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Neighborhood News

Pinball Wizards Can Hone Their Craft and Earn Their Own Machine at Showroom



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Modern Pinball Coming to Kips Bay

KIPS BAY — Pinball wizards, give it your best shot.

At **Modern Pinball**, a new pinball shop opening at 362 Third Ave. near 26th Street, if you play enough of the game, you can take home a pinball machine of your very own.

The showroom, which opens on Oct. 28, isn't an arcade that charges players for each game with tokens or quarters, but instead allows users to pay by the half-hour, hour, or day. In addition, players can count the money they've spent toward the purchase of a pinball machine, which can range in price from \$1,500 to \$12,000, said Steve Zahler, co-owner of Modern Pinball.

Grand opening rates for playing the games are \$7.50 for a half hour, \$10 for an hour, and \$20 for a day. By that calculation, if players go to the showroom every day for close to 15 months, they could take home a \$9,000 "Wizard of Oz" pinball machine, which comes loaded with an LCD screen that plays animations and scenes from the movie.

"It's a new concept, a new business model," Zahler explained. "It's for people who are curious about pinball, whether they're buyers or collectors.

"This isn't a bar. This is good, clean fun, and a place where people can buy the machines and enjoy them at home," he said. "Pinball is really an art form."

Other pinball machines sold at the shop include games themed with "The Addams Family," "Metallica," "Star Trek" and "The Simpsons."

At the start of "The Simpsons" pinball game, for instance, the cartoon's familiar theme song swells from the machine, and images of Bart Simpson on his skateboard and a chase between Itchy and Scratchy light up.

Other than keeping the ball from going into the gutters, the object of the game is to get three balls through the garage and onto the Simpsons couch in order to play with several pinballs and earn more points, Zahler explained.

Some pinball machines are more expensive than others because they're no longer produced and are available in limited supply, the Modern Pinball owners said. Older machines have been restored to their former glory so that they look brand new, explained Steve Epstein, co-owner of the store.

Epstein, who has been playing pinball for more than four decades, is also a co-founder of a large pinball competitive group called the **International Flipper Pinball Association** and the **Professional and Amateur Pinball Association**, which hosts some of the world's largest pinball tournaments.

Every pinball machine carried in the store is up for sale and for play, including the popular "Addams Family" pinball machine, which features a hand that pops out of a box and grabs the ball during play, Zahler said.

Aside from casual play, Modern Pinball also offers tournaments and pinball lessons for more competitive players.

"The more you know how to control the flippers, the better you will do," Zahler said. "It's very physical, and it's different from video games because there are no patterns to learn."

The 1,400-square-foot space also features flat panel screens, which will be used to stream live pinball championship games and pinball documentaries, he said.

"We're going to be everything pinball," Zahler said.

For its grand opening, Modern Pinball will host a two-day tournament on Nov. 16 and 17. Some of the proceeds will benefit Food Bank for New York City.

"I went to my first pinball tournament three years ago, and have been hooked ever since," Zahler said.