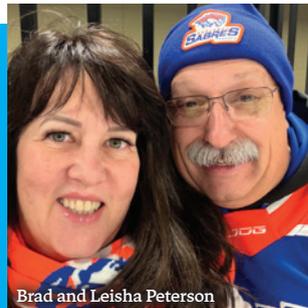


BUILT FOR LEAGUES

Modernizing Without Losing the Competitive Edge By Stephanie Davis

Bowling has always been personal for Brad Peterson. He grew up in his family's center, became a competitive bowler, and was later nominated for induction into the North Dakota Bowling Hall of Fame. When he and his wife, Leisha, purchased Strike Zone in Williston, North Dakota, in 2015, they set out to run a center bowlers could truly rely on.



Brad and Leisha Peterson

So when it came time to make major equipment decisions, it wasn't something Brad took lightly. "We're a league-heavy house," he said. "We host a lot of tournaments, including the biggest state scratch tournament in North Dakota. Whatever we did had to respect the game."

Strike Zone's 24 lanes are busy with leagues Monday through Thursday and host tournaments that draw

bowlers from surrounding states and Canada. Weekends are packed with open play and birthday parties, keeping the lanes in near-constant use.

For years, the Petersons relied on 1958-era free-fall pinsetters but keeping them running grew harder every year. "Labor is tough to find here, especially for back-end work," Brad said. "Things could be fine on a Friday, and by Monday morning we'd have six or seven lanes down."

Parts costs only added to the pressure, climbing to \$20,000–\$25,000 a year. "The machines just weren't sustainable anymore," Brad said.

CHOOSING A PRACTICAL SOLUTION

The Petersons approached modernization cautiously, paying close attention to how closely any new system mimicked free-fall play. "I needed to bowl on them myself," Brad said. "I wanted to understand what our league and tournament players would experience." That made the decision easier. "There really wasn't much difference at all," Brad said.

They moved forward with Boost ST String Pinsetters and completed the installation in December 2024. Knowing some bowlers might be skeptical, the Petersons focused on transparency, inviting league players behind the lanes to see how the system worked. "Once they understood it and bowled on it, the concerns disappeared," Brad said.

Since the upgrade, Strike Zone hasn't seen any drop-off in league or tournament participation. In fact, it's grown. "We added a new

ladies' league on Thursdays—eight teams we didn't have the year before," Brad said.

RESULTS THAT ADDED UP FAST

The impact showed up quickly, with changes Brad could see across several key areas:

- **Consistent lane availability:** "Having all 24 lanes running all the time has made a noticeable difference. On weekends, we're full, and we're not losing revenue to breakdowns."
- **Lower labor needs:** With fewer staff required in the back end, the Petersons reinvested those savings into their team. "We've been able to increase wages and keep good people."
- **Reduced energy usage:** Overall energy consumption dropped, even after a utility rate increase. "We can't help but think about how much higher the bill would have been with the old machines."
- **Less heat behind the lanes:** The older equipment generated significant heat. "Now our AC units behind the lanes barely run. The units back there didn't even kick on last summer."

BENEFITS BEYOND THE NUMBERS

Leisha was quick to notice the difference in sound. "It's much quieter now," she said. "You can be on lane 24 and hear people talking on lane seven or eight." With less background noise, they were able to turn the music up, something guests have loved.

Safety improved as well. "It's safer for our staff, which gives us peace of mind," Leisha added. With less time spent behind the lanes, the risk of injuries has dropped significantly, and staff can focus on guests instead of equipment. "About 95% of the time, the machine takes care of most issues on its own."

That reliability has given the Petersons something they didn't have before: time away from the center. This winter, they spent time in Arizona, something that wouldn't have happened a few years ago. "That flexibility is priceless," Brad said.

LOOKING AHEAD

"We have a turnkey operation now," Brad said. "When we decide to sell someday, the next owner won't have to worry about finding a mechanic. That makes the business easier to take over and adds real value."

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In the end, the biggest gains weren't the ones the Petersons planned for. The reliability and freedom to step away proved just as valuable as the operational savings, if not more. ●