

# IAAPA Investment Pays Off

## Gameroom Guru George McAuliffe Shares Parks Show Excitement & Spotlights Key Seminars

**By GEORGE MCAULIFFE**

President of Pinnacle Entertainment Advisors by Redemption Plus

This will be my 25th IAAPA. I'm just as excited about this one as I was back in 1988. I can't tell you where that show was because it moved around quite a bit in those years. I was there, at the "Parks Show" as we arcade operators called it, to scour for attractions to combine into our new, big footprint family entertainment center.

IAAPA provided this young arcade guy so much more than just a place to see rides and attractions. It offered a masters level education in business in general, and in the attractions business in particular. It is even better today. The seminars provide targeted educational opportunities. Beyond formal seminars there are numerous roundtables, field trips, networking and idea sharing forums, and social events where some of the best work gets done. Check the daily schedules.

Most of your time and focus will be on the trade show floor. In the early days, there were no sections. Show management didn't group exhibitors by type of attraction or product. Today's show floor is much easier to navigate. How-

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ever, with a reported nine miles of exhibits to walk, and 1,100 exhibiting companies, you really do need a plan to make the most effective use of your time.

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floor because you never know where the next great idea will come from. The future is often on display in an obscure booth on the other side of the show. If your team has multiple mem-

bers it can be good strategy to break up the show floor among the team, meet later and share the highlights from each section. Each member can then target all of the booths highlighted by the team.

For more ideas on working the floor, IAAPA offers a seminar for this purpose, called "Seminar — Trade Show Floor," held strangely enough, on Tuesday from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m..

The good news for most FEC operators is that most of their focus will be on what is still called "The Coin-Op Pavilion." (In today's world of debit cards and the continuing



**Where's Waldo, er, George?** Columnist George McAuliffe is no doubt in there somewhere having been to the last 24 IAAPA/Parks shows. Even after all those trips to this megashow, he still walks the floor looking for the next opportunity and attends educational sessions looking for valuable insight.

move to cashless payment systems, the term is in need of an update.) The Coin-Op Pavilion is in the lower left hand quadrant as you look at the Expo floor plan (available at [www.iaapa.org/expos/attractions/2012/exhibitor/BookBooth.asp](http://www.iaapa.org/expos/attractions/2012/exhibitor/BookBooth.asp), a great resource to recon the floor in advance of the show). All of the game manufacturers and distributors are in this area, as are many of the related attraction providers for FECs.

I'll be in the Redemption Plus booth #1021 throughout the show. Please stop by, say hello, and we'll take you through some of our innovative redemption, crane and merchandiser products.

When I'm not in the booth, I'll probably be in Brunswick Bowling's booth (#5143) with Kurt Harz and his team. There is no better resource than Brunswick for the continuing growth and development in the bowling sector. As we've written in this column before, FEC operators should be taking a close look at adding bowling as an attraction.

We've helped almost 50 bowling centers add FEC attractions like redemption game rooms, laser tag, rides, mini golf, etc. The model works! Traditional, non-bowling FECs need to examine the possibilities bowling can bring for their facilities. The best part is the way they complement each other's weak spots on the weekly calendar. Traditional FECs do 70% of their business between 6 p.m. Friday and 6 p.m. Sunday. Bowling provides more week-day business, usually from a different demographic. A close second is the effect on group sales and party business.

The interaction, product awareness, and idea sharing with vendors and fellow operators that takes place on the trade show floor is invaluable. The other events round out the



educational experience and provide the opportunity to see and hear world-class executives and professionals from a variety of fields.

One of the things I learned long ago was that I could learn a lot at IAAPA from people operating outside of our direct niche of family entertainment centers. We built our guest service program for our first modern day FECs from a Disney model. We learned a ton about merchandising from the carnival sector, and all about throughput and single-attraction marketing from the miniature golf operators. In the corporate world this is called career broadening; whatever the term, getting outside our comfort zone can lead to some great things.

This year's seminar and event program provides a broad range of subjects: theming and design, finance, leadership development, training, marketing, communication, and group sales are a few I highlighted which are pretty common FEC subjects.

One of the things we learned in Bowling FEC development is the great impact food and beverage upgrades can have. The "Food and Beverage Case Study" from Noon to 2 p.m. on Tuesday looks like it should yield some valuable information on the upgrade to Funopolis.

I've already marked my calendar for my friend Michael Getlan's seminar called "Been There, Done That, Lessons

Learned," on Tuesday from 3:30 to 4:45 p.m. Michael's a great speaker, informative and funny, with a unique way of getting his ideas across. Dorothy Lewis, another industry veteran, will join him. They'll share their top three winners and losers from over the years. Another friend, George Smith, CEO of the Family Entertainment Group, hosts the arcade seminar "Game On. Making the right choices for your Arcade." Many arcade operators and owners mistakenly go with their gut on game buying decisions based on what they like at the show. I'm sure George will lend some technique and perspective to developing effective selection criteria.

There are many other great topics. A personal mission of mine is to help move our Pinnacle clients to fuller use of their debit card systems, especially in marketing and promotions. Gregg Borman, the veteran VP of Palace Entertainment, joined by Dorothy

Lewis, will address this in their seminar "Get the Most Out of your Debit Card/POS System-Creative Marketing Through Technology" from 5 to 6:15 p.m. Tuesday.

On a personal note I'll be attending the lunch session: "Reinventing Coney Island: a review of its current transformation into a state-of-the-art entertainment complex," from Noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesday. I was born in Brooklyn and spent lots of days at Coney Island with my grandfather. The 1875 version of Coney Island featured "cabaret, vaudeville, fortune tellers, games, and some rides, like small carousels" (Amusement Park Historical Society), and many say it was the forerunner for the amusement park as we know it today. I'm interested to see what is planned for its next phase.

A quarter century later, this IAAPA will be as heavily scheduled as the first one. A lot of industry trends and products have come and gone. Many have morphed and evolved. There are new ones around the corner yet to be discovered. Most rewarding have been the people met, friends made and relationships forged at the show. It's a great show that can generate the excitement I'm feeling about this year's opportunity. Hope to see you there!

George McAuliffe is a 30-year family entertainment center operator and president of Pinnacle Entertainment Advisors by Redemption Plus. Pinnacle is an industry consulting firm ([www.grouppinnacle.com](http://www.grouppinnacle.com)) founded in 1996, and a division of Redemption Plus. George has operated public space entertainment centers from 2,000 to 150,000 square feet, including a wide variety of entertainment components and related businesses such as bowling centers, restaurants, tourist attractions, ice skating, rides, and laser tag, to name a few. He has operated redemption and merchandise games since 1983, and serves as the strategic partner for games and family entertainment for Brunswick Bowling & Billiards. Pinnacle's consulting practice has served new and established family and location based entertainment operators, with clients as diverse as Wal-Mart, Disney, ESPN Zone, Brunswick and many other independent facilities. George can be reached at 913/563-4370 or [gmcauliffe@redemptionplus.com](mailto:gmcauliffe@redemptionplus.com)