

New owner vows to shift Fresh Meadows' JIB Lanes into fast lane

BY NICHOLAS HIRSHON
Monday, August 18th 2008, 8:19 PM

Here comes the kingpin to save the day.

A Nassau County businessman has promised to pump \$1 million into an outdated Queens bowling alley once he takes over on Sept. 1, calming fears the rundown pin paradise would become the borough's third to close this year.

John LaSpina, who owns two alleys in Brooklyn and two in Long Island, has inked a deal to operate JIB Lanes in Fresh Meadows - with plans to install LCD scoring monitors and set aside "boutique lanes" with a portable bar for private parties.

"We'll make it contemporary," vowed LaSpina, 59, as he roamed the dimly lit bowling alley recently. "We'll have purples and yellows and boldness, and the before-and-after will be real striking."

Tucked in the basement of an electrical workers' union headquarters on Parsons Blvd. near Jewel Ave., the 48-lane alley fell into disrepair after its longtime operator, Ruben Dankoff, died at age 92 in 2003. His family still ran JIB, but couldn't afford costly fixes to cracked lanes, busted lockers and a leaky ceiling.

LaSpina promises to rejuvenate it as part of his highly regarded empire, which stretches east from Maple Lanes in Bensonhurst and Gil Hodges Lanes in Mill Basin to Farmingdale Lanes and Coram Country Lanes on Long Island. LaSpina's 30-year-old son, Joe, who oversees the chain, offered an idea to attract younger crowds: a tournament that mixes bowling on JIB's lanes and virtual bowling on the Nintendo Wii video game console.

LaSpina's only previous foray into Queens was operating Americana Lanes in Ozone Park, since renamed Cozy, from 1991 to 1997. But his JIB takeover was greeted with glee by avid bowlers who suffered recent setbacks with the closings this spring of Van Wyck Lanes in Richmond Hill and Woodhaven Lanes in Glendale.

"He's a well-respected bowling entrepreneur that has a 50-plus-year history in the industry," said Jim Santora, 55, of Middle Village, who plans to take the Woodhaven Lanes leagues he manages to JIB. LaSpina also announced he's in the mix to open an alley at the Shops at Atlas Park in Glendale. City Councilman Anthony Como (R-Middle Village) is trying to broker a deal between LaSpina and Atlas Park development director Damon Hemmerdinger.



Bowling alley czar John LaSpina (l.) and son Joe have big plans for JIB Lanes.

JIB Lanes * 67-19 Parsons Blvd * Flushing, NY 11365 * (718) 591-0600

www.bowljib.com

