

SEAN DAVIS
Lucky Strike FTW - Chicago IL

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[Begin Sean Davis - Lucky Strike FTW]**00:00:00**

Ricky Nguyen [RN]: Alright, this is Ricky Nguyen and Jeremy Chionglo reporting from Lucky Strike For The Win Chicago Arcade on November 3rd, 2016. Here with me is Mr. Sean Davis. Mr. Sean, what is your current job title?

Sean Davis [SD]: I'm the director of operations at Lucky Strike FTW?

RN: What is your professional work or background?

SD: I've been in this business, the entertainment business, since the early 90s. I kind of came up as a unit manager, GDM, you know all the way up. I've run this place I've - in Chicago I've run FTW Lucky Strike, Cubby Bear in Wrigleyville. I've run, back east where I'm from Massachusetts. I ran Jillian's for nine years and before that some restaurants. I started out as a pizza maker assembly.

RN: So your first job was a pizza maker?

SD: Yeah.

RN: So how did your career develop into your current job? So like, did you expect to be here today?

SD: Yeah I discovered early on that I really like it. You know what I mean. You know, I like the business. And in the business there are so many different things, you know what I mean, it's not like - you could do fine dining, you could do this, you could do concerts, you could do just about anything and it's a really diverse field. Do you know what I mean? What I mean - like the people I know are a unique breed, you know what I mean? Like we love crazy busy with and being up for all hours - you have to like it, like accountants have to like accounting or there's no way they would do it.

RN: So when did you first enter the entertainment industry and then the coin op industry?

SD: I started making pizzas in '86. It was a local place. There was a mini golf course and a 9 hole golf course. Then I moved to Boston. Worked for a couple different places. Then I went into Jillian's and that was about '93 I started working there. That was - we had 52 pool tables, 200 video games and the restaurant had like 70,000 square feet right across the street from Fenway park.

RN: So why did you enter the industry?

SD: It looked like a lot of fun. It was - it was really a great opportunity. You know, it's even to this day, it's a great place to work. It's right outside of Fenway Park. I'm a huge baseball fan. It had everything I wanted to do. It was an opportunity I couldn't pass up.

RN: So jumping back to careers, what education or training did you have that prepared you to work in the amusement industry?

SD: I took a - well most of it way just day in, day out. You know, like I took some classes at Northeastern University in Boston - so business classes. Most of it really was just doing the work almost like the old-school apprentice shops, do you know what I mean like you kind of learn as

you go because you can teach people numbers and ‘hey this is how it goes’. But in this business, how it goes isn’t usually how it goes, do you know what I mean? So a lot of it is on the job.

RN: When did you start working here?

SD: I started working here in two thousand.. August 8th, 2011.

RN: How many different roles did you have in this company or in the industry?

SD: Well, I’ve been a cook, I’ve been a waiter, I’ve bartended. I’ve been manager, general manager, and now director of operations so I kind of came up - I’ve done just about everything that there is to do.

RN: So let’s talk about your personal opinions. Do you play video games?

SD: Yes.

RN: With you family?

SD: My daughter loves to come in here. I play at home. I play XBOX with the son when he’s in school. I kind of put it away when he’s not there because it would be kind of weird to go back. I don’t do the online stuff because those guys just kick my ass.

RN: [laughs]

SD: But you know, I gamed. We play here. I live outside of the city so it’s not like my family comes in frequently, but I love playing pinball. I love the old games. I mean even though we have new games, you know, the fifth generation of whatever, I like playing..

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RN: Do you want your kids following your footsteps?

SD: No, I don’t. I want them to do their own thing. It takes a lot out, you know what I mean. In this industry, you are working weekends, you are working holidays. It’s not a choice. You know what I mean, like you have to because that’s where it is. Typically, I’ll have a Monday, Tuesday off and it’s great. You can get anything done because there’s no one around. But there’s not much fun going out on a Monday or Tuesday night, you know what I mean.

RN: Yeah.

SD: So no, I want them to do their own thing. They seem to be going to school for a couple different things. I think they are going to do well.

RN: That’s respectable. You mentioned you played video games. Do you play your own games at the arcade?

SD: Yes!

RN: And how often do you play them?

SD: As much as I possibly can.

RN: Really? Ok.

SD: Well one thing that we do is we go around and we play the games, not just for fun but to make sure they are working properly, you know what I mean. Like for instance, *Big Buck Hunter*, that sight could be off, do you know what I mean and you wouldn’t know that or a customer might not say “Hey, your sight’s off on *Big Buck Hunter*.” You know, so we go through and make sure everything works and that everything’s right - that all the buttons work

and everything else. Oddly enough, that's a job. [laughs] It's kind of cool right? So yeah, we play there and I'll play for fun like if there's nothing going on I might take a break and play some pinball. I'm a big pinball fan. Yeah, I'd say we play here.

RN: So what is your favorite game here?

SD: The pinball. We just got *Cruise* in. That's really great. I haven't played that in a long time. There's a *Zombie 3D*. It's right outside the door which is fantastic. If you've never played it, you got to play it. It's a great game. I don't go too much in for the claw games, although I'll try them to make sure they work - that everything is operating on them. There's a shield game where your a guy and you shoot the bad guys. But my all time favorite game is *Silent Scope* which was the best game I ever played in my life.

RN: So either *Silent Scope* or pinball, are there any tricks to playing the game?

SD: You got to pay attention.

RN: Pay attention?

SD: Well the pinball you do. *Silent Scope* - have you ever seen it?

RN: No.

SD: Well they don't make them anymore. It was back in the '90s where you were a sniper. But the only way you could see the - you could see the screen but it was kind of blurry unless you put your eye through the scope and it was just really great like a badass game.

RN: So it was one of the top ones? With the sniper?

SD: Yeah, yeah.

RN: Okay. So what is your view on joystick vs handheld games?

SD: I like the - I like - you mean joystick like the ones we got in here?

RN: So joystick here and handheld as in the props, so guns..

SD: Oh, I like the props better. The props - I think it adds something to it. I think you almost feel like you're more involved in it. You know like we've got some games where you push a button and something happens. I don't - I'm not a fan of those games because it's just like you're not really doing anything. You're just pushing a button where I think if you get in something and you put something on, you become more involved with the game. You know what I mean like it's just cooler.

RN: How do you feel about the arcade equipment for games? For example, the racing simulators or special mission cabinets that have ??.

SD: You mean the big cabinets?

RN: Yeah.

SD: Those are good. A lot of those bigger games you usually have two players which is fun. And a lot of those two players you can either - on the bigger ones, they're linked so you can play with your friends. I like games where you can kind of be involved with other people. You know what I mean like if we three were to race, we would have fun doing it. Like I'm sure you guys do.

Like it's a videogame but you still want to win and it is a lot of fun to do those games that are either linked or you're playing with someone else because you know, we got *Jurassic Park* there

for instance, so it's a two player game. You can play it with one but it's not fun so if your buddy dies, you're trying to cover him until you can swipe that card again, do you know what I mean?

RN: Yeah.

SD: Right? It's fun.

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RN: It's just like the tense feeling

SD: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, it's really good.

RN: So speaking about the players, what impact do you think games have on them?

SD: I - one of the reasons that we did FTW is - with the size of the games and I know there are a lot of retro bars out there which are great - which I really respect that because it's not easy keeping those games going. You know, they don't make parts anymore. But here all the games are really big and one of the reasons that we did that was because you know the older folks kind of get to feel like a kid again. Do you know what I mean because when you were a little kid, you would go to the arcade. You know, you would stand in front of this huge cabinet. You know what I mean and you would play your game. But then when you get older, you're like that cabinet's not really that big since I can now touch the top with no problem. With the bigger games, it kind of gives you that feel that you're a kid again. You know and that's kind of what we are going for, you know to give it that feel. When you walk in here it's like you get a lot of stuff coming at you. You know, you got sound, you got music, you got lights, I mean you got everything and it kind of creates excitement you know. Like that new *Pacman* that we have, it's huge, you know like it's nuts. I can't wait to try it.

RN: So you mentioned that you live outside the city.

SD: Yeah.

RN: So what brought you to Chicago?

SD: You can't really get paid in the suburbs. You know what I mean like economic factors you just get paid more in the city. There's much more opportunity in the city. You can probably take something like this to Schaumburg or something like that but there aren't that many places in Illinois that could sustain something like this you know. It's not like the old days where you got like a corner place and a guy would throw in twenty games a week, backing kids with tokens all day long.

RN: So what was your first coin-op experience? Either in business or as a child playing game?

SD: Oh my parents got divorced so every Saturday I'd go with my dad and we'd go to the movies and there was an arcade right there in the mall. We'd go in there and play. At the time, the big game was - it was like a *Jaws* game. It was terrible. The whole - thinking back it was great to play because it felt like you were shooting something but like the graphics were really bad. There was another one where you were a gun-slinger and you stood in front of this big screen and you would have to draw. Hopefully you would shoot them and then you would go to the movies. So that was my first experience and then in high school they opened up a arcade near

the high school. So we would ditch and hit the arcade because there was also pizza there which was good.

RN: [laughs] So what were your expectations when you first started this industry? How do they compare now?

SD: I can never picture myself...growing up I guess I could never picture myself as like a 9 to 5 person working in a cubicle. I just couldn't do it, you know what I mean, and I think I knew that right away because you know I had some friends who graduated and they were doing this and I'm like, "That sounds absolutely miserable like I don't know why you would do that." And I don't get that in this industry you know what I mean like there's a lot of interaction with people. There's a lot of - it's exciting to see someone having fun you know what I mean like when people say I had a good time, it kind of makes you feel good you know what I mean. I think much better than, you know, pushing paperwork in some desk somewhere. It's got to be dreadful. But yeah, I think I gotten everything that I expected out of it you know. Yeah. I'm happy where I'm at.

RN: So you mentioned you worked prior to this business. So - and you experienced the crash correct? The crash of arcades?

SD: Oh yeah, yeah.

RN: So what was it like being in that era?

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SD: That was back in the '90s, generally. We had 250 games, it was great. The thing was it would hum. You could almost circle the date on the calendar where you're like 'where did everyone go?' And we tried all different types of things like lowering the price, changing the settings so that it was easier but people weren't just coming in because now, I mean, they had Atari which really wasn't any sort of competition. But then all of a sudden - in the '90s there were a lot of sporting games. We had like golf, we had basketball, you had baseball, and then all of a sudden you could play those in your living room for not that much money, do you know what I mean. If you thought about it, the amount of tokens you would use, you could buy - what was it - Nintendo. I don't think Atari made it. What was another one? Who did Sonic the Hedgehog?

RN: Sega.

SD: Sega. That was another one. Not only did - they really weren't coming out with new games. Like a lot of time *Cruising USA*. So you'd buy *Cruise* and you'd be able to get an upgrade pack which would give you new courses, new graphics, new stickers, and everything else. They start doing that because they were all - all their attention was geared now towards the home market because that was going to be the thing like online gaming was going to be the big thing. Like I remember the first time I'd even heard of that I was like "What do you mean you can play video games online against other people?" And we at the time thought about putting in a online lounge. But we didn't have the technology to make all of that work do you know what I mean like we didn't really understand it I guess. So yeah, it was pretty bad. I mean I know that arcades and

things were drying up. It was terrible. And I honestly didn't think it would come back but I think the - although the graphics are a thousand times better than they were back then and the gameplay is a lot smoother and it's a lot nicer and cooler, I think, you know, the arcades started coming back. I think people still wanted to go out you know what I mean. I'm sure that gamers play here but then they also go home and play too you know what I mean. So - and I think another thing - fashions come and go like bellbottoms are in, they're out, they're in and they're out so I think that the older folks like - "Yah I remember going in an arcade and here's the arcades again!" you know what I mean. Like I still go - I still play the older games like *Missile Commander*. I love it. *Galaxia*. Love it. I play it all the time. If I find it, I'm throwing quarters or whatever it is. So we'll see how long it lasts do you know what I mean. Like I remember the '90s, they were going to come out with technology like we had a lot of fighting games. You stood on a platform and anywhere you moved, that's where the guy on the screen moved. Like that's cool. It never happened. It never came out you know what I mean. We used to go to venues. We would have big conventions about what's coming out and stuff like they had it but then they just scraped it. So I think if they start doing that, the industry can sustain even longer you know.

RN: So what major changes have you seen or experienced outside of the crash? So could be for better or for worse.

SD: I think one thing that they're doing now is they're taking all of the phone apps and turning them into video games. I think that's a huge mistake. Because you have it on your phone so why would you play *Candy Crush*. Do you know what I mean like we have *Angry Birds* but you have *Angry Birds* on your phone and I think if - I don't think they'll ever be able to catch up to them because I think the phone apps, the games, come and go so quickly that there's no way for whoever to make the next big thing and by the time they get it out that game is probably already gone. I think what they should do is do more virtual reality stuff. Things that almost immerse you in the game that you can't get at home no matter what, you know. Like I said there was a platform where wherever you moved, it fought and that would be a cool game if you and I were to stand on a platform and pretend fight each other on the screen you know. More immersion, more bringing folks together, like team stuff. Like I know that the online gaming is a big deal you know like - so you fight another team from somewhere else. You could probably do that in arcades too. I don't see why not. But it has to be different.

RN: So you mentioned your opinion about some of the phone apps.

SD: Yeah.

RN: But more specifically, what - so what projects have you worked on that are important for your career?

SD: Oh for my career? Or the games?

RN: Let's say your career.

SD: My career? My career would be to keep this place clean, keep it running because the games do go down a lot. They do need a lot of attention. You'd be surprised. And it takes like

dedication. You have to have people maintain it. The last thing you want to do is walk around an arcade and “This one’s out, that one’s out, and this button doesn’t work” you know what I mean because people talk do you know what I mean and they’re going to think this arcade is terrible because nothing works in there and I never want to have that so I want to make sure that it’s running all the time. Everything needs to run in time. And that’s a challenge you know like you’d be surprised - we get all of our games new and a month later we need parts for them. It’s crazy. You know, it’s bananas like how is this possible?

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RN: So let’s talk about impact again. How has the industry impacted your life outside of work?

SD: Well I’ve always - you know when I was back east and when I came out here, I kind of always have been around video games and I’ve always played video games so it’s kind of hard for me to say - it’s not like a year ago all of a sudden I discovered videogames and everything changed. Like it kind of came up - I kind of came up in it. It affects me negatively. Sometimes there’s too much noise do you know what I mean like I don’t know if it’s a negative or not but sometimes I get dizzy.

RN: [laughs]

SD: It’s just too much. Well the impact - a positive impact is it kind of helped Lucky Strike, you know, get to that next level because now we have - we can offer you just about anything you want to do which is a nice piece. You know like a lot times people bowl and we will give them some player cards to play the games and they come over and they love it you know. I do, you know - when you’re playing video games you really can’t be mad. It’s fun to see kids get like get stuff out of redemption. You know what I mean like rings and whatever else. They’re all psyched. The one thing that’s bad is - it’s good and bad like it was always fun to see people with handfuls of tickets. You know what I mean, that was cool and they’re putting them out there and tickets flying everywhere. Now in the electronic age, everything is on their card. You know what I mean which I get because they were a pain for us. You know like I remember tickets and tokens. Two things that were a nightmare you know like - but they were fun. I thought it was fun when you had tokens in your pocket you know what I mean because you’re always trying to put them in like something else like a phone or candy machine or something to try to use it you know. So I don’t think my life has really changed because I’ve always been around it you know.

RN: What kind of advice would you give to someone pursuing a similar career?

SD: Oh, buy a good pair of shoes. Be patient. Everything is going to be alright. No matter what, everything will be alright at the end of the day. People yell and scream. Let them do it. Just like get good people. Be engaged all the time. You know like I can’t do this sitting in my living room. I can’t do this sitting in my office so you really have to be engaged. You have to be on the floor. You’ve got to be walking around. You’ve got to be talking to people and just making sure everything is going alright you know.

Jeremy Chionglo [JC]: Just a - just a quick question. Where do you think you’d be without - without videogames? As in the industry. What do you think you’d do without it?

SD: With this space? This place is almost designed for video games for whatever reason you know. Like when I first got here, it was vacant. And this has been here a little over a year. I told Steven the auditor like you should put an arcade in this space. And at the time he was like you know they really hadn't hit yet. Like there was some of the old school ones. Then all of a sudden we did it and it's been a pretty good success so far. I know my life would be a lot easier if I didn't have an arcade. But I don't think it'd be as fun do you know what I mean like it's a whole other set of headaches. But it's good you know what I mean like we have a nice thing going so to just pull it [laughs]. It's funny because everyone was all excited and I'm like guys listen you don't know it's going to be - "ah it's going to be great. We're going to have an arcade. We're going to do this" and like "it's a lot of work." "No." I'm like "yeah!" You know so like my redemption manager is running around making sure we have enough stuff like when *Star Wars* came out, I go "Is that all you have? It's not going to last a weekend." She's like "Oh no, it will." One day it was gone. I'm like those kids eat that stuff up. You know like they're on a mission. Like you go in the redemption room. I want that and you're going to keep playing until you get those points.

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RN: So similar to advice for their career, what games do you recommend to learn about coin-op?

SD: They're all ones and zeros do you know what I mean. People - some people like redemption games, some people don't. I'm not a big fan of redemption games. The one area that does consistently well - we have like - we walked past like the rolldown and the goldfish things, we'll call it Carney Row, because it's like carnival games, people like that. Again because you're competing with other people do you know what I mean. It's not a solitary game. It's hard to know what someone's going to like you know. A lot of times I'm like "oh people are going to love this game" and no one plays it. And other games, no one's going to play it and they can't stop playing it like there's a new game out called *Killer Queen*. You guys heard of it?

RN: No, I haven't.

SD: Alright, it's really - we're getting it. It's like a nine player game. It's really low resolution. I don't understand the whole manouche of how it goes but everyone's dying to play it. You know like you really don't know - you know like when you put your room together you're like "Okay, I got to have some driving games." But you know what? Too many driving games because they're all the same. You know what I mean like shooter games. Well they're all the same too so it's tough to get a good mix and it takes a little while to dilate. So I don't know. Maybe just a broad overview you know like all the games are the same really when you get down to the basics of it.

JC: How do you know what types of games do you think will succeed at your arcade? Like do you just hear it around? What people like?

SD: Yeah, there's a lot of industry magazines and there's a lot of sites and you know we will go to places and check out what's going at other establishments. Like you know we - one game that does exceptionally well and we just got it in is *Big Bass Wheel*. You pull the handle and the

wheel spins and then you get tickets. We took one of those and kind of did an FTW treatment to call the *Wheel of Wonder*. It didn't get played that much. We didn't understand why so we got rid of it. Then we put a *Big Bass Wheel* and *Wheel of Wonder* side by side. The *Big Bass Wheel* played more than the *Wheel of Wonder*. It's the same game. One looked different. *Big Bass Wheel* has a lot of the - it's very colorful and stuff like that. So that has a lot to it like the lights and things attract people. They're attractors. And that's another thing too like once you get the games in, they all have different settings for their different attractors. So you got to walk the room like is it too loud here. Can I get a game too much because sometimes I'll be in here and one game will stick in my head and it makes you crazy you know what I mean like you just keep hearing the same thing over and over and you're going to lower it. Yeah. The sounds. They kill me.

RN: You mentioned sticking your head in it so a question we have is what is the weirdest thing that has ever happened to you?

SD: In life?

RN: Let's say - life is a little sketchy.

SD: [laughs] Shut that off. The weirdest thing that ever happened to me. Years ago. Before the whole card swipe thing came out, we used to use tokens. So you'd open up a token machine and you have three bins. You pull the bins out. You fill them with tokens. If you pull them out too far, they fall down. So - and it's a two man job because someone has to hold them. So we fill the bins and one falls out and they hold a ton of tokens. And the other two fall out and I was up to here in tokens cleaning this pile and everyone around us - this is in Boston. It was almost like - just in the movies like everything stopped. There was no sound or anything and everyone started grabbing them. And I'm trying to kick them away and - it was - that was probably the weirdest thing because it was just a free for all. Those tokens were gone in seconds. Like and there was thousands of tokens you know. You were just grabbing handfuls and running away screaming. It's kind of funny if you think about it. But yeah, that was probably the weirdest thing.

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RN: So on the opposite end, what is the best day that you had?

SD: This has happened a couple times like we'll do things where we'll either bring in, you know, kids who don't have much money you know what I mean on a poor spectrum more? Maybe have some emotional or you know like handicapped kids and to those guys have fun, like I just got a whole bunch of cards that they made out - you know like thanking me like get them some food and they can play all the games and you know I even let them win prizes because what the hell you know what I mean. Just go for it. That's always good. When I was in Boston, we used to do an event every year where kids from Chernobyl would come to Mass. General for treatment - for radiation treatment. And I mean, then walk into the place and they had - I guarantee you they had never seen a place like that. And like to see them have fun, that's cool. There's really nothing better.

RN: So are there any other high points of your business then?

SD: It's profitable. [laughs]

RN: [laughs]

SD: A lot of - a lot of the games are expensive. If you're going to open up a video game - an arcade - don't rent your games because you're going to give one guy 50% of all your stuff and you're still going to have to pay to fix everything. Like buy your games. That way everything you made was yours you know what I mean so - and videogame money, even though they do break down frequently, they're not that much to fix do you know what I mean like unless you have a major crash. But that money goes right to the bottom line for the most part. Like our cards - our cost on redemption is about 9%. The rest of it - right to the bottom line.

RN: So let's talk about the business. Can you tell us something about Lucky Strike and tell us about Lucky Strike?

SD: Sure. Lucky Strike has been around since the late '90s. We've got 19 locations. All throughout the United States. FTW is - this was the very first one. It was kind of like the trial. This year we want to open up in Albany. There will be another one opening in Denver. First of the year Bethesda, Maryland. Hawaii. And I think there's two more but I don't know the cities of them yet so Lucky Strike is getting into the next concept where if you look, like Lucky Strike looks completely different than the side. It's going to look - it's going to have the same feel as this side probably after the first year. We're getting into the season where it's just going to be too busy to do any sort of construction or anything like that. But in the spring we will kind of give it the FTW feel - no games or anything but just like with the colors and the wood and things like that. So it's a concept that's really being rolled out throughout the country and most of the FTW - most of the Lucky Strikes and a lot of new projects going on because FTW could stand alone. It doesn't need Lucky Strike to be with it do you know what I mean like you could put this somewhere and it would be able to go because we've got food, we've got drink and can definitely stand on its own.

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RN: Has your family influenced your business?

SD: Yeah. I've got three kids, two of them are in college, one of them is in eighth grade, and a wife. They love coming out to play games. My daughter's had her last two birthdays here, and she can have her third one not too long from now. They're very interested as to what we're doing. Now, the wife would like to see me more, she'd like to have a little more weekends, so that might be a negative impact, but, should be alright.

RN: So is this a family business then?

SD: Yeah, even though it's a corporation - it's owned by Steven Foster, who is my boss. He's out in California. It's not like a Dave and Busters where it's a worldwide conglomerate, you know what I mean, like it kinda is a family business. We have on the unit level - we have a lot of say as to how it goes. It's not like - I don't have an office full of clipboards, I don't get a book every month, a manual like "you must do this." I have the ability to come up with things on my own and do them and execute, you know and if they work out - great, and if not, that's ok, and

Steven's been great, my whole life I've known him, well, since the early '90's. And working like that is really cool you know, because if something does fail, he'd rather have you try and fail than not try, you know, because a lot of times you don't know, you know you give it a go, and what might be a failure, maybe you can just tweak it here or tweak it there and all of the sudden it's a success. You don't get too much grief and aggravation if you make a mistake. It's been pretty good, and it's a great place to work honestly, for that reason alone. If you go to a Dave and Buster's or a place, you're not thinking, you're just following a manual. Like what fun is that? It sounds dreadful, it really does. So I like that.

RN: So you mentioned this venue offers a lot of entertainment such as the bar, the bowling. How does that affect how you run the business?

SD: You've got to wear a lot of different hats. We've got pool, we've got ping pong, we've got bowling, we've got video games, we have minigolf. So, keeping all of those going is kind of like an orchestra, you know what I mean? So like on this side, I've got game techs, and redemption people. Those people are completely different from bowling mechanics that I have on the other side. They're completely different than bowling control desk people. The servers here are a little bit different just because our bar is different because of the theme of FTW being steampunk. We have all draft beers, so the staff here - they don't know - they're not better than the staff next door they're just different. So, you've got to approach people differently, like computer guys are different than mechanics, like a mechanic is kind of "[growls]" whereas a computer guy could just talk forever like alright I'm dizzy now you can send me home. So yeah you've got to keep everything in motion. You've got to make sure you have enough ping pong balls and all the paddles are right, and do you have enough chalk for pool tables, it's a lot you know? And all those people have to be handled differently, like you can't treat everyone the same I guess is what I'm saying. It's not like a restaurant, you know it is what it is and you're all on the same team. We're all on the same team here, but we wear different shirts.

RN: You mentioned FTW being new, correct?

SD: Yeah, brand new.

RN: How do you see it fitting into the Chicago arcade scene?

SD: Oh, I think it fits in well. I think - you know the folks who pay homage to the old school games, I have great respect for those guys, what they do is not easy. I think this is an alternative with the new games. I think there's plenty of room, it's a huge city. We haven't even really scratched the surface about getting the word out to everyone that we're here. Being connected to the movies brings me back to when I was a kid. So a lot of people who go to the movies say "Wow look at that, let's go in." So I think it fits in well in Chicago. I mean, pinball was invented in Illinois, so it should.

RN: So you mentioned the large screens making you feel like a child. On that note how would you describe the culture of the business? I guess the atmosphere would be a better term.

SD: Oh, you know, we'll get - we book a lot of private parties with companies, and initially the people will be like "No, we're the 'joe-shmo' company, and we're the executives, we don't play

video games.” And then when they do, they’re having fun, like they’re playing air-hockey and laughing, and like being kids again. It is really funny because I’ve had so many people have parties that, you know “We’re professionals, and we don’t go in for that sort of thing” but then they’re like “Damn we had a good time.” I think people are too uptight. Like I said before, if you’re playing video games you’re having fun. Like I said if we’re racing, even if you lose you don’t care because it’s fun. You play air hockey, it’s fun, it’s just fun. There’s nothing bad. It is amazing to me and it still - I’ll tell you the same thing, people who say we never would have thought, and can’t wait for the next time, because they do have fun. I think people underestimate the amount of fun they could actually have. I think people do that a lot. Because they don’t want to, I don’t know. Maybe they feel, like when they get to a certain age they can’t be goofy anymore, but, why the hell not?

00:41:46

RN: Seeing that FTW is doing pretty well, what do you think makes a good or bad arcade?

SD: Keeping it running, keeping it good-looking. Back in the day I remember going to really dark arcades and like “Oh I don’t really want to go in there.” You know it’s bright, there’s a lot of action, when you walk in the door there’s a lot going on. We serve great food, great beer. It really is like the total package. And it’s geared more towards adults than it is kids, because we do have a lot of adults saying “Hey we’re going to bring our kids here” and you know they have their birthday parties here and kids love it. Typically the bigger arcades are more designed for kids and they have to bring their parents and so we said well why don’t we make it for the parents and they have to bring their kids. It seems to be working out.

RN: You mentioned that that’s how you kind of differ from other arcades, so how do you keep your edge over other companies then?

SD: I think our food and beverage program - I guess there would be a couple different classifications, like there are some brew pubs that have great video games and a really great beer menu and food menu. With that being said I think most of those games are older, you know like the retro style. So if you were to put in classes I guess we’d be like a Dave and Buster’s or a Level 52 or something like that. I think if you were to compare us to that - all of our food is made fresh here, it’s not out of a freezer, which, those places choose to do that, and that’s fine, I can understand that, it’s easy to do. But like our chef Eric really puts time in to develop dishes so you do get that gastro-pub feel like you do at one of the other ones like the Beer-cades and stuff like that where the old games go. So we’re kind of like a hybrid you know like when we’re putting it together and looking at it, we came to the conclusion that might be a cool direction to go where everything is made fresh, and you know people come in, they expect to get french fries and chicken fingers and we have that, but we also have a lot of stuff that’s really really good, and they’re really surprised by the food, and they’re like “We didn’t know you could get arcade food like this,” and it’s not arcade food, like we have flatbread pizzas which are made fresh. It’s not like a frozen thing you put on a conveyor belt inside and you cut it and serve it, you know, we put time and effort in. As far as the games go I mean we probably have the same games as Dave

and Buster's or Level 52, whatever it's called. I think we just do it in a little bit of a cooler way, because we're more geared - I don't want to say geared to adults where we don't want kids, we want kids, but it's a place where you can come as an adult and have fun too.

RN: You said you targeted both adults and kids. What would be the majority of the age group of your clientele?

SD: Well I can tell you on the weekends, Saturday and Sunday days, it's just wall to wall kids parties. It's like Chuck E. Cheese in here. And then at night that flips where it's just adults. We stop letting kids in at 8, kick 'em out at 9, but like we have DJ on Friday and Saturday nights, and make a successful flip with that, and fill it up with adults afterwards. And it's cool to you know, I go in before or after to get something to drink and come play some games.

RN: Regarding the age policy, what do you think are the advantages and disadvantages?

SD: Well the advantages are you don't get - we serve alcohol so there's definitely..there's that, you know like kids hiding behind a game and drinking. I think for the adults, if you're on a date or you're with your friends drinking you don't want kids running around. It just kinda kills it. So when they're gone, then adults can have fun because it's all playing video games. And vice versa in the day, like we are geared towards kids during the day, because you don't get groups of people out drinking, you know what I mean? [laughs] So it's kind of the best of both worlds.

RN: Something I've noticed on the website is that there's a dress code policy. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of that?

00:47:10

SD: We've done away with the signage on the dress code policy. You want to have a certain...like being in the city you do get some homeless folks hanging out, and you don't want to say "hey you can't come in because you're homeless" but like, we all know what it is, you know, and if we're in here drinking, and someone came in that looked homeless, it's like "What's going on here?" you know what I mean? Dress code policies are a tough thing lately, to be honest. We've done away with it on the door, we'll probably get away - take it off the website as well...it's a different world.

RN: Regarding the two policies, were these initial, like marketing decisions or ones that developed over time?

SD: Those were there for a long time. It wasn't anything new that came out, it's the same thing over in Lucky Strike.

RN: You mentioned the birthday parties and then the adults at night. Which group has been the most successful and why do you think so?

SD: The adult parties at night, we do a lot of those, like we'll do adult birthday parties, we'll do a lot of corporate parties. The kids parties are very inexpensive, so they're not really money makers to say, where the adult, you're making money on your food and booze, and the kids are getting some pizzas and some goodie bags and some sodas, and they're here having fun, and hopefully they'll tell other kids about the business, that's why we do it. The kid's parties have skyrocketed since I've been here, it's really big, really good. You can combine bowling and, you

can do just about anything you want. You can do straight video games or straight bowling, you can do a combination of the two. They have a lot of options.

RN: What is the turnover of customers and employees?

SD: Oh, we have a lot of the same employees - on FTW side - we have a lot that we started with. In the summer time we get slow, just because everyone wants to be outside, so a lot of them went to Wrigleyville to work. I would expect to be hearing from them in the next few days to come back, because they know that in the winter we really are ready. So, we get a lot of that, I don't want to say seasonal help, but we keep rotating our seasonal people through and that seems to work out, you know, I understand. It also makes my life a little bit easier, we don't have to carry a big staff and have stuff for them to do. There are days in the summer time where it's just slow, because it's beautiful outside. Our parties are usually between two and three hours long, kids parties usually stay later because they'll be done with their party space but they're still playing games and having fun. People are here for a few hours. We do get a bunch of people who will grab a quick beer before a movie, then a lot of those folks come back after their movie. Last night we had 200 people in here for a private party and they were supposed to be done at 9 and they stayed until 12:30 [AM] watching the game.

RN: What is the demographic like of your employees and coworkers?

SD: Oh, they're all over the place. I think I'm the oldest one though. We've got some hosts that are late teens, early twenties. Every nationality I think is represented..yeah just about everything, I mean, if you're a good employee, you're in man. So the demographic is kind of anyone that wants to have fun you know? It's a good place to work.

RN: [laughs] Seems like it.

SD: Yeah!

RN: You mentioned that this is not a 9-to-5 job. What hours do you work then?

SD: During the week, I usually get in here any time between 8 AM and 11, and I'm usually out of here between 7 and midnight, depending what's going on. It seems when I want to get out of here I can't, so a lot of times I'll look around and go "Oh, I can go" I just disappear, you know. Weekends, those are usually a little bit longer. I usually start my day at 2 in the afternoon and then close, so close at 2, get out of here about 2:30. That's Friday, Saturday. I try not to work Sundays because my wife hates it, but there are some Sundays that I work. I put in anywhere, like 50-55 hours a week.

RN: What is it like to manage that schedule?

SD: You know everyone goes, "Oh you make your own schedule, it's great!" Let me tell you guys right now, when you make your own schedule, it's the worst thing you could possibly do, because that means you're in charge of something, and if you're in charge of it, that means you gotta make sure it's right. Making your own schedule is terrible, because you find that you're here more than anyone else. I'm not complaining about it although sometimes I do. But it's a responsibility, not only to the venue but to myself. Yeah, making your own schedule is a bitch. [laughs] You guys will see one day.

RN: How would you describe a typical day at your job?

00:54:22

SD: I don't know that there's a typical day, like I walked in yesterday, this whole floor was disorganized, people were putting games together, we had a party at 2, and then 200 at 5 [PM], so had to scramble for that. My sound system went out next door, so I had to get that going. There's always something going on, there's always a catastrophe, you know. It's never "Hey everything's great." But what I'll do is I'll check on all my notes from the night previous, I'll check the previous day's sales, and make sure that's all right. I'll look at any scheduling issues, I'll do ordering, I'll go through departments and make sure that they're all set, make sure we have everything we need, whether it's liquor, I don't do food ever. Just make sure we have everything to keep going, and staffed, you gotta be staffed. It's a lot. It doesn't sound like that but damn, it takes a long time.

RN: You mentioned the catastrophes, what are your biggest daily concerns then?

SD: My biggest daily concern is that - about a month and a half ago, two months ago a pipe broke above us, and water from the next room over was pouring into the space. They couldn't shut it off, a sprinkler had broken, and the whole place filled with water. And I've got video from the outside of the building, flowing out of the windows like a waterfall. The problem is, we've got a lot of electricity in here. So water coming from the ceiling is my biggest concern. That could be a catastrophe, you know, and we don't need that. Not so much people getting hurt, just replacing all their stuff. Yeah our insurance will pay for it and that, but you're still going to lose you know...

RN: [suggesting] like down time...

SD: The down time, fixing it, getting everything back together. I'll be on the phone a lot if that happens. [laughs]

RN: [laughing] Sounds dreadful.

SD: It does, it's horrible! Luckily, the water didn't get deep, and none of these games are on the floor so we didn't lose games. We lost some carpeting, it stunk so we had to have someone come in and clean all the carpeting. When it was all taken care of I think we lost a day of sales, but what are you going to do, it could have been a lot worse.

RN: So we'll talk about the business then. What are some of the challenges you face in your career and business?

SD: Getting the word out, getting people in. You know, in my career we've done TV, we've done radio, coupon, just everything you can possibly think of. And you really don't know if it works, like, we don't have the big budget like a Dave and Buster's where they can get their names on racecars and things like that, so a lot of it is people on the street handing out fliers, a lot of the social media. You run an ad in the Reader and you don't know if it works. The one thing I find - social media seems to be working well, but like handing someone a coupon, I don't want to call it a coupon, but like a five dollar player card, I find that that works the most. But it's

also like, it's time consuming. Two people can only hit so many people on the street. Getting the word out is probably the toughest thing to do.

RN: On the other end of the spectrum then, what was your busiest year, and what are other periods that have done well?

SD: Here? Or throughout?

RN: Let's say Lucky Strike and the arcade.

SD: Well this is a year and a half old, so at the end of last year, it was the busiest year that I've had here, and this year is going to be busier than that, so we're in it right now. It's going to be a good year this year.

RN: I'm sure you're looking forward to that.

SD: [knocks on wood] [both laugh] I hope so.

RN: So let's talk about the arcade cabinets and games. How do you choose the games that you place?

SD: Well you see what's trending in other places. There are the magazines and such, they'll give you like, "Hey this hot new game." What works in one room might not work in another. We try to get the top ones. There aren't all that many to choose from. We stay current with what we have going, like we just got a bunch of games in so, when I saw that new *Pacman* I'm like, "Yeah let's get that, that looks cool." A lot of it is that too, going through the catalog, you say "Hey, that looks alright," then you read up and you see how it's trending in other places and give it a go.

01:00:27

RN: You mentioned the catalogs, can you name any specific publications that you read?

SD: Amusements. The distributors will come out with their own like catalogs, let's say like Shaffer Distributing, Sega has their own stuff, Konami has their own stuff. There's a ton of information out there. There's...I'm trying to think of one I read the other day, it wasn't Amusements, I can't think of the name of it. But this one talks about like all the entertainment stuff, like theme, not theme parks but, like places with rides, amusement parks. They'll cover everything. A lot of times you get crazy ideas out of those too.

RN: Are there any trade shows you go to to see these?

SD: Yeah, there's always one, there's usually like regional ones that are smaller, there's one in Vegas in February, and that's a really really...that's a good one, it's really for the industry. They cover - like if you're a game tech they'll have five identical games, and they'll all have the same problem, and they'll be like, "Ok guys, go!" and it's a competition to see who can fix it the fastest. You get to see all the new games that are coming out, the stuff they've been working on. It's a great place to meet people in the industry, and you'll see like - I haven't been, because this had just opened, but back in the day I would go every year, and you know you'd see the same people. They're big but there's not that many people there like when you get down to the distributors and things like that. So that's always a lot of fun, I love that. I might go this year.

RN: So kind of an opinion question, but why do you think people play coin-op games, in lieu of like consoles?

SD: I think people want to get out. I think when you're out, you might not think of it, but I think when you see it you want to do it. I don't know if people are sitting at home going "Oh let's go to an arcade," like they used to do in the past, but I think when they see it they do explore and once they walk in the door they start playing. I've seen many who are going to a movie or whatever, and they kind of walk in and just want to look around, and ok no problem, and then ten minutes later they're playing games. I think this one is inviting so when you do come in, it kind of feels good to play games. The whole console... you can get different things on that right? You can play *Gears of War* with people from all over the world. You can't get that here where it's kind of like I said before, we're all racing, and it's fun - like the online gamers get off on fighting a team from Australia - I think it's more personal here like, you're not communicating over headset. Not that that's bad, if that's your thing.

RN: What do you think makes a good or bad arcade game?

SD: A good or bad game?

RN: Yeah for the cabinets..

SD: Oh, well...that's a damn good question. I think you'd have to look at the game, so you have your driving segment, you've got your shooting segment, you've got your redemption segment, and after that...you know some people don't like guns, they might like driving games, so if you were to take the individual segments, I think what makes the games, like the biggest games in those segments popular, are like graphics, how they sound, how they look, how they feel. Like some driving games for instance, it doesn't feel right like when you drive in it, like the steering wheel might be wrong, or the seat might not be just right, and you know, can the seat be adjusted. If you're shifting, what does it feel like, when you shift does it feel like you're really shifting. There used to be a Ferrari game out there that was hot as hell to play, but it felt like you were really shifting a car. I can tell you that I think video games in the past were a lot harder than the games out today. I think that in the '90's, you had to be accurate with your shots, whereas here the window is kind of bigger. I don't know why. A gun - you know, if you're going to do a shooting game, does the gun feel right, does it feel too much like plastic or does it feel real. I think those things are tremendously important. We've got a showdown game, the graphics are alright on it, but the steering wheel feels good, like it feels like a car wheel, it doesn't feel like a game or a toy. I think you don't want that. And that's something I don't think you can get at home. I remember sitting there with my little console with a shifter, you know it was fun because I was doing it at home, but it was still kind of a cheesy game.

01:07:01

RN: What are the popular games on your route?

SD: Oh, the popular games on hand?

RN: Yeah.

SD: Those carnival games go well. The *Nothing But Net* basketball game...the games that do best are the games that have people involved in them, like where you're either, you know, playing t...or, you know, you can play together. Those seem to be the best games. Seem to be the best games by far. You know, like, I think we've got six rolled out and like six people will play that or even...two because I think we all like competition, you know what I mean, so competing with someone, those are the...those are the most popular games.

RN: So, I'm not sure of...if they are ticket redemption or high score but what is popularity between the two, is one better than the other?

SD: People like...People like redemption because they get things. Kids love redemption because they're winning. You know, whether they win two tickets or two hundred tickets, they still win. Kids like that because they like to get prizes. I noticed like, you know, we've got some high end prizes in there, like we've got some Apple stuff and I think people who come will save their...like save up their points to get that. Whereas kids will just kinda swipe like crazy and just push buttons, they wanna see what they win, you know what I mean, where I think older folks, you know, take their time and I think they're like, shooting for something more...more so than kids are. Like you hand kids candy and they love it, just getting stuff. You know? Just fun stuff.

RN: Do you think the licensed games do better or ... equally, maybe?

SD: What do you mean by licensed games?

RN: Say for like the *Angry Birds*, something that has, like...licensed titles.

SD: Oh! Yeah, I...I don't know that they do, like I've said already the games that are being made now, a lot of them are phone apps or apps in the computer and I think that the frequency that those change, like they fall in and out of popularity so quickly, I don't know that the game manufacturer can really keep up because they're kinda...they should be kinda on the forefront of that wave and they're still riding the tail end of it, you know what I mean, because like we just got an *Angry Birds*, maybe that would have been good two years ago but it's going to take them time to come up with cabinets and everything else so it's not like you can just make an app and throw it up, you know what I mean, it's a little bit different with a video game and I'm not sure if that's time well spent on the manufacturers, you know what I mean, like you've got *Candy Crush* and you know I've seen people out playing *Candy C*...playing *Candy Crush*. I don't get it. God bless 'em. You know it's cool that they like it, but I don't think that I would ever play it in an arcade, you know what I mean, but someone who loves *Candy Crush* might just be...be jeweled and be beside themselves, you know what I mean, like for me it's...it's...I'm not into it. But I don't know that they're all that popular, I think the old school games like *Throwdown*...the *Down the Clown*, that's popular with basketball, that's all...those are really popular.

RN: Do you...Are there any foreign...popular foreign games that the arcade owns?

SD: Well, that's funny. Most of the games that the...the big one that we have, our main attraction, is made in England, which had some difficulties for power but that's already breaking up. We don't have many...when I was at Jillian's, we had a lot of games that really came from Japan, like, it was in Japanese, and I thought that was cool as shit, you know what I mean, like it

kinda made you feel like man this is something we shouldn't have but it's really really cool and I think I'd like to get some of those. We don't have many like that, I mean, a lot games are made in Korea, some are made in England, Japan still makes a bunch, but it doesn't have that feel, you know what I mean, like we had a *Tekken 2* and all the graphics were in Japanese and I thought that was badass. I'd like to get some of that I think.

RN: Then that kinda leads into the next question, kind of why don't you own any now or do you...and do you plan to get some in the future?

01:12:00

SD: I think we plan to get some in the future, it's you know, we're just starting out, we'll see how it goes. You know, like, we got...we're sending a bunch of games out to the Denver location, which is happening. We're getting new games in and, you know, as we get relationships with these people...we establish relationships, that's how you get those, you know what I mean, they'll be like, well...you know, you go through their warehouse and they'll be like, "oh we got this game but it's in Korean", "alright, give it to us, we'll give it a go" you know and...it's...it's kinda hot and...it's more expensive, I think, if you go to purposely buy it as opposed to stumbling upon it, you know.

RN: So, outside of the age and dress code policies, are there any other restriction on your games or on the business?

SD: Well, the city and state put, you know, we have certain guidelines, especially with redemption. We can't, people used to bet on...I can't think of the name of that...pinball, so you can't bet on pinball, which I never thought anyone would bet on but I guess if you're running the score you can. Most of the restrictions comes with the redemption games, because you can easily turn those into casino games, right? Like, you're putting money in and getting stuff out. Whereas, I think if someone's playing a racing game, they know what they're getting and they're not getting anything. So, those have to be set at, you know, they have to be primarily skill based where, you know, you got something spinning around and you gotta push the button for it to stop at that one point where you get the win. So the restrictions come mostly with the redemption games. Like I said, what's to stop me from taking that thing that's got Hello Kitty in it and filling it with money, do you know what I mean, and make it impossible for people to play and now it becomes a casino. It's a fine line.

RN: So, how many game...how many games are normally in the arcade and do you like cycle out if you have more than...

SD: We have...I think we've got a hundred thirty, a hundred forty games right now. We probably have a little bit more because some are leaving and we just got bunch in yesterday. So, Logan and his team will get all those out of here, but we usually stay about a hundred thirty-five.

RN: How do people interact with your machines?

SD: How do you mean?

RN: So, do people put drinks on them? Do people kick more...

SD: Oh yeah! We...place little tables throughout the floor so people don't set them on them. The...that's bad. Sometimes they hit them, some games are made to be hit. They can be abusive to games. Games do get beaten up.

RN: In that note, how do you protect them?

SD: Just fix them, you know, like if someone is going crazy on something, we'll say something to them but a lot of them, like *Kung Fu Panda* you're supposed to hit the pads. Like, I'm not going to go and tell him you're hitting too hard, like have at it and fix it, you know what I mean, like you don't want to be, you know, if someone's doing...clearly damaging a game, you know, hitting the games where you're smashing the screen with the gun, that's not cool.

RN: How often do you deal with maintenance issues then?

SD: Daily.

RN: Daily?

SD: Daily. Daily, because they get played you know, but they're computers and you know, we have *Pump Up the Jam* which is a *DDR* game that gets...that gets played all the time and you know, like the pads move or something doesn't work. Let me tell you, if there's one thing wrong I get emails on that one because that's got a cult following and they go crazy. When we first put it in, I guess, we were like...and this dude found something and I'm like "really, that's nuts, we're going to fix it". Yeah, it's...it's daily. Definitely daily.

RN: Do you do the repairs yourself or hire a mechanic?

SD: We have one...a mechanic on site.

RN: And then, since you mentioned you played the games, have you ever been injured by a machine?

01:17:00

SD: No, I have not been injured by a machine. No, not I...no. Are there any machines that have injured people, is that your next question? [laughs]

RN: [laughs] No, but my next question is do some need more repairs than others?

SD: Yeah, it seems that...it's hard to sell...it's hard to tell here just yet but back in, when I was in Jillian's there were games that were broken down all the time. Yeah there is, I can even tell you those big drops in the back break down constantly. It's just, I think they're poorly made, you know what I mean. There are some games that are rock solid that'll never break down, like *Star Wars* is a game, [knocking] which I haven't had one problem with. All the buttons work, like nothing's been replaced on it. And there are some that have to be replaced all the time. You know, like, it's crazy, but I think it goes down to...I guess it's like cars, like sometimes some are made better than others, you know.

RN: Where do you get your parts for the machines? Back from the magazines and trade shows again or somewhere else?

SD: Oh well, the...we'll order directly from the distributor. Shaffer, those guys are here, we've bought some games from them and so they're sending them up, we get parts from them. Or from the manufacturers.

RN: What is the life cycle of a game? Be it in you removing it from the venue or it becomes absolutely destroyed.

SD: [yawning] Excuse me. I mean there are video games out there that have been in play for, not here but in other places...I tell you what we have a game room in Lucky Strike in Novi, it's an old game room and there are games in that game room that I played that specific game that's still working, you know what I mean, like as long as they make parts, as long as people are playing them, they'll continue to be on the floor, you know, like the retro game thing is, you know...it's hard to get parts for them but if you can keep them going, you keep them going, you know. People always want to play them, that's what...younger kids might not but us old timers do.

RN: How do you feel about people playing marathons on your machines?

SD: Where you sit and play it and play it and play it and play it?

RN: Yeah.

SD: We get that a lot with the *Pump It Up*, the dancing game, I don't know, do you go over and say "hey, hey, you've played enough", you know, like it's kind of a weird thing to do. I don't mind it. A lot of times the *Dance Dance* people, I think they like that people are watching them, but we don't have someone who...we usually have a couple of each game for that reason, you know what I mean, so someone can stay on a game all that long. Pinball, we seem to have some problems with this, we just got another one because people...we only had two. [coughs] We've got one more coming in so we'll have four because that kinda takes a while and you play that, that seems to be the game because I think it's solitary, where you continue to play. But we don't really kick people off the games.

RN: On record games, has any...has someone broken a record on your machines? And how does this affect your business? Like, positively, negatively.

SD: We don't really do any record...well the *DDR* game, that's online and then they have their own thing, like if you play that there's a Chicago *Dance Dance/Pump It Up* organization and I know that they track their stuff very religiously. But as far as like, you know getting a high score... [screech] ...on one of these games out here, I don't...people...I don't think that people really care, you know what I mean, like all that much. They do get reset more often than they used to, like, back in the 90's, like I remember being like "Hey, there's my initials."

I've...maybe people felt like...I don't know though.

RN: How do you decide the price to play a game?

SD: Well, redemption games are easy. You kind of figure out how many plays and what's the percentage of the pay on that game. And, you know, do we make the game easier or harder. For non-redemption games, we just kind of see what it is, you know, like if no one is playing it we might bring it down some in points, if someone's playing it we might take it up some in points, you know. Kind of like with the...and that has a lot to do, too, with where a game is on the floor, like is it in the front, is it in the back, what's next to it, is it next to a game where if someone's playing this, they'll see that and go play that one and they'll...the physics of it, is mind...you know what I mean, you'll make yourself crazy trying to figure it out, you know. Like we have a

punching game where you'll punch the bag, right? Guys love playing that game, right? They don't understand that it's not how hard you hit it or how quick it goes, so you can go and you fwip real quick and you're going to get the high score, where people like, they just rail back and throw haymakers. Well we had that by the bar and it was great but non-stop play. It was loud and it was kind of like, "Alright guys". So we moved it to the...kind of the middle of the room, it doesn't get as much play but it's a game where people get hurt, you know what I mean, like it says all over it, "If you miss, you will punch a wall", you know, so that dropped right off and that's an instance where it kind of was good to kind of put it in with other stuff that people aren't going to go crazy on, you know, because you get competition. One guy gets mad at the other arguing about who hit the bag hard enough at an arcade. Sounds like a stupid argument, doesn't it? [laughs]

01:23:55

RN: Yeah.

SD: Yeah.

RN: Does that ever actually happen to...

SD: [interrupting] Yeah! Yeah. I tell him that's dumb, what are talking about. It's a video game. Take it into perspective.

RN: So, we mentioned the...the trade organizations and the distributors, are there any other ways that you interact with the industry?

SD: Other than s...we've got a couple games on the floor right now, where we're testing them to see how durable they are and what happens, you know like, do people like playing this game and on those games we'll move them around, we'll give them prime spots, we'll give them not prime spots and the manufacturer will want our input from that. So, kind of like, I guess R&D, I mean like, that's probably the final step for the game to...whether or not they are going to make that game in mass production or not. So that's fun. And that's kind of...it's kind of cool too, you know, and I've told a guy, "This game sucks, it's the worst game I've ever played", and he knows so, he played it too and you just spin the wheel, I don't understand.

RN: So let's broaden out to the industry as a closer, how would you describe the coin-op industry today?

SD: I think it's in the beginning of a rebirth, you know what I mean, it's...I think it's common enough...I think that...I think the industry will develop better games for arcade. I don't think they'll abandon it like they did in the 90's. I think that they're starting to see that, yeah, people are playing games and I think that they're gonna really stay with it and not abandon it, like they won't doubt it like they did in the 90's. So that's what...that's why I doubt it.

RN: How's the reality of the industry different from the reputation?

SD: What's the reputation?

RN: In my opinion, that it's kind of in...in it's last legs.

SD: Really?!

RN: In my opinion, because now that we are moving on to consoles, for example, a lot of things are...for example, virtual reality is becoming a real thing but they are always pushing that towards consoles or a computer. So I like, in my...in...to me the reputation of arcades is that it's dying out, people only come back here for nostalgia purposes.

SD: Yeah, but nostalgia sells man. [chuckles] Right? I think...I think that...I don't agree with you on that. I don't know that consoles will...I mean consoles didn't kill it in the 90's. Now, I know you got the VR coming up but how far can that go. I...I think that...I do think that there's going to be...I do think there's going to be a beginning of like, it's coming back. I don't...I just thought it. [laughter] I do think that like the older ones will drop off because they will run out of parts...

RN: Okay.

SD: ...but the new ones, I think that...I think they'll be going for a while.

01:27:37

RN: What do you want people to know about the coin-op industry?

SD: [coughing] You mean customers?

RN: Customers and people, like, looking into the career?

SD: [coughing] It's a lot of fun. Prepare to work a lot, you know. Prepare to, like really be on top of it, you've got to be meticulous. It's something that you do, you have to put your time in, you know, you gotta...if a game is popular somewhere and it's not working in your room, why is that? Like what are you doing wrong? Because it's not the game, you know, if it's going crazy everywhere and it's not going crazy in your place, why is that? Is it too much? Is it in the wrong spot? You're gonna, really, constantly think about it.

RN: How has the marketing changed over time? And then, along with this, how has the required skill set changed?

SD: Oh, the marketing used to be...you would run a radio promo, which was nothing, you would give them some money, they come in, set it up, and do it. You run an ad. Now it's all social. [coughing] Excuse me. It's mostly social, so I've had to learn use social media which I'm still learning, but that's...that's really immediate and you can really get...you kind of know when get people so...and it's a lot less expensive than TV. [coughs] Excuse me. TV's nuts.

RN: And then can you go over the skill set? Has it changed at all or is it still just entertaining?

SD: The skill set? I think today you really have to know a lot about com-...you have to be computer savvy. In the token days, there was still a lot of mechanical components to it, you know, [coughs] you don't have that anymore. Like it's strictly computers, from the...the swiper all the way through, you know. In years past, if something didn't work, nine times out of ten, you would just shut it off, turn it back on, it would reboot, and it would be fine, or a coin jammed, or a ticket jammed, those were all mechanical things, like that door has changed more than anything else, because it is all computer now. Whereas before, you know, you had rollers that would come in and leave grooves in the tickets so that you know it came from the machine. You know, the whole coin back systems...I was...I was here when...I got here...I was on the planet when we

went from tokens to cards, you know what I mean. That was in some respects a great day because tokens are heavy and a lot of work with tokens. [coughs] So you d-...you do need to have some confunology to work here.

RN: Why has there been such a big boom or resurgence in the old style of vintage arcade games?

SD: Nostalgia, brother! People love that, like Christmas, you get the same thing. You get a warm feeling, you know what I mean. You see something that when you were a kid and, you know, as an adult you got so much shit in your head and you go, “I remember this”, and you’re like...you remember your buddies from back then and stuff like that and that’s why. Nostalgia.

JC: How packed does it usually get during Christmas?

SD: What’s that?

JC: How packed does it usually get d-

SD: On the weekends, it gets...it gets real busy. Like it...it’s...it gets real busy. And hopefully we’ll get...the weather’s still warm so people are still doing their outside thing and [coughs] the Cubs hurt us a little bit, you know, because everyone’s at sports bars, but you come in November on Friday night, it’ll be packed. It’s good. It’s fun then.

01:32:00

RN: You mentioned this a couple times that you actually have some, what makes pinball so popular?

SD: It’s a challenge, I think, you know, like I know when I play it, like “dammit hit the flipper at the wrong time”, and I think it takes an enormous amount of concentration, you know, it’s a game that’s been around for a thousand years, not a thousand but you know, it’s like one of the original ones. There’s a lot of skill in playing pinball, you know, it’s not like you go hit a button and that’s it, and people like that.

RN: Alright, then what makes one better than the other? Well, one more popular than the other?

SD: In pinball?

RN: Yeah.

SD: The feel of the flippers, like you can definitely tell the difference and stuff. We have one now where you push a button, the ball comes out, it shoots it up, which I do not like, I like to pull the hammer back and shoot it up. It’s funny, we just got the *Game of Thrones* pinball, which is supposed to be popular. There are some out there that are like the *Big Lebowski* pinball machine that’s something everyone is looking for, it’s weird. I don’t know what the difference is. I do know that there’s some I like and some I don’t and I can’t tell you why. [coughs] Like I like the *Walking Dead* pinball but I don’t like the...the castle one that we have. It’s just...It’s got a castle and shakes and stuff, I don’t like that. But other people might like it.

RN: Then, who plays the pinball machines? Is there a specific group?

SD: Oh, everyone. I’ve seen little kids give it a try. Mostly the parents.

RN: The parents.

SD: That’s always fun too. You see the playing like, “I’ll be there in a minute”, you know like, it’s just funny.

RN: What are some key advancements in the...of the industry? As in, what are the key areas that you see change and growth happening?

SD: One of the things...one of the big advantages is all the games communicate through the computers. So I can tell you who's playing what, what games getting played, when it's getting played, how many times it's getting played, how much that machine is making. Whereas before that it was getting done one game at a time. So if we've got a hundred thirty games, we would go through every single one and count the tokens and we'd weigh them...weigh the tokens, see how much it made, now I can tell you up to the minute, I can tell you up to the minute how much the arcade is making which is a huge advantage, you know, because then you can make decisions. While you have time to make decisions, go through the next day, it's already there. What was the second part of the question?

RN: What are the areas you see change and growth happening?

SD: I see them coming out with next generation of the old games, like that *Cruising* game was a game that huge in the 90's, which is funny because at the end of it, you had a little clip of you in the hot tub with a bunch of chicks, you guys don't know that, right? Funny as hell. I've not gotten to the end of this one. I also haven't gotten to the cheats yet. You know that these games have cheats, right? Yeah, they're badass, like some of them are cool. I can't wait to figure those out. So they're coming out with like, *Cruising 2.5*, and they haven't made a new *Cruising* in a long time. I think they'll start looking at the old ones that were popular and coming back out with them. I think.

RN: What are the special opportunities that the industry offers?

SD: Well it's an opp-...it's an industry that, I mean, if you like video games, you can make a living at it, you know. Live fixing it or running a place. You know, back in my day, when, you know, it was looked down if you were hanging out at an arcade, you know what I mean, "Oh well, there's stuff going on in there", stuff like that. No, it was just a bunch of kids playing video games and kind of having fun with their friends, you know. You can buy a house and raise a family doing that now, you know what I mean, like working in that industry, where I don't think when that came out, I think no one could envision it. You know, like I remember the days when towns would try to shut down arcades or they have to be on the edge of town like it was some evil place, you know, like it wasn't, you know. It gave kids kind of something to do. Now, quite frankly, everyone is just staring at their phone, you know. Whereas we would go to a place and play games.

01:37:15

RN: What are the special challenges then that does...the coin-op industry face?

SD: Staying relevant, you know. Know when to fix it...really watching your games and, you know, if you've got something that's not working and you've tried everything then get rid of it as fast as possible, get something else in. [loud background noises] Hold on.

RN: Alright.

SD: I just didn't want to be...sorry

RN: It's okay,

SD: Making sure everything is, you know, tip-top. That people are having fun.

RN: After that, what do you see fut-...what do you see as the future for coin-op and the future for your company?

SD: Well, we've got a bunch of FTWs that have been going for a while. We've got another one that was built this year, two more to open at the end of this year, and next year we have four. So I think, like a bowling/FTW concept will catch on, hopefully, you know. I'm not going to say it's a unique product, I think we do it in a unique way, you know, because it's a bowling alley/arcade those have been around forever, you know. I do think we put a different spin on it than others do. And I think we do a good job at it.

RN: Okay, this is the closing so, is there anything else you would like to tell me that I didn't ask?

SD: I think...I touched upon earlier, I couldn't...one of the reasons why people do this job or work in this industry is to entertain, you know. Like it's entertainment, that's what it is. If you guys are thinking about going into this, you gotta know that you have to entertain. It's frustrating at times, sometimes you look like, "what the hell am I doing", but it is rewarding, you know, like...some of the worst situations I've ever had in this business, I've looked back and laughed, you know what I mean, with a fondness, you know what I mean, because it's...it is cool, you know, it's cool to make someone happy just by throwing some video games in a room or bowling, you know, like someone who's never bowled, you know, like it's...it is exciting, you know, you see first dates, you see last dates. [all laugh] The last dates are the ones you talk about, you're like, "Wow! Did you see what he did?" Yeah, those are the fun ones. But, no, I don't have anything else.

RN: And then for our course, is there anyone else we should...you think we should interview?

SD: What do you want to know?

RN: Anyone who is related to the coin-op industry, really.

JC: It could be someone who has worked on cabinets or just like a manager of a store or like someone who assembles, anything like that.

SD: Do you want to talk to someone who fixes them?

RN: That would be great too, yeah. Someone who...like a mechanic or a distributor, yeah.

SD: Yeah, I can...I don't know if Logan can talk to you today but...

RN: Okay.

SD: ...I can introduce you to him.

RN: Okay. This is meant for, like the future...

JC: [interjecting] Yeah.

RN: ...of the course. We will contact them...

SD: [interrupting] Oh, okay!

JC: Yeah, we don't need him right now.

SD: Oh, yeah, yeah, no...they can give Logan a call, he does repairs. I can give you a number of Shaffer Distributing, which is local. They can...they'll...I don't know if they'll answer questions and shit, but Logan can give you some insight like, or whoever, as to what it is to maintain them and, you know, they get cleaned everyday and you gotta go through them.

RN: Well I'll ask about the contact...

SD: [interjecting] Okay.

RN: ...in a minute. So we're done, thank you for your time to answer these questions...

SD: [interrupting] No problem, I hope I'm helpful.

RN: ...It was nice meeting you. You are helpful. [laughs] Thank you for...

SD: [interjecting] Alright.

RN: ...allotting time. I know this was possibly a painful two hours.

SD: No, no, it's fine. Do you guys want to play some games?

JC: I wouldn't mind. [all laugh]

SD: I'll get you some cards, hold on.

JC: Oh, thank you.

RN: Thank you very much.

01:42:05