighting I have in my home arcade as "Luna City Lighting" because that's what struck me about the photos of Luna City. Hirschberg struck a perfect balance between the monitor lights and strategically placed overhead lighting to reproduce the historically accurate arcade

ambiance I remember in 1982. He reproduced it because he knew that getting the lighting right *first* was paramount to recreating the sensory perception effect he was hoping for. After all, you just can't reach back through time and grab the feel of an 80s arcade by throwing a bunch of games together and turning them on. You have to first turn the lights down or off completely. Let the monitors light the way back. They know the way by heart.

A few days ago Hirschberg asked me if my home arcade had a name. It didn't. So I got to thinking; the most common theme influenced by Luna City in my own arcade is blue light. Blue light is the color of ozone, a trioxxygen or gas that's found all over the planet. However that after-rain smell that came off the new video game monitors back in the 80s arcades *-that's also ozone*. So I named my home arcade "OZONE". It houses 46 games including some pinballs. And, like most collectors, there's even more in our home.



Derek Sorrell's "Derek's Arcade" / "The Arcade"

You'd start Googling and after a while you'd come across Luna City. And it was, like, *oh my god, this is like Mecca*. This is what every arcade collector dreams of. I mean, that's it. It had the high ceilings. It had the carpet. It had the change machine. It had the posters.

I was looking at Luna City and thinking, it brought back my childhood and it was, like, maybe I could do something like this on an absolutely ridiculous yet smaller scale. And I think that really drove me to try to, but I think it drove a lot of other people, too. And that's why Luna City still resonates with people.

When you look at other people's home arcades, they always look like a home arcade and there isn't anything wrong with that. Most people have two, three or four, maybe 10 games. And you know, you always want your arcade to look cool. So you beg, borrow and steal anybody's ideas. You type in, "arcade" or "home arcade" in Google Images and then you would come across Luna City and you were, like, 'Okay, how much information can I find out about this guy?'

I remember there were all these comments about how amazing Luna City was and people were thanking Peter Hirschberg for allowing them to come. That's what I wanted. I wanted to have a place where people can come to and they can have fun. Hirschberg and Luna City absolutely inspired many more people than he knows since he may not know them directly. And it's just an amazing thing. Although Luna City has been gone for 10 years it definitely affected a lot of people.

If it wasn't for Luna City, who knows what some of us may have had for a home arcade. I turned mine into a business and, you know, I get to see people enjoy it all the time now. And I don't know that I ever would have done that if it wasn't for seeing what was possible, and a large portion of my incentive was inspired by Hirschberg's arcade.



Derek Sorrell's turned his hobby into a business in the form of a public arcade called "The Arcade"



David Hernly's "Auric's Arcade"

While Auric's Arcade was founded in 2007, Luna City represented the Mount Olympus of arcades and certainly influenced the evolution of Auric's.

During the sunset of Luna City, David made sure to work with Peter to keep a little of the arcade alive. When you visit Auric's you'll find some decorations, posters and even some of the carpet from Luna City.



Bill Dermody's Flynn's Arcade

Luna City was the first collection that really showed me what was possible beyond having just a game or two in the family room. I just wish I had that kind of space.



Randy Christie's "Binary Starcade"

Definitely not just the games, Luna City inspired the wall art and signage. To me it's as important as your game selection. I see lots of pics of peoples arcades with bare walls and it looks incomplete to me. To me an arcade isn't complete till the walls are covered with posters etc. and black lights are in the ceiling.



Barry Evans' "Yesterday's Museum and Game Room"

I was following Luna City's arcade build with excitement and envy. I was loving the progress pictures. At the time, I didn't know how I would have my own arcade room or how to build one for my collection that has been in storage for years.

I loved Luna City's black light carpet. Since original signage, posters and displays are what I've been collecting for decades, seeing Luna City's signage made me investigate and locate the original signs from my childhood game room at our local mall. After two- years of research, I found the original owners and they still had all the signage sitting in their warehouse since 1990! After I told them my stories of loving everything video game and arcade related, they were thrilled that someone had such fond memories for their long gone business, they let me have everything; five original full size arcade signs, photographs of their arcades that were hanging in their offices, buckets of tokens, and many original logo items. I restored all the signs, restored the photographs in photoshop (years of UV damage took their toll) and it's all on display in my collection today.

Yes, seeing Luna City gave me many ideas and inspiration to make my dream come true. Thank You Luna City!



Jerome Arcade (France)

You were one of my dream places and gave me the will to build my own. Le JR's arcade in France.



Richard Bushy's "Patiocade" (Tempe AZ)

I was influenced by your story from "Space Invaders In Search of Lost Time". My wife was so understanding after she watched the movie.



Ryan Tilden's "Tilly's Arcade"

I saw pics of Luna City and always wanted to build a dedicated pole barn for my games. I will one day! I'm totally grateful to have my game room in the basement, but to have a dedicated building would be amazing.



Steve Grunberger's "Dragon's Lair HQ" (Australia)

I'm honored to be part of this. Luna City is the 'godfather' of home arcades.



Jeremy Wagner's "Vintage Vault Arcade"

Luna City set the bar for everyone. I was house hunting at the time looking for something that would become my dream arcade, something I always had aspirations of as an 80's kid. I came across your website, videos, and game days and showed my wife at that time. I told her, 'This guy went big, and that's what I'm looking to do.' A few years later I bought my home and created the Vintage Vault Arcade. Located just outside St. Louis, MO.



Todd Gedeon's "Gedeon's Gameroom"

I stumbled upon a YouTube.com news story about Hirschberg's Luna City and hearing him say how much his family and friends enjoy Luna City. When we bought our house, the basement slowly became the most popular room in the house and drew people to it. It makes people happy and they enjoy all the posters and other items on the walls.



“Brentradio’s” “The Jack Daniels Barcade And Poker Room” (Fabulous Las Vegas)

All I have to say is who WASN'T inspired by the Luna City Arcade? I know I was. That place looked like Heaven. The amazing detail that Peter put into every game and inch of the Luna City Arcade inspired me to try and do the same with the space that I had.



Brian Weissmann's "Station Break" (NW Arkansas)

I was inspired by Luna City to find a new house either with enough land to build an arcade building on, or to find a house with a large separate building behind the house. So in 2013 I bought a house with a standalone large 8-car (tandem garage, 4 car wide by 2 car deep) building for my arcade. It features 12' ceilings, a full bathroom, a dedicated 200AMP panel (after the city upgraded my property to 400 AMPS), all brick structure, a working payphone and a HVAC system. It will hold about 70 games max. I had 61 games in total a few months ago but recently sold 7 games so I can add more pinball machines.

I even run 'Gamedays' as also inspired by Peter Hirschberg and I even have a web page dedicated to Luna City on my website:

http://www.hsapinball.com/HSA_PINBALL/Luna_City.html

My arcade's name is "Station Break". It is themed after the 40 or so Station Break arcade chain locations that existed in the early 1980's. The sign logo and the numbers on the upper part of the wall are all part of the Station Break theme.



“yaryar’s” “Starbase Alpha”

This is our home arcade, Starbase Alpha. Definitely inspired by Luna City. Loved Luna City’s space theme and carpet, so it gave my wife and I some ideas when we built our own arcade six years ago. It’s built on the slab of a home that was demolished from Hurricane Katrina. Contractor put up the building, then my wife and I did the insulation/electric/sheetrock/interior framing/trim, and plumbing, etc. It houses 67 machines, including 4 pinballs, 4 cocktails, 1 cabaret, and the rest are uprights. The ceiling is covered in blacklight reactive planets/stars that react when the game room/black lights are on. Not pictured is the high score table, and the overhead monitors that are usually playing 80’s music videos. Been collecting since 1991. We are located a few miles from New Orleans.



Keith Glindemann's Quarter Up Arcade (Columbia, Missouri)

I followed the blog of this guy named “Peter” who was building his dream arcade in Virginia. Of course, my wife was, like, “ What? No.” However, I’m proud to say my “Quarter Up Arcade” was inspired by Luna City and continues to grow. A dozen machines...and growing.



“Madboy214’s” “The Hypercade”

This is my home arcade, The Hypercade, located in San Luis Obispo, California. When I learned about Luna City, It inspired me to make a more-complete arcade experience.



Shane Hill's "Hill Brothers Arcade"

I'm sharing pictures of my home game room we call "Hill Brothers Arcade".

I have been collecting for 10+ years and it was a video of Luna City on YouTube that inspired me to build my arcade.

Thanks again for everything you have done for our hobby!

Rock on





Tom Hughes' "Tom's Arcade" (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada)

As a teen in the 80's, we camped at a park that had a rec center that housed a jukebox, a few arcade games, and some pinball machines. Any quarters I had went into those machines as well as haunting local arcades in my hometown. Inevitably, the movement of time and a job dictated few if any visits to the park or any free time for arcades.

In 2013 I was offered a pinball machine – a perfectly playing 1970's era Gottlieb Centigrade 37. Playing that machine instantly brought back memories of my youth playing pinball on a hot Saturday summer evening. As one does, more pinball machines and a couple of "multicade" arcade cabinets followed. However, a change in relationship status forced me to liquidate. I sold what I could, packed up my stuff, and headed into an apartment. While I knew the hobby wasn't over for me, I was at a serious impasse. A home arcade would be in my future - I just needed to keep myself inspired.

It was around that time I discovered the documentary "The Space Invaders: In Search of Lost Time (2012)". where I found out about Peter Hirschberg and the Luna City Arcade.

And, down the rabbit hole we go.

Guitar players frequently describe hearing the first Van Halen record as the "game changer" for rock guitar – and, rightfully so. Not often will you meet a guitar player who doesn't consider Mr. Van Halen as one of the ultimate guitar deities – and rightfully so. Paul Gilbert from Mr. Big described that first album as "unfair" for guitar players – and rightfully so.

Luna City Arcade was just that – a game changer and almost unfair – and rightfully so (and in a good way). Peter took the idea of a home arcade to the high-water mark. So many vintage machines! The right artwork, the right layout, the perfect era of games. The perfect carpet, lighting - even a token machine! Searching for photos of Luna City took me right back to the mall arcades I haunted in the 80's, or the arcade scene in the original TRON (1982) where we first meet Flynn. If you listened close enough, you could just about hear those great machines firing up and running in attract mode, people dropping in quarters, Journey's "*Separate Ways*" playing in the background.

Just like hearing the first Van Halen record, you either put your guitar under the bed or you take inspiration and rise to the occasion. Giddy up.

In the fall of 2015, I rented a small shop space and began to collect project pins and games, with the restored arcade games going into the apartment. How I got away with this I'll never know – At one point I had 8 games in that apartment! As well, the shop was quickly filling up.

In March of 2017 I met Kerry. As our lives began to align, we realized we needed to find a space that fit our lives, our hobbies, and our lifestyles. By summer of 2018 we moved into the perfect house, complete with a finished basement to build my dream arcade. We are a great team, and this wouldn't have been possible without it. As an added feature in the arcade, the family that owned the park I visited as a teen gifted me the last surviving machines from the old rec center. It took some serious work to get them working again, but it was worth every minute. Every day I get to come down and play some of the exact machines from my youth, whilst the juke plays an old Styx tune in the background.

This hobby is driven by community. The friends I have made through this hobby have been incredible and are a constant support team. We are always there for each other when a part is needed, an idea needs to be fleshed out, a cabinet needs to be moved, or inspiration to keep going when you just can't get that finicky Robotron board to boot. Thanks!

Thanks to you, Peter, for the inspiration, and for having my story in this book.



Richard Ford's "Area 51" - Pittsburgh

I can trace my interest in arcade games all the way back to being a young child. I was fortunate to grow up at a time when arcade games and the arcades would reach their peak. It was a great time. Socializing with your friends and girls at the arcade. Lining up your quarters waiting for your turn on Pacman, donkey kong, or the newest game release...everywhere you went you would find a game or two. The grocery store, department stores, pizza joint, you name it. Fast forward when i was in my early twenties I had finally surpassed the point of being a poor college student and was embarking on my new career as a Police Officer... although early on I was still poor, I did manage to save a few extra dollars here and there from extra overtime. This was the dawn of ebay and at the time when you could find super rare things on the site as everyone was discovering an entire new platform to sell their treasures. We finally had a site where your treasures weren't junk anymore..they were appreciated by other fellow collectors. I purchased my first game which was Pac-man. It was fun figuring out all the shipping dilemmas and how to transport it to my house. I eventually figured it out and I was once again hooked into the hobby. My game collection quickly grew and eventually I realized I had gotten so into the hobby I was outgrowing my basement arcade. Flash forward a few years. I'm browsing the internet late one night on my night off of work when I couldn't sleep because I always worked night shift in those early days. I come upon what can only be described as fantasyland in my world. Someone had built a custom arcade building and to top it off even had a great name for it, Luna City. This was the first time I would come to find out the man behind this great accomplishment, Peter Hirschberg. Although I never had the opportunity to visit in person, there were many nights I would just scroll through the pictures and think why couldn't I do something like that. I knew I had the

passion to do it just not the money at the time. Well those early days of seeing what could be are what led me to what I have today. My own 1800 square foot arcade bldg that I have so named Area 51. It kind of looks like air hanger from outside but inside you will find nothing but arcade goodness. Countless road trips and trades to amass a collection I'm extremely proud of. It's not just filled with arcade games and pinballs but also many items that tell the history of these games and the people who helped design them. I owe the dream becoming a reality to Peter, his early motivation to do something that most regular folk could only dream of has now kinda become a following. Today I see a lot of collectors realizing their dreams and also constructing arcades to house their collections. Karma would follow Peter as when his arcade closed I came to be in possession of a lot of the art he had hanging on his wall. We exchanged several emails many years later when I asked if he might want to work out something to get some of it back. Finally the day came when he was able to visit and I was able to reunite him with some of his favorite items he wished to retrieve. It really feels good to give back and meet the man behind what seemed like a myth so long ago. I get the feeling when Peter visited my arcade although he misses what he once had he gets even greater pleasure knowing all the collectors he inspired to do what he did. Thanks Peter!

WHAT DID MY KIDS THINK OF ALL THIS?

My children were very young when I first started accumulating games. They were basically born into the whole retro gaming thing, so it didn't seem like anything special to them. At the time, they were, perhaps, mildly interested in the arcade to put it best. I remember when I got a "Primal Rage" game (Atari, 1994), it was something that really appealed to them at their age.

But unwittingly, as they got older the retro games began to make them feel nostalgic and they began to be drawn to them more and more.

Humorously, any time they visit a typical modern-day arcade full of nothing but redemption games, they inevitably go in and come back disappointed, asking "Where's all the classic games?".



Pac-Man cakes that my daughter made for Pac-Man's 40th birthday.



Arcade character plushies my kids made for me.

I recently sat down with my children to discuss the influence that Luna City Arcade had on their lives.

ME: Piper, what about Luna City influenced you when you were a kid, and inspired you to be into classic arcade games today?

PIPER: It was cool to see an entire building dedicated to something someone was passionate about. And I think it's interesting to see what people could do with the limited resources they had back then, and made some really creative stuff despite that.

ME: So, Aspen - you like classic games, right? Like what they have at the barcade in Richmond (The Circuit)? Why is that?

ASPEN: Yeah because you don't have to think as hard to play them. You just play them and also they're nostalgic. You don't have to think about storyline, or choices like that. You just play them until you're better at them.

ME: You said nostalgic - like from your childhood, right? Like when we had all the games?

ASPEN: Yeah. Because it reminds me of playing the games with you and watching you fix them up and the Game Days and everything.

ME: Nemo, so I feel like you're a natural gamer. What are your memories of the game rooms that we had and did think they were cool?

NEMO: I thought it was fun. There were a couple of games that I had as my favorites and I feel like there were some that I just never played.

ME: What were some of your favorites?

PIPER: Oh I have so many. When I was little it was Moon Patrol but for a long time it was Primal Rage.

NEMO: I liked Night Driver. I would play that one a lot. I liked the standup Tron game (Discs of Tron) a lot too.

ME: You guys loved the Discs of Tron game!

ASPEN: I remember you would always fuss at us because we would put our feet up on the control panel to try and be tall enough to see the screen.

ME: Well, I had just put a new control panel overlay on it, so I was, like, STOP.

NEMO: The Space Wars game, that was one of my favorites.

ME: Oh yeah. We got that game pretty early on. So Nemo, those are like really simple games. What made them your favorites? The fact that they were simple? Or the graphics?

NEMO: The Space Wars one, I guess was because it was multiplayer. So it was more like a social game.

ME: Yeah, definitely.

PIPER: We would battle against each other on it a lot.

ASPEN: That was why Gauntlet was one of my favorites because it had the four joysticks so me, Piper, and Nemo could all play together.

ME: So - we have the game room in our basement at both houses, and then we were building this big, huge game room. What did you guys think about that? Did you guys think I was crazy for building that or was it just, like, normal for you guys?

NEMO: I didn't think it was crazy. I thought it was cool. And kind of the logical step to take when you have arcade games taking over your house.

PIPER: Yeah, same. It was cool because we would have room to get more games then.

ASPEN: I thought it was really cool. I used to brag about you at school.

PIPER: All my friends liked to come over for parties because we had all these cool games and stuff.

NEMO: It's like a secret fort, but the size of your house.

ME: I remember all the interviews back then said "...and Peter's kids aren't interested in the games, they just want to play Wii". I'm not sure that was entirely true, thinking back, I just think the Wii games were maybe just more your speed?

ASPEN: I feel like I was interested in them in different ways. I wouldn't really go play an arcade game just by myself. I liked to play them when there were a bunch of people there. They felt more like social games. And then Wii games were like, I want to play this by myself and I don't want anybody else around me.

PIPER: I didn't see what the big deal was. To me it wasn't any different than having a modern game console in your house, so I didn't get why people thought it was so crazy. And turning on the arcade felt like it was more for parties, when new stuff was more casual.

NEMO: For me. I know at some point I started taking them for granted. Cause I had just played them so much. So it was like a normal part of life for me. So I just stopped playing them as much. But now that we don't have them anymore, I keep thinking, oh, I want to play that game.

ASPEN: Yeah, same.

ME: So that is exactly what happened to everyone my age is that we took them for granted. We thought they'd always be there. And then they were gone. And building my arcade was the only way I could start playing all those games that I wanted to play again. It got out of control when I had like 80 or 90 games and a whole building the size of the house. But it started out, I think, with me just wanting to play those games, like you said, that you miss playing and the only way to do that is to buy them and fix them and put them somewhere.

ASPEN: I also feel like it's not the same if you buy like a simulator or something. Because most of the fun of the game isn't just playing it. It's, like, the buttons, and like they play a completely different way. And listening to the sound effects and the fact that the machine is like as tall as you are. The controls make it its own thing.

PIPER: Yeah. You just can't emulate something like Marble Madness.

ME: Does it seem weird to you that at some point in history they would make an entire giant wooden cabinet just for one single game?

ASPEN: Maybe this is just because I grew up around them, but I don't think that's weird.

NEMO: I thought it was weird when I found out that they were mostly empty. I thought they had to be that big because of how outdated the technology was.

PIPER: Yeah me too.



Me playing Black Hole pinball with one of my kids watching. Photo credit: Mike Hirschberg

An excerpt from a poignant college essay my youngest recently wrote:

If I were to say that 80's arcade games make me nostalgic for my childhood, you might think that I'm much older than I actually am. In truth, I was born 20 years after the arcade craze. But my reasons for this nostalgia are a little different than the people who grew up in the era of arcades.

My dad has always loved everything retro; retro TV shows, retro action figures, retro video games. For as long as I can remember, he's been collecting these artifacts as a hobby. When I was younger, he used to work as an engineer at a warehouse a couple of hours away, helping to fix up and move vintage arcade games in exchange for taking some of these machines home with him. He would receive them neglected and battered after years of disuse and painstakingly restore them to their original condition. Many times he had to rewire and fix the internal mechanics of the machines, search for rare replacement parts online, and re-render and print the cabinet's art, all by hand.

Over the course of twenty years, my dad eventually accumulated and restored over 80 vintage arcade machines. He ended up setting up a building adjoining our own house and transformed it into an '80s style arcade. Space-themed carpet, black lights, retro memorabilia and posters, and the overlapping sound effects of arcade machines all helped to recreate the ambiance of a retro arcade. Although he had all of these games set up at the house, he still felt that something was missing. I remember him saying that it wasn't just the games that made the arcade atmosphere, but the people playing them. Because of this, he ended setting up events every few months where he would open the arcade up to the public, dubbed "Game Days." There was no admission, and all of the games were free to play.

Some of these Game Days blur together, but the one that occurred in August of 2008, when I was eight years old, stands out to me. It was probably one of the biggest turnouts we had, with over 150 people in attendance. Some of them had even come from as far away as Florida or even California. Most of the attendees were adults who had grown up during the '80s, there to reminisce on the hobbies of their youth. Some of the adults had brought their own children along to give them a chance to see the kinds of games they'd grown up with.

While the adults played arcade games together and reminisced, I hung out with some of the other kids. There was a small space underneath the stairs that we had claimed as the "Kids Fort", and we hung out there excitedly talking. I was really surprised to hear about how far some of the other families had driven. For them, it was a special event, but for me it was just my house. I remember leading a couple of the other kids around, showing off my favorite games and helpful tips. I proudly demonstrated my knowledge of how to open a machine and give yourself millions of credits (despite all of the games being on freeplay), or how to slide up the glass on the crane machine to get at the candy (which I was too weak to do by myself). The other kids were completely amazed by the arcade and couldn't believe I lived there. I was more excited just to hang out with other kids and talk about how cool my dad was.

At the end of the night, everyone was exhausted. It had been a long day full of running around playing video games. All of the guests started to pack up and leave, ready to make the long trek home. I said goodbye to all of my new friends and watched all of the cars slowly pull out of the driveway. All of the guests had gone home, but my siblings and I stayed. We were already home.

How sudden growing up felt to me. One moment I was a kid playing in my dad's arcade, and the next thing I knew it was just a memory.

My daughter's "Animal Crossing" arcade, "Luna City Jr"



THE GAMES OF LUNA CITY

Here is a list of every game I had in Luna City Arcade, and what each one meant to me. Every game in the collection was added for a reason, and almost all have very specific strong memories and emotions associated with them.

THE VIDEO GAMES



Armor Attack

Cinematronics, 1980

Like all of Cinematronics' "vector" games, I loved the amazing amount of details they put into this game, especially considering the extremely limited hardware. I don't remember playing this game in the arcade. I think my first experience with this game was actually at Home Amusements. It was one of the games I pulled out of a back room and got working.



Asteroids

Atari, 1979

The first game I ever owned, the graphics and tactile sensation of playing Asteroids is unmistakable. I remember playing this game at a local "Zayre" department store with my friend John Baker, who would donate quarters to me so I could play.



Asteroids Deluxe

Atari, 1980

Chuck E. Cheese. 1980. My father and stepmother had taken me there and gave me a LOT of tokens. I spent every one of them playing this game, carefully studying the detailed ship graphics. The cabinet was absolutely gorgeous, with the game screen appearing to "float" over a black-lit 3D graphic.



Basketball

Atari, 1979

Another game I never played in the arcade, but remembered seeing it. I bought it because I thought the cabinet was cool and the graphics looked neat.



Battlezone

Atari, 1980

I remember walking into “Time-Out 2” one day in 1980 and seeing an entire row of these for the first time. I played as much as I could afford. I remember being absolutely stunned by the 3D graphics and simulated physics. The periscope viewer, the controls, and blacklit background made an already insanely immersive game even more so. I had two of these machines in the arcade to simulate my first experience with the game.



Berzerk

Stern, 1980

As a huge fan of Battlestar Galactica, there was no mistaking the inspiration for the robots in this game, with their distinctive vocoded speech and moving “eye”.



BiPlane

Fun Games Inc, 1976

This game was actually donated to me. I took it in and repaired it because it was an EXTREMELY rare machine.



Burgertime

Bally/Midway, 1982

This is one of several examples of games I never played or liked, but bought to give people visiting on Game Days more variety. I bought this as an empty cabinet and purchased all the parts needed to restore it on eBay.



Centipede

Atari, 1980

I was never a huge fan of this game, but who can imagine an arcade without a Centipede?



Circus

Exidy, 1977

If I remember I bought this from CoinOp Warehouse on a whim because it looked “cute”. I vaguely remember seeing this in the arcades back in the day.



Crystal Castles

Atari, 1983

I first played this game at Dave Whittaker’s house. I loved the amazing pseudo 3D isometric graphics and the trackball control.



Defender

Williams, 1981

An unmistakable classic - Williams did game sound effects RIGHT. The game was also unmistakably hard, but the amazing sound effects and unique gameplay made this a must have.



Dig Dug

Atari, 1982

I loved this game’s adorable music soundtrack that only played as you moved your character around.



Discs of Tron (environmental cabinet)

Bally/Midway, 1983

Oh my god. This machine had everything. To play, you actually stood inside it. I remember first seeing this game at Time-Out. Being a huge TRON movie fan, this was a must-have for me. It is considered by most collectors to be one of the “holy grails” of arcade games.



Donkey Kong

Nintendo, 1981

I played this mostly at the little downtown mall when I was in high school. No arcade would ever be complete without the distinctive sounds of Donkey Kong playing in the background.



Dragon's Lair

Cinematronics, 1983

What can I even say about Dragon's Lair? It was SO different from everything that came before it. The animation was unrivaled, and I remember first seeing a row of these games at Time-Out 2, complete with TV sets on top so passers-by could watch the action. One of the things I loved the most about having this game in my arcade was the attract mode "trailer" that played every few minutes. It added so much to the arcade ambience.



Eliminator

Sega, 1981

Another game I first saw (and I think the ONLY place I ever saw it) at the little downtown mall I visited as a teenager in high school. Loved the color vector graphics and the massive explosion when you blew up the large enemy target.



Escape From the Planet of Robot Monsters

Atari, 1989

Coming in after the video game "crash", I remember this being one of the very few post-crash games that I actually liked. I played it first at Time-Out.



Football

Atari, 1979

The game all the "cool kids" would play at Time-Out. I don't think I ever played this in the arcades but it was such an iconic game.



Frogger

Sega, 1981

One of the seminal games of the '80s, of course I had this in my arcade. I can't remember where I first saw one. I got this from Lloyd during my time at CoinOp Warehouse. I remember he had a whole row of them in the warehouse.



Galaga

Bally/Midway, 1981

This is another of several examples of games I never played or even liked, but bought to give people visiting on Game Days more variety. People would always ask me "but do you have Galaga??" I hated this game, preferring its predecessor "Galaxian" (which ironically and sadly I never owned).



Gauntlet

Atari, 1985

A friend donated this machine to me. I remember unloading this machine from the house where he bought it and he let the machine go while taking it down some cement steps. It ended up landing on my arm, breaking it.



Gorf

Midway, 1981

I remember this game from the very back of the Time-Out 2 arcade. I thought it odd at the time with it being basically 4 games in one, but it grew on me to become one of my favorites.



Gravitar

Atari, 1982

I think the first time I ever saw one of these was at Home Amusements. I was fascinated by the "physics" aspect of it and the color vector graphics. It was like Lunar Lander on steroids.



I, Robot

Atari, 1983

Another latecomer to the arcade scene, I remember seeing this for the first time at Time-Out arcade. I was blown away by the shaded polygon graphics - a first in the industry. It went on to become one of my all time favorite games.



Joust

Williams, 1982

I remember seeing this game for the first time at the small strip mall arcade near my house. I remember it being a very unique game, having “flap” buttons instead of “fire” buttons. It was also cool that you could play with two players at the same time, either cooperatively or competitively.



Joust 2

Williams, 1986

The sequel to the game “Joust”, this game ramped up the cool-factor by allowing you to transform into different creatures with differing abilities.



Junkyard

Americoin, 1976

Not a video game, but a mechanical junkyard “claw” that you would operate to pick up little toy cars in the bottom of the machine and drop them into a hopper. The more cars you dropped into the hopper before the timer expired, the more points you got. It had an 8-track tape player that would play “junkyard” sound effects while playing the game.



Lunar Lander

Atari, 1979

Another of my all-time favorites, my friend John Baker and I would play this endlessly at Time-Out 2. I think we had more fun crash landing than actually playing the game properly.



Marble Madness

Atari, 1984

An even more latecomer to the arcade scene, I remember seeing this for the first time at Time-Out 2 arcade. The isometric graphics and stereo sound effects (an industry first) were mesmerizing to me. I also remember playing this game at the beach boardwalk arcades. This would go on to be one of my all time favorite games.



Missile Command

Atari, 1980

I don't remember where I first saw this game, but I remember there being one in the front of one of the local department stores.



Moon Patrol

Williams, 1982

That music. That magical music. It totally made the game. I first saw this game at one of the local strip mall arcades near my house. I remember getting this game on my Atari 800 home computer and playing it a lot.



Night Driver

Atari, 1976

Shakey's Pizza near my house had this one. I remember playing it - zooming through the course, and my brother saying "You're pretty good at that" which was saying something since I was universally bad at video games.



Omega Race (cockpit)

Midway, 1981

First saw and played the cockpit version of this game at a Flipper McCoy's arcade during one of our annual beach trips with my mother. Beautiful cabinet.



Pac-Man

Midway, 1980

The mother of all arcade games. I played this endlessly at the little downtown mall arcade. I remember getting a book with all the patterns in it and managed to memorize the first few levels, but after that I would be totally lost.



Paddle Battle

Allied Leisure, 1973

I don't ever remember seeing this in the arcade but bought it from CoinOp Warehouse because of the groovy cabinet. It was basically one of hundreds of Pong knockoffs that came out at the time.



Paperboy

Atari, 1984

I don't really remember much about this game in the arcades, but at some point I bought this and fell in love with the gameplay.



Phoenix

Centuri, 1980

I remember seeing this at Shakey's Pizza and thinking the graphics "sucked", but bought it for nostalgia's sake. It was actually pretty fun.



Pole Position II

Atari, 1983

"Prepare to qualify!" - every single place that had arcade games of any sort had at least one Pole Position. I always liked Pole Position II better because of the different track options. And of course the cockpit version made it even cooler.



Pong

Atari, 1972

This was the very first arcade game I ever saw or played. It was in the lobby of a hotel where me and my parents were staying in 1973.



Primal Rage

Atari, 1994

This game was sort of an oddball in my arcade. Being both a '90s game and an "fighting" game, which I refused to have in my arcade. But the gorgeous stop-motion dinosaurs wooed me over to the dark side. This was one of my kids' favorite games in the arcade.



Punch Out!!

Nintendo, 1984

I hated this game, but had to have it in my arcade for the constant blare of “Body blow! Body blow!” coming from the machine. I remember hearing that sound at Time-Out 2.



Q*Bert

Gottlieb, 1982

Saw this for the first time at a local strip mall arcade. Loved the isometric graphics and the overall “character” the game oozed. I was also delighted by the pinball “knocker” solenoid that would hit the bottom of the cabinet when the characters fell off the gameplay pyramid.



Qix

Taito, 1981

Never one of my favorites, but I recall seeing this at some random arcade. I can't even remember where.



Race Drivin'

Atari, 1990

Another '90s game. I believe I was working at Home Amusements when this game came out, and saw it in some local arcade. The realism of not just the graphics, but the physics of the car were, at the time, amazing.



Reactor

Gottlieb, 1982

I sucked at this game but the soundtrack that blared when you pushed any button on the machine while in attract mode kicked ass.



Rip Off

Cinematronics, 1980

I can't remember where I first saw this game, but I do remember being fascinated (as with all the Cinematronics games) by the hyper-detailed vector graphics.



Scramble

Konami, 1981

I first saw this game at a small mall arcade when I was living with my father. I think the reason I bought one for the arcade was that I played it a lot on my Atari 800 computer.



Sea Wolf

Midway, 1976

I definitely do not remember where I first saw this game, but I do remember loving the immersive periscope viewer and "heads-up display".



Space Encounters

Midway, 1980

This was another game I first saw during one of our annual beach trips with my mother. I remember thinking how much of a Star Wars rip-off it was, with its obvious reference to the Death Star trench. But once again nostalgia won out.



Space Fury

Sega, 1981

I remember this game from some department store near our house whose name escapes me. I remember thinking the talking alien head was “dumb”, but this game eventually became one of my favorite games.



Space Invaders

Midway, 1978

There was a point before Pac-Man came out when I was in love with Space Invaders. Every arcade had one. I played it every chance I got!



Space War

Vectorbeam, 1977

A truly pioneering game, it was the first vector game ever. It had a “sister” game called (subtly different) “Space Wars”. They were both the exact same games, but produced by different companies at the same time. I originally started with a Space Wars machine but sought out the rarer singular version of the game, which was much smaller and had cooler artwork. My friend John Baker and I played Space Wars endlessly at Time-Out 2.



Sprint 2

Kee Games, 1976

I saw this game for the first time at an ice-skating rink my mother took me to in the late '70s. I didn't play it at the time, but loved the cartoony little 8-bit cars.



Star Castle

Cinematronics, 1980

Cinematronics definitely knew how to make additive and compelling games with lovely vector graphics. This was yet another example. I can't recall where I first saw this game.



Star Trek
Sega, 1982

Another game that my friend John Baker and I played. Our favorite part of the game - the photon torpedo into a dense minefield, setting off a chain reaction of explosions. Pure joy. Great color vector graphics.



Star Wars
Atari, 1983

I don't think I actually played this back in the day, but when CoinOp Warehouse had one come through with the more-desirable larger monitor, I snatched it up. By that time it had become another "holy grail" machine so I figured I had to have it.



Stargate
Williams, 1981

The sequel to "Defender", I bought this to compliment my Defender machine. I was bad at Defender, and worse at Stargate. But again, the visual overload and sound effects were amazing.



Starship I
Atari, 1976

I remember this as the "Star Trek" machine that I first saw in a smoky Time-Out in the late '79s. With its Star Trek looking spaceships, huge cabinet, amazing black-lit cabinet graphics, I had to track one down. Nostalgia does that.



Stunt Cycle
Atari, 1976

Every other weekend after my parents divorced I would ride a bus to visit my father for the weekend. The bus stop where I would get dropped off by my father had one of these. I almost instinctively smell cigarette smoke when I remember this game.



Super Shifter
Allied, 1974

Another game that the "cool kids" would play at Time-Out in the late '70s. More of an electro-mechanical game than a video game, I loved the pure essence of the '70s that this game had. Mine was a project machine that sadly I never got a chance to start restoring.



Super Zaxxon

Sega, 1982

“Let’s take Zaxxon and make it impossible to play”, the designers must have been thinking. I got this from CoinOp Warehouse because I was a huge fan of the original Zaxxon game.



Tac/Scan

Sega, 1982

Another game I bought from CoinOp Warehouse. I don’t remember this game from the arcades at all, but bought it because it was in near-mint condition.



Tail Gunner 2

Exidy, 1980

Probably my all-time favorite game. I played this forever at Time-Out 2 arcade. I loved the cockpit version of the game but found that the upright version was actually easier to play.



Tank

Kee Games, 1974

Another game I don’t remember from the arcades but bought it because it was basically an arcade version of the Atari 2600’s “Combat”.



Tempest

Atari, 1981

The first time I saw this game was at Time-Out 2. I didn’t play it at the time but simply stared, astonished, at the screen of the first ever color vector game.



Toobin’

Atari, 1988

This game I actually discovered after I started collecting. I loved the weird cabinet, the cool marquee water “animation” effect, and it was FUN!



Touch-Me

Atari, 1974

I was a huge fan of the tabletop electronic game “Simon” when it was released, and bought this for historical purposes since Ralph Baer, creator of the Simon game, would later go on to base Simon on Touch-Me.



TRON

Bally/Midway, 1982

The sheer beauty of a fully restored TRON machine is something to behold. Arguably one of the prettiest arcade cabinets ever made. I first saw this game at a small strip mall arcade near my house, before the movie was even released. Wendy Carlos’ iconic soundtrack music, incorporated into the game, just added to the entire package.



Video Pinball

Atari, 1978

I definitely remember playing this in the arcade, but cannot recall where. Atari did a great job way back in 1978 of creating realistic ball physics for this game, which “projected” the black and white graphics onto a blacklit three-dimensional fake pinball playfield.



Wizard of Wor

Bally/Midway, 1981

I actually bought this game because of my brother. It was his favorite game. When one came through CoinOp Warehouse I got it sort of as a tribute to him. I ended up loving the game.



Zaxxon

Sega, 1982

WAY back when I was working at Hardees as a teen, I remember there being a small arcade behind the restaurant, and seeing this game for the first time. Again, isometric graphics are always cool. Remember that.

THE PINBALL MACHINES



Baby Pacman

Bally, 1982

I don't have any specific memories of this game but as with anything Pac-Man related, I wanted one. It was a super weird hybrid of pinball and video game, but it was actually really fun. Keeping it working was not fun.



Black Hole

Gottlieb, 1981

Time-Out 2 at Springfield Mall. The first pinball machine I ever thought was actually "cool".



Centaur

Bally, 1981

My coworker/boss Ron Duane owned one of these machines. I grew to adore this game watching him play.



Close Encounters of the Third Kind

Gottlieb, 1978

I got this game for free when I worked at AOL. It had been sitting, broken, for a couple years in a small "gameroom" area of the building. When I asked about it I was told I could have it.



Eight Ball

Bally, 1977

After the Washington post article about my arcade came out, some random person contacted me and said I could have this game for free if I collected it, which of course I did. I remember seeing this, along with the Stunt Cycle, at the bus station near my father's house.



Flash Gordon

Bally, 1981

I remember this game from the bowling alley my father would take us to on the weekends we spent with him. I bought it pretty much because of the attract mode sound "Emperor Ming Awaits!".



Haunted House

Gottlieb, 1982

The game I worked on my first day at Home Amusements. Sort of a sister game to "Black Hole", this game had no less than 3 levels and 8 flippers. I got mine "home use only", meaning it had never been in an arcade or location. It looked as if it had just been taken out of the crate.



Mr & Mrs Pac-Man

Bally, 1982

Another machine I got simply because of the association with Pac-Man. Mine was a project machine that I sadly never got to.



Super Mario Bros

Gottlieb, 1992

I bought this more for my kids than myself, but ended up liking it quite a lot.



Whirlwind

Williams, 1990

I was briefly in a bowling league when I worked at Home Amusements. I remember being hot and sweaty after a game and playing this machine. When the top fan kicked on it was so refreshing. I remember thinking - I definitely need to get one of these one day.

OTHER MACHINES



Bill Changer

Rowe

I wanted an authentic arcade experience, so I got two vintage bill changers and rigged them up to dispense quarters when pushing a button. Then you'd use the quarters to play the games.



Rowe Bill Changer

Rowe

I wanted an authentic arcade experience, so I got two vintage bill changers and rigged them up to dispense quarters when pushing a button. Then you'd use the quarters to play the games.



Candy Crane

"The Challenger" by A.G.E.

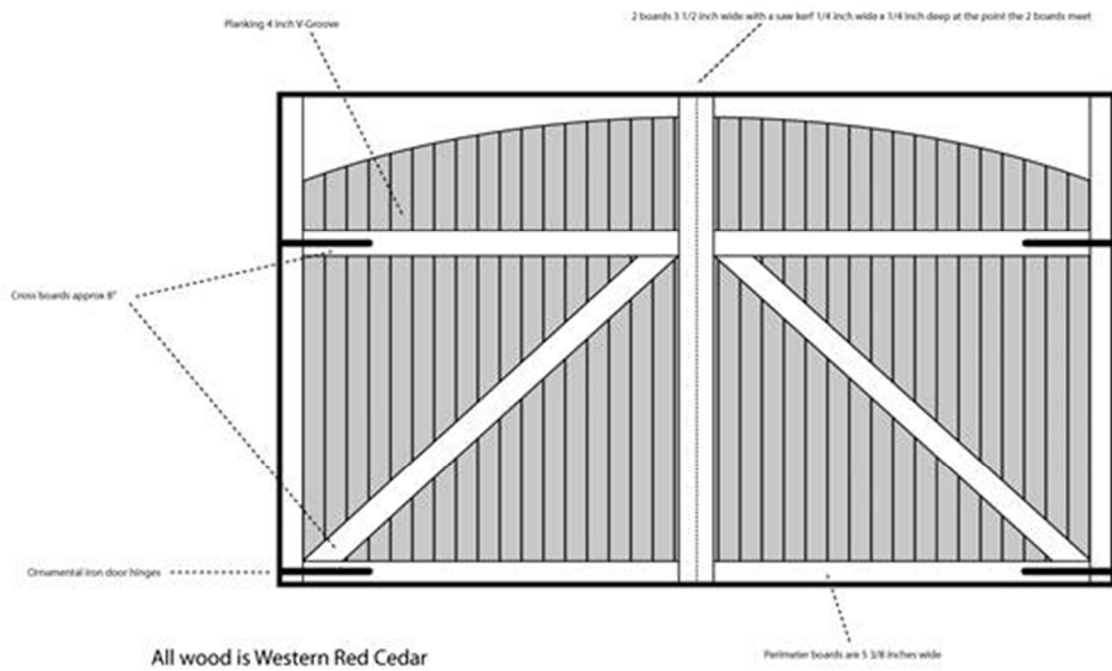
I bought this to entertain my kids and kept it full of different kinds of candy. When the staff of ThinkGeek came out for a private Game Day, they brought all sorts of cool things to fill it with (plastic zombies, etc).

LUNA CITY CONSTRUCTION PHOTOS









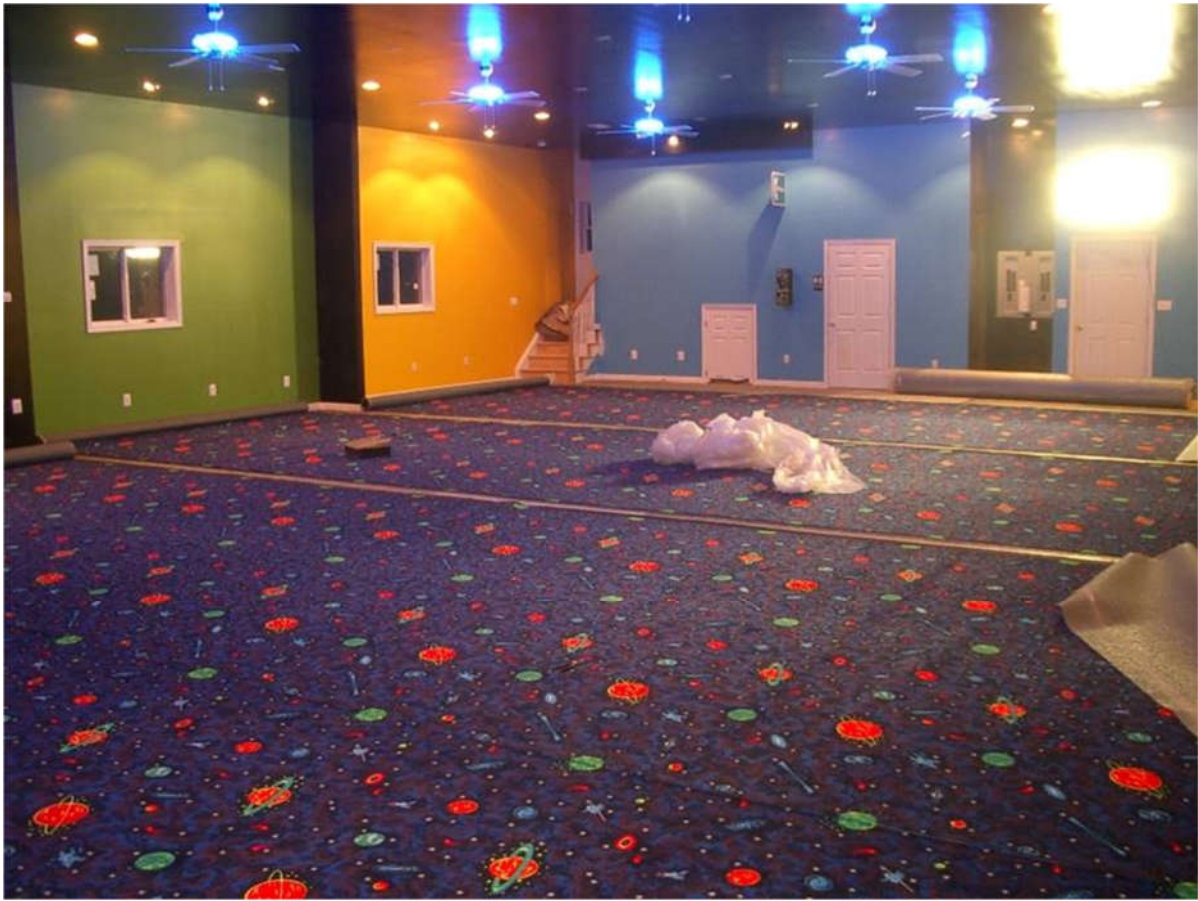














LUNA CITY ARCADE TRIVIA

The Luna City Arcade that I ended up building was actually supposed to be a temporary stepping stone. I had originally designed a MUCH larger building with a pinball room at the entrance, a massive video game area behind that, a repair shop, a mezzanine with more games overlooking the main room, a snackbar, and a theater.

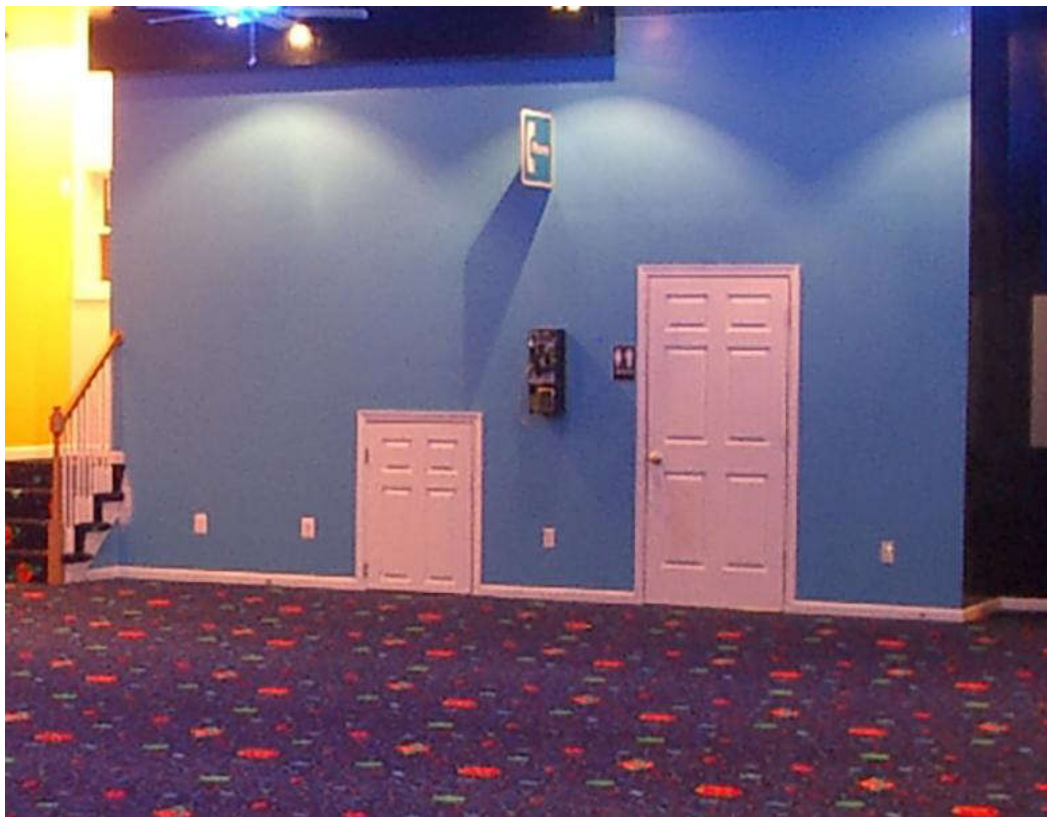
I ordered so much black light carpeting that the mill actually had to make a special run just for me so that they'd have enough from the same run to fill the arcade.

The arcade building was the same size as our house - 40' x 60' (2400 sq ft on the main floor) and had a second story. Construction of the building took just over 1 year.

Luna City had two 400amp breaker panels to power all the games, which maxed out the transformer feeding our neighborhood.

Many of the posters in Luna City were shipped to Canada for use in the production of the 2010 film TRON: Legacy. The film also used a modified version of my "House Rules" sign artwork.

The small door pictured here led to a "kids fort" I built for my children. I made the door short so only kids could get in. They loved it!



The upstairs of the arcade housed a "mini museum" of vintage computer systems.



Luna City Arcade used 40 blacklight bulbs at a cost of around \$800 just for the bulbs.



THE GUESTBOOK

When I first opened the Luna City 2.0 building I thought it would be a cool idea to have a guestbook that visitors could sign. I love how it turned out!

Game day April 30th 2008

Luna City Arcade

CHRIS ALCOTT - www.zfcamaro.com

CON Russell } Alexandria, VA

Keith Russell } -

Abby Russell }

James Trizanny - EA Mythic

Michelle Urschel Fairfax, VA

Wayne Aiken Raleigh, NC

Alison & Rich Wickersham (Oak Hill)

Josh & Erica Harrison - Reston VA

Richard Conover Manassas Va

KATHIE CONOVER Front Royal

Keith Thornton - Baltimore MD

Steve Treichel - Vienna VA/LA, CA

Andy Treichel - Falls Church, VA

Tim Wooldridge Hart, VA

BRYAN & HEATHER WENDELN RALEIGH, NC

BRYON THOMPSON PHILADELPHIA, PA

PETE AUSTIN PHILADELPHIA, PA

ED Sikorski NEWTOWN, PA

Jon Girard, Alexandria VA.

Ed Storzuk, Ashburn VA

Keith Shufflett, Winchester, VA

Sara Schramburg, Winchester, VA

Jon Elch, VA

Jody Radowicz VA

ROBERT BURT VA

James Water, WVA

David Stanley, Manassas VA

Noelle Stanley, Manassas, VA - Anesanel!

Matt Billings Washington VA ☺

Chris Jones Washington, DC

ANDREW WISEMAN	WASH DC
Carl Haines	Leesburg VA
Eric Sheppard	Centreville VA
DAN MORIZ (visit #2!)	ARLINGTON VA
Ben Glover	Winchesters VA
Stephen Brandon	Alexandria VA
Ben Cummings	Arlington VA
Alan Davies	Fairfax VA
Allan Raymond	Kingdon VA
DON BAILEY + KIDS	PENN LAIRD, VA
SHARON RAE Pettigrew	Alex VA
JAMES HUNT	RALEIGH, NC
Megan Furr	Orlean, VA
Derek Wojciech	South Riding, VA
VICTOR HESS	Berryville, VA
Donna Hess	Berryville, VA
Jason Poffenberger	Kearneysville, WV
Laura "	"
Justin "	"
Jessica "	"
Rachael "	"
Ashley Sorgensen ③	Front Royal VA
Jeffrey Bohberg	Front Royal VA Here
Ryan Cheatham	Evington, VA
Chris McCubbin	New Market, MD
Scott & Ryan Hanson	Herndon, VA
ADAM GUBS	DC
Paul King	Baltimore MD
Jay Wright	Wash DC
Alex Markson	Silver Spring MD

Tony Primerano Potomac MD;
Howie Umran (2nd time) Vienna, VA Thanks!

Josh Harrison josharris01@gmail.com
THANK YOU! THIS ROCKS!

John Ross growhister@hotmail.com
Silver Spring Md.

Conner Morgan con.morgan@gmail.com

Delighted as Always -
Jason Scott Waltham, MA

Mike Barbier Arlington, VA
"Devil Boy"

Thanks for the memories!
80s forever...
Darren and Irma
Vienna, VA

Aspen's 8th Birthday Party

mom Edinburg, VA

April Cox Linden VA

4/12
ALEX Hirschberg AWESOME!

JOE MARCO

Mike Kinsler Wizard of War rocks!
Maggie Kirschberg Webkinz,
Bkemonand LPS rock!

Jen Rhoton

Thank you for the wonderful
birthday Trip! Amy Crowder
April 26, 2008

THANKS MUCH +

& GIVE THE 'OL BIPLANE
A GOOD HOME!

FRAN

Brian Laffer
Brings back memories that
I'll never tell.

THANKS AGAIN!
YOU MADE MY YEAR!!

HUMBERTO AMADOR
AKA "OS PAURA"

CENTRA / DARPA
Game Day
10 May 08

Alex Hirschberg

Ryan Thompson

Chris Thompson

~~SAJ~~ and Alan & Ethan
5-10-08

Thanks for everything (but mabeey once
and a while fell the candy machine) Magaceta

Mike Hickey

Alex Hall

Chris Hall

Dave & Mary Hall

Don, Karla, Cassie + Wyatt Pruefer

Folena Family (5)

Brian Gottlieb

Scott, Sue, Walker ; Sydney Morris

Kikkio >w< NYEE!

Scott and SUE MORRIS

~~✗~~

FRED & VICIE KENNEDY

+ BRENDAN (12) + AIDAN (7)

fred.kennedy@darpa.mil

Jane De Zalla

Jeff Von Ward

Christine ~~29~~ 29-May-2008 "ZFCAAARO"

Nemo 11th Birthday

Zaw Labierre (Nemos classmate)

Austin King

Blake Cockrell

Think Geek! 6-21-08

Pete Welsch - Thanks so much!
This really takes me
back...

Brian Coats - Fairfax VA

Janelli J. Italian
"so cool!"

Thank you!!

Peter.

Amazing Arcade!! Thanks for
having us here! Jerry

Nice job Peter. Dream come true!

Paolo

Joe Hood, Ann Ditcher

Liam, Mark, Brian

Ann Arbor

Nice!

A Geek's Heaven

Jennifer P

AMAZING!! YOU DID A GREAT JOB. NOW
TO GET SOME OF THAT GLOWING CARPET
FOR MY LIVING ROOM... 😊 Jen F.

THINKING TOO...

Hi Peter & Family!

THANKS SO MUCH FOR
PRESERVING SUCH AN
AWESOME COMPONENT
OF GEEK CULTURE!!

WILLIE
THINKGEEK

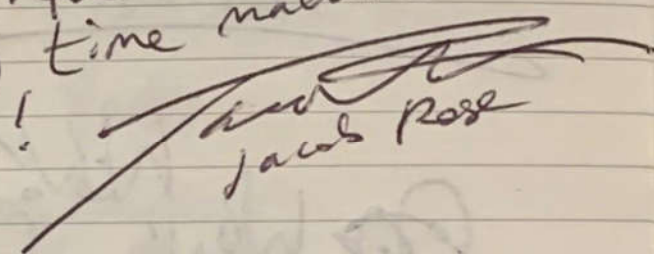
Wow! Thank you so
very very much
for such a nice
time at your most
wonderful arcade!
Wow! (!!!!
.....etc)

Hans F.

This is ^{Also} Thinkgeek
freaking amazing
Somehow I'm not as good
at Sea Wolf as I was when I
had to stand on a box to play ~~jeop~~

Thanks so
much for
extending the ThinkGeek
day to friends! This is a
step back in time!
Cool - friends
Geek!

Julie & Peter - thanks for
opening the doors to your
private time machine to all
of us!


Jacob Rose

Thanks for having us.

Great set up.

Patrick and Joseph
Hood

So awesome! Thank you
for having us!
Friends o ThinkGeek!

Wow, memories! Thanks!!

Great Place! Thanks for letting us play!
Andy

IF YOU DONT MIND SOMEONE LIVING HERE,
PLEASE CONTACT ME. I'M ON MYSPACE.

THANKS! Alan

RANDY + GAIL Kitchin!

Happy Birthday!

Frank + Alison Truslow - Happy B-Days, Val!

Donnie, Diana + Jeremy Orze

Andrew, Traci + Tom Darrow

Great Place!!!

Daniel, Dolly, Ariana & Daniel
McWilliams VERSAILLES, KY

Awesome!!

Ann McWilliam

Wow! I am Awe struck
Coming down the stairs -
from the Carpet to the ceiling
Such a Cool place -

Oh man - The 70's & 80s
Love again!!

This rocks! Brings back
good memories. This is
AMAZING! ☺

Amanda & Josh Kemp
Robin Blake, ~~Mark~~
Better Than Dan & Busters!

Thanks for having us for
Valerie & Fred's birthday party!
Nate & Charity East

Sarah Akeas + Tim moy
Thanks for helping me
share part of my childhood
with my child.

7-19-08

Fred Ohs sweet!! thanks

ANDREW DARROW

CHARLES GIBBS

Brian Hepler thanks!

Matt Boone thanks for the invite!

Dave & Alexandra Skinley

All the way from Houston, Texas -
Thanks!!

Leah, Richard, & Natalee Veazey
(Luke Warren's family)

Brian and Heidi Cornell
Thanks

Awesome
☺

8-20-08 JBW

August 23 2008
Benefit GAME DAY

Colleen Haines

Dakota Puccio
Phillip Haines
Florence Hughes
Jim Mische
Sam, Laura, David + Audrey Blackburn

Michael, Alex & Abigale Verrecher
Brooke Medeiros
~~John B~~

Tom, Susan, Olin & Julia Wells
Nancy - very cool Gambrills, Md.

DAVE PERROTTA
221 HENSLEY PL. RUTHERFORDTON, NC
dperrotta72@bellsouth.NET

ADAM DE SANTIS
218 LAKELAND AVE K2
SAYVILLE NY 11782

X360 FAN 4 LIFE @ optonline.NET

Ed & Ruth Lawless
Dallas, NC

The Shaffers
411 Meghan Drive
Woodstock, VA 22664

Zoe + Evvie

ANKUR PATEL
12 Crenshaw Dr
FLANDERS, NJ 07836

CHRIS GORDON
POTOMAC FALLS VA 20165

Cassandra & Barry Brickner
141 Revell Rd.
Fredericksburg, VA 22405
Thanks Hirshbergs!

Jim & Jean Jalbit
"What a blast from the past"
Thank You ☺
174 Pee Wee Ln
Linden VA 22642

DON + AMANDA BAILEY
w/ RACHEL + AIDAN !
beetle@geekspeed.net

Andy Treichel tryks67@yahoo.com
Wheeeee!!!!

RUTH ERICKSEN
602B MAIN STREET
GAITHERSBURG, MD 20878

GEOFF KOVAR "FOSSEL" 30 ARCADE
MIKE MCGINN "MIKE-BO'S"
109 LIGHTHOUSE LANE
WINCHESTER, VA 22602

SUE MCCLAIN
5356 TAYLINGTON PL
COLUMBIA, MD 21044

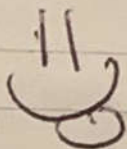
JAMES HUDSON
5670 COMPTON LANE
ELDERSBURG, MD 21784

Darren Jones and son Stuart
116 Button Bush Ave.
Stephens City VA 22655

Rob Whitney Very Cool!!
Millersville, MD

Heather Lewis
Annapolis, MD
"Radical!"

Traci Duane
"Ronald Duane's
daughter"
your place is AWESOME!!



Rachel Duane - (Rev Duane's Beer)
Jen Snyder says
"this place is the
oasis in the desert!"
Thank you

one word: Tempest
- Bey Mink

Tom

Dotdown

Awesome! Joan, Elvira
Charlotte Terry

I had so much fun!

-cholee

Alex had fun too

~~Alex~~

Steve
Bammer

Zachary Jenkins

- Zach Jenkins
(Bruce's son)

Andrew Moore & Family (Mossy, Alex (10),
- Fairfax, VA Christina (17))

Avi Gold
Alexandria VA

This arcade is
amazing!

Thank you so much! 😊
Susan E. Treeman
Fairfax, VA

MARCO'S MY FAVORITE 13 AGO WITH THANKS.
Robyn S. Young ☺

Evan Grumetell / April Ferguson
Woot! Joust! 😊 Thanks
Newport News, VA

Craig Accoun + Liz Busch
Picnic ND, VA Simply AMAZING!!!

Richard + Katie Conover
Manassas Virginia

Gilles Melanson, Reston Va
(FSPA'er) - what a
wonderful collection

Jeff Kinder
AWB SOME
PACB!!!

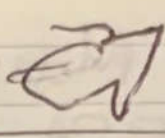
Ben Cummings, Arlington VA
Pipertirschberg ^w^

David Cowover
Guthrieburg MD

WOW! Defender, ROBOTRON, GACAGA,
GUITAR + SO MUCH MORE -
I'M IN HEAVEN! THANK YOU!
PETE (P. AWA, P.S. PSAM) SHAW
LEESBURG, VA

Tim Woldridge
~~Joe Ben~~
Vanessa Wilcox-Ducery

Stephen Halvo
Strasburg, VA

Anna Shaw 

Love it

Thanks so much!

Todd MacDermid


BLAKE CHEATHAM



Ron Duane

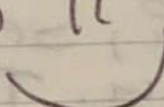
the best of times!!!

Lawrence B. Louky

Brandon Ketola

EMMA  BOB

Zoe  Yanni 

Noelle Stanley, Manager,
8/23/08 "  WA

Pat Grooten

James J. Lewis

Young Marine Emily
Lunde, your place
is awesome thanks
for lending your land
for the fund raiser
We love the Arcade,
it's awesome THANK YOU

Richard, Elena, and Sonia Goedeken

Edward W. Don Belt MD

Still loving it!

-Choke

Rock out 80's
style

Hey Peter,
Randall here, sent i.e.t
on the KLOU forum. Thanks
for another great time!

randall5200@yahoo.com

Randall

Hey Bob,

Thomas Hirschberg

Bryan & Heather Wendler

Raleigh, N.C.

- Had a fantastic time!

Reagan Heller, Pittsburgh, PA

Thanks so much!

Thanks for letting us come & play!

Erik

insidegamers.com

Baltimore, MD

-ZF-


Wayne Aiken

Raleigh, NC

Great Arcade!


Bill Quinn 8/23/88

Thanks, This was
great! CLASS OF
80

Steve Audin  &
Reagan Heller
Pittsburgh, PA

Peter & Everyone who helped
build & run
this place

Thanks for allowing us to
visit this killer road.
Absolutely love it. Congrats

Dylan Marchi 

Awesome Stuff

I know so much

100% SHARON

100%

"Be careful with your pen!"

Kick butt!

can't wait for the
next one!

Thank you!

Mike Baker

SO MUCH FUN!

— THANKS PETER
FOR EVERYTHING.

— MARC
ARENA
(BURKE, VA.)

Molly
Jenna

John & Beverly
McCord

Jacob Ammons
Jessica Ammons
Jenna Ammons

Awesome Place !!!

9-7-08

Garrett Dean 9-13-08

Awesome
RACKON

Thank You so much for
a wonderful Early Release
Day! You guys are great

The First Baptist
Church

Mike + Michelle Roberts
59 Elsie Dr.
Kearneysville, WV 25430

Thank you Peter

So cool!

Cliff + Joanne

McMAHON

PORT CHARLOTTE

FL. WOW!!

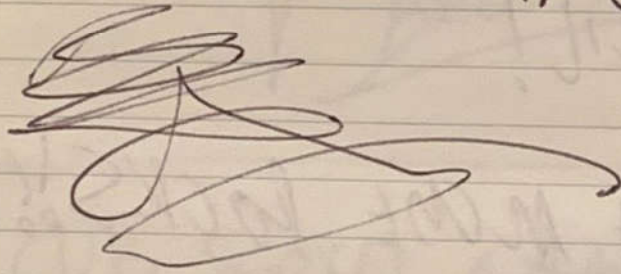
molly

Jessica Ammons
this was not pmb
Molly Debolt

Julia Duvier
Autumn

JENNA

Samantha ZKT Ghaol



9/27
Holly Roberts III

Karalea Harrigan

10/4/08 Rosemary Manlove
(Aunt Rose) Lanesville, IL
Cool, dude!!

November 20th, 2008

Peter, you're such a nice person and I thank you very much for opening that wonderful "grown up playground" to receive a visitor from BRAZIL!

LUNA MORE ROCKS!!!

Never shut it down!

don't let people tell you're too adult for that! lol

Regards, Antonio Barba


11 / 20 / 08

Peter, parabéns por
sua espetacular coleção e
por seu excelente bom gosto.

Abraços,
Juliano Gusso Figueiredo
BRASIL

CUB SCOUT GAME DAY
1-24-09

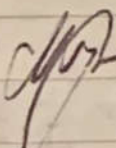

Ryan and
Christian Thompson

Sarah, Garren, Bryce: Mason Rust
Claire  Finn Cardiff
Dylan Lars, ~~At~~ Mom! (Nic)

Dan, Tara, Piper O'Donnell
dan 27205@hotmail.com

Warren & Jan McQueary ^{Thanks!}
Arlington, VA ^{This was}
Great!

Steve Voss (William John)
fantastic! Thanks!

David Thorp
Great Time! John Thorp
Jonathan Wilson
M:  Maggie 

Game Day April 24 2009

Young Marines benefit

JOE KACE - CRYSTAL LAKE, IL

Mike Woods Johnsburg IL

Meghan Horner
Hi!

CHILTON W. HOFFMAN

SEVERN, MD

THANKS FOR KEEPING THE MEMORY ALIVE!

Tim Wooldridge Hart, VA

This is too cool! DAN HUTCHINS,
FAYETTEVILLE, NC

SAL VENANZIO WINCHESTER VA

JIM VENANZIO

DAVID FERROTTA NC

Thank you!!!

ADAM DESANTIS BY
THANKS SO MUCH!!

Paul Galvanek psg@pitt.edu
Pittsburgh

Chris Fineburg Pittsburgh

Randy Thomas, ELKTON MD

Joshua Thomas, Dover, DE

Ron Duane Silver Spring Md
Always a pleasure to see you P+S !!

Andrew DiCello Silver Spring, MD
1st time Amazing!

AMBER & BOBOY WOOD BOWIE, MD
IT'S SO FUN .. THANKS!

Heather Corrant-Cardwell
Penther Glen, VA

John + Jacobs MacLeod
Woodbridge VA

Daniella Koontz ~~THANK~~ YOU'S

Deland, FL

am I the furthest guest?!"

Dave and Iris Oranchak

Roanoke VA

oranchak.com

Franklin and Mary Beth Bowen

Leonardtown, MD

-WOW! Thanks for sharing
your treasures!

Mark Hewitt & Ben Hewitt

Gainesville, VA

Great Set up - thanks.

Michael Shaffer

411 Mountain Drive

Woodstock VA 22664

THANKS
SO MUCH!

Chris & Larra Nolan

2210 Meadow Trail Lane

West Friendship, MD 21794

2½ hour drive is
worth it every time!

Tom Williamson

515 Smoke Tree Ln

Lynchburg VA

Joe, Stephanie & Sam Brewer
Mt. Rainier, MD

BEST ARCADE EVER!

The Mathews Family... Mike,
Mary, Katie, & Jack
Ruther Glen, VA

JAMES HUDSON Eldersburg, MD
THIS IS SWEET!

PAUL POKOS SYKESVILLE, MD.
THANKS - GREAT TIME!

Eric Cardwell
thanks this is Amazing!!

Brad Ginn excellent collection!

MIKE McGinn (MIKE-80's)

Keith Shufflett (3rd time here!)

DAVID ROGERS 1ST TIME!!

Richard Conover Herndon, Va
3rd Time
Thanks!!! 😊

Andrew & Julianna Gaffner
3885 Forest Glen Rd, VB, VA

Wayne Aiken - Raleigh NC

Ashley Eddie Zimeley

9706 53rd Avenue
College Park MD 20740

Jennifer Nagy Ashburn, VA
Daniel Nagy
Laurie Glan Washington DC

Jennifer Burgess
Middletown VA 22645

Gary and Josh Mosholder

Garrett Weber
McLean, VA

Matthew Hirschberg and Family
Stanley Hirschberg, M.D. and family.

Nate Bwalden
Des Moines, IA

THIS place is a time warp!

☺ DREW WALLNER

Rikki TISSIER

LYNCHBURG VA + LONDON UK

Pat George

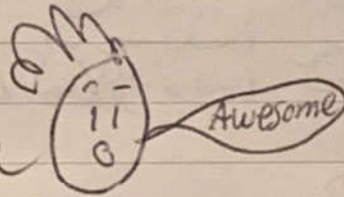
Manassas, VA

Christina Wick + Elizabeth VanMetre
McLean, VA

Todd & Alex Brannan
Burke VA

Go

Y.M Cpl Ketta



Mark Stewart
Bethesda, MD This rocks!

Someone A large, stylized signature or scribble.

Ryan W

Silver Spring, MD

Ed

Melinda Pfister

Lauren

BILL QUINN, MANASSAS

VIC TORTORA, SILVER SP.

STEVE BAUMLER, HERNDON

Thank you Peter!

Ryan Cheatham Evington, VA



I love you, Peter!

Rhuel Adams, Epenburg, PA

Jonathan Green Appomattox, VA

Frank Cohen Warrenton, VA ^{Awesome} man!

Thanks for the great
game day!

-Chris, Angel + Eric
McCubbin

Had heard of your place, thanks for
the chance to live it.

The Huehn Family

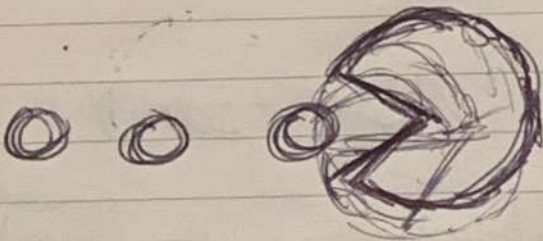
100 have great taste in music
Jimmy Corcoran

Awesome collection of machines!

楽しかった! =>

-SK

FANTASTIC Walk Down
Memory Lane! Thanks - Mark Gerl



I FINALLY MADE
IT TO GAME
DAY!!! VERY
Cool!! -CORY
LUCEL

you've made my
husband very happy!

The Parents

We enjoyed ourselves. Also got
to enjoy Linden again & the
apple donuts!! The Andersons.

its beautiful.

BNSTVNS@GMAIL.COM

Peter - Thank you so much for having a Public
Game day. I can't wait to make the
next one as well!
Rich Wietgosh

Ben Butcher COMPLETELY EPIC!!!

2nd time is even better! Tom W.

Loving it all the way from PA
Martin S.

Thanks so much -
Now my 10 year old
daughter will know
what an arcade
really is.

Discs of Tron Rocks!

Donny & Kaley

AWESOME! BROUGHT MY BROTHER, FROM
S.C., HE'S JUST BACK FROM IRAQ!
WOOT! THANKS! DON + AMANDA BAILEY

Thanks for having us - if still rocks!
- Joe & Julie Schuber

Thanks so much Peter! You're
my hero!
- Keith Wojciech

Thanks for a great day!
Dale + family + friends

THANKS FOR OPENING YOUR ARCADE
UP.

-PACIFIC

I SEE SOME OF MY GAMES (X-GAMES)
GETTING PUT TO GOOD USE. GREAT
PLACE YOU HAVE HERE. KEEP UP THE
GOOD WORK AND I'LL TRY TO KEEP
GETTING YOU THE GAMES YOU NEED.
IF YOU EVER NEED ANYTHING CALL!
Darryl

This brings back wonderful memories.

Janis Nendli + Paul Good

BLAST FROM MY PAST. GREAT TIMES
RAY ORTESA

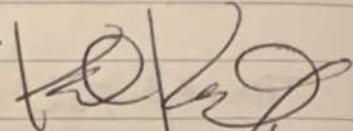
This has been the greatest
arcade experience ever!

Matthew
Knight

Thanks for the nostalgia trip!
4-25-09 Kyle Knight

WE CAME FOR SEAWOLF, WE STAYED
FOR TAILGATTER & SPRINT 2!

THANKS



I love to play Dragins
thank Marie

Thanks for having Game Day!
Our kids love it, and so do we.
Scott + Joan Tury (+ kids)

This has been so much fun!
Thanks for opening up your
home to so
~~many~~ many people - amazing!

Lauren from Bethesda, MD

I TAKE MY KIDS AND
SHOW THEM THIS AND
THEY ARE IN AWE. IT IS
VERY SIMILAR TO THE ARCADES
OF UPSTATE NEW YORK IN THE
80'S, EXCEPT THE GAMES ARE
ALL IN GREAT SHAPE.

Many thanks & God Bless
Pete, PJ, Anna, Jenna, Alec.
Liam

CARLISLE CHILDRESS

It even smells like I remember
arcades smelling ☺

~~Ed~~

I loved the
original Qix game

~~Ed~~

THANKS PETER & FAMILY,
FOR OPENING YOUR HOME &
ARCADE

ch.

Peter,

We are so much alike, its
rediculous. I never thought I
would ever meet any one that puts
the same attention to details that
I do. I hope someday to make my
room as grand as yours.

Sincerely Your Prodigy,

Ed Lawless.

PS. You are going to have to come
down for one of my events! Take
care of the KA7200!

Peter,

You are like Mohamed Ali,
The Greatest!

But please fix your Sony
Hunter machine! It was
so wispy out!
Cheers!

Mike

Other than that, the game selection
was awesome that time.
most in such great shape!

Peter,

Brought my 13 & 14 year olds and
said welcome to 1983! They loved it.
Thanks for the memories

Richard

Thank You!!
The Turners

0001

AOL GAME

10-15-2009

PETER,

AMAZING COLLECTION OF MEMORIES
HERE. LUNA CITY IS A PORTAL IN TIME
TO MY PAST!

-RICHARD

Hi Peter,

Thanks for letting us come
and play your game collection.
It's amazing what you have.

Scott

This is awesome! Now I can
get Star Wars closer! Thanks
so much for having us out. -Dan

Thank you for letting us crash your
arcade - you Rock! Christine

Thanks pal! Sorry you were
not feeling well. We had a good
time! ~~Paul H~~

The Memories that this place
brings back from my youth
It's a magical thing! Thanks for
having the whole team out we
HAD FUN - Totally Dig GRAVITAR
-TODD

Thanks so much for letting
us share the games!

The Schettini Family

Great place, Great classics
Kevin + Elan Boe

Flashbacks!! (Y.M.)
HARRY + NATHAN BOWNALL

I feel 25 years younger as I walked in. I can not believe this. The most incredible retro place I have ever seen.

Mario - Jerry
Centennial Broadcast *My*

~~Don't Ask About~~ Don't Ask About
~~Just Kidding.~~ *ABack*

~~Atari Sign~~ ~~was~~ ~~Don't Ask About~~ All Back
Accepting responsibility for all of this
S Simon (ST) *My*

Will bring back (Wed)

Aspen's Birthday Party 17 April 2010
Emily W. Happy Birthday
Aspen. Hope it's your
Best yet! 10! Love!

Moomy - Hope ya get a
wand so I can Apparate with
you!

EPILOGUE

In 2014 I remarried. At the time of this writing my wife and I have 5 video games and 15 pinball machines in our modest, ever-expanding basement arcade. Our gameroom doesn't have a name. It doesn't feel substantial enough to actually name, but I doubt I would use "Luna City" again.

My wife and I have become almost exclusively interested in pinball only. I think that's a natural progression with collectors. Ben Thoburn recently joked, "*Video games are a gateway drug to pinball machines*". I think that's true.

There are still some video games I'd like to get back one day, in addition to the "Asteroids" and "Marble Madness", and "Tempest" machines we have in our basement, "Tail Gunner", "I, Robot", and "Pac-Man" being among them.

People constantly ask me if I'm ever going to create another Luna City. I just don't see it happening. The money just isn't there anymore and the price of games has skyrocketed since the days when I was first collecting. Luna City Arcade was a freak happenstance. A perfect storm of just the right ingredients.

It makes me sad that the two people who inspired me the most to create Luna City Arcade - Dave Whittaker and John Baker, never actually got a chance to visit the arcade.

But Luna City Arcade will live on in the hearts and minds of those who visited and even in those who didn't get the chance, and in all the ways it inspired and continues to inspire people of all ages.

That makes me happy, and I suppose that made it all worth it.





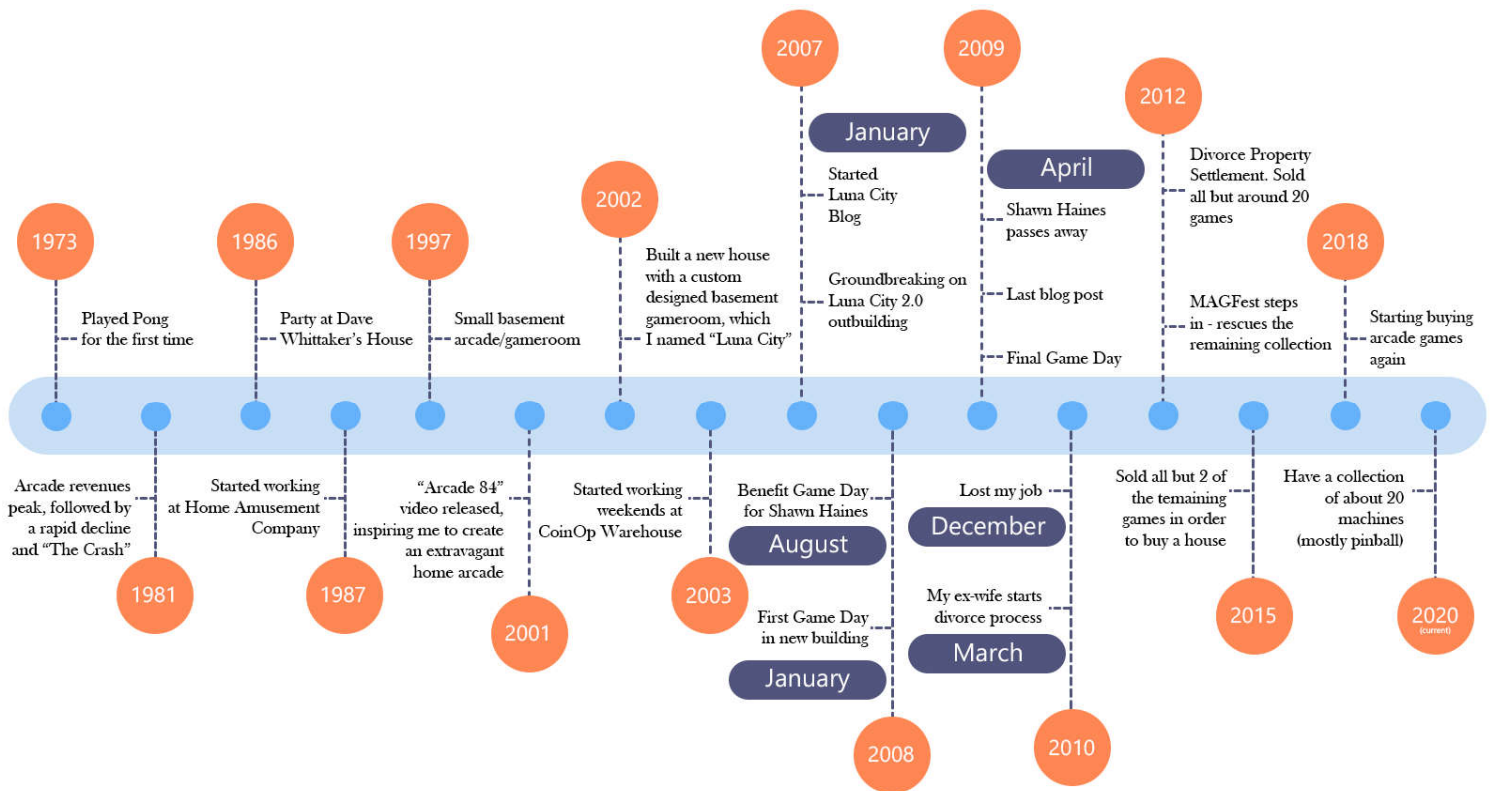






My wife working on one of her pinball machines

TIMELINE OF EVENTS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people for their contributions to make this book possible. THANK YOU!

My wife, mother, and kids

Adam DeSantis

Ben Thoburn

Bill Winters

Blake Patterson

Bruce Jenkins

Carl Haines & Family

Catherine DeSpira

Dave Whittaker

David Hernly

Jacob Rose

Jason Scott

Jeff Kinder

Jim Miller

John Baker

Lloyd and Sheree Thoburn

Mike Verrechia

Paul Good

Ron and Lori Duane

Todd and Alex Brannam

Van Burnham

Zachary Weddington