

FREY 'I HAVE A LOT OF FOND MEMORIES'

CONTINUED FROM B1
panis, staffs the main concession, where drinks and fried foods are dispensed.

He's been a fixture at Northfield Lanes for nearly five decades as patron and part-time employee. It also served as a place he and his wife, Rosemary, could take their 10 kids without breaking the bank. The Freys raised their children a few miles north of the post-World War II bowling alley that anchors the north end of Grand Rapids' Cheshire business district on Plainfield Avenue NE.

Generations of bowlers have patronized the 62-year-old facility, which has been like a second home for the Frey family.

Many high school bowlers got their start at Northfield — it serves as home alley for Northview and Creston high

ONline

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PHOTOS: View a gallery of Jim Frey photos.

“When Jeff was killed, I became an accidental proprietor.”

— Jim Frey, of his brother, who

co-owned Northfield Lanes with his

schools and Northpointe Christian Schools.

The bowling alley is epicenter for community fundraisers, including a May event for Rays of Hope that benefits Haiti. Rosemary Frey is deeply involved in the organization, which raises money for clean drinking water for citizens of Haiti, the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere.

Frey hosts a Community Based Occupational Training bowling league Monday and Tuesday mornings, and one of the participants works at the bowling alley a couple of times a week. CBOT is a Grand Rapids Public Schools vocational education program that provides job coaching to impaired young adults.

“It's one of our better

leagues, or at least I enjoy them because of the enthusiasm,” Jim Frey said. “I'm pretty proud of that league.”

Frey also serves on the Blessed Sacrament school board and finance council and is treasurer of his neighborhood association, called Village at Cross Creek North. He even coached a Northern Little League team of girls ages 5 and 6.

When Frey, a 1984 Northview High School graduate with a bachelor's degree in finance from GVSU, and his brothers bought the bowling alley nearly 14 years ago, the Cheshire Village Business Association was in its infancy. Frey served as president and treasurer of the association.

Community-minded

“Jim is always thinking of the community and of the businesses in Cheshire Village,” said Jackie Needham, an area resident who works at Saint Mary's Health Care as a registered nurse. “Many restaurants/stores have closed in that quaint Cheshire area, but Northfield Lanes is a stable, family-oriented place that keeps going strong.”

Frey is a proponent of community involvement; he volunteers at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, All Saints

Academy and in the business district.

“He has many fundraisers at the lanes to help local charities,” Needham said. “He is selfless with his money, whether it be at church or through work.”

The other family anchor, Blessed Sacrament church, is less than a mile from the bowling alley. It's where Frey's wife, the former Mary Koelzer, spent her childhood, starting at age 13, as part-time organist. You still can hear her playing there at 11 a.m. Mass on Sundays.

Like Frey, Mary, 43, comes from a large German Catholic family with strong ties to the Northeast Side. Mary is No. 7 of 11 kids. She and Jim married in 1994 at Blessed Sacrament and, for a while, enjoyed movie nights, softball, bowling and dining out.

“Then the kiddos arrived,” Frey says. He and Mary and their six kids — ages 2 to 11 — live in a close-knit neighborhood east of Perkins Avenue NE between Leonard and Knapp streets, about 2½ miles from the bowling alley.

Frey juggles his schedule so he can take the kids to school Tuesdays and Thursdays, a job he shares with Mike Koelzer, his brother-in-law. Koelzer runs Kay Pharmacy on Plainfield, two doors

down from Northfield Lanes. Frey is up around 6:30 a.m. and gets to the bowling alley by 8 a.m. Morning leagues get under way at 10 a.m. If he needs quiet, he takes a 16-ounce glass filled with black coffee and does paperwork at an empty table in the adjoining Tap lounge, which doesn't open until 2 p.m.

His office is a cramped rectangle that overlooks the 16-lane alley. It's noisy even with the door closed. Frey relies on ESPN sports radio to mask the din.

An easygoing boss

On Monday, Wednesday and Friday, he leaves by 11 a.m. and makes the 39-mile drive to the Muskegon bowling alley he bought in September 2005. Sherman Bowling Center, on West Sherman Boulevard, less than a mile west of Business Loop U.S. 31, is also a neighborhood landmark.

The two facilities provide jobs for 25 mostly part-time people. The Muskegon site will host the men's state bowling tournament in 2010.

“I'm lucky; I found good employees, so I don't work many nights,” Frey said.

Employees are just as complimentary, describing Frey as a fair, easygoing boss who takes care of his workers.

Frey still bowls in the same Tuesday evening league he joined 22 years ago. A teammate is Tony Vicari, 76, the bowling alley's former manager who was Jim's boss when he worked at the bowling alley during his school days.

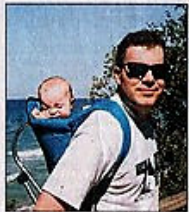
“We had a great time running this place, and I have a lot of fond and fun memories of my brothers,” Frey said.

The community landmark serves as a tangible, symbolic tribute to business partners:

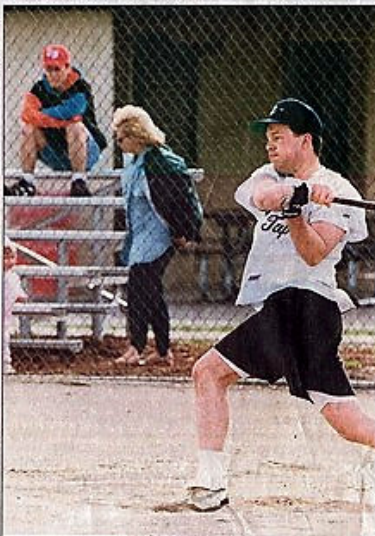


PHOTO: KATY BATHOFF

Time to talk: Jim Frey talks with his wife, Mary, at the dining room table of their Grand Rapids home. Daughter Julia, 5, sits on Mary's lap as daughters Maria, 11, and Christina, 10, put plastic on the windows. The Freys also have another daughter, Laura, 8, and two sons, Dan, 6, and David, who turns 3 on Feb. 18.

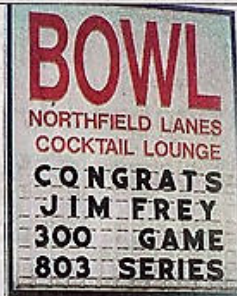


Traveling man: Frey straps daughter Maria on his back for a hike while vacationing in the northwestern part of Grand Rapids County, in summer 1998. Maria is the oldest of Jim and Mary Frey's six children.



COURTESY PHOTOS

Slugging it out: Frey loves playing softball and has a mighty swing to prove it. Frey, who played left field in a city softball league, is too time-strapped to play these days, though he exercises six times a week and bowls.



300 and won: Frey is all smiles standing in front of the marquee for Northfield Lanes touting a 300 game, which he rolled during a Sunday night league with Mary as his partner. The perfect game, bowled Feb. 11, 1996, was also his father's 64th birthday.



Girls' night out? Jim, left, and older brother John get ready for Halloween in this photo taken about 1968.



The honeymooner: Jim stands in front of a sign for James Island during a trip to Charleston, S.C., during his and Mary's honeymoon in May 1996.



COURTESY PHOTOS

All in the family: Jim Frey is No. 7 of 10 kids born between 1954 and 1971. The family of 12 appears in this photo taken about 1972. From left, Jane, Jill, mom Rosemary, sister Rosemarie, Jerry, Jim, Jean, John, Joann, dad John, Jackie and Jeff.



The jazz man: Frey is a musician. He played trumpet in high school and brother Jerry, lower right, played trombone. The brothers are shown here in downtown Grand Rapids for Festival of the Arts on Calder Plaza in June, 1984. Frey's older children take piano lessons, and their mother is a professional musician, playing organ at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church on Diamond Avenue NE.

brothers and friends, who, like Frey, considered Northfield a second home.

Faced with seemingly insurmountable tragedy, Frey sought solace from his family

and faith. He relies on both the way a bowler relies on a well-oiled lane; you can't get far without it.

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