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DeKalb's Star Worlds Arcade keeps yesterday's games alive today

By John Puterbaugh - jputerbaugh@daily-chronicle.com[Comments \(4 comments\)](#) | [Add Comments](#)

Video game systems can be found in homes throughout the country, with controllers comfortably in the hands of children and adults alike. But it wasn't always like this. Toward the latter half of the '70s and throughout the early to mid-'80s, video games were played in arcades.

While the number of these types of arcades, or game rooms, has certainly gone down over the years, Patrick O'Malley will tell you there's no reason they can't still succeed, especially in a city like DeKalb. O'Malley, who lives in DeKalb, is the owner and operator of Star Worlds Arcade. He's owned Star Worlds for about 25 years, and brought the business to DeKalb from Maple Park about five years ago.

When O'Malley heard in June that Stride gum was working to "Save the Arcades" with an online contest, he was happy to hear of a project that would build excitement about arcades, though also reflected on his own reality here in DeKalb. The truth is, O'Malley said, Star Worlds Arcade doesn't necessarily need saving. While \$25,000 would certainly be nice, O'Malley stressed that Star Worlds is healthy here in DeKalb no matter what happens with the contest.

The reason for Star Worlds' continued success has very much to do with its loyal customer base here, O'Malley said. From children to college students to those same children's parents, there is no typical Star Worlds patron. It's just people looking to enjoy themselves in a way they can't anywhere else.

What makes Star Worlds so unique here in DeKalb, in addition to retro games in original full-size presentations, is a public and social environment in which people can just hang out.

"That's what arcades used to be: people coming together, having a good time," O'Malley said earlier this week in the arcade. "We offer a good social environment for people to hang out."

O'Malley said that while there are a good number of university students who frequent the arcade, the trek to far-east Lincoln Highway seems to bring only those who really have an appreciation and respect for his business. And this is good, because the arcade also attracts a good number of children and their parents.

Sometimes, O'Malley said, parents will bring their children to the arcade hoping only to keep their kids entertained for a while, but find way more than they ever expected. Before you know it, he said, those parents are taking back their



Ken Gage of Cary gets into the zone as he plays Kangaroo at Star Worlds Arcade in DeKalb on Tuesday. (Beck Diefenbach - bdiefenbach@daily-chronicle.com)

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kids' coins and buying more to use up themselves on games they haven't seen in years but used to love.

"It's kind of a family togetherness time, and it's really good to see," O'Malley said. "You can't find this stuff anywhere else."

Star Worlds also has stayed true to the arcade of 20 or so years ago in its pricing. Gamers purchase coins to play the games, at rates that haven't changed in years.

"It's still a place you can spend \$5 and play for an hour and a half," said Glenn Thomas, pinball specialist and a business partner of O'Malley. "The prices are still the same from when these games came out."

And true to the community in which Star Worlds operates, O'Malley said he's always open to special events and group parties at the arcade. He also has held and plans to hold more special video game contests, such as Tetris tournaments and other game competitions.

And when it comes down to it, Star Worlds is a haven for arcade game purists. O'Malley said he gets lots of customers who come in as much to talk with him about the games as they do to play them. He keeps connections with a lot of his customers and others who share his genuine interest in the games. And he said he's always open to working with customers to find and acquire new games people might like.

O'Malley, who constantly rotates the games he features at Star Worlds, also sells the games and even offers repair and restoration service for people with games in their homes. And as if this weren't enough to keep track of, O'Malley also provides and services dozens of games in bars and restaurants throughout the area.

"I think you actually have to have a love to do what you're doing," O'Malley said of his mission. "We'll keep the games alive."

IF YOU GO

Star Worlds Arcade
1234 E. Lincoln Highway, DeKalb
www.starworldsarcade.com
815-787-4599

Note: Visit Star Worlds' Web site for information on upcoming community events and tournaments. Star Worlds also can be found on Facebook.

'SAVE THE ARCADES'

To compete on behalf of Star Worlds in Stride's "Save the Arcades" online contest, go to www.savethearcades.com. The other arcades featured in the contest can be found in Austin, Texas, Nashville, Tenn., and San Rafael, Calif. The contest ends Oct. 6.

USUAL SUSPECTS

There are about 40 active games at Star Worlds, but many of them are rotated through with other games from the arcade's inventory. Here is a list of games that can typically be found at Star Worlds:

- Pac-Man
- Ms. Pac-Man
- Baby Pac-Man (video pinball)
- Donkey Kong
- Donkey Kong Jr.
- Bally Sente Stocker
- Burgertime
- Tetris
- Super Mario Bros
- Punch Out
- Joust
- Area 51
- Caveman (video pinball)
- Hook (pinball)
- Smash TV
- Kangaroo
- Dr. Mario



Comments

SycamoreTree wrote on **August 26, 2009 8:06 p.m.**

"I have always wanted to go into this arcade. Great article and so many great classic arcade games right here in DeKalb. "

Report

Proton Studio wrote on **August 27, 2009 9:02 a.m.**

" I think this place is awesome. "

Report

gadgetguy56 wrote on **August 27, 2009 9:40 a.m.**

"I've been there plenty of times. It's the only real arcade around DeKalb. All the games work and look great! I've also played the Save the Arcade game that they mention. It's an easy game and I think Star Worlds is the only true classic

arcade in the competition and should win the money!"

Report

Proton Studio wrote on **August 28, 2009 9:16 a.m.**

" Take your kids to this arcade, it's as if you are in a video game! Flashing lights awesome sound effects. A cheap and fun way to spend time with your kids, as well as support a very cool DeKalb business."

Report

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