

ARCADE

Welcome to Arnie's Place

By STEVE MADWED

★ Question time: In the midst of what is being dubbed "the great arcade slump", who opens a high-tech emporium full of coin-ops in the middle of an area not exactly famous for their arcades of any size?

Answer: a fellow from Westport, Connecticut named Arnie, and the incredible inside-a-jukebox style arcade he has opened is known, prosaically enough, as "Arnie's Place".

Arnie acknowledges that there *is* a slump, that there are virtually no luxury arcades in the Northeast, and he has opinions on everything from kids-'n'-coin-ops to convertible videogames. Take her away, Arnie.

"There is no doubt that there is a slump in the coin-op field, but I don't think it is unique to our industry. I think that due to "pie-in-the-sky" reports by the media, many people jumped into operating videogame arcades, which, for one thing, spread the number of game players thinner and, secondly, the great demand for large numbers of games caused the factories to gear up production. As a former manufacturer I can tell you that once you gear up you have to keep production flowing; hence, the circulation of some not-very-good games with poor return on your investment."

Any suggestions?

"With the high cost of new equip-

ment and the decline in business, many of the new operators will fall by the wayside, leaving the players to consolidate in the larger, more up-to-date, better run facilities."

One look around Arnie's Place and you've got a nearly-perfect idea of what the man is talking about. The arcade is lush, magnificently styled from its spacious, impeccably gardened parking lot to its lavish interior. Copper ceilings, festooned with gold-piping track-lights, cast a discreet golden glow on the scene below. The coin-ops and foosball tables are encased in white wood casings. While purists may be disappointed to find the gorgeous lathework and decal

art from their favorite coin-ops obscured by the game-separating, perfectly shaped wooden arches, they give the game emporium a coherent, undeniably stylish overall ambience.

There are even coordinated "child stands", step-up podiums that give tyro arcaders the same overview of the



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console as the average adult gamer.

The most striking thing about a truly striking arcade, however, is its uniqueness. Why aren't there more coin-op palaces like this in the Northeast?

"To open and maintain an arcade of our calibre," Arnie explains, "takes a great capital outlay and most people

do not have the funds. A reason we were able to make it economically feasible was due to the fact that we did most of the work ourselves — designing, construction, etc."

In order to make sure that Westport loves Arnie's Place, there are strict, scrupulously-enforced rules. No smoking, drinking, or any profane language. "At all times," Arnie adds, "there are a minimum of three uniformed attendants on duty to insure this. We have contacted all the schools within a 25 mile radius and asked them for their school calendars. When a young person unaccompanied by an adult enters we ask them: 'No school today?' If they say 'no' we find out which school they attend and then check the calendar to see if it checks. Some schools vary from others for holiday or break schedules."

Games are selected by a trio of

methods. "One is by player request. If a great number of our patrons request a particular game we will usually purchase one or two. Second is to rely on some of our distributors — factory reps — based on reported income at other operations. Last, but not least reliable, is 'hit and miss'. We purchase a game and hope our clientele will be attracted to it. The success of a game varies from location to location depending on the type of customer; their age, education and cultural background. A game may earn big in one location and die in another."

Now warming to his subject, Arnie gave his opinion on a subject that's shaking the arcade industry to its foundations: convertible games. They are so-called "generic videogames" in which new games are not purchased complete, merely new program boards are obtained to replace those in yesterday's model. The old title marquees and side decals are interchanged and, voila!, instant new coin-op.

"Convertible games," according to Arnie, "have various effects depending whether you are looking at it from a manufacturer's outlook or an operator's (the person placing the game on location). For the most part I think it will help the industry in general."

Finally, we wondered whether or not ol' Arnie was an arcader himself. Ever the diplomat, after confessing that he was, Arnie refused to name a favorite. "I derive a pleasure from observing my patrons having fun, especially young children." 

