

SCORING SUCCESS

family fun

*play* "The Operators' Choice"  
**METER**

April 2013



Arizona **FLIPS** over newest FEC



**FlipSide**

*FlipSide's eagerly awaited completion brings hundreds of guests before official opening.*

**F**lipSide has redefined the meaning of family fun for the communities of East Valley, Ariz. The excitement and anticipation began well before the location's soft opening in January, as noted by the 1800+ fans they were already interacting with on Facebook; that number having since grown to over 2,400.

Creating a destination for the community, that promotes outrageous fun in a safe and family-friendly environment was the ultimate goal of co-owners Nathan Crane II and Ryan Owens. Be-

ing East Valley residents and fathers of young children themselves, Crane and Owens were inspired to create a destination where families could relax and feel comfortable bringing their kids or dropping off their teenagers.

The \$6 million, 52,000-square-foot bowling entertainment complex was the result of a well thought-out business plan to invest in an industry that would thrive in a challenging economy. Through their partnership in Emblem Holdings, Inc., Crane and Owens own an aviation maintenance company.

Realizing that aviation is impacted by the state of the economy due to its heavy reliance on disposable income, the partners began investigating recession-resistant businesses that could see them through the down times.

In 2009, Crane and Owens met Jerry Merola of **Amusement Entertainment Management (AEM)** and that began the three-year process of going from concept to completion. AEM was retained to conduct a full-scope market feasibility study, focusing its attention on the greater Phoenix market, as a number of potential development sites were available at the time.

Ultimately, AEM established a master development plan, largely driven by the limited inventory of family-focused entertainment alternatives throughout the area.

Soon after the development plan was put into place, the U.S. national economy collapsed, sending the financial services market into a tailspin. The result was a near shutdown of bank lending, particularly in the states of Arizona and Florida, where residential development had been the most robust during the past decade. Fortunately, AEM and the Emblem team prevailed, meeting with more than fifteen regional banks throughout the state to acquire the necessary capital to begin the project.

During the same timeframe, the team was able to successfully negotiate a suitable lease agreement that incorporated strong landlord participation through provision of tenant improvement dollars to support retrofit of the second-generation commercial space.

“Against all odds, Nathan Crane and Ryan Owens have proven that a well-conceived, well-executed entertainment concept can be brought to life through patience, perseverance, and planning,” noted Merola.

“Navigating challenges within the local economy, commercial real estate market, and municipal approval process takes a tremendous amount of dedication and forethought. Most telling is that

the end result exactly matches the vision we collectively adopted four years ago. These gentlemen have set a new watermark for execution within the entertainment sector.”

### COMMUNITY OUTREACH

After construction began in July, Crane and Owens began reaching out to the community by utilizing social media and engaging their future customers early on. They created a subscription service for specials, updates, construction news and more. Over 1,000 individuals subscribed before the center ever opened.

Facebook was utilized to directly interact by using fun exchanges of information, asking questions and responding to posts from the community. Crane felt that they were able to “build the buzz” by being clever and engaging the user. They even allowed their Facebook “friends” to name the new mascot through an interac-

tive voting process.

One resource that the partners agreed was not as important, prior to opening, was the Web site. They felt that by having a landing page ([www.exploreflipside.com](http://www.exploreflipside.com)) that provided the pertinent information about the attractions would be effective.

They provided a “Count Up” to completion and ongoing construction photos so future guests could see the progress. By not putting so much effort into the Web site, it allowed them to concentrate on other things they needed. The real Web site will be launched in March 2013 and should include all the information needed to answer any questions about FlipSide and what guests can expect when they get there.

### BEST ENVIRONMENT

Technology and innovation have played a huge part in the overall design



of the hybrid center. Every decision was made with the fundamental concept of creating the best environment for their guests.

The seamless integration of their Micros POS system with their Conqueror Pro Scoring system, tied together with Embed's Cashless Debit Card System, allows customers to use their "Passport" debit cards for everything from bowling and game play to food purchases; one card can handle everything.

"The system also allows us to add bonus dollars to our guests' cards," said Crane. "These bonus dollars can't be redeemed for food, but they can be used for game play."

The partners made a decision early on that in order to keep the facility truly family-friendly it would be alcohol-free.

Crane said, "Our guests seem to re-

ally appreciate our choice, going as far as thanking us because they don't have to worry about bringing their kids into an environment where they have to be concerned about the presence or consumption of alcohol. Church and school groups have been excited about scheduling lock-ins at a location where they don't have to worry about the potential liability and are looking forward to bringing their kids here."

"Our aim is to provide a safe, upscale environment that will attract families and especially appeal to the moms, who we recognize are our target market," commented Owens. "We wanted to create an entertainment center that nothing could compare to in the area."

## FOOD COMPONENT

Crane and Owens realize, without al-

coholic beverages available, their food would have to be that much better. **The Round Trip Café** is designed as a 'fast-casual' concept restaurant where customers place their orders, take a number and the food is brought to them when ready.

There is also full-service to the bowling lanes and VIP suite. The menu boasts everything from hot wings and nachos to wraps, salads, burgers, hot dogs and brick-oven specialty pizzas. You can even find a 14 oz. rib-eye steak, Ahi Tuna, and a variety of pasta dishes in the mix.

"Initially we were told that people will not come to an entertainment center as a food destination and most certainly never to just eat," said Crane. "In the first month of operations, I can't tell you how many people I saw come in the door, get their food, and then leave. One family came in four days in a row just for dinner. When I commented to them about seeing them there the previous days, they told me they 'really loved the food.'"

In addition to the 50-seat restaurant and 28-lanes of bowling, six of which are in a private VIP suite called the "Sky Club," the complex has a private mini-bowling area that has turned out to be the sleeper attraction for FlipSide. With the four-lanes of Route 66 mini-bowling being housed in a separate, glass enclosed area; the demand for private parties has been overwhelming and the lanes are always full.

The 5,000 sq. ft., two-level laser tag arena was designed by **Studio 41B** and utilizes a 30-player NexusFEC laser tag system with the enhanced membership option.

This will allow FlipSide the ability to offer memberships that will draw the traffic on slower nights and encourage repeat play. The arena is one-of-a-kind, featuring a burned out semi-trailer and an airplane fuselage that covers the ramp as well as incredible artwork throughout. It is currently the number one revenue generator for FlipSide.



**FLIPTOPIA**

Fliptopia, FlipSide’s game zone, provides 63 games to play with everything from air hockey to video and redemption. With 70 percent of the games being redemption and merchandisers, it is no surprise that their Redemption Prize Center is a favorite spot for kids and adults alike. **Alpha-Omega Sales** worked with **Sureshot Redemption** on the display and prize setup. They also provided the games, staging, and layout of the equipment for proper flow through.

Rounding out the attractions is a 3-level “Blast Pad” Ballocity by **PrimePlay**, Spin Zone Electric Bumper Cars by **Amusement Products**, a **Funovation** Laser Maze Challenge, billiard tables, party rooms, and a 25-seat coffee shop. Guests can purchase passes for individual attractions or incremental passes for the arcade games and bowling. There are a variety of packages to choose from so they can tailor their experience to fit what they want.

There have been a few stumbling blocks that were unanticipated prior to opening, but coming up with creative solutions is something the partners pride themselves on. To them, it is all about anticipating the “combustion points” and finding solutions before the customer knows there is even a problem. As an example, insurance companies now require closed toed shoes in the laser tag arena.

“Instead of telling kids they can’t play

if they are wearing the wrong shoes, we decided to allow our guests to use a pair of bowling shoes if needed,” explained Crane. “Since it is about safety, we don’t charge them for the shoe rental. It was a creative solution that utilized what was available to us already and in end, helps create a better guest experience.”

It is no surprise that FlipSide has been an instant hit, even prior to opening. With over 100 birthday parties scheduled in less than a month, two school districts already scheduling summer camps, and an exponentially growing list of friends and followers, FlipSide has customers “flipping” over their newest family fun destination!

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**Amusement Entertainment Management, LLC**  
 Amusement Entertainment Management, LLC is a worldwide industry consulting group specializing in the feasibility, design, layout and operation of Family Entertainment Centers and Leisure-Based Entertainment venues.

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**Written By**

“When you are in the entertainment industry, it is all about laughing, having fun, and escaping,” said Crane. “If you are not creating that experience, then why be in the business?”



**Frank Seninsky** is president of the Alpha-Omega Group of companies, which includes Amusement Entertainment Management (AEM), Alpha-Omega Amusements & Sales, and Alpha-BET Entertainment. Frank is co-regent for Foundations Entertainment University and a Past President of both the Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA) and the International Association for the Leisure Entertainment Industry (IALEI). Seninsky can be reached via email at [fseninsky@aol.com](mailto:fseninsky@aol.com) or call 732-616-5345.



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**For more information on FlipSide, call (480) 471-8444 or visit the Web at [www.explore-flipside.com](http://www.explore-flipside.com).**