



Local Pinball Wiz Opens Atomic Pinball Arcade in Wood River

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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WOOD RIVER - Calling all pinball wizards! With over 100 pinball machines, Atomic Pinball Arcade will host its grand opening on Saturday, Aug. 5 in Wood River.

Previously CP Pinball in South Roxana, Atomic Pinball Arcade will have more games and a “BYOB” policy that appeals to league players and casual pinballers alike. Owner Chuck Sanderson, an avid pinball player himself, explained that it’s all about the games.

“It’s a great place to play some pinball and have a couple of drinks. It’s not a place to drink and play a couple of games of pinball,” he said.

In addition to the pinball machines, Atomic Pinball Arcade will offer several other favorites like Skee-Ball, shuffleboard and some video games. They plan to sponsor a pinball league where players can compete against each other starting on Sept. 6.

Sanderson made the decision to move to a bigger facility and rebrand the business as Atomic Pinball Arcade about two years ago. The popular arcade had outgrown its building.

“We basically only had room for 70 games at our old location, and every time we got something new in, we had to sell something,” Sanderson explained. “A customer of mine approached me about how we could keep all the pinball machines, and I said we’d need a bigger building. And he offered to pay half.”

The two bought the building for \$50,000 and then put \$650,000 into it. Sanderson noted that everything inside the facility is new, including 30 of the newest pinball machines.

The partnership speaks to the passion that many of Sanderson’s customers have. Pinball is more than a game to them. This is also partly why Sanderson enjoys owning the business; he gets to watch people fall in love with the game he’s played for over 20 years.

“Most people think it’s two flippers and a ball,” he said. “Every pinball machine tells a story that most people don’t know. They think they’re just trying to keep the ball alive.”

Sanderson explained that a pinball machine will introduce new challenges as you play. The ultimate goal is “wizard mode,” which means you’re playing with three to seven balls at once. Depending on how well you’ve played earlier, wizard mode can multiply your score and completely change the outcome of the game, making it exciting and ever-changing.

It’s no wonder, then, that so many people love it. The game is competitive — Sanderson himself is ranked third in Illinois and 256 nationwide — but also brings people together, whether they’re playing against each other or just enjoying a night at the arcade.

To that end, the building will also have a basement with no games where people can take a break from playing, chat and enjoy a snack from the vending machines. While it can be a fun night out, Atomic Pinball Arcade is also family friendly. Sanderson noted that there aren't many other places you can take your kids for a few hours without spending a lot of money.

"Kids have a blast and parents have the most fun. It's affordable," he added. "And then, some people start to get it. I'd say 75% of people that come will come back."

He hopes to see more people in Wood River and the surrounding communities come out and play the silver ball. After all, the arcade is about connection as much as it's about pinball. And while Sanderson loves the game, he might appreciate the people even more.

"I've probably met 1,000 people, and I've only met five people, I can count on one hand, that aren't good," he said. "The pinball community is really, really a bunch of good people."

Atomic Pinball Arcade will host their grand opening from noon until 11 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 5. Their new facility, located at 102 Whitelaw in Wood River, will be opened on Wednesdays and Fridays from 5–11 p.m. and noon to 11 p.m. on Saturdays. For more information, visit their [official website](#) or [Facebook page](#).