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Bowl Expo Preview: A-to-Z

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One Smart Guy

Whether it's running his 10 bowling centers or chairing BPAA's Smart Buy Committee, Andy Bartholomy is making a difference.

By Barry Sparks

In 1988, Andy Bartholomy took his first step into the bowling business when he purchased a 12-lane center in Marshfield, Mo. Today, he owns 10 centers in four states. Along the way, he has relied on the advice and experience of others. And he is quick to reciprocate.

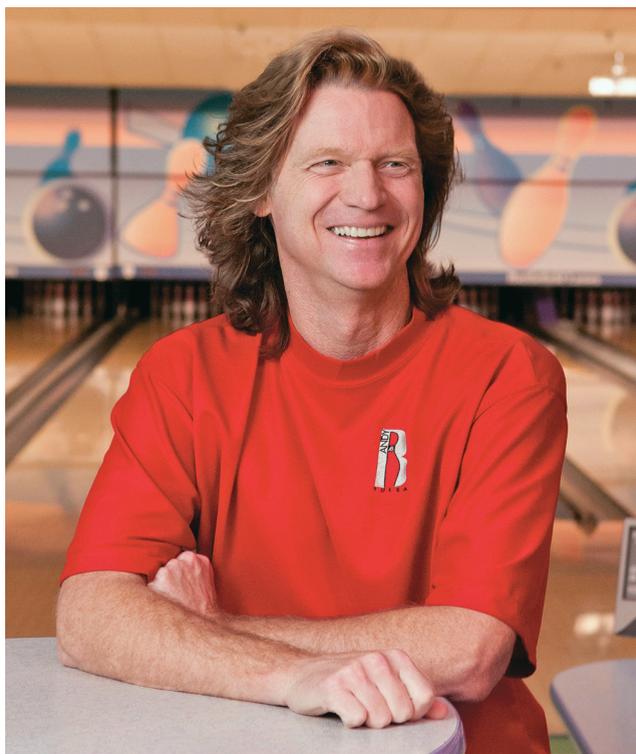
Bartholomy is a long-time member of the Multi Unit Bowling Information Group, and has served as MUBIG's Vice President. He also has served as Chairman of BPAA's Smart Buy Committee, and has actively participated in many FEC groups and conferences.

In recognition of his leadership as Smart Buy Committee Chairman and his enthusiasm for the sport of bowling, Bartholomy was named this year's recipient of the V.A. Wapensky Award, named for the BPAA's long-time Executive Director, "Chief" Wapensky.

"I'm humbled and appreciative to be named the Chief Wapensky Award winner," says Bartholomy. "The Chief was a great man, and I'm proud to be associated with him and his legacy."

As a long-time member and chair of the Smart Buy Committee, Bartholomy says he's proud of the work the group has done.

"The Smart Buy program has



Andy Bartholomy has grown his business from one 12-lane center to seven rehabbed traditional centers and three FECs. He also has found time to chair BPAA's Smart Buy Committee, leading to his selection as the 2017 V.A. Wapensky Award recipient.

evolved over the years," he says. "Today, it consists of more than 30 leading product suppliers, including Pepsi, Sysco, Office Depot, Live Oak Bank and Best Buy."

By combining the strength and number of BPAA-member centers, Smart Buy has been able to form partnerships with national account pricing, resulting in tremendous savings.

"Smart Buy savings add up, and it

pays to be a BPAA member," says Bartholomy. For example, last year, the National BPAA Pepsi Program paid out \$4.5 million in rebates to BPAA-member centers.

"I'm a big believer in belonging to BPAA," says Bartholomy. "The camaraderie and networking, along with the Smart Buy savings, are invaluable.

All proprietors could benefit from being a BPAA member."

Bartholomy believes the bowling industry is unique in its willingness to share information and success stories, and generally help one another.

"It's an amazing industry when it comes to sharing," he says. "A lot of people helped me in the beginning, and I want to help fellow operators. I believe we all understand the competitive nature of the business, but it's essential to help each other.

"As a BPAA member, there's always someone to call who has experienced the same problem [you may be experiencing]. You are not forced to come up with a solution on your own."

Bartholomy's business philosophy has served him well. His company, Bartholomy Bowling Centers, specializes in the procurement of centers that are downsizing or failing,

and transforming them into positive revenue-generating operations.

Bartholomy presently owns 10 bowling and entertainment venues in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri and Tennessee.

Seven traditional bowling centers are located in small to medium markets. These centers typically include amenities such as billiards, redemption games, food and beverage, as well as party and event rooms.

The company's second business model is called Andy B's. These three family entertainment centers are located in Tulsa, Okla.; Barlett, Tenn., and Springfield, Mo. The FECs have a much larger footprint and more attractions than the traditional centers. They feature go karts, laser tag, large redemption game rooms, expanded food and beverage menus, state-of-the-art meeting and party rooms, and their brand identifier: VIB Bowling — Very Important Bowler private, luxury bowling lanes.

The first Andy B's opened in Tulsa in 2007, and the second in Barlett in 2012. In 2015, Bartholomy spent \$4.4 million to renovate and expand Battlefield Lanes in Springfield into Andy B's Entertainment Center.

Converting traditional bowling centers into FECs elevates the simple concept of "upgrading" to another level. It can be challenging, according to Bartholomy, who stresses it's not always the right move for every center or community.

"I am, however, very optimistic about the future of FECs," he says. "The days of running double-shift leagues are long gone. This is a new and very different model."

Bartholomy regularly shares information about what works or doesn't work, whether it's at one of his FECs or traditional bowling centers. He says sharing information is part of his DNA.

"With 10 centers across four states, it's a giant team effort," he notes. "We are all working toward the same goal. I lean heavily on my managers. We pass along ideas from one center to another. We toss the bad ideas away and keep the good ones. I don't need to be the trailblazer. I don't need to have all the ideas."

Bartholomy says it's important to recognize opportunities, and take advantage of them, if you want to succeed. As an example, he recalled an

incident from the mid-1990s when he had a lane issue and was looking for a solution.

He attended Bowl Expo and was introduced to a glow additive for lanes. It was just being rolled out and no other proprietor had it. He could see the direct application of how he could use the glow additive to increase his late-night bowling business. He used it as a 9 p.m.-to-close promotion from Monday through Thursday for several years, and his late-night bowling business skyrocketed.

yourself, 'Does my center measure up? Does my center meet customers' expectations?' Be honest with yourself. Upgrades are important. You need to keep moving forward."

Ask Bartholomy what it is about his centers that makes him the proudest, and he will tell you it's the vital role they play in their communities. It also is a reason his enthusiasm for the game of bowling has increased over the years.

"I've seen firsthand how important the game of bowling is to communities," he says. "For many communities,

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"Communities with bowling centers are richer, and I don't mean that in a financial sense. Bowling centers and FECs help meet the needs of a community."

"I wasn't looking for that product," he points out. "But I could see the opportunity of how it could help me increase my business and put me on the cutting edge. It's also another example of why you need to attend Bowl Expo."

Pride of ownership and commitment are two cornerstones of Bartholomy's success. "There's a level of pride you have in owning a center. It's what makes you want to keep getting better," he says.

"And, when you join BPAA, you're saying you want to get better. You can take advantage of the collected knowledge and information of thousands of proprietors. Every proprietor needs to do the best he or she can. By raising the bar, we are helping the entire bowling community and making the industry stronger."

Part of commitment, according to Bartholomy, is taking a truly objective look at your center, which can be difficult.

"Look at other centers and ask

the bowling center is a focal point for the family. It plays a key role in the entertainment options, which can be limited in small and medium towns. Bowling helps families to spend time together, to bond and to connect.

"Communities with bowling centers are richer, and I don't mean that in a financial sense. Bowling centers and FECs help meet the needs of a community. Now, I have seen multiple generations at our centers. It's one of the reasons why we have to make sure the game is strong for the future."

Bartholomy admits he spends more time looking ahead than thinking about the past. He's constantly pondering how the landscape is changing and what needs to be done to survive and thrive.

"It's important to understand that change is going to happen with or without you, so you might as well explore taking advantage of the new opportunities that change is creating," he suggests.