

News > Metro

## Hamden lanes roll out return

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By Ann DeMatteo, Assistant Metro Editor

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HAMDEN — “Welcome to my bowling alley. Bowl good.”

Those words, spoken by 3-year-old Kyle Thomas, signaled to Johnson’s Duckpin Lanes owner Sandi Thomas — Kyle’s grandmother — that 10 months of hard work was ending. Hamden’s only bowling alley was finally reopening.

Kyle was brought to the microphone Saturday to help welcome 85 bowlers from the region who participated in a Duckpin Professional Bowlers’ Association tournament over the weekend.

“I could have cried. It was so nice and normal here,” Sandi Thomas said of the tournament. “It’s been so abnormal here for 10 months. “

While rebuilding after the fire that damaged the lanes and five other businesses last Nov. 18 was a tough row to hoe, Thomas said she has made it through with support of friends, family, customers and contractors.

“Fortunately, it was not a loss of support. It’s just been phenomenal,” she said a few hours before league play was to resume Monday night.

The lanes’ official grand re-opening will take place Saturday, starting at about noon, “until the last bowler goes home,” Thomas said. “Clink the Clown” will entertain, there will be prize giveaways and radio station KC101 will do a live remote from 1 to 3 p.m.

A specific cause of the fire, which began in the Miami Glo Tanning Salon, has not been determined, Fire Chief David Berardesca said. He is waiting for a report from the state fire marshal.

Construction continues at DiMatteo’s Restaurant, which suffered extensive damage. Owner Andrew DiMatteo said Monday that he hopes to reopen by the end of the year. Prior to the fire, he had planned on expanding, and now is doing so. Miami Glo’s lease was not renewed.

Connex Credit Union, which relocated to Memorial Town Hall after the fire, reopened last month in the plaza at 2100 Dixwell Ave. Lovely Nails is scheduled to reopen, and Thai Spice owner Alex Munghung said Monday he hopes to reopen in about two months.

Johnson’s Duckpin Lanes, one of the original tenants of the plaza since the mid-1950s, sustained heavy water and smoke damage, with 1,500 gallons of water pouring into the lanes, which are in the building’s basement.

There is still some minor work to do in the lanes, but nothing that would prevent bowlers from walking across the wood

approaches and trying out the new synthetic lanes. Thomas also made other renovations, including refurbishing the bathrooms and giving a bright new look to walls and ceilings. None of the pin-setters or other machinery were affected.

The dark wood is gone, getting rid of the “dungeon” or “cave” effect that many used to refer to.

“Oh my God, it’s wicked nice,” said championship bowler Becky Airhart of Enfield when she stopped by with bowler Tim Smith of Hamden Monday afternoon.

“It’s the first time we’re bowling on synthetics,” said Smith, 21, who has been bowling at the lanes since he was 5 years old. “It’s fantastic. It’s bright. It’s very inviting. We called it going dungeon bowling.”

Airhart and Smith have been bowling together for several years as part of traveling junior leagues. Airhart, 18, is the top female player in the National Duckpin Youth Association.

Todd Turcotte, owner of Highland Bowl in Cheshire, said he was happy to help out Thomas when the fire occurred so that youth programs could continue. He also took on other leagues, as did Woodlawn Duckpin Bowling in West Haven.

“It was important to us that she keeps her youth program going and that bowlers were able to bowl. The place came out great. It’s a beautiful bowling center anybody would be happy to visit,” said Turcotte, who bowled in the weekend’s tournament.

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