

THE TURNAROUND BET

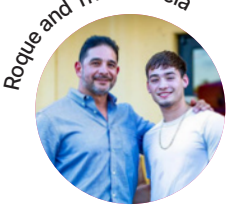
A STRUGGLING CENTER REIMAGINED

By Stephanie Davis

By 2022, Roque Vela knew something had to change at his family's Del Rio, Texas, bowling center.

The Vela family, which operates three centers, bought the closed 16-lane Del Rio property in 2001 and reopened it the following year. Two decades later, aging equipment and the difficulty of finding a qualified mechanic were taking their toll.

"You're either growing or dying," Roque says. And at the time, Del Rio was "dying a slow death." Initially, he was considering little more than paint and a facelift. Then his son, Tristian Vela, decided to join the family business and take on Del Rio.



Roque and Tristian Vela

The modest facelift became a complete reinvention and instead of patching up the center again, they decided to reinvent it.

RETHINKING THE CENTER

The Velas shut the center down for nearly a year. A market analysis led to an unexpected recommendation from Brunswick: remove four bowling lanes and turn that space into a laser tag arena.

"You know you have a quality partner when they want you to take out equipment that they sell because it's a better fit for your market," Roque says.

The center added laser tag, an arcade, and an upgraded food-and-beverage operation. The bowling side received Brunswick Boost ST string pinsetters and Sync, Brunswick's center management and point-of-sale system, and the venue was refreshed and rebranded from Jett Bowl Del Rio to Pla-Mor Del Rio.

TACKLING THE MECHANICAL PROBLEM

One of the biggest changes came behind the lanes. The old pinsetters were a constant source of interruptions, and finding an experienced mechanic to keep them running was difficult. That made Boost an important part of the reinvestment. "They're a lifesaver," Tristian says.

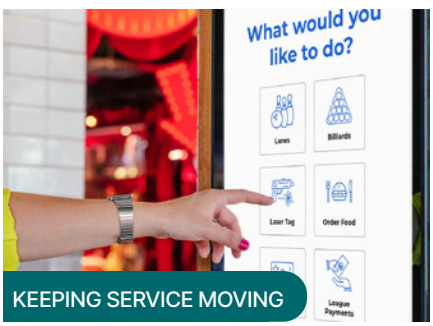
The new pinsetters are much easier for his team to manage. Staff can be trained to handle occasional issues without years of specialized mechanical experience, and many minor problems resolve themselves within seconds rather than leaving a lane down for several minutes.

While some league bowlers were initially hesitant about string, those concerns faded quickly. After a few weeks of bowling on the new equipment, Tristian says, "They realized that it is just bowling."

ONE SYSTEM, LESS FRICTION

The Velas already had experience with Sync at their Laredo locations and wanted the same integrated approach in Del Rio rather than running separate systems for bowling, food, and beverage.

Servers take orders and payments on handheld tablets from anywhere in the center, with food orders going straight to the kitchen.



KEEPING SERVICE MOVING

Kiosks give customers another option, helping keep lines down and service moving. It also means employees have one system to learn instead of bouncing between different ones. "The less we have to teach staff, the better," Roque says. It "just makes things function that much better for us."

The system also makes it easier for Roque to keep tabs on the center from Laredo. "I'm three hours away, but Sync emails me reports every day, so I can see what's going on without having to be there."

BOWLING COMES BACK STRONG

Business is now roughly 50/50 between league and open play, with two leagues, regular tournaments, and league bowlers frequently returning to practice. "I think we've done a good job of expanding the bowling culture in Del Rio," Tristian says."

Tristian says the community's response has encouraged him to keep building the bowling side of the business, including plans for a pro shop and, eventually, more youth bowling opportunities.

THE NUMBERS CHANGED

The financial turnaround has been just as dramatic.

Roque says overall revenue is now roughly four times what it was before the renovation. Del Rio's bowling revenue from games, lane rentals, and shoes comes close to one of the family's 24-lane Laredo locations, and even a bad month today outperforms what the center once considered a good month.

When the bank questioned the project's financial viability, the Velas committed significant personal funds to see it through. They now expect their reinvestment to pay for itself in about five years.

Before the renovation, Roque dreaded the three-hour drive to Del Rio because it usually meant another problem needed his attention. Today, he may go six months between visits.

Now, when he makes the trip, he says, it's because he wants to, not because he has to.