

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

Phil & Patti Ontko – Castle Lanes, Racine

by Yvonne Bennett



From left to right: Phil Ontko, Jason Belmonte & Patti Ontko.

Admittedly, before joining the BCAW staff earlier this year, I had heard of Castle Lanes but had never been there before. I knew “of them” because of the aggressive marketing they have become known for. It was through the recent blast in social media that I learned that they were hosting PBA Player of the Year Jason Belmonte (aka Belmo) during a Storm Bowling Products’ “Matchmaker” event. What better time to check them out, so I left the office early to head down to their Tuesday afternoon event.

When I pulled into the parking lot, there were cars from all over the Upper Midwest; North Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota, Indiana and Illinois. If that wasn’t impressive enough, how about nearly 200 fans attending something at 2:00pm on a weekday? It was exciting to see people of all ages enjoying the Matchmaker session, spending time on the lanes with Belmo and later patiently waiting in line for an autograph. Awesome indeed!

I spent some time talking with proprietors Phil and Patti. It didn’t take long to recognize their passion and enthusiasm for bowling. Phil spoke of bowling’s heyday, an era we both could fondly recall . . . growing up in bowling when bowling and bowling centers were the center of communities; a gathering place to enjoy the good times with friends and family.

Today Phil and Patti maintain that same perspective in all they do. Having bought the bowling center in 1991, they have successfully built the business around one activity . . . BOWLING! While they have a very nice lounge

No arcade games; no redemption center; just the lanes, ten pins and a ball.

They have been very successful flooring 24 lanes of five-person per team leagues, Monday through Friday. They have some second shift leagues and will soon be adding an 11:30pm league later this fall.

Recognizing youth are their future and the future of the game, the Ontkos have a very robust developmental program for kids. With a double shift of Saturday morning youth leagues, they have over 125 kids in their USBC youth program. Castle Lanes is also a proud supporter of BCAW’s High School Bowling Club and has enjoyed seeing success come to several of their players. Most notably perhaps, is Racine’s Stephanie Schwartz. A current member of USBC’s Junior Team USA, Schwartz recently represented the Red, White and Blue in Hong Kong where she medaled at the World Youth Championships this past summer.

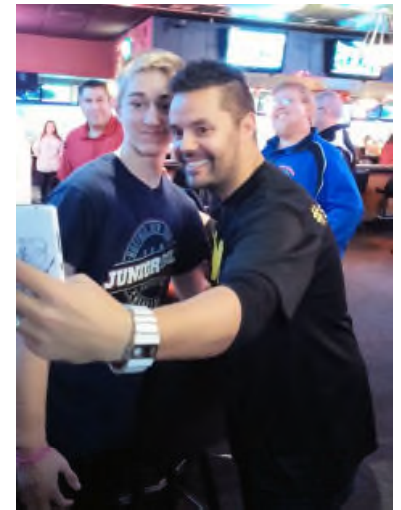
Core to their philosophy is treating their bowlers as members; not unlike a country club membership, with special offers available only to their league bowlers. They offer generous bowler recognition, including \$100 cash whenever a bowler has a 300 game or 800 series in league. Their high school bowlers are encouraged to improve through free open play practice whenever lanes are available. Bowlers like Schwartz have benefited from hours on the lanes, honing their skills.



Jason Belmonte signing autographs.

Considering some of the negativity in the media about our sport, I must say there is still plenty to be excited and optimistic about bowling. The Ontkos bring the enthusiasm and positive outlook that is paying big dividends daily in their center.

We wish Phil and Patti, and Castle Lanes, continued success for many years to come!



Jason Belmonte and guest taking a self photo.