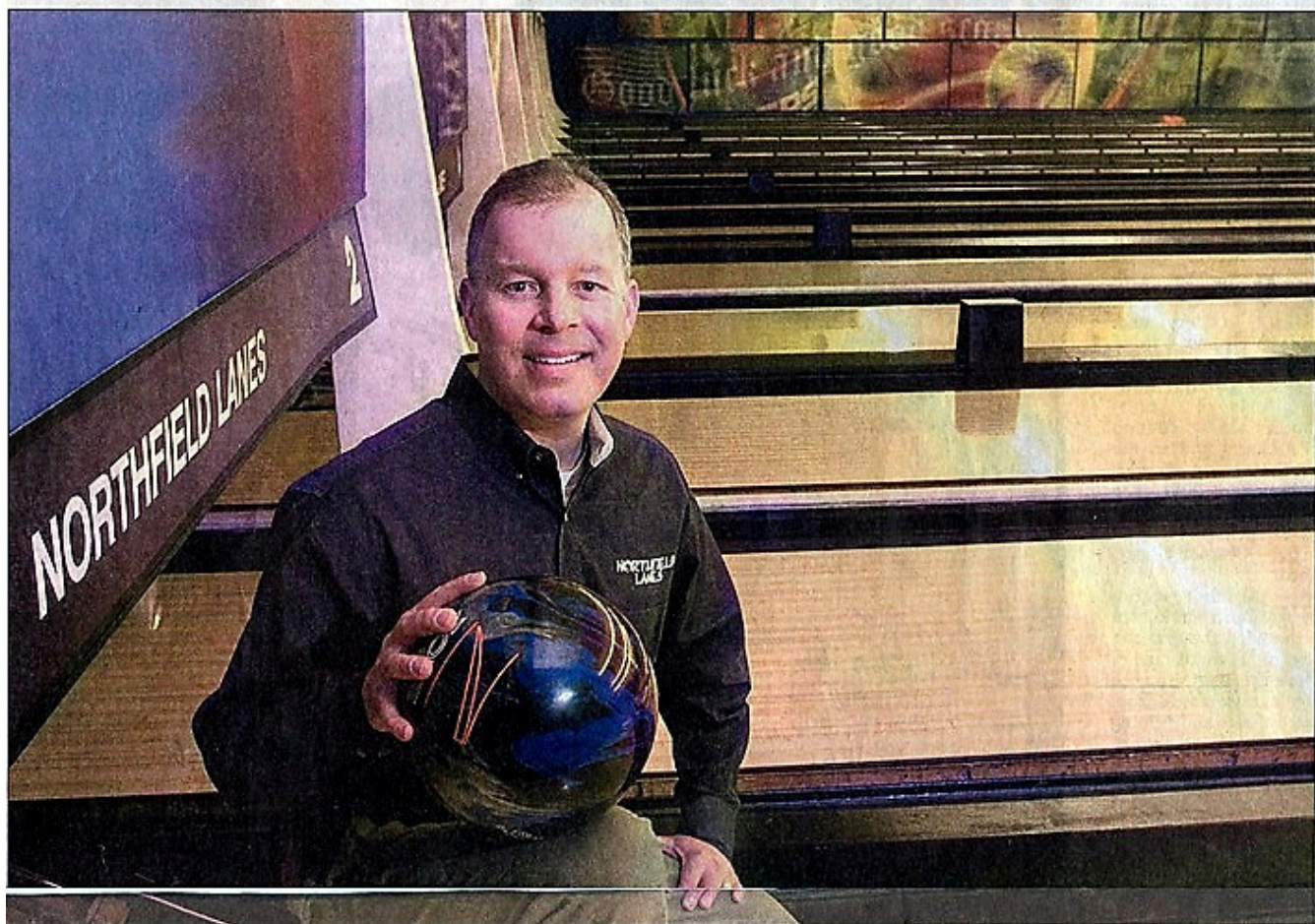


# ALLEY CAT



PRESS PHOTO/LANCE WYNN

**He's on the ball:** Owner Jim Frey, 42, arrives at Northfield Lanes bowling alley, 2222 Plainfield Ave. NE, each morning by 8. Frey left his job at Old Kent Bank and took over the bowling alley when his brothers and business partners died in separate accidents less than three years apart.

BY JOHN HOGAN  
THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

**T**he Frey brothers — Jim, Jeff and Jerry — had great plans for Northfield Lanes, the neighborhood icon they bought in August 1995.

Business already was steady with an average of three leagues playing a day. Computerized scorekeeping, new lanes and attractive murals were in the works. Jim and Jeff Frey would keep their full-time jobs while Jerry Frey ran the bowling alley.

"I was in banking and Jeff was in insurance," Jim Frey said. "Jerry had always worked at the alley, and this was going to be his lifelong job."

Jim Frey even managed to land a job at the Plainfield Avenue branch of Old Kent Bank, across from the bowling alley.

In less than three years, he left the banking job he loved and went from part owner to sole owner of Northfield Lanes. Both brothers had been killed in separate traffic accidents — first Jerry while walking across West Fulton Street to attend a bowling banquet, then Jeff in an accident

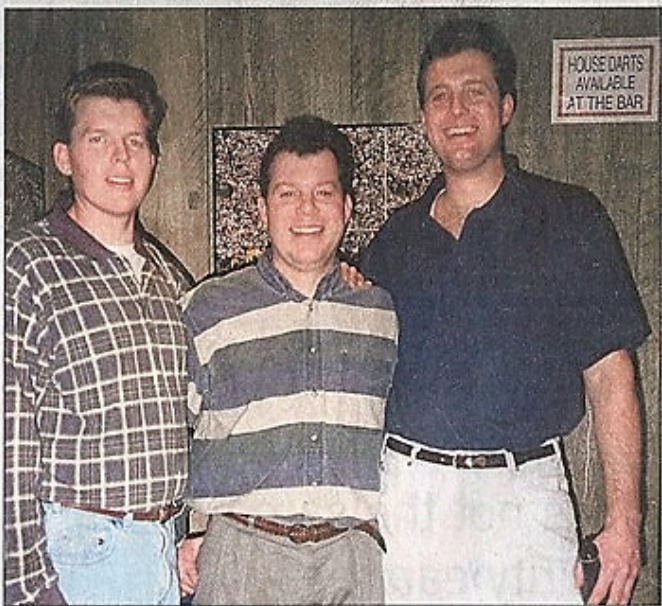
in Newaygo County.

"When Jeff was killed, I became an accidental proprietor," he said with a smile that doesn't diminish a lingering pain.

When Jim Frey arrives at Northfield Lanes, workers already are preparing for the first wave of customers.

Jim's father, John Frey, 76, often dressed in a flannel shirt and work

SEE FREY, 13



COURTESY PHOTO

**Band of Brothers:** Three of the four Frey brothers became business partners in August 1995, purchasing Northfield Lanes bowling alley at the corner of Plainfield Avenue and Halena Street NE. Pictured here, from left, are Jeff, Jim and Jerry.

## BIO BOX

Five things to know about Jim Frey:



Jim: At 6 months old.

- Before leaving for an annual four-day bowling tournament, he leaves notes for his wife and kids to read each day he's away (28 hand-written notes). No carpal tunnel syndrome — yet.

- Blow your horn? Frey hasn't done so in a while, but he used to be a pretty good trumpet player at Northview High School. "I don't have the chops to play anymore."

- He's a bookkeeper, treasurer for civic, religious and professional groups because of his accounting degree and banking experience, including stints as assistant branch manager for Old Kent Bank.

- He's a rabid fan of Tom Izzo and the Michigan State University men's basketball team, but also roots for underperforming pro teams. "I'm still married to Detroit, doggone it," he said.

- He could be a poster child for the American Dental Association, maybe. Frey never has had a cavity, which drives his brother John, a dentist in Belmont, to distraction. Jim "never" flosses, his wife contends.

- He drives a Toyota Sienna minivan with the vanity license plate: BOWL4FN.