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## Star Worlds celebrates 25 years in business

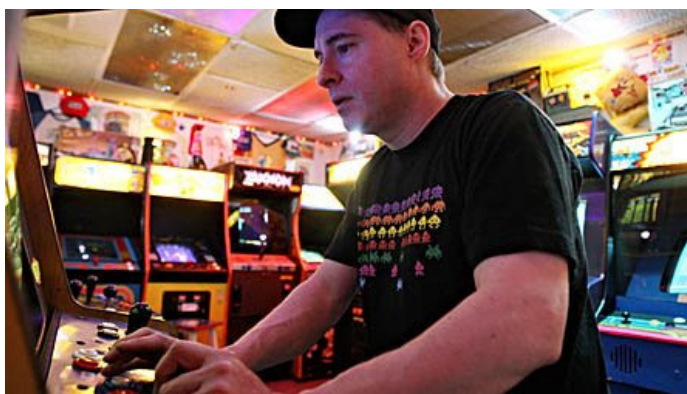
By DANA HERRA - [dherra@daily-chronicle.com](mailto:dherra@daily-chronicle.com)

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DeKALB – The window paint on the front door of Star Worlds Arcade is enough to make an old-school gamer’s heart skip a beat.

“Space Invaders Tournament! Save the Earth Here!” it proclaims in neon pink letters.

Space Invaders, released in 1978, was the first video game arcade owner Patrick O’Malley ever owned, so it seems fitting he should choose it to celebrate his 25th year in business.



Patrick O’Malley, owner of Star Worlds in DeKalb, plays one of his numerous arcade games on Friday. Star Worlds is celebrating its 25th anniversary. (Rob Winner – [rwinner@daily-chronicle.com](mailto:rwinner@daily-chronicle.com))

O’Malley began collecting full-size arcade games as a child in the early 1980s. By the time he was 12, there were 18 machines crowding his parents’ Maple Park home and garage, he said. Eager to get their house back, his parents helped him to rent a game room in Maple Park, which he ran every day after school until 7 p.m. At 15, O’Malley was placing games in other businesses like restaurants and bowling alleys in addition to running the arcade.

“Doing business with people when you’re that young, a lot of people say, ‘Get out of here, you’re not ready for this,’” O’Malley said.

“People who took faith in me got to see I really did know what I was doing.”

O’Malley started playing and collecting because of a passion for the games, he said. When he graduated from high school, he decided to follow that passion and work at the arcade full-time.

In 2005, he moved to DeKalb because it was a larger market and closer to his core group of business customers. The arcade buzzes and beeps with the sound of 40 games, sounds O’Malley can distinguish like a parent recognizing a child’s cry.

“If I get a new game in, it can be all the way in the back, but I’ll know from listening there’s a new game back there,” he said. “That’s just my insanity.”

Over the years, home gaming systems have dramatically changed the landscape for arcades, but Star Worlds continues to go strong, O’Malley said. His regulars include adults, students from Northern Illinois University, children and families.

“My crowd is ages 4 to 54,” O’Malley said.

“That’s changed since I opened the first room. It used to be all boys playing video games. Now I get families coming in here for family time and we get a lot more girls, moms playing with their daughters.”

The games are a mix of new and old, though some classics – Ms. Pac-Man, Burger Time, Tetris and pinball – are such crowd favorites O’Malley said he could never get rid of them without risking the wrath of his customers.

With his 25th anniversary, O’Malley is launching a new initiative. His campaign, “Celebrate the Arcades” will focus his

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year on fun events at Star Worlds, like the Space Invaders tournament. He hopes to sign on local businesses to sponsor events and eventually expand the campaign to help other arcades across the country reach out to their customer base.

"You have to get out with your customers and promote," he said. "A lot of people, as they get older, they put someone in to run the business. I can't do that. I'm always here."

#### Star Worlds Arcade

Address: 1234 E. Lincoln Highway, DeKalb

Phone: 815-787-4599

Web: [www.starworldsarcade.com](http://www.starworldsarcade.com)

[www.celebratethearcades.com](http://www.celebratethearcades.com)

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