

## WHAT'S RIGHT WITH BOWLING



Pro Tips And Ball Reviews

# Mike and Mike

They're not on ESPN, but Mike Schmid and Mike Farrell's pro shop is just as well known to Twin Cities bowlers.

BY BOB JOHNSON

The early months of 2011 were unforgettable for Willmar, Minn., native Mike Schmid. Not only did he travel to Reno to compete in the USBC Open Championships for the 50th time — then only the 137th person to achieve that distinction — but he also marked his 50th year in the pro shop business.

If you're looking for an example of "what's right with bowling" today, just look toward Mike's Pro Shop, located inside Flaherty's Arden Bowl in St. Paul, where Schmid continues to serve the bowlers of Minnesota's Twin Cities.

And what a shop it is. A reclaimed lane directs visitors from the front door to the service counter. There's a side bench — another reclaimed lane — where guests can sit and try on shoes. There's a meticulously maintained merchandise wall dedicated to bags, shoes and accessories. There's even another Mike — Farrell, by name — who was hired by Schmid when he was 16 and has been with him ever since.

"We're brothers," Farrell says of their working relationship and long-time friendship. "Somebody lied and told me I had a future here. The great thing is I never dread coming to work." He pauses, then adds with a smile, "Well, there are some days..."

Farrell confirms the "brotherly" relationship. "I fired him six times when we were younger," he says. "The last time was when he was 23. We still fight every 15 minutes."

In-between those friendly spats, "Mike and Mike" run a pro shop that has stayed the course, bucked trends, and remained a viable entity.

Schmid was first exposed to bowling when he'd accompany his mother to the neighborhood YMCA, which had eight lanes. He was 11. In 1961, he cashed a check on the PBA Tour. He was 19.

Late that year, his father borrowed \$900 from a life insurance policy in order to open a pro shop at Minnehaha Lanes, with \$700 going toward equipment and \$200 toward inventory. On Feb. 1, 1962, the shop opened. Schmid was 20.

"We started out selling Manhattan balls because we couldn't get Brunswick balls; you had to have some kind of franchise to sell Brunswick balls," he recalls. By putting in the time and servicing his customers, Schmid says he became the first person in Minnesota to make a living exclusively in the pro shop business. "Everyone else had part-time jobs."

Because the shop was open so many hours, Schmid could offer "drilling while you wait," and he says that "people loved that. It also helped that I was a bowler myself. That gave me credibility."

Over time, Schmid would expand into the trophy business, as well as the sporting goods business, selling jackets, t-shirts, softball uniforms and corporate I.D. shirts. Things were going great when, nearing his fifth decade in the business, the owners of Minnehaha Lanes decided to close the center.

Schmid was allowed to keep running his pro shop there while he looked for another location.

"The problem was that all the good centers already had a pro shop," he recalls. "We looked at 18 different places for a free-standing shop, but none of them made sense."

While on his search, Schmid had visited Flaherty's Arden Bowl, one of the oldest continuously family-operated centers in the country. It was one of those centers that already had a pro shop.

A few weeks after the visit, the owners called him back and said, "Let's talk." Before long, a deal was struck for Schmid to lease a 1,000-sq.-ft. space for

his pro shop, and more space in the basement for his trophy business. Mike's Pro Shop would live on.

Through the years, Schmid and his crew have built more than a million trophies, and presently have enough materials on hand to build around 20,000 awards of various types. On an ancient drill press, bearing a well-worn patent #1883 inscription, more than 140,000 bowling balls have been drilled.

"When I first started in the business, I thought I'd do it for a year," Schmid says. "Now, I'd never give it up because of the people. That drill press will be going in my coffin with me."



**PATENT #1883:** Mike Schmid poses with an ancient drill press that has been used to punch out more than 140,000 bowling balls.