

SILVERBALL

Pinball
From a scarlet past, game now knows new era

Champion Perspective

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Stories and photos by Jane Muller



Step right up and put yourself against a machine. Total escape and entertainment for a quarter. Thrill to the sights and sounds of Captain Fantastic, flashing lights, electronic clings and dings while you control the great silver ball. Concentration and fast reactions are the key to beat the highly animated machine, causing it to surrender free games. Put pins, bumpers, flippers, a spring-loaded plunger and silver balls together in an enclosed case on legs, with a flashy backboard, and you've got the exciting game of pinball. Pinball is fast emerging from its shady past to become an accepted and valid form of recreation, with machines in colleges, senior citizen homes and restaurants. The resurgence of pinball could be attributed to the failing economy—causing more people to seek escape through cheap entertainment, or possibly the Who's rock opera Tommy, where a deaf and blind kid played a mean pinball, and in fact, became a pinball wizard.

But the main reason pinball machines have become respectable is the fact they were legalized in Ontario just four years ago with the provision elements of chance be eliminated. Prior to the legalization of pinball, Oriena Currie of Currie Amusements and Distributors in Campbellville, accommodated ways, but found that specifications were always changing. The rules changed with the location—with some cities disallowing flippers, others the tilt mechanism or the bumpers, and some not allowing the free game mechanism. After playing a losing political game with no rules, Mrs. Currie went to the Ontario Government and quickly had the law changed to allow pinballs. The old law was written in the time before the invention of flippers when gambling machines were popular, and the law-makers really had nothing against pinball. It was just that no one had ever asked to have the law changed before. The roots of pinball are marred with its early at-

tachment to gambling machines, and it is still considered by some as a gambling device. But generally it is now lumped in with the various amusement machines seen in arcades around the country. Mrs. Currie thinks pinball is a cheap form of entertainment, and playing the game is like renting time for a quarter. She also points out that as times get rough, the amusement machine business picks up. "People need an escape and pinball is a cheap one," she said. At Currie Distributing, pinballs are bought and sold, put into locations, and repaired. As is the tendency of all machines, pinballs too break down, and skilled repairmen are hard to find. The gilded cabinet of the pinball conceals a maze of electronic gadgetry which resembles a large serving of wire spaghetti. Mrs. Currie and her son David have for the past three years offered a training program in the repair of these mechanized monsters. It is the earn-while-you-learn program and applicants are accepted as the need for employees presents itself. They have guided the hands of 10 trainees

through the intricacies of the pinball vitals. After the course is completed, the student receives a certificate from Conestoga College, and most then move on to start their own repair business. Last year pinballs took their place in the computer age, incorporating digital read-out and memory banks. One of the newest machines out of Chicago, Ill., is called Circus and features a repetitive tune played every six minutes which is the first two bars of the circus song. Chicago is the major centre for pinball manufacturing and is the birthplace of the game. Although pinball is legal in the State of Illinois, in the city of Chicago pinball is not allowed. Although there is no legislation prohibiting pinball, regulating the game. In Milton the zoning by-laws do not allow for pinball arcades or body-rub parlors. Strange that these two types of establishments are grouped together, perhaps a lingering shadow of pinball's seedy past. "You cannot lightly deprive citizens in today's leisure-oriented world of fundamental right to

recreation and entertainment," was the result of a legal case heard in California. This was the ruling of the judge in Los Angeles who heard a landmark case where a private citizen sued the city, claiming his constitutional rights were being deprived by the prohibition of pinball. This case set the pinball rolling in the fight to bring the game out of back rooms and basements. David Currie confided that pinball will never die. Its nearest competitor, video games, had a success which was short lived. The amusement machine business is now acquiring a more favorable public image, with games being part of private home recreation, and in institutions. In Poland some places of employment have installed pinballs for use by employees on breaks. The performance of workers on the job has improved since playing the games which gives them a more total escape from the daily routine. Pinballs are sold throughout the world, with manufacturers supplying coin acceptors to take currencies of more than 40 countries.

Canada's largest collection part of future plans

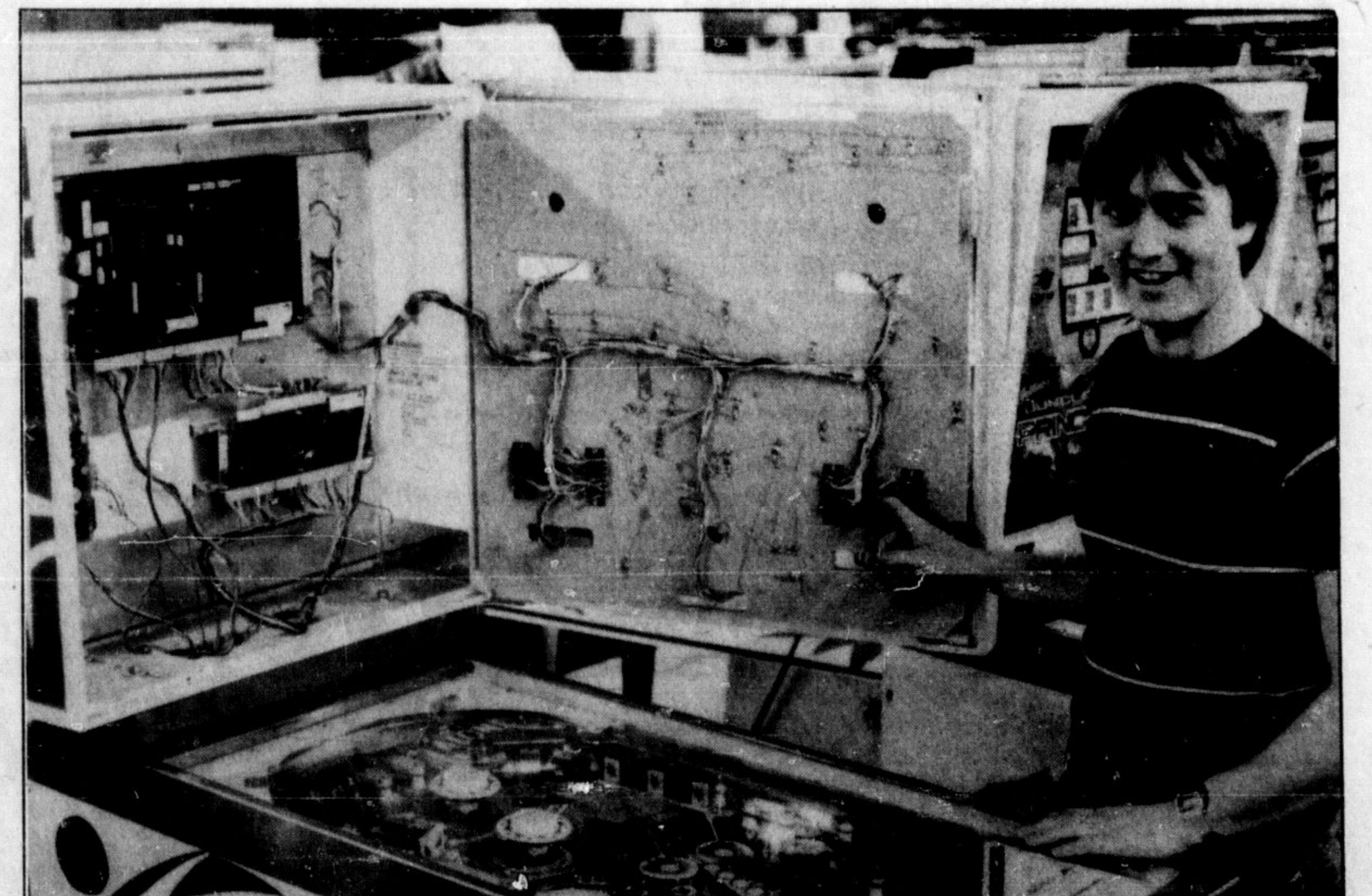
They sit lifeless and dustcovered, row on row in a dark storage shed... a cluttered collection of 120 amusement machines, some as old as the business itself. To David Currie's knowledge, his is the largest collection in the country—including 45 pinballs, assorted bingo machines, arcade pieces and jukeboxes. As David was literally born into the amusement

machine business with his mother, Oriena Currie and himself still operating Currie Amusement Distributing at Campbellville, the antique machines were fairly easy to come by. He has many connections, and through these started collecting three years ago. There is an increasing demand for antique pinballs, but David is holding onto his. He has doubles of some

machines, and these he will probably sell. David has plans for these pieces of the past, they are not destined to remain in the dingy domain. He is a young man with time to plan for the future of his assorted treasures. A museum where he will display his finds is a dream he hopes will become a reality. He wants people to have an opportunity to see the machines in a light which will do them justice. His plans do not end there, however. A restaurant featuring antique pinballs and other arcade pieces is also on the mind of this soft-spoken collector. A pinball called Fireball is an extremely valuable and rare machine which David prizes. Only 2,000 were produced, and are now worth more than \$2,000 compared with their original selling price of \$600. A fortune telling gypsy is one of the more unique pieces in David's collection. She is displayed in the Currie's dining room, along with one of the many coin operated weigh scales of ornate design David has acquired. The small gypsy woman is encased in glass on top of a sturdy metal stand where coins are inserted. At the drop of a nickel into the coin slot, her eyes will see your future and foretell your fortune on a small printed card. As for David's future? It lies in the business of amusements, as well as another form of entertainment. He also spends his time performing in a new wave band called Children of Divorce, who have a stage show like no other, according to David. David has a commitment to his feeling that pinball will never die, and his livelihood could depend on pinballs' longevity.



Computerized sensation. Space-age pinballs featuring digital readout and memory capabilities hit the market one year ago. Pinball jets into the future with a new model produced each month by the industry's giants at Chicago, the home of 90 per cent of amusement machine manufacturing.



Pinball Wizard: The door usually closed over the mind of the pinball machine is opened by David Currie as he displays its computerized works, color coded wires, the lifelines of the game. David must know pinballs inside and out as it is he who keeps the lights flashing and buzzers buzzing when a breakdown occurs.