

BCAW MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

January, 2019



Bennie & Laporsha Cooper

Court Lanes Mill

Milwaukee, WI

Bennie Cooper, with the help of his daughter Laporsha, has entered into bowling center ownership in August 2018. Bennie and his center has been a part of urban renewal in the Havenwoods north side neighborhood. In their short time as a BCAW member center, they have grown from 142 league bowlers to 309; they have added the new Marshall High School Bowling Club, and a traveling league. When talking with Bennie recently, he had lots to share.

Please give a bit of history of how you started in the bowling industry.

I had started in 1988 as a house kid at Red Carpet. I bowl in many leagues. I've worked my way up doing everything from house kid to bartender, to manager and now as owner of Court Lanes Mill. All of this while working a second job. Always hustling, always working.

What is the best advice you were given before opening this center?

I always strive to make someone's day a little better. If I see they are having a bad day, I'll try to brighten it with a kind word or gesture. That is my philosophy in life and in business. Customer service is key and that is what keeps customers coming back. Bennie's online reviews also attest to his customer service philosophy.

What is your favorite moment of bowling so far?

I've been coaching another new bowling center owner with everything that I have learned. That's my way of giving back to the bowling community that has embraced me. I am humbled by the support of my bowling center colleagues. Because of this support Bennie jokes that his neighborhood has never seen so many white folks at his place.

How has your community reacted to your ownership and what plans do you have for your center?

When we first opened the center, we had the neighborhood watch group meeting in our banquet hall. That first meeting was tough. They had all kinds of complaints such as parking, noise, etc. I tried to address it the best I could. Then at the second meeting recently, I was a little more strategic. I invited neighboring businesses, provided complimentary food and an agenda. The same complaints were brought up, but we worked through them one-by-one and the relationship is much better. One obstacle I have yet to overcome is closing time. Because the previous owner did not address the issues, I was granted license if I close at 11 p.m. I lose between \$300 - \$1,000 a day of potential income because of that. I hope with us continuing to be a good neighbor that will change soon.

So far, we have renovated the center with the easy stuff. We've updated the bar equipment and painted, we've updated the lighting with LEDs, replaced the monitors over the lanes, put in a kids' area, and updated the kitchen equipment for more food choices. We're all about making it reasonable and convenient for parents. I am in the process of renovating my banquet hall, updating more in the kitchen and I would like to buy the lot next door and put in more lanes. Perhaps open a second center.

Always hustling, always working. Welcome to BCAW Bennie and Laporsha!