



## Building on a Passion

Tenpintec's Ray Jordan built his successful business on his childhood bowling experiences. *By Paul Lane*

Cybernetic Solutions, also known as Tenpintec, is a well-established and respected manufacturer and supplier of a line of unique electronic products for the tenpin bowling industry. Founded in 1993 by Ray Jordan and Graeme Rose, the Victoria, Australia-based Tenpintec's home market includes New Zealand. Their products are sold globally through a network of international distributors. The company is also the distributor for over half a dozen major manufacturers, including Kegel, Twister Pins, and ZOT Bowling Parts.

Tenpintec's co-founder and co-owner Ray Jordan shares his remarkable journey with *IBI* readers.

Ray's first encounters with tenpin bowling was as a child in the mid 1960s. His mother regularly bowled with a group of friends at local AMF centers. "I remember the unique sounds and smells of bowling made an impression on me way back then," says Ray. "They are not much different now. For some reason I remember the ball polishing machine. It looked to me a bit like George Jetson's car, with the big clear bubble top. Ball maintenance has changed a bit since then, though!"

Fast forward to 1981. "I was an auto mechanic at the start of my final year of a four-year apprenticeship at



a GM dealership," said Ray. "I had bought a house the year before and had tried a few different second jobs so I could keep up the mortgage payments. My friend John had recently started work as a technician at a local bowling center and I would drop in some evenings and talk with him and some of his co-workers, watching them clean pins, overhaul and service distributors, tables, and motors, while leagues filled the lanes. I was hooked. As it happened, it was not long before a part-time position became available. I jumped on it."

Ray's first shift was a Saturday. After assisting the head

technician with the morning ritual of mopping gutters, dragging lanes, sweeping approaches, and oiling lanes with an AMF Unimatic, he gave Ray an 82-70 Pinspotter manual and told him to sit on a machine and watch it work. He spent a few hours watching the machine, identifying parts, and figuring out how things moved and adjusted. After working on cars for years, this was almost familiar.

“In 1982, another one of my mates, Graeme Rose, started work at AMF Northcote. Graeme had been working as a lighting technician for various organizations, including Melbourne University. He brought a solid electrical and electronic background with him,” said Ray. “Over the next several years, we worked separately at different AMF centers around Melbourne and occasionally moonlighted at privately owned venues on our days off. Graeme and I were also bowling in several leagues; we were teammates in one league.”

Fast forward to 1992, Graeme had been reassigned as the head technician at AMF Northcote, a center with 30 lanes. This venue was having electrical issues with sweep and table motors, and he was using his knowledge and experience to find a solution. He had designed a device called a solid-state start switch and was trying it out on Northcote’s machines. It was working remarkably well and somehow word got out.

“An Australian bowling parts distributor, an ex-AMF technician and friend of ours, Tony, ordered a number of these solid-state start switches to sell to his customers. But Graeme did not have the time or any business experience to be able to make it happen. That’s where I came in,” said Ray, “with my recently acquired business knowledge and some time on my hands. Together we bought the necessary components and hand-built a batch of 20 starters and sold them to Tony. We were on our way.”

In March 1993, Ray and Graeme started Cybernetic Solutions and got to work streamlining the solid-state starter production process and designing more electronic and electrical devices for use on tenpin bowling machines. These included the LaneMinder and MachineMinder lane and machine safety systems, and the ColorSplash LED pindeck light.

Later that same year, Ray was diagnosed with facioscapulohumeral muscular dystrophy (FSHD). The muscle deterioration caused by this genetic disorder explained why he had been having some difficulty with many of the physical aspects of being a pinspot-



Wendy and Graeme Rose with Kegel’s Don Agent (center)



Graeme, Wendy, and Jordan at the Australian proprietors conference in February 2020



Ray Jordan (seated) L to R Graeme Rose, Keith Kitt (Summit CO) and Alex Smith (Cypress Lanes, FL) Bowl Expo

ter technician. He was forced to spend less time in the backend of bowling centers and more time in the office and workshop.

“Around 1995 we built our first website and began engaging with the international bowling technician community through the Bowl Tech website,” said Ray. “A couple of years later, through that website, we offered some free samples of the solid-state start switch.”

This generated some interest from the U.S., which eventually led Ray to Carl Klauck at AMF Bowling in Mechanicsville, VA. “I had many late-night, Australian-time chats with Carl as we discussed bowling machines, our history, and experiences. He gave generously of his time and knowledge as he had our product thoroughly tested by the team in the AMF plant. In 2001 we received our first purchase order from AMF and that relationship has continued through the transition to QubicaAMF to this day. I was lucky enough to visit with Carl and others in Mechanicsville later in 2001 and again in 2005.”

The first Bowl Expo for Cybernetic Solutions was in

2002. “The trade show was an eye-opening experience for us,” says Ray, “and it provided an opportunity to make new contacts and expand our company into both an importer and exporter of bowling products.”

Since then, Ray and Graeme have become familiar figures at Bowl Expo in Las Vegas; and Las Vegas has an incredibly special significance for Ray. It was at the Bowl Expo in 2010 where Ray had his first in-person date with his now-wife Cyndi, who flew in from Tucson, AZ, to meet him. Cyndi, a software quality analyst for a global accounting and tax software company, had previously met Ray on social media in 2009 via their mutual membership in a group dedicated to people affected by facioscapulohumeral muscular dystrophy.

In the following months, they exchanged emails, communicated via Skype, long distant phone calls, vacations, and met at an FSHD Society conference, also in Las Vegas. They were married at The Flamingo in Las Vegas after Bowl Expo in 2016.

Since early 2014 a good part of Ray’s spare time is taken



*Ray and Cyndi's wedding at the Flamingo Resort in Las Vegas the day following the Bowl Expo in 2016*

up with the chairing and the administration of The All Aboard network which brings together individuals, professionals, government, and non-profit organizations with the object of advocating for the accessibility of public transit. Ray says, "This volunteer work is something that gives me a great deal of satisfaction and I'm quite proud of the achievements of the group over the years."

"In 2009, we were approached by the Australian Kegel distributor who wanted to retire and sell the distributorship," said Ray. "As part of our due diligence, we contacted Kegel to make sure they were onboard. Since we had already known Don Agent and the team at Kegel for several years by way of their visits to Australia, Bowl Expo, and our visits to their facility in Florida, this turned out to be just a formality."

"We worked hard to promote and expand the reach of Kegel products in Australia and were able to offer what the previous distributors had not – full national repair and service of lane machines, lane pattern design, training and consultancy," added Ray. "Within a year or so we had almost doubled the size of our business. By 2020, Kegel products and service accounted for about two-thirds of our business."

COVID-19 required Ray and Graeme to make a few changes to the way they run the business. "I am now spending a lot more time in the U.S., which is something with which my wife Cyndi is mostly pleased. While working from my home office in Arizona, it has been much easier to keep in touch with our U.S. suppliers and customers. It has also meant that Graeme and I have swapped responsibilities. Graeme has become much more involved with the day-to-day running of the business, while I have stepped up my role in product development. For both of us, it has been a steep but rewarding learning curve."

Australia and New Zealand have rebounded well from the pandemic and the bowling industry in both countries has returned to somewhere near normal. This of course means that Tenpintec is now just as busy as they ever have been. One of the challenges has been keeping up with customer demand for products where manufacturers have been hit hard by labor and raw material shortages. Once the global supply chain returns to normal, the road ahead looks smoother. ●