

Chris Dammacco

Windy Gaming – Chicago IL

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Interviewer: Sydney Mcnamar

Transcription: Christopher Hernandez

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Project: History of Coin-Op in Chicago

[00:00:01]

Sydney Mcnamer[SM] : Ok my name is Sydney Mcnamer today is October 2 2015, it is now 1:00 and I am interviewing Chris Demaco at Windy City Gaming

Chris Dammacco[CD]: Windy Gaming

SM: Windy Gaming, sorry.

CD: Those guys are gambling [enthusiasts]

SM: Ok, could you please give me a description of your business?

CD: Yeah, I'm an import-heavy video game shop. Online based. On the convention circuit as well. Between Japanese arcade and Japanese home system

SM: Ok. Could you explain a typical day for you?

CD: Typical day: well there's two kinds of days that I have. One is coming in early, filling in orders, and, you know, whatever social marketing I needed to do that day, replying to emails (especially the ones I get from customers). And then the other days are if I'm in import mode when I am restocking or gaining new product I end up switching over to, you know, Tokyo time and then I'm, you know, waking up at 2 in the afternoon because I'm staying up til 6 in the morning

SM: Oh jeez

CD: Yeah. And just staying in touch with the people overseas just to make up for the time difference.

SM: Ok. And when did you start your business?

CD: It would have been unofficially September of 2012

SM: Ok

CD: And officially it would have been January of 2015

SM: Ok

CD: When I officially I officially filed paperworks. Works, work

SM: Ok perfect. Do you - well I saw your inventory but do you buy/sell vintage console games or things like darts or pinball?

CD: Yes, I do -well there's a lot of console in the other closet. Which I kind of opened up for you guys just so you could see what else is going on. I do deal in American stuff when it does come my way, just cause people like to, you know, options. If I come across it great, if I don't, you know, everyone knows me as an import shop. But yeah, I got a - I've done a couple of Pachinko or "Patchy" slots. There's one right over there.

SM: Oh I did see that one, yeah

CD: Pinball less so, it's just another nightmare I don't really play so well with. I've owned a couple of tables, which I no longer have.

SM: Is there a particular reason you don't deal in those? Or is it just cause?

CD: Pinball?

SM: Yeah

CD: Pinball is just - it's..it's a nightmare of wires

SM: Oh ok

CD: I equate it to someone's father's old Fiat in the garage where it's the best car in the world when it's going two months out of the year, but it's a lot of maintenance, it's just a lot of stuff that is, if you're gonna sell it you need to be perfect with your...with everything. And everything needs to be always going and they have a habit of breaking down when people show up, so I've dealt in a couple. I'm probably not gonna go down that road again, it's just high ticket with a high rate of failure so it's not really where I'm at.

SM: That makes sense. Alright, and do you mostly work alone? You do everything by yourself?

CD: I got a couple people that help me out. I got two college kids that come with me on the road when I do conventions. They get free road trips and, you know, staying in fun hotels and stuff, you know, across the country. Every now and then one or two of them come and help me with bagging, pricing and that kind of stuff. I do have a tech, he comes in and does a lot of the repair

work, he does a lot of other stuff in that range. Then one or two other people like to pop in from time to time cause they like playing with this stuff, so.

SM: That's cool. Alright, and is the industry close-knit? So, like, do you know a lot of people that deal in the same business?

CD: Yeah in terms of being a vendor or being a dealer yeah it's pretty close knit a lot of people know each other people are leery of the new guy, you sit there and you prove yourself. I've been fortunately accepted by a lot of them and a lot of them know me and they know me by both name and face. They know my brand and they know what I do. Some it's a lot less on the developer side where some of them know me but it would be more on the indie side; Microsoft has no idea who I am. But, in that term it's a good community of people, there's Facebook groups of small shop owners, and there's other things kind of bang out heads together in an indie shops unite kind of stuff.

SM: So does it mostly help you, or does it ever hinder you? Like competition?

CD: No well me I'm online, so I'm everywhere. And then when I hit the road again I go everywhere. We were just in, two weeks ago, northern Wisconsin, and then three weeks ago it was Columbus, Milwaukee, Texas, Kansas City. We make the rounds. Philly, New York. Yeah, we - I'm native there so it was nice to see family.

SM: From New York?

CD: Yeah. Excuse me *sneezes*. Sorry. Just ending for me, I feel not contagious enough to have you. And so I mean they all know who I am, but I'm a specialty shop, a lot of the other shops really, really focus primarily on NA release stuff, so I'm in the interesting position of being able to kind of walk amongst the crowd without pissing anybody off, at least so much. I mean there's a couple other guys that you know, whatever. Some of us bang our heads, but most guys are very,

very, very cool and it's very, very, very nice and warm. After conventions a lot of times bunches of us will go out for pizza and beer after.

SM: That's awesome

CD: Just hang out and "Hey, how was your show?" "Awesome, how was your show?" that kind of stuff.

SM: So would you consider the industry fairly large on your level?

CD: On my level, very large. Big primary reason why I did specialty like I focused on something. Aside from the, there's a lot of independent game stores opening now and there's also, you can't throw a rock without seeing someone on Craigslist flipping Nintendo games or same thing on EBay, there's a mess of that stuff. You know, I came into business as a collector and, you know, just kind of how I ended up in business was this was a troll job, that's what this was. It was, it happened a little before that September I told you, I got into an argument with a dealer, and he had a store, he had everything any startup could want. He had financial backing, he had a ridiculous location, high-end neighborhood, high-end everything, high-end stock, and he took his customers for granted and he was just really, really, really had a disdain for the customer base, and he was also grossly overpriced and he was just a nasty guy and, you know, Windy happened because it was sort of a, you know, it was an online forum argument, you know, like internet drama *woo* you know that kind of stuff. It was "neiner neiner neiner I can have a store too, and I'll hurt yours." And so, you know, that's what I did I started doing import. Import was a grossly underserved part of the problem - not problem, of the industry, and that's why I was able to kind of grow in the way that I did. this was \$300 two years ago. That's what I put into it, and then I think over the course of those 3 years I put a couple grand in, but this is, this is mostly natural growth, and was really just, like I said, it just, it just kind of grew from there because people knew me as "Hey, import guy. Go see the import guy. You want to get into imports? Awesome" A lot of the times they're cheaper than the American release because, you know, unless you can read Japanese, you know. Some of them are dual-language which is nice but, you know, that's just kind of how it goes. A lot of stuff didn't come out here.

SM: How has the industry changed since you started? I know it's like fairly recent.

CD: No, it actually has changed a lot. It's - prices continue to go up, a lot of, like, my other distributors, other people are trying to hit the import game now, because again it was a cheaper market. And other people are trying to get in so it's jumping my prices because my distributor's like "I know we've been working with you for years now, or a couple years at least but this guy just showed up and he's willing to give me this" Alright, you know, give it to him, because there's no money to be made there after you ship it. You know, cause shipping from Japan not cheap, an average, you know, 20 pound box that I would get from Japan I'd get like 8 or 10 at a time, you know, about 2-2.50 apiece to - just to ship. That's just my shipping cost, and that's before I fill up the boxes. But at the end of the day, it's what I do what's different from a lot of people is I guarantee everything that's out there so if you get something or it doesn't work right all of my customer's know "Hey, you know, no one can be perfect" As much as I want to be, I know I have a very, very high customer satisfaction rate, and that's why my customer's come back to me. My concept was to keep the prices sane. A lot of independent stores brick and mortar, their prices are going to be higher because they have a huge amount of overhead. I looked maybe for brick and mortar initially and, I mean, for a tiny little outlet, you know, or a tiny little storefront in an ok neighborhood I'm lookin at 2-3 grand a month plus utilities, plus all this other stuff that they need to make up for. And that leads to a lot of, you know, marked up prices, and I understand that side, I'm not, you know, nothing to be mad about. But then people see that, then they make their prices on EBay that and it just everything feeds into itself, so, you know, I try to price myself 10% below EBay to make up for the difference in volume. And again people like that, they like to say "Ok, this guy's got a price"

[00:10:03]

SM: That's awesome. Yeah. So what would be an ideal day for you?

CD: An ideal day?

SM: Yes

CD: All the orders! Yeah, someone coming in, sell a couple machines, website's hoppin. That's really why I do it. You know, ideal is not necessarily how it works, it's all business. You get a couple of days like that a year. And it's really, really nice. A good ideal day like a convention is one I know I'm pacing myself for a five-figure weekend. Those are the best. When I know it's a rockin show and I'm gonna be able to really, really come out ahead on this cause that lets me get more interesting stock as well.

SM: Yeah. So could we go back to conventions, cause I actually didn't know you did that. So could you like walk me through the steps of how that happens?

CD: Sure. So, this is actually my favorite show, Midwest Gaming Classic, it's up in Milwaukee, and let's just talk them for a minute cause I'll wax poetic about these guys forever. It's my favorite show of the year. You know, and I've been doin that show since I've existed and I was a convention goer. Some shows are just more flea market sale-athons, other shows have gaming areas, they have a lot of different things going on. These guys really have everything, they have a very, very rich market, they have a lot of great exhibits, things to do, from both tabletop to everything. That's what these guys do; these guys are just amazing. So what you do is, you know, you reach out to them when it's time to, you know, apply. You find out when and where the shows are, you know, when it's time for vendors to sign up you sign up. And they'll send you a contract and you pay them money and you get a booth. Depending on how money you get is how much booth you get, from one 8ft table to over there, I've become something of a draw. I don't want to sound like I'm speaking up, but a lot of my customers come there for me, a lot of people know what I do. I have a background in specialty food, and at the retail level where I would be
CD: I was a cheese broker, which is like being a stock broker but with dairy. I would go to stores and help them market and do all the other stuff, so I have that background where I knew how to retail market, so when I do my displays what I do, everything else, this show last year - so I started with like two tables the first time I did it, then I had a 50ft straight away table set the year after that, then last year I had a private salesroom, where people would come in and I would set up pop-up shop style island displays, shelves, all kinds of stuff, I'd just bring it in, I'd build a store for the weekend. That's more of the extreme end, it's usually a series of tables. Then customers would come they would buy their admission, and they're either going to buy some games, or they were going to hit the market. Usually the market gets hit early, hard, cause everyone wants to get the stuff before it's gone. Then it would get hit again on Sunday cause, you know, a lot of times there's deals to be had for people that don't want to take some stuff home or whatever. But that's kind of the in and out of it all, really. You just, you go, you work like a

madman for 2-3 days, and then you relax. Most people just sort of, you know, jet right after the show. That show in particular, and a couple of other shows, I stay one extra night, because I'm wiped. I can have one last night in the hotel, go out to dinner, celebrate, whatever, and just chill for a night and then hit the road the next day. So, that's kind of - did that work for you?

SM: Yeah, that's perfect. I've actually never been to a convention before.

CD: You should go. Go to the one in Milwaukee, it'll blow your mind.

SM: When is it?

CD: April, I believe it's April 10th this year.

SM: Ok. I probably will, cause that's really cool.

CD: Yeah, it's like \$25 to walk in the store, but there's a lot of stuff to do.

SM: Oh, that's perfect. Awesome, so what do you think is best about your industry?

CD: Best is there's no shortage of creative minds. A lot of people are very, very, very nice, and a lot of people want to do the right thing for the hobby, for the communities. That's what I like to think that I'm doing, like, I'm trying to keep it for the player, for the end user. There's a couple of kinds of dealers where you'll see guys that only deal in super high-end, holy cats look at that thing "It's still sealed and it's incased in Lucite!" and they'll never play this game. And that's fine, if that's what you collect I'm not going to rip on it, except for that. I deal a lot of my stuff is what's called gamer-condition, which is, you want to play with it. It's very, very playable. I certainly have my share of - I've got some pretty nice stuff. I'm not, not joking around, I've got some nice things. But I have a lot of very approachable stuff, you know, you need to have a

perfect mix, you know, in box matching serial, you know, crazy system with all the games, I can do that. But you know, you just want a little Super Famicom so you can play your Japanese Super Nintendo games I do that on the cheap as well, and that lets me kind of, you know, breach all the markets.

SM: Ok. And least about your industry?

CD: Kind of the opposite of that. So there's - I believe the technical word is "Asshats" out there. I don't know if you can use that in your class but that's the word that I use. There's some guys that won our so staunchly anti-seller of anything, so whether or not I'm a legitimate business like I am, or Craigslist guys or whatever and some of the Craigslist guys are a little shady. I've known some of them, they're whatever, I'm not gonna - again, they do they gotta do, I do what I gotta do, not that the paths should cross. But there's other guys that will literally just, you know - people that want to see the world burn. I had a situation a little while ago with someone that never did any business with me that decided to try to slander my name, and he ended up costing me a lot of money. And unfortunately when stupid internet drama meets whatever, you know, these are the guys that are cheering me on one day and then all of a sudden I show a little success and some people wanna, you know, take you down a peg. I had a lot of very, very good support which I'm very thankful for that really kind of quashed it before it did a ton of damage but, you know, I had to face the repercussions of it. Some people are, you know, whatever they're anti-shop or they're anti-whatever, you know, "Keep it community" you know. And that's, I mean, I always try to be a community shop. I always try to be, you know, keep my prices in check where you're not going nuts with "What are you charging me for?" But you can walk in with a couple of bucks. I'll tell you a really good, quick story, this happened in northern Wisconsin two weeks ago. This show wasn't exactly a big show, I knew the showrunners personally. They've wanted me to go up for a couple of years they, you know, and they're very, very nice people. He's a great guy. So I went up there and, you know, helped them out did this on a show I wouldn't normally go to; that's a little small for me. But I went and, you know, it was a bunch of people that didn't have any money to spend, and someone came up to me and he looks down and he sees a DS, just an old Nintendo DS, it was a first-gen and one of the hinges was cracked but it still held open just fine, you know, it was priced accordingly it said \$22. And he looks down and he goes, "Is that a DS?" and I go, "Yeah" "and it's \$22?" and I go, "Yep" "So you're telling me for \$22, for \$22 I can have a DS of my very own?" And it was kind of funny, you know, when it was happening. I'm like me, I had one of those college kids come up with me to that show, I mean, it was past Green Bay. Like, it's 300 miles straight north, it's like holy cats, is Wisconsin still

happening why am I not in Canada yet north? And, you know, on the drive home we were talking about that guy and it was - ended up being a really, really nice almost warm and fuzzy where I was able to really make this guy's day because I was able to kind of keep the prices in check. There was another guy selling DSs and these are not even the 3DSs, these are, like, the older ones, and his prices started at, like \$45-\$50. I was less than half of that and this guy that couldn't afford, you know, a seven-year-old not even considered vintage machine and he came over and he got it, and he was able to get a couple of games for it with me. I think he spent like \$35, and he was just the happiest camper and he got exactly what he wanted and, you know, to know I made a guy's day, you know, is why I do it. And the same thing with the candy cabs (the Japanese machines). People look all over the place for these things. I looked for 2 1/2 years to find my first one, and I drove to Detroit for it, and it's still in my basement because I love that machine. And I drove up to Detroit, and I realized that my Equinox didn't quite fit this machine in there the way I had measured it, and I had to kind of take it apart very carefully to make it fit in there and drive home, and then re-assemble it when I get home. But that's, it was just, you know, it's that discovery, it's going out and that's why I started bringing those in. That was a big part of it for me cause, you know, people are looking for these and I made it very easy. Out west, west-coast, easier to get, ports over there, people bring them in over there, a lot more common out there. Midwest over, it was a desert. Now I'm starting to bring these in there's starting to be more whatever, I was the guy that lowered the price nationally on that. I feel good cause now they're not cheap, but they're also a lot more approachable. You know, everyone started to adhere to my price point. Which was really, really interesting to show what kind of actual reach I had. Cause everyone would go, "Oh, you want \$1100 for it, well this guy's got it for \$900, and he's got multiple. I can go and pick and choose, he'll get on Skype with me." And I'll do that; if someone's out of state I'll get on Skype, I'll walk the room and let them pick a machine, we'll fire them up right there so.

[00:22:17]

SM: That's really awesome

CD: It's nice when I can make someone's day, like that's really, that's a big part of it because, you know, small business guy doesn't get paid much, but I take what I get, what I can get.

SM: Yeah, so what, if anything would you change about the industry?

CD: *coughs* Excuse me. The general sourpuss-ness. There's a lot of, like I was saying before, like the guys that are just out to watch the world burn, the guys that want to complain, the guys that want to whatever, I have guys that come to me, I'm not even joking, will pick up 5 copies of the same game and will give me an outrageously low price on all 5 of them. I mean it's very obvious you're not even trying to hide what you want to do with it, you know what it is that you have in your hand, that's why you have 5 of them and, you know, you clearly want to make a profit off of another store and I'm just looking at you like, "Come on, guys. Seriously? Like, you want 2 of them, great I'll give you a couple of dollars and there you go" I make my prices low enough to where, you know, the meat's off the bone, but, you know, it kind of is what it is with those guys. *fidgeting with chair* I mean, I just want everyone to be happy, that's really it. This is completely embarrassing, I'm stuck. I'm going to lose a shoe here so sorry. There we go. That was ridiculous. I've never done that before. Alright, yeah. Yeah, that's classy. Alright.

SM: Ok. Moving on.

CD: Moving on. I'm gonna not put my foot up anymore

SM: Ok. So how do you feel about places like Chuck E. Cheese or Dave & Buster's? The really commercialized arcade places?

CD: They have their place. Dave & Buster's has a lot of much newer stuff, Chuck E. Cheese is more tickets for prizes and Dave & Buster's has a lot of that as well. I'm not offended by them, but I'm not the biggest fan. Really, I mean I guess I'm offended by Chuck E. Cheese cause their pizza is brutal, but I mean, I'm from New York, I lived in Chicago for 15 years, and you want to hand me a slice of Chuck E. Cheese [pizza], I mean these are two big pizza towns, like, for the love of all things holy what are you guys thinking? The pizza's really the only thing offensive about Chuck E. Cheese to me. Cause you know what, it's little kids. And they want to go and have their fun and the parents want to go and have a Chuck E. beer over on the side and it's all whatever. Dave & Buster's is just Chuck E. Cheese for adults. It's an expensive arcade. But the resurgence of the arcade, that's really where it's at right now. Like Dave & Buster's is cool I

guess, they're catching some residual bonus attendees cause people want to play arcade stuff again. But it's really all about the real arcades for me, I mean those guys, I don't even consider them arcades they're just, you know, they're just chains, they're there. You know, it's like saying you're going to go to Shake Shack call me Homer, or Portillo's, or you going to go to McDonald's and get a burger? I mean, yeah, it's a burger, I mean or Shake Shack is delicious, so is Portillo's or, you know, In-And-Out Burger, or wherever else you're going.

SM: I actually work at In-And-Out Burger

CD: Do you?

SM: Yeah, that just made my day

CD: In-And-Out's my favorite, man. In-And-Out, Whataburger, oh my gosh.

SM: All of the above

CD: Oh yeah, there's some great chains out there just, those are the smaller regional things, where it's like, 7-Eleven or Wa-Wa if you want to go out east. My little brother has a Wa-Wa tattoo. It's ridiculous, like that's how serious that place is out there. You end up in Jersey or New York or something, walk in a Wa-Wa your mind will be blown.

SM: Ok, I will do that. I actually have some friends over on the east coast going to school so I'm going to go visit them. I'm going to definitely go to Wa-Wa.

CD: Ask them about Wa-Wa. Oh my gosh, it's sandwiches, it's like, it's everything. Oh my god, it's like the greatest 7-Eleven you've ever been in. Oh yeah, it's unreal. Sorry, continue on, sorry. Don't get me waxing poetic about delicious things back east.

SM: Do you have any favorite experiences while working in the industry? I guess you mentioned the DS.

CD: The DS guy was great. A couple of youtubers came: semi-popular guys that I've collaborated with, very, very nice. Yeah *coughs*. I got to meet James Rolfe on a couple of occasions which was, he's a cool guy. I don't know if you know who he is.

SM: I don't.

CD: Angry Video Game Nerd, like he's one of - He's like the a-list YouTube guy.

SM: So is it like R-O-L-P-H?

CD: Rolfe

SM: F-E?

CD: Yeah, he signed one of the carts over there that him and his co-host for his YouTube show, that's the game "Sat Guys" above that. Those are some popular youtubers so that whatever. I'm doing the diner thing where everything's like, too windy. You know, it's kind of funny, you know. But, you know, when a guy like him comes in, who's very, very, very knowledgeable on it - he was able to kind of - I remember showing him the Japanese version of Mike Tyson's Punch-Out just because it was a fun, weird thing. Mike Tyson's Punch-Out is a fairly rare title in Japan. Very common here, it came out here first, then it went to Japan. Again, a rarity. Cause they got the original Punch-Out and we ended up getting the original Punch-Out when Mike Tyson went to jail. So it's a rarity out there because they got Mike Tyson's Punch-Out because he had just gotten the championship, you know, they hired Mike Tyson pre-championship to be the head of this game cause he was cheaper than the actual champion at the time. And then Mike Tyson went on

to be one of the greatest champions of all time. So they still had his rights, sent him off to Japan, about two months later he went to jail. So they were just pulling that off the shelves. And what was interesting was it was really lazy packaging, but amazing at the same time where they didn't translate the program into Japanese so I don't know if you've ever played the game. There's little bits in between where there's kind of tips and clues about how to beat the boxer, between rounds, that you're facing, and it's still in English. And these poor Japanese guys don't know, don't speak English or can't read English at least and English is not necessarily an easy language, but, there's the manual, and below the manual is a separate dictionary that it came with pictures of every single screen and the translation of every single screen. And it was just very, very, very funny that they just threw in a dictionary as opposed to being programmed in, cause I guess that was cheaper just to make a little book. I showed him that and it blew his mind and he's talking about it, he's, you know, it was very, very, very - it was a cool experience. And honestly, I mean the best part is, you know, it's getting the face-time. I get a lot of Facebook messages, Twitter. A lot of interaction online. And when they come they'll see I'm wearing my Windy shirt or whatever, "Are you the Windy Gaming guy? That's awesome! Come on, I bought like four things from you! Oh yeah!" And when you put the names to the face, and that's a big part of why I do conventions too, is I get the face-time with these guys. You know, you show that it's not just, you know, some guy with a shop like Amazon, but for import games, it's, you know, there's a guy behind this and he's the guy doing this and it's very, very nice. People shake my hand, I had to sign an autograph once which was very, very weird. Not something that I'm - I would ever think would ever happen just because I'm a retail store, man. You know, like I'm not, you know, whatever, but when people are excited to meet me or are really jazzed about what I do, that's really, that's the best. I mean, cause it's validation, it's saying, "Ok, I'm on the right path." You know, that's how I, you know, that's how we did it.

SM: Yeah. So what would you say to someone who's dismissive of modern coin-op?

CD: Go to hell.

SM: *Laughs*

CD: No, I mean, yeah, modern coin-op, you know what, some people want to stay in the golden age or some people want to go to the 90s, say the 90s are the best or some people say whatever.

You know what, it's all the same thing, man, just technology grows. If you look, on the wall, right there, those are arcade boards. That's all that's in an arcade machine that makes em work. It's - You see that one, that big, like the gold edge on the side? That's all you need to plug in to make an arcade machine work. That's it, that's the only thing. Those are just my tester boards. And when, you know, that's what they all looked like. And now today's modern coin-op, like, usually has like an i5 inside. Pushing eight gigs of ram, a hard drive, all kinds of, you know, it's a computer. And yeah, so, I mean yeah, it's going to be more powerful and I mean yeah, it's going to have all the bells and whistles, so for one there's a certain amount of charm on the old stuff, the new stuff doesn't have that charm because, well, it's new. It has a chance to, you know, get a luster going, but it's really like I have, I have so much fun playing modern coin-op as much as I do the old ones. You know put me in front of a *BlazBlue* cabinet, you've lost me for the day. You know, put me in front of, you know, *Mario Kart GP* or any number of other coin-op, you know, modern games *Initial D*'s a great one, a lot of the *Beatmoni* guys, *Beatmania* rhythm gamers, there's some really cool stuff happening, and it's just, just awesome to see it. And then yeah, nothing's wrong with *Donkey Kong*, I love *Donkey Kong*, you know, I'll play, you know, *Final Fight*, I've got *Final Fight* on the wall over there, or it's over on the wall over there. You know, I'll play, you know, whatever, it's - they're games. They're there to be enjoyed; if you're dismissive of it, then, you know what, that's someone less on [in] line getting in my way when I want to play it, because you're missing out. That's all I got to say to that, I mean whatever, you want to call it retro vs modern or - and then various retro people, like I don't go pre-NES, you know, I just, I don't play with the Atari era below, and below, for a reason, because it just, it's just not, not where my crowd is. But some guys will only play, you know, "Oh, I have to play, you know, I have to kick my *Galaga* score up." Or all these super-classic games, and they won't even go near a *Street Fighter 2*. And again it's one of the greatest games ever made, one of the most balanced, perfect, controlling games and it looked good doing it. That was 91, you know, it's still a 25-year-old game, it's still old, so I mean, so people still doubt on the 90s stuff. But I think, for me, that's my favorite era, just cause that's where they really like, graphics, color, things looked like things, you know. So that's kind of where I'm at with that, yeah, sorry if that was kind of rambling, but yeah I just think you're missing out if you just miss something.

[00:34:16]

SM: Yeah. Do you have any advice for someone who wants to get started in the industry?

CD: Don't. It, it's an uphill struggle. It's what it is, it always is, if you're going to do it, have money behind you. That's big advice. I've gotten to a point where, you know, I've built up my business credit enough to where I have a business line of credit, which has certainly helped. If you're going to do it, you're all in, and it's gonna, it's gonna be grating, it's gonna be difficult, and right now, it's a hot commodity. So if you're going to do it, you're getting on when the prices are the highest. So, you know, the whole key to business being "buy low sell high", you're buying high now. It's - right now's probably not the best time to get in. If you want to do it, God bless you. We could always use another person jumping in, but it's going to be an uphill battle. I mean, that's just the truth of it all.

SM: Ok. Is it difficult to buy or sell the machines at certain points? Or is it always like - I guess for you it sounds like it's just kind of

CD: Are you talking about, like, the arcade machines?

SM: Yeah

CD: Yes and no. It kind of comes in bursts. Where *coughs* excuse me, again, I'll get like twenty people that want something and then it'll turn into two or three people that end up buying. You know, and you've got to talk to each one of them like they're going to buy, you know, but, you know, a lot of them will just fall off and they'll like, "Oh, well I can't do that. You know, how about I give you 1/3 of your price?" I don't know why you would ask that. Would you go to a car dealer and say, "Hey, nice \$30,000 car here's 10k." No. You know, it's just one of those things where it's a lot of ebb and flow to it. My home stuff, always in demand. The machines, again, people see an article on them or they'll see something on them and they'll be like, "Yeah, I need one of those!" I had someone call me up yesterday saying, "I've been looking for a Candy Cab forever." Great. What kind are you looking for? Here's what I have in stock. He's like, "Oh, well I need this, this, this, or this." And what he does is he labels of, like he read in an article of the 12 most rare let's-go-unicorn-hunting machines, these are machines that, without a game in them, just machine in barely playable condition can be 4,5,10 grand a pop for me to buy before he gets it. And he's like, "Well I don't want, you know, the one that everybody has." Well, not everybody has that, and that's the one that you want because if you've never done it, that's the perfect starter machine and, you know, whatever. I try to give advice. So, it is what it is, so.

SM: Ok. Oh, is it typical to buy new arcade machines?

CD: New? Na, not really. I say I've - it can happen. I know of a couple of vendors in China, Hong Kong that will basically make those machines now, but not by Sega. Especially new like that you're not gonna find, you know, CRTs are kind of on the outs, if you wanna get into HD gaming like you were talking earlier about modern then yeah, you can buy new machines or new blank cabs without games set to them, but, you know, it's - the answer to that is 75% no, 25% yes. You know, new machines, yeah you can do it and I've done it, just less often.

SM: Ok. How often do machines need repairs?

CD: Depends. Really depends on the machine. Like I was saying before pinball: it's great the two months out of the year that they work. Some machines do better than others. Arcade machines, generally pretty easygoing. I know I do tune-ups on mine where I'll, you know, I'll discharge the monitor, change out the buttons, redo the wiring harness just as maintenance. But actual repairs less so. They're pretty sturdy things. A couple of models out there that are real finicky and people know to - unless I need to, you know, catch em all like a Pokémon it's, you know, people tend to avoid some of the, you know, the nasty ones, but usually, you know, most cabs, pretty reliable.

SM: Are they expensive to repair?

CD: Again, it's about what went wrong, so I mean yeah, you fry a harness, \$20 new harness. You know, you blow your chassi, \$300. You know, your tube? Find a tube, good luck. You know, you know, power supplies can be a couple hundred dollars, could be \$50 depending on what you need, you know, like I said, it's - it can be expensive, but most general repairs, especially if you're fairly handy with electronics (you own a multimeter) you can figure out, troubleshoot your problems. There's a huge community of people out there that collect, so those guys will be like, "Hey, what's up? Here's what's wrong, here's what my meter reads." And they'll be like, "Ok, yeah. Cap kit." Cap kit, you know, \$30 and an hour of your time. And, "Oh, look, I'm running again. Yay."

SM: Alright. So, let's see, are some games more difficult to obtain or sell than others? Cause that sounds like yeah.

CD: Yeah. Oh, of course. Yeah, I mean you have things like, if you want to talk home stuff, you know, every Nintendo came with a *Mario/Duck Hunt*, you know? Not every one, but, you know, a little hyperbole never hurt anyone. The game quality - you know, some people try to push the value of that cause there was *Mario* on it from like 10 to \$20. It's like a \$1 game, it really, like, I give em away sometimes. Or you get something like Stadium Events which is a 5-figure game. You know, like, there's a reason it's 5-figures cause, you know, there's x-amount out there. You know, some games are - what's interesting is when there's hype on a game, so take *Earthbound*: *Earthbound* is a perfect example of a perfect storm. It didn't sell well unlike the rare, uncommon, common sale (it's an uncommon game) it's not exactly, you know, it's not as common as *Mario*, *Mario 3*, something like that, but, you know, they sold a couple hundred thousand copies and it's, it's not a hard game to find, but that game holds a weird charm and a weird value because that game has been inflated, hyped so hard. Like so many collectors all of a sudden, now it's a \$150, \$200 game, when that's usually a price reserved for something that's a little bit more scarce. So, you can kind of, you know, you can find anything just be prepared to pay the price.

SM: What is your favorite game to play? I know it's kind of difficult.

CD: My favorite. I have a few. Right now it's *Rocket League*. Right, cart-gen, right now it's *Rocket League*. I tweet to them, because I love them so. It is such a perfectly dumb game, I love it to death. Games I can go back to would be the Twinbee Games, all day. Twinbee I'll do that forever. A lot of the manic bullet-hell shooters, specifically Cave, Treasure, those are the publishers, those guys just, they know how to make a game. I just love em. *coughs* I'm a little stuffy now. I'm trying to think, you know, I always go back to Lunar. The Lunar series is something I play multiple times a year, same thing with *Secret of Mana*. I've gotten - I've done *Secret of Mana* so much, where that's very texty that game, that I just play it in Japanese now, and it freaks people out. It's very funny. That's just kind of how I do it.

SM: Is there a particular reason you're attracted to those games or is it just playability?

CD: They're just playability. Like, you know, Secret of Mana a friend of mine had when I was kid growing up and he was like, "Oh my God this is the best!" and he loaned it to me and I just never returned it. One of those, like, everyone has that story, it's kind of funny. I feel bad about it, one of these days I'll re-link up with my childhood chum, you know, and say, "Hey, I got your Secret of Mana still." I still have his game, I have my own copy now in case we ever run into each other I can hand it to him. Or, you know, the Lunar game was such a really good exercise in storytelling. There's two main games in that saga and then there's another handful of very poorly constructed games that were a bad excuse for cashing in on the property title. But those two first games were just, just unbelievably good storytelling, the right amount of prettiness and whatever, you know.

SM: Yeah. Do you think the coin-op business is still significant in modern society?

CD: I don't know if it's significant again yet; it's on the rise. You have guys like the Galloping Ghost, Who I know personally. Those guys are just, I mean they're really, they're leading the pack in terms of bringing coin-op back. You know there's the guys up at Nickel City up in Northbrook, I think there's two of them. They do a good job. There's a couple smaller arcades and they're kind of popping up again. There's a couple of great arcades out in California, there's a couple of candy-type arcades out there as well. New York has got a couple happening. You know, they're happening in Texas, they're happening, it's coming back. Would I say it's significant just yet? No. But it could be, and I love the resurgence of it because, this is stuff that all I wanted to do when I was a kid was go to the arcade and there was a spot, my dad lived in Texas and he took us there, it was called, like, it was like "Dime City" or something like that. It was some ridiculous name and every game was 10 cents. Like, it blew my mind because he was still putting quarters or fifty cents or a dollar into these things. So, we'd go there and he'd give each, me and my brothers, each of us we'd get a \$10 bill and we'd get a hundred dimes and we'd just feed these things. All over the place, you know, it was the only time I beat *Willow* in an arcade, if you remember that movie. It was an arcade game.

[00:45:15]

SM: I don't remember that movie.

CD: You should watch it. It's ridiculous. 80s fantasy movie with a young Val Kilmer, deeply entertaining. He likes my Dolan's huh?

SM: What?

CD: He's taking pictures of my Dolan.

SM: *laughs* Arcade games aren't as popular as they used to be so how has that, like, affected you personally through your business or just in life?

CD: Well, they're not as popular as they used to be, but every day they're getting a little more popular. Like I was saying before it's a resurgence. So, being able to jump and, you know, say, "Hey, everyone else kind of wants to have these things." You know, everyone's into, you know, everyone's into this so, you know, there's just new collectors showing up every day whether it's the older players, guys my age now that are having kids, and trying to give their kids a little taste of what they had, or it's something else like that, yeah, I mean it's kind of, like I said, it's rising again. Will it ever be its peak in like the 80s and then the crash, and then again in the 90s? Maybe not, but it's a very nice rise and like I said it's coming back into cultural significance.

SM: Yeah. Let's see, next page. Ok. Is it common to run into the same people or organizations repeatedly? That's what it sounds like.

CD: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. We, you know, the general crew we tend to run into, and a lot of us, you know, we're at the same shows, we're at the same meet-ups, the same events, and we all go out, you know, go have a pizza and beer together.

SM: Yeah. So what are the prospects for the industry in 20 years, in your opinion?

CD: In 20 years it's going to be interesting. People have been clamoring for the bubble to burst, and that's one thing we're - a lot of people are kind of counting down on, you know, on who survives the bubble. Because this wasn't that big of a bubble even four years ago but it was rising, you could see it happening. And every four or five months, "Oh, the bubble's about to burst." Nope, went higher. "The bubble's about the burst." More Air! "The bubble's about the burst." So, it's really, it's when the bubble bursts is when, is when you'll see what a lot of people are made of. But honestly, every day there's just, like I said, there's new people coming in every day. And what's really interesting is that it's trendy to be into the old stuff. Being a nerd, being a dork, it's cool now. Would have helped me in high school. Being into this stuff is just, "Oh, it's rad. There you go, have fun!" But yeah, it's cool, it keeps growing bigger. So 20 years? In 20 years I expect that it would be tapered a little. But in, you know, the next five years I don't see it going anywhere. Maybe 10 years we're starting to hit some rocky times, but I don't see it going anywhere in the next few years, people are just, are rabid. This isn't Beanie Babies cause these can be - these you can actually play with or have fun with. These are, you know, there are people that are going to be doing the full collecting, like I said encasing in Lucite ridiculousness. Or the people that want to just build up a collection and have a library. There's just - there's a lot of things to be had, every category's accounted for: if you like sports, if you like, you know, rpgs, if you like action and beat-em-ups, fighting games, there's something for everyone. Evo out in Vegas is a perfect example of that. Are you familiar with Evo?

SM: I am not.

CD: Evo is called the Super bowl of fighting games. Let me show you something real quick, it's a riot. Come on, wake up. Oh for crying out loud, there we go. Oh, no there's no way that's Street Fighter 4. You know what, no, I'm going to go over to 2014. Fighters, that was a great game, that's one of my favorites. The grand finals, alright. They stream this live, millions of viewers.

SM: Really?

CD: Yeah. *advertisements begin to play* And of course there's an ad. And there's a crowd watching two people play a fighting game.

That's incredible.

CD: *coughs* This is a commercial, so this is not how the game looks. Oh, well that game looks like that. They have announcers, like it's ridiculous. I'm trying to get through it a little so hopefully you'll hear some of the crowd or something or. Oh, you know what? That's a perfect one, cause you can kind of see what's going on. Sorry about this, cause everything's monetized. *video plays* So, like, this is 2012. They all got custom sticks, they all got things built up for them. There was a guy that went really far the other day, he was saying, "It's not about the trying stick." And he went with the pad and he went really far which was impressive because the sticks give you a whole lot more control. Just kind of get this thing going. So this is a 2-vs-2 game, it's kind of like a tag team match, they tag each other in. If you hear everyone in the back, I mean, you want to talk about hype, you want to talk about where it's going, this show, I mean people are winning huge amounts of money playing in this tournament.

SM: Do you know how much?

CD: I don't want to speak out of turn. I know it's at least five figures.

SM: Wow.

CD: I want to say it's getting close to a 100k now. This tournament's been going on for a while. Huge crowds, and what's interesting is, cause there are professionals now, I'm sure you've heard of, like, the gaming leagues and stuff. Hang on, you know what, let me see a really good one. We can see something here. There we go, so this is *Smash Bros. Melee*, which is a crazy - this is this year's. It's, it's nuts. Like, this is not a messing around industry. These are people that like Smash Bros. Like, what was supposed to be a kids game, like, it was never meant to be a competitive fighting game, but it got that way. There's a few really just wacky things always happening. And of course it's lagging. I mean, this is legit size. This is bringing in tens of thousands of people, this tournament, and anyone can enter. So, if you wanted to play against the best in the world, cause the best in the world fly out to this thing in Vegas, guys come from a million different

countries, you know, it's what they do, you can go up against them, you will lose bad. It won't even be pretty.

SM: Instantaneous.

CD: Yeah. You're going to throw away your entrance fee unless you've trained. Everyone's going crazy, hold on one second. There was one that was just wacky, was that the one? That might be it. Yeah, they did it. This was another one. This one was a particularly - look at the crowd, this wasn't even EVO, this was a different show. And he's coming in like a wrestler. I mean, they're like rock stars in these rooms. These are just players, this is just a guy that's good at a video game.

[00:55:42]

SM: I love that he's in like a wrestling ring.

CD: This is - He's doing Stone Cold, that's what he's doing, yeah. And again, streamed to many, many, many, many viewers. And he's there to play a fighting game. It's so dumb *video is turned off*. But, I don't want to say it's dumb, but that's what they're doing. Like, that's what I'm talking about, it's not going away in five years. It's not going away, maybe ten years, you know, it ain't going to go away anytime soon though. That, like, you know, it's so ridiculous. It's over the top, this is just tournament play, this isn't even the collectors, some of the collectors are absolutely rabids. And then you get the, you know, what I affectionately call the holly-tubers, the guys, the high-end, super-monetized YouTube guys. So, James Rolfe, love James Rolfe. Game Sack is another one, awesome show, guys like Pewdiepie, not my favorite thing in the world, but he's the most well-paid guy on YouTube right now. This guy breaks seven figures in ads. He's in the millions of dollars to make stupid noises at a camera, I'm not even joking, have you seen him? He's ridiculous. Like, I don't understand why people watch him, he plays terrible games badly, and he does, "*gibberish*" And that's his shtick. And whatever, but he has a rabid fan base. You know, Jontron, another unbelievable guy, just unreal, when he walks in a room - I'll tell you what, when James Rolfe walked in at my table, he had lines around the corner to do the meet-and-greet thing with him but then he was kind of trying to stealthfully walk the room, and he ended up at my table, and me and him were having that Mike Tyson talk we were talking about.

I'm not even joking, just, he gets mobbed, and me and him were having a conversation, and it's almost rude, like it is rude, but, you know, I get it, he gets it, but just people like, "Ohmigod, ohmigod!" You want to say, you know, starfucker type of stuff. But that's what he does, he makes a living making videos on YouTube or making whatever, making his thing and that's awesome, the popularity is through the roof. This is just, you know, just things to know.

SM: Would you say it's at a peak right now or is it...?

CD: I don't even know if it's peaked yet. Like, that's what I'm saying. Like, every year it goes up. Hang on, just one second. Oh, Jesus Christ, what did he do? I need to know, now. This guy's - he's messed up kid. And this is unbelievably not politically correct, so I'm going to put it over there and not show you what that is.

SM: Ok. Alright.

CD: Yeah, he's just, he's a special guy, I love him but, we're just not going to do that. You guys are in college so you might get offended, I stopped being offended at things long time ago, after college.

SM: Are arcade machines more popular in some states or cities than others?

CD: Oh, for sure, yeah. *coughs* I'll tell you what, I meet very few collectors that don't aspire to one day have one, just have one. California, it's huge, west coast, it's huge. Chicagoland, pretty big. Pennsylvania's very nice. Boston, Massachusetts that's a crazy weird segment there, that's a great segment over there. You know, but it kind of gets spotty. You know, Texas gets big, but, you know, other parts of the south, less so. Maybe it's economic differences because you don't see a lot going on in Alabama, but a lot going on in, say, Dallas. You know, maybe it's something else. But usually when it gets to the more metropolitan areas where you start seeing the real concentrations of people happening, so California in general is a wealth, well-off state, so you see a lot across the board there. But Illinois gets a little less so once you leave the Chicagoland

area, and I include Milwaukee in Chicagoland like that encompassing double metro area that we have here, it's very, very lush with arcade people. But you go kind of out like into Iowa and people don't care and, you know, Omaha's a good - you know, so I think a lot of it circulates around a lot more metro areas.

SM: Let's see. Where would you say is the least popular place for arcade games?

CD: Least popular place for arcade games? It would just be - I don't want to say it like this but it would be like an impoverished area like where people don't have the money to do it. It just, you know, so you want to go to rural Mississippi? I mean, I don't think I've ever shipped anything to Mississippi. Maybe one \$10 thing or something but it is what it is.

SM: So just like where people have the money?

CD: Yeah, it's not a cheap hobby. I mean each of those standing machines are \$950 a piece when I sell them so, that's a major purchase for a lot of people.

SM: Are there some particular games in your inventory that are more popular than others?

CD: Oh, always. So, PC Engine is really, really hot right now, which would be the Japanese version of the Turbo Graphic 16. So anything playable is just off the shelf constantly. Just people go, "Ohmigod, ohmigod, ohmigod, ohmigod, gimme, gimme, gimme!" It's the same thing for, say English rpgs are always popular, anything that, you know, really, really, good action-heavy. Or then something like James Rolfe or the Game Sack guys, if they do a review of a game like that, all of a sudden everybody needs it. You know, when Rolfe was at the show I was at the day that I met him for the first time, you know, people were going through my really cheap, terrible original Nintendo carts looking for stuff that he reviewed so that he could sign their cart which is funny, that's why he signed like that cart cause he reviewed that game. It was one of his more famous videos. People were looking for, "Oh, I want this one, or I want this one, or I want this. Do you have this? Do you have this? I want to get James Rolfe to sign it." And not realizing that

before time, those games were selling out across the shelves, you know, so people could have something for those guys to sign. It was outstanding. It was a really cool thing, so.

SM: What would you say is the usual age range for people that you sell to?

CD: I kind of, you know, I know there's kids that are really into, kids that seek me out, which for a 35-year-old guy that's creepy. You know, they'll come out with their parents, but their parents know me as a reputable guy, so that's a plus, you know. But usually late 20s to early to mid-30s, you get some guys in their 40s or 50s, guy that, you know, have deal with me before. But usually in that 20s -30s, you know, you get the young guy with his first real career that finally has his own money and now he can get the shit that mom wouldn't let him have. You'll be there soon. And then the same thing with the older guys. Ok, great. I got my house, I got my car, I got the wife, I got the kid, now I can get something for me. That's what that is.

SM: Is there anything that would draw new customers to the industry, that weren't previously in before?

CD: Yeah, seeing how much fun their other friends are having. I mean that's really it: it's viral. It's video games are huge. People like, "Oh, I'm not really into it." Ah, but I don't know, you know what's a video game? Candy Crush is a video game. Maybe you like puzzle games, here try this. This is not gonna hit you up for money all the time. You only gotta pay for it once. There's a fly.

SM: Ok. Let's see, so that actually finishes all the questions that I have.

CD: Wunderbar

SM: Is there anything that you want to add?

CD: Buy my stuff. No, not really, I mean that's a pretty good, I mean, series of things, you know?
I think we covered a lot.

SM: Yeah. Alright. Awesome.

CD: Awesome.

[01:05:34]