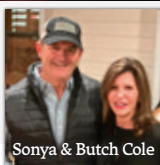


LESS WAITING, MORE SPENDING

Upgrade Drives Stronger Profits and Happier Guests for This Alabama Operator

By Stephanie Davis

For a true snapshot of family fun on the Gulf Coast, look no further than Gulf Bowl in Foley, Alabama, and Eastern Shore Lanes in Spanish Fort. Between the two centers, co-owners Sonya Cole and her husband Butch have built destinations that feel more like playgrounds than bowling centers. Guests can knock down pins, zap friends in laser tag, race go-karts, climb walls, conquer mini golf, throw axes, and take on ropes courses, all with arcades buzzing in the background. Gulf Bowl offers 23 lanes and a 150-seat restaurant, while Eastern Shore has 24 lanes.



Sonya & Butch Cole

"I've been doing this for 39 years," Cole said with a laugh. "Every day still feels different, and I love hearing the sound of kids in the arcade laughing or bowlers cheering on the lanes." But behind the fun comes the challenge of running two large, fast-paced centers. With so many attractions, service speed and staff efficiency are just as important as the games themselves. That's why, when Cole first learned about Brunswick's Sync suite, what stood out was how much easier it could make things for both staff and guests—and so far, it has delivered exactly that.

Both centers have used Sync for about five years, adding kiosks two years ago. In May 2025, they rolled out Sync Pay, which also turned on the lane-side menu feature for tablets already in use. The impact was immediate: guests could order directly from their lanes, tickets went straight to the kitchen, and food runners delivered when ready. "It's been great," Cole said. "People love the convenience, and it takes away so much of the back-and-forth, making everything easier."

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That ease translated into real numbers. During the slower summer months, one center saw food and beverage sales climb by \$5,000 in a single month, while the other added \$1,500. Cole expected younger customers to catch on quickly but was surprised by how fast older guests embraced the system too. And when people spend less time waiting, they naturally spend more.

A TIPPING POINT FOR STAFF

The system also gave Cole's team a financial boost. "That first month, we couldn't believe it," she said. "The amount of tipping

through tablets at the lanes was incredible." Since launching Sync Pay, gratuities have consistently run higher, not only at the lanes but also in the restaurant and at the bowling counter, putting more money in employees' pockets, boosting morale, and making staff happier, more motivated, and easier to retain. Guests also appreciate entering tips directly without staff handling the credit card machine, creating a smoother, more comfortable experience for everyone.

THE BOTTOM-LINE BENEFITS

Sync Pay also delivered direct savings. Now, both centers save a couple of thousand dollars per month. "Brunswick analyzed our credit card statements and showed us exactly what we'd save and what we'd pay," Cole explained. "It was honest, transparent, and easy to see the value."

And the install? Surprisingly painless. "The process was smooth and training didn't take long," she said. "Before we knew it, the whole system was up and running." Another perk Cole points to is flexibility. "The kiosks are movable, so if we want to shift where they are in the center, we can," she said. She also likes that the Sync system continues to evolve, helping her keep pace as the business grows.

ADVICE FOR FELLOW OPERATORS

Her advice for fellow operators is straightforward: don't get stuck in old habits. "The industry is changing constantly, and guest expectations keep evolving," Cole said. "Having contemporary solutions in place is the best choice for guests, employees, and your bottom line."

She also recommends taking a close look at credit card processing fees. After sending in her statements for review, the detailed breakdown revealed savings she hadn't expected—significant enough to impact both centers each month.

For Cole, the financial benefits are clear. But so is her deeper reason for being in the business. "It's the thrill of watching people have a good time," she said. "That's what this industry is about." With a modern system in place, her staff spends less time chasing orders and tabs and more time creating those joyful moments. And that, Cole says, is a win worth celebrating. ●

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