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# Casting a Wide Net

A surprising aspect of FatCats Queen Creek is that there is no single targeted demographic. It's a 'plan' that's working.

BY ROSIE CREWS

The success story of FatCats, as many great business stories begin, can be traced to some scribbling on the back of a napkin. That was two decades ago.

While it may not be the recommended plan taught at business schools, that unofficial agreement between restaurant owner Dave Rutter and bowling equipment sales executive Sean Collins brought to life the two businessmen's shared vision of "all out fun" centered around family entertainment and great food under one roof.

Within two years, the first FatCats opened. The year was 2001, and the site was near Salt Lake City. The movie theater concept was added as part of the growing FatCats mix in 2015 with the debut of the location in Gilbert, Ariz. Movies proved to be successful as the company subsequently expanded the cinematic multiplex to Saratoga Springs, Utah, and Mesa, Ariz.

Two decades of entertaining customers have led to the company's ninth and newest location, a bustling FatCats in Queen Creek, Ariz.,



Fat Cats has brought a diverse mix of attractions — including bowling and movie theaters — to the growing Arizona community of Queen Creek.



which opened earlier this year. The idea of opening a new business featuring bowling and movies might be daunting to some after a year of pandemic-related business interruptions for both industries, but not for the men behind FatCats.

By the time the Queen Creek location opened in April, mask mandates had been lifted and the staff had already meticulously planned for ongoing social distancing and sanitation efforts. The energy around the opening was palpable as more than 500 people attended a job fair for the opportunity to join the FatCats staff.

The customers were just as amped, many having been introduced to the model years earlier by the Gilbert and Mesa locations less than 30 miles away. FatCats Marketing Manager Trevor Cannon says the mix of location,

## At a Glance

**Venue:** FatCats Queen Creek

**Location:** Queen Creek, Ariz.

**Owner:** FatCats, LLC

**Architecture and Design Services:** A.R. Mays Construction Company

**Masking Units, Bumper Gutters, Capping:** Allied Bowling, LLC

**Bowling Equipment Installation:** Allied Bowling, LLC

**Scoring:** Steltronic (Focus-NEX – scoring, front desk, snack bar and bar)

**Arcade:** Betson Entertainment

**Arcade Debit Card System:** Intercard

**Redemption:** Redemption Plus and Fun Express

**Music Source:** Bowling Music Network



demographics and entertainment options made Queen Creek an instant business win.

Cannon adds that the company built on the successes of the Gilbert and Mesa centers by marketing throughout the region, resulting in a knowledgeable and built-in audience in the rapidly growing Queen Creek community.

“This location is just in a perfect neighborhood of a growing community, and we’re seeing record sales, which is fantastic.”

The ironic thing about the FatCats demographic is that “there isn’t just one,” Cannon adds. Cannon points out that the venue might see an older demographic come to the theaters to enjoy a show in a comfortable recliner, families gather for the pizza and soda specials offered during open bowling, kids taking to the expansive arcade, or private parties mixing up action on the lanes with a round of glow mini golf.

“One thing that we like about FatCats and the way it works together is [how] all tides lift all boats,” Cannon says. “If we have a big movie, it also makes our bowling sales great. If we have a big birthday party, then our arcade sales go up. Each one of our attractions usually gets played by almost all of our customers.”

The attractions at Queen Creek are plentiful: 20 bowling lanes, an eight-plex movie theater, indoor mini glow golf, virtual reality and a new bar and grill focused on shareables to service all aspects of the business.



Cannon says the food is the element that ties together many of the business segments as customers cross over from movies to bowling to arcades all in one visit.

“Our business is aimed at getting the customer to stay longer, and it’s working.”

While the footprint for a typical FatCats with a movie theater is 61,000 square feet, Cannon believes there is room to go up to 75,000 square feet with an expanded arcade operation or additional private hospitality.

“A little bit bigger arcade is one thing we have looked at, along with more corporate event options,” he says. “We are always surprised to see some of the numbers week to week from our arcade. There are times that it doubles what bowling will do in a week, and it’s just insane.”

The FatCats bowling business is primarily open play in most of the newer complexes, although the legacy operations built before the addition of movie theaters still host a solid league-play business.

Tracking the spending patterns and activity of customers has become an integral asset. That’s where the FatCats loyalty program, Gold Cat, comes in.

For \$25 per year, customers receive discounts on movie tickets, bowling and other activities, all while accumulating reward points. There is a free introductory level of the rewards program called Alley-Cat, but the focus is on increasing the upgraded loyalty membership program and converting customers to the Gold Cat level. Cannon says building that bond is necessary in a

world in which customers have so many options for their limited spare time and dollars.

“The frequency of a customer visit is much higher when they are a loyalty member because they see their points accumulating,” says Cannon.

What’s next for Queen Creek? More success as business continues to thrive, Cannon believes. As for further FatCats expansion, Cannon says that the owners and investors are always looking for the right opportunity and location to build on a winning formula.

With an average of 18 months between the last several builds, the future for FatCats may be getting even bigger and brighter sooner than later — more than living up to its mission statement of creating experiences that bring customers back.



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